

Harnessing Nigeria's Linguistic Diversity for Market Intelligence: A Case Study of Plateau Languages in Socio-Economic Transformation

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Abstract

Nigeria's vast linguistic diversity, with over 500 indigenous languages, presents both challenges and opportunities for socio-economic development. While market research in the country has historically emphasized English and, to some extent, Pidgin, this narrow linguistic focus overlooks the strategic value of multilingual data for understanding consumer behavior and enhancing market intelligence. This article explores how Nigeria's linguistic resources, with special attention to Plateau State — one of the most linguistically diverse regions in the world — can be harnessed for socio-economic transformation. Major Plateau languages such as Berom, Ngas, Mwaghavul, Tarok, Goemai, and Ron are examined as case illustrations of how indigenous languages shape trade, communication, and local economies. Methodologically, the paper adopts a qualitative, descriptive case-study approach based on documentary analysis of relevant literature and secondary materials. The discussion argues that multilingual data can offer useful insights into market trends, brand loyalty, and community-specific needs across diverse sectors, including agriculture, healthcare, education, and financial inclusion. However, challenges such as under-documentation of minority languages, lack of natural language processing tools, and policy neglect remain significant obstacles. The study concludes that rethinking linguistic diversity as an economic resource, rather than a barrier, is vital for inclusive development in Nigeria. It recommends stronger policy frameworks, technological innovation, and public-private partnerships to integrate indigenous languages into national and regional market intelligence systems.

Keywords: Multilingual Data, Market Intelligence, Linguistic Diversity, Plateau State, Socio-Economic Transformation, Nigeria

Introduction

Nigeria is widely recognized as one of the most linguistically diverse countries in the world, with estimates ranging from 500 to over 520 indigenous languages spoken across its six geo-

political zones (Eberhard, Simons, & Fennig, 2022). This diversity, far from being a mere cultural artifact, holds enormous potential for economic development when systematically harnessed for market intelligence. Language shapes how people think, communicate, and make consumer choices, thus becoming a key variable in understanding markets and designing socio-economic policies (Bamgbose, 2020). However, conventional approaches to market research in Nigeria continue to rely heavily on English and, to some extent, Pidgin, neglecting the deep insights that indigenous languages could provide about consumer behavior, local identities, and purchasing decisions.

At the national level, Nigeria's major lingua-cultural clusters — Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo — have historically dominated the narrative of language and commerce. Yet, this framework often overshadows other regions with rich linguistic mosaics that play critical roles in shaping local economies. Plateau State, situated in North-Central Nigeria, is a unique case. With more than forty indigenous languages, Plateau is considered one of the most linguistically diverse areas not just in Nigeria, but globally (Blench, 2021). Among its most widely spoken languages are Berom, Ngas, Mwaghavul, Tarok, Goemai, and Ron, each serving as a cultural anchor for local communities and facilitating trade, traditional governance, and intergroup relations. This multilingual reality provides fertile ground for rethinking market intelligence — not as a one-size-fits-all English-driven exercise, but as a nuanced, language-sensitive strategy that reflects consumer realities at the grassroots.

The intersection between linguistic diversity and socio-economic transformation is particularly relevant for Nigeria's emerging digital economy. The rise of mobile technology, social media, and artificial intelligence has made it increasingly possible to capture and analyze large volumes of multilingual data. For instance, analyzing consumer conversations in indigenous Plateau languages such as Ngas or Mwaghavul on local radio stations, town markets, or digital platforms can reveal patterns of demand, trust, and brand loyalty that may not be visible through English-only data collection. Similarly, tailoring financial services, healthcare campaigns, or agricultural innovations in Tarok or Berom can enhance accessibility, acceptance, and impact among rural populations who may not be proficient in English.

Despite this potential, Nigeria's market research ecosystem faces significant challenges in integrating multilingual data. The dominance of English as the official language and as the medium of instruction in schools has led to the marginalization of indigenous languages in formal economic planning. Furthermore, Plateau's smaller languages are under-documented, and the absence of robust Natural Language Processing (NLP) tools for them limits their visibility in big data analytics. These challenges highlight a critical gap: while Nigeria's linguistic diversity could serve as a driver for inclusive socio-economic transformation, insufficient attention to multilingual data risks entrenching inequalities and limiting innovation.

This article therefore seeks to interrogate the role of multilingual data in market intelligence with a specific focus on Nigeria, while situating Plateau State's major languages as a microcosm of the broader national reality. By exploring how Berom, Ngas, Mwaghavul, Tarok, Goemai, and Ron — alongside Nigeria's other major language blocs — influence consumer behavior and market structures, the study underscores the importance of harnessing linguistic diversity as a tool for development.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the growing recognition of language as a critical factor in economic communication, Nigeria's market intelligence practices remain predominantly monolingual or limited to major lingua francas such as English, Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo. This neglects the vast number of smaller linguistic communities whose economic behaviors remain undocumented and

unaccounted for. Consequently, businesses risk missing market opportunities, while government policies may fail to capture the full range of citizen experiences and aspirations.

Objectives of the Study

This paper seeks to:

1. Explore the role of Nigeria's linguistic diversity in shaping consumer behavior and market dynamics.
2. Analyze the potential of multilingual data in strengthening market intelligence systems.
3. Demonstrate how harnessing linguistic diversity can contribute to Nigeria's socio-economic transformation.
4. Identify challenges and propose strategies for integrating multilingual data into policy and business practices.

Research Questions

1. How does Nigeria's linguistic diversity influence market behavior and consumer engagement?
2. What role can multilingual data play in enhancing market intelligence in Nigeria?
3. In what ways can multilingual insights drive socio-economic transformation?
4. What challenges hinder the integration of Nigeria's linguistic diversity into market research, and how can they be addressed?

In light of these questions, this paper argues that Nigeria's multilingual resources, when systematically documented and analyzed, can serve as a powerful tool for socio-economic growth and inclusivity. The Plateau examples presented in the paper are therefore treated as illustrative case examples drawn from the reviewed literature and contextual discussion; they are not presented as the results of a new field survey or experiment conducted by the authors. This approach provides a basis for examining the potential of multilingual data for market intelligence while identifying areas requiring future empirical investigation. The study relies on secondary documentary materials, particularly the literature cited in the paper on Nigerian multilingualism, Plateau languages, language policy, multilingual communication, and the technological processing of language data. The materials were purposively selected for their relevance to the study objectives and research questions. The analysis is thematic, focusing on the relationship between language, market communication, consumer engagement, socio-economic participation, technological possibilities, and the challenges of incorporating minority languages into market intelligence.

This paper adopts a qualitative, descriptive case-study design based on documentary analysis. Plateau State is used as the focal case because of its marked linguistic diversity and the relevance of its indigenous languages to local economic and social activities.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative, descriptive research design to examine how Nigeria's multilingual environment can support the generation of market intelligence. Data were collated from multilingual sources, including consumer expressions, local-language interaction, interviews, and observations. The use of indigenous languages alongside English enabled study to capture culturally and linguistically specific information that may not be adequately represented in English-only data. The collated data were translated, coded, categorized and thematically analyzed to identify recurring consumer needs, preferences, attitudes, buying behaviors, and market trends. These findings were then interpreted as market intelligence, providing insights that can support product, and market communication development.

Multilingual Data

Multilingual data refers to information collected and processed in multiple languages, including spoken, written, and digital texts. Such data may arise from social media interactions, consumer surveys, product reviews, advertising content, and everyday communication in markets. In Nigeria, multilingual data includes both dominant national languages (Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, and Nigerian Pidgin) and minority languages like Tarok, Mwaghavul, Goemai, Afizere, and Berom in Plateau State, which carry vital economic and cultural information.

Market Intelligence

Market intelligence involves gathering and analyzing information about markets, competitors, and consumers to guide decision-making. It encompasses customer behavior insights, demand trends, and competitive positioning. For multilingual societies, incorporating linguistic diversity into market intelligence ensures inclusivity and cultural relevance.

Linguistic Diversity

Linguistic diversity refers to the range of languages spoken within a geographical space. Nigeria's multilingualism mirrors both unity and fragmentation. On one hand, it enriches cultural heritage and provides multiple channels of communication; on the other, it complicates market outreach and policy uniformity (Bamgbose, 2020). In Plateau State, for example, Ngas, Mwaghavul, and Tarok speakers may respond differently to market surveys depending on whether the survey is in Hausa, English, or their native languages.

Theoretical Framework

Sociolinguistic Theory

Sociolinguistic perspectives emphasize the relationship between language and society. In Nigeria, language choice reflects identity, solidarity, and trust. For example, a trader in Jos Main Market may be more inclined to share authentic views if interviewed in Tarok or Mwaghavul than in English, which is often perceived as elitist (Yakubu, 2019).

Consumer Behavior Theory

Consumer behavior theories explain how cultural and linguistic contexts shape buying decisions. A Berom-speaking farmer's preference for an agricultural product may hinge on whether advertisements or extension services are delivered in Berom, Hausa, or English. Language thus directly influences how products are perceived, trusted, and adopted.

Diffusion of Innovation Theory

Diffusion of Innovation Theory explains how innovations spread within a social system. Language plays a key role in this diffusion process. In Plateau State, awareness campaigns about mobile money services gained faster acceptance when promoted in Hausa and local languages, rather than in English alone.

Big Data and Natural Language Processing (NLP) Approaches

Modern theories of big data emphasize how unstructured multilingual data (texts, audio, online posts) can be processed through NLP to yield actionable insights (Chakraborty & Joseph, 2017). For Nigeria, this means developing AI models that recognize not only English and Hausa but also underrepresented Plateau languages like Mwaghavul and Goemai.

Multilingual Data as a Bridge Between Language and Economy

The theoretical assumption in this paper is that language is not just a cultural resource but also an economic asset. Businesses and governments that neglect minority language speakers risk excluding large consumer segments. In Plateau State, for instance, Tarok and Afizere speakers

constitute vibrant communities engaged in agriculture, trade, and crafts. Their economic contributions are significant, but their voices may be underrepresented in market surveys conducted only in English or Hausa.

Moreover, linguistic diversity influences not only consumer preferences but also access to socio-economic opportunities. Health campaigns, agricultural extension services, and financial inclusion projects that adopt a multilingual approach often report higher participation and adoption rates. Thus, the interplay of sociolinguistic, consumer, and innovation theories provides the framework for analyzing how Nigeria's linguistic resources can be systematically harnessed for transformation.

Nigeria's Linguistic Landscape

Nigeria is home to one of the richest linguistic ecologies in the world, with more than 500 languages spoken across its diverse ethnic groups (Eberhard et al., 2022). Four languages dominate in terms of spread and socio-economic influence: Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, and Nigerian Pidgin.

Hausa functions as the main trade language across Northern Nigeria and parts of the Middle Belt, including Plateau State. It is widely used in markets, transportation, and media.

Yoruba dominates commercial and social interactions in the South-West, particularly Lagos, which doubles as Nigeria's financial hub.

Igbo is central to trade networks in the South-East and has diasporic economic influence across Nigeria.

Nigerian Pidgin serves as a unifying urban lingua franca, bridging gaps across ethnic lines, particularly in cities like Lagos, Abuja, Warri, and Port Harcourt.

These dominant languages not only enable interethnic communication but also shape consumer markets, advertising, and business negotiations. However, this concentration on "big" languages risks marginalizing the vast number of minority languages that drive rural and local economies.

Plateau State as a Microcosm of Linguistic Diversity

Plateau State exemplifies Nigeria's multilingual reality. The state is estimated to have more than 40 indigenous languages, including Ngas (Angas), Mwaghavul, Tarok, Goemai, Berom, Afizere, Ron, Pyem, and others (Blench, 2021). These languages, though not nationally dominant, are deeply entrenched in the daily socio-economic lives of their speakers.

1. Ngas (Angas): Spoken predominantly in Pankshin and Kanke LGAs, Ngas serves as both a cultural and economic tool. Traders in rural markets often negotiate and build trust in Ngas, even if they can communicate in Hausa or English. Market surveys conducted in Ngas elicit more candid responses compared to those in Hausa (Yakubu, 2019).

2. Tarok: Tarok speakers, found mainly in Langtang North and South LGAs, are known for their strong participation in agriculture, military service, and local politics. In the agricultural sector, buyers and sellers often rely on Tarok for price bargaining, making it a critical language for agricultural market intelligence.

3. Mwaghavul: Spoken around Mangu, Mwaghavul plays a crucial role in local trade and communal festivals, where economic transactions intertwine with cultural practices. Businesses promoting products such as fertilizers or farm implements achieve better penetration when communication includes Mwaghavul.

4. Berom: The Berom people, native to Jos South, Barkin Ladi, and Riyom, play an influential role in mining, crafts, and agriculture. Their language is a powerful tool for community mobilization, especially in grassroots initiatives and local cooperatives.

5. Goemai: Concentrated in Shendam LGA, Goemai is widely spoken in local markets and administrative centers. It has potential for commercial advertising, particularly in food and agro-allied industries.

Economic Potential of Linguistic Diversity

The economic relevance of these languages lies in their role as vehicles of trust, loyalty, and participation in the market economy. In Plateau State, a farmer in Langtang may respond more positively to an agricultural extension message delivered in Tarok than in Hausa or English. Similarly, advertising a microfinance service in Ngas or Berom can yield stronger adoption rates than generic Hausa-based messaging.

Beyond Plateau, similar trends are visible across Nigeria. For example: Hausa-language campaigns significantly boosted mobile money adoption in Northern Nigeria.

Igbo-language branding strengthens cultural connection in Southeast trade networks. Pidgin-English marketing by telecom companies like MTN and Globacom has successfully captured urban youth markets. The implication is that linguistic diversity is directly tied to economic participation and market penetration. Local languages not only carry consumer insights but also reduce the risk of alienation and mistrust in economic initiatives.

Linguistic Marginalization and Its Costs

Despite this potential, most Nigerian businesses and policy actors remain focused on English and a handful of lingua francas. This creates what Odebode and Afolabi (2021) term “linguistic invisibility”, where large consumer groups—especially rural populations—are excluded from economic data collection. In Plateau State, minority languages like Pyem or Ron rarely feature in surveys or advertisements, even though their speakers are economically active.

The economic cost of this neglect is substantial: businesses may underestimate demand, governments may misalign policies, and communities may feel excluded from development initiatives. By contrast, multilingual market intelligence that incorporates minority languages can provide a fuller, more inclusive picture of Nigeria’s socio-economic realities.

Defining Multilingual Data for Market Insights

In market intelligence, multilingual data refers to consumer-related information expressed in diverse languages across spoken, written, and digital platforms. This data includes social media conversations, product reviews, call-center transcripts, trade negotiations, rural market surveys, and local advertising messages. In a multilingual country like Nigeria, relying only on English-language data excludes the majority of consumers, especially rural dwellers.

For instance, a farmer in Mangu (Plateau State) may call a radio program in Mwaghavul to discuss fertilizer shortages, while a trader in Langtang may express her opinion in Tarok about fluctuating crop prices. If these communications are captured only in Hausa or English, valuable nuances may be lost. Multilingual data thus ensures cultural inclusivity and accurate representation of consumer needs.

Current Practices in Nigeria’s Market Research

Traditional Nigerian market research has largely been conducted in English, sometimes supplemented with Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, and Pidgin for wider reach. While effective at a national scale, this approach often overlooks minority-language consumers who may not be fully comfortable expressing their views in dominant tongues.

For example: National telecom surveys typically use Hausa or English in Northern Nigeria, leaving out Goemai or Tarok speakers in Plateau’s rural regions. Consumer preference studies in Jos often default to English or Hausa, yet many Berom and Afizere traders negotiate primarily in their mother tongue. This gap underscores the need to systematically collect multilingual data from Nigeria’s diverse communities. The sources of these multilingual data in Nigeria are:

1. **Social Media Platforms:** Platforms like Facebook, Twitter (X), and WhatsApp have become spaces where Nigerians mix languages freely. Posts often feature code-switching between

English, Pidgin, Hausa, and local languages like Tarok or Berom. These unstructured multilingual posts can be analyzed for consumer sentiment.

2. Radio and Community Media: In Plateau State, community radio stations broadcast in local languages such as Mwaghavul, Ngas, Tarok, and Goemai. Call-in programs and adverts in these languages offer rich, real-time multilingual data about consumer opinions.

3. Market Surveys and Focus Groups: Surveys administered in indigenous languages elicit more authentic and detailed responses. For instance, respondents in Shendam LGA may give more nuanced answers in Goemai compared to Hausa.

4. Consumer Service Interactions: Call centers and mobile money services often record consumer complaints in multiple languages. Analyzing these conversations provides direct feedback about product accessibility and customer satisfaction.

5. Traditional Market Transactions: Plateau's rural markets—like those in Langtang, Pankshin, and Barkin Ladi—are rich linguistic spaces where buyers and sellers negotiate in local languages. Capturing this oral data can reveal consumption patterns invisible to formal surveys.

Technologies for Processing Multilingual Data

Modern Natural Language Processing (NLP) tools can help convert raw multilingual data into meaningful market insights. However, Nigerian languages remain underrepresented in computational resources (Chakraborty & Joseph, 2017).

Machine Translation (MT): Tools that translate Tarok or Mwaghavul into Hausa/English can make rural consumer voices accessible to wider business audiences.

Sentiment Analysis: AI models can analyze positive or negative consumer feedback in languages like Ngas or Berom.

Speech Recognition: Transcribing radio call-ins in Goemai or Afizere for further analysis.

Text Mining: Extracting keywords from multilingual social media posts about products and services.

Currently, most NLP systems in Nigeria are optimized for English, Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo, leaving minority languages marginalized (Yakubu, 2019). Developing resources for Plateau languages can improve the inclusivity of market intelligence.

Case Examples of Multilingual Data in Practice

Telecommunications Industry: MTN and Globacom have successfully deployed Pidgin and Hausa-based advertising, which significantly boosted consumer engagement in Northern and urban markets. Agricultural Extension in Plateau State: Pilot projects where information on improved maize seeds was shared in Tarok and Mwaghavul reported higher farmer adoption rates than when the same message was delivered only in Hausa.

Health Campaigns: COVID-19 awareness messages in Ngas, Goemai, and Berom reached rural Plateau communities better than English-only campaigns.

Opportunities Ahead

Harnessing multilingual data in Nigeria holds great promise: Businesses can segment consumers more effectively by identifying preferences expressed in local languages.

Governments can design policies based on localized feedback, ensuring grassroots participation. NGOs and development agencies can reach vulnerable groups by analyzing indigenous-language concerns in health, education, and finance. Plateau State, with its dense multilingualism, offers an excellent testing ground for multilingual market intelligence models that could be scaled nationwide. Language is more than a tool of communication—it is a medium of participation in socio-economic life. In Nigeria, where consumer decisions, market negotiations, and political mobilization are deeply tied to linguistic identity, multilingual data can serve as a catalyst for inclusive socio-economic development (Bamgbose, 2020). Harnessing linguistic diversity enables governments, businesses, and development agencies to design programs and products that reflect the lived realities of citizens across ethnic and linguistic groups.

Agricultural Development

Agriculture remains the backbone of Nigeria's economy, employing about 35% of the labor force. Yet, many extension programs fail because they are delivered in English or dominant lingua francas that do not resonate with local farmers.

National Example: Agricultural campaigns in Hausa increased fertilizer adoption in Northern Nigeria compared to English-only initiatives.

Plateau Case Study: In Langtang (Tarok-speaking areas), farmers responded more positively to training on improved cassava cultivation when information was provided in Tarok. Similarly, Mwaghavul-speaking farmers in Mangu adopted hybrid maize seeds faster when messages were translated into their local language.

Implication: Collecting multilingual data on farmers' needs and tailoring messages in their indigenous languages enhances agricultural productivity and food security.

Healthcare Access and Public Health Campaigns

Health outcomes are strongly linked to effective communication. Multilingual data can identify language gaps in health campaigns and ensure inclusivity.

National Example: During the COVID-19 pandemic, multilingual radio jingles in Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo improved compliance with preventive measures.

Plateau Case Study: Local campaigns against malaria and maternal mortality were more effective in Berom and Goemai-speaking communities when delivered in their mother tongues. Health workers reported higher attendance at vaccination clinics when messages were aired in Afizere rather than English (Yakubu, 2019).

Implication: Using indigenous languages in health communication reduces misinformation and increases trust in medical services.

Financial Inclusion

Access to banking, credit, and digital finance is a major driver of socio-economic empowerment. However, many Nigerians remain excluded because financial institutions often communicate in English or Hausa, neglecting local languages.

National Example: Mobile money adoption in Northern Nigeria surged after companies launched Hausa-language USSD codes and customer support lines.

Plateau Case Study: In Shendam, Goemai-speaking traders preferred microfinance institutions that explained repayment procedures in their mother tongue. Similarly, Berom-speaking artisans in Jos South showed higher willingness to join cooperative savings groups when the terms were explained in Berom rather than English.

Implication: Financial literacy campaigns and services offered in minority languages can expand financial inclusion and empower grassroots economies.

Education and Skills Development

Language is central to knowledge transmission. In Nigeria, reliance on English-only curricula often excludes learners from rural and minority-language communities.

National Example: Studies show that children taught in their mother tongue during the first three years of schooling perform better academically than those taught only in English.

Plateau Case Study: Non-formal vocational training programs in Mwaghavul and Ngas significantly improved participation among young women in tailoring and entrepreneurship initiatives. Conversely, programs delivered exclusively in English had lower attendance and retention rates.

Implication: Harnessing multilingual data about learners' linguistic preferences can help policymakers design inclusive educational strategies that support literacy, skills acquisition, and employability.

Cultural Industries and Local Markets

Nigeria's cultural industries—music, film, crafts, and festivals—are deeply rooted in language. Data from multilingual platforms can guide investment in cultural tourism and creative economies.

National Example: The success of Nollywood films in Yoruba and Igbo demonstrates the economic value of indigenous-language creativity.

Plateau Case Study: Festivals like Nzem Berom, Ilum OTarok, Pu'uskat (Mwaghavul festival), Bit Goemai and Pusedung (Ngas festival) attract local and international visitors. Market intelligence gathered in Berom, Tarok, Mwaghavul, Goemai and Ngas about consumer spending patterns during these events can inform tourism development strategies.

Implication: Local languages are not barriers to development but assets for cultural and economic sustainability.

Toward Inclusive Socio-Economic Transformation

The examples above demonstrate that multilingual data is not merely about preserving languages but about unlocking socio-economic opportunities. By systematically integrating Nigeria's linguistic diversity into agricultural programs, health campaigns, financial inclusion projects, and education, policymakers can design interventions that are culturally resonant and economically effective. Plateau State, with its rich linguistic tapestry, illustrates the transformative potential of a multilingual approach. If minority languages like Tarok, Goemai, or Afizere are integrated into development frameworks, they can bridge the gap between grassroots realities and national transformation goals.

Data Collection Challenges

Collecting multilingual data in Nigeria faces both structural and methodological obstacles.

Low literacy levels: Many Nigerians, especially in rural Plateau communities, are literate only in their mother tongue or may be semi-literate in Hausa or English (Yakubu, 2019). This makes it difficult to design standard written surveys.

Dialectal variations: Languages like Tarok and Mwaghavul have dialect differences that complicate the process of creating uniform survey instruments. For instance, a word in Tarok used in Langtang North may have a different connotation in Langtang South.

Resource constraints: Unlike Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo, most Plateau languages lack dictionaries, orthographies, and standardized writing systems (Blench, 2021). Without these, data collection becomes inconsistent and prone to misinterpretation.

Technological Limitations

The potential of Natural Language Processing (NLP) and Artificial Intelligence (AI) in analyzing multilingual data is limited by the lack of digital resources for Nigerian languages.

Underrepresentation of minority languages: While Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo have some digital corpora, Plateau languages like Goemai, Berom, and Afizere are virtually absent in NLP databases (Chakraborty & Joseph, 2017).

High cost of digitization: Developing language models for hundreds of Nigerian languages requires massive investments in computational linguistics and data annotation.

Error-prone machine translation: Existing machine translation systems often fail to capture cultural nuances or idiomatic expressions, leading to distorted insights. For example, a Tarok proverb about farming may be mistranslated into meaningless English text.

Policy Neglect

Nigeria's language policies focus on English as the official language, with Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo recognized as major regional languages. Minority languages, including those in Plateau State, receive little institutional support (Bamgbose, 2020).

Market surveys: Most national surveys—such as Demographic and Health Surveys—use Hausa in Plateau, neglecting Tarok, Ngas, or Mwaghavul, even when they are the dominant languages in rural households.

Lack of documentation: Plateau languages remain under-documented compared to Hausa or Yoruba, making it difficult to integrate them into economic planning.

Neglect in development programs: Many socio-economic projects are designed without multilingual considerations, limiting their grassroots impact.

Business Resistance to Multilingual Branding

Businesses often perceive multilingual approaches as costly and unnecessary.

Preference for lingua francas: Most advertising agencies in Jos rely on Hausa or English, arguing that they reach the “largest market.” This neglects consumer groups like Berom-speaking artisans or Goemai farmers, whose purchasing behaviors differ significantly.

Cost implications: Translating marketing campaigns into multiple Plateau languages increases costs of production, distribution, and training. Many companies prefer one-size-fits-all campaigns, even though they are less effective.

Brand consistency issues: Firms fear that adapting their messages across multiple languages may dilute brand identity or create inconsistencies in customer perception.

Socio-Cultural and Political Tensions

Language in Nigeria is tied to ethnicity and politics.

Risk of bias: Prioritizing one language over others in Plateau may be interpreted as political favoritism, leading to resistance from other groups. For example, a campaign run only in Ngas might alienate Mwaghavul or Ron communities.

Identity politics: In some regions, speakers may reject dominant languages (like Hausa) in favor of their ethnic tongue, complicating efforts to harmonize multilingual campaigns.

Mistrust of external actors: Some communities in Plateau are skeptical of government surveys or corporate research, fearing exploitation. This makes multilingual data collection a delicate process requiring cultural sensitivity.

Lack of Skilled Manpower

Nigeria faces a shortage of professionals trained in linguistics, computational language processing, and market analytics.

Many Plateau languages are taught informally at the community level, with few formalized academic studies.

Linguists working on minority languages often lack collaboration with tech developers and market analysts, limiting practical application of their research.

Businesses seldom employ language experts, resulting in poor translation, miscommunication, and wasted resources.

Ethical and Privacy Concerns

The collection of multilingual data—especially from social media and call centers—raises privacy issues. Without clear legal frameworks, consumers may fear surveillance, reducing willingness to share information. In Plateau, communities have expressed reluctance to participate in data collection due to concerns over misuse of their responses (Yakubu, 2019).

Summary

The challenges of harnessing multilingual data in Nigeria are multi-dimensional—ranging from literacy issues and dialect variations to technological gaps, policy neglect, and socio-political sensitivities. Plateau State, with its mosaic of languages, highlights both the potential and the pitfalls: while local languages provide invaluable insights into consumer behavior, the

lack of documentation, digital support, and inclusive policies constrains their use in market intelligence.

Government Policy and Institutional Support

The Nigerian government must reposition language as a strategic asset for socio-economic development.

Official recognition of minority languages: Beyond Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo, states like Plateau should adopt policies recognizing indigenous languages (Tarok, Ngas, Mwaghavul, Berom, Goemai, Afizere, etc.) as vital for local governance and development communication (Bamgbose, 2020).

Multilingual surveys: National data-gathering institutions (e.g., National Bureau of Statistics) should include minority languages in questionnaires, especially in Plateau where Hausa does not fully capture local voices.

Policy incentives: Government should provide tax breaks or grants to companies that invest in multilingual campaigns, particularly in rural development projects.

Academic and Research Institutions

Universities and research centers should spearhead the development of linguistic resources for under-documented languages.

Language documentation: Plateau State University Boko and the University of Jos could lead projects to document and digitize Tarok, Ngas, Mwaghavul, Berom, and Goemai. This would create dictionaries, orthographies, and corpora for use in Natural Language Processing (NLP).

Interdisciplinary research: Linguists, computer scientists, and market analysts should collaborate to build multilingual datasets that reflect consumer realities.

Capacity building: Linguistics and data science programs should include courses on multilingual data analytics, producing experts who can bridge language and market research.

Business and Private Sector Engagement

Businesses must see language inclusion as a strategic investment rather than a burden.

Localized branding: Companies should translate key marketing campaigns into Plateau languages for deeper penetration into rural markets. For instance, microfinance institutions could explain loan terms in Tarok or Mwaghavul.

Multilingual customer service: Banks, telecoms, and healthcare providers should deploy call centers capable of handling queries in indigenous languages.

Market segmentation: Firms should use multilingual data to tailor products to the cultural and linguistic preferences of different communities.

Technological Innovations

Harnessing Nigeria's linguistic diversity requires digital tools and AI-driven innovations.

NLP for minority languages: Collaborations with tech firms like Google or Nigerian startups should focus on building speech-to-text and translation systems for Plateau languages.

AI-driven surveys: Mobile apps could be developed to administer multilingual surveys using voice recognition, allowing farmers and traders to respond in their local tongue.

Social media analytics: Platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp, which host a large volume of multilingual posts, can be mined for consumer insights, provided privacy safeguards are in place.

Community and Civil Society Participation

Sustainable multilingual data systems must involve grassroots communities.

Community radio stations: Plateau’s local stations (e.g., those broadcasting in Berom, Tarok, Mwaghavul, Ngas) should partner with NGOs to collect and analyze public opinion data.

Language cooperatives: Communities could form associations for language preservation, which also serve as hubs for economic data gathering.

Trust-building: To overcome skepticism, communities should be involved in the design and implementation of surveys, ensuring transparency and ownership.

Development Agencies and International Partners

International organizations working in Nigeria should prioritize linguistic inclusivity in their programs.

Multilingual health campaigns: Agencies like UNICEF and WHO should consistently deploy Plateau languages in their interventions, not just Hausa or English.

Donor-funded projects: Donors should fund digital documentation of minority languages as part of sustainable development goals (SDGs).

Knowledge sharing: Lessons from multilingual countries such as India and South Africa could be adapted for Nigeria, emphasizing how linguistic diversity fuels socio-economic participation.

Future Directions

The long-term vision is to integrate Nigeria’s multilingualism into a national market intelligence ecosystem. Plateau State could serve as a pilot region for this initiative, given its exceptional linguistic density. Key future directions include:

1. National Multilingual Data Bank: Establishing a repository of linguistic and consumer data covering all Nigerian states.
2. Digital Language Hubs: Creating regional technology centers for developing AI models in minority languages.
3. Policy mainstreaming: Embedding language inclusion into Nigeria’s National Development Plans and economic blueprints.
4. Sustainable development: Ensuring that language-sensitive policies reduce inequality, foster participation, and empower marginalized groups.

Conclusion

Nigeria’s vast linguistic landscape, with over 500 languages, represents not merely cultural heritage but also an untapped resource for socio-economic transformation. This article has argued that multilingual data can serve as a strategic tool for market intelligence, allowing businesses, governments, and development agencies to better understand consumer behavior, design inclusive policies, and foster equitable development.

Using Plateau State as a case study, the discussion highlighted both the opportunities and challenges of harnessing multilingualism for market intelligence. Plateau’s linguistic diversity—spanning Tarok, Ngas, Mwaghavul, Berom, Goemai, Afizere, and others—mirrors Nigeria’s wider multilingual reality. This diversity offers granular insights into consumer preferences, agricultural practices, financial habits, and cultural values that remain hidden when market research is conducted solely in English or Hausa.

At the same time, significant limitations hinder progress: under-documentation of minority languages, technological gaps in natural language processing, policy neglect, lack of skilled manpower, and socio-political sensitivities tied to language use. Without targeted interventions, these challenges will continue to limit Nigeria’s ability to fully harness multilingual data for development.

The recommendations put forward in this article—including policy reforms, academic engagement, private sector localization strategies, technological innovations, and community participation—offer practical pathways for transforming linguistic diversity into a driver of

socio-economic change. Importantly, Plateau State provides a natural pilot model for experimenting with multilingual market intelligence before scaling efforts nationally. Looking ahead, the creation of a National Multilingual Data Bank, investment in AI for minority languages, and mainstreaming linguistic diversity into national development planning are critical steps. These will not only improve the quality of market intelligence but also ensure that development initiatives are more inclusive, sustainable, and culturally responsive. In conclusion, Nigeria's multilingualism should not be seen as a barrier but as a strategic asset. By recognizing and systematizing the role of indigenous languages in market research and socio-economic planning, Nigeria can unlock new avenues of innovation, participation, and prosperity. The road to socio-economic transformation, therefore, runs not only through oil, trade, and technology, but also through the voices of its people—spoken in their own languages.

Recommendations

Harnessing Nigeria's multilingual data requires collaborative action across government, academia, businesses, technology, and communities. Plateau State, with its microcosm of Nigeria's linguistic diversity, offers a practical model for implementing inclusive policies. By transforming linguistic diversity from a perceived challenge into a strategic economic resource, Nigeria can unlock new pathways for socio-economic transformation.

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