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**Examining the Relevance of Language to the  
Making of the Educated Person and the  
Implications thereof to Relevant Education in  
Nigeria**

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**Abstract**

*Language makes a person: the Biblical parent was exalted to a person by his referential nomenclatures given to other created creatures; Francis Bacon's dictum enunciates the principles of making of a*

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*person via language: reading makes a man; conversation/debate, a ready man, and writing a/n complete/exact man. The making of a man, the readiness of a man, and the completeness of a man are language determined. This paper gives a bird's-eye view of the relevance of language to the making of an educated person and the implications thereof to relevant education in Nigeria. The implications however hinge on the recognition of the teacher as the actual educated person who knows about his language, understands language teaching methodologies, listens and observes much, reads, speaks, writes well and is informative in their choice of words. These sterling qualities are cyclically inculcated in those who reflect knowledge of language in relevant superstructure of society for the ennoblement of peoples and cultures.*

### **Introduction**

Relevance suggests something fundamental, indispensable, unavoidable; a live wire reckoned with all the time, at any place and for any action. Language is purely the only human social behaviour relevant to human gregariousness, and energetic for cementing human ties and consolidating such relationships once contracted. To make language come true as a social behaviour, the functional roles come to light. "Functions are concerned with social behaviour and represent the intention of the speaker or writer, for example, advising, warning, threatening, describing, etc", (Hutchinson & Waters 31). Evident successful manifestation of these functions is, according to Hutchinson & Waters (29), the "knowledge of when to speak, when not, what to talk about with whom, when, where, in what manner". The possession of this knowledge of language use marks out the educated person. The educated people persuade, they do not cajole; they inform, they do not leave people uninformed; they build with their ideas, they do not destroy, they lead with experience and example, they do not rule with pride; they present themselves as models, they do not alienate themselves from people. Language is the substructure whereupon these feature manifestations of the educated persons emanate, and upon which relevant education in Nigeria

revolves. Underneath are discernable aspects of relevance of language to the educated person.

### **Social Status Relevance**

The fundamental of language is apparent in depicting societal consideration of status. Language is a tool veritably used by creative writers to hammer home significant social elevation. Chinua Achebe through Ezeulu in *Arrow of God* avers:

I want one of my sons to join these people and be my eye there. If there is nothing in it you will come back. But if there is something there you will bring home my share. The world is like a mask dancing. If you want to see it well you do not stand in one place. My spirit tells me that those who do not befriend the white man today will be saying had we known tomorrow” (46).

Similarly, Kofi Awooner in *This Earth, My Brother...* through language recorded the high esteem the local people held their state secretary after an address presented to the District Commissioner on their behalf:

During this speech the elders who didn't understand a word of what their learned secretary was saying nodded approval intermittently. When it was over, the elders said yes, they had a learned man indeed, a man who could speak for them, a man who knew the wisdom of the old white people. Not like the small boys nowadays who couldn't even read a telegram. (46)

Summing up the social relevance of language in placing people at enviable pedestals, Buchi Emecheta in *Second Class Citizen* states that “an intelligent man was judged by the way he spoke English” (59). Achebe's “Be my eyes”, Awooner's “knew the wisdom of the old white people” and Emecheta's “an intelligent man” totally agree to the positions occupied by people made possible by language.

### Oratorical/Rhetorical Relevance

Language makes mankind human being. However, not every human being uses language endearingly. Some speak euphonously, others cacophonously. Euphonous speeches are speeches of persuasion, pleasant, mellifluous and sonorous to the ear. Oratory and/or rhetoric are either learned or endowed. Ancient Greek and Roman statesmen learned and practised oratory. Many modern day statesmen display their skill in oratory in campaigns and state functions. In pre-European Africa, skill of oratory was mainly endowed or inherited. Learning, endowing or inheriting find parallel in a character in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* who says that some people are born great, some achieve greatness, while some have greatness thrust upon them. So, oratory can be a gift (endowed), it can be learned, and it can be inherited. The nature of oratory apart, the perceptible demonstration is persuasive speech to act or to dissuade. Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, Chapter twenty-four furnishes the power of language to spur or to forbear. Okonkwo is angry at speech of forbearance which makes a community effeminate:

The greatest obstacle in Umuofia, Okonkwo thought bitterly, is that coward, Egonwanne. His sweet tongue can change fire into cold ash. When he speaks he moves our men to impotence. (141)

Another orator in the same chapter is Okika. Using progressive linguistic element and repetition, he paints a sorry picture of repression. The speech is intended to move people to action, but it is only Okonkwo that subsequently acted:

When I saw you all pouring into this meeting from all quarters of our clan so early in the morning, I knew that something was after our life... All our gods are weeping. Idemili is weeping, Ogwugwu is weeping, Agbala is weeping, and all the others. Our dead fathers are weeping because of the shameful sacrilege they are suffering and the abomination we have all seen with our eyes. (143)

The success or failure of oratory is alluded to in Julius Caesar. Cassius taunting Antony at the battle field reminded him, though scathingly, of the power of his tongue in buying over the crowd at the (funeral) oration scene of Julius Caesar. Cassius described Antony's speech as robbing the Hybla bees and leaving them honeyless. The crowd who were initially hostile to Antony were bought over, and they began to act guided by Antony. This is suggestive of the efficacy of language in the mouth of privileged people to persuade listeners to action or non-action.

### **Teaching Relevance**

People raised above others had been religious reformers, political reformers, economic reformers and cultural reformers. Leopold Sedar Senghor with other Negritudians celebrated cultural nuances of Africa. Their poems are laced with praises of Africa – “Naked Woman, Black Woman” eulogizes Africa as a woman, beautiful, tantalizing, inspiring. Karl Max intellectualized the economic caste which afterwards found revolutionary disciples in the erstwhile Soviet Union (Union of Socialist Soviet Republic) in 1917. Political reformers existed all over the world – Abraham Lincoln defines modern democracy as the government of the people, by the people and for the people, Winston Churchill, the war time prime minister of Britain, gave inspiring speech “Save Europe by Uniting Europe” which moved Europe to rise against Adolf Hitler. All the great revolutions in history – the American War of Independence 1776, the French Revolution (the emergency of Napoleon Bonaparte), the Bolshevik Revolution – were political reforming changes initiated by people. In Africa and Asia the struggle to reclaim lost independence constrained nationalists to experiment with capitalism and socialism. Recently in 2011 revolutionary protests engulfed North African Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya which ultimately overturned sit tight tyrannical leadership with their repressive administration. Religious reform found expressions in Jesus Christ whose parables are unrivalled by other religionists before and after him. Confucius, Gauthama Bhuda, Mohammed, Zoroaster introduced religious beliefs

in practice today in the world. The common denominator for transmission of these adoptions or leanings is language. The ideas introduced by these great minds find channel of transmission from generation to generation via language. Their teachings are adopted, imbibed and reproduced as models for shaping moral behaviour in national and international arenas through the tutelage of language. Teaching at any levels is facilitated by language: teaching involves speaking a language, listening in a language, writing in a language, and reading in a language.

### **Multilingual Relevance**

Knowledge of more than one language opens vistas of cultural values, world views and personal dispositions of tribes. Emphasizing the need for teaching the literature of a language, Ellis and Tomlinson (179) record these reasons:

- (1) It provides vicarious experience of other cultures, philosophies and attitudes and therefore helps pupils to become more informed and tolerant of the world outside their own environment.
- (2) It allows the pupils to compare their own society with that of other peoples and can encourage them to become more aware of both the virtues and limitations of their own inherited attitude and values.

Literature is language in use by creative writers. Literary and non-literary works in languages abound. Monolinguals limit themselves to literatures of a language; bi- and multi-linguals have opportunities of diverse literatures in more than one language. This privilege afforded by knowing more than one language makes an educated person “more informed and tolerant” about other cultures as they discover their own virtues and limitations arising from comparing other cultures and theirs. English literature, French literature, Russian literature, German literature, Classic literatures of Ancient Greek and Latin, etc. are available. Knowledge in the languages of these literatures makes “pupils become broad-minded, perceptive and capable of constructive

criticism” (Ellis and Tomlinson 179). In addition to the above, knowledge of more than one language helps interlocutors hide the subject matter of their discussion to standbys, passersby or eave-droppers.

### **Education/Scholarship Relevance**

Hamlet, the Prince of Denmark, in reply to a friend’s inquiry about what he is reading says “Words, words, words”. Language is just about speaking words, listening to words, writing words and reading words. Scholarship brainstorming with their varied nomenclatures of conference, seminar, workshop, symposium, and colloquium has words as their medium. Courses and/or subjects of studies from pre-nursery, nursery through primary, secondary schools to tertiary institutions are effectively carried out through words. Ideas embodied in curriculum designs, education policy developments are enunciated in words and executed in words. Making man real human, meeting man’s needs, facilitating movement of man, and enabling man’s gregariousness, requires the need for giving words the central locus in the curriculum. Not just any language, but the one that poses little problem in learning, the one that the majority of a people will willingly take up the challenges of overcoming whatever hitches arise from learning it. If it is English, we go for it, if any Nigerian language(s), we go for it. But the onus rests on considering and adopting a language of wider communication intranationally, interethnically, interregionally and internationally as choice will make us belong to the currencies of scientific and technological unfoldment.

### **Sport Relevance**

The all embracing sports association is the Olympic Games. Taking its origin in ancient Greek in 776, its primary principle is summed up in this dictum – “A healthy mind is to be found in a healthy body”. This principle underlying the spirit of the games came to us not via internet or any other electronic gadgets, but through words. Today sports rule the whole world. Any continent holding any international sports has the whole world focused its attention on that continent. Nationals of

other continents are conveyed to the country of the continent hosting the sport: millions of money are spent, millions of money smile into the coffers of participants, and much more millions of money are realized by the hosting nation. Nevertheless, the sports, the gains and the nations involved cannot have facilitated themselves. The only perceptible denominator making successful the tempo of the activities is language.

### **Displacement Relevance**

Language is the only medium for talking about the past, the present and the future. Many could not visit the past, but through language, visiting the past is assured. History books and novels tell us about the events in the past, some novels and poems talk about places one may not visit in a life time. But taking and reading such novels or poems will just take one to those places. Emily Dikenson in her poem, "Frigate" tells of the speed by which reading a book takes one faster than a frigate (a fast sailing ship) to places mentioned in the book, and in making this conveyance, there is normally no offence of toll, no inconvenience, no obstacles, no passports/visas, no checks and other limitations as physically experienced in real situation of travelling.

### **The Obvious Implications for Attaining and Sustaining these Aspects of Relevance**

Language makes us human; otherwise man would be subhuman just as such apes as chimpanzees, gorillas, baboons and monkeys. Man speaks intelligently to reflect social status and persuasive use of words in buying other humans over, in teaching others, in showing acceptance of other human cultures, in scholarship brainstorming and in sports engagement. Man also uses words to talk about now, before now and after now.

The implication therefore is that, as reading makes a man; conversation (or what is being done now) a ready man; writing a complete man, language is the thread that runs through human activities. Without this thread holding man together, things will surely



be falling apart for man. Language disruption automatically caused the seizure of the construction of the Tower of Babel; the introduction of a common language in the Pentecost automatically caused the unconditional conversion of three thousand converts who initially understood languages peculiar to their individual races.

Apart from language as a thread, the unstoppable march of a language – English – towards making the world a global village is evidence of language making people one. The English language introduced to England about 1,600 years ago (410 AD) and spoken as a vernacular even up to the threshold of Renaissance is today a world language whose manifest features reflect regional standards of English as a Native Language, English as a Second Language, English as a Foreign Language. An educated person failing to manifest any of these standards would not be considered educated.

The majority of Nigerians speak poorly, write illiterately, listen without understanding and read inattentively. This is evidence of their background preparation blamed on parents, teachers and the learners-turned users. A badly trained teacher will continue to cheat society by turning out ill-groomed graduates scarcely worthy of the certificates meriting their use of English as educated people. Illiterate and/or inattentive families are plagues infusing apathy to the proper use of English in their children. Dilettanti in classes as learners display their obtuseness in understanding instructions on language use. These triad hindrances conglomerate to suppress the use of language reflecting the nuances of the aspects of relevance of language.

Knowledge of language bifurcates into knowing a language and knowing about a language. The former describes those who speak a language but cannot explain the systematic workings of the language; the latter refers to those who speak not only the language but also understand the language system, that is, language teachers. Therefore, two groups considered educated are language teachers and others. This is suggestive of the role of the teacher as the pivotal agent making the relevance of language to the educated person palpable.

The language teacher dons the garb of being the only perceptible denominator enabling language learning and using to come alive, and this makes summing up the educated person thus:

- i. the educated person knows the language system and is cocksure of the functional relevance of any language element deployed in his utterance.
- ii. the educated person is at home with the methodologies of teaching and is certain of the type suitable for explaining any task inculcated to learners.
- iii. the educated person talks less, but listens and observes much, thus fulfilling the diction, speech is silver, silence, golden.
- iv. the educated person reads voraciously to acquaint themselves with styles of good writers, speaks intelligently in scholarly disputation and brainstorming, and writes with panache to make surroundings better than they inherited.
- v. the educated person is informative in their choice of words and not destructive. An orator who uses words rhetorically has oratorical and rhetorical training. People use language, but few speak language constructively and persuasively.

### **Conclusion**

Relevant education in Nigeria can never be sustained without the teacher. The teacher knows about the language, how to teach it, and how to secure and sustain society via knowledge. The language user in all aspects of society manifesting in social status, oratory/rhetoric, teaching, multilingual skills, scholarship, sport, creativity is manifestation of the consequence of the unique selfless service of the teacher of English. This is my panegyric, penned to exalt speaking, writing, listening and reading as facilitated by the teacher and recognized in the National Policy on Education (38) thus:

Since no education system may rise above the quality of its teachers, teacher education shall continue to be given major emphasis in all educational planning and development.

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