

Multilingualism, Sociolinguistic Dynamics and Issues of Education in Nigeria: A Linguistic Analysis of Vagueness, Inexactness and Indeterminacy in the National Policy on Education (2013) Document

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Abstract— This paper is an analysis of the sociolinguistic dynamics that play out in the “default” multilingual configuration of Nigeria, and how this can be leveraged for overall national advancement. It is informed by Mackey’s (1978) assertion, “Only before God and the linguist are all languages equal.” Advocating for the harnessing of the nation’s rich linguistic repertoire, this research argues for a concerted effort towards developing and implementing a Language Policy and Planning (LPP) document which will address the question of “national language” as well as other marked challenges of linguistic pluralism, and ultimately reduce “policy ambiguities” randomly gleaned from other policy documents which do not necessarily have LPP as their primary focus.

Keywords— Multilingualism, Sociolinguistic Dynamics, Vagueness, Inexactness, Indeterminacy, National Policy on Education (NPE) Language Policy and Planning (LPP).

I. RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

Analysts of the National Policy on Education (NPE), such as Okoroma (2006), have called for the discontinuation of the document fashioned after the American system, and recommend the adoption of the Asian models practiced in countries such as Japan and India which take the culture of the people into consideration. This paper argues that the document could be better presented and accepted if it addresses certain semantic and cultural concerns.

1.1 Scope of Study

This paper will discuss issues surrounding multilingualism in Nigeria: Nigerian’s predisposition to multilingualism, code-switching, translanguaging, tribalism, language inequality, language attitude, language rights, Nigerian English, Nigerian Pidgin, Language Planning and Policy as well as the socio-economic and political nuances these have on the everyday lives of the people. Also, this analysis will explicate how the NPE document attempts to employ the nation’s multiple linguistic resources for both social and human capital development, and more importantly, how this has been done, and also examine vagueness and indeterminacy in the document.

1.2 The Linguistic Distribution of Nigeria

Geo-linguistically, the total population of the country composed of more than 250 ethnic groups is placed at 205,629,289 (World Population Review 2020). Of this the

Hausa are 30%, Yoruba 15.5%, Igbo (Ibo) 15.2%, Fulani 6%, Tiv 2.4%, Kanuri/Berberi 2.4%, Ibibio 1.8%, Ijaw/Izon 1.8%, and others 24.7% (Nigeria People 2020).

1.3 Nigerian English

There is also the argument for the existence of a regional variety- Nigerian English. Bubier (2010) defines Nigerian English as the variety of English that has been used in the region of the Niger, West Africa, for purposes of trade since at least the 18th century, at missions since the 19th century, and increasingly in education, administration, the media, and the workplace, especially since the formation of a unified Nigeria in 1914. This variety of English has come about as a result of environmental influences and factors which are linguistic, social, cultural, political and economic. Mustapha (2010) posits that not only has Nigerian English been suggested as Nigeria’s national language, it is *de facto* seen as such since it is employed in education, the media, and governance. Nigerian English is spoken by people who have a certain level of formal education. Ekpe (2007) argues that Nigerian English has gone through the criteria for standard language which are selection, codification, elaboration of function, acceptance and intelligibility.

1.4 Nigerian Pidgin

In addition to this, there are also proponents of Pidgin. Okey (2018) notes that this originated as a lingua franca for trade purposes between the Nigerians and the Portuguese merchants in the 17th century. It is spoken along the coast of West Africa and has extended to the diaspora, due to the movement of Nigerian migrants. After the departure of the missionaries, this lingua franca remained and is the most widely spoken language in Nigeria today. There are still Portuguese words present in the pidgin such as: “Sabi (to know) and Pikin (child)”. Nigerian Pidgin is not only spoken in Nigeria, but is widely used by the diaspora communities in America, England, and Canada. In addition, a large group of the Nigerian community in Luxembourg use Pidgin as a means of communication, these diaspora communities use pidgin among themselves to feel at home. The pidgin varies in written and spoken form depending on which part of the country the speaker is from, as the language is spoken differently in each state of the country. Each state tends to add words from their dialect into pidgin making it more interesting and understood by everyone. Nigerian pidgin remains the only language that unifies the Nigerian population.

Both the literates, such as the president, campaigning politicians, lawyers, doctors, and non-literates understand and speak pidgin, though it is mostly used in informal situations.

1.5 Some Sociolinguistic Problems of Multilingualism in Nigeria

As a linguistically diverse country with over 500 languages, Nigeria is understandably predisposed to certain problems that occur with multilingualism. These include: tribalism, linguistic inequality, and language attitude.

1.5.1 Tribalism: Though we can safely say that there are as many tribes as there are languages in Nigeria, this linguo-cultural situation, in itself, is not necessarily a problem. Difficulties arise when a kind of language loyalty creates a negative attitude towards others not within a language group- a problem called *tribalism*. Nothwehr (2008) defines tribalism as “the attitude and practice of harboring such a strong feeling of loyalty or bonds to one’s tribe that one excludes or even demonizes those ‘others’ who do not belong to that group.” One way to address this problem is to reach a consensus on a national (not official) language. As Mustapha (2010: 63) points out that a national language is different from an official one and a lingua franca even though they may have some similarities: for instance, a national language and an official one may enjoy official backing. However, while government backing is not mandatory for a national language, it is for an official language. Again, while a national language is symbolic of the people’s collective identity, an official language is mainly for government business or official matters. Tribalism is such a big problem because decisions concerning favors, relationships, marriages, careers, political affiliations, education, residence, and other high-stake matters are influenced by this attitude. The NPE seeks to end tribalism. Omotoyinbo (2016: 82) observes that section 8 part 1 of the NPE tries to discourage all forms of tribalism, discrimination, and ethno-linguistic prejudices and replace them with the spirit of ‘One Nation bound in Freedom, Peace and Unity’. Ibiwari-Ikiriko (2019: 1) argues that people show strong sentimental attachment and acceptance to others who are similar in language and tribe even though there is also the strong tendency for this to create a disadvantage or problem to others. Furthermore, Olagbaju (204: 66) observes that as a linguistically diverse or multilingual nation, Nigeria, quite understandably, has problems of language choice, planning and implementation. Therefore, in a bid to protect all the languages and assign responsibility to them, each in its own right, there is a need for language planning, policy development and implementation.

1.5.2 Linguistic Inequality: Mackey (1978: 7) states, ‘Only before God and the linguist are all languages equal.’ This suggests that languages are supposed to be equal at least, by the tenets of Theoretical Linguistics (ibid. p. 7). However, Dada (2010: 417) opines that how well a language prospers depends on the social status and prosperity of its speakers. So why do some languages appear to enjoy a “higher status” over others? One explanation has to do with language and power. The exclusive positioning of these 3 indigenous languages as national languages implies that the other languages are regarded as minority languages. This suggests an intention to politically subjugate the other minority tribes. This major-minor

dichotomy orientation is akin to what Freire (1972) discusses in the “Pedagogy of the oppressed” which leads us to accepting without questioning the state recognition of certain languages are superior to others. This dichotomy clearly violates the notion of language equality stated by Mackey (1978: 7). Since language issues are people issues, the people should ideally not have this major-minor dichotomy foisted on or *taught* to them since “liberating education consists in acts of cognition, not transferrals of information.” Freire (1972: 60). Then, it is possible to have language attitude which is negative towards other languages. To resolve this imbalance, society can pursue the social ideal of language equality by recognizing and incentivizing the use of available languages, and abrogating the major-minor language dichotomy through the following ways:

- i. offering scholarships to study these languages at the tertiary level
- ii. sponsoring the orthographic documentation of minor languages
- iii. encouraging the writing and reading of literature in these languages, and
- iv. funding linguistic research that focus on all the minority languages

Another point worth considering on language status in Nigeria is made by Emeka-Nwobia (2015: 114) who implies that the superior position of English in the development of Nigeria has in turn downgraded the native languages making them appear less significance in the scheme of things. For him, the standing of English poses a future threat to the nation’s linguistic identity.

While we must admit that English is a linguistic barrier-breaker in Nigeria, it is also important that we make concerted efforts to elevate the status of other native languages, especially, the “minority” languages. Every language has something peculiar to offer the human family, especially in terms of value systems. For this reason, language down-grading should be discontinued because as Ogunwale (2013: 373) argues when a native language is devalued, the ethos and value systems it contains are also devalued. Makinde (2007: 186) corroborates this point further stressing the beneficial impact that the mother-tongue would have on the education of the Nigerian child: he would always be in tune with the cultural roots of his forbears; he would have an identity to identify with, and be proud of. For him, by default, a child’s best language is his native tongue (ibid. p. 186). This being said, it is logical to still conclude that whatever importance is attached to a language is a function of its utility in the overall well-being and progress of an individual or a group. In this regard, Omotoyinbo (2015: 82) notes that a language is seen to be prestigious based on a number of reasons such as its socio-economic value, status-raising potential, instrumentality, functions, numerical strength, political and economic power.

1.5.3 Language Attitude: Language attitude refers to people’s negative predisposition towards a particular language. Dada (2010: 433) raises concern over language attitude which manifests in various forms such as the negative elitist disposition towards the use of indigenous languages which is the bane of language policies in Nigeria. Dada (2010: 434) recalls the Guardian Newspaper reporting a Lagos State legislator who

tried to sponsor a motion urging the House to adopt Yoruba as the official language of the House but was vehemently opposed by the elitist members of the House who considered the use of Yoruba as demeaning. This happened in the south-western part of the country where, ironically, there appears to be some disdain around the perceived superiority which the Hausa accord their own language in the north. But it is important to consider the thought-provoking point Amao (2014: 165) raises that it behooves on us to take up the responsibility of translating textbooks into the indigenous languages since we cannot expect foreigners to do this for us.

1.6 Code-switching

Given her multiplicity of tongues, Nigeria is a true language hub. Adetuyi et. al (2017: 2) define code-switching as “the alternate use of more than one code (i.e. language, dialect, speech variety) in the same conversation or verbal interaction.” Chukueggu (2010) notes that the act of choosing the appropriate language or variety with which to communicate, at any given time is a common feature of multilingualism. However, the choices they make are governed by a number of sociolinguistic factors such as: the time and place of communication, the formality of the occasion, the topic under discussion, the degree of familiarity between interlocutors, social class, ethnic group, religious beliefs, values, age, and sex, etc. Code-switching from one language to another is a common feature of a bilingual or multilingual society. Chukueggu further notes that Nigerians code-switch from Standard English to pidgin in informal situations as happen in the tertiary institutions among students, and in the police and military barracks. Nigerians also code-switch from English to a local language in response to the communicative situations they find themselves. At other times the code-switching occurs between dialects for mutual intelligibility, for instance, Central Igbo (Igbo Izugbe) is used by two Igbo persons from different Igbo-speaking states which use different dialects.

1.7 Translanguaging

MacSwan (2017) observes that translanguaging is a new term in bilingual education which supports a language ideology that views bilingualism as valuable in its own right. He argues that the political use of language names can and should be distinguished from the social and structural idealizations used to study linguistic diversity, favoring the multilingual model of individual bilingualism. Essentially, Nigeria through the NPE tends to hold this view, and works towards her native languages having a place in the educational scheme of things by recognizing that “the language of the immediate communities” is to be used in the early years of schooling.

1.8 Nigerians' Predisposition to Multilingualism

On the average, a Nigerian can speak at least two languages, or three, if we add Pidgin English to the mix. In schools, English is the language of instruction and examination. Other languages such as Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba are also taught and even examined at the secondary school certificate level. Other situations that help multilingualism are commercial activities such as interactions in market places; work life where coworkers of various backgrounds feel free to speak local languages in

addition to the official language which is often English; and inter-tribal marriages. For instance, in inter-tribal marriages (say, Igbo + Yoruba) the children would have three languages-English, Igbo and Yoruba. And where the children of our last example are raised in the northern environment, they add Hausa to their linguistic reservoir. So the Nigerian acquires bilingualism through the family, school, and immediate environment. We therefore see how important it is for the country to design a language policy, and make it a priority to preserve all languages regardless of their perceived or assigned status. Emeka-Nwobia (2015: 15) corroborates this noting that efforts should be made at preserving these languages by documentation.

1.9 Language Planning and Policy (LPP)

Wright (2007) highlights the importance of greater acceptance of diversity. This position supports Okoroma's (2006) suggestion for the adoption of an LPP like the Japanese and Indian models which take the cultural identity and pride of the people into consideration. It has been stated that apart from the NPE and the 1999 Constitution, there has not been a singular document devoted to the issues of LPP in Nigeria. Oyetade (2003) states that there has never been a concerted effort to produce a comprehensive LPP for Nigeria. In the mainstream of national planning, LPP has only remained at best offshoots of some other processes: the closest to an LPP has come from the 1999 Constitution and the NPE. So as it stands now, there is currently no single dedicated document particularly outlining Nigeria's LPP. This suggests that one of the most important actions of government that should be done to foster cohesiveness in the country. Salisu and Dollah (2015: 123) define language planning as a deliberate effort to influence the function, structure, or acquisition of languages or language variety within a speech community. Though it has to do with government planning, it is also used by a variety of non-governmental organizations, such as grass-roots organizations and even individuals. The purposes of language planning may differ depending on the nation or organization, but in general, it includes making planning decisions and possibly changes for the benefit of communication and interactions.

One thing stands out from the analysis of the sociolinguistic dynamics of Nigeria and how it affects the individual: the need for a cohesive LPP to address these various issues which affect people's wellbeing and progress. We can define LPP as a deliberate effort at resolving language related problems needed for the development of a given language. In other words, LPP involves the focus of society on problem-solving in language matters. Its approach must therefore be systematic and futuristic. Given the realities that present themselves in a multilingual nation, a sensitive, progressive and proactive government is expected to formulate policies that will regulate and oversee how linguistic resources are deployed in her space to make the lives of her citizens more meaningful. Omotoyinbo (2016) observes that LPP will greatly help in significant regional distribution of languages while at the same achieving the effect of eliminating or balancing bias. Indeed, this would of itself enhance the national status of the languages and encourage active multilingualism. It must be admitted that the

lofty intentions of the NPE cannot be overlooked and indeed must be commended, especially in its advocacy of the greater use of native Nigerian languages. However, a certain challenge exists which a dedicated LPP can resolve. Omotoyinbo (2015: 85) argues that one major challenge to using the native tongue as a medium of instruction is its implementation in cosmopolitan areas like Lagos, Ibadan, Port Harcourt, Kaduna, and Abuja, cities where people come from various ethnic backgrounds. Given this reality, it becomes extremely difficult to consider one language as an instructional medium for all the children from different ethnic groups.

1.10 Language Rights of the Child

Article 30 of the United Nations Convention (1989/90) on the Rights of the Child states that in those countries where ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities or persons of indigenous origin exist, a child who belongs to such a minority or who is indigenous should not be denied the right, in the company with other members of his or her group, to benefit from his or her own culture, to profess and practice his or her own religion, or to speak his or her own language.

If the child is entitled to quality education, and freedom of expression, then it follows that his language rights derive from these. Mackey (1978) had observed earlier that no language is intrinsically superior to any other because all languages have the capacity (or at least, the propensity through the various morphological (or word-formation processes available to it, for instance, coining, reduplication, loaning, blending and clipping) to capture or represent any dimension of reality. This means that the notorious major-minor language dichotomy, by extension, infringes on the rights of the child. The article 30 of the Convention highlights and upholds the rights of the child to be taught in his mother-tongue along with his community. As Amao (2014: 164) observes, the native Nigerian languages were and are still used to serve every aspect of the people's lives- social, cultural, political, health, economic and even the spiritual needs of the people. They are custodians of the traditions, norms and values of the different communities. This ideal clearly transcends any country's goal to have the child taught in the language of the immediate community. In other words, parents, guardians or the state should make it their aim to have their children bond linguistically with their own indigenous communities- to give them a sense of belonging, and connectedness to their cultural roots. As Makinde (2007: 186) points out, one of the most important reasons put forward for the integration of the major Nigerian languages in the NPE is the preservation of people's culture. This is because language is seen as one of the key factors in expressing a people's cultural heritage and identity. No foreign language will be adequate in preserving a people's culture.

The child should not be deprived of the opportunity to enjoy his or her own culture, especially the aspect of language. It is as though this provision equates language with identity. Furthermore, passive competence of his native language is not enough: the goal of this provision is only achieved when the child can operate fully in his mother-tongue, or use his or her own language and achieve both *langue* and *parole* (Saussure, 1972). To this end, that the UN marks the *International Mother*

Language Day celebration on the 21st of February every year. As Emeka-Nwobia (2015: 114) notes every language has a characteristic uniqueness for the expression of the culture of its speakers. Languages are culture-specific and adequate in representing the world of its speakers. Part of being human is being able to communicate with one's environment through creativity, education, music, integration, expression of emotion, as well as beginning and ending relationships.

II. THE NPE (2013): A DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF VAGUENESS, INEXACTNESS AND INDETERMINACY IN THE DOCUMENT

2.1 The Sociolinguistic Complexities in Nigeria: Their Implications for Individuals

To account for the culturally pluralistic geo-political entity called Nigeria, it is important that we understand the background of her political and administrative history. Ogunwale (2013: 367) observes that:

The arbitrary and haphazard territorial boundaries imposed by the colonial masters in the last two centuries or so did not take cognizance of the people's diversities before differentiating Nigeria and other sub-Saharan African states. As a result, the geo-political enclave now known as a country encompasses people with varying linguo-cultural identities.

Various other studies over the years have progressively provided various figures to account for the number of native languages within the nation's borders; Olagbaju (2014: 66) notes that Greenberg (1971) puts it at 248, Bamgbose (1976) at 400, Hoffman (1975) at 400 and 513, while Oyetayo (2006) identifies 510 living languages and 9 extinct languages, bringing the total number of indigenous languages in Nigeria to 519. This aggregates the findings of Emeka-Nwobia (2015) and supports the more recent reports of Ebehard, Simons and Fennig (2017) placing the figures at 519 or 520 including both the living and extinct languages. We can therefore safely conclude that there are, as at the last supported count, 519 native tongues in Nigeria. English is the official language of governance and administration, and is also the language of law, the media and education.

2.2 Methodology

a. Textual Selection: The choice of the NPE document for this study is informed by the dual roles it plays in documenting the federal government's policy on education and on the assigned instrumentality of various languages in certain given contexts.

b. The Feature of Vagueness/Inexactness/Indeterminacy: The decision to focus on indeterminacy in the document is borne out of the necessity to examine expressions that are rather indefinite and subject to multiple interpretations, as well as the portions that appear dodgy are selected.

c. Analytical Framework: Critical Discourse Analysis or CDA (Fairclough, 1989; 1995)

Analytical Tool: The analysis of the text will be done from the CDA perspective as propounded by Fairclough which considers language as *neither neutral nor innocent*, but views language as a form of social practice, identifies and analyzes power

ideologies or manipulations involved in discourse on social areas such as education and LPP.

Levels of Analysis: There are 3 levels to this analysis: first, at the micro-level which is the textual-linguistic analysis, this paper examines the use of language in the NPE especially with regard to words that are not pegged down to specific meaning potentially causing them to lead to indefiniteness or even multiple interpretations such as inexactness, indeterminacy and vagueness in the document; second, at the meso-level which deals with discursive practice are the issues of processing which examines the source(s) and intended recipient(s) of the text: in this case the Federal Government of Nigeria through the agency of the Ministry of Education spells out provisions that will guide how linguistic resources in a multilingual nation will be deployed in a manner that will make for social equilibrium, while the audience here are practitioners and all stakeholders in the education sector; and third, at the macro-level, an analysis of inter-textual and discursive elements taking into account the societal currents that underlie and affect the text: this paper presents the view that in the face of multilingualism, the government is seen trying to perform a balancing act by projecting English which is a neutral or foreign language as the linguistic barrier-breaker while still, as much as possible, recognizing and using the native languages in certain contexts.

2.3 Nature and Rationale of the Document

What exactly is the NPE about? In the foreword to the document, the then Minister of Education, Wike (2013: ii) explains the essence of the document succinctly:

The National Policy on Education is the national guideline... a statement of intentions, expectations, goals, prescriptions, standards and requirements for quality education delivery in Nigeria... We will NURTURE the MIND to Create a Good Society that can compete globally. YES, WE CAN.

The NPE is intended to be a “driver” or propeller of the developmental plan of the government. The logic is simple: there is a social strategy for national development, and education is overall tool to develop the human capital to drive this development plan, so a policy thrust in education will provide an intentional plan with regard to social orientation and empowerment. Further, it (ibid. p. ii) states that basic changes in social, economic and political arrangements essentially dictate the necessity for a change in policy thrust of the education system and vice-versa. This will help the nation align its education system with her current developmental goals and that of the emergent global village. It states that to leverage this expectation, Federal, State/FCT and Local Governments will seek to establish and fully empower Special Policy Implementation Monitoring Units within the Ministries of Education and Local Government Education Authorities and diligently monitor and provide necessary feedback on compliance (NPE, 2013: v).

2.4 The NPE Document (2013)

In the NPE (2013), we have a department of State- the National Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) itemizing policy articles, addressing an intrinsically pluralistic (in reference to the nation as a whole) Nigerian

readership through the means of the policy document on education. A close reading of the text reveals that certain linguistic nuances (vagueness, inexactness and indeterminacy) tend to blur the lofty intentions and ideals of the NPE provisos, and somewhat detract from their potency and efficacy. This section will critically examine the document, highlight its vagueness and indeterminacy, identify how these are created, and what effect they have had.

2.5 Vagueness in the NPE (6th Edition, 2013)

The Cambridge Dictionary (4th Edition) defines vagueness as “not clearly expressed, known, described or decided.” The present edition of the NPE (2013: v) was produced to “reflect the National Vision of attaining global economic relevance by 2020...” (as stated in the preface). Ironically, as it currently stands, 2020 is just a couple of days away, and speaking of “global economic relevance” recent statistics from the ATLAS World Poverty Clock (2018) shows that with “86.9 million (nearly 50%) Nigerian now has the largest extreme poverty population in the world, and places first at the table of Top 10 African countries with extreme poverty.” The questions then arise, “What exactly is *global economic relevance* referred to six years ago?” “If it was plausible as stated in 2013, to attain this *global economic relevance by 2020*, how is it possible that in December 2019, the country’s extreme poverty index are bleak? This wordiness cannot be seen helping to drive home meaning, primarily because it leaves the intended course of action among the tiers of government open-ended. The issue that needs clarification is a definition of global economic relevance. Does it mean that the country will rank among the first twenty richest nations in the world? Or be among the most industrialized? Or be among the largest importers? And what specific role does the NPE have to play in this regard?

Perhaps, we see the biggest example of vagueness in the NPE (2013: 10) document shown in *Article 31*: “Measures shall be taken to ensure that the culture of the nation is kept alive through the teaching of Creative and Cultural Arts and visits to Museums.” This expression is not as harmless as it seems. It potentially raises questions such as, “What culture exactly?” “What aspects of culture?” and ‘Whose culture exactly?’ And these questions are not just about Nigeria being a pluralistic state; we have had (and still have) certain *cultural* practices such as degrading widowhood practices, and female genital mutilation (FGM). In plain terms, the proviso is potentially open to multiple interpretations. When we talk culture, we cannot to leave any room for multiple interpretations or ambiguity because of the reality of cultural relativity which provides a basis for potential double standards across multicultural communities in a country; matters of culture are relative to individual communities: what may be acceptable in a Yoruba community may be abominable in, say, an Edo community- a policy document is perhaps not the place where vagueness is a good idea.

In another example, the NPE (2013: 26) *Article 82(f)* states: “Tertiary Educational institutions shall pursue these goals through... provision of a more practical based curriculum relevant to the needs of the *labour market*...” The problem here is created with the words *labour market* which gives the

impression of “job seekers” rather than independent “job creators”. A wealth-oriented curriculum should create graduates who have the entrepreneurial mindset rather than needing to be employed. This does not seem consistent with the NPE goals that help “prepare students with the knowledge and skills for *self-reliance*.”

2.6 Inexactness in the NPE (6th Edition, 2013)

The word inexact means “not known in detail” (Cambridge Dictionary). An illustration of inexactness is found in the NPE (2013: 3) *Article 9(c)*: “The quality of instruction at all levels of education...shall be oriented towards...moral and *spiritual principles* in interpersonal and human relations.” The choice of the words *spiritual principles* makes the proviso very problematic, or at least, controversial because Nigeria is a multi-religious entity and schools are made up of learners from various backgrounds. So where exactly are we supposed derive these *spiritual principles* from? Is it African Traditional Religion or Christianity? Atlas World Poverty Clock (2018) observes that, “Muslims make up 48.8% of the country’s population while Christians add up to 49.3%. The remaining 1.9% are either practitioners of indigenous religious or no affiliations.” Obviously, in the Nigerian context, the phrase “*spiritual principles*” without any pegging down of meaning or adjoining explication can be mischievously used by extremists. This implies that it can vicariously lead to religious tension; and Nigeria has in the past experienced some of this. It is possible for fanatics to misinterpret this for their own sinister intents, though we must admit that this may not be the original intention of the concerned religious system.

A further example of inexactness is found in *Article 24.1* states that: “There shall be no common entrance examination for transition from Primary to the Junior Secondary School. Each state and Federal Capital Territory (FCT) shall make adequate arrangement for smooth transition based on prescribed benchmark.” What is this prescribed benchmark? How is this arrived at? Who defines it? Whether this proviso stems from being politically patronizing or not, the fact, as at today, remains that common entrance examinations are still being conducted even in government-owned schools in the English language.

2.7 Indeterminacy in the NPE (6th Edition, 2013)

Indeterminacy is defined as “not measured, counted or clearly known” (Cambridge Dictionary). An example of indeterminacy is found in the NPE (2013: 8) *Article 20(d)*: “the medium of instruction in the Primary School shall be the language of immediate environment for the first three years in monolingual communities. During this period, English shall be taught as a subject.” This raises issues around dialectal differences where unintelligibility can occur on a wide range across a language spectrum. Even where it is claimed that there is a central variety of a language, there will still be learners who are linguistically excluded from that variety.

Furthermore, the provision of the NPE (2013: 8) *Article 20(e)* reads: “From the fourth year, English shall progressively be used as a medium of instruction and the language of immediate environment and French and Arabic shall be taught as subjects...” The problem with this is that it is difficult to see how realistic it would be to have children at that higher level

perform optimally in academic work with English used as the new language of instruction. The situation does not promise a smooth *academic* transition, and where it seems to happen, the mother-tongue in the monolingual communities tend to be derogated as “vernaculars”.

In Section 1, *Article 8(g)* of the NPE (2013: 2) reads, “Every child shall be taught in the mother tongue or language of the immediate community for the first four years of basic education. In addition, it is expected that every child learn one Nigeria language.” Furthermore, some other clarifications have to be made here: what exactly is the ‘language of the immediate community’? What is the definition of Mother tongue? The very notion ‘language of the immediate community’ is very problematic because it is subject to multiple interpretations. For instance, what would parents of a child living in an Igbo community within Lagos State (Yoruba land) consider ‘language of the immediate community’ since within the Igbo folks, Igbo is used even though they are resident within the larger Yoruba state? This is vague because it does not clarify what is meant by ‘one Nigerian language’ (because on the average a Nigerian typically learns three to four languages). The vagueness here lies in the fact that the caregivers themselves may be proficient in the language of the immediate environment like *Yoruba* in Lagos, Igbo in Enugu and Hausa in Gombe, but it also happens that people who can afford crèches belong to the crème de la crème of society; they speak English to their little ones, and naturally place them in crèches where the care-givers speak English, which though is a Nigerian language, is not an indigenous language.

Furthermore, although the NPE (2013: 6) *Article 16(j)* which still covers Early Child Care reads, “Government shall... ensure that the medium of instruction is principally the mother-tongue or the language of the immediate community” one point that may be questioned is ‘the language of the immediate community’. A clear explanation of what should be considered ‘the language of the immediate community’ or better still, a definition would clarify the concept.

We also consider NPE (2013: 20) *Article 68(a)* which, at face value, is perhaps the most “poetic” and most interesting. It reads:

In order to promptly eradicate illiteracy, there shall be a nationwide mass literacy campaign based on various strategies including that of “each-one-teach-one” or “fund the teaching of one,”

Note the use of the word “promptly” which according to the Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary (4th Edition) means “quickly, without delay”. With all the verbosity in this proviso (written in 2013), it simply does not have a definite target date, i.e. it does not say when illiteracy needs to be eradicated. Then as if to end the document on a certain note of indeterminacy, the NPE (2013: 47) *Article 158* says with a tone of open-endedness:

Funding should be made available at the Federal, States/FCT, Local Government levels to provide camps for natural disaster victims instead of using schools as make-shift camps.

Where exactly is this funding supposed to come from? Is it from the federal government to the lower tiers, or should the funding be generated within each of the tiers of government?

Then at the state level, should the local government generate its own funding or have to get it from the state government? This proviso leaves these questions unanswered.

III. CONCLUSION

The aims of the NPE are lofty, no doubt. The provisions give primacy to the native tongues of the land. As Dada (2010: 421-422) states:

... NPE makes provision for the use of the mother tongue or the language of the immediate environment as the medium of instruction at the pre-primary school stage or the first three years of primary school.

However, from the cited illustrations above, we see that vagueness, inexactness and indeterminacy occur in the document. Given these findings, it is recommended that work begin to revise the present edition of the NPE which will meticulously avoid the semantic pitfalls of any shades of ambiguity and painstakingly achieve a considerable level of precision that makes the document more actionable. Better still the advocacy on a deliberately planned LPP should also be a priority. As it is often said, LPP is where linguistics meets politics. In the incisive words of Omotoyinbo (2016: 88):

It is therefore expedient on any sincere government to have a body of language policy formulators and administrators from both minority and majority sides to assist in sustaining the unity of the nation through proper language policy formulation and implementation...

Importantly, Nigeria can no longer stay without an LPP which guarantees the right to use one's native language, abrogates the major-minor language dichotomy, and helps us to forge a national identity and consciousness we can truly be proud of.

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