

## Some Preliminary Findings Concerning the Non-existence of Newspapers in the Minority Languages of Nigeria

Abiodun Salawu

*Department of Communication University of Fort Hare, Alice 5700,  
South Africa*

*E-mail: asalawu@ufh.ac.za; salawuabiodun@gmail.com*

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**ABSTRACT** The study sought to ascertain if the non-existence of newspapers published in the languages regarded as minor in Nigeria is due to state policy or language apathy or lack of economic viability, or a combination of some or all of these reasons. This study adopted the Historical Research method, using relevant documents and interviews as instruments. Structured interviews were conducted with some socio-linguists, media scholars and professionals, as well as some members of the ethnic minorities in Nigeria. Data gathered for the study were qualitatively analysed. The dominant opinion is that government policy cannot be said to be responsible for non-existence or poor performance of minority language newspapers. Yet extant literature points to the fact that the language provisions in the Nigerian 1999 Constitution and the Language Policy in the National Policy on Education have an adverse effect on the development of minority languages and their use in publishing. There is a consensus among the respondents that lack of cultural assertiveness, otherwise called language apathy, is responsible for the poor performance or non-existence of minority language newspapers. There is also a strong opinion that even though ethnicity plays a prominent role in power equation and resource allocation, it has nothing to do with the non-existence or poor performance of newspapers published in minority languages. This view runs contrary to the position of Critical Political Economy theory that there is interrelationship between the distribution of material and symbolic resources. There is again a general consensus that minority language newspaper publishing is not economically viable because of the relatively small populations of the minority ethnic groups.

### INTRODUCTION

There are about four hundred languages within the boundaries of Nigeria (Ajeigbe 1987). Of these, only three – Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba – have the official recognition as national languages. This is enshrined in the nation's 1978 and 1999 constitutions. The choice of these languages is not unrelated to the fact that they have a larger number of speakers than the other languages.

Intertwined with the issue of national language is also that of language in education. The 1981 revised edition of the National Policy on Education also gave special recognition to these national (major) languages. Commenting on this policy, Adeniran (1995: 192) remarks:

*In addition to appreciating the importance, and as a means of preserving the people's culture, the Government considers it to be in the interest of national unity that each child should be encouraged to learn one of the three major*

*languages other than his own mother-tongue. In this connection, the Government considers the three major languages in Nigeria to be Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba.*

This policy, just like any other, has been bedeviled not only with the problem of implementation, but also that of geo-political protestations. The minorities continue to protest the imposition of the three big languages – Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba – on them (Aniche 1997: 79). Yet, despite the protestations, the cultures of these three major tribes continue to be grafted on the national canvass. The symbolic representations of the nation are picked from the three cultures. In fact, informally, in Nigeria, you are Hausa, Igbo or Yoruba. This is reflected on the national emblems as well as in the signature tunes of network news on national broadcast media.

In a way, this may be the reason why newspapers are not published in most of the nation's indigenous languages. Generally, African languages are suffering neglect due to the historical fact of colonization and, perhaps, lack of cultural pride among most Africans. All the same, some languages still do better than others in terms of use - which may be officially induced. For instance, in Nigeria today, only two languages – Hausa and Yoruba – have a viable

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*Address for correspondence:*

Professor Abiodun Salawu  
Department of Communication  
University of Fort Hare,  
Alice 5700, South Africa

*E-mail: asalawu@ufh.ac.za, salawuabiodun@gmail.com*

press. Some other reasons apart from official recognition may have been responsible for the not too impressive performance of Igbo language newspapers that have been published at one time or the other. The language apathy as contended by Prof. Samuel Uzochukwu, a retired professor of Igbo (Salawu 2006) and the problem of finding a generally acceptable standard orthography for the Igbo language (Emenyonu 2002) are two major reasons why Igbo newspapers do not thrive.

The problem of failed newspapers is, however, not peculiar to Igbo language, or even indigenous language newspapers in general. The point is that at any point in time, there is at least one Hausa or Yoruba language newspaper in the market. In fact, despite all odds, there is a newspaper each in Hausa and Yoruba languages in existence for at least six decades. The newspapers are *Gaskiya Ta Fi Kwabo* (founded 1937) in Hausa and *Iroyin Yoruba* (founded 1945) in Yoruba.

Even though, there had been other indigenous language newspapers in Northern Nigeria (Duyile 1987:115), only those published in Hausa language are currently in existence. Kperogi (2006), for instance, notes that the Baatonum language, along with several other minority languages in Northern Nigeria, has been a victim of systematic and deliberate state neglect. Oso (2006) sums up the problem of discriminatory use of languages:

...the use of any language within a multilingual society like Nigeria depends to a good extent on the power relations between the language groups within the country. In the case of the use of any language by the mass media, the economic potential of the speakers of such a language is also of crucial importance. Again, we cannot divorce this from the issue of power in the sense that resource allocation within a polity is a function of power and class relations (p. 178).

### Indigenous Language Press in Nigeria

*Iwe Irohin Fun Awon Ara Egba ati Yoruba* was historically significant for being the first indigenous language newspaper in Nigeria (Akinfeleye 1985:35; Duyile 1987:17) and indeed the first newspaper in the country.

*Iwe Irohin* was established by Reverend Henry Townsend, a missionary of the Church

Missionary Society (CMS) in 1859. Excited over this unique feat, Townsend, in a dispatch to the CMS in England, wrote:

*I have set on foot a Yoruba newspaper. My first number is out, I am writing the second. My object is to get the people to read i.e. to beget the habit of seeking information by reading (Duyile 1987).*

Folarin and Mohammed (1996:101) categorized the establishment and appearance of indigenous language press into five 'waves'. According to them *Iwe Irohin* stood on its own in the first wave (1859-67) while the second wave covers the period 1885-92 and featured two Efik papers, *Unwana Efik* and *Obukpon Efik* as well as a Yoruba paper, *Iwe Irohin Eko*. The third wave started with the founding of *Eko Akete* in 1922 and ended with the second and final death of the paper in 1937. The fourth wave began with the entry of *Gaskiya Tafi Kwabo* (1937/38) and went on till Nigeria attained independence and republican status in the 60s. The rest of the development till the present time, they note, may be conveniently subsumed in the fifth and the last 'wave'.

Of all the newspapers in the first to the fourth 'wave', only *Irohin Yoruba* and *Gaskiya Tafi Kwabo* still exist till today. *Gaskiya Tafi Kwabo* (Truth is worth more than a penny) was established by the quasi-official Gaskiya Corporation, which had an objective of promoting the development of literature in the North.

Gaskiya Corporation which, at various times, was named Northern Literature Bureau and Northern Literature Agency (NORLA) for the purpose of expansion, published other periodicals in the different languages of the region. Coker (1968:211), Duyile (1987:115) and Hayat (1983) make a list of the periodicals for each of the twelve provinces of the then Northern Region: *Ardo* in Fulfulde for Adamawa; *Ganzaki* in Hausa for Bauchi; *Mwanger U Tiv* (1948) for Tiv and *Okaki Idoma* in Idoma for Benue; *Albashir* (1951) in Kanuri for Borno etc.

*Iroyin Yoruba* was established on June 4, 1945 by Chief Obafemi Awolowo. It is, presently, on the stable of African Newspapers of Nigeria Plc, publishers of *Tribune* titles. *Gboungboun* had its first appearance on October 29, 1970. It is a publication of the distressed Sketch Press Limited.

The equally distressed Concord Press of Nigeria (CPN) Ltd., published *Isokan*, which

started on July 15, 1980. Other mother-tongue newspapers in the stable of CPN included *Amana* (Hausa) and *Udoka* (Igbo), which started in 1980 and 1981 respectively.

The emergence of *Alaroye* newspaper in 1996 marked a milestone in the affairs of Yoruba and, indeed the indigenous language press in Nigeria. Within a short time, this newspaper became popular because of its arresting cover design and styles of headline-casting and story presentation. It actually popularized reading of Yoruba newspapers among the people. It is the largest local language newspaper with a circulation figure of not less than 150,000 per week. It sells in Europe and several West African countries where the Yoruba reside (*The Fourth Estate* 2000:7). Its publishers, World Information Agents, have also added other Yoruba publications to their stable. They include: *Alaroye* magazine, *Atoka Alaroye*, *Iri Aye* and *Akede Aghaye*.

The success of *Alaroye* and the frenzy political situation in the country before the return of democracy and at the birth of democracy have also triggered the emergence of other Yoruba publications. These include: *Ajoro*, *Alaye*, and *Ofe*.

There are other local language newspapers in Nigeria. A lot of these are, however, obscure and unknown.

### Statement of the Problem

The study sought to know if the non-existence of newspapers published in the languages regarded as minor in Nigeria is due to state policy or language apathy or lack of economic viability, or a combination of some or all of these reasons.

### Objectives of the Study

The aims of the study were to:

- i) identify which newspapers in Nigeria are published in minority languages; and
- ii) investigate why there are so few, exploring alternative hypotheses including issues of lack of cultural assertiveness, state responsibility and economic viability.

## METHODOLOGY

This study adopted the Historical Research method, using relevant documents and inter-

views as instruments. The secondary materials used for this study included literature on language policy, critical political economy, cultural studies and language ideologies. The primary raw materials included literature on the specific language policies in Nigeria; and the history, development and problem of indigenous language media, with particular focus on the minority language press, if any. To supplement the primary materials, structured interviews were conducted with some socio-linguists, sociologists, a political scientist, media scholars and professionals, as well as some members of the ethnic minorities in Nigeria. The scholars representing various disciplines mentioned were purposively selected because the issues around the study cut across these disciplines. Members of the ethnic minorities were also purposively selected. Data gathered for the study were qualitatively analysed. Specifically, Grounded Theory as described by Strauss and Corbin (1998) was applied. This helped in putting data into specific categories and analysing them based on identified themes in the data gathered.

### Research Questions

The study seeks to find answers to the following research questions:

1. To what extent is the state policy responsible for the non-existence of newspapers published in minority languages in Nigeria?
2. To what extent is the lack of cultural assertiveness responsible for non-existence of newspapers published in minority languages in Nigeria?
3. To what extent are power equation and resource allocation responsible for non-existence of newspapers published in minority languages in Nigeria?
4. What is the (economic) feasibility of publishing in minority languages in Nigeria?

## ANALYSIS OF DATA

### Extent to Which State Policy is Responsible for the Non-Existence of Newspapers Published in Minority Languages in Nigeria

Considering the socio-linguistic situation in Nigeria, it is very difficult for an indigenous language to emerge as the national language.

Because of the nation's linguistic diversity, Elugbe (1991: 50) says "the choice of any of the major indigenous languages would arouse discontent in the other areas not covered by that language". Thus, both the 1978 and 1999 constitutions labelled or proposed Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba as the national languages. As a result, English, since 1947, had been adopted as the official language. This was officially stated in the colonial Richard's constitution. Earlier, in 1942, Arthur Richard had given his reasons for making English the official language. According to him, the main problem was how best to promote Nigerian unity because of the patent diversity of outlook between the different parts of Nigeria.

On the choice of English as Nigeria's official language, Professor Ayo Bamgbose, quoted in Ajeigbe (1987: 74) says:

*Of the entire heritage left behind by Britain at the end of the colonial administration, probably none is more important than the English language. This is now the language of the government, business and commerce, education, the mass media, literature and much Internal as well as external communication.*

Intertwined with the issue of national language is also that of language in education. Different Nigerian governments had considered what languages are suitable for passing instructions at different levels of education. The National Policy on Education (1977) stipulates that the medium of instruction initially in the primary school would be the mother-tongue or the language of the immediate community and, at a later stage, English. The 1981 revised edition of the policy aimed not at just promoting the mother-tongue, but also enhancing national unity. Adeniran (1995: 192) states:

*In addition to appreciating the importance, and as a means of preserving the people's culture, the government considers it to be in the interest of national unity that each child should be encouraged to learn one of the three major languages other than his own mother-tongue. In this connection, the government considers the three major languages in Nigeria to be Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba.*

This policy has been bedeviled with the problems of implementation and geo-political protestations. The problem of implementation could be tied to paucity in both human and material resources as well as lack of political will and

commitments on the part of governments. Yet, the minorities continue to protest the imposition of the three big languages – Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba – on them (Aniche 1997: 79).

The dominant opinion concerning this question is that government policy cannot be said to be responsible for low level of existence of minority language newspapers. A socio-linguist interviewed (July 17, 2006), Professor Wole Oyetade, is of the opinion that no government in Nigeria has ever brought out any policy that would be to the detriment of the publication of any minority language newspaper. Another sociologist, Dr. Emeka Okafor (interviewed September 5, 2006) concurs to this view when he says that no government prevents or encourages any majority or minority tribe when it comes to local language newspaper publication in Nigeria. A member of a minority ethnic group (Mr. Ona Omenka, interviewed August 3, 2006) is also of this view. He says: "Government policies are not primarily responsible for the non-existence or poor performance of my local newspaper." However, another socio-linguist, Dr. Oka Obono (interviewed August 8, 2006) believes that policies of government as enshrined in the nation's constitutions and National Policy on Education have gone a long way to relegate the publication of minority language newspapers to the background. He contends that no government – either federal or state – has ever established a minority language newspaper. A member of another minority ethnic group (Mr. Otarigho Edeki, interviewed August 4, 2006) expresses a similar view when he states that to some extent government policies are responsible for the near total non-existence of minority language newspapers. His reason is that government language policy in education is geared more towards the development of English language learning and proficiency and the teaching of the three major languages (Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba) than the minority languages. He expresses concern by stating: "The federal government and my State government are not funding local language education in my community".

The Urhobo interviewed in their native towns of Warri, Abraka and in some villages between September 5 and 12, 2007 are of two different views about whether or not government policies are responsible for the non-existence or poor performance of newspapers published in the Urhobo language. One group holds govern-

ment's policies responsible while the other is of a different view. For those who hold government responsible, they base their justification on the lacklustre attitude/non-willingness of government towards improving minority languages in the country, and government's failure to encourage minority language by approving a curriculum for schools. Respondents with the opposing view argue that government is a large entity and cannot solely be depended upon to take responsibility for all its citizenry wants; government cannot force the newspaper on people who are not willing or have just a little interest in it; newspapers are not like school text books that can be forced on students or made compulsory.

Essien (1990) points out that one of the problems facing minority languages in Nigeria is the country's own language policy in education. He notes:

*Such a policy, it is argued, discriminates against minority languages in so far as it does not give equal right and attention to all the languages in the country ... Policy provision apart, minority languages also face the problems of non-implementation of even the little that the Policy provides for them (Essien 1990: 155).*

Essien (1990) specifically writes about the situation with the use of minority languages in the nation's media. He notes:

*In the media so far, only six of the hundreds of them – Edo, Efik, Fulfude, Ijo, Kanuri, and Tiv – are used in news translation on Radio Nigeria at the Federal level and none of them has ever been used on the NTA national news. Even at the State level, only a few more of them are used in news translation and some magazine, religious and children's programmes. For example, in the Cross River State, Bekwarra, Efik and Ejagham are used in news translation on both radio and television, and in Borno State, Kanuri, Babur/Bura and Fulfude, are also used in these media. Virtually, none of the minority languages is cultivated by any newspaper in the country (Essien 1990: 158).*

The picture painted by Essien has not really changed up to now. The use of the minority languages in the broadcast media remains the same, while the only minority language newspaper that came to attention in the course of this research is the *Urhobo News*, a bilingual (English-Urhobo) newspaper. The fact that this minority language newspaper goes by an English name

attests to the weak standing of the native language. A further search, however, reveals that this newspaper does not even exist any longer. In fact, many Urhobos interviewed in the course of this study have no knowledge of it. There, however, used to be a newspaper solely published in Urhobo. The title of the newspaper was *Urhobo Waadoh*. A quarterly newspaper, it was published four times in 2002 before it was finally rested. The existing newspaper for the Urhobo is called *Urhobo Voice*, which is published weekly and solely in English Language. The publisher of *Urhobo Voice*, Chief Ogbemure Imene, was also the publisher of the defunct *Urhobo Waadoh*. The issue of Language Policy and National Language Policy in Education is apparently germane to the matter of newspaper publishing in indigenous languages. It would be too simplistic to assume that since no government has ever brought out any policy to encourage or discourage newspaper publishing in either majority or minority, therefore non-existence or poor performance of minority language newspapers has nothing to do with (language) policies.

Another problem militating against publishing in minority language newspapers is the issue of orthography. In this matter again, governments are also a culprit. Essien (1990) noted that one of the consequences of the non-implementation of the government intention of developing orthographies for and producing textbooks in Nigerian languages is the non-development of a great number of minority languages. He remarked:

*It is very disheartening that more than five decades after the well-articulated IAI's Policy Statement and someone decade after the National Policy on Education which expressed the Federal Government intention to "develop orthographies for many more Nigerian Languages and produce textbooks in Nigerian Languages", a staggering percentage, (75%), of the languages so far known in Nigeria have no orthographies, no primers, no dictionaries, no written and literary tradition at all (Essien 1990: 61).*

He further noted that the former National Language Centre tried, in spite of poor funding, to develop orthographies for some unwritten languages and standardize those (for example, Edo, Kanuri, Tiv) which have already been written, in line with the National Policy on Education. Yet, according to him, there has been no significant development in the produc-

tion of literacy materials in those languages. All these equally have significant implications for newspaper publishing in minority languages.

**Extent to Which Lack of Cultural Assertiveness is Responsible for the Non-existence of Newspapers Published in Minority Languages in Nigeria**

There is consensus among the respondents that lack of cultural assertiveness, otherwise called language apathy, is responsible for the poor performance or non-existence of minority language newspapers. Professor Adekunle Adeniran, a socio-linguist (interviewed on October 25, 2006), notes that members of the minority tribe hardly identify with their languages and prefer to communicate in English or the nearest major local language to their own. He remarks: "Since language is an instrument to achieve certain goals, it now makes it difficult or impossible to articulate the goals and objectives of these minority tribes". Dr. Oka Obono agrees to the views expressed above. There is, however, contention among the two socio-linguists about whether the language apathy is exclusive to the minority tribe. Professor Adeniran is of the opinion that the apathy is largely exclusive to minority languages. According to him, despite the harsh economic situation, some newspapers that are published in Yoruba, Igbo or Hausa can still be found on the newsstands. He cited the examples of *Alaroye*, *Akede Agbaye* and *Gaskiya Ta Fi Kwabo*. Dr. Obono controverts this, saying that "the so-called major local languages do not enjoy the patronage they deserve from their speakers." He further notes that the difference in the two is that while the government is encouraging the publication, teaching and speaking of the major local languages - through the provisions in the nation's constitutions and National Policy on Education - such support is not extended to the minority local languages. Professor Adeniran also believes it is the general apathy and lack of interest of minority language speakers in their languages that is mostly responsible for the non existence of minority language newspapers in Nigeria. This, according to him, is without prejudice to the fact that government's recognition of the three major local languages - Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa - to the detriment of the minority languages is a disincentive for the minority languages to develop into written form and a medium of mass

communication like a newspaper. The socio-linguist further says that it is the native minority language people, especially the rich among them, who should endeavour to develop these languages through newspaper publications. He asserts: "Language apathy like deliberate refusal by these minority language speakers to communicate in their own language or even patronise their few and far between newspapers is a great disincentive to the existence and continuous sustenance of these minority language newspapers".

Native speakers of minority languages interviewed equally acquiesced to the contribution of language apathy to the non-existence or poor performance of newspapers published in minority languages. An Urhobo speaker (Mr. Edeki, interviewed August 4, 2006) says:

*Language apathy is of course one of the major causes of poor performance of the newspaper in my local language, Urhobo. People are more comfortable speaking and writing in the English language. Many of them do not identify with the Urhobo language as they consider the language (as) inferior. At present, many Urhobo people especially those based outside Delta State do not speak it with their children.*

An Igede speaker (Mr. Omenka, interviewed August 3, 2006) speaks in the same vein: "People no more speak the language constantly, and without being ashamed of themselves."

Urhobo natives interviewed in their native towns and villages between September 5 and 12, 2007 give the following reasons for the non-existence or failure of newspapers published in their language: low readership due to illiteracy in the Urhobo language; low patronage; high printing cost; lack of finance to keep the project going; poor autographical standard; lacklustre attitude of the people towards the language and lack of interest/participation in the study of Urhobo language; and dialects variance i.e. not all the people of the 23 Urhobo clans can understand one another.

All the 10 Urhobo people interviewed between September 5 and 12 were unanimous in their view that language apathy is responsible for the non-existence or poor performance of newspapers published in their language. Their reasons include gross indifference towards usage of the Urhobo language, lack of pride in speaking the Urhobo language and inferiority complex on the part of the minority language

speakers. In a separate interview, Chief Imene, publisher of *Urhobo Waadoh* and *Urhobo Voice*, expresses concern that the attitude of the Urhobo to the development of the language is not encouraging. He explains that *Urhobo Waadoh* did not succeed because of the poor attitude of the people to the language.

Considered against government language policies, Professor Oyetade contends that all in all, it is the general apathy and lack of interest of minority language speakers in their languages that is mostly responsible for the non-existence of minority language newspapers in Nigeria. He, thus, counsels:

*Until when people (minority language people) begin to develop more interest in their language, speak it more frequently will they have the push to take it to the domain of mass communication through newspaper publishing.*

The example of language assertiveness of French-speaking Canadians is very instructive here. Being the minority in Canada, the French-speaking Canadians, for fear that their language might be over-run by the majority English, resisted all attempts to sideline their language, and they succeeded in making French a language to reckon with in Canada (Oyetade 2003).

Meanwhile, lack of cultural assertiveness is not peculiar to minority languages in Nigeria. The major languages are equally not doing well enough in this regard. The Igbo language is a case in point:

*In spite of all the efforts made so far to promote the use of Igbo language in the print media, not much interest has been shown about the publication and readership of news materials in Igbo. This state of affairs is attributable to the general apathy shown to the language by its speakers, especially the elite. Most Igbo people today cannot read their language and those who can, show little or no interest because they prefer to speak English or other languages. This negative attitude towards the Igbo language is worrisome, as it does not augur well for the survival of the few extant Igbo newspapers (Nnabuihe and Ikwubuzo 2006: 54).*

#### **Extent to Which Power Equation and Resource Allocation are Responsible for the Non-existence of Newspapers Published in Minority Languages in Nigeria**

To start with, power equation means equitable and proportional allocation of power to

various ethnic groups in the central administration of the country. The idea is to give every ethnic group a sense of belonging in the polity. The allocation of power has a lot of implications for resource allocation in the country. The reality, however, is that minority ethnic groups in the country are sidelined (marginalised) from power and, thus, from resource allocation (See Suberu 2001; Adebani and Obadare 2009).

A political scientist and some sociologists were interviewed in an attempt to provide answers to the question: "To what extent are power equation and resource allocation responsible for non-existence of newspapers published in minority languages in Nigeria?" All the respondents were of the view that publishing an indigenous language newspaper is not about who controls political or economic power. One of the sociologists, Dr. Emeka Okafor, said that publishing an indigenous language newspaper depends on the willpower of the educated elites and media professionals of any ethnic group to decide if they want to publish in their local language. A political scientist, Dr. Kunle Amuwo (interviewed on September 6, 2006) reasons thus:

*Having more economic power or resources by the major tribes does not necessarily contribute to having major language newspapers in the country. There are even many well-to-do and rich people from minority tribes who are never interested in publishing newspapers in their local languages.*

Meanwhile, all respondents to the interview questions relevant to this research question agree that ethnicity is a factor in the power and resource allocation in Nigeria. A sociologist, Dr. Oka Obono, traces the issue of ethnic-based power and resource allocation to the pre-independence era "when the major ethnic groups had access and control of resources." He adds:

*Again, since independence, the major ethnic groups have been currying power and resources in their favour to the detriment of the minor ethnic groups. It is only when some of these minor ethnic groups are needed for political or economic reasons that some seemingly beneficial resources or favour are extended to them.*

While admitting this reality, the political scientist interviewed, however, regards it as an aberration. According to him, the Nigerian constitution has made adequate provisions for re-

source allocation through such mechanisms like the derivation principle. (Derivation principle has to do with compensating a part of the country where a particular mineral resource is obtained by giving them special allocation from the federation account. For instance, there is a 13% derivation paid to oil-producing states in Nigeria from the federation account). He also adds that constitutionally, tribalism and ethnicity are not factors in power allocation but they come into play when it comes to the practical aspect of politics.

All the respondents also agree that the three major tribes in Nigeria – Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba – have the greater access to power and resources. One of the sociologists, Professor Oyetade, sees this problem beyond the national level. Since the constituent states in Nigeria are not mono-ethnic, the problem is replicated at this level. The sociologist notes:

*If we come down to the states level, it will also be seen that even the so-called minority ethnic groups also exhibit this major-minor power control. The more populous of these groups in the states are the ones serving as state governors and holding other important positions to the detriment of the lesser ethnic groups.*

While discussing this matter, this study believes we should not lose sight of the fact of the close relationship between those who control cultural policies and those who wield political (and economic) power. While we agree that the major tribes have always been in power, and that there is a connection between power and resource allocation, we should, going by Critical Political Economy theory, appreciate the inter-relationships between the distribution of material and symbolic resources (Murdock and Golding 1995). Critical Political Economy is that branch of political economy that specifically deals with issues of culture, and therefore, the media. Because of the global changes dictated by the rapid growth of capitalism in the last three decades, both the State and private sector have increased their capacity for controlling public discourse. Language is central in this matter as it is through language that meaning is mediated. In the logic of critical political economy, defining what meanings are in circulation is an important part of one group exercising power over others. The structure of the global media is now such that the priority with regards to language is not so much to enhance

diversity as to increase efficiency, as the media are seen primarily not as channels for citizens to participate meaningfully in their own governance, but as means of manipulating public opinion, largely through advertising, and generating income on a large scale. Efficiency and maximization of profit, therefore, are of paramount importance. The literature of critical political economy addresses the close relationship between those who wield political (and economic) power (Chibita 2006). Invariably, we can establish a connection between power equation/resource allocation and use of languages or language policy.

#### **Research Question 4**

##### **Feasibility (Economic) of Publishing in Minority Languages in Nigeria**

Respondents agree on the importance of the economic factor in the publishing of newspaper in any language. Dr. Oka Obono, a sociolinguist, has this to say:

*The major factors for publishing newspaper in any language are profit, and how far and wide the information can go or cover. Publishers think of how their newspapers are going to sell, be read and reach a lot of people, hence reason for publishing in the three major languages in Nigeria, apart from English.*

The socio-linguist adds that if newspapers are published in minority languages, it may not sell and the publishers will make a loss, and subsequently, the paper will go out of circulation. The political scientist interviewed, Dr. Kunle Amuwo, corroborates this, saying what contributes more to the availability of a local language newspaper is the interest of those who have the means to publish and the availability of a reading public. According to him, these two factors are more available and favourable to the major ethnic groups.

Media scholars and journalists interviewed are also of the view that it is not profitable publishing in minority languages. A media scholar, Professor Lai Oso (interviewed on September 26, 2006), actually says:

*On a general note, they (indigenous language newspapers) are not as profitable as the English press. But we must distinguish between the indigenous languages. Papers published in the languages of the three major ethnic groups (in*



*Nigeria) would still do better than newspapers in any of the minority languages.*

In his answer to why newspapers published in major languages would do better than those published in minority languages, the media scholar explains:

*The population of the major languages is much higher. They are likely to attract better advert patronage and circulation. Then, in terms of organisational structure, they are likely to enjoy better financial base, which may mean better technology, higher chance of attracting a higher level of professional manpower, which obviously means better product, more attractive newspaper, and so on and so forth.*

Another media scholar, a member of a minority ethnic group, Dr. Victor Ayedun-Aluma (interviewed on September 26, 2006) does not see the issue of unprofitability of publishing in minority languages from the perspective of population. Rather, he locates his explanation of the phenomenon in language ideologies. His position:

*I don't think they are viable because the power contest among languages does not favour minority languages. There is a tendency to marginalise minority cultures because they tend to be weaker than the majority cultures in the contest. There is a tendency to discourage the forums, such as minority language newspapers, without a conscious policy. Majority languages exercise a sphere of influence. This means probably because of their large population and greater political visibility, majority language cultures exercise influence beyond their own geographical boundary. They become lingua franca. This serves as a discouragement for indigenous minority media. Another reason is the literacy level in the indigenous minority languages. The official educational policy still discriminates in favour of English and a handful of majority indigenous languages.*

### CONCLUSION

The following is the summary of the findings of this study:

1. The dominant opinion is that government policy cannot be said to be responsible for the non-existence or poor performance of minority language newspapers. Yet extant literature points to the fact that the language provisions in the Nigerian 1999 Constitu-

tion and the Language Policy in the National Policy on Education have adverse effects on the development of minority languages and their use in publishing.

2. There is a consensus among the respondents that lack of cultural assertiveness, otherwise called language apathy, contributes to the poor performance or non-existence of minority language newspapers.
3. The dominant opinion in this study is that even though ethnicity plays a prominent role in power equation and resource allocation, it has nothing to do with the non-existence or poor performance of newspapers published in minority languages. This view runs contrary to the position of Critical Political Economy theory that there is interrelationship between the distribution of material and symbolic resources.
4. There is a general consensus that minority language newspaper publishing is not economically viable because of their relatively small populations.

For the minority languages to survive and become veritable vehicles of communication, the Soviet example might be one to emulate. In the Soviet example, no language is made superior to the other irrespective of demographic strength. In order to implement the equality of all languages in the USSR, the Soviet Government had, among other things, to develop press, schools, theatres, clubs and cultural and educational institutions employing the native language; and establish and develop a wide network of schools and vocational courses also making use of the native language as the medium.

However, a significant matter in this issue is for the speakers of the minority languages to take more than a passing interest in embracing their languages and striving for their development. If this happens and a reading public is guaranteed, individuals who have the means may venture into establishing newspapers in such languages. An observation is that native individuals and groups have not been known for establishing newspapers in minority languages. It has either been a mission, like Scotland Mission that published *Uwana Efik* and *Obukpon Efik*, or a government agency like the Northern Literature Agency (NORLA) that established *Ardo* (Fulfude), *Mwanger U Tiv* (Tiv) and *Okaki Idoma* (Idoma).

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Having made these observations, the following recommendations may be made:

1. Government should make the National Policy on Education and the National Language Policy more favourable to minority languages. Government should also endeavour to ensure the effective implementation of the little that the National Policy on Education even provides for the minority languages.
2. Governments should make conscious efforts to develop orthographies for many minority languages that are yet to have written forms.
3. Governments should encourage newspaper publishing in minority languages by providing subsidies for such a venture. State governments should also embark on publishing newspapers in the minority languages that fall within their jurisdiction.
4. Importantly, programmes should be designed to get people of ethnic minorities to better appreciate and use their languages.

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## APPENDIX

### Interviews

- Interview with the Sociolinguist, Professor Wole Oyetade. University of Ibadan, Nigeria, July 2006.
- Interview with Mr. Ona Omenka, a native of Ikwokwu, Benue State, Nigeria. University of Ibadan, Nigeria, Thursday, August 3, 2006.

Interview with Mr. Otarigho Edeki, a native of Agbarho, Delta State. University of Ibadan, Friday, August 4, 2006.

Interview with the Sociologist, Dr. Oka Obono. University of Ibadan, Thursday, August 8, 2006.

Interview with the Sociologist, Dr. Emeka Okafor. University of Ibadan, Tuesday, September 5, 2006.

Interview with the Political Scientist, Dr. Kunle Amuwo. University of Ibadan, Wednesday, September 6, 2006.

Interview with the Media Scholar, Professor Lai Oso. Lagos State University, Adebola Adegunwa School of Communication Studies, Surulere, Lagos, Nigeria, September 26, 2006.

Interview with the Media Scholar, Dr. Victor Ayedun-Aluma. University of Lagos, Nigeria, September 26, 2006.

Interview with the journalist, Jude Njoku (*Vanguard*). Lagos, October, 2006.

Interview with the journalist, Jerry Amah (*New Age*). Lagos, October, 2006.

Interview with Julius Ogunro (National Standard). Lagos, October, 2006.

Interview with the Sociolinguist, Professor A. Adeniran. University of Ibadan, Wednesday, October 25, 2006.

Interviews with ten Urhobos at Warri, Abraka and some Urhobo villages between September 5 and 12, 2007.

Interview with the Publisher of *Urhobo Waadoh* and *Urhobo Voice*, Chief Ogbemure Imene, Saturday, September 15, 2007.

**Interview Questions for the Esearch Project Entitled, 'Impact of State Policy on the Existence of Minority Language Newspapers in Nigeria'**

***For Socio-linguists***

1. Do government (language) policies have any impact on the status of languages in Nigeria?
2. If yes, how?
3. Are government policies responsible for literacy in languages?
4. Taking a cue from the preceding questions, can we say government policies are responsible for the existence or poor performance of newspapers published in minority languages?
5. Can we say language apathy is responsible for the non-existence or poor performance of newspapers published in minority languages?
6. If the answer to 5 is yes, is the language apathy affecting the non-existence or poor performance of indigenous

languages exclusive to minority languages? (Or is it similarly applicable to major languages?).

7. Taking into consideration all that have been said so far, which of the government language policies and language apathy (lack of cultural assertiveness) is more responsible for the non-existence of minority language newspapers?

***For Members of the Ethnic Minorities***

1. Has there been any newspaper published in your language?
2. If the answer to 1 is yes, does any of the newspapers still exist?
3. If the answer to either 1 or 2 is No, what is responsible for the non-existence of newspapers published in your language?
4. Can we say language apathy is responsible for the non-existence or poor performance of newspapers published in your language?
5. Can we say language apathy is responsible for the non-existence or poor performance of newspapers published in your language?

***For Media Scholars and Professionals***

1. Have there been minority language newspapers in Nigeria?
2. If the answer to 1 is Yes, do they still exist?
3. If the answer to either 1 or 2 is No, what is responsible for the situation?
4. How economically feasible or profitable is it publishing newspapers generally in indigenous languages?
5. Does it make any economic difference publishing in major languages or in minority languages?
6. If the answer to 5 is Yes, what is responsible for this situation?

***For Political Scientists and Sociologists***

1. Is ethnicity a factor in the power and resource allocation in Nigeria?
2. Using the typology of major-minor, which type of the ethnic group has greater access to power and resources?
3. Can this be a factor in the publishing of newspapers in the languages of major and minority ethnic groups? If the answer to 3 is Yes, how can this be?