



Dissertation

By

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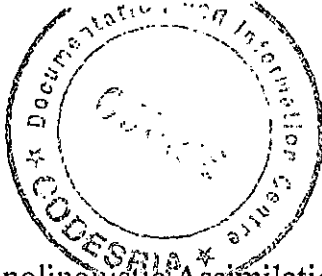
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**Taboo and ethnolinguistic assimilation: the orring
case**

June 1998



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Taboo and Ethnolinguistic Assimilation:
The Orring Case

A Project Report Presented to the Department of
Sociology/Anthropology, Faculty of the Social Sciences,
University of Nigeria, Nsukka

In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Master of Science (M. Sc.)

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June 1998

Approval Page

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Acknowledgment

I cannot thank enough all the people whom I had the good fortune of working with in one aspect of this project or the other in Eteji (Ntezi), Lame (Okpoto), Ukelle, Amuda and Utonkong. It is impossible, for reasons of lack of space, to mention each and every one of them. They include their Majesties Oluṅ e Lame, and Oluṅ Eteji; and my informants: John Olung, Chinyere Ilimi, Goddy Okoro, Chukwu Ikwo, Christian Oda, Patrick Ebu ... The list is inexhaustible. My landlord, Chukwuma Onwe, was always patient with me when, as was frequently the case, I was too cash strapped to pay my rent.

Outside my field base, the Dean of the Faculty of the Social Sciences, Prof Dan Obikeze and Head of Department, Dr Azuka Dike, were the great pillars whose invaluable moral support proved to be my worthiest tonic in the most challenging points of the project. My Supervisor, Ibe Chukwukere, was so exacting in his inspection of every stage of the work, and this has the great advantage of ensuring that I may be less disappointing to readers than otherwise could be the case. To all of these revered intellectual colossi and to their colleague at the Department of Linguistics/Nigerian Languages, Dr Pat Ndukwe, who supervised the initial project that gave rise to this, I owe eternal

debts of gratitude. Any shortcomings that still remain on the work are entirely my making.

My thanks go also to my alter ego, Paul Dede, who typed the manuscript with his famous expertise which only those who have had the bad luck of dealing with the average Nigerian latter-day typist will learn to laud.

Paucity of fund would have frustrated this project but support by the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) by way of their Small Grants for Thesis Writing award made its execution finally possible. I will remain forever grateful to this unique establishment.

Abstract

Although taboo is one of the subjects that has interested anthropologists from the earliest days of the discipline, nevertheless no researcher has previously investigated its place in ethnolinguistic assimilation. The present study focussed on taboo in an effort to explain why the Orring traditional religion is the only resilient domain among a total of four investigated in this minority ethnolinguistic group whose clans that live adjacent to the Igbo are found to be assimilating to their numerically superior neighbours. Existing works also present taboo as a negative injunction on which the ethnic has only the binary options of observance or violation. The Orring experience brings to light a third category, *avoidance*. It is the strategy adopted in these clans by the Christians who neither want to risk incurring the consequences of infringement of the taboo nor violate the tenets of their imported faith which frowns at autochthonous rites as idolatry. I have introduced the *three-gate schema* to try to explain this.

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Chapter One

Introduction

1. 0. 0. Background to the Project

The Orring are an ethnolinguistic group who live in several discontinuous territories in Benue, Cross River and Ebonyi States of southeastern Nigeria. Although those of them in Ebonyi State have been mentioned in ethnographic reports, history books and official documents (Cook 1935; Isichei 1976; Greenberg 1966; Murdock 1959; Talbot 1969; Anambra State House of Assembly 1981), no academic investigation had been carried out exclusively on them until 1991 when I researched on their language for my bachelor's degree thesis (Ezeh 1991).

Two problems were addressed. First, is whether the variety spoken by these people is a language of its own, or a dialect of Igbo? Secondly, if the variety is a language of its own, do the Orring still guard its vitality in the sociolinguistic domains to be investigated? Those domains were school, business, religion and family.

Only the two clans of Okpoto and Ntezi were investigated. In the fieldwork lasting nine months (from November 1990 to July 1991), I combined

administration of questionnaire and participant observation in an effort to address the two problems.

The questionnaire was useful in determining how people perceived themselves culturally and linguistically. It also proved helpful in typological analysis of the two languages: i.e. Igbo and Korring.

I modified the Swadesh list as part of one of the questions combining it with my own unstructured tests on the phonotactics and syntax for the purpose of testing for the latter information.

It was found that the Orring and the Igbo have distinct languages. After modifying the Swadesh list for local peculiarities, it was found that none of the 25 words selected had the same name both in Igbo and Korring (language of the Orring)¹. The morphological and syntactical characteristics of both languages were also compared and found to be different. For instance, whereas Igbo syllables are open (i.e. always ending in a vowel, syllabic nasal or consisting only of a vowel), Korring syllables may end with a consonant. Also, whereas in Igbo it is the verb that carries the perfect marker, in Korring it is the object that does this.

Cook (1935) noted that, practically, the Orring of Ntezi and Okpoto ran a monarchical system up until the British administration was imposed. At the

head of the monarchy in each of the clans was the one he described as a “deified personage”. In contrast, their Igbo neighbours were traditionally republican (Comhaire 1981: 15). But by the time under reference (1990 - 1991), the Orring of both clans had adopted the Igbo title of *Igwe* for their traditional rulers. In the old order that Cook described, the ruler was known as *olun̄*, or *ede olun̄*, meaning respectively “the supreme ruler” or “the supreme ruler patriarch”. The former expression is also used to refer to God, the qualifier *ubu* (spiritual) may be affixed.

But it was found that although the Orring and the Igbo had disparate linguistic and cultural systems, the Orring were assimilating to the Igbo in both spheres. It was also found that out of the four domains investigated, namely: school, business, religion and family, only that of religion showed some resilience.

In the domain of religion, it was found that there was a taboo prohibiting the use of any other language but Korring for traditional rituals. The ethnics who still adhered to the Orring autochthonous religion felt free to speak Igbo in any other contexts in the domains investigated but not in that of traditional rituals. However, those Or rings who had converted to Christianity used Igbo, Korring and English in their worship. The present research seeks to

investigate the nature of taboo in the light of the Orring ethnolinguistic experience.

Outside Ebonyi State, Korring is spoken in Utonkong (Benue State) and Ukelle (Cross River State). The Orrings of Ebonyi State live in four discontinuous towns in three neighbouring local government areas, namely: Ishielu (Ntezi, Okpoto), Ohaukwu (Effium) and Ezza (Amuda). The last, i.e. Amuda, have all been assimilated to the Ezza Igbo, though vestiges remain, mainly in their lexicon.

Ntezi is 35 kilometres from Enugu, the biggest town to the east, and 20 kilometres from Abakaliki, the major town to the west. It continues on the mainly rolling savannah topography until it joins Okpoto in the south. To the north, both are separated from Effium by several Igbo-speaking towns. After Effium in that northern direction the other Korring-speaking town is Utonkong. But the two are separated by several towns speaking one or the other Idoma dialects. The Ukelle Orrings have only one Igbo neighbour to the west, Izzi. They are almost surrounded by speakers of other minority varieties: Mbembe, Boki, Egede and Iyala. Their last village before Izzi is about 60 kilometres east of Ntezi.

The indigenes call themselves Orring, which in their language translates

“The Wise Ones”. They refer to their language as Korring. They call the Igbo *Ufuono*, and the Igbo language *Kifuono*. Their towns which to officialdom and the rest of Nigerians are Ntezi and Okpoto are to the Orring themselves Eteji and Lame, respectively.

1. 1. 0. Statement of the Problem

Taboo is a potent factor in regulating social activities, of which the use of language is one. How does taboo function to inhibit or encourage ethnolinguistic assimilation among a people that are faced with such a phenomenon?

Although there have been studies on taboo as well as on culture and language change, none has addressed the subject of language change from the perspective of taboo. Wallis (1983) while commending Douglas’s (1966) work on taboo nevertheless noted that its coverage was limited in scope. Language change is one of the subjects not covered by the work.

Concepts such as “acculturation” Richmond (1979: 1) and “assimilation” (Banton 1979: 9) have been used to describe the process or the resultant position which the individual or group that are shedding their previous cultural traits for those of another group find themselves. Such traits may include language.

The Igbo-Orring cultural experience, which this project seeks to investigate, fits into the concept of assimilation. Here, a people sensing themselves to be a minority in a multi-cultural situation adopt as a strategy the language and other cultural characteristics of the rival group. The authoritarian practices of the preperestrioka, former Soviet Union and polyethnic nature of United States have provided examples that are more familiar in the literature (Haarman 1986; McDowell 1982; Nagel and Snipp 1993; Banton 1979: 9; Epstein 1978: 61-67, 70-91).

But clearly there is something different between all those cases and the one of the Orring. Whereas in the cases reported in literature official policies make assimilation compelling, no such policy was present in the Orring case.

In the Soviet Union situation which Haarman reported, the authorities in the supraethnic socioeconomic structure under which all the various groups must operate decreed the use of a compromise language and other cultural manifestations. Hebrew and Jewish cultural practices were suppressed in favour of Russian and communism. In other examples, there was no express fiat in favour of any of the different languages and cultures in a polyethnic situation but nevertheless a minority group deemed it more helpful to adopt the ways and language of a rival group. In these situations the favoured language

was the language of business and bureaucracy or/and its native speakers, or bearers of the associated culture, were those in control of economic and political power.

None of the two situations applies in the Igbo-Korring case. Neither of the two are theoretically in a superior position in the supraethnic political structure which European colonization introduced. Those Orrings in Ebonyi State have always formed part of the same local administration with their Igbo neighbours from the beginning of colonial rule until the present (Cook 1935).

Earlier studies taking historical and bureaucratic fact-finding approaches (Isichei 1976; Cook 1935) have recorded for the Orring a people that were proud of their identity, including language, and were prepared to go to war to preserve it.

Officialdom may have felt embarrassed by this latter-day effort by the Orring to shed their language in favour of a rival one. In a previous democracy, the parliament of Anambra State to which the Orring territories belong debated and approved the use of Korring in the electronic mass media as a part of the strategy to save it from extinction (Anambra State House of Assembly 1981).

Instead of such official interventions or any other strategy it is only

taboo that has been more effective in slowing down the assimilation in the domain of the language where it applies.

1. 2. 0. Research Questions

From the foregoing, the present inquiry will therefore seek to address the questions outlined below.

- (a) Would the assimilation of the Orring to Igbo language and cultural identity have been faster had linguistic taboo not been present in autochthonous rituals?
- (b) Have there been instances where this taboo was broken? If so, what was the consequence?
- (c) Because adherents to Christianity feel exempted from observance of this taboo, does such a condition affect the population of Christians positively or negatively?
- (d) Are Christians considered by the rest of the ethnics as genuine members of the group or are they regarded as being disadvantaged in any way as a result of their attitude to the taboo?
- (e) Is this situation of assimilation the same in the Orring clans outside the Igbo neighbourhood?

- (f) If (e) is answered in the positive, does taboo also help to slow down the process?
- (g) If (e) is answered in the negative, how may the difference be accounted for?

1. 3. 0. Objective of the Study

The study aimed to investigate taboo as an inhibitor to change in the linguistic domain, among the Orring people of southeastern Nigeria. The focus was on those of them in the two clans of Okpoto and Ntezi although for comparative purposes there was a plan to ascertain the situation among a clan of this ethnic group outside the Igbo neighbourhood.

Through this it was expected that more insight would be gained into the nature of taboo, and its use for preservation of group identity. Previous studies and theoretical formulations had tended to anticipate an either-or situation in terms of observance or violation of taboo (Radcliffe-Brown 1965: 133-152; Udo 1983: 272-276). Munro (1979: 227) even introduced a definition that set up observance of taboo as a criterion for determining whether or not one was a member of a group. This study in investigating the position of Christians who do not observe the taboo on language use in Orring autochthonous rituals aimed also to confirm or deny such a claim. Regarding the more familiar two-

category, observance or violation, notion of taboo, the Orring example with relation to the Christian ethics seemed to suggest a third category: that of avoidance. This was to be investigated also to confirm or disprove this speculation.

1. 4. 0. Significance of the Study

If more can be learnt about the nature of taboo as a change-inhibiting factor there is no end to the diverse use which such knowledge may be put. Besides increasing how much is known theoretically of the subject at present, it may then be possible to manipulate such a social-control modality to encourage socially salutary acts and discourage inimical ones. I foresee greater applicability of such knowledge in wider cultural and social contexts than just in the confines of language. What is learnt on the subject of taboo and change among the present ethnics may be found useful wherever else in the world, and whatever other contexts even here in Nigeria, the issue of restraints from taboo are the subject. One such practical example is the series of unsuccessful attempts to introduce democracy following political independence from Britain in 1960. Politicians themselves (Sule 1996) as well as local and foreign scholars (Nnoli 1978, Comhaire 1981) blame untoward ethnic practices for the bunglings.

1. 5. 0. Operationalization of the Concepts

It seems helpful, for the purposes of avoiding ambiguity, to delimit the meanings of the key concepts as they were used in this study

- (i) Taboo: This refers to an injunction of religious or magical nature to avoid certain acts, or things or persons either permanently or during a specific occasion or period, under the pain of some adverse consequences to be inflicted direct by some divinities or authorized human agents acting on behalf of such supernatural principals.
- (ii) Observance of taboo: The act of complying with specifications relating to a taboo.
- (iii) Violation of taboo: The act of failing to comply with specifications relating to a taboo.
- (iv) Avoidance of taboo: The act of evading a circumstance that will have obliged one to observe a taboo. This is different from violation because avoidance is anticipatory whereas violation is participatory or executory.
- (v) Ethnolinguistic assimilation: *Ethnolinguistic* is a compound attribute indicating that both the aspects of ethnicity and

language are present in the noun being qualified. For instance, to refer to the Orring as an ethnolinguistic group means that they are both an ethnic group and a language group. This position may be appreciated if it is noted that where as possession of a distinct language is one of the criteria designating an ethnic group, nevertheless not all ethnic groups have distinct languages. For example, Austrians and Germans are disparate ethnic groups but they speak the same language.

Ethnolinguistic assimilation is therefore a process of adopting or the state of having adopted the language and/or other cultural manifestations of another group by an individual or group who originally belonged to a different one. The assimilees may no longer like to be associated with their previous ethnolinguistic identities.

- (vi) Assimilee (plural: assimilees): An individual or group who are assimilating to a different cultural identity and/or language.
- (vii) Ethnic (plural: ethnics): A member of an ethnic group or more than one of this, as the case may be.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

2. 0. 0. Taboo

Two famous studies within postevolutionary theoretical frameworks include that of Radcliff-Brown that originated from a lecture he gave in 1939 in honour of the Scottish classicist and armchair ethnologist, Sir James Frazer. Radcliffe-Brown's postulations on the subject now appear as a chapter of the same name in his book, *Structure and Function in Primitive Society* (1965). The other study is that of Mary Douglas (1966). The latter is usually rated the more widely respected, in terms of the originality of insight she brought in on the subject

The origin of the word in Western literature of whatever kind goes back to the 18th century. Captain James Cook, the English explorer encountered the Melanesian cognate of the word in 1777 among the Tonga (Munro 1979: 227). He found that in many other places he went in Polynesia and Micronesia there were also variants of this word. In each of those places it might appear as *tabu*, *tapu*, *kapu*, or possibly other variants. But in whatever form, the notion grouped together all prohibitions of whatever kind. It was in its use in Western literature that the word acquired the meaning that is now usually associated with it in the sociological sciences.

Radcliffe-Brown (1965: 133) stated that Frazer was in 1886 the first in the Western scholarly tradition to study the subject systematically. Frazer's views were for publication in the ninth edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. He afterwards published a full-length book, the first on the subject, along anthropological lines (Frazer 1936), but which lacked the analytical rigour of either Radcliffe-Brown's or Douglas's.

On grounds of the etymology of the word and, to an extent, its social functions or value Radcliffe-Brown recommended its replacement with two terms in anthropological references. One is "ritual avoidances" (alternatively "ritual prohibitions"). The other is "ritual value". He intended the former to identify "a rule of behaviour which is associated with a belief that an infraction will result in an undesirable change in the status of the person who fails to to keep to the rule". He intended "ritual value", to identify the object of such an action, for as Munn (1973: 603) succinctly made clear afterwards a taboo usually consists of two parts. The action that is prohibited, and an object of such an action.

Radcliffe-Brown's objections are anchored on two grounds. Etymologically, the word has a meaning that is wider than what anthropology currently assigns it. As regards the ritual object, such a thing or person is a taboo either because it/he/she is holy or unclean. He then was looking for a single expression that would connote both

states, in the manner of the French attribute, *sacré* or Latin *sacer* (pp. 138, 139). Nonetheless he saw taboo as part of the mechanism by which a society kept itself in existence (p. 152).

The fears that led to his changing of the more familiar term for the phenomena that the subject is concerned seem exaggerated, considering all else that is known about human language, and its fluidity of meaning. Linguists have coined such terms as “polysemy”, “homonymy” and related terms to try to account for the tendency to diversity of meanings on the part of some lexical structures. Typically expressions in a human language may only be specified in context. It is a major challenge of which no solution has yet been found (Rey-Debove 1975: 190, 191, 200-204).

As for delimitation in anthropological writings of the original South Pacific word, this is not new either in human language. The sociologist, R. A. Hudson (1980: 58-71), has devoted an ample space to its discussion. Usually meanings of borrowed expressions are circumscribed, extended or otherwise tampered with in their new environments. For instance, Smollet (1993: 12) cited an example where the English word, *businessman*, was borrowed into Bulgaria but it acquired the following forms which are anything but how their original cognate is used: *beezinesmen* (sic) (singular), *beezinesmeni* (plural), and *beezinesmenka* (feminine). Besides, taboo is not the only word in the anthropologist’s register in the position that Radcliffe-Brown

was objecting to. There are also, to cite only two examples, “shaman”, and “magic”. Lewis (1969: 277) states that originally the former was but a Siberian medicineman. Magic comes from $\mu\alpha\gamma\omicron\varsigma$, an original Greek cognate that means a wise man or a sorcerer (Gall 1975: 18).

More recently Mary Douglas (1966) took a totally different approach to this analysis which is yet to be surpassed for its originality, although this too does have its own share of imperfection. All societies, she notes, erect systems of classification which divided phenomena into a range of mutually exclusive categories. In those societies where alternative cognitive systems does not exist, any such phenomena that cannot fit into the familiar conclusions on the affected categories are excluded. As Wallis (1983: 392) citing Douglas (op. cit) has observed, such cognitive systems assume that the categories are immutable. Any deviation from the familiar characteristics of such categories are considered an anomaly to be rejected. An example commonly cited is the dietary prohibition on pork among the Jewish and Islamic cultures (Gariné 1994: 247, Munn 1973: 604). It is prohibited to eat the meat of ungulates, but not that of pig which lacks some of the familiar attributes of this class of animal.

One criticism of the effort of Douglas which relates to the instant project is that her formulations cannot account for all cases that fall under the term, taboo. Certainly

it does not explain its linguistic variant such as this project is interested in.

2. 1. 0. Assimilation

According to Banton (1979: 9), American sociologists became interested in this concept after the First World War following the fear that ethnics arriving the United States were, in his words, being Americanized. Later writers, he observed, tend now to see assimilation as a two-way traffic in which both cultures involved mutually influence each other. He, as Haarman (1986), also sees assimilation as a multi-layered phenomenon where the assimilating group may or may not completely shed their own identity. As in the Soviet Jewish community which he studied, what may result may be a part fusion; from an original B- identity to that of B^a- identity (p. 45). It may also lead to more far-reaching results. McDowell (1982), another study that considered assimilation from linguistic perspectives, also observed an incomplete process where the assimilating group still retain aspects of their original identity.

It seems unarguable that assimilation is gradual. But the view that assimilation is mutual between the two cultural groups in contact is debatable, on the basis of observed reality. Such cultural give-and-take may be possible in a situation of acculturation; not assimilation where there is a conscious effort to delearn or shed one set of cultural characteristics in favour of another. The latter are always considered more desirable in terms of the advantages and prestige they may confer in the

prevailing situation. In some cases, like in Haarman (1986) or even in the African colonial situation under the Portuguese and to some extent under the French (Nwanunobi 1992: 138) the authorities whose culture must be assimilated to had specifically enjoined such unidirectional process. Banton and those that hold his type of view have not demonstrated that they have taken this variant of the experience into consideration.

Nagel and Snipp (1993) studying the native American Indian case, in the face of the imposition of Western-style systems, identified assimilation as one of the three strategies for survival a minority ethnic group coming in contact with a dominant one in a new and sustainable socioeconomic relations may adopt. The others, according to them, being amalgamation and accommodation. It is their formulations on assimilation that relate to our present subject.

They have a definition that sees the minority group as the one that may assimilate, and this usually is unidirectional. Their definition also anticipates that both groups form parts of the same political structure, and that the need to assimilate arises because the dominant group pose a threat to the survival of the minority which may only be remedied or escaped from with this strategy (p. 204). It is remarkable that they consider none of the strategies identified by previous studies adequate in accounting for the situation of the native Americans they studied, hence their coinage of a new

term, *ethnic reorganization*.

It seems that the term, assimilation, is appropriate in the Igbo-Korring case. What seems different here is the source of the pressure to assimilate. Unlike in all other cases in the literature, the group whose culture is being assimilated to has no political power over the assimilees, rather both of them are constitutionally held as equal in a local-government structure which itself is part of a much larger polyethnic federal government. Here again the group whose culture is being assimilated to are not the one in charge.

2. 2. 0. Igbo-Orring Relations

The earliest document I have been able to find on the subject is that of A. E. Cook (1935), a British colonial officer who studied the people for the government of the Southern Provinces. In general not much is found in print on the subject. Probably many intellectuals of Igbo origin who have written on the subject of the Igbo and their neighbours do not know about the Orring. Afigbo (1981) both in written and cartographical illustrations made no mention of them. Up until 1990 the Orring of the two communities I previously investigated had not got a university graduate. I do not know of any academic work any of them has done on the subject. Foreign writers seem to have taken more interest in the matter but frequently arrive at debatable conclusions regarding their historical relations with the Igbo, which as a rule has been

the focus they adopt. Cook (1935) quoted another colonial officer as speculating that the Orring came from the North into the hostile Igbo territory where they were being pressed back. But such a speculation cannot account for the existence of an Orring clan further southeast at Ukelle in the present Cross River State.

Talbot (1969: 226) speculated an earlier origin of the Orring in the Igbo territory, predating the Igbo themselves. Isichei (1976: 89) recounts that having defeated one of such Orring clans, the Ezza Igbo subsumed them as the Igbo community of Amuda.

One common thread running through all those accounts is that they typically conflict with each other. In any case, none has studied the present subject of assimilation.

Chapter Three

Research Methodology

3. 0. 0. Research Design

The methods expected to be employed for obtaining data were basically qualitative, just as the analysis and presentation of the data were to be mainly idiographic. "Idiographic" is used here in contradistinction to nomothetic analysis. According to Mitchell (1979: 101), citing Wilhem Windelband who first made the distinction, an idiographic analysis is concerned with particular proposition, whereas a nomothetic one is concerned with general proposition. He considers theoretical sciences as those that may be served better by the latter, citing as examples, physics, economics and genetics. The qualitative-idiographic strategy seemed the most advisable option, given the nature of the subject to be inquired into.

Principally participant observation was to be used for data collection in the present research, but would be supplemented with other methods in circumstances where such would be more effective. The other methods that was expected might come in handy were focus-group discussions and questionnaire interviews.

3. 0. 1. Research Population

The exact population of the Korring-speaking groups put together has proved

hard for me to obtain up until now, although I continue to make efforts. The 1991 census figures have not been broken down below local-government levels. For instance, although the figure 180,932 is cited for Ohaukwu and 132,552 for Ishielu, it is not known what proportion of these relate to the Orrings in these districts.

However, the population for Ntezi and Okpoto had been put at 25,000 in 1981; Okpoto 12,001, and Ntezi 13,000. If the conventional 2.5 percent annual growth rate is adopted, we should have for the two towns some 34,376 at present. There is a difference of a little more than 4,000 when compared with an official figure which in 1996 gave 30,004 for the two towns, based on the 1963 census (Anambra State House of Assembly 1981: 1611). By those figures, Okpoto separately has 14,047, and Ntezi, 15,957.

3. 0. 2. Sample and Sampling Technique

For purposes of the questionnaire-style interview aspect of the research alone, I expect to employ quota sampling to select twenty respondents from the two clans where the taboo applies. Age range would be from twenty upwards. This was to ensure that respondents had enough experience on the subject to comment upon it. Each must be an indigene of the clan on which he or she was to comment. Their sectarian sympathies would be noted in an effort to determine what effects their religions had on their attitude to the taboo.

The proposed questionnaire is attached as an appendix herein. It ought to be stressed that besides this structured interview it was expected that occasions would arise for me to carry out interviews of the unstructured varieties with others, or among those involved in this mode as the need arises.

3. 0. 3. Instruments for Data Collection

Three data-collecting instruments were expected to be used: (i) participant observation (ii) questionnaire, and (iii) focus-group discussions.

Focus-group discussions was to be used to try to compare whatever conclusions I might reach based on my independent observation and replies that might be elicited from isolated, individual interviews. Because illiteracy was widespread in these communities as I have indicated in 2. 2. 0., I hope to administer the questionnaire orally.

A questionnaire was to be helpful in ensuring that the same questions were asked to respondents in areas where a fact was to be established by a concurrence of replies by respondents. For instance, such a strategy was useful in determining whether or not Koring and Igbo were different language as shown in 1. 0. 0.

I thought that a questionnaire would also be useful in the aspect of this research that sought to gauge the potency or lack of it, of taboo as a hedge to assimilation.

Because of the tact required in eliciting the information on this delicate

subject, I planned to conduct all the interviews by myself. Consideration for the favoured quantitative procedure for selection of a sample for a random investigation was not to be paramount, which is not to say that my method was to be desultory. Some writers on social science research have recommended such a modification where it will be more effective than strict statistical procedures in obtaining attitudinal data (Hammersley and Atkins 1992: 3, 19, 25; Obikeze 1990: 18, 19, 159; Sayer 1992: 200, 201). Peltó (1970: 159, 160) citing Bennet and Thaiss (1967: 169, 314), is even more emphatic in his warning about the use of quantified research procedures in ethnographical research. His reason is mainly that this form of inquiry, in contradistinction to sociology, inclines to "holistic depiction". The emphasis is on adjustments to realities in the field rather than insistence on prescriptions of preconceived research models.

3. 0. 4. Material Equipment to be Used

For the participant-observer and the focus-group-discussion aspects of the inquiry, electronic permanent recordings were expected to be necessary. These were to complement writing. An audio cassette recorder and a still camera were to be employed in appropriate circumstances.

3. 0. 5. Residence and Duration of Fieldwork

Residence among the ethnics were seen as essential for an effective participant

observation. Between January 1997 and December 1997 there were to be three festivals. Besides these, there would also be numerous irregular traditional occasions. Each of these required diverse rites in the two clans. The three festivals were: Ofie Ode (Ntezi, January), Elugwu (Okpoto, January-February), Etukpar (Ntezi, June). During those months I planned to live in one of the communities for purposes of the research.

Ackroyd and Hughes (1981: 107) citing Gold (1958) have classified participant observation into four types to include varieties where residence in the community being studied is not possible. However, I chose to be resident in the community within the period. In doing this I would adopt the option the authors call *participant-as-observer*, one of the methods by which the researcher immerses himself, as it were, in social life of the community. The difference between this strategy and its alternative which they named *complete participant* is that in the latter the researcher operates more or less like a spy, never revealing his true intention. In the former strategy, he does.

What makes such a covert-research strategy unsuitable is not the fact that its intention is disguised. Often it can be an effective way of getting at data which people will not otherwise release. Holdaway, a sociology student and policeman, has used it for a study of his own place of work (Hammersley and Atkins 1992: 68, 69). But it

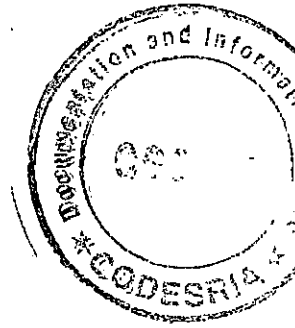
has been suggested that a researcher employing this tactic should beforehand have been very familiar with and already integrated, for other purposes, in the setting he will work (Hammersley and Atkins, *ibid.*).

3. 1. 0. Methods of Data Analysis

Presentation of the report was planned to be mainly idiographic, as explained in 3. 0. 0. Statistical manipulations, while not being totally neglected, were not to be paramount. There was not to be any attempt to use them to erect any universally applicable principle. These would only be used where findings in the field made them necessary for reasons of ease of understanding of the report. It was not likely that more than such descriptive statistics as percentages, mean, ratios, and the like; and illustrative devices as tables, charts or graphs would be found helpful.

Chapter Four

Experience in the Field



4. 0. 0. Preface to the Report

It may be helpful to state that I wrote the three preceding chapters before I began actual fieldwork. What now follows is the account of actual experience in the field and analysis of the findings. In the present chapter I focus only on those aspects of the field experience which were not anticipated in the three previous chapters.

4. 1. 0. Initial Contacts

I began the fieldwork for this project on 21st January 1997 and continued until 20th December 1997, 12 months. Initially, in order to lessen suspicion among curious natives, I decided to take up honorary teaching at the only one secondary school at Ntezi, one of the two clans to be researched on. Before I got a place to live there, I was shuttling most days from Emene, a suburb of Enugu. I did this for three months before I got a one-room apartment at Ulepa, a place just about 150 metres away from Ofie Ode, the pan-clan shrine of the Ntezi.

In the school I was assigned to teach economics to the senior class. As I have mentioned, no remuneration whatever came from this but the tactic certainly paid off vis-a-vis my research. It was from the school that I met some of my contacts,

including the most devoted of my informants, John Olung.

John was teaching in a primary school, about three kilometres away but had come to the secondary school to register his sister. We arrived earlier than the officials. As I waited for the classrooms to open, and he awaited the arrival of the authorities he wanted to meet, I tried to engage him in a chitchat. Gladly he was quite responsive. It happened that, however ambivalently, he had not been happy about the assimilatory process going on at the expense of his culture. It was he and another colleague of his at the school, a man known as Uncle O (real name, Goddy Oke) who approached the landlord first on my behalf.

Living among the ethnics provided me with the level of interaction which led to access to first-hand information which previously available sources outside the clans had not made possible. Some of such data are not directly connected with the focus of the present inquiry, but are nevertheless relevant to the ethnology of the clans as a whole. Examples of these are the oral tradition of the people concerning their origin, and information on other clans related to the Orring group.

Cook (1935) and Talbot (1969) expended much effort speculating on the origin of the group. Talbot (1969: 226) stated that it was possible that the Orring of the present Ebonyi State were the first to settle there. Cook (1935) speculated on two possibilities: (i) the people might have migrated from the northern districts, or (ii) they

might have had the same origin as their northeastern Igbo neighbours, mentioning in particular the Ezza, Ezzamgbo, Ngbo, Ezillo, Ishielu and Ohafia-Agba.

On account of overwhelming linguistic evidence, I had as early as the time of my previous project suspected this thesis of Cook's to be faulty (Ezeh 1991: 7, 23, 24), although then, as now, I cannot claim to have got sufficient facts to suggest an alternative conclusion. Apart from the linguistic evidence adduced in my earlier essay against Cook's account; my interactions with the Orring of Ntezi and Okpoto in the present research brought to light what their lores say about the origin of the groups.

The Ntezi give as names of their founders a couple; Ògbá (♀) and Úgbòlókē (♂). Indigenously the Ntezi refer to themselves with the full designation *Eteji-Ogba-Ugboloke*, meaning Ntezi the descendants of Ogba and Ugboloke.

The first place the couple arrived is conserved as a great shrine. I was denied a visit to the place. According to the natives, a non-Ntezi may only enter the grove on the pain of death. It is said, for instance, that in times of trouble involving an Ntezi and a non-Ntezi, if the Nteziperson should escape to the grove and the non-Nteziperson insists on pursuing him to such a refuge, the aggressor will disappear in magical circumstances.

The Okpoto call their own founders Órē-Úkwō (♀) and Ùsáí (♂). They first settled in Ileolung village whose name literally means the Ruling Home. Until 1977

this was where the powerful *olun̄* (king) originating from precolonial days must be selected. But with the present transformations, the clan made a new rule since 1977 introducing rotation of the office, one village after another.

In the context, the pairing of the patriarch's name with that of his consort is remarkable from anthropological perspectives. Among the Igbos, for instance, this is not usually the case. Only the name of the patriarch is usually preserved. Certainly more research will be rewarding but it appears that the people are not matrilineal, nor does their system appear to be double-descent. Inheritance is only through the father. But one feature that may interest gender anthropologists is the emphasis put on the position of the woman in her husband's lineage. Her children may bear hers as surname, or bear that of their father. I worked with some male informants who bear their mother's name as their surname.

Again, Cook gave only men's names as those of the founders of the two clans. None of those names he gave was corroborated by my informants.

4. 2. 0. Other Orring Clans

When I set out for the present research, I only knew, from my past inquiry, that the Orring had a clan each in Cross River State (Ukelle) and Benue State (Utonkong). Also I knew that in Ebonyi State three clans: Ntezi, Okpoto and Effium, were Korring-speaking. Amuda (Izem, in Korring) although Korring-speaking until recent past had

as good as assimilated to Igbo.

But in both spheres I came upon fresh facts in the course of my present work. Informants told me of other clans in Cross River State that are Korring-speaking. They are Okum, Izekwe and Biase. Sadly, owing to paucity of fund, I was not able to travel to these places.

Within Ebonyi State, I came upon a place named Ntezi Aba. I had travelled to Abakaliki and was walking the Ezza Road linking the Kpirikipiri roundabout with the new Enugu-Abakaliki road. At a point there was a signboard announcing this community. It is at least thirty kilometres to the Ntezi town, which is the only community with this name that I knew previously. Naturally this aroused my curiosity.

When I returned to my field base I asked three of my informants in separate interviews at different venues where none was likely to have heard what the other told me. All the three knew about the existence of that community, but their explanations differed as to the historical relationship between the two places. Two of them also pointed out using scanty materials from oral tradition which, typically, is a very intractable research instrument. However, one fact has become clear following these and other accounts. There were migrations involving mass settlements in the past, either by the Igbo of these northeastern districts or by the Orring.

After the main Ntezi community there is an Igbo town, Ohafia-Agba, that speak a dialect related to the Izzi variety. Izzi is the last Igbo-speaking town in the northeast, and after them is, quite remarkably, Mfuma an Ukelle town that speak the Korring variety. As I mentioned above there is also an Izzi settlement in this Ukelle town.

At Okpoto, an informant told me that each of the three of the Orring communities in Ebonyi State had a parallel in Cross River State. His pairing was: Okpoto (Ebonyi) and Okum (Cross River); Ntezi (Ebonyi) and Ukelle (Cross River); Amuda (Ebonyi) and Izekwe (Cross River). In the Igbo town of Ezillo, the next town to the north of Ntezi, there is a little settlement called Amuda-Ezillo. Remarkably many of the households still trace their origin home to the main Amuda. Amuda-Ezillo live side by side the Ezza Ezillo. One home is that of an Amuda family, another may be that of an Ezza. The location is middle of the way between Ntezi and Ezillo.

According to the Orring lore, the Amuda were an ally to the Ezza in days of interethnic wars. The greatest contribution of the Amuda was to interpret the Korring language to the Ezza. The Ntezi tell of one particular occasion when such an alliance proved disastrous in a war with Ezza where the Orring side were otherwise having the upper hand. After the Ntezi ran out of supplies, the commander shouted an order for a replenishment. The Amuda allies of the Ezza, unknown to the Ntezi, interpreted the

message to their friends. As the Ntezi moved to the rear to get the needed supplies the Ezza gave a successful chase.

Isichei (1976: 89) sees the collaboration for the Amuda and Ezza as the result of the conquest of the former by the latter, but my informants unaware of her conclusions hold that the Amuda were a voluntary ally of the Ezza.

4. 2. 1. Extended Connection

Linguistic clues to the effect that the Orring are ethnolinguistically connected with more groups in Nigeria and, possibly, other places in central Africa are many. The time and funds available for the present inquiry made it impossible to do more than has been shown here. But at each turn, one came upon new facts not previously addressed, or even anticipated in literature.

4. 2. 2. A Possible Mbembe Link

My first suspicion that there might be a historicolinguistic link between the Orring and the Mbembe, a group widespread in the southwestern districts of Cross River State, was when I noticed that there was a hamlet called Igbo (pronounced, *Ígbō*; not to be mistaken for *Ígbò*). There is a clan in the western districts of Cross River State that also go by that name and speak a variety related to that of the rest of Mbembe group. They share a boundary with the people of the eastern fringes of Ebonyi State. Ntezi's Igbo hamlet and the main Igbo town are about sixty kilometres

apart. In both places no respondent knew of any historical connection.

Two respondents from the Cross River town interviewed at Enugu said they did not know of the existence of the Ntezi hamlet. But at Ntezi, the adults said they knew of the Cross River Igbo clan. Nevertheless they denied any link whatever with them.

Talbot (1926: 5-7) identified the groups as belonging to different ethnolinguistic groups although he put them in the same linguistic subphylum which he called Semi-Bantu -- something not different from recognizing that Yoruba and Igbo belong to the same subphylum of Kwa but nevertheless confirming them, for what they are, distinct ethnolinguistic groups. Many expressions selected at random are the same in both languages but more systematic comparison needed to be done. Out of six expressions chosen at random, three are the same in both languages, namely: wadum (man), letar (stone), leto (head).

I have also discussed with a Camerounian here in Nigeria who know of a town in the northeastern part of his country which bear the same name as the Okpoto, namely Lame. The Orring are also the only Nigerians who distinguish their people and language exactly the way some of central African Bantus do, prefixing K--- to the language.

Surely each of these require to be subjected to the rigours of exclusive

scientific inquiry for the resultant conclusions to be reliable. And the clues are too strong for such an inquiry to be ignored.

4. 3. 0. Experience with Respondents

Four basic reactions to the questionnaire and unstructured-interview aspects of the research were met with. (i) Some did not want to reply to questions because they were unable to see how anything useful could come out of the research. They considered it a waste of time. (ii) Some are scared. They could not be convinced that there was not a hidden, pernicious intention behind the inquiry. (iii) Some wanted to reply, for whatever the inquiry was worth, but they needed to be compensated in cash or kind. (iv) Some readily responded to the questions.

With some effort, it was possible to persuade some respondents in categories (i) - (iii) to reply to the questions. In some cases my informants had persuaded me to give kola, or monetary token in its place. There were occasions where such gifts were required as a legitimate part of the custom. An example was when I met a council of titled elders during *Etukpar*, the Ntezi festival commemorating the harvesting of the new yam. My informants counselled that the applicable custom was that I should give any amount of money that I could afford as a sign of respect. Outside the contexts where such gestures were sanctioned by custom, I relied solely

1 verbal perusasion, even if I risked failing to secure such an interview or
administration of the questionnaire, as was the case in a number of instances. It
seemed to me that the response would be more reliable if volunteered than if induced
by a material reward.

The elderly were more likely to be more cautious in dealing with me than the
younger people. It happens also that it was among the elderly that the larger number
of people who were still enthusiastic about the traditional Orring ways were to be
found. Typically, among the young ones respondents turned out to be mainly those
who had abandoned the Orring autochthonous religion. Such a state of affairs has
some implications to the findings of the research as shown in the next section.

Chapter Five

Analysis of the Data

5. 0. 0. The Data

Although, as indicated in 4. 3. 0., it was often hard to convince respondents to speak on the subject of the project, nevertheless the number envisaged in 3. 0. 0., namely twenty, were interviewed. Eighteen of them replied to all the questions of the interview, only two refused to reply to all the questions. Their refusal to reply to some of the questions is worth noting because this was out of fear or suspicion, not out of lack of knowledge of the answer.

All the 20 replied that they had witnessed at one time or the other a ritual involving autochthonous-religion-style prayer in either of the two clans, namely Ntezi or Okpoto.

It is important to mention that in the field I modified the original questionnaire, Appendix A, to include a question aimed to find out whether or not the respondent had ever witnessed a violation of the taboo on the use of language in prayer. Out of the 20 responding, 2 had responded to the questions before I brought in the amendment. Out of the remaining 18, 2 as I said in paragraph one above did not reply

to all the questions. Finally, out of the 16 that replied to this particular question, only 2 said they had witnessed a violation; 14 said they had never.

The youngest of the respondents was 22 and the oldest was not less than 70. Records of birth were not kept in these clans until recently when, at least nominally, the Nigerian Federal Government introduced birth registers in all parts of the nation-state. Respondents guessed out their age, excepting three of them who said they did not know. Two are men; one a woman. The lady could not be less than 30. She already has daughters one of whom cannot be less than 18. Between the two men, one is the oldest among all the respondents. He is already stoop by age, and I and one of my informants/interpreters had to be shouting the questions. The other man cannot be less than 35. He is a farmer and eldest man in his compound.

5. 0. 1. Autochthonous Religion versus Christianity

In the two clans, Christianity is very popular among the younger people -- those in their teens and twenties. This is also the case among those who although a little older belong to one of the two categories: (i) travel outside the clans frequently, or (ii) work in the public service or for non-indigenous business interests, that is those economic establishments with non-Orrings as their proprietors.

In the course of the interviews I met with old respondents who, though practise the Orring traditional religion, spoke wistfully of the hope to convert to Christianity.

One of them who put his age at 52 had actually so converted. He told me that it was far cheaper, economically, to be a Christian. According to him, his expenses involved in getting sacrificial materials and other ritual items in the autochthonous religion were by far more than the fees and donations the Christians were required to pay.

Among the 20 sampled, only one responded that he never was in the Orring Autochthonous Religion. Among the rest, three categories emerged: (i) those who had always been with the indigenous faith, (ii) those who converted from it to Christianity, and (iii) those who converted from Christianity to it (see figure 5. 1). In other words, 95% of the sample were either with the indigenous faith previously, or were still with it at the time of the interview. Even the one who said that he had always been a Christian also said that he had witnessed rituals involving adherents to the autochthonous religion praying with kola.

Figure 5. 1

Sample size	Categories						
	AR → C	C → AR	AR → D	C → D	B	BB	%
20	9						45
		4					20
			0				0
				0			0
					6		30
						1	5
20	9	4	0	0	6	1	100

Key:

→ = Converted from the religion indicated to another

AR = Ooring Autochthonous Religion

B = Always an AR adherent

BB = Always a Christian

C = Christianity

D = Any other religion than AR and C

5. 0. 2. What Punishment?

Surprisingly there was no unanimity as to what consequence anyone who violates the taboo on the language use in prayer may suffer. Replies ranged from outright expression of outrage to those of respondents who said that the erring supplicant would only be called to order. Six respondents said that the effect of breaking the taboo was invalidation of the prayer; 3 said that breaking of the taboo was unimaginable; 5 said that the erring supplicant would be called to order in the course of the uncompleted ritual.

These replies seem to indicate a scrupulous respect of the taboo by Orrings of the Autochthonous Religious persuasion. Out of the 20 respondents only 2 said that they ever witnessed the violation of this taboo. The incidents of violation are rare, which would have led to the difficulty, on part of some of the culturebearers, in remembering the consequence attendant to such a deviation.

It is important to specify that no respondent, whatever his or her religious persuasion, disputed the exclusivity of Korring as the only language for traditional rituals. This fact is crucial to the understanding of the rest of this analysis.

Furthermore, I should indicate that although focus group discussion was anticipated as one of the research tools, reality in the field made the use of this impossible. Within the period and resources available for this project it was

impossible to organize focus group discussions that could serve any useful purpose. Given the situation described in 4. 3. 0., truly representative panels up to the number that could help the inquiry would require a longer period and more fund to organize. One peculiarity of focus group discussion is that groups, not individuals, are the units of analysis (Bender and Ewbank 1994: 70) and the group should be selected in such a way as to represent all shades of likely views or information on the topic in question. In the present case, at least four focus groups would have been needed but going by my experience, the older respondents of the autochthonous religious persuasion, not the least women, were unwilling to join in such a formal debate.

In the place of focus group discussions, I made use of every opportunity in crosschecking disputed points through unstructured interviews.

5. 1. 2. Christians and the Taboo

When a person in these clans converts from the autochthonous religion to Christianity the person no longer has any need to pray to the indigenous deities. But the person still prays to the supernatural being in whom the Christians believe. However, he or she feels freed from the taboo that enjoins the use of Korring in praying. He may pray in any language he is proficient in, believing that the supraethnic deity whom he now addresses is capable of understanding any language.

In this, as in my previous fieldwork (Ezeh 1991) I witnessed such prayers. On

Easter Sunday of 1997, 21 March, I went to two different Christian places of worship for the purpose of observing language use in those places. One is Methodist and the other Grace of God Mission, one of the new-generation pentecostalist sects. In the session I observed, out of 18 songs sung, only 2 were sung in Korring. Of the remaining 16, 11 were in Igbo and 5 were in English, including Pidgin. A total of seven sessions of prayer proper were had. All were in Igbo.

At the Grace of God Mission, seven songs were sung in the segment that I observed. One was in Igbo. Six in English. None in Korring. Four prayer sessions were had, and all four were in English.

I observed individual prayers at mealtimes at various times in the course of my stay. None was in Korring. Depending on the level of proficiency the supplicant had in English, the prayer could be in that language or in Igbo.

The Christians feel they are bound by this taboo only as long as they have not converted to their new religion. But the adherent to the autochthonous faith feel obliged to follow the proper ritual procedure including the use of Korring without which his prayer will be wasted.

5. 2. 2. Avoidance as Strategy

It is noteworthy, as indicated in 5. 0. 1., that some of the adherents to the Orring Autochthonous Religion have had to convert to Christianity to avoid some

obligations that go with the traditional faith. Some speak of their wish to do so.

Going by the replies of interviewees, the number of Christians is increasing although summary statistics on this are not readily available, and the time and resources available for the present inquiry cannot bear a detailed census of my own. Nevertheless none of the proselytes, or those aspiring to be these, mentioned the linguistic requirement in Autochthonous Religious rituals as the reason for his or her conversion. Each nonetheless felt freed of that obligation once he or she was a Christian.

In the insight into taboo that anthropologists and scholars of religion are most familiar with, Douglas (1966) states that a simple society treats as taboo a critical deviation from the familiar. An example is given with the Jewish Levitical dietary prescription where pork is tabooed because although having many of the attributes of the ungulates, pig nonetheless lacks some of the other important attributes of this category of beasts.

But the classification or paradigm that produces such prescriptions is itself a product of a specific social system or culture. Thus what taboo is, is necessarily dependent on space and time. To illustrate this using Douglas's formulations already referred to, pork was not a taboo to the Jews in pré-Levitical times, and afterwards, after Christianity broke the exclusivity of Judaism as the autochthonous faith of the

Jews, converts to the new religion felt exempted from the dietary observances of the old faith (Dow 1974: 178)³.

In both cases, the Orring and the Jewish ones, the culturebearer feels obliged to observe the taboo as long as he still adheres to the old religion. But he is unable to change either the structure or its function. He only rejects these and adopts a parallel structure within the same culture. In the study of the Yoruba traditional power relations, Lloyd (1968: 27) found that introduction of such parallel norm (he used the word, "technique") necessitated an adjustment of roles in the older structure.

My interest in the Orring case is ethnolinguistic. My investigation showed no such adjustment. It can be demonstrated that the taboo on ritual language use seems to have slowed down assimilation to the rival language. Although adherents to the Orring Autochthonous Religion feel free to speak Igbo for non-ritual purposes, they make no mistake to do this while praying. They condemn the attitude of the Christian as sabotaging the authenticity of Orring culture. But they seem helpless in the face of all that. The existence of the two rival normative systems is a *fait accompli*.

In Cross River State, I sampled opinions of speakers of this variety at Mfuma, Ukelle South community. I was there in December 1997. Coincidentally, at that time there was the strong rumour that the town might be transferred to Ebonyi State which was created about fourteen months previously with preponderance of Igbo-speaking

clans. The reaction of the part of Ukelle group was bitter. Many respondents told me that as a punishment, they would deny the Izzi-Igbo elements among them the farmland they usually let to them.

The relevance of that to the present essay is to stress how jealously the group guard their identity. I was told that owing to the policies of early Christian missionaries the older generation were bilingual in Efik and Ukelle. When the need arose, they also adopted Efik as their ethnic group. More work is required to establish how widespread this practice still is. It may help the understanding of this passage to state that the missionaries were the first to popularize Western-style education in eastern Nigeria, and often worked in collaboration with the colonial authorities (Afigbo 1986: 18, 19; Comhaire 1981: 101).

In Ukelle as in Utonkong, respondents said that the same taboo on ritual language use also existed. In each place as well, Christianity was identified as the only threat to the vitality of that custom. ⁴One Mfuma elder told me: "In the culture, we can't make such a mistake (i.e. praying with a language other than the Ukelle dialect). It is only in church that people might use English. Church discourages culture. That's the foolish thing we see in our place".

In Utonkong, respondents describe a similar situation. Rather like the Orring of Okpoto and Ntezi, vis-a-vis their Igbo neighbours, the Utonkong claim the identity

of Idoma, the large ethnolinguistic group in Benue State that nearly encircles them. Only the southern part of the clan is not bordered by an Idoma group. It ends at the Mfuma River after which another segment of the group continues in the adjacent Cross River State.

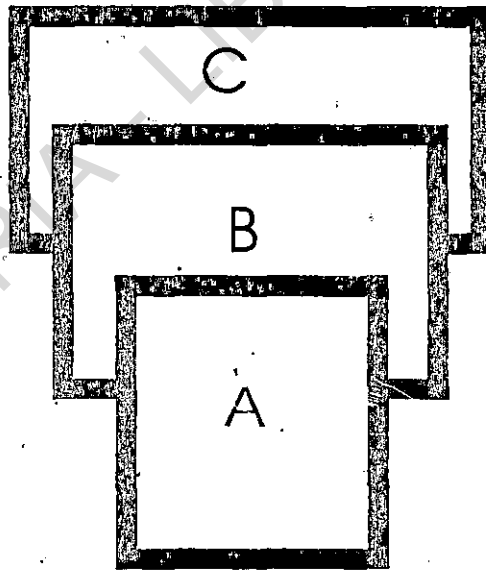
In Ntezi and Okpoto, Christians claim that their strategy is the more salutary for the Orring. It enables the people to scale constraints of the traditional order, in preference for a strategy that has worked for the rival ethnic group. They consider the taboo-governed autochthonous religion irreformable from within. One may only avoid the obligations it imposes on adherents by staying outside it.

As anticipated in 1. 3. 0., the strategy of the Christians vis-a-vis this particular taboo is that of avoidance; not a simple case of observance or violation. They choose to operate outside the system which will otherwise oblige them to observe it. A three-option paradigm then emerges, namely: OBSERVE, VIOLATE, or AVOID. But the last in the list does not appear to be possible as long as one adheres to the Orring autochthonous religious structure.

It seems that going by the present findings, were all Orrings of the Ntezi and Okpoto clans to be Christians there would have been a faster assimilation to the rival language. The strategy of taboo avoidance would have enabled them to circumvent the strongest restraint to such an assimilation. The process may be illustrated

diagrammatically. In the three-gate schema, A = primordial religion, B = rival religion, C = linguistic assimilation. Where taboo is the restraint, linguistic assimilation cannot take place unless the assimilee leaves gate A to gate B. This is probably true of all other cultural indices where taboo is involved as the hedge to change.

Figure 5.2



5. 0. 3. Conclusion

The main theoretical importance of the findings of the present research lies in the fact that they expose an aspect of taboo that has not been addressed in extant literature, namely AVOIDANCE. Munro (1979:227), summarizing both Radcliffe-Brown(1952) and Douglas (1966) observed that only the binary observance-violation applied on the subject. He went on to state that breaking of taboo was disruptive of the moral system and of one's position in it. But the position of the Orring Christians should compel one to reexamine such a conclusion. While this applies to the ethnic who operates within the social structure where the particular taboo applies, the Orring experience appears to show that an ethnic is spared of the obligation if he subscribes to a rival structure within the society. Automatic application to all within the society appears to be the case only where no such rival structure exists, as in the cases of pre-Christian Jewish society or pre-Christian Orring.

But it is important to distinguish a simple case of deviance from an approved, alternative social practice recognized as such. In the latter, the ethnics in either group recognize legitimacy of the practice of their rivals in the appropriate context, although not usually subscribing to such practices themselves. In the former, the practice is

usually seen by all groups as an affront to social norms and those involved in such a practice may not operate openly identifying themselves as such. In a Christian society a Sikh minority group may propagate for members. But a head-hunting anti-Christian gang are not likely to. They are deviants. Not to comply with the Orring language requirements on ritual when one is an adherent to the Autochthonous Religion is deviance. It is not when one does not comply because one is a member of a rival faith where the taboo does not apply.

It seems on basis of the Orring experience on ritual language use, but controlling for such other variables as possible future micronationalism, official intervention, and so on, that assimilation to the rival language will be faster if the newly introduced religion displaces the autochthonous one altogether. It has been shown that decline in the vitality of the language goes on in all but the domain of autochthonous religion (Ezeh 1991). It has also been shown in the present inquiry that all the Christian respondents avoid the observance of the taboo on ritual language use. Out of the 10 Christians in the sample of 20, all said that they felt free to use any language of their choice to pray in their new religion.

5. 1. 3. Beyond Ethnolinguistics

Taboo avoidance arising from a rival normative system in a particular culture is likely to have important implications outside the linguistic domain. Wherever

taboo is the restraint to some attitude, it seems that such an attitude may be changed if the moral neutrality of neither-observance-nor-violation which AVOIDANCE represents can be found. But anyone hoping to employ such a strategy as a vehicle for a swift, social change must take into account two factors that are central to this phenomenon. One, taboo avoidance cannot take place within the normative structure where the taboo belongs. A rival normative structure contemptuous of or hostile to the taboo must first be put in place. Two, even where such an alternative system has been put in place, attachment to the older system is slow to change.

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Notes

1. As explained in Byron (1975:267), the comparativist linguist, Morris Swadesh, worked out a set of expressions that are believed to exist in every language, whatever the stage of development or cultural peculiarities of the society that speak it. They comprise names of such things as the ones that have to do with eating, dying, giving birth, and so on.

The ones used in the research and the response elicited are shown below.

English	Korring	Igbo
I	ná	m
you	ánó	i or i
one	kòné	otu
two	éfa	abuḡ
man	wádum	nwoke
woman	ìlaágwā	nwanyì
fish	wásél	azu
bird	kénòh	nnunu
blood	kpenyí	ḡbara

bone	kekúf, <i>or</i> kekuph	okpukpu
hair (on the body)	ruf, <i>or</i> ruph	aji
head	létó	isi
mouth	kamá	onu
tooth	lérar	eze
belly	léme	afó
neck	lókér	olu
breasts	ligbée	ara
see	yoño	lee
hear	fié	ny
sit	tó	noṛo (oḍu)
stand	gbér	guzo (oṭo)
give	nyie	nye
stone	letál	nkume
white	ólára	oča
black	gbubil	oji

2. Interview with *Ọlun* Stephen Onwe, traditional ruler of Okpoto.
3. See also St Paul's epistle to the Romans, 14: 1, 2, 14; The Jerusalem Bible.
4. Patrick Ebu, retired school teacher, at an interview in his home at Mfuma, Iyalla local government area of Cross River State, on 13 December 1997.

Appendix

Questionnaire

1. Have you ever been in an occasion where only Orring people prayed with the kola?
2. What language was used? (If she/he replies that it was Korring, I will proceed to ask question number 3, if not I will skip it.)
3. What other language may be used for the same purpose? (If she/he replies that no other language can be used, then I will ask the rest of the questions, otherwise, I skip the rest until question 12.)
4. What will happen if another language is used?
5. Have you witnessed where such a consequence occurred?
6. Compared with 10 years ago, what is the present state of this custom: (a) is its impact on the Orring just the same, (b) waning, (c) getting stronger. (If the respondent chooses option (b), I will proceed to ask question no. 7.)
7. What do you consider the greatest threat to this custom?

8. What should the Orring do to deal with this threat?
9. Do you think they will be able to do so?
10. Has this been already tried; if so with what result? Was it (i) effective (ii) ineffective (iii) don't know?
11. Why did you reply as you did in no. 10 above?
12. What is your religion? (i) Christianity (ii) Islam (iii) Traditional Orring (iv) any other. Specify?
13. Have you always belonged to this religion?
14. If not, when did you change? Why did you change?