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La decadencia de las lenguas autóctonas de Guinea Ecuatorial: una manifestación de la pérdida de identidad cultural

The decline of the indigenous languages of Equatorial Guinea: a manifestation of the loss of cultural identity

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Resumen

El presente estudio se centra en el análisis de la situación sociolingüística de Guinea Ecuatorial. En este sentido, se parte del hecho de que la falta de aprendizaje de las lenguas autóctonas del país ha derivado en una pérdida de identidad cultural, la cual se ha visto agravada por otros factores como la globalización. La poca importancia que se presta a las lenguas autóctonas, hace que todas ellas estén sufriendo cambios que provocarían su decadencia y posterior desaparición. Se debe invertir en políticas lingüísticas que puedan contrarrestar este efecto porque cuando desaparece una lengua lo hace también una parte de la misma cultura. Es importante remarcar que esta investigación no se ancla en el relativismo lingüístico por cuanto reconoce que potenciar las lenguas autóctonas no es una manera de vetar las lenguas oficiales del país.



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En la actualidad existe una pérdida de identidad cultural motivada porque no se enseña a los niños las lenguas autóctonas, pretenden que sean políglotas o bilingües sin una base lingüística propia: nos referimos a sus lenguas autóctonas que les identifican como parte de un grupo o comunidad. A lo largo de este trabajo, se pone de manifiesto que no puede haber políticas culturales sin políticas lingüísticas, porque las personas deberían conocer las lenguas autóctonas de su cultura. De hecho, los principales resultados de esta investigación evidencian la necesidad proteger las lenguas autóctonas, es incoherente potenciar el español en detrimento de las lenguas autóctonas que representan la identidad de cada grupo étnico.

Palabras clave

Autóctono, cultura, decadencia, identidad, lengua.

Abstract

This study focuses on the analysis of the sociolinguistic situation in Equatorial Guinea. In this sense, we start from the fact that the lack of learning of the country's indigenous languages has led to a loss of cultural identity, which has been aggravated by other factors such as globalization. The lack of importance given to indigenous languages means that all of them are undergoing changes that could lead to their decline and subsequent disappearance. It is necessary to invest in linguistic policies that can counteract this effect because when a language disappears, so does a part of the same culture. It is important to note that this research is not anchored in linguistic relativism because it recognizes that promoting indigenous languages is not a way of vetoing the country's official languages.

At present, there is a loss of cultural identity because children are not taught native languages, and they are expected to be polyglots or bilingual without a linguistic base of their own: we are referring to their native languages that identify them as part of a group or community. Throughout this work, it becomes clear that there can be no cultural policies without linguistic policies, because people should know the indigenous languages of their culture. In fact, the main results of this research show the need to protect indigenous languages; it is incoherent to promote Spanish to the detriment of the indigenous languages that represent the identity of each ethnic group.

Keywords

Native, culture, decadence, identity, language.

1. Introduction

The present research constitutes an analysis of the indigenous languages of Equatorial Guinea, because there is an unprecedented loss of these indigenous or vernacular languages, which opens a gap that leads to an anthropological crisis in our cultural context. The purpose that leads us to study this reality lies in the importance of teaching and using indigenous languages to maintain the cultural identity of the peoples of Equatorial Guinea.

Therefore, it is evident that language confers cultural identity to its speakers. Before stating the thesis defended in this paper, it is useful to better justify why we maintain that language is part of a person's identity or why the loss of language implies a loss of cultural identity. First of all, we must start from the fact that language is one of the elements of a culture, and therefore confers an identity on those who speak it. In this sense, to lose a language is to lose cultural identity, because language is a communication system that contains the



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thoughts, experiences and even the history of human beings. It is important that it be used and taught, regardless of whether the language has a spelling or not.

Consequently, the thesis of this research is that, if native languages are lost, man becomes a being unknown to his own being. In other words, language is inextricably linked to culture because it constitutes an element of belonging for those who use it. The theoretical support for this statement can be found in the fact that "culture and language are indivisible aspects of the total existence of the human being" (Pozzo & Soloviev, 2011, pp. 178-179). Of course, it could be deduced that, if the learning of indigenous languages is taught or potentiated, children would know better the anthropological reality of their own culture, which is distributed through the different indigenous languages. Thus, language constitutes the anthropological reality of a culture and is a catalyst for social cohesion.

In the light of the above thesis, we have proposed to answer the following questions: Do indigenous languages contribute to the dissemination of culture? How does the lack of knowledge of an indigenous language affect human beings? Can the crisis of cultural identity be overcome through the teaching of indigenous languages? Is there a language policy in Equatorial Guinea?

This research presents as a fundamental problem the loss of indigenous languages due to the lack of language learning, caused mainly by the impact of globalization and by the many languages that are recognized as official languages in Equatorial Guinea. This constant leads to a crisis of cultural identity, where it is observed that currently the new generations of the Equatoguinean society do not speak their vernacular languages such as Fang, Ndowe, Bisio, etc. This fact puts at risk one of the cultural aspects of the ethnic groups that make up this country, we are referring to the cultural identity.

On this basis, we are motivated by the question of whether the loss of indigenous languages implies the loss of cultural identity. It is appropriate to focus on the impact of globalization on the indigenous languages of the world's cultures. This is the objection from which we start in this paper, because we consider that globalization is not an isolated fact when it is considered that the cultural identity of an ethnic group is lost, as is the case of language. It is not a sociolinguistic relativism, but rather the need for each human group to preserve its culture, and language, which provides cultural identity, is part of it.

At the outset, we would like to clarify some issues related to language and the cultural identity of people. It should be taken into account that beyond the culture that each person has, we use languages as linguistic signs to communicate, both with people of our own culture (ethnicity, nationality, etc.), as well as with people from other cultures. Thus, a speaker of Fang from Equatorial Guinea will use his language to communicate with people who also speak this language; but the same person may use French, Spanish or English to communicate with other people who have other languages, cultures or origins. In other words, languages, by facilitating communication, favor the exchange in society, whether it is familiar, local, regional, national or international. Speaking other languages does not necessarily mean renouncing the culture of origin; we use one language or another in order to meet the needs we have at any given moment.

"Language is intimately linked to thought, to the expression of ideas, to creativity and to cognition in general through a coarticulated and coevolutionarily developed relationship" (Piedra, 2010, p. 17). And in order to learn this thinking, it is necessary for each culture to preserve its language. What is also not a normal praxis is the fact that language is an instrument of communication, some languages are abandoned to opt for others that are apparently attractive. This is, in other words, to annihilate culture, because without



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language as a linguistic sign, it would be difficult to carry out something that is vital for human beings, the transmission of the culture of peoples, that which characterizes them and in some way forms part of their vital essence. In this sense, it is important to bring up the thought of an outstanding researcher who considers that:

[...] Language is but a part of language, albeit an essential one. It is both a social product of the faculty of language and a set of necessary conventions adopted by the social body to permit the exercise of this faculty in individuals (De Saussure, 1945, p.33).

In this assertion, De Saussure shows that there is a very compact relationship between language and language, just as there is between language and culture. Speaking gives identity and creates or maintains the human being within a structure. Therefore, language is what is human, that which allows us to use our reasoning and to be able to articulate it. In this sense, language is a natural advantage of Homo Sapiens.

Therefore, when we insist that when a person loses his language, he becomes a being unknown of his own being, it is to point out that without the language that gives identity to a human being, he is in albis, because he does not know his anthropological or contextual reality of the environment in which he develops, thus depriving himself of the thought of this culture.

2. State of the art

Addressing the question of the indigenous languages of Equatoguinean society is a task that presents major challenges for any researcher. The first and most fundamental problem has to do with the scarcity of sociolinguistic or ethnolinguistic studies. Therefore, this research had to face this great difficulty. The theme linked to the study of languages is always of great importance, due to the fact that it analyzes an important dimension of human beings such as language. The decline of the indigenous languages of Equatorial Guinea is a phenomenon in which many factors are involved. There are many arguments by which the loss of a language can be considered to imply a substantial anthropological crisis.

One of these arguments focuses on the fact that:

[...] the attitude towards language and its use becomes especially attractive when the fact that languages are not only bearers of certain linguistic forms and attributes, but are also capable of conveying social meanings or connotations, as well as sentimental values, is appreciated in its proper magnitude. The norms and cultural marks of a group are transmitted or emphasized through language (Fernández, 1990, p. 178).

As you can see, our language is in this sense linked to the way we are. It is not only to speak well, but to speak to be understood and to understand what you are talking about.

The learning to which the individual is subjected since childhood is nothing more than training in subjects that have to do with his culture. However, the aspects that mark above all human language. In an ever-changing world, with globalization as the main factor, it is more important than ever to reopen or evoke a debate that is sometimes avoided at the international level, and that is about languages. First of all, it must be understood that all languages are equally important, so none is more important than the other regardless of their nature. Chinese is not more important than French or English, just as Portuguese is not more important than the Bubi language spoken in Equatorial Guinea. We cannot fall into linguistic ethnocentrism.



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It is important to point out that even if language is not the only thing that gives cultural identity to a person, it is an important "support of cultural identity" (Fyle 1983, pp. 6-7). On the discussion of languages, we must stay away from any ethnocentric pretension, as this could obfuscate or mislead the researcher, mainly because "[...] ethnocentrism orders social reality in a hierarchical manner and establishes criteria of superiority and inferiority with respect to one's own and others' lifestyles" (Giner, 1998, p. 277). The best way to proceed could be to recognize that any people has its own language and that linguistic imposition can even destroy the identity of the inhabitants of a given region, because when they lose their language, they lose their culture and therefore their identity. It seems a link that it is better to safeguard because it contains the essence of the human being.

We do not mean to say that it is bad to learn other languages, what strikes us is that when you learn another language, at the same time you learn another culture, and it is assimilated as such, which is why the phenomenon of globalization is so powerful, since it sweeps away local languages, imposing another one that ends up absorbing the native language of the place. In other words, globalization has affected people's lives in different ways. "In the case of linguistics, this phenomenon has caused hybridization, evolution and in an extreme case, the disappearance of languages and their cultural values that have historically been in contact with others." (Villalobos Graillet, 2015, p. 5).

This fact is currently abysmal, which is a danger for small countries or small communities, which see how their languages end up disappearing. In this sense, language is presented as "the reflection of the spirit of a people and is, therefore, subject to the vicissitudes that the people suffer" (Alvar, 1982, p. 39). When a language disappears, so does the culture, because language is part of the culture, it is identity, and without this identity, it is worth the redundancy, anthropologically, man becomes a being unknown to his own being. In this regard, some research authors maintain that:

Languages, as is well known, distinguish peoples, are bearers of their system of cultural values, constitute an important element of nationality as a concept, and are a unifying factor [...] If globalization continues on its current predominant course [...] it would be that of the universal language so often dreamed of by philosophers and thinkers (Odio Zamora, 2001, pp.136-41).

Language is what each one of us is, so we must speak it and teach it to our children so that they in turn can teach it to their children. Linguistic diversity is a very important aspect that must be taken into account, for the same reason that cultures and people are different, it is necessary to create a mechanism that prevents or serves as an obstacle to globalization that indiscriminately devours the languages of small communities, simply because national policies have not been able to design the necessary means to prevent it.

The very concept of culture, as a product of human creation, is inextricably linked to that of cultural identity. We do not wish to go back over the definition of what culture is, because, at least from a sociological perspective, we find that:

It refers to the way of life of the members of a given society-their habits and customs, along with the material goods they produce. Society refers to the systems of interactions that bring into contact individuals who share a common culture. No culture can exist without society. But, by the same token, there can be no society without culture (Guiddens, 1991, p. 65).



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Therefore, when one feels linked to a place where he/she was born or grew up, he/she identifies with it, that is, with the customs and behavioral patterns of the place, which makes him/her identify with or feel that he/she belongs to that group, because he/she shares with it, certain traits that may be beliefs or simply cultural values. Accordingly, Olga Lucia Molano maintains that:

The cultural identity of a people is historically defined through multiple aspects in which their culture is embodied, such as language, an instrument of communication among the members of a community, social relations, rites and ceremonies, or collective behaviors, that is, value and belief systems (...) A characteristic feature of these elements of cultural identity is their immaterial and anonymous character, as they are the product of the community (Molano, 2008, pp. 69-84).

In this definition of Gonzales Varas, cultural identity is imprinted from the culture. In other words, in order to identify with an ethnic group, you must first be or know this culture. When the aforementioned author speaks of language as one of the aspects of culture, he does so knowing that it is the instrument of communication. However, it must be specified that what is communicated is culture, we say communicate because it is passed on from generation to generation. If there is no language that identifies an ethnic group or if the members of this ethnic group do not give so much importance to their language, then we are or could be facing a crisis of cultural identity as is happening with the ethnic groups of Equatorial Guinea, each one of them as far as possible is losing its native language.

The abandonment of the learning and teaching of indigenous languages is due to multiple factors, although as we have highlighted above, it is mainly due to the disdain for the languages themselves, because they are considered poor. This is probably due to the fact that each ethnic group uses and does what it wants with its own language. However, there is a real danger that a great cultural legacy is being lost. In this sense, it is important to strengthen cultural identity, which, as has been mentioned, refers to the feeling of belonging to a place or group.

It is possible to affirm that a people has an identity when its individuals share representations around traditions, histories, common roots, ways of life, motivations, beliefs, values, customs, attitudes and traits. They must also be aware of being a people with characteristics different from those of other peoples (Pérez et al., 1999, pp. 251-279).

In this sense, when all these things fail, then there is an unprecedented cultural identity crisis. Indigenous languages imprint the identity of each of their individuals. If these languages are not taught, this identity is in great danger for the mere reason of not being able to coexist with the official languages, although we cannot argue that there is a linguistic purge in the country, but rather that the role of these languages in cultural identity must be revalued. There is a great deal of literature on sociolinguistics, but at the level of national academic literature, there is hardly any research on our object of study. This is one of the reasons why it has been necessary to use a theoretical framework of what has been said at the academic level in general, about the relationship between language and culture, and above all, the way in which the loss of language, as one of the aspects of culture, affects cultural identity.



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3. Defense of the thesis

The outlook for the languages of Equatorial Guinea is not very encouraging. Each of the languages of this country represents the different ethnic groups that can be found there. Language is part of the cultural identity of a society. The problem in Equatorial Guinea is not the official languages recognized in the constitution, such as Spanish, French and Portuguese, etc. The problem lies in the attitude of rejection or disdain with which the indigenous languages are conceived, which have gone from being a sign of cultural identity to a symbol of low social or economic status, even taken as a lack of universal culture.

It is not unreasonable to think that indigenous languages are discriminated against by Equatoguineans themselves. Moreover, everyone wants their children not to speak these languages because they consider them primitive or obsolete. It is this very negative attitude towards indigenous languages that is a cause for concern. It is not in vain that Sanguinetti has argued that "language is the house of being and in its dwelling man dwells" (Sanguinetti, 2006, pp. 59-72).

When we speak of autochthonous languages here, we are referring above all to those that are distinctly native to the country. That is, those languages spoken by the natives of Equatorial Guinea before the arrival of the Europeans, and which survived colonization. At present, to cite a few indigenous languages in Equatorial Guinea:

Seven indigenous languages [Bubi, Fang, Benga, Kombe, Baseke, Balengue, Bujeba] of the Bantu family, a Portuguese Creole [Annobonese], an English pidgin [Pichío Pichinglis] and Spanish, as the general language of Coine, are spoken. It is not a monolingual territory, not even bilingual, but, as we have seen above, it is a melting pot of languages, where Spanish is not the mother tongue of any of its speakers (Quilis and Casado-Fresnillo, 1995, pp. 27-35).

The most striking aspect is the disappearance of indigenous languages. Today, in Equatorial Guinea, there are more speakers of the official languages than of the indigenous languages. This equation is probably not taken into account, but the truth is that one in three Equatoguineans express themselves in the country's official languages, especially Spanish. We say they express themselves because the fact that they speak these languages does not mean that they all speak them well, that is, that they master the linguistic or grammatical codes of these official languages.

Furthermore, education also plays a very important role in the overlapping of native languages. In 90% of the country's educational centers, Spanish is taught in Spanish, which means that young people speak more Spanish and force their tutors or parents to express themselves to them in these languages. This asymmetry that exists at the national level is extremely worrying. The agony suffered by the indigenous languages of Equatorial Guinea only reflects the crisis of cultural identity. In an interview with Justo Bolekia Boleká, Álvarez-Feáns, in an interview with Justo Bolekia Boleká, points out that:

One of the clearest manifestations of enculturation is through language, and the percentage of people who do not speak the native languages is increasing. The presence of the colonizer's language in the most important contexts of society, such as the school, the church, the media, makes the people there identify it as the language that will provide them with what they need, the language of development, of prestige, of wealth,



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and this turns the native languages into cloistered languages, limited to the family context [...] When an African does not have any language that identifies him/her, the language of development, of prestige, of wealth. [...] When an African has no language that identifies him as such, only speaks French, English, Spanish, Portuguese or German, he ceases to be African, because language is the support of our identity (Álvarez-Feáns, 2008, p. 35).

Boleká's explicit arguments are only truths that, in the light of this research, we emphatically share. We do not say that foreign languages should be eliminated, but that the linguistic cultural legacy of our peoples should be protected. In addition, direct observation of the linguistic context of Equatorial Guinea forces us to be sensible and admit that there is an anthropological crisis, which can be understood and explained from the point of view of linguistic anthropology or philological anthropology. The indigenous languages of Equatorial Guinea are in need of a lot of oxygen, in the sense that none of the languages spoken by the natives of this country can be considered exempt.

The cultural identity crisis caused by the loss of indigenous languages is largely due to weak language policies. To avoid this type of situation we must first start from the knowledge that "culture is language and language is culture; it is a particular symbolic construction of social reality; it specifies our understanding of the world and, by the same token, categorizes and values our actions" (Teillier et al., 2016, pp. 137-161). Clearly, it is not possible to establish a dependent relationship between language and culture if there is no language. Therefore, the learning of national languages must be promoted so that culture continues to grow. The general characteristics that can be extracted from the indigenous languages of Equatorial Guinea are as follows:

- a) a) They are all Bantu-derived languages, except Annobonese, because it is a creole language of Portuguese origin. By Bantu we refer to the great linguistic family of languages spoken in Africa.
- b) b) Each of these languages gives a cultural identity to its speakers, so that by the mere fact of speaking a certain language, one knows directly to which ethnic group one belongs.
- c) They are ungrammatical languages. So far, there is no evidence that there has ever been a spelling in the indigenous languages of Equatorial Guinea. However, there is a linguist who has even published a dictionary in one of the indigenous languages of the country's ethnic groups. He is the writer Julian Bibang Oyé.

The problem with the dictionary of the Fang language published by the aforementioned author is that it does not seem to us that a culture should be forced to have a spelling and impose it on the speakers, as we have seen in this case. It is best to reach a consensus with several philologists, ethnolinguists, anthropologists, etc., in order to dare to establish a spelling; the impertinent thing is to do it unilaterally. As we have seen, language can be verbal or written. In the case of African peoples, most of the languages are unwritten, that is to say, they have no writing.

Roughly speaking, we consider that these are some of the characteristics that we can point out about the indigenous languages. Bear in mind that we are moving between linguistic anthropology and philosophical anthropology, which is why we do not want to focus so much on the linguistic aspect alone, even though it is somewhat unavoidable. Among the characteristics announced above, we can only say that there is a linguistic plurality depending on the different ethnic groups of the country. However, in spite of this linguistic



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plurality, it is also worth mentioning a nuance that we think is important. If we look at the issue geographically, we can say that the indigenous languages of Equatorial Guinea suffer more from decadence in urban than in rural areas. However, this does not mean that rural areas are exempt from this problem, since the official languages, especially Spanish, are widely spoken in rural areas, which endangers the indigenous languages. There is currently no cohabitation between these languages, rather we see that cohabitation is disappearing little by little, because the indigenous languages are no longer being taught and spoken.

The different languages that we are going to develop do not fully represent the linguistic panorama of the country. The reason for focusing our attention on them is mainly due to the fact that they are the most widely spoken.

3.1 Fang language

As the language with the largest number of speakers, it is the one most affected by the loss or decadence of the language. One of the main moments of the loss of the Fang language is found in the acculturation suffered by its members due to the Spanish colonization. However, with the passage of time, it has not been possible to recover part of what was lost.

The concern to emphasize that language confers cultural identity to those who speak it has not always gone unnoticed in Equatorial Guinea. In fact, President Francisco Macías Nguema, the country's first president, when he saw that Fang culture was in danger due to the invasion of European culture, imposed Fang as the country's official language because it had the most speakers.

Nationalist sentiment was one of the main motivations that led the president to impose Fang as the language of instruction, thus blocking Spanish, because he thought that it went against the cultural values of the people of Equatorial Guinea in general, but particularly of the Fang. In fact, he forbade Spanish to be spoken any more, something that could not be enforced as such. The loss of the cultural identity of the Fang, meaning the fact of being Fang, is subject to several factors, each of which has a very considerable impact on this language. Although the Fang language is the most widely spoken language in the country, it should be mentioned that it is gradually being completely invaded by Spanish, which is increasingly endangering the cultural vestiges of this ethnic group.

3.2 Bubi Language

After Fang, Bubi is the second most widely spoken indigenous language in Equatorial Guinea. Most of its members are located in the insular region of the country. Bubi is not an endangered language, but it is possible that it is on the way to extinction, as it is nowadays known that most of them speak more pidgin, which is a different English than the one we are used to, which they learned during the stay of the British colonists on the island of Santa Isabel, today, Malabo, capital of Equatorial Guinea. On the use of English pidgin on the island of Bioko, Lipski points out that:

It is considered a vulgar language, of low social class, poorly spoken [...] where individuals make daily use in oral communication, especially informal, of Pichinglish rather than Bubi, Kombe or Annoboneses, but the government refuses to recognize it in its records. Its use is located especially in the capital Malabo, and less so in Bata (Lipski, 2004, pp.116-119).



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In Guinea, Pichi or Pichinglis is part of the linguistic reality, especially on the island of Bioko, and serves as a communication tool with Nigerians and Cameroonians, who share this English-based pidgin. Apart from pidgin, they also speak Spanish, which may even be the mother tongue of many of them. There are Bubi who have never expressed themselves in this language, since they do not know it and cannot use it, so it is in disuse. At present, people of senile age are the ones who continue to be the guarantors of the language of this culture, because they use it for everything, it is their language, therefore, their culture, and it is not that they do not want to teach it, but there is, as we have made clear when speaking of the Fang language, a rejection of the learning of vernacular languages by young people, although it must be said that there are no great attempts to improve this situation. Aware of the cultural loss of having no indigenous language to safeguard, Professor Bolekia Boleká has made several attempts to present formulas to get young people interested in learning the Bubi language.

3.3 Annobonesa Language

The Annobonese language is, above all, the fusion of a Creole language, a product of Portuguese colonization. In this sense, we cannot say that the Annobonese originally have a linguistic unit. Rather, they have developed a vernacular language known as Ambo, which unites all Annoboneses, since it is a sign of cultural identity for them. In addition, the geographic location of Annobon may be playing a major role in the fact that the Annobonese language remains robust. While Spanish is the official language of the country, and all citizens residing in the country must use this language as the language of social cohesion, on the island of Annobon, F-Dambo, which is the indigenous language of the area, is the preferred language of Annobon, and is spoken by the Annobonese.

3.4 Ndowe Language

The Ndowe language is the fourth most widely spoken indigenous language in the country. However, it has not been spared the loss of cultural identity caused mainly by ignorance or refusal to disseminate and learn the language. This language is mainly used by the Ndowe, but it should be noted that it is a language spoken by the beach people, i.e. the ethnic groups found along the country's coastline. It is an ethnic group made up of the Combe, the Baseques, etc. On the other hand, it should be noted that the Ndowe have long been in contact with Western languages, which have introduced cultural changes in this ethnic group. Many Ndowe, such as the Combe, now speak more Spanish than their indigenous language. So how can the Ndowe think that their identity can be preserved if the language that characterizes this language is in disuse?

For our part, we believe that language is culture, therefore, identity, without it, it is inconceivable that there are ethnic groups that claim to be of a particular ethnicity when they do not really express themselves in their indigenous language. The causes of the rejection or lack of interest felt by the Ndowe to inculcate it in their children are due to multiple factors. The linguistic and cultural policies are the tools that the State must make available to all, in order to avoid this crisis of cultural identity that affects all the ethnic groups of the country, and that if it is not stopped, there is a risk that globalization will end up taking everything in its path, being disastrous for the ungrammatical languages like ours.

3.5 Bisio language

Of all the ethnic groups described above, the Bisio are one of the least numerous, making them, first and foremost, an ethnic group whose culture may disappear. If we say culture, it is because the language will also disappear. The vitality of a language is probably due to the



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number of speakers it has. By linguistic vitality we refer to "the actual use of the variety by a community of native speakers" (Mounin, 1979, p. 89). In the case of the Bisio, it cannot boast of being a culture whose cultural identity has several members that constitute the same cultural identity. In this sense, the Bisio language may disappear over time. In fact, if we take stock of all the indigenous languages of Equatorial Guinea, the Bisio language is very likely to decline. But why is this happening?

Undoubtedly, this is due to the lack of diffusion of the language itself. The fact that there are few speakers using a language is not a necessary condition, although it may be sufficient for its disappearance. Even if a language has few speakers, if they try to use and safeguard it, there will not be many problems. With this approach there is something that may perhaps lead to misunderstandings in this research. The thinking of a cultural group resides in the language they use. Therefore, linguistic and cultural identity go hand in hand. The autochthonous languages of Equatorial Guinea possess the reality of the cultural thought of each of these ethnic groups. This legacy must be safeguarded, however, the cultural identity of these ethnic groups is threatened, as we have been emphasizing.

Globalization profoundly affects indigenous languages because all of them have largely lost their cultural values. It is very important to redefine cultural, and especially linguistic, identity. It is urgent that cultural measures be adopted to prevent indigenous languages from being absorbed by various factors. The loss of cultural or linguistic identity, caused by the lack of teaching and learning of indigenous languages, must be halted. Culture unites people or communities, it is like an umbrella under which we shelter ourselves, therefore, it is important to know one's own language.

We continue to insist that the issue in this work is not that national languages should be eliminated, since they are already part of our heritage. We understand that the indigenous languages of the country are all unwritten and unwritten, so to try to eliminate the languages that are considered official so that some of the indigenous languages such as Fang or Bubi become official would be very conflictive, since a spelling would have to be investigated.

Indigenous languages imprint the identity of each of their members, those who use them. If these languages are not taught, cultural identity is compromised because they cannot coexist with the official languages, although we cannot argue that there is a linguistic purge in the country, but rather that the role of these languages in cultural identity should be revalued.

The impact of foreign languages on native or local languages in this sense is extremely devastating, since the impact is not only linguistic, but also sociocultural. The coexistence of foreign languages with indigenous languages is not at all harmonious, because as the former are more widely used, many of the indigenous languages are disappearing, because they increasingly have very few speakers. For this reason, UNESCO maintains that:

Many indigenous peoples, associating their disadvantaged social status with their culture, have come to believe that their languages are not worth safeguarding. They abandon their language and culture in the hope of overcoming discrimination, securing a livelihood and improving their social mobility or integrating into the world market (UNESCO, 2003, p. 2).



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This does not mean that this process is irreversible, because it is not. What is missing is the design of linguistic policies that allow or help inculcate in young people the importance of learning native languages, since they are the ones that allow these people to share with others in their environment, some of the features that characterize their community or ethnic group to which they belong.

When a language is abandoned, it is because the local people probably value the official languages more, even though these same languages are foreign, and therefore contribute to the decline of cultural identity. Children who do not know their own language are at a crossroads because they would know nothing of their own thinking that forms their own worldview of the world. Children who do not know the languages of their parents and grandparents have serious problems of inclusion and interaction with the community that should instruct them in all the cultural values of their people. In this process, the vernacular language plays an extremely important role because it shapes the very identity of the human being. Learning our languages is a benefit for our own experience throughout life, it is to be and to belong to something.

One of the problems that a priori is observed with respect to the loss of cultural identity is undoubtedly the lack of national educational policies aimed at promoting the learning of indigenous languages as part of the cultural heritage of the different peoples or ethnic groups that make up what is Equatorial Guinea. This way of proceeding is the one that, from our perspective, makes bilingualism even preferable. To clarify what bilingualism is, we use it in this work understanding that it is "the disposition that people have to handle at least two different languages; which they are able to manipulate and mix to achieve their discourse needs, and express their multicultural identity" (Araujo-Quiroz, 2013, pp. 189-204).

Bilingualism is one of the aspects that is currently taking place in our society as more and more children are being educated in this type of education. Equatoguinean children must currently speak Spanish, French, English and Portuguese, which would perhaps be a new way of expressing their multicultural identity, but not with the same cultural identity. As a result of all the theoretical body exposed, the objection we raise goes against those who point out the following: it is better for each person to speak the languages he/she wants because this way he/she is more educated and has better job possibilities.

As a counterargument to this objection, we must recognize that it is good to be polyglot or bilingual, that is, to be fluent in several languages. However, in my personal opinion, the best thing would be to start first with the learning of the native languages, since it is not possible to speak many languages to the detriment of the native ones, those spoken in the place where one was born.

The solution is not to be bilingual but rather to first have a cradle education that implies knowing the native language, the language of our parents, and then learning another. Before adopting any language policy, indigenous languages must be preserved and taught so that children can learn their culture through the speech of their mother tongue. All this, because "language can be the vehicle by which, in the diverse profiles that life presents, we can collaborate to establish a communicative level in the social and cultural spheres" (Habermas, 1987, pp. 351-432). In general terms, our position is that those who do not know the language of their parents or grandparents suffer a real identity crisis, since they cannot be located in a given culture or region.



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The learning of indigenous languages is of utmost importance because this is how human beings connect with their environment. Today, the indigenous languages of Equatorial Guinea have disappeared or are disappearing due to the influence of foreign languages and globalization. In this way, a real anthropological crisis has been created in the life of Equatoguineans. When a Fang or Annobonese speaks a foreign language, which we are not saying is something diabolical, it can be observed that he or she does so as a person trying to adapt to another way of seeing or conceiving the world, because language is life. To teach children a language is to make them learn a certain culture. If we want children to know their culture and not be in this anthropological crisis, they must necessarily learn their language, and therefore their culture. In this regard, we have to take into account a fact that is not isolated, and that is:

When people communicate in a language that, at least for one of them, is foreign, it is not possible to ensure that the shared meanings and values with which they are imbued are the same, which can be assumed when speakers express themselves in languages that share similar characteristics. The task of acquiring a language as spoken by a particular group means learning the meanings, values and practices of that group, expressed through the language (Byram and Fleming, 1998, p. 12).

With this, it is evident that if we want children to speak their parents' own languages, we must begin by valuing our own culture first. Today, it seems a necessity to implement the bilingualism mentioned in one of the chapters of this research.

4. Methodology

Since this research deals with a sociocultural issue such as the loss of native languages, a qualitative methodology has been used. The reasons that led to the choice of this methodology are due to the fact that "qualitative research has specific relevance for the study of social relations, due to the fact of the pluralization of life worlds" (Flick, 2004, p. 15). However, even if it is a qualitative research, it is susceptible to quantification, which helps us, thanks to research instruments and techniques, to know the reasons for this loss of cultural identity caused by the loss of native languages. Furthermore, it should be noted that "qualitative methodology has an exponential value in social studies, in that it brings together a series of characteristics that make the research go beyond the mere sum of data collection techniques" (Taylor and Bogdan, 1994, p. 20).

Although languages are not the only cultural manifestations of peoples, it should be known that they are linked to human thought. As a research technique, the survey was used and the instrument was a mixed questionnaire, containing closed and open questions, which was important for the collection of the data analyzed in this research. The survey has been chosen because it is the best technique that fits this research and because thanks to it, information has been obtained from the selected sample on the subject under analysis. Based on the research problem and the questions formulated, it was possible to carry out a survey of the Equatoguinean population. The questions asked were based on the assumption that all respondents speak the country's ancestral languages. The sample selected is 402 citizens, who are located in the two main cities of the country, namely the cities of Malabo and Bata.

Analysis and discussion of the results

The results presented below are the result of the survey conducted on a very select population, which is composed of the main ethnic groups of Equatorial Guinea, which we



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have mentioned throughout our argumentation. We believe that these data are important, since it is a part of this research that has made it possible to verify or verify the objectives set out in this research. To analyze the data, we used the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to measure the closed questions.

		Frecuency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
valid	They are disappearing	104	25,9	25,9	25,9
	They are less spoken compared to the official languages	173	43,0	43,0	68,9
	They are considered part of each culture, but there are no linguistic policies to promote them.	125	31,1	31,1	100,0
	Total	402	100,0	100,0	

Table 1. ¿What is the current situation you find in the indigenous languages?

According to this question, 43% of respondents say that the situation of indigenous languages is worrisome because they are less spoken than official languages such as Spanish or French. This is clearly seen in the percentages of question number one of this questionnaire where it is observed that more and more the different ethnic groups of the country speak very little of their native languages, choosing to express themselves in Spanish, French or English, which is why native languages are disappearing and because there are no more consolidated linguistic policies to avoid this fact.

		Frecuency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Válido	Yes	223	55,5	55,5	55,5
	No	178	44,3	44,3	99,8
	3	1	,2	,2	100,0
	Total	402	100,0	100,0	

Table 2 ¿Should indigenous languages also be official?

One of the things that is noticeable in many African countries is the demand of the natives and of some ethnolinguists for the possibility of making African indigenous languages official. This is the case that we observe in the response given by our respondents, where 55.5% agree that indigenous languages should be official, possibly because they give value and importance to indigenous languages, as is the case with languages that are official in many African countries, but which can also be considered as foreign languages. However, in the light of this research it must be recognized that, for the indigenous languages of countries to be official as such, they must also have a spelling, something that is not present in many of them. All indigenous languages should also be official, although this may entail other social difficulties.



		Frecuency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid	Globalization	111	27,6	27,6	27,6
	Lack of interest in culture	214	53,2	53,2	80,8
	Anthropological poverty	77	19,2	19,2	100,0
	Total	402	100,0	100,0	

Table 3 ¿Which of the following reasons contribute to the loss of cultural identity?

The loss of cultural identity alluded to in this work and evidenced by the different ethnic groups in the country, leads people to affirm that 53.2% is due to a lack of interest in culture. The reasons for this lack of interest in culture may be due to several not isolated facts, such as globalization that imposes in a direct way, which must be adopted especially by those minority cultures and that usually end up absorbing the culture of other peoples.

		Frecuency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid	Ndowe	97	24,1	24,1	24,1
	Bubi	113	28,1	28,1	52,2
	Fang	83	20,6	20,6	72,9
	Annoboneses	109	27,1	27,1	100,0
	Total	402	100,0	100,0	

Table 4 ¿Which of the following ethnic groups speak little of their native language?

According to the analysis of this table, we can see that of all the ethnic groups that appear in this question asked to our respondent, the Annobonesa ethnic group is the one that speaks little of their native language, probably because they are a very small group of speakers or because of their historical past, which we have described in this work. Apart from this, the data we have here show that the Bubis are the second ethnic group that speaks little of their language, also because Spanish or Pichinglis is more widely spoken on the island of Bioko. There are also the Ndowe, who express themselves more in Spanish than in their native languages. The picture we see with that, is that the Fang are the only ethnic group that speaks more of their language, although that does not mean that it is not being lost.



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		Frecuency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid	It is helping to strengthen Equatoguinean culture.	42	10,4	10,4	10,4
	It is absorbing the indigenous languages and contributing to their disappearance.	291	72,4	72,4	82,8
	It is coexisting with the indigenous languages without altering them.	69	17,2	17,2	100,0
	Total	402	100,0	100,0	

Table 5 ¿What do you think is the relationship between Spanish and the indigenous languages?

Since Spanish is the language most widely spoken by the inhabitants of Equatorial Guinea, we asked this question to find out how the citizens see the situation of Spanish in relation to the indigenous languages. For 72.4%, the Spanish language is absorbing the indigenous languages, which is accelerating their disappearance, since the number of speakers of Spanish in Equatoguinean society is increasing compared to the past, however, this Spanish has its peculiarities, since it is a Spanish spoken in Africa, from the African culture and has its own manifestations. In this way, what we can call Guinean Spanish emerges, which is the fusion of the indigenous languages of the country with the Spanish language itself.

		Frecuency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid	Through inclusive language policies	69	17,2	17,2	17,2
	Through an educational system	182	45,3	45,3	62,4
	Through the family itself	151	37,6	37,6	100,0
	Total	402	100,0	100,0	

Table 6 ¿How can the learning of indigenous languages in Equatorial Guinea be promoted?

It is evident that indigenous languages must be empowered, and to this end, the National Education System must reorient itself to safeguard our languages. It is a danger that our native languages are not recognized in the current General Education Law as languages of instruction, but rather Spanish, French, English or Portuguese. One of the results obtained



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with this type of policies is that the foreign languages that are official in this country end up or lead to the equipment of the native languages, because if they are not spoken at school, in the family or in interpersonal relationships, they fall into disuse and end up disappearing, since they cannot adapt with the other languages, because there are no mechanisms created for this purpose.

Just as there are official State institutions such as the Equatoguinean Academy of the Spanish Language (AEGLE), there should also urgently be an institution to safeguard the cultural legacy of the indigenous languages, which is impregnated in the different indigenous languages. On the other hand, it should be taken into account that for the indigenous languages, there must be a confluence of many factors, but although the educational system has been pointed out as shown in the table, the weight of the family must also be notorious. For the education of parents is extremely important, if they do not teach their own children to speak Fang or Bubi, neither will they teach their children to speak Fang or Bubi. If such a scenario occurs, this language will undoubtedly disappear.

		Frecuency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid	Yes	205	51,0	51,0	51,0
	No	197	49,0	49,0	100,0
	Total	402	100,0	100,0	

Table 7 ¿Can bilingualism help the loss of cultural identity?

Among all the questions posed, the answer obtained here from our respondents, where 51.0% have indicated that bilingualism can help the loss of cultural identity, is a challenge for us. This answer can be considered valid, because if we understand that speaking many languages to the detriment of others, especially those that are not used or recognized internationally or globally, this means that many of them would disappear and, therefore, there would be an acute anthropological crisis. Therefore, mastering more than two foreign languages is a good thing, as long as it does not mean ignoring one's own language, which gives one a sense of identity and belonging to a specific place.

Considering that the world is becoming more and more interconnected and it is a global requirement, indirectly, that people speak more than two languages, those who express themselves in only one language may be considered as the illiterates of modern times. However, we insist unceasingly that to the extent that one becomes bilingual, it should always be on the basis of knowledge of the language of one's culture.

It is highly praiseworthy that our children speak or express themselves in many languages, as this would mean that they are very up-to-date citizens and can easily integrate into other cultures different from their own. However, it is worth the redundancy, a bilingualism that is made at the expense of avoiding the learning of the native languages that allow one to identify oneself, is an empty or null bilingualism because it threatens the very essentiality of the people.



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6. Conclusion

Language has an inexorable relationship with culture; therefore, it is important to identify with it. Throughout this research, it has become clear that language gives a certain identity to those who speak it. However, in view of the fact that indigenous languages are rarely spoken, which means that they are gradually disappearing, a crisis of anthropological identity is thus being generated.

All languages have the same importance, since they are part of the reality of each people. They contain the entire legacy that has been forged from the most remote times to the present day. The language of the people can be considered alive as long as it is being used by its speakers. If they do not use this language, which should be passed on from generation to generation, it will disappear. In this sense, the linguistic situation of the country is extremely worrying. Hence, there is an anthropological crisis caused fundamentally by the loss or lack of interest shown in learning indigenous languages.

It has been seen that when one does not know the language of one's progenitors or one's social reality, one also does not know oneself. With this research work, we have not said that Equatoguinean children should not learn the official languages of the country, but rather our argument is that they should first learn their native language, which can be Fang, Bubi or Annobonese, simply because they constitute their own anthropological basis.

This research has revealed results that alert us to the danger in which these languages find themselves. Practically, without exception, all the indigenous languages of Equatorial Guinea are less spoken in the country, although it must be recognized that there are ethnic groups where the impact of language loss is more noticeable than in others, the evidence is that none of them is safe from this identity crisis.

There is no cohabitation between the indigenous languages and those that are official in the country. No indigenous language is official, so they are banned from being used in public spheres, with the argument that this prevents any ethnic group from being discriminated against by a linguistic supremacy exercised by another ethnic group that feels it has the authority to do so. As long as foreign languages such as French, Spanish, English or Portuguese continue to be the official languages and overlap with the indigenous languages, it is clear that the disappearance of these languages will become much more notorious. Therefore, if these languages cannot be made official as an effect to prevent them from disappearing, at least these languages should be declared as part of the cultural reality.

It may be that making native languages official is not the solution to the problem of the cultural identity crisis, but this path must be explored to see if it is feasible or not, therefore, it is imperative that serious linguistic policies be designed. Whether we want to admit it or not, globalization is affecting many of the country's native languages. In this sense, it is time to promote the teaching of these languages as it has never been done before. Children from an early age have the right to know the languages of their country, the one spoken by their parents, but we are referring to the one they learned from their parents.

For modern times, bilingualism comes in handy, as it allows people to have more possibilities to be able to speak one or more languages. However, in this process of learning multiple languages, native languages should not be left behind. Before learning a foreign language, one must know the base language. We should not have polyglots who know French, English, Chinese or German, but do not know their base language, such as Fang, Quechua or Catalan, to cite examples.



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Language policies are needed to encourage the learning and use of the indigenous languages of Equatorial Guinea. The textbooks used in the country's education system are in Spanish. This means that the only place where children can learn the indigenous language of their parents is in the family. However, this is not the case either, because even in the family more Spanish is spoken.

One of the limitations of this research lies in the lack of national studies on the status of these indigenous languages. At the academic level, this problem has not been given as much importance. Most of the research, such as that cited in this study, focuses on the Spanish spoken in Equatorial Guinea.



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