



Acceptability of Nigeria's 2022 Language Policy in Adamawa State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Nigeria, right from its colonial periods, kept on promulgating language policies, and on November 30th 2022, one came into effect. As has often been the case with the previous policies, the new policy came to face oppositions. Peoples' attitudes to the new policy were surveyed in Adamawa State in order to determine the level of its acceptability. The study applied the descriptive survey research design, and an online questionnaire for data collection. The emerging data, having been subjected to simple percentage grading, indicated low attitude and low motivation of the people towards both acquisition and use of their indigenous languages, and high towards the English Languages. The study, furthermore, rejected the use of mother tongue as language of instruction in schools. The study, thus, concluded that the policy stands rejected in Adamawa State. Therefore, the study advised that people for whom language policy is meant should be consulted before promulgating a language policy, and that to come out with a successful language policy, language engineers must rest their plan on language practice and the peoples' ideology towards existing languages in their societies.

Keywords: language policy, language planning, language practice, language ideology, language motivations

I. Introductory Background

On the 30th Day of November 2022, the Federal Government of Nigeria introduced a new national language policy to make up for observed defects in the then existing, 2004 language policy. However, no sooner than the policy was launched, it faced negative criticisms from various corners of the Nigerian society, to the extent that the policy sounded unacceptable among the people (Tolu 2022). Language policy, as Nordiques (2016) observes, is enacted to cater for the linguistic roles in achieving the aspirations of a society. Since the aspirations of Nigeria are closely tied to her educational philosophy, her language policies are

as well tied to her policies on education. This partly explains why Nigeria keeps on unveiling policies upon policies on education, and all of which remain tied to language policies. These policies, however, are often met with various challenges immediately they surface.

Challenges to language policies arise out of desires to reject the often imposed language policies. As Yaqub (2023) observes, language policies should rest on two pillars, ideology and language practice, and governed by language use rules and regulations. It, however, remains doubtful whether these factors have been being considered whenever language policies are being carved for Nigeria, for policy designers, very often, rely on language use rules and regulations in their process of promulgating language policies.

Ideology is one of the driving forces that lead to accepting, or rejecting a phenomenon (Haryo & Dwi, 2022). As such, language ideology would serve as driving force for accepting or rejecting a language policy; where a people's ideology towards a policy is positive, there is a high tendency that such a policy goes acceptable among them, and where the ideology is negative, the tendency would tilt towards rejection. Haryo & Dwi (2022: 12-29) hold that language ideology is "a set of self-evident ideas and objectives a group holds concerning roles of a language in the social experiences of members as they contribute to the expressions of the group". It can, therefore, be concluded that language ideology plays a crucial role in a language policy acceptability.

Language use practice is closely tied to what Seven (2022) calls language motivation. According to him, we learn, acquire or use a language because we are motivated to do such. He further distinguishes two types of language motivation, basing on psychological theories of motivation- the intrinsic and the extrinsic motivations. In intrinsic motivation the language user is internally, or self-motivated to use a language, whereas the motivation occurs externally in extrinsic motivation. Thus, the factor of



language ideology and motivation for language use are interwoven, and dependent upon one another. Unfortunately, both language ideology and language practice pattern do not appear to be considered when designing a language policy for Nigeria, the result of which is the promulgation of language use rules that may not conform to the citizen's language practice and ideology.

The Problem

Language policies are enacted to salvage situations in multilingual societies (Ibrahimov, 2023; Romaine, 2024). The arising challenging situations in multilingual societies include clamors for dominance, and resistance to such dominance over political, social, economic and educational aspirations. However, some language policies, such as the 2022 Nigeria's, often face rejection challenges from those the policies are meant for. Such policies often reflect the feelings of those in power, without necessarily contacting the wider population (Haryo, & Dwi, 2022).

Several studies address the problems in the pre-2022 Nigerian national language policies as derived from the earlier National Policies on Education. Ibrahim & Gwandu (2016) studied the problems of implementing emerging language policies, and found that Nigerian language policies fell short of preparedness for implementation, because of inadequate language cultivation materials. Olagboju (2014) studied the challenges that emanate from the course of implementing Nigeria's language policies within the education system, and found problems of selecting language statuses in schools. Emananjo (1998) looked at the role of multilingualism in resources management in Nigeria; he concluded that who gets what share of Nigerian resources depends on his ethnicity.

However, there still remains much to be done as reasons for the often negative criticisms language policies meet remain not focused on. Following from Brudner & White (1978)'s findings that even parents contribute to pattern of language acquisition and learning among their children, and from Cavanaugh (2020)'s conclusion that language ideology mediates between language practice and language policy, this work investigates whether the people of Adamawa State have positive attitudes towards Nigeria's 2022 National Language Policy, and whether their language practice agrees with the provisions of the language policy, in order to determine its level of acceptability.

Aim and Objectives

The study was conceived to determine whether the newly emerged National Language Policy (2022) of Nigeria is acceptable among the people of Adamawa State. To achieve this aim, the following objectives were raised.

- a). Determine the pattern of language practice in in Adamawa State.
- b). Determine the dominant languages in in Adamawa State.
- c). Determine the relation between language practice and religious affiliation in Adamawa State
- d). Determine the motivating factors in language choice in Adamawa State

Study Questions

The following questions were raised to guide the study

- a). How are languages used in Adamawa State?
- b). What is the dominant language in Adamawa State?
- c). What is the relation between the preferred language of communication and religious affiliation in Adamawa State?
- d). Which languages do language use motivating factors favour in Adamawa State?

Limitations of the Study

There arose a problem of responding to the questionnaire on paper, which led to change from responding on paper to online responses. This further reduced the sample size to only 282, respondents to represent a population of 4,902,100. Earlier on, a sample size of 4,200 (0.08%) was targeted. However, when the questionnaire was printed on paper, a non-significant number of the filled questionnaire was returned, so short a number that reasonable conclusion could not be drawn from. Thus, the work was left with no other option than relying on a sample size that emerged from online responses, 282 respondents, to represent a population of 4,902,100.

II. Literature Review

Language policy is understood as the conception, direction and, or documentation on languages statuses and their preferential uses in a multilingual setting. The term is often interchangeably used with such other concepts as language planning, language engineering, and language policy and language planning. However, this study notes that a language policy is the



product of language planning, hence establishes the distinction between language policy and language planning, even though both address the phenomenon of selective use of languages in a multilingual setting.

Romaine (2024) posits that language policy is "...all about choices made in domains of language or from the macro, or polity level, or micro, or community level, to the micro or individual level". What can be noted here is the position of 'choice' in understanding the concept of language policy. Choice, for instance, arises in a situation of abundance, in our own case, language planning occurs in a multilingual setting, such as Nigeria. Nigeria is said to be the third most multilingual nation on the globe, with about 527 living languages, behind the first, Papua New Guinea, with 840 living languages, and the second, Indonesia with 715 living languages as of Sunday, April 21, 2024 (Worldometer.info). Although Nigeria herself adds about 100 more living languages to make 625 (Sahara Reporters, 30/11/2023) to her account, the fact remains that Nigeria is a highly multilingual country that would call for language planning and language policy.

The desire to achieve national objectives ignites the need for language planning, consequent upon which emerges language policy. As Ibrahimov (2023) puts it, "Language policy is understood as ensuring national unity, economic conditions and political reasons for interfering with the forms and functions of languages within the framework of political power". This implies that countries which are multilingual plan for the forms and functions of their languages to help them achieve conceived national objectives.

In the case of Nigeria, Warner (2022) notes that its language policies aim to achieve four objectives of:

1. National unity
2. Equality of opportunities
3. Permanence of literacy and numeracy
4. Linguistic competence and literacy for higher education

This, perhaps, explains why Nigeria's language policies are always tied to its education policies, and often surface together. Ibrahimov further rests the principles of language policy on a tripartite pillar of language ideology, language practice, and language management. In this opinion the term language ideology is used to conceive the set of beliefs language owners have about their own languages, language practice is used in the sense of selective use of languages, and language management is understood as language policy

itself, which embodies legislations on the mode of language use, especially in specific domains of social intercourse. Yaqub (2023) shares this view when he opines that language policy is a triangular pyramid with language practice on one of its vertices, language ideology on the second and language policy on the third. This implies that language policy is a complex phenomenon that requires a number of dimensions to consider.

A given government in its bid to achieve a national objective, may plan to interfere with the natural course of a people's beliefs about their languages, the way they selectively use their languages; only to legislate to them which language should be used, and for which purpose. As such, Zheng & Huang (2024) see language planning as "Any specific efforts to modify or influence the language practice pattern and language ideology of a people". It should be remembered that if languages were left to fare on spontaneously, they would continue on their social roles at birth. Situations, however, calling for preferring one language over the others may emerge, thus engendering language preference in favour of a given language, and consequently a language policy.

Language Ideology

Language ideology, otherwise linguistic ideology is a key factor in determining the pattern of language practice in a multilingual society. Haryo & Dwi (2022: 12-29) define language ideology as "... a set of beliefs about languages as they are used in the social worlds". To Haryo & Dwi, languages are instruments for representation of power and ideology, and as such, a language mirrors the ideology of the user; his language ideology would in turn determine his allegiance to a linguistic group. This situation can lead to discriminatory use of languages in a society. When this situation arises authorities wed in to mediate in the use of these languages to favour collective interests.

Woolard (2020) defines language ideology as "A morally or politically loaded representation of the nature, structure and use of languages in a social world". This Assertion points that moral values and politics of a society shape its beliefs about its languages. This can be seen when one appreciates the role politics plays in proposing, and even enforcing the course of languages in a multilingual society, such as done in language planning, whose result is a language policy. Resistance to these policies often emerge when



language owners fail to see motivating reasons for embracing what the authorities propose.

Language ideology decides people's relation to their languages, and to their relation pattern with others' languages. This notion, according to Cavanaugh (2020), mediates "between the social practice of language and the socioeconomic and political structures within which it occurs". This signifies that a person's language ideology decides his attitudes towards a given language; where he believes a given language offers social, political and economic potentials, he holds it at a high esteem, and where he feels such a language has low potentials for economic, political and social mobility the urge to learn and use such a language remains low. Therefore, it can be concluded that language ideology plays a significant role in choosing the language to learn and use in a multilingual society, and that language ideology shapes the pattern of language use in multilingual societies.

The Role of Motivation in Language Practice

According to social psychologists, motivation generally accounts for reasons people engage in activities. Mallaci & Lancia (2022), along this line, remark that "Goal oriented activities are started and sustained by motivation". This is to say, motivation initiates an activity, and in turn, sustains it by further expanding the dimensions of motivation. Psychologists hold that human instincts generally propel their behaviors, and satisfaction of one instinct generates the urge for satisfying the others, waiting in queue. Thus, the more motivation works on instincts, the more intense the consequence.

Linguists realize the role of motivation in language learning. Aktan-Erciyas (2021) recognizes the role of motivation in propelling the interest of a language learner in the process of language learning. He maintains that at each stage of language learning, there emerge some linguistic tasks, the satisfaction of which leads to, yet, generation of further tasks; in turn the sum of satisfaction of these tasks result into more interests in language learning. These emerging motivations culminate into acquisition and use of complex linguistic functions that, eventually, satisfy linguistic needs, such as proper fitting into a social community.

Taylor-Adams (2023) notes the role of motivation in second language learning. He posits that just as the case with any other activity, motivation starts a linguistic task and maintains persistence on such a task over a reasonable period.

He holds that motivation "is a key for persistence", such as in second language learning and practice.

Seven (2020) bluntly puts it that "most students learn English because they believe it will benefit them in one way". To him, that belief is the motivating factor in second language learning, and consequent use. He further maintains that without motivation, students would fail in their attempt to, and hope for learning the second language. The same notion can be true of language use selection mode in multilingual settings, where languages are used selectively, depending on their respective conceived functions. This situation points that the more a language appears to satisfy the owners' needs, the more they employ such a language in their daily social intercourse.

According to Nguyen (2022), the desire to be recognized as a potent member of a speech community is an important motivation factor in second language learning. For instance, a designated official language would create interest in citizens to learn to be proficient in that language. The study, further, recognizes two sets of motivation: intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. The intrinsic motivation comes from within the learner, such as the desire to function well in the target language, while the extrinsic motivation results from the desire to earn a reward, or escape a punishment. The study concludes that motivated students learn faster, and that parents' ability in the target language conversely, relates to students' success in language learning. It can, therefore be concluded that motivation is a significant factor in learning and using a second language.

Studies in Nigeria's Language Policies

A lot of work is done on Nigeria's language policy. For instance, Anyadiegwu (2012) focused on the implication of Nigeria's language policies on national development and found conflicting opinions; while some accept English as official language, others reject it on the grounds that it is too elitist to accommodate all citizens, particularly the illiterates. Salisu and Dollah (2015) dwelt in the historical developments of language policies in Nigeria. They found language policies favouring differing languages at different points, spanning from colonial era to these days. Ibrahim & Gwandu (2016) investigated the problems in implementing Nigeria's language policies. The study found that the country seldom prepares to accommodate the challenges of implementing emerging new policies..



Study Methodology

Study Area

The study is set in the whole of Adamawa State, Northeastern Nigeria. The study is based on the assumption that Adamawa State is made up of between 80-90 linguistic groups, thus, raising high chances of absence of monolingual linguistic blocs, and constructing challenges in the process of status determination of languages during language planning.

Research Design

The descriptive survey research design was used. The design was chosen because of its capacity to reduce data manipulation, which could be possible with other designs. Moreover, the descriptive survey research design is fast, cost effective and admits both qualitative and quantitative data.

Study Instruments

A set of questionnaire was used for data collection. The tool consisted of three sections, the first was on the respondents' demography, while the second was on language motivation factors in language situations in the state, and the third was on language policy recommendations. On respondents' demographic quests, items like nature of names, religion, tribe, local government of origin, town of residence and tribe were included. Furthermore, respondents' mode of language practice was surveyed. The following two sections surveyed the types of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, and lastly the instrument sought for opined language policies.

Study Procedure

A set of questionnaire was shot to the Website. A period of 2 months was dedicated to data collection. Follow up messages, phone calls and visits soliciting for responses followed soon. At the expiration of 2 months, receiving responses was blocked, marking the end of data collection procedures.

Study Population

The entire inhabitants of Adamawa State made up the population of the study. According to the

Nigerian National Population Bureau, there are 4,902,100 people in Adamawa State. Therefore, the population of this study is 4,902,100.

Sample Size and Sampling Procedure

A sample size of 282 was drawn from all of the 21 local government areas of the state. A sample size of 4,200, to represent 0.08% of the population, was initially targeted, but there occurred a fall in the number of respondents when hard copies of the questionnaire were distributed. The resulting recollection of responses fell so short of expectation that no significant conclusion could be derived from it. Thus both the sampling procedure and sample size abruptly changed in the course of the study. The sample size became 282, and the size was determined by the convenience of access of the respondents to the questionnaire on the web within the set period of two months.

Data Presentation, Analysis and Interpretation

The data was subjected to the simple percentage statistical grading. This package was chosen because of the nature of the available data. The resulting data did not call for comparison or determination of dispersal and, or variance; only mere values to help draw conclusions were all that were needed; so the simple percentage grading served the purpose.

Data Presentation, Analysis and Interpretation

The emerging data is as follows. The data is presented based on what each of the study questions required.

Research Question 1: What is the pattern of languages used in Adamawa State?

To determine the pattern of language use at the study area, the nature of names of the respondents were asked. The study also collected data on languages mostly used generally, and based on religious affiliation. Furthermore, language use at the family domain was explored. The following tables present the data.



Table 1: Pattern of Language Practice at the Study Area

Table 1 Nature of Names in Adamawa State

Item	N	A	B	C	D	E	F	Cum
Nature of Name	282	73 25.89%	31 10.99%	58 20.57%	78 27.66%	36 12.77%	6 2.13%	100

Key: N= sample, A= Pure Arabic names, B= Pure English names, C= Pure indigenous names D= Mixed indigenous and English names, E= Mixed indigenous and Arabic names, F= Mixed Arabic and English names, Cum. = Cumulative.

Mixed indigenous and English names are more common in Adamawa State, 78 (27.66%), followed by pure Arabic names, 73 (25.89%), with pure English names scoring 10.99%. This data shows a sharp shift from indigenous languages to English and Arabic, both languages alien to the State, and even Nigeria.

Table 2 Languages mostly spoken based on Religious Affiliation

Religion	English		Lingua Franca		Mother Tongue		Others		Total	Cum.
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%		
Christianity	71	53.79	16	12.12	32	24.24	13	9.85	132	100
Islam	33	22.0	32	21.33	65	43.33	20	13.33	150	100
Total	104	75.79	48	33.45	97	67.57	33	23.18	282	

The data indicates relation between language preference and religious affiliation as most Christians 53.79%, prefer using English, while 43.33% Muslim respondents prefer their mother tongues

Table 3 Languages used most of the time

Language spoken most of the time	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative
English	104	36.88	36.88
Lingua Franca	48	17.02	53.90
Mother Tongue	97	34.40	88.30
Other Languages	33	11.70	100.00
Total	282	100.00	

The table indicates pattern of language preference among the people of Adamawa State, generally. Most people recorded English (36.88%), and mother tongue, (34.40%) as the language they speak most of the time.

Table 4 Language acquisition Pattern

Language mostly spoken by children	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative
English	58	28.02	28.02
Lingua Franca	34	16.43	44.44
Language of other parents	18	8.70	53.14
Mother tongue	97	46.86	100.00
Total	207	100.00	

The table presents data on language acquisition pattern of children at Adamawa State, indicating only 46.86% acquiring mother tongue, and 28.02% English. This shows eminence of indigenous language endangerment, as language acquisition process is dislocated in the state.

Table 5 Dominant Languages in Adamawa State

Dominant Language in the study area	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative
English	14	4.96	4.96
Fulfulde	46	16.31	21.28
Hausa	202	71.63	92.91
Other Languages	20	7.09	100.00



Total	282	100.00
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The table presents data on language dominance in Adamawa State, with the Hausa Language (71.63%), and Fulfulde (16.31%) dominating other languages used in the state. English recorded a low dominance mark of 4.96% only.

Table 3 Motivation Factors in language use in Adamawa State

Language	Motivation Factors				
	Education	Communication	Self Esteem	Economy	Politics
English	243 (86.88%)	206 (73.57%)	104 (36.88%)	233 (82.62%)	248 (87.94%)
Fulfulde	02 (0.71%)	02 (0.71%)	10 (3.55%)	06 (2.13%)	04 (1.42%)
Hausa	30 (10.64%)	71(25.36%)	128 (45.39%)	39 (13.83%)	17 (6.03%)
Others	03 (1.06%)	01(0.36%)	32 (11.35%)	04 (1.42%)	07 (2.48%)

The table shows that the English Language enjoys high motivation dimensions for learning and use in Adamawa State. The language scored 73.57% as the favoured language of everyday communication, 86.88% as the favoured language of education, 82.62% as the favoured language of commerce, and 87.94% as the favoured language of political participation. Curiously, the language was rejected for being a language for self- esteem, recording as low as 36.88%. from that perspective.

Summary of Findings

The study found the following

1. Most people bear mixed indigenous and foreign names in Adamawa State
2. Religious affiliation determines language preference in Adamawa State
3. English is the most preferred language in Adamawa State
4. There is low mother tongue acquisition by children in Adamawa State
5. Language learning and use purposes favour the English language in Adamawa State.

III. Interpretation of Findings

That most people bear mixed English/Indigenous (27.66%) and Arabic/indigenous (12.77%) names signals the phenomenon of language shift in the state. Peter (2020) attributes language preference, the phenomenon that culminates to language shift, to developments from the sociopolitical and economic spheres. The place of Arabic as the official language of the dominant religion in the state, and that of English as the official language of the country gives the two languages an edge over the state's indigenous languages, so much that the black man in Adamawa State would bear a name similar to the white man's of England, or that of the coloured man's of Saudi Arabia.

The study found religion to determine the pattern of language practice in the state. Most Christians (53.79%) were found to prefer speaking English to speaking other languages, as Muslims prefer indigenous languages to English (43.33%). The study agrees with the findings of Ding & Goh (2019), and Balraj, Sigh & Abd Manan (2020) that religion dictates the pattern of language choice in multilingual societies. The studies note, for instance, that Arabic, the official language of Islam spreads wildly among the Muslims, while English does so among the Christians. The situation in Adamawa State affirms the role of religion in language shift and language choice.

English was found to be the most preferred language, at the expense of the indigenous languages, in the state. It could be noted that English is the official language of the country at large, and indisputably the language of learning and commerce. The language is taught in schools and remains the medium of instruction throughout the state. Seven (2020) realize why people aspire to learn English when he concludes that students learn English because they realize what it would do for them

Low level of mother tongue acquisition among children in Adamawa State was recorded; only 46.86% of the children were found to first acquire their parents' mother tongues. This seriously points to possibility of language shift and language endangerment. Puthval (2017) postulates that where the young generation stops acquiring a language, when the language owners die off, the language dies with them as well.

English of all the languages used in Adamawa State was found to enjoy more motivating reasons for learning and use. Respondents reported that English language offers them brighter life opportunities and self-esteem in the society. The situation agrees with Seven (2020)'s assertion that people learn languages



because of what they believe these languages would offer them.

IV. Summary Conclusion and Recommendations

The study was conceived to determine the level of acceptability of the Nigeria's 2022 language Policy in Adamawa State. Online questionnaire collected data, and the result was that the people of the state have negative attitudes towards the 2022 Nigeria's language policy. Thus, the policy is not acceptable in the state

The study concludes that the 2022 National Language Policy was not based on language practice and language ideology as opined to in Yaqub (2023). The way the people manage their languages falls contrary to the dictates of the 2022 National Language Policy, thus stands rejected.

Since this policy is rejected because of its failure to consider the mode of language practice in Adamawa State, we recommend that language engineers study how language owners manage their languages before embarking on designing a language policy for a people.

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