

Language Attitude and Ideologies in Multilingual Nigeria

Ioryue Godwin Aondohemba

School of Foreign Languages, National Research University Higher school of Economics Moscow (HSE Moscow)

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ABSTRACT

Nigeria's multilingual landscape, marked by the coexistence of English, numerous indigenous languages, and Nigerian Pidgin, is shaped by deeply rooted language attitudes and ideologies that influence social interaction, education, identity formation, and national development. This study examines prevailing language attitudes in Nigeria and the ideological frameworks that sustain linguistic hierarchies within the country. Adopting a systematic literature review approach, the study synthesizes existing scholarly works to analyze how historical, colonial, educational, and sociopolitical factors have contributed to the dominance of English and the marginalization of indigenous languages. The findings reveal that English continues to function as the language of power, prestige, and socioeconomic mobility, while indigenous Nigerian languages are largely confined to informal and cultural domains, despite their central role in identity construction and cultural transmission. Nigerian Pidgin, meanwhile, emerges as an important communicative bridge across ethnic and social boundaries. These coexisting attitudes reflect a persistent hierarchy in which languages are valued differently based on perceived economic, political, and symbolic capital. The study further highlights the implications of these ideologies for education, social inclusion, and cultural sustainability, noting that the privileging of English often undermines effective learning and contributes to linguistic exclusion. While recent developments in media and digital spaces suggest a gradual re-evaluation of indigenous languages, dominant ideologies remain largely unchanged. The study concludes that fostering more inclusive and balanced language ideologies is essential for promoting educational equity, preserving linguistic diversity, and strengthening social cohesion in Nigeria.

Keywords: Language attitudes; Language ideologies; Sociolinguistics; Indigenous languages; English dominance; Multilingualism; Nigeria.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Language plays a central role in human society as a medium for communication, cultural transmission, identity construction, and social organization. For indigenous communities, language is not merely a communicative tool but a repository of collective memory, ethical values, and indigenous knowledge systems that link past generations to the present (Olawe, 2022). Scholars have consistently emphasized that language shapes thought, worldview, and cultural practice, making it fundamental to social cohesion and continuity (Akinkurolere & Akinfenwa, 2018; Afe, 2012).

Nigeria represents one of the most linguistically diverse societies in the world, with over 500 indigenous languages spoken alongside English and Nigerian Pidgin (Bamgbose, 2010; Adebija, 2014; UNESCO, 2013). This multilingual configuration reflects the country's ethnic and cultural plurality, yet it is characterized by profound inequalities in language valuation. Languages in Nigeria operate within hierarchical systems of attitudes and ideologies that assign differential prestige, legitimacy, and socioeconomic value. While English occupies a dominant position as the official language of governance, education, and upward mobility, indigenous languages are largely confined to informal and cultural domains.

These hierarchies are deeply rooted in Nigeria's colonial history. The British colonial administration institutionalized English as the language of power and modernity, a status that persisted after independence through postcolonial language policies and educational practices (Bamgbose, 2010). As a result, English

continues to be widely perceived as a marker of intelligence, social status, and economic opportunity, while indigenous languages are often stigmatized as “vernacular” and associated with backwardness or limited utility (Adegbija, 2015; Olarewaju, 2012). Such perceptions have influenced parental language choices, schooling practices, and broader societal attitudes, particularly in urban contexts.

The implications of these ideologies are especially evident in education. Despite policy provisions advocating mother-tongue instruction in early schooling, implementation remains inconsistent, reinforcing the marginalization of indigenous languages within formal education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013; UNESCO, 2013). This has raised concerns about educational equity, effective learning, and cultural sustainability. At the same time, Nigerian Pidgin occupies a distinctive position as a contact language that facilitates interethnic communication and challenges rigid linguistic hierarchies, particularly among younger and urban populations (Adegbija, 2014).

Although several scholars and international organizations have warned about the vulnerability of many indigenous Nigerian languages (UNESCO, 2013), claims about large-scale language extinction require careful interpretation and critical triangulation across sources. Nonetheless, there is broad consensus that negative language attitudes and weak policy implementation contribute to language shift and declining intergenerational transmission. Against this backdrop, examining language attitudes and ideologies in multilingual Nigeria is crucial for understanding how linguistic hierarchies are constructed, maintained, and potentially transformed. This study therefore situates itself within existing scholarship to critically analyze the ideological forces shaping language use, valuation, and sustainability in Nigeria.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Historical Roots of Language Ideologies in Nigeria

The foundations of Nigerian language ideologies can be traced to the colonial period. The British colonial administration established English as the language of governance, education, and formal interaction, thereby conferring on it high prestige and institutional power (Bamgbose, 2010). Indigenous languages were largely restricted to informal and domestic domains, while English became associated with modernity, civilization, and socioeconomic advancement. This colonial linguistic hierarchy persisted after independence, shaping postcolonial attitudes that continue to privilege English over local languages in most formal contexts (Adegbija, 2014).

Status of Indigenous Languages in Nigeria

The state of indigenous languages today mirrors the situation of indigenous life (culture, traditions, values, norms among others). In many parts of the country, they are on the verge of disappearance (UNESCO, 2013). Nowadays, people judge an educated man by his ability to speak English fluently. When you can speak English fluently, people believe you are educated, neglecting other aspects of education. On most occasions, people focus on the language in Education. Their ultimate aim is for children (students) to speak English fluently. Because of this, parents of contemporary times tend to criminalize the use of indigenous language in the glorification of foreign languages, particularly English (Adegbija, 2015). They see our indigenous languages as something that should never be spoken in schools, churches, houses, on the streets, in the market places and in society in general. When you speak your dialect, people tend to judge you as local and barbaric and when you speak English, then, you belong.

Bamgbose (2010) iterated that when two persons converse in their native language publicly, many people would turn to them to first assess their physical appearance because the mentality is that, such people must be uncouth, uncivilized and uneducated to have spoken that “local language” in a public place. The belief is that indigenous languages should only be spoken in rural settings; hence, children who are supposed to be integrated into the society through the language are discouraged from learning or speaking the languages. A lot of parents are indoctrinated by the modern-day slogan of private schools captioned speak English. English is our language have ingested the notion that speaking the indigenous language which is the child's first language will nullify the

tendency for writing and speaking Standard English. Such a child is demoralized and prevented from having a keen interest in his native language (Olanrewaje, 2012).

Describing the attitude of people towards Nigerian languages, Omotolani (2020) elucidates that parents don't speak their mother tongue to their children anymore and most children are banned from speaking their indigenous languages in public places, schools and even at home. She further explains that many people have the belief that speaking one's mother tongue deems you uncivilized, local and violent and native speakers are scared of being judged to be 'razz' and loud. This simply explains why many children, especially in the urban cities can neither speak nor hear their indigenous languages. Since mother tongue is often used only by older people, an entire generation of indigenous children can no longer communicate with their grandparents. Children even take pride in saying that they do not understand their mother tongue.

The Nigerian school system does not help the situation. The study of Nigerian indigenous languages is not a thing of priority both in speech and writing. Ayakaroma (2017) affirmed that our educational system pays no serious attention to giving the study of indigenous languages in our school curricula. Many students are either punished or made to pay a certain amount of money as a fine when caught engaging in the act of speaking indigenous languages. Some could argue that this step is an essential measure to ensure that students enhance their communicative competence in English but mastery in one's mother tongue does not mean one cannot learn or gain proficiency in other languages (Adegbija, 2014). Unlike the English language that is a compulsory and core subject from primary, secondary up to tertiary institutions, no indigenous languages are placed on such status. For any student to gain admission into any tertiary institution in Nigeria, such student must have a minimum of credit pass in English but this cannot be said of any indigenous language. They are handled and taught with much levity. It is quite common to see young Nigerians who cannot have a simple conversation in their mother tongue. They feel there is no need to speak their language when their friends probably don't speak it back to them or it isn't cool to speak it. Today, an utterance in an indigenous language is incomplete without the addition of English lexicons which result in code-switching and code-mixing to conceal their weakness and inadequacies in both the native and second language. What exists now is a hybrid form of language where English is filled with bad grammar and bacterized accent as well as Indigenous languages are characterized with wrong lexical choices and unacceptable sentences.

Reasons for Treating Nigerian Indigenous Languages as Inferior

Many factors continue to debilitate the importance of indigenous languages in Nigeria. Olarewaju (2012) has blamed both the white men who introduced their language to us and the Nigerian native speakers as the major cause of our native languages going into extinction. Olarewaju sees the colonial government as being guilty of selfish ambition of introducing the white man ideology to the Nigerian natives while the Nigerian natives are guilty of ignorantly allowing the colonial government/Christian missionaries to brainwash them to the extent of preferring foreign language (English Language) to their own. The researcher agrees more with the latter. It is not the fault of our colonial masters but that of ourselves: government, parents/Guardian, schools and society at large to buttress this, some of the reasons

Nigerian indigenous language has been regarded as local, uncivilized and a mere vernacular by the Nigerian native speakers themselves are highlighted below

A). Nonchalant Attitude towards Teaching and Learning of Nigerian Languages

As stated in the national policy of education' (1977, revised 1981, 1998 and 2004), the government recognizes the peculiar multilingual nature of Nigeria and would in best capacity promote the use, teaching and learning of the indigenous languages to enhance social interaction, national unity and preserve culture. Therefore, according to the provision of the NPE, every child is expected to learn the language of his/her immediate environment and also one of the three major languages: Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. Ige and Otutu (2012) explained the provision of NPE means that it is required of a child at the junior secondary school from the south to learn Yoruba as the language of his/her immediate environment and learn either Hausa or Igbo as L2 in the interest of national unity. For his counterpart from the North, he/she must learn Hausa as a language of his immediate environment and

learn either Yoruba or Igbo; while the one from the east would learn Igbo as a language of the environment and either Yoruba or Hausa.

Furthermore, the national policy of education states that every child should start his education in his mother tongue or the language spoken in the immediate environment. So at least, in primary one, every subject should be taught in the child's mother tongue or the language spoken in the area. If we look within ourselves, it's crystal clear that these laudable policies are not implemented. The implementation of this national policy on education in most of the primary, secondary and tertiary institutions has either been poorly handled or neglected. The mother tongue which is the language of the immediate environment is hardly taught not to talk of one of the other Nigerian languages (Ayeomoni, 2012). The major emphasis on language in a Nigerian school system is the English language. It is a fact that the majority of both state and private-owned schools have neglected the teaching of mother tongue languages, hence, the vast population of the students cannot read or write in their mother tongue. Though, even when mother tongue language is offered and seated for in examinations like WAEC, NECO etc., students are more unserious towards the subject because it neither adds nor subtracts from the quality of their result Adegbiya, E. (2015). Since students on numerous occasions are prohibited from speaking the Nigerian languages within and outside the school, they misplace and confuse their priority and thus become demotivated and unserious towards indigenous languages. The non-implementation of the laudable language policy continues to ridicule the values of Nigeria languages and place them on an inferior scale.

B). English Dominance and As the Language of Instruction

English is used in Nigeria for a large number of purposes. It is the language through which employment opportunities are guaranteed. In our society today, people who can speak English are placed above those who can't. Ige and Otutu (2012) asserted that the Europeans who came to Nigeria in the 19th century used their native language (English) as the medium of communication, promoting it in schools by making it the language of instruction, giving annual grants to schools that taught English and their graduates were offered ready-made employment. This influenced Nigerians to be disposed to using English both in oral and written modes, allowing English to penetrate most cultures and educational systems. This important role being played by English in Nigeria and in the rest of the world places English above Nigeria indigenous languages and suppresses the enthusiasm of Nigerians towards indigenous languages.

Apart from being the language of Dominance, one of the major functions played by the English language in Nigeria is being the language of instruction. It is the tool that the teacher uses to impart knowledge, skills, ideas, and aptitude to the students. The idea is that a student who is deficient in English would not be able to have access to the information being passed by the teacher and other educational materials. Since English is the language of education, people believe that every child who has gone to school should be able to use it effectively. Nwanyanwu (2017) commented that there is a rigid and erroneous pattern of language behaviour among both literate and illiterates that intelligence or knowledge is synonymous with competence in English. It is believed that when children speak English, it reflects their intelligence and ability to cope educationally.

Equally, the language of instruction being English makes indigenous languages less important. It will be difficult to write 'addition' or 'subtraction' and other English words on the chalkboard and start teaching in the mother tongue. Therefore, we tend to behave as if English is better than the mother tongue (Ayeomoni, 2012). When we adopt this attitude, it affects the way we react with children when they use their mother tongue. Thus, mother tongue is regarded as vernacular or local language and students are compelled to speak the English language. Students become uninterested or see learning the indigenous language as not being useful to them. Reading materials are not available in the mother tongue and they don't need a credit pass in the subject to gain admission into the university or get a job. The value placed on education and English as the language of education blinded us to regard our Nigerian languages as a shadow of our formal self or uneducated folk.

Attitudes toward English in Nigeria

English occupies a central and highly influential position in Nigeria's sociolinguistic landscape. As the country's official language, English functions as the primary medium of instruction, governance, law, commerce, and interethnic communication. Attitudes toward English in Nigeria are largely positive, shaped by historical,

socioeconomic, educational, and global factors (Olawe, 2022). English enjoys overwhelmingly positive attitudes in Nigeria due to its perceived instrumental value. It is widely regarded as the language of education, employment, governance, and global connectivity. Proficiency in English is often equated with intelligence, competence, and elite status, especially in urban settings (Unuabonah, 2014). Consequently, English functions as a gatekeeping language, determining access to higher education and lucrative employment opportunities. However, this ideology also reinforces social inequality, as access to quality English education is uneven across regions and socioeconomic groups (Adegbija, 2004). Attitudes toward English are also shaped by its perceived neutrality in a multilingual society. With hundreds of indigenous languages spoken across the country, English is commonly regarded as an ethnically neutral language that facilitates national unity and intergroup communication (Adegbija, 2004). Unlike indigenous languages, which are strongly tied to ethnic identity, English is viewed as a unifying tool that minimizes ethnic favoritism and conflict. This ideological positioning has helped sustain widespread acceptance of English as Nigeria's official language.

However, positive attitudes toward English coexist with critical perspectives. Some scholars and cultural advocates argue that the dominance of English contributes to the marginalization and underdevelopment of indigenous Nigerian languages (Afe, 2012). There is growing concern that excessive reliance on English in education and governance undermines cultural identity and limits effective learning among students who are not proficient in English at early stages of schooling (UNESCO, 2003). These critiques reflect emerging counter-ideologies that call for a more balanced multilingual approach. In contemporary Nigeria, globalization and digital communication continue to reinforce favorable attitudes toward English. Its role as a global lingua franca in technology, science, and international relations further solidifies its high status among young people and professionals (Adegbija, 2015). Nevertheless, code-switching and code-mixing between English, indigenous languages, and Nigerian Pidgin illustrate a dynamic linguistic reality in which English coexists with other languages rather than completely displacing them.

Attitudes toward Indigenous Nigerian Languages

Attitudes toward indigenous languages in Nigeria are often ambivalent. On the one hand, these languages are valued as markers of ethnic identity, cultural heritage, and communal solidarity. On the other hand, many Nigerians perceive them as having limited economic and educational utility compared to English (Adegbija, 2015). As a result, some parents discourage the use of indigenous languages at home in favor of English, believing this will enhance their children's academic success. This negative or indifferent attitude contributes to language shift and endangerment, particularly among minority languages with small speaker populations (UNESCO, 2013). Indigenous Nigerian languages constitute the cultural and linguistic foundation of Nigeria's diverse ethnic groups. With over 500 indigenous languages spoken across the country, these languages play a crucial role in identity formation, socialization, and the transmission of cultural values. However, attitudes toward indigenous Nigerian languages are complex and often ambivalent, shaped by historical experiences, socioeconomic considerations, educational practices, and dominant language ideologies.

Historically, the status of indigenous languages was significantly diminished during the colonial period. British colonial language policy privileged English as the language of administration and formal education, while indigenous languages were relegated to informal and domestic domains (Bamgbose, 2010). This historical marginalization fostered long-lasting attitudes that view indigenous languages as less prestigious and less useful for socioeconomic advancement. These perceptions persist in postcolonial Nigeria and continue to influence language choices in both private and public spheres. In contemporary Nigerian society, indigenous languages are widely valued as symbols of ethnic identity and cultural heritage. Many Nigerians express strong emotional attachment to their mother tongues, regarding them as essential markers of belonging and cultural continuity (Adegbija, 2014). Indigenous languages are central to traditional institutions, religious practices, folklore, and community life. Positive attitudes are particularly evident in rural areas, where local languages remain the primary means of everyday communication and social interaction.

Despite their cultural significance, indigenous languages are often perceived as having limited instrumental value. In urban and formal contexts, many Nigerians regard them as unsuitable for education, science, technology, and official communication (Unuabonah, 2014). This perception has led some parents, especially in

urban and middle-class settings, to prioritize English over indigenous languages in child-rearing, believing that exclusive or dominant use of English will improve academic and career prospects. Such attitudes contribute to language shift and reduced proficiency in indigenous languages among younger generations. Attitudes toward indigenous languages also vary according to language size and political influence. Major languages such as Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo enjoy relatively higher prestige and institutional support, including their use in broadcasting, literature, and regional education (Adegbija, 2014). In contrast, minority languages often face stronger negative attitudes and are more vulnerable to endangerment, as speakers may abandon them in favor of more dominant languages for reasons of social mobility and wider communication (UNESCO, 2013).

Educational practices further reflect and reinforce prevailing attitudes. Although Nigeria's National Policy on Education recommends the use of the mother tongue or language of the immediate environment in early primary education, implementation remains inconsistent (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013). The dominance of English as the medium of instruction often signals to learners and parents that indigenous languages are of secondary importance, thereby perpetuating ideologies of linguistic inferiority (Bamgbose, 2010). In recent years, there has been a gradual re-evaluation of indigenous Nigerian languages. Increased advocacy for cultural preservation, as well as the growing presence of local languages in media, music, film, and digital platforms, has helped to challenge negative attitudes (Adegbija, 2015). These developments highlight the adaptability of indigenous languages and their potential relevance in modern and globalized contexts. Meanwhile, attitudes toward indigenous Nigerian languages are characterized by a tension between cultural pride and perceived socioeconomic limitations. While these languages are cherished as carriers of identity and heritage, dominant ideologies continue to marginalize them in formal domains. Addressing these attitudes through supportive language policies, educational reforms, and media representation is essential for sustaining Nigeria's linguistic diversity and promoting inclusive national development.

Neglect of Nigerian Languages by Parents

Due to colonial hangover, most of the elite parents in Nigeria do not only see the English language as superior to Nigerian languages but more financially rewarding to study. For that reason, the parents do not encourage their children and wards in any form to speak in Nigerian languages (Ige & Otutu, 2012). Many parents behave as if the indigenous languages should be forced out of sight. Some parents could figuratively kill their children because they spoke their mother tongue. It should be English at all times and this culture influences the woman next door to want her child to speak English like other kids, thereby relegating our much-valued indigenous languages to the ground and reducing it to nothingness (Olawe, 2022). The constant discouragement of many school-age children nowadays from speaking Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa and others which is their native language is the principal reason Nigerian languages is about to be washed ashore to the realm of invisibility

The School/ the Teacher

The private schools and teachers share part of the blame for the inferiority of the indigenous language in Nigeria. Studies have shown that educators are not adhering to the policy of indigenous language in education. It is evident that what most schools especially private schools place much emphasis on speaking English and since many parents want their children to speak the white man's language fluently, private schools continue to ridicule our indigenous languages at the glorification of English; instilling the belief that our indigenous languages are vernacular and not worthy to be spoken at all. Instead of identifying the times that are appropriate for pupils to speak English, they simply indulge in punishing the pupils who speak 'vernacular' as they would call it as if they had committed a crime in doing so (Afe, 2012). To motivate students to be effective in learning English, teachers paint indigenous languages in colors that portray them as inimical to their success and future attainments. As stated by a news magazine: Ayakoroma (2017), many unwise teachers place an embargo on the use of the vernacular in schools to encourage proficiency in the use of the English language, the same reason some ignorant parents speak only the foreign tongue with their children at home. This practice is one of the reasons children, parents and societies do not see the important role of indigenous languages other than being cantankerous to their life achievement

Glorification of Foreign Values

One of the damages colonization and civilization has done to Nigerians is the appreciation of foreign life more than ours. Right from the time when colonial masters arrived upon the shores of Africa and Nigeria in particular, the admiration of the white man's way of life has continually propelled us to lose touch with things of our own. We accepted to sell our brothers in exchange for white man's materials; we sold our heritage to live like the white man. We did not just lose our sense of belonging but also our traditions, customs and norms, dressing, religion, behavior and most importantly, our language in which all our culture and philosophy are explained and understood (Ayeomoni, 2012). Since English is a white man's language, many people would kill to speak the foreign language. The more fluent your English is, the more prestige you get, the more educated you are positioned and the more you are positioned above others who can't speak the language. This has been one of the major reasons our indigenous languages have lost their values because every man and parent is after speaking the white man's language. All these factors identified and discussed above are some of the reasons that serve as an impediment to the recognition of our indigenous languages as an important language that plays the central role of socializing us into the values, norms and beliefs of our community (Adegbija, 2014).

Education and Language Ideologies in Nigeria

Nigeria's educational system reflects prevailing language ideologies. Although the National Policy on Education advocates mother-tongue or language-of-the-environment instruction in early primary education, implementation remains limited (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013). English continues to dominate as the medium of instruction, even at early stages where learners have limited proficiency. This practice reinforces the ideology that English is superior and indispensable for learning, while indigenous languages are viewed as unsuitable for academic and scientific discourse (Bamgbose, 2010). Education in Nigeria is deeply intertwined with language ideologies that shape how languages are valued, used, and institutionalized within the school system. Language ideology refers to the beliefs and assumptions about languages and their speakers that justify particular language policies and practices (Woolard & Schieffelin, 1994). In Nigeria's multilingual context, educational language ideologies reflect historical legacies, political considerations, and socioeconomic aspirations, with significant implications for learning outcomes, equity, and cultural sustainability.

One of the most dominant language ideologies in Nigerian education is the prioritizing of English as the primary medium of instruction. Rooted in colonial history, English was established as the language of formal education during British rule and has retained its status in the post-independence period (Bamgbose, 2000). English is widely perceived as the language of academic excellence, modern knowledge, and global relevance. As a result, proficiency in English is often equated with intelligence and educational success, reinforcing its hegemonic position within the school system (Adegbija, 2015). This ideology is clearly reflected in educational practice. Although Nigeria's National Policy on Education recommends the use of the mother tongue or language of the immediate environment as the medium of instruction in early primary education, English continues to dominate classroom instruction even at the foundational level (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013). Many schools, particularly private and urban institutions, adopt English-only policies, signaling to learners and parents that indigenous languages are inferior or unsuitable for formal learning. Such practices contribute to the devaluation of local languages and undermine policy intentions.

Another influential ideology is the belief that indigenous Nigerian languages lack the capacity to convey scientific, technological, and academic knowledge. This perception has limited their development as languages of instruction and scholarly discourse (Adegbija, 2014). Consequently, indigenous languages are often taught as subjects rather than used as media of instruction, reinforcing a hierarchy in which English is positioned at the top and local languages occupy subordinate roles. This hierarchy affects students' linguistic self-esteem and shapes attitudes toward multilingualism. The dominance of English in education also has implications for access and equity. Many Nigerian children enter school with little or no proficiency in English, particularly in rural and linguistically homogeneous communities. Early exposure to English as the medium of instruction can hinder comprehension, participation, and cognitive development, leading to poor academic performance and high dropout rates (UNESCO, 2013). Despite extensive research demonstrating the educational benefits of mother-

tongue-based instruction, prevailing ideologies continue to favor early and exclusive use of English (Adegbiya, 2014).

Ethnicity and national integration further influence educational language ideologies. English is often viewed as an ethnically neutral language that promotes national unity in a highly diverse society. In contrast, the use of specific indigenous languages in education is sometimes perceived as privileging particular ethnic groups, especially in multilingual urban centers (Bamgbose, 2000). This perception has contributed to resistance against the broader adoption of indigenous languages as media of instruction, despite their pedagogical advantages. In recent years, globalization and sociocultural change have begun to challenge entrenched language ideologies in Nigerian education. Increased advocacy for bilingual and multilingual education, as well as the growing visibility of indigenous languages and Nigerian Pidgin in media and digital spaces, has sparked renewed interest in linguistic diversity (Adegbiya, 2015). However, these shifts have yet to translate into systematic and sustained educational reforms.

Implications of Regarding Nigerian Indigenous Languages as Inferior on National Development

As an individual, one might have problems of health; it might be a headache, sore throat, sprain or the like. When any part of the body is disturbed, the overall performance will be affected. This is the same with language. Since language is an essential attribute of human society with which man's intellect is structured and made functional, the inferior quality with which we handle our various indigenous languages will affect the level of development both socially, economically, politically and technologically. For the sake of clarity, the implications of the inferior ways we handle our indigenous languages are enumerated below

(a) The Effect on Society: - Speaking one's indigenous language is important to pass oral traditions, heritage and diversity through generations. Language is the key to the heart of the people and if we lose the key, we lose the very essence of the people. Sadly, it seems this generation of young Nigerians is well on its way to losing its command of traditional languages. It then implies that in the future, small ethnic groups will lose their cultural identities and languages and become lost tribes relegated to the history books.

(b) Polluted Social Integration: one of the means through which a child is integrated into his society is through language. It is through language that the norms and values, aspirations, experiences, history and challenges of his society are handed over to the coming generation. When this language is saturated with another alien language, it is like describing a black color from a white color perspective when they are opposite to each other. Our belief systems and values are changing. Our norms, taboos, values, attitudes, and thinking have turned towards the likes of the foreign people whose language we ardor. The language that should preach the values the society prefers and those rejected, what one should, ought and must do as well as what one should not, ought not and must not do have been compromised. This is one of the reasons our taboos have been discarded as superstitions. Our culture and traditions are now seen as barbaric and archaic. We no longer cherish our own but we continue to appreciate foreign life. Our youths today now have so many distinctive styles of dress, behavior, speech, distinctive tastes especially in music and distinctive values (social and political) in varying degrees of strength. These pervade all aspects of youth life both in the rural and urban areas and it continued to grow. Invariably, we produce citizens with no culture; people who neither belong to the foreign culture nor understand those of their immediate environment.

(c) Importation of Foreign Habit: Today, foreign habits, dressing, behavior, attitudes and ways of life are the order of the day. Concepts like divorce, baby mama, cultism, immoral dress in the name of fashion, prostitution and pornography that are preached against in our various indigenous languages have been glorified. It is not hard to see a secondary school student become a drug addict, or a six-year-old girl crushing on some guy. All our moral rectitude has been thrown away as a result of the glorification of foreign language. One thing we forget is that a behavior that is socially acceptable in one society can be judged immoral in another setting. Its rightness or wrong is embedded in the language which we have either discarded or neglected. The result of this, according to Ajepe and Ademowo (2016) is that the younger generations are beginning to lose the core values and virtues in their cultures. The dress culture of the younger generation is also taking after the dress culture of the people whose language they speak. They wear shirts on the street with an inscription of bad guy, fuck you, and so on.

The younger generation is reflecting the culture of the language they speak more by gradually modifying their names to be pronounceable in English.

(d) Weak Social Institution: When children are poorly integrated into society, culture becomes disorganized and social order collapses. When social order collapses, the mores lose their compelling power and the social core of common values shrinks. Individuals feel insecure and confused in a society whose norms have become undependable. When most people do not conform to well-established norms, most of the time, a society cannot function efficiently

(e) The effect on Individuals: The individual self is very important in nation-building. The individual plays a significant role in the making and destruction of a nation. Therefore, the individual needs to understand himself and his environment before he can adequately contribute his quota to his society. That is why the Nigerian educational philosophy lays much emphasis on the integration of the individual into a sound and effective citizen and geared towards self-realization, better human relationship, individual and national efficiency, effective citizenship, national consciousness, national unity, economic, political, scientific and technological progress (NPE, 1977). With language, the tool with which a man defines himself, the individual is faced with a lot of confusion that tells on the development of the society. Some of these include:

(f) Mistaken Identity: Language is society itself. Without language, there is no society, people or culture. The people, culture, belief and philosophy are all embedded in the language in which the society speaks. Speaking the language of the society makes one part of that society. Language is the most potent form of identity politics in Nigeria. People hardly believe a person is from a region if he cannot speak the language of that region. Most times, the intonation identifies where one hails from and gives way to our origin. Therefore, glorification of the foreign language at the detriment of our indigenous languages is deteriorating and causing misidentification. When you prevent a child from speaking his indigenous language, you are preventing him from identifying himself with the society to which he belongs; he finds it difficult to associate himself with the culture, tradition, norms and values of his society. Treating our languages as vernacular and beating a child when he speaks such language is more or less seeing ourselves as taboos or calling ourselves mistakes and errors. Transferring these erroneous beliefs into the young ones that our indigenous are vernacular and not worthy to be spoken about is more or less telling our young ones that our culture is wrong, and our way of life is primitive. This negatively affects the upbringing of the child. He forms characters, attitudes and behavior that are alien to his environment and inimical to reasonable growth of the society since he doesn't know which society he's identified with. He neither understands the culture of his environment nor can he associate with the culture of the language he speaks. He is then propelled to import the character of the culture he doesn't understand well and behave in such a manner he can explain. Consequently, national development is impeded with such confused individuals.

(g) Self-Patriotism: Everywhere in Nigeria today, self-patriotism has become the order of the day. Since we cannot associate or identify ourselves with the society in which we belong, we lose the sense of our national patriotism. When a person cannot associate with the language of his society, such person loses his identity, his patriotism and love for his country; he loses his sense of belonging as a citizen and invariably seeks means to escape to other countries. There is no doubt that this will bring corruption, indiscipline, underdevelopment and immorality. This is because the cultures embedded in our indigenous languages that seek to curb these vices are seen as vernacular, taboos and primitive. This leads to the glorification of foreign culture which appears to work against our country.

(h) Low Self-Extreme and Self-Concept: We hardly depend on ourselves to provide the solution to Nigerian problems. We depend critically on the foreign to lay our beds. We could no longer rely on our intelligence to do anything. If it has not yet been said or Okayed by the foreign men, it's not yet positive. This continues to develop into our unconscious sense of the negative attitude to our nation. When people see products made in Nigeria, they are tempted to think that such products are inferior and of low quality. That's why we see products made in China, Italy, India etc. on almost all products in Nigeria. Until we learn to be proud of our language, cherish our own culture and traditions; our eyes will remain closed to meaningful national development

(i) Low Productivity: Nigeria as a nation can only be built by individuals with acceptable character, intellectual and vocational skills who are willing, ready and capable of revolutionizing ideas from patriotic minds for the

sake of development. When such individuals cannot express their thoughts and experiences adequately or exhibit characters of a foreign language, the right attitudes and skills needed for positive development will be eroded. The drug addict, the cultist, the alcoholic, the prostitute, the armed robber or the economic saboteur hardly contribute to national development. These are people who have been disoriented through the norms handed to them by implicit languages. Many workers in their various places of work display a wrong attitude and poor skill that one would wonder about the kind of education we get in schools. Productivity comes from one's ability to think and create but with indigenous languages eroded, there is a low motivation for positive creativity. Those who try to find solutions are rarely appreciated because we do not have trust in them. Hence, attempts are directed towards personal glory and wealth while national glory is neglected

(j) The effect on Education: Education can serve as a tool for developing an effective value system. By this, it means education can help us better understand our beliefs and how they can affect our society. Education, whether formal, informal or non-formal, is made achievable through language and such education does not supersede the society in which it is being operated. Some of the effects of treating our indigenous languages as vernacular on education include:

(k) Low Educational Product: It is a fact that nowadays, what we have mostly are people who are highly schooled but less educated; people with high intelligence but low skills, less self-esteem and low self-worth. Ajibade (2019) in his work questioned the quality of education in Nigeria. Ajibade (2019) faulted education to be directed more on the certificate rather than knowledge gained. The education is Certificate-Based rather than Knowledge-Based. That is why the standard of education is falling drastically, producing many unemployable graduates. It is a matter of fact that language enhances our thinking and reasoning and since this language is distorted, many people are less aware of themselves. If you ask why a university student chooses a course of study, it is unlikely for him to give a logical reply because he hardly understands himself or realizes what he wants to do. Today, all we hear are many big grammars with no content, giving way to "malpractices of different forms such as result buying, bribery, impersonation, forging of certificates, ghost students" (Ajibade, 2019) and so on.

(l) Language Incompetence: Odebunmi (2006) opines that context determines what we say and what we do not say. Learning to speak a language means learning to use the language appropriately in a different context. A wink from one's mother is enough to pass the message across to the child. In our everyday life, we vary the kind of language we use according to the levels of formality and familiarity. In context or situations where there is an obvious status difference between participants, we are careful to express the right amount of respect. These days, young Nigerians do not have the required sociolinguistic competence to use language as dictated by the social-cultural environment. In their everyday life, they rarely vary the kind of language they use according to the context of language use. They are hardly careful to express the right amount of respect when there is an obvious status difference between participants. This leads to many grammatical but unacceptable sentences. Many students are rude in their expressions. They rarely consider the age and status of a person before raining on such a person several abusive comments. Teachers complain of high moral decadence among students. Many students have lost the polite way of addressing elderly people. When some students talk, one would question if such persons pass through the realm of school at all.

Apart from this, many students do not possess the ability to understand and create forms of the language that are longer than sentences, such as stories, conversations or letters. They have low thinking and reasoning ability to the extent that they can hardly express themselves in logical manners. Many students can't produce their imagination in concrete ways because of their poverty of language. The ideas expressed in English by Nigerian speakers of English already exist in them in their local languages or dialects. They merely interpret these into their equivalent words in English. When these ideas are not properly formed in the language in which they think, presenting these ideas would be faulty in their utterances and written communication. This is evident in their poor performance in essay compositions. Some of these problems are due to the interference of one language on the other and the inability to think clearly. That is why today, we have children with big mouths but empty brains.

Despite the high morals embedded in indigenous languages, enriched with proverbs, warnings (ikilo) and didactic folklore and folktales meant to teach morals, these indigenous languages are hardly taught in schools. Many students cannot read or understand texts written in the indigenous language. Though there are books that have been published in the indigenous languages which are highly didactic, they are inaccessible to most students. Those who can read it lack fluency while many cannot attempt to read at all; so many prefer to read and write in English. They can hardly speak pure or undiluted Yoruba, Igbo or Hausa without code-mixing with lexemes or phrases of English or code-switching from Yoruba, Igbo or Hausa to English intermittently. Hence, we have students who are not proficient in English and not competent in the indigenous languages.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a systematic literature review (SLR) approach to examine language attitudes, linguistic hierarchies, and language endangerment within multilingual contexts, with a particular focus on Nigeria. A systematic approach was chosen to enhance transparency, rigor, and replicability in line with established academic standards.

Source Selection

Academic sources were collected from recognized scholarly databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, and JSTOR. The search covered peer-reviewed journal articles, books, policy documents, and reports published primarily between 2000 and 2024 to ensure both historical grounding and contemporary relevance. Key search terms included language ideology, language attitudes, multilingualism in Nigeria, language endangerment, language policy, and English dominance.

Sources were screened using predefined inclusion criteria. Only publications that (1) focused on language use, attitudes, policy, or endangerment in Nigeria or comparable multilingual contexts, (2) demonstrated clear methodological grounding, and (3) were published in reputable academic outlets were included. Duplicates, non-scholarly sources, and studies lacking empirical or theoretical relevance were excluded. This screening process ensured consistency and reduced selection bias.

Analysis and Triangulation

Selected sources were analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns related to language hierarchy, ideological positioning, and language sustainability. Claims regarding language endangerment were critically interrogated and triangulated across multiple sources, including UNESCO reports and Nigerian scholars such as Bamgbose and Adegbija, to avoid overgeneralization or alarmist interpretations. Where discrepancies appeared, cautious and evidence-based language was adopted.

DISCUSSION

This study highlights how language hierarchies and attitudes in multilingual Nigeria are shaped by historical, ideological, and policy-driven forces rather than by inevitable linguistic decline. Synthesizing findings across the reviewed literature reveals a consistent pattern: while English continues to dominate formal domains such as education, governance, and economic mobility, indigenous languages remain central to cultural identity and community life. However, negative attitudes toward indigenous languages and weak implementation of language policies have contributed to language shift and reduced intergenerational transmission rather than widespread extinctions.

Importantly, a critical comparison of sources demonstrates that claims about language endangerment must be interpreted cautiously. Triangulation of UNESCO classifications with Nigerian scholarship shows that only some languages are classified as vulnerable or endangered, and that sociopolitical factors rather than linguistic inadequacy are the primary drivers of marginalization. These findings challenge alarmist narratives and underscores the need for evidence-based discussion in language policy research.

From a policy perspective, the findings suggest that effective language planning in Nigeria requires moving beyond symbolic recognition of indigenous languages toward consistent implementation of mother-tongue education and multilingual policies. Strengthening institutional support, promoting positive language attitudes, and integrating indigenous languages into formal domains could mitigate language shift and enhance educational equity.

Furthermore, recognizing Nigerian Pidgin's role in interethnic communication may support more inclusive language planning strategies.

The discussion thus links empirical insights to practical policy implications while reinforcing the importance of methodological rigor in sociolinguistic research.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

Nigerian language attitudes and ideologies reflect the country's complex multilingual reality, shaped by colonial legacies, ethnic diversity, educational practices, and globalization. The continued dominance of English as the language of power, education, and socioeconomic mobility underscores deeply entrenched beliefs about linguistic prestige and utility. At the same time, indigenous Nigerian languages remain vital symbols of cultural identity and social belonging, while Nigerian Pidgin functions as an important bridge across ethnic and class boundaries. These coexisting attitudes reveal a persistent hierarchy in which languages are valued differently depending on their perceived economic, political, and symbolic capital. The implications of these ideologies are far-reaching. In education, the prioritization of English often undermines effective learning and marginalizes indigenous languages, despite policy provisions that recognize their pedagogical and cultural importance. Socially and politically, language attitudes influence inclusion, identity formation, and access to opportunity, sometimes reinforcing inequality and linguistic exclusion. Yet emerging trends in media, popular culture, and digital communication suggest a gradual re-evaluation of linguistic value, particularly among younger generations.

Ultimately, fostering more inclusive and balanced language ideologies is essential for Nigeria's sustainable development. Recognizing multilingualism as a national resource rather than a liability can enhance educational outcomes, preserve linguistic and cultural heritage, and promote social cohesion. A deliberate commitment to supportive language policies, effective implementation of mother-tongue education, and positive public discourse on linguistic diversity will be critical in reshaping language attitudes toward a more equitable and culturally grounded Nigerian society.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made;

Firstly, Nigerian indigenous language should be taught and made compulsory subjects across all educational institutions. It should be mandatory and effectively implemented for all schools, pupils and students to study their indigenous languages and educators must adhere to this policy. By making local languages compulsory in education, it will stimulate pride and discourage the encroachment of English. A widely spoken language will be more efficiently taught and a more effective tool for mass communication.

Also, the government needs to encourage the use of indigenous languages in all spheres of social life. If the government in Nigeria wants to counteract the growing dominance of English, they will do well to use indigenous languages in government business. For example, they could be used in reading the yearly budget speech, giving state broadcasts and performing other important government functions in the judiciary and legislative arm.

Nevertheless, society should not make native speakers feel ashamed to speak their language. Parents should also be encouraged to share their cultures and traditions with their kids and not ban their children from speaking it.

They should correct the mentality that our indigenous language does not train children to develop intellectual skills or civilized habits as a child can be fluent in his indigenous language and equally fluent in English.

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