

The Pragmatics of Resistance: Multilingual Strategies in Ethnic Narratives of Marginalized Communities in Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper examines the pragmatics of resistance in ethnic narratives of marginalized communities in Nigeria, focusing on the Igbo, Ogoni, and Tiv. Using Giles et al.'s (1977) Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory (EVT) and Fairclough's (1995) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the research explores how multilingual strategies empower these groups to resist sociopolitical marginalization and assert their identities. Data drawn from 3 speeches, each from the 3 minority group under study were analyzed using a qualitative approach. The study highlights how linguistic choices—code-switching, translanguaging, implicature, metaphor and indigenous idioms—serve as pragmatic tools for contesting dominance, reclaiming agency, and fostering solidarity. It further emphasizes the complex interplay between language, identity, and power. EVT, however, provides a framework for analyzing the vitality of these languages amid hegemonic pressures, while CDA unveils the underlying power dynamics in their discourses. The findings reveal that these multilingual strategies reinforce cultural resilience and challenge the structural inequalities that perpetuate their marginalization. By intertwining pragmatics and discourse, this study underscores the transformative potential of language in ethnic resistance and identity construction.

Keywords: *Pragmatics; Ethnic Narratives; Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory (EVT); Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA); Nigeria.*

INTRODUCTION

Language is a powerful tool in the construction, negotiation, and contestation of social identities and power dynamics. It plays a crucial role in constructing and expressing individual and group identities across diverse social and cultural contexts. As people from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds interact in an increasingly interconnected society, their sense of self continues to evolve. And in this dynamic process, understanding the complex relationship between linguistic practices and identity formation becomes essential, as language not only reflects but also shapes how individuals perceive themselves and are perceived by others. (Gee, 2022; Bucholtz & Hall, 2021; Pavlenko, 2021). For marginalized communities, language often becomes a mechanism for resistance and identity assertion, particularly in multilingual societies like Nigeria. This study, however, explores the pragmatics of resistance, focusing on how multilingual strategies are employed in ethnic narratives to challenge oppression and assert collective identity in Nigeria. Pragmatics, as a field of study, emphasizes how context influences meaning in communication, making it a crucial lens for understanding how marginalized communities use language as a form of sociopolitical resistance (Mey, 2001). Pragmatics equally presupposes that language as a socio-cultural artifact is often deployed in order not to simply dispense information that may modify others' worldview, but more

importantly, to interact with people: to perform actions such as convincing people of some facts, asking for things, apologizing, inquiring about information, inviting, complimenting others on their achievements, (Austin, 1962); and to also create, maintain, enhance or destroy social relationships (Locher, 2006; Spencer-Oatey, 2008).

Nigeria, often referred to as the "Giant of Africa," is a linguistically diverse nation with over 500 indigenous languages spoken across its ethnic groups (Eberhard, Simons, & Fennig, 2023). This linguistic plurality reflects not only the country's cultural richness but also its complex history of ethnic relations and marginalization. Marginalized communities in Nigeria, such as the Igbo, Ogoni, and Tiv, have historically faced systemic exclusion, socio-economic deprivation, and political subjugation. Through their narratives—be it oral traditions, written literature, or modern digital discourse—these groups employ pragmatic and multilingual strategies to resist marginalization and assert their identities in a hegemonic sociopolitical structure.

The research aims to examine and unpack the specific pragmatic features of resistance in these ethnic narratives, focusing on how speakers manipulate language resources such as code-switching, implicature, presupposition, and metaphor to convey dissent and solidarity. It also highlights how these multilingual strategies align with the broader sociopolitical and cultural struggles of marginalized communities in Nigeria.

Overview of Marginalized Communities in Nigeria

Nigeria's marginalized communities are defined by their exclusion from political representation, economic opportunities, and cultural recognition within the larger Nigerian state. These communities, predominantly ethnic minorities, are often geographically concentrated in resource-rich but underdeveloped regions. For instance, Ogoniland – comprising the present-day Eleme, Khana, Gokana and Tai local government areas – in Rivers State has been the focus of many debates in terms of ecological injustices, especially since 1993, when the late Ken Saro-Wiwa, and the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) began to raise concerns of the devastating impacts of crude oil exploration in Ogoni (<http://www.mosop.org/>; Senewo, 2015). The creation of the MOSOP in 1990 by Ken Saro-Wiwa marked the beginning of a new frontier in the struggle for better living conditions among the Ogoni people. Saro-Wiwa's interest in seeking environmental justice for his people in particular and the Niger Delta region as a whole became intense, as the military governments of Generals Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida and Sani Abacha used more repressive measures. The ideals and philosophy of MOSOP were captured in the Ogoni Bill of Rights (OBR). The OBR primarily advocated for the rights of the Ogoni people; it further set out the movement's demands to include increased autonomy, and a fair share of the proceeds from oil sales for the Ogoni people, as well as a well-structured out environmental remediation to the Ogoniland (Amugo and Chinda, 2016).

The challenges for access to scarce resources – land, clean water and waterways, however, became intense. And due to the rampant oil spills that devastated their land, the people of Ogoni (especially the youths) were compelled to engage in various forms of protest, agitations and resistance to draw attention to their plight. But despite these persistent outcries, the federal government of Nigeria remained largely indifferent, failing to take any meaningful action to hold the oil companies—particularly Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC)—accountable or to address the environmental and socio-economic crisis inflicted upon the Ogoni people.

Similarly, the Igbo ethnic group, despite being one of the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria, has experienced systemic marginalization since the Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970). Kate Meagher (2009) noted that,

The Nigerian Civil War is often seen as an event that crystallized ethnic divisions in Nigeria, and led the Igbo people down a trajectory of marginalization from political and economic power. While there is no doubt that, since the Civil War, the Igbo have faced systematic exclusion from the most influential positions in the state and the formal economy, Igbo traders, artisans and business people have achieved legendary success in the informal economy (2009:32).

The war, often referred to as the Biafran War, left lasting scars on the Igbo community, who continue to narrate their collective experiences of marginalization through oral histories, literature, and social media discourse. These narratives often employ multilingual strategies, such as switching between English and Igbo, to emphasize their dual identities and articulate their resistance to perceived injustice (Ezeigbo, 1997). And throughout their history, the Igbo people's cooperation across communal and ethnic cleavages played a major role in their economic survival and identity formation. Although stateless and dispersed in pre-colonial times, Igbo communities 'were embedded in a variety of networks establishing translocal, regional, and even more far-reaching connections without any overarching governing institutions' (Harniet-Sievers 2006:43). These connections, referred to by Silverstein (1983) as 'pan-Igbo' institutions, bound Igbo society together in a broad cultural and economic sphere despite the absence of a common ethnic identity.

Furthermore, the Tiv people of Benue State, is another example of an ethnic minority whose narratives frequently highlight their struggles against land dispossession and political exclusion. Having endured historical oppression and cultural genocide brought about by more dominant forces—through wars, forced migration, and systemic marginalization—the Tiv people lost material, human, and symbolic cultural resources that are profoundly irreplaceable (Martí & Fernández, 2013). Such loss is usually followed by coping mechanisms such as mourning, resistance, escaping, or accepting and adapting to survive (e.g. Alkhaled & Sasaki, 2022; Martí & Fernández, 2013).

Tiv resistance is often expressed through proverbs, songs, and storytelling, where pragmatic features like implicature and presupposition are used to critique government policies subtly while avoiding direct confrontation (Mnena & Tar, 2020). According to Ijir (2001), the formation of the Tiv ethnic militia was a direct response to the long standing injustices which the state failed to address. As he argues,

It is an inevitable reaction to a threat to the very survival of the Tiv nation in modern Nigeria. The Tiv indigenous to Nassarawa and Taraba states since the dawn of the current political dispensation in Nigeria, have been subjected to all forms of harassments incompatible with human dignity and existence... It is amazing that in spite of all these atrocities committed against the Tiv people, this did not attract the attention of the Nigerian State's attention, concern and intervention (p. 3).

Rotimi Suberu (1996) further concludes that minority problems in Nigeria are deeply rooted in complex historical and structural processes of pre-colonial and colonial incorporation and consolidation of diverse ethnic segments, federal territorial evolution and reorganizations, revenue allocation, and political competition and representation. In his epigraph, he issued a scathing condemnation of the Nigerian government's deliberate and persistent neglect of

minority groups, particularly the oil-producing communities. Despite the clear and pragmatic narratives of resistance and the strategic deployment of multilingual expressions of discontent by these marginalized groups, the government has willfully turned a deaf ear to their grievances. This disregard, however, is not without consequences. By continuously sidelining the voices of those whose lands and resources sustain the nation's economy, the government is sowing the seeds of deeper unrest—one that will inevitably demand reckoning. As he categorically states,

Throughout the country....ethnic minorities are in ferment. They are striving to shake off age long usurpations, to cast off the yoke of distant suzerains and to take their own destinies in their own hands. This ferment, which this nation can ignore only at its peril, is what has been subsumed under the national question. It is real, and it is urgent. To pretend that it does not exist is to be deluded (Suberu 1996:4).

Recent movements pushing for liberalization and democratization in Nigeria and other culturally fragmented societies have not only exposed but also intensified the deep-seated frustrations of marginalized groups, whose voices of discontent grow louder against a government they perceive as fraudulent, exploitative, and woefully insensitive to their plight. Rather than fostering unity and genuine democratic inclusion, these movements have been met with heightened divisive and destructive centrifugal forces—symptomatic of a state more invested in maintaining its grip on power than in addressing the legitimate grievances of its oppressed citizens.

In all these cases, language serves as a critical tool for these communities to resist domination and assert their voices in a multilingual and multi-ethnic nation where power dynamics often favor the majority groups. As Bamgbose (1991) notes, multilingualism in Nigeria is both a blessing and a challenge, as it creates opportunities for cultural expression but also exacerbates tensions among ethnic groups vying for recognition and resources. This study, therefore, situates itself at the intersection of pragmatics, multilingualism, and resistance, examining how marginalized communities in Nigeria navigate and manipulate these dynamics in their ethnic narratives. By analyzing the pragmatic strategies employed, the research aims to uncover the nuanced ways in which language becomes a site of resistance and empowerment for marginalized voices.

The Significance of Multilingualism in Nigeria's Sociolinguistic Landscape

Nigeria's linguistic diversity is one of its defining features, with over 500 indigenous languages spoken across the country (Eberhard, Simons, & Fennig, 2023). This multilingualism reflects not only cultural plurality but also the complex historical, social, and political dynamics that shape the nation. In the context of resistance narratives, multilingualism plays a crucial role in how marginalized communities assert their identities, negotiate power, and contest domination. The ability to switch between languages—whether for strategic ambiguity, emphasis, or solidarity—enhances the pragmatics of resistance in ethnic narratives, making language a powerful instrument of sociopolitical engagement.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

This study aims to examine the pragmatic features and multilingual strategies used in ethnic narratives of marginalized communities in Nigeria, focusing on their role in resistance discourse and sociopolitical power negotiation.

The specific objectives are to:

1. To analyze how pragmatic elements—such as implicature, presupposition, and code-switching—are employed in multilingual resistance narratives.
2. To explore the sociopolitical implications of multilingual resistance discourse, particularly how language choices challenge dominant ideologies and reinforce marginalized group identities.

Significance of the Study

The study is significant as it contributes to the fields of Pragmatics, Discourse Analysis, and Sociolinguistics by examining how language functions as a tool of resistance among marginalized communities in Nigeria. By analyzing the pragmatic features and multilingual strategies embedded in ethnic narratives, the research sheds light on how linguistic choices shape identity, solidarity, and power dynamics in sociopolitical contexts. It further has practical implications for media practitioners, educators, and social advocates by highlighting how multilingual discourse can serve as a mechanism for empowerment and advocacy. Understanding these linguistic strategies can help in framing more inclusive communication policies that recognize and validate the voices of marginalized communities. And by bridging the gap between linguistic resistance and sociopolitical realities, this study ultimately underscores the role of language as not just a communicative tool but a powerful instrument of agency, defiance, and identity assertion within Nigeria's complex sociolinguistic landscape.

Previous Studies on Pragmatics of Resistance

Previous researchers have carried out pragmatic studies on marginalized communities in Nigeria; but none has been narrowed down to the multilingual strategies deployed in the ethnic narratives of these particular groups, namely, Ogoni, Igbo and Tiv in Nigeria. This is the research gap which the present study intends to fill.

Statement of the Problem

Marginalized communities in Nigeria navigate complex sociopolitical and linguistic landscapes where their ethnic narratives serve as both resistance and identity assertion. However, the pragmatic strategies and multilingual resources these communities employ remain underexplored, particularly in relation to power dynamics and sociolinguistic vitality. This gap is significant given the increasing ethno-political tensions in Nigeria, where dominant linguistic and sociopolitical structures often silence minority voices. Understanding the pragmatic mechanisms through which these communities construct resistance, identity, and solidarity is crucial for unpacking broader issues of power, language, and representation.

Despite scholarly attention to language and marginalization in Nigeria (Omoniyi, 1994; Bamgbose, 2000), research has largely focused on policy, endangerment, and language shift, with little emphasis on how multilingualism functions pragmatically in ethnic resistance narratives. This study addresses this lacuna by examining how marginalized ethnic communities strategically use language to assert their vitality and resist sociopolitical subjugation. Adopting Giles et al.'s (1977) Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory (EVT), the study explores how the linguistic choices of these communities reflect their perceived vitality and group identity. EVT posits that language is central to group survival and can be a tool for resisting assimilation into dominant cultures. The study also draws on Fairclough's (1995) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to interrogate how power and ideology are embedded in these narratives. Given that discourse is inherently tied to social structures, CDA enables an

examination of the ways in which marginalized groups use language to challenge dominant discourses and construct counter-narratives (Fairclough, 1995).

Multilingualism, particularly code-switching and code-mixing, often plays a pragmatic role in ethnic resistance, yet its functions in the narratives of marginalized communities remain under-theorized. Studies have shown that multilingual practices can serve as acts of identity, resistance, and in-group solidarity (Myers-Scotton, 1993; Blommaert, 2010). However, little research has specifically analyzed the pragmatic dimensions of these practices within Nigerian marginalized communities. This study, therefore, seeks to uncover the strategic use of multiple languages in ethnic narratives—whether for emphasis, irony, solidarity, or defiance—thereby contributing to discussions on the role of language in resistance and social struggle.

Moreover, existing research has not sufficiently addressed the intersection of multilingualism, resistance, and pragmatics in Nigerian ethnic discourse. While scholars such as Igboanusi (2008) and Adegbija (2004) have examined language endangerment and minority language struggles, there remains a need for an analysis that situates language use within pragmatic resistance strategies. This study fills that gap by examining how marginalized communities negotiate linguistic power through pragmatic tools such as presupposition, implicature, politeness strategies, and speech acts. By doing so, it extends the application of EVT and CDA in analyzing the intersection of language, power, and identity.

In sum, this study responds to the urgent need for an in-depth examination of the pragmatic strategies and multilingual practices in the ethnic narratives of marginalized Nigerian communities. By investigating how language functions as both a medium of resistance and a marker of group identity, the study contributes to ongoing debates on ethnolinguistic vitality, discourse power relations, and the broader sociolinguistic dynamics of Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research design, employing discourse analysis to examine the pragmatic features and multilingual strategies in ethnic resistance narratives. Data will be drawn from online documentaries which include 3 speeches; each from the 3 stated marginalized communities in Nigeria. Using Fairclough's (1995) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Giles et al.'s (1977) Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory (EVT), the study will analyze how language choices reflect resistance, identity, and power negotiation. The findings will provide insights into the role of multilingualism in shaping ethnic discourse and social struggle.

Analytical/ Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on two complementary theoretical frameworks: Giles et al.'s (1977) Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory (EVT) and Fairclough's (1995) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). These frameworks provide a comprehensive lens for analyzing the pragmatic features and multilingual strategies employed in the ethnic narratives of marginalized communities in Nigeria.

EVT examines the extent to which a linguistic community can maintain its language and identity within a dominant sociopolitical structure. Giles et al. (1977) argue that a group's status, demographic strength, and institutional support determine its vitality and ability to resist assimilation. In this study, EVT will be used to analyze how marginalized communities employ multilingual strategies such as code-switching, code-mixing, lexical borrowing, and language hybridity to reinforce group identity and resist sociolinguistic subjugation. The theory helps to

explain why certain linguistic choices in ethnic narratives function as resistance mechanisms, reflecting a community's efforts to assert its presence within the national discourse.

CDA, as developed by Fairclough (1995), provides a critical approach to examining how language constructs and sustains power relations. Fairclough posits that discourse is not neutral but deeply embedded in ideological structures that shape social realities. Given that marginalized communities often operate within oppressive sociopolitical environments, CDA is useful in uncovering how their narratives resist dominant discourses through pragmatic strategies such as presupposition, implicature, metaphor, and speech acts. By analyzing data from online documentaries, 10 Facebook posts, and 3 YouTube videos, CDA will reveal how language is strategically used to challenge hegemonic structures, articulate resistance, and construct counter-discourses.

Together, EVT and CDA provide a robust framework for understanding the pragmatics of resistance in multilingual ethnic narratives. EVT contextualizes the sociolinguistic vitality of marginalized groups, while CDA interrogates the discursive power struggles inherent in their linguistic expressions. This combined approach allows for a nuanced analysis of how language serves as both a tool for survival and a medium for challenging marginalization.

Data Analysis

Specific paragraphs from the speeches, are taken as **excerpts** (from the full speeches); critically examined and analyzed in order to expose the sociopolitical implications of multilingual resistance discourse; and reveal how language choices challenge dominant ideologies and reinforce marginalized group identities.

Multilingual Pragmatic Resistance and Ethnolinguistic Identity in Nnamdi Kanu's World Igbo Congress Address

In line with the study's emphasis on the pragmatics of resistance in marginalized ethnic narratives, Nnamdi Kanu's 2015 address to the World Igbo Congress in Los Angeles stands as a seminal text. Through a nuanced use of multilingual strategies, indigenous idioms, implicature, metaphor, and rhetorical appeals, Kanu constructs a powerful ethnic counter-narrative that challenges Nigerian hegemonic structures while reinforcing Igbo-Biafran identity. This section critically analyzes the speech using Giles et al.'s (1977) Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory (EVT) and Fairclough's (1995) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework.

Ethnolinguistic Vitality and Identity Assertion

Giles, Bourhis, and Taylor (1977) state that, status, demography, institutional support and control factors combine to make up the vitality of ethnolinguistic groups. According to EVT, a group's vitality depends on its perceived strength across status, demography, and institutional support. This implies that a group's strengths and weaknesses in each of these domains can be assessed so as to provide a rough classification of ethnolinguistic groups as having low, medium or high vitality. Low vitality groups are most likely to go through linguistic assimilation and are not considered a distinctive collective group (Bourhis, Giles, and Rosenthal 1981). On the other hand, high vitality groups are likely to maintain their language and distinctive cultural traits in multilingual settings. The Igbo can be classified as a high vitality group with distinct language and rich cultural heritage which cannot be linguistically assimilated or submerged.

Kanu, however, emphasizes the demographic spread of Biafrans ("Biafrans at home and in the diaspora"), their cultural distinctiveness ("traditional four-market days," "two-piece wrappers"), and institutional recognition ("IPOB registered in over 88 countries," "UN ECOSOC registration"). By listing these, he constructs Biafrans as a viable nation deserving autonomy. The strategic listing amplifies the group's vitality, thus resisting the hegemonic narrative of Nigerian national unity. For example, his reference to Biafra's compatibility with "Republican value system predicated upon natural justice" positions Biafra as inherently democratic and civilized, countering historical narratives that paint separatist movements as anarchic.

Multilingual Strategies: Code-Switching and Translanguaging

The switching between languages in same and single discussion is termed code-switching (Macaro, 2005). On the other hand, when polyglot speakers use their languages as a combined communication system, beyond language boundaries, this practice is known as translanguaging (Wei, 2018).

In resistance discourse, speakers often alternate between languages to reinforce identity and solidarity. For instance, Igbo activists advocating for self-determination frequently switch between English and Igbo in public statements to ensure accessibility while reaffirming their ethnic allegiance. This aligns with Myers-Scotton's (1993) Markedness Model, which suggests that code-switching signals a deliberate choice to convey a particular social meaning or power dynamic. In this way, multilingualism enables marginalized voices to resist linguistic assimilation and assert their distinct identities.

Kanu frequently code-switches between English and Igbo, notably inserting Igbo phrases such as:

"ndewo nu umu Chineke" (greetings to children of God),

"izu ka nma na nne ji" (unity is strength),

"Chi bu Eze" (God is King),

"nwanne di na mba" (kinship exists across boundaries),

"Onuru ube nwanne agbala oso" (do not abandon your sibling in distress).

This strategic translanguaging serves several pragmatic functions:

- a. It reinforces insider solidarity among Igbo/Biafran listeners,
- b. It marks a subtle resistance against linguistic domination by English and Hausa/Fulani linguistic hegemony in Nigeria;
- c. It indexes authenticity and emotional appeal.

By fusing languages, Kanu constructs a hybrid linguistic identity that asserts the legitimacy of indigenous expression within global political discourse.

3. Pragmatic Strategies: Implicature, Metaphor, and Indigenous Idioms

Kanu's speech is laden with pragmatic devices that subtly communicate resistance:

Implicature:

According to Stephen C. Levinson (1983), implicature stands as a paradigmatic example of the nature and power of pragmatic explanations of linguistic phenomena, which means that

the source of pragmatic inferences is outside the organization of language and is tied to some principles of co-operative interaction but still has an effect on language structure. Kanu's assertion that "Nigeria was not a united country and will NEVER be" implicates the illegitimacy of the Nigerian state without directly calling for violence, navigating political sensitivities pragmatically.

Metaphor:

Human thoughts processes are metaphorical in nature and that is why a concept, when metaphorically structured, is reflected through the activity and language employed. Metaphors, for George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (2003: 4), are "a matter of extraordinary language and are considered as tools for poetic imagination and rhetorical flourish, and for a better grasp of abstract and indefinable concepts." In their book, *Metaphors We Live by*, Lakoff and Johnson (2003: 4) claim that, "metaphor is not only a characteristic of language—namely words—but rather a matter of thought and actions." Metaphor, therefore, is prevalent in our everyday life and governs what we perceive, how we get around the world, and how we relate to other people around us.

Kanu frames Nigeria as an "unholy marriage," suggesting forced union, irreconcilability, and a legitimate cause for divorce (secession). The "children of light" metaphor positions Biafrans as a morally superior group destined to lead the Black race.

Indigenous Idioms:

Phrases like "Egbe bere ugo bere" (let the eagle perch and let the hawk perch) ground the speech in Igbo philosophy, invoking fairness, mutual respect, and justice—values that the speaker contrasts sharply against the perceived injustice of Nigerian governance. Through these strategies, Kanu shifts the narrative from mere grievance to a morally justified call for emancipation.

Critical Discourse Analysis: Unveiling Power Dynamics

Critical discourse analysis "reveals ideology within discourse, linking language to power structures" (Breeze, 2011, p. 520). Harris (1952) highlights its worth in exploring language's relationship with culture and society. Breeze (2011) further emphasizes discourse analysis as a tool for understanding language-power dynamics in social and political contexts. It uncovers implicit meanings, cultural influences, and power structures in communication (van Dijk, 2009).

Using Fairclough's framework, CDA is applied in unveiling layered power dynamics in Kanu's discourse which includes the delegitimization of the Nigerian State. By historicizing the forced amalgamation of Biafra, Oduduwa, and Arewa, Kanu constructs Nigeria as an artificial, colonial entity devoid of organic unity.

Empowerment of the Marginalized

Listing IPOB's achievements (e.g., designating Boko Haram as a Foreign Terrorist Organization, popularizing Radio Biafra beyond BBC) repositions the marginalized Biafrans as agents of influence and not victims.

Globalization of Local Struggles

His repeated referencing of international organizations (United Nations, USA Congress) and international media (CNN, BBC) situates the Biafran struggle within a global human rights

framework, thus trans-scaling the resistance. And the careful navigation between local vernacular appeals and global legalistic discourse evidences a sophisticated multilingual resistance strategy. In all, Kanu's speech pragmatically deploys language as a tool for contesting dominance, reclaiming cultural agency, and fostering global Igbo-Biafran solidarity.

The resistance, cultural resilience, and solidarity imbued in his speech resonates with the study's finding that multilingual strategies—especially code-switching, translanguaging, indigenous metaphors, and idioms—reinforce ethnic resilience and provide symbolic power to counter systemic marginalization.

Multilingualism as a Mechanism of Power Negotiation

In a country where political and economic power is often concentrated among dominant linguistic groups, multilingualism becomes a crucial mechanism for negotiating power. Nigerian politicians, for example, frequently deploy multilingual rhetoric to appeal to different ethnic constituencies. This practice is mirrored in resistance movements, where activists switch between languages depending on their audience.

Marginalized communities often exploit this linguistic fluidity to challenge dominant narratives. For instance, when advocating for Biafra, Igbo nationalists sometimes use English when engaging with international audiences but shift to Igbo or Pidgin in local mobilization efforts. This strategic linguistic adaptation ensures that their message reaches both global and grassroots audiences, maximizing impact while maintaining ethnic authenticity (Ezeigbo, 1997).

Moreover, pragmatic strategies such as presupposition, implicature, and politeness strategies are frequently employed in multilingual resistance narratives. These pragmatic features allow speakers to challenge authority indirectly, ensuring their messages remain powerful yet contextually appropriate (Mey, 2001). For example, an Igbo proverb like:

“*Onwụ adịghị egbu onye ndidi*” (Death does not frighten the patient person)

may pragmatically function as an implicit assertion of resilience in the face of oppression. Such expressions, deeply embedded in cultural and linguistic contexts, demonstrate how multilingualism enhances the pragmatics of resistance.

Summarily, Nnamdi Kanu's 2015 address serves as a paradigmatic example of how marginalized communities in Nigeria utilize complex multilingual pragmatics to resist political domination, assert collective identities, and galvanize diasporic support. By applying EVT and CDA, this analysis underscores how language practices operate as strategic, transformative tools in ethnic resistance narratives.

Pragmatic Resistance and Multilingual Agency in Ogoni Discourse: A Critical Analysis of Chief M.A.M. Tornwe III's Letter

Chief M.A.M. Tornwe III, a signatory of the Ogoni Bill of Rights and a key figure in the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), wrote a poignant letter articulating the plight of the Ogoni people. The letter forms part of a broader historical resistance against systemic exploitation, ecological destruction, and political marginalization. Tornwe's discourse resonates as a multilingual, pragmatic instrument for identity reclamation, international attention, and domestic resistance.

Pragmatic Acts and Illocutionary Force:

In the early 1990s, Ken Saro-Wiwa, the Ogoni “arrowhead” (Kukah 2011), mobilised the Ogoni society to nonviolently challenge their oppressed and marginalized conditions, which are made worse by the combined effort of the multinational oil company, Shell Petroleum Development Corporation (SPDC) and the Nigerian state. Their demands as contained in (OBR 1990) were for the autonomy for the Ogoni people, a fair share of the proceeds of oil extraction, and remediation of environmental damage to Ogoni lands.

Pragmatic Acts and Illocutionary Force

The letter is rich with pragmatic acts—speech acts strategically employed to assert identity, demand justice, and inspire solidarity. These include:

Commissives: “We will rebuild Ogoniland...” (a promise of restoration)

Directives: “We must speak again... We must demand...” (urging both Ogonis and the government to act)

Assertives: “The wealth beneath our land belongs to us...” (asserting ownership and identity)

Declaratives: “This is not a call for separation, but for empowerment.” (Redefining political goals)

These acts carry illocutionary force—that is, they do more than communicate; they perform actions. They resist marginalization through assertive redefinition of history and rights. They also reshape dialogue from one of dependence to partnership, particularly with “we must speak not as victims, but as partners.”

The use of “we must not be reduced to mere bystanders” functions to reframe Ogoni discourse as agentic rather than passive.

Using Pragmeme Theory (Mey, 2001), Chief M.A.M. Tornwe III letter functions as a socio-political pragmeme encompassing acts of accusation, appeal, condemnation, and solidarity.

Condemnation (Expressive):

In other Ogoni discourses where we see words like “genocide,” “ecocide,” “environmental terrorism”, they carry heavy expressive weight, pragmatically assigning moral guilt to external agents. Matthew Hassan Kukah an Ogoni activist in his *Witness to Justice* (2011), equally condemns the militarization of the region, the execution of the Ogoni Nine, and the state's disregard for environmental justice. He frames the Ogoni case as emblematic of Nigeria's deep-rooted governance failures and the need for sincere reconciliation and structural reform. He states that, “the tragedy of the Ogoni struggle is not only in the lives lost or the environment degraded, but in the deafening silence of a nation that watched its citizens cry for justice while the state wielded the sword of complicity” (2011, p. 184).

Solidarity and Representation (Declaration):

“We, the Ogoni people...” is a declarative construction of collective identity and voice, aligning with Austin’s (1962) performative speech acts. The Ogoni’s struggle against the state resonates with all the victims of injustices in the country. As Kukah (2011) argues, it offers an insight into the dynamics of minority politics in Nigeria.

Multilingual Strategies and Translingual Resistance

Tornwe's letter, though primarily in English, integrates vernacular expressions, Ogoni worldview metaphors, and paralinguistic ideophones—fragments of Ogoni semiotic systems embedded in English structure. This mirrors translingual resistance where English is appropriated and localized for anti-hegemonic struggle.

Metaphor Analysis

The oil is referred to as “the wealth beneath our land”, laden with spiritual and ancestral implications. The idea that “our rivers poisoned, our land degraded” metaphorically renders oil not just as a resource but as a source of contamination, tying economic exploitation to environmental desecration. This reflects Ogoni cosmology where the land is sacred, ancestral, and alive—thus, oil becomes a violated sacred fluid, akin to “blood.” By metaphorizing oil in this way, the letter fuses spiritual discourse (land as ancestor, oil as blood).

Political Symbolism

Here, extraction is seen as theft and desecration. This metaphor empowers the Ogoni people to claim moral and spiritual authority over their land and to resist purely economic interpretations of development.

CDA and the Ideology of Marginalization

Applying Fairclough's three-dimensional model, Tornwe's discourse textually deploys a high frequency of lexical items signifying death, dispossession, silence, and resistance. Discursively constructs an Ogoni identity as victimized yet dignified—an active agent demanding restitution. His letter is not merely an emotive lament; it is a strategic multilingual performance of resistance, embedding local ideologies within global human rights discourse. And it socially situates itself within a postcolonial Nigeria where ethnic minorities are structurally excluded from resource control and self-representation.

Ethnolinguistic Vitality and Resistance Identity

Using Giles et al.'s (1977) Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory, institutional support from MOSOP and international NGOs elevates the Ogoni voice. In addition, the demographic and territorial distinctiveness reinforces their collective identity. The use of English in the letter is not assimilationist but strategic—projecting Ogoni resistance to global human rights platforms. It shows a performance of vitality, affirming the endurance of Ogoni language, culture, and political presence through multilingual acts.

Chief Tornwe's open letter exemplifies pragmatic resistance through multilingual, narrative, and metaphoric strategies. It communicates a layered message that blends tradition, memory, policy, and protest. The speaker's use of culturally grounded expressions like “*Miidekor*”, political metaphors like oil as blood, and speech acts of assertion, demand, and solidarity serve to empower a marginalized ethnic group while calling for systemic justice.

Contextualizing Tiv Youths' Narrative of Marginalization and Resistance in Contemporary Nigeria

In 15 Sep 2016 *Daily Trust* report titled “Tiv Youths Allege Marginalization” by Fidelis Mac-Leva, the National Council of Tiv Youth (NCTY) gave a formal political response to what is perceived as systemic exclusion under the Buhari-led administration. The Tiv community, known for its demographic strength and electoral significance in the North-Central region, used

the press release to renegotiate their stake in Nigeria's federal structure. Delivered in the capital city of Abuja—a symbolic act in itself—this public outcry is not just political lobbying but a linguistic performance of resistance, leveraging national media to amplify their voice.

Pragmatic Acts and Resistance Speech Functions:

Using Mey's Pragmatic Acts Theory and Austin's Speech Act Theory, excerpts from the statement reveal several illocutionary forces:

Accusation (Assertive):

“...they had been relegated to the background by the government.”

This is a declarative speech act that frames the Tiv's exclusion as a deliberate act of marginalization, intended to expose injustice and provoke institutional redress.

Appeal and Threat (Directive + Commissive):

“Our party leaders... shall no doubt have an enormous task in convincing the larger population of the Tiv people in favour of the APC in future elections.”

This utterance functions as both directive (urge for redress) and commissive (a veiled threat of electoral withdrawal)—a potent pragmatic strategy to pressure the ruling party.

Warning (Expressive):

The use of emotionally charged words like “worrisome,” “insensitivity,” “regrettable disappearance” adds an expressive layer, highlighting the deep affective dimension of perceived injustice.

Identity Reaffirmation (Declarative):

The phrase “the Tiv nation” invokes collective ethnic identity—a self-ascribing term that transcends geopolitical boundaries to assert a unified resistance group.

CDA and the Politics of Language Use:

As Willig (2008) rightly pointed out, analyzing discourse is a means of struggle against power. CDA analyzes the field which take place on the intersection of language and social structure in order to reveal the asymmetrical use of power, exploitation, manipulation and structural inequalities (Blommaert and Bulcaen, 2000). Following Fairclough's (1995) CDA framework, the Tiv youths' statements are structured to expose and contest hegemonic power relations. At the textual Level, we have, repetition of phrases like “Tiv people,” “Tiv sons,” “Tiv farmers” reinforces ethnic collectivity, presenting a unified front that seeks inclusion, not fragmentation.

Discursive Practice

Kazemian and Hashemi (2014) describe Critical Discourse Analysis as an interdisciplinary lens through which textual discourse is examined to uncover how power, authority, dominance, and social inequality are constructed, sustained, resisted, and reproduced. As for Meyer (2001), CDA aims to make transparent the discursive aspects of societal disparities and inequalities. Fairclough (1992:315, cited in Min 1997:148) states that CDA explores the social function of language, in describing linguistic processes in social terms, that reveals “ideological” and “political investments.” The discourse positions the Tiv as previous supporters of the President Buhari's led regime, now betrayed—a narrative designed to invoke guilt and compel reparative action from the federal government.

The reference to figures like Dr. Paul Orhii and Mr. Robert Orya, followed by an expectation of replacement by “a Tiv son,” reflects an ethno-political expectation of rotational justice, which is common in Nigeria’s federal character arrangements.

Ethnolinguistic Vitality and the Crisis of Representation

Applying Giles et al.'s Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory (1977). The Tiv assert their demographic and political relevance, reminding the state of their role in the 2015 election victory. They express that the absence of Tiv elites in federal institutions signals a crisis in institutional vitality, which this discourse seeks to reverse.

They allude to demographic strength. And by invoking “45,000 Tiv farmers... sacked or killed,” the discourse presents the Tiv as both numerically significant and unjustly victimized—a paradox that legitimizes their claim to political inclusion.

Multilingual and Figurative Strategies

Although the statement is rendered in formal English, it demonstrates translanguaging pragmatics through ethnic idiomatic structuring. The phrase “give... a sense of belonging” is a Nigerian-English idiom often used in political discourse to mean inclusive governance—a translation of indigenous communal ethos into English.

We also see metaphorical framing where terms like “relegated to the background,” “regrettable disappearance,” and “game of interest” carry metaphorical weight that frames politics as a competitive space in which the Tiv have been unfairly benched.

Deictic anchoring ensures that such references like “our party leaders in the state” and “the Tiv nation” are made in order to construct a spatial and cultural identity that juxtaposes the Tiv as both internal to Nigeria and distinct within it—a discursive act of resistant positioning.

Summarily, the press release constructs a victim-hero binary. The Tiv as loyal contributors to national democracy and economic productivity (farmers), and the government as insensitive betrayers of that loyalty. This mirrors the postcolonial resistance framework, where marginal ethnicities leverage language and media to interrogate national injustice and reclaim agency.

The public statement is a strategic pragmatic act of resistance that uses political memory, emotional rhetoric, and coded metaphor to challenge exclusion and demand equitable representation. It reveals how multilingual Nigerian English expressions, when deployed in national forums, become powerful tools for ethnic self-assertion, collective identity construction, and resistance against hegemonic silence.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Findings from this study reveal that multilingual strategies are veritable tools of resistance. And that marginalized ethnic groups like the Igbo, Ogoni, and Tiv employ code-switching, translanguaging, and indigenous idioms to assert identity and challenge sociopolitical subjugation. These strategies however, enabled speakers to switch between languages for emphasis, secrecy, or solidarity. Pragmatic features were applied to subvert dominant narratives. Such features like implicature, presupposition, metaphor, and irony are used to veil dissent while delivering powerful critiques of state oppression and systemic inequality.

Discourse has further been revealed as a site of identity construction and empowerment thereby allowing ethnic narratives to reinforce their cultural pride and group solidarity; and this is ultimately achieved by embedding communal histories, resistance memories, and shared grievances into everyday discourse, especially on social and digital platforms. In addition, ethnolinguistic vitality in marginalized narratives prevailed despite hegemonic pressures. These communities demonstrate high ethnolinguistic vitality, preserving their languages as tools for activism, resistance, and intergenerational continuity, particularly in digital and oral storytelling.

Recommendations

The imperativeness of accountability for historical and environmental injustices can never be over emphasised. Truth and reconciliation mechanisms should be established to acknowledge and redress decades of state violence, environmental degradation (e.g., Ogoni land), and displacement suffered by these communities, with legal and economic compensation where appropriate. Protection of civil rights and freedom of expression is very crucial. The Nigerian state must stop the criminalization of ethnic activism and ensure that leaders and youths from marginalized communities can voice their demands without harassment, unlawful detention, or censorship.

Secondly, there is an urgent need for institutional redress and constitutional inclusion. The Nigerian government must initiate constitutional reforms that guarantee political inclusion and fair representation of marginalized ethnic groups in national decision-making bodies, such as the National Assembly, federal cabinet, and resource control agencies. Equitable resource allocation and infrastructure development is advocated. These marginalized communities should benefit from targeted economic interventions, including infrastructural projects, employment schemes, and environmental remediation programs—especially in oil-producing and agriculturally neglected regions.

While linguistic strategies empower resistance, there is a need for legal protection of minority languages and cultures as part of national heritage. These should be celebrated and preserved as central to Nigeria's pluralistic identity. And finally, this study recommends the promotion of inclusive national narratives. National media and educational curricula should reflect the histories, contributions, and struggles of all ethnic groups to foster mutual respect, unity, and reduce the perception of exclusion and suppression.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that multilingualism is a defining feature of Nigeria's sociolinguistic landscape, shaping how marginalized communities resist, assert identity, and negotiate power. It has also demonstrated that the Igbo, Ogoni, and Tiv communities engage in dynamic and strategic resistance using not only linguistic and pragmatic tools, but also through persistent social, cultural, and political assertions of identity and rights. Their multilingual narratives are embedded with decades of resistance, survival, and defiance in the face of systemic oppression, economic deprivation, and political marginalization. Beyond the use of code-switching, metaphors, and cultural idioms, these communities mobilize collective memory, digital activism, and grassroots movements to challenge a state structure that often renders them voiceless. Their resistance is not only spoken—it is lived, enacted, and remembered through generations.

So, the intersection of multilingualism and resistance thus underscores the profound role of language in shaping Nigeria's sociopolitical discourse. Because language alone cannot dismantle the deeply entrenched inequalities in Nigeria's federal structure, a holistic approach that addresses socioeconomic disparity, political exclusion, and historical injustices is required. Only then can the voices of Nigeria's marginalized truly be heard, not as background echoes, but as vital agents of transformation, equity, and national unity.

In sum, pragmatic and multilingual resistance in Nigeria is not merely an act of communication—it is a call to justice. It signals a powerful demand for visibility, dignity, and structural change, echoing from the margins and demanding rightful space at the center of the nation's future.

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Appendices 1, 2 are the full speeches from Mazi Nnamdi Kanu (IPOB Leader), Chief M.A.M. Tornwe III, a signatory of the Ogoni Bill of Rights and a key figure in the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), and appendix 3, the press statement by Chief (Dr.) John Akpereshi Gum, the President of the National Council of Tiv Youth (NCTY) as contained in National Newspaper (DailyTrust, 2016) during a press conference in Abuja.

- **Appendix 1**

Nnamdi Kanu's speech at the World Igbo Congress on September 06, 2015

[Being part of an address by Mazi Nnamdi Kanu, Leader of Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), at the Plenary Session of World Igbo Congress (WIC) in Los Angeles--California, on September 6th, 2015]

With great humility and submission to the will of the Most High Chukwu Okike Abhiama puru ime ihe nile, I stand before you today here in Los Angeles California, in the presence of the children of light, the custodians of our traditions in faraway lands, the bringers of hope and savior of the Black race the World Igbo Congress. I acknowledge the presence of each and every one of you, especially the members of the high table, distinguished ladies and gentlemen here gathered and those listening around the world. I say “ndewo nu umu Chineke” to all of you.

It is my guess that the question on the lips of every delegate here today is perhaps ‘what is Nnamdi Kanu doing here at the congress of all Igbos worldwide talking about the global effort to restore Biafra’?. My answer as always is a very simple one, ‘izu ka nma na nne ji’. There will be no Biafra without the support of World Igbo Congress in particular and the Igbos in the USA in general.

Every right-thinking human being knows that the slogan “One Nigeria” is a ruse. Nigeria was not a united country and will NEVER be a united country even in the foreseeable future. To refresh our memories, Nigeria is a country made up of three distinct nations with mutually exclusive and diametrically opposed and irreconcilable value systems. Among these nations, BIAFRA is the only one with a distinct and internationally accepted Republican value system predicated upon the twin philosophy of (1) “Egbe bere ugo bere” the principle of natural justice, fairness, equity and equality before the spiritual and temporal laws and (2) “Eziokwu bu ndu” which is the weaving of the irreducibility of truth into the day to day discourse of life, in essence a life of nobility predicated on honesty.

Futhermore and ingrained in the DNA of every Biafran, is the axiomatic expression that “Chi bu Eze” or God is King. Regrettably, the British colonial masters forcefully merged BIAFRA with the other two nations of AREWA and ODUDUWA to form what is known today as Nigeria. Implicit in our value system and its incompatibility with those from other merged nations lies the need for the immediate extrication and restoration of the nation of Biafra from the country called Nigeria to represent as it was ordained a pinnacle of hope for the black race the world over. That Nigeria is perpetually in the doldrums politically, economically, and socially is of no surprise to any discerning mind and keen followers of the miserable history of Nigeria. After all, is it not why today we found ourselves in far flung lands like the USA and many more countries around the world? The frustrating part of this history is the fact that Biafrans have been at the receiving end of the sorry state of affairs in Nigeria even though they possess the manpower and resources to sustain themselves and flourish as an independent nation.

Biafrans are known for their industrious and enterprising lifestyle propelled by sheer hard work and the “can do” spirit. Biafrans don’t run away from history, rather they make history. Biafrans are adventurous and are not afraid to venture into the unknown. But the same cannot be said of other merged nations in the country called Nigeria. Biafrans have been held down and their development arrested by virtue of merging them with other nations to form Nigeria.

One of the questions going through the minds of many could be; but who are actually the Biafrans or put in another way; what is the footprint of Biafraland?

Biafraland consists of the states in the present South East and South-South with the exception of Edo state but including Igbanke in Edo state. Biafraland also include Igala in Kogi state and Idoma land in Benue state. In all these areas we have the traditional four-market days

and their women tie two-piece wrappers and have names and words that are interchangeable irrespective of the state.

For over 100 years Biafrans have endured the unholy marriage called amalgamation and creation of Nigeria by the British colonial masters. Biafrans at home and in the diaspora can no longer endure the subjugation of Biafra under Nigeria. As in most revolutions and emancipation struggles, patriotic citizens in diaspora are always in the lead for collective objective of achieving nationhood.

A very good example is the case of the State of Israel in which the Jews in America funded and supported the independence of the nation of Israel. We share a common ancestry with our Jewish brothers and should follow similar strategy in achieving the nation of Biafra. In this regard, WIC is expected to play a critical role in the quest for the restoration of the nation of BIAFRA.

As some of you may have known, there is an ongoing effort to galvanize Biafrans globally to work together to achieve the collective objective of restoration of the nation of Biafra. This effort is spearheaded by the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) with Radio Biafra London (RBL) as the media arm. The operational headquarters of IPOB is in Vitoria-Spain, outside of Nigeria for obvious reasons. IPOB is registered and recognized by various countries all over the world. Coincidentally, the USA headquarters of IPOB is here in Los

Angeles—California. But what has IPOB/RBL achieved, you may ask? Through the works of IPOB/RBL within the past three years, we have achieved the following:

- Radio Biafra is today the only African institution in the history of the world to be ranked No.1 in an independent survey against other (media) organizations from around the world. That Radio Biafra is today more popular than BBC Radio is clear testimony to what we can accomplish as a race when we put our minds to it.
- Designation of Boko Haram as F.T.O. (Foreign Terrorist Organization) by the Department of States of the USA. We have the proof to make this claim.
- IPOB gained recognition as national liberation movement in over 88 countries where we are registered and carry out our meetings and rallies unhindered.
- Initiated and continued annual 30th of May Biafra Heroes Remembrance Day. The 2015 edition at Aba recorded over 3 million attendees without a single adverse incident recorded.
- Forced the Nigerian Government to halt the continuous aerial bombardment of Cross Rivers and Akwa Ibom under the guise of fighting kidnappers' havens. We alerted the world that Nigeria used the banned NAPALM bombs on Biafrans for three consecutive days of June 17th—19th.
- We have raised the consciousness of our people on the Rights and the legality of their quest for their nation of Biafra based on the UNDRIP which Nigeria is a signatory to:
- Debunked and dismantled all the lies and innuendoes dished out by Yoruba and Northern media concerning Biafrans, which in some cases are geared towards dividing the various sections/areas of Biafraland.
- We have formed an effective opposition to the tyrannical rule of the current president of Nigeria and checkmated him in trying to take Biafrans for a ride.

- Nigerian Police now know that you can no longer kill a Biafran and get away with it. Through the activities of IPOB in Igweocha (Port Harcourt) the officer responsible for the shooting of an unarmed bus driver has been dismissed from the Nigerian Police pending trial. You will agree with me that this has never happened before.
- Through our work/efforts, we got Microsoft to recognize the word Biafra.
- We have brought Biafra restoration into global discourse such that media juggernauts such as CNN, BBC, VOA, RFI, etc., who hitherto stayed away from discussing Biafra are now forced to talk about Biafra.
- We are also registered with the ECOSOC department of United Nations as INDIGENOUS PEOPLE OF BIAFRA, where we made it clear that no organization is representing us but we are Biafrans and representing ourselves.

In my humble submission, I do strongly believe that WIC can get involved and help achieve more. The Igbo speaking Biafrans are known for their resourcefulness and resoluteness when they make up their minds to embark on a mission. The Igbos from all I know about them, do collectively abhor evil, they love hard work, helped one another, and tenaciously believed that “nwanne di na mba.”

I am using this opportunity to call upon each member of WIC to join hands with other Biafrans and members of IPOB to work towards the restoration of our dear nation of Biafra. You can help in diverse ways such as funding, diplomatic connections, lobbying your congressmen and people of significant clout and influence, and sundry activities geared toward the singular goal of achieving sovereignty for the nation of Biafra. Your loved ones in Biafraland look up to you because we have it in our saying that “Onuru ube nwanne agbala oso.”

BIAFRA restoration is here, all you have to do is put in your efforts and BIAFRA will come. Like many other well-meaning Biafrans of Igbo extraction around the world, I look forward to the day when World Igbo Congress will be held in any of our towns and villages in Biafraland.

May Chukwu Okike Abhiana bless all of you and bless the nation of BIAFRA

Mazi Nnamdi Kanu

Leader of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB).

Address by Mazi Nnamdi Kanu, Leader of Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), at the Plenary Session of World Igbo Congress (WIC) in Los Angeles--California, on September 5th, 2015.

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE Ogoni People and Nigerian Government by Chief Matthew Atangsi Marcus Tornwe III, One of the Signatories to the Ogoni Bill of Rights. (Source: Ogonity 4th April, 2025)

To My Beloved Ogoni People and the Government of Nigeria,

At 82 years of age, I write to you, not with bitterness or anger, but with the wisdom of a long life, deeply rooted in the struggles and hopes of our people. I have seen many seasons, seasons of hardship, of pain, of sorrow but also seasons of hope and resilience. Through it all,

my heart has remained steadfast in its desire for peace, justice, and prosperity for our land, Ogoniland, and its people.

I remember, with clarity, the day in 1990 when we presented the Ogoni Bill of Rights to the world. It was a declaration of our resolve. Our land, our rivers, and our people had been exploited for far too long. The Ogoni Bill of Rights was not just a political document, it was the voice of our ancestors echoing through the generations. It was the voice of every Ogoni who had felt the heavy hand of injustice, and it was a promise to the generations that would come after us. A promise that we, the Ogoni people, would never accept exploitation, and that we would fight for our right to control our land and its resources. It was about dignity, justice, and a future where our people could live without fear of their land being poisoned or their voices silenced.

In OBR, we introduced the principle of *Miidekor*, which I proposed, and which remains at the core of our struggle. *Miidekor* is simple, yet profound. It says that the owners of the land should have the right to control the wealth that comes from it. It is the custom of our people since time immemorial, just as the owner of a palmwine farm receives a share of the harvest from the tapper, so too should we, the Ogoni, share in the wealth that comes from the oil beneath our soil.

I am one of the three remaining signatories to the OBR, out of the original thirty. This is a testament to the sacrifices of those who are no longer with us, among them, Ken Saro-Wiwa, the Ogoni Thirteen, and countless others who gave their lives so that we could stand here today and speak of justice. Their memory is woven into the fabric of our struggle. We must carry their legacy forward, not with anger or bitterness, but with a deep commitment to the values they fought for, values that are not just about the past, but about the future of Ogoniland.

Now, with the government's recent call for dialogue on the resumption of oil production in our land, we must speak again. But this time, we must speak not as victims, but as partners. We must demand that any such dialogue starts from a place of mutual respect. The resources of Ogoniland are ours, and any conversation about the future of oil production must first address the wrongs that have been done to us over the years. Our rivers poisoned, our land degraded, and our people left to suffer the consequences of this exploitation. The time for lip service has passed; we need action.

The restoration of our environment is not something that can happen overnight. The damage is deep, and the scars of decades of pollution cannot be erased in a day. But I speak with the wisdom of my years when I say that we cannot wait forever for perfection. We cannot wait any longer for the land to be healed. The people of Ogoni are suffering from the toxins that have been left untreated for so long. We need immediate, measurable action. We need the government and the oil companies to take responsibility for the damage they have caused and begin the work of cleaning up the land and water.

At the same time, we must be realistic. We cannot restore Ogoniland to the way it was before the oil companies arrived. That is not possible. But we can begin the long, difficult journey of healing. The government and all stakeholders must act with urgency, transparency, and accountability. The recommendations of the UNEP report must be fully implemented. We do not seek promises; we seek results. We demand that the restoration of our environment be a priority, because it is not just about our land, it is about our dignity.

But environmental restoration alone will not be enough. We must also look to the future of Ogoniland. The wealth beneath our land belongs to us, not just to outsiders. For too long,

our resources have been extracted and sold, while we are left to suffer. It is no longer enough for others to profit while we are left in poverty. The Ogoni people deserve control over our resources and the reinvestment of those benefits into our community and the nation. We deserve a fair share of the wealth that has been taken from us. Let us learn from the experiences of other Indigenous communities, such as the Fort McKay First Nations in Canada, who have used their oil wealth to build strong, self-sustaining communities, while maintaining control over their land and culture. We too, must be in control of our destiny. Miidekor calls for equity, for fairness, for the right of the Ogoni people to benefit from the wealth of our land.

I invite the Ogoni Dialogue Committee and other stakeholders to visit Canada, to meet with myself and other Indigenous leaders and chiefs. This will provide an opportunity to learn from the successes of communities that, with the support of their government, have taken control of their resources. Together, we can learn how to manage our resources wisely and ensure that the wealth of Ogoniland benefits our people, not just outsiders.

We must also address the pain of the past. The loss of our leaders, the destruction of our environment, and the marginalization of our people have left deep scars on our community. Our youth, especially, have borne the brunt of this pain. Many have turned to harmful ways of coping, as they struggle to survive in a world that has too often turned its back on them. To heal, we must invest in our youth. We must give them the tools they need to succeed such as education, skills, opportunities, and the chance to one day lead. We must also provide support for their mental health, as they carry the weight of intergenerational trauma. The government can play a critical role in this by empowering the youth of Ogoni to help rebuild our land and society. Government investments in education, technical skills, entrepreneurship, policies that encourage Indigenous participation, and mental health programs are crucial in empowering the Ogoni people, particularly our youth, to rebuild and shape the future of Ogoniland. These investments are the foundation upon which we can restore our dignity, ensure our people thrive, and transform Ogoniland into a self-sustaining and prosperous region for generations to come.

I commend President Bola Ahmed Tinubu for his leadership in signing the bill to establish the Federal University of Environment and Technology in Ogoni. This is a step in the right direction, showing that there is good faith and a commitment to addressing the needs of the Ogoni people. We must continue to build on this momentum, taking action to ensure that our people benefit from the development of our land, rather than just being the recipients of empty promises.

Finally, I return to the idea of an Ogoni State. This is not a call for separation, but for empowerment. We must have the ability to govern ourselves, to preserve our culture, and to ensure that our resources are used for our benefit. We deserve the right to manage our own affairs and to control our own destiny. We ask for the opportunity to govern ourselves, not for division, but for empowerment.

I urge the Nigerian government to listen to the voices of the Ogoni people. History has shown that when we speak with one voice, in unity and in one spirit, the Almighty listens. This is not just a call for oil, it is a call for justice, dignity, and the restoration of our land and our people. The wealth beneath our land belongs to us, and we must have a seat at the table. We must not be reduced to mere bystanders in the conversation about our future.

I may not live to see the full fruits of this struggle, but I have faith that the generations to come will continue this work. The Ogoni people will rise again. We will build a land that is peaceful, prosperous, and free. I call on all Ogoni people, especially our youth, to hold fast to

hope. Our journey is long, but it is not in vain. Together, we will rebuild Ogoniland, returning it to the peace and prosperity our ancestors dreamed of.

Sincerely,

Chief Matthew Atangsi Marcus Tornwe III, JP

A Son of Ogoniland

Signatory to the Ogoni Bill of Rights

Former Special Advisor to the late Ken Saro-Wiwa on Traditional and Cultural Affairs

Founding Member of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP)

Dailytrust

Tiv Youths Allege Marginalization

By

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The National Council of Tiv Youth (NCTY) has faulted what it termed ‘marginalization, unequal treatment, unfair and unjust denial of Tiv people in the current APC-led federal government.

The National President of the council, Chief (Dr) John Akpereshi Gum, who made this position known at a press conference in Abuja yesterday, said in spite of the profound support and enthusiasm demonstrated by the Tiv for the needed change in the 2015 elections, they had been relegated to the background by the government.

“It is indeed worrisome that at the inception of the Buhari administration, the Tiv people welcomed it with profound enthusiasm, hope and great expectation. However, the administration has witnessed a regrettable disappearance of many Tiv sons at the federal level needed to give Benue people and the Tiv nation in particular a sense of belonging”, Gum said.

He said the administration had removed without replacement, many prominent Tiv sons such as the former Director General of the National Agency for Food Administration and Control (NAFDAC) Dr. Paul Orhii, former Managing Director of NEXIM Bank, Mr. Robert Orya as well as Mr. Samuel Ukura whose tenure elapsed as the Auditor General of the Federation but should have been replaced by a Tiv son.

While calling on President Buhari to urgently redress the trend, Gum said: “This perceived insensitivity and marginalization of the Tiv people by the Buhari administration has become worrisome to us because politics is a game of interest.”

He cautioned that if Tiv people were unable to aggregate their interests as a people under the Buhari administration, “Our party leaders in the state shall no doubt have an enormous task in convincing the larger population of the Tiv people in favour of the APC in future elections.”

On the festering farmer/herder crises in the state, he said an estimated 45,000 Tiv farmers had been sacked or killed in their communities and homes, subjecting others to become residents of internally displaced persons’ camps.