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Research Article




A Sociolinguistic Assessment of Language Shift in Hyam

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Abstract

This paper dubbed “A Sociolinguistic Assessment of language shift among Hyam speakers”

examines the sociolinguistic concepts of language shift and its resultant effect of language death or extinction. This is against the backdrop that like many other minority languages, the Hyam language is still in competition with other more sophisticated and standard linguistic codes. To achieve this aim, a total of two hundred (200) structured questionnaires are administered to both the home and the Diaspora populations respectively. findings reveal that even though people speak the language with their children and still have native-like competence, a greater number of them still speak or prefer other language varieties. They equally do not use the language with their friends or non-native speakers because it is not mutually intelligible. Nevertheless, the degree of solidarity and loyalty for the Hyam language are still very high regardless. It is however disturbing to say that the language is not standardized, literatures are very much lacking in the language, making teaching and learning in it somewhat challenging; and it is still incapable of performing modern functions typical of a metropolitan variety. It is on this light that this research is quick to state, and also by way of recommendation, that if something is not done soon and fast particularly in the area of instruction, documentation and standardization, the shift though gradual for now, may become irreversible and language death may therefore become inevitable.

Keywords: Sociolinguistics, Linguistic domination, Dialect, Nativity, Multilingualism

Conceptual Clarification

The extent to which prestigious and more economically viable language are dominating minority language is quite alarming. These prestigious languages are believed to possess all the characteristics listed under factors that determine language domains in Nigeria: prestige and status, level of development, historical and political profile, institutional policies, numerical strength, the institution of government, the media and commerce to say the least (Ominiya, 2012). It is therefore not surprising that many languages in the world today are facing the danger of death or extinction as a result of speaker shifting to more economically viable languages. This is expected perhaps even unavoidable because of the numerous competitions that the more dominating languages bring on all fronts. It must be reiterated here that a dominating language may not necessarily be a foreign language like French, English or Arabic; an indigenous language can also be tagged “dominant” if it linguistically suffocates another in any bilingual or multilingual situation where there are many competing linguistic codes.

Having established all these premises, the crux of the matter, in this research, is that language is a human phenomenon, and it is what makes man distinct. The language of the human species is for the purpose of communication, and to facilitate the preservation, growth, and development of the species (Smith & Millar, 1968 p.265). Henry and David (2000) concur to this view when they define language as a conventional system of spoken, manual or written system by which human beings, as members of a social group and participant in a culture, express by which themselves. According to him too, the functions of language include communication, the expansion of identity and emotional release among others.

This implies that language is an important tool to humans as it is the means by which human beings express themselves, their identity and culture. It can therefore be inferred that there exists a relationship between language and culture. Wardhaugh (2004) agrees with this when he asserts that the structure of a language determines the way in which speakers of that language view the world. He adds that the culture of the people find reflection in the language they employ because they value certain things and do them in certain ways; they use their language in ways reflect what they value and what they do.

The culture of a people, for instance, is expressed in their language. This proposition brings to mind the hypothesis of linguistic relativity, also known as the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis. The Whorf hypothesis, or Whorfianism, is a principle suggesting that the structure of a language affects its speakers' worldview or cognition, and thus people's perception are relative to their spoken language. From the aforementioned, it implies that language do not exist in a vacuum but in a society which houses it. And there co-exist a relationship between language and society; this in turn is the main thrust of Sociolinguistic which is a branch of Linguistics. Scholars over the years have defined sociolinguistics in various ways.

The Concept of Sociolinguistics

Onah (2005) describes this (Socio-Linguistics) field of linguistics studies as a product of dual parentage which manifests the genetic traits of its parents. In this wise Linguistics and Sociology are the parents, and each has useful theoretical framework, methodology and technical resources that are needed to guide any scientific study.

Holmes (2013) views Sociolinguistic as a field of study that is concerned with relationship between language and the context in which it is used. Holmes' definition suggests that the context of usage determines our choice of language e.g. The way we talk to parent at home differs from the way we talk to them in public place, when and where determines how and which language and social structure. Awolaja (2012) regards sociolinguistics the study of the relationship between language and socio setting in a society i.e. the sex, age, educational background, relationship of interlocutors etc. in a communicative act are the preoccupation of sociolinguistics.

In addition, Gerad and Katamba (2011) define sociolinguistics as the relationship between society and language while Yule (1996) on the contrary views it as the inter-relationship between language and society; this means the relationship between the duo can be vice-versa as against Gerad and Katamba view which is strictly the relationship between society and language. Sarwat (2019), in an attempt to distinguish between the relationship between language and society, posits that sociolinguistics studies language in relation to society, while the study of society in relation to language entails the sociology of language.

He posits that the goal of sociolinguistics and sociology of language differ, he said while in Sociolinguistics is concerned with the study of the context of language use in order to know more about language; in sociology of language, the study of language is mainly to know more about the society, Onah (2015) lends his voice to the controversy of the relationship between the language and society when he posits that as technical as this may appear, the real difference between two prospective is a factor of emphasis (that can be explored by the) interest

of the investigator and skill with which the researcher is using to analyze either language, or society.

Wardhaugh (2010) however makes a distinction between Sociolinguistics and the Sociology of language. the former is concerned with investigating the relationship between language and society with the goal of bringing a better understanding of the structure and how language function in communication; the equivalent goal is the sociology of language is trying to discover how society structure can be understood through the study of language e.g how certain linguistics features serve to characterize particular social arrangement.

Statement of the problem

The first step to a language death is language shift; when users of a language gradually shift from using a language to another, its communicative functions diminishes and when it totally lacks users it dies off. Most of the present day Hyam speakers have shown some level of apathy in the use of the language. In formal setting, most Hyam speakers can hardly use the language without code switching or code mixing. There is seemingly a low patronage for the language; parent hardly speak the language with offspring and economics activities have also reduced the use of language in public domains. For the time being, until Hams who are competent speakers in the language take pride in the language, it is doubtful whatever Hyam would survive the next three generations. Most Ham youths thirty-five (35) years of age downward especially those born in the cities are hardly able to speak Hyam. In an event where youths of thirty five (35) years are unable to speak the language, what will such youths pass to the next or subsequent generation? If the current trend in the use of Hyam continues unabated, the language will undoubtedly die. The focus of this work therefore, is to examine those areas where Hyam Language is experiencing language shift and the factors responsible for this phenomenon and how the situation can be changed.

Aim and objective of paper

This paper specifically examines the sociolinguistics phenomenon of language shift among Hyam speakers. The specific objectives are to:

- a. Determine the extent of language shift from Hyam language to other languages
- b. Find out the factors contributing to language shift I Hyam language
- c. Ascertain the level of danger that those factors pose on Hyam language
- d. Identify the steps taken by the speakers to vice and maintain the language
- e. Find out the extent to which adult and children use the language
- f. Establish the domains where the language is use or not used

Data presentation and analysis

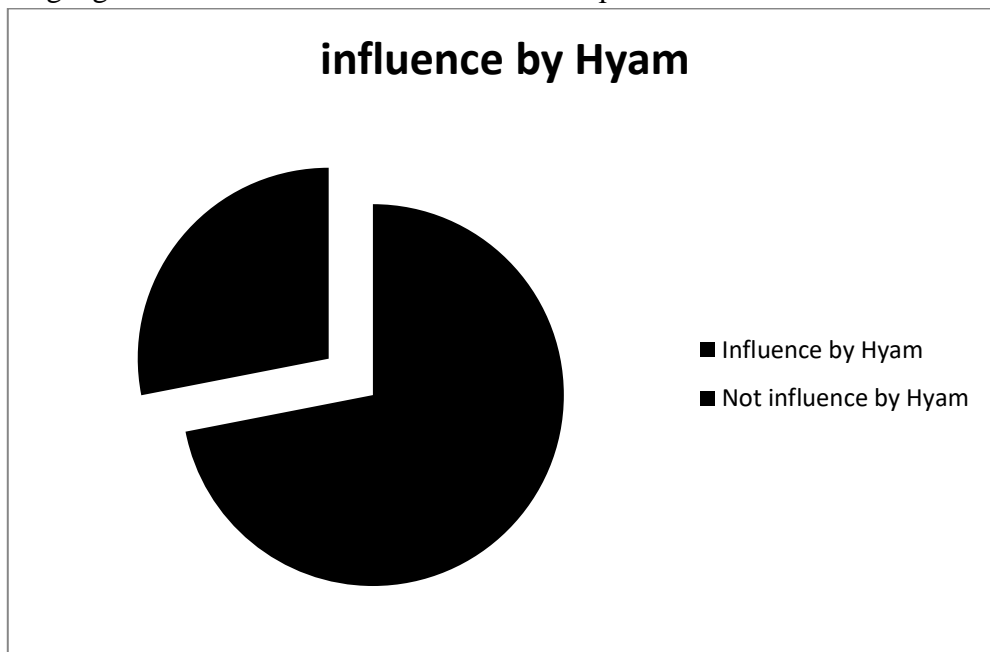
Different questions are asked with regard to the endangerment of the Hyam and the responses are represented on each pictograph for ease of interpretation.

Question 1: “In which areas(s) of your life are you compelled to use Hyam?”

100% of the home population uses Hyam in all area (s) (i.e. education, religions function, businesses and leisure) of their life as much as they have fellow speakers.

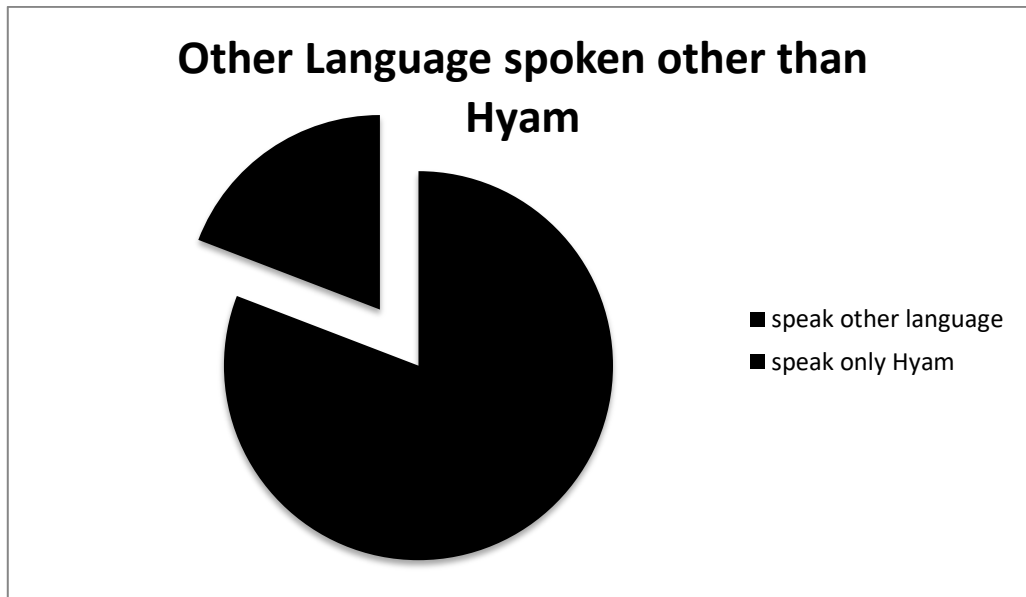
The Diaspora population has 10 person that compelled to use it in education, 5 in religious functions, 5 in business and 10 persons for leisure these sum up together gives us 30 person (which implies 30%) that are compelled to use it in other areas of their life.

In general analysis, there are more people using the language in all areas of their lives at home than those who live outside ham land, presenting it in even percentage, 65% of the respondents have all areas of their lives being influenced by the use of Hyam language and 35% have no area of their life influenced by the language at all. It can therefore be concluded that the language is not 100% used in all areas of the speakers' life



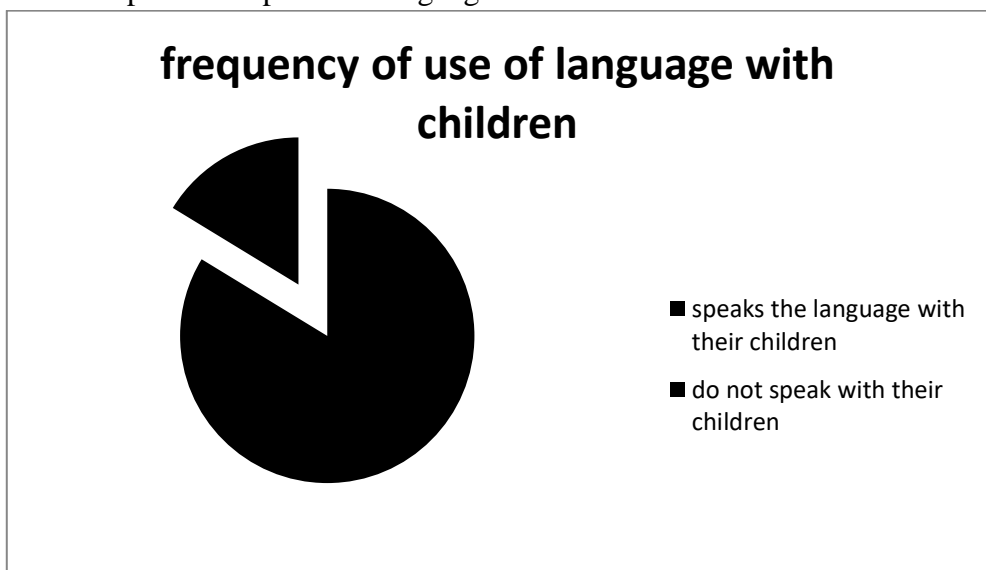
Question2 “what other language(s) do you speak other than Hyam?”

65% respondents of the home population speak other languages (Hausa, English, Jju, Gwog, Koro and other). While 94% of the Diaspora population speak other languages, using the Home population and Diaspora population to find overall percentage, in the general analysis 79.5% of our respondents use other languages, while a minute 20.5% do not use other language(s) other than Hyam. It can therefore be suggested that Hyam language community is not a purist language community but has a lot of multilingual speakers, and this is also an obvious indication of the existence of Bilingual/Multilingual phenomena.



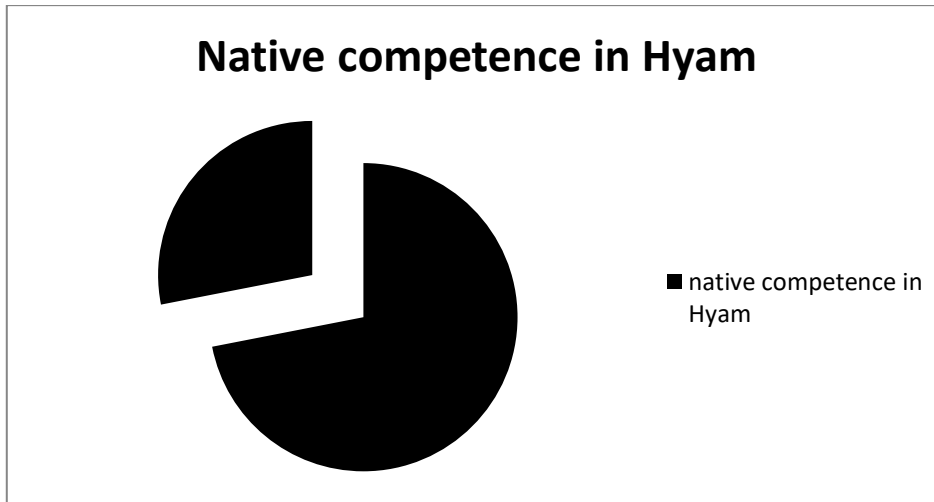
Question 3 “As parent, how often do you speak Hyam to your children?”

12 of the home population often speak the language with their children; 88 speak the language very often with their children. This implies that 100% of the home population’s parent are ready and able to the transmit the language to the next generation while 28% of the diasporic respondent often speak the language; Again 12% respondent speak it very often, 47% not often and 13% not at all. This means 40% of the respondents in the diaspora population are patriotic in transmitting the language while 60% are unpatriotic. Invariably 60% do not often speak the language with their children. In general analysis the percentage will be 70%, which means that 70% of all the respondents speak the language with their children.



Question 4: “To what extent are you competent in Hyam Language?”

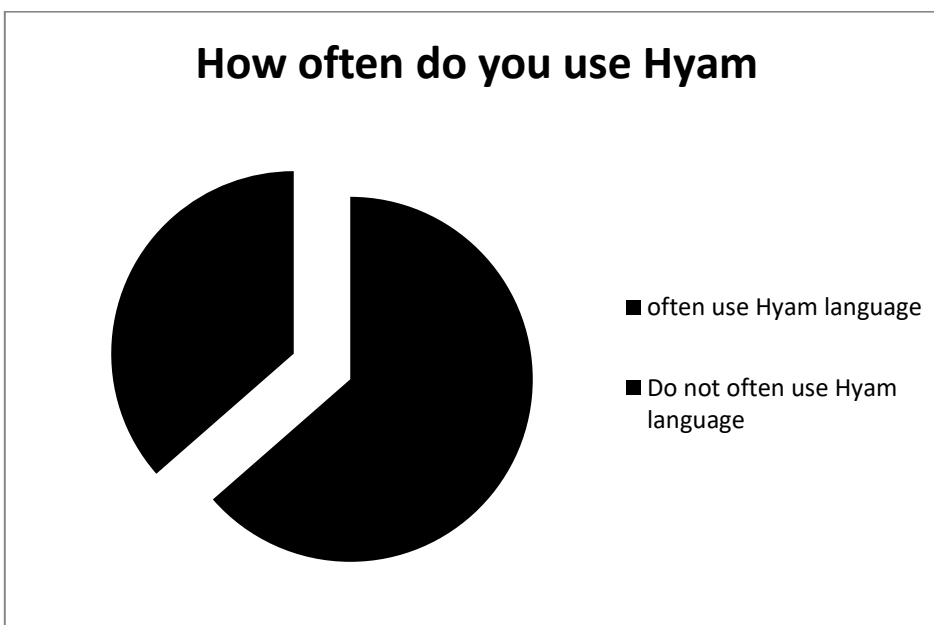
In this question, 100% of the home population have native competence in the language and can pass it to their children. But the diaspora population has 40% competence in speaking Hyam. Sum up together would be 140% which means that all respondents have a 70% native competence in the language while 30% do not have such an ability.



The reasons given here (Question 4) are not unconnected to the dominance of English and hausa in all aspects of the respondents' life and some parents who are neither fluent nor committed to the language.

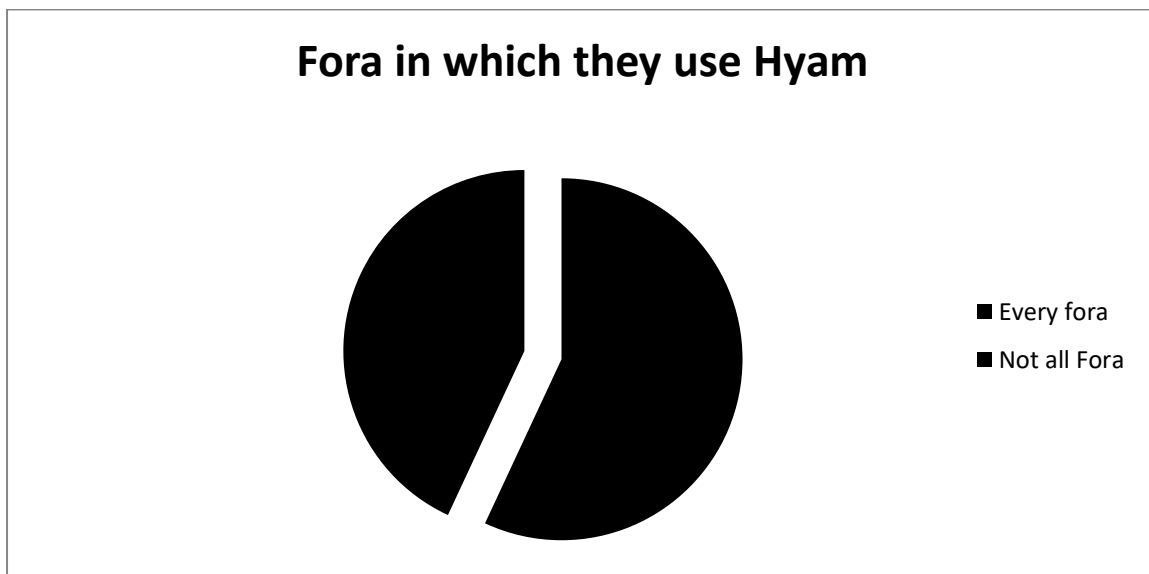
Question5: “How often do you speak the language?”

100% of our home populations often speak the language while 32% of the diaspora population often speaks the language while 68% do not often speak the language. 66% of our respondents often speak the language. This implies that at an average, the Ham people often speak their language.



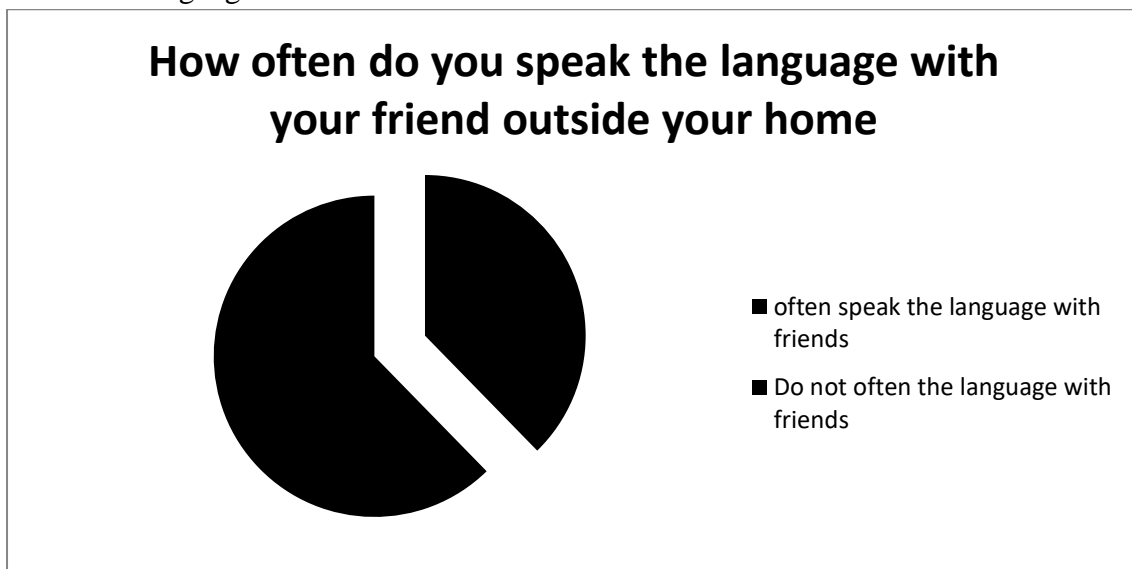
Question 7: “At what fora do you use the language?”

100% of the home population uses the language in all spheres of their life but only 24% of the diaspora population uses the language in their daily endeavor. On the overall 62% of Ham people use Hyam in their daily endeavor while 38% do not.

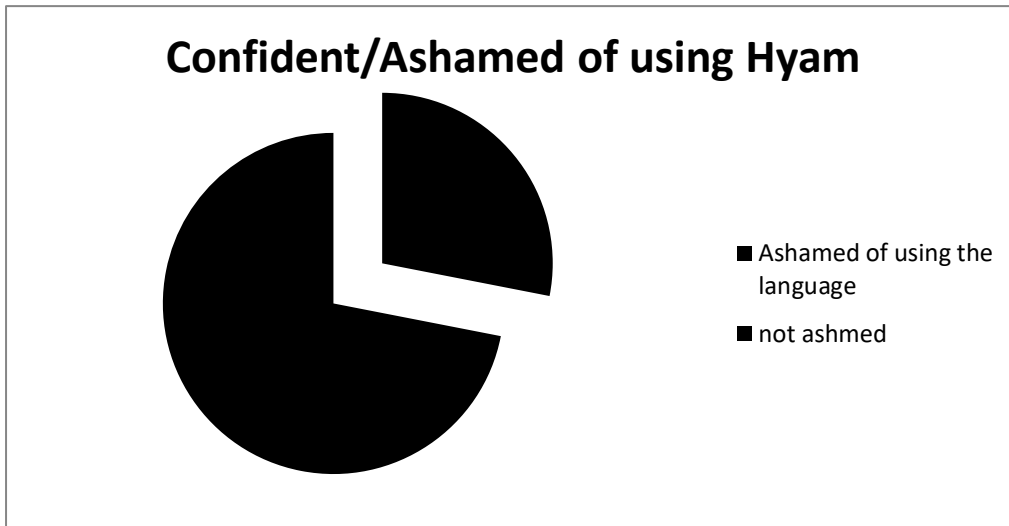


Question 8: “how often do you speak the language with your friends outside your home?”

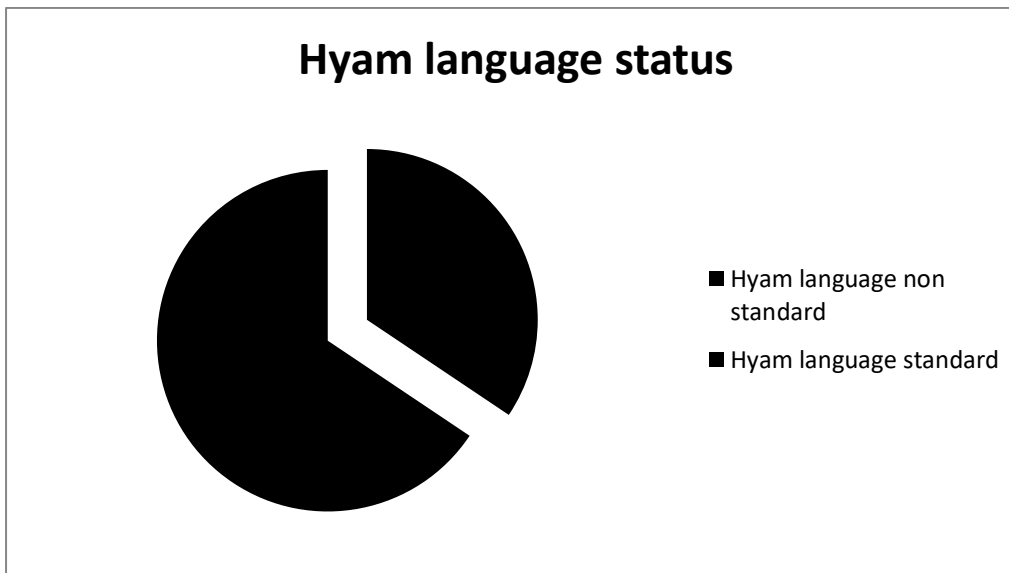
In this question 66% of the home population often speak Hyam with their friends outside their home while 34% do not but in the diaspora only 13% speak the language with their friends outside their home and 87% do not. Only 39.5 have the confidence of speaking Hyam outside the home. This may pose the greatest threat to the language as it may reduce competence in the use of the language.



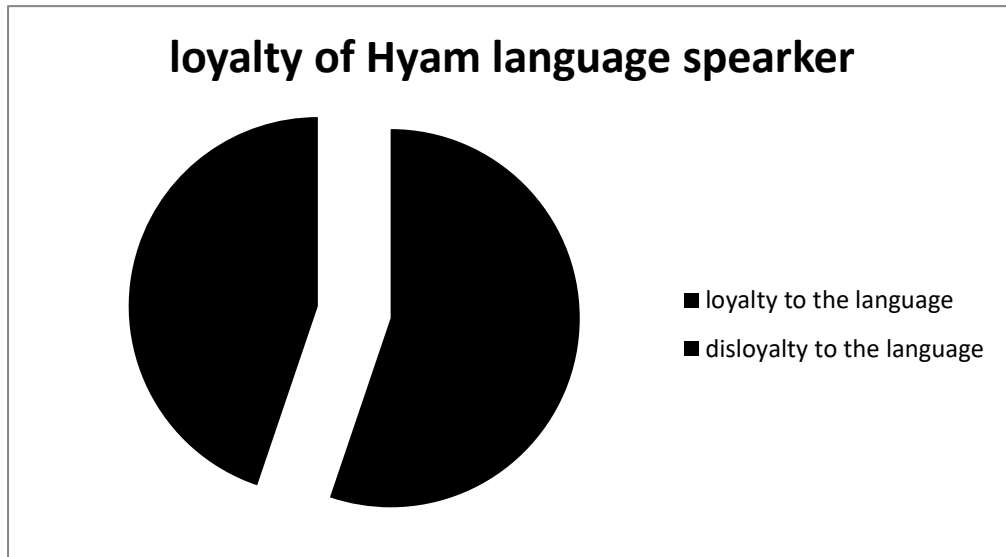
Question 9: “What occasion are you ashamed of using Hyam or lack of confidence in using the Language?” 40% of the home population often feels ashamed of using the language and 50% of the diaspora population also feels ashamed of using the language in certain occasions. Generally 45% of the population is often ashamed to use Hyam in certain occasions. This is indicating a twiddling loyalty to the language and its usage anywhere anytime.



Question 10: “How do you rate Hyam in the global Background?” 89% of the home population inside. Hyam to be a standard language while 11% sees it as not standard while 47% of the diaspora population sees it as standard 53% considered it as non-standard putting both the home and diaspora we have 32% of the Haym speakers consider Hyam as a backward, nonstandard and impracticable in today’s globalized world while 68% do not have such views.



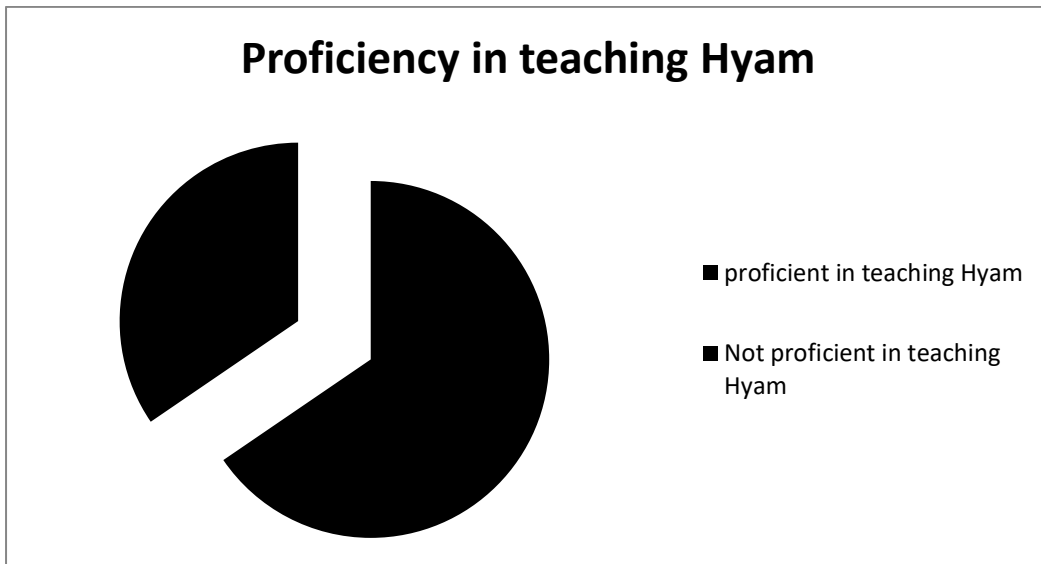
A conclusion cannot be reached until the general level of the loyalty of all respondents in measured by summing up the percentage of those loyal to the language and those disloyal. This summation within each theme is hereby given: question 8 = 39.5% loyalty and 60.5% disloyalty; question 9 = 55% loyalty and 45% disloyalty; question 10 = 68% loyalty and 32% disloyalty summed up 162.5 loyalty and 137.5 disloyalty; therefore the general percentage is 55.2%.



From the foregoing, the Hyam language has a certain level of language loyalty (55.2) but not too well for language under threat by some prominent languages. It can be suggested that a high loyalty level of 90% may arise. This show of loyalty is especially needed in elites who do not use the language in various interaction and look down on the language as backward or even primitive. The language loyalty would improve if these perceptions are changed – there is no language that cannot be used for any interaction effectively except if the commitment of the users is not there.

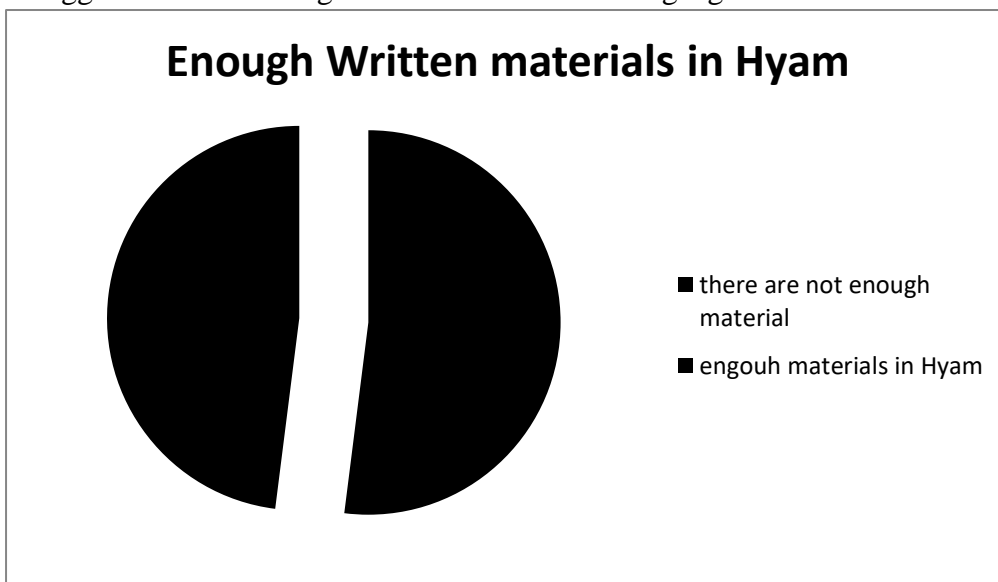
Question 11: “How proficient are you in teaching Hyam to others?”

This question intends to investigate the capacity of speakers to teach other the language. 97% of the home population is proficient while 3% are not while 30% of the diaspora population is proficient while 70% are not. In summation of the home and diaspora population thoses that are proficient in teaching is 63.5%. Therefore, 63.5% of Hyam are proficient in teaching Hyam to others though it is averagely good but not also good for a language under threat.



Question 12: “Are there enough Hyam Literatures for literacy in the Language?”

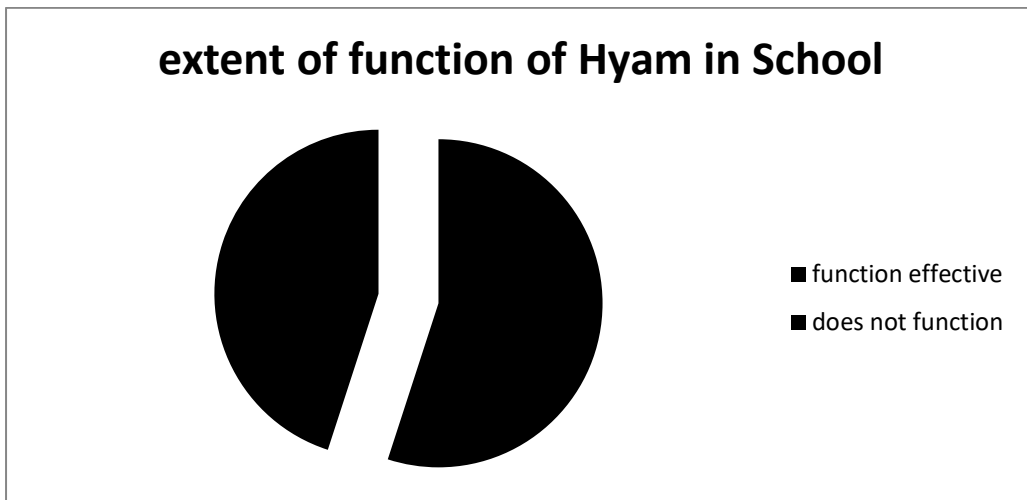
This question intends to know if Hyam has any documented writings. 78% of the home respondents from 10 respondents interviewed believe that Hyam has enough literature while 22% do not; also, of the diaspora population 83% persons are against the notion, while 7 agree, so the summing up of the entire percentage of respondent who have agreed is 47.5%. Hence, 47.5% of Ham people believe that there is enough Hyam literature while 52% do not believe and have suggested more writing should be done in the language



Question 13: “To what extent does Hyam language function in school?”

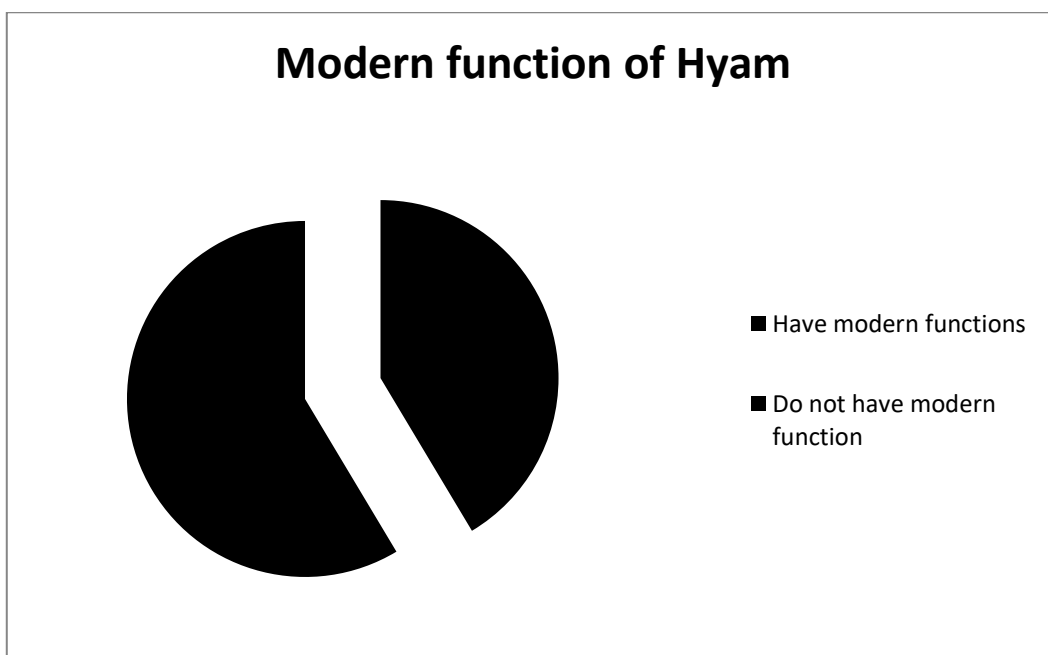
From the 100 Home respondents, 75% believes Hyam functions effectively while 25% do not; on the other hand, 40% of the diaspora population acknowledges that it functions effectively while 10% do not believe. 55% of the entire respondents believe that Hyam can function

effectively in school and can help in transmitting knowledge and information to learners while 45% do not believe it so.



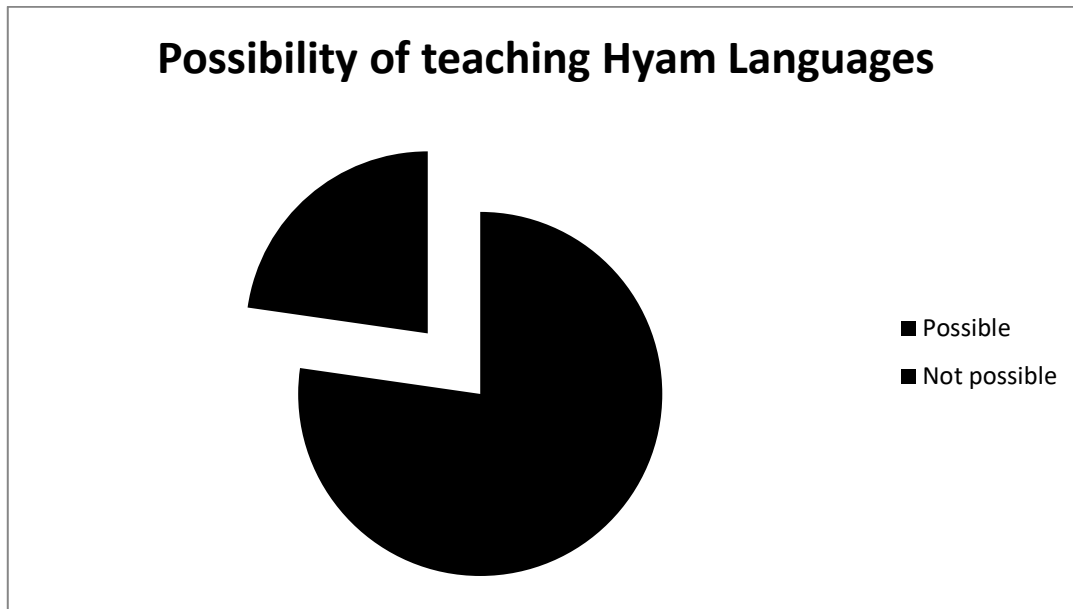
Question 14: “To what extent does Hyam language function in the internet and broadcasting industry?”

48% of the home respondents believe it 0%-50% function while 60% of the respondents believe it doesn't have any function. The diaspora population has 43% respondents agree that it is between 0 to 50% function while 67 says it does not have any function at all. 41.5% of the entire population believes Hyam function in the internet and broadcasting industry while 58% do not see it that way.



Question 15: “Is it possible for Hyam language to be taught in schools?”

Here, 80% of the home population believes teaching Hyam is possible while 20% do not and 90% of the diaspora population believes it is possible and 30 do not. This means that 75% of the entire respondents see teaching of Hyam in school as possible while just 25% see it as impossible task.

**Conclusion**

Language shift and its resultant death is a linguistic reality that cannot and should not be taken lightly precisely where a minority language like Hyan is concerned. It is already hypothesized in this research that languages are in competition both for dominance, acceptability, mutual intelligibility and functionality regardless of whether they are major or minority languages. Unfortunately, Hyam falls in the latter group, and therefore prone to the negative antecedents that could arise when in competition with more standard and dominant languages with ever increasing varieties and dialectal continuum like perhaps English language and the Hausa language. Given this scenario, cases of code mixing and code switching are already prevalent linguistic phenomena and it could get worst in the years to come if drastic measures are not taken to increase the number of Hyam speakers as well as to make the Hyam language a standard language in every regard.

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