

Macro- Language Policy And Planning And Lack Of Proficiency In Language Learning And Use By Nigerian Students

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Abstract

In this study, the problem of non-proficiency in language learning and use among Nigerian students is investigated. Using empirical data and information from available literature on the subject as evidence, it was observed that the language deficiencies of the students could be attributed to the lack of fit between the formulation

of the national (macro-) language policy and planning and implementation procedures, in view of the complexity of the socio-cultural, multilingual and multi-ethnic context of the nation. The perceptions of students' language deficiencies at different levels of education were described and the attendant effects on national development stated. A "bottom-top" proposal was then made for initial prioritization of micro-language policies and planning procedures that would later provide bases for viable macro-policy and planning projects.

1. Introduction

Doing fieldwork, analyzing data and publishing papers in learned journals should not be our only preoccupation as *linguists*. Our social responsibility demands that we look beyond the classroom to see how we can empower *Nigerian languages...* for use in education and other domains.¹ (Emphasis ours)

The observation above will serve the purpose of this paper with a slight modification on the expressions highlighted. For 'linguists, who are the target of the above address, we substitute 'intellectuals' to extend the population of human actors; and we interpret 'Nigerian languages' more inclusively to refer not only to indigenous languages, as intended in the quotation, but to all languages in Nigeria, both indigenous and non indigenous. The intention is to admonish the addressee to embark on more advocacy or practical work of language development.² This study investigates the lack of proficiency in language learning and use by Nigerian Students and attributes this mainly to a lack of fit between the national language policy, on the one hand, and planning and implementation procedures, on the other hand. It then suggests an initial bottom-up prioritization of micro-language policies, planning and implementation procedure that would provide support for a more viable macro-language policy.

¹Ayo Bamgbose, "Linguistics and Social Responsibility: The Challenges for the Nigerian Linguist" (Keynote Address Delivered at the 20th Annual Conference of the Linguistic Association of Nigeria at the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council, Abuja, Nigeria, November 13-17, 2006).

² Jibril avers that a combination of research, advocacy and activism is required by linguists to bring about a reversal of policies so that African languages may grow and flourish. See Munzali Jibril, "New Directions in African Linguistics." In *Rethinking the Humanities in Africa*, ed. Sola Akinrinade, et al. (Ile-Ife: Faculty of Arts, Obafemi Awolowo University, 2007), 281.

The paper is divided into five sections as follows: the context of languages and education in Nigeria; language policy, planning and implementation in education; proficiency level of students in language learning and use; alternative policy and planning strategies; and conclusion.

2. The Context of Languages and Education in Nigeria

Nigeria has about 400 languages which have been categorized in different ways by scholars, based on the parameters of sequence of acquisition, number of speakers, and roles assigned to languages. The categorization in terms of number of speakers and roles assigned to languages has provided us with the following labels³:

- i. Dominant official language, English, spoken by a small population of speakers;
- ii. Major ethnic languages, regional lingua francas, proposed but not utilized as official languages: Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba;
- iii. A trans-national language, proposed as second official language: French
- iv. Main ethnic languages used in network news: Angas, Edo, Efik/Ibibio, Fulfude, Kanuri, Epira/ Igala, Idoma, Ijo, Nupe, Tiv, etc.;
- v. Minor ethnic languages: Fula, Ikwere, Itsekiri, Jukun, Kalabari, etc.;
- vi. Restricted lingua franca: Pidgin English;
- vii. Languages for religious and personal use: Arabic, Latin and German.

Another categorization presents the status of Nigerian languages in ethnographic terms thus: dominant, deprived, endangered and dying⁴. The dominant label matches English in Nigeria. The deprived languages refer to Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba, which though have a relative advantage over the minority languages in terms of extent of their

³ Wale Adebite, "Enlightenment and Attitudes of the Nigerian Elite on the Roles of Languages in Nigeria," *Language, Culture and Curriculum* 16:2 (2003):185-86.

⁴ Ayo Bamgbose, "Deprived, Endangered and Dying Languages" *Diogenes* 161 (1993): 19-25.

use mainly for informal communication, are less officially recognized than English. Endangered languages are minority languages that are used very little, for informal communication, or are not used at all. Lastly dying languages are languages that are almost in extinction.

On the educational context, we observe that apart from the informal education or home training that is generally assumed for all human beings, the *National Policy on Education*⁵ has a list of the following categories of education: Early Childhood/Pre-primary (2-5years); Basic education (Primary and Junior Secondary): Primary education (6-11years); Secondary education: Junior (3 year duration) and Senior (3 year duration); Tertiary education; Mass literacy, Adult and Non-formal Education; Science, Technical and Vocational education; Open and Distance Education; and Special Education.

While primary to tertiary education above has been administered in schools over several decades, the others are designed as ad-hoc or remedy programmes to tackle problems as they arise. The schools are of two types, viz. public schools run by the state and private schools owned by individuals and organizations.

The general impression of Nigerians in recent times is that education of children is better in private schools than in public schools, because the former has better infrastructures and management than the latter, which has suffered neglect over the years. The consequence of this is that only the children of the low working class attend public schools, while the rich and others who can afford it send their children to high fee paying schools at home or abroad. It is however, important to note that the private schools are of different standards and the quality of education received by learners differs in them.

3. Language Policy, Planning and Implementation in Education

The language provisions pertaining to education are contained in several sections of the NPE. But these can be properly considered in relation to the general provisions on language in the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria⁶. Below, we present the language provisions in both documents that are relevant to the discussion in this study.

1. The business of the National Assembly shall be conducted in English and in Hausa, Ibo (sic) and Yoruba when adequate arrangements have been made therefore.

⁵ Federal Republic of Nigeria, *National Policy on Education* (1977, revised 1981, 1998 and 2004). References are made to the 2004 edition in this paper, henceforth as *NPE*.

⁶ Federal Republic of Nigeria, *1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria*, henceforth referred to as *The Constitution*.

The Constitution 1999, Paragraph 55

2. The business of a House of Assembly shall be conducted in English, but the House may in addition to English conduct the business in one or more other languages that the house may by resolution approve.

The Constitution 1999, Paragraph 97

3. Government appreciates the importance of language as a means of promoting social interaction and national cohesion; and preserving cultures. Thus every child shall learn
the language of the immediate environment. Furthermore in the interest of national unity, it is expedient that every child shall be required to learn one of the three Nigerian languages, Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba.

(*NPE*, 2004, Para. 10a)

4. For smooth interaction with our neighbours, it is desirable for every Nigerian to speak French. Accordingly French shall be the second official language in Nigeria and it shall be compulsory in Primary and Junior Secondary schools but Non-vocational elective at the Senior Secondary School.

NPE 2004, Para 10b

5. Government shall ensure that the medium of instruction is principally the mother tongue or the language of the immediate community.....

Early Childhood/Pre-Primary Education (*NPE* Para 14c)

6. The medium of instruction in the primary school shall be the language of the environment for the first three years. During this period, English will be taught as a subject. From the fourth year, English shall progressively be used as the medium of instruction, and the language of the environment and French shall be taught as subjects.

Primary Education (*NPE*, Para 19e and 19f)

7. Junior Secondary School (*NPE*, Para. 24a)

Core Subjects (Languages): English, French and Language of immediate environment.

(The language of the immediate environment shall be taught as L1 where it has orthography and literature. Where it does not have, it shall be taught with emphasis on oracy as L2.)

Elective (Language): Arabic

8. Senior Secondary School (NPE Para 25c)

Core Subjects (Languages): English language, a major Nigerian Language

Electives (Languages): Literature in English, Arabic, any Nigerian language that has orthography and literature.

3.1 The Prospects of the Policy Provisions

The provisions above, without any doubt, have some prospects. First is the recognition of the importance of language in national communication, for social interaction, cohesion and unity, smooth interaction with our neighbours and as mediums of instruction and subjects in schools. Where there is a multiplicity of languages, all of such languages must be cultivated and developed to serve the various communicative needs in these different domains⁷.

Secondly, the identification of indigenous languages in the policy alongside English expresses the desire to break away from an exogenous policy situation in which a non-indigenous second language alone is used by a fraction of the population for governance, to the exclusion of the majority of the population. Another prospect is that of bilingualism/multilingualism, which has the double advantage of enabling the nation to preserve its indigenous languages and forge a unique (indigenous) national identity, on the one hand, and foster national and international communication, on the other hand, in the present day world. For example, by the end of secondary education, a child is expected to have learnt three or four languages, if his or her L1 is different from a major language, thus:

- i. the language of the immediate environment,
- ii. English,
- iii. A major language, i.e. one of Hausa, Igbo or Yoruba (henceforth referred to as 'other' language).

⁷ See Rene Appel and Pieter Muysken, *Language Contact and Bilingualism*. (London: Arnold, 1987); Efurosibina Adegbiya, *Language Attitudes in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Sociolinguistic Overview*. (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1994a).

iv. French

The learning of the above is done without prejudice to other languages like Arabic and Pidgin English which the child may find expedient to use by virtue of his/her religion or area of birth.

3.2 Problems and Weaknesses of the Provisions

Just as the provisions have their strong points, they have also have weak points which scholars have labeled differently as “weaknesses”, “constraints” and “threats”. Bamgbose identifies the following constraints in the implementation of the provisions: failure to accord priority to language policy, negative attitude to all indigenous languages, absence of well coordinated implementation strategies, administrative or political instability leading to frequent changes of policy makers and policies, failure to use language experts and lack of political will.⁸ He considers, for example, the expression “when adequate arrangements have been made therefore” in Provision 1 as gratuitous and unnecessary. It is an escape clause that is not time bound, which justifies why the formulators have not been bothered about its non-implementation after almost three decades of the initial formulation in 1979. Also, he avers that the tentativeness of the clause in Provision 2 “*but the House may in addition to English conduct...*” has removed the steam from the engine of a provision that would have promoted bilingualism/multilingualism.⁹

Owolabi identifies possible threats in terms of (i) downright opposition to the policies from three quarters, viz. speakers of main and small group languages whose native languages are not overtly recognized, elite who have the native language prejudice syndrome (NLPS) and those who would like to oppose the policies because they are not part of the teams that produce them; and (ii) official reluctance to implement the policies.¹⁰ Nigerians from the ethnic minority groups believe that some of the provisions favour the three major Nigerian languages and neglect others.¹¹ Meanwhile, the hegemonic status of the three major

⁸ Ayo Bamgbose, “Language Policy in Nigeria: Challenges, Opportunities and Constraints” (Keynote Address presented at the Nigerian Millenium Sociolinguistics Conference, University of Lagos, Lagos, August 16-18, 2001).

⁹ See Ayo Bamgbose, “Fifteen Years of the National Policy on Education: How Far Has Language Fared?” *Language in Education in Nigeria*, edited by Wale Adegbite and Chukwuemeka Onukaogu, (Ile-Ife: Centre for Language in Education and Development, 1994), 1-10.

¹⁰ Kola Owolabi, “On the Translation of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria into Selected Languages” In *Forms and Functions of English and Indigenous Languages in Nigeria*, edited by Kola Owolabi and Ademola Dasyilva (Ibadan: Group Publishers, 2004), 523-37.

¹¹ See Efurosibina Adegbija, 1994a.

languages has diminished over time in response to political action. For example, the constant creation of states and local government areas since 1967 has brought into prominence several other ethnolinguistic units and more of former minority languages have gained ascendancy in the status and functions assigned to them.¹² Thus, part of the weakness of Provisions 1 and 3 is the overt mentioning of the indigenous languages to be used, which has created the rivalry and fear of dominance among the ethnic groups.

Lastly, Omoniyi perceives threats to macro-language policies in terms of the complexities associated with the nation-state formation¹³ According to him, nation-state policies plans would seem to have been set out to fail or at least have difficulty in succeeding because of problems such as the complex demography and heterogeneous population, policy formulation and disparity between the language needs of the larger population, migration into urban cities, displacement of refugees as well as dual habitation and citizenship in arbitrary boundary demarcations. For example, scholars have reported instances of non-implementation of Provisions 4, 5 and 6 above. On Provision 5 Ohiri-Aniche reports that most of the nursery schools in Nigeria, which are privately owned, use English as a medium of instruction and some of them do not even have the language of the immediate environment as a subject on the school time table.¹⁴ On Provision 6, some prominent scholars have commented that the fourth year period of change-over from language of immediate environment to English is too early for effectiveness.¹⁵ They suggest that the native language should be used as a medium of instruction throughout the six years of primary school or even up till the end of basic education, while at the same time taught alongside English as a subject. Furthermore, the political circumstances surrounding the formulation of Provision 4, have been questioned by some scholars, who argue that French does not deserve the status of a second language, most especially at a time when Nigerians are still grappling with the

¹² See Francis Egbokhare, "Language and Politics in Nigeria" In *Forms and Functions of English and Indigenous Languages in Nigeria*, edited by Kola Owolabi and Ademola Dasylva, (Ibadan: Group Publishers, 2004), 507-22.

¹³ Tope Omoniyi, "Alternative Contexts of Language Policy and Planning in Sub-Saharan Africa" *TESOL Quarterly* 41:3 (2007): 533-549. See also Jan Blommaert, "Language Policy and National Identity" In *An Introduction to Language Policy: Theory and Method*, edited by T. Ricento, 238-254. Oxford: Blackwell, 2006.

¹⁴ Chinyere Ohiri-Aniche, "Language Endangerment among a Majority Group: The Case of Igbo" Paper presented at the Nigerian Millenium Sociolinguistics Conference, University of Lagos, Lagos, August 16-18, 2001.

¹⁵ See A. Babs Fafunwa, et al. *Education in Mother Tongue: The Ife Primary Education Research Project, 1970-1978*. (Ibadan: University Press Limited, 1989); Adebisi Afolayan, "The Alienated Role of the Mother Tongue in Literacy Education for Sustainable National Development: The Western Nigeria Yoruba example." In *Proceedings of the First Pan-African Reading for All Conference*, edited by Seth Manaka, (Pretoria: International Reading Association, 2001), 70-88; Pai Obanya, *Revitalizing Education in Africa*, (Ibadan: Stirling Holden, 2002).

problem of learning and using English effectively and at the same time clamouring for more attention to be paid to developing indigenous languages.¹⁶

4. Proficiency of Students in Language Learning and Use

Language policies and planning always have a direct consequence on the linguistic repertoire of a community and this can be described in terms of the number of languages acquired and learnt, the modes of acquisition and the levels of proficiency of members. The language proficiency of students is described here in terms of two parameters, viz. the number of languages learnt and the performance levels of students in the languages in both communication and education.

4.1 The Languages in Students' Repertoire

In a survey of the linguistic repertoire of Nigerian subjects, Wolff reports as follows:

“... the number of languages spoken by each of the subjects of the speech communities studied ranged from two to five as follows: 60 percent of the subjects spoke two languages; 30 percent three and 10 percent spoke over four languages.”¹⁷

Although the findings above indicate the capacity of Nigerians to acquire two or more languages, the survey is limited by its non-recognition of monolinguals among Nigerians. A more representative survey should reveal two groups of speakers. First there are speakers who are monolingual in the languages of their respective communities. These are mainly old and young illiterate people who live in the villages and small towns. Then, there are bilinguals and polyglots who speak two or more languages. Nigerian students belong to this second category. To attempt to describe the repertoire of speakers from the perspective of individual speakers may be very cumbersome as individuals learn and use languages for various uses in different settings. However, from a societal perspective, a dominant pattern of

¹⁶ See Ayo Bamgbose, 2001; Tope Omoniyi, “Language Ideology and Politics: A Critical Appraisal of French as Second Official Language in Nigeria” *AILA Review* 16 (2003):13-25. Bamgbose wonders further how feasible it is to introduce French in the primary school curriculum, since every primary school teacher teaches all subjects and very few of them can teach the subject.

¹⁷ H. E. Wolff, “Multilingualism, Modernization and Post Literacy: Some Central Issues Concerning the Promotion of Indigenous Languages in a Democratic Society” (Paper Presented at a Workshop on the Role of African Languages in Democratic South Africa, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa, 1998).

bilingualism emerges whereby native languages or languages of immediate environments, on the one hand,

and English, on the other hand, play diglossic roles; the former are acquired earlier and are used for personal and social interaction, while the latter which is learnt much later serves official and inter-ethnic function. Other languages apart from the two above serve specific needs of the individuals and do not cut across the society.

4.2 Performance Levels of Students in Languages.

Performance levels of students are described in this section and the next, first in terms of the bilingual skills and the degrees of the mastery of these skills for communication and education and second, in terms of the levels of achievement of students in the learning and use of languages.

Bilingual speakers exist with varying degrees of competence in their native languages and English. Coordinate bilinguals have good mastery of the basic skills of oracy and literacy in the two languages. Members of this group are less than 5% of the bilingual population and they constitute mainly of adult graduates and “undergraduates of those days” who had the double advantage of first being well grounded in their native language before going to school to learn both languages under conducive circumstances.¹⁸ It is doubtful whether younger tertiary students of nowadays can be classified into this category.

Subordinate and incipient bilinguals make up the second and third groups of bilinguals and these are made up of secondary and tertiary students for the former and some brilliant primary school students for the latter group. Members of this group have mastery of one of the languages and understand the other language partially, with the former being slightly higher on the bilingual competence ladder. Normally, children of the low class have adequate exposure to their native language orally at home before going to school but fail to achieve literacy in the language as well as master any skill in English at school because of several constraints. In contrast, children of elite parents never mature in their native language before going to school and thus lack both oral and literacy competence in it. Some of them, however, eventually succeed in gaining mastery of English via adequate exposure to it at home and in their elitist schools. For this category of students, English replaces the parent’s language as native language of the child.

¹⁸ Festus Adesanoye, “The English Language in Nigeria: The Case of a Vanishing Model” In *Forms and Functions of English and Indigenous Languages in Nigeria*, edited by Kola Owolabi and Ademola Dasylva, 2004, 507-22.

The two groups above used to constitute the bulk of the bilingual population, until the recent past two or three decades when the emergence of a fourth category of bilinguals, 'limited' bilinguals or 'semilinguals'¹⁹, which is fast becoming a threat to the phenomenon of bilingualism altogether. It is taken for granted by cognitive linguists like Noam Chomsky that a speaker must have competence in his or her native language, even if the competence in a second language is in doubt. However, in recent times, the Yoruba speech community is bombarded by an increasing number of children who have limited bilingual skills as a result of bad language acquisition planning.

Hornby comments that:

Many factors may potentially affect the relative status or strength of an individual's two or more languages. Such as age and order of acquisition, usefulness and amount of opportunity for communication, degree of emotional involvement, social function as well as literary and cultural value.²⁰

The reasons why students lack competence in their native language are many, (cf. Fabunmi and Salami 2005) but a mention of some of them will suffice here.²¹ First is the generational shift in language taking place as a result of contact of languages with English. The social prestige and high status accorded English have influenced the attitudes of parents and children positively towards English and less so towards the native language. Some parents forbid their children from speaking the native language at home, even when the fathers and mothers speak it to each other. Some overzealous parents even prevent their children from playing with peers in the neighborhood, except those who can speak to them in English. A second reason is the low priority accorded indigenous languages at school in a 'straight for English' programme. Apart from the fact that fewer periods are allocated to the languages in the school curriculum, if they occur as subjects at all, school regulations forbid children from speaking them, even when the teachers do so. Thus, for some children who initially have

¹⁹See Colin Baker, *Foundations of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2001); S. A. Dada, "Language Contact and Language Conflict: The case of Yoruba-English bilinguals" In *Language and Economic Reforms in Nigeria*, edited by Ndimele Ozo-Mekuri, Clara Ikekeonwu and B. M. Mbah (Port Harcourt: M & J Grand Orbit Communications Ltd. and Emhai, 2006) 68-85.

²⁰ Peter Hornby, "Bilingualism: An Introduction and Overview". In *Bilingualism: Psychological, Social and Educational Implications*, edited by Peter Hornby (New York: Academic Press, 1977), 1-3.

²¹ See Felix Fabunmi, et al. "Is Yoruba an Endangered Language?" In *Trends in the Study of Languages and Linguistics in Nigeria*, edited by Ndimele Ozo-mekuri (Port Harcourt: M & J Grand Orbit Communications Ltd. and Emhai, 2005), 245-260; S. Oluwole Oyetade, "Attitude to Foreign Languages and Indigenous Language Use in Nigeria" In *Language Attitude and Language Conflict in West Africa*, edited by Herbert Igboanusi (Ibadan: Encrownfit, 2001), 14-29.

some mastery of the oracy skills in their native language before going to school, further interest in the language is killed at school and there is little or no chance to become literate in the language. But for other children who do not speak their parent's language before going to school, the school denies them the opportunity to have any interest in it in future; thus, they fail to master the language to any significant degree.

Also students lack competence in the English language for many reasons such as learner motivation and readiness, inadequate exposure to data, poor language reinforcement, wrong curriculum objectives, planning and implementation inadequate qualified and motivated personnel and materials and poor infrastructure among others²² contribute to the inability of students to achieve competence in it at school, despite the amount of school time devoted to it. However, one needs to also consider the fact that most of the students do not speak or write the language as much as they should outside school.²³

Why, for instance, is the romance with English not matched by adequate performance? The fact is that except for a minority of population, Nigerians communicate more, in terms of time, in their indigenous languages and lingua francas than in English, at home, at the market and in social gatherings. Adegbija²⁴ observes that in states like Kano, Katsina and Sokoto, the attitude of the majority of the population who speak Hausa towards English is generally indifferent, negative or downright hostile, especially when spoken by any one in black skin. It is also a common occurrence for Nigerians to speak their indigenous languages, including Pidgin English, in offices, schools and other supposedly exclusive domains of English. Indeed, there is ambivalence and contradiction in the attitude of Nigerians, who are proud to identify with their ethnic groups, for which the native languages serve as a powerful symbol, while at the same time taking maximum advantage of all the benefits that proficiency in English confers.²⁵ In consequence, the dominant assumption in

²² See Aliyu Mohammed, "Communicative Competence Acquisition in Infelicitous Learning Environments: The Problem with SSS English in Nigeria." In *New Englishes: A West African Perspective*, edited by Ayo Bamgbose, Ayo Banjo and Andrew Thomas (Ibadan: Mosuro, 1995), 130-152; Funso Akere, "Languages in the Curriculum: An Assessment of the Role of English and Other Languages in the Education Delivery Process in Nigeria." In *New Englishes: A West African Perspective*, edited by Ayo Bamgbose, Ayo Banjo and Andrew Thomas, (Ibadan: Mosuro, 1995), 178-199. Femi Akindele and Wale Adegbite, *The Sociology and Politics of English in Nigeria* (Ile-Ife: Obafemi Awolowo University Press, 1999).

²³We should treat with caution the assumption that Nigerians speak in English more than they do in their native languages when apparent evidence from their performances indicate otherwise; this can be sheer posing or positioning in English. Bamgbose confirms this doubt when he asserts that it would be useful to find out the difference between language preference and actual language use. See Ayo Bamgbose, 2001.

²⁴Efurosibina Adegbija, "The Context of Language Planning in Africa: An illustration with Nigeria" In *Language Contact, Language Conflict*, edited by Martin Putz (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1994b), p. 151.

²⁵See Ayo Bamgbose, 2001; S. A. Dada, "Language Contact and Language Conflict: The case of Yoruba-English bilinguals" In Ndimele Ozo-mekuri, et al. 2006.

the literature that Nigerians have a positive attitude to English and a negative attitude towards their native languages or that they are more fluent in English than in the native languages should be re-examined.

4.3 Evidence of Poor performance of Students in Languages

A lot of evidence abounds in research studies to affirm the poor performances of students in both their native and second languages and this can be observed in the comments made by scholars across the different stages of education. While discussing the role of Yoruba language in education, Fafunwa²⁶ reports that parents, government officials, teachers and others complain that the products of primary schools are neither proficient in English nor their mother tongue, Yoruba. He then remarks that one can attribute the lack of language skills to a number of factors such as poorly prepared teachers, lack of adequate teaching aids, paucity of appropriate textbooks or the absence of a national or state language policy. Jibril also reports the observations of scholars on the lack of ability of students to speak languages as follows:

- (i) 34% of primary school children in Rivers State could not speak any Nigerian Language;
- (ii) even among children from a major language group (Igbo), 18% in private schools and 10% in Federal Government Colleges couldn't speak their native languages.²⁷

In addition to the above, a national assessment of the Universal Basic Education Programme (UBEP) was conducted in June 2003 to test the achievement of pupils in Primaries 4, 5 and 6 in four subjects – English, Mathematics, Primary Science and Social Studies. The results in Table 1 below indicate the poor performances of the pupils in all the subjects taught via the medium of English:²⁸

²⁶ A. Babs Fafunwa "An Integrated Primary School Curriculum Scheme in Nigeria: A Six Year Project" In *Yoruba Language and Literature*, edited by Adebisi Afolayan, (Ibadan: University Press Ltd and Ile-Ife: University of Ife Press, 1982), 295.

²⁷ See Munzali Jibril, "New Directions in African Linguistics." In Sola Akinrinade, et al., p 284.

²⁸ Universal Basic Education, *UBE DIGEST – Newsletter of Basic Education in Nigeria*, Vol. 4. Abuja: UBE, 2003.

Table 1: Performances of Primary School Pupils in Four Subjects

Class	English	Math	Primary Science	Social Studies
Pry 4	24.70	30.95	40.33	25.18
Pry 5	25.00	37.00	39.00	26.00
Pry 6	21.00	36.00	40.00	21.00
Total	23.57	34.65	39.78	24.06

In Nigerian Secondary Schools only between 18% and 30% of all candidates who sat for the Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination in 1999 obtained credits in the core science subjects of Mathematics (18.25%), Chemistry(31.08%) and Physics (30.57%). In this particular examination, the credit pass rate in English language was 9.7% but as high as 90% in the indigenous languages of Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba and Efik.²⁹ The contention is that if English as a medium produced the best results and children were able to master it as well as other subjects taught through it very well, there would not have been any concern. The reality, of course, is that at virtually all levels of education, performance in English is inadequate and this continues to affect acquisition of knowledge in other subjects³⁰

The lack of proficiency in English does not terminate at secondary education, but extends to tertiary education at undergraduate, postgraduate and even postdoctoral levels. After an analysis of written English of some Masters and PhD students in a department of a Nigerian university, Adesanoye felt disturbed and raised an alarm thus:

If therefore, students whose main preoccupation is communication work are still insecure in their written English performance to produce such grammatical errors, one can only wonder what the situation must be in those other scholarly pursuits with far less interest in communication matters...³¹

He even feels more so in a later work, after reading through some inaugural lectures by some University Professors and observing various errors ranging from failed concord to maze

²⁹ Akere observes that the figures for English compared with those for Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba are dismal. From 1988 to 1990, while the average percentage pass at credit and distinction levels for English was only 7.7%, the corresponding figures of Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba were 25.9%, 48.6% and 49.7% respectively. Out of 195,840 candidates that sat for the examination in 1990, only 12,382 (6.3%) passed at credit level and above. See Funso Akere, "Languages in the Curriculum: An Assessment of the Role of English and Other Languages in the Education Delivery Process in Nigeria." In Ayo Bamgbose, et al. 1995.

³⁰ See Ayo Bamgbose, 2006.

³¹ Festus Adesanoye, "Tertiary English in Nigeria" *Language and Polity: Essays on language and Society in Africa*, edited by Samuel O. Asein and Festus A. Adesanoye, (Ibadan: Sam Bookman, 1994), p 24

structures, pattern failure, unusual collocations and sheer gibberish expressions. Adesanoye again expresses his apprehension thus:

Are our university dons, and most worrisome, those of us at the pinnacle of the academic ladder already going the way our students (both undergraduate and graduate) have already gone? This must never be allowed to happen.³²

One can continue to cite examples of instances and expressions showing lack of mastery of languages by Nigerian Bilinguals. Indeed from the 1960s to the present moment, a greater percentage of research time has been and is being spent on both error analysis and contrastive analysis of students' errors both in indigenous languages usage and English.

5. Alternative Language Policy and Planning For Proficiency in Language Learning and Use

Our contention in this paper supports the opinion of other scholars that lack of proficiency in language learning and use can be attributed majorly to problems of language policy formulation and implementation. Consequently, there is a need for a reappraisal of current language policy and planning procedures for the enhancement of efficiency in language learning and use in education and communication in Nigeria. In this section, we shall suggest a revision based on four principles:

- i. a recognition of the primacy of all indigenous languages in Nigeria as Native Languages and assignment of vital roles to them in the national political economy;
- ii. a recognition of English as a Nigerian language and assignment of secondary roles to it as a Second Language, to complement the functions of the indigenous languages; and
- iii. a summation of principles 'i' and 'ii' above into a societal bilingual perspective that is 'additive' and 'sequential'³³; and

³² Festus Adesanoye, 2004, p 251

³³ Additive bilingualism is preferred to subtractive bilingualism because the former promotes the development of the two languages and encourages the user's flexibility in them, while the latter demotes the first language in the process of acquiring the second and results in the loss of native cultural identity. See Kris Gutierrez, et al., "Conversations: 'Sounding American': The Consequences of New Reforms on English Language Learners" *Reading Research Quarterly* 37:3 (2002):328-343. See also Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, "Do Not cut My Tongue, Let Me Live and Die With My Language" A Comment on English and Other Languages in Relation to Linguistic Human Rights" *Journal of Language, Identity, and Education* 3:2 (2004):127-33 In sequential bilingualism, the acquisition of oracy and literacy skills is presented to learners in a sequence such that oral skills in the native and second language facilitate the literacy skills acquired earlier in the native language as well as those acquired later in the second language. See Wale Adebite "Sequential Bilingualism and the

- iv. a recognition of the complementarities of both macro- and micro-policy and planning models for operating in different contexts of language learning and use.

Since 'iii' above is a summation of 'i' and 'ii' we shall elaborate on 'iii' and 'iv' below.

5.1 Bilingual Policies for the Nigerian Nation

A societal bilingual policy is conceived here as a national framework, integrating different ethnic groups and social classes and is geared towards mobilizing the majority of people towards contributing to national development. The specification of such a policy can be represented symbolically thus: NL+SL+ (OL), where NL refers to Native Language; SL refers to Second Language (English); and OL refers to another indigenous language, Pidgin English and other non-indigenous languages such as French, Arabic, German and Latin among others.

It can be seen that the specification above supports polyglottism, but a status distinction is made between obligatory languages and optional language(s) in brackets. An application of the framework above to the provisions stated earlier in Section 3 will thus produce the following alternatives to Provisions 1-7:

1. The business of The National Assembly shall be conducted in both English and indigenous languages.
2. The business of a House of Assembly shall be conducted in the language(s) of the immediate environment in each state, as the House may by resolution approve, and in English.
3. Government appreciates the importance of language ... every child shall be required to learn another Nigerian language apart from his/her own native language.
4. For smooth interaction with our neighbours, it is desirable for Nigerians to speak French. Accordingly, children shall be encouraged to learn French in the curriculum for primary school.

Teaching of Language Skills to Early Primary School Pupils in Nigeria" *Glottodidactica* 28 (2000): 5-18; Stephen Krashen, "Three Roles for Reading for Minority Language Children" In *English Learners: Reaching the Highest Level of English Literacy*, edited by Gilbert C. Garcia (Newark, DE: International Reading association, 2003), 55-70.

5. Government... shall ensure that the medium of instruction is principally the mother tongue or language of the immediate community, while both mother tongues and English are subjects in the curriculum.
6. The medium of instruction in the primary school shall be the language of the environment. During this period, the language of the environment, English, another Nigerian language and French shall be subjects in the curriculum.
7. Junior Secondary School
 - a. Core Subjects (Languages): A Nigerian language, English
 - b. Elective: another Nigerian language, French, Arabic

Kaplan and Baldauf³⁴ differentiate between macro- language policies which have a nation-state focus and instigated by government and micro- language policies which focus on a person group or community and are addressed to specific language and literacy problems. Micro-language planning also accommodates the involvement of non-governmental associations (NGOs) and private individuals. Omoniyi³⁵ asserts that the literature of language policy and planning has been dominated by macro-language policies, while projects and activities of the micro type go routinely unreported. While arguing that considerable attention be given to micro-language policies and planning in language development, he opines that both types of policies should serve to complement each other, rather than be conceived as alternatives. In a sense of which failure and inadequacy in macro-language planning and policies have led to the development of other programmes for effectiveness, language planners thus need to continue to engage with the nation-state to devise ways of effectively implementing policies.

The policies presented in Section 3 above and the alternatives suggested in 5.1 are macro-language policy types. In essence, although they generally express the vision and ideals of the government and overall people of the Nigerian nation towards achieving national goals such as sovereignty/ national and international relevance, unity and progress, the policies cannot serve the immediate interests of the divergent people and groups in the

³⁴ Robert Kaplan and Richard Baldauf, *Language Planning from Practice to Theory*. (Clevedon, England: Multilingual Matters, 1997), p. 240.

³⁵ Tope Omoniyi, 2007, p. 534.

country. Micro-policies and planning procedures are thus required to adapt macro-policies to diverse specific contexts for effective implementation.

5.2 Micro-language Policy and Planning

Micro- language procedures can in our opinion facilitate the effective implementation of macro-language through formulating models and embarking on activities which cut across status, corpus, acquisition and action planning. A few examples are presented below to illustrate models and activities.

1) Models of bi-literacy acquisition

Ogbonna³⁶ presents four possible models for pursuing bi-literacy in primary schools, summarized thus with our comments in parentheses after each model.

a. The exclusive use of the mother tongue (MT) as a medium of instruction in all primary classes (1-6); Both MT and English are also taught as subjects. (This model coincides with macro-policy suggested above and can work in some dominant Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba states.)

b. Use of the MT as medium, and teaching of the MT and English as subjects in the lower primary classes (1-3); use of English as medium, and teaching English and the MT as subjects in the upper classes (4-6). (This is what is provided for in the current version of the National Policy on Education. The policy is applicable in contexts where the native languages are not developed enough to be used as medium throughout primary education.)

c. Use both languages for teaching and learning as much as possible throughout the primary school cycle. In other words, both the MT and English would be learnt as subjects and used as media of instruction in the classes. (This corresponds with the dual method or maintenance bilingual education. It can be used by resourceful teachers in contexts where learners are under so much pressure to learn English, yet are not denied the opportunity to learn the native indigenous language).

d. Use of English as medium of instruction, and learning it as a subject from primary one to six; the MT is only learnt as a subject. (This is the model followed in private schools

³⁶ Simeon O. Ogbonna, "Language, Literacy and Learning in Nigerian Primary Schools" *Literacy and Reading in Nigeria* 11: 1 (2006): 162-163.

and most urban public primary schools where there is little or no desire to learn the native language).

The models above are micro- language policies that apply to specific allignable and exceptional contexts within the national macro-framework.

2) Research- based Bilingual Education Projects

a. The Primary Education Improvement Project (PEIP)³⁷

The project was launched by the Institute of Education, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria, on behalf of, an in association with, the governments of the Northern states, with financial assistance from UNICEF and technical assistance from UNESCO. Dissatisfied with the outcome of the ‘straight- for- English’ project embarked upon by the government at independence, the project followed three patterns:

- i. In states with Hausa as the dominant or only language, Hausa was retained as the medium of instruction, while English was taught as a subject for the first three years. In the fourth to sixth years, English became the medium and Hausa was taught as a subject.
- ii. In states with several languages, none of which was dominant or accepted as such, English was retained as the medium of language through the entire education course, while both English and Hausa were subjects.
- iii. In states in which Arabic was used extensively for religious worship and in which the study of Arabic for this purpose was well-established, Arabic was studied as an optional subject along with Hausa or with one of the other indigenous languages.

Omojuwa admitted that the option of making Hausa the language of education from the beginning to the end of primary education was considered and rejected because of anticipated political, pedagogic and operational difficulties. Marginal success was, however, recorded in the areas of curriculum content and methodology, the extensive exploration of local languages for modern education and production and efficient distribution and utilization of instructional materials. The bilingual programme is said to have influenced the development of regional languages such as Kanuri, Nupe Tiv and Fulfude, which are now used as mother

³⁷ Ralph A. Omojuwa, *Primary Education and the Problem of Medium Transition*. (Zaria: Institute of Education, Ahmadu Bello University, 1980).

tongue media in the states where they are spoken by substantial populations. The project was discontinued in 1978 for lack of funds.

b. Ife Six Years Primary Project (ISYPP)

This project was coordinated by the Institute of Education of the University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University), Ile-Ife, Nigeria and begun in 1970. The objective of the project was to demonstrate that primary school children could achieve better scholastic results if they were taught in their mother tongue. The experimental group was taught all the subjects in the six – year primary school curriculum, except English, in Yoruba, while English was taught as a subject. For the control group and the rest of the school, English was used as a medium and also taught as a subject.

The results of the ISYPP have been widely reported by scholars³⁸ Pupils in the experimental classes demonstrated better competence in English than the control group and performed much better in practically all the other subjects in the curriculum, including science and mathematics. In 1985, the Oyo State Government decided on a pilot scheme of the experiment and extended the project to 131 schools in the state. Although the ISYPP has been acclaimed as having achieved tremendous success in demonstrating the superiority and effectiveness of the MT medium in primary school, political instability and lack of political will have prevented the replication and implementation of the project nationally.

c. Rivers Readers Project (RRP)

The Rivers Project (RRP), which was based at the University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria in the 1970s, involved the use of the small indigenous languages in Rivers State to enable the children to learn to read first in their mother tongues before going on to English³⁹. The RRP succeeded in producing school readers in every 20 languages and the materials were used to some extent in the primary schools located in each language area. Although the project was reported to have aroused a good deal of interest in, and support for, the development of the local languages, the objective of use of these languages in primary school

³⁸ See A. Babs Fafunwa, et al., 1989; Adebisi Afolayan, 2001.

³⁹ Kay Williamson, “Small Languages in Primary Education: The Rivers Readers Project as a Case History” In *Language in Education in Nigeria*, Vols I and II, edited by Ayo Bamgbose (Lagos: National Language Centre/Federal Ministry of Education, 1980). An output of the Rivers Readers’ Project is the Obolo language Project. Initially, some teachers formed the Language Committee to develop books for teachers and students in the Obolo language. Then, a group of Obolo Christian Students formed the Obolo Bible Transaction Committee. Later, the two groups merged to form the Obolo Language and Bible Transaction Committee (OLBTC) in 1980. The Committee embarked on various programmes of language and literacy development such as enlightenment, Bible translation project, publications of several books to provide a stock of Obolo Literature, training of teachers and teaching of Obolo language in pilot schools. The community embraced the project and became enthusiastic about writing and having books in Obolo. See Aaron, Maria J. “Improving Literacy in Primary schools in Nigeria through the Mother Tongue.” In *Reading for All in Africa*, edited by Arua E. Arua, (Newark, DE: International Reading Association, 2003), 166-70.

instruction (that every child would learn to read first in his or her own language) could not be immediately achieved because of negative attitudes, lack of expertise in the teaching of local languages and non-implementation.

3) Language Modernization Efforts

There have been reports of some activities of translation and lexicalization of indigenous languages to enable them function in specialized domains of technology, science, agriculture, law, politics and linguistics.⁴⁰ On the criteria for including Nigerian languages in the translation of the Nigeria Constitution project the following criteria were set:

- a. preponderance or numerical strength of the speakers of the language in question;
- b. official recognition and use of the language by Government and/ or institutions;
- c. availability of copious and suitable written materials on the grammars, literature, culture and orthography of the language;
- d. availability of legislative terminology in the language.

Languages were then grouped into major, main and small group categories. It was agreed on that the project would take place in stages and that the earlier work done should provide the bases for later translations into smaller languages.

Owolabi⁴¹ reports some of the projects embarked on as follows:

- i. a glossary of technical terminologies in science and mathematics for primary schools in Nigeria (GTTPSN) in eight languages, sponsored by the Federal Ministry of Education;
- ii. metalanguage in three languages on linguistics, literature and methodology, sponsored by National Educational and Research Development Council (NERDC);
- iii. 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria translated into three languages (1st phase);
- iv. a quadrilingual 'glossary of legislative' terms (QGLT) completed in three languages, sponsored by NERDC;

⁴⁰ See Kola Owolabi, 2004; Kola Owolabi, "Nigeria's Native Language Modernization in Specialized Domains for National Development: A Linguistic Approach" (An Inaugural Lecture Delivered at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria on Thursday 29 June, 2006).

⁴¹ Kola Owolabi, 2006, op cit.

- v. Yoruba Dictionary of Engineering physics (YDEP), produced by an engineer, Mr. Odetayo.

4) Codification of Standard Nigerian English

The recognition of English as a Nigerian language has implications for the learning and use of the language, especially in terms of domestication and standardization. Nigerian English has been characterized as a distinct variety of English with its own sub-varieties⁴² This dialect shares the common core of World Standard English, into which are incorporated culturally-relevant lexical items. Although Standard Nigerian English exists in reality, little progress has been made towards its codification. The project is an enormous one with huge financial implications for both the government and the people.

5) The Use of English (UOE) Programme in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions

The Use of English is a micro-language programme located in all tertiary institutions in Nigeria. It is designed both as a remedial and developmental programme, to remedy the deficiencies in English mastery by students after secondary education, on the one hand, and equip students with the new skills they will require to cope with the various programmes in tertiary education on the other hand.⁴³ Since the inception of the UOE as a compulsory course for students in tertiary institutions in the 1960s, the programme has met with varying degrees of success in different institutions. In the 1980s a Communication Skills Project (COMSKIP) was designed by the British Overseas Development Administration (ODA) to re-invigorate the UOE programme and The British Council, Lagos was charged with the responsibility of overseeing the project.

6) Assignment of Roles to Languages in Nigeria

⁴² Ebo Ubahakwe, (Ed.) *Varieties and functions of English Language in Nigeria*.(Ibadan: African University Press, 1979); Ayo Bamgbose, "English in the Nigerian Environment." In *New Englishes: A West African Perspective*, edited by Ayo Bamgbose, et al., 1995, 9-26; Ayo Banjo, "On Codifying Nigerian English: Research So Far" In Ayo Bamgbose, et al. 1995, 203-31. The target suggested for education and formal communication is Standard Nigerian English, which refers to that variety which is close to Standard British English in syntax and semantics, similar in phonology, but different in phonetic features as well as with regard to certain lexical peculiarities.

⁴³ Adebisi Afolayan, "The English Language and Development Education in Nigeria." In *English Language Studies in Nigeria Higher Education*, edited by R. Freeman and Munzali Jibril (London: The British Council, 1984), 35-55.

Pragmatic and economic reasons may stimulate people to learn a language, if such a language counts for upward social mobility, further education and competitive job opportunities alongside English. Using the Igbo language as a basis, Ugorji gives the following suggestions for enhancing the status of indigenous languages in Nigeria:⁴⁴

a. The standard variety becomes the language of administration. In Urban centres, it may be the standard dialect. A Local government Chairman addresses his staff in Igbo, the local council meeting involving Councilors is conducted in Igbo. At the state level, the residents are addressed in Igbo and translations provided in English for non-residents. In due course, the language becomes the language of the judiciary, at least at the lower courts. Also news items are sourced and cast in Igbo and translations are provided in English for other residents.

b. States, local governments and other employers of labour shall require a credit pass in Igbo at the relevant levels for alternative job opportunities, while those workers already in service are encouraged to meet up through training programmes. Admission requirements for tertiary schools may also require a credit pass in Igbo language or literature.

c. It should be obligated on industries, firms and government agencies operating in Igbo area to write sign posts, notices.

d. Government and NGOs are to fund or establish a language agency or academy to enhance language maintenance and development.

e. Foreign immigrants who settle in the area are made to acquire the language for full official residence permit to be granted.

Before we wind up this discussion, it is germane to emphasize the crucial role of agency in micro-language policy and planning⁴⁵. Whether as individuals, in groups, institutions or positions of authority in government, the success or failure of a programme is ultimately decided by the level of responsibility of some kind of person(s).

In the opening quotation of this paper, Bamgbose appropriately admonishes linguists in Nigeria to go beyond theoretical and analytic procedures and take seriously advocacy as an

⁴⁴ C.U.C. Ugorji, "The Igbo Language: Endangerment and Empowerment" In Ozo-mekuri, Ndimele 2005, 166-167.

⁴⁵ See Nancy Hornberger, et al. "Slicing the Onion Ethnographically: Layers and Spaces in Multilingual Language Education Policy and Practice" *TESOL Quarterly*, 41:3 (2007): 509-32.

aspect of social responsibility in linguistics.⁴⁶ He claims further in the paper that social responsibility can be exercised by individual or a body of linguists, citing the instance of the stand taken by the Linguistic Society of America in relation to the English-only litigation in the USA.

But linguists are only one among numerous stakeholders concerned with language policy and planning matters. For example, some scholars have reported the efforts that local educators, teachers and local communities in some parts of the USA and Canada are making to build bilingual education programmes that strengthen local language and cultural resources in the face of English monolingual policies.⁴⁷ The scholars suggest that collaborative efforts between educators, families and communities can help mute the English-only standardizing pressures of official language policies. In another vein, Sealey and Carter opine that the events that surround the English education policy in England in 1988 were outcomes of human agency as specific individuals (e.g. Kenneth Baker as Secretary of State) who made decisions and acted upon them in response to certain contextual factors of the period.⁴⁸

Back in Nigeria, the crucial roles played in the planning of indigenous micro-language activities reported above by Professor Aliu Babatunde Fafunwa in his various positions such as the Dean, Faculty of Education and Former Minister of Education deserved Special attention in future studies on this topic. Also deserving attention are the feats achieved by Professors Ayo Bamgbose and Adebisi Afolayan whose voices are authoritative on both indigenous and English language studies, and other active scholars, linguists and non-linguistics, politicians, media practitioners, writers, publishers and philanthropists, working either as individuals or in groups, agencies, organizations and civil service. Thus, sometimes, a planned programme of festschrifts to honour deserving people and organizations may be regarded as worthwhile activities of micro- language planning.⁴⁹

7. Conclusion

This study has pointed out that a linguistically heterogeneous country such as Nigeria requires efficient language policies and planning procedures to develop all its diverse language resources to enable the whole population of its citizens acquire and use the languages efficiently for national development. It has presented both qualitative and

⁴⁶ See Ayo Bamgbose, 2006.

⁴⁷ Theresa L. McCarty, et al. "Indigenous Language Education and Literacy: Introduction to the Theme Issue" *The Bilingual Research Journal* 19:1(1995): 1-4; Mary E. Romero-Little, et al. "Language Policies in Practice: Preliminary Findings from a Large Scale national Study of Native American Language Shift" *TESOL Quarterly* 41:3 (2007):607-618.

⁴⁸ Alison Sealey, et al., *Applied Linguistics as Social Science*. London, New York: Continuum, 2004.

⁴⁹ See Ozo-mekuri Ndimele, 2006, op cit.

quantitative evidence to show that poor performances in languages and education at school are largely as a result of exclusive language policies and poor planning activities and implementation procedures. While suggesting that macro-language policy and planning models at the nation state level should be complemented by micro-policy and planning programmes in order to facilitate the proper implementation of such programmes in micro ethnic and sub-ethnic contexts, an additive endo-exoglossic bilingual framework is proposed to enhance the efficient acquisition and use of native languages and English, among other languages in Nigeria.

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