

IMPROVED ATTITUDE, ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT AND MOTIVATION: PANACEA FOR ENHANCING THE STATUS OF NIGERIAN LANGUAGES.

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Abstract

Attitude towards indigenous languages has been tending towards negative, and enrolment into them in educational institutions has subsequently been drastically declining, while on the other hand, their foreign counterparts are enjoying boom and a mad crave for them. The status of our indigenous languages has been endangered, with much of the speakers shifting to English or other foreign languages. Yet the culture of every nation is tied to its languages. That is why we should not allow this our natural heritage to fizzle away in the face of the general consensus that the loss of any language harms the cultural diversity of the world. Rather, the teaching and learning of Nigerian languages should be encouraged. This paper therefore wants to support that economic and material equipment, improved attitude by native speakers and motivation by stake holders are vital tools in revamping the already declining fortunes of indigenous languages. Motivation, though a second language learning factor, needs to be re-emphasized here and utilized to make the generation of today's Nigerians embrace their indigenous languages, speak and study them.

1.0 Introduction

Language is of such importance that it is described by Crystal (2000) as the “emblem of its speakers, the archives of history”, adding, “we infer the spirit of the nation in great measures from the language which is a sort of monument to which each forcible individual in a course of many hundred years has contributed a stone” and “once a language is gone, the links with our past is gone”. Language is a communication coding system that can be taught as a school subject; an integral part of the individual's identity involved in almost all mental activities, the most important channel of social organization embedded in the culture of the community where it is used.

In spite of the importance of language to its owners, there has been increasing decline in interest in most of the Nigerian indigenous languages even among the major ones, by native speakers who view English or any other European language as an instrument of prestige, economic and material empowerment. Since the only ticket to well-paid jobs is the ability to communicate fluently in English and to perform it to a considerable level on paper, English therefore has become a ticket for belonging to the elite. The ascendancy of English language and other European languages (due to their economic and material powers) over the indigenous ones, accounts for the poor attitude of majority of Nigerians, especially the elite, on the indigenous languages. The attitude of indifference among some Nigerian populace has always left any language policy that seems to favour the development of indigenous languages at bare. After all, what next after studying a Nigerian language at school? Where do you work? Where do you go with it? What relevance has it in science and technology? Can one speak it? And to the critic, where will a local language take you to?

The low economic status of indigenous languages has also left them with retarded development and the risk of endangerment. This has subsequently made it unattractive for people to opt for them as academic discipline. Yet local languages are seen to be valuable because “they promote community cohesion and vitality, foster pride in a culture and give a community and (thus a workforce) self-confidence” (Crystal 2000).

But to the average Nigerian elite English is “the key to social, professional and economic success” (Banjo A. 1990). We should not forget the ascendancy of English over the local languages has a historical antecedence of colonialization, perhaps today we should have been developing our won technologies and scientific thoughts in our local languages like China, India, Japan, and some other Asian countries that has developed their technologies in their local languages. Even in the 21st century, our indigenous languages are currently threatened by the processes of globalization and neo-colonialism, where the economically powerful languages dominate other languages.

This paper is an attempt at exposing some vital inputs towards enhancing the status of Nigerian indigenous languages, making them interesting and viable.

1.1 Attitude towards Nigerian Indigenous Languages

Attitude of Nigerians, especially the elite towards the Nigerian indigenous languages has been indifferent, in fact, negative. They see anything called European language as a gateway to economic emancipation while the domain of usage for the indigenous languages has been limited to the homes. The home environment of today has also never been favourable to the languages either, because there, parents exclude their children from being ‘polluted’ by the local languages, because they believe acquiring English first, or only it, will make them more competent in it. But this is not true since any child has the ability to acquire and perform competently in any language to which he is exposed. The semi-literate on the other hand, chooses to communicate with their children in Pidgin English, ‘to make them speak the English language’. Many private nursery and primary schools go as far as placing ban on the use of local languages on their premises to ensure that their pupils are not corrupted by a vernacular language. They even start to teach French in that early infancy. This attitude has never helped any Nigerian language policy to thrive. By this, it even calls for question the commitment of those that make the policies who do not obey the real tenets of the policies’ provisions. They are the people that send their children to international schools where no local language is taught. It is also they that most of the time, have the where withal to send their children to study abroad. The indigenous languages do not carry economic, political or administrative powers, while the foreign ones are so privileged. The level of usage has also created mutually exclusive domains for the indigenous and foreign languages. Thus “the two types of languages are mutually exclusive such that the high domains are marked for the foreign languages, notably English, while the primary domains are reserved for the indigenous languages...” (Oyetade 2001). The higher domain accorded English against the low esteem of the indigenous languages has made it possible for virtually every facet of Nigerian life to be dominated by English language- the courts (laws and edicts), all governmental policies, administration and the media and “all the things crucial to the life of every Nigerian citizen are first handed down in English” (Oyetade 2001). The areas of science and technology are not left out, where English has been argued to be the only viable means of transmitting technology and scientific knowledge. In the face of all these, English is given a ‘higher status’, making it more stabilized than the ‘lower status’ languages – the indigenous languages. This helps in challenging the adequacy of indigenous languages as against European

languages in the educational system of Nigeria. But it has been proved elsewhere in China, India, Japan, and some other Asian countries, that science and technology have been successfully transmitted through the local languages. To prove the adequacy of other languages' ability to express scientific and technological terms, the University of Halle in 1694 (after the Reformation) taught science and technology in German, then a 'vernacular' language, a debut breakaway from the norm-Latin, the then reigning international language. Back home here in Nigeria, Hausa, if no other Nigerian language with its rich literatures, advanced vocabulary, and with international representation in the media, like the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) Voice of America (VOA), Radio Deutsche (Berlin), Radio Teheran, Radio Beijing and Radio Cairo, if put in the right position could cater for the scientific and technological needs of the country and could as well be used to represent Nigeria in international politics. English gained the upper hand over Nigerian indigenous languages through the historical antecedent of colonization, where the colonial masters through the educational ordinances of 1886, 1887 and 1948 built into the curriculum activities that favoured their language against the indigenous ones. Today, the effects of globalization and neo-colonialism have taken the day, making many speakers of the indigenous languages shift to the 'perceived' languages of science and technology. Who says that Nigeria does not have a language that can cater for its communicative, scientific and technological needs? Every language is complete and following the arbitrariness in the nature of words, names could be assigned to meanings, and you have your words formed. In this regard, it could be said that no language is lacking in anything; rather its development and growth have been a function of the speaker's attitude and motivation. English is gradually replacing the utilitarian functions of some of these indigenous languages in education, politics, administration, and the media and even in interpersonal communication. The case of Igbo, which has already been affected by urban drift, seems more pathetic and the language could be termed as 'deprived', both in the Igbo-speaking and non-Igbo speaking milieus.

In this regard, Igboanusi (2004) laments:

The true position is that there is a decline in the level of interest in the language, particularly among the younger generation so that the rate of acquisition of the language by children indicates a downward trend. Attitude of its speakers....is unfavourable.

Policy makers and other stakeholders in language planning policies could be said to be playing only lip service to language policies in Nigeria. The apathy and the shift from Nigerian languages cut across all levels of education. For instance, the data below showing the admissions into various departments in the school of languages, College of Education, Akwanga Nasarawa State, illustrates the level of interest into the various languages and from every illustration, the foreign languages are much more favoured with only a small fraction representing Igbo and Yoruba, except for Hausa.

ADMISSIONS INTO SCHOOL OF LANGUAGES 1993-2004

	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
ENG.	158	280	196	341	271	380	301	203	285	169	180	94
HAUSA	56	50	44	48	36	43	40	36	98	97	72	82
IGBO	9	7	4	5	3	7	6	5	5	3	4	4
YORUBA	6	3	8	6	2	2	4	3	2	2	1	2
FRENCH	48	55	106	89	86	99	106	100	94	82	80	74
	277	495	358	489	398	531	457	347	384	353	337	256

An incidence like this shows signs of language shift, with the consequence of assimilation, where a speech community prefers another language at the expense of their own language.

In this case, Essien (2004) reminds us:

The nation....teachers, scholars, educationists, students and policy makers that we cannot wish away any Nigerian language, no matter the size, for each language, including such small languages, carries its own unique mental heritage or horizon and our world is richer for this.

“Language shift can be detrimental to at least parts of the community associated with the language which is being lost.”

Ohiri-Aniche (1997) observes -“a tendency among many Nigerians to bring up their children as monolingual speakers of English”

and regrets that this can lead to their children

“holding their heritage language in disdain, and feeling ashamed of the languages of their parents and grandparents. As a result of this, some Nigerians are said to feel neither fully European nor fully Nigerian”.

1.2. **Motivation as a Factor in Language Learning.** Motivation is usually a second language learning property but it has become necessary in this moment for enhancing the teaching and learning of Nigerian languages in the face of dwindling fortunes and in the danger of loss of younger generation of speakers. The majority of Nigerians view foreign languages as being more prestigious and in the position to accord materials and economic wellbeing as against the indigenous ones that given neither ascendancy in the labour market nor recognition in both local and international policies and administration. For this, all attention has been accorded it as against the local languages. In view of the lopsided ascendancy of English over the local languages, a sort of motivation is therefore required to bring these local languages to the limelight again. The local languages need to be promoted by some measures to make them viable and attractive to the younger generation of speakers whose interest has been dominated by English. A child acquires his mother tongue naturally as language acquisition is a natural heritage of every normal human child, while a second language is learnt in a formal or informal setting. Language also exists in two forms – the

spoken and the written forms, and the written form, more or less forms the curriculum for language learning in an academic situation. It is also the written form that sustains language existence.

Language maintenance is possible through learning the language in academic institutions and usage in administration and politics. Promoting education and literacy in Nigerian indigenous languages are measures to make them more viable, attractive and more acceptable to the younger generation of speakers whose attitudes towards learning the indigenous languages have been tending towards zero. What then is motivation? Motivation is the psychological quality that leads people to achieve a goal. For language learners, mastery of language may be a goal. For others, communicative competence of communicative skills could be a goal. (Wikipedia 2014) To motivate means “make a course of studying interesting” (Webster), and this accounts for what prompts someone to wish to acquire more skills, or performing certain tasks or achieving certain results. Psychologists have defined motivation in different ways: - Owen et al (1978) reviewed in NTI DLS English language Cycle Four (1990), sees motivation to include “the operations that energize behaviour towards some goal”, noting that there are two sources of motivation, “intrinsic and extrinsic”. Intrinsic may be in terms of natural disposition, need, and drive (psychological or physical) that is situated within the individual. This also accounts for the natural tendency to acquire a language or languages to which one is first exposed. Every human child has the inherent ability to acquire any language to which he is exposed, i.e. acquisition usually precedes learning. Extrinsic motivation deals with influence of the external environment on an individual to want to do certain things. This may account for what motivates an individual to learn a certain language above the other. Need is a very active force in motivation.

Maslow (1968) identified a number of needs in this hierarchical order:

- Physiological needs (or biological needs).
- Safety needs (or needs for self- preservation).
- Love and belonging needs (social needs).
- Esteem needs (the urge to feel being valued).
- Need for self actualization (self concept, achieving).
- Desire to know and understand (intellectual quest).
- Aesthetic needs (feeling for beauty/elegance).

When you examine the functions of language, you will agree with the writer that these needs enlisted above are addressed in the functions of language. Motivation for learning English in Nigeria for instance stems from the fact that many of the natives trained by the colonial masters in their language were able to communicate with the white man and it offered them the opportunity for white collar jobs and this made those who were literate in English those days to be the envy of their admirers and counterparts who did not have such rare opportunities. Literacy in English language also opened the flood gate to economic and material wellbeing, as only those who had credit passes in English language were offered jobs and admissions for high academic qualifications. The functional and utilitarian roles of English made its in-road into virtually every facet of the life of Nigeria and Nigerians – especially in the areas of administration, politics, education and mass communication. Language learning has also prompted or motivated by some environmental needs which must be met to maintain both biological and social existence. To this end, two types of motivation have been identified in language learning and they are: Instrumental and Integrative motivation as identified by Gardner and Lambert (1972). Integrative motivation has to do with the natural tendency of the child to identify with his parents and relations within the

family. Instrumental motivation deals with satisfying utilitarian functions. Hence a child is motivated to learn a language so as to achieve a practical purpose using the language.

But of recent, certain factors have been reducing the motivation factors for learning and acquiring the indigenous languages. Both the integrative and instrumental motivations have been eroded by preference for foreign languages. To this end, this work wants to deviate from the usual intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to external factors – including actions of government, language policy planners and stake holders in language issues to take interest in learning and acquiring indigenous languages in order to sustain their existence.

2.0. Economic and Material Empowerment as Motivating Factors for Language Learning.

The ever increasing world population, impact of the processes of globalization, advancement in transportation and communication technologies and all other advancements in the activities of man need language to be carried out. For a language to make impact, it must be supported with economic and political power of a nation. Languages spread by usage and more often than not, the growth and usage are tied to economic, political and military prowess of its owners. These, account for the global weight of English, being backed up by such super powers as the U.S and Britain. Latin and Greek gained international recognition via political and military feats. For instance, Latin gained international status for education due to the military powers of the ancient Roman Empire, while Greek became a language of international communication in the Middle East 2000 years back as a result of military powers of Alexander the Great.

Crystal (1997) then says; “without political, military or economical power no language can progress”. We are not advocating fighting a war today, but we can with pride say Nigeria has come of age in international politics as a “giant of Africa” and perhaps being considered today for a permanent seat at the United Nations Security Council.

Nigeria then needs to be represented linguistically in international politics. Apart from that;

“Local languages are seen to be valuable because they promote community cohesion and vitality, foster pride in a culture and give a community (and thus a work force) self-confidence”.(Crystal 2000)

But the average Nigerian citizen sees English language as the flood gate for social and professional breakthrough and for that every motivating factor has been geared towards acquiring or learning English, as without it, Bamgbose (1971) reviewed in Iloka (2005) says:

“the gate of national development, of job opportunities and fuller participation in the cultural life and other social intercourse is blocked for those who cannot speak or write the English language and its literature”.

For this, interest has shifted from the local languages to the foreign ones. Yet the local languages carry with them the cultural and economic life of its owners. To the younger generation of speakers, the general attitude has been expressed in such questions: ‘What next after studying a local language in school? Where does a person who studies it work?’, and other such questions like that. They are disgusted because they don’t see a future for a career in the local languages. To redeem the already dwindling image of indigenous languages, a high level of motivation through economic empowerment is required.

The areas of empowerment include:

- (i) Education
- (ii) Social communication
- (iii) Economic
- (iv) Media communication
- (v) Global life

Each of the above has a role to play in revitalizing the already gloomy future of most of the local languages in Nigeria.

2.1 Education:

This is perhaps the most important area of empowerment for a language. For a language to grow, it needs to be taught in schools but the educational system of Nigeria has not so much encouraged the growth of Nigerian languages. As the medium through which any language policy could be channeled, it has been polarized along private and public institutions and the private is gaining an upper hand as the private institutions do not see the need to teach Nigerian languages. They rather would prefer to start teaching the pupils French at that lowest level of education. The written form of a language is only preserved by learning it at school. Except the education institutions encourage the growth of Nigerian languages through teaching them, it is still difficult to preserve and maintain the languages. Research and researchers in the languages should be encouraged through grants and aids. It is a general research notion that language is not a favoured area like health, education, sports, etc., in budgetary allocations. Scholarships should be offered for further studies in Nigerian languages.

2.2 Social life:

Languages should be encouraged to grow by using them in gatherings, debates, songs, plays and literatures, competitions for recitation could be organized to further the use of indigenous language. The homes should encourage the local languages by allowing children to speak and study them.

2.3 Economic Empowerment:

This is another level of encouraging the growth of any language. Economic growth of any nation fosters its language. Perhaps this is the most important aspect of language promotion. What stops us from making and writing instructions on goods produced in Nigeria in the local languages, knowing that this act can induce many other people, even outside the borders of Nigeria to seek to learn the language in which it is written? When instructions on goods and articles are written in the indigenous languages, trading with them becomes easy. There is a kind of linguistic affinity when a trader discovers that a buyer speaks his language, especially in a non-native milieu. For instance, goods produced in China, Russia or Germany, have their instructions written in the languages of their origin.

2.4 Economic and material empowerments:

Are very important in language promotion. It encourages one to study a course or an academic discipline when one knows it could fetch him or her employment. Therefore automatic employment opportunities should be provided for people that study Nigerian languages. The use of the languages should be encouraged in administration and politics of the nation to make people pick interest in

them. Material well being should be attached to the indigenous languages by recognition and due honour and respect accorded those who study them.

2.5 Communication:

The mass media has been a veritable tool in language development as issues become public when they are broadcast in the media. The use of the indigenous languages should be encouraged on the media. To this end, community radios and televisions could be established to broadcast on a particular language.

Egbokare (2004) reviewed in Enwere and Abadu (2005), draws a crucial connection between language, culture and development

...the cultural base of a mass society which is in reality premised on African languages provides the only credible condition for the development of a society which involves the masses and uplift social-culturally and economically from where they are, on the basis of what they have.

When languages are used on the media it encourages positive attitude towards them and helps people to develop interest as the media tries to encourage the use of the language.

2.6 Global life:

Language becomes more powerful as its owners become powerful socio-economically. This accounts for the international repute for English, German, French, Latin and Greek etc. Nigeria is growing in international politics and may pull its languages along, by adopting an indigenous lingua Franca, which could be used as one of the languages in the U.N. Security Council. If such a language is adopted, people will no doubt take interest in it in all ramifications.

3.0 Conclusion and Recommendations:

One cannot but agree with Crystal (2000) that “fostering positive language attitude is accordingly one of the most important initiatives to be achieved in the task of language preservation”. To redeem the image of the indigenous languages, a high level of motivation is required. It is important to understand that a people’s language is the repository of their cultural and historical antecedents, and therefore should not be wished away. Economic and material wellbeing should be attached to the local languages to attract the attention of learners to them. Language maintenance is possible through the use of a language in the educational systems of a nation, so a place should be reserved for languages in curriculum developments in Nigeria. Existing policies should be given a life line by government. The Nigerian language policy on education should be revisited and revised. Encouraging researchers and researches in the local languages will go a long way to make people develop interest in the local languages. In all, we should not forget that every language has the capacity to carry the linguistic needs of its owners since we can assign names to meanings and get what we want in the language.

The use of the languages in the mass media, national assembly and the state legislatures should be encouraged and enforced by a legal instrument. The stance of the Anambra State government, where the study of Igbo language is made a compulsory subject from primary to tertiary levels should be emulated by other state governments, to encourage the learning and speaking of indigenous languages. Government should sponsor the acculturation immersion programmes in Nigerian languages, to enable students benefit from programmes of NINLAN. Such sponsorship

will make more students take interest in studying Nigerian languages. Scholarships should also be awarded to enable students take courses in the Nigerian languages in the universities.

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