

# **Language Prestige, Human Dignity and Humiliation of Indigenous Peoples of Nigeria: Historical and Current Issues.**

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## **Abstract**

Spoken language has been identified as a unique characteristic of the human species. Many peoples are identified by their language and bear the 'prestige' associated with it. Over time, conquering/colonizing people force their language on the conquered/colonized people resulting in many sociological, economic and psychological imbalances between the conquered/colonized and their conquerors/colonizers. This paper therefore sets out to study the history of spoken language in Nigeria from pre-colonial, colonial, post-colonial and the current language situation in Nigeria. The area of study is the geographical location known as Nigeria while one out of the six geopolitical zones namely; south east Nigeria comprising of five core Igbo speaking states of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo states is sampled. The survey research method is used and the instruments of library, internet, social media and structured personal interviews are used to source the data. In the findings, the pre-colonial Nigeria spoke mainly the indigenous languages except in few communities in the north where Islamic Jihadists had conquered some cities and forced Arabic language to be spoken to some extent in those cities. Also in south west, a mixture of Spanish/ English pidgin was spoken minimally by traders and a few who had embraced Christianity towards the end of the pre-colonial era. During the colonial era, English was forced on Nigeria as the official and media language and the medium of instruction in educational institutions from primary to tertiary levels. The situation was sustained in the post-colonial era during which period the effects of the language policy has began to take roots. People began to embrace the English language and abandon their indigenous languages to the extent that today these languages are in different stages of decline with many extinct or at the verge of it. Many other developed nations have also began to cash in on the situation of apathy on the part of Nigerians towards their indigenous languages by offering juicy scholarship programmes to Nigerian to study their languages. To worsen the situation, currently there is widespread accusation against the Federal Government of Nigeria for sponsoring a Jihadist movement in Nigeria geared towards the forceful Islamization of the country. The allegation claims that the recent directive by the newly established Islamic Ministry to float an Arabic language course as a General Studies course in all tertiary institutions in Nigeria as one of the moves geared towards the achievement of their Islamic agenda. If this is implemented, it would further deepen the level of humiliation of the already subjugated indigenous peoples of Nigeria.

This paper therefore concludes that over time language has been and is still being used as a tool of humiliation and subjugation of different ethnic groups in Nigeria.