



Language Rights and Language Policy/Practices in Multilingual Nigeria

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Abstract

Preoccupation with language rights in monolingual and multilingual societies is not unconnected with some of the effects of migration and language issues in multilingual communities. However, a lingering question is whether nations who are signatories to international declarations on language rights are committed to making good their promises by respecting language rights of people in their domains. This paper examined language policies and practices in multilingual Nigeria in light of some of the language rights declarations that are purported to protect people's rights. We reviewed and critiqued the available Nigeria's language policies enshrined in its official documents vis-a-vis language practices in the country. The highlights of our review and critique revealed that while some measures that protect individuals' and groups' language rights appear to be in place, there are lingering gaps to be filled. Thus, this paper calls for pragmatic steps to fill the existing gaps between the language policy and practices and language rights of individuals and groups.

Keywords: Language rights; Multilingualism; Language policy; Practices; Gaps; Nigeria.

1. Introduction

Language rights of minority groups in Europe and other parts of the world has turned out to be a rich source of research (Cassels Johnson, 2013; Coulmas, 1997; De, 2001; Freeland and Donna, 2004; Landman, 2006; Lippi-Green, 2012; Ricento, 2006; Skutnabb-Kangas and Robert, 1995; Tiersma and Lawrence, 2012) in recent time. However, the concern with language Rights in Africa that is largely characterised by widespread multilingualism appears to have attracted little attention barring Bamgbose (1991), among others. This dearth of research coupled with reports of endangered languages and agitations in Africa because of dominant languages (cite some), beckons on concerned linguists to give more attention than has been given thus far to the issue of language rights of dominated language speakers. Such endeavours might help arrest language endangerment and agitations and strengthen respect of the language rights of individuals and groups in multilingual Africa (Solanke, 2006). Thus this paper concentrates on Nigeria, a multilingual society and examines the language policies and practices of its people in light of international declarations that call for respect of the language rights of people.

2. Background

Language or linguistic rights as it is discussed and studied within general linguistics and in particular, sociolinguistics, might have taken its inspiration from some of the negative effects of multilingualism and language hegemony of some dominant world languages. Similarly, these concerns might have motivated international bodies that have responded in some ways such as declarations in support of the preservation of minority languages together with the promotion of linguistic rights. Amongst the international bodies is the Convention on the Rights of the Child (education in mother tongue etc.). It must be acknowledged that some of their declarations have helped to fuel sociolinguists' interest in language rights in monolingual and multilingual communities. For example, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Articles says that:

In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practise their own religion, or to use their own language.

Similarly, the UN Draft Declaration on the rights of Indigenous Peoples stipulates among others issues that indigenous people have the right to learn their mother tongue and (that they) have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning cited in *Linguistic imperialism*. In addition, the Universal Declaration of Human rights Article 2 says that "Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status".

In spite of these declarations that many nations are signatories to, it does not appear that compliance and implementation of the above declarations have been encouraging and/or total. Consequently, some multilingual societies are experiencing language endangerment, language domination, and language shift and/or language agitations. In some cases, language death/extinction has been reported. This does not mean that many of these nations have been irresponsible, in fact, some nations have put mechanisms in place to foster respect for the language rights of their peoples. For example, Nigeria has established a National Language Centre that is shouldered with promoting the use of and the development of its local languages. Similarly, South Africa has come up with a

language policy that has provision for the functional use of about ten local languages as official languages out of its between 25 to 80 local languages (Webb and Kembo-Sure, 2000). These moves suggest frantic effort to revitalize local languages in their domains.

However, one would wonder why a nation's local languages have to be revitalized (promoted) when they have living speakers within their geographical space. One ready answer might be a situation where certain languages especially majority languages are dominating the minority languages thereby denying and/or disrespecting their speakers' language rights. It might also be the case of the hegemony of foreign language that has been domesticated taking over most of the communicative functions of the people's languages. What such scenario suggests is that there might be some gaps in the implementation of these international declarations or between the language policies and the language practices of the people.

To address some of these emerging issues, sociolinguists have been at it in order to ensure that the tenets of sociolinguistics, especially language equality and its implications are not only embraced and propagated in the classroom but taken from the academic 'towers' to the 'towns' where language users are. Recently, courses such as Language Rights, Multilingual Practices have been on offer in some European universities. For example, the Department of Language and Linguistics, at the University of Essex has modules on linguistic rights in collaboration with its Human Rights Centres. The writer of this paper is aware that up till 2017, Professor Peter Patrick teaches a module on Linguistic Rights to both undergraduates and postgraduate students in conjunction with his university's Human Rights Centre. This, in a way, is intended to help address or at least create awareness on the language concerns or language rights of individuals and groups.

This acknowledgement of contemporary sociolinguists' efforts does not mean that the subject of language rights has not been taken up in other branches of sociolinguistics. For example, language rights has been a significant subject matter within language planning and language policy especially when there is a search for national language or clamouring for language recognition among minority or dominated language speakers (De, 2001; Freeland and Donna, 2004; Skutnabb-Kangas and Robert, 1995). Perhaps what should be noted is that this novel approach to language rights is the outcome of recent advancement in applied sociolinguistics.

According to Patrick (2016) sociolinguistics involves, among other things, the comparative study of the range of existing social situations defined in part by language. Sociolinguists attend to the role of language in constructing social context and institutions, as well as to the myriad ways in which language structures, and patterns of language use, reflect social realities. It is interesting that within this spectrum of their concerns, sociolinguists have delved into language rights, a blend of human rights and language rights of individuals.

3. Sociolinguistics and Language Equality

What are some of the major arguments in sociolinguistics that relate to language rights? In sociolinguistics, all human languages are treated equally including varieties or dialects of the same language. Emanating from language equality is the argument that speakers of these languages should not be denied the use of their languages under any guise. In fact, all languages should be recognized and given space among others especially within their geographical space. As members either of their immediate society or somewhere far from home, individuals should not be discriminated against because of the use of the languages they are used to speaking. Any attempt to rob them of the use of their language(s) might be a subtle attempt to erode their culture and identity and in some way dominate them.

It is interesting to note that these concerns or arguments have been taken up by some organisations at different forums. Important documents for linguistic rights include *The Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights* (1996), *The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages* (1992), *The Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989) and *The Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities* (1988), as well as *The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (1966). These declarations have immensely helped to spell out what language rights entail.

4. Language Rights

Wikipedia says that linguistic, or language rights are the human and civil rights concerning the individual and collective right to choose the language or languages for communication in a private or public atmosphere. It has further been spelled out thus that linguistic rights include, among others, the right to one's own language in legal, administrative and judicial acts, language education, and media in a language understood and freely chosen by those concerned. Linguistic rights in international law are usually dealt in the broader framework of cultural and educational rights. According to Patrick (?),

language rights may be considered as a subset of cultural rights. The notion of culture, especially 'traditional' culture, is sometimes considered as an obstacle to the spread or realisation of (universal) human rights, since 'culture' and 'tradition' can be invoked by one group in order to uphold practices that infringe on another's rights: e.g., head-hunting, female genital mutilation, etc. However, a focus on language makes clear that such a view is too monolithic. Traditional ways of speaking are certainly part of culture - but the same people who object to the practices above (e.g. human rights professionals, members of the international media audience) are likely to view the preservation of ancestral languages, or traditional oral arts, more sympathetically - especially if sociolinguists or linguistic anthropologists can describe, translate or contextualise them. In this way we might help to make the argument for the positive value of cultural rights as a crucial element in human rights.

Based on these definitions and declarations, sociolinguists have been exploring human language/linguistic rights people (should) enjoy around the world. Thus, [Patrick \(2016\)](#) observes in one of his lectures notes at the University of Essex,

That issues of language rights have become increasingly prominent in the last decade, and are often raised in the context of more general human rights. Linguists have become involved in this area via diverse pathways – e.g., language endangerment, preservation and revitalization; language planning; forensic (=legal) linguistics; bilingual education and other school-centered language issues; action research with urban linguistic minorities; work with indigenous peoples, including land claims; refugee and asylum issues, and more.

This background is important in order to establish a basis for our preoccupation in this paper which is language rights in multilingual societies (with particular reference to Nigeria). For example, one of the multilingual countries in the world, India, has recorded agitations among its citizens who are demanding for national recognition of some of their local languages. There is no doubt that India might have been working hard to contain language tension. However, relating an experience, [Balldridge \(1996\)](#) noted that even apart from such opinions and actions, the simple fact that most Indians still deal with a multiplicity of languages everyday ensures the continued importance of the language issue. Tensions may still rise when one uses the wrong language in some places. It is often recommended that one should not speak Hindi in south India, as N.G. reiterates, "If you try to communicate in Hindi, the people won't answer back, they'll be rude, or they'll say something.

However, the situation might have changed or improved since this report was published many years ago by [Balldridge \(1996\)](#) but the re-occurrence of language activists' movements in some multilingual countries of the world tends to stress a need for empirical investigation into language rights. It is anticipated that findings of such investigation would proffer solutions that will douse the tensions in some troubled communities and foster national integration and unity.

While some countries have established language centres, (for example, Nigeria established its National Language Centre decades ago), that are shouldered with the promotion of their indigenous languages (which is not enough), individuals have formed groups preoccupied with addressing these matters either to draw official attention or complement government efforts. The fact is that the formation of these centres and interest groups suggests that language rights issues should extend beyond minority groups in foreign countries. Language rights should be examined in multilingual communities.

For example, in India, there is a group of language activists under CLEAR (Campaign for Language Equality and Rights) clamouring for government recognition of some Indian languages that to them appear to have been marginalized and dominated by some other languages within the country. For example, the literature suggests that the imposition of Hindi as the national language of India gave birth to CLEAR which is agitating for the inclusion of 38 other Indian languages in the constitution of the country. The clarion call from the group is that Hindi is not the national language of India. This is anchored in the belief that "linguistic or language rights are the human and civil right concerning the individual and collective right to choose the language or languages for communication in a private or public atmosphere". Similar occurrence has been reported in Ethiopia, the Philippines, Nigeria and in some other parts of the world.

For example, some African countries had witnessed some uprisings in relation to language issues. According to [Attah \(?\)](#), efforts to enforce an indigenous language in a multilingual area too often result in bloodshed. An example is the Soweto case (1976) in which many blacks and whites lost their lives when an attempt was made by the whites to force Afrikaans on the blacks. In the Sudan, the protracted civil war is a reaction to a government policy of Arabisation. Even in Nigeria, some language policies have already resulted in riots. For example, the Tiv riots of 1962 were a direct result of the peoples' rejection of Sardauna's policy of Hausa-isation in the old Northern Region of Nigeria. These uneasy situations are not peculiar to the above mentioned countries as it is commonplace in multilingual countries excluding countries that accord due recognition to their local languages. However, these uprisings that bother on language rights call for empirical studies that will proffer solution.

5. Objectives

As an attempt along this direction, this paper raises some pertinent questions that bother on language rights in Nigeria and attempts to provide answers to some of them based on the available literature and an involved observer's notes. Amongst the questions are whether multilingual societies, with particular focus on Nigeria, operate language policies and practices that are in tandem with language rights. It is anticipated that this paper would add to the voices of other scholars ([Adegbiya, 1997](#); [Adeniran, 1973](#); [Bamgbose, 1991;2005](#); [Emenajo, 1990](#); [Mustapha, 2014](#)) who have addressed language rights in multilingual societies with particular attention to Nigeria. In what follows, I attempt a critical review of the language situation in Nigeria in terms of its recognition of the language rights of individuals and groups within its geographical space. In other words, does Nigeria, a multilingual society that has to its credit over 400 local languages respect the language rights of its diverse ethno-linguistic society? The main objective is to determine the place of language rights in the language policy and practice of the government and peoples of the country.

6. Methods

To provide answers to the following questions, I shall, in what follows, provide the language profile (sociolinguistic profile) of Nigeria before using the stipulations of its language policy and practices together with the

language ideology and practices of Nigerians to answer the questions raised in the objectives. The approach is mainly textual analysis and analysis of an involved participant observation.

7. A Sociolinguistic Profile of Nigeria

According to [Webb and Kembo-Sure \(2006\)](#) Nigeria has over 400 languages that are classified into dominant or majority languages and minority languages. For example, Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, Edo, Efik-Ibibio, Fulani, Nupe, Tiv, Urhobo and Nigerian Pidgin are dominant because of their ethnic significance and location. English, French and the three majority languages – Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo are the official languages although English is a dominant official language, followed by the three majority languages – Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo. The classification into majority and minority languages has been controversial. Thus many linguists ([Awobuluyi, 2013](#); [Banjo, 1995](#); [Mustapha, 2013;2014;2016](#)) have argued against the speaker population criterion that has been used to classify Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo as majority indigenous languages and the others (over 300 languages) as minority languages within the same country. Other languages in use in the country such as Arabic, Lebanese, Hindi, and German are used by migrants and expatriates and are taught in some special schools and language centres. Popular languages such as English, Nigerian Pidgin, Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo are used as lingua franca in inter-ethnic interactions.

This language situation leaves no one in doubt that Nigeria, like other African countries, is multi-ethnolinguistic community. In addition, there is a vigorous effort by the government geared towards the development and functional use of all the local languages with particular attention being given to the minority languages. Well did [Jowitt \(1991\)](#) noted that indigenous languages have gained ground in the school curriculum... (with) the National Language Centre that seeks to establish orthographies for as many Nigerian languages as possible, and encourage the writing of primers and other materials in them”.

8. Language Policies and Practices

Although Nigeria has no singular document labelled language policy, its language policy is enshrined in some official documents such as the Constitution, National Policy on Education (1977 revised in 1982) state language laws, among others. For example, the Constitution of the country stipulates that: the English language shall be the language of deliberation in the National Assembly and the House of Representative and while the three majority languages, Hausa, Yoruba and English shall be used when adequate provisions have been made for their use. At the state level, each state House of Assembly shall use the dominant local language in its environment in addition to the English language. The same Constitution stipulates the use of English as an official language and added the three majority languages together with the French language. Thus Nigeria has five official languages although one of them, English, is the major language of government, the law, the media, education, and religion.

In practice, English is functional at the federal level while the majority languages (Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba) are not in use because they are awaiting necessary provisions for their use at the upper and lower houses. At the state level, all the states use English while some use the dominant language in their environment occasionally or once in a week. For example, the Lagos State House of Assembly uses English for four working days and devotes a day each week for the use of the Yoruba language.

Most government pronouncements and activities are in English with limited use of local languages. However, both federal and state government use Nigerian Pidgin for jingles on air and on billboards for the common people at the grassroots. In the law courts, English is used to keep records of proceedings although provisions are made for interpreters into local languages when there is a need for them in court proceedings. However, some customary and magistrate courts use local languages but records are kept in English.

Another official document that contains language policy is the National Policy on Education of 1982 which stipulates that the child shall be instructed (language of instruction) using the language of the immediate environment in the junior primary school level; English will become the language of instruction from the senior primary level to the tertiary level. However, the child shall learn one other local language (Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo) aside from the child's mother tongue.

In practice, most schools except government schools start off with the child using English as the language of instruction. In fact, most parents prefer the use of English from day one as the language of instruction for their wards. Although the learning of local languages are required, learners have limited access because of dearth of language teachers and learning materials in such local languages barring the majority languages; only the languages with orthography and those that are recognized by examination bodies such as the West Africa Examination Council (WAEC) and NECCO are available to learners.

The citizens are free to use their local languages anywhere among themselves. However, there might be communication breakdown in cross-ethnic communication where speakers do not share the same indigenous language and are not literate in English or Nigerian Pidgin. Thus people are compelled to use English, Nigerian Pidgin, Broken English or any of the majority languages that both dyads share. For example, at some point, speakers of Ijebu, Egba, Ikale dialects of Yoruba who found themselves among Hausa monolinguals might have a hard time communicating with their Hausa hosts. Similarly, a Hausa monolingual coming down to the Southwest where Yoruba is spoken might also encounter communication difficulties. But what most people do is that they learn the dominant language in their new environment without giving up their mother tongues.

The larger population of Nigerians has positive attitudes towards Nigerian Pidgin although some people, especially the people in the educated class are unwilling to promote the use of Nigerian Pidgin for some reasons such as its low prestige and lack of uniform orthography and its association with the lower class people. It must be added that the use of English and Nigerian Pidgin is often characterized by heavy code-mixing as linguistic items from the

various local languages are often mixed with those two lingua francas, English and Nigerian Pidgin especially in informal conversations. For example, a Nigerian could make a statement such as *Chineke, I don't want that kind of meat, joo*. [God! I don't want that meat, please]. *Chineke* is an Igbo word for 'God', *joo* is a Yoruba word meaning 'please'. It has been argued in some quarters that this emerging code (mixing of the local languages with English and Nigerian Pidgin) appears to be a reflection of the nondiscriminatory use of languages in daily interactions among speakers of the various languages that might develop to a full-fledged language or a kind of creole in the country. But what is clear in the literature is that Nigeria does not have a national language. What appears to be in place is that each region or geo-political zones (of the West, East and North) has a dominant language. For example, Hausa is a dominant language in the North East, North West and to some extent North Central while the Igbo language is in the South East and Yoruba in the South West.

In the Western part of Nigeria, there are many local languages but Yoruba appears to be the dominant language. In this region, Yoruba and English are used in schools although Yoruba is the language of wider communication. This situation is similar to what we have in the Northern part of the country where the Hausa language dominates the other local languages. Thus one might find out that while Hausa is the language of the North, Yoruba is of the West, it might be controversial to claim that Igbo is the language of the South East but Nigerian Pidgin appears to be dominant in the South South being linguistically diverse where there are many languages such as Ijaw, Itsoko, Urhobo, Efik, Ibibio among the others.

Similarly, migrants from other countries (Pakistan, India, Niger, Chad, Germany, among others) are required to use English although they are free to use their foreign languages among themselves. Also there is no restriction on the use, teaching, and learning of their foreign languages especially among themselves and in their special schools. In the next section, we appraise the policy and practices in Nigeria in light of language rights.

9. Assessment of the Policy and Practices

Nigeria's language policy as enshrined in the Constitution, the National Policy on Education and the practices in educational system among the people indicates a measure of compliance with some of the declarations of the international bodies described earlier in this paper. In other words, the stipulations of the two official documents together with the writer's (as an involved observer) observation of language practices provide empirical evidence of a measure of respect for the language rights of individuals and groups. For example, the Constitution provides for the use of three local languages out of the over 400 indigenous languages at the national level (the National Assembly and Houses of Representatives). The three local languages are Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo that are termed majority languages also enjoy national recognition and larger speaker population. The language section of the National Policy on Education also stipulates that the Nigerian child should learn one of the three majority languages in addition to his or her ethnic language. In some documents, these majority languages are loosely referred to as national languages. The choice of these three languages by those who formulated the policy is premised on the speaker population thereby classifying the other languages as minority languages because of the lower speaker population compared to the majority languages.

Similarly, the national policy on education stipulates that the learner child shall be taught in the local language that is, language of the immediate environment in the first two years of the primary education before the English language shall be introduced as the language of instruction at the senior primary level. This is with the understanding that English Language must have been introduced as a school subject in the preliminary years (Basic 1 and Basic 2). In addition, the learner within the Basic Universal Education system shall learn one of the majority languages (Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo) in addition to the child's first language so that the child would be proficient in one of the majority languages that have wider usage in the country. At the end of the secondary school education, the competence of the learner in one of the majority languages shall be examined and where the minority language has been developed (with its orthography and literatures) and is offered as a school subject and recognized by the examination bodies (WAEC & NECCO), the child shall be examined in the said language too. In addition, the position of these documents ensures further development and recognition of minority languages although their functions appear to be restricted to their local environment.

Aside from the individual family language policy, there is no barrier to learning the other local languages spoken outside the confines of the family circle. In fact, because of inter-ethnic interactions, many people often learn the language of their immediate environment even though the language is not the home language. Thus it is not impossible for a child of the Igbo language speaking parents in the South west of Nigeria where Yoruba is the language of wider communication to learn and use the language (Yoruba) and become so competent in both the family language (Igbo) and the language of the immediate environment.

Another milestone is the provision granted all the state Houses of Assembly of the federation to conduct their businesses in the language of their immediate environments. For example, the Lagos State House of Assembly does conduct its business on one of the days of the week in Yoruba, the language of wider communication of the state (Lagos State) amidst other spoken local languages such as Ogu, Awori that are in use by the minority groups in the state.

In fact, it is not impossible to hear teachers who are expected to teach using English as the language of instruction in classroom discourse code-switch between English and the language of immediate environment (Mustapha, 2013a). The similar scenario could be witnessed in formal gatherings where speakers interlude their speech in English with proverbs and stories in their local languages. Such code-switching tends to spice their speeches and portray speakers as 'true children of the soil' - natives. This practice also suggests that there is freedom to use any of the local languages.

It must be placed on record that Nigeria, to the best of the knowledge of the writer of this paper, has no group, in recent times, agitating for local language recognition aside from groups calling for the development (orthography and functional use) of their indigenous languages. However, there is the other side to what has been observed thus far and this other side shall be addressed in the next section.

10. A Critique of the Language Situation

To assess the language situation in Nigeria further in light of these language rights, providing answers to the following questions might be one of the appropriate methods: (i) how did the three major languages emerge as dominant languages and the others minority languages? (ii) To what extent has the language rights of speakers of the minority languages (the dominated languages) been respected amidst classification into major and minor languages? (iii) Do the language profile, policy and practices described earlier in the language profile of the country respect the language rights of individuals and groups?

It is often noted that the dominant languages might have been promoted because they have larger speaker population than the speakers of the other languages. Also, it might be added that they were promoted because they were developed (in terms of orthography) before the other languages developed their orthography. However, with the development of some of the minority languages (Kanuri, Fulfude, Etsoko, Gwari, Efik, Ibibio among others) one cannot but question the low status that is still being accorded those developed minority languages. In fact, many of these developed minority languages have little or no recognition outside their immediate environment as they are rarely used at the national level.

In response to the second question, it appears that the language rights of individual and groups are respected in a very limited sense. For example, an objective consideration of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Article 27) which says, "In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practise their own religion, or to use their own language.", reveals some disrespect of the language rights of some people. Or else how could a dominant language be adopted as language of instruction in an area that houses users of other languages different from the dominant language? For example, there are communities where their native languages are not Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo and yet the medium of instruction in formal education is in one of these three major languages. There are communities in the North that their local languages are not Hausa but they have been compelled to learn Hausa. In fact, many media houses operate in English and in the three major languages thereby excluding users of other languages in the same state.

It appears that the interpretation of the language of the immediate environment (in the National Policy on Education) supports the adoption of the dominant languages to the neglect of speakers of other languages in each state which in a way infringes on the language rights of the minority groups. There is also the issue at the national level where English is used to exclude the larger part of the population in national issues and deliberations that affect the entire population. This linguistic domination has its effects aside from the infringement.

Language endangerment that has been reported among some of the local languages suggests that all might not be well with the language practices in the nation. For example, a study reported that some young people from Badagry in the Lagos State whose native language is Ogu are beginning to abandon their language, Ogu for Yoruba, the dominant language in Lagos State. In fact, some of the young people do not like to associate with Ogu because of its low status and would rather speak and be spoken to in Yoruba. This trend is strong among youngsters who seek social acceptance and relevance in their immediate environment. Although the media houses in the state government are promoting the Ogu language there is no recent empirical study showing that Ogu and Awori languages are being revitalised. In fact, it is also worrisome that some of the local languages are not available for formal teaching and learning in the educational system either because of lack of materials and/or personnel to teach and examine learners or their orthography is yet to be developed. Of course, it might be difficult to make all the 400 languages available in the education system, since many of them are not developed – lack orthography. However, there are developed local minority languages that are not in the national curriculum. For example, (Urhobo, Kwale, Ogu and the others have their orthography). Individuals living in some parts of the country are sometimes compelled (informally) to learn the dominant languages of their host community.

These observations suggest that there are gaps to be filled in the language policy and practices of the nation. For example, the promotion of the language of immediate environment (in the Constitution and the National Policy on Education) does not respect the language rights of persons who speak other languages aside from the dominant language in the environment.

However, it is encouraging to note that the establishment of a National Language Centre that is shouldered with addressing some of these problems appears to be up to the task by promoting the development (by developing the orthographies and producing materials in those local languages) of local languages. In fact, it appears that at the local and national levels, local languages are being recognized and their use is being promoted. Educational agencies and religious bodies e.g. The Bible Society of Nigeria are also playing significant roles in the development of local minority languages. Some places of worship use the local languages among their congregation whether they are in the majority or minority; while some have their sacred books translated into some of the local minority languages of the people. The print and electronic media are also using local languages for their operations in addition to the use of English and the three major languages and Nigerian Pidgin especially at the state level. Nigerian artists (musicians) appear to be leading in promotion of the use of the local languages in their works.

To sum up the result of our textual analysis of the language policy and involved participant's observation, it appears that speakers' of minority languages language rights are not being respected as many of them are

compelled to learn the dominant language in their environment (language education); two, they are being compelled to indirectly abandon their languages and use the dominant languages in their environment as they listen to national pronouncements in English and in the majority languages while their languages are being neglected. The general attitudes towards minority languages tend to be negative thus pitching the younger speakers of those minority languages to prefer the majority languages to their minority languages. In fact, the language classification into majority and minority language is a subtle disrespect for the language rights of minority language speakers not to talk of the omission of many minority languages in the national and state documents on language policy. Aside from the vigorous activities of the Bible Society of Nigeria that has been translating the Bible into many local languages (both majority and local languages) it is difficult for the writer of this paper to mention other government and private bodies that are into developing local languages with impactful influence.

11. Discussion and Conclusion

These findings suggest that there are gaps to be filled in the language policy and language practice in Nigeria. To pass the language rights tests, the language policy has to be reworked and the gaps filled. The promotion of the three majority languages in the Constitution and in the National Policy on Education should be downplayed. Aside from the measures that have been put in place, that is, the establishment of a National Language Centre that is to promote local languages, the centre should also address the protection (respect) of language rights of the people. Non-governmental organisations which are into human rights should include language rights as part of human rights just as higher institutions should include human linguistic rights in their curriculum. Similarly religious organisations should also follow suit by respecting the language rights of their congregation. In addition, the following suggestions are put forward for consideration and implementation.

One is to scrap the classification of local languages into majority and minority languages since such distinction will foster discrimination against the minority languages and their speakers. The clause in the National Policy on Education and the Constitution promoting three languages - Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo above the other languages should be reviewed. All the developed languages (with orthography) should be adopted for use at the National Assembly and the House of Representatives so that lawmakers would use the languages of their immediate constituencies that they represent. In other words, lawmakers at the federal and state levels should be given the liberty to use their indigenous languages and interpreters into the English language should be made available. Similarly, all the developed languages should be incorporated into the National Policy on Education as languages of instruction/learning with a clause that will ensure open policy to the other languages as soon as they developed their orthography. Learning materials and personnel to teach and examine these local languages should be provided and examination bodies should be encouraged to include these languages among school subjects so that learners would not be restricted in their choice of language studies. In other words, Yoruba should not be promoted and imposed on learners as language of instruction if there are other developed local languages in the South-West. It is important to note that we are not referring to dialects of the same language e.g. of Yoruba but languages that are different from the Yoruba language. The same position should be maintained in the North, whether in the North East, West, or Central.

That way, languages within all the geopolitical zones would be developed and promoted for use and learning and their speakers' language rights would be respected. In fact, it is not impossible that this process will occasion language revival or revitalisation thereby preserving the languages and the cultures of the people. Other agencies of education such as the church and the mosque should be carried along to promote the local languages of the people by using the local languages of the people whether in the minority or majority. As the early Christian missionaries had helped in the promotion of the local languages, similarly religious bodies should continue the same process.

The Government of the country might need to make their official documents and pronouncements available in all the developed local languages in addition to its use of English and the major local languages. The use of billboards should reflect the languages of the communities where they are mounted. For example, government offices should use the language of the immediate community for billboards in addition to the English version.

Perhaps, there is a need for another national conference on language issues in Nigeria. Such conference should seek memoranda from all the stakeholders – representatives of all the local languages, and due consideration should be given to the language ideologies and preferred practices of the people so that the country can emerge with a language policy that would be acceptable to the people. For example, South Africa appeared to have emerged with a national language policy that appears to be widely acceptable to its people.

Since the language rights recommends that nation states should recognize and accommodate all the local languages of their peoples without discrimination, these measures suggested in this paper could help in some way to achieve this desired goal. By accommodation is meant full recognition of local languages at both the local and national levels. What these add up to is that there should be no form of discrimination from government, organizations and individuals, against any local language or its speakers.

In addition, there should be public enlightenment on individual rights to use their indigenous languages in public and private places (on the bus, in offices) without any form of embarrassment. It is argued that if some international organizations could allow the use of three or four languages in the office, national corporations or government functionaries should provide for the use of the people's languages in addition to the official languages. Also, each state can set up language machineries that would help to develop not just the dominant languages but all the local languages in their domains and promote their learning and teaching thereby fostering their functional use. Parents and guardians should also encourage (unwritten) family language policy that will not jeopardise the learning and functional use of their local languages.

12. Conclusion

To conclude, although the language policy and practices in Nigeria appear to respect the language rights of some of its people to a certain extent, there are gaps that should be filled at the national and state levels in order to improve on what is currently on the ground. The existing language policy as contained in the Constitution, the National Policy on Education, and other official documents might be long overdue for review to be in keeping with the language rights declarations and demands. It might not be out of place to organize stakeholders' conference on language rights, language ideologies and practices of the peoples in order to identify further areas of concerns and to emerge with a language policy that will reflect or accommodate the language ideologies and practices of the people in such a multilingual community.

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