

Examining The Role of Traditional Festivals, Ceremonies, And Other Events in Promoting Multilingualism in Nigeria: Case of Nguru Town

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the role of traditional festivals, ceremonies, and other cultural events in promoting multilingualism. Through a multifaceted approach combining qualitative and quantitative methods, the study analyzed how these events serve as platforms for the natural and dynamic use of multiple languages, thereby fostering linguistic diversity and inclusion. The research highlighted the integration of different languages in performances, speeches, and public signage. Findings revealed that such events not only celebrate cultural heritage but also encourage cross-linguistic communication and reduce language stigmas and ethnolinguistic tension among communities, by normalizing multilingual interactions in public spaces. Additionally, these gatherings facilitate code-switching and code-mixing, contributing to the development of new linguistic varieties and enhancing linguistic competence among speakers. The study underscored the importance of cultural events in sustaining and promoting multilingualism, advocating for greater support and recognition from policymakers and community leaders. By leveraging the cultural and social impact of festivals and ceremonies, societies can better preserve linguistic diversity and foster inclusive environments that value and celebrate multiple languages.

Keywords: *Festivals, Traditional ceremonies, Multilingualism, Language attitude*

1.0 Introduction

Language preservation has become an urgent issue as many languages around the world face the threat of extinction. Cultural events such as festivals, ceremonies, and other traditional gatherings are integral to the social fabric of communities and play a significant role in the preservation and promotion of linguistic diversity (Donitsa-Schmidt, 2004). These events often serve as platforms for the expression of cultural identity and the use of indigenous languages, thereby fostering multilingualism and raising awareness about the importance of maintaining linguistic heritage. There are several instances of language extinction that occurred around the world. These patterns are repeated in regions such as Australia, South America, New Guinea, and Africa, prompting calls for linguists to take action. However, not all linguists agree. In a 1992 article in *Language*, Peter Ladefoged argues that the views of Hale and his colleagues are "contrary to those held by many responsible linguists" (1992: 809). Ladefoged contends that in places like Tanzania, it would be inappropriate for linguists to work on preserving language diversity. In Tanzania, authorities view local languages as fostering tribalism and promote Swahili at the expense of local languages to unify the nation (Diab, 2006).

Nigeria is a nation with many languages. Most of these languages remain undocumented and undescribed, with many highly endangered and some already extinct. According to the UNESCO Atlas of Endangered Languages, 29 Nigerian languages are listed as endangered (Mosley 2010). However, this number may not accurately reflect the current situation due to the lack of updated and comprehensive data. The United Nations General Assembly Resolution 74/135 on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples has declared 2022–2032 as the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (IDIL 2022–2032), with

UNESCO as the lead agency. This initiative responds to the severe endangerment of many indigenous languages globally. UNESCO has developed a Global Action Plan to address this issue. According to the plan, indigenous languages are "languages currently or historically used by indigenous peoples and considered integral to their heritage, knowledge systems, or identity." Language is a crucial element of human existence and an essential aspect of a community, serving as a marker of identity. It acts as a repository of a people's culture and lifestyle. Bloch and Trager (1945:5) famously defined language as "a system of arbitrary vocal symbols by means of which a social group co-operates." Philosophically, Chomsky (1968:41) refers to language as "a species-specific possession, the human essence," highlighting its unique and fundamental role in human nature.

1.1 Problem statement

Despite the potential of cultural events to contribute to language preservation, there is limited research on how effectively these events promote multilingualism and support endangered languages. It is unclear which types of events have the most impact, what specific strategies are employed, and how communities perceive the role of these events in language preservation. Moreover, there is a need to understand the challenges and limitations faced by organizers and participants in using these events to sustain linguistic diversity. So this seeks to uncover the forces that can be used in language preservation in a multilingual settings like Nguru. Nguru has a composition of Kanuri, Hausa, Bade, Yoruba, Igbo and Babur languages. This has clearly identified it as Multilingual community.

1.2 Aim of the study

The research sets out to achieve the following objectives:

1. Identify and categorize various cultural events (festivals, ceremonies, traditional gatherings) that promote the use of multiple languages.
2. Assess the effectiveness of these events in promoting multilingualism and preserving endangered languages.
3. Identify challenges to organizing cultural events for language preservation.

1.3 Research Questions

The study aims to answer the following questions:

1. What types of cultural events are most commonly used to promote multilingualism and language preservation?
2. How do community members perceive the role and effectiveness of cultural events in language preservation?
3. What are the challenges of organising these linguistic cultural events?

Significance of the Study

This research will provide valuable insights into the role of cultural events in promoting multilingualism and preserving endangered languages. The findings can inform policymakers, cultural organizations, and language preservation advocates on best practices and effective strategies for using cultural events to support linguistic diversity. Additionally, the research will highlight the importance of

community involvement and the need for sustainable approaches to language preservation.

Ethical Considerations

The organizers of the event were informed by the researcher on his motives for the study. Since there were different events, each head of the organisers was informed verbally about the aim of this research which will eventually add to the colour of the event. All the organisers approved of the researcher's participation and to collect data from the participants.

2.0 Literature review

Early research primarily focused on how attitudes influence behavior (e.g., LaPiere, 1934). Attitudes were often examined based on their valence (positive or negative evaluations) and intensity (the strength with which an individual holds an attitude), and these aspects continue to be significant for many researchers. Allport's (1935) tripartite model of attitude formation, suggesting that attitudes can include independent cognitive, affective (emotional), and conative (behavioral) components, has greatly influenced social psychologists and sociolinguists. Although it is generally believed that most attitudes contain an affective element (Perloff, 2017), not all attitudes will necessarily exhibit all three components. Moreover, current technology sometimes makes it challenging for researchers to distinguish between these components (McKenzie, 2010). While most professional linguists now believe that no language or language variety is inherently superior or inferior to another, non-linguists are much more likely to hold positive. Non-linguists often hold both positive and negative attitudes towards linguistic phenomena and advocate prescriptive views (Edwards, 2012). Historically and currently, such language attitudes are frequently based on value judgments about the supposed superiority or

inferiority of a particular language or variety. These judgments are typically justified by assumptions about the purity, correctness, logic, complexity, or aesthetic quality of the languages in question. There is substantial evidence that attitudes toward linguistic varieties reflect specific stereotypes—category-based generalizations linking category members with perceived traits (Correll, Judd, Park, and Wittenbrink, 2010)—which are associated with and attributed to their speakers (McKenzie and Gilmore, 2017).

The practice of multilingualism leads to the development of mixed languages, primarily due to intense language contact. Consequently, speakers often use a blend of languages during verbal communication. This contact can also result in the creation of slangs, which are typically influenced by urbanization, migrant labor, and industrialization, as seen in some communities. Multilingualism generally fosters cross-linguistic communication strategies like code-switching and code-mixing. Code-switching occurs when individuals switch between languages used at home and those used outside, a phenomenon observed in most of our communities such as: Fulfulde- English, Kanuri-Hausa, Kanuri-English, Fulfulde-Hausa, Igbo-Hausa, Yoruba-Hausa etc. In regions where bilingualism or multilingualism is prevalent, such as Belgium, Switzerland, and China, Kenya, Niger Republic speakers commonly alternate between languages .

Multilingualism can lead to a diglossic situation where, among two official languages, one typically dominates and is referred to as the subordinate language when viewed functionally. In Africa, for example, English, French, and Portuguese are considered high languages (H),

while indigenous languages are seen as low languages (L). In Congo, for instance, French serves as the high variety used for formal functions, whereas Ciluba, Lingala, Kiswahili, and Kikongo, which are national languages, are regarded as low varieties.

Nigeria, a multilingual nation with around 500 languages (Akindele, 2019), sees each language playing a significant role in its respective community. Proposals for national languages are categorized into unilingual and multilingual approaches (Akindele, 2019). The unilingual approach includes various suggestions such as creating a composite word from different languages like "Wazobia" and "Gusoa," adopting English, selecting a major indigenous language from Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba, or choosing a minor indigenous language like Swahili. The multilingual approach, on the other hand, primarily suggests designating the three major languages—Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba—as national languages while maintaining English as the official language (Coleman, 2017). Some scholars view this multilingual strategy as a gradual move towards greater multilingualism within indigenous languages. Currently, the Nigerian federal government supports a multilingual arrangement, as indicated in Section 51 of the 1979 constitution and Paragraph 8 of the 1977 (revised 1981) National Policy on Education (Chapter 7), aiming for national unity through multilingualism.

3.0 Methodology:

This study employed qualitative research approach. Specifically, document analysis and participant observation were employed, which involves interactions with participants.

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Interviews with a handful of participants was also included to know about their experiences, perceptions, and the role multilingual mingling in the event. At this stage, broader questions will be

used to explore the participants' language preference, language usage and attitudes towards multilingual situation.

4.0 Findings:

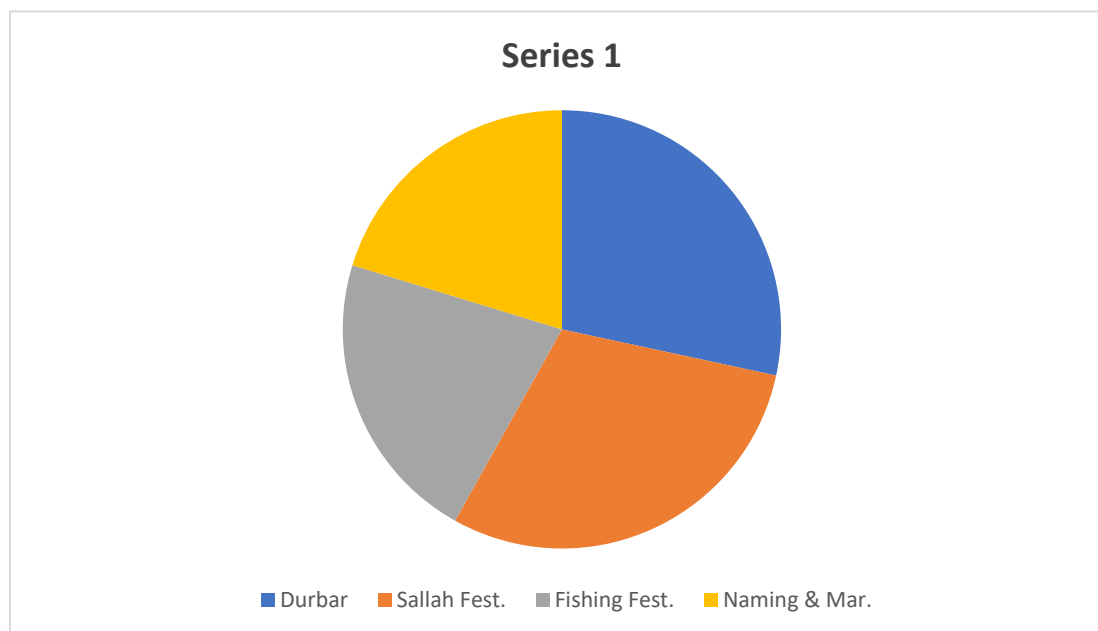


Figure 1: Statistics of different events in the festival

The examination of festivals, ceremonies, and other events reveals their significant role in promoting multilingualism. These cultural gatherings serve as dynamic platforms for the natural and vibrant use of multiple languages, fostering a sense of inclusion and cultural diversity. They facilitate cross-linguistic communication, allowing participants to experience and appreciate different languages in practical, engaging, and meaningful context. As indicated in the above chart, Sallah celebrations contribute more towards the aspects of multilingualism because the event subsumes so many multicultural events such as the horse riding, traditional musics, traditional dances and other non-musical events. Sallah celebration incorporates some main themes of Durbar

celebration; horse riding, and traditional musics. The second aspect with the highest percentage is Durbar. Both Durbar and Sallah celebrations involve a composition of people from different parts of local areas where they are rich in cultural activities. However, Durbar celebration differs from Sallah because it can be organised at any time of the year or it can be organised to impress a guest or to test the strength of horses while Sallah has a fixed time and it cannot be changed. As for the fishing festival, Fishing Festival: this is usually organised between suburb villages and more villages of different linguistic background will come and participate. It usually involves: traditional dances, musics and several cultural displays. It is one of the oldest and well-known cultural festivals in and around Nguru town.

It has a specific season for its organisation, usually during hamattan season. It also brings a lot of people of different background together in order to showcase their talents of fish catching. Those with special talents are normally rewarded at the end of the event. Finally the last on the list is naming and marriage ceremonies. The composition of people under this category are normally from almost one community. Sometimes, a handful of guests usually attend but they don't have any linguistic impact for their attendance.

Effectiveness and Challenges

These festivals have been recognised by almost everyone that their role towards improving interpersonal bond as well encouraging multilingual development cannot be overemphasised. However some of the challenges that most organisers faced may include the following:

Logistical Challenges

- **Coordination and Planning:** Ensuring smooth coordination among various stakeholders, including performers, vendors, and volunteers who speak different languages, can be complex.
- **Translation and Interpretation:** Providing accurate translation and interpretation services for multiple languages requires skilled professionals and can be costly and time-consuming.
- **Communication Barriers:** Ensuring effective communication among participants, organizers, and attendees who speak different languages can be difficult, potentially leading to misunderstandings.

- **Accessibility:** Making the festival accessible to all language speakers, including those with disabilities, requires additional resources and planning.
- **Technology:** Utilizing technology for real-time translation or multilingual announcements can be challenging, requiring reliable systems and technical support.

Cultural Challenges

- **Cultural Sensitivity:** Ensuring that the festival respectfully and accurately represents the diverse cultures and languages involved is crucial but challenging.
- **Cultural Appropriation:** Avoiding cultural appropriation while showcasing various languages and cultural expressions requires careful planning and consultation with community leaders.
- **Inclusivity:** Balancing the representation of dominant and minority languages to ensure inclusivity and prevent marginalization of smaller language communities can be difficult.

Financial Challenges

- **Funding and Sponsorship:** Securing adequate funding and sponsorship for a multilingual festival can be challenging, as these events often require more resources than monolingual ones.

5.0 Conclusion

These cultural events not only preserve and showcase the rich traditions of Northern Nigeria

but also serve as platforms for promoting multilingualism. They facilitate cross-linguistic interactions and appreciation, helping to maintain the region's linguistic diversity. By celebrating these festivals, communities in Northern Nigeria reinforce the importance of linguistic and cultural inclusiveness.

Key findings highlight that festivals and ceremonies not only celebrate cultural heritage but also encourage linguistic diversity by incorporating multiple languages in performances, speeches, and signage. This visibility of various languages helps normalize multilingualism in public spaces, challenging monolingual ideologies and reducing language stigmas especially in a multilingual country like Nigeria. Furthermore, these events provide opportunities for code-switching and code-mixing, enhancing linguistic competence and confidence among speakers. The creation of new linguistic varieties and slangs, as observed in urban settings, underscores the dynamic nature of language contact facilitated by these gatherings.

In conclusion, festivals, ceremonies, and other events play a crucial role in sustaining and promoting multilingualism. They act as vital arenas for the celebration of linguistic diversity, contributing to the preservation and revitalization of languages. Policymakers and community leaders should recognize the value of these cultural events in language promotion strategies and support their organization and inclusive practices. By doing so, they can foster a more linguistically diverse and inclusive society, where multiple languages are valued and preserved for future generations.

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