



Language Preference and the National Language Question in the Nigeria's National and State Parliaments

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ABSTRACT

The study investigates the comparative advantage of Nigerian Law makers being bilinguals in a multilingual nation for the conduct of legislative matters. In other words, it seeks to establish if bilingualism is a strength or a weakness with the bid to conclude that law makers across the Houses of Assembly in Nigeria prefer the Language of their Immediate Environments (LIE) to the official English Language. The study seeks to contribute to solving Nigeria's National Language Question, by investigating the efforts being made towards realizing the dream of having an indigenous lingua franca in Nigeria. The theoretical orientation of the essay is the duo of Sapir-Whorfian and Bernstein's hypotheses. The theories help to unravel the perception of Nigerian Senators and their preferred codes when they have to choose between their indigenous languages or the official English language with which to communicate their ideas in the hallowed chambers. The theory corroborates the observations made during the researcher's visit to the National Assembly where the language at plenary is strictly English. The research work has been able to confirm the clause in section 91 of the National Language Policy that an indigenous language may become the official language of the country when "adequate arrangement has been made". We find that the English language has remained preponderantly a preferred language of the parliament.

KEYWORDS: National Language Question, English Language, Indigenous Languages, National Assembly, Preferred Language, Official Language

INTRODUCTION

Our focus in this paper is to provide a report of a fieldwork embarked upon by a team of researchers sponsored by the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) in its institutional-based research funding interventions in the years, 2021-2022. The preliminary activities involved visiting Houses of Assembly resident in the six geo-political zones in Nigeria, including the National Assembly in Abuja. Kaduna State House of Assembly, Rivers State House of Assembly and Oyo State House of Assembly as well as the Kwara State House of Assembly were visited, representing North-Central, South-South and South-West. The core North East and North West as well as South East were not visited for lack of Research Assistants and Resources for the visits. Chief of the challenges faced at the time of gathering data for this report was insecurity across the country.

The remote purpose of this article is to further investigate the progress made by the Nigerian governments and the citizens in the language education provisions in Nigeria's *National Policy on Education* (NPE) and thus, we are approaching the discussions of the provisions against the consideration of what principles would facilitate socio-political integration as well as promote overall cultural and national development.

The immediate purpose is to carry out statistics of the indigenous, languages-in-use in the Houses of Assembly and particularly in the National Assembly in Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory. For a developing nation such as Nigeria, Kelman (1971, p. 40) has suggested two functional considerations to guide the authorities to arrive at their respective language policies. The first relates to the patterns of communication that would enable the socio-economic institutions to function most effectively and equitably in meeting the needs and interests of the population. The second is how to ensure that different groups within the society, varying in their linguistic repertoires, have equal access to the public system and opportunities to participate in it.

Adeniran (nd) in a post-dated article edited by Ayodabo (2013, p. 238) writes in his article titled, "Language Education Provisions in Nigeria's National Policy on Education" that Ferguson (2022) suggests a series of societal language choice questions which language policy in a developing multilingual country may address: What language(s) shall be the official medium of the government to be used in laws, administration and the armed forces? What language(s) shall be used as medium of instruction at the various levels of the educational system? What language(s) will be accepted for use on the



radio, in publishing and as school subjects? Documented answers to such questions according to Adeniran (ibid) will in part constitute input into the country's language policy.

Akindele and Adegbite (1999) have clarified the two major ways of looking at the issues of language in relation to political and educational policies in Nigeria. The first is to look at the language policy statement made by the government in the constitution of the country. The second is to consider a language policy made in the light of education. The ideology of the Nigerian government from history concerning the language situation in the country as enshrined in Section 51 of the Nigerian Constitution of 1979, 1989 states that

"The business of the National Assembly shall be conducted in English,

Hausa, Ibo and Yoruba when adequate arrangements have been made

thereof"

Also section 91 of the same constitution reads:

"The business of the House of Assembly shall be conducted in English

But the House may in addition to English conduct the business of the

House in one or more languages in the state as the House by resolution

approve"

The statements above is an ambitious course of the Nigerian government towards achieving nationism by suggesting three indigenous languages and English as languages of the nation. As it was in the beginning after the formulation of the language policy, so it is now that English seems to take priority over the indigenous languages. Since 1979 till 2023, the status of the English language has remained superscript in such a way that the expression, "adequate arrangement" is vague. Attitudes towards the English language and the indigenous languages have continued to determine the preferred language at the Houses of Assembly and the National Assembly since 1979 (see Soyele, 2007). A flashback to the debates between 1979 and 1983 indicates attempts to implement the provision of the Paragraph 51 which received contrary views from those people representing minority languages. The motion was to make adequate arrangements for the use of Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba in conducting the business of the National Assembly.

In the past, the minority groups argued in favour of the English language as the only neutral language that could most effectively serve as the instrument of Nigeria's nationism. Akindele & Adegbite (1999, p. 107) narrated further that "despite the controversy on the issue, the Senate was able to provide a grant for the production of a quadrilingual dictionary of legislative terms and the training of bilingual officials for the National Assembly. There has been no problems implementing the provision of Section 91 in some

states' Houses of Assembly where linguistic uniformity exist among people of the state". The monolingual states include those inhabiting Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba languages while the states where there is much linguistic divergence, the problems of implementation would be similar to those encountered at the national level where representatives of the entire country assemble for deliberations. This paper seeks to re-establish the fact that the attitudes of Nigerians towards the majority or minority languages in relation to the English language have not changed.

Statement of the Research Problem

There are thirty-six states in Nigeria. Each state has a legislative arm of government which is saddled with the responsibility of making laws for the state. These laws are written in the constitution of the state, subject to periodic review as dictated by circumstances in the state. The state Houses of Assembly are also thirty-six in number in the country. The activities of these state assemblies are run in the official English language on the one hand and the indigenous languages of the immediate environment on the other as circumstances warrant the legislators to so do. Has the privilege of communicating in more than one language in each House of Assembly been an advantage or a disadvantage? This is a question to be answered as we investigate the attitudes of Nigerians towards the majority or minority languages in relation to the English language.

However, while Adeniran (1994), Bamgbose (1982) and Acheoah & Hamza (2017) amongst others have contributed immensely to findings relating to the multilingual status of Nigeria and its implications for the educational system and development of the nation, Adegbija (1994, 2004) has attempted the accurate documentation of the languages existing in Nigeria, taking a cue from the efforts of Hansford, et.al (2022) amongst others in documenting the languages available in Nigeria. To the best of our knowledge, no scholarly studies in student research or institution-based research has dwelt on the comparative advantage of bilingualism amongst the Houses of Assembly members in Nigeria. This study will further encourage scholars and research students alike on the need to explore new frontiers in the issues relating to the multilingual nature of Nigeria. The objectives of the study include examining the multilingual nature of Nigeria in respect of languages actively used in the Houses of Assembly across Nigeria, to examine the immediate advantages of the bilingual nature of the Law Makers and to examine the remote and immediate advantages of the existing languages employed in the Houses of Assembly for the legislative businesses.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Language choices in a country is political. Since Nigeria is a multilingual nation, she needs a politically-willed language planning policy whereas language planning is discussed in this research as a politico-linguistic issue. Politics plays a role in language planning through legislative authority.

Government can legislate over which languages are to be used (see 1979 constitutions) but will that be a wise decision? If the majority of the users of each language do not support it, especially in each state, it will be an experiment in failure. It is futile for any government to legislate out a language. It can even be counter-productive (Ker 2002).

The linguistic entity constituting Nigeria must also be taken into consideration. Here Fishman's (1989) categorization of multilingual states into amodal, unimodal and multimodal is very useful. In an amodal state, there exists no great indigenous tradition within the state and national affairs have to be conducted in a foreign language. In contrast, the unimodal state has one great tradition that unifies all the various linguistic ambits of the country. This leads to the choice of the indigenous language identifiable with the great tradition as the national language. The multimodal state is characterized by several great traditions and leads to the use of some of the major languages side by side for the conduct of national affairs. Nigeria falls in this category.

Since Nigeria is a multilingual nation, activities in her legislative arm of governance across the country are likely to be performed with the mix of the indigenous languages and the official English language. In several literature on the multilingual nature of Nigeria, (see Adekunle 1972; Adetugbo, 1977; Adetugbo 1980; Brann, 1990, 2006; 1996; Ker 2002, p. 123) the argument has remained that, it is not possible to use one Nigerian indigenous language in the conduct of national affairs in Nigeria because of its multimodal nature and because ethnic loyalty determines access to economic and political opportunities. The choice of a lingua franca for Nigeria lies between using English which opens the gate to national and international contacts or to use several major Nigerians languages (cf. Bamgbose 1995).

Under multilingual circumstances, such as are common in Africa, it will be necessary to recognise a 'multiple norm' or introduce an 'alien norm' (cf. Munzali, 1990:109). In the words of Ker (2002, p. 124), "if we decide for English, we will be making a good choice. The European community has chosen English since 1992 and the language has become more significant. Secondly English has co-existed with linguistic communities all over the world". With this consciousness our law makers at the state Houses of Assembly and even the National Assembly in Abuja, conduct their affairs in English and possibly code-mix when the need arises with indigenous languages. Each state House of Assembly, however, has a Language of the Immediate Environment (LIE) for wider and effective communication. Are there comparative advantages having a plethora of indigenous languages for their legislative affairs? This is the crux of this research being proposed to TETFund

METHODOLOGY

The study uses both the qualitative and the quantitative research design methods in collecting, describing and analyzing the data. The first approach used by the researcher

is mere observation. The researcher sits quietly to observe how the House proceedings are carried out. Questionnaire and voice recording of the parliamentarians were the second methods of data gathering. The subjects are members of the legislative Houses in the states concerned as they deliver their speeches during plenary sessions. The data for the study included the renditions in English and other dialects or indigenous languages being used to drive home their points during their deliberations. Their voices were recorded with electronic recording devices such as telephone recorders. The period of data gathering did not exceed one month which the researchers spent in the four states; which include Kaduna, Rivers, Oyo and Kwara states, visited. Contacts were made to gather information from the thirty-six states of the federation.

The first stage of data gathering was the administration of a hundred questionnaires to the legislators and the Assembly staff. Only fifty questionnaire were sampled from the number of questionnaires that were returned. The researcher patiently waited to collect questionnaire from the legislators themselves while quietly observing the linguistic choices of the legislators as they participated in the parliamentary debates. The recorded voices were transcribed orthographically for the description of the mixed codes and the degree of preferences of the preferred linguistic codes for expressing salient arguments. The collected data were analysed using primarily statistical instruments to determine the frequency of code-mixing and code-shifting by the law makers in their speeches.

Theoretical Orientation

To corroborate the findings from the statistical analysis, relevant sociolinguistic theories capable of discussing multilingualism have been used for the discussion of bilingualism. Such theories include Sapir and Whorfian (see Nordquist 2019) and Bernstein's Deficit Hypothesis (see Halliday 1978). Sapir-Whorfian Hypothesis relates the idea that language has power and shapes the world. Language is a guide to reality, structuring of thoughts and choices. It provides the framework through which a speaker makes sense of the world.

Bernstein's Deficit Hypothesis which is sometimes referred to as a theory of educational failure is a theory about how a society persists, and how it changes. It is a theory of the nature and processes of cultural transmission; and of the essential part that is played by the language therein. To the lawmakers, their preferences as they speak will reveal their perception of the world determinable through their choices of the indigenous languages or their second language - English. The statistical counts of the preferences have informed the discussions of the results from the investigations and the conclusions made in this study. This is not without observing all necessary ethical codes. Before embarking on the journeys to the state Houses of Assembly, contacts were made to the members of staff of the legislative Houses in order to book

appointments with the Assembly members and to know when there would be plenary. Letters were written to secure approval to conduct the research before the researchers moved to the fields for their investigations.

DISCUSSION OF OBSERVATIONS

Theoretical discussions of the observations on the field will be presented later in this paper. Meanwhile, a discussion of the observations in each State's House of Assembly will dovetail into submissions with theoretical validity. The data for this study are human subjects who provided information regarding language preference at plenary or at sub-committee level of deliberations at the National Assembly. Reliably, the Nigerian National Assembly has a total of four hundred and

sixty-nine (469) members. This includes one hundred and nine (109) members in the Senate and three hundred and sixty (360) members in the House of Representatives. This accounts for the figure which has been statistically engaged for the validity of the findings in this study.

In Rivers State, the House of Assembly, situated in Port-Harcourt has a total of 32 members, while Kaduna State House of Assembly has thirty-four (34) members. The third House of Assembly that was visited is Oyo State. It is the legislative arm of government like others too, as unicameral in structure, with thirty-three (33) members elected from the 33 local government areas of the state. Each member represents a local government in their respective states. The figures are clearly presented in the table below.

Table 1. Population of Houses of Assembly

S/N	Name	Number of Members	Type
1.	National Assembly	469	Bi-cameral
2.	Rivers Assembly	32	Unicameral
3.	Kaduna Assembly	34	Unicameral
4.	Oyo Assembly	33	Unicameral
5.	Abia	24	Unicameral
6.	Adamawa	25 of 21 LGs	Unicameral
7.	Akwa-Ibom	26	Unicameral
8.	Anambra	30	Unicameral
9.	Benue	32 of 23 LGs	Unicameral
10.	Bauchi	31 of 20 LGs	Unicameral
11.	Bayelsa	24	Unicameral
12.	Cross River	18	Unicameral
13.	Delta	29	Unicameral
14.	Ebonyi	13	Unicameral
15.	Edo	18	Unicameral
16.	Ekiti	26	Unicameral
17.	Enugu	24	Unicameral
18.	Gombe	24	Unicameral
19.	Imo	27	Unicameral
20.	Jigawa	30	Unicameral
21.	Kano	44	Unicameral
22.	Katsina	34	Unicameral
23.	Kebbi	21	Unicameral
24.	Kogi	25 of 18 LGs	Unicameral
25.	Kwara	24	Unicameral
26.	Lagos	40 of 20 LGs	Unicameral
27.	Nasarawa	24	Unicameral
28.	Niger	27	Unicameral
29.	Ogun	26	Unicameral
30.	Osun	26	Unicameral
31.	Oyo	32	Unicameral
32.	Plateau	24 of 17 LGs	Unicameral

33.	Sokoto	30	Unicameral
34.	Taraba	24	Unicameral
35.	Yobe	24	Unicameral
36.	Zamfara	24	Unicameral

Official Language(s) in Nigeria's Houses of Assembly

The observations at the states' Houses of Assembly have informed the discussions in this section. The languages in each state were investigated while the predominant language was investigated viz-a-viz the preference in each state. Let us begin with Abia State. Abia people, we find are predominantly of the Igbo ethnic group who are one of the indigenous peoples of Southeastern part of Nigeria. Their traditional language is Igbo as its citizens are dominantly Igbo people. In fact, ninety five percent (95%) of Abia population are Igbo people. English is widely spoken and serves as the official language in governance and business. In the Unicameral House of Assembly, English is the lingua franca used in the House. Only on occasions where code-mixing is observed do the legislators speak the Igbo language.

Adamawa state has fifty-eight (58) languages spoken as first languages in Adamawa State. Major languages of Adamawa State are *Bicama/Bata (Bwatiye) Bura-Pabir, Fulfulde, Huba (Kilba), Longuda, Mumuye* and *Samba Daka*. Most other languages in Adamawa State are extremely small and endangered minority languages, due to the influence of Hausa and Fulfulde. *Holma* is reported to be dying out. Respective local governments and the indigenous languages include *Numan and Guyuk (Bacama), Numan (Bali), Numan, Song, Fufore and Mubi (Bata), Guyuk, Gombi and Song (Bena), Numan (Bile), Gombi (Boga), Gombi (Bura-Pabir), Mubi (Daba), Numan (Dadiya), Guyuk (Dera), Numan (Dza), Mubi and Michika (Fali)*, centre in Yola (Fulfulde), Ganya (Gaa), Gombi (Ga'anda), Mayo-Belwa and Fufore (Gengle), and *Numan (Kwa)*. The remaining languages include *Xedi, Yendang, Ziziliveken, Wom, Waja, Vemgo-Mabas, Sukur, Teme, Tso, Waja, Wom, Peere, Nyong, Nzanyi, Nyong, Ngwaba, Mumuye, Mom Jango, Mbula Bwazza, Mboi, Marghi, Longuda, Lamja-Dengsa-Tola, Lamang, Lala-Roba, Laka, Kumba, Kugama, Kpasham, Koma, Kamwe, Kaan, Jarawa, Hwana, Holma, Higgi, Gude and Gevoko*. From the 58 languages, *Hausa* and *Fulfulde* are the identity markers of the people. The major ethnic group in Adamawa State are the Fulanis. *Hausa* is the common language of the people.

Although, their occupation is not the concern in this study, it is important to state that most of the people living in the State are farmers engaging mostly in cattle rearing and cultivation of cash and food crops such as cotton, groundnuts, maize, yam, cassava, guinea corn, millet and rice. From our observation, most of the languages are extremely small and endangered minority languages in Nigeria, due to the predominating influence of *Hausa* and *Fulfulde*. *Hausa* and *Fulfulde* are seldom used because they are the two codes with the largest group in the state. English, Hausa and Fulfulde in

that order are the languages of the widest communication in Adamawa State.

In Akwa-Ibom, there are twenty (20) languages spoken as first languages. The major languages are Anang, Ibibio and Igbo. The other languages are minority languages. The Local Governments with representations at the centre include *Itu, Etinan, Ikot Abasi, Ikono, Ekpe-Atai, Uruan, Onna, Nsit-Ubium and Mkpato Enin*. However, the business of the House is conducted in English language despite having three indigenous languages. The indigenous ethnic group in Anambra state are the Igbo (98% of the population) and a small population of Igala (2% of the population) who live in the Western part of the state. English and a code-mix of Igbo are the linguistic codes in the State's House of Assembly. *Bauch* State has a total of 55 tribal groups in which include *Hausa, Fulani, Gerawa, Sayawa, Jarawa, Bolewa, Karekare, Kanuri, Fa'awa, Butawa, Warjawa, Zulawa* and *Badawa* as the main tribes. Because of the multiple linguistic codes, English is preferred as language of the House of Assembly. In many cases, *Hausa-Fulani* languages have been code-mixed in very serious domestic matters.

Benue State is inhabited predominantly by Tiv, Idoma and Igede. Minority ethnic groups in Benue are *Etulo, Igbo, Jukun*, peoples, etc. The capital, Makurdi hosts the House of Assembly. Because of the level of linguistic diversity, English is the official language of the House of Assembly. The languages of the Ijaw are widely spoken in Bayelsa State, along with Isoko and Urhobo. The state is the primary home for the Ijaws, their ancestral home. English is the official language while pidgin and the individual's indigenous language interpolates during serious emotional debates. Cross River is composed of three major ethnic groups: the Efik, the Ejagham and the Bekwarra. The Efik language is widely spoken in Cross River State, and as far as Arochuku in neighbouring Abia State. However, English is the official language of the legislative house.

In Delta State, more than half of the percentage in the state speak Igbo language. There are eleven (11) languages spoken in Delta, howbeit the major languages in Delta State include *Izon, Igala, Urhobo Igbo* and *Itsekiri* languages. The business of the legislature is conducted in English because of the diversity existing in the language of the people. The population of Enugu is predominantly Christian. Like the rest of Nigerians, most people in Enugu speak Nigerian English alongside pidgin and the dominant Igbo language in the region. There are ten primary languages spoken in Ebonyi State: *Afikpo, Mgbo, Izzi, Ezaa, Edaa, Ikwo, Kukele, Legbo, Mbembe, Okposi Uburu* and *Oring*. This height of diverse tongues has made the English language, a language

preferred by the legislators. Languages in Edo are tribal languages including Edo, Etuno, Etsako, Esan, Ake-Ievbu and Okpamheri. Edo is also home to several ethnicities, which include Edo, Okpe, Esan, Afenmai, Akoko, Igbanke and Emai. Unlike Edo, Ekiti people are culturally homogenous and they speak a dialect of Yoruba language known as Ekiti. The homogenous nature of Ekiti confers on the state some uniqueness among the states of the federation. English language at its speak is spoken at the Ekiti Legislative House. Only on informal situations of jokes that Yoruba or the Ekiti dialect of Yoruba is used in the House.

In Gombe State, Fulani dominates *Bolewa, Kanuri, Tera, Tangale, Kushi, Moo Loo, Wurkun* while the English language is the official language of the Assembly. In addition to English being official language, Imo State is a predominantly Igbo speaking state, with Igbo people constituting a majority of 98%. In Jigawa state, populated by the *Hausa, Fulani* and the *Mangawa, Badawa* and *Ngizimawa* which are dialects of the *Kanuri* people, the English language is the official language of the legislative House. The official language of Kano State is Hausa. A vast number of Kano indigenes also speak *Fulfulde*. The Kainji languages include *Moro, Kurama* and *Map*, spoken in Doguwa Local Government Area. The major tribes in Katsina State are *Hausa* and *Fulani*. *Hausa* and *Fulfulde* are the indigenous languages spoken in the state. In Kaduna State, the following languages exist: *Hausa, Fulani, Gbagyi, Ashe, Duya Koro Wachi, Adara, Ajiya, Kuce, Shuwa, and Zamani*. *Hausa* and *Fulani* are seldomly used when domestic matters are discussed and emotions set in during debates. In Kebbi State, there are sixteen (16) languages in the state; the most in the North-West geopolitical zone. Diversity makes the English language preferable in Kebbi State. The main languages in Kogi are *Ebira, Igala* and *Okun-Yoruba*. Other common languages include *Nupe, Kakanda, Kupa, Bassa Nge, Basa Komu, Kupa, Hausa, and Osayen*. *Igbo* is spoken in the border areas. English is used in the House of Assembly in Kogi State. In Kwara State, five languages are spoken: *Yoruba, Hausa, Tapa, Ebira* and *Bariba*. Four languages dominate: Yoruba majorly, then *Nupe, Bariba* and *Fulani* minorities. English is however, the language of the State's House of Assembly.

Lagos, Ogun, Osun and *Oyo* states are *Yoruba* speaking states. Yet, the English language is the language of the Houses of Assembly. On occasions, members have used proverbs in Yoruba language to buttress the points. In Nasarawa, where there are twenty nine (29) languages, with the major ones being: *Agatu, Basa, Eggon, Gbagyi, Gade, Goemai, Gwandara, Ham, Kofyar* and *Lijili*, the English language is the language of the parliament. Niger State has eleven (11) languages with *Nupe, Gwari, Gbagyi* and *Hausa* being the indigenous languages. The forty or so Plateau languages are a tentative group of Benue-Congo languages spoken by 15 million people on the Jos Plateau. The English language has been the official language of the parliament. In Sokoto State, apart from *Hausa* and *Fulani*, there are the *Zamarmawa* and *Tuareg* minorities

in the local government border areas. Zamfara State is not different from Sokoto in language and ethnic groups, though Arabic is spoken by the Muslim Ummah and Islamic clerics. Taraba State has *Fulfulde, Ichen, Fam, Gbaya, Jibu, Jukun, Takum, Kam, Mumuye, Ndoola, Chamba Dakka, chamba leko, Tiv* and *Hausa*. Yet the English language is preferred in the business of law making in the state. The Nigerian thirty-six states and the Federal Capital Territory have had an unbroken record of strict adherence to the language policy of the nation, which is to consistently use the English language until adequate arrangements have been made. The next section discusses the findings at the National Assembly.

Language of the Nigeria's National Assembly

The National Assembly is a congregation of people of diverse ethnic backgrounds from the nook and cranny of the contraption called Nigeria. Each member of the upper or lower House represents the about five hundred (500) languages according to Hansford, et.al (1994). Difficulty reaching some of the senators to respond to questionnaires made the researcher administer questionnaire to the National Assembly staffers who gave vital information about the proceedings at the National Assembly.

From the questionnaire administered to harvest responses from the National Assembly Honourable members and workers, ninety eight percent (98%) of the respondents confirmed that English is strictly the language used by the Senators and the Representatives in the conduct of the parliamentary affairs. A close observation reveals that neither the president of the country nor the parliamentarians joke with language choice during their formal national functions. The one hundred and nine (109) members representing the thirty-six (36) states of Nigeria have three senators each for each state. In other words, three senators come from each state, representing three senatorial districts. The House of Representatives, on the other hand, consists of three hundred and sixty (360) members, with each member representing one federal constituency in the country. The National Assembly approved the national language policy of the nation, which ensures that there is no dispute whatsoever on the choice of language for communication at the national level in the country. Thus, there is a background knowledge that members of the senate are from diverse ethnic nationalities and have to interact using the official English Language.

Relativity and the Elaborated Codes in the Nigerian Context

Statistics of language attitudes in Nigeria favours the exoglossic mindset. This is because of other attendant extensions from language to the economy of the nation. It appears from the study that it is a Nigerian tradition to embrace whatever is foreign. Little wonder why parents in many educated homes communicate in English with their children. Sapir-Whorfian sociolinguistic theory is a hypothesis about linguistic relativity. The concept behind it is that the structure and vocabulary of a particular language

will influence or determine the perception, worldview, or cognition of the native speakers of that language. The hypothesis relates to the idea that language has power and shapes the world. This power being referred to as possessed by language manifests in the manner in which Nigerians regard the English language. The perception of the world by Nigerians is Anglicized and there is nothing anyone can do about it, even in the nearest future.

There is an untold linguistic neo-colonialism which has seen Nigerians tied closely to the apron of their colonial masters. The strongest of all the legacies bequeathed to Nigerians by the British government is the English language. The senators who have shown some level of inadequacies in their use of the English language have either been mocked by their fellow senators or being made the cynosure of all eyes on the various social media platforms. Of a truth, language is a guide to reality, structuring of thoughts and choices. It provides the framework through which a speaker makes sense of the world.

Bernstein's Deficit Hypothesis relates to codes of communication – restricted or elaborated. Restriction is inevitable when the language user is half-educated and it is elaborated when the language user is very educated. The fluidity in mobility from a variety or standard to another is squarely dependent on the individual's level of competence in the target language. This is the case in the Nigeria's National Assembly where the very educated and the half-educated in the English language congregate to deliberate issues of national importance. Thus the Bernstein's hypothesis which is sometimes referred to as a theory of educational failure is a theory about how a society persists, and how it changes. It is a theory of the nature and processes of cultural transmission; and of the essential part that is played by the language therein. To the lawmakers, their preferences as they execute plenary businesses have revealed their perception of the world determinable through their preferential choice of the English language to the over five hundred indigenous languages in Nigeria.

Our observation at the senate chamber is that competence in English is applauded proudly. Senators who use jaw-breaking expressions are even applauded loudly and therefore become very popular in the House. While eloquent senators are always given audience and rapt attention, senators who are known to commit grammatical errors are usually mocked. On many occasions, senators whose ability to speak good English is poor, do not confidently take the floor but rather comfortably remain onlookers who nod their heads in support of every motion raised in the senate chamber. Evidently, the linguistic codes they choose sell them out.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This study primarily seeks to investigate the language preference of the Senators and Representatives of the Houses and the National Assembly in Nigeria. In the course of interacting with the Assembly staff members, we find

that a number of legislators communicate better in the English language just like children of this generation whose parents have made to attend fee-paying schools where they are brought up speaking English at the expense of their Mother Tongues. From the first generation of politicians (first republic) to the present, the use of English in Nigeria has survived the departure of the colonial administrators as the language of administration. In 2023, several years after independence, English still survives and has been assuming more important roles in Nigeria. Apart from being a medium of social and inter ethnic communication, English is a national language and it is used to conduct legislative, executive and judicial functions at the three tiers of local, state and federal government levels. The 10th National Assembly is a testament to the tenacious adherence to the English language with a form of inseparable tie which may remain like that until Nigeria probably ceases to exist in the future. More than fifty percent (50%) of the respondents were of the opinion that Nigeria needs to secede or be restructured before the indigenous languages can become official lingua francas in their regions or separate countries.

External factors influence the preference of the English language at the National Assembly. The Assembly complex welcomes people of all walks of life who speak different languages and therefore need to use the official language for mutual intelligibility. This scenario is likened to that of the colonial masters and the missionaries who came to Africa for evangelism and other business activities. For these visitors to function satisfactorily and efficiently as they interact with their domestic staff, who needed to understand English and use the language for communication, the English language was taught in schools and churches. The converts could not have escaped mastering the English language because of the only version of the Bible that was available was in the English language. The initial workers with these colonialists, helped to spread the English language considerably as they became the nativist intermediaries in trade, missionary effect and administration. The Senators and Representatives are like the White men who visited the coast of West Africa and who needed to communicate with the natives. The English language which is common to all, serves as the official language in the National Assembly. It is the language with which the government conducts its business. It is the language that literate people from different ethnic groups working in the Assembly complex use to communicate with one another.

The National Assembly of Nigeria is unlikely to allow for any "adequate arrangement" as long as the romance which each Nigerian presidential aspirant continues, before elections and after each election. The British government has continued to savour a kind of neo-colonial relationship which may not end in the nearest future. The British government mid-wives the nascent Nigerian democracy and serves as the signature to the most International Monetary Fund (IMF) loans being awarded the country apart from playing host to the political

leaders who are on a regularly basis on a medical tourism in Europe. Therefore, suffice it to say that English performs three broad functions in Nigeria, viz, accommodation, participation and social mobility. The Nigerian parliament has not been able to jettison the English language because the language is recognized as a world language, so it performs international functions. It actually serves as the link between the people of Nigeria in their multilingual capacities. It is the language of international politics, trade and sports; the salient roles which any of Nigeria's indigenous languages has not been able to play. Instead, Pidgin has been heard to be used to run commentaries during international football matches. The parliament has continued to support the use of the English language at the Organization of African Unity, (OAU), the United Nations' Organization (UNO) and the Commonwealth. Nigeria has no language other than English for taking part in the deliberations. The doors to high technology, science, trade and diplomacy opened by the English language have made Nigeria's indigenous languages to be a flyspeck in the colony of world languages.

CONCLUSION

From the findings and the observations discussed so far in this article, there is no gainsaying the fact that the English language has a bright future in Nigeria, much more than any one of the three major languages of Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. This appears to remain the reality until there is a sudden circumstance which would peacefully allow for a secession of the six geo-political zones into separate federations or independent united nations of Nigeria. But for this disintegration and without any revolution towards restructuring the nation, the English language will remain the language of the Houses as well as the National Assembly for a long time, until "adequate arrangements" have been made for an endoglossic language to emerge. With reference to the aim and objectives of this study, bilingualism has remotely been an advantage despite the fact that the English language is the preferred language from every indication. The senators have used proverbs in their indigenous languages to buttress their points in some heated arguments and intense debates. In all, an endoglossic language code which is preferred by the Nigerian Senators goes to confirm both the Sapir-Whorfian worldview of the Nigerian Senators and the Basil Bernsteinian opportunistic ambiance through the fluidity and the fluctuating manner of linguistic codes. The emergence of an endoglossic language must therefore be politically goodwilled, unanimously accepted, collectively approved for an indigenous national language and immune to possible diverse sentiments breaking from the initial multilingual structure of the nations within the former country.

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