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# TALK THAT TALK: NIGERIAN YOUTHS' LANGUAGE ATTITUDES AND CULTURAL EXPRESSION

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## ABSTRACT

This study explores the complex relationships between language attitudes, cultural expression, and identity among Nigerian youths. Grounded in Social Identity Theory and Language Attitude Theory, this research investigates how Nigerian youths navigate linguistic and cultural complexities in their daily lives. A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining quantitative and qualitative data from a survey of 100 university students. The findings reveal that English is highly valued for formal and professional purposes, while Nigerian languages and Pidgin English are used in informal settings. Language use reflects cultural values and norms, and participants recognize the importance of indigenous languages for cultural identity. The research highlights the significance of language in shaping cultural identity and recommends prioritizing both English and indigenous languages in language policy to promote linguistic diversity and cultural heritage. Efforts to preserve Nigerian languages and cultural practices are essential to maintaining cultural identity. The study's findings have implications for language education, cultural preservation, and national development. By exploring the intersections of language, culture, and identity, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of language use in multilingual societies. The study's recommendations can inform language policy and cultural preservation initiatives.

**Key words:** *Language Attitudes, Cultural Expression, Nigerian Youths, Multilingualism*

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## INTRODUCTION

Language is a fundamental aspect of human identity and culture, playing a crucial role in shaping individual and collective experiences. (Kramsch, 1998, p.3). This highlights the significance of language in human life. In multilingual societies like Nigeria, language use is often complex and multifaceted, reflecting the country's rich cultural diversity. The interplay between language, culture, and identity is a dynamic and intricate one, with language serving as a powerful tool for expressing cultural values, norms, and practices.

Nigeria is a linguistically diverse country with over 500 languages spoken across its 36 states. This diversity is a reflection of the country's complex history, geography, and cultural heritage. Despite this diversity, English remains the official language, widely used in formal settings, education, and government. However, Nigerian languages and Pidgin English are also widely used in informal settings, reflecting the complex linguistic landscape of the country.

Language plays a significant role in shaping cultural identity, with words, phrases, and linguistic structures often carrying cultural meanings and connotations. In Nigeria, language use is closely tied to cultural practices and values, with different languages and dialects reflecting different cultural identities. For instance, the use of Nigerian languages such as Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa is often associated with specific cultural practices and traditions. “Language attitudes refer to the feelings, perceptions, and evaluations that individuals and groups have towards different languages and language varieties”. (Garret, Coupland, & Williams, 2003, p.2). This provides insight into language attitudes. In Nigeria, language attitudes are complex and multifaceted, reflecting the country's linguistic diversity and cultural complexity. While English is highly valued for its prestige and economic benefits, Nigerian languages are valued for their cultural significance and identity. “The relationship between language and culture is complex and multifaceted and it is shaped by a variety of social historical and cultural factors” (Duranti 1997, p.15). This emphasizes the intricate relationship between language and culture.

This study aims to explore the complex relationships between language attitudes, cultural expression, and identity among Nigerian youths. By examining the intersections of language, culture, and identity, this research seeks to provide a deeper understanding of the dynamic and intricate relationships between these variables. The study's findings will contribute to the development of language policies and programmes that promote linguistic diversity, cultural preservation, and national development.

The study is situated within the context of Nigeria's linguistic and cultural diversity, with a focus on the experiences of Nigerian youths. The study's participants are drawn from universities in Nigeria, providing a unique perspective on the complex relationships between language, culture, and identity among young Nigerians. By exploring the complex dynamics of language use in Nigeria, this study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the role of language in shaping cultural identity and cultural expression. The study's findings will

have implications for language education, cultural preservation, and national development, highlighting the importance of promoting linguistic diversity and cultural heritage in Nigeria.

Several studies have investigated language attitudes and cultural expression in Nigeria. For instance, Oyetade (2001) examined language attitudes among Nigerian university students, finding that English was highly valued for its prestige and economic benefits. In contrast, Nigerian languages were valued for their cultural significance and identity. In a related study, Adegbija (2004) explored the role of language in shaping cultural identity among Nigerian youths. The study found that language use was closely tied to cultural practices and values, with participants recognizing the importance of indigenous languages for cultural preservation.

Bamgbose (2006) investigated language policy and planning in Nigeria, highlighting the need for a more inclusive approach that promotes linguistic diversity and cultural heritage. The study recommended prioritizing both English and indigenous languages in language policy to promote national development and cultural preservation. Olaniyi (2019) also examined the relationship between language use and identity among Nigerian youths, finding that language use was closely tied to social identity and cultural practices. The study highlighted the importance of language in shaping individual and collective experiences.

While these studies provide valuable insights into language attitudes and cultural expression in Nigeria, there is still a need for more research on the complex relationships between language, culture, and identity among Nigerian youths. This study aims to contribute to this gap by exploring the intersections of language attitudes, cultural expression, and identity among Nigerian university students.

The study "Talk That Talk: Nigerian Youths' Language Attitudes and Cultural Expression involves four key concepts that require clarification:

### i. Language Attitudes

Language attitudes refer to the feelings, perceptions, and evaluations that individuals and groups have towards different languages and language varieties. According to (Garret, Coupland, and Williams,2003, p.2) Language attitudes are complex and multifaceted, reflecting a range of cognitive, affective and, behavioural components. These attitudes can be positive, negative, or neutral and are shaped by social, cultural, and economic factors. For instance, Nigerian youths may have a positive attitude towards English due to its prestige and economic benefits, while having a negative attitude towards indigenous languages due to perceived lack of utility. This can lead to language shift, where younger generations prefer English over their native languages. Olaniyi (2019) found that Nigerian youths' language attitudes are influenced by their social context and cultural values. Specifically, the study highlights the importance of social identity theory in understanding language attitudes among Nigerian youths.

### ii. Cultural Expression

Cultural expression refers to the ways in which individuals and groups express their cultural identity, values, and practices through language, art, music, and other forms of communication. Cultural expression is vital for preserving cultural heritage and promoting diversity.

The Nigerian youths may express their cultural identity through traditional music, dance, or art while also adopting Western cultural practices. This can lead to cultural hybridity, where different cultural practices are blended together. Adegbija (2020) emphasizes the importance of promoting indigenous languages and cultural practices to preserve Nigerian cultural identity. The study highlights the role of language in shaping cultural identity and promoting cultural diversity.

### iii. Nigerian Youths

Nigerian youths refer to individuals between the ages of 18 and 35 who are citizens of Nigeria. This age range is significant because it captures the period of transition from adolescence to adulthood, during which individuals are forming their identities and making important life choices. Nigerian youths are increasingly using social media to express themselves and connect with others, which can influence their language attitudes and cultural expression. Social media can provide a platform for Nigerian youths to showcase their cultural identity and connect with others who share similar interests. Okoro (2020) found that social media use among Nigerian youths can lead to cultural erosion and the adoption of foreign values. The study highlights the need for Nigerian youths to critically evaluate the cultural content they consume on social media.

### iv. Multilingualism

Multilingualism refers to the ability to speak multiple languages and the coexistence of different languages in a given society. Multilingualism can facilitate communication and cultural exchange but also poses challenges for language preservation and cultural identity. Nigerian youths may navigate multiple languages, including English, Nigerian languages, and Pidgin English, which can influence their language attitudes and cultural expression. Multilingualism can provide cognitive benefits, such as improved problem-solving skills and enhanced creativity. Bamgbose (2020) emphasizes the importance of promoting multilingualism and language diversity in Nigeria to preserve cultural heritage. This study highlights the need for language policies that support multilingualism and promote language diversity.

## STUDY OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

### A) Objectives

The objectives of this study include**:**

**i.** To investigate Nigerian youths' language attitudes towards English, Nigerian languages, and Pidgin English.

**ii.** To examine the relationship between language use and cultural identity among Nigerian youths.

**iii.** To identify the implications of language attitudes and cultural expression for language policy and cultural preservation in Nigeria.

**B) Research Questions**

The following research questions guided this study:

**i.** What are the language attitudes of Nigerian youths towards English, Nigerian languages, and Pidgin English?

**ii.** How do Nigerian youths use language to express their cultural identity?

**iii.** What is the relationship between language use and cultural values among Nigerian youths?

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHOD OF STUDY

The study "Talk That Talk: Nigerian Youths' Language Attitudes and Cultural Expression" is grounded in two theoretical frameworks:

### i. Social Identity Theory (SIT)

Social Identity Theory, proposed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner (1979), posits that individuals derive a sense of identity and belonging from the groups they belong to. According to SIT, language is a key aspect of social identity, and individuals' language attitudes and use are shaped by their group membership and social context.

Tajfel and Turner (1979) argue that individuals categorize themselves and others into in-groups and out-groups, and that language can be a powerful marker of group identity. In the context of this study, SIT provides a framework for understanding how Nigerian youths' language attitudes and use reflect their social identity and group membership.

### ii. Language Attitude Theory

Language Attitude Theory, developed by researchers such as Lambert (1967) and Gardner (1985), posits that language attitudes are shaped by individuals' experiences, social context, and cultural background. According to this theory, language attitudes can influence language use, language learning, and language policy. Gardner (1985) argues that language attitudes are complex and multifaceted, reflecting a range of cognitive, affective, and behavioral components. In the context of this study, Language Attitude Theory provides a framework for understanding the complex and nuanced nature of Nigerian youths' language attitudes

These theoretical frameworks provide a foundation for understanding the complex relationships between language attitudes, cultural expression, and identity among Nigerian youths. By applying SIT and Language Attitude Theory to the study, we can gain insights into how Nigerian youths' language attitudes and use reflect their social identity and group membership, and how language attitudes shape language use and cultural expression.

## 1. Method of Study

The study used a survey-based design, with a questionnaire administered to a sample of Nigerian youths. The questionnaire included both closed-ended and open ended questions to capture both quantitative and qualitative data. A purposeful sample technique was used to select a sample of 100 Nigerian youths from different universities to ensure diversity and representation. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and inferential statistics, such as frequency distributions. Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis, with codes and themes emerging from data. The questionnaire was administered using random sampling either online or in-person. Data were collected using a self-administered questionnaire, and these included:

- **i.** Closed-ended questions used to capture demographic information and language attitudes
- **ii.** Open-ended questions used to capture qualitative data on language use and cultural expression
- **iii.** Likert-scale questions used to measure language attitudes and cultural identity

The questionnaire was designed to capture data on: demographic information (age, sex, ethnicity, etc.); language attitudes (towards English, Nigerian languages, and Pidgin English); language use (in different contexts and domains), and cultural identity and expression (through language and other forms of communication)

## 2. Data Presentation and Findings

The collected data on the language attitudes and cultural expression of Nigerian youths indicate as follows:

| | **DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION** | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Variable** | **Frequency** | **Percentage** | |
| Age (18-24) | 60 | 60% | |
| Age (25-30) | 30 | 30% | |
| Age (31-35) | 10 | 10% | |
| Male | 55 | 55% | |
| Female | 45 | 45% | |
| | **LANGUAGE ATTITUDES** | | |
| **Language** | **Positive Attitude** | **Negative Attitude** | **Neutral Attitude** |
| English | 80% | 15% | 5% |
| Nigerian languages | 60% | 15% | 15% |
| Pidgin English | 40% | 30% | 30% |

| | **LANGUAGE USE** | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Context** | **English** | **Pidgin English** | **Nigerian languages** |
| Home | 20% | 60% | 20% |
| School | 80% | 10% | 10% |
| Social media | 50% | 20% | 30% |
| | **CULTURAL EXPRESSION** | | |
| **Form of expression** | **Frequency** | **Percentage** | **Remark** |
| Music | 70 | 70% | High |
| Dance | 50 | 50% | Medial |
| Language | 80 | 80% | Very high |
| Art | 40 | 40% | Low |

## DATA ANALYSIS

**A) Trends**

i. **Age:** The majority of respondents (60%) are between 18-24 years old, indicating that the study captures the views of young adults.

ii. **Language Attitudes:** English has the most positive attitude (80%), followed by Nigerian languages (60%), and then Pidgin English (40%). This suggests that English is highly valued, while Pidgin English is less valued.

iii. **Language Use:** English is predominantly used in school (80%), while Nigerian languages are mostly used at home (60%). Pidgin English is used more in social media (30%).

**B) Patterns**

i. **Language Attitudes and Use:** There's a correlation between language attitudes and use. English is highly valued and widely used in formal settings (school), while Nigerian languages are valued and used in informal settings (home).

ii. **Cultural Expression:** Language is the most popular form of cultural expression (80%), followed by music (70%), and dance (50%). This suggests that language plays a significant role in cultural expression.

**C) Correlations**

i. **Age and Language Attitudes:** There's a possible correlation between age and language attitudes. Younger respondents (18-24) may have more positive attitudes towards English, while older respondents (25-35) may have more positive attitudes towards Nigerian languages.

ii. **Language Use and Cultural Expression:** There's a possible correlation between language use and cultural expression. Respondents who use Nigerian languages at home may be more likely to express their cultural identity through language and traditional practices.

## DISCUSSION ON FINDINGS

The study "Talk That Talk: Nigerian Youths' Language Attitudes and Cultural Expression" reveals several key findings that shed light on the complex relationships among language, culture, and identity among Nigerian youths.

**a) Language Attitudes**

The study shows that English is highly valued among Nigerian youths, with 80% of respondents holding positive attitudes towards the language. This finding is consistent with previous research that highlights the importance of English as a global language and its role in education, business, and government in Nigeria (Bampsbose, 2004). However, the study also reveals that Nigerian languages are valued, particularly in informal settings, with 60% of respondents holding positive attitudes towards these languages.

**b) Language Use**

The study highlights the importance of context in shaping language use. English is predominantly used in formal settings such as schools, while Nigerian languages are mostly used in informal settings like home. This finding is consistent with the concept of diglossia, where different languages or language varieties are used in different contexts (Ferguson, 1959).

**c) Cultural Expression**

The study shows that language is a vital aspect of cultural expression among Nigerian youths, with 80% of respondents using language as a form of cultural expression. This finding highlights the importance of language in shaping cultural identity and transmitting cultural values.

The study's findings have implications for language policy and cultural preservation in Nigeria. The high value placed on English highlights the need for language policies that promote multilingualism and support the development of Nigerian languages. Additionally, the importance of language in cultural expression highlights the need for initiatives that promote the use of Nigerian languages in cultural contexts.

The study provides insights into the complex relationships between language, culture, and identity among Nigerian youths. The findings highlight the importance of language in shaping cultural identity and transmitting cultural values. The study's implications for language policy and cultural preservation underscore the need for initiatives that promote multilingualism and support the development of Nigerian languages.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study "Talk That Talk: Nigerian Youths' Language Attitudes and Cultural Expression" provides valuable insights into the complex relationships between language attitudes, cultural expression, and identity among Nigerian youths. Through the lens of Social Identity Theory (SIT) and Language Attitude Theory, the findings highlight the significance of language in shaping cultural identity and cultural expression.

According to Social Identity Theory (SIT), individuals derive a sense of identity and belonging from the groups they belong to. The study's findings suggest that Nigerian youths' language attitudes are influenced by their social identity and group membership. Specifically, the preference for English over indigenous languages reflects the prestige and economic benefits associated with English, which is often linked to social mobility and status.

Language Attitude Theory posits that language attitudes are shaped by individuals' experiences, social context, and cultural background. The study's findings support this theory and align with Chris Onyema's (2010) position on the complex and multifaceted nature of Nigerian youths' language attitudes, as it affects Language Endangerment in Nigeria and the rest of Africa in era of globalization. The positive attitude towards English and the ambivalence towards indigenous languages reflect the complex interplay among language, culture, and identity.

The study's findings have implications for language policy and cultural preservation in Nigeria. The preference for English over indigenous languages highlights the need for language policies that promote multilingualism and support the development of indigenous languages. Additionally, cultural initiatives that promote indigenous languages and cultural practices can help preserve Nigerian cultural identity.

Based on the findings of the study, the researchers recommend that language policymakers and educators should consider promoting multilingualism and language diversity in Nigeria. This can be achieved by supporting the development of indigenous languages and cultural practices while also acknowledging the importance of English as a lingua franca. Language education programs should be designed to promote bilingualism or multilingualism, allowing Nigerian youths to develop proficiency in both English and their indigenous languages. This can help preserve cultural heritage and promote national identity. Future studies should investigate the impact of social media on language attitudes and cultural expression among Nigerian youths, exploring how online platforms shape language use and cultural identity. This can provide valuable insights into the complex relationships between language, culture, and technology in the digital age.

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