MULTILINGUALISM AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

From the linguistic perspective, the single most admirable fact about Nigeria is the linguistic and cultural diversity. It is a known fact that Nigeria as a nation is multilingual and multicultural in varying degrees and levels. This obvious fact establishes the existence of several spoken and written languages across the length and breadth of this nation. Each linguistic community is in turn characterized by an autonomous ethno-linguistic identity. On the other hand, the most heralded paradigm of development in the current nation Nigeria is predicated on the ideal of multilingualism as an ideological foundation of nationhood in Nigeria. This work provides a framework for maintaining and harnessing benefits inherent in multilingualism for national development.

Keywords: Multilingualism, bilingualism, national development, national cohesion and Linguistic sources.

Introduction

Multilingualism is an English word that has origins in Latin; 'multi' meaning 'many', 'lingua' meaning 'tongue' or 'language; and 'ism' meaning 'the state'; Thus, multilingualism denotes the state of having more than two languages in use. On the basis of the numbers of languages in use, English has created the following set of words 'monolingual' meaning 'of one language', 'bilingual' meaning 'of two languages', trilingual' meaning 'of three languages' and 'multilingual' meaning 'of many languages (Crystal, 63). Multilingual societies, in general, use three kinds of languages, first languages, second languages and foreign languages. First languages are the mother tongues that one learns first, second languages are those languages that are learnt after acquiring the first language. In most countries in Asia, English is the most common second language. Thirdly, there are 'foreign languages', that is, languages that are learnt along with second language.

According to Crystal, 'a foreign language', is more restricted, and a non-native language taught in schools that has no status as a routine medium of communication in the country. A second language is a non-native language that is widely used for purposes of communication, used as a medium of education, government, or business (431).

Taken together, multilingualism is a sociolinguistic phenomenon that arises as a result of language contact. It is a situation in which two or more than one language operate within the some context. It is the act of using, or promoting the use of multiple languages either by an individual speaker or by a community of speaker(s) One who can communicate in more than one language be it activity through speaking, writing, singing or passively through listening, reading or perceiving is termed a bilingual. To this end, multilingualism is an act of using, speaking or writing in several or different languages.

National Development

National development is much sought-after ideal in a developing nation like Nigeria. It has been forcefully argued that the economic and social development of any nation depend crucially on the development and uses of many languages in the nation which is the major concern of multilingualism as a sociolinguistic concept (Bamgose, 3). According to Chumbow (90) National development is the nation's human resources acting on its natural resources to produce goods (tangible and intangible) in order to improve the welfare and social well-being of citizens of the entire nation.

Multilingualism and National Development

Nigeria is the most multilingual nation in Africa with about 400-500 indigenous languages, which have various status; developed, developing, and underdeveloped (Emenanjo, 3, Aziza, 257). Language has been identified as a conduit for transmission of culture, idea, thought etc from one generation to another. Despite the apparent difficulties posed by multilingualism in the enterprise of national development, the dominant ideological position is in favor of development anchored on multilingualism.

Multilingualism is normal and monolingualism is exceptional (Chumbow, 6). Chumbow further stresses that, most countries of the world are multilingual and even the few putatively monolingual countries of Europe are increasingly becoming multilingual and multicultural as a result of the mobility and migration factors characteristic of the phenomenon of globalization. Nigeria is the

most multilingual nation of African and this is facilitated with the multi-ethnic nature of the country.

On the other hand, development is the bane of our present world. The concept of development has attracted varied debates by scholars. Development has to do with constant and consistent growth in some aspects of human life or social well-being. According to Lado, languages people speak are intimately tied to their feelings and activities; it is bound up with nationality, religion, and the feelings of self. It is used for work, worship and play by everyone (3). With this, it is clear that people's languages provide a conduit, repository and means of transmission, expression and communication of economic belief, social political educational and political trajectory of the people/society. This therefore situates that a successful transformation and development of the society can only be achieved through the use of peoples languages which is sine qua non to multilingualism.

The Multilingual Design of Nigeria

Nigeria, next to the Island of new Guinea, is linguistically the richest country in the world with over 400-500 indigenous languages. This situates the country as one of the multilingual nations of the world. Out of the existing indigenous languages, three are regarded as national languages; Igbo,Hausa and Yoruba. (Ordering is alphabetical not necessarily due to the numbers of speakers, preference, dominance or importance). The status of three languages existing separately in Nigeria as major/official languages is captured in the National Policy of Education formulated in 1977 and revised subsequently in 1981, 1989, 1998, 2014 and 2013. The Nigerian language policy (hereinafter NLP) is a principal statement of the Federal Government of Nigeria which has statutory flavour, guiding the teaching, learning and official use of different languages in the country. This policy according to Ngozi, (112), stresses the importance of multilingualism to national development and as a means to promoting social infraction and national cohesion, as well as preserving the national rich cultural heritage.

Conceptualizing the Role of Multilingualism in National Development

Multilingual studies and the use of linguistic resources are fast becoming a discipline that has attracted the attention of various scholars from various disciplines. The patronage could be attributed to the fact that multilingualism encapsulates the people's diverse cultures, traditions, identities, customs, and ideologies of the people. Some roles of multilingualism in national

development include, nationalism, national integration, technological advancement, indeed multilingualism is central to Nigeria development. According to Ngozi, a nation is best developed by the way the language that best portrays its ideology is used; that language serves as a medium for expression of the entity it represents.

Enhancing National Development through Multilingualism

To develop a nation, all hands must be on deck; national development is not the responsibility of a single individual but a group of individuals can converge to formulate strategies for development of the nation. This formulated national development pla from a few individuals is usually conveyed to the entire populace through linguistic recourses. So language provides a tool for the conveyance of national development. Edward and Sienkewiez, in observing the significance of multilingualism in enhancing national development, cites Mamadu Kouyate, thus: "We are vessels of speech, we are the repositories which harbor secrets of many centuries of old … we are memories of mankind; by the spoken word we bring to life the deeds and exploits of kings. Documentation is a tool for preservation of various facts of human ideas, achievements and ideologies (90). These preserved resources can only be transferred from one generation to another through people's languages, beliefs, customs and practices which serve as indicators for national development. People's languages hold the power to maintain national and cultural identity.

Problems of Multiplicity of Languages to Development in Nigeria

Multilingualism, though important for national development, has embedded in it germs of social tension and problem resulting from linguistic dominance and marginalization. Majority languages tend to be more dominant than minority languages as a result of their prestige status and the economically important functions they are called upon to play. This may lead to social conflict and polarization of ethnolinguistic communities.

According to Chumbow (24), the fittest playing against the minority language and minority linguistic groups, which may then succumb to assimilation. The result, of course, would be the loss of the language and linguistic identity, and a cruel blow to the lofty ideal of multilingualism. He further stressed that, the key to the survival of any language in a multilingual situation is its vitality which is determined by a network of micro and macro linguistic variables that ensure that the language is alive and strong enough to withstand the vicissitudes of threats from other languages in contact.

In the modern world, multilingualism is a common phenomenon. In fact, the number of multilingual individuals in the world is greater that the number of monolingual individuals (Paulston and Tucker, 301). Multilingualism can be both a problem and a resource.

Problems caused by multilingualism can easily be seen at both the individuals and societal levels. People living in multilingual societies who are not monolingual are, daily, faced with the question of which languages to use (Caulmas, 123). As it is almost impossible to select only one language or another, such polyglots usually find themselves in situation where they switch back and forth between the languages (this phenomenon is also known as code- switching). The resulting mixture usually makes it hard for outside observers to understand, therefore, it tends to be considered a bastardized blend of languages. Such consideration is known to not only hinder social interaction, national development but also cause social distress to multilinguals.

At the societal level, as it is apparent that multilingual communities have problems that many monolinguals are not conversant with (Fosold, 4) stressed that multilingualism is a threat to nationalism. At the most practical level, communication challenge within a country can act as impediment to commerce and industry and disrupt the nation. More seriously, however, multilingualism could destroy nationalism. As language holds importance in the unity of a nation, monolingual nations are more likely to be stable than multilingual ones. The development of a sense of nation is more difficult for a multilingual state.

According to Commins (81), the involvement of multilingualism with society could work against nationalism in this context for instance, on pragmatic terms, the best immediate option for the governing language in a newly independent colony might be the old colonial language because those nationals with the most ruling experience already master this language. Nevertheless, the old colonial language is usually a terrible option on nationalist grounds. This is capable to destroying the national platform and hinders national development.

Solutions to the Language Situation in Nigeria

Whereas multilingualism brings about problems for both individuals and the development of this nation, its problems are unlikely to outweigh its benefits. Multilingualism has long been credited for privileged linguistic abilities, cognitive competence, and personal development in polyglots. Since, in any multilingual state like Nigeria, dominance prevails as determined by a conjunction of vitality and status, confirming variables of a social, economic and political nature, the researcher submits that language planning (LP) has the duty and responsibility of mediating dominance of one

language over another, by way of redistribution of the variables so that all the languages have at least the minimum required for their vitality and survival. Without intervention and a judicious mediation some of the languages will ultimately go extinct due to concomitant progressive weakening

According to Chumbow (38), one of the ways to solve the problems of languages situation in Nigeria is through functional complementarities and mediation. According to him, this principle of complementation of functions happens when minority languages are used in relations to the domains of the majority or dominant languages. The normal distribution of power between majority and minority languages is not dependent on the intrinsic value of the languages concerned but on historical accidents of military, political or economic power. Thus, the balance of power in favour of dominant official languages in the Nigerian context is due to the unfortunate circumstances of imperialism, economic rape etc., in the era of colonization. It may also be attributed to a conspiracy ignited by the forces of globalization in collusion with the local Nigerian ruling class.

Commitment to linguistic diversity or multilingualism means acceptance of ethnolinguistic pluralism as a fundamental element in the paradigm of development for Nigerian nation. This requires the promotion of peaceful co-existence of ethnolinguistic groups of people in a multilingual society like Nigeria where multilingualism does not entail replacement of one language by another but a recognition of the functional complementarities of all languages in relation characterized not by mutual antagonism but by mutual support. Given its importance, the principle is defined by Chumbow (42) as follows:

The principle of functional complementarities (PFC) requires that at the level of status planning (or policy formulation), all languages of the nation should be ascribed their identity function (the primary function) and be allocated some other valorizing functions (education/literacy, media, public, administration, parliament, business/commerce, etc) for national development enterprise in the private and public realms. Valorizing functions are those that procure economic and social and political advantages and thereby contribute to raising the status of the language. What is the motivation of the principle of functional complementarities and what is it intended to achieve?

Firstly, the PFC is congruent with the objective of multilingualism and the need to develop multilingual and multicultural society like Nigeria where all ethnolinguistic identities are nurtured, preserved and harnessed for national development and cohesion.

Secondly, it seeks to empower minority languages which have generally been disempowered by being left with only the indentify function to boast of, leading to a situation where users choose to

go straight for the dominant language of power, which guarantees economic advantages and social amenities, leading to the abandonment, environment and consequent shift of the minority language.

Thirdly, commitment to the PFC requires that languages share some functions, and that their users be supportive of each other and see each other as members of a team where the goal is the attainment of national development. The principle of complementarities commits all linguistic communities to some sort of vicarious responsibility for their common endeavours for national development and cohesion.

Fourthly, redistribution and sharing of valorizing functions by this principle according to Chumbow (49) reinforces the vitality of all languages including minority languages and thereby guarantees their survival and stability which in turn brings the most needed development.

In the implementation of multilingualism principle and other principles geared towards ensuring harmony in the development of the nation and of the various ethno-linginstic communities in a multilingual state like Nigeria, the greatest obstacle to this process is the negative attitude of citizens towards the other languages or towards their own languages (in preference to a foreign official languages). The ability for a language to resist domination pressure and adopt mechanisms to appropriate and consolidate the use of existing domains and penetrate new domains and acquire valorizing function etc depends on the attitude of its users.

Conclusion

The role of language in human society is indispensable. It provides means for social function management and organization. Development is the sustainable economic, political, social culture and technological transformation of a society and language on the other hand provides the means of conveying the developmental paradigm to the society. Language therefore serves as a catalyst in national development. It is imperative to take the linguistic features into account in order to ensure full participation of all her citizenry in the developmental process. For this to happen, there is a need to enhance and sustain the ethics of multilingualism in our nation Nigeria.

Multilingualism is pivotal for agricultural, technological, social, political, economic and scientific advancement. It is not enough to formulate policies, but we should go beyond policy formulation to policy implementation, to translating multilingual theories into practice for national development.

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