Issues in introducing indigenous languages in higher education in Africa: the example of Nigeria

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The example of Nigeria

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As the most populous African nation, with one of the most diverse, and problematic, ethnolinguistic profiles in the world, Nigeria provides a case study for the potential introduction of indigenous languages in (higher) education delivery in once colonised territories. We argue that increased enrolment in higher education will become necessary for Nigeria to attain its developmental goals. We then discuss the limits to what the Nigerian educational system can be expected to achieve using English as the medium of instruction. Once these limits are surpassed, the gradual addition of a limited number of Nigerian languages will become inevitable. We propose to make use of a distinction between languages as designed (or intellectualized) and languages as discerned, inspired by the terminology of 'Ausbau' and 'Abstand' languages as used by Kloss. The article briefly reviews the complex linguistic makeup of Nigeria and outlines a number of principles that could guide rational language choices in this area, such as ease of acquisition and inclusivity. It ends with suggesting a number of concrete steps that should be taken over the coming years in order to make the introduction of indigenous languages into higher education in Nigeria a practical possibility.

Keywords: Nigeria, indigenous languages, higher education, medium of instruction, colonial languages

1. Introduction

Nigeria's sociolinguistic profile has presented a dilemma for linguists and educationists for decades. The main issue has been how to navigate between the desirability of indigenous languages for education, and the reality of the continued dominance of English. Nigeria's National Policy on Education (2014) acknowl-

edges the key role that education plays in 'empowering the people for the attainment of the nation's developmental plans and targets' (p iv). In order for such empowerment to happen, steps must be taken to increase participation in higher education (the enrolment ratio), building on the progress that has been made over time. Such participation will have to increase significantly; with that comes the need to carefully revisit the issue of the medium of instruction in education.

The Nigerian language policy, as embedded in the country's policy on education, recognizes the importance of the use of indigenous languages in education. However, it only commits the government of Nigeria to "the use of the mother-tongue or the language of the immediate community" for pre-primary education and partly for primary education (National Policy on Education 1981 Section 2: 11 (3)). The policy does not extend to secondary school education let alone higher education. As we argue in this paper, this will have to change. Furthermore, such perfunctory statements as above in the education policy only pay "lip service" to these needs; in reality, English continues to be promoted above the indigenous languages (Akinnaso 1991). One issue that is often raised in this regard is the difficult problem of which indigenous languages might be adopted as a national lingua franca or official language. Other related issues include the notion of underdevelopment of the indigenous languages due to the focus on English, as well as "affective" issues such as the loss or confusion of linguistic identities and of sense of pride in one's own linguistic heritage. In the sections below, we outline some of the reasons why the introduction of local languages for (higher) education will become inevitable over time anyway. We also suggest ways in which some of the difficulties highlighted here might be overcome.

The arguments presented in this article build on earlier contributions of the co-authors. Data on the performance of educational systems are examined in relation to the Nigerian context and to relevant issues in language policy. Internationally recognized models for the assessment of proficiency in languages, and Normalised Edit Distances are used in a new way, to indicate the ease or difficulty of learning a second (or third) language for speakers of a specific language.

2.   Why a transition to Nigerian languages will be needed

Many authors have argued in favour of a transition to African languages (Fafunwa 1975; Mann 1990; Bamgbose 2011; Djité 2008; Kamwangamalu 2016; Oloruntoba-Oju 2015; Wolff 2016; Brock-Utne 2017); for a more extensive review that also discusses some of the shortcomings of the current debates, see Van Pinxteren (2022). The advocacy generally builds on the argument of linguists and language education planners regarding the advantages of using the child's mother tongue as

medium of instruction (UNESCO 1953; Fafunwa 1989; Adegbite 2008; UNESCO 2010). This consensus holds, even though the concepts of first language (L1) or 'mother tongue' are sometimes questioned. In many African countries, both in rural and urban settings, children learn two or more languages from an early age on. Sometimes these languages are used as a resource, in what has come to be known as 'translanguaging' practice; however, usually this is employed as a means to gaining proficiency in a former colonial language.

Alexander (2012) has pointed to the issue of economic efficiency: if the amount of resources devoted to education is a given, then that education will be more efficiently delivered in a language closer to what learners already know – in other words, better quality education can be achieved using the same amount of resources and using a language that is close to what children already know, as compared to using a language that children do not yet know well enough.

Authors have pointed out the negative effects of continuing with the current policies: children drop out of the school system unnecessarily, leading to a waste of talent and resources and under-utilization of African talents – see for example Ouane and Glanz (2010). This also gives rise to the problem of semilingualism, a phenomenon where people are not proficient enough in *any* language to properly express their thinking (Wolff 2016: 227).

Apart from the linguistic and economic arguments, there has also been the argument of 'affect' (Oloruntoba-Oju 2015: 21), where language is seen as "a source of identity … pride and dignity". A related argument is about rights; indeed, language rights have been analysed as human rights: African languages have a right, "not only to survival but also to development" (UNESCO 2010: 8). The language rights are of course the rights of the people who use the languages.

Despite this clear desirability of education in an indigenous language, for improvements in the quality of education and to handle increased enrolment as well as affective concerns, the path to the realisation of that ideal has remained elusive. Sometimes the expectation is pitched too high. For example, some scholars feel that *all* the languages in a multilingual environment "must be cultivated and developed to serve the various communicative needs in these different domains" (Adegbite 2008: 5). This seems a tall order in an environment such as Nigeria with over 500 languages. Socio-economic incentives have also been suggested in the literature, for example, a 'reward system' through the creation of jobs and advancement prospects associated with indigenous languages (Akinnaso 1991).

While the debate so far has concentrated on issues of linguistics, ideology, culture or rights, we propose in this article to focus on what we can actually expect an education system will be able to deliver in a multilingual environment, and how this can be achieved. Our aim is to demonstrate that the introduction of indige-

nous languages for higher education will become inevitable in the Nigerian context as enrolment figures rise in the years ahead. We also demonstrate that policy must be firm in dealing with the issues while avoiding problems earlier raised such as ambiguity and lukewarm implementation (Akinnaso, 1991). To help reduce the complexity here, we employ the distinction between 'discerned' and 'designed' languages (Van Pinxteren, 2021: 86), which is inspired by the distinction between 'Abstand' and 'Ausbau' languages (Kloss 1967).

2.1   On discerned and designed languages

While there is no unanimity on the number of languages spoken in Nigeria, it is generally agreed that it runs into the hundreds. *Ethnologue*, one of the most quoted sources, puts the number of indigenous languages spoken in Nigeria at 505.[1] This figure often leads to the argument that their introduction would be "politically impossible" (Mann 1990: 98). However, it would be entirely feasible (and advantageous to Nigeria) to choose a much more limited number of languages. This leads us to the distinction between "discerned" and "designed" languages referred to above.

The term 'discerned' points to speech forms, registers or dialects that have been identified as different from one another; hence there is justification for the social act of pronouncing them a separate language. This is therefore basically a *linguistic* concept. The term 'designed' is *sociological* in nature: it points to the act of extending a spoken language into a standardized language, including its written form. This is similar to the concept of 'intellectualisation'. According to Prah (2017: 216), citing Sibayan (1999): an intellectualised language is a 'language which can be used for educating a person in any field of knowledge from kindergarten to the university and beyond'. The term 'designed' as proposed by Van Pinxteren reinforces the notion that there is a social process involved here.

In practice, for a country like Germany, *Ethnologue* discerns 15 German-like languages that are spoken in the country;[2] yet, education is not provided in any of these 15 languages. Instead, all speakers of these different discerned languages use a common, designed standardized form of German – '*Hochdeutsch*'.[3] This standardized form is actually *spoken* by almost nobody in Germany, but it is used in all formal domains and thus serves as a common *designed* language for speakers of all the 15 *discerned* languages spoken in Germany. In order to master such a designed language, a certain amount of formalized learning is always required, as it is not

1.   https://www.ethnologue.com/country/NG accessed 21 January 2021.

2.   https://www.ethnologue.com/country/DE accessed 31 October 2019, 22nd edition.

3.   https://wenr.wes.org/2021/01/education-in-germany-2 accessed 18 July 2022.

wholly identical to anybody's mother tongue. In fact, Hochdeutsch is not *mutually intelligible* with all these German-like languages. Still, it makes more sense in Germany to use Hochdeutsch as the common designed language, as opposed to using, for example, Polish. This means that in principle, a limited number of *designed* or intellectualized languages could serve a larger number of *discerned* languages.

Let us now apply these concepts to the Nigerian situation, examining the country's complicated language ecology, as pictured in a simplified way in the map below. As is clear from the map, the three 'major' languages Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba belong to three large language families: Afro-Asiatic (Chadic), Yoruboid, and Igboid. However, these are by no means the only language families present in the country. With such a rich language ecology, the challenge is how a limited number of languages can be chosen for the purpose of widespread and effective education.
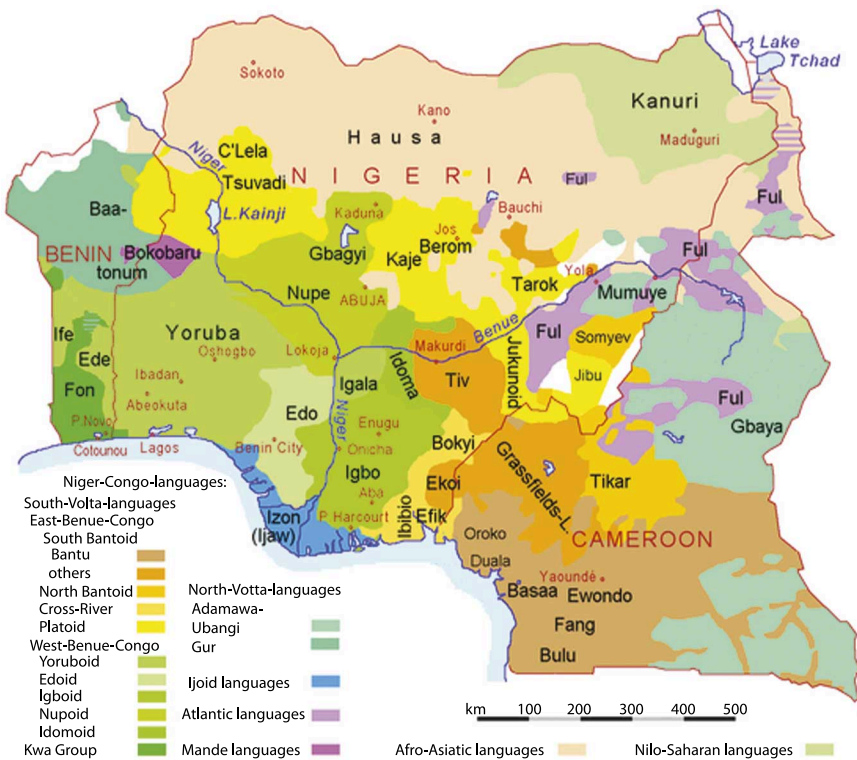
Source: Wikipedia, Languages of Nigeria by Ulamm, CC BY-SA 3.0, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=2983770

2.2   The challenge of education for all

As argued above, education implies formal learning, which in turn requires formal language. Since such a language will always be different in some respect from what learners have been exposed to, it may be difficult to grasp for children, especially those who may not be gifted in that area. This will also depend on the difference between what children already know and what they are required to learn: it will be easier to teach children a different language that is *similar* to one they already know than to teach them a language that is completely *different* from what they already know.

It is the experience of the authors, and we believe it to be the Nigerian experience as well, that children can generally be taught at least the basics of another language. However, the country's neo-colonial status ensures that this language is English. The Nigerian National Policy on Education expressly states this (see NPE 2004, S4.19 (e & f)). This choice may appear to be rational on the surface and for the moment, but this may not be so in future when demand for tertiary education increases. In theory, if in future the Nigerian education system is expected to educate more people than the number it can effectively teach a formalized English, it will no longer be able to make exclusive use of English as medium of instruction.

2.3   Required language level in Tertiary education: The case of Nigeria

There are a number of systems used internationally for assessing the level of proficiency in a language. One of these is the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), which has six levels.[4] To profit from tertiary education, a language proficiency level corresponding to at least the CEFR B2 level is considered necessary. This level stands for 'upper intermediate' – it is the level used by many universities. For Nigeria, the SSCE credit pass (C6) corresponds roughly to the B2 level, although the standard associated with this level may not always be achieved in practice.

The proportion of the population that Nigeria's education system is able to educate to the B2 level of proficiency in English at the end of secondary and the start of tertiary education can be estimated by multiplying the completion rate for senior secondary education by the percentage of students that obtain a credit pass in English at the Senior School Certificate Examination (SSCE). UNESCO gives the completion rate for senior secondary education in 2018 as 49.3%: nearly half of Nigeria's youngsters currently receive education up to senior secondary level.

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4. https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages/home accessed 20 July 2019.

However, not all of those youngsters receive a credit pass in English: according to information from the WAEC Nigeria,[5] such a pass was reached by 65.2% of those who sat for the SSCE in 2020. This means that, currently, the Nigerian education system is able to educate just over 32% of its youngsters to a B2 level of proficiency in English (of children completing secondary education, two-thirds obtain the credit pass in English, therefore amounting to roughly one-third of all of Nigeria's youngsters).[6] But how good or bad is this? The Estonian system provides a good benchmark for comparison.

Estonia gained its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. After independence, it had to reform its education system, which up until then was based on the Soviet model, with Russian as the medium of instruction. The Estonian language (spoken by around one million people) belongs to the Uralic language family and is very different from English. The national language, Estonian, is used as medium of instruction, while English is taught as a subject. According to the First European Survey on Language Competences (2012), Estonia is able to educate 34% of its secondary school population to the B2 level of proficiency, while Nigeria, which uses English as medium of instruction, can only manage 32%. This benchmarking shows:

1. it is not necessary to use English as medium of instruction to teach youngsters a good level of English – such a result can also be obtained by teaching English as a subject; this point has been made in different contexts by Nigerian linguists and educationists (Fafunwa 1975; Bamgbose 2011).
2. if Nigeria were to emulate the Estonian education system it could give at least as many children a good level of English as it currently does; and
3. in spite of the frequent criticisms levelled at secondary education in Nigeria, it is performing relatively well when it comes to teaching children English.

However, we also need to look at the level of enrolment in tertiary education. In Nigeria, this level has increased significantly over the years, and in 2011 (the last year for which Nigerian statistics were published) it stood at 10.2% – a dramatic increase compared for example to 1981, when it stood at only 2.3%. However, for Estonia, the level has increased as well and stood at 70.4% in 2018.

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5. https://nairametrics.com/2020/11/02/wassce-2020-records-65-24-credit-pass-in-5-subjects-including-mathematics-and-english/ accessed 21 January 2021.

6. Note, though, that this percentage may be overly generous. Many UK Universities require a foundation year for students from Nigeria before they can enter a UK University; the entry requirement for that is also a credit pass, which is assessed as being on the border between the B1 and B2 levels – see https://www.ncuk.ac.uk/ accessed 21 January 2021.

What this means is that the Nigerian education system is able to use English as medium of instruction in tertiary education because it is able to give more youngsters the required level of proficiency in English than there are places available (32% of children at the required level, but places in tertiary education available to only 10%). By contrast, even though the Estonian education system is able to give more youngsters a good level of English, it is not able to use English as medium of instruction in all of its tertiary education: in Estonia, 34% of children are at the required level of English, but tertiary education is available to over 70%. Because the enrolment level in tertiary education in Estonia is seven times as high compared to Nigeria, Estonia has to use Estonian in large parts if not all of its tertiary education system.

The level of effort that an education system has to bring to bear on teaching a certain proportion of the population a foreign language (or indeed any designed language) increases as enrolment increases: giving 10% more children a good level in English will require more than 10% additional effort, simply because education will be extended to those less gifted in language. Currently, Nigerians can still cling to the belief that English as medium of instruction is the only option for all students of tertiary education. However, this system will grind to a painful and expensive halt as enrolment increases. Nowhere in the world are educational systems able to marshall the resources that would be needed to give all students the required level in a very different foreign language in situations where levels of enrolment approach those of the global North. The current belief will prove to be fictional in ways that will be increasingly painful and expensive for society. In other words: if enrolment in tertiary education in Nigeria were to approach levels of the global North, the addition of Nigerian languages as medium of instruction in parts of tertiary education will become a necessity. It will be impossible to give a good enough level of English to all those intellectually able to follow tertiary education. Instead, recourse will be needed to Nigerian languages. How then should this be brought about and what principles underlie the difficult choices that will have to be made?

3.   How to choose Nigerian languages for use in education

As noted earlier, monolingual alternatives to English as the national or official language in Nigeria have been widely discussed in the literature. Options that have been suggested have included Nigerian Pidgin, one of the major Nigerian languages, and other African languages such as Swahili. In addition, some people have suggested using artificial languages such as GUOSA, or ESPERANTO. GUOSA is a constructed language based on some of the major Nigerian languages

(Igbineweka, 2007), while ESPERANTO is one of the oldest artificial languages originating in Europe. In addition, WAZOBIA was proposed as a national language, based on the three major languages in Nigeria: Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo (Ndubuisi, 1998). Furthermore, these major indigenous languages have been recommended as the primary language of instruction in basic education in their respective region of dominance in the National Policy on Education.

Of all these proposals, perhaps Nigerian Pidgin has the largest following. However, as with the other proposals, it suffers from the problem of standardization and the absence of an ethnic or cultural base (see Adegbija, 1994). Nigerian Pidgin has two other problems: it has the stigma of a low-class language and can easily be considered less attractive to learn when seen in comparison with standard English.

In our opinion, these proposals all fail to do justice to the language ecology of the country. We suggest instead to opt for a multilingual solution using a limited number of designed languages from the numerous discerned languages in the country, and these for the purpose of education – as mediums of instruction at various levels, including tertiary education. This proposal to some extent avoids the murky waters of politics, and engages the interests of minority languages.

In our view, a major principle in the choice of designed languages used in tertiary education is that the number should be kept low for effectiveness and ease of management. These languages should already be taught as a subject in primary and/or secondary education, so that students already have a sufficient entry-level of proficiency in the medium of instruction for tertiary education. What this also means is that for primary and secondary education more languages could be used in instruction; these should be as close as possible to what learners already know. In order to make practical and equitable choices in this area, one could decide on the minimum number of speakers needed to justify the use of that language as a medium of instruction at a specified level. Thus, hypothetically, one could hold that for a minimum of 1,000 speakers it is justified to develop a language to such an extent that it can be used for the first four years of primary education. Then, for a minimum of 10,000 speakers, it might be justifiable to do the same for the whole of primary education. For lower secondary education, a minimum of 100,000 speakers might be required, for upper secondary 500,000 and for tertiary education, a minimum of around 1 million speakers. This would on the one hand allow education to start in a familiar language but on the other hand would encourage a transition to easy to learn other languages later on in education.

Another principle we propose is to base the choice as much as possible on scientific criteria, in order to minimize ethnically-based conflicts. In our view, and within the specific context of Nigeria, and Africa, a rational choice would be gov-

erned by considerations such as *ease of acquisition and learning, equity, inclusivity* and *state of development*. (These elements are adapted from Van Pinxteren, 2021.)

3.1   Ease of acquisition and learning

Ease of acquisition implies a language that is easy to acquire or learn for speakers of various discerned languages. English in Nigeria is not easy to learn, because of the 'distance' between the language and indigenous Nigerian languages.

The issue of which languages are more easy or more difficult to learn, and for whom, has not received wide attention in the literature. Van Pinxteren (2020:137) points out:

> the question of what ease or difficulty of language learning means for large groups of learners and for an education system has not been asked in the literature in that way. Yet, this is a question of key relevance for Africa (…)
> Common sense suggests to start from the principle that languages that are close to one another are easier to learn and to be taught in formal education than languages that are very different from one another

US experience shows a considerable difference in learning 'easy' or 'difficult' languages to a B2 or equivalent level: for a talented American learner, the difference can vary between 10 weeks of full-time instruction for a 'very easy' language to more than 80 weeks for a 'very difficult' language. As an approximation, Van Pinxteren benchmarked the U.S. scheme to scores of language distance (Levenshtein or Normalized Edit distances) that can be calculated through the Automated Similarity Judgement Program (ASJP).[7] This classification goes from very easy to very difficult, as follows (from Van Pinxteren 2020:141):

ASJP distance	Category
< 60	Very easy
≥ 60, < 90	Easy
≥ 90, ≤ 95	Medium
> 95, < 100	Difficult
≥ 100	Very difficult

A categorization based on these scores has its limitations, because it does not take account of differences in sounds and tones between languages or of stricter or less strict grammatical rules. Thus, it could be that languages 'X' and 'Y' form

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7. https://asjp.clld.org/ (accessed 6 January 2021). For more information, also consult their Wiki page: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Automated_Similarity_Judgment_Program.

an easy language pair in this categorization but due to differences of the type mentioned above it may be easier for speakers of language 'X' to learn language 'Y' than the other way around. Therefore, any suggestions for language choices would need to be validated through expert linguistic knowledge. Another limitation of the ASJP scores is that the database discerns 379 Nigerian languages, whereas a database like the *Ethnologue* discerns 510 in its 25th edition.

For Nigeria, it is important to note that both English and Nigerian Pidgin English are either 'difficult' or 'very difficult' languages for all but a few speakers of another Nigerian language.[8] However, the combination between English and a Nigerian language is not the only difficult combination. Thus, for a speaker of Yoruba, Hausa and Tiv are difficult languages to learn (and vice-versa). Therefore, any attempt to introduce one of the current Nigerian languages as the national language (as was done with Swahili in Tanzania) is bound to face resistance from other language communities, both for reasons of this difficulty and for affective reasons – as they would rather invest their time in learning a 'neutral' language like English, not a 'rival' indigenous language. Clearly, higher education in Nigeria will have to employ multiple languages, but how many, and which ones?

A first characteristic of the Nigerian language ecology is the *uneven distribution* of the number of speakers over the different languages and language groups. Whereas the largest language (Hausa) has well over 45 million speakers, the smallest languages have numbers of speakers that are below 100 in total.[9] A second characteristic is the fact that some language (sub-)families show much more *internal similarity* than others. This means that for some language families, one language could be developed as an easy to learn discerned language to serve all the languages in that family. For other languages, three, four, or perhaps even more languages would be necessary. For Nigeria, then, the need to make use of existing multilingualism and the need to build incentives for linguistic collaboration among communities become important principles.

A partial impression of the complexities of the linguistic situation in Nigeria is given in Table 1 below, representing the ASJP scores for the languages from the Cross-River family. The choice of these minority languages is deliberate in order to provide a model outside of the majority languages and to signal our interest in inclusiveness.

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8. The assessments of easy or difficult language pairs are all based on the benchmarked ASJP scores computed by the authors as extracted from the full ASJP database. (Wichmann, Holman & Brown (eds.). 2020).

9. Thus, the Ethnologue (25th edition) gives the total number of L1 speakers of Hausa as over 50 million; for Yankam, the number is given as 100.

Table 1. ASJP distance scores, Cross-River languages

2 SYNONYMS, AT LEAST 28 WORDS
LOANWORDS EXCLUDED

Purely on the basis of this theoretical model, the 40 Cross-River languages discerned by the ASJP database could be served by four designed languages: one from the Lower Cross-River subfamily (this might be Ibibio, with 4.5 million speakers), one from the Upper Cross-River subfamily and one from the Central Delta subfamily of languages (both with around 400,000 speakers). The last one would be a Bendi language, with around 100,000 speakers. If we were to take the rule of thumb suggested above as a guideline, that would mean that education up to lower secondary level could be provided in these four languages. After that, students would have to choose between Ibibio as the medium of instruction, the only language from this family that could be provided up to senior secondary and tertiary level, or one of the other languages that might be offered in the areas where the students live. According to the data in Table 2, Ibibio is not an easy language to learn for speakers from the other subfamilies (ASJP distance scores are all above 90); depending on individual preferences and levels of bilingualism, it could be that many would still prefer to study in English, which anyway would continue to be taught as a subject at the lower levels.

If we apply this model to all Nigerian languages, we arrive at a model that would mean using 12 languages at the tertiary level. These would be one of the Edoid languages, Ibibio, Igbo, one of the Ijoid languages, Fulfulde, Hausa, Kamwe, Kanuri, one of the Marghic languages, one of the Nupoid languages, Tiv and Yoruba. This means that none of the Adamawa, Jukunoid, Kainji or Platoid languages would be represented at this level, partly due to low speaker numbers, but also to large internal diversity within these groups. It is rational to keep English as a medium of instruction in addition to indigenous languages at the tertiary level, because for some of the speakers of the smaller Nigerian languages English is not necessarily much more difficult to learn than any of those twelve. What this might look like in terms of ASJP distances is illustrated by Table 2 below. The table shows that most of these language combinations are difficult; for a speaker of Tiv, learning Hausa is marginally more difficult than learning English. However, there are some combinations of medium difficulty in the table, especially involving Yoruba, and two that are easy.

The suggested requirement of a one-million speaker base for using a certain designed language as medium of instruction at tertiary level is to some extent arbitrary. Thus, Icelandic is spoken by fewer than 350,000 people; yet, the default medium of instruction at the University there is Icelandic.[10] It is thus conceivable that Nigerian states or communities work together to set up their own designed languages as medium of instruction. It is also conceivable that this is decided at

10. https://english.hi.is/university/university_of_iceland_language_policy accessed 3 February 2021.

the federal level, in order to approximate an equitable position for all linguistic communities and to keep indigenous knowledge stored in discerned languages accessible. However, this should only be done on the basis of a sound linguistic analysis and assessment of the situation, with a view to maintaining the principle that only a limited set of languages should be used. If this were to be done, the number of languages used for higher education would multiply, to reach numbers comparable to the number of official languages in the European Union (24) or to the number of 'scheduled languages' recognized in India (22, out of the more than 450 spoken in the country).

Table 2. ASJP distance scores, potential languages for tertiary education in Nigeria

2 SYNONYMS, AT LEAST 28 WORDS													
LOANWORDS EXCLUDED													
LDND	TIV_1	IBIBIO_2	YORUBA	AUCHI	IGBO	FULFULDE	NUPE	IZON	KANURI	HUBA	KAMALE	HAUSA_3	ENGLISH
TIV_1	0												
IBIBIO_2	98	0											
YORUBA	96	97	0										
AUCHI	94	89	92	0									
IGBO_ONITSHA	96	97	95	98	0								
FULFULDE_ADAMAWA	98	94	94	93	99	0							
NUPE	98	92	94	95	95	98	0						
IZON	102	96	94	100	87	98	96	0					
KANURI	101	103	98	104	98	96	101	96	0				
HUBA	96	101	102	98	100	95	104	98	95	0			
KAMALE	99	99	103	98	99	96	103	97	98	92	0		
HAUSA_3	106	102	99	99	102	101	98	96	101	97	94	0	
ENGLISH	104	97	99	102	100	103	100	97	102	98	100	99	0
LDND	TIV_1	IBIBIO_2	YORUBA	AUCHI	IGBO	FULFULDE	NUPE	IZON	KANURI	HUBA	KAMALE	HAUSA_3	ENGLISH

3.2 Equity

Equity here means the right of children of every ethnic or linguistic group to be educated in their own language or as close to that as possible. This is necessary both for emotive reasons and for practical effectiveness. Akin to the policy followed in Ethiopia (Smith, 2013), for example, schools should be encouraged to cater for specific linguistic minorities where they are of significant size.

In all, then, for secondary and higher education Nigeria would have to resort to far less than 500 languages – perhaps as few as twelve would be sufficient, probably in addition to English. Such a change would make the Nigerian education system much more efficient and accessible for many more children. With the same amount of inputs, their average results would increase, thus benefiting the Nigerian economy and Nigeria in general. This is in line with what has been found in other parts of the world. For example, Grin (2003) has looked at multilingualism in education in Western countries, notably Canada and Switzerland and has given an economic analysis. One of his conclusions (p39) is that: 'The application of

basic economic concepts then suggests that society is likely to be best off not when it tries to eliminate diversity, nor when it attempts to embrace limitless diversity.'

If Nigeria would emulate the Estonian system and teach English as a subject, at least as many youngsters as at present would be able to reach a good level in English. However, in order to increase national cohesion and to further facilitate national communication, another measure would be important: Nigerians should start to learn one another's languages more. This is actually provided for in the Nigerian Policy on Education; however, as already pointed out, only lip service has been paid to the policy. Currently, due to the numerical and economic dominance of the Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba-speakers, many other Nigerians formally or informally learn one of those languages, to various degrees of proficiency. However, it is much less common for speakers of these three large languages to learn another Nigerian language (Akinnaso, 1991) More than these three languages should in future be taught as a second-language subject, although the repertoire offered could vary from state to state. Those less gifted in language will find this difficult, but they would probably be able to learn enough to engage in basic but meaningful communication. Those more gifted will be able to reach higher levels, thus extending their communicative options. Another advantage of using indigenous languages as medium of instruction could be that it would make it easier to access the wisdom contained in Nigeria's indigenous knowledge systems.

3.3   Inclusivity

By inclusivity we mean that most designed languages will serve speakers of a number of discerned languages in such a way that as many people as possible have access to a formalized language that is relatively easy for them to learn. The table below shows the profile of language (sub-)families represented in Nigeria and the pattern for the most common languages in these families.

The table shows that the three *major* Nigerian languages are so designated because of their large speaker numbers. Each of these languages is easy or very easy to learn for several other discerned languages and dialects.

Table 3. *Profile and pattern of inclusiveness of language families in Nigeria* (Table constructed with information from the *Ethnologue* as main source and researcher familiarity with the language situation in Nigeria)

Language (sub)family, no. of speakers	Key language(s)	Where spoken	Development
English – 79M	English, Nigerian English, Pidgin	Throughout, less in the North	English is fully developed, Pidgin is less fully developed and has several regional varieties.
West Chadic – 59M	Hausa, Angas, Mupun, Ywom	Bauchi, Borno, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Niger, Sokoto, Taraba, Zamfara (North), Plateau (Middle Belt)	Hausa has literature, dictionary, grammar, used in media and secondary schools.
Defoid – 44M	Yoruba, Igala, Itsekiri	Anambra, Delta (South South), Edo, Ekiti, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Osun, Kogi, Kwara	Yoruba and Itsekiri have literature, dictionary, grammar, used in media and secondary schools
Igboid – 30M	Igbo	Anambra, Benue, Delta, Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo, Rivers	Igbo has literature, dictionary, grammar, used in media and secondary schools
Atlantic – 15.5M	Fulfulde	Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Niger, Sokoto, Taraba, Yobe (North)	
Cross River – 13M	Efik, Ibibio	Abia, Akwa-Ibom, Cross-River (South-South), Rivers	Efik and Ibibio have literature, dictionary, grammar, used in media and secondary schools
W. Saharan – 8M	Kanuri	Bornu (North)	
Bantoid – 4.5M	Tiv	Benue, Plateau, Taraba, Nasarawa (Middle Belt/North)	
Nupoid/Ukaan – 4M	Igbirra, Nupe	Kogi, Niger, Federal Capital Territory, Kogi, Kwara	
Edoid – 3M	Edo, Idoma, Urhobo	Delta Edo, Bayelsa (South-South)	Taught in primary schools, used in media
Ijoid – 2.5M	Izon	Bayelsa Delta Edo (South-south	
Platoid – 1.5M	Berom	Bauchi; Kaduna; Plateau	
Adamawa – 0.5M	Mumuye	Adamawa; Taraba	
Central Chadic – 300k	Kamwe	Adamawa	

3.4   State of development

A key requirement for a designed language is that it must have achieved a reasonable level of standardisation. As noted earlier, this has been a major deficit with regard to languages such as Pidgin English and Guosa. Another element is its functional diversity – the number of domains in which the language is being used. Some Nigerian languages are already in use in the formal education system, having been taught in primary and secondary schools, used in literature, for print and electronic media, and in religious literature. Those languages will be more apt as choices for use in tertiary education or at least that they would be the first to be introduced at that level.

So far, we have shown:

a. a gradual transition to using Nigerian languages in higher education more will become unavoidable in future (even if it is not necessary now);
b. it is possible to make such a transition by using a limited number of easy to learn languages;
c. the choices made would have to be governed by principles of ease of acquisition and learning, equity, inclusiveness and state of development of the various languages;

However, what would it take in practice to make a start with such a transition?

4.   How could a transition be made?

The first step to take would be to evaluate which of Nigeria's languages should be developed as designed languages for use in secondary and higher education. This can be a difficult and emotional process. What is needed here is a gradualist approach to adopting these designed languages as medium of instruction.

Our recommendation is that in the same way that currently the medium of instruction after the first few years shifts from the mother tongue to English, education in future will start in the mother tongue or a language close to it, but could shift to a different indigenous language that would be considered most effective in the circumstance. This language will also be close to the mother tongue and therefore easier to teach and learn than English would be. Thus, given the gradualist approach, education would start in a familiar language, in preparation for a transition to easy to learn other languages later on in education. Related linguistic communities would be encouraged in this way to converge on the designed language that might be easiest for a larger group of speakers. Where one does not already exist, steps should be taken to design one based on one of the existing lan-

guages. This could mean that the discerned language that is taken as the basis may not be the one currently most spoken. Such a language could then be introduced to higher education on a regional basis, e.g., Efik and Ibibio in the Cross-Rivers area, Yoruba and Itsekiri in the South West and South-South, Tiv in the Middle Belt, and so on.

One could argue that the problem raised in this article is not urgent, due to the relatively low availability of places in tertiary education in Nigeria today. However, in order to meet the UN 'education for all' goal, *all* education should be extended to much larger groups of learners and it should be relevant for the students – the idea of people dropping out of the system with little or no useful knowledge or skills is wasteful from the point of view of the individual and his/ her family, from the point of view of educational resources not wisely spent and from the point of view of lost economic opportunities. Therefore, it is important to take note of another area of medium to higher education that is set to expand, namely the area of technical and vocational education and training (TVET).

In the area of TVET, the current language policy will run into problems earlier than in the tertiary education sector. This is because on average, students who choose a career in this area could be less linguistically gifted than those that choose other routes. Therefore, expanding TVET using English as medium of instruction will also mean expanding the drop-out rate, teacher, student and parent frustration and wastage of scarce resources. In practice, these problems can be mitigated if teachers and students use Nigerian languages as well. This 'translanguaging' practice is described e.g. by Yevudey and Agbozo (2019). However, if the language of examination remains English, this will only offer limited scope for improvement.

No matter what course is chosen in the Nigerian context, inputs from community organizers and experts in Nigerian languages would be needed. Probably, this could be supervised by the National Institute for Nigerian Languages, with the help of others. An integrative policy approach has been repeatedly advocated for related language issues in Nigeria: "It becomes the responsibility of the Nigerian elite, the makers of policy and movers of society, academics, linguists, educationists, lawmakers, government and the entire citizenry to summon the required will to [tackle the problem] with renewed vigour" (Oloruntoba-Oju 2015: 28). It might be necessary to establish expert committees at the national and state levels, tasked with coming up with a set of recommendations that would include the adoption of a new national law on language in education in Parliament.

The next step would be to prepare for a transition that should start with educating sufficient numbers of interpreters and teachers, to prepare teaching materials, etc. The better this is understood and planned, the easier it will become to make the transition. A lot will be needed and many questions will need to be

answered. Would it be better, for example, to start with using local languages as medium of instruction in all of primary education and then to introduce it in secondary and higher education only later? Or would it be better to introduce it for example first in TVET education? Is it better to gradually introduce local languages for certain professions (like primary school teachers) and to leave others to (much) later? Which tertiary education institutions would start to use which language as medium of instruction and with which courses and when? All these are difficult questions to answer – but it is not impossible if enough time is taken for a proper preparation. The reward in terms of a more efficient and vibrant education system, greater innovation and greater achievement and in general a wealthier Nigeria able to develop in a culturally appropriate and sustainable manner will be worth it.

5.   Conclusions

We have shown that if Nigeria aspires to reach education levels comparable to those currently available in the global North, it would have to follow the medium of instruction path that has universally been chosen in the global North: in other words, it will have to make use of Nigerian languages as medium of instruction, probably alongside English, at least in large parts of its educational system.

We have shown that it will be impossible and indeed unnecessary to use all languages discerned in the country in the education system. The concept of *discerned* versus *designed* languages has been used to demonstrate that one formalized (or designed) language can in fact serve several discerned languages for educational and other purposes. Principles which in our view should govern a choice of which designed languages to develop for Nigeria, include developing a *limited number* of designed languages for education and basing the choice on factors such as *ease of acquisition and learning, equity, inclusivity* and *state of development* of existing languages.

Ultimately, we have shown how a transition to Nigerian languages will become a pressing issue, and why preparations involving the relevant experts and policies should start now. The steps that we have outlined in the foregoing should form part of a process leading to the preparation of a revised National Policy on Education. The policy should be based in part on the considerations raised in this article regarding the deployment of indigenous languages at various levels of education. This insertion should also take the results of consultations with specialists, educators and other stakeholders, both at state and federal levels, into account.

Acknowledgements

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Áljẹbrà

Gẹgẹbi orilẹ-ede ti o pọ julọ ni Afirika, pelu etno-linguistik profaili (tabi iwoye abinibi ati ede) ti o jẹ ọkan lara awon ti o je oniruuru ti o si níṣòro jùlo ni agbaye, Naijiria pese anfani fun iṣafihan iseese lilo ede abinibi fun ẹkọ (giga ju) ni awọn agbegbe ti ijọba amunisin ti wa tẹ́lẹ̀rí. A jaa niyan pe yoo se pataki fun iforukọsilẹ fun ile ẹkọ giga lati pọ sii ti Naijiria yoo ba ni iyorisirere ni eto idagbasoke rẹ. Lẹhin eyi, a jiroro lori gbendeke iwọn aṣeyọri ti awọn ọmọ Naijiria le nireti lati ni labẹ lilo Gẹẹsi gẹgẹbi ede ikọni. Ni kete ti awọn gbendeke iwọn yi ba ti rekọja, o di dandan ki lilo awọn ede Naijiria die fun ikọni bẹrẹ diẹdiẹ. A daba lati ṣe amulo iyatọ ti o wa laarin ede ti o jẹ "disaini" ("designed"), eyinni àgbélẹ̀rọ tabi àtọwọ́dá ede (ti onìmọ̀), ati eyi ti o jẹ"disaani" ("discerned"), ti i ṣe awọn ede ti a da mọ; a lo ìpẹ̀dè wonyi pẹlu imisi awọn ìpẹ̀dèe 'Ausbau' ati 'Abstandi' lati owo Kloss (1967). Àpilẹ̀kọ náá ṣe àyẹ̀wò ní ṣókí nipa ìdíjúmọ́rí èdè ni ile Nàìjíríà, o si ṣe ìlà àwọn ìlànà mélòó kan tí ó lè ṣe atọ́kun fun íyàn èdè to mọgbọ́nwa, gégé bí, bi mimọ ede ṣe rọ̀rùn si, àti eto ìfikúnra. O pari pẹlu didamọran awọn igbesẹ gbòógì kan ti o yẹ ni gbígbé ni awọn ọdun to n bọ niwaju ki eto naa to le je ṣíṣe ni pàtó.

Resumo

Kiel la plej homplena afrika nacio, kun unu el la plej diversaj, kaj problemoplenaj, etnolingvaj profiloj en la mondo, Niĝerio liveras modelan kazon por studi la eventualan enkondukon de indiĝenaj lingvoj en liveron de (supera) edukado en iam koloniigitaj teritorioj. Ni argumentas, ke pli alta nivelo de frekventado de supera edukado fariĝos necesa por ke Niĝerio atingu siajn evoluigajn celojn. Ni sekve pridiskutas la limojn de tio kion oni povas atendi de la niĝeria eduka sistemo per uzo de la angla kiel instrumedio. Kiam oni trapasos tiujn limojn, la iompostioma enkonduko de limigita nombro de niĝeriaj lingvoj fariĝos neevitebla. Ni celas distingi inter lingvoj dezajnitaj (t.e. intelektigitaj) kaj lingvoj perceptitaj, laŭ inspiro de la terminologio de lingvoj 'Ausbau' kaj 'Abstand' uzata de Kloss. La artikolo mallonge resumas la komplikan lingvan konsiston de Niĝerio kaj skizas kelkajn principojn kiuj povus gvidi raciajn decidojn ĉi-terene, kiel ekzemple akirofacilecon kaj inkluzivigon. Fine ĝi sugestas kelkajn konkretajn paŝojn por ke la enkonduko de indiĝenaj lingvoj en superan edukadon en Niĝerio fariĝu praktike ebla.

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