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Lexicography: An Indispensable Document for Language Standardization

By

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Abstract

This paper is an applied Linguistics paper which aims at exposing the indispensable function of dictionary as a document for language standardization. The major objective of this paper is to highlight the society on the invaluable use of dictionary in promoting uniformity in the use of Language structure, which is one of the stepping-stones towards standardization of language of any society. Since this paper is an applied Linguistics topic, it is based on purely applied Linguistics framework dealing with impact of Linguistic material on the language of the society. This paper is therefore divided into four subheadings. The first part deals with a detailed explanation of the term applied linguistics, the second highlights on the concept of language standardization, while the third exposes the role of dictionary as a document for language standardization and the forth is mainly conclusion and recommendations.

The field of Applied Linguistics deals with the application of Linguistic theories to human problems. It studies the use of Linguistics in solving human problems. According to Schmitt & Celce-Murcia, (2002: 1) "Applied Linguistics is using what we know about (a) language (b) how it is learned (c) how it is used in order to achieve some purposes or solve problems in the real world". He stated that the purposes are many and varied, and this can be witnessed in the definition of Wilkins (1999:7) as follows,

"In a broad sense, applied linguistics is concerned with increasing understanding of the role of language in human affairs and thereby with providing the knowledge necessary for those who are responsible for taking language related decisions whether the need for these arises in the classroom, the working place, the law court or the laboratory".

From the explanation above, it is clear that applied linguistics cuts across all human disciplines.

The boundaries of applied linguistics are unquantifiable, though Schmitt & Celce-Murcia (2002: 1) have restricted the boundaries to forty-seven special areas. Out of the above number of areas, he was able to list out eighteen areas recorded by American Association of Applied Linguistics (AAAL) Conference in 2002, which he described as eighteen topic areas. They are

1. Language and its acquisition
2. Language and assessment
3. Language and brain
4. Language and cognition
5. Language and culture
6. Language and ideology
7. Language and instruction
8. Language and interaction
9. Language and listening
10. Language and media
11. Language and policy
12. Language and reading
13. Language and research methodology
14. Language and society
15. Language and speaking
16. Language and technology
17. Language and translation/interpretation
18. Language and writing
19.

He further stated that out of these 47 areas in applied linguistics, where papers were called for by the above conference, the document application has always been the teaching and learning of second or foreign language. Apart from the above broad disciplines, applied linguistics can be applied to some academic and professional disciplines such as Law, Medicine, History, Sociology, Psychology, Anthropology, Computer Studies and Mathematical Studies, to give the following areas of study such as language of medicine or medicalese, language of legalese, historical linguistics, socio-linguistics, psycho-linguistics, anthropological linguistics, computer linguistics and mathematical linguistics respectively.

Having seen the scope of applied linguistics, it is not surprising to note why it is very difficult for one to undertake writing a book in applied linguistics. Formally, books in Applied linguistics were always co-authored by several specialists in various areas of Applied linguistics. This can be testified by several books in applied linguistics. A case in point is a textbook titled *"Perspective on Applied Linguistics in Language and Literature"* written and published in AD 2000 in honour of the retirement of Professor Ephraim E. Ubahakwe, edited by Adebayo Lawal, which

comprises of thirty-eight prolific writers in various specialized areas of applied linguistics.

Conclusively therefore, applied linguistics cuts across all conventional fields of knowledge namely science, arts, and technology resulting to explosion of knowledge for solving human problems with language.

Concept of Language Standardization

The word '*Language*' is a system of communication. It is an art of communication. According to Samarvar and Porter (2003:198) "Language is a symbolic system in which meaning is shared among people who identify with one another". They stated that both verbal and non-verbal aspects of language exist, and that in the study of language and culture, the verbal aspect of both written and spoken communications has been the predominant focus of research. They further reiterated, "If language not be in accordance with the truth of things, affairs cannot be carried on to success". According to Okolo and Ezikeojiaku (1999), "Language is useful in all the mundane transaction of our daily life". This implies that the role of language in human society is very indispensable and therefore, must be given adequate attention to ensure its growth, maintenance, and nurture until it reaches the stage of standardization in all human societies.

What is then Language Standardization?

It is the ability of any ethno-linguistic community to nurture and maintain their language in such a way that it can be generally accepted by all the members of such community as a language for official use. Once a language has attained the level of standardization, it will be assigned a higher role than has been in the past. It can be upgraded either as a language of education or a national language of the country concerned. According to Awobuluyi (1992), language standardization is an effort designed to make the form of a particular language uniform throughout the area where the language is used. He stated that both spoken and written form of a language must be made uniform by any speech community using the language. Language uniformity means that the language must be spoken and written in the same way throughout the speech or linguistic community concerned. For example, Igbo language is said to be standardize because the language is spelt, pronounced, spoken and written in the same way in all the nook and cranny of Igbo territory as well as Igbo (in Diaspora) scattered in various areas in the universe. As has been mentioned earlier, the words must be spelt and pronounced in the same way while the syntactic rules must be applied in the same way in sentence construction in the entire Igbo ethno-Linguistic environment in both spoken and written communication.

One of the major characteristics of language standardization is that not only the language be spoken community-wide, but be codified. Codification is ability to put a language into writing by assigning orthography to the language under development. Awobuluyi (2008), in his postgraduate lecture note in applied linguistics, defined orthography as a set of written symbols and associated convention for writing the

words of a language. These orthographic convention and symbols which have been specially designed by language experts and generally accepted by the society involved, must serve as the acceptance norms for writing the language in order to ensure uniformity in spelling, pronunciation, phrases and sentence construction including uniformity in the determination of meaning of the language spoken or written.

It is necessary to note that the variety of the language to be standardized must be prestigious so as to enable the people concerned create a positive attitude towards it/them. Language standardization leads to the development of positive attitude of the people towards the language. Codification is one of the factors that creates positive attitude towards the language of a people. The writing of the language orthography gives the language a new prestige. So publication in a language creates a loving, proud and respectable attitude of people towards their language. Take example of the written Nigerian languages and those that have not been written. It will be noted that the written ones give more respect to the speakers of the language. If a language is standardized, people's attitude towards the language will be positive but if it is not standardized, people may develop negative attitude towards their language which may even lead to language shift and eventually, language death. Standardization is a product of history. It is people's dint of hard work towards the development of their language that results into language standardization. In some underdeveloped language, some native speakers can neglect their language until it dies.

The Role of Dictionary as a Linguistic Document for Language Standardization

Lexicography is the arrangement of words in alphabetical order for detailed explanation or description. The aim of alphabetical arrangement of words is to ensure easy references when one is searching for linguistic information details. Dictionary is a kind of Lexicography and lexicographers put words into dictionary in order to supply vital linguistic information on the use of language so as to make sure that people use the language correctly and uniformly.

According to D.A. Wilkins;

If we were to wonder into classroom where pupils were learning a foreign language and if we listened to them speaking that language or observe their attempt to write it, we should notice before long that the same mistakes of pronunciation, spelling, grammar and vocabulary tend to recur in the language of deferent individuals. (Wilkins 1972:190).

It is this type of impression of errors in the use of the structure of languages that dictionary wants to correct in order to bring up uniformity in the application of language structure and meaning in any language by all the members of the community whose language has been written in various dictionaries. The objective of creating dictionaries is to account for necessary linguistic information and supply some details about them. The linguistic information supplied deals with accurate spellings of words, phonological information that highlights users on the accurate pronunciation based on International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) or any other conventional signs approved. The

third is syntactic information which exposes the syntactic rules of the language and finally, is the semantic information which exposes the acceptable meaning of words in the language.

In the phonetic information, dictionaries, more especially monolingual dictionaries, supply the spelling order of what language concerned. The most acceptable spelling is written first before any other spelling to be considered as acceptable in the language. For example, in the Igbo word (áki) "aki" means "palm kernel" in English language. It has another acceptable second variant pronounced as [áku] "aku". Two of these spellings are acceptable by Igbo linguistics communities, but the most common and popular one (aki) is written first in the dictionary while the less popular one [aku] "aku" is written second. This is to ensure that the most popular word [ạki] is mostly used by every Igbo speaker in any official sector of the community such as the legislation, judiciary, education etc while the second one will serve as synonym of the first word. The word that is mostly used in writing, publication and in teaching is the most common one [ạki] and anyone that deviates from the use of first spelling will be regarded as incorrect. The essence of highlighting about common spelling in the dictionary is to ensure uniformity in the spelling of words and no one is expected to deviate from the acceptable spelling as dictated by the dictionaries. The uniform spelling of words based on dictionary approval is an appropriate step towards standardization of the language concerned.

Concerning the phonological information, dictionary supplies accurate pronunciations of the generally accepted words in the language of any ethno-linguistic community. If a word has two pronunciations or more, it is the function of the dictionary to write the most common pronunciation first in the dictionary list before considering any other variant of the word. For example, the word (íhé) meaning "something" in English language has about five dialectal spelling and pronunciations. These five allomorphic variations /ihe/, /ife/, /ive/, /iɸe/ and /iβe/ are not contained in the monolingual dictionary. The only acceptable pronunciation is the first one /ihe/ which is written in Igbo standard dictionary so as to ensure uniform pronunciation in the speaking and writing of standard Igbo both in school, legislation, court, and any other official sectors such as writing and publication sectors. The essence of promoting this common pronunciation is to ensure uniform pronunciation of the word "ihe" by all members of Igbo community both at home and abroad and as such, promote Igbo language standardization. Another alternative to the pronunciation "ihe" is "ife" which is listed as the second pronunciation in Igbo monolingual dictionary.

In Igbo community, the word "food" is pronounced as /ńrí/, /ńLí/ and /írí/. The first pronunciation /nri/ is accepted by the generality of Igbo community as the standard and official pronunciation and it is that one that is written in the Igbo monolingual dictionary while other variants are left out. The essence is to ensure Igbo standard pronunciation in all the official sectors and also in the urbanized areas where agglomeration of people from different Igbo localities are involved. The choosing of

one variant "nri" will ensure uniformity in pronunciation and therefore, propagate Igbo standardization. From the above examples enumerated, it has become clear that the essence of putting acceptable spellings and pronunciations of any ethno-linguistic community in the dictionary document of such community is to ensure that every member of that community spells and pronounces the words in the same way world-wide so as to ensure language standardization. Secondly, second language learners of the language concerned will only concern themselves with learning only the dictionary acceptable spellings and pronunciations of words rather than dabbling into other variants which may lead the learner to confusion and lack of precision in the use of the structure of the language concerned.

Apart from the general dictionary, there are also specialized dictionaries written in different disciplines such as Law, Medicine, Linguistics, Education, Anthropology, and Sociology etc. According to Akmajian:

> *The field of linguistics, the scientific study of human natural language, is a growing and exciting area of study with an important impact on the fields as diverse as education, anthropology, sociology, language teaching, cognitive psychology, computer science, neuroscience and artificial intelligence among others. (Akmajian 2002:5).*

Therefore, specialized dictionaries based on the registers of the above disciplines mentioned must spell and pronounce their words the same way so as to ensure uniformity in the correct use of words by members of those special disciplines. Therefore, both monolingual general and specific dictionaries aim at uniformity and standardization in spelling and pronunciation when writing their words or register.

Another area where dictionaries supply linguistic information based on standardization of language is on the use of grammatical information known as part of speech. Dictionary supplies different lexical categories and how they are used in syntactic constructions as nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs. A lexical item that is used as a noun only will be regarded as incorrect if it is eventually used as a verb. But where a word belongs to two syntactic categories, the two forms will be shown in the dictionary starting from the most common category to the less common one. For example, an English word such as "august" can be used in two forms; noun and adjective. The noun form "august" ['∂g $\supset$ st'] is marked with the specification "n" e.g. "This is the month of *"august"*. The second form [∂'gΛst) has the specification 'adj' e.g. I have an *august* visitor. Another English word is 'import' which is used as noun and verb respective. The dictionary will make sentences to show the difference in the usage of the two grammatical categories e.g. 'import' "ń" as in "The federal government planned to make an import of certain essential commodities for Nigerians". Import (v) "the federal government wants to import some essential commodities for Nigerians". The essence of these syntactic constructions as contained in the monolingual dictionary e.g. Oxford English Advanced Learner's Dictionary is to show

accurate syntactic usage of these words by the generality of the people using the language starting from the most common to list the common grammatical category in other to ensure uniformity and standardization of the language concerned, whether foreign or indigenous language. Therefore, whether dictionaries are written in foreign or vernacular languages, in general or specific registers, the objective is to ensure standardization in spelling, pronunciation and syntactic use of the language and any deviation from the approved norm of the dictionary information will be deemed incorrect and at the consequence of the user. According to Labov (1973:182) in his book titled *Sociolinguistics Pattern*, stated "according to recent research (Taylor, 1973) most black profess to want their children to learn the standard dialect". The above statement by Taylor shows that the importance of language standardization cannot be overemphasized for it enables a community to be highly enlightened on the common use of their language.

Another area where dictionaries supply linguistic information for uniformity and standardization of language use is in the field of semantics. This deals with the study of meaning. Initially the only linguistic information supplied by earlier dictionaries is meaning but in this recent period, dictionaries supply linguistic information based on the four linguistic levels namely phonetic/phonology, morphological/morphology, semantic/semantics and syntactic/syntax levels. Dictionaries supplies information on the accurate meaning of lexical items and any deviation from the dictionary meaning will be unacceptable. If the meaning of a "man" [mąen] is a "male adult human being" and woman [wimąen] "a female adult human being" as stated by Advanced Learners Dictionary of English Language, any deviation from the above meaning defined by the dictionary will be regarded as incorrect and inappropriate and the consequence is on the user.

In a question asked by Allen and Corder (1975:337) "should pupil be exposed to a language that they cannot produce?" Dictionary is the answer to this question because the use of dictionary will expose the learner to accurate use of the language concerned in the fields of spelling, pronunciation, morpho-syntactic use including the semantic realization of the language. So anyone seeking to practice the proper use of the linguistic structure of any language should learn how to make use of the dictionary of the language he/she wishes to learn.

Conclusion

Dictionaries are produced by trained lexicographers. The essence of dictionary production is to ensure standardization by adopting uniformity in the use of the structures of language. It happens to deal with all aspects of language structures to show that these structure levels such as phonology, phonetics, morphology, syntax and semantic are uniformly employed in the use of language thereby ensuring language standardization. According to Ndimele (2003:4), "UNESCO stated that the essence of globalization of language is to prevent all forms of linguistic segregation and safeguard linguistic heritage of humanity".

Since language standardization is a strong property of language globalization, it becomes necessary that the information supplied by dictionaries in the use of language must be adhered to strictly in order to ensure language standardization and encourage it very strongly.

In Igbo linguistic environment, a group of linguistics known as "Authoritative Linguists" headed by Prof. Nolue Emenanjo emerged after the Nigeria Civil War in 1970 with the objective of standardizing Igbo Language. One of the first steps they took is the creation of the first Igbo standard dictionary, which was introduced in secondary schools and universities where Igbo language courses were offered. Dictionary serves as a very important material for language development and standardization. The importance of dictionary for language development and standardization could be witnessed in the statement made by Essien and Okon as follows:

> *The role of language in development is not just to act as a facilitator at the individual level so that a Newton, an Einstein or Churchill can be produced but also at the collective and societal level so that the very great, the great, the medium range and even the small range minds and talents according to endowment, can emerge for the overall growth and development of the society. For no society makes itself. It is people who make it. Since man is not just flesh and blood but mind and language … we can say that it is really these two that help man to control human society. (Essien and Okon) (2003:26).*

Therefore Dictionary is an indispensable document for propagating development and standardization of languages, for the creation of dictionary of any language community is a signal of movement from sub-standardization to standardization of such language concerned.

Recommendations

Since this paper has discussed in details the usefulness of dictionary not only as a language material for teaching and learning in schools, but also as a linguistic document for language standardization, It is hence recommended that all language learners wishing to gain mastery in learning of any language must development interest in the use of dictionary as reference material. Language teachers in primary and secondary school must expose their scholars to the use of dictionary. Learning in lexicography should be introduced as a compulsory-elective course in the university at least, for a semester so as to encourage application of lexicography in any field of study in the university system.

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