

Research Article

Effects of English Language on National Development

Olofin Alabi Olusoji

Principal Lecturer, The Federal Polytechnic, Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria. Email: olofin1@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

The importance of the relationship between language and society cannot be over emphasized in the overall development of any community. However, language has become so much part of our everyday life that we tend to take it for granted. The ordinary man hardly bothers to find out what contributions a language can make in the development of a nation. This paper stresses the importance of English language, as a world language, and a powerful factor for the promotion of unity, national consciousness and at the same time facilitating the mobilization of its resources for national development. The paper tries to examine English language as the language of education, its benefits as a second language and its impact on the development on the country. The aim is to show the extent to which the language has been able to project the cultural values of the people to the international world and how it has facilitated the development of both material and human resources. The result led to the conclusion that the use of English as a second language as well as the language of education provided a speedy access to modern development in science and technology.

KEYWORDS: English Language, National Development, Language Policy, Communication.

Introduction

The most basic and most valuable possession of man is language. With language man has the capacity for dealing with changes in the environment to organize his society and face other various emergencies of life. It is often argued that for any nation to make progress, the science and technology must be well developed. One of the means of achieving this is through the language in which the concepts are expressed. In a country like Nigeria, characterized by cultural diversity, language problems exist which makes the choice for a common language very difficult as there abound a handful of native languages. A number of reasons have been cited for this loss of choice, Bamisaye, (2006) describes these reasons as multifaceted controversies which, include; politics, economics and linguistic questions. Other linguistic groups rightly believe that the chosen language will gain upper status and all other languages will now function in a subordinate capacity. However, English language, because of its neutrality, gained acceptance as a common language among the different ethnic groups that make up the country. With English language, the number of problems usually posed by lack of a common language in heterogeneous communities such as Nigeria became suppressed and the language has remained one of the strongest instruments of unity and development for the people of the country. The language has continued to play such a unifying role to the extent that it has become the country's second language.

Concept Clarification

It is necessary at this stage to explain the use of certain concepts such as "Language" and "Development" in relation to this paper.

Language:

Claremont Dictionary of Grammar simply refers to language as "the means by which human beings communicate, using words" Language is the hall-mark of any group of people, community or society. It is one enormous advantage man has over other living and non living species. By language in this paper, we refer to English as a second language (ESL). Akindele and Adegbite (1992) believed that the quality of a nation's education could considerably be determined by the quality of language which it adopts.. Language in this paper therefore, refers to a means of communication that is accessible to the generality of the world. The status of English as a world language provides various avenues for global communication, science and technology, international business, diplomatic relations and human development which would have been difficult to achieve if Nigeria had not adopted English as a second language.

Development:

The term development has a number of interpretations in different concepts, however, in this paper, our idea of development falls in line with the view of Oyeleran (1988). He interprets development from the angle of human affairs. To him development implies; "The conscious promotion of the well-being and security of persons in such a way that is constantly able to optimize the realization of their individual potentials".

This view is similar to the one expressed by Adediji (1992) who sees development as a "constant and appreciable amelioration in economic, social, technological, political and cultural aspect of life of a people". Our interest in adopting the above concepts is not only because they are in line with the objectives of this paper but because they are also in line with Lado, (1964) that; "Language is intimately tied to man's feelings and activity, it is bound up with nationality, religion, and the feelings of self. It is used for work, worship and play by everyone"

The concept of development as conceived by this paper covers all areas such as human, economics, socio-political, scientific and technological progress.

The Language Situation in Nigeria

Communication is a basic requirement in the life of any group of people, since communication is done through language, it remains an important factor in national development and national consciousness. Nigeria has a natural division, through the rivers Niger and Benue, into three major areas and these divisions correspond with the three major language groups in the country namely the Hausa in the North, the Igbo in the East and the Yoruba in the West. Beyond these three major language groups, however "Nigeria is made up of more than 250 ethnic groups with a conservative estimate of 4000 languages" Akindele and Adegbite, (1992). Unlike the homogenous societies which have no problem with communication because they have one common language, Nigeria is characterized by diversity of languages.

The multiplicity of language is so obvious and grave in Nigeria that within the major ethnic groups, there are still differences in languages and dialects. The situation is that some of the dialects found within a linguistic group are not mutually intelligible even though the speakers belong to the same linguistic group. Within the Yoruba ethnic group for instance, the Akoko Yoruba speaker in Ondo state, understand the Ilorin Yoruba speaker in Kwara state but the Akoko speaker is not understood by the Ilorin speaker.

Spencer (1962) and Bamigbose,(1990) see this situation as a barrier to national unity and development. To break this language barrier, there is the need for a common language to facilitate a common and effective communication. However, the question now is which language is to be used as Nigeria's national language? Without a common language, the fragile unity which presently binds the country together would have collapsed. Imagine what would become the fate of the Head of State, both the states and the National Assemblies, the law courts, education and all other areas of national communication. Given the situation explained above, finding a common national indigenous language will be a very difficult if not an impossible task. This is because the choice of any indigenous language as a national language will certainly generate bad feelings of jealousy, rancor and fear of ethnic domination and may even lead to the total collapse of the entire nation. As it were, the country needed to find a solution to its language predicament and come up with a common national language. Certainly, this can never be any of the nation's indigenous languages since none of them is politically neutral to serve this purpose. The only option open to Nigeria, therefore, will be the choice of a neutral language. English language readily becomes acceptable for this role since the missionaries had already introduced the language to serve the purpose of communication.

English as a Language of Education

We had earlier remarked the large number of different languages spoken in Nigeria .It will not make good sense therefore, to ignore the problems that these languages will pose to education in Nigeria. The federal government demonstrates appreciation for the use of the indigenous languages as a language of education through the provisions of the (1981) National policy on education, particularly under the section: 'The National Language Policy'. This section states that: "Government will see to it that the medium of instruction in the primary school is initially the mother tongue or the language of the immediate community and at a later stage, English".

Government goes further to demonstrate its commitment towards the enforcement of these provisions. A subsection 19(4) was further introduced into the (1989) constitution under 'Educational Objectives of State Policy', emphasizing that 'Government shall encourage the leaning of indigenous languages'. To give strength to these provisions, some Nigerian scholars such as Bamgbose and Akere. (1991: 3-8), Awobuluyi, (1991) vehemently opposed the use of English as the language of education and for that reason, openly canvassed in parliament for the replacement of English language with one of the indigenous languages as the official language citing the problem most people have in understanding the language and the inability to communicate effectively through the language as the major barrier. Bamgbose, (1976 12-13). However, much as one would like to salute the sense of patriotism demonstrated by these Nigerian scholars, the fact remains that none of the

indigenous languages has the linguistic capacity to handle the teaching of subjects like physics, chemistry, mathematics, geography, etc. This fact is buttressed by Adedeji, (1984) when he points out that: "A science student needs language for acquiring and communicating knowledge and skills in science and technology. He needs language to help him define concepts and describe substances, objects, locations and processes, report facts, draw inferences, make conclusions, classify items and make generalizations"

In addition to this, as long as the Nigerian constitution guarantees the freedom of movement, freedom to live and operate in any part of the country, using an indigenous language in education will deny many non speakers of such language many benefits and a sense of belonging. It is a common knowledge that traders and civil servants move and receive transfers to work in any part of the country. What happens to a teacher who does not speak the language of the host community or the pupils who find themselves in a school where a different language other than the one they speak is used?

It must be stated clearly that it is not the intention of this paper to oppose the use of indigenous languages in schools. Even scholars such as Dennis, F. et al (1989), Brann,(1977) Osaji, (1979) believe that the best means of acquiring linguistic skills is a sound linguistic foundation in the mother tongue. Apart from this, countries like Japan, and China acquired their science and technology through the use of their indigenous languages. They are among the technologically developed nations of the world today. However, in a nation of linguistic and cultural diversities like Nigeria, an acceptable language to serve as the language of education and communication will be a daunting task.

Language Policy in Nigeria

As a matter of fact, there are no distinctive language policies in Nigeria. Rather, most of what is referred to as language policies as enshrined in section 51 of the Nigeria constitution of 1979 and 1989 can at best be referred to as mere government's statement of intention towards achieving nationalism. By suggesting three indigenous languages and English language as the languages of education and by extension, the national languages, government has not demonstrated any seriousness towards solving the language problem in the country. (p80 Akindede) As we can see, the policy made no clear statement to distinguish properly the position of the English language in relation to the indigenous languages. No wonder English continues to play a dominant role in the affairs of the country as a discipline right from the elementary to the tertiary level, as the language of education at all levels and as a national language. Up till today, all subsequent government provisions made no effort to change this position.

Problems of Learning English in Nigeria

The word 'problem' is not used in this paper in terms of difficulty alone, it extends to what needs to be done, or considered in the process of teaching, learning and using of the language. One major problem associated with the learning of the language is found in the fact that the language is learned as a second language (L2) by students who are already proficient in the use of one language. The common problem associated with this is interference. Majority of the teachers who teach the language, are incompetent. Apart from this, the teachers themselves are victims of incompetent teaching. Part of the problems in the learning of the language according to Bamgbose, (1968) is found in: "the difficulty inherent in the language itself, such as irregular patterns: according to him, (the plural of man is men but the plural of pan is not 'pen'.)

To further complement Bamgbose's position, Obayan, et al (1991) traced the problem right from childhood. In his view: "the first problem which faces the Nigerian child learning English for the first time at the primary school level is how to adjust the mouth and ears to the new language which is very different from most Nigerian languages"

In the light of my own experience as a teacher, areas such as the translation of idioms, irregular patterns, morphology, pronunciation and spelling of words are veritable sources of difficulty and confusion. One of the problems usually encountered by the learners is that some elements of his native language tend to show up in the English they produce, a phenomenon commonly referred to as interference. This is common especially, in the translation of idioms and other expressions and forms which are wide spread in Africa and accepted as a feature of African English but not found in English language.

I know it is not wholly correct to say that all subjects are badly taught, but English language is giving most teachers much difficulty, and since English is the medium of instruction in the school system, other subjects taught in the school are naturally affected. This naturally affects the quality of teaching. Thus more attention should be paid to the training and welfare of teachers as first steps in improving the standard of teaching as well as the quality of teachers.

Self Development

We had earlier highlighted the fact that the issue of education cannot be discussed successfully without the language which serves as the medium of instruction. Any literate Nigerian must, of necessity not only be able to

read and write in English language but also communicate effectively with it. Most of the school subjects provide the learner with information and experience of things and the world around him that promote his intellectual and mental development. This will not be possible without an appropriate language through which the concepts are expressed. The implication of the foregoing is that before any Nigerian can occupy any position of eminence today, he must be 'English compliant'. A look at the Nigerian society will show that a large percentage of Nigerians occupying important positions of authority are literate. Appointments into government services, political positions and in recently traditional positions consider literacy as a prerequisite. Added to this is the realization that promotions and the ability to advance your career through national and international interaction and communication is tied to your education and in particular your ability to express yourself in good English.

In a discussion of this nature, the tremendous success recorded, by the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) scheme introduced in 1973 by the Federal Government cannot be ignored. The success of the scheme is largely due to the use of English as a language of national communication, cooperation and understanding. At the NYSC camp in each state, youths from different linguistic backgrounds congregate yearly to undergo a one-year national service. Without the English language performing the role of communication-bridge, the achievement of the scheme would have been a mirage. There is hardly any area of professional discipline, whether law, medicine, teaching etc, that Nigeria had not recorded both national and international recognition. The noble prize won by Professor Wole Soyinka is still fresh in mind.

National Development

National development is seen by Awolokun (1995) as a minimum socio and political development as well as economic development in the building of a national identity. The ability of a country to improve the social welfare of the people by providing social amenities like quality education, water, good roads access to health facilities, etc accounts for the development of any nation. Education is basic to any form of development. Since we cannot talk of education without the language through which the concepts are expressed, English as the language of education in Nigeria contributes in no small way to the rapid development experienced in Nigeria. There is no doubt that Nigeria, as a country has benefited tremendously through the use of the English language to advance the development of the country. Several scholars have attested to the international value of English language. Baugh (1978) recognize, numerical ascendancy over other highly developed European languages. Its importance in global civilization, as well as its accessibility to foreign learners as factors has guaranteed the English language a priority of place in the international community. Expressing a similar view, Treen, (1982), quoted in Akindele, (1985) explains: "Today, like it or curse it, English is the closest thing to a lingua-franca around the globe. Roughly, over 700 million people speak it, an increase of 40 percent in the last twenty years and a total that represents more than one seventh of the world population.

Going by what is on ground in terms of human development in all spheres of human interactions, technological advancement, provision of social amenities, etc there is no doubt that Nigeria can lay claim to greater achievement through her adoption of English as a second language.

Social Development

Nigeria has moved from the days of town criers to the latest communication gadgets in the world. The contribution of Information technology to social development is found in human comfort and the guarantee of an easy access to the whole world. This beneficial aspect provided by the influence of science and technology is succinctly captured by Brumfit, (1995) when he observes that: "There is easy knowledge transfer now in quantities and at speeds unimaginable in the past; there is real communication not just through television, but real communication of massive databases. We can be, in principle, anywhere in the world, and connect to databases that are traditionally preserved in Paris or in Oxford or in Washington"

Information travels fast these days through more outlets as Internet, Television, compact disc, Radio, Telephone and print media.. It is possible to sit down in your room and reach out to the whole world. Though expensive, these communication gadgets have reduced the whole world to a 'global village'. Any important event now needs not gather crowds together at a particular position to watch such event. You simply sit down in your room and watch events live and direct all over the world. The benefit of such gadget is facilitated through the knowledge of common language which is English.

Nigeria is a member of several international bodies such as African unity (AU), United Nations organization (UNO), etc. Nigeria is able to function and interact effectively in this organization through the use of English language

Political Development

Politics in Nigeria would have been a difficult business but for the ease of communication brought in by English language. One of the activities of politics in Nigeria is house to house and open rally campaigns. Without English language it would have been quite difficult if not totally impossible to address political audience at

different rallies. The language made it possible and easy for the Head of State to address the people of the country once. This alone has contributed a lot to the existing unity in the country. All the houses of assembly, representatives, the senate, judiciary and all other bodies in the nation find it easy to interact and communicate in English language.

Economic Development

One of the major sources of revenue for Nigeria is through oil production. Internally, Nigerians engage in trading and other business activities, the major foundation for the success of these businesses is the existence of English as a language of national communication. Without English, unity and peace will be difficult to achieve. A common language facilitates smooth business interaction and peaceful co-existence. The danger of linguistic diversity was exhibited in the recent religious riot in Kaduna. Language contributed to the identifications of non indigenes as rioters demanded openly from suspected non natives' linguistic evidence that show them as a native before they were either spared or killed.

One other major area of achievement is education. It is possible for Nigerians irrespective of ethnic background to study in any part of the country. The same goes for the teachers who could also choose to teach in any part of the country without fear of language hindrance. The text books too are coded in English language. The importance of English language in the Nigeria educational system is emphasized in the 1977 language provisions of national policy of education:

Government will see to it that the medium of instruction in the primary school is initially the mother tongue or the language of the immediate community and at a latter state English. Today Nigeria has benefited a lot from the modern technology. They are able to read and interpret, and put into use the instruction of such information. Areas such as medicine, agriculture, communication and transportation, arts and craft have received a boost from modern technology.

Even though, these innovations in technology have some negative effect but the advantages far over weighs the disadvantages. Though the country is yet to come out with any known self developed technology, there have been breakthroughs in some areas where certain tools have been refashioned to suit the local needs example are common in agricultural machines and areas of local industries. Before now, it is common for the country to invite experts to assist in almost all areas including such areas as education, administration and construction. Nigerians have now graduated to a stage where they now handle personally almost all of their affairs.

Conclusion

From our discussion so far, we have been able to show the language situation in Nigeria and the implication of such situation on national development. We realized that the issue of language in Nigeria is a sensitive one and if not properly handled, could lead to civil-strive among communities if the central government fails to provide guidelines that will determine at the national level which language shall be used or what aspects of our national life and activities.

English is used by a sizable world population; this offers the people of this nation the benefit of developing their potentials and participating in global affairs. The paper arrived at a conclusion that English language is a powerful factor for unity that promotes the felling of oneness, progress and national consciousness. The teaching and learning of the language as a subject as well as the medium of instruction has placed the language above all other native languages and this has helped to suppress the power tussles of ethnics

Finally, the paper does not in any way intend to suggest that the indigenous languages are inferior or incapable of performing educational functions like the English language, however, it is the believe of the paper that the geographical spread of English language provides the benefits for more international communication and interactions than the indigenous languages that still have a limited spread.

References

- Adedeji R (1984). The English language Teacher and the Technical Student. In Freeman,R. and Jubril, M. (eds.) English Language Studies in Nigeria Higher Education. London: British Council.
- Adediji O (ed) (1992). Emerging Trends in Nigeria Local Government. Ibadan: Adefila Commercial Printers.
- Akindele, F and Adegbite. N(1992). The Sociology and Politics of English in Nigeria: Debiyi-Iwa Printers.
- Awotokun, M. A. (1994). Local Government and National Development.
- Bamgbose, A. (1968). The Relationship of Vernacular and English: Journal of theNigeria English Studies Association. Vol3, No.1. p 81
- Bamisaye, T. (2006). Studies in Language and Linguistics: An introductory Text, Ibadan: Mortem Paperbacks.

- Baugh AC and Cable T(1978). A history of the English language. (3rd ed.) London: Routledge& Kegan Paul.
- Brann, C.M.B. 1977. Language Planning for Education in Nigeria: Some Demographic, Linguistics and Areal Factors, in Bamgbose, A. (ed.) Language in Education in Nigeria, Vol. 1. Lagos, Nigeria: The National Language Center, Federal Ministry of Education, pp. 47 - 61.
- Brumfit, C. (1995). "English as a Second Language and English Language Teaching: Retrospect and Prospect." In Bamgbose, et.al (eds.) New English's: A West African Perspective Ibadan: Monsuro Publishers.
- Claremont (1995). Dictionary of Grammar. Scotland: Geddes & Grosset Ltd. Language and the National Questions in Nigeria in African Notes, Vol. 14, Nos. 1&2.
- Dennis F et al(1989). Varieties of English. London Macmillan. Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria Lagos: Federal Government Press.
- Lado R (1964). Language Teaching: A Scientific Approach. New York: McGraw Inc.
- Obayan, et al (1981). Teaching Oral English in the Nigerian Primary School Kaduna: National Teachers Institute.
- Osaji, B (1979) Language Survey in Nigeria. Publication B 13 - 81, International Center for Research on Bilingualism, Quebec, Canada.
- Oyetunji, D. (1968). English in the Primary School in Nigeria. In Journal of the Nigeria English Studies Association. Vol. 2, No.1. p.17.
- Spencer J.W. (1992). Language in the Multilingual State. In Language and Society Ibadan: Ibadan University Press
- Treen, (1982). "English, English Everywhere." In Akindele M(1985) English in Nigeria. Ibadan: Monsuro Publishers.