

THE MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION CONTROVERSY: LANGUAGE UTILITY OR INEFFICIENCY?

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ABSTRACT

The choice of a medium of instruction, an aspect of status planning, is a sensitive, political and social matter in a multilingual setting. This paper explores the controversy about medium of instruction. A survey of attitude towards medium of instruction in the basic educational level was conducted in the six geo-political regions of Nigeria. A total of 600 teachers and non- teachers responded to a set of questionnaire. The result shows that language utility highly influences the choice and acceptability of medium of instruction; in fact, it may enhance its functionality.

Keywords: multilingual setting, controversy, geo-political regions, functionality.

INTRODUCTION

Getting educated is a personal matter and providing education is a social matter (Bill, 1964). The process of providing education encompasses the choice of a medium. A medium of education, therefore, as an integral and essential part of the larger process to get learners educated and enables society to educate. Bearing this in mind, the choice of a medium of instruction, an aspect of language status, needs not be controversial as it is. The controversy associated with it, especially in a multilingual society, may be connected with inadequate knowledge of what a national medium of instruction should be or a deliberate attempt to overlook the criteria associated with its choice.

A qualified language for medium of instruction needs to possess both objective and subjective characteristics of language planning (Stern, 1983). The former has to do

with codification, elaboration and writing of language while the latter deals with language acceptability as well as the suitability of the language for its assigned roles and functions. The constituents may be summed up to be attitudinal factors, which Emenanjo (1991) described as language imperatives. The teaching of the language to the required standard by competent teachers is as important as their proficiency in the language and their ability to use suitable methods and materials when instructing in the language.

Obanya (1992) identified four factors influencing the choice of a language of education in Africa as historical influence, political evolution, sociolinguistic contours of each country, and the strength of linguistic and educational hobbies. The first three factors can be classified under Stern's (1983) subjective characteristics and the last is strictly objective. Both Stern's (1983) and Obanya's

(1992) identification emphasise linguistic and non-linguistic aspects of language choice.

Discussion on a workable language of instruction has always been controversial since the inception of formal education in Nigeria to date (Darkin, 1968; Tiffen, 1975; Adesina, 1977). Language of Immediate Community (LIC) was predominantly used in early formal education during the colonial period as stipulated in the 1926 Ordinance and the Phelps-Stokes Commission report (UNESCO 1953; Adesina, 1977). From inception of primary education to this moment, the choices have been among Mother Tongue (MT) (Fafunwa, 1977; Bamgbose, 1994; Emenanjo, 1994); Transitional Bilingual Medium (TBM) (FGN, 1981); Gradual TBM (Omojuwa, 1982); Straight for English Medium (SEM) (Ogunyemi, 1991; Adedun, 1992). Bodunde (2004) discovered that parents show preference for Straight for English Medium.

Several reasons for medium choice are identified in favour of one medium or the other. For instance the choice of MTM is hinged on the fact that it provides psychological appeal, motivation and experience in use, thus, removing the trauma and stress associated with a new environment (formal schooling) (Fafunwa, 1977; Chumbow, 1990). Questions may, however, be raised on the pragmatic and pedagogical appropriateness of education in about 450 Mother Tongues in a multilingual setting like Nigeria. LIC is viewed as a compromise between MT and Straight for English Medium (SEM) because it brings a reduction in the number of mother tongues to be developed to a manageable proportion and discourages the use of a foreign language. The pluralistic nature of the community where LIC

is advocated is played down and no other function aside from education is given such a medium. Transitional Bilingual Medium (TBM) is said to develop a more effective and a 'humane' bridge to English in providing an effective education for children whose MT is not English. As humane as the medium is, the time of transition (3 years) and the bulk transition do not consider the readiness of learners in transiting to the other medium (English). The issue of acceptability seems to be inconsequential.

Another medium is gradual transition which is seen to help pupils to transit to English medium when they are ready unlike the bulk transition. The cumbersome nature, of using different languages for different subjects at different time is overlooked and underestimated in gradual transition. The choice of SEM is a situation in which English Language is used for teaching from primaries one to six as observed in most privately owned schools (Bodunde, 2005). This is based on its strength in terms of accessibility, availability of teaching materials and the numerical strength of speakers worldwide. The early use of the language and the psychological effect of using a strange language at school may create phobia and hatred in a young learner.

The above reasons may have accounted for the controversy. This study was conducted to find out the opinions of teachers in both primary schools and tertiary institutions; and those of parents on education language policy in the basic educational level (primary school) in Nigeria. A particular emphasis was on subjective aspect of medium of instruction in order to compliment the already established objective part.

The Study

A language survey on medium of instruction choice was conducted in the six geo-political regions of Nigeria. The major objective was to investigate choice of medium of instruction and reasons for choice in order to establish the research subjects' attitudes towards their choice of medium of instruction and other languages of instruction.

Research Questions

- i. What are the language choices made by teachers and parents as medium of instruction?
- ii. What is the relationship between language choice and reasons for choice.

Hypothesis

There is no significant relationship between medium of instruction choice and reasons for choice

initiators and formulators in the field of language education while those in primary schools are end users of language of instruction. One hundred subjects were drawn from each state representing each geo-political region of Nigeria (Ogun, Edo, Anambra Kwara, Kaduna, and Plateau states). The choice of six geo-political regions is to provide an objective coverage of the policy since it is a national issue, hence all regions are represented in the sample.

A set of questionnaire was used to elicit responses on medium of instruction choice and reasons for the choice. The questionnaire was administered in the selected states representing the regions in both rural and urban primary schools, universities, public places- banks, post offices and market squares. They were administered by the researcher and research assistants in each region. The exercise took three weeks.

METHODOLOGY

A survey research was conducted on vital facts and opinions of people on medium of instruction. Survey research is appropriate for a study on a large population in which samples drawn would enable the researcher to discover relative incidence, distribution and inter-relations of psychological and sociological variables (Ndagi, 1984). A sample of 600 primary school teachers, university teachers who read psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics and English education and parents was drawn from the six Geo-political zones of Nigeria. Parents were included in the sample because they are the sponsors of the pupils who can not decide the choice of language in which they wish to be educated. It is therefore part of their responsibility to make the choice for them. The choice of teachers of English from universities is based on the fact that they are likely policy

RESULTS

The result was analysed using basic percentage and Chi square statistic which tested the relationship between language choice and reasons. Attitudinal profiles on reasons for language choice were presented.

A summation of the respondents' choice shows English as most desired medium of instruction (77.17%) in all the regions. Table 1 gives a breakdown of language choice according to region.

The table reveals highest responses in favour of English medium in each region with the highest responses from the (North West (87%) and the lowest from the South South (71%). The Maintenance Bilingual medium (English\NL) was placed second in all the regions (16.3%) with North Central having the highest on regional level.

Table 1: Language Choice for Education in the Primary School

Languages	SW	SE	SS	NE	NW	NC	Six Regions	%
Major Nig. Lang.	3	5	1	6	4	3	22	3.66
Main Nig. Lang.	0	2	4	1	0	0	7	1.17
Minor Nig. Lang.	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0.17
English	81	72	71	80	87	72	463	77.17
English/ NL	16	21	20	8	8	25	98	16.33
Other foreign Lang.	0	0	4	5	0	0	9	1.5
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	600	100

The choice of an indigenous language - major (Yoruba, Igbo & Hausa) was placed third in the six regions combined (3.66%). In the regional level, five out of the six regions placed it third (0.17%). However, the SS has the main

languages as third. The desirability of using any minor Nigerian Languages was zero for five out of six regions. North West shows a 1% level of desirability.

To further verify the level of desirability of the indigenous languages, respondents were requested to indicate other languages they would want their children or pupils to learn in the primary school, apart from the ones indicated in Table 1. The result in Table 2 reveals that English was still most desired in the South East (33%) while the major Nigerian language, Yoruba, was desired in the SW; Hausa in the NE and the NW; and Yoruba in the NC. The six regions combined show 31.2%. The South-South has a high desirability of using the main Nigerian

languages probably because the highly rated languages in the region are main languages, for example, Edo, Urhobo, Ishan. English language was placed second in order of desirability in five out of the six regions except SE where it was rated first. The cumulative total was 29.2%. The Maintenance Bilingual Medium of English and Nigerian languages was third in order of priority.

The main Nigerian Languages were still poorly desired except in SS (Table 2).

The use of French was more rated, than both main (6.8%) and minor Nigerian Languages (2.5%) cumulatively. It should be noted from Table 1 that English is the most desired language of Education. It is assumed that no reference would be made to it in Table 2 because the responses should be other languages (implying apart from the use of two Nigerian Languages as a form of Maintenance, Bilingual Medium was least desired (0.2%). The reasons for choice of languages desirability as shown in Table 3 below

Table 2: Classification of Other Languages Desire for teaching in the Primary Schools

Languages	SW	SE	SS	NE	NW	NC	Six regions	%
Major Nig. Lang.	37	21	7	32	40	50	187	31.2
English	32	33	27	30	28	25	175	29.2
English/ Nig. Lang.	17	32	18	11	13	8	99	16.5
French	7	12	8	21	10	8	66	11
Main Nig. Lang.	0	1	36	0	3	1	41	6.8
English/ French	6	0	3	0	1	6	18	2.6
Minor Nig. Lang.	1	1	1	6	5	1	15	2.5
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	600	100

Table 3: Attitudinal Reasons for Languages' Desire for Use In the Primary Schools

Languages	Solidarity	Reasons for Choice							Total	%
		Loyalty	National Prestige	Utility	Functional-ity	Inter Prestige	Famili-arity	National Integrity		
Major	92	70	2	15	5	2	0	1	187	31.2
English	9	29	0	2	0	0	1	1	41	6.8
Eng./NL	1	11	0	3	0	0	0	0	15	2.5
French	1	2	50	59	25	37	1	0	175	29.2
Main	7	2	5	60	10	6	6	4	100	16.5
Eng./ French	1	0	0	6	11	42	4	1	65	11
Minor	0	1	0	0	0	14	1	0	16	2.6
2NLS	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0.2
Total	112	115	57	145	51	101	13	6	600	100

reveals the effect of attitude on language choice.

The choice of any major Nigerian Languages was mainly for solidarity reason. It

shows that many respondents identify with the languages of the majority. Specifically people from the linguistic communities where the languages are spoken chose them for loyalty reason. A very few respondents

desired their use for utility purpose whereas English was desired mainly for utility and national prestige reasons. The choice of a Nigerian Language as substrates to English in Maintenance Bilingual Medium was strictly for utility reason. Both languages in the medium could be used for formal or informal purposes (Nigerian languages). The use of two foreign languages was for international prestige. The choice of minor and main Nigerian languages was mainly for language loyalty. It can be observed that there is an overlap in the reasons given.

Hypothesis Testing

The only hypothesis tested states that "there is no significant relationship between

language desired for pupils or wards and reasons for choice in all the six geo-political regions of Nigeria". Table 4 shows the result of Pearson chi-square value of the relationship between language choice and reasons for choice.

A significant association exists between the choice of language desired for education in the primary school and reasons for choice in the six geo-political regions, including the six regions combined. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected. The existing association between language choice and reasons for choice shows that the choice of a language is a manifestation of the motive.

Table 4: Test of Relationship between Language Choice and Reasons for Choice

Region	Chi-Square Value	Df	Probability	Decision
SW	155.69	35	.000	Significant
SE	109.2	35	.000	Significant
SS	118.75	42	.000	Significant
NE	147.48	28	.000	Significant
NW	198.45	36	.000	Significant
NC	214.45	42	.000	Significant
Six Regions	753.14	49	.000	Significant

DISCUSSION

Language of Instruction Desired for Pupils/Children

The investigation conducted gives a revelation of the importance of language imperative in language planning and acceptability. In the light of this finding, it is essential to discuss the results. In the six regions, the choice of English, a foreign and second language, to have been desired for use in the

primary schools suggests that there is something special about the language. The reasons given might be influenced by the power accorded the language worldwide. Particularly in Nigeria, as an official and second language, English is used in nearly all spheres of Nigerian life, even in homes as a medium of communication. English language, because of its utility and function in Nigeria, was most desired. The status of a language might

be a determining factor for its desirability. For instance, the result shows that in addition to language utility and function, language prestige, within and outside Nigeria, plays a role. It also shows that any language that improves one's economy is indirectly empowered to be in a high demand. The marketability and mobility of a language offer it a high capital base that provides it a great demand in the language stock market. This is evidenced in the national prestige accorded the language as shown in its adoption as a lingua franca and language of examinations at all levels and for instruction at post-primary education levels.

The need for easy communication is found to influence preference. Thus, the simultaneous use of LIC and English language was rated high. It is assumed that if both languages are used simultaneously, communication will be easier. The learner who learns in Maintenance Bilingual Medium is provided the opportunity to interact informally and formally. These two situations basically hinge on language utility and suitability.

Language solidarity plays a role in language policy formulation. The preference for sole Nigerian Languages (major, main and minor) is influenced by sociolinguistic considerations. Viewed critically, this reason may not be as important as the use of a language that has power and been accorded responsibility (use) in the society. If the use is limited to what Heine (1977) describes as horizontal medium because it is only for solidarity and social equality, its acceptability may be faulty. The assertion that MT encourages continuity from home and removes stress was played down but only solidarity and loyalty reasons were expressed. Little or non-utility and low functional use of Nigerian languages inform the non-

preference of the indigenous languages. The functional use of a language increases its demand and scope. The prestige accorded a language may stand to determine its suitability for instruction. The desire for a particular language as medium of instruction is observed to have been influenced by attitudinal reasons. These reasons are diagrammatically expressed in the figure below:

The eight reasons are expressed in order of importance. The first four are of major importance. The least reason given, national integration is at the right edge of the figure. It can therefore, be theorized that the higher the utility of a language, the more its desirability for pupils or children.

The result of the hypothesis tested shows a significant relationship between choice of medium of instruction and reasons for choice. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected. It therefore suggests that the respondents' attitude (reason) influences language choice in all the six regions. It shows that irrespective of region in Nigeria, the choice made is precipitated by reasons behind the choice. This typifies the feeling of people towards language and choice.

Implication for Language Policy Formulation

It is very clear that the choice of a language policy entails linguistic and non linguistic aspects. Limiting language policy to only an aspect may affect the acceptability of the policy. Adapting straight for English as medium of instruction has psychological and pedagogical implications on the learners, most especially if the child is from a strictly mother tongue setting. It also implies that qualified teachers who can handle English language need be recruited to facilitate

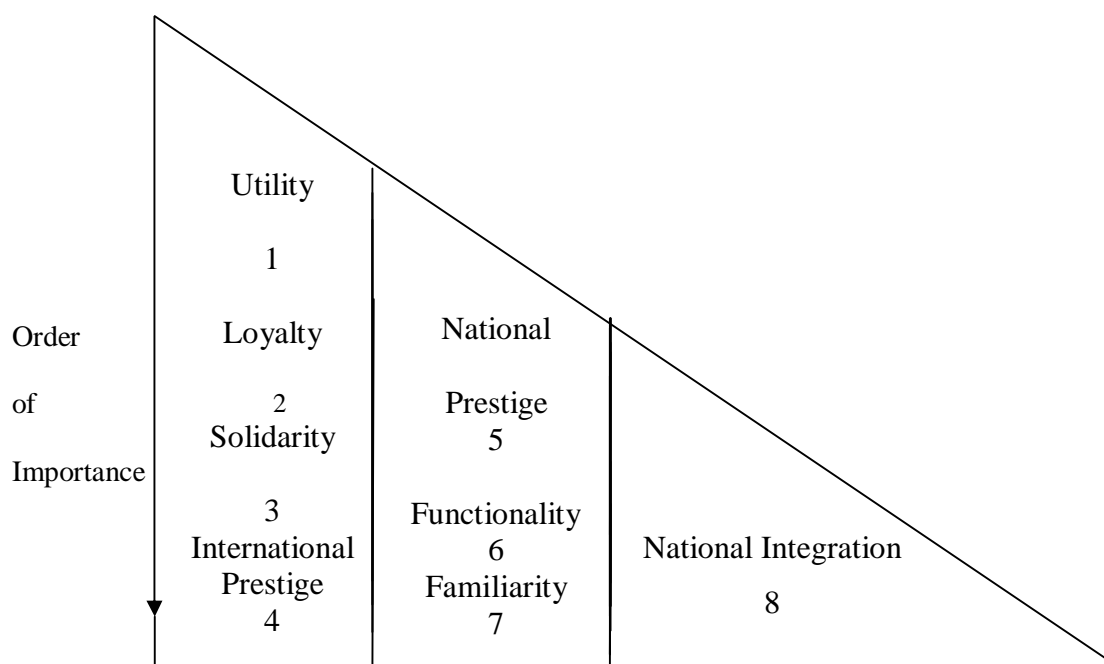


Figure 1: Attitudinal Profiles of Reasons for Language Desirability for Use in the Primary Schools

learning.

The implication of using Maintenance Bilingual Medium still lies on training bilingual teachers who should be able to switch from the two languages involved effectively while teaching and draw parallel questions in the two languages for examination purposes.

In adapting Nigerian languages, particularly, the major and main languages that have been committed to writing, functions must be accorded them officially. This may act as a means of reinforcement towards viewing Nigerian languages as standard, competent and superior. More teachers also need be trained in the Nigerian languages to facilitate their use for instruction.

CONCLUSION

The study shows that Nigerian languages, particularly the major and main ones, are not inefficient. They are under used in formal settings in the Nigerian society hence they are not appreciated. The controversy on whether indigenous languages are incapable for teaching is based on the fact that they are only used informally hence, the apathy towards their use for instruction in the primary schools. There is the need for the political will to empower indigenous languages, not on paper alone, but to match the empowerment with action that would encourage the learning and use. They need to be accorded appropriate utility and functions. English language has the capacity to enhance individual's access to the world's knowledge and of enabling one to achieve personal advancement. It is equally important to note that all

languages, if promoted, have the universal capacity to achieve this role. It is, therefore, pertinent for language planners to consider the relationship among psychological, pragmatic and sociolinguistic implications of language planning. The mutual co-existence of indigenous languages and English might lead to the development of bilingual schools with language MT varieties and English co-existing as media of instruction for different curricular subjects.

An average Nigerian is confronted with the problem of reconciling the demands made on him by his personal gains, ethnic loyalty and modernization. When the Nigerian today prefers his child to be educated in English, he thinks of the prevailing language circumstances in Nigeria. It is not because he dislikes Nigerian languages or that he is not patriotic, it is just that his national awareness with the larger society through Nigerian indigenous language has not been sufficiently developed.

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(Manuscript received: 22nd November, 2006; accepted: 12th May, 2009).