

An Evaluation of the Problem of Language in African Philosophy

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Abstract: *The problem of language in African philosophy is coextensive with the question as to whether there exists an African philosophy. This is so because when the question: "what language is African philosophy to be done?" arises, it implicitly calls into question the very foundation of the discipline. Little wonder then, that the language question has remained a front-burner issue in African philosophy. Essentially, the problem of Language in African philosophy raises the question as to whether the expression of the African experience of reality in foreign languages can generate an authentically African philosophy. Put differently, the problem centers on whether or not foreign languages should be used to express African philosophical thoughts. In an attempt to address this problem, two camps have surfaced among African philosophers, namely, the conservatives and the progressives. For the conservatives, for a philosophy to be authentically African, it must be expressed in African languages. They base their argument on the fact that language is tied to culture and every culture has its peculiar conceptual framework. Consequently, to express the African experience of reality in a foreign language necessarily implicates 'conceptual superimposition.' In contrast, the progressives commit themselves to a more pragmatic approach to the question of language. They opine that the lack of a continental lingua franca in Africa legitimizes the use of foreign languages. This research therefore evaluates the position of both camps with a view to establishing the possibility and plausibility of having an authentic African philosophy in foreign languages. This is without prejudice to the significance of African languages in construing the African experience of reality. This research employs the expository, analytic, and evaluative methods.*

Keywords *Philosophy, African Philosophy, Language, Culture, Problem, Evaluation.*

Introduction

Broadly construed, language is a vehicle or a tool for conveying and expressing our thoughts. It is incontrovertible that every language is tied to a particular life form, and as such, what is expressed in one language may not be fully understood and appreciated in another language because of the differences in life forms. The point being made here is that there is a nexus between culture and language. Culture essentially

involves how we perceive and apprehend reality, and this in turn colours how we express our experience of reality. Hence, to understand and appreciate a people's experience of reality, one must take into cognizance the language in which it is expressed and the cultural context of such language.

Whenever there is a bifurcation between the language used to express a people's experience of reality and the cultural context, what emerges is an 'epistemic deficit.' By this, I mean that when a language different from that in which the people conceptualize reality is used to express a people's understanding of reality, something is lost. The foregoing assertion finds further expression in the works of scholars like W.V.O. Quine, Benjamin Whorf, and G. Lakoff. These scholars have at different times argued that language shapes a people's world, and when there is an attempt at translation, the result is usually an indeterminacy of translation. In a similar vein, the American philosopher George Lakoff has argued that "differences in conceptual systems do create difficulties for translation" (Lakoff, 1987, p. 311).

Following from the above, most African scholars have argued that doing African philosophy in a language other than African languages is a disservice to the African experience of reality. This raises the question as to whether we can have an authentic African philosophy devoid of African languages. In an attempt to address this problematic issue, some African scholars like Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Francis Ogunmodede, Sophie Oluwole, and a host of others have argued that for a philosophy to be truly African, it must be expressed in an African language. In other words, using African languages gives legitimacy to African philosophy. At face value, such a position seems to have put an end to the discourse on language in African philosophy, but upon critical examination, more questions arise. For instance, in what particular African language are we to do African philosophy? Put differently, with what particular language is the African experience to be construed? It is a fact that Africa is a multi-lingual continent. In other words, there is no unified African language but diverse languages. Do we take one of these languages and make it the general African language? Does that not lead to a resurgence of the 'conceptual imposition' problem that is embedded in the usage of foreign languages?

Alternatively, if we choose to philosophize in the various dialects that make up Africa, the question that will arise here is, are our languages developed enough? These concerns have led some scholars like Kwasi Wiredu, Olusegun Oladipo, and Chinua Achebe, amongst others, to argue that the language used in expressing our experience of reality is inconsequential, in as much as we can express our thoughts. Kwasi Wiredu, for instance, holds that it would be counterproductive to relegate foreign languages used in African philosophy since we have yet to realize the idea of a continental lingua franca (Wiredu, 1995, p. 35). What flows from the exposition so far is that there is no consensus among African scholars on the language to be used in African philosophy.

The Concept of Language

Language as with many other concepts in philosophy is one that we find intuitively difficult to define (Floridi, 2013, p. 601). The difficulty here arises as a result of the plurality of perspectives from which scholars have attempted the definition of the concept. As such, there is no univocal definition of the concept among scholars. According to Merriam-Webster Dictionary, language is the "system of words or signs that people use to express thoughts and feelings to each other." Implicit in this understanding of language is the fact that a language can either be verbal or nonverbal. As such, signs and gesticulations are equally warranted as language. For Ayn Rand, language is "a code of visual-auditory symbols that denote concepts" (Rand, 1977). In other words, languages are not empty categories. They embody shared meaning and values. Following this, language can be said to be "a subjective agreement by a group of people to conceptualize and verbalize their perception of reality in a certain way" (Fayemi, 2013, p. 2).

Highlighting further the social dimension of language, Batista Mondin opines that language is the instrument with which man effectuates communication. Through language, man actuates himself as a social being, as the *Mitsein*, as the I-thou (Mondin, 1985, p. 129). The underlying assumption in Mondin's characterization of language is the view that language is a human prerogative. Such a view was well anticipated in the definition of language put forward by Edward Sapir. Sapir defines language as "a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions, and desires using a system of voluntarily produced symbols" (Sapir, 1921, p. 7). Some philosophers are of a contrary opinion, as we shall come to see later on.

However, beyond effectuating communication, language equally has the power to shape our experience of the world. This is because language is experiential; it mirrors people's experience of their environment and of reality in general. According to Attabor, Moses and Augustine (2019, p. 80) "human beings are social animals and language is the instruments through which they interact." To them, language is a symbol of unification and a mark of identity. Furthermore, Attabor (2019, p. 47) stressed that "the particular language or dialect that a person chooses to use on any occasion is a code, a system used for communication between two or parties." In this regard, the Wittgensteinian dictum that the limit of one's language is the limit of one's world holds. D. A. Masolo buttresses this point when he avers that it is only within a people's language that one can arrive at a people's understanding of reality. He states *inter alia* that "one can arrive at the structure of reality of a particular people beginning from their language..." (Masolo, 1994, p. 101). Thus, language can be construed as a store of a people's understanding of reality. It is their collective memory bank. As the aphorism goes, language is to a people what memory is to an individual.

Sequel to the above, some philosophers have continuously emphasized the intrinsic link between language and culture. Just as language expresses culture, culture embodies language. Based on this, it is argued that a people's identity, ideas, and personality have a lot to do with their language. This line of thought flows from Martin Heidegger's postulation on 'in-authenticity.' For Heidegger, the lack of authenticity can be traced to the language in which a person thinks, judges, and decides (Egbunu, 1985, p. 137). It is on this point that most African philosophers hinge on their argument for the use of African languages in doing African philosophy.

Characteristic Features of Language

As it has been argued by Sapir above, language is a distinctively human form of communication. It is characterized by some features which mark it out from the form of communication that is noticeable among animals. Language is symbolic, systematic, arbitrary, social, non-instinctive, and productive (Hakim, 2019). These features from a rich tapestry make language distinctively human. The point being made here is that in the communication system noticeable among animals, the aforementioned features are either lacking or not noticeable.

Language is symbolic: Languages are not empty categories. They denote concepts and meanings. This means that in a language, the words used are symbolic and they are not merely patterns or images. Put differently, when words are used, they represent something other than themselves. It is this symbolic nature of language that gives it meaning. The intelligibility of a language depends on the correct interpretation of these symbols (Hakim, 2019).

Language is systematic: For a thing or an action to be systematic presupposes that it proceeds in an orderly, methodic, and coherent manner. As it relates to language, certain precepts, norms, axioms, and laws guide the use of language. When such laws are not followed, the intended meaning to be communicated may be

lost. For instance, in the English language, there are rules of concord. It is such rules that help ensure the rationality of the language.

Language is social: Every language is tied to a society. It is the society that conventionally uses language. It follows then that language is a social phenomenon because it is the possession of a social group. Through the instrumentality of language, members of a social group can interact and share their thoughts and ideas.

Language is arbitrary: When we speak of the arbitrariness of language, we mean that there is no intrinsic connection between a word and the meaning it conveys. This accounts for the differences that are evident in various languages. For instance, the word 'man' is rendered in various languages differently, but it does not change the reality of man. So when the Yoruba man says eniyan or the Urhobo says *oshare*, the different words used do not change the reality expressed (Hakim, 2019).

Language is non-instinctive: Every language is a product of evolution. In other words, no language was created in a day out of a mutually agreed upon formula by a group of humans (Hakim, 2019). Language is considered non-instinctive because it is naturally acquired by us.

The Problem of Language in African Philosophy

At the crux of the language problem in African philosophy is the quest to evaluate how much of the originally intended meaning in African languages can be transmitted in the dominant foreign languages, like English, French, and Portuguese, which are used in expressing African worldviews. African scholars have expressed divergent views on the problematic issues of language in African philosophy. This section shall examine the views of some selected African philosophers, to crystallize the dominant camps in the language discourse in African philosophy. They are Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Kwasi Wiredu, and Chinua Achebe.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's Conception of the Problem of Language

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's conception of the language problem in African philosophy stems from the political perspective. He is a staunch critic of the use of foreign languages in expressing African thoughts and philosophy. For him, the continued usage of foreign languages in expressing African worldviews not only distorts the African worldview but also implicates a form of neo-colonialism. Wa Thiong'o opines that "until African writers accepted that any true African literature must be written in African languages, they would merely be pursuing a dead end" (Wa Thiong'o, 1986, p. 24). This simply means that for any body of work to be considered genuinely African, it must be produced and expressed in African language. The language determines the authenticity of the thought expressed.

Wa Thiong'o's postulation is largely an offshoot of his understanding of the intrinsic connection between language and culture. Language and culture are two sides of a coin in wa Thiong'o's thought. He avers that language is not only a means of communication but also a carrier of culture (Wa Thiong'o, 1986, p. 13). Foreign languages, he believes, are removed from the African environment and as such do not reflect the African culture. In other words, foreign languages no matter how well they have been mastered and used, in the final analysis, dissociate the African from the unique African experience of reality. These foreign languages have been largely used as tools of subjugation. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, therefore, opines that to achieve decolonization of the African mind, we must begin by dissociating from the languages that have been used as tools of subjugation (Wa Thiong'o, 1986, p. 9).

Sequel to the above, Ngũgĩ took what many have described as an extreme step by deciding to express his thoughts only in his local dialect, Gikuyu and Kiswahilli. He writes in his *Decolonizing the Mind*, "This

book, *Decolonizing the Mind*, is my farewell to English as a vehicle for any of my writings. From now on it is Gikuyu and Kiswahili all the way" (Wa Thiong'o, 1986, p. xiv). The two-fold implication of this decision by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o is that the African languages he employs have over time been developed and they have equally ensured that the integrity of the African concepts is maintained. Akin to this, Samuel Oluoch Imbo is of the view that a reversal to African languages, as wa Thiong'o has done, "would serve as an avenue for empowering the formerly excluded and downtrodden by involving them in the production of knowledge and making accessible to them the findings of contemporary debate" (Oluoch Imbo, 1998, p. 100).

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's views resonate with the stance of thinkers like Kwasi Wiredu, Obi Wali, Chris Uroh, Kwame Gyekye, and many others who believe that reverting to African languages in writing and philosophical ruminations would make the decolonization process complete. Chris Uroh, for instance, maintains that the use of foreign languages in expressing African ideas has far-reaching consequences for the African identity in general. He writes that:

The problem becomes more complex when foreign languages with markedly different worldviews are imposed on people in place of their language. In that case, they are forced to perceive themselves through an alien cultural screen, which is bound to distort their image. Such people will suffer from an identity crisis, for they will neither be like "themselves" nor exactly like the culture they are imitating (Uroh, 1994, p. 138).

This leads to syntactic interference and other forms of interferences. "Igala native speakers of English for instance encounter shared difficulties at the level of using English Noun phrases as a result of the nature of Igala noun phrase systems and its influence on English learning" (Attabor, 2019, p. 40).

Uroh's submission as with wa Thiong'o's highlights the importance of the need for reverting to African languages because it is not only the distortion of African meanings that is at stake but ultimately, the distortion of the African identity. No doubt, this conservative approach to the language problem in African philosophy comes with its peculiar challenges; Godfrey Tangwa points this out when he argues that Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's postulations are fundamentally mistaken.

Tangwa holds that "a mother tongue is particularly important for an individual in providing ideational paradigms on a mind as yet a relative *tabula rasa*, being the language with which the neonate first learns to communicate. But language, even the mother language, is not as determinant of human thought and behavior as Ngũgĩ's arguments presuppose" (Tangwa, 2017, p. 134). The point Tangwa makes is that the focus on language is unnecessary since language is merely a tool and the limit of language cannot be exactly said to be the limit of a person's world. That notwithstanding, Ngũgĩ's arguments are quite germane since they point out the overriding effect of foreign languages on African worldview.

Kwasi Wiredu's Conception of the Problem of Language

One of Kwasi Wiredu's contributions to the development of African philosophy is his idea of 'conceptual decolonization.' Essentially, conceptual decolonization is the attempt to dissociate African philosophical heritage from the undue cultural influences of colonialism. It is an intellectual reconstruction through conceptual understanding and clarification (Fayemi, 2013, p. 5). No doubt, language is central to this project since concepts are products of language. As a frontline advocate for the use of African language in doing African philosophy, Wiredu maintains that "the way your language functions can predispose you to several

ways of talking and, indeed, to several ways of reasoning" (Wiredu, 2000). What is implied here is that language plays a role in shaping our perception of and response to reality. For the Africans, it would be inadequate to perceive and react to reality through the lens of foreign languages. The African should be able to think, feel, and communicate first in his mother tongue, and this is precisely why Wiredu called for 'conceptual decolonization.'

According to Wiredu, conceptual decolonization has two complementary meanings, one negative, and the other positive. Conceptual decolonization is negative when it involves "avoiding or reversing through a critical conceptual self-awareness the unexamined assimilation in our thought (that is, in the thought of the contemporary African philosophers) of the conceptual frameworks embedded in foreign philosophical traditions that have had an impact on African life and thought" (Wiredu, 1995, p. 22). On the flip side, conceptual decolonization is positive when it has to do with "exploring as much as judicious, the resources of our indigenous conceptual schemes in our philosophical meditations on even the most technical problems of contemporary philosophy" (Wiredu, 1995, p. 22). By this, Wiredu means that African languages possess rich intellectual materials and as such should be the point of departure for any authentic African philosophical rumination.

The implication of the conceptual decolonization project by Wiredu is that it would help in "promoting an adequate understanding of the intellectual foundations of African culture" (Wiredu, 1991, p. 98). This is, no doubt, very important when it is considered against the backdrop of the denigration of African culture and history, which was occasioned by colonialism. It is apt to state here that while Wiredu shares Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's conviction that African philosophy should be done in African languages, he does not however share Ngũgĩ's reversal to writing in solely African languages. This is so because, for Wiredu, it is slightly premature to seek to do or even teach philosophy in vernacular (Wiredu, 1984, p. 38). Following this, Wiredu takes a more realistic step by calling on African thinkers to be "always on the lookout for any conceptual snares" (Wiredu, 1995, p. 21). For Wiredu, this is achievable when the African thinker pays closer attention to concepts like:

Reality, Being, Existence, Thing, Object, Entity, Substance, Property, Quality, Truth, Fact, Opinion, Belief, Knowledge, Faith, Doubt, Certainty, Statement, Proposition, Sentence, Idea, Mind, Soul, Spirit, Thought, Sensation, Matter, Ego, Self, Person, Individuality, Community, Subjectivity, Objectivity, Cause, Chance, Reason, Explanation, Meaning, Freedom, Responsibility, Punishment, Democracy, Justice, God, World, Universe, Nature, Supernature, Space, Time, Nothingness, Creation, Life, Death, Afterlife, Morality, Religion (Wiredu, 1995, p. 21).

These concepts when comparatively analyzed in African and Western paradigms reveal the nuanced meanings they carry. For instance, Truth is variously understood in Western Epistemology, and there are some nuances that the African, particularly Akan concept of truth embodies, which the Western conceptions do not.

Some Scholars like Fidelis Elejo Egbunu have admitted that Wiredu's conceptual decolonization project is not an easy task since most indigenous languages have yet to achieve the desired development that makes the conceptual decolonization project viable (Egbunu, 2014, p. 367). Wiredu makes a similar submission in his examination of concepts like truth and mind in the Akan language when he admits that some philosophical problems are not universal (Wiredu, 1984, p. 47). They can be posed in one language but not in another. The difficulty associated with conceptual decolonization, for me, is what makes the conceptual decolonization project all the more urgent and necessary.

Critics have pointed out that Wiredu's position on the language question in African philosophy carries with it some problematic issues. A.G.A Bello, for instance, argues that while philosophical insights can be drawn from linguistic facts, as it is in the analytic tradition of philosophy, it would however be mistaken, as Wiredu has done, to use "purely linguistic facts (for example, translatability or non-translatability) as knock-down arguments for philosophical beliefs or doctrines" (Bello, 1987, p. 7). Also, Ademola Fayemi argues contra Wiredu that we do not necessarily take on colonial ideas when we employ foreign languages in doing African philosophy (Fayemi, 2013, p. 9).

Chinua Achebe's Conception of the Problem of Language

Achebe's position on the language question was first crystallized at the 1962 Makerere Conference; the same conference where the renowned African thinker, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, equally expressed his views. Achebe avers that "the African writer should aim to use English in a way that brings out his message best without altering the language so much that its value as a medium of international exchange will be lost. He should aim at fashioning an English that is at once universal and able to carry his peculiar experience" (Achebe, 1997, pp. 342-349). What can be deduced from this is that Achebe is sympathetic to the use of foreign languages to the extent that the language can convey the unique African experience of reality. This puts Achebe in contrast to thinkers like Kwasi Wiredu and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, since he (Achebe) makes a case for the use of foreign languages in African philosophy and literature.

However, it would be mistaken to think of Chinua Achebe as being entirely against the use of indigenous languages in expressing African worldviews. Achebe defends the use of foreign languages in African literature and philosophy solely on pragmatic grounds. He opines that "The real question is not whether Africans could write in English, but whether they ought to. Is it right that a man should abandon his mother tongue for someone else's? It looks like a dreadful betrayal and produces a guilty feeling. But for me, there is no other choice. I have been given this language and I intend to use it..." (Achebe, 1975, p. 102). In other words, for Achebe, the global appeal of foreign languages makes them necessary tools that the African writer for practical purposes has to embrace.

Achebe further adds "I feel that the English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experience. But it will have to be a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit new African surroundings" (Achebe, 1975, p. 103). This simply means that while language plays a vast role in philosophizing, it is the experience being communicated that is of more importance, not the language used. Another point we can deduce from the above is that, Achebe's call for a new English can prompt a domesticated English language that becomes uniquely African and can carry African meanings without some form of epistemic deficit.

Other philosophers like A.G.A Bello, M. Akin Makinde, Godwin Azenabor, and Godfrey Tangwa among others, share Achebe's conviction. Bello, who is a frontline advocate for the continued usage of foreign languages in doing African philosophy, maintains that we are likely to run into some practical problems when we choose to do African philosophy solely in African languages. For him, "the use of vernaculars for all philosophical activity will mar philosophical communication not only between Africans and the rest of the world but also among Africans themselves." This is for the obvious reason that "Africa does not yet have a lingua franca and not all Africans understand or speak other indigenous African languages" (Bello, 1987, p. 10). In support of this thesis, Azenabor opines that what determines the authenticity of African philosophy is not the language used but the thought expressed. According to him, "we do not need to write in African languages to write authentic African philosophy. What we need is to express our thoughts in a language that is universally understandable and intelligible and avoid foreign categories and models"

(Azenabor, 2004, p. 47). One wonders if there is a 'universally understandable and intelligible' language as Azenabor suggests, since even foreign languages merely have a wider appeal compared to their African counterpart. When really can a language be said to be 'universally understandable?'

The above views of Philosophers and African Scholars which we have examined bring to the fore the currency of the debate on language. While there is yet to be a consensus on what exactly characterizes an authentic African philosophy, it remains contentious to use language as the sole paradigm for judging authentic African philosophy. The rival camps of the conservatives and progressives show this all too clearly.

Evaluating the Problem of Language in African Philosophy

At the core of the conservative position, which is expressed in the views of scholars like Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Kwasi Wiredu, and others, is the patriotic desire to develop African languages and retain African meanings. This stance, though noble, does not have, at the moment, a sustainable pragmatic value. By sustainable pragmatic value here is meant that the audience to which African philosophical thought would be open would be quite limited. Samuel Imbo puts it this way, "anybody who works in African languages is most likely to be limited to the skimpiest of audience in terms of geography and numbers" (Imbo, 1998, p. 120). This is because most African languages are yet to attain the kind of development that allows for global usage. Conscious of this fact, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, for instance, recommends that African languages should have more widespread usage. Hence, he proposed the Kiswahili language to be the language of the world (Wa Thiong'o, 1993, p. 35).

For us, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's proposal is a reemergence of the language problem. This is so because by making Kiswahili the language of the world, one would inadvertently be faced with the problem of retaining meaning in other languages. This consideration brings to the fore the elusive nature of the language problem. Moreover, Africa is a linguistically diversified continent and as such lacks a unified lingua Franca. In other words, there is no "the" African language; there are only several languages that are spoken in different parts of Africa. A. K. Fayemi opines that "owing to the large number of African languages, [we are faced with a dilemma] which one are we to choose from in doing African philosophy – ethnic dialects, national lingua franca, regional African language or continental African language?" (Fayemi, 2013). One way to argue against this continental lingua Franca criterion is that philosophy in other continents is not considered as such merely because of a common lingua Franca.

Due to the intrinsic relationship between language, thought, and reality, it is often assumed that when one uses a particular language, especially colonialist languages, one would necessarily take on colonial ideas and ideals. This is undergirded by the Wittgensteinian dictum that the limit of your language is the limit of your world. However, experience has shown that one can make a clean bifurcation between the colonial language and the colonial ideas. Put differently, one can use colonial languages, for instance, English, without having to accept the imperialist ideals that the language may embody. This is instantiated in the various criticisms of colonialist ideals by African philosophers even when they (African philosophers) speak or write in English.

Another consideration which, in my opinion, the conservatives often ignore or do not adequately acknowledge is that the so-called colonial languages have contributed to the robust philosophical discussions that now characterize African philosophy. This is because there is now a common language which African countries can use to communicate. As such, a Nigerian is able, for instance, to understand the Akan concept of truth and morality because it has been rendered in a language that is accessible to him.

Such a feat would have, before the Advent of colonial languages, been difficult to achieve due to language differences.

The above notwithstanding, the conservative position remains germane since the only way to ensure that African languages develop as much as other global languages is by their constant usage. Fayemi corroborates this when he asserts that:

The use of indigenous language in contemporary African philosophy can be seen as just good in itself. It may also be instrumental in rating the level of learning admiration of African languages even by non-speakers of the language. One couldn't help noting the large number of English speaking scholars of Heidegger who have found it useful to learn to read German in order to appreciate the depths and subtleties of Heidegger's writing, and yet who have been able to make these apparent to an English speaking audience (Fayemi, 2013, p. 10).

In a similar vein, writing in African languages could ignite scholarly interest in the discourse and by so doing develop the language to accommodate the philosophical resources embedded in the African thought system.

From the perspective of the progressives, we cannot do African philosophy in African languages yet because African languages are not as developed as Western ones (Azenabor, 2000, p. 326). The questions that arise here are: when is the right time to use African languages in doing African philosophy if not now? How can African languages develop if they are not being used at the moment? Do the so-called developed languages have the conceptual scheme to adequately accommodate the African experience? Experience shows that certain words in indigenous African languages cannot be fully expressed in Western languages.

Another argument that has been put forward in support of the progressive stance is that philosophy deals essentially with ideas and thoughts and these are held to precede languages. One may agree with Chris Uroh who posits this idea when he avers that "Experience shows that there are many ideas for which we have no words, and words which do not exactly correspond with our perceptions of reality in their general grammatical structure and classification" (Uroh, 1994, p. 138).

Again, one may agree with Uroh that there are instances where our language does not immediately capture our perceptions. However, it would be counterintuitive to hold on to the position that ideas precede language. Ideas are formed within the ambits of language and where language is deficient, a new word is morphed to capture the perception/idea under consideration.

The foregoing lends credence to my earlier assertion that the language problem is elusive. In other words, the language question will linger on as long as African languages are left underdeveloped and underappreciated. This is not to imply that every scholar who holds the progressive viewpoint is entirely against the use of African languages in African philosophy. For me, the central point that has been used in support of arguments against the use of African languages in African philosophy is that African languages have a limited audience. While this is true in many respects, given that some Africans cannot speak, write, or even read in their mother tongue, it fails to see that the authenticity of a philosophy is not determined by the size of its audience. We shall now turn towards seeking possible solutions to this seemingly philosophical impasse.

Possible Solution to the Problem of Language in African Philosophy

One way to resolve the language question in African philosophy is to focus more on philosophical traditions/schools of thought than the language used. For instance, in talking of a 'European' philosophy or Western philosophy, one does not think of it as solely in a continental lingua Franca. It is rather the traditions that are the most distinguishing factors. By way of illustration, analytic philosophy is mostly associated with the British, pragmatism is usually associated with America, and so on. Here, the focus is more on the ideas expressed than the language in which they are expressed.

Another consideration that should be given urgent attention is the teaching of local languages in schools, at every level. This would ensure that the various African languages develop more rapidly. It is only by using African languages that we can develop them. The alien languages used today in African philosophy would not have been so developed if they had been abandoned. Doing African philosophy in African languages as Fayemi points out, "will add to the extant meaning of contemporary African philosophy by saying it is the philosophy in an African language" (Fayemi, 2013, p. 10). In other words, a resolution of the language problem would invariably lead to a resolution of the perennial question, what is African philosophy?

Furthermore, given the merits of both the conservative and progressive standpoints, scholars should consider a *via media*, that is, a middle way. This would entail that scholars consider a fusion of both African and alien languages in doing philosophy. This is possible when we consider for instance the conceptual decolonization Kwasi Wiredu called for. In expounding concepts like Ubuntu, such a middle way is exercised since originally African concepts are not adulterated by the need for exact translations.

Moreover, scholars can also write in African languages and then translate them into other languages. This would serve the dual purpose of reaching out to a larger audience and developing the African language. It could also ignite interest in African languages. In addendum, if, for instance, the works of Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, and other classic works are translated into African languages, it would allow for greater participation in the Philosophical discussions that are prevalent now in our higher institutions (Fayemi, 2013, p. 9).

Conclusion

To recapitulate briefly, the language problem in African philosophy has remained elusive because the two overarching positions that argue in favor of and against the use of foreign languages in African philosophy are plagued by weaknesses that cannot be overlooked. On the one hand, the conservative position which is represented in the views of scholars like Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Kwasi Wiredu, though patriotic, is flawed on the ground that its insistence on the use of African languages in doing African philosophy does not take cognizance of the fact that most African languages have not developed the needed syntax and vocabulary to accommodate contemporary challenges and sophistication. On the other hand, the romanticization of foreign languages by the progressive stance, which is supported by Chinua Achebe, A.G.A Bello, and others, have far-reaching implications for African identity and the authenticity of the African experience expressed in foreign languages. Given these flaws, I proposed a middle way that allows for the development of the African languages and a wider reach to a larger audience.

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