

LANGUAGE EDUCATION FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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Abstract

This paper examines the centrality of language to national development in a typical multilingual nation like Nigeria. Language is an instrument for establishing and maintaining social identity and ethnicity. It is closely tied to the nation's development because all the four features of national development (i.e. political, social, economic and educational) depend on Language for their attainment. Nigerian language problem vis-a-vis language education programmes are also examined. Although information and communication technology (ICT) is useful to language education programme, computer should assist rather than displace language teachers. Language should be made functional by practicing its use rather than emphasizing its theory (i.e. learning about the language). Finally, the paper re-examines the status of English as the nation's Lingua Franca in relation to the recommendations of Modern Language Association (MLA) concerning the qualifications for English language teachers in particular and the teachers of indigenous languages, for a viable and enviable language education programme in the 21st century.

Introduction

Language can be seen as a means of communicating thoughts and as a means of social control. Language makes it possible for individuals to live in a society and is as well as a means of individual self-expression. Speech is the instrument of society, which is used by man for specific and distinguishable purposes such as using it to establish and maintain social identity and ethnicity. Individuals build upon residual elements of shared culture to receive a common sentiment upon which to found ethnically based interest groups (Mencer, 1998). Ethnic identity thus becomes a means of eliciting political and social support in the pursuit of goals, which are defined within the terms of reference established by the society at large.

Every society, especially developing nation like Nigeria, craves for development. There are four features in the concept of development that every developing nation aims at. These features are political, social, economic and educational. All the features have a very strong tie with *language* for their attainment.

Politically, especially in very recent times, democracy is the in-thing, the fashionable trend in Nigerian political activities. As democracy is being stressed generally, self-determination by small nationalities is also being actively encouraged (Banjo, 1995). The meaning of democracy has been refined to cover the freedom of all nationalities, however, great or small, to determine their future. This new emphasis poses a problem for most developing countries, like Nigeria, which are trying to forge a nation out of nationalities. The implications of this for the nation's language programme is very devastating because each ethnic group, in trying to re-assert its future, use the weapon of language. No wonder loads of problems besiege Nigeria's language policy. Democracy emphasizes participatory governance, which also has important implications for communication.

Socially, the most important feature of modernity is the freedom of the individual to develop himself to the fullest extent, and the necessity for all citizens to be equal before the law. At the same time, a serious attempt is made to fashion a national culture out of the diversified cultural groups and the need therefore arises for that culture to be projected by a Language.

The modern state is largely governed by economic considerations. The creation of wealth, according to Banjo (1995), is the goal of modern democracy and the rough and ready yardstick by which development is measured is economic. The nations in the top economic league are developed. The aspiring ones are poverty-stricken. A nation is as developed as its economy allows. It costs money to develop people individually and collectively, and it costs money to develop the environment and the people's culture through their language.

Also, education has to be put at the service of the development process, making it possible for individual citizens to be as fully developed as possible, improving skills and creating new knowledge.

But it is also an important agency for forging a common nationality. This may be a relatively easy task for monolingual countries. But it is not so in multilingual ones, like Nigeria.

Language Problem in Nigeria

The language problem in Nigeria is tied to the consequences of the implantation of the English language in the country. The incidence of English and its maintenance as an official language in Nigeria derives from colonial experience under the British who run the administration of the pre-independent Nigeria with English, thus, institutionalizing it as the official language in the country till the present time.

One of the conflicts, which have hindered unity and socio-cultural development in Nigeria, is language conflict. Language problem in Nigeria has to be understood from the backdrop of the numerous ethnic languages, all of which are in competition for supremacy and survival. A constant source of language conflict in Nigeria is the relationship of the major to the non-major languages (Bamgbose, 1985). Apart, from the demographic factors, the major languages are among the first to be reduced to writing in the early or mid 19 century with substantial vocabularies, primers, collected texts, and translations (Hair, 1967).

Minority languages in Nigeria are often neglected. Their speakers seem to be aware that their languages do not often function in gaining upward social mobility. Government's national language policies in general and minority language development in particular are often viewed with suspicion. Among speakers of the neglected minority languages, there are usually political tension and rivalry resulting from perceived educational and "infrastructural under-development, cultural and linguistic alienation and manipulation, discrimination and exploitation on linguistic grounds (Webb, 1974). Language attitudes in many African nations are seen as a central element in language policy, language use and language learning (Schmied, 1991). There exists a strong relationship between language and ethnicity. No wonder Adegbija (1994) reports that mutual suspicion existing between language groups result in prejudice, stereotypes and subtle linguistic hostility. He observed further that such deep-rooted, culturally sectioned stereotypes and prejudices are a commonplace in multilingual and multicultural societies both among major language group and among the minority groups.

In Nigeria, English is generally perceived as a language of prestige, it is still the dominant language on the Nigerian linguistic scene, its status has hardly diminished by forty-five years of national independence or by the promulgation of the national policy on language in Education. For some obvious political and demographic factors, indigenous language development in Nigeria favors the major languages.

Following the recognition of the role of language attitudes in developing language policies as well as the on-going agitation, for the rights of minority languages, there is a great need for thorough research on the attitudes of linguistic minority speakers and their stereotyped perceptions of the speakers of major languages in order to assist in developing a comprehensive language policy in Nigeria.

Many people genuinely believe that more than a national policy on language education, we need a national language policy. But the policy on language in Education can, in fact, be seen as the government's cautious and indirect approach to what is potentially an explosive national question.

Language Policy for Educational Development

Educational development is one of the most important and crucial variables (i.e. economic, political and social development are equally important but educational development is a wide and clear access road to them. Without a virile National Policy on Education, there can be no meaningful development in educational sector and without a clear and well-integrated language policy, considering the language problem already existing in Nigeria, the road to national development via Economic, social, political and Educational sector would not be clear.

Considering the multilingual nature of Nigeria, two things need to be considered. The first relates to the pattern of communication that would enable the socio-economic institutions to function most effectively and equitably in meeting the needs and interests of the population. The second is how to ensure that different groups within the society, varying in their linguistic repertoires, have equal access to the public system and opportunities to participate in it (Kelman, 1971).

Focusing on the above assertion, Adeniran (1977) suggests that language policy for Niger-should serve the following objectives:

- 1) Increased integration through (a) common indigenous language(s);
- 2) Increased communication efficiency in our public institutions;
- 3) Increased and easy access to knowledge of varying degrees of technicality;
- 4) Equal access to information in the public system leading to equal opportunities to participate in the system, and
- 5) Increased access to our indigenous literary arts and, opportunities to participate in, contribute to and propagate them.

These language objectives are quite remarkable, especially in the 21st century as they all ten-towards national development through language development. Of utmost importance are numbers two and four objectives.

Language is a unifying factor, and before we can have increase in communication efficiency in our public institutions, we must have unifying language that would promote free flow of communication, which brings about mutual understanding. Any society with mutual understanding would always attract national development. Also, the Nigerian language policy should channel a way for national identity by promoting our indigenous literary acts through our indigenous languages. The developed countries all over the world, which Nigeria is emulating, are armed with their culture. identity through the use of their language.

Based on the above assertion, the question that arises is what type of language policy can we adopt for us to achieve the above objectives?

For this question to be answered, it is pertinent to have a glimpse of language provisions in the National Policy on Education. As rightly pointed out by Banjo (1995), successive administrations in the country have adopted the rather cautious approach to language policy formulation, considering the volatile nature of Nigeria's ethno linguistic composition. What is today regarded as language policy is the language teaching and learning portion of the National Policy on Education (NPE (Adeniran, 1977). Still, it is important to take the portions in the NPE relating to language as the national development change to the language resource and proceed now to evaluate their potential effectiveness for national development.

Section 1 para. 8 in the National Policy on Education (Revised ed., 1985) states a philosophical awareness (on the part of government) of the role of language as a means of preserving culture, and of the adoption of particular languages as media for fostering national unity. It states:

In addition to appreciating the importance of language in the educational process and as a means of preserving the peoples culture, the Government considers it to be in the interest of national unity that each child should be encouraged to learn one of the three major languages other than his own mother-tongue, in this connection, the government considers the three major languages in Nigeria to be Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba.

The above language policy is in consonance with what must be considered the right strategy for developing in a multilingual society that is developing in a collaborative venture, and that it is best prosecuted in the context of indigenous culture. This shows the importance of language in culture development, which the language teacher and all stakeholders should consider in language programme in 21st century.

The language policy in pre-primary and primary level stipulates that "...the medium of instruction will be principally the mother-tongue or the language of immediate community ..." (2:11). This is usually referred to as "mother-tongue medium (MTM). This policy provides a non-intimidatory link between the home and formal schooling. And to ensure its feasibility, government has committed itself to develop the orthography of many Nigerian languages and to produce textbooks in Nigerian languages.

At the secondary school level, the two broad aims stated are related to the overall national development objectives. They are (a) preparation for useful living within the society and (b) preparation for higher education (Section 4:17). Among the specific objectives are the development

and projection of Nigerian culture, art and languages as well as the world's cultural language, and the fostering in Nigeria, unity with emphasis on the common ties that unite us in our diversity (Section 4:18). The policy further states that "in selecting two Nigerian languages, students should study the language of their own area in addition to any of the three main Nigerian languages, Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba, subject to availability of teachers".

The above policy statement and objectives have also reemphasized the importance of having a functional language programme for national development and integration especially in the 21st century.

At the tertiary education level, the policy stipulates on higher education that university should mount a compulsory first year course in the social organization, customs, culture and history of our peoples. The award of degree will be made conditional upon the passing of the paper in the course (Section 5:37).

The above policy statement is aimed at correcting the wide spread ignorance among Nigerian groups about each other and about themselves. It has also very clearly expressed a justification or the compulsory study of Nigerian cultures at the tertiary level with the condition stated above attached to it. It is equally important to note that the study of the culture of Nigerian peoples would include the study of their languages.

In conclusion, looking at both pre-primary and secondary NPE, it is discovered that provisions are made for language education but not with the tertiary education except for the teaching of a few of the languages as academic subjects. The objectives and implementation programme appear on paper to be viable and capable of leading the nation to the goals of socio-cultural, social-political and technological development. Finally, the goals of the programme will however need to be vigorously canvassed among the citizens so they can develop positive response to it and give it all the support it requires for its success. This is an opportunity to launch Nigeria into the twenty-first century as a self-reliant nation.

Making Language Education Relevant to National Development

The 21st century is witnessing the greatest changes in the history of language learning. More languages are studied than ever before. This may be as a result of the roles of language to educational development.

In order to make language more relevant to the nation's development, there is a need for integrative and focused language policy, whereby both common languages (i.e. English language which Nigeria has adopted as their Lingual Franca) and indigenous languages would be given thorough attention in teaching and learning. Because of the unifying role of English language, it enhances increased communication efficiency in our public institutions. In support of this, Obanya (1982) asserts that English language fills a huge communication gap. It helps to facilitate contact between Nigerians of diverse language backgrounds. It is also the official language of the country, the language of official documents, official communication, and so on.

If the above assertion is to be taken seriously, English language needs to be taught functionally to be able to achieve the stated objectives. In other words, the teaching of English is not teaching facts about the language but about how to use the language. What this implies in effect is that learning facts about a language is not learning that language, and language is not a matter of learning facts (Williams, 1973).

Expatriating on the differences between learning facts about a language and learning a skill as it relates to language, Williams (1973) further says that:

In learning a language, it is not just the ability to make a sentence that matters, what counts is the use to which that ability is put. A skill in itself is a tool. Our real concern is not with being able to handle the language, but with it when we handle it. We are not concerned primarily, with learning about conditional clauses, but with the use we can make of such clauses, and with the job of using them properly in the normal course of conversation or business.

What could be deduced from the above is that to learn a language is to acquire skill(s) which we can put correctly into use as the needs arise without much hesitation.

Moreover, in order to have increased access to our indigenous literary art and, opportunities to participate in, contribute to, and propagate them, as suggested by Adeniran (1990) our indigenous languages also need to be given prominent attention in the nation's language policy not just the mere

"Statement of intention" contained in the National Policy on Education. It is possible for a child to learn more than two languages and be conveniently controlled by them if he could learn up to seven subjects in the school and at the end of term he passes all. What the child needs is encouragement from all the stakeholders i.e. government, teachers and parents. When the above issues are considered i.e. developing English language alongside the indigenous language(s), the nation is sure to record huge success in educational development, in particular, and national development, as a whole.

Recommendations and Concluding Remarks

Having highlighted the relevant areas of making language programme functional for national development, it is important to look ahead to attempt to discover direction in which progress may be made. Firstly, since much of achievement in language education programme is due to advances in linguistics, it is advised that adherence to linguistic technique should be considered and language teaching must proceed to teach language in use whether or not every aspect of it has been linguistically described.

Secondly, it is discovered that language teaching has gradually been taken over by electronic devices. This should not be so because language is the chief means by which the human personality express itself and fulfils its basic need for social interaction with other persons, it is therefore difficult to see how the machine could replace the live, complex human being. Therefore, research efforts should be on the ways in which the machine can increase the power of the teacher rather than replace him.

Moreover, the greatest promise lies in a scientific view of language learning and teaching. Language learning is complex. It ranges from the acquisition of simple automatic skills to an understanding of abstract conceptual and aesthetic meanings, all occurring in the same sentences. And this learning must be achieved to an unbelievable degree of facility involving hundreds of articulatory changes and grammatical and lexical selections per minute. For this reason, one is no longer justified in expecting any single development to solve all the problems of language teaching. It requires scientific training to applying the best that is known to the teaching and learning of a second language. Based on this, the language teacher in the 21st century cannot ignore the results of linguistics (the scientific study of language), the psychology of human learning, the age and education of the pupils, or the personality and capacity of the individual students. A scientific approach to language teaching applies the best that is known to each particular class and its students. When a better way to teach something is reported, the teacher incorporates in into his courses, just as a doctor (physician) incorporates into his practice new and more effective ways of meeting each disease as reported in medical literature.

For one to successfully perform professional duties, one must be professionally qualified. The language teacher must be educated, at least to the level of his peers. He must have the following special qualifications in the field of the foreign language he teaches.

(a) Language

The language teacher must know the target language well enough to be imitated by his students. The English language teacher for instance must be able to use the language freely not only the significant sounds, syntactical constructions, and general vocabulary, but also many details of pronunciation and idiomatic expression of native speech and writing. The language teacher should devote a great deal of effort to the achievement of this level and to maintain his proficiency once achieved.

Also, it is not enough to speak a language, to be qualified to teach it. Even the native speaker cannot model the language or guide the students unless he can isolate and demonstrate its various elements. He must know the description of the structure of the language. He must also know the linguistic facts of the language of the students in order to understand the particular problems they will have in learning the target language.

The student cannot go far into the target language without facing differences in cultural meanings because the meanings expressed in a language are, largely, culturally determined. Therefore, the language teacher must understand the intimate relation between a language and its culture. These involve knowledge of specific facts concerning the culture and some understanding of

the major patterns of thought, beliefs, traditions and values that account for the way the people live and behave and give significance to their accomplishments.

Finally, this formidable set of qualifications represents a standard that all language teachers should strive to meet if not surpass: the Modern Language Association of American (MLA) qualification, which includes (1) Aural comprehension (2) Speaking (3) Reading (4) Writing (5) Language analysis (6) Culture and (7) Professional preparation. Each is described on three different levels of excellence superior, good and minimal. These qualifications represent the standard advocated by the largest professional association of language teachers of the United States. They reflect a growing preoccupation with the need for qualified teachers to meet the language needs of the modern world.

Thus, language situation in Nigeria is still facing a serious dilemma. While some educators are clamoring for education in mother-tongue, some sound otherwise. The attitude of the Nigerian elite to indigenous language according to Bamgbose (1985) reflects that they are plagued by linguistic imperialism -an attitude that recognizes as normal the continued use of English language in all advanced sectors of life. This attitude is reflected in the impunity with which proprietors of nursery and primary schools disregard the provision in the National Policy on Education by using English as a medium of instruction right from nursery to primary six. Also the inferior status accorded the indigenous languages on the curriculum in secondary school reveal their positive attitude to English language.

Not only this, people believe that it is not economically viable to teach in the mother-tongue due to cost of production of textbooks and finally, no Nigerian language or mother-tongue is as complete as English. The above reasons' should not be enough to neglect totally, our indigenous language(s). It should be given an equal opportunity to develop as English language in order to achieve our goal of national identity. Also, since English language has been accepted as the nation's Lingua Franca, the language of advancement, the advance world's language (which Nigeria is emulating), its teaching should be more functional in order to increase communication efficiency in our public institutions.

Government should pay particular attention to the recommendations of Modern Language Association of America's (MLA) qualification as mentioned above so as to produce highly efficient and qualified language teachers in the country. This is not peculiar to English language teachers alone, but also to indigenous language teachers.

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