

THE CHALLENGE OF ENGLISH AND OTHER FOREIGN LANGUAGES ON NIGERIAN CULTURE

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ABSTRACT

The crave for modernity by developing countries in Africa to meet up with the ever changing state of the world, is today receiving much attention. In retrospect, Nigeria like other African countries was colonized and the language of the colonial master being English was imposed on her. This language which was later adopted as a second language has posed a herculean challenge on our Nigerian culture and consequently collapsed the adoption of an indigenous lingua franca. This paper therefore stresses the need for a common language as an important mark for identification, a powerful factor for promoting unity, national consciousness and at the same time facilitating the mobilization of its resources for national development. Finally, it tries to draw attention to areas of our Nigerian culture which have been bastardized by the infiltration of a foreign language and to proffer a plausible solution as a way forward.

INTRODUCTION

The focus of this paper is on the challenge of English and other foreign languages on Nigerian culture. In this discussion, there will be recourse to the concept of language in general and other foreign languages with emphasis on the English language in terms of its history and subsequent implantation with its obvious challenges on the Nigerian culture most especially in the 21st century.

There is no accepted and or universal definition of language. As such, any definition of its concept tends to push it further back into ambiguity. Being a complex phenomenon, language lends itself to a variety of multitudinous approaches as to its actual definition, its uses and what it entails in comparison with other systems. Most approaches see language as a tool for communication, while others view it as an instrument used by social groups for interactions. Still, others see language as a veritable source of human co-existence which has a varied number of functions or roles which it performs in human societies. While these independent views might be right in their conception, it is pertinent to establish the fact that language is a conceptual grid, a system of values through which we experience reality. But language is not an independent, all-powerful entity, it is part of the fabric of social and political life. It shapes our perception, but it also is shaped by its social context. That is, because of its strategic role in perception, language must be shaped to serve the needs of dominant groups.

Culture on the hand, has to do with the peoples organic way of life. Language and culture provide us with ways of thinking about ourselves and experiences. In Nigeria, our culture is not one unified system but rather consists of competing systems of thought, each with its own set of possible figures. In the opinion of Obafemi (1999) linguists generally agree that language, being culture-determined, is the most democratic phenomenon as it subjects itself to the will and whim of the people who

use it. Lado, (1964) also commenting on the inseparability of language and culture states that language is intimately tied to man's feelings and activity, it is bound up with nationality, religion, and the feeling of self. It is used for work, worship and play by everyone. From the discussion so far, it is clear that

language is the medium through which culture and learning are transmitted. It is the totality of culture, and culture cannot be expressed in any other way except through language, (Ugoma, N, 1986).

Holding the above view in mind, one might be right to affirm that the most valuable possession of man on earth is language. With language man has the capacity for dealing with changes in his environment, to organize his society and face other various emergencies of life. It is often argued that for any nation to make progress and join the comity of nations in global development, her science and technology must be well developed. One of the means of achieving this is through the language in which the concepts are expressed.

On the history of English and other foreign languages, it must be stated that no specific period could be said to mark their origin in Nigeria. However, the English language began to assume a very remarkable position in the linguistic topology of Nigeria with the advent of colonialism and subsequent imposition of the language by the colonizers. Supporting the above view, Don Adams (1974), says that the question of language is of key element in colonial relationship. The colonizers often impose their language on their colonies and use this language for important societal functions. Thus, the English language is undoubtedly the most important legacy of the British colonial master in Nigeria.

In a country characterized by diversity of language like ours, diverse language problems exist which make it difficult for the country to have a common language among the various indigenous languages. It has been difficult adopting any of the indigenous languages as the national language for a number of reasons. One of such is that other linguistic group believes that the chosen language will gain upper status and all other languages will now function in a subordinated position.

Giving credence to the useful role of the English language, Adebisi Afolayan (1984) says among other things that:

It is unrealistic for anybody in Nigeria today to think that the national unity, can be forged in the country without recourse to utilization of the English language... It has been the language of the political entity itself, and also the language of its political, economic unification and administration. Furthermore, as the language of Nigeria nationalism cannot be denied

However, the English language, because of its prominence and neutrality, gained acceptance as a common language for the different ethnic groups that make up the country. With English language in Nigeria, the number of problems usually posed by lack of a common language in heterogeneous communities such as ours became suppressed and the language remained one of the strongest instruments of unity and development for the people of the country

It is equally important to state at this point that of recent, the attention being given to the French language by the Nigerian government and the representative of the French government in Nigeria to the detriment of developing an acceptable indigenous language in terms of its teaching at all levels of our educational system and job placement is almost becoming embarrassing to the Nigerian citizenry

CHALLENGES POSED BY ENGLISH AND OTHER FOREIGN LANGUAGES ON NIGERIAN CULTURE.

Having come to the realization that communication is a basic requirement in the life of any group of people and that since communication is done through language, it therefore remains an important factor in national development and consciousness. In this sense, while appreciating the role and directive function the English language has played and still plays in Nigeria especially how it contribute to the unification of Nigeria, and provide the country's necessary link between the educated sections of the people from different areas and facilitates the development of an integrated civil administration, a uniform judicial

system and a common language of higher education, one is equally tempted to say that English language has equally posed a herculean challenge on the Nigeria culture.

The influence of English and other foreign languages have been overwhelming. The English language being the second language in Nigeria, its unifying role should not have been in doubt, but instead of cutting across linguistic barriers and promoting national integration and cultural identity, it alienates the intelligentsia from the masses and is more or less a status symbol of a privileged and exploiting class. It stifles creativity and originality and is incapable of creating a climate of intellectual tradition and sustained scholarship. Because of the complexities involve in the manipulation of phraseology and sentence construction, it places maximum strains on the mind of the individual and makes him a split personality or a divided self.

It is an assertive statement that the influence of foreign languages have bastardized all aspect of Nigerian culture. Using our various cultural dances as a take off point, every community in Nigeria has a particular dance step that is associated with the custom and culture of the community. But as of today, all the cultural dances in Nigeria have been taken over by Makossa dance imported from Francophone countries, especially from the Congo. The language of the music is so foreign and the pattern of their dance is so corruptive and morally unacceptable to the Nigerian culture. This is so because of its pornographic nature and it leads the youths to all forms of sexual dreams. The most challenging aspect of the Makossa dance is that it has infiltrated into our churches and our religious leaders seem not to be doing anything about it. The truth of the matter is that if this situation is allowed to continue without any arrestive measure, it will degenerate to the extent that in the near future, there will be no cultural dance that will serve as a marker of cultural identity in Nigeria.

Most Nigerian parents are equally guilty in the area of child upbringing in terms of language acquisition. It will be quite difficult to erase the colonial mentality of most literate Nigerians to enable them imbibe the habit of bringing up their children in their native languages at infancy and put aside the pride of their children fluency and competence in foreign languages which they parade in ignorance. What an ironic situation that a child of two or three years can speak both English and French languages fluently but cannot say "come" in his native language. On a predicative note, if parents refuse to create their own system, by bringing up their children in their own various indigenous languages before exposing them to English or other foreign languages, then the parents, their children and their future generation will be enslaved by the system created by the foreign languages.

It is a common knowledge that all technologically advanced countries developed their technology in their respective languages. For instance, America and Britain speak English language and almost all their technological terms are in English language. Japan in Japanese, Russia in Russian, Germany in German, and France in French. Since Nigeria has no language of her own-being a pluralistic society with heterogeneous linguistic groupings, all technological terms are studied in English language. Today, Nigerian cultural heritage has been eroded by foreign cultures in terms of cultural ways of life and manners of thinking. No wonder we seem to always wait for technology to be developed in Europe and transferred to us. This explains why Nigerians kept thinking of "Technological Transfer" in the 1980s: knowing fully well the importance of culture to language and technological development, it is very doubtful if we can develop indigenous technology with a common indigenous language in the 21st century. This is one of the greatest challenges of the English language to the development of indigenous technology in Nigeria.

SUGGESTION

A lingua franca is a socializing instrument and an eliminator of uncivilized nature. Mackey (1978) states that "thinking is patterned by language and language determines ones own view of the world".

And this is a widely accepted fact. It implies that if Nigerians speak in the same way and have a common view, this will eliminate clashes of opinion and make for unity, peace and development. Still supporting this view, Obafemi (1977) posits that most linguists believe that only an indigenous language can help attain the fulfillment, essence and sense of belonging by the people socially, economically and politically.

Today, Nigeria is forty-one years and by implication, she is old enough and therefore must try to evolve a culture and language of science that will support the development of her technology in this century. We regard ourselves as people of diverse cultures and languages, with unity in diversity. To develop our technology within our cultural milieu, we need a common language. If our common language is used to express scientific and technological terms and processes, the level of scientific literacy and technological development will improve. Scientific language is a means of transmitting cultural values, the common language that will facilitate development will not only be the language of technology, it must also be the language of commerce, education, economics, advertisement and marketing to mention but a few. Unfortunately, this language does not exist, but in the absence of an acceptable indigenous language, Nigeria must develop technologically, and everything needed for her technological advancement should be handled with care. Therefore the English language which has been adopted as a second language must be given the attention it deserves in this direction.

CONCLUSION

From the discussions so far, this paper has been able to establish the fact that language in general is indispensable in human existence. It has equally been able to show the symbiotic relationship between language and culture. And on the challenges of English and other foreign languages on Nigerian culture, this paper quite states that Nigerian contact with these foreign languages is a sheer historical accident. It further highlights areas of the Nigerian culture that have been bastardized by these infiltrating languages. Notwithstanding, it equally recognizes and appreciates in particular the fundamental role of the English Language in Nigeria.

Finally, while this paper advocates for the continuous use of English in the absence of an acceptable indigenous language, it equally urges Nigerians to live up to the challenge of evolving an indigenous language that will be useful in all spheres of her socio-economic advancement.

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