ISSN 2141-9744

Ibadan Journal of Humanistic Studies

Volume 27, June 2017

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IBADAN JOURNAL OF HUMANISTIC STUDIES

Volume 27, June 2017

ISSN: 2141-9744

Published by
Faculty of Arts, University of Ibadan,
Ibadan, Nigeria

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IBADAN JOURNAL OF HUMANISTIC STUDIES
Volume 27, June 2017
ISSN: 2141-9744

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Language Policy and Governance: The Pontius Pilate Example

JACOB OLUDARE OLUWADORO[1] , BOSEDE ADEFIOLA ADEBOWALE[2] AND OLUGBEMIRO O. BEREKIAH[3]

Abstract

Pontius Pilate's trilingual inscription on the cross of Jesus Christ has received considerable scholarly attention from different perspectives. However, none of such studies has taken a sociolinguistic perspective in the analysis of the inscription. Adopting the Socio-linguistic theory of language planning as theoretical framework, this study employed the tools of linguistic criticism to analyse Pilate's inscription, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews", in order to examine the probable reasons behind Pilate's use of three languages to write the inscription and the implication of the title 'King' within the socio-cultural setting and antecedent linguistic history of the Jews at that time. Primary data were drawn from the King James Version of the Bible; the text of the *New Testament in Modern Hebrew*, the *New Testament in the original Greek, Byzantine Text Form*, and the *Latin Vulgate*. Hebrew was the religious language of Judaism; Greek was the *lingua franca* and Latin was the language of Roman imperialism, especially in governance and jurisdiction at that time. The title 'King' was associated with the Jewish hope of a messianic conquering king. The Romans held the title in contempt since their last king before the Republic was deposed. The use of Hebrew, Greek and Latin by Pilate has sociolinguistic implications reflecting the status of the three languages.The study recommends that contemporary political leaders should promote Nigeria's indigenous languages in addition to the English language for effective communication in governance.

Keywords: Jesus Christ, King of the Jews, linguistic imperialism, Pontius Pilate, Socio-linguistic Theory.

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[1]Jacob Oludare Oluwadoro is of the Department of Linguistics and African Languages, University of Ibadan, Nigeria. Email: oluyemidare7@gmail.com

[2]Bosede Adefiola Adebowale is of the Department of Classics, University of Ibadan,Nigeria. Email: olusegunbosede@gmail.com

[3]Olugbemiro O. Berekiah is of the Department of Religious Studies, University of Ibadan, Nigeria. Email: berekiah2@yahoo.com

John 19:19b

... יֵשׁוּעַ מִנָּצְרַת מֶלֶךְ הַיְּהוּדִים (*y e s h ua' mi nna t s' rathrel ekh ayy' hudi*) (Hebrew)

...'Ιησους ὁ Ναζωραῖος ὁ βασιλεὺςτῶν 'Ιουδαίων. (*'IesoushoNazoraioshobasileus ton Iudaiown*) (Greek)

... *IesusNazarenusrexIudaeorum* (Latin)

... Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews (English)

Introduction

Introduction

Pontius Pilate placed a trilingual inscription on the cross where Jesus was nailed. It reads: "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews". According to John's gospel, many of the Jews were able to read this inscription, not only because Jesus was crucified near the city, but also because it was written in three different languages: Hebrew, Latin and Greek.

John 19:19-22

[19]And Pilate wrote a title, and put *it* on the cross. And the writing was, JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS. [20]This title then read many of the Jews: for the place where Jesus was crucified was nigh to the city: and it was written in Hebrew, *and* Greek, *and* Latin. [21]Then said the chief priests of the Jews to Pilate, Write not, The King of the Jews; but that he said, I am King of the Jews. [22]Pilate answered, what I have written, I have written. (Emphasis ours)

The population in Jerusalem at the time of Jesus' crucifixion was multilingual. It was during the time of the Jewish Passover feast when many adherents of the Jewish religion came to Jerusalem on pilgrimage. They spoke not only Hebrew, Greek and Latin, but also Aramaic. Why then did Pilate write his inscription in Hebrew, Greek and Latin? To answer this question, it is the objective of this paper to explore the following: (i) the linguistic history of the Jews, since the socio-political space in which this script was written and published was in the Jewish capital of Jerusalem, (ii) the implications of the title "King" in Hebrew, Greek and Latin, within the geo-cultural setting of John's gospel; and (iii) the sociolinguistic implications of Pilate's script. In doing this, some research questions were raised: Who were the Jews of Pilate's times? What is the linguistic history of the Jews? How did they come under the influence of Hebrew, Greek and Latin languages? What were the statuses of Greek, Latin and Hebrew languages in Jesus' days? What did the title 'King' portray to the Hebrew, Greek and Latin speaking audiences of the script? Why did Pilate use Hebrew, Greek and Latin to write his inscription instead of using just one of them? What can contemporary political leaders learn from this? In addition to this, this study also aims to discuss how the Nigerian language policy affects Nigerians in

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general and provide recommendations on how to improve the policy. In order to achieve these, the King James Version of the Bible, *New Testament in the original Greek, Byzantine Text Form*, *Latin Vulgate as well as*, literature in Religious Studies, Classics and Linguistics that are related to these objectives were consulted.

Theoretical Framework

There are two theories of language policy and planning. These are the Instrumental Theory and the Socio-linguistic Theory. We concentrate on the latter because it is relevant to this work. The socio-linguistic theory sees every language as a resource that can be used to proffer solution to social problems. Scholars like Ferguson (1968), Jernudd & Das Gupter (1971) and Rubin & Jernudd (1971) propounded the socio-linguistic theory in reaction to the instrumentalist's view.[4] Advocates of the socio-linguistic theory do not attempt to improve the aesthetic and functional qualities of languages as tools; neither do they believe that some languages are better than others. Rather, they believe that attempts should be made to determine which of the available linguistic alternatives is most likely to improve a problematic situation, then orderly steps are to be taken that will make the best alternative succeed. They are very sceptical about the instrumentalist idea that it is possible to determine what is most efficient in language in the absolute sense and plan for it. Two principles underlie the socio-linguistic theory of language planning. These are: (a) all known languages are symbolic of equal native value. (b) Language planning should not only deal with the technical aspects of language, but also with its social aspects. The first principle holds that though some languages lack the metalanguage to talk about certain aspects of modern life in industrialised societies; that does not make them primitive. Also, vocabularies happen to be easily expandable. Since this theory does not promote any language above the other, we believe it is more suitable for our work than the instrumentalist framework, especially in Nigeria as a country and Africa as a continent where majority of our languages have gone into extinction and several others are dying gradually because of the intimidating status of the English language.

A Short History of the Jews

Who were the Jews of Pilate's time? The precise connotation of the word "Jew" is often a matter of debate. Derived from the Hebrew word

[4]Tauli (1968) cited in Adeniran (2005) is probably the best-known advocate of the instrumental theory. This theory sees language fundamentally as a communicative tool. It posits that communication would be easier if languages were standardised, using the criteria of balance of beauty, clarity, elasticity and economy. When this is not possible, language planning should be used to improve the quality of the inadequate languages. But this theory has been

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יְהוּדִי *y^{e}hudi*, it originated from the eponymous patriarch, the fourth son of Jacob, after whom the tribe of Judah was named during the exodus from Egypt. It originally denoted a member of the tribe of Judah; to which land was allocated when they settled in Canaan. The nation of Israel later split into two. The South became the Kingdom of Judah, comprising the tribes of Judah, Benjamin and Simeon, and some cities of the Levites. This period also witnessed religious schism, generating two distinctive religious traditions: (i) The religion of the Jews with centre at Jerusalem in the Kingdom of Judah, and (ii) religion of the Samaritans, with many worship centres within the territory of the Northern Kingdom, e.g. Dan, Bethel (1Kings.12:26-31), Samaria (cf.Hos.8:5-6) and Mount Carmel (cf.1Kings.18:19-39). At about 722BC, the King of Assyria deported the Northern Israelites and replaced them with non-Israelites (cf.2Kings.17:6, 23-24). Northern Israelite refugees may have become assimilated with the Kingdom of Judah, and "Jew" became synonymous with "Israelite". Around 586BC[5] the Kingdom of Judah also became a province under the Babylonian empire, with the largest part of its elite population carried to exile. The term *Jew* at this time referred to inhabitants of the province of Judah, as opposed to the inhabitants of other provinces; or the exiled indigenes living in various Jewish colonies abroad. At the time of the crucifixion, the term Jew denoted everyone who descended from the ethnic lineage of Judah as well as those who identified with their religious tenets, whether Israelite or not (Wiseman, 1996, p.584). Hence the Jews of Pilate's time can be subdivided into three main culture groups: (i) The Hebraic Jews who were the home-born, home-bred Jews of Palestine, less influenced by foreign culture and ideologies than their counterparts in the diaspora, (ii) The Hellenistic Jews who were

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The Linguistic History of the Jews of Pilate's Time

The speakers of Hebrew, Greek and Latin included governors and subjects, scholars and laymen, missionaries and proselytes, buyers and sellers, clients and kings (Macfarlane, 1997, p. 228). How did the Jews come under the influence of these languages? Hebrew was both the mother tongue and the language of religion for the Jews, until their deportation to Babylon in the sixth century BC. During the exile, there began a gradual shift in their

---

faulted for deliberately promoting some languages at the expense of others, which, according to Oluwadọrọ (2017a) is tantamount to linguistic imperialism.

[5]The exile of the Jews did not happen just once. It was a series of deportations that covered the period from about 597 to 582BC.The climax was the fall of Jerusalem and the exact date is subject to debate. The limits, however, was within 587 and 586BC (see further, Ellison (1996, pp.617-621).

language habits. The Hebrew language of the pre-exilic period became gradually Aramaicised until it finally gave way to Aramaic. Even though Hebrew and Aramaic languages had coexisted for many centuries in the Ancient Near East before the Jews were exiled, by the latter part of the Babylonian captivity, Aramaic had become the more important of the two, and soon became the everyday language of majority of the Jews, even after returning from exile, and during the latter part of the Medo-Persian period.

Moreover, the Jews underwent further political and cultural changes under Greek rule in 331BC during the eastward campaign of Alexander the Great. According to Zgusta as cited by Rochette (2010), the conquest of Alexander the Great imposed the Greek language as the *lingua franca* on the entire Macedonian Empire. Alexander intended to unify his empire by imposing Greek as the sole administrative language of his provinces. This period is called the Hellenistic period. The Jews continued to enjoy the same relative freedom of worship and government as under the Persians, like most other conquered peoples. They absorbed many Hellenistic elements into their lifestyle along with the Greek language. It was at this period that the Greek version of the Hebrew Scriptures, also known as the Septuagint emerged. For many centuries, Greek remained the *lingua franca* of various kingdoms that resulted from the division of the vast empire of Alexander the Great. Thus, Greek supplanted Aramaic which had hitherto been the *lingua franca* of the Old Persian Empire.

Greek is one of the oldest and the most thoroughly studied Indo-European languages. It was the language of culture and commerce for the Greeks. It is a very important world language, considering its influence on all European languages. Its linguistic history dated back to the second and first millennia BC, when its ancient speakers arrived in Greece. It was spread through the exploits of Alexander the Great and his successors from Asia Minor to Egypt and the border region of India, and the Attic dialect became the basis of the κοινη (*koine*, - a sort of pidginised variety of the language). Though the language is referred to as "Greek" in English, the linguistic autonym for speakers of Greek is based on an entirely different root. Greek speakers call their language ελληνικά (*heliniká* – Hellenistic). The terms 'hellenism', 'hellenistic' and 'hellenisation' were derived from this stem and the Greek verb ελληνιζω (*hellenizo)*, which means 'to speak Greek' or 'to make Greek'.

The conquest of Alexander the Great exposed and subjugated all conquered peoples not only to the Greek religion and philosophy, but also to the Greek language. This transformed Greek to a world language, which continued to thrive after the death of Alexander. The influence of Hellenism on Judea continued after the Seleucids, under the Hasmoneans and then under the Herodians, and this greatly reflected in both their secular and religious affairs. At this period, the dispersion of the Jews among different cultures

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decentralised their political and cultural unity. Greek became the *lingua franca* of the Hellenistic Jews, even when they visited or resettled at Jerusalem. The Jews became more accustomed to Hellenism and used the Greek language more commonly. Horsely (1995, p. 247) observes that language use, especially in Galilee was "heavily interrelated with the fundamental social (political-economic-religious) division between the rulers and the ruled, cities and villages, and the historical changes introduced by rulers based in cities". He asserts:

> Greek was apparently the official language of Sepphoris under Herod and Antipas as under the Seleucid and Ptolemaic imperial administrations earlier (and in Tiberias, once it was founded). Yet, we cannot conclude, on the basis of their supposed contact with Sepphoris, that most Galileans had become accustomed to speaking Greek by the first Century AD.

Although the Romans gained political and military supremacy in 63BC, the Hellenistic culture, however, continued to be the dominant culture throughout the history of Roman Empire. Though Latin was the native tongue and original language of Roman administration and continued to be so in all of the western provinces, Greek remained the language of Roman government in all of the other provinces. It became the *lingua franca* of the 'Greco-Roman world (Porter, 1992).The Roman Empire is conventionally divided into the Greek East and the Latin West. The governors and their staff in the provinces of the Greek East were required to be fluent in Greek and the governors were equally expected to have education in Greek literature. It was into this multilingual context that Jesus was born; a cultural climate where Greek was the language of the educated and wealthy class. Hebrew, however, did not disappear from among the Jews, not even when Aramaic became the common language, nor when they started to use Greek and Latin. Latin was the language of the Roman Imperialism, while Hebrew remained the language of Judaism.

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The Title "King" in Hebrew, Greek and Latin within the Geo-cultural Setting of John's Gospel

In this section, we explore what the title 'King' meant to the major culture groups, targeted by the three languages of the inscription 'Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews', in the Johanine account of the Gospel. John particularly pointed out that the time was during the Jewish pilgrimage feast of Passover (John 18:28); that the Jews in particular read it (John 19:20) because the place was close to Jerusalem and it was written in the three major languages of literacy at the time, Hebrew, Latin and Greek. He also took record of the reaction of the chief priests to the inscription, and the response of Pilate to their reaction (John 19:21-22). Though Luke also pointed out that

the inscription was written in the three languages, he did not go further to note the particular impact it had on the Jews (Lk.23:38).

Despite the fact that Porter (1991, p.37) cited an estimate of 20 to 30% male literacy in any given Hellenistic community, the Jews in particular considered literacy as a necessary part of piety, Hence, it can be expected that majority of them were literate. Moreover, majority of people moving in and out of the city of Jerusalem at this time, being the Passover feast, were expectedly Jews. Therefore, the major culture groups involved in this communicative episode can be represented by the following: (i) the Hebraic Jews, (ii) the Hellenistic Jews, (iii) the Jewish proselytes, (iv) Pontius Pilate and other Roman imperial agents, and (v) the Jewish High Priests. It is possible that the target audience of the inscription either had close affinities with the Jewish religion or were connected with the enforcement of Roman imperial rule on the populace and understood Latin.

Hebrew may be considered the native tongue of the Hebraic Jews, while Aramaic may be considered their vernacular[6] and Greek may have been the *lingua franca* (cf. Tov, 2001, p.5).[7] The Hebrew language, according to Spolsky (2014, p.13) is "firmly embedded in their sociolinguistic ecology". In spite of the fact that the average population of native Judeans at the time of Jesus can convincingly be asserted to be multilingual, the place of the Hebrew language cannot be overemphasised.

The argument that the Hebrew language was already extinct and that what the gospels refer to as Hebrew in Pilate's inscription must have been Aramaic, had been contended by various scholars such as Tresham (2009 and Baltes (2014). Hebrew remained the language of worship and devotion. It had become *l'shonhaq'desh*– "holy tongue". According to Poirier (2007:55), it has been established that the Jewish population of Palestine at the time of Jesus was actually trilingual with a mix of Aramaic, Greek and Hebrew. The Jewish scriptures were written in Hebrew. Jews taught their children to read and write Hebrew as a matter of religious duty. It was used in public worship in the synagogues and at the Temple. Hence, an average adult Jew of Palestine, in addition to any other language of communication, should be expected to command a reasonable level of proficiency in Hebrew literacy. It could, therefore, be asserted that those who retained the use of the Hebrew language at the time of the Crucifixion were those who consciously held unto the religious and political hopes of Judaism. According to Fitzmyer (1970, p.503), Hebrew language had become a "token of one's loyalty to the national effort" at the time of the Maccabean revolt.

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[6]Ong (2015:37) explains the distinction between the mother-tongue and the vernacular.

[7]Tov(2001:5) pointed out that the Greek found in the Judean desert "included documents showing that the administration was conducted in Greek in the Roman provinces of Syria, Arabia, and Judea, and that letters were written in that language"

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The word "King" מֶלֶךְ -*melek,* when considered in the full religio-cultural connotations of the Jewish religious heritage triggers the deep sentiments of Jewish messianic hope. Unlike the Romans, who at that time held the title of King and the idea of monarchy in contempt, the deepest aspirations of the Jewish nationalistic and religious hopes revolved round the expectation of a coming messianic king and the restoration of a monarchical kingdom. The expected Messiah would be a God-man, a victorious conquering King that would usher in divine rule of peace and prosperity, in which the Jewish nation would hold imperial sway over all other nations of the world.

The Hellenistic Jews speak Greek, the *lingua franca* of the 'Greek East', the language of learning of great philosophers, and one of the noblest bequests of the Hellenistic era. Most of the Hellenistic Jews were born outside Palestine, and for them the native tongue was neither likely to be Hebrew nor Aramaic. Nonetheless, their *lingua franca* would most probably be Greek, because of the hegemony of the Greek heritage in the realm of learning and socialisation at that period of time. Many of them probably would have acquired proficiency in the Hebrew tongue, but there would have been a sizeable number whose literacy must have been limited to the Greek language. This is particularly so because the Jewish scriptures had been translated into Greek, and this Greek translation might have been their primary scripture. They were sometimes referred to simply as "Grecians" or "Greek speaking believers", while the Palestinian Jews were simply called the "Hebrew" or "Hebrew speaking believers" (cf. Acts 6:1). There are testimonies of Synagogues for Greek-speaking Jews even in Jerusalem (cf. Act.6:9).

The strong messianic hopes of the diaspora Jews should not be underestimated. The fact of constant pilgrimage to Jerusalem at the feasts of Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles is a testimony of their strong hopes for the restoration of the Israelite sovereign kingdom under the rule of the expected messianic king. The incident of the crucifixion occurs on one of such pilgrimage feasts, hence the title ὁ βασιλεὺςτῶν'Ιουδαίων (the King of Jews) would naturally have called to mind their messianic expectations as well, because the title is reserved for the expected *Messiah.*

Apart from the native born and diaspora Jews, the Jewish proselytes shared the messianic hopes of Israel, even though they do not have ethnic or racial ties with Israel. They were often referred to as "God fearers" or "worshippers of God". The theme of the expected conquering king had been so strong and pronounced in Judaism that any adherent of the Jewish religion must of necessity share in this messianic expectation. For most of the Proselytes, the Greek language is the *lingua franca*, and the language of learning and worship, though they retained proficiency in their various native tongues [cf. Act.2:5-11]. For all Jews, therefore, the title 'King' is a metaphor

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for the expected Christ, the Messiah, and Redeemer of the nation of Israel, and all true worshipers of God.

Pontius Pilate, the writer of the inscription, represents the Roman overlords of Palestine at the time under consideration. Latin was the language of the laws of the empire. It was "used mainly by the Romans who occupied the land and for more or less official purposes" (Fitzmyer, 1970, p.32). Palestine had come under Roman rule when the Roman army General, Pompey conquered the region around 63 BC (Wilmington, 1984, p.938). Pontius Pilate himself was a Roman of the equestrian order (Wheaton, 1996, p.929), which represented the upper middle-class of the stratified Roman society. The title, "King", had become odious to the average Roman elite since the Roman revolution and deposition of the last king in their history, Tarquinius Superbus. Following the abolition of monarchy, the Republican era began, and this later gave way to the era of the Empire (Hayes et al., 2015). Josephus' account of Pilate's tenure as governor of Judea shows a marked contrast between the Roman and Jewish religio-political ideologies. The erection of the Roman ensigns in Jerusalem by Pilate as a symbol of Roman rule was vehemently opposed by the Jews, who saw it as idolatry (Whiston, 1987, pp.479-480). For the Jews, "God is King" and Jerusalem is the seat of Divine Rule. For the Romans, the Emperor was not only the ultimate ruler in the human realm; a successful emperor was worshipped as a god while alive and deified after his death (Grant, 2016). For the Jews, the religious space must be kept free of all sorts of images, but the Romans considered it befitting to honour their heroic leaders with statues, which at times were erected not only in public, but at times in religious spaces such as the temples.

The Chief Priests represented the priestly aristocracy of the Jewish nation. They understood the implications of the title "King" both to the Romans and to the Jews. They played on Pilate's political ambition by calling his attention to the political implication of kingship as treasonable felony within the Roman Empire (Lk. 23:2-3). Hence they claim "whosoever makes himself a king speaks against Caesar" (John 19:12); and "we have no king but Caesar" (John 15). On the other hand, they recognised fully, the Jewish hope of a messianic conquering king. They therefore, approached Pilate to change the title to read specifically that "He (Jesus) claimed to be the King of the Jews". This shows that they were willing to have a real King of the Jews, only they did not accept that Jesus of Nazareth was the expected King (Compare Lk. 23:2; 35).

The Jews and Jewish proselytes who had seen and believed the miracles of Jesus before his crucifixion would have read the inscription with dashed hopes (Matt. 2:1-2; Lk. 19:37-38; 24:19-21; John 1:49; 6:15; 12:13-15). The inscription, for them was a mark of reproach against their nationalistic and religious dignity. The expected "king" was conceived as a super-human who could not possibly have been so shamefully destroyed. So,

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if indeed, this was the 'king' of the Jews, who hung, dying or dead on the cross, then it was intended to publicly show a defeat of Jewish nationalistic hope by the ruling Roman imperial lords. The questions that this brings to mind are: What was the rationale behind Pilate's action? Was he aware that his action could incite an insurrection among the Jews? Or was he using this inscription to spite the chief priests and the Jewish aristocracy who insisted that Jesus must be crucified despite the fact that he had not committed an offence worthy of death? Or was he convinced that Jesus was indeed the 'King of the Jews', since the proceedings of the trials probably had shown him that the masses believed in Jesus as their deliverer whereas the Priestly aristocracy deliberately plotted his death because they perceived him as a rival? (Matt. 27:18). A socio-linguistic consideration of Pilate's motive may give some insight.

A Sociolinguistic Perspective on Pilate's Script

Sociolinguistics is the study of the part played by language in maintaining social roles in a community. It is "the study of language in relation to its social context" (Hanks et al. eds., 1997). One major task of a sociolinguistic enquiry according to Coulmas (2013) is to "uncover, describe and interpret the socially motivated" choices of language and expressions made by a speaker in a specific social context. The fact that Pontius Pilate used Hebrew, Latin and Greek for his script meant that his message was not intended for the Jews alone. If his message had been for the Jews alone, he would have used the language of the Jews – Hebrew alone. His use of Latin and Greek implies that he had a wider audience in mind other than the Jews. He may have used Latin because it was the official language of the Roman Government, and the Jews at that moment, were under the colonial rule of the Roman Emperor, whom he represented as the governor.

Others apart from Jews and Romans might have been resident in Jerusalem at the time. Greek was the *lingua franca*, i.e. the common language habitually used as a medium of communication between individuals or groups of people with different mother tongues (UNESCO,1953). Greek at that time was like English to an average Nigerian, or an Anglophone African of today. Pilate used Greek so that those who could neither speak nor read Hebrew or Latin, would be able to read the message in Greek, since a majority of the people could understand Greek. Obviously, the governor took the pains of writing in those three languages so that everybody in Jerusalem at that particular time would have access to the information.

What social issues could have motivated Pilates' choice of expression? His discussion with the Jewish leaders during the trial could give an insight. One pertinent question that we may need to answer here is: 'If Pilate actually believed that Jesus was the King of the Jews, why did he approve his crucifixion?' Oluwadọrọ (2017b) opines that he was actually

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driven by fears; fear of Caesar, the emperor; fear of Jewish insurrection, fear of losing his position and possibly his life. For instance, in John 18: 38-39 and 19: 4, 6, Pilate declared Jesus innocent of all the accusations against him. The Jews discovered that Pilate was willing to release Jesus, so they said:

> We have a law, and by our laws he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God... If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend: whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Caesar. (John 19:7& 12).

Here, they implied that Pilate himself could be charged with 'treasonable felony'. When Pilate heard this, he was frightened and felt threatened, and wondered how he could be accused of treason against the government he was representing. He asked perhaps sarcastically, in John 19: 15b: "Shall I crucify your king?" They replied him: "We have no king but Caesar". As noted earlier, the chief priests represented the priestly aristocracy of the Jewish nation. They understood the full implication of the title 'King', both to the Roman and to the Jews. They played on Pilate's political wits by calling his attention to the political implication of Jewish concept of messianic kingship within the Roman Empire as treasonable felony (Luke 23:2-3). Matthew's account, (27:24-25) shows more vividly Pilate's unwillingness to condemn Jesus. In fact, Matthew pointed out that Pilate's wife had warned him not to have anything to do with 'the just man', because she had suffered many things in a dream because of him. After the superscript had been placed, the chief priests requested Pilate to modify the script - "Then said the chief priests of the Jews to Pilate, write not, The King of the Jews; but that he said, I am King of the Jews. Pilate answered, what I have written I have written" (John 19:21-22). This shows that Pilate used the phrase intentionally, as a paronomasia, deliberately assaulting Jewish religio-political sensibilities. The irony here is that though he appears to have been forced by the people to condemn Jesus against his wish, as Oluwadọrọ (2017b, p.11)observed,

> One striking feature that distinguishes the case (Jesus' case) from contemporary legal trials is the fact that even though, the judge was bent on acquitting the accused of the two-count charge, because he declared him innocent, yet he was prevailed upon by the complainants (the Chief Priests) to sentence him to death due to the fear of men.

Yet he uses the word-play to ridicule them within the scene of the crucifixion. The mockery of Jesus by the soldiers in John 19:2-4 also

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buttresses this point. Pilate's experience is reminiscent of Justice Sowemimọ's saga in the treasonable felony case against the Late Chief Obafemi Awolọwọ by the government of Nigeria in 1962, in which the judge stated: "I am willing to release you, but, my hands are tied" (Aderogba et al., 2012, p.14). It could, therefore, be argued that Pilate had an intuitive awareness of Jesus' superhuman attributes. John 19:5-8 reported that Pilate was afraid when he was told that Jesus claimed Divinity. His deliberate selection of the words of the inscription was to shame the Jewish leaders for their ill-treatment of Jesus, who, Pilate must have heard, performed many benevolent miracles for the good of the people. The term "King" meant different things to the Jews, Greeks and Romans. So, the inscription, within the scene of the crucifixion enforces Roman imperial powers over the Jewish nation, depicting the Jewish leadership as a conquered people, in spite of the national pride in religio-political independence.

The Implication

Pilate's use of three languages instead of one is an important lesson for contemporary leaders, especially in multilingual Africa. He could have used the official language, Latin or simply added Greek, which was the *lingua franca*. He, however, included Hebrew, which was the native language to the indigenes. So, no one could claim not to have access to the information. In contemporary Nigeria, the English language is the official language, but the leaders use it to the exclusion of the majority who do not have a good mastery of the English language. The indigenous languages were largely neglected. According to Bamgbose (2000, p.108), this is tantamount to 'language and exclusion'. In other words, those in government deliberately exclude the majority of their subjects by using a language that is alien to them.

Sociolinguistics scholars are of the opinion that Nigerian leaders are plagued by English linguistic imperialism. The most painful aspect of this is in the legal unit where the language of adjudication is English. Court proceedings take place exclusively in English, even when the judge, the complainants, the defendants, as well as the witnesses speak the same indigenous language. Instead of using the common native language, the judge especially, pretends not to speak the language. So, interpreters are engaged in most cases, incurring needless costs, which is tantamount to waste.

Some years ago, a popular Yoruba comedian, the late Moses Olaiya Adejumo, whose stage name was Baba Sala, captured this pathetic situation in one of his numerous comedies in a case that involved him and a friend. Coincidentally, the judge that was to handle the case was a childhood friend of Baba Sala. When the judge was to travel to the United Kingdom to study Law, Baba Sala was one of those friends who sponsored him. Instead of the

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proceedings to be held in Yoruba, which was common to the people involved in the case as well as the lawyers and the judge; English was used. The judge gave his verdict in English; unknown to Baba Sala, his friend had sentenced him to five years imprisonment. When he was asked if he had anything to say, he responded by commending the judge for his good mastery of the English language. So it was obvious that he did not understand the verdict. The interpreter then interpreted to him that he had been sentenced to five years imprisonment 'with hard labour'. He lamented that his bosom friend who had a mastery of English language jailed him at the expense of his ignorance. This, of course was ignored, he was whisked away by security men. In contemporary Nigeria, politicians campaign in the local languages of the masses to secure their votes, only to get to the seat of governance and turn around to use the English language exclusively for governance.

Recommendations and Conclusion

First, this paper recommends that the Nigerian language policy should be reframed in such a way that all the 'escape clauses' woven around the prescriptions of the use of mother tongue in education and governance are removed. Second, this provision should be extended to the judiciary; so that if the judge, the counsels, as well as the court clerk speak the same mother tongue with the complainants and defendants, their mother tongue should be used in adjudication. When this is not possible, then any of the major languages they all have in common could be used. It is only when the first and second options are is not practicable and applicable that the English language should be used. The foreseen objection is that implementation of such policy is subject to developing the languages in terms of orthography standardisation and codification as well as making arrangements for their use in governance. As far as the three major languages – Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, as well as some other dominant languages in different states are concerned, these conditions have been satisfied. Therefore, implementation should be enforced by policy makers, so that there will be true justice and democracy.

In addition, the aspect of the policy that makes the learning of one of the three major languages compulsory should be extended to cover politics, justice, the military as well as other security units (the police, civil defence, etc.). Those aspiring to the office of the Nigerian president should be required to learn at least one of the three major languages in addition to their mother tongue. This should also apply to aspirants to the National Assembly. It is gratifying to note that the military is already taking steps towards the implementation of this aspect of the policy. For instance, in Nairaland.com of 22-11-2017, we have the following excerpt:

> The study of languages is a global practice among armies, in which officers and soldiers are encouraged to be

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> ultilingual. The policy will foster *espirit-de-corps* and better communication with the populace to enhance information gathering, civil-military relations, increase understanding between militaries and soldiers to perform their duties professionally. It is important to note that English still remains the official language in the Nigerian Army. Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba languages could be used during CIVIL MILITARY COOPERATION (CIMIC) activities or interrogation. (Source: http://www.guardian.ng/news/nigeria-army-introduces-new-language-policy-for-personnel/)

Other security agents should be encouraged to take a cue from the military. At the state level, aspirants to the gubernatorial position should, in addition to their mother tongues, learn the major languages in their respective states. This should also apply to the aspirants for election to the States' Houses of Assembly. If the above recommendations are implemented strictly, Nigeria's language policy will be more effective and better inter-ethnic communication will be facilitated. Some scholars have asserted that any individual who can speak the three languages has about 65% chances of being able to communicate with people anywhere in Nigeria. Any communication in the three languages will also reach about the same number of people in the population. This is because these three languages account for between 60% and 70% of all Nigerians.

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