



Research Paper

Language, Social Mobilization and Political Participation: A Qualitative Study

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ABSTRACT: This paper conducted a qualitative study of the relationship among language, social mobilization and political participation in a polity. It considered the role of language in social mobilization and examined how the language factor hindered or smoothed political participation in the study. The specific objectives of the work were to study the relationship among language, social mobilization, and political participation, interrogate the role of language in social mobilization and verify how the language of social mobilization impeded or facilitated political participation. The paper's analyses were framed on the Nigerian nation state, with structural functionalism as theoretical framework of the contribution.

KEYWORDS: Language, Social Mobilization, Political Participation, Language of Social Mobilization

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I. INTRODUCTION

What role does language play in social mobilization? How does the language factor hinder or smooth, political participation? These are the essential research questions of this paper. In the work, language is a system of conventional spoken, manual (signed) or written symbols by means of which human beings, as members of a social group and participants in the culture of the group, express themselves. Functions of language accordingly include communication, imaginative expression, play, emotional release, and the expression of identity [1]. Language is primarily a means of communication, and communication almost always takes place within some sort of social context and therefore the effective communication requires an understanding and recognition of the connections between a language and the people who use it [2]. The general objective of the study therefore is to examine the issue of language, social mobilization, and political participation. The specific objectives are to (i) study the relationship among language, social mobilization, and political participation (ii) interrogate the role of language in social mobilization (iii) verify how the language of social mobilization impedes or facilitates political participation. The paper's analyses are framed on the Nigerian nation state, with the contribution's theoretical framework fitted on structural functionalism.

1.1 WHAT IS SOCIAL MOBILIZATION?

[3] argues that social mobilization (seemingly an everyday terminology) is definable by nearly everyone but highly unwieldy to conceptualize. The politician, revolutionary activist, human rights advocate, the musician, community health activist, and so forth, therefore, perceive social mobilization as an imperative of their diverse occupations. [4] in [3] describes social mobilization as "that process of engaging a wide range of traditional, community, civil society, and opinion leaders around a common purpose, as it reaches out to non-governmental organizations, professional groups/networks, youth groups, women's groups, community-based organizations, faith-based organizations, professional networks and the private sector, to catalyze these different groups to action and/or support change as a common cause".

[4] referred to social mobilization as “a generic process of change, which occurs to significant parts of the population in nations which are transiting from traditional to new ways of life”. He suggested that social mobilization is a peculiarity of needy nations, grappling with the challenges of modernization. [5] seems to agree with [4] in attempting to establish linkages between social mobilization and the criticality of national development in needy nations. But social mobilization is not a new phenomenon as it has existed since the 19th century, under the broad nomenclature of “civil rights movements” in the USA, Latin America and some African countries. The fundamental tenets of these movements were aimed at claiming a space and articulating voice and citizens’ role in the development of their societies [6].

Social mobilization is definable simply as a means of inspiring people to action and engagement, concerning social issues. The key for mobilization in these regards is “to inspire and motivate individuals, to go from the comfort of their homes to engage in development actions” [6]. Furthermore, some scholars see social mobilization “as one particular dimension of political participation, outside the institutional and regular political participation, by voting and militancy, relying on the autonomy of individuals” [7]. But this definition is highly contentious, as it subsumes social mobilization into political participation (not even political mobilization).

What then is the relationship between political mobilization (for political participation) and social mobilization? [3] posits that political mobilization is a sub-set of social mobilization and its effective type (that is, political mobilization) is targeted at only the germane members of a community. According to [3]:

It would for instance, be defective or even futile to “politically mobilize” the citizens of non-voting age in a state (at the time of general elections), as such juvenile denizens may although, attend political rallies, even as miscreants in politically volatile environments. They may even illegitimately engage in social media exchange of political abuses. But the processes that lead to their dispensable presences are not profoundly describable as political mobilization, which refers essentially to the process of engaging and sustaining the interests of the relevant citizens of a state in political affairs.

[3] further asserts that “these pertinent nationals may be registered voters or even their counterparts of voting age who are not yet registered for such purposes”. Furthermore, political mobilization may entail the encouraging of adult citizens to enlist as members of subsisting political parties in a given nation-state and may suggest also the process of legitimately engaging the interests of sundry organizations and corporate bodies of a state in political matters.

From a revolutionary trajectory, [8] in [3] suggests that the objective of political mobilization is “to transform the masses into an unstoppable weapon, as it corrects the problem of a neutral population, pushing the masses from a state of neutrality to a state of revolution”. Political mobilization is therefore highly prone to contentious (even combative) considerations. But political and social mobilizations are interrelated. Despite the linkages, social mobilization is more all-embracing in its nuances and the conceptual intentions are less disputative. Fundamentally, “social mobilization is the compelling galvanization of the masses, into undeviating patriotism and refers to the process of enlisting the services of most citizens in matters of the state” [3, p. 30]

1.2 CONCEPTUALIZING POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Political participation is the involvement of the citizens in the political system. It is the process through which the individual plays a role in the political life of his society and has the opportunity to take part in deciding what constitutes the common goals of the society and the best ways of achieving them. Political participation is an aspect of political behaviour and focuses on the ways in which individuals take part in politics. It is a voluntary activity, whereby participation may be direct or indirect. The essence of political participation in any society is either to seek / acquire power or to influence decision making. It is additionally a means of contributing ones quota to the political system and the overall development of one’s nation [9, 10, 11]. Political participation accordingly deals with the realistic extant level of popular engagement in the processes of politics in a state [12]. [11] opines that “some of the factors which determine political participation are: cultural, economic, political, religious and educational backgrounds of individuals and the level of political awareness, as well as the measure of confidence in the political process, which determines the extent to which the citizens participate in the political system”. [13] in [10] perceives political participation as “freedom of expression, association, right to free flow of communication, right to influence the decision-making process and the right to social justice, health services, better working condition and the opportunity for franchise”.

According to [14] “political participation spices up democratic societies and encompasses a wide range of political activities which include voting at elections, contesting elective posts, belonging to a political party, and many more”. [17] assert:

Political participation in a democracy can take many forms, ranging from voting for representatives at regular intervals to voting on policies in referenda, forming political groups, and engaging in legal or illegal protest. The individuals engaged in such participation likely expect, or at least hope that these actions will have some impact on the content of government policies. However, the effects of political participation might not be limited to outcomes. Political participation might also affect individual life satisfaction and happiness.

Political participation refers to the activities of the masses in politics, with regards to voting in elections, helping in a political campaign by giving money to a candidate or cause, petitioning, boycotting, demonstrating, writing or calling officials, and working with other people on these issues. Political participation provides the means for citizens to communicate their views in a democracy or representative government [16].

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

[13] studied political participation in Nigerian democracy by focusing on some selected local government areas in the country's Ondo State. He examined the extent to which the citizens were involved in political activities. The study adopted both qualitative and quantitative means of data collection and found that 57% of the participants were not actively involved in political activities. Also, there was the gender factor on political participation as 30% and 13% of males and females respectively were involved in political activities. Also, 38% and 12% of males and females respectively were regularly involved in voting exercise. This study recommended the adoption of formal and informal approaches to political education in Nigeria.

[10] researched Women and Political Participation in Nigeria. They perceived the low level of political participation of women in the country as alarming and disturbing, as this hampered women from contributing their quota to the development of Nigeria. The aim of their study, therefore, was to find out the specific factors responsible for the low level of political participation of women. They found that the major inhibiting factors were sedentary in nature rather than the issue of money politics, violence, etc., which were considered by women respondents as secondary. In elucidating the sedentary findings, [10] highlighted that a lot of their female respondents believed that politics would prevent them from taking absolute care of their families. [14] focused on Indices of Access to Information in Nigerian Public Libraries and Citizens' Political Participation and concluded that libraries have been found to be impactful of societies in many ways, such as being agents of information, education, and culture and the more enlightened and informed the citizens were, the more they would engage in political [10] participation. [15] argue that full and equal participation of both women and men in political decision-making provide balance that more accurately reflects the composition of society and may as such enhance the legitimacy of political processes by making them more democratic and responsive to the concerns and perspectives of all segments of society.

In [19] theoretical literatures on procedural utility and the psychological benefits of political participation, suggested that people who participate in political activities will be more satisfied with their lives because of the resulting feelings of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Then individual-level data from Latin America showed in one dataset under study but not in another, a positive and statistically significant relationship between voting and life satisfaction. Variation in desire to vote as measured in Costa Rica, however, suggested that the causal arrow may run from happiness to voting. The use of multilevel models further revealed a consistent but untheorized cross-country negative relationship between enforced compulsory voting and happiness. Only preliminary results were found regarding the relationship between some other forms of political participation and life satisfaction.

Has the study of political participation become the study of everything? [19] opines as follows:

The rapid expansion of the study of political participation in the last fifty years reflects the crucial significance of citizens' involvement for democratic decision-making... The combined increase in both the repertoire and the domain of political participation implies that these activities affect virtually all aspects of social life in advanced societies. In other words, the study of political participation has become the study of everything.

[19] has presented a truly interesting argument. Remarkably again, his positions were anchored on aspects of life in the advanced societies. The study of political participation may therefore mean the study of everything in pejorative ways in such societies. But under the settings of the emerging societies, studying political participation can still imply the interrogation of some distressing specificities, such as in the relationship between gender and political participation. Even in the Western industrialized democracies [21] still finds a persistent gender gap in citizens' political participation, with women less politically engaged than men.

2.1 LANGUAGE AND SOCIAL MOBILIZATION

[16] have studied modern theories of language and arrived at the conclusion that such theories attempt to understand how language use arises from domain-general, embodied learning and processing mechanisms operating in service of communication that takes place in richly structured social environments. Consequently, they highlighted that research has begun to move away from the study of language as the behavior of individuals, to consider how it arises as a cooperative enterprise within social groups ranging in size from dyads to global communities. The current contribution focuses on the gender-dyad, and the Nigerian national community, classifiable as richly socially structured. [2] add that “each community, just like each individual, has its own language that expresses the ideas, values, and attitudes of its members. Hence, a particular group of language users who share the use of a specific language adapted to fit their needs is called a language community. These language communities may be created by interests, say a sports team or a school club one belongs to, or by age group, by gender and so on”. The inclusion of gender among the interests that may lead to the creation of distinctive language communities is underscored in the expositions of [2]

In [17] “mobilization involves using good communication strategies in appealing to people in a convincing manner, to adopt particular patterns of desirable behavior. It implies getting together for service and then achieving a goal, through a properly articulated group action. It is, accordingly, a comprehensive approach to the unification of the people of a given community in pursuit of common goals”. In social mobilization therefore, the boundaries of sex, religion, gender, color, class, race, ethnicity, and related classifications are completely disregarded. The essential purpose of social mobilization is the unification of a people, under a common agenda [3] [18] posit that “social mobilization has been related to political conflicts in various (and often contradictory ways). Consequently, while much of early literature viewed social mobilization as a prerequisite to political “development”, it is also possible for social mobilization to lead to political ‘disintegration’”. Thus, [19], relative to the declines in South Africa’s evolving political culture and the country’s African National Congress (ANC), refers to “the increased social mobilization of disgruntled citizens, who rely on a discourse of violence, rather than articulating grievances, through political structures”. This notion of mobilizing disgruntled citizens therefore suggests that both dissatisfied (disgruntled) and contented nationals are subject to mobilization [3].

[19] researched identity, social mobility, and ethnic mobilization, with emphasis on language and the disintegration of the Soviet Union. The work was built on the premise that the disintegration of the Soviet Union was an essential case for the study of ethnic politics and identity-based mobilization. However, analyses in the paper demonstrated that commonly used measures of ethnic diversity and politically relevant-group concentration showed little consistent relationship with events of ethnic mobilization in Soviet regions during the period 1987-1992. In contrast, the proportion of a regional population that did not speak a metropolitan language had a consistently strong negative relationship with mobilization across these regions. In line with recent work on identity politics, the researcher argued that a lack of proficiency in a metropolitan language marked non-speakers as outsiders and hindered their social mobility. Regions with many of these individuals thus had a relatively high potential for identity-based mobilization. These findings thus provide further impetus for looking beyond ethnic groups in measuring identity-based cleavages and indicate that language can play an important role in political outcomes aside from proxying ethnicity [19].

It is also usually taken for granted that language possesses unifying undertones in intra-ethnic relations. But findings of [20] indicate that intrastate conflict is more likely within linguistic dyads than among religious ones. The work was hinged on the hypothesis that political violence was more likely to occur along religious divisions than linguistic ones. The researchers challenged this claim by analyzing the path from linguistic differences to ethnic civil war along three theoretical steps: (1) the perception of grievances by group members, (2) rebel mobilization, and (3) government accommodation of rebel demands. Testing their arguments with a new data set of ethnic cleavages that recorded multiple linguistic and religious segments for ethnic groups from 1946 to 2009 and adopting a relational perspective, they assessed ethnic differences between potential challengers and the politically dominant group in each country. They found that intrastate conflict was more likely within linguistic dyads. The authors of the paper however remarked that while their empirical results corroborated the link between linguistic cleavages and ethnic civil war, future research needs to examine the individual mechanisms of the researcher’s theoretical framework more closely.

The contribution of Eke (2019) was on English language and national development. The primary objective of the study was to examine the role of English language in socio-political development in Nigeria. Findings of the paper indicate that English language has given a boost and access to even-socio-political development in Nigeria, particularly in the Akwa Ibom state area of the country. These findings have bearing with the language and social mobilization variables of the current study. However, the review of related literature still showed research gaps in the role of language in social mobilization, as this pertains to gender and political participation. In attempting to fill the attendant research gap, this study then set out to interrogate the

role of language in social mobilization and how the language factor debar or facilitates political participation for the gender divides in Nigeria.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The paper's theoretical framework is structural functionalism, also easily called functionalism and closely associated with the work of Talcott Parsons [23]. Emile Durkheim, Herbert Spencer, and Robert K. Merton were the other theorists also linked with the development of structural functionalism (Crossman, 2020). Parsons has however written more than 150 articles and books on functionalism. He addresses in these works how individuals become members of a given society to guarantee the survival and stability of the social system. Parsons sees society as a global social system based on an integrated value system. The individual person then participates in the social system by interacting with other members in line with the various roles and positions the individual holds in that system [23].

Functionalism holds that society is more than the sum of its parts, as each aspect of it works for the system's stability. It emphasizes consensus and order, social stability, and shared public values in the society. From this theoretical perspective, dysfunctionality in the system leads to change because societal components must adjust to achieve stability. Hence, when one part of the system is dysfunctional, it affects all the other parts, creating social problems, and prompting social change (Crossman, 2020). Functionalism is however criticized for ignoring the negative implications of social order, as the perspective justifies the status quo and the process of cultural domination that maintains it. It accordingly does not encourage people to take an active role in changing their social environment, even when doing so may benefit them. Structural functionalism's critics accuse the perspective of seeing the agitation for social change as undesirable because the various parts of society will compensate in a seemingly organic way for any problems that may arise [21].

Therefore, in the application of structural functionalism to this paper, the thesis is that when one part of the societal system is dysfunctional, it affects all the other parts. This is applicable even in the relationships among language, social mobilization, and political participation.

3.1 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURE

Six focus group interviews were conducted for the study, at different intervals in the six different rural communities of Ukpok, Ogwashi Ukwu, Ihiala, Okija, Ihembosi and Nsukka, in Southern Nigeria. The focus groups consisted each time of 6-8 gender-unbiased residents of the communities. The research procedure followed a relatively unstructured interview guide, which contained six major questions / themes (created with inbuilt flexibility) aimed at covering the research agenda and still allowing related topics to emerge during the focus group sessions. Each of the meetings was moderated by one of the researchers as principal moderator, with a research assistant drawn from the host community as co-moderator. It was ensured that all the group members spoke and made contributions at the meetings and the syntheses of their viewpoints recorded. The researcher / moderator(s) primarily facilitated the discussions, as opposed to directing it, and the participants were encouraged to talk to each other, as different from responding to the researcher's questions. The interview guide was tested on a pilot group of six lecturers at Madonna University, Okija, Nigeria.

IV. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Findings of the study are in this subsection of the work presented in a tabula form, built side by side the focus group questions.

S/N	INTERVIEW GUIDE	RESPONSE SYNTHESIS
1	What is the predominant language of politicians during electioneering campaign visits to your community? Is it vernacular or a foreign language? Why do you think they use the language choice?	Predominantly English. Attempts to communicate in vernacular usually fail them, and they revert to English. They are already disconnected from the community. They can no longer speak our language as our leaders.
2	Among English language, "Pigeon English" and vernacular, which would you recommend as language of communication for Nigerian politicians. Give reasons for your recommendation.	The language of service and the language of money. Whatever language they speak, let them "see us", we vote for them. They don't do anything with the votes we cast for them. Let them speak the language of service or the language of money to us. It is their choice.
3	Do you consider the usual language of the politicians, elitist, until they share money?	They usually speak to themselves. They entertain themselves. They usually make fake promises.
4	Between the male and female candidates, who usually attempts more to communicate in vernacular on such occasions? Why do you think so? Any surrounding stories you may want to share with this group?	They are the same. But the men are somehow usually better. The men in any case also share more money on such occasions.
5	Between the member of a popular political party who communicates poorly in vernacular and the member of a comparatively unpopular party who communicates flawlessly in vernacular, who is more likely to make you go and cast your vote on election day. May we know your reasons?	The later, anyway. But it actually depends on who "performs more" before the voting. They are not trustworthy all of them.
6	There seems to be increasing voter apathy in the country. If it were possible for all the candidates at the local level to be speaking to their constituents and the potential voters in flawless vernacular would that lead to decline in voter apathy? Share with group members any recollections on such flawless speakers of the local dialect either currently or in the past.	In the country's First Republic, very popular candidates and leaders communicated in flawless vernacular at the local level. They also used flawless English when their audience was mixed.

The study's findings are further itemized as follows:

- English is the predominant language of social mobilization and political participation in Nigerian local communities.
- Social mobilization and political participation understand the language of money in Nigerian local communities.
- Fake promises of politicians on electioneering campaign trails negate hopes on social mobilization and political participation in the country
- Male candidates on electioneering campaign trails in Nigeria attempt more to communicate in vernacular than their female counterparts.
- Interest in vote buying and selling is not gender biased in the country
- Flawless deployment of language (vernacular / English) enhances the prospects of social mobilization and political participation.

4.1 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

A. English as the Predominant Language of Social Mobilization and Political Participation in Nigerian Local Communities.

The implication of this finding is a disarticulation among language of social mobilization and political participation in Nigerian local communities. [22] underscore the crucial role of local languages in facilitating community participation in socio-economic development. Local languages invariably facilitate political participation which has linkages with socio-economic development. [23] argues that the dominance of an exogenous language (that is, English) over other numerous indigenous languages may portend grave implications for Nigeria's democracy. In other words, such a scenario is capable of stunting political participation. Findings of this research on this score agree with the earlier contributions of [22] and [23]. Moreover, Nigerian women have always been disadvantaged in political participation in the country [23, 24, 25, 26]. The language factor, particularly in the local community settings of our focus group work worsens these disadvantages. Such continuing gender disadvantages in the country possess the implications of structural-functional disequilibria in the nation.

B. Language of Money in Social Mobilization and Political Participation in Nigerian Local Communities

A central feature of focus groups is that they provide researchers with direct access to the language and concepts participants use to structure their experiences and to think and talk about a designated topic [31]. And so, the focus group participants of this work provided the euphemism of “language of money” as pun to the study’s “language” variable. The language of money alludes to the issue of corruption in Nigerian politics, particularly its vote buying dimensions [27] [28] [29] [30]. The language of money as concept and practice, social mobilization and political participation are disarticulated. They have very negative linkages and when women express preference for hearing the language of money in a political system, otherwise thought to have been a male tendency, the attendant possibilities present worrisome conjectures. It is a structurally damaging methodology of seeking gender parity in political participation.

C. The Negation of Hopes on Social Mobilization and Political Participation by Fake Promises of Politicians on Electioneering Campaign Trails

Besides the euphemistic language of money in these discourses, there is also the language of fake promises as spoken by the country’s political actors. Implicit in the focus group discussions were the linkages between the language of fake promises and the language of money. The politicians who make the bogus promises are still the ones that engage in vote buying and vote sellers have fallen for the bait of the politicians in attempting to obtain materially, whatever they could from the political storytellers. Fake promises made by politicians on electioneering campaign trails in the country have accordingly continued to negate hopes on possible positive linkages between social mobilization and political participation. The structural-functional disparities in the country, inclusive of gender disparities thus continue to exist.

D. Male Candidates on Electioneering Campaign Trails in Nigeria Attempt to Communicate in Vernacular More Than Their Female Counterparts

The male candidates are comparatively experienced. They know the importance of vernacular communication on such occasions. Citing [31], [32] asserts that political interaction requires language structures, and linguistic behaviour, necessarily involves structures of domination and legitimation. While the female candidates in their inexperience may stop peripherally at the possibilities of social mobilization for victory at the elections, the male candidates are further engaged in linguistic behaviour involving structures of domination and legitimation. But findings of the study also suggest that the male candidates engage more in vote buying than their female counterparts. Invariably, the male candidates engage more in behaviours, involving structures of dominion, necessary for the legitimation of their existing gender superiority. Language is accordingly used in the democratic process to elicit the people’s support, woo them, and control the minds of the people, with the goal of gaining, controlling and retaining political power [32]. Findings of the study on more male tendencies in vernacular usage again support some earlier suppositions of [32]. The challenge for female candidates is to enhance the level of their focus on language as tool of social mobilization towards strategic political participation and systemic structural balances.

E. Absence of Gender Bias in Vote Buying and Selling

Findings of the study have earlier indicated that in attempts at social mobilization for election purposes, men engaged more in vote buying than their female counterparts. The counterpoise of vote buying is vote selling. The study’s all-female focus group participants did not indicate a disdain for vote selling. Vote buying and selling in the local communities of Nigeria are accordingly devoid of gender bias. The language of who “performs more”, as a condition for voting for a candidate, irrespective of his/her level of popularity or proficiency in the usage of vernacular for social mobilization, is illustrative of this lack of gender bias. The focus group participants who vouchsafed these viewpoints were homogenously female. It appears as if the commoner phenomenon researched by scholars is vote buying. But following [42], this contribution highlights that vote buying has its counterweight in vote selling. Citing [34] [42] posits that the negative consequences of vote-selling are not apparent because they attack the heart of democratic governance and unnoticeably erode its essence. But this paper posits that vote selling leads to apparent dysfuntionalities in a political system.

F. Flawless Deployment of Language (Vernacular/English) Enhancing the Prospects of Social Mobilization and Political Participation

Findings of this contribution then suggest that the role of language in social mobilization borders on the flawlessness of the language in use. The focus group submissions indicate that in Nigeria’s First Republic (1963-1966), very popular candidates and leaders communicated in flawless vernacular at the local level, and they also used flawless English when their audience was mixed. It may be contentious to out-rightly claim that the Nigerian political leaders of this period were highly effective in social mobilization. What may not be in contention however, is that the political actors of the period (across gender divides) were consummate users of

vernacular and the English language (as the need arose) in their social mobilization for political participation. The ultimate challenge in these regards is for political actors to aim at flawlessness in their language use in social mobilization. This contribution accordingly recommends for the case study state and comparable others, where there are disarticulations among the study's variables, the integration of a language paradigm into the national social mobilization agenda.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The authors recommend that the same research theme be replicated under similar focus group methodologies in the different geopolitical regions of the country, to retest the research results on wider/national applicability.

5.1 CONCLUSION

This paper studied the relationship among language, social mobilization, and political participation. It interrogated the role of language in social mobilization and verified how the language of social mobilization impeded or facilitated political participation. The study found that the language factor smoothened the path of social mobilization for political participation in the case of the male divide in the case study country but hindered this same route for the female opposite. But the relevant language is critical to social mobilization. It is hoped by the researchers that the participants in the focus groups of the study would by their involvements in the research process engage more in political participation in their local communities. It is further expected that the multiplier effects of their focus group involvement in this research undertaken would lead to a better appreciation of the role of language in the social mobilization and political participation nexus in Nigeria.

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