

LANGUAGE EDUCATION AND THE PROMOTION OF PEACE CULTURE IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Language is embedded in the culture of a people. Culture comprises the customs, traditions, arts; social institutions, etc of a particular people, hence it is the sum total of the ways of life of people. Language is expressed in words and actions; this is why every human activity has its own language. A particular language system is developed for use by a people and it is peculiar to them. There will be no productivity or human coexistence without language because language being one of the most significant aspects of human life is the most important conveyor or carrier of information. The curiosity to discover this propelling factor of human sustenance causes man to study language beyond his own. Language education makes the study of other languages possible to a non-native speaker of a particular language. In the course of studying this language, which is not his own, he comes in contact with the history, norms and concepts of the additional language. This gives the learner the opportunity to learn. Since education is a facilitator of knowledge, language education cultivates the facilitator of knowledge; language education cultivates that force which propels peace as an understanding and respect developed towards a language.

Language is a dependable ally in the pursuance of peace culture. The practice of language implies participation in the native culture of the language in use. Culture as we already know, includes a people's values, beliefs, world views, perceptions, traditions as well as their material products. When the issue of language is discussed, we are stressing a people's emotional, moral, and mental dispositions that are behind the maintenance, production and application of services which sustain their society. Therefore, speaking a particular language will place one in practical participation of the culture of the language.

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Inyang and Edung (2005) present language as a depository of culture, hence the practice of any given language implies participation in the native culture of the language in question.

Nigeria, in particular, is a multi-lingual country. There has not really been any noticeable or significant progress made as it concerns language education as a tool for integration in Nigeria. This paper seeks to remind and sensitize the authorities concerned towards the importance of language as a major tool for the peaceful sustenance of our national entity.

Human communication is most effectively carried out in a natural language. Edung (2001) explains that as a people communicate in a natural language about their experiences (concrete and abstract, individual and collective) that make up and engender their peculiar way of life, i.e. their culture, they necessarily bring about their language units and structures, which enable them to express and to communicate these experiences. Thus, a people's language is a verbal reflection and a depository of the culture of its speakers. We have towed this angle as a pedestal to showcasing language first as an important aspect of human existence and secondly, as an aspect for enhancing the maintenance and preservation of culture for the purpose of co-existence.

The Concept of Language

Language is said to be the key to the heart of the people. If we lose the key, we lose the people, if we treasure the key and keep it safe, it will unlock the door to untold riches which cannot be guessed at from the other side of the door. The lesson learnt here is that, language plays a vital role in the life of a people. Hence, Ani (2007:274) submits that, "Human beings cannot think without language. It is an integral part of man; it surpasses communication and social interaction. Language influences thought, and thought often conditions actions, also, it influences conduct." It is because of the importance of language to mankind that Ibiowotisi (1996) states that: language is so vital to man's life that, there is hardly any situation where it is not involved; it is a vehicle of power, a means by which we control, create and preserve.

The Concept of Education

Education simply means the act of imparting knowledge to mankind. What is knowledge? Some philosophers, among them in the mainstream are Francis Bacon and Socrates who were both English and Ancient Greek Philosophers; assert that "knowledge is power and virtue". The lessons adduced from the assertions of these two great philosophers are that knowledge is a treasure source. It opens wellsprings of unfathomable insights into the world, how to improve it as well as transcend its barriers and stereotypes. Knowledge liberates one from the shackles of ignorance and unveils immense vistas of possibilities. Knowledge opens one's horizons and broadens one's worldview. It enables one to see one's reality in a balanced perspective, sets clear and realistic goals as well as control history.

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As earlier stated, the process of acquiring knowledge is described as Education. It is this process that has enabled humanity to develop, to raise critical questions to subdue nature, master it, invent new things, transmit values and sustain civilization. Education takes place in formal and informal settings as well as applies various methodologies that lead to national development.

Given the need for clarification, the concepts of peace, peace education and culture were explicitly defined. According to Edikpa, (2006); Odumokoro and Oyistso (2007); and Ominyi et al (2009), peace refers to the presence of well being, social justice, gender equality and human rights characterized by trust, compassion, calmness, quietness and justice. They add that, peace involves non-violence, security, absence of conflict, strife and an absolute state of well-being.

With the idea of Peace and Education put together, there arose the concept of peace education. For Gumut (2007), the concept of peace education connotes an effort to educate people in the dynamics of conflict and the enhancement of peace making skills in homes, schools, communities and society at large using the channels and instruments of socialization. It provides education for global security and focuses on direct organized violence, specifically the institutions of war and armed conflicts, employing the framework based on recent theories of human society. Peace education initiates the idea of human dignity and human rights with specific reference to such values as economic equity, political undertakings, ecological balance and the formative principles relevant to international human rights standards. According to Akpan (2009), peace education includes different approaches which can transform the behaviours of people through the inculcation of desired knowledge, value, attitudes and skills for effective contribution to the cultural, social, economic and political development of their country.

The Importance of Language

Language enables competence in communication. Communication is all about language – be it sign language or verbal language. Thus, communication competence is language competence. There is no way or yardstick for understanding another person's culture other than language. When one has a mastery of another's language, the mere fact that this language is understood and spoken by one who is not a native speaker exudes so much warmth between the native speaker and the non-native speaker who perhaps might be meeting for the first time. This will immediately create an avenue for friendship that will eventually lead to intimacy. This kind of relationship often coaxes those involved to open up to each other on issues and matters that will help them progress.

Apart from understanding another person because he speaks your language, it also serves as an instrument to heighten security. One can find himself in the midst of a people whose language he understands, a discussion may be going on when it is less believed that the non-native speaker understands the language. In a situation where the

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discussion affects him (the non-native speaker) negatively, it is possible for him to pick the information and try every avenue to forestall the negative effect of that information.

We would say here that we are considering not only the Nigerian indigenous language but also foreign languages. For instance if our security personnel are very well versed in foreign languages, it will help in the preservation of peace. One of the tools for security and surveillance is language. One can pick information on a planned attack on a territory with the presence of an unsuspected non-native speaker of a language. This could further go to help forestall the attack or invasion. In cases of cross boarder banditry, spies could be sent to live in the midst of these bandits, listen and get their plots and thereafter be able to quell and also seek ways of aborting whatever plots are or were made against one's country.

The National Policy on Education and its Outlook Towards Language as it Affects Peaceful Co-Existence

The National Policy on Education has prescribed a number of languages from which a child should select. In the latest edition, emphasis has been laid on the importance of language. The policy says,

“Government appreciates the importance of language as a means of promoting social interaction and national cohesion and preserving culture. Thus, every child shall learn the language of the immediate environment. Furthermore, in the interest of national unity, it is expedient that every child shall be required to learn one or the three Nigerian languages: Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. For smooth interaction with our neighbours, it is desirable for every Nigerian to speak French. Accordingly, French shall be the second official language in Nigeria, and it shall be compulsory...”

We start by saying that the Nigerian Educational Policy recognizes language as an essential tool for the preservation of cultures. The NPE has prescribed a number of languages for a child to learn from pre-primary to tertiary institution. Initially the policy said, the child should be encourage to learn but recently it came out more compelling and more emphatic saying the child shall learn. This is because the government has realized that language is not just a tool for national unity and preservation of cultures but a very importance one at that. This article of the NPE should be given a national effect and proper attention.

Apart from the Unity schools and may be a very minute percentage of other public schools who implement the NPE guideline on language, language acquisition has not really taken a place of importance in our educational system. Even in the few schools where this policy has been considered, a negligible number of students pay any attention to our indigenous languages. There is the tendency for people to see the implementation of another's language as an imposition upon others. Little wonder why there is difficulty in teaching our national languages in areas where these languages are

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not spoken. We see on the GCE and NECO Time Tables every year, where these languages are given dates and times for examination, but some of these examinations are taken mainly in areas where these languages are spoken.

This problem is not only with our national languages. The National Policy on Education has recommended French as the second official language in Nigeria, and has gone further to say it shall be compulsory. It is somehow discouraging to note that this clause is not very visible in the nearest future, because what we tend to see is a prescription without implementation. The government has taken time to duly make a policy for the purpose of learning languages to enhance integration and national unity. But has it really been given the required attention so as to realise the intended goal? There are a couple of factors which we believe have impeded the complete implementation of this policy. Let us briefly look at these factors.

(a) The Concept of Language Superiority and Inferiority

There are some sections of the country that consider their languages more important than others. We reason that there are infightings as to whose language should be given more prominence. The government says “a child shall learn one of the national languages”, attention has not been give to this clause else there will be that understanding that instead of emphasizing on only the Igbo language in Igbo schools, it is better to carry along the Hausa or Yoruba and vice versa. What we see is a situation where an Igbo child is taught only the Igbo language in school and in very rare cases one will find Hausa or Yoruba being taught alongside and vice versa.

Let us come down to Akwa Ibom State to illustrate a case. There are more than five (5) languages spoken in the state. At a time, efforts were made to introduce the Ibibio language in secondary schools across the state. There was a strong resistance from the speakers of the other languages. The reason being that, there was this impression that the Ibibios were trying to impose their language on the entire state and thereby cause the others to be of disadvantage in that their children will forget their mother tongue and eventually lose their identity. There are elements of misconceptions here. This is a case of language of the same environment, but we are sure this is what happens at the national level.

There is also the issue of language inferiority. Many people feel uncomfortable studying their language. Remember, the National Policy on Education also says “every child shall learn the language of the immediate environment”. We talk about language inferiority because a lot of people feel ashamed mentioning that they went to school to study their own language. Some see it as a waste of time going to school to formally learn or study the intricacies and components of a language they were born into. Some also feel that those who study their own language in school are not very bright, this is typical of human nature. Fiddo (1987) points out that,

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“language is not merely grammar, spelling, pronunciation, diction and meanings of words. Separated from their socio-cultural setting, these components of language are empty...”

One has to formally study language in order to be able to relate the grammatical, syntactic and semantic components to the cultural components. It's all about knowing the nitty gritty of a language to be able to pass same down to others. Edung (2001) says that it becomes possible that as we study a language, certain elements of the language can lead us to certain aspects of the culture of the native speakers of the language – their values, mind set, world view: their emotional, mental, and moral dispositions.

(b) Lack of Professionals

It takes one who is conversant with the rudiments of a particular language to effectively transfer the knowledge acquired to another person. Since there is not much emphasis laid on indigenous languages, we lack adequate professional for these languages. Over the years, we have suffered serious shortage in the area, due to the fact that the government has not done enough to encourage people to go into the study of language. What we have mostly, as it concerns our indigenous languages, are those who studied English or French and went on to study linguistics where they majored in theses indigenous languages. Not much has been done to cause children to start to study these languages from the pre-primary to the tertiary level. For instance, in the Ibibio literature, there are hardly books that can be used.

Ibibio is not the only language that has suffered this impediment, there are others. We commend those who have done some work on their literature so that they are readable in schools, for example, the Yoruba literature. These literatures were and are made possible by people who understood early enough, the importance of formal impartation of their language and culture.

The National policy on Education also says “French shall be compulsory”. The government has been trying overtime to sensitize people to study French for the purpose of making Nigeria actually francophonised so as to flow with her neighbours. Despite the efforts made over the years, professionals in this field can still be counted by the tip of the finger. In most of the Colleges of Education and Universities, eighty percent (80%) of those who register to read French do this as a last resort. They must have tried to get admission to read other courses and were not successful and so they decide to turn to French just to get a certificate or a degree. Eighty percent (80%) of our secondary schools do not offer French. In our pre-primary and primary schools, it is almost the same situation. This is, no doubt, the reason for low or poor turnout in the number of qualified French Instructors. However one may look at it, we do not have sufficient professionals for the teaching of languages, be it indigenous or the recommended foreign language.

(c) Lack of Facilities

Language involves the entire man. For the purpose of proper teaching and instructing in language, certain facilities are very necessary for effective language pedagogy. A school needs to be properly equipped for this purpose. When one studies another person's language, one is trying to borrow from that person and as such, needs to arm himself in everywhere, as it has to do with living, in the borrowed language. There are not enough language laboratories, audio-visual aids and even books to cover these areas. Cassettes will help the learner to listen to the native speakers from recorded materials while the books will be there for the learner to see what is being listened to. The books also carry documented evidences of the speaker's culture and civilization. This also works out well in the area of pronunciation and vocabulary development.

(d) Lack of Sufficient Awareness and Encouragement

There has not been sufficient awareness on the importance of language education. The government lays too much emphasis on science to the detriment of many other areas. As regards French as a foreign language, up to the mid 80's those who studied French were supported by the French and Nigerian governments. The learners of the French language were sponsored to France and other Francophone countries by government and this gave them the opportunity to interact with the native speakers of the language. That was quite good and it helped promote the language. In recent times, the government has made no effort to encourage those interested studying both our indigenous and foreign languages. This is evident in the experiences of those who further their studies in languages as they struggle through their programmes with all the attendant inconveniences and expenditure.

Language Education and Peace Culture

Hanson and Brembeck (1966) state that language is a sine-qua-non for education because education is a communication between the communicator and the person communicated to. A mother's smile to a baby is a form of communication because it creates a sense of acceptability, love and security. Definitely, communication occurs between the mother and the sucking child, even as the child robs the breast of the mother. Thus, the mother assures the child immediately that the child is loved by robbing the child and the child responds in robbing her in return.

Learning a language is learning about the culture and civilization of a people at the same time. Wallwork (1969) says that language is used for phatic communion i.e. using language to express culture. Language, as he further shows, is used to control the environment (the people) and also as propaganda. He also sees language as a social regulator to control relationships. Studying a language brings about respect for the culture of the speakers of the language. It further facilitates the understanding of the cultural intricacies of that language. Understanding the culture of a people makes it possible for one to find out factors that could enhance peaceful co-existence between the members of a national entity.

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Culture is a way of life. Chomsky (1972) presents studying language means studying the human essence. Essence is something within not without and cannot be touched except by using a very strong force. Language is the only force that can penetrate the human soul to touch the human essence so as to be able to implant peace and remove prejudices. The human essence is within just as peace is within. Peace becomes a people's way of life when peace is imbibed by the people, hence we can refer to this as "peace culture". Just as people make violence their way of life due to the exigencies of social demands which push them into a culture that was not originally theirs, so also, peace could become their way of life due to the need to evolve a progressive society.

Wallwork (1969) says language is used for records and history of a people. He further says that language is used to convey information to enable and embody thought to influence a people. Since language is studied, it goes along with the history and culture of the people whose language is studied, one can take a deep look at what factors led to past aggressions and what misunderstandings had been part of the people in the past. Through this process our children are reminded about what respect for one's culture is and what could come out of disrespect for that culture. Cultural conflict erupts mostly when one does not understand or does not show respect for another's language and or culture. Even the Bible in Prov. 22:6 says we should "train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old, he will not depart from it". This shows the importance of exposing a child early enough to language and culture. Whatever is learnt early in life sticks and impacts more than what is learnt later in life. This is why we are sure that when a child learns about one's culture early in life, he will understand that culture for peaceful co-existence of a national entity.

Conclusion

Language is the cardinal point of human interaction. It is also a strong force in the unification and integration of a people. Education is a facilitator of knowledge, therefore, language education involves the process of formally inculcating the norms and components of a particular language in an individual. Language education enables the learner to properly study a language thereby minding the intonation and pronunciation, as well as having a firm grasp of the proper concepts of the language. In this ways, it will be possible to avoid linguistic or language conflict.

The importance of language cannot be over emphasized. A sound functional knowledge of as many languages as possible by the citizens of a nation can greatly enhance the promotion of peace. Uptil now, language education in Nigeria cannot be said to be anywhere near producing the degree and level of understanding amongst cultures as envisaged here. So, something expedient needs to be done for an appropriate study of languages and cultures of a people. Edung (2001) refers to appropriate study of language to mean the study of language that leads to a good understanding of the people's mind set and world view, for these are the exponents of

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the concepts and operationality of their systems and techniques, as aspects of their culture. This good understanding of another's culture through language education will facilitate the birth and sustenance of peace culture in a nation.

Recommendations

- i. A more purposeful and goal oriented implementation of language education should be adopted in our schools.
- ii. Other than the recommended national languages in the National Policy on Education, people should be encouraged to study languages of their choice.
- iii. Beyond the implementation of the recommended languages, a massive language education, be it African or non-African Languages, should be encouraged in the line of what American is doing by studying many languages as stated in Crystal (1997):

In 1985, the U.S. Department of Education published a list of 169 languages which the U.S. government considered to be "critical".

The 169 languages listed include seven (7) Nigerian Languages namely: Efik, Fulani (fulfulde), Hausa, Igbo, Kanuri, Tiv and Yoruba. p.34

- iv. Manuals written should accommodate all aspects of language study such as multidisciplinary approach to language.
- v. Nigerians should be well oriented to understand that language spells one's authentic identity.

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