The Role of the Yoruba Language in the De-Escalation of the Language Conflict in the Idiroko Border Community

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ABSTRACT: *This study investigated the role of the Yoruba language in the de-escalation process of the language conflict in the idiroko border community. This study employs an exploratory survey paradigm, which integrates a mixed research approach to collect data. A total of 50 respondents were involved in the study to represent the entire population, 20 Nigerians, and 25 Beninese. Under this investigation, data was collected quantitatively and qualitatively. Quantitative data was collected using questionnaires containing multiple-choice, open and closed-ended questions, and attitude scales. Qualitative data was collected through observation (non-participant). The results from the quantitative data collected affirmed that the role of the Yoruba language in the de-escalation process of the language conflict in Idiroko community is reconciliatory with 48% index, 36% of respondents see the role as neutral while 16% see it as passive. The study recommends that policy makers should take specific measures in the context of language policy making for border community. Also, it is recommended that policies be implemented to reflect the institutionalization of the Yoruba language as the language of mediation for the language conflict in the Idiroko community. This was be done by the government of both countries as a matter of urgency because large-scale intercultural conflicts start with the conflict of language.*

KEYWORDS*: Intercultural Communication, Trans-border Communication, The Yoruba Language, Accommodation Strategy, Language Conflict*

I.   INTRODUCTION

The indigenous people of Idiroko are the Yoruba, the Anago, the Egun and languages spoken by residents include Nigerian Pidgin, French, English and Yoruba. (Omoniyi 2004:44.) Idiroko also has a large transient population as a result of cross border trading. Traditionally, the town is ruled by the Oba, the Oniko of Idiroko, who is aided by a council of chiefs. (Afolayan 2000:48)

The domain of cross-border communication in connection with linguistic diversity has not been adequately researched. In particular, the use of Yoruba language as an intercultural communication tool has not only been mentioned by few scholars but also very little attention has been given in relation to its vitality in enhancing intercultural interactions, especially in Idiroko (Okombo 2008:343) only mentions the pertinence of Yoruba as a

transactional and socialisation language. Similarly, (Habwe 2009:2), in his paper, gives a glimpse of how Yoruba language can be used as a tool for enhancing cross-border trade in the West African sub-region. (Okombo 2020:1) In his work examines how age is a major determinant of language variation among ordinary people using Yoruba in the West African region as a case study. Conflicts do not always originate in political and economic constellations of multilingual settings, but can also be self-generated through the conflict of languages. Example: At present, the European Union deals with 72 language combinations. Sometimes more than 700 interpreters work the same day. French, English and German are the most important languages. Only tricks and an asymmetrical interpretation structure allow communication. The understanding of the status of the Yoruba Language in the de-escalation of similar conflict in the Idiroko community is expedient to the linguistic prosperity and arrest of possible language conflict in that community. It should be known that language is closely connected to culture in other words, language and culture are Siamese twins therefore, a linguistic conflict is cultural and people can become hostile when their culture is being attacked.

In the de-escalation process therefore, it is proposed that we are required to pick a single language to serve as a major, dominant language. This language must and should be embraced by all as the language of social cohesion and official dealings. The acceptance of this language by every culture in this community might not be immediate although, that acceptance would lead to linguistic and intercultural prosperity for all. Language conflicts can be brought about by changes in the expansion of the social system when there is language contact between different language groups (Inglehart/ Woodward 1967). According to research, the disadvantaged language group tends towards assimilation. However, we need to look at the bigger picture because the expansion and intensification of language conflict remains an impediment to social elevation and social mobility. This language conflict has to stop and every group needs to make a compromise.

II.   STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

The problem statement of this study is the increased contacts of people of different linguistic backgrounds during trans-border encounters in Idiroko Community creates a nascent ground for high risk of an escalated language conflict. This fragile situation demands a subtle intervention for the de-escalation of this conflict. Just like in Europe and in other multilingual contexts in the world, there is a need for a dominant language to rise to the occasion and mediate this language conflict. There is also a need for the inhabitants of the Idiroko community to accept and embrace this language for the linguistic prosperity of ball. Europe has several languages which cause a lot of language crises and until they all learned to embrace a dominant language, the conflict persisted. Our failure to solve this language conflict would create a threat for the economic development of this community as no economic activities would be possible if partners are in conflict linguistically. Despite the existence of, several researches on intercultural communication problems, little attention has been given to the Yoruba language and border communities.

III.   RESEARCH QUESTION

1.   What is the role of the Yoruba language in the de-escalation of the language conflict in the Idiroko border community?

IV.   SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study has both policy and academic significance. This study opens up new horizons of the significance of language unification to solving the problems of linguistic diversity in the context of trans-border communication in border communities in the West African sub region.

Language conflict is a major challenge facing the African society as Africa remains a multilingual and multicultural entity. This makes the linguistic situation extremely volatile. Every culture sticks to his language and hence, most African languages become threatened and may not survive the test of modern time. This work aims to propose a humanitarian corridor within the borders of this crisis and proffer a lasting solution to the

problem of language conflict in the Idiroko border community and subsequently suggest that this intervention be introduced to border communities across the West African sub-region.

Furthermore, results of this study inspire the urgent need for the governments of both countries to forge effective and efficient language policies and programs inspired with the aim to deescalate existing language conflicts. Finally, the results of this study provide academic pertinence by adding empirical evidence in the field of intercultural communication. More importantly, it serves as a call to interdisciplinary research on the role of trans-border languages, especially from a sociolinguistic point of view in relation to intercultural communication. Thus, it offers a basis for future research.

V.   LITERATURE REVIEW

The word "conflict" conjures up images of violence, i.e. the sort of violence typical of war, riots or terrorism. In some cases language conflict has indeed been accompanied by or has given cause to language riots or violent actions. Belgium is known for its language riots, for example those in the 1970s when Flemish people protested in Schaerbeek (a suburb of Brussels) because the mayor refused to treat Dutch-speaking inhabitants on equal footing with the French-speaking inhabitants in the town hall (Defoort 1998).

Although language conflict as a topic is dealt with in linguistic literature prior to the second half of the twentieth century (Kremnitz 1990), it took until the 1960s before it started to be more prominently explored. Scholars such as Haugen (1966), Inglehart and Woodward, joy (1972, 1967), contributed significantly to putting it on the research map in North America.

In an attempt to contribute to the constructive development of research on language conflict this contribution provides a systematic state of the art of language conflict research. Rooted in what some would refer to as "traditional" macro sociolinguistics, the sociology of language or contact linguistics (Wildgen 2005).

Literature on societal language conflict emphasizes that language conflict at the societal level comes about in situations of societal language contact (Haugen 1980). These situations are characterized by asymmetrical rather than symmetrical multilingualism. Language often develops into a significant symbol of social conflict, even if it is not the direct cause of the conflict. In that sense, it is possible to characterize language conflicts as "diverted social conflicts" (Mattheier 1989: 1). In order to track down the causes of a language conflict one needs to carefully consider the ecology of the language contact situation which reveals a lot about the nature of the social or other cleavages that characterize a situation of language contact.

The debates in the media, in language commissions, governmental assemblies, etc. are also loaded with what Haugen (1987: 630) refers to as "power brokerage". Especially the analysis of processes of language standardization shows how different forces in society attach emotional values to specific historically grown linguistic varieties and sometimes experience the rejection of their own variety almost as a denial of their linguistic identity. These emotions interfere with the process of codification (the second stage in Haugen's language planning model)

Olalaye et al. (2017) state that language plays an important role in conflict resolution. They looked at the different discourse strategies which make language cohere and helps to facilitate conflicts resolution. According to them, there is authority and a dominance force in language when it comes to conflict resolution. Language is a means which is use to solve many conflicts in Africa in particular and the world in general, even if the conflict is ethno-religious or electoral. In relation to our study the Yoruba language is used not only as a main means of communication in the Idiroko area but as a medium to calm down conflict in the Idiroko boarder community that houses people from different ethnic backgrounds and nationalities.

Democratic Progress Institute (2004) dwells on language and identity as the root causes of many conflicts. Despite being the causes of conflict, they still play an important role in peace building and democratic advancement at local, national and international levels. They also point out the role of language, media and identity in conflict and challenges of implementing linguistic diversity. This is related in our work as we see the Yoruba language bringing people together in the Idiroko community which is a business and boarder town.

People coming from different parts of the world have settled in the area and with time have learned the language which in turns facilitate communication between people of different ethnic groups.

De Matos (2006) sees language as a mental marvel for peaceful meaning making and problem solving. He went further to emphasis the use of language, peace, and conflict resolution as a way to understanding, preventing, monitoring, overcoming and eliminating all forms of communicative violence in personal lives, communities and the world. The Idiroko border community is a heterogeneous community with more than one language used as a means of communication. The Yoruba language is widely used in the community and also as a medium of solving disputes since majority of the population understand the Yoruba language.

VI.   APPROACH

The approach known as "linguistic profiling" dates back to the 1960s. At that time scholars such as Ferguson (1962), for example, promoted the idea that studies based on a profile of the broad social environment in which a language is used allow for a better judgment of the changes in the status and function of that language. Haugen soon picks up this idea and pleads for a multidimensional and interdisciplinary approach to the interplay between language and its environment. He labels this approach "the ecology of language" (Haugen 1972). In his writings, he emphasizes that the ecology of language wants to cover "a broad range of interests within which linguists can cooperate significantly with all kinds of social scientists towards an understanding of the interaction of languages and their users" (Haugen 1972: 328–329). What the ecology of language (like other sorts of profiling such as Wölck's Community Profiles, cf. Wölck 1985) aims for is to discover major social distinctions and structural divisions in a community and to identify a subset of the population that represents such features or structural divisions.

VII.   METHODOLOGY

This study employs a cross-sectional survey paradigm, which integrates a mixed research approach to collect data. Qualitative and quantitative data are collected to enhance understanding of the participants' attitudes, perspectives, and experiences on the role played by the Yoruba language in the de-escalation of the language conflict in Idiroko community.

The instrument was self-designed to measure the status of Yoruba Language in Idiroko community; it examines the role the Yoruba language plays in the de-escalation of the language conflict in the Idiroko border community. The questionnaire was divided into two sections: Section A and B. Section A provided demographic information of the respondents such as name, nationality, occupation and sex while section B contained 10 items carefully worded to elicit responses from respondents. The items in the Section C were structured along four-point modified Likert scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). Cronbach alpha was used to determine the reliability and the coefficient of 0.80 was obtained. The QSALE was piloted on 30 individuals that were not part of the population intended to be used for the main study. Cronbach alpha was used to determine the reliability and the coefficient of 0.78. The collection of data for the study lasted one month after which the data were analyzed. The data collected was presented in tables and figures and analyzed through thematic content analysis (TCA) by the use of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The deductive approach was thematically used descriptively to present coded narrations (words, sentences and paragraphs) to facilitate the emergence of themes and sub-themes.

As the study involves investigating the status and role of the Yoruba language in the de-escalation of the language conflict in Idiroko community, a sample of 50 respondents was involved in the study to represent the entire population. A total of 50 respondents were involved in the study to represent the entire population. 25 Nigerians and 25 Beninese were selected to provide useful information for the study. For data collection and analysis, a triangulation approach was adopted where the researcher used different approaches, including observations (non-participant), scheduled interviews (individual) were conducted through structured

questionnaires. These data collection methods were utilized to reduce bias and increase the validity of the research findings.

Using the above-stated methods, the data collected was presented in tables and charts and analyzed through thematic content analysis (TCA) by the use of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The deductive approach was thematically used descriptively to present coded narrations (words, sentences and paragraphs) to facilitate the emergence of themes and sub-themes.

VIII.   RESULTS

Research Question: What is the role of the Yoruba language in the de-escalation of the language conflict in the idiroko border community?

Table 1

Role of the Yoruba language in the de-escalation of the language conflict in the idiroko border community		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Reconciliatory Role	24	48.0	48.0	48.0
	Neutral Role	18	36.0	36.0	84.0
	Passive Role	8	16.0	16.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

Source: Fieldwork

With reference to the above **Table 1**, you would realize that the Yoruba Language was seen by inhabitants of this community as playing a mediatory role in this de-escalation process. 48% of respondents affirmed that the Yoruba language is the only reconciliatory mechanism that could be mediate the impending language crisis in this community. During the non-participant observation, it was realized that the Yoruba language is seen by inhabitants of this community as a linguistic messier that has emerged to rescue the situation. They believe that since the Yoruba language is common to both linguistic entities of the Republic of Benin and Nigeria then the acceptance of the Yoruba language as a linguistic reconciliatory is just but natural. Although, 36% of the respondents believe that the role of the Yoruba language in this de-escalation process is neutral as they still believe that the languages of the imperialists English and French are still the solution to this crisis. Some 16% of respondents believe that the role of the Yoruba language is passive in the communicative highway. The implication of the above result is that the Yoruba language receives the high support from all sides as the only solution to this language conflict and that the institutionalization of the Yoruba language as the dominant and operational language of this community is the only way to solve this endemic language conflict.

Based on the respondents reaction in Table 1 above, we deemed it necessary to further ask them to categorize this role in the below parameters. They concluded based on the data collected that the role of the Yoruba language in this de-escalation process is absolutely a major one. Table 2 below confirms this assertion.

Table 2

Rating of the role played by the Yoruba Language in the de-escalation process					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Major	29	58.0	58.0	58.0
	Minor	13	26.0	26.0	84.0
	Insignificant	8	16.0	16.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

Source: Fieldwork

From the above, you would realize that, most respondent agreed that the role of Yoruba Language in this process is indeed a major one with an index of 58%. Although, 26% of respondents claim that its role is minor while 16% claims that its role is insignificant.

IX.   DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The pbjective of this study is to analyse the role played by the Yoruba language in the de-escalation process of the language conflict ion the Idiroko community. This objective was achieved as evident in the data collected where most respondents 48% confirmed that the Yoruba language is the reconciliatory mechanism that must be supported by governmental policies to solve the conflict of language in the Idiroko communication highway.

Idiroko just like every other borderline community is a multilingual setting and hence, people seem to be in the enclave of their own language and communication becomes impossible. In situation like this, ethno-linguist encourage that compromise must be made for communication to survive. The compromise of finding a common linguistic ground for all and an embrace of the language of unification which in this case is the Yoruba language. The use of such common language is crucial for fostering mutual understanding among inhabitants. It creates viable sites for the construction of social cohesion. The multiplicity of languages in border communities does more harm than good because a border homes people from heterogeneous linguistic affiliations and they cannot coexist seamlessly until they embrace a common linguistic code as their interface of communication.

CONCLUSION

This work affirms that the Yoruba language plays a significant role in the language conflict de-escalation process, it is important to note that as straightforward as this reconciliatory mechanism seems, the acceptance process must be relentless and focused. The acceptance of one dominant language might take time but it is the only solution to the complex linguistic confrontation. Actors in the policy sector must give the orientation and reorientation for people to realize the reason for such conclusion; they must be made to realize that this decision is not antagonistic to their linguistic affiliations but taken for the common good of all.

Language policy makers must add advocacy to their strength and stop being mechanical about policy making. The ability of policy makers to make the consumers understand the inspiration behind their policies would go a long g way in creating a favorable atmosphere for the policy to thrive and it would engender the acceptance rate of such policy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the research findings of this study, it is recommended that policy makers should take specific measures in the context of language policy making for border community. This is because it has been realized that, most countries have failed to take specific, focused and dynamic policy measures when it comes to border communities. Most countries don't even see the need to put in place border-specific language policies.

The issue of language policy in borderline communities is often confused with language policy in the bordering countries however; border communities require specific policies to suit their diversities.

Table 3: Existence of a Defined Language Policy

Existence of a Defined Language Policy					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	50	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Field Work

All the respondents agreed that there is no specific language policy at Idiroko Community**.** This might seems strange as it's a common knowledge that every country should has a language policy although, the Idiroko community is located in the borderline between the Republic of Benin and Nigerian and hence, no language policy is officially operational at the moment. This is because several linguistic and cultural factors have to be considered before a language policy can be institutionalized. This notwithstanding does not conflict with the fact that Yoruba language has unofficially taken up the role as the language of reconciliation in this community as several linguistic functions are carried out with it.

Figure 1: Existence of a Defined Language Policy

Existence of language policy

100.00%

No
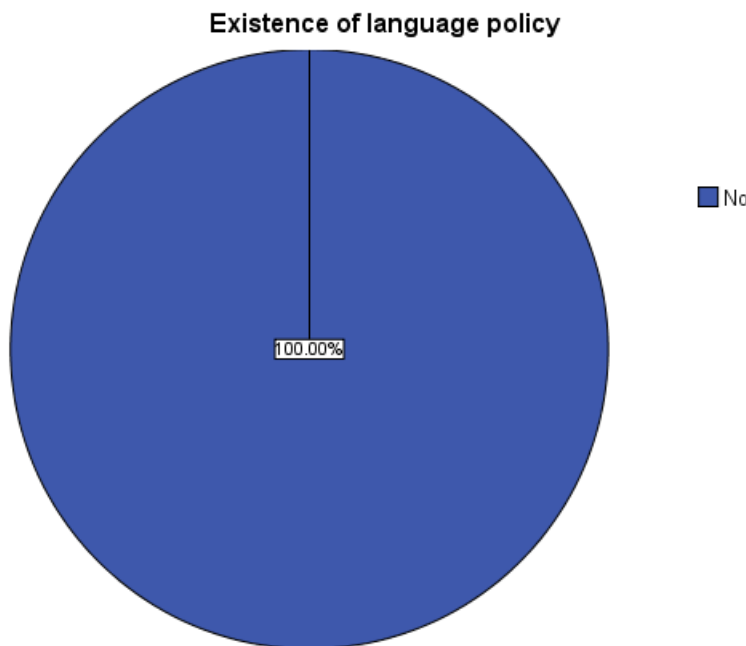
Source: Field Work

All the respondents disagreed that language policies are implemented in Idiroko Community, this is because there could be no implementation for a policy that doesn't exist.

Furthermore, it is recommended that policies be implemented to reflect the institutionalization of the Yoruba language as the language of mediation for the language conflict in the Idiroko community. This was be done by the government of both countries as a matter of urgency because large-scale intercultural conflicts start with the conflict of language. To avoid this potentiality, immediate policy intervention must be taken to mediate this fragile situation.

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