

Ebonyi Journal of Language and Literary Studies

Volume 1 No. 4: 12-21 (2018)

ISSN 9091 4582 7142

Culture and Language: Essential Tools for National Integration and Development

Theodore Madu OKAFORtheoafor@yahoo.comSchool of General Studies,
Imo State Polytechnic,
Umuagwo, Nigeria**Anthony NWOGU**School of General Studies,
Imo State Polytechnic, Umuagwo,
Nigeria**N. C. OSUAGWU**School of Environmental Sciences,
Imo State Polytechnic,
Umuagwo, Nigeria

Abstract

For any nation to succeed there is the need for her to understand her socio-cultural realities and put them into context for a result-oriented policy formulation and development considerations. Language is a powerful instrument of thought, and since every given language is rooted in a culture, the language of a people then is vital in their way of perceiving the world and their reaction to life in general. As different cultures have different languages, so we may expect different philosophical temperaments. The implication here is that in order to understand the culture and philosophy of a people, there is the need to also understand the language which is the medium of thought. Nigeria has well over 400 indigenous languages, but the language of the Nigerian colonial masters, English, is till date used as the country's lingua franca in spite of the stiff opposition against it. While the role of English as a unifying factor in Nigeria cannot be too stressed, the researcher is of the view that the development of African philosophy is better done with an African Indigenous language. By extension, the development of what could be termed a Nigerian philosophy as we have the English empiricism; German Idealism or American empiricism could be better realized through an indigenous language, which is a product of Nigerian culture. The historical background of Nigeria proves that it has abundant cultural endowment. In the case of Nigeria, since the adoption of one indigenous language as a lingua franca will not only result in chaos but also in the suppression or death of many cultures, this paper advocates the effective implementation of the language policy by ensuring that every Nigerian child studies the major indigenous languages of Ibo, Yoruba, and Hausa in addition to English which at the moment serves as the only language of national integration.

Key words: Culture, Language, Development, Integration, Philosophy, Culture and language

Introduction

Language and nationality have been described as the two major cultural factors and elements of “state idea” which could affect the cohesion and strength of a state. (Leng, 1980:15). This statement was made following the observation that the new independent states South-east Asia, sought to establish their state ideas by analyzing the role which each state’s population, language, culture and nationality can play in promoting cohesion and viability of a given state. Against this background, this paper surveys the concept and interrelatedness of culture and language, looking at their roles in determining people’s world-view. Language is seen as an obligatory element of culture in that it serves as an “excellent barometer for expressing other elements such as religion, food, dressing, dance, education, music and value system. Makinde et al (2010:62) points out that the role of language in expressing and promoting culture in turn promotes national development and national cohesion. In fact, language is culture in expression; and culture and development are interwoven. It is significant to note here that when a language is lost, the culture is lost; a lost culture is knowledge lost; and no meaningful development can take place without knowledge.

The experts who fashioned the national policy on education realized that language is fundamental to the education of the child. Therefore, in the national policy on education (2007), it was stated that “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 as well as one of the three Nigerian languages: Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba.

Going by the above document, every child is required to learn at least two Nigerian languages namely, his own language and any other from the languages of wider communication--- Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba. A look at the implementation of this policy at lower levels of education shows that its implementation has not been faithfully pursued by stake holders.

This paper advocates the implementation of this policy with a little modification. Rather than recommending the study of just one out of the three major languages, every Nigerian child should be taught the three Nigerian languages. This makes the individual truly Nigerian with the capacity to adapt wherever he/she finds himself/herself. This will, in turn, promote national integration and accelerate development.

In the words of Bello-Osagie (2012) cited in Ugorji (2013:10),

The more languages you know, the more keys to treasure houses you have. If you know all the other languages and don’t know your language, that is called enslavement. If you know your language and add all the other languages, that is called empowerment. (Ugorji, 2013:10)

Exposure to indigenous languages is an ideal which must be embraced for national integration and development. In the building of physical infrastructures or any other phase of national development, language is needed to initiate and make joint actions possible. Besides, language is needed to create necessary awareness, to re-orientate or harmonize the people's values towards the national objective. Ike (2007:51) argues that language can and in fact, do impede national development when it is not commonly used or understood by the people. According to him, "it is not commonly used or understood when about 15% of the population of a nation understand and can use the language while about 85% do not use or understand the language as is the case with many developing countries".

When this happens, language ceases to serve its unifying functions. Rather than serve the purposes of unity and solidarity, it now serves a separatist function or the purposes of independence and separate national identity.

Therefore, there is a close relationship between the language that is commonly used or identified with in a nation and the national development of that nation. A commonly used language in a country is tantamount to that country having a common culture, a common identity and a common world-view. Without a common indigenous language, the country will find it difficult to achieve social and political cohesion. Again, she cannot set common or national goals and objectives which form the bed rock of national development.

Clarification of concepts

Culture

The term "culture" has been viewed from different angles. Some see it as an essential element of interaction of human being in a manner supportive and mutually beneficial to everyone, (Ntagu, 2010:44). Goldhorp (1976:12) states that culture becomes more prominent when relationship between societies is considered. This goes to show that culture, being man-made, evolves through man's interactions with features of the environment. For example, a riverine community is likely to be a fishing community. Events in their lives may give rise to beliefs regarding the river to prevent unusual occurrences.

Lyons (2002:301) distinguishes between two types of cultures namely: culture as synonymous with "civilization" and in an older and extreme formulation of the contrast, opposed to "barbarism". He added that this is the sense that is operative in English, in the adjective "cultured." It rests ultimately upon the classical conception of what constitutes excellence in art, literature, manners and social institutions. This is culture interpreted in its classical sense. The second concept of culture, according to Lyons, is what might be described loosely as its anthropological sense. In this sense of the term, which was spread from anthropology to the other social sciences, every society has its own culture; and different subgroups within a society may have their own distinctive subculture. Thus, a national language and culture become manifestations of its distinctive national spirit or mind. Culture, therefore, is the socially acquired

knowledge, that is, the knowledge that someone has by virtue of his being a member of a particular society.

As far as language is concerned, it is quite possible that there is an innate language-acquisition faculty, but there is no doubt that one's knowledge of one's native language is culturally transmitted. Significantly, language seems to be the beginning of every culture. The greater the culture one acquires, the vaster the language of expression.

Ntagu(2010:63) observes that one of the objectives of the organization of African Unity at its cultural policy meeting held in Addis Ababa is the encouragement of the increased use of African languages as vehicles of instructions at all educational levels. The outcome of that meeting is the formation of a pan-African linguistic association (PALA, 1988).

Emenanjo (2000:81) argues that the most crucial missing links in culture, science and technology is the use of indigenous languages which could have afforded room for creative application and manipulation of human reality within the society.

Language

Language is a key for affective communication. In Nigeria, the cultures are quite diverse and so are the languages. The mere fact that language is a vehicle for the transmission of culture invariably means that diversity of culture is concomitant to diversity of language. Unfortunately, the use of foreign language as lingua franca in Nigeria has made the nation vulnerable to tension and fragmentation. Obviously, the stark reality of our national stagnation is a clear testimony of a country suffering from years of confusion and disillusionment and non implementation of a language policy.

As an instrument of communication, language makes it possible for the people in an environment to interact and co-exist. It paves way for continuity of society. Human beings get equipped for maximum self-realization and self-development through the use of language.

Language is a vehicle of communication and expression used in all human interactional situations: politics, commerce, education and culture (Abdulkarin, 2008). It is a tool for communication and a means for creative expression and ability.

National integration

Integration implies the giving of full civic rights to those deprived of them on racial grounds (Nebe, 2014). For any group, nation or society to succeed, there is the need for her to understand her socio-cultural realities and put them into context for a result-oriented policy formulation and developmental considerations. The point is that Nigeria is actually a colonial formulation, but today the reality is that it is one country with a sovereignty consisting of multi-lingual and multi-ethnic nationalities. In the absence of a common indigenous language, the English language naturally assumes this position within the Nigerian nation-state.

Unfortunately, English language has not satisfactorily filled this vacuum because it portrays foreign cultures that are alien to the Nigerian peoples. Without a common indigenous language(s), the country soon degenerates into a collection of mere tribal enclaves each of which is wont to pursue its own selfish interests at the expense of the others, which would lead to a breakdown of law and order among participating tribes and eventually culminate in chaos and disintegration of the linguistic entities making up the country.

National development

Development is a multi-dimensional phenomenon directed towards man's physical, political, economic and social environment. It involves a continuous improvement in the capacity of the people and their society to control and manipulate their physical environment as well as themselves for their own benefit and those of others. Nwosu (1990:16) defines development as "a process initiated by a people and executed mainly by their own efforts for their own good and good of humanity." Whatever a country has to show for its development should be seen as the end products of sustained development efforts of a people who have worked tirelessly to involve their ingenuity, energy and creativity in transforming their environment.

National development is a continuous improvement of the material and human resources of a nation in order to maximize and manipulate the physical environment for the benefit of the citizens.

National development is all encompassing in nature. It occurs as a result of careful and purposeful plan of action. It is a socio-political and economic phenomenon that distinguishes between old pattern and new pattern of life. Therefore, development is a departure from traditional ways of life to modernity. Agada and Ogah (2012) posit that development is a many sided process that takes place at the level of the individual, social group and society.

National development, in the context of this paper, occurs when there is a marked improvement in people's living conditions manifested in the areas like availability of food, water, shelter, good road network, medical care, road and rail transportation. It is an indication of economic viability, socio-political stability, and good governance, display of desirable attitudes, social adjustment and adequate utilization of national resources for the benefit of the citizens. National development does not only confine itself to social, political and economic progress in the society, but also embraces quality character or attitude that promote common good of human existence in the society.

National development in Nigeria is one that takes the whole nation for its province. It is a kind of development that will ensure equal distribution of essential social services, economic activities and industrial establishments to all the corners of the country without any form of ethnic bias.

The process of national development has been slowed down by the absence of a national language which is understood and spoken by all Nigerians, especially the majority of the people living in rural areas. English language, which for now, serves as the national language is yet to be effectively deployed in

the discussion of national issues which transcend tribal and regional boundaries. This ugly situation calls for a language policy that will encourage the use of indigenous languages by the peoples of Nigeria.

Theoretical framework

Systemic functional theory – Halliday’s model

The systemic functional theory was developed by the British Linguist, M.A.K Halliday. Opkara (2009:16) observes that “the inadequacies of the traditional and transformational model of grammar are overcome in the systemic functional approach of Halliday”. Here, meaning is built into the grammar and the text is the basic unit. The functional approach is seen in the stress on the role of social/cultural context and in the importance of the role of register which consists of the environment in which a text is instantiated. The language user makes appropriate language choices according to the variables in the context of situation. Halliday’s claim in the theory is that language structure reflects the social uses to which it is put.

Halliday’s model of grammar, the systemic theory, is comprehensive including the use of *langue* for interaction, representation, control of behaviour and so on. All these functions of language are grouped under the three functional categories (metafunctions) namely, the ideational function, the interpersonal function and the textual function. The ideational function refers to the way language conveys and organizes the cognitive realities of experience. Language is used in this component of the metafunctions to express content, to convey information, message, ideas, concepts, processes and experiences. The interpersonal function expresses the speaker’s role in the speech situation, his/her personal commitment and his/her interaction with others. It expresses the relation between language and its users, communicate the speaker’s attitudes and influences the behaviour and attitudes of the hearer.

The textual component of the metafunction expresses the structure of formation and the relation of each part of the discourse to the whole and to the setting. Language is thus, used to produce a cohesive text.

From the above theory, it is evident that success in interpersonal communication depends partly on success in producing a text that would be appropriate in a speech situation. In other words, how language is organized to describe experience, express the speaker’s commitment and produce a cohesive text are all issues that relate to integration and development.

We all make lexical and grammatical choices in our daily language use. Functional language use accounts for not only how language is used in various contexts, but also investigates how words and sentences are couched in contexts to achieve goals. The Tower of Babel project described in the Holy Bible (Genesis 11:4) failed due to communication breakdown. This underscores the importance of language to development. A text can be organized to build or destroy. When it is organized to build, national integration and development result. Conversely, when a text is organized to destroy, people’s yearning for national integration and development becomes a mirage.

The role of language and culture in national integration and development.

Part of the reason for Nigeria's snail pace development is the use of foreign language (English) as our lingua franca. This has obscured our creative abilities as a nation. It is odd for a language to possess cultural items that have no bearing with the life of its speakers. In using the foreign language, therefore, Nigerians have to place themselves within the same cultural framework as the original speakers of the (English) language for effective utilization of the language. Moreover, there has been a long time close relationship between education and lingua franca (language of communication of the people) to achieve a speedy development of our country. This development cannot be meaningful without common indigenous languages of communication by the people of this country.

A common indigenous language is necessary for national cohesion. This is the language which an individual acquires in early years and which normally becomes his natural instrument of thought and communication. In addition to effective communication, the individual is able to acclimatize himself with his identity which is a first step forward towards national identity, development and cohesion. So important is this familiar language that to ignore it and to begin to teach the child in a foreign and unfamiliar language as soon as he comes to school is like taking the child away from home and putting him among strangers.

According to Makinde, et al (2010:239), "every cohesive nation in the world has a lingua franca". India, a multilingual nation like Nigeria, has the same colonial history like Nigeria, but she developed Hindi and some indigenous languages as national languages. Because of the heavy emphasis on indigenous languages in India, the nation is more cohesive and immune from national aggression.

The importance of the people's cultural values in national development and integration cannot be too stressed. The discrimination of the people's cultural ideals and values as well as their moral and ethical values rooted in the culture are essential requirements for accelerated development. This helps to re-orientate the people towards national goals and in harnessing the national resources for the development of the nation and the welfare of its citizens. Thus, infrastructures are not enough to ensure a nation's development. The attitudes of the citizenry towards national development, sense of patriotism or value system is far more important and all encompassing than mere infrastructures. In this regard, national development can be said to comprise two important components one of which is physical and the other non-physical. While the physical component consists of physical infrastructures of development, the other component consists of the ideals, values and desired attitudes that not only ensure unity, peace and tranquility, but also the attainment of the national goals. Stressing the role of indigenous language for advancement of knowledge, Achilike (2007) states that mother tongue makes learning easier for the child and helps him think clearly in his own language. She pointed out that our educational backwardness, lack of creativity and our inability to develop our indigenous technology were caused by

language problem. She asserted that it is through language that our thought and its processes are expressed as well as acted upon practically.

Conclusion

The paper stresses that culture and language are indispensable in the attainment of national integration and development. This presupposes that the citizens of any nation must be adequately at home with their environment to enable them realize their potentials and contribute fully to the well-being and upliftment of their society. The absence of a common indigenous language is the chief cause of degeneration of Nigeria into a collection of mere tribal enclaves, each of which is bent on pursuing its own selfish interests at the expense of the others. This has led to breakdown of law and order in some parts of the country -- a situation which threatens national integration and development. A country without a common language risks general insecurity arising from suspicion, distrust and lack of faith among the citizenry. Since there cannot be a peaceful, developed and united Africa without a common means of communication, developing our indigenous languages is a sine-qua-non for national development and national integration.

Recommendations

It has been established in this paper that culture and language are important for national development and integration. Mutual understanding is achieved through effective communication which is the principal function of language. Strategic teaching in Nigerian language as recommended in the national policy on education (2007) is aimed at the preservation of the people's culture and promotion of national unity.

National integration could be promoted through indigenous languages in Nigeria by using regional languages of wider communication (RLWC) for educational and political purposes. Certificate courses in these languages should be run in the colleges of education and Universities for workers in public and private establishments.

The mass media in Nigeria could create programmes or columns for the teaching of Nigerian languages. Government at all levels must promote the teaching and learning of Nigerian languages by giving all the needed financial and technical encouragement to language teachers and students.

Essentially, national integration can be achieved by using indigenous languages to inculcate national consciousness in our citizens. Effecting national reconciliation and mass participation in government by all linguistic groups or nationalities can be made possible by the use of indigenous languages.

Our indigenous culture should be developed through our mother tongue as this will afford room for creative application and manipulation of human reality within the society. Since development is a process initiated by a people and executed mainly by their own efforts for their own good and good of humanity, indigenous technology can only be possible if our culture and language are fully developed.

References

- Abdulkarim, A. (2008) Emerging issues in the study of indigenous language in the 21st Century. A paper presented at the national conference organized by Federal College of Education Kastina.
- Achilike , B.A (2007) The language of education in Nigeria : Psychological Implication. *Journal of Applied Literacy and Reading* 3.110 - 115.
- Agada, B.A &Oga, M.O (2012) Poverty and career development among youths: implication for national development in the political dispensation in Nigeria. *Journal of Women in Colleges of Education* 16(1) 20.
- Ezechi, C. (2015). Nigeriannation-building:the impact of English language. A paper Presented at the 2nd annual National Conference of Kaduna state University
- Federal Republic of Nigeria (2007).National Policy on Education. Abuja: NERDC.
- Goldhorpe, J.E. (1976) An introduction to sociology.London: Cambridge University Press.
- Ike, N.J (2007). Sociolinguistics. Abuja: WilbestEducational Publishers.
- Lyons, J (2002) Language and Linguistics: an introduction. Cambridge: CambridgeUniversityPress.
- Leng, L.Y (1980) Race, language and national cohesion in Southern Asianstudies 11(1), 122-138. <http://www.Jstor.org/pss20070330> accessed on 5th Sept. 2012.
- Makinde, S.O, Apari, W.J &Oyinlola, A (2010).The place of language in promoting national cohesion in Nigeria. *Journal of Nigerian Languages and Culture* 12(1) 239-241.
- Ntagu P.A (2010) Culture and language: Veritable phenomena for national integration in Nigeria. *Journal of Nigeria Languages and Culture* 12 (1) 197-199.
- Nebo, R.E (2014) National integration and security in Art Education. *Knowledge Review* 31 (3) pp 118-119.
- Nwosu, H. (1990) Administrative underdevelopment: a case study. *NigerianJournal of Development Studies*.2 (21) 2.

- Okpara, S.C. (2009) Aspects of functional grammar (a systemic approach) Enugu: Victojo Production Services.
- Emenanjo, E.N(2000) Culture, Nigerian languages and national development *Journal of Nigerian Languages and Culture* 2(5) 202.
- Ugorji, K (2013). Repositioning Major Nigerian languages in the school curriculum: the way forward. *Nigerian Journal of Business, Humanities and Information Technology* 2 (1) 2-4.