

GLOBALIZATION AND TEACHING/LEARNING OF URHOBO LANGUAGE IN DELTA STATE AND DIASPORA

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Abstract

The pervasive state of language subordination in this era of globalization generates a syndrome of self – relegation or self – rejection, and continues for as long as the so-deemed Urhobo elites prefer to conveniently ignore the wealth of unique language civilization originally invented, patented and bequeathed by autochthonous Urhobo sieges before external language imposition. Hence the paper examines the impact of globalization on the teaching and learning of Urhobo language. The paper argues that little has been achieved in the teaching/learning of the language, this could be traced to poor policy formulation and implementation, lack of adequate teachers, poor infrastructure, lack of organized orthography, inadequate written history and literature and lack of interest on the part of the owners of the language. The modest proposal of this paper is therefore, the projection of the teaching/learning of Urhobo and other Nigeria languages as an option that creates linguistic disposition for national development, integration and better projection into this global era. Efforts are also made on the ways Nigerian languages can be protected from extinction as a result of the pervasive nature of globalization.

Globalization is seen as a means to forge closer integration of countries and peoples of the world by affording them unrestricted transportation and communication and by eliminating economic barriers that restrict a free flow of goods, services, capital, and knowledge (Moshi, 2006). We all know that civilization no longer operates exclusively within a given shared language or national borders. Pescod, (2009) opined that increasing numbers of people across the globe – and not just in the developed world – can buy goods and services internationally, or share ideas with someone in another country as easily as well as someone in the same street. Globalization is also seen as a means to reduce the sense of isolation of those living in the developing world and also serves as a source for the world’s access to knowledge and innovations in technologies.

Teaching and learning of Urhobo language in Delta State and Diaspora has been a thing some Urhobo sons and daughters at home and abroad had been show-casing. The Urhobo nation of about two million people is the most populous in Delta State and the territory is located in the tropical rainforest belt of the western Niger Delta region of Nigeria. The point to emphasize here is that the primacy of oral communication means that the bulk of literary activity in Urhobo territory is created in the oral media. There are numerous genres and traditions of stories, songs, poems, proverbs, and folk rhetorics stored in Urhobo language awaiting the diligent effort of researchers, collectors, translators, and interpreters. Language as a bridge that connects group of people, underscores the most valuable possession for dealing with changes in man’s environment. Language is a manifestation of culture and tradition which is the most enduring artifacts of any group. Many people in Nigeria and *Multidisciplinary Journal of Empirical Research Volume 10 No. 1 April, 2012*

other countries all over the world are interested in knowing the spoken form, its literature and the culture of the Urhobos.

In the process to enhance and facilitate the learning and teaching of indigenous languages, the Federal Government as a matter of fact politicized National Policy on Education (1998) stresses the importance of the language as a means of promoting social interaction and national cohesion, and presenting/preserving cultures. Therefore, every child in Nigeria shall learn the language of the immediate environment. This view of every child being required to learn language of immediate environment is a laudable policy statement by the government in its effort to see that these languages are taught and learnt as second languages (L₂) in Nigeria being a multilingual nation. In order to implement the language policy on the teaching and learning of the language of the immediate environs the Federal Government mandated that Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba be studied as a second language (L₂) in all the Federal Government Colleges and so called Unity schools and the states were also mandated to implement the teaching and learning at all costs. This led to the formulation of different syllabus for the three major languages across different levels of studies, i.e. syllabus for primary, secondary Colleges of Education and Universities. The policy was also incorporated by some states who thought it right to also teach their languages which did not fall within the three major languages in Nigeria, in the spirit of teaching and learning of the language of the immediate environment.

This paper therefore examines the global approach to the teaching and learning of Urhobo in the University, colleges of education, secondary schools and primary schools in Delta State. From all indication globalization has increasingly knitted together the world, created unity out of great diversity, Harmonizing different languages, culture and beliefs. It is therefore a sine qua non to investigate the problems and prospects of the teaching and learning of Urhobo as a language in this 21st century.

Impact of Globalization on the Teaching and Learning of Urhobo in Schools.

The reality of human existence today is that different and separate parts of the world are interconnected and the world has become a global village (Umukoro, 2009). Globalization is a process of creating a global market in which increasingly all nations are forced to participate (Orunmolu, 2002). Globalization and the growth in the spread of the teaching and learning of Urhobo in Nigeria and Delta State in particular help in creating a sort of consciousness that helps in enhancing awareness as a way of strengthening the desire for learning different languages of the world. Elugbe (1990) posited that linguistics diversity is one of the better known attributes in Nigeria which brings about ethnic divisions which are also based on linguistic lines that is to say, the existence of many languages in Nigeria means the existence of many basically distinct ethnic nationalities trying to form a nation.

Today, Urhobo language is being studied both in Nigeria and many homes across the globe both at schools and extra mural classes with the view to fast track the teaching and learning of the language both locally and internationally. This has equally made the study of the language (Urhobo) well spread. That is, the study of Urhobo has improved to the extent that the knowledge can be

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accessed in the website and other literatures. The continuing world-wide growth of access to internet is being mirrored by an equally discernible rise in its use by ethnic ideological and national groups anxious to assert their cultural identities (Obiora; 2002). Globalization has made it possible for the whole world to be wired and plugged into T.V. programmes, movies, news, music, life style and entertainment of the advanced countries (Jean, 2002). Satellite, cables, phones, walkmans, V.C.Ds, D.V.Ds and retail grants as well as wonders of entertainment technology are creating the mass marketing of culture. It is pertinent to note that Urhobo as a nation is also part and parcel of these technological innovations.

It is also evidenced that the acquisition of ICT skills and the adoption of ICT in our educational system will improve teaching and learning of Urhobo language both at home and in the Diaspora. The use of ICT as a delivery medium is in itself a benchmarking process and can improve the study of Urhobo and enhance the need to preserve our cultural heritage. Although, some scholars, more pessimistically have argued that apart from eliminating social exclusion, the transition to an information society is actually contributing to the widening rift between the rich and the poor.

In the course of the study, the researchers observed that most of the exponents of the Urhobo tradition were passing away like libraries destroyed by fire, to recall Hampate Ba's immortal statement:

“Every old person who dies in Africa is like a library destroyed by fire”.

In a similar situation:

“Every language that is endangered or goes into extinction is like a library destroyed by fire”.

This is the researchers own rendering of the famous statement credited to Ahmadou Hampate Ba of the Republic of Mali in West Africa, who in his life – time engagement in the collection and translation of folklore and oral literature in his Fula language, Hampate Ba was apparently pained by loss of some traditions as a result of the death of custodians and the influence of western education which undermined the indigenous knowledge of his people (Darah, 2010). Commenting on Hampate Ba's statement, Ojaide (2003) observed thus “ Ba's metaphor of a burning library underscores both the imitations of an oral culture, such as the traditional African, and the urgent need to retrieve as much of the folklore as possible for study and preservation before its aged custodians die with their vast knowledge”.

Irele (2001) noted that there is need to promote, protect, preserve and modernize Black and African culture in general, in order to empower them to compete favorably in the emerging global world dominated by western cultural values and standards. One way of doing that is the need to aggressively collect Urhobo oral traditions especially poetry, and preserve them with audio – visual facilities in order to conceptualize, the mechanics and technique of Urhobo performance arts as well as enhance their utilization for research and development purposes.

Consequently, it is the apprehension of linguists, individual and emerging cultural organizations that Urhobo local language is endangered. Apart from not using the language in official domains, it is worrisome that many Urhobo families are today confronted with the problem of the use

of their mother tongue. Children brought up in their immediate environment do not speak their indigenous language let alone read or write in them. Their parents who, though understand and use the indigenous language discourage their children from doing so and would prefer that they go for English.

Prospects of Teaching and Learning Urhobo Language in Schools

Arohunmolase (1998) opined that we can use the linguistic, historical, and the cultural evidences in Nigerian languages for our desired national development and unity. This means that if these linguistics, historical and cultural values of the Urhobo people are properly developed, these can foster the unity and oneness of the people which in turn will contribute immensely to national development. By implication, if all Nigerian languages can be taught and learnt at all levels of education then the unity and oneness of the nation can be enhanced. The language richness of our nation (Nigeria) should not be seen as a negative concept rather it should be harnessed as a blessing. Hence, the Urhobo and other languages should strive to exploit their ancestral ties so as to show to the world that they have a common history. Urhobo and indeed other ethnic groups, have vast original and contemporaneously viable home knowledge civilization that deserves advancement and marketing to the world as unostentatious but economically viable products.

The culture of research and original thinking that marked indigenous education should be recaptured and instilled from basic education if Urhobos or Nigeria expects to generate positive, Nigeria – unique, intellectual outputs at home and abroad. Classroom education in contemporary Nigeria languages must prioritize indigenous epistemology in vision and content for a noble posterity. Nzewi (2009) recently stirred the hornet nest when he opined that; the envisaged reconfigured classroom educational policy and goals as well as the theory and methodology from early age education to tertiary scholarship should produce learners who rely on home resources to prepare their international visions.

Beside, the National policy on Education concerning the three major languages in Nigeria, it is advisable that other Nigerian languages Urhobo inclusive be taught across the Federation so as to enhance the purposes of its establishment that is to foster the unity, peace and love. Let it be categorically stated here that majority of the internal crises that we had or witness in Nigeria have been caused by misunderstanding and mischief as a result of not understanding each other languages and the context of use. There is general consensus that if all these languages are properly taught and understood frequent crisis that do occur here and there will be reduced.

Furthermore, just as we made French second official language in this country (Nigeria), majority of this languages could be made official languages or (L₂) across the federation so as to teach the doctrine of cultural heritage and the historical background of the people. The Nigeria Educational Research and development council (NERDC) should develop curricula if possible for all the languages in the federation and not only Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba as second languages for the primary, Junior secondary school, senior secondary school, colleges of Education and the university. However, establishment of more or if possible in each state of the Federation National Institute for Nigeria languages like the one in Aba (Abia State) in order to help in the production of Nigerian language

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teachers as to facilitate the learning and teaching of these languages Urhobo inclusive as a way to fast track the whole thing.

Scholars like Elugbe, Fishman, Agbedo among others have identified that the major problem with developing Nations has been the issue of multilingualism and if well handled, that is if the people in the Nation are well informed and educated, in their own languages, that will minimize the problems and the way to go about it is to establish language centre for these languages to be discussed and enhanced for the people's use and documentation.

Globalization and Constraints to the Teaching and Learning of Urhobo Language.

Trying to capture the Urhobo language in the 21st century without touching on the alarming hurricane which is blowing over Urhobo cultural values, especially the linguistic rights of the Urhobo people would leave us with a warped representation, as foreign languages such as English and Pidgin have displaced the local languages in national development processes. A cursory look at the Urhobo language indicates the following scenarios:

- (i) A situation where parents do not impact on their children their spoken languages.
- (ii) A situation where parents are even ashamed to speak their language to their children.
- (iii) A situation where the youth are ashamed to speak their language
- (iv) A situation where both parents and children cannot write in their local languages.
- (v) A situation where siblings hate their local music and language. Finally, there is also a situation where the Urhobo language is not accorded proper recognition even though language is the backbone of the home and the hub in the wheel of the nation.

The fact is that if development is to be meaningful, there is no way in which it can be carried out in a language which excludes the majority of the people in the society (Bamgbose, 1998). Hence, the justifications for putting greater emphasis on the use and development of a country's indigenous languages.

Until recently, the Urhobo language does not have an organized orthography let alone the teaching of it at any level of schooling, even at the NPE policy, the language (Urhobo) had been abandoned due to many factors such as; no written history or documents, lack of teachers, no motivation for those trying to do some work on languages. Thank God for the effort of Urhobo language committee (ULC), Urhobo studies Association (USA) Urhobo Historical Society (UHS) and some other individuals who saw it as a big challenge and summoned courage to start writing things in the language.

It is observed that those that are teaching Urhobo language at the pre-primary and primary schools as teachers are not trained as Urhobo language teachers. Therefore majority of what they teach are not correct as a result of not having standard orthographies and written documents to facilitate the teaching and learning of the language. Arohunmolase (2006: 131), citing Junaidu and Ihebuzo (1993), submitted that :

[...] the problem of the supply of teachers in Nigerian languages represents one of the greatest problems facing the curriculum development efforts in Nigeria. The introduction of Nigerian languages (Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba), as L₂ at the JSS level and the colleges of

Education worsened the compounded problem of the supply of trained teachers. It is a matter of great regret that, adequate plans were not made for the supply of teachers before the Federal Government decided to implement the Nigerian languages policy in the colleges of Education.

If the positions of the three major languages are bad in terms of having adequate and qualified teachers then minority languages are potential candidates for heart attack. It is a truism that so many of their spellings are wrong and they do what is known as direct translation from English language to Urhobo language meanwhile, the structure of the Urhobo language differs from that of the English language e.g. the English language is head final and the Urhobo language is head initial etc. This problem had posed a lot of problem to the teachers of the Urhobo language who are not trained in that field making the teaching and learning of the language so difficult.

Another major problem associated with the teaching and learning of the language is lack of adequate production of literatures and inadequate number of teachers to teach and implement the provision of the NPE by the Federal Government.

Also worth noting is the problem of inadequate plans by the federal Government to implement the NPE policy and unavailability of resources to give or supply information for the documentation of the language (Urhobo). Political instability has been a principal impediment to the implementation of language policy in Nigeria (Adegbija, 2004).

He further observed that:

agreed policies are often abandoned by new regimes and implementation is truncated leading to policy fluctuation, reinterpretation and misinterpretation and adhoc and arbitrary policy initiatives.

Lack of interest on the part of those who happen to be the original owners of the language. Not many young Urhobo's are interested in learning the language, either formally or informally: Attitudes towards languages are motivated by several factors including their perceived socioeconomic value, their status – raising potential, their perceived instrumental value, their perceived esteem, their perceived functions or roles in the nation, their numerical strength, the perceived official domains, their educational value (Adegbija, 2004). As a result of these challenges, the Urhobos have become educationally as well as politically programmed as consumers of foreign languages which are injurious to their own language. The Urhobo leadership and intellectual elite remain drained of the intellectual energy to research and design contemporaneous curricula for the teaching and learning of Urhobo.

Conclusion and Recommendations

For as long as Urhobo language usage is confined to cultural activities, the possibility for long – term survival is dim as rural urban migration, education, employment and globalization possibilities continue to have their toll on the language. Besides, as Urhobo and other Nigerian languages battle with globalization, Nigeria should find the National will to invest in local languages. The adoption of modern technologies like the cell phones are encouraging aspects that create opportunities for Urhobo language as well as establishing an important role for all Nigerian languages in this 21st century.

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It is therefore pertinent to recommend that the Federal Government of Nigeria should revisit and design the National Policy on Education to include the teaching/learning of Urhobo language as a compulsory subject at the pre-primary, primary, JSS, SSS and the colleges of Education in line with the principle of studying a language of immediate environment. It is obvious that scholars and leaders of the field of Urhobo cannot afford to let these developments pass by and not seize the opportunity to place Urhobo on the global map. Adegaju (2008) opined that to empower local languages, it is not enough to prescribe teaching/learning them in school curriculum. We need to come up with workable language policies that appreciate the multilingual nature of our communities and give due recognition to the potential of every language to contribute to national development.

National Institute for Nigerian languages should be established by the federal Government in each of the states to train teachers of Nigeria languages as to facilitate the teaching and learning of these languages. These institutions should create conducive environment for research and development of local languages. It is pertinent to note that UNESCO is not comfortable that most information on the web are in foreign languages. Thus she stresses the promotion of cultural and linguistic diversity of the Nations to safeguard the linguistic heritage of humanity (Okwudishu, 2003).

Essien (2003) corroborated: the retention of the dominant role of English will negatively impact on language development of minority languages, the fact of the failure of the language policy notwithstanding. Indeed he argues that the present situation results in linguistic undernourishment a condition of impoverished knowledge of both English and our respective mother – tongues. Therefore parents, pupils, students and teachers of these languages should answer the clarion calls for the revitalization of these languages so as to cope with the global setting and language in content. That is parents should encourage, and motivate their children and those working and researching on the development of these languages in our country and beyond.

Finally, scholars and researchers should be encouraged to write and document materials (Literature/text books) for the teaching and learning of the language because it was observed that there are no adequate materials for the learning/teaching of Urhobo language and Nigerian languages in general.

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