

## **Intercultural Influences of Neighboring Communities on Olùkùmí Speakers: A Case Study of Ugbódu**

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### **Abstract**

*Neighbouring communities can influence a particular community's speech form, and cultural belief, especially if the community is smaller than others. Such is the case of Ugbódu, an Olùkùmi speaking community that is sandwiched among Igbo speakers in Delta state, and shares a boundary with Esan speakers of Edo state, Nigeria. This paper aims to investigate the influence of Igbo and Esan/Edo languages on Olùkùmi and its extent. This will contribute to the knowledge that a dominant community usually has a magnitude effect on the enclave one i.e. the minority group. Data for this paper are drawn from our research visit to Ugbódu. Competent native speakers and custodians of the heritage of the community were interviewed such as the Ọlọ̀zà of Ugbódu. Based on the Acculturation Model Theory, this paper shows that language contact has made acculturation inevitable and has a psychological and sociocultural influence on the enclave Ugbódu. Amongst the findings, it is observed that Olùkùmi speakers are predominantly Olùkùmi-Ìgbò bilinguals. Furthermore, the influence of Edo and Igbo is well-pronounced in the social and cultural life of Ugbódu people. In protecting and preserving Olùkùmi, Ugbódu people are taking radical revival steps to instil the love of Olùkùmi in its speakers to guard against its future loss. In conclusion, this paper shows that if a drastic measure is not taken, a dominant language(s) can threaten a dominated group and even result in assimilation acculturation.*

**Keywords:** Acculturation Theory, Cultural Diversity, Intercultural Influence, Olùkùmi, Speech Community.

### **Introduction**

A speech community is a group of individuals characterised by the same language or speech form using certain rules that generate intelligibility and mutual understanding. It is an environment where language operates, whether in a room, class, market, church, mosque, state, nation or anywhere. Hence, it could be a small or large one. The individual within the speech

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community must undergo a process of socialization by acquiring knowledge of the social and cultural values of his society, and the constraints which the society imposes on social behaviour and language behaviour. In other words, the individual must possess good communicative competence to accomplish the various roles he is expected to play within the society in a particular language or its dialect.

Haugen (1966a) pointed out that language and dialect are ambiguous terms. However, in Chambers and Trudgill's (1998) view, dialects can be regarded as subdivisions of a particular language and a language is thus seen as a collection of mutually intelligible dialects. Wardhaugh (2010), says language is used to refer either to a single linguistic norm or to a group of related norms, and dialect is used to refer to one of the norms. A language is therefore a unitary system of linguistic communication that subsumes several mutually intelligible varieties. According to some scholars such as Edward (2010), the difference between dialect and language is not a clear cut and it depends on three contradictory factors; linguistic, cultural and political. In this study, Olùkùmi is assumed to be a dialect of the Yoruba language following Eleshin-Ajikobi's (2021)<sup>1</sup> classification.

Apart from the language, a speech community exists with its unique attributes such as cultural and social beliefs. According to Babalola (2010), culture is the super-structure that reflects the nature of the socio-economic basis of a group of people. It can be said to be that complex which includes knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, laws, customs, and any other abilities acquired by man. As language varies so does culture which translates to cultural diversity. Mazur (2010) opines that diversity is a subjective phenomenon created by group members themselves who on the basis of their different social identities categorize others as similar or dissimilar. As no language is superior to other so also is culture which implies the concept of cultural relativism. Cultural relativism states that no culture is inherently superior or inferior to others, but that since every culture constitutes an adaptive solution to fundamental human problems, all culture are equal (Atemie and Girigiri 2006). There exists a close relationship between language and culture which made George (1976) state that language is a powerful instrument for identifying cultures and it is the most important system of culture.

It must be noted that no human community can be isolated by not interacting with neighbouring communities. This has made globalisation a worldwide phenomenon. Globalization requires more interaction among people from diverse cultures, beliefs and backgrounds than ever

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<sup>1</sup> Olùkùmi is classified as belonging to the Yoruboid group of languages under the Kwa family of the Niger-Congo Phylum (Lewis, Gary and Charles 2015). However, this study maintains its classification as a dialect of Yorùbá in reference to Eleshin-Ajikobi (2021)

before. This has made language and cultural contact inevitable resulting in cultural diversity. According to Lin (2020), cultural diversity is an open-ended discourse that refers to a reality of the coexistence of diverse knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, laws, customs etc. Human beings are full of diversity in terms of language, gender, social class, ethnicity, religion, cultural background and so on (Banks 2008b, Lin and Jackson 2019a). In the cause of the global interaction, a dominant community is at the advantage of making a minority community emulate its ways of life and even have a magnitude effect on the speech form of the minority group through any variable of the acculturation process.

### **Olùkùmi and its Speakers**

Olùkùmi is spoken among the Odiani clan of Aniocha North Local Government Area of Delta State. This clan constitutes a distinct and unique tribe in western Igboland and has been described aptly as a ‘Yoruba Enclave’. An enclave according to Maher (1996) is a community where speakers of one language A is surrounded and, or dominated by speakers of a different language B, in a defined political or geographical area. The major speakers of Olùkùmi are found in Ugbódù and Ukwu-Nzu. Olùkùmi is also used in communities such as Anioma, Idumogo, Ogodor, Ubulubu, and Ugboba by settlers who either migrated from Ugbódù and/or Ukwu-Nzu. The data for this analysis is from Ugbódù community. According to oral narration by Olózá of Ugbódù (HRM Ayò Isinyemeze), Ugbódù settlers migrated from Ọ̀wò/Àkùré in the present day Òndó State, South-west, Nigeria between 9th and 11th century AD to settle down in Benin Kingdom during the reign of King Ogiiso. They later had contact with Esan speakers before they finally got to their present-day settlement in Delta state. Though the current population figure of Ugbódù community is not ascertained, the National Population Council, as of the last conducted population census in 2006, puts the population figure of Ugbódù town at 13,750.

### **Ugbódù and its Cardinal Neighbours**

Ugbódù community is a border settlement between Aniocha Local Government Area of Delta State and Esan South-East Local Government Area of Edo State. It is situated at the extreme north of Aniochaland. It is bounded as a community by Ohordua to the north; Onicha-Ukwu to the south, Idumuje to the west and Ukwu-Nzu to the east. The nearest larger towns are Agbor and Asaba.

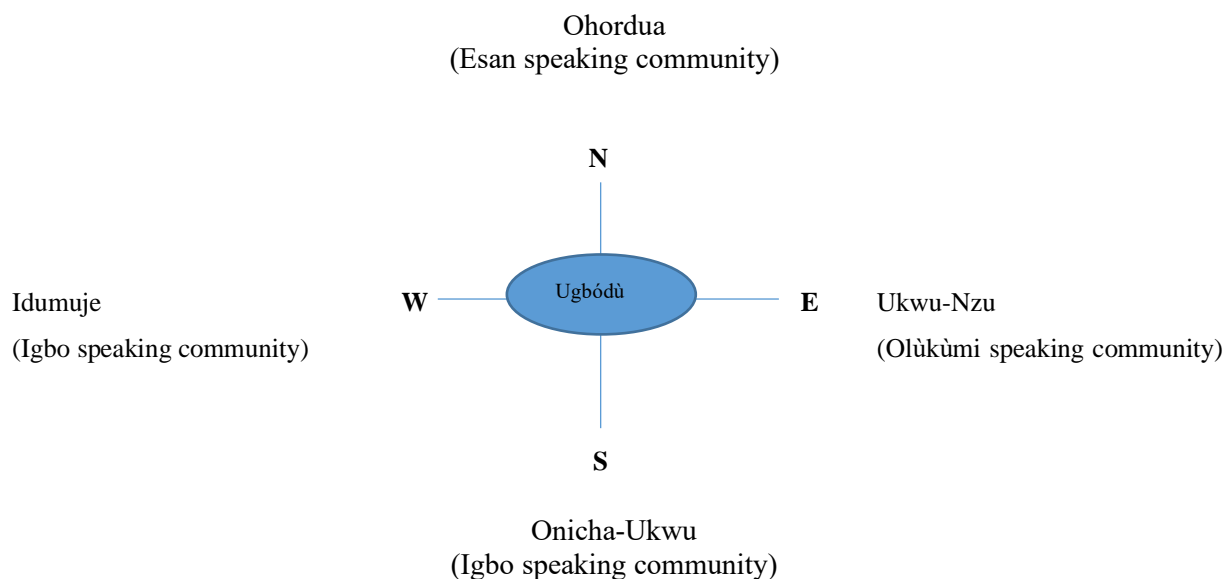


Figure 1: Ugbòdù Cardinal Neighbours (adapted from Eleshin-Ajikobi 2021)

### Research Methodology

The qualitative research method was adopted for this study. As stated by Lewis (2018), qualitative studies are inductive, and as such data are collected, observed, and analysed in a bottom-up approach, and conclusions are drawn based on the native speakers' intuition. The primary data were sourced through interview, observation, and discussion while the secondary data source involved library consultation of various forms. Seven competent native speakers of Olùkùmi from the Ugbòdù community in Aniocha North LGA of Delta state were consulted which comprised five males (including the paramount ruler) and two females. Bilingual and introspective approaches to data collection were used to record the interview which was later transcribed for data elucidation. Apart from the raw data from the consultants, libraries were consulted where references were made to books and journal articles.

### Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework adopted for this study is the Acculturation Model Theory. It was proposed by John Schumann in 1978 to describe the acquisition process of a second language (L2) by members of ethnic minorities when members of two ethnic groups come in contact. According to Redfield et al. (1936), “Acculturation comprehends those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns of either or both groups.”

Acculturation is the process of adapting to a new culture which involves a new orientation of thinking and feeling on the part of an L2 learner (Brown 1994).

Various scholars have worked on Acculturation Theory and perceive it to be effective in capturing both language and culture data analysis. Such works include: Berry (1980, 1994, 1997), Birman and Trickett (2001), Birman, Trickett and Vinokurov (2002), Nguyen and von Eye (2002) etc. Arends-Toth et-al (2006b), proposed three components of acculturation process namely:

- (i) Acculturation Conditions
- (ii) Acculturation Orientations
- (iii) Acculturation Outcomes

Acculturation conditions are the features of the dominant and dominated communities which is the perceived intergroup relations that bring about changes overtime. Acculturation orientations are the attitudes of individuals of the dominant communities (cultural adoption) and the dominated community (cultural maintenance) which can result in adopting the mainstream culture of the dominant communities or maintaining the heritage or culture of the dominated community. Acculturation outcomes are the effects of the dominant communities on the dominated community which is psychological and sociocultural in nature. The psychological aspect includes psychological distress, mood state, and feelings of acceptance and satisfaction. The socio-cultural aspect has to do with competence in native culture and mainstream culture i.e. dominant culture.

Acculturation could be minimal or maximal/vast. It is minimal when the contiguity occurs by chance, and maximal when the aim is intentional. Berry (1997) postulates two fundamental parts of acculturation; the maintenance of original identity and the maintenance of relations with other groups. The work further states four strategies of acculturation which are marginalization, integration, separation, and assimilation. Marginalization describes those who neglect cultural maintenance and intergroup relations. Integration relates to those who amalgamate cultural maintenance and intergroup relations. Separation has to do with those who appreciate cultural maintenance but devalue intergroup relations. Assimilation refers to those who reject their cultural identity and adopt the dominant culture.

## **Findings and Discussions**

### **Influence of Neighbouring Communities on Ugbódù**

Since Ukwu-Nzu is an Olùkùmi-speaking community, it does not have any significant influence on Ugbòdù, unlike Esan and Igbo communities. Following Arends-Toth et al (2006b)'s proposition, the acculturation outcomes have psychological and socio-cultural impacts on Ugbòdù. The effect of these other speech form speakers on Olùkùmi as spoken in the Ugbòdù community is presented in two but related aspects as discussed in the following subsections.

### **Effects on Olùkùmi Dialect**

The neighbouring communities' acculturation effect directly influence the speech form of this minority settlement in aspects such as lingual status, lexicon, plural formation, syntactic construction etc. This is examined below.

### **Bilingual Nature of Ugbòdù People**

Ugbòdù settlers are predominantly Olùkùmi-Ìgbò bilinguals. Bilingualism is simply defined as knowing two languages irrespective of the degree of competence (Valdez and Figueora 1994). Some Olùkùmi speakers (especially the elders) have native competence of the two speech forms, the former as a native tongue and the latter as the language of the neighbouring community. While most of the youths have stronger skills in the dominant language i.e. Igbo which is not their L1. Most of the elders are even multilingual as there was a time in the history of Ugbòdù when the ability to speak Edo in addition to Olùkùmi and Igbo was considered a prestige. Multilingualism is an advantage in the linguistic domain but not at the detriment of one's identity. Ugbòdù elders are aware of this and have put a measure in place to make the bilingual form a native-like competence. This would further be mentioned in the revival strategy sub-session.

### **Lexical borrowing**

Lexical borrowing is a morphological process of word derivation. It is a productive morphological process whereby lexical items and other linguistic expressions from lending sources gain entry into the borrowing language (Ajiboye and Omoloso 2008). The effect of this integration acculturation is also evident in Olùkùmi lexis as the intonation of the speakers is slightly different from that of other Yorùbá speakers. Due to language contact Olùkùmi also has some lexical items borrowed from Igbo and Èdo languages, some of which they have Olùkùmi variants for. However, some Olùkùmi speakers are not even aware of the Olùkùmi variants.

1. Words from Igbo:	Gloss	Olùkùmi variant
i. ògè	‘time’	ùkò
ii. oché	‘chair’	ágá
iii. òpià	‘cutlass’	ádá
iv. àfùfà	‘garden egg’	
v. éghó	‘money’	
vi. ákpú	‘cassava’	
2. Words from Edo/ Esan:		
i. òdùmà	‘lion’	
ii. ize	‘rice’	
iii. òbòbó	‘flower’	
iv. èbùbè	‘dust’	
v. Òsòlobùà	‘God’	

### Plural formation of human nouns

Plurality has to do with numbers. It is one of the grammatical categories of number, the other being singularity. It’s a feature of a noun and denotes quantity represented by the given noun (usually one, i.e., singular). Plural denotes two or more of an entity. Languages mark this feature differently. Some do so through affixation and some with the use of an independent morpheme. An example of a language that uses the former is English, while Yorùbá and by extension, Olùkùmi use the latter. Apart from the use of morpheme *àwan* for plural marking, Ugbódù also alternate the initial vowel sound in its human noun for plural marking as attested in Èdo through integration acculturation. This is illustrated below.

<b>3.</b>	<b>Singular</b>	<b>gloss</b>	<b>Plural</b>	<b>gloss</b>
i.	oma	‘child’	ima	‘children’
ii.	okùnṛen	‘man’	ikùnṛen	‘men’
iii.	obìnṛen	‘woman’	ibìnṛen	‘woman’

The examples above are in line with the plural formation strategy in Edo (a neighbouring community to Ugbódù). In such instances, the isolated plural morpheme, *àwan* is left out of the composition and the initial sound of the head noun is alternated from the back vowel (usually [o] or [ɔ]) to the front high vowel [i]. An example of this sound alternation strategy as an attribute of Èdo language plural marking system is evident in (4) below.

4.	Singular	Gloss	Plural	Gloss	
	i.	òkpià	man	ìkpià	men
	ii.	òkhuò	woman	ìkhuò	women
	iii.	ògiè	king	ìgiè	kings
	iv.	òbó	doctor	èbó	doctors
	v.	òtèn	relation	ètèn	relations

(Adeniyi 2012)

### High tone initial

Standard Yorùbá does not permit a high tone-bearing unit to start a word. However, in Olùkùmi, integration acculturation has made this permissible in its lexical entry as most of its words start in a high tone as exemplified below with their equivalents in standard Yorùbá.

5.	Olùkùmi	Gloss	Yorùbá
	i. órí	head	orí
	ii. ózú	eye	ojú
	iii. ímó	nose	imú
	iv. ádá	cutlass	àdá
	v. éní	mat	ení

This trait is assumed to be from the neighbouring communities as Igbo is known to begin words in like manner. Data in (6) confirms this.

6.	Igbo	Gloss
	i. éghó	‘money’
	ii. ákpú	‘cassava’
	iii. árá	‘madness’

### Use of Affirmation Marker

The effect of acculturation is also evident in Olùkùmi syntactic constructs with the use of a peculiar final particle *ni* termed affirmation marker (Eleshin 2017)<sup>2</sup>. An affirmative construction according to Crystal (2008) is a term used in grammatical description to refer to a type of sentence or verb which has no marker of negation. This marker is not attested in any of

<sup>2</sup> See Eleshin 2017 for more on this marker.



the surrounding communities. However, it is attested in an Ijoid language; Defaka<sup>3</sup> spoken in Rivers State, Nigeria. Also, Dagaare and other Mabilia languages exhibit this phenomenon overtly. This particle appears in sentence finally in Olùkùmi affirmative constructions, but it is sensitive to negative, and interrogative constructions. This is illustrated below.

### Proposition

7. (a) Tosó zẹ ẹza ni.  
Toso eat fish Aff  
'Toso ate fish.'

### Derived Negation

(b) Tosó é è zẹ ẹza.  
Toso 3sg-Neg Neg eat fish  
'Toso did not eat fish.'

8. (a) Ewé té Olú rà ó nò ni.  
book REL Olu buy 3sg lost Aff  
'The book that Olu bought got lost.'

(b) Ewé té Olú rà é è nò.  
book REL Olu buy 3sg-Neg Neg lost  
'The book that Olu bought did not get lost.'

### Statement

9. (a) Tosó zẹ ẹza ni.  
Toso eat fish Aff  
'Toso ate fish.'

### Derived Interrogation

(b) Tosó zẹ ẹza ní?  
Toso eat fish be-Qst  
'Did Toso eat fish?'

10. (a) Òwùò ni Ọmárè mí yú ni.  
Morning FOC Omaremi go Aff  
'Omaremi went in the morning.'

(b) Kàá ùkò Ọmárè mí yú?  
Qst time Omaremi go  
When did Omaremi go?

The propositions in examples (7a) – (8a) have the Affirmative particle while the negative forms in the (b) part, do not. Also, the statement forms in (9a) – (10a) have the affirmative particle which is not in the interrogative forms as seen in the (b) part. This buttresses the fact that the particle is sensitive to negation and interrogation.

### Effects on Ugbódù Social and Cultural Beliefs

<sup>3</sup> It is believed that Defaka speakers were at some point in time residents in Delta state. It might be during the period that Olùkùmi adopted the use of the overt affirmative particle. However, the genesis of the particle still calls for a linguistic investigation.

The influence of the neighbouring Esan/Edo and Igbo communities is well pronounced in the social and cultural life of Ugbòdù people in various aspects which includes; naming, greeting, religion, festival, dressing etc.

### **Naming**

Naming is a critical business in traditional African (Yorùbá) society. Our names have meanings. They are imitations of hope, destiny and affirmations of origin. It is so important that everything in existence is named. Ogunwale (2016) says ‘Nothing exists in any society without a name given to it. In Olùkùmi, a child is named after the fourth day of his birth. This is an effect of assimilation acculturation because child naming in Yorùbá communities used to be the seventh day for a female child and the ninth day for a male child before it became the eighth day for both genders. There is a transition in Olùkùmi's names that needs to be mentioned.

### **Personal Name**

The first six rulers (Olozas) who reigned in the early days of the kingdom when foreign languages had not infiltrated the dialect bore typical Yoruba names- Adétólá, Adérèmi, Àríyò, Òdòfin, Adétúnjí and Oyètúndé. As they gradually lost contact with their kinsmen back home, they began to gravitate towards Benin and other Edo communities which resulted in acculturation that led to the adoption of Edo names among the people e.g; Osakpolor, Esigie, Ebor, etc. With the arrival of the communities east of the River Niger, Edo influence began to wane and decline, because the Igbo pitched their settlements nearer to the Olùkùmis than the Edos. Igbo influence steadily and progressively continued to make permanent and considerable impact on the socio-cultural life as well as the linguistic orientation of the Olùkùmis which is sustained till date. Hence, the general shift of names from Edo to Igbo began in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Names such as Dike, Ezenweani, and Isinyemeze became the names of Olozas during the period. However, Olùkùmi now name their children Olùkùmi names such as Ayò, Adébòwálé, Èyírèmi, Tosóbùàfò, Temofé, Omárèmi, Mísùbi etc. It is observed that the first trend of Olùkùmi names were purely Yorùbá names while the current Olùkùmi names are dialectal.

### **Chieftancy Title**

Unlike other Yorùbá settlements where their chiefs' titles are Òtún, Òsì, Aṣípa, Ìyálóde, Balógun etc., Ugbódù uses a combination of Èdo and Igbo chieftancy titles in addition to Olùkùmi titles which include;

Olùkùmi: Ológun, Òzà, Azẹbíọlọzà (honorary title) etc

Èdo: Íyasé, Ísamá etc

Igbo: Odogwu, Oduah, Owelle etc

In addition, it is observed that Olùkùmi has no praise name or cognomen such as Àkànní, Àlàbí, Àbẹní, Àjíkẹ and so on which is one of the peculiarities of most Yorùbá communities. This integration acculturation effect could be attributed to the impacts of the Igbo and Esan neighbouring communities that also lack such cognomen.

### **Greetings**

Greetings is one of the unique features of Yorùbá people as they can greet to a fault. It is an important part of Yorùbá culture that depicts morals. Greetings are countless and there is no occasion without its distinct greetings among the Yorùbá people. Ugbódù people take a bow when greeting just like other neighbouring communities, unlike Yorùbá people who prostrate or kneel in greetings according to gender. Also, they have no specific greetings for various occasions or professions, unlike the other Yorùbá people. However, they uniquely greet you according to the quarter you belong to. This is an influence of assimilation acculturation. Ugbódù comprises four villages or quarters; Ògwá, Ògòzà, Àgbá and Igwizí. Each of these four quarters has its unique greeting which is known to all indigenes and are used accordingly.

11.	<b>Quarters</b>	<b>Greetings</b>
i.	Ìdúmù Ògwá	Ígwe
ii.	Ológozà	Onówu
iii.	Ìdúmù Àgbá	Òkíta
iv.	Igwisí	Èbì

Idumu Ògwa is the royal compound and as such anyone from the quarter is greeted Ígwe. Ológozà is the compound of the village security head (Ológun) and they are greeted with the greeting for Íyasé i.e. Onówu. Any member of Igwisí is greeted Èbì which is the greeting for Òdóbú. Ìdúmù Àgbá members are greeted Òkíta which is the greeting for Òzà. However, salutation or greetings to the paramount ruler is *Wa zẹ pé!* (May you live long!).

### **Religion**

Religion is a varied belief system which connects people to spirituality. It is the belief in and worship of a supernatural being assumed to be somewhere sacred. Unlike their ancestral home; Yoruba, where you can hardly find a family without the three major religious believers in Nigeria; Muslim, Christian, and traditional believers, Ugbódù is predominantly a Christian community but like many African groups, they believe in African traditional worship as a way of preserving ethnic purity, and religious rights are strictly carried out in Olùkùmi. This is an effect of integration acculturation.

### **Festival**

A festival is a joyous ceremony designed by a group of people to felicitate and commemorate a remarkable event in their history life (Ossai-Uloku and Anyanwu 2024). The values and beliefs of a set of people are demonstrated through festivals (Izu 2021). Assimilation acculturation has affected the names of most of the festivals celebrated in Ugbódù as listed below.

12. i. Ñzè            ‘New yam festival’
- ii. Ùtù            ‘god of harvest’
- iii. Ògún        ‘god of iron’
- iv. Àgho
- v. Ìgwè

Only Ògún Festival still retains its name as referred to in other Yorùbá settlements. New Yam Festival; *Qdún Ijẹsu* is Ñzè in Ugbódù and god of harvest *Òrìṣà Oko* is referred to as Ùtù amongst others in Ugbódù.

### **Dressing**

Dress tells a story about cultural interaction and artistic innovation and also serves as a marker of power and status. The paramount ruler (Ọlọzà) of Ugbódù is usually dressed in white attire, bead and beaded crown or red cap. This is more like the way the obi in the Igbo land dress. Though some Yorùbá *Oba* also wear white as royal attire such as Ọlówò (usually dressed in a white wrapper, beaded blouse and beaded crown), and Ọ̀ni (dresses in complete white, bead and beaded crown), most of them dress in the native attire; *aṣọ òfí*, bead and beaded crown. Ugbódù chiefs also use red caps like Igbo chiefs, unlike other Yorùbá chiefs that use *aṣọ òfí* caps. This is an effect of assimilation acculturation.

### **Ugbódù Revival Strategy**

Acculturation threatens and weakens the real identity and heritage of a dominated group if care is not taken especially the assimilation form. Thus, a dominated group that cherishes its identity and heritage needs to guard against the loss of its language or dialect and social values. A community with a lost identity is like a rebirth with no trace of history. It is observed that Ugbódù is taking a radical revival process to instil the love of Olùkùmi in its people to guide them against its future loss. Until the 1940s, little interest was shown in the use of Olùkùmi because the ability to speak Igbo and Edo was considered to be a status. However, after World War 11, Olùkùmi speakers began to develop an interest in their native speech form; Olùkùmi spontaneously. The revivalists condemned in strong terms the inferiority complex created wittingly by the people for themselves. They began to give their children Olùkùmi names, and also sing and pray in Olùkùmi. Some radical revivalists even changed their Igbo names to Olùkùmi by translation; a good example is the incumbent Qlózà who was christened with an Olùkùmi name, Ayò. Furthermore, to strengthen the use of the dialect among its people, the Ugbódù community organises a debate and competition among its indigenes in the Olùkùmi dialect. Winners are motivated with awesome gifts to encourage them to improve in the use of their native tongue. Olùkùmi dialect has remained the only legacy which clearly distinguishes Ugbódù town from the western Igbo sub-culture area in which it is ‘sandwiched’.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this paper shows that cultural diversity is inevitable in a speech community of a minority population surrounded by other language speech communities of a larger population. This can lead to acculturation of various forms and if a drastic measure is not taken, a dominant language(s) or speech form(s) can threaten a minority group and even cause its extinction. As evident in this study, minimal acculturation has psychological and sociocultural influence on Ugbódù. Igbo and Esan/Edo languages have integration acculturation influence on the phonological, morphological and syntactic levels of Olùkùmi dialect. Also, integration and assimilation acculturation strategies have influence on the sociocultural values of this minority group. In this case, Olùkùmi people jettison some of their social values subconsciously, and emulate that of the neighbouring dominant groups, especially since the Ugbódù community is far away from its proto-form, Yoruba community. It is observed that in protecting Olùkùmi, Ugbódù people are taking a radical revival process to instil the love of Olùkùmi in its speakers to guard against the future loss of the dialect and its cultural values to strengthen its identity and heritage irrespective of its location.

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