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Language, Literature and African Common Norms

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Abstract: The basic function of language is communication and its users subconsciously protect its expensive capabilities. It helps in cultural transmission and each generation uses the form of language handed down by the previous generation, language is usually adapted and altered to suit the personal requirements of the next generation. Similarly, a distinctive form of language can give a cultural group a sense of identity, uniting insiders and alienating outsides. The situation in most parts of Africa supports scholars' argument that for any group of people to share a sense of common norm, a certain minimum level of communication between them must be guaranteed. And the incontrovertible evidence shows that language has remained one of the most visible and enduring senses of that shared identity. In Africa, evident shows that language has become a very strong factor for ethno-national identity, with the ethnic loyalty overriding national interests. Previous scholarly contributions on the complex linguistic situation in Africa have discussed strategies adopted in language planning and types of language policies in many of the nations in Africa. Drawing on these contributions, as well as incorporating recent developments, this article language, literature and African common norms discusses aspects of language, literature, and African common norms and how they affect Africa. It examines language as power, norms of Africa, African literature and the importance of language in African society. The study adopts a qualitative descriptive method and uses Dell Hymes (1966) communicative competence theory. The findings show that the study of language, literature and African common norms has really contributed a lot in Africa. The study recommends that African norms should be maintained through teaching and exposing our children to them as early as possible so that it can become part of their way of living.

Key words: Language, Literature, Common, Norm, Africa

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INTRODUCTION

Studies in languages and literature of Africa may be approached independently but the strong connection between the two in providing holistic understanding of the African worldview has made an inclusive engagement of the two disciplines not only fashionable but also productive. The study of African language means of communication of culture and symbols addresses issues such as the number of spoken languages and other groupings. Human beings interact and communicate in sound with one another in their various societies. Language is simply the conventional use of meaningful sounds and symbols with which we communicate. The sounds exhibit themselves in the representation of the sounds in Phonetic symbols and letters of the alphabet of a language. It is a developing phenomenon. Language is a means of communication among human beings. It is that instrument with which we all conduct our lives to be in terms or in conflict with others in our environment. Effective communication is made possible through English language and literature. English language and literature have made rapid and remarkable progress in the study of languages in Africa. As disciplines, they quickly gained recognition, popularity and acceptance in Nigeria in particular and Africa in general.

Therefore, these disciplines have come to stay because they have dominated every aspect of our culture, especially African common norms. This is why Akindele and Adegbite opine that "English language had been cultivated, redomisticated and indigenized in a socio-cultural milieu" (55). This means that the language has become our language and nothing can be done about it because we use it in our everyday interaction. It helps in establishing and maintaining relationship among people. Crystal surmises that language refers to "the concrete act of speaking, writing and signing in a given situation" (265). In this case, language is seen as defining the feature of human behavior. Furthermore, Merriam Webster defines language as a "body of words and phrases used by a large community or by people, nation, or group of nations" (439). This definition supports that language is wildly used by all. The words we select in the language we use have power. They can praise, delight, inspire, hurt, offend or even destroy. "Words that offend break the golden rule of language to rule, preventing others from identifying with one and thus, damaging one's credibility" (Lunsford, 282).

Humans have the gift of creativity in language to capture the uniqueness of each context and language situations. "Our language changes to meet the needs of people" (MacCallum et tal, 86). The general understanding that comes from all the above views on language is that it is not a matter of communication alone, it is a way of expressing fastidiousness, elegance and imaginativeness especially in carrying out our African common norms. O'Grady and Archibald support the above view as they say that "language is at the heart of all things and the vehicle for literature" (1).

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Literature also is a discipline most cherished by many. It is written by Nigerian and African citizens for readers, addressing so many issues in Nigeria in particular and Africa in general. It also deals with the lifestyle, culture, history, custom and traditions of Nigerians and Africa in their various endeavors. Literature is no doubt one of the greatest achievements of human thinking or knowledge which assumes in a society a very powerful role in making and shaping the society, which produces it. As a form of knowledge, it has proved to be a decisive factor in the relationship between man and the society. According to Mkaanem, "humanity as a whole benefits from it, particularly, if such a literature is produced and is effectively utilized for the betterment of the society that produces it" (80). It is an instrument for moulding and shaping people's attitudes towards their society. Similarly, it gives people an understanding of their life and society to which they belong. It is a social phenomenon, constantly sensitive to and expressing new aspects of life's current demands and hope giving rise to new social attitudes and relationships, which were hitherto unnoticed. At times, it is used to coerce and integrate the masses into a particular ideological mainstream. Literature also makes people to see what happens around them as natural or normal. At times, a writer of literature rebels against his societal values. He is the one that is sensitive to what is going on around him, one who wants a better deal for everybody. This is the kind of writer and the kind of literature that becomes an instrument for social transformation. Its basic aim is to awaken the revolutionary consciousness in the majority group of the society who are oppressed, exploited and deprived of good social living conditions. Ebong supports the above assertion as he declares that "the writer as a revolutionary thinker strives always to change the word, to redirect and channel the minds and conscience of his people towards a new set of values, a higher awareness or reality" (72-3). Furthermore, Ngugi sees a literature of the people as:

> A means of reflection, exposing society's economic structure, class formation, conflict and contradictions, class power, political and cultural struggle arising from the antagonism between those that are dying and those that are pointing to the future (n.p).

The extract above maintains the fact that a literature of the people must take sides with the oppressed, exploited and the deprived social class of the society. This is only where the writer and his work become more relevant to his society. Language and literature play serious roles in discharging African common norms in the sense that people explain African common norms using both disciplines. For example, for one to greet the other, one uses language to carry out the exercise of that greeting. So, the African common norms are found in our languages and literature. These norms are authoritative standard or principles of right action binding upon the members of a group and serving to guide, control, or

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regulate proper and acceptable behavior. This study insists that no society lacks norms governing conduct.

Conceptual Clarification

In other to carry out this study, there is need for conceptual clarification on major terms used in this study as such will get a better understanding and insight of the terms. The terms have been listed in the key words.

Language

Language is a creator of society: sharing a language is a necessary result and a necessary condition of people living together. Pre opines that "language has its national and international aspects: It has a "Department of state", which administers relationship among various tongues" (7). This part looks into the present and future of languages and supports what we can do about it. Language is something more than a system of communications, according to Pie, it is a "social convention which one must observe, under penalty of being misjudged" (17). Ignorance or improper use of language can easily interfere with one's success and advancement. It can take money out of one's pocket. Widdowson surmises that language is a "means of initiation into the conventions of conceptualization and communication which define particular culture" (103). This means that language serves a crucial socializing purpose. This language has been a great concern to man. Language is a gesture from one personality to another. The mover of the gesture is the encoder--- the first speaker and the decoder –the listener. Language is thus the basis of interaction among groups of human beings in the society. As much as language is beneficial and contributing to the development of human society, it demands some tasks. The task of training and daily preparation for attaining perfection in speaking and understanding its use in our different societies. Scholars support that for any group of people to share a sense of common identity, or common norms a certain minimum level of communication between them must be guaranteed.

Literature

Literature introduces one to a rich language, helps one develop and discover good skills and words by a critical view, explore texts with new perspectives, read about culture, understand the value of poetry, gain the literary skills of classics and develop a good fun fact. It is also a social activity. It is a vigorous and demanding one and requires attention, energy and an act of will. Literature has the potential for meaning, implication, response and result. The reader must activate them, give them life and turn them from quiet print into a lively interplay of ideas and feelings. Literature makes things happen, usually in the mind and imagination, but sometimes in the larger world as well, the process of literature involves not just the consciousness of the self. Literature doesn't just happen to one, one has to do it, and doing it involves decision, reading out, discovery and awareness. Literature

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is an act of power and learning how to get the most out of its possibilities can be an invigorating activity. For all its association and quietness solitude, and the sedentary life, literature involves –at its deepest level-action, and interaction.

Common

Common according to Hornby is "something happening often or existing in large numbers or in many places" (224). Similarly, it is something shared by or belonging to two or more people or by the people in a group.

Norm

Hornby opines that "norm is a situation or a pattern of behavior that is usual or expected" (795) Norm is also a standard of behavior that is typical of or accepted within a particular group or society. It is one of the essential properties of language, ensuring its functioning and historical continuity makes it to be inherently passed on from generation to generation. Norms also help to preserve speech traditions, and to satisfy current and changing social needs.

Africa

This is the world's second-largest and second most populous continent after Asia. It is about 30.3 million Km2 including adjacent Islands. It covers 20% of the earth's land area and 6% of its total surface area with 1.4 billion people as at 2021. It accounts for 18% of the world's human population. Africa's population is the youngest amongst all the continents. It has a wide range of natural resources. It is the least wealthy continent per-capita and the second least wealthy by total wealth. Scholars have attributed this to different factors including geography, climate, tribalism, colonialism, the cold war, neo-colonialism, lack of democracy and corruption. Despite this low concentration of wealth, recent economic expansion and the large and young population make Africa an important market in the broader global context. The continent is surrounded by the Mediterranean Sea to the North, the Isthmus of Suez and the Red Sea to the north east, the Indian Ocean to the South East and the Atlantic Ocean to the West. It contains fully recognized sovereign states, eight cities and Islands that are part of non-African states and two de facto independent status with limited or no recognition. It straddles the equator and the prime meridian.

Theoretical Studies

This paper adopts the theory of Communication Competence. Communicative competence theory was developed by Dell Hymes in (1966), as a reaction to Noam Chomsky's (1965) linguistic competence which focused on correctness in grammar; that is, knowing and adhering to the rules of grammar. According to Hymes, having an accurate knowledge of the grammar rules of a language is not enough to make the learner competent in the use of that language for communication. The learner also needs communicative competence which entails knowing what to say, to whom, in what circumstances and how

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to say it. In other words, communicative competence refers to the language user's grammatical knowledge of his language and as well as his social knowledge about how and when to use this language to accomplish specific communication goals. Communication competence is also helpful in this study because, it is one who is competent enough in the English language and literature that will be able to allow this language to influence his own language, culture and others. Similarly, the English language teacher also needs to be competent in the processes of teaching the language especially in the area of the African common norms.

Research Methodology

In other to obtain an in-depth and thorough information on language, literature and African common norms, the study uses qualitative descriptive design method.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study is to:

1. Examine language as power.
2. Discuss common norms of Africa.
3. Discuss African literature and
4. Highlight the importance of language in African society

Language as power in Africa

In virtually every part of the world, the challenge of language recognition, language rights and attitudes arise in jurisdiction where language diversity exists. Recently in Nashville, Tennessee, USA, a proposal to legislate English as the city's only official language suffered a setback because those who voted against it argued that it would diminish the provision of emergency services in languages other than English. This is based on the belief that a citizen is able to exercise his/her rights only if he/she receives communications from government officials or service providers in a language he/she understands (Patten, 695). Language rights become more contentious when dealing with multilingual nations with a great diversity of languages and cultures. Long before factors such as conquest, slave trade, missionary activities, colonialism, and migration came to alter the linguistic configuration of Africa, local languages of the natives were subject of convenient choices depending on the region and location of the speakers. Each nation has continued to adapt her individual peculiar socio-cultural and socio-political experience to manage linguistic issues arising from the factors mentioned above. At best, many countries have opted for a multilingual society to support the traditional socio-cultural landscape and contain the potential spill-over crisis that may arise from unfavourable language policy by those in power.

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Common Norms of Africa

There are some common norms of Africa that we cannot do without: greeting, showing respect to elders, pointing at things, verbal motion calling, sole of the foot, eat with the right hand, hissing and kissing, silence, not publicly showing anger, frustration or impatience, positive communication and relationship matters.

Greeting

In Africa, actions speak louder than words, especially if there is a barrier between languages. In our effort to contextualize and be mindful of a complex mindset and worldview, here are a few African cultural values to be aware of when travelling in Africa. Greeting people in Africa is one of the most important things you can do. A quick "hello" paired with a handshake is a sufficient way to make a positive first impression with anyone. I have seen a situation were greeting alone earns one a scholarship by some prominent men and women.

Show Respect

African cultural values are based on a foundation of the past and present, a leading reason why elders are so well respected. Always acknowledge an elder, let them ask questions, and during mealtime elders should be served first. At the same time, a younger person in the midst of elders should not talk anyhow unless if the opportunity to do so is given.

Pointing at Things

Pointing at something or someone with the index finger is usually considered rude or just straight offensive. Different ethnic groups have different ways of pointing at things or persons at different times.

Overhard Mortion Calling

Avoid motioning to call a person with an upwards palm. The preferred method is to call someone over with the palm faced down and pulling the fingers inwards.

Sole of the Feet

Just like in many cultures around the world, the very bottom of your foot is the very dirtiest part of your body. Try not to directly point your foot sole towards anyone.

Eat with the Right Hand

You might have heard this before; the right hand is for eating food and the left hand is reserved for the unsaving task of what happens afterward. Whatever you do, don't touch African food with your left hand.

Hissing and Kissing

To call the attention of someone is often performed with a hissing or loud snack of the lips if you are not expecting it, the sounds might come as a surprise, but it is totally acceptable and very common.

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Silence is an African Value

Don't be alarmed or nervous with spans of silence during African conversation. When there is something to be said, it will be said, when there is nothing to be said, silence is perfectly fine. There is no need to feel uneasy during a period of silence in Africa, take the time just to enjoy the presence of others.

Time-A Little Less Important

Despite the use of clocks to tell "what time it is" African clocks work differently; things fall into place as they unfold. An African worldview does not focus far into the future, but dwells more on past events and whatever is happening currently. Future scheduled times can't be rushed and thinking so will make one more and more frustrated.

Use Flexibility

Africans will teach you to be flexible closely relating to how future time is of less importance, schedules aren't always at the forefront of lifestyle. If a plan gets shut down or change drastically, there's not always something you can do besides accepting it and continue with a positive attitude.

Do not publicly show anger, frustration or Impatience

Though circumstances have potential to become frustrating, it is highly important to not publicly display any sort of negative feeling in public. Africans have incredible self-control, being careful not to offend or shame anyone in public.

Positive Communication

Positive communication is a key for African cultural value. Along with not displaying public negative, there are countless ways to express issues for example, one can say 'good' or 'ok'. When one approves of something. Don't immediately get into discussion about a hardship or struggle, these topics can be gradually be brought forth.

Relationships Matter

Meeting people and spending time with others develop lasting relationship. This is an aspect of African culture that is truly cherished by many.

Don't talk too much during a meal

In Africa, it is a taboo to talk while eating. This is because it is believed that pepper will choke one's throat and cause problem for one. At times, simple small talk is permissible, but don't try to talk too much business or develop any serious conversation during a meal.

These African norms/traditions are expressed through many different art forms and commands such as music dance, arts, sculpture and beadwork. These traditions are deeply ingrained into the whole African culture. Many African languages are tone "tone languages" meaning that Pitch level determines meaning (www.victoriafalls.guideneta=africa…). English like French and Portuguese was assumed

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to be the natural language of literary and even political mediation between African people in the same nation and between African and other nations.

African Literature

African literature is literature from Africa either oral (orature) or written in Africa and Afro-asiatic languages. Examples of pre-colonial African literature can be traced back at least the fourth century AD. The best known is the *kebra negast* or "book of *kilang*. Among the first pieces of African literature to receive significant worldwide critical acclaim was *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe, published in 1958, African literature in colonial period increasingly feature themes of liberation and independence. Post- colonial literature has become increasingly diverse with some writers returning to their native languages. Common themes include the clash between past and present tradition and modernity self and community, as well as politics and developments. On the whole, female writers are today far better represented in African literature prior to independence. Today African literature has changed in the sense that its landscape is leading to the rise of digital reading and publishing platforms such as Okada books and so on.

Common things about African Literature

The main characteristics of all African literature include oral tradition, folk tales, slave narratives and the African novel. Oral tradition involves the telling of stories, advice and history to new generations by mouth often using mythical and fairy tale elements through spoken words. It involves both the material that is spoken and the setting in which it's spoken. While it has been adapted for modern use, oral tradition is still alive and remains a meaningful mode of storytelling for many Africans. Some varieties of this oral arts include chant songs, poems, dramas, epics, and stories of the past. These can be accompanied by musical instruments and performances. It employs a popular storytelling technique known as call and response, here, the speaker's statements call is punctuated by responses from the audience. African cultures employ this technique to more than just storytelling. It was used along public gatherings, discussions of civil affairs, and religious rituals. African folk tales are characteristically anonymous and timeless.

New line Slave narratives refer to autobiographical accounts of enslaved Africans. These narratives were the first form of African literature that gained popularity in the west. African novels from the 1950s mainly expressed a desire to become independent from the effects of colonization.

African literature expanded to include hymns, romance, epic, poetry, fictional narrative, epistles, diaries, philosophy, biography and autobiography. One particular form of African narrative which may have been the 1st to draw western attention for the first time was composed by slaves. This is because it was commonly recited during praises. These

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poems are often an important part of an oral tradition as professional Bands who maybe both praise singers to the chief and court historians of their tribe.

Language as a problem to African literature

There are so many languages in Africa, most of them are not spoken by a very large number of people. Even if one really wants other Africans to read one's work, one is probably going to have to publish it in English or French, this is because it is the only way to sell enough copies for it to be profitable. This has been a problem for writers. Furthermore, it is believed that Africans know themselves and anything written in Africa can be consumed, so it means that a writer should concentrate his/her writing to the foreign audience using correct and acceptable language that will help them in understanding the message of the write up. This is where Dell Hymes theory of linguistic competence comes to play. One needs to be competent in the grammar of English so as to pass one's message across to others. Without correct use of the language, it will be impossible to write and convince people.

Current predicaments of African literature

The major problem one finds when it comes to African literature is how to define it. That is, what exactly is it that we can term African literature? This is because Africa is vast and it has many languages. Do we simply say that African literature is literature written in the languages of the colonizer? English French and Portuguese are some of the major languages that African literature is written in. African literature should be written in vernacular languages so as to strike back against the colonizers and produce what can be termed an authentic African literature. Similarly, Africa has many languages and tribes, hundreds of them to be precise. How can we then come up with African literature that everyone will be able to understand if it is written in so many languages? There is also the problem of race. White people cannot be termed authors of African literature. The reason is because they are the colonizers and many of them consider themselves to be European even though they were born in Africa they consider themselves European as a result of their skin color, they do not fit into the traditional conceptualization of the term African. This subject material is concerned with Africa however. Consequently, there are those Africans who have moved abroad and started writing. Will their experiences there be relevant to Africa? Are they still conversant with the harsh realities of everyday life in Africa? What about the literatures of the descendants of Africans in the USA and the Caribbean. Are their struggles in the new world still relevant to Africa? (www.quora.com). All these have been the predicament of African literature.

Importance of Language in African Society

Within African communities, language plays a crucial role in creating a shared understanding of cultural values and practices within a particular community. Take for

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example the Zulu language of southern Africa, which has a rich vocabulary to describe cattle- This is because cattle are not just a source of food and income for the Zulu people, but also a symbol of status and wealth. In Zulu culture, the size of a man's *Kraal* (cattle enclosure) is often used as a measure of his wealth and social status. This is reflected in the Zulu expression *umnumzane ubonakala ngesibaya sakhe* which means "the man's social status is seen by the size of his *Kraal*. This example illustrates how the Zulu language reflects and reinforces cultural value, common norms and practices, and how it can help to reinforce a sense of love and community among its speakers.

Examining the Yoruba language of Nigeria, we uncover a complex system of greeting that reflects the importance of respect and social hierarchy in Yoruba society. African communities are able to express their cultural values and common norms worldview in a way that is both practical and meaningful. In Yoruba, a common way to express best regards as an e-mail closing remains would be a cable, which literally translates to peace be with you. This greeting reflects the Yoruba value of peaceful coexistence and mutual respect, and serves as a reminder of the importance of maintaining harmonious relationship with others. In Igboland for example, in the morning, we greet *ututuoma*, which is translated as good morning in the English language. All these are the common norms we must observe in our different societies and communities. Furthermore, if one is not adhering to these common norms, one will be looked down upon as not knowing what one is doing.

Language plays a crucial role in shaping African norms due to its impact on various aspects of African life. By recognizing its significance, businesses can navigate the intricacies of economics, politics, democracy and rights on the continent. In the same vein, embracing the most lingual heritage of Africa enhances our understanding of African norms and enriches research and teaching activities in African studies institutions worldwide. Language is a key factor in understanding local and diaspora African common norms. Recognizing the importance of language in African Development and engagement with the world is essential for businesses and language professionals. By understanding the role of language in African common norms, businesses can offer superior language consultancy and localization services, catering to foreign clients seeking to adapt their content to local languages. The connection between language, African norms and business serves as the driving force of keyboard language services brackets (KLS) and empowers us to provide relevant and valuable services to our target audience. Understanding the importance of language in Africa helps us to conduct thorough research on specific target markets in each region and also help to identify key languages spoken in various African countries and recognize the significance of localization for successful market penetration. The role of language in African common norm is complex and multifaceted. African languages are not

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just a means of communication, but also carry within them the history, customs and beliefs of the people who speak them. Similarly, by acknowledging the symbiotic relationship between language and African common norms, businesses and language can unlock opportunities for growth and success. Embracing the richness of African common norms through language not only enhances localization practices, but also strengthens connections within and beyond the African continent (kabodgroup .com).

Discussion of Findings

From the discussion so far, it is a fact that there are African common norms. These norms exist in our societies, communities, schools and so on. Similarly, these norms are practiced daily using the media of language and literature that make them come alive in our day-to-day endeavors.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made.

1. The study of African common norms must be taken serious in our homes, schools, societies, communities, churches by everyone.
2. The elders in our societies should start on time to inculcate these norms to the younger generation and if possible, make them to adhere strictly to them so as to know them very well.
3. The school curriculum for English language and Literature should be designed with these common norms, this will help learners to always read along with these norms in mind.
4. English language and literature teachers should also make out time to discuss these African common norms with their students and tell them how important they are in their life.
5. If these norms are implemented and practiced, not only will students become better in character but they will be down to earth and can confidently know the right and the wrong behavior. This will also make them to respect their elders.

Conclusion

Language and literature help so much in interaction. It is only those who are competent in them that can use them to interact conveniently. These disciplines are very important in showcasing the African common norms. Language teaching and learning activities should continue to be an exciting and growing field and the importance of the African common norms should be emphasized using these disciplines. We believe that language and literature are nurtured, they are not inherent. They are identities of a people. They also incorporate the totality of people's way of life, their belief, ideology, norms and values, wisdom, and philosophy. Language and literature should not be toiled with because if they are to be eliminated, it will lead to the elimination of people. Language and literature

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give power and authority to their users. This study reviewed language and literature, language as power, literature and its problems, the African common norms and the importance of Language to African common norms. The study made use of descriptive method and uses Dell Hymes theory of communication theory.

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