

DEVELOPING AND SUSTAINING NIGERIAN LANGUAGE IN THE ICT AGE

Prof. S. A. U. Ituen
Faculty of Education
University of Port Harcourt

Introduction

Language plays a crucial role in national development. Language policy relates to “the decisions of a polity regarding the acceptable language for those who are to carry out the political, economic, legal and social affairs of a nation or region of a nation” (Health, 1985: 2898). Health stresses that language policy is greatly dependent upon planning by language scientists and linguists whose duty is to describe the form of the language code and to spread, oversee its codification in dictionaries, grammar books and spellers. There is also the need for the elaboration of its vocabulary for appropriate technical and literacy term. There is also the need to support the use of the languages in different areas ranging from the earliest years of schooling to the National Assembly. In Nigeria, for example, the country is highly multilingual. The philosophy of Nigeria education makes provisions for Pre-primary education; Primary education, Secondary education, Higher education, including professional education, Technical education, Adult and Non-formal education. One of the perennial problems of education in Nigeria is the issue of language implementation but we shall briefly make reference to the relationship between language and culture.

Language and culture are inextricably bound. Fishman (1991) makes reference to three aspects of culture. (a.) A language indexes its culture. This means that over a long period of history, a language with its accompanying culture would have grown up together and have had a harmonious relationship with each other. Thus, the language best expresses that culture. At a cognitive and emotive level, its vocabulary, idioms and metaphors are the ones that best capture and explain that culture. (b.) A language symbolizes its culture. Language is a representation of culture. Speaking German in the US during world war I and France and Britain in world war II was not acceptable, not because the Allies (US, France and Britain) were at war with German language but because the German language symbolized the enemy. Similarly, English in Nigeria and some other West African countries symbolizes colonial subjugation. Also, in Nigeria, an apparently dying minority language symbolizes low status and low income. (c.) culture is partly created from its language. A great deal of elements of culture, are transmitted verbally. The prayers of a culture, songs, hymns, the folktales of a culture, its shrewd saying, its appropriate forms of greeting and living, its history, wisdom and ideals are all captured in its language. The flavour of a culture, its memories and traditions are stored in its language. When a language is lost, the loss is tremendous because it takes with it both the language and the highly cherished customs. Thus, language development implies developing one’s language and culture. Failure to do so brings about such things as language decline, decay and even extinction.

Language Shift and Language Maintenance

Minority languages are constantly in a state of change. The change May be political, social, demographic, cultural or linguistic.

Conklin and Lourie (1983) identify a number of factors encouraging language maintenance as opposed to those encouraging language loss. We have selected three items in each case.

	FACTORS ENCOURAGING LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE	FACTORS ENCOURAGING LANGUAGE LOSS
A	Political, Social, Demographic Factors.	
1.	Stability in occupation.	Occupational shift, especially from rural to urban areas.
2.	Employment available where is spoken daily.	Employment requires use of the majority languages.
3.	Educated and articulate community leaders loyal to their language community.	Community leaders are alienated from their language community by education.
B	Cultural factors	
1.	Mother-tongue institution (e.g. schools, community organization)	Lack of mother-tongue institution (e.g. mass media, leisure activities).
2.	Cultural and religious ceremonies using mother-tongue.	Cultural and religious activities in majority language.
3.	Emotional attachment to mother-tongue giving self identity and ethnicity.	Self identity derived from factors other than shared ethnic background.
C	Linguistic Factors	
1.	Mother-tongue is standardized and exists in a written form.	Mother-tongue is nonstandard and/or not in written form.
2.	Indigenous language has international status.	Indigenous language of little or no international written form.
3.	Indigenous language literacy used in community.	Illiteracy (or literacy) in home language.

Source: *Adapted from Baker, C. (1993) Foundation of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters Ltd. Pp 43-45. In Conklin, N and Lourie, M. 1983 A Host of Tongues. New York: The Free Press.*

Conklin and Lourie have shown that shift is strongly related to economic and social change, politics and power, and communication networks among minority language speakers. These factors interact and intermingle and it is often difficult to perfect which minority languages are in more or/less degree of danger of declining. Researchers have pointed to a number of very important attitudes which lead to language death. Dorian (1981:105) has stressed that:

The home is the last bastion of a subordinate language in competition with a dominant official language to wider currency...speakers have failed to transmit the language to their children so that no replacement generation is available when the parent generation dies away.

Edwards (1985), in his contribution poses the question. When languages die, are they murdered or do they commit suicide? Some researchers have argued that in the histories of the native Indian languages of Canada and the United States, and particularly in the case of languages of Africans who were subjugated to slavery, there is evidence of murder. Similarly, they have argued that in the histories of the Irish, Gaelic and the Welsh language, the language has been murdered by English and England's dominant rule over the peripheries of Britain and they pose the question, "Are monolingual English schools part of a language murder machine?" One could also pose the question, when a language dies, is the cause of death deliberate and conscious or unconscious and through indifference?

Edwards (1985) is of the view that when minority language speakers become bilingual, prefer the majority language and the minority language dies, such death is suicide because there is an element of choice. When parents do not speak to the children nor expect to be spoken to in the minority language, they commit language suicide.

Language Revival and Reversal

Giles, Bourhis and Taylor (1977) have developed a three factor model of language shift and vitality. They include status factors, demographic factors and institutional factors.

A. Status factors

These factors comprise economic status, social status and symbolic status. The economic status of a minority language appears to be a key element in language vitality. **Economic Status** relates to prosperity and power. When minority language members experience widespread unemployment, there is likely to be pressure for them to shift towards the majority language. The **social status** of a language is closely related to economic status of a language. When minority language speakers are seen as having more political power and giving higher social status, they tend to shift towards the majority language. **Symbolic status** is also important in the study of language vitality. An indigenous language is an important symbol of one's ethnic identity. It relates to one's roots in the glorious past; a symbol of one's cultural heritage. Nigeria's cultural resources such as traditional dances, masks and musical instruments are all part of our glorious heritage. However, as one looks at one's personal balance sheet involving elements such as employment market today, educational and vocational success, interpersonal communication and attitudes to language, one finds that one's symbolic status is much diminished. As Baker (1993:52) rightly puts it, "Goodwill towards the language stops when the personal pay-off is not great."

B. Demographic factors relate to the absolute **number of speakers** of a given language and their saturation within a specific area. Baker's (1985) research in Wales had shown that saturation of speakers within a particular area was of importance in language maintenance. For example, there appeared to be more chance of the language surviving in communities where over 70% of people speak Welsh. Also, literacy was an important issue in language maintenance. It was found that there was an increased likelihood of language decay in contexts where bilingualism existed without literacy. When speakers of a minority language cannot write in that language, the number of functions and uses of that language are diminished. What this means is that bilingualism without biliteracy involves a decrease in the status of that language. Another issue is strong religious beliefs. An example is the case of the Old Order Amish, Pennsylvania Germans. They have continued to speak not contemporary German but the old order Amish at home and in the community. Another factor is mixed, **inter-language marriages**. Such marriages often show that the higher status language normally has the best chance of survival as the home language.

C. Institutional Support Factors

When a minority language is used in a wide variety of institutions, it enhances language vitality. Examples of such institutions are National, State and Local Government, religion

and cultural organizations, mass media, commerce and industry and education. A minority language gain prestige if it is used in **mass media** (Television, Radio, Newspapers, Magazines, Tape and Computer Software). The use of books and magazines in a minority language promotes biliteracy.

Religion is also a powerful preserver of majority and minority languages. The maintenance of majority and minority languages has been achieved through the use of classical Arab in Islam, Hebrew in Judaism and German among the Protestant Old Order Amish in Pennsylvania. Missionaries and teachers have done a great deal to standardize majority and minority languages.

Those who provide **administrative services** in a minority language also give status to the language. Such services increase the usefulness of the minority language for communication. Providing schooling in a minority language offers long-term survival to their language but as Hornberger (1988:229) has rightly pointed out, "Schools cannot be agent for language maintenance if their communities, for whatever reason, do not want them to be". In other words, for education in a minority language to survive, other support services are essential.

Garcia (1992) uses the term Language Garden as a striking analogy to portray language planning. Garcia's analogy points out that if one travelled through the countries of the world, looking at field after field, garden after garden, of the same type of flower, one colour, one size, one shape, the world would be a dull boring experience. But in the real world, our gardens have different colours, shapes, sizes and they enhance beauty and aesthetic value. In London alone, Baker (1993:39) identified 184 languages. Using her Language Garden analogy, Garcia refers to situations where some flowers are at risk, particularly when the garden is unkempt while other flowers spread so alarmingly that they stifle smaller ones. Williams (1991) observes that there are three different environmental attitudes to the survival of minority languages. These are **evolutionist**, **conservationist** and **preservationist** attitudes. The evolutionist attitude is the tendency to follow Darwin's idea of the survival of the fittest. The idea is that of allowing strong languages to survive and flourish while the weaker languages either adapt themselves to their environment or decay and perish. The evolutionist attitude is perceived in terms of a free language economy whereby languages are meant to survive on merits without the support of language planning. Williams stresses that the survival of the fittest idea is too simplistic a view of evolution. It postulates a negative view of evolution and is akin to killing, exploitation and suppression. He points out that a more positive view of evolution is interdependence instead of incessant competition. Williams rightly points out that "Language movement occurs through deliberate decisions that directly or indirectly affect languages. Language shift is not a natural evolutionary process. Rather, it reflects economic, political, cultural, social and technological change. It is therefore possible to analyze and determine what causes language rather than simply believing language shift occurs by a 'free economy' accident".

(p. 41) Evolutionists who support an economic, cost-benefit approach to languages, seeking the domination of a small number of majority languages for international communication, hold a short-sighted view of the function of languages. Instead of focusing solely on economic communication for the few majority languages, one should be concerned with human culture, human heritage and value of diversity. The second approach to languages relates to the conservationist view (Williams, 1991). The position of conservationists is that there should be maintenance of variety among

languages and language planning should be embarked upon to care for and cherish minority languages. Conservationists argue that threatened languages should have a special status to ensure that they survive and grow. The third approach to languages is the one supported by preservationists (Williams, 1991). The preservationists are more conservative; rather than seeking to develop the language; they insist on maintaining the status quo. They do not view change, not just language change, as a desirable thing because their concern is that any change will mean damaging the chances of survival of their language. The preservationists are traditionalists and not forward-thinking in their outlook. According to Williams (1991: 42), “conservationists may think global and act local, preservationists will tend to think local and act local”.

Examples of evolutionist, conservationist and preservationist attitudes will now be highlighted. In the United States, a large percentage of the citizens have an evolutionist attitude. As Baker (1993: 41) points out, “many politicians prefer monolingualism to bilingualism. The preference is for the assimilation of minority communities into a more standardized, monochrome garden “to use Garcia’s analogy. In Nigeria, the country is multilingual and yet very little is done to promote minority languages and many of the languages run the risk of extinction. Out of the several indigenous languages of Rivers State, for example, the following are at risk, according to Ndimele and Williamson:

1. Defaka language: This is an endangered language. Few young people speak it with any degree of fluency.
2. Ibani is heavily threatened by Igbo language.
3. It’s been found that the speakers of Obonoma have abandoned the language completely to speak Kalabari.
4. Ochichi: This is the most threatened language spoken in Rivers State. It is spoken by only a few old people in Ikwerrengwo and Umuebulu towns in Etche Local Government Area (Ndimele and Williamson, 2010: 157 – 160).
With respect to the preservationist attitude, one element is the link with religion as indicated above. The Pennsylvanian Germans came to the United States in the middle of the 19th Century.

At home and in the community, they speak a German dialect but in Protestant religious worship, they use archaic forms of German which is disappearing.

Fishman’s Steps in Reversing Language Shift

Fishman (1990, 1991) presents Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS) for the purpose of effecting language reversal among threatened and disrupted languages. The scale shows that the higher the number on the scale, the more a language is threatened.

Fishman's (1990, 1991) Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale for Threatened Languages	
Stage 8	Social isolation of the few remaining speakers of the minority language.
Stage 7	Minority language used by older and not younger generation.
Stage 6	Minority language is passed on from generation to generation and used in the community.
Stage 5	Literacy in the minority language.
Stage 4	Formal, compulsory education available in the minority language.
Stage 3	Use of the minority language in less specialized work areas involving interaction with majority language speakers.
Stage 2	Lower government services and mass media available in the minority language.
Stage 1	Some use of minority language available in higher education, central government and national media.

Source: Baker, C. (1993) *Foundations of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters Ltd. P. 58.

Fishman (1991) considers Stage 8 the worst case for a language. A small number of the older generation still speak the language but since they are socially isolated, they do not have occasion to speak with each other. Folklorists and linguists make efforts to collect as much information as possible so that a younger generation can revive the language.

In Stage 7, mature-age speakers beyond child-bearing use the minority language on daily basis. But since the mothers and fathers speak the majority language with their children, the minority language is unlikely to be reproduced in the younger generation. To ensure minority language continuity, efforts must be made to reproduce the dying language, to spread the language amongst the young. Language life should be encouraged at the daily participative level. For the minority language to survive, ceremonies, cultural meetings and so on should be linked into normal, daily family socialization.

Fishman considers Stage 6 to be the crucial, pivotal stage for the survival of the language. Minority language is passed to the next generation and used in the community among grandparents, parents and the children. It is used in religious and cultural events, in leisure and local informal commercial activity. What is crucial is that members in the minority community must not fail to ensure that early childhood and teenage socialization is maintained in the minority language and culture. The Focus indeed is the family and the family within the community. Fishman insists that unless a language is transmitted across the generations, not much can be achieved.

Stage 5 takes place when there is literacy among minority language speakers in the home, the school and the community. This raises the image and status of minority language speakers and permits minority language culture, political and ideological viewpoints to thrive. It may also open more doors to employment, and bring about an increase in social and vocational mobility. Minority language education can be achieved through local community effort, for example, through the establishment of Saturday and Sunday schools, evening classes and through religious institutions. This can bring about vitality, commitment and enthusiasm among minority language members. For Fishman, Stage 8 to 5 should be seen as the minimum basis for reversing language shift. Those stages constitute activities carried out solely through the efforts of the minority language community.

Stage 4 minority speakers embrace formal compulsory education. The schools may be created and supported by members of the minority language community. But the community may request government to be involved in the educational process. The minority language community should show active interest in the school so that a high level of success might be achieved.

In Stage 3, some minority language speakers use their minority language at the local level. Minority language speakers get involved in minority language enterprises and services. While communicating in the minority language, they should stretch their efforts from the local market, to the national and international markets. It will be useful to relate with majority language communities.

In Stage 2, efforts are made to extend local government services and mass media into the minority languages. The local government may provide services in the minority language through such services as telephone, banking services, health, courts, the police force and radio. A set number of hours of television coverage should be devoted to minority languages. In Stage 1, the minority language is used in the University and mass media and is strongly represented at the national level. Minority languages should be officially recognized in central government legislation or as a Language Act.

Immersion Bilingual Education as a Strategy for Sustaining and Developing a Language

The immersion programme is an approach to language teaching which has “attracted positive attention from many countries around the globe” (Obadia, 1996:1). According to Baker (1993:158, cited in Lambert & Tucker, 1972), the immersion movement started in St. Lambert Montreal in 1965. He stated that some disgruntled English speaking, middle-class parents persuaded school district administrators to establish an experimental kindergarten class of 26 children. The aims were that the pupils should:

1. Become competent to speak, read and write French;
2. Reach normal achievement levels throughout the curriculum including English language;
3. Appreciate the traditions and culture of French speaking Canadians as well as English speaking Canadians.

In other words, the children were to become bilingual and without loss of achievement. The immersion programme in Canada involves teaching through the language, French, that is, using French as a medium of instruction. In that manner, the language is used across the curriculum in all areas of the curriculum, whether in Science, Sports, Mathematics and so on. Students are assisted to learn skills, knowledge, concepts and attitude through French.

The linkages among the curriculum areas help learners to achieve greater performance. One element strongly linked to content integration is constructivism. As Met (1999:138) has rightly pointed out, “constructivist theory ... holds that learners construct their own understandings by giving meaning to information and experience. Learners achieve this by linking new knowledge to what they already know, thus making meaning out of new experience” She stresses that if learners are able to see how the parts of learning relate with the whole, learning is bound to be deeper and more profound. Current research points to the view that relationships are stored in networks in the brain. Thus, understandings are linked to one another not only within networks but also through the links between and among the networks themselves (Met, 1999:138). Thus the subject areas in

the curriculum get connected to a broader context, that is, the school curriculum and this helps learners to retain learning quickly and longer. In the Canadian immersion programme, all subjects are taught in French except that English is taught as a subject. The immersion programme has three variants: Early immersion which connects not later than Grade 1, middle French immersion begins in Grade 3 or later, while late French immersion commences in Grade 6 or later (Obadia, 1996). Early immersion is found to be the most effective. In the United States, most immersion programmes begin in pre kindergarten, or Grade 1. There are many immersion programmes involving minority language speakers in different parts of the world, for example, Navajo and Spanish in the U.S., Catalan in Spain, Ukrainian in Canada, Gaelic in Scotland, Finish in Sweden, and Welsh in Wales; others involve the Maori language in New Zealand and the Irish language in England (Baker, 1993:162).

Similarly, Fishman had found over 5,000 mother tongue schools among the following ethnic communities in the U.S; Arabs, Africans, Asians, Jewish, Russian, Polish, Latin America, Dutch, Bulgaria, Irish, Romanian, Serbian and Turkish. These mother-tongue language schools are mostly elementary schools but in Wales, for example, such schools are available to the end of secondary education and Welsh can be used as a medium of study at College and University.

Implications for Minority Language

Reference has been made above on the variations in attitudes to the language environments, that is, the evolutionist, the conservationist and the preservationist attitudes. Certainly, for endangered and minority languages in general, the conservationist option seems to be the best. In Rivers State for example, a number of endangered languages have been noted as indicated above. There is the need for language revival. As a result of the efforts of members of the Rivers State Readers Project, materials in 20 of the languages have already been produced (Obondo, 2007). With this impressive work, one would have expected that relevant materials be used in schools but there seems to be no evidence of progress in this direction. The view of the present writer is that appropriate strategies be applied to the teaching of these languages in Rivers State schools. We have pointed above to the effectiveness of immersion programmes in Canada and other parts of the world, which are similar to the Nigeria Ife Six Year Primary Project. Our proposal is that each of the languages be used as medium of instruction in schools. To begin with, each of the present four languages employed in Rivers State radio and television broadcasting (Ikwerre, Ekpeye, Kana and Kalabari) be used in schools as medium of instruction except English which should serve as a subject. This programme would cover primary one to three, after which at least two subjects apart from English should be used as medium of instruction till the end of primary six. Clusters of schools in each of the four language groups (Ikwerre, Ekpeye, Kana and Kalabari) should be identified and two or three schools selected on experimental basis. The indigenous teachers in those schools should be trained while the non indigenous teachers should be encouraged to learn the language for two years and be trained.

Necessary materials should be adequately supplied. Teachers, administrators, parents and the general public should be sensitized for the take-off of the programme which should commence after two years needed for the training of non-indigenous teachers. Committees should be set up to monitor all facets of the project. The Ministry of Education, Companies and organizations, the media, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and so on, should be involved financially and otherwise. Language Camps should be established in a number of locations to encourage learners

to have direct community experience with the language and target culture. Remuneration where necessary should be applied to ensure that the programme functions effectively. However, to carry out this language planning adequately, information and communication technology has to be used.

Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in Language Teaching and Learning

Today, teachers play a crucial role in the adoption and implementation of technologies in the classroom. Teachers need to interact with students to make teaching and learning efficient and effective but unless suitable materials are provided, expectations among teachers and students cannot be met. The teacher has to be provided with diverse technological tools and resources for classroom use. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) focuses on the application of computers and other technologies to the generation, storage, processing, retrieval and dissemination of information. Some of the technologies include computers, the internet, broadcasting technologies (radio and television), telephony, satellite, computer mediated conferencing, CD ROM, video conferencing, the world wide web and software applications. (Negata, 1996, McKenna, 2005, Merrill, 2002, Tafani, 2009). The internet, for example, is an important source of professional knowledge for teachers in terms of articles, bibliographic resources. Students are provided with comprehensible input and made to engage in collaborative team work.

They discuss various types of topics and develop such skills as responding and initiation, defending view points and negotiation of meaning. For writing purposes, they engage in planning, drafting, redrafting, editing and publishing. Computers motivate learn and achieve excellent results more effectively than traditional methods.

Conclusion

Majority and minority languages continually experience change. They grow and weaken depending on a number of factors which may be political, social, demographic, cultural or linguistic. In the case of minority languages, some run the risk of extinction. Language is an import resource, it is therefore important that appropriate measures be applied to ensure that there is growth in all facets of national life.

Recommendations

Based on the views presented in this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Efforts should be made to encourage children to speak, read and write their mother-tongue.
2. Parents should be encouraged to use their mother-tongue with their children.
3. Immersion programmes should be introduced to encourage children to use their mother-tongue actively.
4. Teachers, parents and administrators should be sensitized to the use of mother-tongue in schools.

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