



Multilingualism and language endangerment flame via COVID-19-crisis communication

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ABSTRACT

Drawing from health-crisis communication literature and anchoring the study on what we have coined as Dressler-Schmidt's endangered language model, we aim to explore the extent to which COVID-19 pandemic has become a language endangerment window for users of English as a second language (ESL) in Nigeria. To achieve this, data was collected from respondents via online questionnaires and follow-up interviews. The analysis of the data was done using frequency count and percentage while that of the interview responses was done thematically. Overall, the analysis reveals that Nigerian languages are facing a serious linguistic dislocation amid the COVID-19-crisis communication. The paper concludes that the wheel of language endangerment may keep rolling in the multilingual Nigerian society and can get accelerated by any health-crisis communication. We, therefore, propose a COVID-19-crisis communication model to slow down the language endangerment flame in the country.

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Introduction

Language is generally the main medium of communication in all societies of the world. Language and communication are inherently connected in any form of information dissemination in multilingual communities (Njemanze & Ononiwu, 2020). Like in the multilingual American, Brazilian and Indian societies, as reported by Sengupta (2022), in the multilingual Nigerian society, there is a great need for proper COVID-19 communication and reaching out to the vulnerable communities that are culturally and linguistically diverse to avoid 'infodemic' among linguistic minorities and fight the pandemic (Burke, 2020; Obiorah, 2021; Reddy & Gupta, 2020; Sengupta, 2022).

But, it has been observed and complained that the global public health communication on COVID-19 is English-centric; it makes English dominate other indigenous languages in many multilingual countries, and it introduces new terms in the languages in public health issues, which the speakers either use the English terms as they are or adulterate their pronunciations to fit in with their languages. So, the COVID-19 communication is characterised by the massive exclusion of many speakers of minority languages from

having timely high-quality COVID-19 information. It, therefore, brings drawbacks to the socio-linguistic life of many multilingual communities and their efforts in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic (Ahmed, 2020; Karpova & Chaiuk, 2021; Medical Express, 2021; Pillar et al., 2020; Prekazi, 2021; Sengupta, 2022; USA Office of Civil Rights, 2021; Widodo et al., 2021). Against this backdrop, individuals and organisations like Nigerian Digital Healthcare, AfricArXiv, Translators Without Borders (TWB), and African Science Literacy Networks (ASLN) developed videos and write-ups in some Nigerian languages that can help in COVID-19 crisis communication and panic reduction amid the COVID-19 period (Amzat et al., 2020; Mercy Corps, 2021; Obiorah, 2021; Rao, 2020; Translators Without Borders, 2020; Tsanni, 2020).

It is noteworthy, however, that a few COVID-19 words and expressions exist in some local languages. In Hausa, for instance, English words like face mask, vaccine, and distancing had had their equivalents right before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and other previous public health crises such as HIV/AIDS, EBOLA, Lassa Fever, smallpox, polio, etc. as *sumbatta*, *riga-kafi*, *baada tazara* respectively. But, because the number of these words is petite, paving a way for numerous English words and expressions to penetrate the local languages through the guise of public health communication, coupled with the fact that the few local words themselves are often disfavoured against their English equivalents in the domain of public health communication, it is clear the embers of language endangerment in this highly multilingual country are being fanned by the public health, in this case, COVID-19 communication. With this in mind, this paper makes a twofold argument: that Nigerians are shifting to the use of English in COVID-19 communication which can be a sign of language endangerment, and that delivering public health information in Nigerian languages can help Nigerians understand in their own languages how to address the pandemic better. Consequently, using responses of selected Nigerians got through researcher-designed online questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, we aim to investigate what the language preferences of Nigerians are and their reasons for these preferences, and then propose an indigenous languages-centred public health communication model, with a view to arresting the ongoing language shift and endangerment.

In some health crises that preceded COVID-19 like polio, HIV/AIDS, and EBOLA, English dominated health information and communication at their beginning. For instance, Igboanusi et al. (2016) reported that in Nigeria, information on EBOLA at its onset was mainly in English. Successes were recorded in the fight against the epidemic when Nigerian languages were used. In 2019, Siddique, UNICEF's Polio Chief in Nigeria said that UNICEF recruited workers who can read and write in Hausa language to help in eradicating polio through house visits and talks in the language the locals understand in northern Nigeria. Already, Madzimbamuto (2012) believed that patients generally prefer information and communication in their language to English in containing diseases. Igboanusi et al. (2016) opined that measures against a particular epidemic/pandemic can only be effective in health communication if the communication is done in the language that people understand better.

Some important questions we raise here are: In which language do Nigerian ESL users mostly communicate about the COVID-19 pandemic in their multilingual societies? And why? In other words, are Nigerian ESL users shifting from their mother tongues to English or some other language(s) in their COVID-19 communication? What factors are

responsible for the ESL users' preference in using the language(s) in communicating about the COVID-19 pandemic? We answer these questions by analysing responses given by Nigerian ESL users in researcher-designed questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Thus, the following research questions are stated specifically to guide the study.

- (a) In which language(s) do Nigerian ESL users communicate about the COVID-19 pandemic?
- (b) What reasons do they have for such linguistic preferences?

The study can be of great importance in the fight against the pandemic and awakening the Nigerian government, educational institutions, and the public about the new dimension of the longtime language shift and language endangerment that covertly befalls the Nigerian linguistic arena. It provides a practical approach to the government and health workers on COVID-19 communication. The research can equally serve as a reference material, especially, for linguists. It can also stimulate the interest of scholars/researchers, and the Nigerian public in preserving the Nigerian languages and promoting them amid the COVID-19-crisis communication.

In the following paragraphs, we describe the theoretical framework adapted for the study and its methodology, we follow these with results and discussion, and end with implications, recommendations and conclusion.

Theoretical framework

In framing our study, we use health-crisis communication model and combine Dressler's and Schmidt's endangered language models. We argue below that this theoretical combination suits the study's dual nature: dealing with health communication and language endangerment. And we narrow down our discussion on the Nigerian ESL users' COVID-19 communication (by paying attention to the listening, reading, speaking, and writing skills) during the pandemic and their language preferences through the lenses of the aforesaid frameworks.

Language skills and health-crisis communication

Most modern languages (including English) have four fundamental language skills which are employed pervasively in daily communication. These are receptive/perceptive (listening and reading) skills and expressive/productive (speaking and writing) skills. These, in some views, are considered the oracy (speaking and listening) skills and the literacy (writing and reading) skills. However, the literacy skills are hardly used in most of the Nigerian minority languages because the languages are not yet (fully) developed into written form, and many of the languages have become extinct, or are in the danger zone of extinction (Agantiem, 2017; Babalobi, 2020; Garba, 2018; Sarbi, 2016).

In the multilingual Nigerian society, English is used as the language of communication and instruction in schools. Nigerian English second language (ESL) users, therefore, have access to many documents and programmes on health-related crises like HIV/AIDS and COVID-19 pandemic which are presented in the language by TV stations, radio houses,

and other social media outlets (Richardson et al., 2020; Tsanni, 2020). English is frequently used by the Nigerian government through the Presidential Task Force (PTF) on COVID-19 and the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) in communication with the public on the COVID-19 crisis.

Health-crisis communication entails a process of giving and receiving organised information among individuals that can help them understand the knowledge shared on a particular health problem, and make them develop and maintain the desired health behaviour for prevention, medication, or both (United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS and Pennsylvania State University, 1999; van Ruler, 2018). It gives primacy to the comprehensiveness of message, the inclusiveness of people, and the absolute accuracy of the information shared (Supriyadi et al., 2021; WHO, 2020). Health-crisis communication is supposed to take into cognisance political will, socio-cultural differences, linguistic diversity, societal experience, and varying literacy levels of the people (Joyce et al., 2020; Piller et al., 2020; Reddy & Gupta, 2020).

However, the COVID-19 health-crisis communication ignores the vast local languages in multilingual Nigeria. Therefore, its application seems to have come along with some problems of language shift that can lead to language endangerment (of lexical items and expressions) which manifests in the process of fighting the virus.

Theoretical perspectives on language preference and endangerment in Nigeria

The world, and Nigeria in particular, is witnessing many cases of language shift, language endangerment, and language extinction (Agantien, 2017; Ani, 2012; Babalobi, 2020; Balogun, 2013; Sarbi, 2016; UNESCO-ARCMUN, 2018). However, African language endangerment research has been virtually lagging behind the endangered language studies in some other parts of the world (Blench, 2019; Kandybowicz & Torrence, 2017).

Several factors may lead to language endangerment, but the main cause is language shift or social subordination as indicated in Dressler's (1982, as cited in Tsunoda, 2006) and Schmidt's (1990, as cited in Tsunoda, 2006) models of language endangerment discussed in Tsunoda (2006). These models argue that language endangerment is often stemmed from native speakers' negative perceptions of their language values. These negative perceptions lead to the restriction of the language's functions to only a few contexts, typically social or religious. This restricted usage eventually results in language shift and endangerment. Both models suggest language rejuvenation is possible through positivity and expanded usage. In multilingual communities like Nigeria, a language may be falling out of use in daily communication because its speakers prefer a more socially, economically, officially, or politically acceptable language (Anumudu & Chikodi, 2018; Balogun, 2013). Are (2015) and Aboubakar (2020) believe that language preference or shift happens when there is language contact between different speech communities in which a particular speech community gradually changes its pattern of language use (in form of expressions or lexical borrowing) to the other speech community's language with which it has constant interaction. Such language preference or shift signals a huge threat that endangers the existence of languages. However, Mufwene (2002, p. 23) viewed the language preference or shift as a language adaptive strategy that language speakers employ to meet their day-to-day communicative needs.

It seems that there is no universally accepted model that is capable of assessing and addressing all language shift and endangerment situations across the world. The one proposed by UNESCO (2003), is considered inadequate and even problematic in accounting for the African-specific language endangerment issue (Lüpke, 2018), and none among the theoretical models discussed in Sarbi (2016), Obiero (2010), and Garba (2018) is quite relevant to our present study. We, therefore, employ Dressler's (1982) and Schmidt's (1990) models as presented in Tsunoda (2006).

However, we combined these two theories into one for the purpose of this study because each of the models seems to be deficient if it is used alone. Therefore, the combination of the two models, as complementary to each other, is more encompassing and quite relevant to the study. The models share the same ideological fibre and support the same cyclic structure on language endangerment issues. Thus, we consider the models as more practical and convenient because of their similar views and arguments on language endangerment matters which seem to characterise and account for the existing Nigerian language situation, the nature of the problem that is being under investigation by this study, and the set research objectives as well.

According to Tsunoda (2006), and as can be seen in Figure 1, the negative evaluation in Dressler's model corresponds to the stigma and negative evaluation of imperfect language in Schmidt's, which both have to do with socio-psychological thinking that language users have over their language. And in the communicative viewpoint, the sociolinguistic restriction in Dressler's model corresponds to a reduced social function in Schmidt's model. Also, by structural composition, the linguistic decay in Dressler's model corresponds to radical changes and reduction in the language system in Schmidt's model. However, Schmidt's model lacks social subordination which is considered the onset in the process of language endangerment, while Dressler's model is partially cyclic.

As we theorise in this study, Dressler-Schmidt's model does argue that the onset of language endangerment has to do with a negative thought that native speakers have about their language, which is caused mostly by illogical assessment of the economic, political, or social value of the language, and language choice or preference between their native language and another. This is what UNESCO (2003, p. 6) calls 'socioeconomic pressure' which the native speakers face. As the native speakers evaluate their language unfairly with some imperfections measured on these parameters, the language users reduce or restrict the language functions to only a few contexts that are more or less socially or religiously inclined. In such a situation, language shift occurs (Guérin & Yourupi, 2017). However, rather than seeing users themselves as responsible for reducing or restricting their native language use, as done in Dressler-Schmidt's model, it can be argued that it is the larger social structure that places constraints on where language is used. In other words, as novel as it appears to be, Dressler-Schmidt's model of language endangerment seems to focus a lot on individuals' perceptions of their languages and not how their perceptions have been (re)shaped by historical, colonial, educational, and social

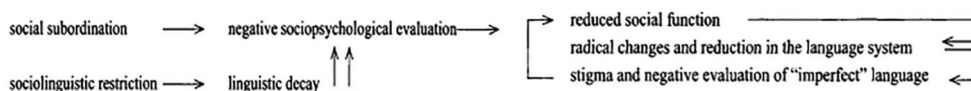


Figure 1. Dressler's model in Tsunoda (2006, p. 33). Schmidt's model in Tsunoda (2006, p. 34).

factors. Such historical cum (non)institutional trajectories and experiences are systemic and very fundamental in understanding the individuals' sociolinguistic perceptions and preferences (Blommaert, 2010, p. 134). Therefore, believing that the social is more important than the individual, our proposed model is designed in such a way that it looks more at what the social structure does than the individuals themselves. Nonetheless, we still believe Dressler-Schmidt's model fits our study well since part of its claims is that the restriction and/or shift in language use leads to language endangerment, moribund, loss, and death eventually. However, being cyclical, this model establishes that the language can be rejuvenated or revitalised especially if the negativity changes to positivity, imperfection changes to perfection, or if it is used in every context of life. This might be the wisdom behind having Schmidt's side of the model as a complete cycle. Even though complete reactivation and restoration of the language into its initial form might be a herculean task or even impossible; this may be the reason for having Dressler's side of the model as partially cyclical. These two possibilities of language re/degeneration are further discussed in Crawford (1995) and Guérin and Yourupi (2017).

Nigeria's linguistic situation and its colonial background

Nigeria is linguistically and culturally rich with not less than 500 indigenous mother tongues (Agantiem, 2017). However, Garba (2018) asserts that among the languages almost 400 are endangered, and 52 are on the verge of extinction. As a nation, Nigeria has six geopolitical zones with thirty-six states. Hausa is predominantly spoken in three zones, namely Northwest, Northeast, and North-central zones which form 19 states including the capital city, Abuja. Igbo is spoken in the Southeast zone which forms 5 states, Yorùbá is spoken in the Southwest zone which forms 6 states, while Efik, Ibibio, and other minority languages are in the South-south zone which also hosts 6 states. The multilingual nature of each of these zones, as well as mobility and language contact, have birthed language borrowing, code-mixing, code-switching and trans-languaging. Apparently, many Nigerians across the zones develop and deploy very complex communicative (in)competencies, particularly through code-switching and translanguaging (Oluwaseun, 2018; Ugwuona, 2020), which are argued to cause language shift and gradual language endangerment, loss and death (see Balogun, 2013; Ernest-Samuel, 2019; Fabunmi & Salawu, 2005; Fakoya, 2008; Njemanze & Ononiwu, 2020; Oluwaseun, 2018). Scholars like Blommaert et al. (2005), Blommaert (2010) and Dyers (2008) labelled such display of language resources and linguistic (in)competencies as 'truncated multilingualism' and argued that it is a typical way of language use in multilingual societies. Capstick (2016) also shared the same view with these scholars, viewing the phenomenon as 'heteroglossia', though – a *Bakhtinian* term that refers to the blending or use of various languages, dialects or linguistic resources within a particular monolingual, bilingual, multilingual context.

Nigeria's linguistic situation is made more complex by its colonial experience and British colonial educational policy in the country which made English the official language and the language of instruction in schools. In the 1920s, Phelps-stock Commission and British Advisory Committee on native education in Tropical Africa recommended and emphasised the use of Nigerian languages in instruction at the lower levels of primary education. English, therefore, has been in use in Nigeria even before its independence

in 1960 and before the official promulgation of the National Policy on Education (NPE) in 1977 (Kodjo Sonou et al., 2020; Nnyigide & Anyaegbu, 2020; Uwen et al., 2020).

As a member of the Commonwealth of Nations, Nigeria is a hub of linguistic legacy of British colonial administration; English is one of the obvious legacies left behind by the British after colonisation. This legacy is manifest in many aspects of Nigeria: its governance, politics, school system and media, to mention a few. Nigeria's language policy has been English-centric. For instance, despite its multilingual and multicultural nature, Nigeria's constitution recognises English as the official language of the country, i.e. the language through which the national identity is projected locally and internationally. The constitution recognises Hausa, Igbo, and Yorùbá as major languages that could be used in their geopolitical domains. Linguists tagged these three as the 'Major(ity) Languages', 'The Big Three' or 'The Class A Languages'. Languages like Kanuri, Fula, Edo, Efik, Tiv, and Ijo are labelled 'The Class B Languages' while languages like Awak, Akpa, Bade, Bolewa, Bura, Tula, Eggon, Esan, Ejagham, Kamo, Lere, Ngizim, and Yala are considered as 'The Class C Languages' or 'Minor(ity) Languages' that have 'no official recognition or function' at both state and national levels (Anumudu & Chikodi, 2018; Balogun, 2013). Among all of the languages used in Nigeria, English enjoys the most prominence because of its official recognition, and status, as it cuts across all the geopolitical zones, cultures, and religions (Mustapha, 2014). In the *Punch* newspaper of 12, January 2020, Babalobi reported that Igbo, Yorùbá, and Ishekiri are endangered in Nigeria, and many minority languages are on the verge of extinction in the country.

Having these in mind, we methodologically examine the ESL users' communication, their language use, and language endangerment problems via the ongoing COVID-19 communication through the lenses of the health-crisis communication model and Dressler-Schmidt's endangered language model.

Materials and methods

The data collection process involved the use of online questionnaires and follow-up interviews. Questionnaires were chosen because of their ability to generate as large data as possible and because the targets of the research are ESL users who have access to the internet, are educated, and actively communicate in English. Hence, our data collection missed those who don't use social media and those who possibly do not actively communicate in English.

Thus, the questionnaires were written in English and administered online because of their nationwide coverage in terms of respondents' geographies and ethnicities, in addition to their being more economical. The link of the questionnaires was randomly shared via social media platforms, particularly WeChat and WhatsApp groups where the researchers are members within the period of two months. The questionnaire link was open for the voluntary participation of all of the target respondents, Nigerians at home and in the diaspora. The questionnaires contained the research respondents' bio-information on gender, age, and a list of ten sentences; each sentence is related to COVID-19 communication and one of the four language skills: listening, reading, speaking, and writing. Five language options (Hausa, Igbo, Yorùbá, English, and other languages) were given for each of the sentences.

In reading [Table 1](#) vertically, we can see that a total of 219 responses were got from the respondents. Among the people that filled in the questionnaire voluntarily, 120 (55%) are Hausas, 13(6%) are Igbos, 12 (5.5%) are Yorúbás and 74 (34%) are speakers of other Nigerian languages. So, the Hausas constitute the dominant group of respondents. Also, 188 (85.84%) are males and 31 (14.16%) are females, who are between the age of 18 and above 36 at the time of data collection for this study. Furthermore, 163 (74.43%) of the respondents live in Nigeria while 56 (25.57%) of them live abroad. [Table 1](#) gives more details about the research respondents:

Although [Table 1](#) indicates diversity in the representation of respondents, there are differences in gender, age, occupation and geographical location proportions. As already explained, the questionnaires were administered via social media and the participation was voluntary. Therefore, we could not explain, for example, why more males participated than their female counterparts. Furthermore, these differences are not likely to significantly impact the study's findings. This may explain why many similar studies (e.g. Abtahian et al., 2022; Demaj & Vandenbroucke, 2022; Mandl & Reis, 2022; Mpofu & Salawu, 2018; Oluwaseun, 2018; Ortega et al., 2020; Sarbi, 2016; Tsanni, 2020) that examine issues of language endangerment before and during the COVID-19 pandemic and/or COVID-19-induced communication do not typically discuss these differences as they may have insignificant roles. Nevertheless, we acknowledge that our study coverage has some limitations that future studies can expand upon.

To mitigate the coverage bias, we utilised online semi-structured interviews as recommended by Vicente and Reis (2007) and engaged 30 research participants through an accidental sampling technique¹ (Edwards & Bowen, 2019; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009; Mphaphul, 2021). This method allowed us to collect additional views and 'richer' data on the Nigerian ESL users' COVID-19 communication. One of the researchers (the first co-author) contacted the participants in the WeChat and WhatsApp groups where the research questionnaire was shared, and the first 30 people that agreed to be interviewed were selected right away. This approach provided a convenient way of getting research data amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, the quantitative data were complemented by data generated from follow-up semi-structured interviews. The participants are

Table 1. Respondents' demographic information.

Gender	Subtotal	Percentage	Present place of living	Subtotal	Percentage
Male	188	85.84%	Nigeria	163	74.43%
Female	31	14.16%	Abroad	56	25.57%
Grand total	219	100%	Grand total	219	100%
Age	Subtotal	Percentage	Occupation	Subtotal	Percentage
18–25	56	25.57%	Student	149	68.04%
26–35	116	52.97%	Teacher	53	24.2%
36 and above	47	21.46%	Postdoc/Research fellow	17	7.76%
Grand total	219	100%	Grand total	219	100%
Geopolitical zone	Subtotal		Percentage		
Northwest	52		23.74%		
Northeast	126		57.53%		
North-central	14		6.39%		
Southwest	9		4.11%		
South-south	2		0.91%		
Southeast	16		7.31%		
Grand total	219		100%		

between 23 and 35 years old, 19 males and 11 females whose ethnic/language groups included Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba, Fulani, Kanuri, Efik, Idoma, Tiv, Bade, Bole, and Tera. All interviews were conducted on a one-to-one basis in English language via WeChat and WhatsApp calls. However, some little code-mixing was used with Pidgin English and Hausa. Each of the interviews lasted for about 15 min. [Table 2](#) presents the demographic information of the interviewees.

The interviews centred on key questions related to the Nigerian ESL users' COVID-19 communication.² The questions granted us some autonomy in further developing interesting points raised by the interviewee's answers. While the data collected from the questionnaire were analysed using frequency count and percentage, the interview responses were jotted down, developed into full-text responses, coded, (re)organised thematically by the first researcher, and some themes were identified³, and the second researcher crossed checked the coding process as done by Pun and Thomas (2020). In the thematic analysis of the interviewees' responses, we considered the semi-structured interview criteria recommended by Allan (2018), Epiphany (2019) and Mortensen (2020). [Table 3](#) gives a summary of the data collection steps and analysis.

Results and discussion

As stated in the introduction, the overarching argument of this study is that public health information dissemination in Nigeria is responsible to some extent for the endangerment of local languages because it is English-dominated. This has the tendency of increasing the

Table 2. Demographic information of the interviewees.

Interviewees	Gender	Age	Occupation	Language	Geopolitical zone	Place of living
P1	M	23	Student	Yorùbá	Southwest	Nigeria
P2	M	29	Student	Igbo	Southeast	Abroad
P3	M	32	Student	Igbo	Southeast	Abroad
P4	F	24	Student	Hausa	Northeast	Nigeria
P5	F	27	Student	Hausa	Northwest	Nigeria
P7	F	28	Student	Igbo	Southeast	Nigeria
P8	M	26	Student	Tera	Northeast	Nigeria
P9	M	28	Student	Idoma	North-central	Nigeria
P10	F	25	Student	Yorùbá	Southwest	Nigeria
P11	M	31	Teacher	Bade	Northwest	Nigeria
P12	M	28	Student	Tiv	North-central	Abroad
P13	F	25	Student	Yorùbá	Southwest	Abroad
P14	M	26	Student	Igbo	Southeast	Nigeria
P15	M	22	Student	Hausa	Northwest	Abroad
P16	M	22	Student	Hausa	Northwest	Nigeria
P17	M	23	Student	Kanuri	Northeast	Nigeria
P18	F	23	Student	Bole	Northeast	Nigeria
P19	F	30	Teacher	Yorùbá	Southwest	Nigeria
P20	M	26	Student	Hausa	Northwest	Nigeria
P21	M	28	Student	Yorùbá	Southwest	Nigeria
P22	M	28	Student	Igbo	Southeast	Nigeria
P23	M	24	Student	Tera	Northeast	Nigeria
P24	F	25	Student	Efik	South-south	Abroad
P25	M	25	Student	Hausa	Northwest	Abroad
P26	M	23	Student	Fulani	Northeast	Abroad
P27	F	35	Student	Igbo	Southeast	Abroad
P28	F	30	Student	Yorùbá	Southwest	Abroad
P29	F	25	Student	Hausa	Northeast	Abroad
P30	M	25	Student	Igbo	Southeast	Abroad

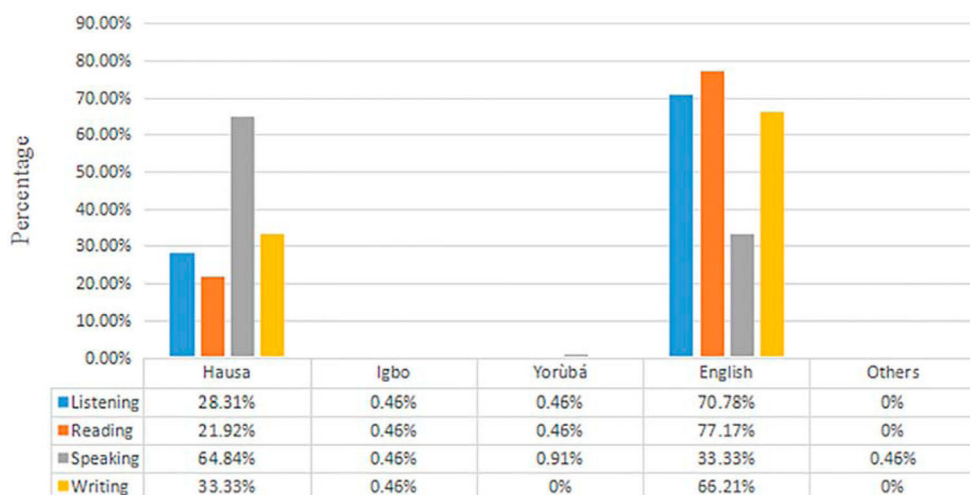
Table 3. Summary of data collection steps and analysis.

Research tool	Medium administered	Target population	Sample responded/ participated	Sampling technique	Data analysis
Questionnaire	Link in WeChat and WhatsApp	Nigerian ESL users	219	Simple random	Frequency count and percentage
Semi-structured interview	Calls in WeChat and WhatsApp	Nigerian ESL users	30	Accidental (Convenience)	Thematic analysis

risk of the pandemic since the locals understand their local languages more than they do English. Using responses of selected Nigerians got through researcher-designed online questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, we analyse below what the language preferences of Nigerians are (the languages are captured in [Figure 2](#)) and their reasons for these preferences. We then propose an indigenous languages-centred public health communication model, with a view to arresting the ongoing language shift and endangerment.

In [Figure 2](#), the number of those who listen and understand news about COVID-19 in the Hausa language is 62 (28.31%), in Igbo, it is 1 (0.46%), in Yorùbá, it is 1 (0.46%), in English, it is 155 (70.78%), and in other Nigerian languages, it is 0 (0%). Here, the number of Nigerian ESL users who prefer to listen and understand news about COVID-19 in English is the highest (155 (70.78%)), and the data show that Nigerian ESL users shift from their various mother tongues to the English language. This is a sign that Nigerian ESL users do not use Nigerian languages mostly in COVID-19 communication – especially on listening skill. This may not be surprising as the use of English is on increase daily in the country, and more especially in Igboland and Yorùbáland (Ani, 2012; Babalobi, 2020; Balogun, 2013; Nnyigide & Anyaegbu, 2020; Odinye & Odinye, 2010).

Still, in [Figure 2](#), the number of those who mostly read and understand news about COVID-19 in Hausa, Igbo, Yorùbá, English, and other Nigerian local languages is 48 (21.92%), 1(0.46%), 1 (0.46%), 169 (77.17%), and 0 (0%) respectively. Here also, those who prefer to read and understand news about COVID-19 in English (77.17%) are the

**Figure 2.** Nigerian ESL users language preference in COVID-19 health-crisis communication.

majority. This means that even in reading about the COVID-19 pandemic, the Nigerian ESL users choose reading English written materials. This result reflects the findings presented in Balogun (2013) and Ernest-Samuel (2019) that many Nigerian youths hardly read and understand expressions written in their mother tongues. Here we can argue that the Nigerian system makes the Nigerian ESL users dump their languages to decay and die in the reading aspect. It is worth noting that literacy in the local languages is generally neglected in Nigeria, like many other African contexts, which is why communication via writing and reading is generally done in English even in the most informal contexts. To be fair to the individual Nigerians, this problem, as stated above, is practically more systemic than individual, though. This could be attributed to the Nigerian antecedence of British colonial presence, language policy in the education system, socioeconomic trends as well as globalisation (Blommaert, 2010; Chimene-Wali, 2019).

However, in Figure 2, on speaking skill, the result shows that those who mostly speak about the COVID-19 pandemic in the Hausa language are 142 (64.84%), and this number is followed by 73 (33.33%) for English, 2 (0.91%) for Yorùbá, 1 (0.46%) for Igbo, and 1 (0.46%) for other Nigeria languages. Therefore, Hausa has the highest frequency in speaking skill. But, English is still higher than each of the remaining Nigerian majority and minority languages. The respondents communicate with close friends and family members mostly in the local languages. We could argue, therefore, that when they receive the information in English, they help broker that information and make sense of it in a Nigerian language so that there is a shared meaning-making process that occurs in Nigerian languages. That is why it is important for information from the top down to be in Nigerian languages too. This finding aligns with the research reports given by Fabunmi and Salawu (2005), Fakoya (2008) and Balogun (2013) that the Yorùbá ESL users confessed that they usually speak in English because they are not fluent speakers of their mother tongues. Ernest-Samuel (2019) also reports the same case regarding Igbo-speaking Nigerians, likewise Sarbi (2016) and Garba (2018) on some minority Nigerian language speakers.

In writing expressive skill, as can be seen in Figure 2, the number of those who mostly write to people about COVID-19 in Hausa is 73 (33.33%), in Igbo, it is 1 (0.46%), in Yorùbá, it is 0 (0%), in English, it is 145 (66.21%), and in other languages, it is 0 (0%). Thus, English is used the most in COVID-19 communication by Nigerian ESL users. This finding supports some scholars' views and reports on the language in use in writing and the preference of the Nigerian ESL users (see Ernest-Samuel, 2019; Musa & Abdu, 2017; Oluwaseun, 2018).

In answering the (a) research question raised earlier, we conclude from the findings above that Nigerian ESL users mostly prefer to communicate about the COVID-19 pandemic in the English language in all aspects of the basic language skills. Even though Hausa is used more than English in speaking skill, the latter has doubled the former in the other three language skills out of the four despite the preponderance of Hausa-speaking respondents among the total number of the people who responded to the questionnaires in the study. Hence, the Nigerian ESL users communicate about the COVID-19 pandemic in English and Hausa languages.

In responding to the (b) research question on the reasons the Nigerian ESL users give for their preference of English (and, to some extent, Hausa) language(s) in their COVID-19 communication, more than half (52%) of the research participants argue that they understand the COVID-19 information better in English (using receptive skills), while 45% of the interviewees argue the same in Hausa. For instance, an Igbo participant[P2: Igbo] says 'I

always get COVID-19 info in English and I understand, you know English dominates all languages'. A Hausa respondent [P5: Hausa], on the contrary, says 'I listen to news about COVID-19 in English but I prefer to get the news in Hausa language so that I can know very well how the disease is'.

However, some of them listened to the disseminated COVID-19 information predominantly in English because the information initially was mainly in the language, but during the apex of the first wave of the pandemic and its second return, they preferred listening to the news in their mother tongues. [P11: Bade] says 'I used to listen to the COVID-19 news in English on TV, but when it spread to so many countries and our country, I preferred to listen to our local radio news in Hausa to know more about the CORONA in our country'. Nevertheless, some of the interviewees preferred listening to the news in their mother tongues *ab initio*, and in English at some point. [P19: Yorùbá] say 'I thought this CORONA was just a normal severe cold and catarrh because I listened to our local FM in Yorùbá mostly. When the thing became more serious, I listen to English news ... the thing is beyond my imagination!' So, there was a change-over of languages in their COVID-19-crisis communication. The preferences and reasons for these two languages could be attributed to the Nigerian language policy which makes English the language of administration, the major Nigerian languages (Hausa, Igbo, and Yorùbá) remain as regional *lingua francas*, while other minority languages have no precise official status (Anumudu & Chikodi, 2018; Fakoya, 2008).

As part of the reasons for their English language preference, about 85% of the interviewees claim that initially there were very few or no available COVID-19 reading materials in the Nigerian languages. They believe that Nigerian languages do not have some COVID-19 terminology like mask, sanitiser, self-isolation, etc, so it will be difficult to communicate effectively in the languages. Another Igbo speaker among the participants [P3: Igbo] says 'COVID-19 information has not been translated in my native language, Igbo. And before they translate it, it may be too late. After all, most of us, we prefer reading in English'. Also, [P8: Tera] says 'I don't know the name of face mask and sanitiser in my language. But, I know *sunbatta*, *takunkumi* or *amawali* [face mask] and *tazara* [distance] in Hausa. I think my language doesn't have COVID terminologies'. Another participant, [P25: Hausa] says 'Everything I read about coronavirus in social media is in English. The other day I saw one small poster in Hausa on how to use face mask, wash hands and create social distance'. Despite the widespread of Hausa and its hip of publications as claimed in Inuwa (2017), there are still very few reading materials on COVID-19 that are used by the Nigerian ESL users in their mother tongue, and this is a big problem in curbing the spread of COVID-19 (Tsanni, 2020). Therefore, the interviewees argue that they have no option but to use the documents written in English. This confirms Fakoya's (2008) report that health vocabulary is dying out in some languages like Yorùbá. So far, most of the COVID-19 information translated is in form of posters and they contain errors (Obiorah, 2021).

Furthermore, the research participants argue that they grow up communicating mostly in a code-mixing and code-switching manner between their mother tongues and English or Pidgin. So, in speaking, 60% of the respondents say they code-mix and code-switch with English and Pidgin especially among the Igbo and Yorùbá speaking interviewees when they speak about COVID-19. For instance, [P14: Igbo] says 'The youth of today in Nigeria are not fluent in speaking their language. So we *de*⁴ speak in Igbo and English and Pidgin even on COVID discussion'. Also, [P21: Yorùbá] says 'I speak in Yorùbá and

English mostly with friends, but I try to speak Yorùbá only with my family members about coronavirus'. The Hausas and some minority language-speaking respondents mostly prefer to code-mix with Hausa and few English words. Here, some of the interviewees, especially the non-Hausas in northern Nigeria, disclose that they communicate in the Hausa language and code-mix with little English. [P18: Bole] says 'I always speak in Hausa language and mix with little English even at home on every discussion including COVID-19'. [P17: Kanuri] says 'I can communicate in Kanuri, but I understand CORONA information better in Hausa'. The non-Hausas do not frequently use their mother tongues (Blench, 2019; Garba, 2018; Sarbi, 2016), and they prefer to use Hausa even in their COVID-19 communication.

It is also expressed by the research participants that they prefer to write in a code-mixing manner, i.e. they mix Hausa with English, Igbo with English or Pidgin, Yorùbá with English, or Pidgin. [P15: Hausa] says 'I write to my friends and siblings in Hausa generally, but I write some words in English like face mask and sanitiser'. [P13: Yorùbá] also says 'I write in Yorùbá, and in English when chatting with friends about COVID-19'. However, [P30: Igbo] says 'I always write in English and Pidgin on coronavirus'. Many of the interviewees showed they communicate with their friends and family members. They also confessed that they cannot write fluently in their mother tongues alone, so they mostly code-mix with, or code-switch to English, or Pidgin. This result tallies with Chimene-Wali (2019) and Njemanze and Ononiwu (2020) on the code-switching made by Igbo-English speakers, and Oluwaseun (2018) that 90% of the Yorùbás cannot communicate in the language without code-mixing with English. Table 4 gives more relevant interviewees' responses on the use of language in COVID-19 communication.

Implications and recommendations

At this juncture, a critique of the recurrent point throughout the paper – that individual linguistic preferences are not unaffected by certain dominant discourses and language ideologies at both local and global levels – is paramount in order to ensure that our data and/or its analysis is more properly contextualised, locally and globally. Given the nature of the objectives of the paper, the ingredients of this critique include historical/colonial experiences of Nigeria, Nigeria's language policy, education, as well as globalisation, particularly its most relevant variables – English as a global language and mobility (Blommaert, 2010). These have made the language to have a special official position in administration, politics, diplomatic relations, educational activity, commerce, and almost all opportunities in Nigeria. Little wonder, English has penetrated the Nigerian society so deeply that it is no longer considered a foreign language (Uwen et al., 2020). This official status has placed it over and above other Nigerian languages. Hence, the Nigerian ESL users' linguistic preferences and the reasons they give can be argued to be related to or influenced by the Nigeria's social, economic, educational, and colonial history, among other (non)institutional trajectories including the globalisation process which reflect their 'biographically given multilingual resources' (Blommaert, 2010, p. 133). And, these *might* be a portrayal or representation of the complex linguistic and communicative resources that the Nigerian ESL users 'actually possess and deploy' or *could* be their 'truncated nature of multilingual repertoires' in their super-diverse Nigerian contexts, being parts of the contemporary 'globalised world' as reckoned by Blommaert (2010, p. 102).

Table 4. Interviewees' responses on language in COVID-19 communication.

Interviewees	Verbatim comments
P1(Yorùbá)	'I get COVID-19 information on TV in English because foreign media give more details about the pandemic'.
P4(Hausa)	'Initially I use to listen to news about coronavirus in English. But, later I prefer to hear the news in Hausa language so that I can understand better'.
P7(Igbo)	'I use to hear COVID news in Pidgin and English from FM station'.
P9(Idoma)	'I always prefer English news about COVID-19 pandemic'.
P10(Yorùbá)	'There are no reading materials about coronavirus in my language. I read about it in English'.
P12(Tiv)	'I prefer to reading about corona in English because understand better'
P16(Hausa)	'We most speak in Hausa about the coronavirus. Communication'.
P20(Hausa)	'If I am at school with friends we speak about the pandemic in either English or Hausa and English at the same time. But at home, most of the time we speak in Hausa only'.
P22(Igbo)	'I speak to people about COVID in English and Pidgin. In fact we de talk most at times mixing the two in our talks'.
P23(Hausa)	'I hardly speak about COVID-19 in my mother tongue because I can't speak the language. So, I always speak about in Hausa'.
P24(Efik)	'With my friends, even if we start to talk about corona in Efik, we switch to English or Pidgin at the end'.
P26(Fulani)	'I prefer to write about CORONA in English because is easier for me'.
P27(Igbo)	'I mix Igbo with English in my writing about COVID-19. I think Igbo doesn't have the COVID terminologies'.
P28 (Yorùbá)	'I mostly write in English or Pidgin on social media about the pandemic. It is very rare I use one or two words from Yorùbá with English or pidgin'.
P29(Hausa)	'I am not good at writing in my language, so I write Hausa or English, or mix the two in my writing on COVID-19'.

Nonetheless, following Sasse (1992, as cited in Tsunoda 2006, p. 34), who shares similar arguments with Dressler-Schmidt's model, we argue that these linguistic and communicative resources that manifest as or through code-switching/mixing and translanguaging (Oluwaseun, 2018; Ugwuona, 2020), truncated multilingualism (Blommaert, 2010; Blommaert et al., 2005; Dyers, 2008), or heteroglossia (Capstick, 2016) are signs of unwelcome language situation unfavourable to local, especially minority, languages. What Sasse (1992) considered as external settings (which, in our context, can include globalisation: mobility of English, Nigeria's institutional and non-institutional trajectories) trigger Nigerians' speech behaviours (i.e. communicating in a heteroglossic speech or truncated multilingual manner) and cause gradual structural (performative) changes in their languages (via (in)frequent code-switching/mixing, translanguaging, language preference/shift, etc.). Each of these can endanger their native languages (see Tsunoda, 2006, pp. 49–117). These points are empirically corroborated by various studies (see also Aboubakar, 2020; Balogun, 2013; Cenoz & Gorter, 2017; Ernest-Samuel, 2019; Fabunmi & Salawu, 2005; Fakoya, 2008; Margana & Rasman, 2021; Mazzaferro, 2018; Njemanze & Ononiwu, 2020; Oluwaseun, 2018; Vander Klok, 2019; Zentz, 2015). Furthermore, to scholars like Mufwene (2002), such linguistic/language preference (that is done for economic, social, survival, and/or medical reason) causes language shift which endangers their native languages and leads to language loss/death. Hence, we want to argue that the so-called truncated multilingualism or heteroglossia in high/complex multilingual society like Nigeria can, in a long-run, endanger and foster more and more shift from and erosion of Nigerian languages, and eventually lead to their loss or death.

Coming to our submission here, the research respondents opt for English in their COVID-19 communication because there is a lack or shortage of COVID-19 reading materials in the Nigerian languages. To address this, as was done by ASLN (Tsanni, 2020), webinars should be organised and articles should be written by both governmental

and non-governmental organisations in the Nigerian local languages to help more in creating proper awareness about COVID-19. Preventive measures such as social distancing, hand-washing procedures, and proper masking write-ups should be translated accurately into Nigerian languages. Also, a quick and sound health literacy programme should be mounted in Nigerian languages by the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), National Institute for Nigerian Languages (NINLAN), and National Language Centre, among other stakeholders. And language experts, news agencies as well as the public should assist more in making COVID-19 health publications, making video clips, and news airing in the local languages as reported in Obiorah (2021). These can help in easing and having effective COVID-19 communication in multilingual Nigeria, safeguarding the local languages, and to a large extent, boosting (education and) literacy skills in the local languages.

The use of Hausa in speaking on the COVID-19 issues portrays acceptance of the language as a big communicative tool in the northern region and some parts of Nigeria. The use of the Hausa language in the COVID-19 communication could be attributed to many factors (like its wide coverage, Hausa culture, etc.) discussed in Blench (2019) and Aboubakar (2020). And communicating with friends and family members in the local languages shows that Nigerian ESL users help in sharing the English version of the disseminated information in the Nigerian languages during the COVID-19 crisis perhaps for easy assimilation and comprehension.

The code-mixing with and the code-switching to English in the participants' COVID-19 communication can be argued to be depicting the Nigerian ESL users' form of truncated multilingualism debated by Blommaert et al. (2005), Dyers (2008), and Blommaert (2010). It can also be believed to be signalling language displacement contended by Dressler-Schmidt's model. According to the model, as pointed out earlier, any restriction or reduction of the function of a language displaces the language sociolinguistically. Guérin and Yourupi (2017) believed that such displacement can gradually make the health-related vocabulary in their languages fade away or disappear. Therefore, there is an externally forced language shift from the Nigerian languages to the global language, English. This, in the view of Agantiem (2017), reveals the exogenous threat faced by Igbo and the Yorùbá languages particularly, and then Hausa and other minority languages to a large extent, from the English language. Such an unwelcome linguistic situation endangers the whole Nigerian languages and can eventually lead to their death (Christopher, 2014). This finding corroborates numerous research findings and scholarly views that many Igbo youths hardly communicate in the language without code-mixing with or code-switching to English (Emeka-Nwobia, 2014; Ernest-Samuel, 2019), so also the Yorùbá youths (Balogun, 2013; Oluwaseun, 2018) and the Hausa youths (Musa & Abdu, 2017). In decelerating the language endangerment, the Nigerian ESL users should control their excessive code-mixing and code-switching form of communication, they should not be encouraged on this practice, and the government should sponsor jingles and write-ups on billboards, pamphlets, and so on to create awareness on COVID-19 and the importance of the mother tongues (Balogun, 2013; Njemanze & Ononiwu, 2020). The finding also reveals how English has become part and parcel of the Nigerian ESL users' communication (Agantiem, 2017) as we can see today in COVID-19 communication.

The 'exclusive nature' of getting the COVID-19 information in the English language, and the Nigerian government's negligence in language policy-making (Ani, 2012;

Fakoya, 2008), particularly on the native languages in terms of sociolinguistic restrictions, make English dominant in the country and seem to have opened a window for shifting from the Nigerian ESL users' mother tongues to English and Hausa in their COVID-19 communication. This linguistic shift or preference, coupled with the attitude of the Nigerian ESL users toward their mother tongues are threats that endanger the Nigerian languages (Ani, 2012; Balogun, 2013; Ernest-Samuel, 2019; Ifejika, 2016), and they can be considered as an absolute social subordination as pointed in the Dressler-Schmidt's model. Thus, the situation, should be addressed collectively, culturally, academically, and officially, otherwise, the languages might continue to suffer from social and linguistic maltreatment, negligence, and handicapped communication and information sharing not only on COVID-19 issues but also in other prevailing pandemics. The Nigerian ESL users, therefore, should save their native languages from endangerment and silent death by developing good attitudes towards the languages and using them properly even in COVID-19 communication (Christopher, 2014). Efforts should be put in place by the government to at least rejuvenate the Class A Languages on health-crisis communication in their respective domains. There should be favourable language policies and documentation for other minority (Class B and Class C) languages that suffer most from the language shift so that their daily use on COVID-19 or other public health issues can be ensured.

Going by the interview responses, and Dressler-Schmidt's model, the Nigerian ESL users have a stigmatised assessment by believing that Nigerian languages have no terms or vocabulary for effective COVID-19 communication, and therefore, English should be used instead. This results in a language shift from many northern Nigerian minority languages to Hausa, on one hand, and from the entire Nigerian languages (including the Hausa) to the English language, on the other. The Nigerian ESL users' negative evaluation of their language coupled with usage restrictions in communication are considered as the onset of language endangerment. And as argued by Dressler-Schmidt's model, any social devaluation or restriction in language usage can lead the language to endangerment and eventual death sooner or later.

Though Sarbi (2016) views language endangerment as a natural process, Babalobi (2020) believes there is no wise nation or its citizens that will leave their native languages in preference for any other dominant or foreign language(s) in any kind of communication. Therefore, as indicated in Dressler-Schmidt's model, and also believed by Daigneault (2019) and Babalobi (2020), the endangered Nigerian language process can be somehow stopped or delayed, and many languages can be restored, especially if the Nigerian ESL users change their negative attitude toward their languages to positive, and if the spectrum of their communication encompasses COVID-19 among other health crises in life. We, therefore, propose the following model for the COVID-19-crisis communication and deceleration of the covertly ongoing language endangerment flame in the multilingual Nigerian society. Thus, the model can help in fighting the pandemic in the right language that can make the communication effective, and at the same time help in reversing the language endangerment process in Nigeria.

This model (Figure 3) assumes that COVID-19 communication mostly begins in the English language in Nigeria using the four language skills. The government, through its relevant parastatals, health workers, and officials, uses English and passes down policies, decisions, and information about COVID-19 to the public via the use of media (like radio, TV, newspapers, Facebook, WhatsApp, Tweepers, etc.), community/religious leaders, youth

organisations, and trade unions. The media personnel, leaders, organisations, etc. also use English, or any of the Nigerian languages to reach out to the public and educate people about the pandemic and its effects.

As seen in [Figure 3](#), the double-headed arrows are drawn to show the connectivity and the role which each group plays, among the various tiers involved in the COVID-19-crisis communication and enlightenment, to slow down the Nigerian language endangerment. This framework argues that all Nigerian languages are endangered if the COVID-19 communication is done totally in English at the level of government. That is why the level is marked red in the circle, and it signals the danger involved against the Nigerian languages; the level is, therefore, tagged 'endangered language zone' (ELZ). But, when the COVID-19 communication is done in English, and/or any of the Nigerian languages at the level of media, organisation, and community/religious leaders, then the Nigerian languages are considered to have less threat of endangerment from the English language, therefore, the level is tagged 'less-endangered language zone' (LLZ). This zone becomes a boundary between the endangered language zone and the safe language zone. Hence, the Nigerian languages are on the borderline or verge of endangerment in the zone; the yellow colour shows how fragile the Nigerian languages remain, and abound to wilt in the continuum. But, when the entire COVID-19 communication is done in the local Nigerian languages to the public (family members, peer groups, and individuals), the languages are secure in the 'safe language zone' (SLZ); they are in a risk-free domain. A shared sense-making process, therefore, occurs in the Nigerian languages on the COVID-19 crisis. Hence, the COVID19 information needs to be in Nigerian languages from the top down. And this is in line with the multilingual communication strategy which is important in fighting the spread of the coronavirus across different communities (Piller et al., 2020).

Therefore, this model emphasises connectivity between the Nigerian local languages and their language users, and it can help them to maintain their cultural and linguistic

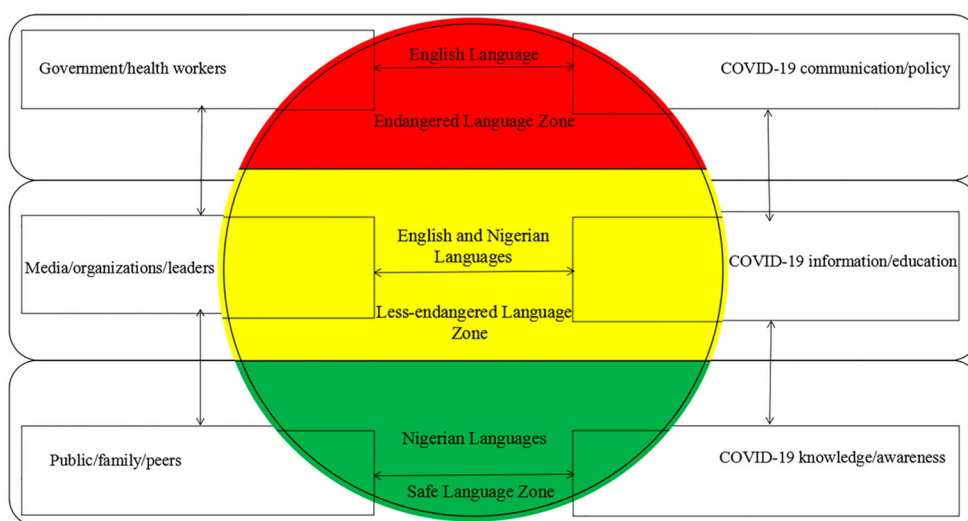


Figure 3. COVID-19-crisis communication model for the deceleration of language endangerment.

identity while communicating on COVID-19 issues. The model is, in other words, supporting a linguistic resilience approach in maintaining minority languages and cultures alongside the majority languages and English as a second language within the larger socio-political cum linguistic contexts. Hence, the model can help in reducing the communication breakdown and suffering encountered by the minority language speakers explained in O'Brien and Federici (2019). The model, furthermore, supports the 'COVID-19 global risk communication and community engagement (RCCE) strategy' articulated in WHO (2020). Thus, the model portrays a nationally led organised COVID-19 communication, which is at the same time community-centred, participatory, and inclusive in the language use.

Conclusion

The sudden arrival of COVID-19 in the last quarter of 2019 has been argued to be covertly igniting and accelerating the speed of the decades-long flame of language endangerment in Nigeria. All Nigerian languages face endangerment amid the COVID-19 health-crisis communication. Minority Nigerian languages face threats from both Hausa and English, but the bigger threat faced by all minority and majority Nigerian languages is posed by the English language which is argued to have been caused by the Nigeria's past colonial experience, language policy, sociolinguistic view of the Nigerian ESL users about their native languages, their upbringing in a code-mixed and code-switched form of communication and their language preference, or interest in the COVID-19 communication. We do believe that all these issues can be incorporated into the discourse of (sociolinguistics of) globalisation (Blommaert, 2010), particularly that globalisation has become a profound mechanism for the transmission of diseases and pandemics like COVID-19. And the pandemic impacts global health, mobility, trade and language use and preference (Shrestha et al., 2020).

Therefore, we propose a COVID-19-crisis communication model that can be used in educating Nigerians about the pandemic and decelerating the current language endangerment process in the country. This study, however, has some limitations of coverage, future studies, therefore, can expand the scope of the data collection. Future studies can also reassess the existing Nigerian language policy, especially regarding health-crisis communication, and language subjects in the schools so that the ongoing language shift and endangerment in the country can be stopped.

The COVID-19 health-crisis communication examined by our study might be happening right now in some other countries in Africa, or elsewhere in the world, that have similar multicultural and multilingual situations like Nigeria, where minority languages are endangered. Our proposed COVID-19-crisis communication model might be of help to those countries in addressing the sociolinguistic situations and decelerating their language endangerment flame.

Notes

1. As explained in Fraenkel and Wallen (2009), and also applied in Edwards and Bowen (2019) and Mphaphul (2021), accidental sampling (also called convenience sample) is a technique of engaging research participants who happen to be most accessible to a researcher by chance;

it is used in situations where there was no prior agreement between the researcher and participants. In our study, there was no prearrangement with the interviewees. As a non-probability selection technique, accidental sampling is used to develop an initial understanding of a small number of subjects or an under-researched population.

2. (1) In which language do you mostly communicate or prefer to communicate about the COVID-19 pandemic? (1a) In which language do you listen to news about the COVID-19 pandemic? (1b) In which language do you read about the COVID-19 pandemic? (1c) In which language do you speak about the COVID-19 pandemic? (1d) In which language do you write about the COVID-19 pandemic? (2) Why do you prefer the language you mentioned in your COVID-19 communication?
3. The themes that emerged are (a) Dominance of English in COVID-19 information in Nigeria (b) Nigerian ESL users' English and Hausa languages preference in COVID-19 (c) Shortage of COVID-19 communication materials in Nigerian languages (d) Nigerian ESL users' shift from the Nigerian languages to the English language.
4. This word means 'is or are' in Nigerian Pidgin English.

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