

Language as repository in the preservation of biodiversity: an ecolinguistic perspective

The current rapid global climatic change has caused a drastic reduction in the biodiversity. Habitats previously occupied by plants and animals are fast being encroached by human populations. But even more worrying are the dynamics within that human population: The older generations who were custodians of indigenous knowledge are being replaced by new generations without this knowledge. This unfortunate trend is especially critical in cases where intergenerational transmission of indigenous knowledge has been disrupted to a great extent, causing an urgent need for intervention. Previous studies have found language to be an elaborate repository of knowledge about a people and their environment (both physical and social) (c.f. Sapir, 1912). It has been noted, for instance, that characteristics of a given social or physical environment is stored in the vocabulary of a given language. This paper is of the view that conservation efforts aimed at restoring biodiversity may not amount to much without records of traditional systems of knowledge. One way to document such knowledge is through language documentation, especially the vocabulary related to the physical environment comprising plants, animals, and social environment - particularly folklore related directly to the social environment, personal accounts, narratives and experiences and knowledge about the climate.