

REVISITING THE *LINGUA FRANCA* QUESTION IN NIGERIA: INSIGHTS
FROM THE 2015 ELECTIONEERING CAMPAIGNS

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Abstract

This paper examined patterns and domains of the use of languages in the 2015 electioneering campaign rallies across Nigeria. Mixed method involving content and critical discourse analyses as well as oral interviews were adopted. It was observed that some dominant language(s) in some regions were solely used during rallies. In some situations, they were used alongside the English language with the ethnic/local languages used for interpretations. Our investigations also reveal that the Nigerian pidgin was used frequently across regions/zones in Nigeria. The study further identified that the dynamics in the use of languages, reflecting ethnic/cultural appeals during the campaign rallies, is an indication of regional use of languages which is believed to be more efficient than the much-talked about but failed national lingua franca issue in Nigeria.

Key terms: *Lingua franca*, Political communication, Politics of language, Linguistic pluralism, Regional *Lingua franca*

Introduction

Electioneering relies heavily on the ability of political office seekers or political merchants to convince persuade and attract the support of the electorate. This makes it a decisive point in terms of means of communicating political messages to an audience as effectively as possible. Here, language, personalities, etc. all count in ensuring that the set goals for electioneering are achieved. This study focuses on the aspect of the use of languages in electioneering. Use of language or 'code' in order to convince, persuade and elicit positive actions from an audience is a major consideration in any electioneering venture (Hahn, 1997). Hahn (1997,p67) further observes that experiences across cultures and societies suggest that "electioneering therefore presents an array of opportunities for the use of languages in order to achieve the set goals of electioneering and that such opportunity is pronounced in linguistic pluralistic societies"

Linguistic pluralism is often viewed both as a liability and an asset to any society. Proponents of the asset-perspective among other factors adduce that it presents a wide range of varieties or possibilities within the linguistic repertoire of both individuals and society while the liability proponents among other factors lament the often heated, sometimes irreconcilable differences, unhealthy linguistic rivalry and competitions for protection of linguistic rights among various groups. Because language is often linked to ethnicity, the agitations are often intense. In relation to this, Hudson (1998) holds that most multilingual societies encounter some challenges in issues such as language planning that encompasses decisions on national language, lingua franca, languages in education, official language etc. Garrett (2005) brings this into proper perspective as he observes as follows "the idea of fighting over language might seem strange, but it is all too common. Like religion, language can move people to take up arms against those who have a different one. That is because language is such an important identity"

Nigeria is a multilingual society and as such a highly pluralist society with regard to language. There are about 400 indigenous languages in Nigeria (Emenanjo, 1990, Bamgbose, 1991), and by recent statistics, 550 languages (Blench, 2012). Every attempt in Nigeria to organize and galvanize as well as harness the linguistic resources of the nation for national unity and development particularly in the area of planning has met the brick wall of language-enabled boundaries and resistance. One of these attempts which have been hampered is the quest to have a national Lingua franca.

Lingua Franca is seen as a language used for occasional communication in a society where there is no language for all groups' communication (Ugbo, 2001). He further observes that the language which serves as lingua franca could be indigenous or alien and may in some cases be unofficially adopted. In relation to this, Agbedo (2007) identifies that English thrives in Nigeria and is seen as 'unofficial lingua franca' of Nigeria and also, the indigenous languages clamour for acceptance as the lingua franca. Nigeria has had her own taste of the bickering associated with adopting a lingua franca (Agbedo, 2007, Ndimele, 2008).According to Maduka-Durunze(2004) a lot of proposals have been made with counter proposals yet none of the over 400 indigenous languages and the foreign languages (English, French, Arabic) and a contact language-Nigerian Pidgin (NP) is accepted. Hence scholars and other stakeholders have labeled the Nigerian situation as "Lingua franca question" which suggests a quagmire of a sort.

It is observed that the decision on lingua franca has never been an easy one for most multilingual climes in the world. Sometimes it breeds wars, crises and all forms of

rivalry. In relation to surmounting the challenges of adopting a lingua franca in Nigeria, most studies have harped on the potency of national dialogue, harnessing the local or indigenous languages among others (Salami, 1977, Agbedo, 1998, Akinnaso, 1993, Haruna, 2006, Okafor, 2009,). This study therefore sets out to examine patterns of use of languages in the 2015 electioneering in Nigeria and how this can help solve the lingua franca question.

Study Objectives

To examine the patterns of use of languages in the 2015 electioneering campaign rallies in Nigeria.

To find out whether the dynamics or patterns of use of languages can help in resolving the lingua franca question in Nigeria.

Literature review

Conceptual framework

Lingua Franca

According to *wikipedia*, “Lingua Franca also known as a bridge language, common language, trade language or vehicular language, has been conceived as a language or dialect systematically (as opposed to occasionally, or casually) used to make communication possible between persons not sharing a native language or dialect, in particular when it is a third language, distinct from both native languages” Lingua francas have developed around the world throughout human history, sometimes for commercial reasons (so-called “trade languages”) but also for cultural, religious, diplomatic and administrative convenience, and as a means of exchanging information between scientists and other scholars of different nationalities.(*Wikipedia.org*)

According to *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Lingua Franca is “a language used as a means of communication between populations speaking vernaculars that are not mutually intelligible” The term was first used during the middle Ages to describe a French- and Italian-based jargon, or pidgin that was developed by Crusaders and traders in the eastern Mediterranean and characterized by the invariant forms of its nouns, verbs, and adjectives. These changes have been interpreted as simplifications of the Romance languages. Also Webster’s dictionary defines it as “a language that is used among people who speak various different languages”

To Richards, Platt and Platt (1985, p214), the term lingua franca (Italian for *Frankish* tongue) originated in the Mediterranean region in the middle Ages among crusaders and traders of different language backgrounds. To them, a lingua franca is a “language of necessity whose major role is to bridge the communication gap amongst people of diverging tongues. Usually, it lacks official backing.” The term auxiliary language is sometimes used as a synonym to capture the role of lingua franca (a helping language). As a language that is used for communication between different groups of people, each group speaking a different language, the choice of a lingua franca is not restricted. A choice might be made from an international language, the native language of one of the groups of people, or a language that is not native to any of the groups.

Abolomi (2000, p9) observes as follows: “lingua franca is an indigenous/alien/neutral language used for all group communication by a multilingual nation”. To Raashed (2012) “it is a language used for habitual communication which could be alien, foreign but better indigenous for communication in societies of multiple

languages” From the foregoing, one understands that lingua franca is a language often used for inter-group communication which in some cases is an indigenous language because of its relationship with the identity of a people.

Empirical/theoretical studies

Lingua Franca Question in Nigeria: Proposals and Counter proposals

According to Maduka-Durunze (2004) several options have been canvassed and various languages suggested for national lingua Franca, some cases being louder than others. He further identifies some of the proposals as follows (p.21)

“The most widely spoken language

The least widely spoken language

A minority language that is ‘culturally neutral’ to the majority languages

A mélange or Esperanto-like mixture of the majority languages

Pidgin English

English

Swahili”

Considering first option, the basic question that has been asked is: what is the most widely spoken language in Nigeria? According to the 1963 census(which needless to say remains controversial) and the 2004 census, the native Hausa-speaking people numbered highest, followed by Yoruba and then Igbo in this order by Fulani, Kanuri, Ibibio, Tiv, Ijaw(a cluster of languages indeed), Edo, and others. It is often the basis of statistics and geographical spread that Hausa has been canvassed as the most probable candidate. Proponents of this option have often said that it is perhaps the most lyrical of the different local languages or tongues in addition to the fact that it contains the most comprehensive lexicon and easy mechanism for creating new words. Also, they hold that it is the most superregional or supranational, being spoken in parts of chad, Niger, Nigeria, Benin, and Togo either by natives or large settler communities. Their submission is that its adoption will enhance interregional co-operation in politics, trade, commerce and culture. Opponents of this option have argued that the statistical basis for the whole discourse does not rest on a firm foundation, citing the slipshod manner in which all the censuses have been conducted and the politically and economically motivated inflation of figures to attract more power and resources. Some have also claimed that the spread of Hausa as a lingua Franca is bound to involve the spread of Islam since these two have been historically associated (in Nigeria).

According to Maduka-Durunze (2004) the second option namely the support for the least widely spoken language, is not too well known, perhaps because it is culturally and politically unthinkable that a minority should hold sway over a majority, or perhaps because the majors have much been sounding too loud and too strenuously and minors perennial political mathematics problem that refuses to go away in Nigeria. “It is held that because of these numerous and unimaginable problems canvassers have adjusted their position more conveniently to option of a minority language.”(Maduka-Durunze, 2004, p.19).

The purpose of the next option which is a minority language that is culturally neutral to the majority languages, is to find a language/culture area that is a sort of transition areas and bridge between the Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba areas; an area so culturally acceptable to the majors that it constitutes no threats to them a completely neutralizes the mutual antagonism between them. According to Sofunke (1990), in this aspect, Igala has

ben suggested. A counter proposal in this regard is that it would be near-impossibility to determine what(or where) is culturally neutral, and just in case two or more areas happen to have this difficulty to-grasp quality, how can one be chosen out of the two?(Maduka-Durunze, 2004) These questions beg for answers. Hence, that option has been dropped.

The option for a *mélange* or Esperanto, often tagged Wazobia, raises some technical and political issues. (Agbedo, 2007). Some questions bother on the reason for choosing three out of over 400 languages. How to fashion out syntax, a new phonology (including tonal features), a new semantic structure etc? proponents of this option have been influenced by this kind of experimentation, Esperanto, created in 1889, a well know *mélange* of languages but it has not been adapted neither as national language or *lingua franca* or even official language of any country. Maduka-Durunze (2004, p.20) observes “Nigeria cannot afford to waste time, energy, money, political will and emotion on a whimsy called Wazobia, Nigua or Guosa”

Another option is the English-lexified Nigerian Pidgin (NP). This is one option that has had wide range of supporters (as represented in Omeri, 1999, Sofunke, 1990, Mustapha, 2010 among others). It is viewed as “a natural compromise between English and Nigerian indigenous languages, it is also politically neutral, often observed at army and police barracks, in effective advertisements and public notices; not too bookish, elitist and exclusive as such does not alienate the minority”(Sofunke, 1990,p89). The worry however about this option is the claim that “it has a very low social status and cannot be expected to bear the burden of dignified discourse; that it has limited number of native speakers, that it is highly variable form from place to place, with no established orthographies”(Maduka-Durunze, 2004,p.20).

The option of the English language has been adjudged to attract some benefits if implemented (Agbedo, 2007). It is said to be the language of international commerce, trade, diplomacy, technology, and communication. English is also claimed to be very vibrant as well as highly accommodating and adaptive to novel situations. It is also said to be neutral to Nigerian internal politics and that its permanent adoption will assuage fears of sectional domination. Subversion of national pride, especially given its association with the colonial experience has been one of the strongest points against this option.

Finally the option of Swahili has been proposed. It is already a regional and national language in East Africa and specifically in other parts such as Congo, and other parts of central Africa. According to Maduka-durunze (2004), this option has hardly been canvassed very strongly except for literary artists and Pan –African political commentator’s sensitized by the dehumanizing apartheid policy in South Africa. It has been the fastest to be jettisoned as an option for a national *lingua franca* in Nigeria.

It is therefore obvious that consensus has not been reached on the language to be adopted as a *lingua franca* in Nigeria, one that must be systematically adopted not occasionally or casually across all zones and areas of Nigeria. So, Nigeria like most countries of the world is still burdened by the multiplicity of languages in adopting a national *lingua franca*.

In terms of empirical studies, we captured some studies on *Lingua franca* question in Nigeria. Some of which include: Salami, (1977), Agbedo, (1998), Akinnaso, (1993), Haruna, (2006), Okafor, (2009) among others which focus on ways of surmounting the *Lingua franca* challenges in Nigeria. Salami (1977) observes that national *lingua Franca* option is “not very feasible” in Nigeria giving the plethora and increasing languages and growing fear of possible language domination among the particularly minority languages.

He advocates that Nigeria continues with the official language option and jettison any attempt to impose any language as a lingua franca. However, Agbedo (1998) does not focus on lingua franca option, but national language which is a term often used interchangeably with lingua franca. He however makes no case for any of indigenous languages in Nigeria or even the foreign language used in Nigeria but, observes as follows "...we should focus on developing a viable national language policy which takes care of all Nigerian indigenous languages irrespective of their individual status."(p.16). Akinnaso (1993) does not bother about which language should be used as lingua franca rather he concerns himself with ways of surmounting the lingua franca question. He suggests "a concerted effort in form of a national dialogue among various ethno-linguistic divides in Nigeria as to arrive at the way forward..." (p.56). Haruna (2006) observes that multilingual societies in sub-Saharan Africa should see adoption of lingua franca as "best option to safeguard endangered languages of the region" (p.34) he makes no specific recommendation of which language should be used as Nigeria's lingua franca. He however escapes from this by stating that "A lingua franca option is possible in Nigeria when we look beyond sentiments to seeing it as a way of helping all our languages grow and be sustained..."Okafor (2009) states that the lingua franca option lies in an effective national language planning. He holds that the inability of Nigeria to have a functional language policy is what breeds the crises about lingua franca. From the reviews of these handy studies, it is clear that the lingua franca issue in Nigeria remains a 'question' we therefore focus on how some dynamics in the use of languages in the 2015 election rallies in Nigeria could help resolve the lingua franca question in Nigeria. We consequently espouse our theoretical framework.

Theoretical Framework (Language Ideology Model)

Language ideology model assumes that language use is one of the strategies for language dominance, growth and fostering language ideology. The model links the implicit as well as explicit assumptions people have about a language or language in general to their social experience and political as well as economic interests. Language ideology (also referred to as linguistic ideology) became a model for explaining cultural, individual's attachment and bond to a specific language. It was first adopted by Cobarrubias (1983) in explaining ideologies that motivate decision making in language planning and the language policy type to be adopted in a given society. Woodlard (1992) formalized it as a model. It is used primarily within the fields of anthropology, sociolinguistics, and cross-cultural studies to characterize any set of beliefs or feelings about languages as used in their social worlds. When recognized and explored, language ideologies expose connections between the beliefs speakers have about language and the larger social and cultural systems they are a part of, illustrating how these beliefs are informed by and rooted in such systems.

The basic division in studies of language ideology model is between neutral and critical approaches to ideology. (Woodlard, 1992). In neutral approaches to language ideology, speakers' beliefs or ideas about language are understood as being shaped by the cultural systems in which they are embedded, but no attempt to identify variation within or across these systems is made. Often, a single ideology will be identified in such cases. Characterizations of language ideology as representative of an entire community or culture, such as those routinely documented in ethnographic research, are common examples of neutral approaches to language ideology.

Critical approaches to language ideology explore the capacity for language and linguistic ideologies to be used as strategies for maintaining social power and domination. They are described by Woolard and Schieffelin (1994) as studies of "some aspects of representation and social cognition, with particular social origins or functional and formal characteristics." Although such studies are often noted for their discussions of language politics and the intersection between language and social class, the crucial difference between these approaches to language ideology and neutral understandings of the concept is that the former emphasize the existence of variability and contradiction both within and amongst ideologies, while the latter approach ideology as a conception on its own terms.

In relation to this study, the critical approach of language ideology model best explains the politics of language associated with adopting a lingua franca in a multilingual society like Nigeria. No doubt, such adoption is a strategy for social power and domination. This explains the rancor, bickering and crises as reflected in the proposals and counter proposals which pervade the choice of a lingua franca in any linguistic pluralist society.

Methodology

The mixed-method was adopted for this study involving content analysis, oral interviews and critical discourse analysis. For content analysis, the choice was informed by the need to get objective information on the subject matter while oral interviews would help gather information from the relevant subjects for the study. The population of the study first comprises of all the video and audio clippings of the campaign rallies of the two major political parties in Nigeria during the 2015 general elections, APC and PDP. The choice of these parties was based on that they had a wide spread campaign across all the zones in Nigeria. Other political parties could not cover this area in Nigeria. Secondly, members of the National Working Committees (NEC) of the two political parties constitute the population for the oral interviews. Their choice was based on the fact that they are by the constitution of the parties, required to attend all the rallies of the parties across Nigeria so, they were considered relevant for this study and suitable for eliciting relevant information for the study. Sample size was obtained via census which involved all the video and audio clippings of the rallies of the two major parties which was accessed through the media units of the parties as well as purposively chosen 50 informants involving academic staff of Abia State University, Uturu. We believe that lecturers are relevant in this study since they are abreast with political issues in the country. Units of analysis include languages used (**LU**), the predominant language used (**PL**), Cases of language mix (**LM**) and language of interpretation (**LI**). Using the frequency and percentage value computation, the frequency of each of the variables (LU, PL, LM and LI) was computed for the zonal rallies of each of the two parties. Higher percentage values are considered significant. The six geo-political zones are as follows: North East (NE), North West (NW), and North central (NC), South west (SW), South East (SE) and South South (SS).

Data Presentation and Analysis

We analyzed the dynamics in the use of languages in the 2015 zonal electioneering campaign rallies of two major political parties: APC and PDP. Table one below provides information on the use of languages while tables two-five provide the frequency value computation. This is followed by the analysis of the data which focuses on the case for a regional lingua franca in Nigeria.

TABLE 1: Use of Languages in 2015 electioneering campaigns in Nigeria.

North East(NE)	LU	PL	LM	LI
APC	*ENG,*H,*NP	*H>(*ENG)	*ENG+*H	*LV,*H
PDP	*ENG,*H,*NP	*ENG	*ENG+*H	*NP,*H
North west(NW)				
APC	*NP,*ENG,*H	*H>(*ENG)	*NP+*ENG+*H	*H,*LV
PDP	*NP,*ENG,*H	*H(*ENG)	*NP+*ENG+*H	*H,*NP
North central(NC)				
APC	*NP,*ENG,*H	*ENG	*NP+*ENG+*H	*H
PDP	*ENG,*H	*ENG	*ENG+*H	*H,*LV
South west(SW)				
APC	*Y,*ENG,	*ENG	*ENG+Y	*Y
PDP	*Y,*ENG,	*ENG	*ENG+Y	*Y
South east(SE)				
APC	*ENG,*NP,*IGB	*ENG	*ENG+NP+IGB	*IGB and NP
PDP	*ENG,*NP,*IGB	*NP and IGB	*ENG+NP+IGB	*IGB
South South(SS)				
APC	*NP,*ENG,*LV	*NP	*NP+*LV	*LV
PDP	*NP,*ENG,*LV	*NP	*ENG+*NP+LV	*LV

ENG-English, IGB-Igbo, NP-Nigerian Pidgin, H-Hausa, Y-Yoruba, LV-local variety.

TABLE 2: Frequency and Percentage Computation of languages used (LU)

Options	Frequency	Percentage
*NP,*ENG,*H	5	42%
*ENG,*H	1	8%
*ENG,*NP,*IGB	2	17%
*NP,*ENG,*LV	2	17%
*Y,*ENG	2	17%
TOTAL	12	100%

TABLE 3: Frequency and Percentage Computation of Predominant Language (PL)

Options	Frequency	Percentage
*H	3	25%
*ENG	6	50%
*NP+IGB	1	8%
*NP	2	17%
TOTAL	12	100%

TABLE 4: Frequency and Percentage Computation of Language Mix (LM)

Options	Frequency	Percentage
*ENG+*H	3	25%
*NP+*ENG+*H	3	25%
*ENG+Y	2	17%
*ENG+NP+IGB	2	17%
*NP+*LV	1	8%
*ENG+*NP+LV	1	8%
TOTAL	12	100%

TABLE 5: Frequency and Percentage Computation of Language of Interpretation (LI)

Options	Frequency	Percentage
*NP,*H	2	17%
*H	1	8%
*H,*LV	3	25%
*Y	2	17%
*IGB and NP	1	8%
*IGB	1	8%
*LV	2	17%
TOTAL	12	100%

The values in table 2 provide a picture of the distribution of languages in the 2015 electioneering. Nigerian Pidgin, English and Hausa combination has the highest percentage of 42%. This shows that this combination of languages was more frequently used during the campaign rallies in Nigeria. This also points to the fact that Nigerian Pidgin and the English language are widespread in terms of use in most political activities in Nigeria. The case of Hausa is attributable to the fact that within the three northern geo-political zones, Hausa is very dominant as opposed to other languages also in use in this region.

For the predominant language used in the 2015 electioneering campaign rallies in Nigeria, our data in table 3, shows that English was most predominantly used, with a percentage of 50%. This is closely followed by Hausa and the Nigerian Pidgin. This reflects the reason for the adoption of the English language as the official language in Nigeria; Language for administrative and formal activities and businesses in Nigeria. However, the

co-official status with English granted the three major languages namely, Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba in the 1999 constitution of Nigeria seems not have been represented based on the data in table 4.

In terms of language mix, interestingly, English, Hausa and Nigerian Pidgin combination has the highest percentage of 50% (25% a piece), the same combination involving Yoruba and Igbo takes 17% while the same combination involving a local variety (LV) has 8%. The implication of this is as concerns local varieties in Nigeria, is that they are not given a pride of place in events and activities. They appear to have been dominated by the majors. This is still a reason for various clamoring particularly among speakers of these varieties for recognition and protection of their linguistic rights. For language of interpretation, we observe from the data in table 5, that expectedly, English is not an option and to us, this makes the option of English language as a lingua franca in Nigeria very unrealistic.

Also, in terms of patterns of language use, majority (89%) informants viewed that language use during the campaigns reflect a regional language use arrangement where Hausa was predominantly used in the North, Yoruba in the South-West, Igbo in the South East and Nigerian Pidgin in the South-South. On whether the patterns can help resolve the Lingua Franca question, majority (90%) of the informants were of the view that Nigeria should begin to rethink the possibility of having a 'national' lingua franca and focus attention on regional use of languages. The troubles of having an acceptable and consensus national lingua franca are unending in Nigeria due to the multiplicity of languages and strong attachment to such languages. Only a minority (11%) of the informants viewed that National lingua Franca is possible in Nigeria. Hence alluding that pattern of language use during the campaigns supports the workability of regional lingua franca in Nigeria. One of the informants observed thus:

“Nigeria should leave the trouble of adopting a national lingua franca which is the root of our problem due to multiplicity of languages. We should go for regional use of languages as it works efficiently than the toga of 'national Lingua franca which is almost impossible in multilingual Nigeria. The use of languages during the campaigns is a test case of how effective regional language use can be in Nigeria.”(Dr Ihechi)

Discussion of findings

We found that patterns of use of languages during the 2015 electioneering campaigns suggest a regional language use of some sort. This reflects in a situation where the dominant language in each of the geo-political zones was predominantly used. The patterns depict ethnic/cultural appeals. Language understandably, is an identifying factor or entity, in this case ethnic/cultural identification for political office seekers. They explore this aspect of language for political support. For instance, Hausa was used more in most Northern zones apparently because of its dominance and more importantly because of its unifying factor for virtually all ethnic divides in northern Nigeria and the Islamic religion in Nigeria. Same for Yoruba in the West and Igbo in the East.

Also, the patterns indicate the futility of actually adopting a national lingua Franca because none of the Nigerian indigenous languages was used across the zones. This also explains the rejections of the option of the foreign language(s) as a national lingua franca.

In terms of resolving the (National) lingua franca question, we discovered that the spread of the languages and dynamics in the use of languages suggest subtle adoption of regional lingua franca option in Nigeria. In support of the regional Lingua Franca issue as a way of resolving the national Lingua franca question, we observe that regional Franca option facilitates a situation where the dominant language(s) within the regions are adopted as the lingua franca without alienating the minority languages in that it would allow some minority languages within each region an opportunity to healthily compete with other languages (the majors) for a place as lingua franca. Similarly, minority languages could receive the much canvassed scholarly attention needed for their standardization and general development in a situation of regional lingua Franca.

Let us briefly examine some fears expressed about the national lingua Franca issue and the hopes brought about by regional use of languages as reflected in the use of languages during the 2015 rallies. The perceived fear of linguistic imperialism has been expressed about the choice of one of the major languages as national lingua franca in Nigeria. The hope of de-centralization of the lingua franca issue thereby allowing regions to adopt their own lingua franca allays this perceived fear. Also, one fact about the regional lingua franca option is that it does not allow the majors even within regions to totally dominate the minors particularly because varieties of the major languages could be used in certain situations depending on choice and loyalty of people to their language. More so, in some cases, varieties of major languages and or minor languages within regions are mutually intelligible thereby disallowing or minimally allowing strife and rancor associated with the choice of mutually unintelligible options.

Another perceived fear bothers on the choice of Nigerian Pidgin (NP) as national lingua Franca. This fear could be allayed when we think of the NP as a regional lingua franca option in areas of its strong hold like South South Nigeria. From our data, one can deduce that Nigerian Pidgin has a wide spread in terms of usage in Nigeria. To be specific, in terms of language use in the 2015 electioneering campaign rallies in Nigeria, a combination involving the Nigerian Pidgin has the highest percentage (42%). In terms of predominant language, the use of NP and a combination of it has significant percentage of 25%. In terms of language mix and language of interpretation, its combinations rank high. These figures add credence to the much canvassed NP as option for national Franca in Nigeria. Arguments against the choice of NP bother more on its low social status, marginal or contact language issue and the issue of cultural anonymity. However, these arguments could be easily discountenanced in light of the fact that in regions where NP seems to have very stronghold like in the South South region, it is virtually creolized. In other words, it is being acquired as mother tongue or first language. The issue of cultural anonymity is gradually eroding. Nothing therefore could stop these people from adopting the NP as their regional lingua franca. Similarly, the ability of the NP to form hub of some sort for languages in contact makes it a veritable option for regional lingua franca in its areas of stronghold. A Pidgin essentially has two languages: one that provides the lexicon and another that provides the grammatical rules. This could allow local varieties within regions where the NP is used as regional lingua franca to constitute languages of the NP. This promotes and protects the linguistic rights of the local varieties.

In the same vein, the regional lingua franca option also allays fears associated with the status-demarcations of languages in Nigeria which further breeds crises and

weaken the possibility of having a national lingua franca. Nigeria is a multilingual country with a complicated sociolinguistic landscape consisting of three major language typologies: (i) about four hundred indigenous languages, (ii) three exogenous languages-English, French, Arabic, (iii) one relatively neutral language-Nigerian pidgin English. The first typology provided convenient excuse for the former British colonial administration to adopt a language policy, which institutionalized English as the official language. Years after the exit of the colonial masters following flag independence, a revised language policy maintained the official status of the English language but recognized Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba as national languages and about ten others as state languages, while local status was ascribed to the rest three hundred languages (Agbedo, 2007). In a regional lingua franca situation typicalised in the use of languages in the 2015 electioneering campaign rallies across Nigeria, these status discriminations are jettisoned. Local/ethnic languages hitherto, of the local status could assume high statuses as regional lingua franca in areas of its stronghold. This was the case in South South region where a dominating local variety like Ikwere was used during the campaign rallies.

In relation to the above issue, Agbedo(2007,p166) aptly observes that “one sure step in the direction of adopting an acceptable lingua franca in Nigeria, is a language policy that emphasizes the developmental aspect of all Nigerian indigenous languages irrespective of their individual status. Such a developmental emphasis focuses on the modernization and standardization of all local languages such that their speakers receive basic education that affords them unrestricted access to the nation’s socio-economic and political dispensations and the opportunities to participate in them” It is only when a language policy which of course allows regional lingua franca and by so doing confers linguistic empowerment on the generality of Nigerians through the instrumentality of their respective Mother Tongues or local/ ethnic varieties (no matter how lowly placed) is put in place, can it be expected that the rancorous situations of adopting a national lingua franca could be redundant or said to have been effectively handled. Once the fear of holding on to the primacy of language to circumscribe the citizens’ inalienable right to participate in various spheres of nation life is allayed, the strife associated with the national lingua Franca question will substantially lose its heat.

One other advantage of the regional lingua Franca option is that it allows more than one language to be adopted within specific regions. From our data, it could be seen that in some regions, more than one language served as language of interpretation which essentially is a regional lingua franca adoption. Also, the regional lingua franca option supports the Corrubias’s (1983) ideologies in language planning particularly linguistic assimilation, pluralism and vernacularization ideology. The linguistic assimilation ideology derives from the belief that everyone, regardless of origin should learn the dominant language in the society. This ideology according to Agbedo (2007) informed the USA’s melting- pot policy that adopted the WASP core cultural consensus and English as its language of expression. The same goes for French in France, Portuguese in Portugal, Spanish in Spain and indeed all endoglossic states. Within the regional lingua franca situation, any of majors within the region or the local varieties could assimilate others within the region. For instance like in the South South region, where NP seems to have assimilated others during the campaign rallies. Linguistic pluralism ideology derives from the recognition of more than one language. This is very possible in a regional lingua option

but one of the major perceived fears of national lingua Franca option in Nigeria. Typical examples are English/ French in Canada, English/Flemish in Belgium, Afrikaans /English in South Africa regions. Vernacularization ideology which derives from the modernization and standardization of an indigenous language lends support to the regional lingua franca option.

Summary and Conclusion

The challenges of adopting a national lingua Franca in Nigeria keep steering us in the face amidst fears of which of the over 400 indigenous languages and about three exoglossic languages could be adopted as lingua Franca. We revisited this issue based on some insights in the dynamics in the use of languages in the 2015 electioneering campaign rallies across six geo-political zones in Nigeria. One major insight among others is that this dynamics in the use of languages represents a subtle adoption of regional lingua Franca in Nigeria. We therefore have made a case for the adoption of regional lingua Franca in Nigeria. Our discussions have also captured some perceived hopes of this option in Nigeria and how such hopes allays the perceived fears associated with adopting a national lingua Franca. We conclude therefore that in some climes where Lingua franca hurdles are surmounted, some political activities/maneuvering among other issues facilitate or provide a litmus-test of some sort. The dynamics in the use of languages in the 2015 electioneering campaign rallies across different regions in Nigeria is a litmus-test of a sort for regional lingua Franca option.

Recommendations

We therefore recommend that in the place of a national lingua franca, a regional lingua franca should be harnessed in Nigeria. The electioneering campaigns of 2015 have provided a litmus test of some sort for the effectiveness of regional lingua franca in Nigeria. Instead of indirectly allowing the dominance of English on Nigerian indigenous languages because of unending struggles for national lingua franca, efforts should be geared towards harnessing regional dominant languages for lingua franca in each region. Presently and for years, the regional use of languages has been obtainable in various regions in Nigeria without a conscious agreement, so nothing should stop Nigeria from taking advantage of the option.

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