LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT AS A TOOL FOR NATIONAL INTEGRATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA: A PSYCHOLOGICAL VIEWPOINT

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Abstract

This paper discusses the psychological viewpoint of language development as a key variable for national integration and sustainable development in Nigeria. In this article, language is defined as a code where ideas are represented through a conventional system of arbitrary signals for communication. The paper also discussed various psychological perspectives of language development which include the nativists' theory, the perspective of social learning theory, the cognitive view, and the ideas of interactionists. The psychological patterns of language development and their corresponding behaviour with ages across the developmental stages have been analyzed. The paper highlighted the role of language development in national integration and sustainable development. Finally, the paper recommended that indigenous languages should be emphasized in national curriculum as well as competition in language arts and skills among school children to enhance national integration and sustainable development.

Keywords: Language Development, National Integration, Sustainable Development, Psychological Viewpoint

Language, being it spoken or written has existed for about 6,000 years (Kottak, 2005) as the primary means of communication. It is an important determinant for the growth and development of the individual and a tool for national integration and sustainable development. This is because; the major parts of learning and social cohesion depend largely on language development (Nevid, 2004). Therefore, the process of social structure and transmission of cultural values in any nation rely on language as the basis of all social communication. Psychologically, learning to understand and use language is not only essential to growth but it also provides a greater and wider opportunity for intellectual, social and emotional development (Raygor, 2005). Thus, language development, is not an isolated skill, like eating with a spoon or riding a tricycle, but brings with it an all-pervasive transformation of

perceiving, feeling, thinking and general intelligence which are instrumental to national unity, integration and sustainable development.

As the individual develops language skills,the behaviour of his /her becomes increasingly controlled and regulated by the words of others or by the communication he receives from others (Baji, 2013). Hence, language is not only instrumental in communication and education; it is also seen as a symbol of cultural distinctiveness, a mark of political unity and a means of identification for cultural development among different communities in Nigeria (Galadima, 2012:27). Psycholinguistically, therefore, language development and usage determines our thinking and perception of other people and realities. It is an instrument of action and is used to influence people and to resolve problems and tension that arises from human interactions, which by extension, serves as an essential prelude for national integration and sustainable development.

One of the overall philosophy of Nigeria is to "…live in unity and harmony as one indivisible, indissoluble, democratic and sovereign nation; founded on the principles of freedom, equality and justice" (National Policy on Education, 2004). National integration, in this context, is the process whereby people of different ethnic background, history and culture agree to live together as a nation-state with one national goal and aspiration (Kurtz, 2001). Sociolinguistically (study of the relationship between social and linguistic variation), multilingualism operates to form the basis of national integration. This implies that people can use two languages or more to achieve national cohesion and integration (Maybury-Lewis, 2002). Isayev, (1977) cited in Baba, (2012:27) stated that: "to achieve national integration, cohesion and development, there must be a language acceptable to all in running the affairs of a nation".In this sense, language development is considered as a tool that binds people of a nation together. Sustainable development refers to application of principles for meeting human development goals. Sustainable development is the organizing principle for meeting human development goals while at the same time sustaining the ability of natural systems to provide the natural resources and ecosystem services upon which the economy and society depend. This definition signifies that the focus of sustainable development is people and their welfare both at present and in future. Against this background, the context of language development provides people with potentials and the concern for carrying capacity of natural systems in order to meet their social, political, economic and educational challenges in a country. This article, therefore, highlights how psychologically, language development influences individual's overall behaviour, transmits socio-cultural values of the people and promotes national consciousness, unity, integration and sustainable development.

What is Language?

Language refers to the human use of words. Kottak (2005:87) defined language as an arbitrary, learned association between words and the things they stand for.

Language development therefore, is a system of communication in which words and their written symbols combined in various, regulated ways to produce infinite number of messages (Hetherington & Parke, 1999). In other words, Bloom and Lahey (1978) cited in Travers (1982) viewed language as a code whereby ideas about the world are represented through a conventional system of arbitrary signals for communication. The definition of language by Bloom and Lahey revealed key important terms that are essential to understanding the concept of language development. These include:

Language is a Code: This means that language is a way of representing one thing with another. Words and sentence represent object, events and even people without reproducing them. This code provides different forms of language among people and integrates them as well.

Language Represents Ideas: The language code depends on the speaker's and listener's knowledge of things, people and the entire environment. Thus, the knowledge about the environment and the relationship that exists within it provides the content of language in the society and in a nation at large.

Language is a System: In language development, sounds form words and words form sentences according to the system of rules of a particular society. These rules determine the pattern of formation of sounds, words and sentences, thus, explaining the linguistic creativity of language that binds and maintains people in a nation.

Language is a Convention: This means that language is used because the members of a particular language community have agreed on the usage. Hence, language represents shared knowledge among people in a nation.

Language is used for Communication: This implies that language is used in social interactions and interchange among people of a country.

From the foregoing, it is obvious to note that language is a tool for verbal and non-verbal communication among members of a community and the citizenry as a whole. The use of language, in this sense, serves as a means of interaction with others and it helps to communicate information and express feelings and views. Hence, language development is the systematic improvement in the art of communication (Baji, 2013). In this context, however, language development requires people to both produce and send communication which are often referred to as productive language (sending messages to others) and receptive language (receiving messages from others) for sustainable national development.

The Psychological Perspectives on Language Development

Several attempts had been made to explain how language develops. Psychologists and other alien fields advocated the influence of heredity and environment for the emergence and evolution of language. Behaviourists believed that language is a learned behaviour. Nativists argued that nature has pre-programmed humans for speech. Cognitive psychologists, on the other hand, observed that learning

of language is a social process involving the interaction of parents and their children, teachers and their students and members of organizations. The following psychological perspectives on language development are briefly discussed:

1. **The Nativists' View:** The biological or nativists' explanation focuses on innate language mechanisms that automatically unfold. According to the advocate of the nativists' view, children are born with an innate mental structure that guides their acquisition of language, particularly the grammar. Chomsky (1972) termed this structure as a Language Acquisition Device (LAD). The nativists maintained that language develops similarly under any condition and children's mastery of their language depends on an intuitive knowledge of the language rules. The biological or nativists' perspectives explain how native speakers can understand and produce sentences that were never spoken or written; signifying that language development is a generational phenomenon that integrates people together. The famous advocates of this theory are Lenneberge (1967), Chomsky (1972) and Pinker, (1994).

2. **The Social Learning Theory View:** The social learning theory perspective on language development varies widely in the degree to which they adhere to the traditional learning principles. However, the central theme of this theory is that language is a learned skill. At one end, the behaviourists (e.g., Skinner, 1957) argued that the principle of operant conditioning totally account for language development. According to this view, parents, teachers or other caregivers selectively reinforce and shape children's language formation and usage by way of approval or disapproval of it. In this context, children develop language when they are encouraged to vocalize and repeat some sounds or words more often. At the other end, the social cognitive perspectives (e.g., Bandura, 1986) recognized the importance of cognitive functioning in language development through imitation or observational learning. According to this believe, children pick up words and sentences directly by imitating what they hear from their caregivers. Afterwards, through reinforcement and generalization, they apply what they have learned to new situations and learn when it is appropriate or inappropriate to use language in particular time and places. This presupposes that language use involves both content and context and therefore, binds people together.

3. **The Cognitive View:** The cognitive theory perspectives explain language as part of the children's emerging cognitive abilities. Language, in their view, is a verbal clue to the complexity and level of a child's cognitive structures. That is, language development is inextricably linked to the development of cognitive structures. This means that language usage and functions increase dramatically as children pass through the four stages of cognitive development and also differ at each of the four cognitive levels: sensory motor stage (0-2 years), preoperational stage (2-7 years), concrete

operation stage (7-11 years) and formal operation stage (11 years and above). Piaget (1952) is a leading advocate of this theory.

4. **The Interactionists' View:** This theory advocates that language is developed as a result of the interplay between biological and environmental factors. According to this perspective, parents and other socializing agents are facilitators of language acquisition in children through conversations. Bruner (1983) the proponent of this view, proposed that the environment provides the avenue for the child with a Language Acquisition Support System (LASS). This implies that parents or other caregivers should support children in development of language through several strategies such as introduction of objects and presentation of events which provide basis for the children to play with and speak about them. The perspective of the interactionists provides another strong base of language as a unifying tool that keeps people together for sustainable development.

The Psychological Patterns of Language Development

The path of language development is similar for normal children throughout the world (Nevid, 2004; Raygor, 2005; Mussein, 1968). At about the same age, manifestation of similar patterns of speech is developed among children. Psychologically, children will not speak before a certain time and once the acquisition process begins, it is difficult to stop it. This is why some literature considered our ability to learn a language as an innate skill (Raygor, 2005). Culture, in this process, plays a little role with language emergence and development but it influences the specific shape of a language.

The following sequence of speech acquisition has been sketched by psychologists:

Table 1.1: Age and Language Development

Age	**Language Behaviour**
At birth	- Crying and perception of other's speech.
5 to 6 weeks	- Cooing, laughing and gurgling.
4 to 5 months	- Babbling and production of consonant sounds.
6-12 months	- Sounds resemble speech, babbling has sentence like, produces sounds for familiar objects.
12-18 months	- Sentence usually one word, symbolic gesturing, imitates words, and understanding of naming processes.
18-24 months	- Use of two words and rapid expansion of language understanding.
25-36 months	- Decrease in gesturing, disappearance of babbling, use of phrases and short sentences.
36-48 months	- Use of questions, coordination of simple sentences and use of conjunctions and prepositions.
48-60 months	- Increased in sophisticated use of pragmatic rules of communication and use of humour, metaphor and could interpret new language on their own.

5-6 years	- Increased of vocabulary of about 14,000 words, understanding of the use and meaning of complex sentences and could use language as a tool for communication
6-7 years	- Possesses some reading abilities, motor control improves, ability to use pencil and begins to tell time.
7-8 years	- Motor control improves and moves more graceful, ability to write, understands that words may have more than one meaning and use of total sentence to determine meaning.
8-9 years	- Can describe objects in detail and could use sentence content to determine word meaning.
9-10 years	- Describe situations by cause and effects, can write fairly long essays, masters dictionary skills and good sense of grammar.

Source: (Baji, 2013; Hetherington & Parke, 1999; &Nevid, 2004).

Developmentally, the implication of understanding these patterns of language development psychologically will assist to create conscious mind and thought process between the children and parents or caregivers. When there is a good homoeostatic condition between parents and their children, national unity, integration and sustainable development is easily attained (Bamgbose, 1991). This is because; parents are the most prime socializing agents who instill right virtues and national consciousness into their children.

The Psychological Perspectives of the role of Language Development on National Integration and Sustainable Development in Nigeria

The ultimate roles of language in fostering national integration and sustainable development are enumerable and therefore, discussed briefly below (Baba, 2012; Bonvillain, 2003; &Maybury-Lewis, 2002).

Language usage has two fundamental elements: purposes and contexts. People speak usually to deliver a message that will affect the relationship between the speaker and the listener. Hence, language is not used in a vacuum; the situation and the audience shape the nature of the message. As Hetherington and Parke (1999) noted, the combination of purpose and content helps to explain how the ecology of language works to integrate people in a nation.

It is also common to say that the primary function of language is communication to exchange information about states of affairs, rules and procedures, expectations and values; and to share knowledge and experience. As part of the general urge to social communion, language integrates people by providing them with the avenue to tell other people what they know, to act on their emotions and for the satisfaction of social sharing, arts and culture.

Like culture in general, language is transmitted through learning as part of enculturation. Unlike the communication systems of other animals, language allows people in a nation to discuss their past and future. Anthropologically, Bonvillain,

(2003) observed that the cultural and social context of language helps to reconstruct the society and makes discoveries about history and patterns of thought in a multitude of cultures.

Also, the National Policy on Education is another striking policy document that strengthens language as a mechanism for national unity and integration. The policy states:

Government appreciates the importance of language as a means of promoting social interaction and national cohesion; and preserving cultures. 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 of the three Nigerian languages: Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba (NPE, 2004:10).

To this end, the policy has stipulated that the medium of instruction both at the pre-primary and primary education levels is the mother-tongue or the language of the immediate community or environment. This is achieved alongside with studying English as an official language of communication.

In the face of globalization and democratic processes, language is enormous in undertaking all the people along to ensure national unity, integration and development. Since democracy is all about participation by all members of the society (Bala, 2012:26), political structures, socialization and franchise are all achieved in a nation through linguistic ideas, styles and expressions (Lakoff, 2000).

Language also provides a role in colonization and in the expansion of the economy in a nation and within nations (Thomas, 1999). This explains why during colonization in Nigeria and with amalgamation in 1914, English Language was successfully entrenched to have a common tongue for the country. After the attainment of political independence, linguistic imperialism had to be sustained in the interest of the nation (Baba, 2012:28).

Among other domains of language that have relationships with national integration and sustainable development are: personal and group origins, births, death, masculinity and femininity, morality, emotions, manners, codes and procedures and family relations. These, according to Stone and Church (1968), provide endless and heavily cohesion among citizens in a nation. Furthermore, the integrative roles of language help people to organize their perceptions, direct their thinking for common national goals and control their actions for peaceful coexistence.

Similarly, with language, people ask questions and present challenges which provide solid basis for national consciousness, integration, progress and development. Hence, language is tightly woven into the human experience which according to Pinker (1994:17), "it is scarcely possible to imagine life without it".

Also, language and thinking are closely intertwined. According to the linguistic relativity hypothesis, language influences our thinking. To justify this assertion, the Whorfian hypothesis named after Benjamin Whorf (1956) holds that the language we use determines our thinking and perception of the world and reality of life. This

apparently signifies that, psychologically, language is a vehicle that directs human actions for peace and sustainable development.

Conclusion

This paper has analyzed the meaning, theories and patterns of language development and how language can influence national integration and sustainable development. Thus, language serves as a potent vehicle of transmitting ideas, cultures, values and norms from one generation to another. It is one of the most crucial attributes that give the basis for national unity, integration and sustainable development.

Recommendations

The current national socio-economic conditions in Nigeria today required development of language as a viable means for peace, unity, national integration and sustainable development. On the basis of this, the following recommendations have been made to facilitate language development in order to achieve greater heights:

1. Language education and linguistic background should be properly created and harnessed into the national curriculum by curriculum planners to foster national integration and sustainable development.
2. Government should build and promote Nigeria indigenous languages alongside with the English Language as the official language (lingua franca) to passionately address problems of cultural and ethnic diversities for peace, unity and development.
3. Parents or caregivers should make effort to reinforce and shape children's language formation, acquisition, development and usage through constant conversations in local language, reading frequently with them, use of observational learning (modeling of proper use of language) and reward children for good language skills, imitation and competition.
4. Governments at all levels and non-governmental organizations should provide conducive and stimulating environment with relevant linguistic and literary materials to enhance children's language competition and development.
5. Teachers should be encouraged to emphasize proper use of language constantly in the course of teaching and learning to facilitate children's language proficiency, development and usage.
6. In the school system, competition in language arts and skills should be encouraged and rewarded by school managers and administrators.

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