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Perspectives on multilingual practices of some language groups in North East Nigeria

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With insights from a sociolinguistic survey of four language groups; Tiv, Chamba, Hausa-Fulani and Jukun, in Taraba south, the study explores the varied interpretations of the meaning and practices of multilingualism in the face of conflict and power struggle. Data for the study were derived through interview and focus group discussions. Information from the study reflects that multilingualism among the groups is determined by the prevailing power positions. To the stronger group, multilingualism is a tool to access power and control over the weaker ones, whereas for the relatively weaker groups, multilingualism serves as a strategy for identity negotiation and survival.

Introduction

With a current statistics of over 500 languages (Egbokhare 2004; *Ethnologue.com 2019*), which is a revision of Crozier & Blench (1992), Nigeria can be credibly rated as one of the linguistically most diverse nations of the world. Nigeria's bustling linguistic ecology best represents the linguistic pluralism inherent in West African states which Spencer (1971) has succinctly described as the most multilingual places in the world. Harnischfeger, Leger & Storch (2014: 1) note that Africa hosts a third of world's languages. In addition, twenty percent of the languages in Africa are spoken in Nigeria (Dalby 1980 cited in Elugbe 2009a: 1). Three out of the four phyla mainstream classification of indigenous languages in Africa namely Niger-Congo, Nilo-Saharan and Afroasiatic are found in Nigeria. The only exclusion is the Khoisan (click) languages which are not indigenous in Nigeria (Elugbe 2009a, Blench 2012). Thus, among other rich cultural heritages, there is no doubt that Nigeria is blessed with luxuriant linguistic diversity. This situation portends multilingualism as the diverse languages are constantly in contact. However, multilingualism as practiced in the different parts of the country is heavily influenced by the dynamics of power and socioeconomic realities in each of the zones.

The about 500 languages which are used by the estimated population of 183.5 million people in Nigeria (World Population Review, 2018) are distributed along the country's six geopolitical zones – North West, North East, North Central, South West, South South and South East. It is worthy to note here that the languages in Nigeria do not have equal functions, status and distribution. While some geopolitical zones in Nigeria are relatively bilingual, there is hardly any monolingual group in contemporary Nigeria. Multilingualism in Nigeria is inadvertently an outcome of the luxuriant linguistic heritage.

Language distribution in Nigeria is diverse and complex. Given the dissimilar socioeconomic and political situations in different parts of the country, one of the consequences is that multilingualism will mean different things in different areas. The attention of this study is on one of the linguistically dynamic and exciting geopolitical zones of the country, North East Nigeria, which has been aptly described as "super linguistically diverse" and "hot bed of linguistic diversity" (Harnischfeger, Leger & Storch 2014). The ethnography and linguistic practices of language groups in this region have continued to attract scholarship (Adekunle 1972, Webster 1993, Dinslage & Leger 1996; Berns, Fardon & Kasfir 2011; Harnischfeger 2014; Salawu 1993 cited in Popoola 2014**)**. The aim of the work is to explore the differing perspectives on multilingualism in some of the linguistically diverse communities in North East Nigeria, a zone characterized by violent conflict and insecurity. With insights from a sociolinguistic survey of four language groups; Tiv, Chamba, Hausa-Fulani and Jukun, in Taraba South, the study explores the varied interpretations and practices of multilingualism in the face of conflict and power struggle. Some of the studies cited here have been concerned with the peculiar practices of the groups such as reconstruction of historical accounts, identity fluidity, language shift and language concealment. But, the focus of this work is on the divergent perspectives on multilingualism among the language groups which inadvertently reflect in their linguistic practices.

Conflict, which include violent clashes over land boundaries and power struggle, have been part of the history of the people in North East Nigeria. The entire geographical space has experienced violent ethnic and communal clashes at some point and recently, terrorism, insecurity and tension, basically from the activities of an Islamic religious sect, Boko Haram. North East Nigeria consists of six states – Borno, Yobe, Gombe, Bauchi, Adamawa and Taraba. The states in this region have experienced spades of Boko Haram attacks often marked by bombing, suicide attacks, mass killing, sporadic shooting in public places, burning of houses, attacks on schools, churches and mosques, abduction of women and children, which relayed into mutual suspicion and internal clashes in different degrees, among religious and cultural groups in the zone. The severity of the attacks is epitomized in the abduction of about 300 school girls from Chibok, a community in Borno, the farthest North East state in the zone in 2014. Chibok incidence led to a global solidarity campaign for the release of the girls with the viral social media hashtag *#BringBackOurGirls#*. In addition to the Boko Haram attacks, there have been incessant internal clashes among the diverse language groups in the region. Conflict in this region has impacted directly on the lives of the people in many significant ways; its pervasive influence can be seen in every facet of the society.

While the most affected state in North East is Borno, the least is Taraba. However, some spaces in the Southern part of Taraba, which consists of different language groups including Wapan, Wanu, Kpanzon, Ichen, Hausa, Fulfulde, Tiv, Kuteb, Chamba, among others, have in recent times experienced bouts of violent conflicts from 2012. The clashes have devastating effect on every group and on every aspect of life in the areas. There is hardly any language group that has not been involved directly or indirectly in conflict, in recent times, in the entire study area. One of the profound effects of the violent clashes is the polarization of the entire area along religious lines – Islam and Christianity. The situation has also impacted on the linguistic practices in this region in significant ways.

This study therefore borders on language and conflict. It explores the current perspectives on multilingualism among the different language groups that have coexisted for many years in the face of ethno-religious insurgence and violent clashes in Southern Taraba, North East Nigeria. One of the aims of the study is to show how language politics as well as violence and insecurity contribute in shaping the linguistic practices of a people.

This work assumes a sociolinguistic orientation. Stratified random sampling technique is adopted in the selection of communities that represent four language groups in Southern Taraba. The groups are – Tiv, Chamba, Hausa-Fulani and Jukun. Instrument used in collection of data include interview and focus group discussion. Elders and community leaders provided information through structured interview. Focus group discussions were also conducted with the different language groups in the communities. All the informants have been directly involved in the violent crises and they narrated the impact of the bouts of clashes on their linguistic practices. The participants in the discussion include a cross section of members of each group who are of different ages, sexes and educational backgrounds. The participants were predominantly matured men. Only few women were willing to volun-

teer information. The women preferred to talk in the presence of the men and only when the men granted them permission to talk. The questions and discussions were structured to elicit information on what multilingualism means to the groups, how it is practiced in their daily repertoires and the patterns of language development in the communities. Each group attempted to provide a historical account of how they migrated to Southern Taraba to assert their identity as well as rights as first comers and indigenes of the community, before addressing the issues.

An understanding of the language situation in the study area will be facilitated by background knowledge of the language situation and language politics in Nigeria generally and in North East, Nigeria in particular.

Language distribution and language politics in Nigeria

Indigenous languages in Nigeria are often classified in levels. Awobuluiyi (1991) cited in Elugbe (2004) identifies three major levels of classifications of languages in Nigeria. At the apex are the three major languages – Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo. The middle level is occupied by non-major languages, which Egbokhare (2004) describes as the medium languages – Efik, Ibibio, Kanuri, Urhobo, Fulfulde, Ijaw, Tiv, Edo, Nupe, Urhobo, Igala. The other indigenous languages in Nigeria are classified under the third level as minority languages. Some minor languages have orthography and written texts – especially Bible translations – and are used in the daily lives of the people. But the majority exists only in oral form. A significant number of languages in the last category are endangered.

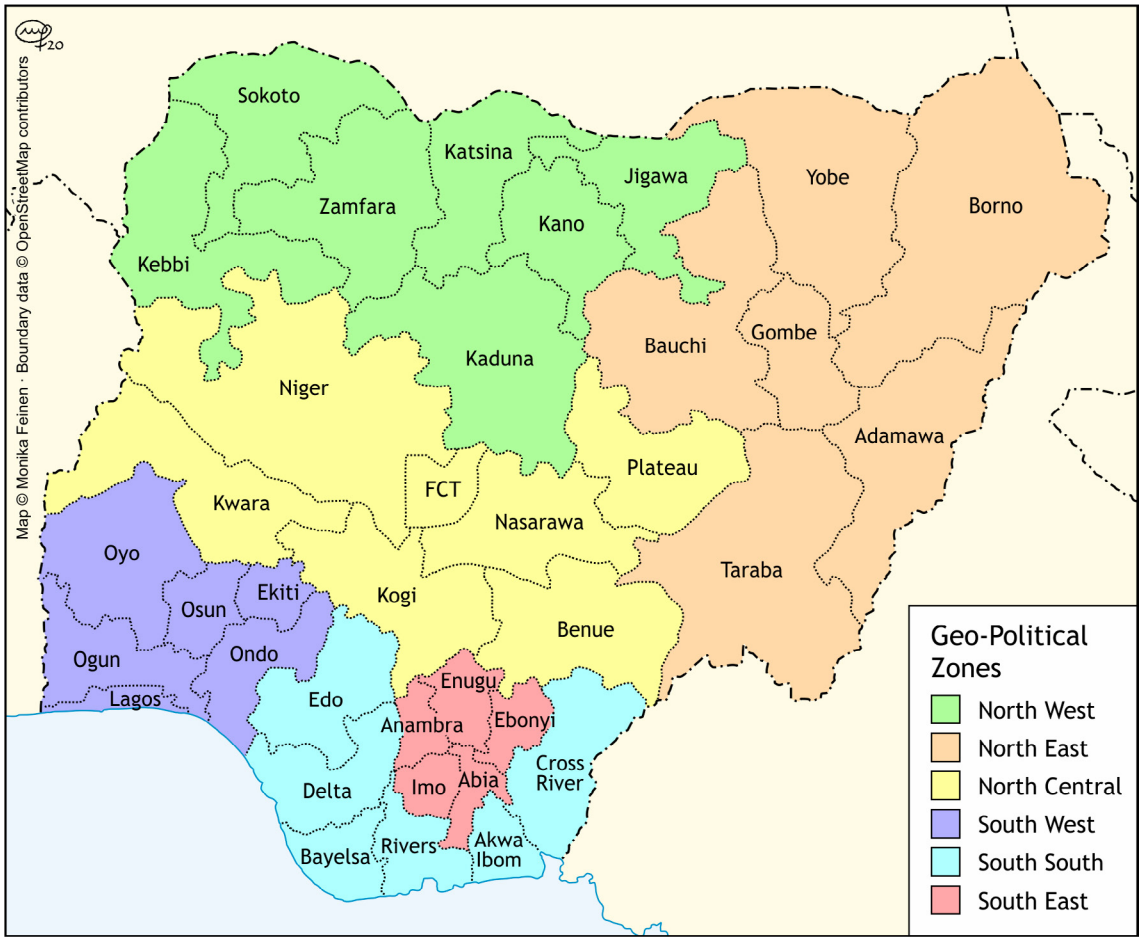
In terms of status and distribution, the three major languages at the apex have equal national status but do not have equal number of speakers and geographical spread. The language provision in the 1979 constitution stipulates that the major languages popularly known as *WAZOBIA* (an acronym coined from three lexical items denoting 'come' from the three languages, namely *wa* in Yoruba, *zo* in Hausa and *bia* in Igbo respectively) will be used in national and state legislative business of the country. *WAZOBIA* is also the name given to a radio programme that promotes the use of indigenous languages, especially Naija. However, the provision on the use of the major languages has a clause "when adequate arrangements have been made for thereof" (section 51 of the Nigerian Constitution). Thus, is spite of the provision, the English language serves as the sole language of legislation in Nigeria. No language policy with provision for the use of the medium and minor languages exists in Nigeria. The National Policy on Education (NPE) language provision as amended in 2004 advocates for the use of the Mother Tongue (MT) or the Language of the Immediate Community (LIC) in teaching school children for the first three years of basic education. But the provision still exists on paper. The reality is that most of the minor languages do not have orthography, written texts and manuals, thus cannot be used as medium of instruction in formal education.

For the purpose of convenience in documenting language distribution, the diverse language groups in Nigeria are neatly distributed into specific geographical spaces. But, with increase in urbanization and consequent mobility, the languages can be found

across the zones. The distribution of the three major languages is as follows – Yoruba covers the entire South West and shares some parts of the South South and North Central, especially Kwara state. Igbo is predominant in the South East and some parts of the South South, in Rivers and Delta states. Hausa remains the major language in North West Nigeria where it serves as the mother tongue to the group identified as Hausa. But it also serves as the lingua franca in linguistically diverse North East and some parts of North Central. Last (1993: 274) notes that North West Nigeria used to be linguistically diverse until as recent as 18th century, and that most of Hausa land was probably not Hausa speaking until as recent as 18th century. Last (1993) further explained that Hausa emerged as a Creole in cosmopolitan Kano, Katsina and Zaria, the states had communication with long distance traders, whose language and culture contributed to the new lingua franca.

The remaining three zones in Nigeria, South South, North Central and North East, are characterised by linguistic diversity.

Map 1: The six geopolitical zones in Nigeria



In consideration of the spread and numerical strength of the three major languages, Hausa ranks first. The language covers North West, North East and a greater part of North Central. Hausa also enjoys language loyalty by the speakers. This is chiefly promoted by Islam and political power. The spread of Islam went hand in hand with the spread of Hausa language as converts adhere to Islamic call for uniformity of identity (Sulaiman 1986).

Superimposing on the three national languages is a colonial language, English, which serves as Nigeria's official language, the language of national mobilization and integration, amongst others. English in Nigeria has spread as well as prestige. The pervasive role of the English language in the linguistic practices of Nigerians can be seen in the functions the language performs in Nigeria. Access to urban life as well as advancement in all strategic sectors of the economy is often premised on one's proficiency in the English language. In Nigeria today, the language is used in all communication domains, including cultural and traditional religious settings which hitherto was the exclusive preserve of the indigenous languages. Although English has gained acceptance and spread in Nigeria, the most widely spoken languages is the Nigerian Pidgin (Elugbe 2009b: 1) and most recently Naija, the language of the masses. Naija is used by people across the social classes and educational background. It is the preferred language of mass mobilization, popular music, information dissemination, advertisement, etc.

Apart from English, other popular foreign languages in Nigeria include French and Arabic. French is mainly studied in schools but it is also used in some areas especially around Nigeria's international borders such as the Lagos-Badagry border as Nigeria shares boundaries with francophone countries. Arabic is studied in schools. It is also the language of Islamic worship in Nigeria. Other foreign languages such as German and Spanish are studied in some special schools.

The linguistic scenario implies that Nigerians, especially in the urban centers, are multilingual. It is difficult to find a Nigerian, even in the rural communities who does not use more than one language regularly in his/her daily repertoire. For example, a typical Nigerian living in a farm settlement in North East Nigeria may communicate with his family in his mother tongue, Ichen, engage in trade transaction with a Tiv partner in Tiv language, and interact with other people in the market in Hausa, Fulfulde, Jukun Wapan, English and Nigerian Pidgin.

Language situation in North East Nigeria

Elugbe (2009a) has identified North Central Nigeria as the most vibrant zone in respect of linguistic diversity but North East appears to be the hub of linguistic diversity in Nigeria. For example, Borno, the state at the northern extreme has three international borders, about thirty-six indigenous languages with other languages including English, Nigerian Pidgin, French and Arabic. The other states in North East provide home for several indigenous languages, which are mainly categorized as minor languages with the exception of Tiv, Nupe, Fulfulde and Kanuri, which are classified as medium languages and Hausa – a major language.

In North East Nigeria, towns and major villages have since pre-colonial times normally been composed of segments with diverse ethnic and linguistic backgrounds (Harnischfeger 2014: 1). Hausa serves as the lingua franca for

the different language groups coexisting in this region of Nigeria. Identity in this zone is pervasively flux. It is susceptible to changes owing to a number of factors which borders around power – economic, political and religious.

Some previous studies have extensively discussed the factors that led to the ascendance of Hausa to the status of a lingua franca in the entire northern region of Nigeria. Ballard (1971) provides a historical account of the language politics that led to the ascendance of Hausa as the lingua franca in middle belt Nigeria. The factors include the Islamic jihadist movement of Usman Danfodio in the North in the pre-colonial times and the influence of the colonial administration's establishment of Hausa as the language of administration in the entire Northern Province. In addition, this study notes the influence of the mercantilist activities of the Hausa traders during and after the colonial era in North Nigeria on the further spread and entrenchment of Hausa language among varied ethnic groups in the area. More so, the politics that saw to the concentration of economic power and location of strategic sectors of the economy, in particular the citing of key educational institutions in core Hausa speaking states such as Katsina, Kano, Kaduna contributed significantly to the prestige, spread and dominance of Hausa above all other indigenous languages in the entire North Nigeria. In search of jobs and admission into the Universities in the core Hausa speaking states, people from the minority groups easily gave up their identity and assumed Hausa identity as that would increase their chances (Mgbemena & Yusuf 2013). Religious influence, especially Islamic religion, and economic as well as political powers contributed significantly to the superimposing status of Hausa language on the zone. In terms of spread and numerical strength of speakers, Hausa ranks next to English and Nigerian Pidgin in Nigeria's linguistic landscape.

The result of the dominance of Hausa in North Nigeria is that people who belong to a language group, reside in or even frequently visit any part in the region easily acquire at least some Hausa lexical items and expressions. The pervasive influence of Hausa is seen in some identity markers – names, greetings, dressing patterns, in North Nigeria. Some children who are from other language groups in North East prefer Hausa to their mother tongue, while some are not able to acquire the mother tongue of their parents. Hausa is the only language that is taught as a subject in government schools in most parts of the North. Hausa alongside with English serves as the language of administration, education, trade, religion, cultural activities and mutual understanding. The dominance of and language shift to Hausa among many groups in North East is general. This study on communities in Southern Taraba provides insights on how the people manage the multilingual situation.

Insights on divergent perspectives on multilingualism from linguistic practices of four groups in Southern Taraba

Taraba is the southernmost part of North East. It shares a boundary with North Central Nigeria. Taraba state also shares international boundaries in different parts of the state with Cameroun. Taraba state is said to have about eighty indigenous languages. Southern Taraba consists of five local governments – Wukari, Ibi, Donga, Takum, Ussa in which are scattered a number of language groups, some are

linguistically related while some are not. The language groups include: Jukun and the various varieties – Wapan, Wanu, Ichen, Kpanzon, Kpanyfon, Kpanyonyo, Kuteb, Chamba, Tiv, Hausa-Fulani, among others.

The towns and communities in Southern Taraba consist of different language groups. As Harnischfeger, Leger & Storch (2014) rightly observe, languages in the communities cannot be neatly tucked into distinct 'areas'. For example, there are Jukun groups in all the communities in the five local government areas. The Jukun in Wukari are known as Wapan, while the Jukun that live around the riverside are called Wanu. However, in every part of Southern Taraba one could find clans of Wapan, Wanu as well as other Jukunoids such as Ichen. The same applies to the other language groups. There are Tiv communities in different parts of Southern Taraba and beyond. The study was conducted in areas where the various groups co-habit.

Speakers from the different language groups were asked questions on their linguistic practices. But, in all the groups, before providing answers to the question, they always chose to provide a historical account of their migration to Southern Taraba. For example, the Wapan in Wukari trace their ancestral origin to Yemen, while the Tiv assert that they are from Senegal. The history of how each of the language groups came to occupy their present location appears to be conflicting. For example, in Wukari city, an octogenarian of Hausa extract narrated that the Hausas were the first comers in Wukari town. This account was refuted by the Jukun Wapan group who declared that they first occupied the geographical space and also named the place Wukari.

However, information from the different historical accounts indicate that the people migrated for various reasons which include political turmoil, leadership tussle, climate change, conflict with the colonial administration, boundary and farmland disputes, clashes between the nomadic herdsmen and farmers, etc. Each language group migrated in small units, clans and kindred and often settled in linguistically mixed areas where communication with their neighbors was only possible through multilingualism. Each group has different reasons and methods of practicing multilingualism. Consider the perspectives of the language groups on multilingualism presented below.

Tiv: Undulating multilingual practice

Multilingualism to the Tiv is a strategy for asserting or negotiating identity, economic and political advancement, security and survival among relatively strong neighbors such as the Jukun and Hausa-Fulani groups; multilingualism is not just a tool for socialization. An investigation among the Tiv communities in Southern Taraba reveals an undulating multilingual practice and contrived monolingual practice in some situations. Background information reflects that this is not recent as the Tiv people in Southern Taraba have a history of changing their linguistic practices to suite the prevailing political and socioeconomic realities in the region. Information on the group was derived from two Tiv communities – *Tor Musa* in Wukari local government area and *Tor Damisa* in Donga local government area.

Among the diverse language groups in Southern Taraba, the Tiv speaking people are perceived to be monolinguals (some speak only

Tiv) and bilinguals (some who have acquired a measure of literacy, thus use Tiv and English). The Tiv in Southern Taraba are known for their disposition of loyalty to their language as they are zealous in maintaining their language and sometimes nonchalant towards other indigenous languages in the region. Tiv people, wherever they are found can easily be identified by the way they uphold their language and other cultural heritage. Their effort in developing their language has earned Tiv language a place among the 'medium' languages in Nigeria.

In respect to language distribution in Nigeria, Tiv language group is categorized as belonging to North Central Nigeria and Benue state in particular, which serves as the ancestral base of their traditional ruler, *Tor Tiv*. The people are notable farmers who are continually in search of more arable farmlands, the Tiv can be found in different communities across North Central and North East Nigeria where they often live in settlements at the outskirts of city centers. Relatively, they live in isolation from the other groups. The point of interaction is usually the markets where they sell their farm produce. In market places, the Tiv usually adopt a stance of not being able to speak any other indigenous language in contact, especially in transactions in which they have comparative advantage. The other groups have to learn to communicate with them in Tiv language or through signs and gestures.

An observation of the naming pattern in the Tiv settlements as well as heavy Hausa lexical items in Tiv language vocabulary betrays an affinity to Hausa language in the time past. The settlements are usually named after the founders. In spite of their acclaimed devotion to Tiv, the names of settlements in Southern Taraba reflect an admixture of Tiv and Hausa lexical items – *Tor Musa, Tor Damisa,* etc. *Tor* is the traditional Tiv title for the 'head of a community or kingdom', and *Musa* is Hausa name, while *damisa* in Hausa denotes 'leopard'. Information from oral interviews of the community heads and from the focus group discussions with a cross section of the people from the two communities confirmed a previous strong political and socioeconomic alliance with Hausa.

In *Tor Musa*, the community head explained that the founding father, Shinku, had close ties with Hausa people in the time past. His Hausa friend nick named him Musa, which eventually replaced his Tiv traditional name Shinku. He probably maintained the Hausa name to facilitate the political and economic ties he had with the Hausa traders. In *Tor Damisa,* the group leaders note that the Tiv name of the founding father was Kaave but for his courage and bravery, a Chamba chief, who is Hausa speaking named him Damisa. The informant further stated that at the point they arrived their present settlement, they aligned with other Tiv speaking people, who were already in the land but they had to learn to speak Jukun and Hausa to facilitate trade relations. Although the Tiv in *Tor Damisa* had close ties with the Chamba, they did not learn to speak their language, as the Chamba people they met were Hausa speaking. Thus, the community had to take the Hausa name *Damisa* in place of the Tiv name *Kaave.*

One of the participants in the group discussion in *Tor Musa* recalled that by 1946, the Tiv people had business transactions with other groups in the area, especially, a thriving business on sesame seed at Donga, which was highly patronized by Hausa traders. Other groups involved in the business include Jukun, Kuteb and Chamba. According to the account,

the Tiv equally learnt to speak Jukun and Kuteb to facilitate trade relations with the group but they could not learn to speak Chamba, as the Chamba people preferred to use Hausa. Since Hausa was the language of colonial administration and was also taught in schools, the Tiv people along with other groups were compelled to learn Hausa. The interlocutors recalled that the factors that contributed significantly to the spread of Hausa among the Tiv were the trade in sesame seed and the influence of the *malamai*, itinerant Hausas, who were revered for selling potent charms and amulets. The people in the region were constantly confronted with atavistic forces and security challenges – internally and externally, such as violent clashes over farm lands, internal malevolent forces such as witchcraft, etc. The Tiv people needed protection, which the charms and amulets of the *malamai* provided. To foster relationships with the powerful *malamai*, in addition to the use of Hausa, they gave them their daughters in marriage. As a result of the contact between Hausa and Tiv, their language acquired some lexical items from Hausa such as *makaranta* – university. A significant number of Tiv elders in the group discussion admitted that they are fluent in Hausa language.

The motivation towards multilingualism as a means of survival was also corroborated in *Tor Damisa*, a Tiv settlement in Donga local Government some kilometers away from Tor Musa. While the closest neighbors to the Tiv in *Tor Musa* are the Jukun Wapan, the Tiv in *Tor Damisa* live closely with the Chamba, who are now Hausa speaking.

An interlocutor in the group discussion in *Tor Musa* noted that at some point in the recent past, the Tiv people in Southern Taraba thrived in their farming and some gained important political appointments in the state and in Wukari local government area in particular. The economic and political power earned the group a measure of identity and prestige in the community. They did not need any other indigenous language to survive. Thus, they reverted to the use of different forms of Nigerian English and their indigenous language to negotiate and assert identity within the ever increasingly linguistically diverse society. The Tiv during this period focused their attention on the development of their language. Children born within the period were not encouraged to acquire any other indigenous language apart from Tiv. Initially, their children were taught Tiv in government schools. Later, the politics in education led to the removal of Tiv from the school curriculum in Taraba state. The only avenue for promoting literacy in Tiv became the church with the aid of the bible translation in the language. Churches in Tiv communities promote their language through other means such as sermon and composition of choruses and hymns. From the family setting and the church, the Tiv community in different parts of Southern Taraba continued to promote the use and development of their language and culture.

Information from the focus group discussions further reveals that although a significant number of Tiv youths speak Hausa, Jukun and English, and some other languages in their linguistically diverse communities; they try to conceal their multilingual facility by adopting a stance of speaking only Tiv. According to the interlocutors, concealed multilingual practice is a strategy for maintaining their language and asserting their identity in the midst of other groups with numerical strength and economic powers. While some Tiv, especially those who live in the farm settlements do not bother to

learn any other language, as they live relatively isolated lives and prefer to intermarry within the language group, others have acquired other languages in contact. But, unlike the other groups, Tiv speakers can easily be identified by their cultural practice of naming. The Tiv do not use Hausa names like the other language groups in the area, they prefer Tiv names and sometimes English names.

The Tiv in Southern Taraba subscribe to multilingualism out of necessity. According to the interlocutors, generally the Tiv prefer to use their language. They conceded that the Tiv sometimes pretend not to understand any other indigenous language whereas they actually understand most of the languages in contact, especially Hausa and Jukun. They gave examples of situations in which they subscribe to the use of any other language. They narrated often times, people from the major groups, Jukun and Hausa hold important economic and political positions in the area. Multilingualism becomes a tool for gaining economic or political favour. When seeking for such favour, they speak the language of the potential benefactor as they understand that such gesture is potent. A young man in the group attested that he uses Hausa and Jukun to gain favour in government offices. Once he is able to identify the language group of a potential benefactor, he switches to his/her language. According to the informant, a linguistically diverse person is always at an advantage in the entire state.

The Tiv group further added that multilingualism serves as a tool to include or exclude other members of the Tiv community from a discussion. One of the interlocutors explained that sometimes he can switch to Hausa or Jukun to convey information to his allies when in the presence of members of the community who do not understand Hausa or Jukun.

The participants in the group discussions agree that the Tiv practice of language loyalty as suggested by their contrived monolingual practice is caving in the face of the current tension and crises in the area. Recent bouts of bloody clashes between the Jukun and the Hausa-Fulani which ravaged the entire community provided the ground for full adoption of multilingual practice. An octogenarian man in *Tor Musa* settlement admitted that after the recent bouts of crises in Southern Taraba, between 2013-2014, the Tiv generally realized that the ability to use the languages of the other groups, especially Jukun and Hausa, is a tool for survival in a linguistically diverse environment. This led to another shift as well as campaign to encourage their youth to acquire Jukun and Hausa as that could provide a means of escape, in case they run into any of the polar groups during the crises. Using the language of a group to aver solidarity and support serves as a means of identifying with the group and a tool to escape being regarded as an opposition as well as the attendant consequences.

From the forgoing, it is obvious that multilingualism for a relatively minority group living in a linguistically plural society characterized by violent conflict is not an option but a tool for self-assertion, identity negotiation, maintenance of power and strategy for survival. Thus, for the Tiv in linguistically diverse Southern Taraba, their multilingual practice has been undulating; it has never been stable. The exigencies of political and socio economic realities in the area drive the trend. A summary of the account of the informants reflects that in times of economic and political boom of the Hausa in Southern Taraba, the Tiv leaned their

loyalty to Hausa for survival and power relation. They also learnt to speak Jukun and other languages in the region to foster economic and political affinity. When Tiv gained a measure of political power, they shifted focus from multilingualism to bilingualism (the use of Tiv and English) and to servicing identity as well as language maintenance. In the face of resurgence of violent crises, the trend shifts back to multilingualism, especially to the use of the languages of the groups that are relatively powerful.

Chamba – from linguistic diversity to identity shift, the story of a lost language in Southern Taraba

The case of Chamba speaking people in Southern Taraba presents a scenario of peculiar linguistic practice marked by favorable disposition towards multilingualism, identity fluidity and identity shift. Just like the other groups, the Chamba speaking people can be found all across the communities in Wukari, Takum, Donga, etc. But, their main domain in Southern Taraba is in the Donga local government area, where they have a traditional council presided by *Gara Donga.* It was not difficult to identify a speech community that is Chamba. But on closer inquiry it was observed that one cannot find any fluent speaking Chamba in Southern Taraba. The Chamba people in the area speak other languages in the environment – Hausa, Tiv, Jukun, Kuteb. More curious is the fact that some have changed their identity to either Jukun or Hausa.

There is a Chamba group in Rafin Kada, a linguistically diverse community in Wukari local government area. Information from an interaction with an aged member of the community, who traced his genealogy to Chamba, reveals that Chamba people in the community have shifted identity to Jukun, basically as a result of intermittent violent clashes among groups in the area. He explained that the Chamba in Rafin Kada are in the minority so they had to integrate into a bigger group – Jukun.

The informant tried to provide a historical account of the migration of the clan from Donga to the place and the various influences on the identity and linguistic practices of the people. According to him, in Takum, the Chamba lived with different language groups such as Ichen, which is a Jukunoid, and Kuteb. To facilitate trade relations, they learnt to speak the languages in contact. Initially, they communicated with their neighbors with signs. But, in the course of time, they could use some lexical items from the languages. He recalled that at some point, the clan had problems with the colonial administrators, so they moved towards Tella at the mouth of River Taraba. There they met with some other groups, Jukun and Fulani. A violent clash erupted between the Fulani and the Chamba, they had to move back to Wukari area and settled in Rafin Kada together with the Jukun and Abakwariga.

The informant recounted that the Jukun name for Rafin Kada was Janumi which means a crocodile pond. But the Hausa later renamed it Rafin Kada which in Hausa still means River crocodile. The place is important to the Jukun as it currently provides a home for the sacred crocodiles. According to the informant, Rafin Kada is a junction which attracted the Hausa itinerant traders, who often rested temporarily in the place. Some of the itinerant traders eventually settled there. Among the itinerant Hausas were the *malamai*, whom the people had so much respect for owing to the potency of their

charms and amulets. The influence of the *malamai* contributed to acquisition of Hausa language by the Chamba people. He confirmed that some of his people have acquired a good number of the languages in the community. Thus, some people could use as many as five languages or more, Hausa, Jukun, Tiv, Kuteb, Chamba, English, in their daily repertoires especially in trade transactions and political relations.

With the political turns in the zones, identity for some Chamba people, especially those who live outside Donga – the seat of the traditional council, became fluid. The option was to lean towards the powerful political groups closest to them. Presently, the Chamba group in Rafin Kada, a community close to Wukari, assumes Jukun identity. They pay allegiance to the traditional ruler of the Jukun, the *Aku Uka* in Wukari. The palace performs important political functions such as the elections and installation of traditional rulers for them in Rafin Kada. While the Chamba in the community close to Wukari adopted Jukun language, the Chamba people in Donga local government area, speak Hausa and assume Hausa identity. The language at their traditional palace in Donga is Hausa. The naming pattern of Chamba people in Southern Taraba reflects an admixture of the languages – Jukun, Hausa, English and Chamba. Examples of names of Chamba people include – Manu Danladi Zachariah Dian. In this example, a Chamba man bears four names from four languages. Information from the study shows that what can be found lingering of Chamba identity in southern Taraba is the names. An informant from Donga stated that there is a strong Chamba speaking community known as Ganye in Adamawa state. The Chamba in Taraba often consult them for the meaning of the names they give to their children and information on some lexical items in the language.

It is clear here that for the Chamba speaking people in Southern Taraba, multilingualism as well as identity fluidity is not just a basic necessity but a strategy for survival in the midst of strong groups and precarious environment that is marked by power struggle, tension and insecurity.

Hausa: from religious cum language loyalty, language dominance to linguistic diversity as a means of asserting identity

Hausa speaking communities found all over Southern Taraba actually comprise of people from diverse language groups in Northern Nigeria. The community is marked with some characteristics. The first is that any community of people identified as Hausa is associated with Islamic religion. Another fact is that all the people who form part of Hausa community share one Hausa identity, which include the use of Hausa language, the use of Hausa and Arabic names as well as the adoption of Hausa pattern of dressing, etc., irrespective of the language group. The third is that the group does not favour the use of other indigenous languages apart from Hausa.

Some of the members of Hausa community cannot trace their historical background to any Hausa group in the core Hausa speaking states such as Kano, Kaduna, but they still assert Hausa identity. It is a known fact that Hausa communities consists of people from diverse ethnic groups in the entire Northern region who deny their heritage and assume Hausa identity as soon as they convert to Islam. For example, in Southern Taraba, some people

from Wapan group who convert to Islam see their indigenous language as a pagan heritage and the language of idolatry, so they disassociate themselves from all cultural heritages including the language. The basic rationale behind this trend has been earlier indicated in this study. While some in understanding of the importance of English, acquire, use and promote the English language, the core Islamic fundamentalist maintain the stance that Hausa and Arabic are sacred languages and the languages that deserve any loyalty. Some members of this group do not just exhibit nonchalance towards other languages, they show contempt. Thus, the majority of the people in Hausa speaking communities in Southern Taraba has abandoned their Indigenous languages and at the same time do not feel the need to acquire any other indigenous language apart from Hausa and any form of English, which they use only when it is necessary. However, some members of the group cannot be referred to as monolinguals or bilinguals as they can use more than two languages – Hausa, Arabic, English yet some of the members of the group prefer to communicate with non-Hausa speaking people in Hausa even when they know that the addressee does not understand the code of communication. Multilingualism is not a common practice among members of the group even when they live in a society characterized by linguistic diversity.

Information from interview and focus group discussion in Ibi and Wukari indicates a shift in this disposition in recent times after the recent bouts of crises in the area. An Imam, who served as an informant, stated that there is a recent awakening by members the communities who have roots in Jukun towards learning and speaking Jukun language. Further investigation reveals that during the recent crises in the area which involved Hausa-Fulani, Tiv and Jukun, the Jukun asserted authority and ownership of the land. The situation did not favour some members of the Hausa community who also claim to be indigenes, especially some members of the group who have Jukun heritage but did not have any identity marker which includes the names as well language. The result is a reawakening towards multilingualism, especially the use of Jukun as a means of asserting identity.

One of the informants, an aged member of Hausa group, stated that he is Hausa Jukun. By this, he means that his grandfather was a Hausa trader from Zaria who settled in Wukari but that his mother and his wife were Jukun. He claimed that he can speak both indigenous languages – Jukun and Hausa, but cannot explain why the generation after him abandoned Jukun language. He corroborated the present attempt towards multilingualism which involves the learning of Jukun. From focus group discussions, the Muslim youth, especially those of Jukun heritage, expressed their desire to learn Jukun however, the major challenge is the polarization of the entire city along religious line, an aftermath of the crises which has made it difficult for the two warring groups to have close contact.

A summary of the multilingual perspective of the Hausa community reflects the linguistic practice of which favours Hausa more and the superimposition of Hausa over all other languages within the community. This practice serves as a strategy for maintaining religious identity, which is extolled over any other cultural identity. Of more significance is the fact that common identity ensures solidarity, dominance and power in the society. But

with strong opposition and threat to identity, political and economic relevance, multilingualism becomes the option to achieve integration in order to maintain identity and power. For the group, multilingualism has never been a tool for socialization but a tool of necessity.

Jukun: from language secrecy which favours multilingualism to language reawakening and development of Jukun as a means of strengthening power

The Jukun ethno-linguistic group is a major language group in Southern Taraba. Jukun serves as a generic name for various language groups in the region and beyond. The group is regarded as powerful owing to their prowess in battle. Due to the prestige and power Jukun enjoys in the region, some smaller groups often assume Jukun identity as a strategy for survival. But, the Jukun speaking people in Southern Taraba are known for their favourable disposition towards learning the other languages in contact as well as their penchant for concealing their language (see Storch 2011). One of the key reasons for language secrecy is that the Jukun see language as a weapon of control and power. Being renowned warriors, they argue that their language encapsulates secret codes which need to be protected from their potential enemies. As a result, the Jukun are more apt to learn other languages than to expose their language to the other groups. Thus, an average Jukun is disposed towards multilingual practice.

A sociolinguistic survey of Wukari town conducted by Mgbemena and Yusuf (2013) notes the consequence of their pattern of multilingualism. A survey of language use and preference in strategic domains in the society – trade centers/markets, social gathering, religious gatherings, cultural activities, educational institutions show evidence of dominance of Jukun language by the Hausa language and a general language shift from Jukun to Hausa and English, a practice, which portends endangerment for Jukun language.

The Jukun people trace their ancestral origin to the ancient Kwararafa kingdom that migrated to Nigeria from Yemen. Jukun stands at present as the custodian of the culture of the kingdom and the seat of power presided by the semi divine king, the *Aku Uka* of Wukari. In 1931, C. K. Meek recorded the history of this people who were known as the Kwararafa people and one of the tribes in the renowned Kwararafa kingdom. According to their oral history, they migrated from one of the most powerful Sudanese kingdoms, probably Yemen, in the East of Mecca about 350 AD. The account claims that the Jukun migrated with the Kanuri people from Yemen and travelled by the way of Wadai to Ngazargamu, a former capital of Bornu. They settled for some time in the region of Lake Chad before proceeding to the Benue region, partly because of series of disputes with the Kanuri and partly because of over population in the region. The tribes previously under Jukun include the Alago, Agatu, Rendere, Gumai in Shendan, among others. However, most of these tribes left as a result of power tussle. Allegedly, some regions occupied by Hausa in the North East formerly belonged to the Jukun. Today, the Jukun have gained spread in some states in Nigeria, Jukun communities in Nigeria are found in Taraba, Benue, Nassarawa, Gombe, Plateau, Adamawa, including the Federal capital territory Abuja (Ajiboshe 2003). Jukun communities and settlements are also found outside Nigeria. There are Jukun communities in four

West African countries – Cameroun, Niger Republic and Benin republic and the Republic of Chad.

The seat of authority and government of Jukun people is in Wukari, where those who speak the Wapan dialect are found. The status of Wapan has been noted in previous studies (Meek 1931; Shimizu 1980). Meek (1931: 1) asserts that "the main body known as Wapa is located in and around Wukari and form under the king of Wukari, an independent unit of the Benue province." Jukun groups are named by their geographical location – Jukun Wanu (the riverine Jukun) and Jukun Wapan, the land Jukun, but in contemporary times, Jukun Wapan mainly refers to the Wukari Jukun. Jukun has many communities and dialects that are historically related and belong to the same language family. Meek (1931) identifies that there are six dialects of Jukun spoken in different Jukun communities – Wukari, Donga, Kona, Gwana, and Pindiga, Jibu and Wase-Tofa.

Basically, the Jukun community practices multilingualism as a means of gaining knowledge of other groups, maintaining power and control as well as socialization. Predominantly, members of the Jukun community speak up to three or four languages. On the average, members of the Jukun community speak Hausa. Observations and information from the Jukun group indicate that the use of other languages in contact while shielding their language from others has yielded to some consequences which include the dominance of Hausa and the shift from Jukun language to Hausa in the communities. It became evident that although the Jukun claim to be the dominant group in the area, their language is not dominant.

There is a present move towards balanced multilingualism after bouts of violent clashes. Interactions with the traditional council as well as focus group discussions with a cross section of the Jukun public reflect a trend towards Jukun language reawakening and development. In this new multilingual practice, the Jukun people use other languages in contact and also make their language accessible to the other groups. The culture of language concealment is caving in in the face of crises in the area. However, it is important to add that there are some aspects of Jukun codes, especially relating to religious practices that remain guided with secrecy. Through the effort of the Jukun language Development Project Group, Federal University Wukari in collaboration with the Jukun Traditional council, Jukun language has become the first indigenous language in Taraba state apart from Hausa, to have a nine year basic education curriculum for the teaching of the language from primary school to the junior secondary. The language is now taught in schools including Islamic schools in Wukari.

The Jukun still maintain a favourable disposition towards linguistic diversity. To the group, multilingualism remains a tool for socialization although with an underlying motive. It is a strategy for gaining information about the other groups as well as a tool for maintaining power and economic relations with the other language groups in contact.

Conclusion

The study reflects language as a powerful tool. Beyond serving as a means of communication and socialization, it can determine the survival of an individual or a people in the face of conflict and threat of extermination of life. It is clear from the discussions that multilingualism would have different meanings,

different motivations and different styles of practice in diverse settings in extremely linguistically diverse Nigeria. The focus of this study on North East Nigeria has revealed the interplay of language politics, socio economic realities, and power relations especially arising from competitions and conflicts on the linguistic practices of the communities in this region. An exploration of motivation for multilingualism in another linguistically diverse zone of Nigeria – South South – would also reveal motivations that are shaped by the sociocultural variables in the geographical space. For the present study, insights from the experiences of four language groups in Taraba south have shown how the dynamics of power, conflict and socio economic realities shape the motivations and methods of multilingual practices of language groups in convergence in the region.

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