

Linguist ideology and linguistic trauma in Nigeria: Issues and challenges

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Abstract

Ideologies are said to be systems of ideas that function to create views of reality that appear as the most rational view; a view that is based on 'common sense' notions of how the social world ought to be. A derivative of the ideology concept is *language ideology*, seen as the self-evident ideas and objectives a group holds concerning roles of language in the social experiences of members as they contribute to the expression of that group. This paper examines the concept of language ideology in Nigeria and how its application in a multilingual and multi-dialectal setting, which dictates linguistic preferences and choices in communication systems, has not only informed the enthronement of linguisticism and conferment of undue linguistic capital on some communication systems but also engendered linguistic trauma. The ideologies and structures, which are used to legitimate, effectuate, and reproduce an unequal division of power and resources between groups, defined on the basis of language, provide veritable ground for linguistic disenfranchisement. In pure linguist ideology, the dominant group/language presents an idealized image of itself, stigmatizing the dominated group/language, and rationalizing the relationship between the two, always to the advantage of the dominant group/language. Given that this deliberate ideologization of language traumatizes the dominated group, this paper calls for a radical reinvention of language ideology in Nigeria in a manner that guarantees the language rights of all Nigerians.

Introduction

This paper is mainly inspired by a typical Nigerian joke, which goes thus: A Nigerian of Igbo extraction in the employ of an oil servicing company as a driver attached to an expatriate maintenance engineer was on his regular duty schedule. He was driving through the early morning busy traffic with his big *Oga* seating behind him portly ensconced in his paraphernalia. Then suddenly, the white man let out a violent sneeze. Almost instinctively, the driver crooned, "*Ndu gi!*" In a typical Igbo setting, when someone sneezes, it behooves anybody around to say, '*Ndu gi*', which literally translates as 'Your life'. It is an expression of solidarity with the sneezing person, which also doubles as a kind of supplication to God, asking Him to preserve the person's life. Moments later, the *Oga* convolved with another round of sneeze that boomed in quick succession. As usual, the driver responded with *Ndu gi*. Yet, the sneezing would not let the white man be. What a stubborn type of sneezing that would not yield to the mollifying effect of *Ndu gi*, the driver wondered. Just then, he remembered that the person sneezing were an *oyibo* and probably an *Ndu gi* prayer wouldn't be an effective antidote for an *oyibo* sneezing. That was it! The driver got ready for his ever-sneezing *Oga*. Luckily, the *oyibo* did not keep him waiting for too long as he promptly sneezed,

this time with a gob of thick sputum jutting out of both nostrils. Quickly, the driver yelled out, “Your life!”

“What?” the white man asked, cocking his ears in apprehension.

“*Oga*, I say *your life*,” the driver explained.

“My life?” the *Oga* screamed, a questioning stare, boring into the driver’s squinted face.

“Yes, your life for sneeze, *Oga*.”

Having confirmed his worst fears, the white man directed his driver to make a detour and drive straight to a nearby police station where he made a formal report, accusing the driver of threatening his life. In an era of kidnapping and youth militancy, the white man, in the calculation of the police, was not far from the truth. They promptly commended him for making the report and promised that the ransom-seeking kidnapper would be properly dealt with in accordance with the laws of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Instantly, the driver was declared guilty as charged before being volleyed headlong into one of the detention cells where hardened criminals pummeled him into atomistic pulps. All efforts sweated out by the driver to tell his own version of the story failed to save him the trauma of having an unsolicited romance with a typical Nigerian police detention cell.

The driver’s trauma reflects in microcosm the linguistic trauma, which victims of pure linguistic ideology suffer in the typical Nigerian sociolinguistic setting. These privations, which form the subject of analysis in this paper, would be examined from intra-language and inter-language perspectives. The first perspective borders on the rationalization of unequal division of power and resources (both material and non-material) between groups, which are defined on the basis of dialects of a given language. The second perspective looks at the valuation of the linguistic resources of a given language as symbolic of social groups at the expense of the devaluation of the linguistic resources of other languages.

Language ideology, linguistic capital and linguisticism: Some theoretical considerations

Heath (1989) defines language ideology as the “the self-evident ideas and objectives a group holds concerning roles of language in the social experiences of members as they contribute to the expression of that group” and later (1997: 383) as “a variety of integrated assertions, theories, goals that attempt to guide collective sociopolitical beliefs and actions regarding language choices in communication systems. Such language values and decisions prescribe one language or language variety (including dialects, registers, and styles) over another and attempt to dictate the linguistic preferences and practices of international alliances as well as nation-states, national, and regional institutions and local communities. Irvine (1989: 255) proposes another definition as “the cultural (or sub-cultural) system of ideas about social and linguistic relationships, together with their loading of moral and political interests. The analytical rationale for linking language and ideology, as Woolard & Schieffelin (1994: 58) “is to examine connections between cultural and symbolic forms, social history, and issues of power along with the investigation of the processes by which essential meanings about language are socially produced as effective and powerful.” Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (2006) define language ideology as “ingrained, unquestioned beliefs about the way the world is, the way it should be, and the way it has to be with respect to language.” This includes assumptions about the merits of homogenous language within a society, the perceived beauty of certain languages, whether certain languages or dialects are seen as intelligent or unintelligent, and other notions about the value of certain ways of speaking. Generally

speaking, the concept of language ideology captures the “shared bodies of commonsense notions about the nature of language in the world.”

A language or linguistic ideology, in a typical sociolinguistic or linguistic anthropology discourse, notes *Wikipedia*, is a systematic construct about how languages carry or are invested with certain moral, social, and political values, giving rise to implicit assumptions that people have about a language or about language in general. Standard Language Ideology, as Lippi-Green (1997) observes, is “a bias toward an abstract, idealized homogeneous language, which is imposed and maintained by dominant institutions and which has as its model the written language, but which is drawn primarily from the spoken language of the upper middle class.” This, notes *Wikipedia*, represents a belief in standard, uniform way of speaking, which is thought to be a better way of communicating, and also that this is the normal way that language exists. Nonetheless, as Tollefson (1995) observes, “linguists agree that variation is normal and intrinsic to all spoken language, even to standard varieties.” In essence, the idea that a standard language, such as Standard British English, has homogenous syntax is to say the least an idealization, based not on the reality of the language, as advanced by modern linguistics’ philosophy of descriptivism, but instead on the prescriptivists’ idea about what language should be. Language ideologies encompass all the explicit and implicit attitudes about language that define what is perceived as “proper” speech. Like other forms of ideology, language ideologies are often politically significant and deeply shape how speakers understand social life, as the assumptions that they involve imply a result without any necessary examination of the facts. While research in sociolinguistics generally holds that all languages are equal in their communicative and expressive abilities, language ideologies may privilege a given lect, language or even linguistic family above all others, claiming it to be intrinsically better for some or all purposes.

Language ideology has wide implications for society including moral and political assumptions about how best to deal with language in society, and thus for a polity’s language policy. The concept of language ideology has a tangential connection with Bourdieu’s (1986) *linguistic capital*, which concerns the manner in which a given language or communicative practices, such as bilingualism or multilingualism can function as a symbolic asset that gives value to their speakers by bringing recognition to the use of two or more languages as a legitimate, important, and worthwhile manner of communication. Whether a language or communicative practice functions as linguistic capital depends on the markets in which it operates. Social arenas have to recognize given languages or communicative practices as having value and different social arenas may give difference to the same language or communicative practice. Thompson (1991), according to Agbedo (2007: 208), notes the relationship between linguistic and other types of capital thus: “The distribution of linguistic capital is related in specific ways to the distribution of other capital (economic capital, cultural capital, etc.), which defines the location of the individual within the social space. Hence, differences in terms of accent, grammar, and vocabulary... are not indices of the social positions of speakers and reflect on the quantities of linguistic capital (and other capital they possess).” In the competition for value, the economic and political worth of the populations who speak a certain language, as compared to resources of other population, enable them to appropriate linguistic capital. Ben-Rafael (1994) makes an important distinction between the market value of a language versus the social status of the original carriers. These two types of value contribute to whether a given language can function as linguistic capital for its speakers in a given social arena/market.

A corollary of linguistic capital is the concept of *linguicism*, that is, ideological struggles, which focus on languages and differential allocation of functions. As a concept, linguicism is a form of prejudice, an “-ism” along the lines of racism, ageism or sexism, which involves an individual making judgments about another's wealth, education, social status, character, and/or other traits based on choice and use of language. The word and its use (in both the original and extended senses) is credited to the linguist, Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, who coined the concept in the mid-1980s, and gave it the following definition: “ideologies and structures which are used to legitimate, effectuate, and reproduce unequal division of power and resources (both material and non-material) between groups which are defined on the basis of language.” Linguicism is also defined as the absence of language rights, as copiously stipulated in the 52-Article Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights document of the United Nations. Prominent among them including the following: (i) every child should have the right to identify positively with his original mother tongue and have his identification accepted and respected by others; (ii) every child should have the right to learn the mother tongue fully; (iii) every child should have the right to choose when he wants to use the mother tongue in all official situations. Essentially, linguicism is a social phenomenon, which may take the form of policy decisions against certain linguistic groups in some regions of the global community or involve a consideration of a person's ability or inability to use one language instead of another.

Although seen as a form of prejudice, linguicism is not at par with racism and sexism in terms of level of public awareness (as cultural taboos), possibly because not much attention has been raised about it. Also, the general feeling is that it is logically unjustifiable and morally reprehensible to draw inferences about a person's education partly based on his/her linguistic proficiency, more so when a good number of linguists are of the opinion that the criteria used for defining proficiency tend to defy every conceivable linguistic logic. Theoretically speaking, any individual may be the victim of linguicism regardless of social and ethnic status. All the same, oppressed and marginalized social minorities are often its most consistent targets, due to the fact that the speech varieties that come to be associated with such groups have a tendency to be stigmatized. Such social minority groups cut across the world's continents. In the USA for instance, African-Americans, who speak a particular non-standard variety of English – African American Vernacular English (AAVE) - are frequently the unwitting targets of linguicism. This is because AAVE, considered as a substandard variety of English is often perceived by members of mainstream American society as indicative of low intelligence or limited education.

Also, Hispanic Americans suffer some degree of linguicism in some parts of the US. For instance, a person who has a thick Mexican accent and uses only simple English words may be thought of as poor, poorly educated, and possibly an illegal immigrant by many of the people who meet them. However, if the same person has a diluted accent or no noticeable accent at all and can use a myriad of words in complex sentences, they are likely to be perceived as more successful, better educated, and a legitimate citizen. Another example can be found in Québec, a predominantly francophone province of Canada, where there is a certain social stigma attached to the use of the English language and to English speakers themselves, and where the English language is also compared disfavouredly with French on historical, aesthetic and cognitive levels.

Such observed attitudes in the given speech communities aforementioned reflect a dominant linguistic ideology. It is the ideology that people should really be monoglot and

efficiently targeted toward referential clarity rather than encumbering themselves with the messiness of multiple varieties in play at a single time. In Nigeria, the sociolinguistic typology, which favours dominant linguistic ideology, has not only conferred linguistic capital on the dominant code (English) but also encouraged linguisticism as an official policy of government. The statutory provisions of language ideology and the underlying linguisticism and its sociolinguistic implications form the thrust of discussion in the next section.

Legitimizing linguistic trauma through dominant language policy: The inter- and intra-language perspectives

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 overlords to adopt a language policy, which institutionalized English as the official language. Years after the exit of the colonial masters following the attainment of 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 over three hundred languages. As regards language use in education, the National Policy on Education (NPE), guided by the need for the development of a national language for the country, opted for the adoption of a gradualist approach, which advocates the learning of one of the three national languages – one of which is envisaged to emerge as the national language in future. To this effect, the primary school curriculum is structured in a manner that predisposes a Nigerian school child to receive pedagogic instructions in his/her mother tongue and English at a later (unspecified) stage. The child is equally expected to learn one of the major languages other than his/her mother tongue. Later, (1998) French was included as the second official language, which the school child would equally learn as a subject. Beyond the school environment, the three national languages were enshrined in the Constitution as alternate means of communication in the National Assembly.

In spite of the lofty projections of the policy on paper, their actualization has been farfetched due mainly to strategic problems of implementation. The gains of this unenviable heritage of failures in policy implementation have translated into deliberate entrenchment of the dominant linguistic ideology, which confers undue linguistic capital on the English language at the expense of nearly four hundred indigenous Nigerian languages. This official policy of the federal government has inadvertently foisted varying degrees of linguistic imperialism on majority of Nigerians, who have little or no communicative competence in the English language. In situations where the inability to use the English language as a common means of communication carries with it social stigmas, it is pointless to ignore the fact that such a policy, which circumscribes the citizens' inalienable rights to equal access to opportunities and participation in the nation's socioeconomic and political dispensations is bound to engender a sense of loss, neglect, and marginalization among such linguistic minority group. Such sense represents some dimensions of emotional and psychological trauma, which Nigerians have been passing through, perhaps in subdued silence.

In classical literature, emotional and psychological trauma has been explained as “the result of extraordinarily stressful events that shatter your sense of security, making you feel helpless and vulnerable in a dangerous world.” Continuing, it notes:

...traumatic experiences often involve a threat to life or safety, but any situation that leaves you feeling overwhelmed and alone can be traumatic, even if it doesn't involve physical harm. A stressful event is most likely to be traumatic if: It happened unexpectedly; you were unprepared for it; you felt powerless to prevent it; it happened repeatedly; someone was intentionally cruel; it happened in childhood. Emotional and psychological trauma can be caused by single-blow, one-time events, such as a horrible accident, a natural disaster, or a violent attack. Trauma can also stem from ongoing, relentless stress, such as living in a crime-ridden neighborhood or struggling with cancer. Commonly overlooked sources of emotional and psychological trauma include falls or sports injuries; surgery (especially in the first 3 years of life); the sudden death of someone close; an auto accident; the breakup of a significant relationship; a humiliating or deeply disappointing experience; the discovery of a life-threatening illness or disabling condition...

Going back to the joke at the beginning of this paper, it would soon be evident that the driver's emotional and psychological trauma derived from *a humiliating or deeply disappointing experience* and the discovery of *a disabling condition*. Not a few Nigerians have been living with the horrors of linguistic trauma reminiscent of the driver. During the Second Republic, some public office holders inadvertently turned stand-up comedians as they provided comic relief whenever they insisted on communicating in English. The story of late Governor Barkin Zuwo and his *coke and fanta* mineral resources development framework provides constant reminder to the effortless ease with which some Nigerian public figures unleash unmitigated violence on the English grammar. This singular grammatical blunder provided the tonic for Nigerians to spin *cokastic* and other similar satirical stories, whose patent they gleefully ascribed to *His Excellency*. From then onwards, Zuwo became a metaphor for demonstrable blissful ignorance of the basic rules of the English language.

Apparently, Barkin Zuwo was not a loner in this *jihad* against all known grammatical rules of English. A member of the National Assembly terribly overwhelmed by the dry parliamentary debates on a bill seeking to legalize abortion in Nigeria took time off to doze away. When it was time to put the matter to a voice vote, the presiding officer asked those in support of the bill to indicate by saying 'aiye' and those against it should do so by saying 'nay'. As the presiding officer's stick struck for the 'aiyes', a colleague of the sleeping parliamentarian sitting by the left raised his hand in support of the bill and promptly nudged him severally to wake him up. As he struggled to rub away shafts of sleep from his drooling eyelids, his colleague enjoined him to raise his hand. Quickly, the man shot up his hand. Then, another colleague, shocked by his strange support asked him whether he was supporting a bill seeking to legalize abortion. "*Babu*", the sleeping honourable member screamed and promptly put down his hand and thereafter voted against the bill as was appropriately educated.

Another honourable member and Chairman of the House Committee on Education, who was reportedly asked by some news correspondents what the House intended doing about the nationwide students' unrest on campuses, expressed genuine surprise at such a 'stupid' question. "How can the students rest when they have to go to lectures, do their

assignments, and write exams?” the honourable member asked dismissively. Of course, one can be sure that an honourable member, who never understood the simple concept of *students' unrest*, could not have snapped at the news reporters in such a flawless language. The Houses of Assembly in the various States equally had their own fair distribution of such honourable illiterates. In the then old Anambra State House of Assembly, an honourable member was taken to task by a reporter on what he intended doing for his constituency. In an off-handed manner, the greatly elated legislator glibly explained his development blueprint in the following words: “I will *water* my constituency; I will *fire* my constituency; I will *korota* my constituency...” Such gaffs and goofs, which characterize the use of the English language in Nigeria, are not by any means an exclusive preserve of public figures as a good number of Nigerians, including the so-called academics and other educated/learned ones have actually ‘distinguished’ themselves in the patriotic quest to *nigerianize* the white man’s language. The only snag with this development is that the tenet of dominant linguistic ideology, which encourages linguicism, not only stigmatizes such linguistic deviance but also circumscribes the linguistic rights of the individual.

Of course, it goes without saying that the honourable member, who dozed off while an important issue was being hotly debated on the floor of the House could not have gone to sleep were it not for the fact that the linguistic fireworks conducted solely in English sounded more like a lullaby that lulled him to sleep. The traumatic effect of this deliberate linguistic disenfranchisement boiled over when he realized his colleague’s apparent mischief. He was barely restrained by other honourable members from venting his spleen on his colleague for attempting to trick him into supporting a bill, which was against his religious belief. Perhaps, it never occurred to him that he had his limited communicative competence in English, which excluded him from participating effectively in the debates, to blame. One can only imagine the magnitude of the emotional trauma, which that humiliating experience exerted on the honourable MP who needed to rely on the trust and confidence of his faithful colleague to keep abreast of parliamentary proceedings throughout his 4-year sojourn in the National Assembly as a representative of his people. It was obvious that this disabling condition imposed great constraints on his legislative duties. If he could not decipher the right moment for *aiye* or *nay*, how then could he have contributed meaningfully to debates, or even engaged in more serious legislative business of raising a motion or proposing a bill? Surely, the best he could have done was to monopolize a seat as Chairman of House Committee on Back Benching, where he diligently waited on his trusted colleague for the right signal whenever the Speaker called for a voice vote, or who to throw punches at whenever the physical prowess of the honourable MPs was summoned to resolve a thorny issue that had defied normal legislative debates.

Beyond the Second Republic MP, whose legislative duties were constrained by linguistic encumbrances imposed by the nation’s dominant linguistic ideology, private and social engagements of Nigerians equally bear the imprimaturs of linguistic traumas. Take the case of a typical University that lost a senior academic. A mock faculty board was organized to honour the deceased colleague. The proceedings commenced soon after the remains were wheeled into the board room, already filled to capacity by other academics eager to pay their last respect to a fallen colleague. As the Dean began the roll-call, members whose names were called answered. When it was the turn of the deceased, the Dean called three times without a response. It was at that moment that the sense of loss was gravely heightened as the realities of death dawned on everybody especially the

deceased's wife and children, who sat beside the casket, all clad in mourning dress. The widow tried all she could but failed to resist the hot tears plopping down her cheeks. Soon after, she broke into a free wail, extolling her husband's virtues and bemoaning his demise. All these she tried to accomplish in the English language. Having found herself in an academic environment, it was only wise and desirable that she cried in the English language. Perhaps, she had reasoned that the message she was struggling to pass across about her husband's demise would have been lost on her audience if she had continued to cry in Igbo. All the same, her limited communicative competence in English not only robbed her the chances of baring her soul but rubbed her audience the wrong way as her *oyibo* crying came off diffidently, sounding so artificial and mechanical as if she were mocking the dead. Of course, it was obvious that the poor widow could not have mocked her dear late husband. It was rather her insistence on crying in English, which amounted to flying to the sun with waxed wings that tended to create the wrong impression. The trauma of losing a dear husband connived with her proven inability to use the English language to rub in this hard feeling, thus making the initial emotional trauma doubly traumatic.

From the intra-language perspective, the so-called *Union Igbo* was contrived exclusively from the parochial standpoints of Qn[cha, Xmxh[a, Owere and Isuama dialect areas, leaving out the rest of Igboland. The generic effect of this convoluted linguistic engineering is that the people, whose dialects were not part of that *Union*, are irredeemably tied to the inescapable option of coping with linguistic traumas quite often associated with linguisticism. In this regard, the people of the northern Igbo extraction (i. e. the present Enugwu and Ebonyi States) appear to feel the heat of dominant linguistic ideology most. From our earlier characterization of linguisticism, this ideologization of the Igbo language not only reproduces an unequal division of power and resources between the dominant and dominated groups but also confers an idealized image of self on the dominant group, who in turn stigmatizes the dominated group, thus rationalizing the relationship between the two, always to the advantage of self. This explains the situation today whereby it is more fashionable to command demonstrable communicative competence in these 'elite' dialects than other dialects considered as mortally unintelligible. Having been thrown up as the dialects of prestige and high status by accident of history, it has become imperative to deploy them as the officially recognized means of expression in formal discourses, literature, print and electronic media and any deviation from this is frowned upon as a linguistic heresy, which attracts all forms of stigmatization. Speakers of such stigmatized dialects are usually prone to varying degrees of emotional and psychological trauma deriving from linguistic disenfranchisement. When one's right to express himself in his dialect is circumscribed by a linguisticist ideology, the tendency is to beat a hasty retreat into one's cocoon of timidity and nurse his bruised psyche in silence. His natural disposition for creativity (whether literary or musical artistry) remains essentially potential because his 'unintelligible' 'inaccessible' dialect coupled with his limited communicative competence in the 'standard dialect' foreclose any attempt at exploiting his rich mines of potentialities.

One of the basic features of a standard variety is intelligibility, which transcends all regional, social, and generational boundaries of the given speech community. This is hardly the case with the so-called Standard Igbo as other Igbo dialects, which were not part of the Union Igbo contraption are hardly mutually intelligible. Speakers of these other 'non-standard' varieties of Igbo learn to speak the standard variety only in formal settings as students of educational institutions where Igbo is taught as a subject. It could

equally be acquired through interactions during language contact situations in urban areas of Igboland by those whose socioeconomic activities take them outside their immediate speech community. For the illiterates and those whose daily routine revolves around their local milieu, the Standard Igbo is equated to an entirely different *oyibo* language, spoken and understood exclusively by the educated ones. This picture of unintelligibility was graphically painted by this comic encounter. An elderly woman from the non-standard-speaking area of Igboland was on *ile qmxgwq* (post-natal visit) at her son-in-law's house. She was so doted on by her daughter that she decided against going back to the village after few days as earlier planned. In the morning of the third day, she was brushing her teeth on the verandah and a co-tenant greeted her,

'*Mama unu aputasi ula*' (Mama, have you people woken up this morning).

The woman snapped back,

'*Xla wen? Izu enq kpxrxr kpxrx.*' (Going where? Complete four native weeks!).

Apparently, the local woman thought the co-tenant was asking her if she was preparing to go back to the village. She made it clear to the inquisitor that she wasn't going anywhere until she had spent at least four native weeks. This encounter speaks volumes of the mutual unintelligibility of the dialects of Mama and the co-tenant.

Given that the Standard Igbo, like all standard varieties is the frame of reference invested with high status and prestige, the tendency is for most speakers of the language including those who have limited communicative competence in the standard variety to tap into the current of information flow by 'gate-crashing' into the 'elite dialects'. In the process, they end up synthesizing a new dialect of Igbo, which comes off as a funny combination of the linguistic features of both the 'non-standard' and 'standard' dialects. Take the case of the artisan from Elugwu-Ezike who found himself in Qn[cha in search of greener pastures. He entered a canteen and demanded to be served. The dialogue went thus:

Waiter: Kedu ife [chqlx? (What do you want to eat?)

Artisan: Kedi ofeyi unu nwer? (What type of soup do you have?)

Waiter: (confused) G[n]? (What?)

Artisan: Q bx ofeyi ekenke kqbx ofeyi xkpxmkpa? (Is it egwusi or qgbqng soup?)

The waiter's face knitted deeper in confusion as the artisan seemed to be uttering mere gibberish. When the artisan realized how woefully he had failed to communicate his desires to the waiter, he resigned himself to whatever that was available but with a proviso: 'Weelx, ofeyi abxle abxle i nwer, kpalxmaa akpalxma kpatasie ya ike ka m gbulu aka o.' (Well, whichever soup you have, please stir it very well, scoop out enough of the soup that would go round for the pounded yam and extra for licking after eating). Whether the waiter eventually understood the artisan and his strange dialect or not was anybody's guess. But the artisan was not done yet. He had a little misunderstanding with his mate in the workshop which prompted the intervention of the *Qga*. When it was his turn to state his own side of the story, the artisan started thus:

"Amarq m ihe ne-eme nwa n[ya. I kwu emetu ye eka, q dxrxb; i kwu emetu ye eka, q fxba arx..." (I don't know what is wrong with this person. As soon as you tease him or even touch him playfully, he would start spoiling for a fight...).

Not only has the synthetic dialect denied the *jjc* artisan interpersonal communication, the derogatory insinuations and sneering remarks- *onye waawa*, *nwa Abakaliki*, *nwa Nsxxka*, *onye Imezi* - that often go with such 'misuse' of Igbo language could be quite traumatic. Such has been the traumatizing burden, which linguistic minority groups in speech communities driven by dominant linguistic ideology are compelled to sweat out.

The challenges of mitigating the traumatic effects of linguisticism stare all of us in the face. This is thrust of analysis in the next section.

Meeting the challenges of linguistic trauma in Nigeria

Classical literature brims over with the approaches to the management and treatment of emotional and psychological trauma. These include but not limited to talk therapies, Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT) - intentionally changing one's thoughts and actions - and systematic desensitization to reduce reactivity to a traumatic stressor. These approaches to healing trauma were developed without brain science information, and therefore have varying degrees of success. Recent developments in the treatment of emotional trauma include new, effective forms of psychotherapy and somatic (body) therapies that were developed with new brain science information in mind. Although often intensely interpersonal, these therapies are also psychological and neurological in their focus and application. This group of therapies relies on innate instinctual resources, rather than medications, to bring about healing. They include Eye Movement Desensitization/Reprocessing (EMDR), Somatic psychotherapies, Hakomi method, Somatic Psychology, AEDP (Accelerated Experiential Dynamic Psychotherapy). Although these methods have recorded varying degrees of successes, the current trend in medical practice lays more emphasis on preventive than curative medicine. Interestingly, these approaches to the management and treatment of psychological trauma hardly took cognizance of linguistic trauma. This takes us to the issue of mitigating linguistic trauma through deliberate enforcement of linguistic human rights.

Possibly the best-known major position taken by sociolinguists on this issue is outlined by Tove Skutnabb-Kangas and Robert Phillipson. In a 1994 volume, *Linguistic Human Rights: Overcoming linguistic discrimination*, Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson note, "The challenge... is to see how a human rights perspective can support efforts to promote linguistic justice." Paulston (1997) characterises the above approach as representing one type of "exhortatory and ideologically based studies in which language rights are considered a causal variable" aimed at producing "social change or future developments". She contrasts this with theoretical historical and descriptive accounts with language rights treated as a dependent variable. Her own argument is to consider LR as context-specific, emic rights rather than universal. Apart from these, other scholars have made insightful contributions in the area of linguistic human rights (cf. de Varennes, 1996, 2008; Patrick, 2005; Skutnabb-Kangas et. al., 1994; Paulston, 1997; Marcia, 1979; Kontra et. al.; 1999; Kibbee, 1988; Hamel, 1997; Branson & Miller, 1998; Phillipson, 1988; 2003; Blommaert, 2001, 2003; Eades, 2007).

The institutions and non-governmental organizations, signatories to the present Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights, meeting in Barcelona from 6 to 9 June 1996, made a number of declarations, one of which considers the following to be inalienable personal rights which may be exercised in any situation: the right to be recognized as a member of a language community; the right to the use of one's own language both in private and in public; the right to the use of one's own name; the right to interrelate and associate with other members of one's language community of origin; the right to maintain and develop one's own culture; and all the other rights related to language which are recognized in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of 16 December 1966 and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of the same date. This Declaration considers that the collective rights of language groups may include the following, in addition to the rights attributed to the members of language

groups in the foregoing paragraph, and in accordance with the conditions laid down in article 2.2: These include the right for their own language and culture to be taught; the right of access to cultural services; the right to an equitable presence of their language and culture in the communications media; the right to receive attention in their own language from government bodies and in socioeconomic relations. The aforementioned rights of persons and language groups must in no way hinder the interrelation of such persons or groups with the host language community or their integration into that community. Nor must they restrict the rights of the host community or its members to the full public use of the community's own language throughout its territorial space.

The Declaration that all language communities that equal rights considers discrimination against language communities to be inadmissible, whether it be based on their degree of political sovereignty, their situation defined in social, economic or other terms, the extent to which their languages have been codified, updated or modernized, or on any other criterion. It requires that all necessary steps must be taken in order to implement this principle of equality and to render it effective. It recognizes that (i) everyone has the right to carry out all activities in the public sphere in his/her language, provided it is the language proper to the territory where s/he resides; (ii) everyone has the right to use his/her language in the personal and family sphere; (iii) everyone has the right to acquire knowledge of the language proper to the territory in which s/he lives; (iv) everyone has the right to be polyglot and to know and use the language most conducive to his/her personal development or social mobility, without prejudice to the guarantees established in this Declaration for the public use of the language proper to the territory.

On the role of the constituted authorities, the UN Declaration stipulated that the public authorities must take all appropriate steps to implement the rights proclaimed in this Declaration within their respective areas of jurisdiction. More specifically, international funds must be set up to foster the exercise of Linguistic Rights in communities which are demonstrably lacking in resources. Thus the public authorities must provide the necessary support so that the languages of the various communities may be codified, transcribed, taught, and used in the administration. The public authorities must ensure that the official bodies, organizations and persons concerned are informed of the rights and correlative duties arising from this Declaration. The public authorities must establish, in the light of existing legislation, the sanctions to be applied in cases of violation of the linguistic rights laid down in this Declaration.

In essence, one sure step towards grappling with the challenges of linguistic trauma and traumatization in Nigeria is the recognition and enforcement of the linguistic rights of the citizens. This, of course requires immediate articulation of implementation strategies for policies already formulated in this regard and other statutory provisions that had been lying comatose in the dusty statute books. Such step would no doubt save the energy often dissipated in managing and treating emotional and psychological trauma deriving from pure dominant language ideology.

Conclusions.

In this paper, we have looked at the ideologies that have tended to provide the basis for the language policy of a multilingual nation such as Nigeria. Such ideologies, which favour dominant language policy has not only encouraged the institutionalization of linguisticism and by implication conferred undue linguistic capital on some preferred communication systems, but also provided a veritable ground for nurturing linguistic trauma. Given that this deliberate ideologization of language traumatizes the dominated

group, this paper calls for a radical reinvention of language ideology in Nigeria in a manner that would guarantee the linguistic rights of Nigerians as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights. This, by implication, requires an urgent rethink of the current national language policy, which tends to accord undue primacy on foreign languages – English and French – to the detriment of the indigenous Nigerian languages. Such a revised national language policy should aim at dismantling linguisticism at both intra- and inter-language levels and conferring unfettered linguistic empowerment on the generality of Nigerians through the instrumentality of their respective mother-tongues.

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