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2395-2628(Print):2349-9451(online)**LANGUAGE PLANNING AND LANGUAGE POLICY IN NIGERIA: IMPLEMENTATION REALITIES****UMOREN, MARIASTELLA**

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doi: <https://doi.org/10.33329/ijelr.6219.192>**ABSTRACT**

This paper recognizes language policy and language planning as a conscious effort by government or its agents to allocate and regulate the functions and use of language at various levels in a community. Comprising status planning, corpus planning and acquisition planning, language planning necessarily follows after certain ideologies: linguistic assimilation, linguistic pluralism, vernacularization and internationalism. In a linguistically diverse country as Nigeria, languages are grouped based on nativity, demographic spread, and population of speakers, constitutional recognition and prestige considerations. The language planning policy in Nigeria favours both endoglossia and exoglossia. But in practice, this sociolinguistic profile is hardly realizable due to the peculiar socio-cultural, socio-political and multilingual realities of Nigeria. Observable setbacks include poor monitoring; failure to match corpus planning with status planning, lack of motivation, political, cultural and economic influences as well as dialectal differences. With the failure of the tripod educational language policy of WAZOBIA due to competition and dominance, there have been agitations to adopt the Nigerian pidgin to replace 'the language of immediate community clause'. This paper proposes that different regions should be given sufficient socio-economic power and some level of autonomy to encourage the development of regional languages and possible emergence of a national language to counter the all-powerful position of English language which, even with a Nigerian identity (Nigerian English) remains non-native to Nigeria and is unable to promote National identity.

**Key words:** language planning, implementation issues, setbacks.**Introduction**

Language planning is a peculiar index in a multilingual society like Nigeria. The assumption that language planning in Nigeria is a problem that requires solution perhaps made Bamgbose (1991) posit that the choice of language for specific purposes and expansion of vocabulary to cope with use of language in new domains are the nagging problems of Nigeria given her linguistically heterogeneous make up. This paper

examines strategies for solving language problems as corroborated by (Bamgbose 1991, p.109) as the 'organized pursuit of solution to language problems'.

However, Cooper (1989) is of the view that language planning is 'the deliberate effort to influence the behaviour of others with respect to acquisition, structure or functional allocation of their language codes'. It is therefore the purpose of this paper to examine the corresponding influence on the people since language itself is a socio-cultural phenomenon. Furthermore, this paper is of the view that language planning is the authoritative allocation of resources to the attainment of language status and corpus goals. (Fishman, 1991).

It is therefore the position of this paper that language planning is a conscious effort by individuals, government or its agents to allocate/ regulate the functions and use of language at various levels in a speech community. An effective language planning defines the sociolinguistic profile of a society and has therefore become a part of modern national building. Language has become one of the basic means of expressing nationalistic feelings. For instance, language planning and policy in South Africa has witnessed the emergence of eleven official languages as opposed to the initial two languages, English and Afrikaans. (Lateef, 2015). Suffice it to say that the sociolinguistic complexity of South Africa is similar to that of Nigeria with the exception of apartheid. The official status of eleven languages in South Africa has addressed the social and political problem of apartheid. The official language policy in this case is intended to make identifiable languages official in domains of legislature, justice, public administration and education. The persistent setbacks in the Nigerian situation revolve around poor monitoring, failure to effectively match corpus planning policies with status planning; lack of motivation; political, cultural and economic influences among others. The implementation realities of language planning in Nigeria are the main focus of this paper.

### **Types of Language Planning**

Language Planning involves three activities: status planning, corpus planning and acquisition planning. (Akinede and Adegbite1999). These are explicated below:

- (a) Corpus planning: This involves planning decisions that are made to effect changes in language structure: vocabulary, syntax, morphology, orthography or even the adoption of a new script. The activities centre on structural adjustments of form so as to position a language to serve desired function. Corpus planning activities include: Graphization, a process of establishing a writing system for a language; Standardization, which deals with issue of either precedence of acceptable codes or the introduction of a totally new poly- phonemic written form to represent all dialects. If one dialect is chosen, it becomes supra dialect and automatically carries with it privileges that can cause serious societal consequences. Standardization processes can sometimes occur over extended time period as in the case of English language. It involves such linguistic activities as orthography development, vocabulary expansion, dictionary compilations, script and spelling reforms, language revival among others. Finally, Modernization as a form of corpus planning is the expansion of language resource to function in new domains. Corpus planning seeks to develop a variety of a language and standardizes it that is; provide it with the means to serve every possible and evolving language function in the society.
- (b) Status planning: Status planning has to do with a language standing in relation to other languages or the language requirements of a political and public authority. (Ndukwe 1988). This type of language planning is usually handled by government. Once a language is declared official by law, it becomes statutory. The issues that inform status planning include: language origin, degree of standardization, judicial status and vitality. Status planning therefore changes the functions of a language or a variety of a language and the rights of those who use it. Status languages may function as official language, provincial language, language of wider communication, international language, capital language, language of education and indeed, it may serve any function assigned to it by government,
- (c) Acquisition planning: Acquisition planning involves the structuring of learning environment; training and developing teachers; creating materials as well as developing theoretical basis to ensure that students learn what they are intended to learn. Acquisition planning is closely associated with status planning. It is

an attempt by national, state or local government to influence the status of a language. Acquisition planning results in the elevation of the status of a chosen language. For instance the ministry of education makes decision bothering on language of education in a country as well as languages that are taught as subjects. When these policies are made, corpus planning is also triggered. Consequently, educational books are written in this language while existing ones are revised to cater for need in schools so as to maintain effective language acquisition. Acquisition planning produce decisions bordering on issues like:

- 1 Language choices in school curriculum.
- 2 The amount and quality of teachers needed.
- 3 The local communities involved.
- 4 Production of learning materials and incorporating the in academic syllabi.
- 5 Establishment of assessment system to monitor progress.
- 6 Ascertaining financial cost.

It is however important to note that that acquisition planning is financially demanding as such, adequate planning is needed. Multilingualism also poses a problem for acquisition planning especially in countries that were once colonized. The issue of national unity usually favours the use of official language as language of instruction while the urge to promote social and linguistic diversity favours the teaching of several native languages.

Holmes' (2008) language planning model suggests four interrelated activities which include: **Selection**, choosing the code, variety or language to be developed; **Codification**, Linguistic processing which involves standardization, language restructuring or modification of linguistic features; **Elaboration**, extending its functions to include use in new domains, that is, developing the necessary linguistic resources to handle new concepts and innovations; and **Securing acceptance**, an activity which revolves around people's attitudes towards the chosen variety, code or language. It focuses on developing and enhancing measures to encourage speakers to develop loyalty and pride towards it. The above explication reveals that language planning is a challenging activity since the task of selecting a code out of several other codes for development is often political. The main challenge 'involves issues relating to the form of variety, the function it serves, and the attitudes that people hold towards it.'

The implication of Holmes' interrelated and comprehensive language planning model in the Nigerian language situation borders greatly on the question of national unity. The selection of the three major languages (Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa) in the course of status planning has aroused social and political consciousness of the speakers of the minority languages. Since political parties are formed along ethnic lines, economic and political powers also revolve along these lines. The choice of the language of any ethnic group over the other is viewed as a deliberate attempt to make the minority ethnic groups economically and politically subservient to the majority ethnic groups since language, culture and politics are usually intertwined.

### **Ideologies that Influence Language Planning**

Four typical ideologies may motivate actual decision making in language planning in a particular society. These are: linguistic assimilation, linguistic pluralism, vernacularization and internationalism. Cobarrubias (1983) cited in Agbedo (2000). The policy of linguistic assimilation hinges on the belief that everyone, regardless of origin should learn the dominant language of the society; linguistic pluralism presupposes the recognition of more than one language which can be territorially based or individually based or a combination of the two. Typical examples are Belgium (French and Flemish), South Africa (English and Afrikaans) and Cameroun (English and French).Vernacularization is the modernization and standardization of an indigenous language and its adoption as an official language, for example, Turk (Turkey), Hebrew (Israel). Finally, the ideology of Internationalization refers to the adoption of a non-indigenous language of wider

communication either as an official language or for such purposes as education or trade. For example, English in Nigeria, Ghana, India and Zimbabwe etc.

It is usually the case that policy decisions about this kind of language planning (Status planning) are informed by the nature of the linguistic set-up of a given nation-state, i.e. whether it is monolingual or multilingual.

Monoglossia, what Bell (1976) calls linguistic homogeneity suggests the existence of a single language used as a medium of communication in a given society. The notion, linguistic homogeneity tends to be utopian since there is no society where only a single medium of communication is used. As Essien (1998:7) observed, "it is common knowledge nowadays that there is hardly any country in the world, including those in Europe, which is monoglossic, though there may be only one official language. Multilingualism, according to the same source, 'seems to be the norm nowadays'. Trudgill (1983) cited in Ndukwe (1988) noted that even such seemingly monoglossic nation like the United States, United Kingdom and France have their own respective multilingualism. The truth is that there is no such thing as linguistically homogenous society or nation since according to Fishman (1971), all individuals control repertoires of codes which differ in some respects from those controlled by others. Moreover, some differences between codes are thought of by the users of the code to be so great as to warrant the distinguishing label, "different language". It is in this sense that one is inclined to posit that linguistic heterogeneity is a rule rather than an exception

### **The Language Situation in Nigeria**

Nigeria is a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multilingual country which occupies a geographically complicated landscape occasioned by colonialism. Danladi, (2007) described Nigeria as a country made up of three nations artificially brought together in 1914 for the specific interest of the imperialist, the British colonialist point of view of major languages (Hausa in the northern region, Yoruba in the western region and Igbo in the eastern region). Nigeria, a country with an approximate population of 140 million people with about 400 to 500 languages is often described as the most populous country in Africa and also a country with the highest linguistic diversity. Nigerian languages have been described along the lines of status/level, influence, function, etc. the major indices that inform such descriptions include, nativity, demographic spread, population of speakers, constitutional recognition and prestige.

**A description based on nativity captures two groups of languages:** exoglossic languages (English, French and Arabic) and endoglossic languages, comprising Nigerian Indigenous Languages, such as Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa, Efik, Ibibio, pidgin. Going by the index of population of speakers, Awonusi (2005) quoting Emenanjo (1985) recognizes five groups.

- (a) Three foreign languages (English, French, Arabic)
- (b) Four very large languages (Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo and Pidgin)
- (c) Seven Large languages
- (d) Twenty medium-sized languages
- (e) Three hundred and fifty small-sized languages

Based on constitutional recognition, the 1999 Nigerian Constitution recognizes English, Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo. The 1998 National Language policy recognizes French as an official language. According to Danladi, (2007), Hausa language is spoken by fourteen million people in Nigeria, Niger, and Sudan; Yoruba, by five million people in Nigeria, Dahomey and Togo; and Igbo, by five million people, spoken only in Nigeria. Relying on these figures, one can readily assume that Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo which are widely spoken in their regions are therefore majority languages while the over 400 others are minority languages. These labels 'majority language' and 'minority language' naturally influence socio-political and economic struggles of its speakers since the language of wider communication attracts so more socio-economic and socio-political power and therefore prestige. To eliminate the majority/minority stigma, Anowusi (2007) labels these language groupings as Decamillionaires, Millionaires and Minor languages depending on population of speakers.

Language Planning and its implementation in Nigeria are often tied to government policy on languages. Holmes' (2008) language planning model observed that the task of selecting and assigning roles to languages usually have socio-economic, socio-political and socio-cultural implications and can only be effectively handled by government. This decision or policy according to Bamgbose (1991) has to do with language status while issues of implementation involve corpus planning activities. This means that once a policy statement is made on the role and status of any language in a speech community, the implementation processes triggers corpus planning with its attendant production of instructional materials, terminologies, primers etc. this source suggest three basic types of language policies:

- (a) Official language policy, languages recognized by government
- (b) Educational policy, languages recognized by educational authority as media of instruction or subject of study at various levels of public and private education and
- (c) General language policy, which covers unofficial government recognition or tolerance of languages used in communication and mass media especially when it involves mass mobilization such as creating political awareness

#### **Language Planning Efforts in Nigeria**

There has not been a comprehensive language policy for Nigeria as a deliberate and planned exercise.(cf.Oyetade,2003). The implication is that a distinct document that may be referred to as the language policy for the Federal Republic of Nigeria does not exist. However, what is often regarded as language policy/planning is connected to provisions in The Constitution of the Federal republic of Nigeria and the National Policy on Education of 1977.

The earliest languages planning effort in Nigeria was during the 1952 UNESCO Conference which gave the recommendation that English language should be used as the medium of instruction in primary one and subject in primary three while the mothers tongue should be used for communication.

The 1969 Nigerian Education Report of National Curriculum Conference of recommended that the child should use his mother tongue(MT) as well as learn English Language and any other language as a third language. Another attempt was made in 1970 at the Conference of Higher Level of Teachers training when it was suggested that Secondary school teachers should be trained in MTs, English and French. Further modifications came in 1974 with the approval of English Language, Edo, Efik, Hausa, Igbo, Arabic and Yoruba as media of instruction at the primary and secondary school levels.

**The 1979 Nigeria Constitution recommended that:** The business of the National Assembly shall be conducted in English; Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo when adequate arrangements have been made. The House of Assembly should use English as well as languages spoken in the State as they house may by resolution approve. Further modifications were made in 2004 as captured in the National Policy on Education: that MTs or the language of immediate community be used as language of instruction in pre-primary and primary schools and English language at the later stage. It also recommended that in the junior school, English should be both medium of instruction as well as a subject and any of the three indigenous languages – Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo be taught.

These government policies have aroused language loyalty or ethnic loyalty of speakers of minor languages. The prime position given to the three major languages in the Nigerian constitution is greeted with stiff protests on the grounds that it is a deliberate attempt to impose the language and by extension, the cultures of majority tribes on minority tribes. (Iwara 1988, quoted In Danladi, 2007).The constitutional provision that Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba be adopted as national languages and consequently be taught in Nigerian Primary and Secondary Schools was greatly opposed by speakers of minority languages. Consequently, this position was revised to read in section 19 sub section 4 of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution that 'Government shall promote the learning of indigenous languages'.

## Implementation Realities

An attempt to evaluate the success of language policy/planning efforts in Nigeria will reveal some setbacks owing to the failure of corpus planning to match status planning realities. This situation upholds Bambose's (1991 p. 111.) argument that language planning policies in Africa is still largely characterized by problems such as avoidance, vagueness, arbitrariness, fluctuation and declaration without implementation'. Emenanjo (1998) simply describes it as the lack of 'functional' national language policy. There is no gain saying that the National Assembly does not use any indigenous language(s) in their transactions and only a negligible number of State Houses of Assembly use it. The provisional clause, 'adequate provision' is never provided for by Nigerian politicians. The implementation of the language policy on education is either totally neglected in some states or partially implemented in some others. The situation is worsened by the influx of private players in the educational sector. These privately owned schools operate various curricular ranging from American, British to a hybrid-curriculum. Though these foreign curricular expose Nigerian children to world class education, only a few of these schools, if not none, teaches indigenous languages as subjects or uses them as media of instruction. Like every well written document, the National language policy, Olaofe (1990, P. 51) concludes is 'quite beautiful on paper'.

This sociolinguistic situation is greatly influenced by the belief that English is the greatest legacy bequeathed to the people at the end of colonialism (Bambose, 1971), Kebby (1986). Nigeria, by constitutional provision is both endoglossic and exoglossic but following inadequate planning and poor implementation procedures Nigeria is more practically becoming purely exoglossic. Nigeria's multilingualism has been interwoven with the nation's multi-ethnicity, education, religion and politics. Egbokhare, (2001, p. 105) describes this situation and observed that:

In a multilingualism society, competition for power often leads to unwholesome intervention in the normal course of change of language usage patterns through language planning and politics. Once a people occupy a dominant position, they strive hard to maintain their pre-eminence.

This competition for domination has immensely affected the language situation in Nigeria.

Udonata (2008, p. 15) in his assessment, asserted:

Our natural endowment and multilingual potentials have been stultified by selfish language planners and policies. The situation is manipulated in such a way that the languages are equated with particular politicians and their tribes. Since politics involves an ability to identify the enemy, most of our languages have been written off as anti-government. In our particular tribal situation, things are never allowed to take their natural courses.

It is important to note that a second language learners' attitude towards a target language is based on motivation variables towards the language. The perceived relevance of a language has a great impact on the learners' attitude. The official status accorded English language in Nigeria has influenced the attitude of learners towards the language. Despite the language policy provisions, indigenous language; (including the decamillionaires) are seldom used in high domains. The attitude towards the indigenous language received a very low motivation owing to the fact that English language is used in all areas of life advancements of a typical Nigerian. Therefore elite parents speak English to their children sometimes exclusively to make room for the children to first of all acquire this all important Language (English). Yet English is not sacred by law.

The implication is that with the present rate of urbanization and technological advancement more Nigerian children are becoming L1 speakers of English Language.

The policy provision of language of immediate community at the early state of learning is fast becoming only practicable in the rural areas where native languages are spoken and maintained. Even at that, the Nigerian child in the rural area is disadvantaged if he is compelled to use only the native language of immediate community which has low value and prestige and is not the language of technology.

The solution, perhaps, lies in the structural adjustment of the society. Language issues in communities the world over have connections with economic, political and religious affiliation of the speakers. The cases of French and in English Canada and Hindi in India are examples.

English language continues to occupy a prime position by status and function following the failure of the WAZOBIA theoretical framework- (the proposed three major indigenous languages). English functions as the language of accommodation, participation and social mobility. As a world language, English serves as a link between people of multilingual societies of Africa and the outside world. For political expediency, the choice of English language allays the fear of domination which hitherto characterized the choice of some indigenous languages over the others. Odebutmi (2005) corroborates this view in the opinion that English is the only means open to individuals from different ethnic and linguistic groups to interact. The argument therefore is that with English, we are equally disadvantaged.

However, despite this seemingly timid and flat-footed national language policy, a trilingual policy which hypocritically accords official status to three indigenous languages, there is need to acknowledge that there have been some provisions and institutional arrangements towards developing local languages. The Nigerian Educational Research Development Council (NERDC) has produced curricular for primary, junior and senior secondary schools in Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba, the council has equally produced Braille Orthographies and funded Meta language projects in these three indigenous languages.

In another development, the National language Centre (now renamed Language Development Centre) has equally produced four manuals of Nigerian Orthographies covering twenty languages, a Quadra lingual dictionary on legislative terminologies in English, Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba; primary science terminology in Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba; and harmonized syllabuses for Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba in colleges of education.

The National Institute for Nigerian Languages has also been established presumably to train teachers in indigenous languages. Although laudable, these measures, according to Essien (1998, P.10). have come a little two late... and therefore fall short of the tremendous and sustained efforts, energies and commitment that European governments put to develop their own natural languages to cope with the linguistic needs of their own respective societies.

The foregoing explains the unfortunate situation whereby English has remained the dominant language in Nigeria, one defined in Essien (1996) as ' a language in a multilingual setting which, regardless of size, usually invests its speakers not only with a full panoply of uses that signify a standard language but also with prestige, self-confidence and power.

### Conclusion

Language planning policies in Africa and indeed Nigeria is characterized with problems both at the status planning and corpus planning levels. The peculiar linguistic, structural and geographical construct of the country militates assiduously against the success of language policy. The unfortunate situation dates back to colonial era when English was planted and accorded the highest functional load above other Nigerian languages. The adjusted and re-adjusted language policy on education lacks strength to get Nigeria out of this dilemma. Instead of the language planning efforts to produce a national language, the English language has continued to expand in status and function. It is the opinion of this paper that until both economic and political power are decentralized, to give room for proper national development of all regions artificially glued and bound by a thin thread (English Language), mutual suspicions among ethnic groups will continue to trail any attempt at a workable language planning in Nigeria. It is important for the three regions to feel sufficiently empowered to promote mutual respect and trust. When regional languages develop, ethnic walls will begin to collapse and the acceptance of the selected trilingual national language model will be accomplished. Over time, these national languages may take over some of the functional loads of English language.

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