



## Implicit Radio Language Policy in Bond FM and Voice of Nigeria

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### **Abstract**

This study explores the implicit radio language policy in Nigeria, with a specific focus on Bond FM and Voice of Nigeria, against the backdrop of multilingual broadcasting in the absence of explicit legal provisions. Despite the lack of regulatory frameworks, these stations have consistently broadcast in multiple languages for over three decades, demonstrating their commitment to multilingual programming. This research aims to contribute to the understanding of language policy in Nigerian broadcast media, a topic that has received limited attention. Data collected through informal interviews and personal observation reveal that monolingual, bilingual, and multilingual language policies are in practice in Nigeria. Notably, Bond FM and Voice of Nigeria have established a stable and equitable implicit multilingual language policy. The study highlights the similarities, differences, and sustainability strategies employed by these stations, as well as the challenges they face in their multilingual language practice. The language used in these stations reflects an attempt to align with national legislation and promote linguistic diversity in radio broadcasting.

**Keywords:** Language Policy, Radio, Multilingualism, Bond FM, Voice of Nigeria.

### **Introduction**

Language policy is a language practice, beliefs and management decisions of a community or polity (Bernard 2004:9). It can be practised in any domain. According to Bernard (2004), language policy refers to the regular process and habitual practice of choosing from the range of language varieties that make up the linguistic repertoire. Language policy represents a set of beliefs about language usage, accompanied by deliberate attempts to influence and shape language practices through strategic planning and management. This aspect of the study has not been investigated in a

Nigerian government-owned radio station which Bond FM and Voice of Nigeria represent. The linguistics situation in Bond FM and Voice of Nigeria is very interesting. The two stations have been broadcasting in various languages for over thirty years, with a wide coverage of various impactful programmes in Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba languages, featuring commentaries, news bulletins, press reviews, news reports, articles, etc (Ndukwe 2012, Okudo and Ifeagwazi 2014). Voice of Nigeria employs other languages such as Ki-Swahili, Arabic, French, English and Fulfude. This is at the heart of what is considered the implicit multilingual language policy in these two stations. Language policy relates to the role and status of language in a multilingual situation, as well as corpus and acquisition planning (Obukadeta 2019). Nigeria has about 540 indigenous languages with English as the official language, and Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba as the major indigenous languages while other languages are classified as minority languages (Obiorah 2021). The Nigerian linguistic situation is also reflected in the legislations that affect language use in the media in Nigeria. Some of these legislations are the Nigeria 1999 constitution as amended, the National Broadcasting Code (NBC) 2014, the National Language Policy 2023, and the Freedom of Information Act 2011.

The 1999 Nigeria constitution provides in section 39(1) as follows: ‘Every person shall be entitled to freedom of expression, including the freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart ideas and information without interference’. Nigerian 1999 constitution recognises English, Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba, but acknowledges other Nigerian languages. Freedom of Information Act 2011 also grants all Nigerian citizens, the freedom to access information in any Nigerian language but is silent on how and when that will be possible.

For the Nigerian Broadcasting Code (2014:29) ‘a community broadcast service shall give prominence to the languages spoken within the community’ indicating that, broadcasting shall be done in English and Nigerian languages (especially the language of the immediate environment) but this does not necessarily pose any obligation on the language of broadcasting in public and private stations. These two tiers of broadcasting appear to be at liberty to choose whatever language they consider suitable



for their audience. The new Nigerian National Language Policy (2023) which is a principled document of the Federal Government of Nigeria, with a statutory flavour, guides the official use of different languages in Nigeria (Mba 2012). The provisions made by the Nigerian National Language Policy (2023:25) on media, that relate to radio broadcasting, admonished that concerted efforts should be made to ensure the effective utilisation of Nigerian languages in the conventional broadcast. It went on to say in article 8 that “broadcast media organisations shall ensure that not less than 60% of their programmes are carried out in the Nigerian languages commonly used in the communities where they are domiciled. From these national laws, it is obvious that there is an implicit provision for the use of any Nigerian language, especially languages in the immediate environment of the media station. However, these regulations do not mandate stations on the number of languages to use in their broadcast stations. The key factor in a broadcast station's success is having a sound language policy that fosters clear communication and language quality.

Currently, the English language is used in all broadcasting platforms in Nigeria. Nigerian Pidgin is also used in radio programmes involving sports, entertainment and call-in programmes. However, the time allotted to English in most radio stations in Nigeria cannot be compared with other languages. English is usually given more time. This is because English has been domesticated and made an official language in Nigeria. Other foreign languages like French, German, Russian and Chinese which are degree courses in Nigerian universities do not feature in Nigerian radio like English, due to a lack of broadcasters who are competent speakers, and audience factors, to some extent. Major Nigerian languages such as Igbo, Hausa, Yoruba and Fulfulde have a common appearance in Nigerian radio especially in state-owned radio stations where these languages are the language of the immediate environment. There are other smaller media size Nigerian languages like Edo, Ibaji, Igala, Egun, Isoko Epira, Okun, Bassa Nge, and Bassa Kwomu which are also used in radio broadcasts in some state radio stations (Obukadeta 2019). Based on the dearth of research on language policy in Nigerian Radio, this study intends to study multilingual language policy in Nigerian radio stations with explicit reference to Voice of Nigeria and Bond FM. The reason for studying this policy in two radio

stations is because both stations broadcast in various languages, and allot what this study considers as ‘reasonable time’ to the languages when compared with other radio stations.

## **1.2 Language Policy in Broadcast Stations**

Language policy is a body of rules that guide language use and practice in a particular domain in order to solve and achieve linguistic aims (McCarty 2011). It exists in every radio station even when it has not been made explicit. Many scholars have initiated a discussion on language policy in various broadcast stations. For example, Obukadeta (2019) examined language policy and planning in the broadcast media of a multilingual context focusing on Kogi state, Nigeria. Relying on the assumptions of the grounded theory method, the study argues that implicit media language policy exists in the state. According to Obukadeta (2019), there are different languages that are assigned different functions in the station. As usual, English was allocated more time in the station’s programmes, followed by the major Nigerian languages, and then followed by the minor ones. In Mpofu et al., (2019), the authors studied the structure of the multilingual broadcasting policy in Zimbabwe’s Broadcasting Service Act 2007 and its subsequent implementation at the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation with a focus on the treatment of indigenous languages. The findings reveal that the implementation of the Act is constrained politically, economically and sociolinguistically.

The study by Nwaneri (2014) investigated the various linguistic and mass communication issues, as well as the problems encountered in the multilingual situation in South Africa using the South African Broadcasting Corporation as a case study. The study documented the reactions of the audience and the challenges associated with daily news broadcasts and entertainment in the eleven official languages in South Africa. The study’s findings indicate that viewers’ programme preferences are influenced by the language of the broadcast, with English emerging as the predominant language used by the station. Nevertheless, the station successfully catered to the diverse linguistic needs of its audience in the region. In the study conducted by Evans (2011), the author examined the attitudes of viewers towards South African Broadcasting Corporation language policies and the



factors that influenced such attitudes. The attitudes of the audience were reported to be complex in the sense that first-language English speakers were neutral to the language policy of the corporation while first-language isiZulu speakers were more loyal to isiZulu and other African languages.

Language policy is very important in broadcasting in Africa. Wherever a language policy is initiated and well-managed, the result is always positive. This is evident from Schwyter (2008), who discussed the radio language policy of the British Broadcasting Corporation and developed a radio language policy aimed at promoting and maintaining the standard variety of English, specifically Received Pronunciation (RP). Similar to the government radio station in this study, the BBC, as a government-affiliated news agency, institutionalized the standardization of RP. To achieve this, the BBC established an Advisory Committee on Spoken English, comprising language experts from diverse backgrounds, to guide its media language policy. The advisory committee worked with the station's research unit that concentrated on consistent and accurate pronunciation. The work of this committee affected the development of the British Broadcasting Corporation's spoken English at the level of uniformity and standardization. Unfortunately, most radio houses in Nigeria lack standard radio language policy and competent hands to facilitate their language policy. The British Broadcasting Corporation's language committee comprised a diverse range of linguistic experts, including:

Dr. Robert Bridges, an American literary scholar and essayist

Logan Pearsall Smith, a renowned literary figure

G. Bernard Shaw, a celebrated Irish playwright, critic, and polemicist

Daniel Jones, an academic at University College London and author of the English Pronouncing Dictionary

Sir Johnston Forbes-Robertson, a distinguished actor

A. Arthur Lloyd James, a phonetician at a university

This committee developed a manual that the station consulted as needed, ensuring the highest standards in language usage. A distinctive aspect of the British Broadcasting Corporation's language use is its deliberate approach to language management, made possible by a dedicated committee

comprising individuals with diverse linguistic expertise and professional backgrounds. The station's success in maintaining its language policy is largely attributed to this committee, whose members brought unique perspectives and specializations to the table.

Nwachukwu (2005) attempted to initiate the discussion of such a radio language policy for radio stations broadcasting in the Igbo language. He suggested that the type of committee set up in the early BBC is needed for broadcasting in the Igbo language on radio. He advised that the Igbo language board should be set up with different professionals which must include heads of programs in two Igbo-speaking states of Anambra and Imo State broadcasting stations (as it was then). Emenanjo (2005) also advocated for a functional Language Planning Agency that will include academics, media practitioners, knowledgeable people in the language and culture whose functions should include collating and editing for publication, dissemination and installation of terms already agreed upon by the parent body that are consistent in pronunciation' ... and total overhaul, revival and revitalization all facets of Igbo language, from phonetics to pragmatic in the media. Although the plan did not materialise as planned it shows that it is a much-needed policy that will benefit radio stations and revitalising the language of broadcasting.

### **Methodology**

To make a broad assessment of implicit language policy in Nigeria, a survey was carried out on language use in fifteen radio stations across Southern Nigeria from January to December 2022. The stations are 91.1 FM, Lagos Talks, Nigerian Info, Wazobia FM, and Rhythm FM. Faji FM, Top Radio, Lasgidi FM, Splash FM, Radio Lagos, Bond FM, Voice of Nigeria, ABS, and Real Power. Informal interviews were conducted with radio presenters in Bond FM and Voice of Nigeria based on their experience in multilingual broadcasting which has spanned over thirty years. Personal observation was also employed during the research visit to the station after due permission was obtained from the radio stations.



### **Different types of Radio Language Policy in Nigeria.**

In Nigeria, a common practice among radio stations is the adoption of a monolingual language policy, where only one language is used in all programming. Examples of stations that follow this approach, using English exclusively, include 91.1 FM, Lagos Talks, Nigerian Info, Wazobia FM, and Rhythm FM. Notably, there are no radio stations in Nigeria that solely use an indigenous Nigerian language, without any English programming. Some Nigerian radio stations adopt a bilingual language policy, characterized by asymmetric bilingualism, where two languages are used unevenly. Examples include: Faji FM, which broadcasts in Yoruba and Pidgin, Top Radio uses English and Pidgin, with English dominating the airtime, Lasgidi FM, which employs Yoruba and Pidgin, Splash FM uses Yoruba and English. In these bilingual settings, the allocation of airtime can vary, with English sometimes receiving more attention than Nigerian languages or vice versa. For instance, Radio Lagos Tiwa-Tiwa prioritizes Yoruba but reads the news in English, demonstrating a mixed approach to language use. In a multilingual radio language policy, a station dedicates significant airtime to three or more languages. Bond FM and Voice of Nigeria exemplify this approach, allocating substantial time to multiple languages. Radio 1, initially a bilingual station using English and Pidgin, has recently added Yoruba to its repertoire. Similarly, ABS Onitsha primarily broadcasts in Igbo and English, with a limited selection of Igala programming. Real Power 100.5 also uses a multilingual approach, broadcasting in English, Igbo, and Hausa, although the time allocated to non-English languages is significantly less than that of Bond FM and Voice of Nigeria. This is why the latter two stations were selected as the focus of this study.

### **Bond FM**

Bond FM, a subsidiary of Radio Nigeria in Lagos State, was established in response to the Director General of FRCN's observation in 1987 that a significant portion of the population, who spoke major Nigerian languages like Igbo, Hausa, and Yoruba but were not proficient in English, were excluded from radio programs. To address this, the Director General

envisioned a station catering to the interests of the unlettered audience. At the time, Radio 1, another FRCN unit, broadcast solely in English on shortwave and FM mono at 92.9, was established in 1976 ahead of FESTAC '77. All stations were simulcasting the same content, prompting the management to seek approval to convert the FM station to an indigenous language station, thereby avoiding the need for a new transmitter and the associated bureaucratic hurdles. Approval was granted by President Obasanjo on September 20, 1987. The station recruited young school leavers fluent in Igbo, Yoruba, and Hausa and initially operated from Lagos Island before relocating to Ikeja mainland to be closer to its target audience, earning it the nickname "grassroots radio." Bond FM's programming schedule is divided into language segments, with Yoruba from 4 am to 12:30 pm, Igbo from 12:30 pm to 2:30 pm, Hausa from 2:30 pm to 4:30 pm, and Yoruba again until the end of the day, with each language unit headed by a team leader and staffed by language professionals.

### **Implicit language policy on Bond FM**

Nigeria's language policy recognizes Igbo, Hausa, and Yoruba as dominant languages, which informed the selection of these three languages for Bond FM. The national language policy prioritizes the language of the immediate environment, resulting in Yoruba receiving more airtime than Igbo and Hausa. In accordance with the National Broadcasting Code, Bond FM has implemented this policy by emphasizing Yoruba. This study agrees with Igbokhare (2011) that using Igbo, Yoruba, and Hausa in one station meets the language needs of approximately 90% of Nigerians.

Furthermore, Bond FM's use of these languages benefits non-native Yoruba speakers in Lagos, providing an opportunity for language learning. Research by Okudo and Ifeagwazi (2014) shows that Igbo language programming on Bond FM enhances Igbo language knowledge among Lagos secondary school students. Although no studies have investigated the impact on Hausa speakers, it is assumed to have a positive effect, as the station promotes cultural preservation through indigenous languages. The station's director emphasizes the importance of mother tongue education,





especially in a cosmopolitan city like Lagos, where the choice of major Nigerian languages reflects the city's linguistic reality. With experienced broadcasters and a legacy spanning over thirty years, Bond FM serves as a training ground for future Nigerian language broadcasters. The use of these three languages in Bond FM and Voice of Nigeria solidifies their status in the Nigerian context.

### **Voice of Nigeria**

Voice of Nigeria, established in 1960 as an international radio station under the Nigeria National Broadcasting Corporation (now Federal Radio Corporation), aims to broadcast authentic information about Nigeria and Africa to the world. Its primary objective is to provide public service in the interest of Nigeria by offering global radio broadcast services in multiple languages. Initially based in Ikorodu, Lagos State, the station's headquarters has been relocated to Abuja, with an additional station in Lagos. As an international radio station, Voice of Nigeria transmits programs beyond Nigeria's borders. Initially limited to two hours of daily transmission in French and English for West Africa, the station now reaches a global audience through its digital platform, broadcasting in eight languages: English, Igbo, French, Arabic, Kiswahili, Yoruba, Fulfulde, and Hausa. Programs in these languages are transmitted from either Abuja or Lagos stations, with Hausa and English broadcast from Abuja and other languages from either station. English dominates the airtime, while the other languages share equal time, with most languages broadcasting programs twice or thrice daily.

### **Implicit language policy of Voice of Nigeria**

Voice of Nigeria broadcasts news and programs in four indigenous Nigerian languages - Igbo, Yoruba, Fulfulde, and Hausa - alongside four other languages, including English, French, Arabic, and Kiswahili. While all languages receive equitable treatment, English dominates the airtime. The inclusion of Arabic and French, foreign languages used in Nigerian schools and religious centers, acknowledges their significance in the country's educational and cultural landscape. Arabic is primarily used in religious

contexts and schools, while French is taught in schools nationwide. Kiswahili, spoken outside Nigeria, is also part of the station's language repertoire. This multilingual approach demonstrates a deliberate language policy pattern, paving the way for future adoption by state and private stations. By embracing both major and minority languages, this policy has the potential to contribute to language preservation and revitalization in Nigeria.

### **The differences in the language policy in Bond and Voice of Nigeria**

Both Bond FM and Voice of Nigeria, two radio stations, share similarities and differences in their language policies and practices. Bond FM's language policy aims to preserve Nigerian culture, unite diverse populations, and give speakers of major languages a sense of belonging. In contrast, Voice of Nigeria's language policy is driven by internal and external factors, prioritizing information dissemination. While Bond FM focuses on language acquisition and promoting indigenous languages, Voice of Nigeria's policy doesn't aim to elevate the status of languages like Kiswahili, Arabic, French, and English, as their status is already established. Despite differences, both stations strive for equitable language use, reflecting a balance based on language status.

The language choices of Bond FM and Voice of Nigeria share similarities, in the sense that both prioritize major languages like Igbo, Yoruba, Hausa, Arabic, French, Fulfulde, Kiswahili, and English. This focus on major languages indicates a bias towards languages with larger audiences, neglecting minority languages prevalent in Nigeria and other African countries. Both stations allocate more time to languages with greater listener bases, reflecting a similar policy approach. However, Bond FM's language policy is locally focused, using only indigenous languages like Igbo, Hausa, and Yoruba, whereas Voice of Nigeria employs both local and foreign languages. The stations' time allocation patterns also mirror each other, with Voice of Nigeria dedicating more time to English and Bond FM prioritizing Yoruba programming, while Igbo and Hausa share equal time on Bond FM.



Interestingly, despite this similar language policy pattern, Voice of Nigeria does not accept public advertisements, unlike Bond FM.

### Strategy in Sustaining the Multilingual Language Policy in Voice of Nigeria and Bond FM

Both Bond FM and Voice of Nigeria tailor their programs and news to cater to their audience's preferences in the respective languages. Bond FM features popular shows like Oyorima and Omenilgbo, presented by Igbo speakers, Kukan Kurciya in Hausa, and Edun Okan, Omo to Omo colour, Adelebere, and others in Yoruba. Similarly, Voice of Nigeria designs its programs to attract listeners. Regarding staffing, both stations employ full-time staff who produce programs, although they are often underpaid, leading to demotivation and absenteeism. The meagre stipends offered to presenters contribute to this issue.

Both Bond FM and Voice of Nigeria promote Nigerian culture by playing local music, featuring oral poets, organizing drama, and storytelling in their respective languages. Bond FM takes it a step further by employing an interviewing strategy where presenters conduct on-the-spot interviews with the audience, which are later aired on the station. This approach encourages audience engagement and loyalty, as listeners tune in to hear their own voices. Additionally, Bond FM hosts phone-in programs where audience members can suggest show ideas, and presenters incorporate some of these suggestions into their programmes.

To further reinforce their multilingual policy, both radio stations organize events that celebrate native languages and cultures. They invite prominent socialites from the Yoruba, Hausa, and Igbo communities to attend these events, which attracts a large audience. During these events, outstanding presenters receive awards of excellence, and winners of phone-in programs receive gifts. This creates a wonderful opportunity for both the audience and presenters to connect and bond, fostering a sense of community and inclusivity.

## **Challenges**

The facilities housing Bond FM and Voice of Nigeria in Lagos require renovation and upgrading. The stations need improved physical infrastructure, including reliable transportation for news gathering and interviews, some digital recorders that can capture high-quality audio, and adequate equipment to facilitate effective news sourcing. However, some broadcasters still rely on personal phones for news gathering, and others translate news without verifying sources. Additionally, some units lack junior staff, posing a threat to their survival when senior broadcasters retire. Staff training is crucial for growth, but training allowances are not provided, forcing staff to pay for courses at government-owned institutions. Moreover, there is a lack of quality reference materials for staff to consult during broadcasting and translation, hindering their knowledge and efficiency. Addressing these issues is essential for sustaining the multilingual policy in both stations.

## **Conclusion**

This study examines the implicit language policies of Bond FM and Voice of Nigeria, despite the absence of explicit policies mandating multilingual broadcasting. The stations' success in broadcasting in multiple languages for years highlights their potential for language engineering and development. By leveraging this potential, Nigerian radio stations can play a vital role in preserving and revitalizing endangered languages. Voice of Nigeria's long-standing use of eight languages demonstrates the feasibility of expanding language offerings with proper planning. To achieve this, the stations must articulate their language policies, emulating the BBC's successful approach. This will inform policy formation, staff recruitment, training, and development, setting a precedent for other Nigerian radio stations. This study reveals the implicit language policies in these government-owned stations, showcasing the Federal Government's efforts to align with constitutional specifications, national broadcasting codes, language policies, and freedom of information acts.



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