

# Exploring Language, Media As A Vessel For Social Mobilization And National Integration

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## Abstract

*The mainstay of a nation and its political system is the presence of virile communication and information institutions championed by a responsive media. This paper is an excursion into the role of language as a catalyst for social mobilisation and national integration. This paper acknowledges the peculiarities of the pluralistic nature of Nigerian language and the demand they make on effective communication. To a positive extent, the effectiveness of any language is a function of how much it is able to carry the masses along with the happenings in the society. This lays emphasis on matters of information, persuasion as well as public relations; and without doubt, language forms focus here. With languages like English, Pidgin and to a reasonable extent local languages performing needed functions in the society, and especially through the mass media, social mobilisation becomes a success. The paper also views the media as a fertile ground where languages could be planted in order to produce the necessary information, persuasion and public relations that can motivate and mobilise the people to the positive direction.*

**Key words:** *Language, Catalyst, Pidgin, Social Mobilisation, Multilingualism, Media, National Integration, Ethnicity.*

## Introduction

The roles language play in the society is priceless, especially when daily human interaction and education is considered. Language is not merely a means of interpersonal communication and influence; it is also a thinking process. Fishman (1971) adds to the above definition of language by saying

that language is not a mere carrier of content that is either latent or manifest. To him, language itself is content where lots of information and meaning can be drawn.

According to Ullmann (1967) language is a vehicle of communication which can be passed across in writing and speech. He maintains further that language is a code which

can be passed across to decoders in order for them to grasp the message therein. Language can also be used as a marker of what is happening at a particular time in a society as well as a powerful tool of control used by the colonial powers. It forms a large part of the culture of the people. It is through their language that they express their folk tales myths, proverbs and history (picador et al. 1998, the African trilogy). There is a symbiotic relationship between language and culture. Your language has a lot to do with your identity. He who have no language has no identity.

Nigeria is faced with monumental linguistic cross road arising from multilingualism and ethnic linguistic diversity. This is because, within the geographical boundary known as Nigeria, there are approximately 400-500 distinct languages.

The social functions languages perform will then serve as a catalyst to harness the people's potentials. For society to continue to grow, the masses must be carried along and language is used to do it. One of the basic concerns of language is to mobilise the people in the society so as to be in line with government policies as well as legislation. One of the most effective carriers of language as a mobilising factor is the media. By media here, we mean the mass media which are used to disseminate information messages, persuasion, public relation, education and others. Because

language is a vehicle of communication, media and language cannot be separated.

### **Social Mobilization in Nigeria**

It is pertinent to note that in any country, to a reasonable extent, the credibility of any government will depend on how much it is able to carry the masses along. Omole (1991), noted that social mobilization is matter of persuasion, information and public relations. These can be conveyed by the use of language. He further added that mass mobilization is also a:

*...pragmatic type of enlightenment campaigns desired to persuade and galvanise a group of people towards understanding and accepting certain ideas or policies more or less as important, normal or logical, thereby ensuring co-operations and solidarity with the authority (P.2)*

Frankly speaking, in Nigeria like in other countries, social mobilisation is often a campaign which is normally carried out through the media. It can be print media, electronic media or the mass as a whole. According to Soola (1991), radio is one that is relatively cheapest, ubiquitous and adaptable as far as mass communication is a medium of social mobilization. For the thrust of this paper, our concern will be on social mobilization and language use especially in the electronic media like radio and television. However, some radios

may not be electronic depending on the area where it is being used but it still falls in the line of electronic media.

Radio, television and print media are essentially unidirectional in medium. This is because they use language to address the mind of the audience but they do not allow simultaneous feedback. The listener or reader cannot immediately respond to the information passed across. But the fact that they are unidirectional does not prevent the media from carrying out the mobilization policies of the government. This is because, in mobilization, the aim of government is to pass the message to the masses and for the masses to fall in line with the message and not to give a talk-back which in some ways can form a digression from the intention of the government.

A government is credible to a large extent, if it can carry the masses along in its policies. Government will always want to win the heart of its citizenry toward supporting its ideals and plans. If a government embarks on a touching issue or sensitive programmes, be it politically, economically or otherwise, it will need effective mass mobilization campaign.

In Nigeria, a lot of policies and programmes had been adopted. Examples are fuel subsidy campaign, the transition programme, national Census, Structural adjustment programme, Anti-AIDS campaign, Ethical Revolution Health, for all in 2020

programme, and a host of others. The primary concern of the government is to carry the masses along with these policies and programmes. These mobilization efforts can be successful depending on the degree of effectiveness of the use of language at the right time. This is because, before citizens are mobilized, there must be something which will relay the mobilization strategies and language is that force that can do this.

Because language situation in Nigeria is problematic as well as delicate because of the pluralistic nature of our society, the government has therefore adopted a number of languages for its mobilization with a view to reaching a good number of audiences in the country.

### **Language as an Instrument for Social Mobilisation**

Language is the chief instrument for social mobilization. According to page (1964), language provides the individual with a tool which can be used to explore and analyse his conceptual process. Language therefore helps us to order our thought in a coherent form; again, it imposes the thinking habit of our community upon us. Using language to mobilize citizens is therefore paramount in the human society.

In mobilising the citizens, the issue of enlightenment is primary. In fact, enlightenment is a major instrument of social

mobilisation. Before the masses are enlightened, language channel is considered. The languages that are mainly used in mobilization in Nigeria are:

- (i) English language
- (ii) Pidgin
- (iii) Local languages

### English Language

Although ethnic plurality and linguistic diversity in Nigeria compounded our problems, we still cannot circumvent the fact that English has come to stay as one of the Nigerian languages. Considering the interpretation of UNESCO in its report on language of education in 1951, English language is Nigeria's lingua franca. It is Nigeria's neutral language, official language, a second language to the majority of Nigerians who speak English appropriately for different purposes. Appropriateness, to Adetugbo (1979) is a specification of the kind of things to say in a specified form to the right kind of people in a right situation. As far as language is concerned, English language is virtually the most important means of communication in Nigeria. It cuts across different ethnic barriers. Because its use cuts across culture and ethnic background, government is employing it in its public enlightenment campaign at various government levels in different mass media. Apart from using it to educate the citizens, it is still being

used to impart awareness and national consciousness that underline the national unity of the country.

Institutionally, Odebunmi (2005) accepts that English is the only means open to individual from different ethnic and linguistic groups for interaction. This shows the colossal Status accorded to English language in Nigeria. On an international level, English plays a global integrative role and has become the world lingua franca per Excellence and the quest and yearning for science and technology are satisfied through English Language. In

Nigeria's domain, English performs a dual role. It is a language of instruction as well as a course of study in the Nigeria Tertiary Institution.

Frankly Speaking, the status of English in Nigeria has remained extremely high and it seems quite unlikely to change due to a vast complex linguistic situation in Nigeria. This also captures the writing on sovereignty and the English language as Awonusi notes:

*'The notion of hegemony English implies the recognition of the English language as a significant linguistic super Structure that has a wide usage and acceptance as well as influence. The role played by English language in Nigeria is rooted in its colonial history; its adoption as the official language in education, politics and mass communication and its high level prestige in international relations and*

*global information and which also include its role as language of government in the National Assembly have continued, despite it's criticism and negative labeling as instrument of colonial domination and heritage'.*

### **Expectation of a Communication**

#### **Practitioner**

It is the duty of communication practitioners to be well grounded in linguistics so as to be able to teach people the correct use of language. In Nigeria, communication practitioners owe it as a duty to give correct English Structures to Nigerians most of whom have no other means of hearing how English language is used.

#### **Pidgin English**

Hayakawa (1965) is of the opinion that even though it is usually deplored as a corruption of English, pidgin serves the needs of millions who would have been unable to communicate without it.

Using the Nigerian perspectives, it will be discovered that quite a considerable fraction of illiterates and semi-illiterates in various circles do use pidgin. A lot of interference do occur in pidgin.

Pidgin is non-complex and easy to understand. Decamp (1979), observes that pidgin is characterized by a limited vocabulary and an elimination of many grammatical devices, imported from other languages can be

added. For example: you bi okporoko head, I go nack you okpo for ya head, yam head era, etc. Pidgin being a language used by wider majority of people is enjoying an overwhelming support in the media. It is being used for advertisement on radios and televisions. In the electronic media, pidgin is a very popular language of mobilisation, persuasion, education as well as for maintaining good public relations. In The Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), Lagos, consider this rendition on AIDS;

*You see one woman you chop am*

*You see anoda woman you nack am*

*You see anoda woman, you deck am*

*My broda, my sister, AIDS no dey show for face ooo!*

*If you dey change woman like wrapper, you dey play with snake o!*

*AIDS na fire wey water no fit quench*

*AIDS no get melecine o!*

This is an appeal to all and this appeals cuts across the various segments or strata of the society because this dreadful issue of AIDS is no longer a new thing to the society.

#### **Local/Ethnic Language**

Prior to the emergence of English which is the neutral language that cuts across ethnic barriers, we had our local languages. In fact in Nigeria, it is hardly possible to get a person who has no local language. Majority of Nigerians who are only monolingual in their local language are illiterates. Intra-ethnic

consumption is being achieved through ethnic languages which are as well common in media houses especially those that are ethnic-specific. So, in the West the popular ethnic language is Yoruba, in the North – Hausa, in the East – Igbo.

There are also many of the popular local languages that are being used to reach the target population. In Edo and Delta States, Edo, Urhobo, Ika, Aniocha languages among others are popular. Tiv is one of the popular languages in the Middle Belt. What all these boil down to is that to a very good extent, ethnic language is used for social mobilisation in the media.

### **Conclusion**

The gamut of this article examines issues relating to language as an instrument for social mobilisation in Nigeria vis-à-vis the distinguished position occupied by English language as the official language of the Nigerian nation, with regard to its prestige and the positions of priority as administrative, educational, economic, social and international advantages. In spite of the fact that Nigeria constitutes a widespread of languages of which majority is Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo languages and has widely spoken both regionally and internationally, English language continues to maintain its colonial official language status in politics, educational instructions, national re-orientation and sensitization.

In Nigeria, English language, Pidgin and local languages are mainly used in social mobilisation efforts.

Finally, although numerous hiccups abounds, language still play a pivotal role for instruction in the Nigerian Educational System, social mobilization and national integration.

### **Recommendations**

In view of the above claims and assertions on the pivotal role of language in the Nigerian educational system and social mobilization the writer recommends that:

- ❖ Since English is commanding a stronger “pull” than the local Nigerian languages in our educational system and social mobilization, government should invest more on linguists and English teachers to enhance productivity.
- ❖ All the agents for social mobilisation must be responsible in their reportage, especially in the use of language.
- ❖ Government should provide free flow of information and encourage dialogue in all its policies.
- ❖ Educational bodies and authorities must also find a way of fixing into the educational system a day when the local languages are identified and encouraged through different programmes.

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