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Language on the margins: multilinguality, marginality and linguistic precarity in the Nigerian context

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Abstract
Multilingualism and multilinguality are conspicuous and sometimes contentious features of the sociolinguistic profile of many African countries. This article looks at the manner in which multilingualism and multilinguality key into marginality and precarity at both societal and individual levels in a representative African community such as Nigeria. Examining the nexus between language, socio-economic status, and government policy, the article suggests that the faulty management of multilingualism in African states produces a precarious multilinguality among citizens across the different social strata. The resultant 'linguistic precarity' creates capacity underdevelopment, entrenched poverty and the devaluation of social capital at societal and individual levels. The article draws data from three key sociolinguistic domains in Nigeria – the school, the linguistic landscape of the urban streets, and the political terrain – to illustrate the interesting and theoretically germane ways in which multilinguality, marginality and precarity intersect.

Keywords: Multilingualism, multilinguality, marginality, 'linguistic precarity', linguistic landscapes,

INTRODUCTION

While bi- or multilingualism is more of the norm in human societies (Chumbow 2009)), it is widely debated whether this 'norm' affects society and individuals positively or negatively. As I elaborate below, this negativity or positivity depends on the 'acquisition and mix modalities' in various societies. 'Acquisition modalities' refers to how the languages are acquired by specific individuals within the society. Established patterns include 'compound', 'coordinate' or 'subcoordinate' bilingualism, as originally elaborated by Weinreich (1963)[1]. 'Mix modalities'on the other hand refers to the nature of

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interaction between the languages, or the manner in which bi/multilingualism is practised – for example, whether the mix is multiglossic (Adegbija 2004) and equalitarian, or diglossic and hierarchical, thereby expressing a dominance configuration, in the manner of Ferguson (1959).[2] These terms imply levels of proficiency or effectiveness in the use of the languages, which is critical to a discussion of precarity.

In Africa, as in most postcolonial societies, the typical language acquisition and mix modalities are the diglossic-subcoordinate modalities. Here, one language, typically the mother tongue or 'first language', is subordinated to a second language in terms of function and prestige. This is also referred to as 'subtractive bilingualism' (Cummins 2000). An understanding of these dimensions is critical for understanding the intersection between multilinguality, marginality, and precarity. The critical question is: how much does multilingualism and its management impact acquisition levels, and to what effect within the society?

Multilingualism had been examined in the African context in terms of the functional distribution of the languages involved (Adekunle 1972), its relative advantages and disadvantages (Chibaka 2018; Simire 2003), its relation to youth identity (Bristowe, Oostendorp and Anthonissen 2014), and 'the multilingual resources drawn on by youth in their performance' (Kanana and Hurst 2019: 35). The phenomenon has also been examined in contrastive linguistic studies, in which contrasts generate predictive values for potential errors in the production of target language expressions (Ayeomoni 2006; Fasold 1984). However, none of these investigations has occurred within the context of precarity. This article therefore looks at the manner in which multilingualism and multilinguality key into marginality and precarity at societal and individual levels.

'Linguistic precarity' is defined here as the inability to convey information or interact effectively in a language, leading to negative social, economic and psychological consequences, in short, to marginality. 'The 'linguistic precariati' are the individuals or groups who are so affected. The term therefore combines the notion of (in) competence with that of its repercussion or the variables informing individual linguistic precarities include language acquisition modalities, socioeconomic location or status, geographical location, immigration status, race, ethnicity, personality, intelligence, and individual effort. Linguistic precarity is also defined in relation to societal constructions and related 'scales of expectation'. In the sections that follow, I draw examples from the Nigerian sociolinguistic environment, and from three sociolinguistic domains – the school, linguistic landscape of urban streets, and political terrain – and examine the intersection between multilinguality and linguistic precarity under the following main headings:

- distinctions between multilingualism and multilinguality, in relation to cognate terms such as bilingualism, plurilingualism and multi-competence.
- the intersection between multi-linguality, marginality, and precarity, from the perspectives of sociolinguistics and post coloniality
- the trajectory of linguistic precarity in Nigeria

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BETWEEN MULTILINGUALISM AND MULTILINGUALITY

Multilingualism, bilingualism, plurilingualism, multi-competence

Multilingualism is typically defined as the habitual use of 'more than one language' in a society (Council of Europe 2017; Valdés, n.d.). The cognate term, 'bilingualism', classically refers to an engagement with two languages, and may either constitute 'an enduring societal arrangement' (societal bilingualism) or an individual's bilingual competence (individual bilingualism) (Fishman 1980: 3). Multilingualism is seen as involving multiple language acquisition factors, environmental factors, individual factors, developmental factors', etc. (Brice 2015: 55). While at least three languages are typically required to qualify as 'multilingual' (Kemp 2009,), 'bilingualism' is sometimes an alternative usage that embraces 'multilingualism' (Baker 2006), or 'a specific case of multilingualism, which has no ceiling on the number of languages a speaker may dominate' (Macías 2020).

Another cognate term, 'plurilingualism', distinguishes the manner in which the different languages or modes of expression in a particular society or particular user's repertoire is deployed for specific communicative purposes (Bialystok 2001; Council of Europe 2007). Council of Europe appraises the twin terms, multilingualism and plurilingualism, under the rubric of 'linguistic diversity'. Hornsby (n.d.) also notes that, 'a person may speak one of his or her languages more easily than another, but she/he remains '"plurilingual"'. The same advantages and disadvantages are listed for plurilingualism and multilingualism; the difference may therefore be merely terminological.

Yet another term is "multi-competence", which is summed up as 'the compound state of a mind with two grammars' (Cook 1991). Its basic assumption is that languages in a multilingual situation interact in an endless mix, with different acquisition outcomes for every user. Multi-competence distances itself from the rigidity of theories in general, but more specifically from the Chomskyan notion of linguistic competence and its apparent fixation with the native speaker's competence. Muliti-competence considers it unreasonable to expect a native speaker's competence of non-natives (Cook n.d.). Unlike in monolingualism, the languages involved in multilingualism are said to be 'totally integrated with each other; [with] many possible degrees of interconnection'.[3] Multi-competence rigorously avoids a deficit view of L2 competence and the associated notion of 'standard'; rather, competence is classified independently and related to specific purposes[4], not tethered to the associated native language. Correspondingly, 'multi-competence', signals a departure from earlier classifications of bilingual competence (e.g., as 'compound bilingual', 'balanced bilingual', etc.), since these apparently promote a deficit view of competence. Instead, multi-competence accommodates a range of competences, from the minimal to the maximal.

Whether any notion of 'competence' can exist independent of a comparative evaluation is debatable; the term 'competence' itself is inherently contrastive, evoking a Saussurean binary, being meaningless without its opposite.

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From the perspective of this article, although multi-competence shuns the native-speaker-as-model paradigm, it does share with SLA (second language acquisition) models the objective of 'producing a successful L2 user', even if 'not an imitation native speaker' (Cook 2016), While accommodating both minimal and maximal levels of competence in its analysis, multi-competence does consider the acquisition of successful modes of communication a desideratum for speakers of a language. This, in my view, is very much in tandem with the aspiration of both L1 and L2 teaching, especially within the Nigerian context.

More significantly, multi-competence acknowledges that some negativities occur in the course of the dynamic interaction between different languages. For example, Cook (n.d.) notes the critical circumstance in which: '*you have failed* if other people can detect foreign accent, spelling mistakes, etc.' in your output as an L2 speaker. (italics added). The contention here is not whether such evaluations should take place or not, but that they do. The resultant linguo-social precarity is a nagging and pressing fact of existence in postcolonial Africa. It is therefore apt to examine the nature of individual multilinguality in Nigeria and the associated variables that combine to generate linguistic precarity.

Multilinguality as individual competence

While multilingualism denotes the existence of two or more languages in a society, albeit with different functional, or acquisitive modalities, 'multilinguality', as used in this article, denotes the language acquisition profile of a specific society or individual. By analogy, borrowing from Saussurean parlance, it denotes the parole of bilingualism or multilingualism, where bilingualism or multilingualism is the langue. In other words, it refers to the specific character, manifestations, or effects of multilingualism in and on a society or individual.

Prior to now, the term 'multi-linguality' had been applied to distinguish the personal or individual from the societal (Aronin and Ó Laoire 2003; Hamers and Blanc 1989/2000). Hamers and Blanc (1989/2000: 6), described bilinguality as 'individual bilingualism', while reserving the term bilingualism for societal bilingualism. Similarly, Aronin and Ó Laoire (2003) described multilinguality as 'a personal characteristic that can be described as an *individual store of languages* …' (their italics). However, these authors offer no rationale for the new term, or why the already established terms, 'individual bilingualism/multilingualism' and 'societal bilingualism/multilingualism' (Fishman 1980) no longer suffice, or how 'bilinguality'/'multilinguality' accounted better for this distinction. Since the morpheme [-*ity*] only means 'having the characteristic of' and does not carry any additional meaning of number or mass, there is no semantic mechanism or logical connection by which bilingual*ity*/multilingual*ity* can bind to, or exclusively mean, personal or individual, as against societal. It cannot describe a societal vs. individual dichotomy. Therefore, it is logical to employ the term bilinguality/multilinguality as I do here, to refer to specific paroles or specific instances or characteristics of bilingualism/multilingualism, whether individual or societal.

The multilinguality of individuals comprises their linguistic repertoires and relative competencies. The delicate

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multilinguality of individual citizens, and how this can key them into the multilingualism-marginality-precarity equation, is evident in the Nigerian situation. Multilingualism and precarity as elaborated in this article capture, not only the material essence of precarity, as a manifestation of existence on the margins, but also its psychosocial essence and affects – the downgrading of personality, loss of face, and of confidence.

PERSPECTIVES ON MULTILINGUALITY, MARGINALITY, AND PRECARITY

Marginality as a generalized socio-economic construct

The precarity of life on the margins is often explicit. Marginality is marked by a painful cognition on the part of the marginalized, that is, by an acute self-awareness of their negative positionality in the value chain, their spatial and hierarchical distance from positions of means, and their perpetual incapability or hopelessness. As noted by Roberts (2004), 'life on the fringes' implies lack of 'full access to opportunities and resources', and 'the marginalized are always aware' (192).

Marginality is by default perceived as a socio-economic issue. In Mehretu Pigozzi, and Sommers' (2000) taxonomy, 'contingent marginality' results from the inequality between individuals, communities, and societies, based on the adverse dynamics of the free market. 'Systemic marginality' on the other hand results from systemic bias that has nothing to do with market forces. Such, presumably, would include race, ethnicism and religious bias. For its part, 'collateral marginality' refers to marginality that is based on proximity to marginalized individuals and communities, while 'lever-aged marginality' is a contingent or systemic disadvantage '…when… bargaining position in free markets is weakened by dominant stakeholders like transnational corporations' (91-93). Though not taxonomised here, linguistic marginality can be regarded as a feature of 'contingent marginality'.

Research findings that link socio-economic status with indices of well-being, ranging from health to housing, to schooling, career success and positive psychological states, include: Duncan et al's (1998) connection of children's cognitive development to socio-economic status; linkage to educational development (Bowles and Gintis 1976), health (Duncan, Ziol-Guest, and Kalil 2010), and career development (Hall and Farkas 2011). The role of class and group discrimination, as well as social exclusion in the production of marginality, has also been emphasised (Davis and Sanchez-Martinez 2014). These established socio-economic links blur or disguise the connections between language, multilinguality, and precarity. However, a consequential relationship between socioeconomic status (SES) and linguistic abilities has also been established, as indicated below.

Language as capital and source of precarity

An inverse relationship clearly occurs between poverty and linguistic capital or competence. Karl Marx conceptualized language as a reflector and refractor of social and ideological content, contending that all forms of speech 'operate in extremely close connection with the conditions of the social situation in which they occur and exhibit an extraordinary

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sensitivity to all fluctuations in the social atmosphere' (Volosinov 1973: 20). The French sociologist and philosopher, Bourdieu, analyses language as 'cultural capital' and specifically as 'linguistic capital', citing Auguste Comte's dictum that 'language is a form of wealth …' (Bourdieu 1991: 37). Thompson (1991) also notes that 'certain educational qualifications can be cashed for lucrative jobs […]'. Language can therefore be 'understood as the product of the relation between a linguistic habitus and a linguistic market' (17). In practical terms, Finegood, and Swain (2013: 10) establihed links between poverty and 'disparities in the development of language processing with] decreases in vocabulary, phonological awareness, and syntax', while Huttenlocher et al (2002) established inadequate comprehension of complex sentences and smaller sized vocabulary among children from economically challenged homes. Similarly, Rowe (2008) established a link between SES and child speech capabilities.[5]

In sociolinguistics studies, linguistic marginality has also been phrased in terms of relative access to enabling language codes, with language variety as a marker of social class and predictor of levels of achievement. For example, sociolectal varieties are sub-classified as 'basilect' and 'acrolect' (Stewart 1965), for the lower and higher echelons of societal speech respectively, and as 'mesolect' (Bailey 1974) for the median echelon. Thus, language variety serves as index of positioning on the social ladder. Such connections between language acquisition and use, and marginality and precarity, was further concretised by Bernstein (1971) and elaborated by Hasan (2002), although they did not employ either of the terms marginality or precarity. Bernstein (1971: 76) found a correlation between social class and linguistic performance and corresponding levels of effectiveness and social attainment. This is also referred to as the 'verbal deprivation hypothesis', an explanation for 'educational underachievement' (Ginsborg 2006: 14, cited in Jones 2012: 176).

In attempting to provide the empirical evidence that was lacking in Bernstein's work, Hasan (2002: 537), examined variant forms of communication between mothers and their young children, and came to the conclusion, too, that codes and their acquisition are concretely related to 'social positioning'. While lopsided distribution of societal resources reduces citizens' opportunity of access to general well-being, the poor management of multilingualism, through governmental policy or lack of it also robs them of access to comprehensible linguistic input. Whatever their source(s), language acquisition inequities lead to linguistic precarity for the citizenry in functional or affective terms (Oloruntoba-Oju 2015).

From multilinguality to precarity

Notwithstanding the connections established above, the exact manner in which multilingualism keys into the trajectory of societal or individual underdevelopment, or even whether it really does, has been the subject of intense international debates (see Bialystok, Martin and Viswanathan 2005; Coulmas 2013; Garfinkel and Tabor 1991, Vildomec 1963, among others). While advantages of multilingualism are apparent, its inherent potential to confuse the language acquisition process is also well established.[6] Language interference, as 'deviation from the

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norms of either language [arises from] familiarity with more than one language, i.e., … language contact' (Weinreich 1963: 1).

One intermediate outcome of interference is reduced communicative competence in one of the languages, usually the second language or third language, while an extreme outcome is 'semilingualism' or simultaneous incompetence in all the languages (Cummins 1976; Edelsky et al 1983). Scholars who extol the advantages of multilingualism also acknowledge 'drawbacks', including "uneven levels of competence' in the associated languages (Hornsby, n.d., citing Baker, 2006.).

Faulty management of multilingualism: language policy and the postcolonial state

Multilingualism, as an unobtrusive, peaceful, equalitarian phenomenon that generally arose from, and facilitated transborder or transnational experiences, including trade and other forms of social and cultural contact, must be distinguished from coercive multilingualism arising from unnatural and violent contexts such as war, conquest, colonisation, and forced amalgamations. Colonisation forced 'coercive multilingualism' and 'coercive diglossia' and resultant marginality on African polities.[7] The faulty management of this multilingualism has occured over time by means of policies based on 'language ideologies' (Irvine and Gal 2000) that marginalize indigenous languages and foist a precarious linguality on the citizenry. This is particularly germane in Africa, and it manifests in negative attitudes, anomie or backlash, language change or language loss.

The deleterious effects of faulty language policies have been elaborated since the late seventies (see Akinnaso 1991; Bamgbose 1982, 1990; Fafunwa 1989; Oloruntoba-Oju 1994, 2015, among others). Policy in Nigeria is plagued by inconsistency, ambiguity, lack of clarity and lack of political will. While successive Nigerian Policies on Education (NPE 1977, 1981, 1988, 2004, 2007 and 2014) acknowledge the importance of the mother tongue, they fail to enforce it or recognise the multiple lingual possibilities. They only pay lip service to the indigenous languages, while continuing to promote colonial languages in various domains, as shown below:

> The business of the National Assembly shall be conducted in English and in Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba *when adequate arrangements have been made therefore* (NPE 1979, Section 51; italics added).
>
> English shall *progressively* be used as a medium of instruction and the language of immediate environment and French shall be taught as subjects from the fourth year. (NPE 2004, Section 4 (19f); italics added).

The policies above 'progressively' increase the space for and significance of English, but the reverse is the case for the 'language of the environment'. Pronouncements regarding the indigenous languages are tokenist and ineffectual (Awobuluyi 1979; Okunrinmeta 2014). For the African child, marginality and precarity begins with the segregation of mother tongue from language of instruction, or the incoherent mixture of both. This precarity is evident in different domains, as further elaborated below.

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TRAJECTORY OF 'LINGUISTIC PRECARITY' IN THE NIGERIAN SETTING

The Nigerian sociolinguistic landscape is defined by three related attributes: the country's multilingualism, diglossia, and unfocused language policies. About 500 languages (and dialects), distributed amongst several ethnicities, were welded together by colonial action that imposed a colonial language on the country. Three ethnic groups and languages became the most prominent: the Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba. However, diglossia meant that English became the country's official language of bureaucracy, education, and government business. It is designated a 'second language', while other colonial languages are 'foreign languages'. French is also taught in most secondary schools, but, unlike English, is not compulsory. Other taught languages include Mandarin, in some environments,[8] and Pidgin, which is regarded as an unofficial 'lingua franca' in many urban centres (although this assessment often has to be qualified (Oloruntoba-Oju 2019: 9-10). These are the contexts that shape individual multilingualities in the country.

Individual multilinguality

Individual multilinguality in Nigeria mostly consists of an indigenous language (e.g., Yoruba), a dialect of the indigenous language (e.g., Oyo, Ijesa, Ekiti, Ijebu, Eko, Okun, etc.), and English or Pidgin English. This tripodal multilinguality may vary with the addition of a second or third indigenous language, Pidgin English, a foreign language or more. The scenarios in the table below reflect a multiplicity of acquisition patterns involving three or more languages, as shown in (1). A confusion of language acquisition patterns, with all manner of combinatory possibilities, is reflected in the slashed options from (2).

Table 1 shows nine possibilities for mother tongue alone, ranging from an indigenous language (e.g., Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba, Edo, Izon, Urhobo, Tiv, etc.); through English, which is classified as a second language but has become a sort of 'first language' for many new generation children, especially in southern Nigerian elitist homes, to foreign languages such as Arabic, mostly in the core north of the country, and French, mostly for Francophone elements in the country. The resultant confusion reflects in the precarious linguistic output of citizens.

'Linguistic precarity' in the classroom

The confusion casused by the mixture of mother tongue and first language in Nigeria has been much discussed (Adeyanju 1976; Duze 2011; Onuigbo and Eyisi 2008; Oloruntoba-Oju 1994, 2015). Evidence of 'linguistic precarity', though not so named hitherto, abounds. Bamgbose (1971: 39) found students' essays in English that were 'hardly recognizable as such', measured against what was considered 'standard Nigerian English' (Banjo 1971). Newspaper editorials also decried 'the poor quality of writing of students' at the university level in the country. In 1994, Oloruntoba-Oju demonstrated that the situation appeared worse, and his revision twelve years later (2015), showed it had not improved.

Samples from different studies point to language contact and interference as a factor in this anomaly. Kraft and Kirk-Greene (1973) drew attention to anomalous word-order mixtures when Hausa subjects render phrases in English (e.g., *car white); Adeyanju (1976)

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	Mother tongue/First language/ Primary language	Second language	Third language	Other languages
1	Indigenous language	Dialect of indigenous language	English/Foreign language (e.g. Arabic)	Pidgin-English/ Other indigenous languages
2	Dialect of indigenous/ Indigenous language	Indigenous language/Foreign language	English/Pidgin English/Foreign language	Other indigenous languages
3	Indigenous language/ Dialect of indigenous language	Foreign language/ Indigenous language	Pidgin-English/ Foreign language	Other indigenous languages
4	Indigenous language	English Dialect of indigenous language	Pidgin-English/	Other indigenous language/Foreign languages
5	English	Indigenous language	Dialect of indigenous language	Pidgin-English/ Other indigenous languages/Foreign languages
6	Indigenous language/ English	English/ Indigenous language	Dialect (of indigenous language)	Pidgin-English/Other indigenous language/ Foreign languages
7	Pidgin-English	Indigenous language	English	Other indigenous languages/Foreign languages
8	Dialect of standard indigenous language	Standard indigenous language	English	Pidgin-English/ Foreign languages
9	Foreign language	Indigenous language	English/Pidgin English	Other foreign languages

compared English and Hausa sentences, with a prediction of similar confusion of structures in output samples. Onuigbo and Eyisi (2008) contrasted English and Tiv structures in a similar vein. Studies on the lexico-semantic structures arising from the contact between English and Nigerian indigenous languages equally demonstrate the role of multilingualism in the creation of anomalous samples (Adegbija 1989). Problems such as these have been traced to a lack of comprehensible input or confusion in the acquisition process due to the problem of multilingualism (Vildomec 1963).

Within this multilingual and diglossic context, the centrality of English to social and economic attainment has meant that students who produce such anomalous samples face an uncertain economic and social future; Igboanusi (2014: 75) recently noted 'economic exclusion for the majority'as one of the consequences of the Nigerian sociolinguistic situation. A sure nationwide index of this precarity

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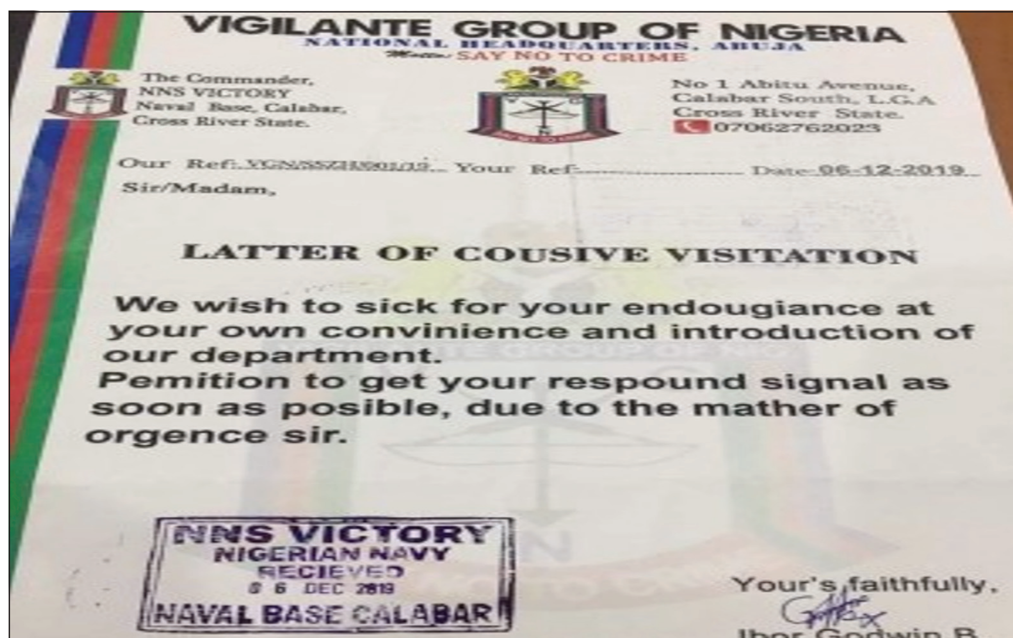
is the data of repeated failures in the West African School Certificate Examination (WASCE), a veritable 'cemetery' of students' dreams in the country. In 2009, a presidential task force was set up to examine the cause of this national calamity, and nine years later, in 2018, the National Assembly also waded in.

Language proficiency as a factor in competency, or failure, in academic disciplines is well established (Adler 1998; Adegboye 1993; August et al 2009;). The West African Examination Council (WAEC) repeatedly fingers poor command of English as an important catalyst of mass failure in other subjects.[9] However, in 2018, the Chief Examiners Report of WAEC specifically fingered multilingual and multimodal exposure, and confusion, though not using these terms, as the culprit. According to Agnes Cudjoe, WAEC's Public Relations Officer, 'the students failed the subject *because they used shorthand and Pidgin English* in their exams'. This anomaly affects 'the scripts of *most* of the candidates' (Pulse 2018; my italics). Pidgin occurs in the multilingual repertoire of most Nigerians. The WAEC Examiners' reports therefore provide 'smoking gun' evidence of the effect of such multilinguality on language and academic competence. Although individual multilinguality in Nigeria is also mediated by the economy and environment, language interference as a feature of language contact is one of the



VIGILANTE GROUP OF NIGERIA
NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS, ABUJA
SAY NO TO CRIME

The Commander,
NNS VICTORY
Naval Base, Calabar,
Cross River State.

No 1 Abitu Avenue,
Calabar South, L.G.A
Cross River State.
07062762023

Our Ref: [illegible] Your Ref: .... Date: 06-12-2019

Sir/Madam,

LATTER OF COUSIVE VISITATION

We wish to sick for your endougiance at your own convinience and introduction of our department.
Pemition to get your respound signal as soon as posible, due to the mather of orgence sir.

NNS VICTORY
NIGERIAN NAVY
RECIEVED
06 DEC 2019
NAVAL BASE CALABAR

Your's faithfully,
Ibor Godwin B.

Figure 1 – Vigilante group letter showing 'linguistic precarity'

cousive visitation	– 'courtesy vistiation'
sick	– 'seek'
enougenance	– 'indulgence'
pemition	– 'permission'
mather of orgence	– 'matter of urgency'

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most important sources of difficulty for learners, due to the 'difficulty inherent in the language itself' (Bamgbose 1968: 87).[10]

From failed classrooms to the linguistic landscape

Linguistic precarity manifests in the Nigerian linguistic landscape in publicly displayed signs, letters, or writings on sundry surfaces. Landscape elements include 'advertisements, billboards, and other signs' (Rochelle and Carr 2018); 'public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings' (Landry and Bourhis 1997: 25); 'shop windows, posters, flags, banners, graffiti, menus, T-shirts, tattoos …', as well as online outlets (Diggitat, n.d.). Previously studied under media formats, as billboard advertisements, graffiti, cartoons, and as multimodal discourses, the elements have been brought together under the name 'linguistic landscape' (Backhaus 2007).

Within the Nigerian linguistic landscape, inability to convey information adequately or effectively in language shows up relentlessly on the streets, displayed on the roads, in the form of legends on commercial vehicles, as shown in Figures 1, 2 and 3, or in the form of billboard inscriptions such as in Figures 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8. These inscriptions generally belong to the basilectal category.

Ineffectual correspondence of the precariati: Spelt as perceived modes

Outside of the classroom, linguistic precarity is manifest in inscrutable and ineffectual language output. The rather inscrutable letter below from a Vigilante

Figure 2: Inscription on vehicles showing 'linguistic precarity' (i)

Figure 3: Vehicles showing 'linguistic precarity' (ii)

Figure 4: Roadside board advert showing 'linguistic precarity'

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group (Figure 1) seems to have been penned by one of thousands of failed school leavers, undergraduates, and even graduates struggling with linguistic precarity. The viral letter aims to *sick endougiance* for a *cousive* visitation and *pemition* for a *respound* signal as a *mather* of *ourgence*: (see gloss below):
The above 'stored as heard' or 'spelt as perceived' sequences represent the best communicative endeavours of the precariati forced to use English in a diglossic environment. Although it was not possible to verify the outcome of this precarious 'sick[ing] for endougiance', it seems likely to have been ignored, consigned to a marginal space.

4.3.1 Linguistic 'precarity' on wheels

The inscriptions in figures 2 and 3 again demonstrate interference typical of a poorly managed multilingual situation, including absence of provision for comprehensible input. For the above inscribers, /l/ and /r/ are in free variation; and they promptly mix them up. 'Tomorrow' becomes *tumolo* in fig. 2 and 'glory' becomes *groly* in fig. 3.

Linguo-spatial and linguo-social correspondence: Precarity on billboards

Billboards are endemic on the landscape. Again, their language is basilectal, and it manifests severe linguistic precariaty. Figure 4 is self-produced by an artisan who seems unable to afford a painted billboard.

Rewaya in Figure 4 is a mixed (Yoruba-English) orthographic rendition of 'rewire'. That word itself is a Nigerian English neologism (a lexico-semantic relexification of the Standard English 'auto-electrician'). 'Ear' is a clipping of 'here', omitting the initial phoneme, manifesting an h-deletion phenomenon in the inscriber's indigenous language (Yoruba). It also represents the 'spelt as perceived' orthographic model. The short message 'Auto electrician is here' is refracted through a process of multilingual interference. The message is signed off in the indigenous language name, *Baba Taye*, which means 'Father of Taye'.
Again, the dilemma of the linguistic precariati is that they cannot use the language effectively, yet they cannot escape using it because their own language has been relegated and is not economically sustaining even in its own native environment. To survive, they must use an unfamiliar language, however they can.

It should be noted that the 'spelt as perceived' model does not always connect to multilinguality or to interference. For example, *shoplifters will be prostituted* (fig. 5, below) is an intralingual error and can hardly be attributed to the indigenous tongue or other languages in the mix.

However, precarity exhibits are ubiquitous on marginal, back-street establishments, such as guest houses, is shown in Figure 6, where the object of 'let' ('us'/apostrophe + s) is omitted.

Figures 7 and 8 not only belong linguo-spatially to the streets, but also linguo-socially to third rated traditional health providers. 'Doctor' Hassan and 'Doctor' Nwatakwochaka belong to a group who practice forms of medical quackery and advertise their trade, and unwittinhly their linguistic precarity, through basilectal mobile billboard inscriptions.

Figs 7 and 8 demonstrate the inability to produce items correctly in the target language. The precariati here have gone through some form of schooling, but their multilinguality is obstructive. The billboard items belong mostly to the '*spelt as perceived*' model in which hearing

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Figure 5– linguistic precarity on show-owner billboard

Figure 6– linguistic precarity on wall

Figure 7– Medical quackery (i) showing linguistic precarity

is negatively modulated by sounds of the precariati's indigenous language. The difference in the multilingualities of the two precariati can can be demonstrated by juxtaposing similar items in their inscriptions.

For example, although both are influenced by their multilingual environment, 'Dr' Hassan's acquisition conditions and therefore his multilinguality appears a little different from 'Dr' Nwatakwochaka's. Of the seven items that they have in common on the billboards,'Dr' Hassan has two ('Fibroid', 'Typhoid') correct, to 'Dr' Nwatakwochaka's one ('Malaria'). Also, 'Dr' Nwatakwochaka's error pattern is 'spelt as perceived', based on indigenous language perceptions, while 'Dr' Hassan attempts to approximate morphological

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Figure 8– Medical quackery (ii) showing linguistic precarity

and even syllabic structures of the target language (e.g., *Gono-rial* vs *Golo-ria*; *All-cer* vs *Orsa*; *Ci-phi-li- ne* vs *Ci-vi-lis*). Conversely, though, 'Dr' Nwatakwochaka's makes up in syntactic competence what he lacks in lexical competence, hence 'We cure Golorial …' seems to inspire more confidence, syntactically, than 'Dr' Hassan's 'We care on Wast pain infection …' Furthermore, many items from Dr Hassan's can be attributed to indigenous language interference. Prominent here are *melicine* (9) and 'teeth pain' (16). The former (sometimes rendered as *melecine*) is well known in Nigeria as a Pidgin rendition of 'medicine', while the latter demonstrates the confusion that arises from faulty equivalences. For example, the indigenous languages do not mark plural inflectionally, but by cardinality and by pronominal modification. This means that both 'tooth' and 'teeth' are rendered with the same lexeme, which may create problems of perception when using a different language.

While the above analysis indicates differences of manifestation, the level of 'linguistic precarity' and marginality in both cases is high. Social capital is devalued, and the socio-economic horizon of the two 'precariati' is severely limited, for both, just as it is for most other precariati in the same social and linguistic bracket.

SCALES OF EXPECTATION: 'LINGUISTIC PRECARITY' IN NON-MARGINAL SPACES: THE POLITICAL TERRAIN

Linguistic competence has face value that translates to social, economic

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and cultural capital, while absence of linguistic competence is face threatening due to societal levels of expectation. In Nigeria, a good command of English is generally a desideratum. Achebe (1960) describes the general admiration for a good command of English, albeit the 'the kind of English that filled the mouth, like the proverbial dry meat' (p. 29). Chimezie (1973: 215) also observed that mastery of English in Nigerian is: 'so valued that it is consciously or unconsciously equated with erudition by most Nigerians – illiterate, semi-literate, and literate alike. [Its] equation with learning, its economic utility and the people's desire for proficiency in a 'foreign' tongue [explains] the enthusiasm and anxiety that characterize the study of English at all levels ....

Wannabe diglossic parenting (Oloruntoba-Oju 2015: 27-28) constantly instills this aspiration in children, who would later wear their inability to speak, understand or use indigenous languages like a laurel. Afolayan (1988) noted that the expectation of standard Nigerian English is high and should be nothing short of the World Standard English, with the caveat that native-like competence is unattainable for non-natives. Banjo (1971: 169-70) also proposed an influential taxonomy of Standard English, comprising four 'varieties' with ascending linguistic and social value. The basic criteria are intelligibility and acceptability. From the point of view of this article, these classifications coincide with a marginality cline. Although the authors did not refer to precarity, they unwittingly index marginality in consigning many speakers to socially unacceptable speech. In short, discourse on linguistic standards indicates societal levels of expectation, and implicitly indexes marginality and linguistic precarity in Nigeria.

It should be noted that society does not necessarily expect a high linguistic performance from the 'precariati' at marginal social levels, but this does not necessarily spare them derisive responses. On the other hand, the expectation is very high on those at higher levels of educational, social or political attainment. They are therefore visited with jeers and greater levels of opprobrium whenever their linguistic performance falls below expectation.

Below are viral samples drawn from a cross-section of domains occupied by linguistic precariati in non-marginal positions. 1-2 are by Senators, 3-4 by journalists and 5-6 by a former First Lady of the Federation.

1. A woman was alleged to have killed her husband to death

Although this appears a case of semantic redundancy, and it sounds comic in English, the structure is actually normal for Nigerian languages. For example, in Yoruba, 'kill' is represented by the lexeme *pa* (/kpa/). However, the same lexeme means 'quench'/ 'blow out' (fire), 'beaten' (by rain/sun), 'hit'/'ravished' (by hunger/ thirst, etc.), 'switch off' (stove/electricity, etc.); expressing actual death is therefore semantically and syntactically complex; hence, *pa ku* ('kill [to] death') is normal in Yoruba, to indicate, or emphasise, a death-causing 'kill'. In short, this is only a case of indigenous tongue interference or interlingual error by the distinguished Senator.

2. Death is inevitable. It will come of s *suding*. ... Let our *righteous good deeds more than our bads.* For our colleagues who said .. *the good ones goes the bad ones* ... you are not the *Molikya* ... I know *those who good will*

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not sleep perpetually; those who bad will never sleep perpetually.
(A Senator. Source: viral WhatsApp clip)

The short funeral homily was delivered on the floor of the Nigerian Senate. The italicised segments reflect non-comprehensible input and interference from other tongues ('other tongue interference'). *Suding* ('sudden'), with the 'u' pronounced as /u/ instead of /ʌ/ is an idiosyncratic pronunciation error; *our bads*, is a pluralizing error, possibly deriving from analogy with the preceding structure (our good deeds - *our bads*); 'righteous good' amounts to semantic overload/redundancy – these three errors are intralingual errors. The verb 'to be' is systematically omitted in three sequences: 'let our good deeds […] more than our *bads'* ('be' is omitted); 'those who […] good' ('are' is omitted), and 'those who […] bad' ('are' is omitted). The preposition 'before' is also omitted in 'the good one goes […] the bad ones'. These syntactic errors are intralingual redundancy errors (i.e., omissions of an obligatory element or addition of unnecessary items). 'Never sleep perpetually' poses semantic and pragmatic problems of interpretation and may be considered meaningless; however, the sentence reflects Yoruba metaphysical rhetoric, the transfer to or imposition of the Yoruba metaphysical ideas of post-life existence on the sentence in English.

3. A Yoruba man who goes by the name Maiyegun General took to facebook to *expresed* his views (Source: https://ng.opera.news/comments/s52ccd571200616en_ng?page=6&count=25)

4. *Does* Pastor Ighodalo's Wife, Ibukun, Really *Died* of Heart Attack? (Source: Opera News)

The mix-up in the tenses above reflects a cross between non-comprehensible input and negative transfer. With the latter, it should be noted that indigenous languages such as Yoruba do not mark tense inflectionally, which, coupled with inadequate acquisition scenarios, leads to much interlingual confusion.

5. i. My husband and Sambo *is a good people*
ii. They don't have respect .. they *are a very bad person* ...
iii. ... it is not easy to *carry second* in an international competition ...
iv. The bombers ... *who born them? Wasn't in not a woman?* They were once *a children* now *a adult* ...
v. Those *bloods* that we are *sharing* in Borno [state]
vi. *Prinspal* ... n*a only you waka come*?
(Former First Lady of Nigeria. Source: https://www.nairaland.com/2106698/top-15-patience-jonathans-english)

The anomalous constructions here are traceable to faulty language acquisition and multilinguality, involving English, Pidgin-English, and an indigenous language. The problem of concord in (i), (ii), and (iv) reflects the absence of inflectional forms in the parallel indigenous languages. The confusion with articles and pluralizing also owes to the absence of the indefinite article in the equivalent indigenous structures. Forms such as (iii): *carry second* ('come second'), iv: *who born them* ('who gave birth to them'/'who was their mother'), and the double negative 'Wasn't it not

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a woman?' ('Was it not a woman?') are transliterations from the indigenous language. The pluralizing of 'blood' in (v) is peculiar. However, the item can occur in a plural environment in indigenous languages like Yoruba (e.g. in a blood bank: *ta lo ko awọn* ẹjẹ yi wa* "who brought these* blood?"), where the item *awọn is* a plural pronoun form. Such possibilities may confuse a linguistic precariat into pluralizing 'blood' in English.

These examples indicate linguistic precarity crossing social margins, indicating the marginalization of the otherwise non-marginal. Okon (2014: 93-95) noted how the viral grammatical blunders of First Lady Dame Jonathan had become a source of public ridicule, so much so that she (Okon) would even prescribe the censoring of such materials. Many other celebrities had come under similar opprobrium (Oloruntoba-Oju 2007; 2015: 23).

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This article brought together several strands of research and data to establish a clear nexus between multilingualism, language policy, and linguistic precarity in Nigeria. It also establishes a link between linguistic precarity and socio-economic precarity and marginality, as well as socio-psycological precarity. The precariati are confronted with a constant dilemma; they cannot use English effectively, yet they cannot escape using it, since successive governmental policies from colonial to postcolonial times have continually tethered survival, and any profitable sociality, to a command of 'alien' tongues, thereby creating scales of expectation that are incompatible with the sociolinguistic reality of most Nigerians.

While some forms of linguistic precarity can be accounted for by a theory of errors, most of the errors cannot be accounted for outside the context of an obstructive multilingualism, ineffectual language policy, and social marginality. Multilingualism in Africa is generally rigged against indigenous languages, through policies that maintain the diglossic prominence and dominance of colonial languages. – this in addition to the inherent potential of multilingualism to generate confusion in the language acquisition process, thereby catalysing linguistic marginality and precarity.

Evidence from different domains and across social cadres shows that linguistic precarity sometimes transcends social hierarchy, as many highly placed persons are constantly subjected to ridicule on account of linguistic disability vis-á-vis the dominant colonial language. The range of the foregoing survey coincides with the size of the problem. African postcoloniality must therefore re-energise response to the colonial legacy of linguistic precarity and the marginality of the citizenry; governmental policy should review the management of the resources of language; policy should pay attention to language acquisition processes and create an environment to enhance comprehensible input and an optimal acquisition of languages. Linguistic rights, including the right to use one's language freely and without recrimination in its native environment, are fundamental rights. How to reinvest African indigenous languages with appropriate functional and prestige values within the context of multilingualism should concern scholars and policy makers alike.

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ENDNOTES

1 The "compound" bilingual acquired the languages at the same time, the "coordinate" bilingual at different times and in different contexts, and the "sub-coordinate"/"subordinate" in sequential stages. In the latter case, one language becomes dominant and acts as the "filter' (Weinreich 1963: 1).

2 Ferguson (1959) explained diglossia as a "highly codified (often grammatically more complex) superposed variety', and Fishman (1967) included another language as the dominant or "high" language.

3 In this regard, "multi-competence" comes quite close to the cognate concept of 'translanguaging'.

4 Multi-competence resonates with the ESP trajectory, in its appreciation of purposes, functions, or needs. Cook (2009) draws a paradigm of communicative purposes (as 'functions'; e.g., 'people using an L2 globally for a wide range of functions', 'people using an L2 internationally for specific functions', etc.

5 Massachusetts Institute of Technology (2004) notes: "Low family income cannot directly cause the depressed language skills associated with poverty, but must operate via mediators…, such as the opportunity for one-to-one contact with an adult and the language use of parents and classroom teachers" (371).

6 Of particular note are studies in contrastive analysis and language interference (Lado 1957; Weinreich 1963), obstruction and negative transfer (Krashen 1981; Krashen and Tracy 1983), and interlanguage (Corder 1981; Selinker 1992).

7 Multilingualism was pre-colonial and non-coercive. Bamgbose (1998) noted that inter-border trade dynamics in Africa involved a mutual acquisition of languages. Indeed, the emergence of a standard dialect or lingua franca could always derive from non-coercive sources, such as literature and learning; for example, Yoruba and Igbo in Nigeria acquired standard varieties due to the translation efforts of Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther.

8 Due to China's recent emergence on the world stage. Mandarin was adopted in 2013 in Lagos State, Nigeria, However,

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fears have been expressed that this may again pose neo-colonial threats to the indigenous language, culture and the state's economic and technological interests (see Adeshokan 2018).

9 A Nigeria Examinations Committee (NEC)'s meeting of the West African Examinations Council (WAEC), in 2013, revealed the candidates' weaknesses as: 'shallow knowledge of the subject matter, poor command of English, poor knowledge of examination techniques, as well as disregard for correct interpretation of questions [also a language problem]' (National Mirror 2013). Counter measures recommended 'include: 'having a good understanding of each question, learning the basic rudiments of English language for better and clearer presentation of their answers …'

10 The problem of communicative incompetence in English in Nigeria is also attributed to lack of relevant or adequate instructional materials (Taiwo 1976); poor equipment (infrastructure) (Bamisaye 1993); lack of student motivation (Adepoju 2008), inadequate exposure, teacher incompetence, unsuitable learning environment (Banjo 1996; Olaitan 1983), mother tongue interference (Aladejana and Odejobi 1999), variety under-differentiation (Oyeleye 1985), lack of comprehensible input (Oloruntoba-Oju 1994; 2015), family background and socio-economics

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