

# LANGUAGE POLICY: NIGERIA AND THE ROLE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN THE 21ST CENTURY

*Shaibu Sunday Danladi*

Institute Of Political Studies, Faculty Of Political Studies,  
Charles University in Prague, Czech Republic

---

## Abstract

This article examines the role of English in Nigeria as a medium of communication, political activities-social and academic guidance from its historical perspective, and the duration of gradual transition to the present status of bilingualism and its democratization of language in conformity with national unification. It shows how English occupied an influential role in the formation of the national expectations and integration of the Nigerian nation through its “official language” status. We find that even a decade after decolonization in Nigeria, English continues to enjoy its primacy, especially in the formation of political and educational systems as a medium of instruction. It highlights the transition from English monopoly to bilingualism in accordance with indigenous demands for language change in educational policy that could be the form in line with mother tongue languages. It also evaluates and shows the current relationship between language shift and language death in another case with the emergence of the Nigerian Pidgin English. Specifically, it critically analyses how language issues are politically motivated in educational, political and social life of the nation in pre- and post-colonial administration. This paper scrutinizes the current response from society on the language issues as it moves toward global democratization of the language situation in Nigeria. Finally, it suggests that despite politically driven forces behind the use of indigenous languages in Nigerian society, the prospects for the English language in Nigerian national affairs are extraordinarily slim, and if the English language survives, it could mean a Nigerian kind of African English as observed by Chinua Achebe: English language, “but in African tones.”

---

**Keywords:** Language policy, hegemony, political transition, language shift, pidgin English and democratization

*“It was humiliating to have to speak to one’s Countryman in a foreign language, especially, In the presence of the proud owners of that Language. They would naturally assume that ,One had no language of one’s own”*1  
...Chinua Achebe, *“Things falls apart”* pp. 214

### **Definitions of language, the roles of language, policy and language policy**

The importance of communication to man is incalculable, especially when daily human interaction is considered. Long before the postmodernist, the value of language began, the primacy of language in human history has never been in doubt. In political and social policy, language functions as a vehicle of interaction and an instrument of communication with the use of communications, although it has always possessed an added cultural importance as a tool of the dominant ideology. That is to learn a language is not only reaching out to others but to maintain a variety of the social bond, a shared sense of values and communal awareness, Linguists of all persuasions seem to agree that a language should be viewed as a system; a set of elements, each of which has a capacity of contributing to the workings of the whole (Beau Grande and Dressler 1992:31). Language is a powerful tool of control used by the colonial powers. Language forms a large part of the culture of people-it is through their language that they express their folk tales, myths, proverbs and history (Picador et al., 1988, the African trilogy) Language also covers a more potent and characteristic of human behaviour. It consists of a comprehensive and overlapping set of “sub-languages, ” both ethnically and geographically defined territory known as dialects--some are in some cases defined by shared settings known to be registered while others are linked to profession, class or educational level or a combination of these elements. The language includes a wide range of variation from a variety of human activities in a system of interacting with somebody, society, or culture. It also plays a crucial role in the social, political and economic life support of the people in a given geographic entity. In spite of all perceived roles of languages to humankind, an all-embracing interpretation of it continues to elude us due to the complexity of its structure and the functions it performs. A useful definition of communication should include the feeling that language has been widely studied and acclaimed as the most valuable human institution and is indispensable in all spheres of life (Crystal 1987) Conceptualized it as having perhaps a “magical, ” "mystical” and "unique” role in capturing the breadth of human thoughts and endeavour.” It means that for a country to function properly it needs the cooperation and understanding of people (Rufai 1977) For co-operation and understanding among different ethnic groups, inter-ethnic discussion was needed. Antonio de Nebrija published in Spain in 1492 the idea “[l] language has always been the perfect instrument of an empire.” Language

functions include the sophisticated mechanism of human communication and as such. It is the crucial component of cultural identity and the most striking factor in distinguishing one culture from another. For example, Igbo and Hausa in Nigeria which share different linguistic identity, culture and social life within one define institutions as a nation. The roles of language include a substantial amount of people's historical experience, their thought patterns, and their world view. Language roles paralleled along the embodiment of culture lead to the depth of a person's reflection—beyond the practical necessities of life to such aspects as the search for knowledge, education and collaboration among multi-ethnic societies, In such a way, it revealed how English language continues to operate signs and elaborate functions in almost all facets of Nigeria's life. Particularly unique position where range of and vital in the use of English are exceptionally experienced in Nigeria is in the domains of politics, education, legal matters, mass media, art and leisure, all of which are typically carried out through the medium of English. The same is true to everyday publications, as well as other various quests for national unity.

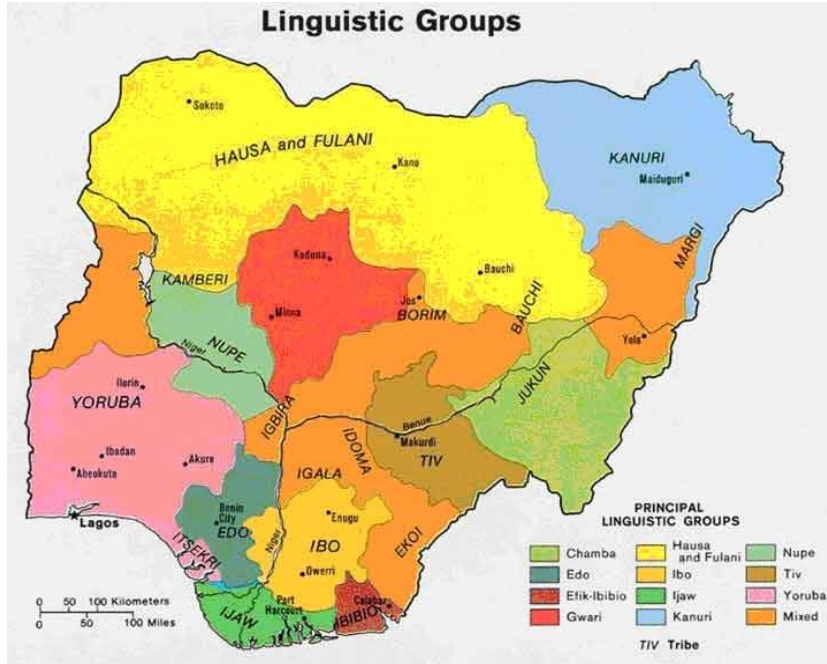
“**Policy**” Policy is defined by the Oxford Advanced Dictionary as “that plan of action, statement of aims and ideas, especially one made by government, political party, Business Company, etc.”

**Language policy:** Hoffmann (1991: 204) considers language planning as concerned with “both the symbolic function of language within a society, and with the instrumental use that its speakers make of their language.” However, Crystal (1990: 174) believes that language policy should be understood as a systematic attempt to resolve the communication problems of a community by studying the various dialects it uses and developing a viable policy concerning the collection and the use of different languages. One crucial point stated in this view is that the primary stage of language policy is seeking to understand the languages available and planning the importance of those selected to use for various functions. Furthermore, related to this is the fact that for any government-oriented change in language status, the first stage is information on its use (Mackey 1989:17). Like Crystal, Kaplan (1990: 4) declares that language planning remains an attempt by any organized body (most often some level of government) to initiate structured language change for some more or less clearly articulated purpose (commonly stated in altruistic terms but not based on altruistic intents). It is a similar but extended view that Kaplan & Baldauf pickup (1997: 3) as follows: Language planning is a body of ideas, laws and regulations. Language policy, change rules, beliefs, and practices intended to achieve a planned change (or to stop change from happening) in the language use in one or more communities. Lewis (1981) opined that: “any guidelines for language, especially in the system of education, has to take account of the

attitude of those likely to be affected. In the long run, no policy will be succeeded, which does not make one of the three following functions: (a) Conform to the express attitude of those involved, (b) convince those who expressed attitudes about the rightness of the policy, (c) or those that seek to remove the causes of the disagreement in any case knowledge about attitudes is essential to the formation of a policy as well as success in its implementation''. But Apple and Muysken (1987: 47) have also pointed out that language planning is part of language policy, arguing that language planning is in fact a part of, or the exact recognition of language policy: a government adopts a strict policy with respect to the language(s) spoken in the country and will try to keep it out in the form of communication planning, any case of language design is based on an effective language policy, and this will generally indicate a more inclusive government policy. However, one way out of these controversies is to adopt the general view held by Spolsky (2004: ISB4 abstract) as a working principle: "The language policy of a speech community may be revealed in its practices, its beliefs, or in straightforward language management" this choice is reflected in this article.

### **Nigeria and the roles of English language from historical perspectives**

Nigeria is a multilingual country comprises of different races, which occupied geographically, a complicated landscape from its historic-cultural, political, economic and educational developments. It is a country populated by approximately 150 million people, covering about 356,669 square miles, bordering the Gulf of Guinea in West Africa (daily almanac 2009). Politically, it is a creation of ideology, framed or fixed together, which means, a 'perfect strangers strangers strangers' 'unified for the specific interest of the imperialist, To put it differently. It is a country made up of three nations, and each of these ethnic group nations is struggling for their survival. I.e., The 'artificial' combination of the three regions in 1914 given the 'major language in Nigeria according to the British colonial point of view as Hausa in the northern region, Yoruba in the western region and Igbo in the Eastern region within the country has already craved an age for English language as the only unifying solution to the newly merges country. Language policy becomes the extraordinary measures to determine, values, norms, basis of conduct and loyalties between the forged nation. Nigeria is a lingua Franca in view of its geographical spread couple with its over 450 languages, and the number of their speakers. However, studies have shown that Hausa language is spoken by fourteen million people in Nigeria, Niger, and the Sudan, Yoruba by five million people in Nigeria, Dahomey, and Togo, and Igbo, also by five million people but spoken only in Nigeria) (Gregersen 1977) See linguistic map of Nigeria.



Geographically, the nation is populated by over 150 million people of whom 29 per cent are Hausa speaking nation located in the northern region. 21 per cent is Yoruba who lives in the western region, and 18 percent is Igbo people located in the eastern part of the country of which particular regions speak different languages as indicated upon the map. Historically, the inhabitant of the present-day Nigeria follows various parts of these regions and is made of diverse ethnic groups the majority of which include minority status. However, based on the language spoken in Nigeria. It is appropriate to assume that Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo are the three main languages, and each is widely spoken in their various regions while the over 400 others spoken languages throughout the country are seen as ‘minority’ languages. The label's majority, a minority language in Nigeria, also translate directly to the distribution of socio-political and economic power and prestige. In fact, belonging to the majority of language groups means reasonably having both political and economic power status while belonging to minority groups of languages means a situation of a weak power status high of socioeconomic and political power status of delivery and resource control. Culturally, Nigeria inherited three dominant religious traditions, Islam, Christianity and local traditional deities and each are widely practiced. Though, there exist other minor beliefs as well.

**Role of English in Nigeria from historical perspectives**

Socially, the social linguistic situation in Nigeria has often seen the social network and other activities be conducted in English. In a nutshell, :

English is widely practiced and occupies a prominent function both at the workplace, in the media and as a medium of instruction in schools along with the three crucial indigenous languages as well. However, we shall consider issues in regard to the three languages in the next section as it relates to educational policy by exploring the question, why has English occupied this position of prestige? Politically, As Eno-Abasi E. Arua (2003:135) rightly put it, “we cannot promptly specify the number of languages spoken in Nigeria” as a nation. The multiplicity of languages in Nigeria is so obvious and egregious that languages of people living within a 25 kilometre radius are massively different and incomprehensible to one another. The implication of this complex language situation is the absence of established effective communications between the ethnic groups, which becomes the basis not only for bigotry and hatred but for resorting to the use of English as a predominantly official language. It also implies that the choice of any of the three indigenous languages as a national language certainly will deteriorate to disintegration or unpleasant feelings. Okonwo (1994) rightly captured it well when he said, “imagine a country where more than 400 ethnic groups project the interest of their individual groups at the expense of the nation! No wonder many calls proffer solutions to this nationalistic state of Nigeria has manifested in suggestions for confederation, redefined federation or restructured federation. This has influenced the essential character and the role of English in Nigeria as unifying compacts.” In view of Adegbite (2004), “English should provide an expected co-coordinating role as a way of inter-ethnic and international communications.” During the early days the first type of English that served as a contact communication in Nigeria was a pidgin English, which has graduated to Creole in some riverine parts of Nigeria. From inception, English served a dual role in Nigeria, serving not only as a contact language between Nigerians who could not interact among themselves on one hand, but also between Nigerians and Europeans. It is now not only a second language, but also the language of commerce, education, politics, law and administration of the entire country affairs, though in different usages and command. Knowledge of English is therefore an essential requirement for anyone to promote or live in any wider context of the community, no matter the variety of English. (By this, we want varieties which have been influenced according to purpose, geographical dispensation, and mother tongue.) It is this convenient texture of the English language that provides the group interaction and group relations varieties for inter-ethnic communication and gives individuals the sense of oneness, unity and loyalty – the few that is accessible. Even the ceremonious English as is taught in the formal settings (school) always support the local texture – not used as an Englishman uses it. English in Nigeria is seen as a weapon because it provides an excellent representation

of political supremacy. Because of its official, instrumental ‘gate keeping’ functions, English is the premier language that Nigeria’s like their children to learn... (Goke-Pariola1987) Many Nigeria’s now imagine that English is the greatest legacy bequeathed to the people at the end of British colonialism (Bangbose 1971; Kebby 1986). In fact, English occupies such an important position within the life throughout the country that some groups of people now suggest positive reasons to justify its retention as Nigeria’s national language. The name most commonly associated with the English option is M. Kebby (1986), who observed, “No Nigerian language can perform scientific and technological needs ... Because no-one is perfect.” Others argue that since English is a neutral language, no ethnic group in Nigeria can claim ownership of it, so it will continue to belong equally to all Nigerians. Besides, English is an international language with the widespread use in international trade, dialogue and diplomacy. Quite recently, there have been significantly agitations for a national language, primarily a demand to defend sovereignty and political independence in Nigeria. English is a consequence of colonialism, to which many Nigerians find it difficult to reconcile them. Olagoke (1982): To be sure, there was a significant pressure for language change in the late 1990s. Achebe (as quoted by Bisong, 1995: 129) said, “I think that the English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experience. However, it will have to be a new English, still in full harmony with its ancestral home but altered to fit its new African surroundings.” This has been the shift in the mother tongue attributes to English words as spoken widely in the 21st century as Nigeria’s pidgin English. For example, in vocabulary and grammar, certain styles are used for acquiring a method of translating expressions as is usual with the indigenous languages, e.g. ‘One day go?’ for ‘are you people going?’ ‘Give me my change’ meaning, ‘can I have my change,’ ‘not on the seat’ for not presently in the office, or ‘senior brother’ for an elder brother. Etc.

Historically, an assimilation of culture emerged wherein English became the language of education as it was the Nigeria’s official language. The pull toward English is motivated by the ideology of internationalization, reflecting the dual needs for an interethnic and the international language of superiority. In fact, The gained language policy on the educational ordinance of 1882 made English the language of instructions in school. Even so, during the period of the nationalist movement to some Nigerians, English was regarded as an aspect of colonial culture, and they called for upgrading of Nigeria languages (Lagos Times, August 9th, 1882). The ordinance was put under immense pressure particularly in the mass media, In response. By 1887, education ordinance gave recognition to Nigeria languages in schools. This was the beginning of the uses of indigenous languages in schools. Despite the legislation and ordinances, English still played an official role in

government and other administration. By early 1947, Sir Richard's constitution reinstated English as the official language in Nigeria while Hausa was recommended as an additional legislative language in northern Nigeria. Meanwhile, the 1954 constitution recognized domestic and regional languages. In its article 114 (1), it recommended the use of English as a national official language and as the regional official language in the south, with Hausa as the regional language of the North with the proviso that when conflicts in interpretation occurred, documentation done in English language is regarded as valid. Despite all constitutional enactments, English remained the intra-governmental written means of communications. It also became a leading priority in obtaining federal or civil-service jobs. English equally valuable still controlled the entire method of instructions in both primary, secondary and tertiary institutions. Hausa language has still maintained its predominant role in regional education and communications. As noted by Omojuwa in 1977 (Awonusi 1985), "the findings also suggest that northerners, in general, tend to actively promote Hausa over other Nigeria languages whereas much fewer attempt is being made by southerners to promote a particular southern dialect rather, they tend to join linguistic minorities in the south and the middle belt which argues that English, rather than an indigenous Nigerian language, should continue to be the nation's official language" (Goke-Pariola 1987). However, English language from the earliest stage to date has followed historical importance of its colonial functions as the official language despite being given many amendments, though other languages have been taught along with English at school as a medium of instruction. The influence and the role of English in Nigeria as a vital tool for continuing unity, general administration, legal, and the government has maintained its sole recognized authority and responsibility. In the case of functions, Jowit (1991) identified five dominant roles of English and other mother tongues in Nigeria as official, educational, mass media, religious observance, and interpersonal relations. Institutionally, Odebunmi (2005) accepts that English is the only means open to individuals from different ethnic and linguistic groups for interaction. This shows the colossal status accorded to English language in Nigeria. There are also linkages that include the increased role of English in Nigeria. As summarized by Akindele and Adegbite (1999; 61) when they state that 'English performs three broad functions of 'accommodation, participation and social mobility.' It means that, the international status of English makes it perform exceptional roles and its ability to adapt easily to contextual variables are an added advantage. On an international level, English plays a global integrative role and has become the world's lingua Franca per excellence, and the quest and yearning for science and technology are satisfied through English. This position is supported by Odebunmi's (2003:36) observation that English has



transformed into a strong identity symbol in international politics, economy and diplomacy. In Nigeria's domain, English performs a dual role. It is a language of instruction, as well as a course of study in Nigerians universities. Such vital functions make it so significant that its quantity and quality (levels) of use have continued to serve as parameters towards evaluating intelligibility and effectiveness in English usage in almost all the space of Nigerian's life. However, there was gross general acceptance of English roles in Nigeria, and I absolutely agree with Spolsky (2004: ISB4 abstract) as a working principle: "The language policy of a speech community may be revealed in its practices, its beliefs, or in explicit language management." Consequently, English becomes the de facto official language of Nigeria, being the predominant language of government and the bureaucracy, education, higher commerce, mass communication, international relations, trade and politics. It is safe to say at this point that, English roles since 1882, ordinances in Nigeria have continued to occupy a superior position acceptable as a medium of all sorts of official engagement and communications. Interestingly, as the principal ingredient of Nigeria's unification and tempestuous unity is English language". Strategically, the status of English in Nigeria has remained extremely high, and it seems quite frankly unlikely to change due to a vast complex linguistic situation in Nigeria. This also captures the writing on sovereignty and the English language, As Awonusi notes: 'The notion of hegemony English implies the recognition of the English Language as a significant linguistic superstructure that has a wide usage and acceptance as well as influence. Thus, supremacy with reference to language connotes a fairly complex interplay of a number of variables such as the potential socioeconomic strength of its users, control (how the strong users of a particular language use it as a weapon of linguistic domination of communities. Especially those that are multilingual or multicultural), legitimacy (the dependence on a language as the basis of social and political acceptance) and influence (the exercise of power) In Awonusi's sense, this has been the plight of Nigeria's situation and the overall relationship roles between native languages and English. However, the colonial rule refined the importance of Hausa to be used as a regional language along with English language in the northern legislative functions in order to indirectly control the northern regions, i.e, mainly for the central power to preserve and maintain stability to the society, despite this factor, the status of English monopoly as the 'official' 'language is unchanged...Trudgil (2002) as a quote in Jibril (2007:284) Language shift is thereof inevitable, He says "language shift is the process by which a community more or less systematically abandons its original language and via an intermediate shift or language death' 'This signifies an obvious language shift with the emergency of the Nigerian pidgin English. Thus, The role played by the English

language in Nigeria as a country as indicated earlier is rooted in its colonial history; its adoption as the official language in education, politics and mass communication; and its high level prestige in international relations and global information and which also include its roles as language of government in the National Assembly, all administrative activities of governments, mass media, legal and international relations with the world stage have continued to maintain high prestige and valuable despite being labelled as a colonial heritage lately.

### **Today-Language policy and language shift in Nigeria**

Nigerian nation has been undergoing a period of anxious transition primarily from its decolonization in the recent past. As quoted before, the current shift as Noss (1971:25), argued, should include “three types of policy: official language policy, educational language policy and general language policy; a three-way paradigm to which Bamgbose (1991:111) also adds a fourth which is the distinction between levels of decision making. In 1963, the constitution retained the independent Nigeria language policy established in 1954; However, the 1979 and 1989 constitutions (article 51 and 53) recommended a new policy of trilingualism, i.e, that the business of the National Assembly in Nigeria to be conducted primarily in English, and in three additional crucial languages when adequate arrangement could be made. Perhaps it is safe to say that the government has stepped up to increase the status of indigenous languages in the society. Owhotu (1990:10) observed that, ,‘both French and Arabic enjoys a ‘less–privileged status‘‘and are non –vocational electives have been moved from being a compulsory language in the first three-years of secondary education', and no official recognition was given to Nigerian pidgin. This indicates that the status of language has been shifted. The new prime language policy forms a prominent part of 1977, (revised 1981) 1995 and 1998 national educational policy. According to the policy, the use of the child’s mother-tongue or the language of the immediate environment as the language of instruction or medium of nursery and lower primary education, through later it became a subject of controversy among educationists and linguists such that by 1991, a team of Nigeria linguists recommended that it should be taken to represent the ‘language of the wider community and not a language spoken by an ethnic community’. This position contradicts obviously Emenanjo’s (1985:125) interpretation, which says to imply all Nigeria languages, including Pidgin.’(b) English as the language of introduction in schools from mid primary through to the university, (c) In junior secondary schools, a Nigerian child shall in addition to his mother tongue study any of the three dominant languages. It means that this article has removed English from being a monopoly of authority, and it also indicates a language shift. For example, this represents the first official indication about the nature of skills,

and abilities envisaged for the ideal citizens about the future. Namely, trilliteracy and trilingualism, consisting of the mother tongue, one of the three outstanding Nigerian languages (other than his or her mother tongue) and English. Central to the notion of equal opportunities is the notion of “federal character”, defined under the constitution as the ‘distinctive determination of peoples of Nigeria to promote national unity, strengthen national loyalty and give every citizen of Nigeria a sense of belonging to the nation’ (Federal ministry of information 1979: 277. This goal tends to pull the policies in different dimensions, for example. They build cultural pluralism certainly contrasts with the call for unity and integration, just as the continue uses of the English language have drastically undermined the development of indigenous languages. Though English continues to enjoy the status of official language together with Hausa in the north who also enjoy a regional accredited position in its administrative capacity/functions. Legally, This also indicates that northern region’s could function with Hausa language during trials. These show some level of indigenous power of language regionally and also a form of the language shift. Despite its limitations, that only in some conflicting situations that documentation could be presented in English. However, at the educational level, like in the nursery and primary school stage, the three Nigeria foremost languages should be taught as a school subject. It is clear from the constitution that language planning is aimed at producing Nigeria trilingual: a speaker of English, his mother tongue and an additional Nigerian language. The revision of these policies in 1998 added French as an official language because it was seen as the language of Nigeria’s neighbours (Francophone Benin, Chad, Niger and Cameroun) and several members of the ECOWAS sub-region (a geopolitical objective. The policy pushes trilingualism in the direction of the quadrilingual as a language shift. English is the “Official” language, Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo are legal Nigeria’s languages to be used officially in schools but the status of English as the official language, especially in high places like national Assembly shifts. English is placed in a high prestige as the language of those that “Belong” to certain classes of distinction. In other hands, Hausa is a regional supper right language taking the place of regular usage in the northern region while in Yoruba case, English is typically used in Lagos and pidgin English. Most government functions in northern part use Hausa in their various activities except in some fundamentally useful where the English could be considered, but the reversed in the Yoruba Western region is quite different, where English is considered as machinery for governmental activities. In fact, Okonkwo (1994: p. 121) the additional price of northerners is so pronounced taboo and would even make them refuse to speak English, though they know it” The Yoruba has this attitude two Okonkwo also added it is only Ndi Igbo, who “love adventure” that

have apathy towards their own language. Politically, most government press, publications, reviews of the National Assembly are released in English also this is another language shift. However, it is not compulsory for civil servants speak English while in their various offices, In most cases, public servants choose to speak in their native language with co-workers during administrative functions, especially if there are from the same regions. Furthermore, all official websites of government are in English though, each of the three principal languages also has their sites; this all interpret the trilingualism of their status. Additionally, the primary reason for increase uses of English in Nigeria is to promote western education and thus provide wider access to social rewards while the earliest motivation for learning another Nigerians language is to allow bilingualism by ensuring meaningful participation in regional collective, economic and political interactions as well as the forces of unification. The Ife six-year primary project (Afolayan: 1976; Fafunwa, 1975 and 1990) and the Port Harcourt Reader Project (Williamson, 1979) have helped to establish the viability of the policy for the use of the mother-tongue as a language of instruction in primary education. Other examples of structural planning include the creation of driving manuals and regulations in Nigeria languages by the Federal Ministry of Education and Road safety Commission, and the research efforts in accuracy, graphitization, linguistic exploration and presentation of texts by departments teaching languages in Nigeria tertiary institutions. However, the 1977 National Policy on Education and its revisions notwithstanding as it appears that they are a little room for expansion of minority languages. The relative weight and envisaged development of the languages still remain a satire. First is the growth or spread of nursery schools from the city to rural areas. The perception of English as a language of socioeconomic power is also demonstrated in the mushrooming of the straight-for-English nursery and primary schools in many urban centres. Almost all English medium nursery schools (with English as the language of instruction) have private proprietors, unlike primary and secondary schools owned by government and some private proprietors. The public schools use Nigerian languages as a medium of instruction while from mid-primary English becomes the instrument. This is unlike the perfectly English medium that private schools offer little or no room for the teaching of indigenous languages. Parents who prefer private education for their children often do so because of the perceived socioeconomic powers associated with a correct English education. The large-scale entrenchment of English in Nigeria's educational system, is responsible, Seweje (1998:74), observed, for the 'Nigerian child's access to the cultural and scientific knowledge about the world ... primarily through English'. The viewpoint and attitudes described above are real as they are, may have made English a language of exclusion as had been

observed in other parts of Anglophone Africa (see Bamgbose (2000). A recent study indicates that, There is also a less-than-faithful implementation of the national policy in schools. As Tsumba (2004 : 81) found out, 40% of schools in the Abuja area do not assess students in Nigerian languages at all at the secondary school level. As observed earlier, it is still uncertain how many Nigerians are trilingual or quadrilingual almost thirty years after the introduction of the policy. As part of the current study, an examination with the use of minority languages in particular communicative domains in some regions of Nigeria was carried out. The sample was drawn from speakers of minority languages (taken in this instance to represent those who do not have any of the Levels IV and V languages as their first language). The respondents were drawn from 20 states (out of a total of 36 states) as shown below by the majority of minority language areas, especially in the south-south and middle belt states of Nigeria as shown below.

(a) Multilingual (Minority Languages) Southern States

(a) STATE	RESPONDENTS
Delta	15
Edo	12
Cross River	6
Rivers	6
Akwa Ibom	4
Bayelsa	1

(b) Multilingual (Minority Languages) Northern States

STATE	RESPONDENTS
Benue	6
Kwara	4
Adamawa	2
Kogi	1
Plateau	1
Kebbi	1

Monolingual (Majority Language) States

STATE	RESPONDENTS	NO.
Anambra	IGBO	3
Abia	IGBO	2
Niger	HAUSA	2
Adamawa	HAUSA	1
Kaduna	HAUSA	1
Nassarawa	HAUSA	1
Lagos.	YORUBA	7
Ondo	ONDO	1
Ekiti	YORUBA	1

This survey indicates that 71% in the south-south claimed that they use English and a minority language as a medium of communications at home while about 30% use minority indigenous language. It is also indicated that 12% Nigerians regard pidgin as English. As for the community 71% English-Nigerian minority language, bilinguals learn English as the highest social and economic growth in their respective life. It shows also that, 72 % respondents' claims mixing their native language with English. This also shows the official language shift. In another way, it shows the gradual diminishing influence of both English, and languages taught, and use at home and in the future to come in Nigeria. There is also an indication that in various expressive domains such as the school, the Playgroup, the food store, the supermarket and religious meetings, many speakers of minority languages claim they depend on English on an average of 70% of the time, with the highest as 90% when communicating in a fast-food restaurant like Mr. Biggs (equivalent of kfc) if and when they run into such 'eateries' in cities in or outside their residential domains. Perhaps the at most areas where minority languages still thrive is in the preservation of local culture because 98% of the respondents claim that they use their local minority languages in cultural festivals when they represent local songs and folklores in their native languages. It is, however, surprising that in their town meetings or other social engagements, only 26% claim, they handle such affairs in their languages. Instead, 74% claim they depend on English. This shows little difference from speakers of most of the languages who constitute 26% of the respondents according to the survey. Within the majority (language speakers, 80% claim that they use their language in the marketplace while 51% use their languages in town meetings and social activities and over 65% use the same in social relationships with their friends and schoolmates. This shows that the majority of languages has developed greater confidence in the uses of their languages in different communicative domains unlike the speakers of the minority languages. Politically, only 24% of government officials, claim that their local language is used in their state houses of Assembly, and it is not surprising that 60% claim that state governors do not make any official broadcast in their local or minority language. While 4% of the survey respondents claim that speakers of majority of languages look down on them in public when they try to speak in their language. In all, 30% indicate that they look down on them all the time while 13% claim they look at them with contempt occasionally. It should be noted that, there is increasing language shift as compared to the formal colonial past, means that the power of English is shifting as nations are growing and realizing the importance of their culture. Interestingly, English has to be playing prominent roles in uniting the multi-ethnic complexity of the Nigerian's and it has successfully maintained the most desirable source of the union as internationally

recognised mediums of interactions between the society, as well as trades, commerce, international relations. Though, there has been often debated on whether education in the mother tongue (MT) would take the place of English as a recognized formal language especially the rivalry between the leading national languages in both education and in governmental functions. The debate has sometimes resulted to rigour hatreds among the minority and majority's counterpart. It also reveals how complicated it is to engage in any of the indigenous majority language as international functional language. This situation has been the conflict between the colonial legacy English-language, and the brand new Nigerians-English as the society is slowly transforming itself into what Fishman, 1973: 93, cited in Master, 1998: 723-724). I argued that, "...When non-English-speaking countries that currently rely on English for modernization...To become strong enough to maintain that growth in their own vernacular languages, for example, by inventing new technology, English will be displaced, as will all those in the population who identify with it, and power will shift to those who know (and. Identify with) the vernacular, Strategically, Its believed that many Nigerian's find it acceptable to the new policy towards the ideas of "Indigenous National languages".” But then, the most decisive issues before the “Constitutional Review Committee” (CRC) during its meetings in 1988, and 1989 was the language issues, specifically about the choice of Hausa, Yoruba or Igbo as legislative languages has, however, often been met with angry protest, see Newswatch of 20th, 1989. Despite government efforts to changes, the national language status as how the three languages could emerge as the“official or national languages” the heated reactions to the federal provision as reviled in mass media has been complicated. Indeed, there are mixed studies going on with options and predictions about which language to emerge Nigerian official language. As one of the paradoxes of the national language questions, Many Nigerians show strong desires for a national language other than English, but few are convinced about the need to choose a language other than their own, but if popular usefulness are to be considered as the future, This article argued, that Hausa stands a better position to emerge as legitimate Nigerian language in time indefinite though, there is a strong evidence also looking from the widespread of Nigeria's pidgin English as the major threats to Hausa candidacy in terms of, “ official status”.

### **Democratization versus Nigerian English-Pidgin**

The spread of the clear colonial rule which led to the first and only time that the ethnic groups in modern history of Nigerian's came together under a popular democratic felt a sense of national identity. Where there did not only begin to see themselves as African or as Hausa, Igbos, or Yoruba, but also as Nigerians in a common struggle against their colonial rulers. And

It was the Increased urbanization and higher education that brought large multiethnic groups conjointly for the first time. This idea of coming together under a colonial democratic settlement enables Nigerians to see themselves having more in common with each other than they had previously thought is possible. This sparked unprecedented levels of interethnic relations, teamwork and interactions, especially in their historical political movements, media outlets, and trade unions whose purposes were to advance all Nigerians in respective of language or ethnicity for their political sovereignty.

“**Democratization**” means an act of making something democratic, It could also be an action taking by groups of people in achieving or meeting a specific urgent need-based on the society or nations”, ” we use this definition as opening context of the development of the Nigerian pidgin English. Our expression is better demonstrated (in Mazrui, 1975). English that ‘will carry the weight’ of his Nigerian experience. As Achebe puts it: ‘. . . It will have to be a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home, but altered to fit its new African surroundings’.

“**Pidgin**” : A pidgin is a new language which develops in situations where speakers of varieties languages need to communicate but do not share a common language. The vocabulary of a pidgin comes mainly from one particular language (called the 'lexifier'). An early 'pre-pidgin' is quite restricted in use and irregular in shape. However, the latter 'stable pidgin' develops its own grammatical rules, which are quite distinctive from those of the lexifier. Once a steady pidgin has emerged. It is generally learned as a second language and used for communication among people who speak different languages. Examples are Nigerian Pidgin English...

**Nigerian Pidgin English:** is a combination of indigenous languages and English, also is a common language throughout western and southern Nigeria? It basically uses English words mixed into Yoruba, Benin or Igbo grammar structures. And the Pidgin English originally evolved from the need for the missionaries, later British sailors to communicate with local merchants. However, today it is often used in ethnically mixed urban areas like Lagos as a common form of communication among people who have not had both formal educations in English and those who do not. In Crystal, (1997, pp124) “ the colonial language is abandoned when a nation retakes its rule, replacing it with the national or local language-as was the case of Japanese in Korea.” To be sure, Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE) used to be seen mainly as the code of the non-literate as well as a bastardization of English and its usage was not recognized, therefore, was considered as a symbol of one’s level of academic proficiency in English. For instance, Agheysi (1971:30) observed that the typical users of NPE are those that have little or no formal education. Nevertheless, in the case of Nigeria,



however, Akande (2008:37) has noted that, the social linguistic reality in Nigeria today is such that NPE is spoken by university graduates, professors, lawyers and journalists. It has also been demonstrated that NPE is not used only in informal settings but also in offices, and other formal settings (Oakland 2008) Linguistically, considering the importance of English in Nigeria as the sole official and international languages, research has shown that Nigerian Pidgin English claimed as the code of the non-literate does not seem to have validity as there are a lot of educated speakers in Nigeria, who can use both Standard English and NPE proficiently (Oakland 2008). A recent survey conducted shows that, 80% of students at the university of Lagos use Nigerian Pidgin English while 98% university of Benin students, on the other hand, claimed to speak and read magazine's in Nigerian pidgin English. (Akinmade T. Akande and L. Oladipo Salami (2010) Additionally, Lagos is the most common city through the use of NPE and Benin city, predominantly from the Edo-Delta region in Nigeria. As indicated above, the democratization of Nigeria pidgin English as demonstrated by the survey signifies that, The Nigeria pidgin English is not only in competition with other three main languages but seriously in contention for official recognition in the national debates currently in motions. There is also evident in some official places where it was argued that pidgin English should be considered as language of instructions. This expression also finds meaning in Mafeni (1971) observes that NPE has become a famously spoken lingua Franca in Nigeria and that many town and city dwellers are at least bilingual in Nigerian Pidgin English and one indigenous language.' Faraclas (2004) contend. Nigerian Pidgin English is spoken, today, with millions of people, especially the younger generation representing various linguistic areas of the Nigeria society. Faraclas (2004:828) says: additionally, observed in the numbers of Nigeria speakers to about 140 million inhabitants of Nigeria are now fluent speakers of the language [NPE], making Nigeria's pidgin English the most widely spoken uttered language in Nigeria as well as the native African language with the largest number of speakers''. This increase growth and the spread of Nigerian pidgin English among the younger generation of Nigerians shows a high level of democratization of the language in Nigerian slowly creating an inconsistent competition among the contending three principal languages for the status of super-official national language which English language has enjoyed for quite a long time. Socially, Nigeria's pidgin English has taken the regular social medium of communications as many tourists from worldwide are rushing to understand a simplified Nigerian English to keep their businesses and stays pretty seriously in the commercial cities like Lagos, port-haircut, Benin city and generally the Niger Delta regions where a greater part of foreign workers are found. Geographically, Hausa language speakers are fixed in a variety of increasing

pressures on both government institutions, marketplaces, international fairs, schools struggling to become the new official language of Nigerian. Though, Nigerian Pidgin English has occupied a significant role in communication in sweeping west and eastern cities especially between and among ethnic groups that do not share a common language. Socially, It has also acquired a formidable status that begins from the roles it plays in Nigerian society. Basically, it could be argued that Nigerian Pidgin English has enabled the wide spread of national consensus, socio-cultural, linguistic and political relationship through collaboration throughout the country as the only language that both the educated and the uneducated, irrespective of their ancestral region could be identified with a simplified term. While Nigerian Pidgin English increases its competitive struggle for national recognition and for international acceptability, Akande (2008:38) Argued “ it could be regarded as a marker of identity and solidarity. It is an inter-ethnic code available to Nigerians, who have no other common language” However, Nigerian’s are mainly concerned with the language that will be called their own language away from the inherited dominance of English-language or for the minority view, a neutral language that lacks dominated by the three main languages. Though, the Nigerian federal government has recognised the vital role that Nigerian Pidgin English plays in helping to get close to the masses. Especially, through cartoons, posters, political campaigns, national awareness and cooperation that co-exists in broadcasting pidgin language, but it still has not been legally or officially recognized under the constitution like English and the other three languages. Politically, another linguist scholar also shares the idea of this official recognition of the Nigerian Pidgin English, although such requests have been turned down (see Awonusi 1990; Egbokhare 2003; Elugbe and Omamor 1991; Elugbe 1995; Mann 1998; 2000; modulo 1989). On the contrary, it is safe to say that, Nigerians are interested in the superiority of their culture as well as an indigenous democratize language that will continue to reflect, fixed their language differences as well as maintaining the united Nigerian as a nation crafted by “artificial union” of 1914 as demonstrated in the opening quotations, In view of man. Officially acceptable”agreements on any of the three key languages or pidgin English, then continues to retain its superior roles as “official Language”of Nigeria's nation.

### **Conclusion**

The entire article examines the complex issues that surround the language policy in Nigeria from its colonial inception, and the distinguished position occupied by English-language as the official language of the Nigerian nation, with regard to its prestige and the positions of priority as administrative, educational and economic, social and international advantages. Despite that, Nigeria constitutes a widespread of languages of

which majority is Hausa, Yoruba and the Igbos languages, and has widely spoken both regionally and internationally, English-language continues to maintain its colonial official language status in politics, educational instructions in schools like, primary, secondary and universities as courses of studies. While Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo were considered as lower languages. Though, in the case of Hausa's language, the situation is different, i.e., Even during colonial days, their occupied some high level of recognition and was used in daily administrative functions in the northern regional government. Even so, in the case of the Yoruba and Igbos, their status is lower as compared to the roles Hausa played in the northern Nigeria. The democratization of language in the recent year's couple with a resolution to change language status along globalization has increased the pride of some of the indigenous languages like Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo but then, English is still ranked high intense of prestige, the roles it played and at the same time, the status of "official" language it occupies, While Hausa, Yoruba and its Igbos counterparts maintain their legal status as the three dominant languages in Nigeria. The language policy as recognized by article 51, 53 and 1999 constitution had provided an enormous bilingualism that was remarkable for the Nigerian's in the course for transition or a shift from English-language as a colonial heritage, It also brightens the chances of indigenous languages notably the three dominant languages, including Nigerian pidgin English and in addition had open doors for competitions for possible language death as the case of the "official" language status of English in the future. Although, there has been quite a diminishing role of English-language in the form of the language shift since the inception of the new policy in Nigeria. Especially to convert official activities of governments into one of the major languages. The English hegemony is diminishing steadily from its role as the official language throughout the empire of which it has been considered significantly since its inception given the highest possible speed evolution of the new Nigerian pidgin English as the next candidate for official languages. However, it should be understood also that Hausa language is in strong contention looking from its glorious past as a regional language of government, In fact, it is not such a pushover considering its widespread and wider spoken status within or among Nigerians. To sum up, The Nigerians ascribe themselves to any language that will keep uniting the country as one and as such there continue to strive for its unification or inclusion through language democratization such like the advance of Nigerian pidgin English or through carefully agreed principles between the three key language's pencils down as possible candidacy for language shift in Nigeria. Politically, where social and the cultural identity of indigenous languages would be sustained through collaboration while trying to dump its elsewhere colonial heritage English as

quoted often in this article... China Achebe 1975, quoted by Bisong, 1995: 129). Argued, ... ‘I believe that the English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experience. In contrast, it will have to be a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit its brand new African surroundings. This situation is the kind of fresh shift in Language spoken as Pigin going on in the contemporary Nigeria.

### **References:**

- Awosika, V. O. (1967). *A New Political Philosophy in Nigeria and Other African Countries*, .
- Akande, Akinmade T. And L. Oladipo Salami. (2010). ‘Use and Attitudes towards Nigerian Pidgin English among Nigerian University Students’. In Millar, Robert McColl (Ed.) 2010. *Marginal Dialects: Scotland, Ireland and Beyond*. Aberdeen: Forum for Research on the Languages of Scotland and Ireland, 70-89. ISBN: 978-0-9566549-0-8
- Jibril, M. (1990). ‘Minority Languages and Lingua Francas in Nigerian Education’, in Emenanjo (Ed.):111
- Mazrui, A. A. (Ed.). (1981). 197.5. *The Political Sociology of the English Language*. The Hague: Davis.
- National Policy on Education.. Lagos: Federal Ministry of Information, pp. 9, 10, 13, 16, and 42.
- Oguntunase, B. (1990). ‘More on English Language Crisis’. *The Guardian*, Lagos, 15 March, 1990: 13.
- Olagoke, D. O. (1979). ‘The Mother Tongue and ESL in Nigerian Education’, in *The Teaching of English Studies*, edited by Ebo Ubahakwe, Ibadan: IUP 1979, p. 15
- Taribo, S. M. K. (1989). ‘The Language Controversy’. *The Guardian*, Lagos: 17 February, 1989: 9. *Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria*. 1989. Lagos: pp. 35 and 46.
- Adekunle, M. (1977). ‘Preliminary English in Our Universities’ in *Language in Education in Nigeria*, Vol.11, *Proceedings of the Kaduna Language Symposium*, Lagos, Language Centre.
- Afolayan, A. (1987). ‘English as a Second Language: A Variety or a Myth?’ *Journal of English as a Second Language*, No. 1, Ife-Nigeria, p. 14.
- Owhonda, John. *Nigeria: (1998.)A Nation of Many Peoples*,
- Falola, Toyin. (1999). *The History of Modern Nigeria*,
- Akindele, F and W. Adegbitẹ. (1999). *The Sociology and Politics of English in Nigeria: An Introduction*. Ile-Ife: Obafẹmi Awolowo University Press.
- Agheyisi, R. (1971). *West African Pidgin: Simplification and Simplicity*. Unpublished PhD Dissertation, Stanford University.
- Appel, R. And P. Muysken, (1987). *Language contact and bilingualism*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Awonusi, V. O. 1990. ‘Planning for a national

(Nigerian) language’. In Eruvbetine, A. E. (Ed.) 1990. *Aesthetics and Utilitarianism in Languages and Literatures*. Ojo: Lagos State University, Department of Languages and Literatures, 113-9. Aba: National Institute for Nigerian Languages.

Adegbite, W. (2004). *Bilingualism-Biculturalism and the Utilization of African*

*Languages for the Development of African Nations*. Oyeleye, L. (Ed.) (2004) *Language and Discourse in Society*. Ibadan: Hope Publications Ltd.

Eno-Abasi, E.U. (2003). *Tonal Reconstruction in Eastern Lower Cross Lects*.

Ndimele, O.M. (Ed.) (2003) *Four Decades in the Study of Languages and Linguistics in Nigeria: A Festschrift for Kay Williamson*. Aba: National Institute for Nigerian Languages.

Rufia (1977); p 72 *National language problems in Nigeria*

Ndimele, O.M. (Ed.) Et al (2006). *Language and Economic Reforms in Nigeria*. Port-Harcourt: The Linguistic Association of Nigeria

Government should set out plans to develop a domesticated English

As the language for the empowerment of the masses since no ethnic group Can lay claim to it.

Adebayo, A.J. (2003). *Language, National Integration and the Nigerian*

Bamgbose, A. 1971. ‘The English language in Nigeria’. In Spencer, J. (Ed.) 1971. *The English language in West Africa*. London: Longman, 35-48.

Egbokhare, F. O. (2003). ‘The story of a language: Nigerian Pidgin in spatiotemporal, social and linguistic context’. In Lucko, P., L. Peter and H. Wolf (Eds.) 2003. *Studies in African Varieties of English*. Frankfurt: Lang, 21-40.

Elugbe, B. (1995). ‘Nigerian Pidgin: problems and prospects’. In Bamgbose, A., A. Banjo and A. Thomas (Eds.). 1995. *New Englishes: A West African Prospective*. Ibadan: Mosuro, 284-99.

Elugbe, B. And A. P. Omamor. (1991). *Nigerian Pidgin: Background and Prospects*. Ibadan: Heinemann.

Akande and Salami, (1995). *Nigerian Pidgin English* 85 Emenanjo, E. N. 1995. ‘Beyond the rivers readers project’. In Emenanjo, E. N., And O. M. Ndimele (Eds.). *Issues in African Languages and Linguistics: Essays in Honour of Kay Williamson*. Aba: National Institutes of Nigerian Languages, 345-60.

Mafeni, B. (1971). ‘Nigerian Pidgin’. In Spencer, J. (Ed.) 1971. *The English Language in West Africa*. London: Longman, 95-112.

[Http://www.nalrc.wisc.edu/brochures/hausa.pdf](http://www.nalrc.wisc.edu/brochures/hausa.pdf) Hausa culture. ( Accessed 23 Feb 2010)

[Http://www.hawaii.edu/satocenter/langnet/definitions/aave.html](http://www.hawaii.edu/satocenter/langnet/definitions/aave.html) (accessed 16-03-2011)