



Integrating Indigenous Language to Promote Unity in Diversity among Broadcast Media in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT: This paper interrogates the status of indigenous language in promoting unity in diversity among broadcast media in Nigeria. The paper is exploratory in nature, as it utilises the descriptive research method whereby relevant literature, documents and records were consulted and analysed based on the existing literature. The paper is predominantly based on information derived from the qualitative data using secondary sources, such as relevant texts, journals, official publications, historical documents and the Internet, which served as tangible sources of insight into the analysis. The method help findings in the works available, check the consistency of such findings, evaluates such findings with other findings. Based on the findings, English is the dominant language of use followed by the major national languages of Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. English is nationally dominant, but the three major languages are regionally applied with Hausa commanding higher airtime across majority of the states in Northern part of Nigeria; Igbo in the Southeast and Yoruba ranks next to English in the Southwest. In the South-south, Pidgin and some indigenous languages rank next to English. Instead of a rise in indigenous language use in broadcasting in the country, the situation appears to be worsening because most broadcasters find it economically unattractive and financially costly to run news and programs in the indigenous languages. The study concludes that there is a weakness in the use of indigenous language among broadcast media in Nigeria. The use of indigenous language among broadcast media has been ignored in the communication industry. The study concludes that there is a need for language policy, because in the domain of mass communication today, the use of indigenous language is not properly addressed.

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INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is a diverse country that has a huge population of about 200 million people, who speak over 450 dialects across 526 ethnic groups who are adherents of Islam, Christianity, Traditional African Religion and or Atheism (Pate, 2021). It is multicultural, pluralistic and heterogeneous. These diversities are manifested in the citizens' cultural and religious practices with more than 450 ethnic groups. The 2018 Ethnologic Data listed Nigeria as having 526 languages. Of these, 519 are living language and seven are extinct. Of the living languages, 509 are indigenous and ten are non-indigenous. Furthermore, 19 are institutional, 78 are developing, 348 are vigorous, 30 are in trouble and 44 are dying (Ethnologue in Pate, 2021). Of the figure,

three are national major languages, 13 are state languages, and over 44 are local languages. Languages considered either too small or non-dominant in any existing political or administrative territory were not listed. Some of the languages are spoken across states with national prevalence and large number of speakers while the majorities are restricted to specific locations in the states and local governments.

The mass media have devoted time and space to reporting diversity, focusing on the conflicts that occur when social groups express frustrations caused by exclusion or discrimination by authorities. The Fragile States Index (2017) rated the country as the 13th least stable nation in the world after Somalia, Yemen, South Sudan, and Central Africa (Found for Peace Report,

2017). The country is segmented on the lines of politics, religion, ethnicity and socio-economic differences. Expectedly, these diversities and contradictions like ideology, religion, regionalism, ethnicity and politics of resource allocation, power sharing and other divisive national tendencies are reflected and debated in the contents of the media without resolutions.

Diversity connotes multiculturalism, plurality and variety. Naturally, these complex diversities would have positive as well as negative consequences and influences on the social milieu of the people. Positively, these diversities form the basis of unity in the nation. Negatively, competitive tendencies and poor management of diversity issues have resulted in explosions that had violently rocked the basis of the country. However, these should not be unexpected in a complex Nigeria where the points of shocks and conflicts are manifold and widespread. In the mix, there are flashpoints of shocks produced by differentiation in expectations and behaviours of individuals and groups. Naturally, too, perceptions differ, many a time to the point of conflict. In all of these, the media and other means of information dissemination and exchange occupy a central position in the process of decision making, opinion formation and behaviour manifestation (Oso, 2018).

Broadcasting is a leading source of public information, a significant knowledge-based institution, and a key element of influence in Nigeria. This is as a result of culture, economics, and structural, as well as systematic factors. Access to terrestrial radio and television signals is free, even though, majority of television stations are now on pay platforms received through subscription. Radio and television are popular in Nigeria for numerous reasons. Many of the cultures in the land are orally oriented; in majority of communities, people talk and listen far more than they read or write. Likewise, the prevailing economic status of the majority of the citizens coupled with a low reading culture limit the reach and influence of the print medium while television is still not freely and easily accessible nationwide for reasons of reach and cost. For the social media, personal computers are out of the reach of most citizens because of income inhibition and broadband limitation. Most people depend on handheld devices to access the internet (Pate, 2021).

Nigeria is 58 year old as an independent nation. Yet, it is still struggling with facts about its social reality. Ethno religious violence and general fear of the unknown are literarily redefining the concepts of understanding and trust as the basis of peaceful coexistence in different parts of the country. The nation is literarily grappling with basic issues about it identify as a people, understanding and accepting it diversities, and being able to effectively and equitably manage the

realities of pluralism. In all of that, the media have been variously involved in defining the issues of integration and relationships in the heavily multicultural and diverse country. Indeed, the use of indigenous language to promote unity in diversity among broadcast media in the context of Nigeria is apt. Without repeating it, the advantages of connecting with the general population in the communities through their local languages are numerous. People need credible information in the languages they understand best, especially in this information age when they are bombarded with boundless information from unknown sources in the language that they do not sufficiently understand to digest.

Within this context, the study is exploratory in nature, as it utilises the descriptive research method whereby relevant literature, documents and records were consulted and analysed based on the existing literature in order to interrogate the use of indigenous language in promoting unity in diversity among broadcast media in Nigeria. The study is predominantly based on information derived from the qualitative data using secondary sources, such as relevant texts, journals, official publications, historical documents and the Internet, which served as tangible sources of insight into the analysis. However, the inquiry is strictly limited to data found in scholarly journals, books, internet and libraries. The method was used to evaluate such findings with other existing literature on the subject matter. The method help findings in the works available, check the consistency of such findings, evaluates such findings with other findings.

Purpose and Objectives of the Study

The study examines the use of integrating indigenous language in promoting unity in diversity among broadcast media in Nigeria. To achieve this broad aim, the following specific objectives are set:

1. To examine the use of indigenous language among broadcast media in Nigeria.
2. To interrogate the pattern of indigenous language in local broadcast stations in Nigeria.
3. To identify the dominant reasons for low use of indigenous language among broadcast media in Nigeria.

The Context of Nigeria

Nigeria operates the presidential system of democratic governance across three layers. The country has a poverty index of 67.1% with about 42.4% of the population living below the poverty line (World Bank in Pate, 2021). The context is characterized by high unemployment, acrimony on national unity, challenges in the country's agriculture, education, healthcare, democracy, the justice system, defense expenditure, crime control, protecting the environment and fighting corruption and economic crimes (Pate, 2021).

Nigeria is a nation in tension. The Fragile States Index (2017) rated the country as the 13th least stable nation in the world after Somalia, Yemen, South Sudan, and Central Africa (Fund for Peace Report, 2017). Pate (2021) remarks that Nigeria is hugely diverse with complex structural, systemic and existential challenges that produce tensions and threats, which in some cases explode into violence, terror, hatred and irredentist tendencies that affect security, order and peaceful conduct of individuals, groups and communities. The country has fought a civil war, experienced a devastating insurgency (Boko Haram) and battling numerous conflicts, extreme terror and violent crimes in the Niger Delta, kidnappings, armed robberies, and high profile financial corruption, drug and human trafficking. All of that make the society tense, dangerous and conflict ridden.

There are multiple points of violent conflicts, acts of terrorism and crimes. For instance, the nation's Chief of Army Staff, according to *Saturday Sun*, September, 22 (2017) summarized the context thus:

Our country is faced with threats ranging from Boko Haram insurgency in the Northeast to others, such as armed banditry, cattle rustling, armed and sea robberies and piracy, militancy, cultism and cult related violence, kidnapping and hostage taking, pipeline vandalism, illegal oil bunkering and crude oil theft, illegal refining of petroleum, herdsman farmers clashes, activities of IPOB and other separatist groups (P. 21).

The situation is compounded by deep rooted culture of systematic corruption in the country. On a consistent basis, Transparency International has rated the country poorly on the global corruption index (TI, 2016). In September, 2017, a national corruption survey by the United Nation Office for Drugs and Crimes, the European Union and the Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics found that 46.4% of Nigerians have had "bribery contact" with police officers, 33% with prosecutors and 31.5% with Judges or Magistrates. The survey revealed that custom officers, judges, magistrates and prosecutors were the public officials who received the largest average cash bribes from Nigerians. The study also found that "a third of Nigeria adults (32.3%) who had contact with a public official between June 2015 and May 2016 had to pay were requested to pay a bribe to that public official" (NBS Website, 2017).

Corruption in Nigeria is a very complex phenomenon that affects every facet of life in the country. In the words of a former Chief Justice of the country, Mahmud Mohammed (*Daily Times*, July 19, 2016), corruption in the Nigerian context "breaches the

fundamental human rights of citizens, undermines the collective security; aggravates poverty, while threatening the legitimacy of constitutional governance and democracy." Corruption has been majorly responsible for the country's underdevelopment, poor elements that breed desperation, frustration and aggression in the system. In the words of Ogunmupe in Pate (2021) (*The Guardian*, September 9, 2016), over time, corruption has shattered the confidence of citizens, organizations, and investors in the Nigerian governance system.

Recently, government at a point appeared unable to enforce governance in some parts of the country because of insurgency and militancy, thereby disrupting social harmony, undermining the productive sector and arresting development. In a scenario where leaders, legislators and ministers and other government functionaries are perceived to be corrupt, private sector organisations and investors also try to shirk their duties. They find ways to avoid tax... the result is that government is deprived of income to sustain the security and development of the nation (Ogunmupe in Pate, 2021). As a result of corruption and poor governance, governments fail to address crucial issues that can promote societal harmony, which in a way intensifies conflict over resources, political offices, and desperation in the land.

Expectedly, all of the diversities and contradictions in the Nigerian nation are reflected in the country's media. Issues like ideology, religion, regionalism, ethnicity, and politics of resources allocation, power sharing and other divisive national tendencies are openly debated in the media.

Interrogating Media Power

The belief in the power of media, leading to the powerful effect theory of the media (hypodermic needle or bullet theory), arose after the First World War. Combatants during the war mobilised the mass media in prosecuting the war. The results, according to McQuail (2010), seemed to leave little doubt of the potency of media influence on the masses; when effectively managed and directly. The belief was further reinforced by what happened in Europe before and during the 2nd World War. By the middle of the 20th century, the potency of the mass media as instruments of propaganda and mass persuasion and for shaping opinions and influencing behaviour, both at national and international levels, was already well established.

From this period, the idea that the media, public relations and propaganda, can be used to 'manufacture consent' was born and has been growing. Towards this effort, many techniques and strategies have been devised to influence perception, popular thinking and behaviour. Lasswell, who was a prominent

figure in communication studies, produced his work detailing techniques of propaganda based on his experience during the war. Many news and information management techniques have been deployed, all in the attempt to influence and manipulate news coverage. Film and entertainment have been produced as tools of advocacy, and opinion, attitude and behaviour change. Wittingly or unwittingly, the main assumption behind these efforts is the belief that the mass media can influence their audiences. These assumptions started with the powerful effect paradigm which “extends from the turn of the century, until the 1930s...” (McQuail, 2010).

The conception of the media audience prevalent during this period was based on fear of the deleterious effect of the mass media on a weak, rootless, isolated, atomistic and passive mass of people. The mass media were assumed to be very powerful in influencing the behaviour of such vulnerable individuals. This image of the audience is of course based on the mass society theory. The media were regarded as having the power to directly and immediately affect the individuals who come in contact with their messages. The minds of such individuals are so open and empty that they were ready to accept any message that hit them. The media message is like a bullet.

Though there still the tendency to credit the media with so much power to influence public opinion and behaviour, scholars have revised their position. McQuail dates this revision to the 1960s when social science research into the process of Mass Communication started in earnest, particularly in the United States. Klapper’s influential statement to the effect that “mass communication does not ordinarily serve as a necessary and sufficient cause of audience effect, but rather functions through nexus of mediating factor” (Klapper, 1960) set the stage for the reformulation of the paradigm. The point is that, it was not that the media were totally impotent or have no effect, but that the media operate within “pre-existing structure of social relationships and in a given social and cultural context” (Pate & Oso, 2017). It was argued that these factors took primacy in shaping the opinions, attitudes and behaviour and also moved from looking for immediate and direct effects towards long term cognitive change towards what people learn from the media, effects on climate of opinion, definitions of social reality (McQuail, 2010).

Theoretical Framework

The study is explicated within the context of theoretical framework of Issue Attention Cycle Theory, which Msughter (2018) believes has the potential to contribute to the understanding of the use of indigenous language to promote unity in diversity among broadcast

media in Nigeria. This is because the level of attention that members of any society accords an issue hardly remains as strong as it usually is initially it fades with time. In this perspective, public’s focus of attention is much like a cycle that has different points, bends and turns. Hardly exhaustive are studies on the rate at which the public’s interest in and attention to certain issues may fade just after their expression of concerns about given issues in the society. Contextually couched in the public opinion research tradition, Down’s theory assumes that public attention to an issue follows an issue attention cycle through which members of the public become aware of issues, with the interest petering out eventually. In Down’s perspective, public attention rarely remain sharply focused on any single domestic issue for a long period, no matter how crucial, significant or relevant the matter may seem to the society. He adds that the public may stop paying significant level attention even if it involves a continuing issue of curial importance to society; it simply fades off public attention (just how the use indigenous language in Nigeria is fading off).

According to Down (1972) what works on the consciousness of the public regarding issues, lies in what he called an ‘issue attention cycle’, which he offers insight into how long public attention is likely to remain sufficiently focused on any given issue until it generates enough pressure to cause actions aimed at effectively changing the status quo. As he notes, the cycle functions in five stages that may vary in duration depending on the particular issue involved. The stages occur in the following sequence:

Preproblem stage: this is the point of what down calls ‘highly undesirable social condition’ in society, but where much public attention to the situation has not yet arisen. However, certain interest groups or experts are already aware of the condition.

Stage of alarmed discovery and euphoric enthusiasm: Down calls this the stage where a series of dramatic event (such as the issue of indigenous language) forces the public into sudden awareness and alarm regarding the social problem. The alarmed discovery is invariably accompanied by euphoric enthusiasm about society’s ability to solve the situation.

Stage of realising the cost of significant progress: here, having been alarmed to the situation, gradually a realisation spreads concerning the huge financial and personal cost to be borne in ‘solving’ it. Thus, the public begin to believe that part of the problem stems from the way the society is currently arranged to benefit some large number while leaving out others, and so will need to be rearranged so that certain benefits can go round the society. For example, the involvement of the broadcast media in using

indigenous language to promote unity in diversity in Nigeria.

Stage of gradual decline of intense public interest: resulting from the third stage of cost of solving the problem, the fourth stage ushers in a gradual decline in the levels of interest and attention that the public now accord the problem. Beside, as more people realise how personally difficult and costly that solving the problem will be, three reactions surge from them: discouragement, felling positively threatened by thinking about the problem, and boredom with the issue or the problem.

The post problem stage: at this final stage in the cycle, a problem, which already has been replaced by newer ones, enters into 'limbo', the realm of lesser attention and interest from the public. However, 'limb' problem now has a different relation to public attention than it did at the first stage, the Preproblem stage. As such, there is a nexus between the theory and the study as issue attention cycle is relevant to this study because it has the potential to contribute to the understanding of

how broadcast media can promote unity in diversity using indigenous language.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Use of Indigenous Language in Nigeria

Pate (2021) observed that the diversity in languages in the country is reflected in the media landscape. He maintained that there are few regional newspapers that publish in the major languages in their areas of operations. The use of specific language is informed by government policies and directions (as for public stations), availability of relevant audience, location, commercial viability, and ownership decision. For example, Pate (2021) data on languages use for broadcasting on radio and television stations across the 36 states and the FCT indicate that English is the dominant language of broadcasting followed by the three major languages of Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo. Even at that there is a significant gap in favour of hours allotted English across the states. See table 1 below:

Table-1: Language Use in each State and FCT

S/No	State	Major Language	Indigenous Language(s)
1	Abia	English, Igbo	Pidgin
2.	Adamawa	English, Hausa	Fulfulde
3.	Akwa Ibom	English, Pidgin	Ibibio
4.	Anambra	English, Igbo	-----
5.	Bauchi	English, Hausa	Fulfulde
6.	Bayelsa	English, Pidgin	Ijaw, Nembe
7.	Benue	English, Tiv	Idoma, Pidgin
8.	Borno	English, Hausa	Kanuri
9.	Cross Rivers	English, Efik	Bekwara, Ijagam
10.	Delta	English, Pidgin	-----
11.	Ebonyi	English, Pidgin	Igbo
12.	Edo	English, Pidgin	Edo
13.	Enugu	English, Pidgin	Pidgin
14.	Ekiti	English, Yoruba	-----
15.	FCT	English,	Pidgin, Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba and Gbagyi
16.	Gombe	English, Hausa	Fulfulde, Tangale
17.	Imo	English, Igbo	Pidgin
18.	Jigawa	English, Hausa	Fulfulde
19.	Kaduna	English, Hausa	Pidgin
20.	Kano	Hausa, English	Fulfulde
21.	Katsina	Hausa, English	-----
22.	Kebbi	Hausa, English	Fulfulde, Dakarci
23.	Kogi	English, Pidgin	Hausa, Igala, Igbira
24.	Kwara	English, Pidgin	Yoruba
25.	Lagos	English, Yoruba	Pidgin
26.	Nassarawa	English, Hausa	-----
27.	Niger	English, Hausa	Nupe, Gbagyi
28.	Ogun	English, Yoruba	-----
29.	Ondo	English, Yoruba	-----
30.	Osun	English, Yoruba	-----
31.	Oyo	English, Yoruba	Pidgin

32.	Plateau	English, Hausa	-----
33.	Rivers	English, Pidgin	Kalabari
34.	Sokoto	Hausa, English	Fulfulde, Jukun
35.	Taraba	English, Hausa	Fulfulde, Jukun
36.	Yobe	English, Hausa	Kanuri
37.	Zamfara	Hausa, English	Fulfulde

Source: (Pate, 2021).

The results from the states revealed that indigenous languages reflect socio-cultural and demographic factors in the states and zones. For example, in the Northwest region of the country, Hausa covers between 80 to 85% of the broadcasting space on radio state funded radio, but not on federal government or private TV stations. Except for English, other indigenous languages hardly broadcasted content that exceed total of two hours per language per week. Most stations broadcast news in English and one or two other languages depending on location. Television stations are dominantly engaged in broadcasting in English Language with limited programming in the major indigenous languages of Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba and newscast in few of the indigenous languages in some of the states.

The use of indigenous languages is comparatively better on state owned radio stations where there are defined political directions or policies on broadcasting in local languages to reflect the diversities in the states. That has obligated many states radio and to a lesser extent, television stations, to broadcast in selected indigenous languages. Most stations have popular politically oriented programs that are generally broadcast in English and Hausa in the North; English and Yoruba, Igbo, and Pidgin in the South. Few exceptions of such programs in local languages like Fulfulde exist in Adamawa State. Overall, except for Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba, indigenous languages are lowly presented on the country's broadcast media in Nigeria.

Pattern of Indigenous Language use in Local Broadcast Stations

Pate (2021) findings also show that English is the leading language of broadcasting across the country. Depending on location, specific major languages like Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba rank next to English. The result from the study revealed the following:

- a. Broadcasting in indigenous languages reflect socio-cultural and demographic factors in the states and zones in the Northwest region of the country, Hausa covers between 80-85% of the broadcasting space on radio states funded radio, but not on federal government or private TV stations. Except for English, other indigenous languages hardly broadcast content that exceed total of two hours per language per week.
- b. Most stations broadcast news in English and one or two other languages depending on location. Television

stations are dominantly engaged in broadcasting in English language with limited programming in the major indigenous languages of Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba and newscast in few of the indigenous languages in some of the states.

- c. The use of indigenous languages is comparatively better on state owned radio stations where there are defined political directions or policies on broadcasting in local languages to reflect the diversities in the states. That has obligated many state radio and to a lesser extent, television stations, to broadcast in selected indigenous languages.
- d. Most stations have popular politically oriented programs that are generally broadcast in English and Hausa in the North; English and Yoruba, Igbo and pidgin in the South. Few exceptions of such programs in local languages like Fulfulde exist in Adamawa State.
- e. Overall, except for Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba, indigenous languages are lowly represented on the country's broadcast media.

Reasons for Low Use of Indigenous Languages among Broadcast Media in Nigeria

Media organisations (print and broadcast), according to Pate (2021) have low representation and use of indigenous languages for a number of reasons as established thus:

- 1) The deregulation of broadcasting in 1992 opened up the sector for private broadcast media ownership and caused shifts from government controlled broadcast stations with policies on indigenous language use to profit oriented broadcast stations that dominantly use English and the major languages for economic reasons.
- 2) Multiplicity of indigenous languages: there are hundreds of local languages across the communities with varying functions, demographic strengths and linguistic status. Consequently, many of the stations find it economically unviable to broadcast in most of the local languages for wider communication range.
- 3) Socio-political and linguistic complexities: based on the complexities and politics involved in the selection and use of indigenous languages in the public domain, broadcast stations tend to restrict their choices to the provision of their establishing laws and the interest of the proprietors. In most locations, people can easily communicate in one or more indigenous languages.
- 4) Spread of the languages: there are some local languages apart from the three major languages (Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba) like Pidgin, Fulfulde, Tiv or Kanuri with fairly

large number of speakers across multiple states. Such languages are adopted in some stations in the states.

- 5) Political decisions: the use of some of the languages is politically derived from the state or federal government. In this case, the political decision is simply an act of social responsibility to give every group some sense of inclusivity and sense of belonging.
- 6) Elite attitudes: in many of the communities, a large section of the elites prefer communicating in English and the major languages to the detriment of their indigenous languages. That attitude is replicated in the media where they are dominant players in many respects.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, the study concludes that there is a weakness in the use of indigenous language among broadcast media in Nigeria. The use of indigenous language among broadcast media has been ignored in the communication industry. Apparently, the ultimate aim of the media is to serve as a platform for people to share information on issues that affect them, using the language they understand better. Thus, content in the media is like blood in the human body. There is a commercial viability in the use of indigenous language in Nigeria. Generally, there is a quantitative improvement in the use of indigenous language in Nigeria, but broadcast media need to do more because language eat up other languages, as such, there is a need to address the issue of indigenous language among broadcast media in Nigeria.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Drawing from the findings, the study recommends that:

1. There is a need for language policy, because in the domain of mass communication today, the use of indigenous language is not properly addressed.
2. There is a need to have constant training of journalists in the broadcast media in order to address the challenge of indigenous language in Nigeria.

3. The use of database is also important in the move to promote the quality of indigenous language as well as language policy. In terms of language policy, journalism is not language specific.

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