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The place of indigenous Languages in the Development and Teaching of Agriculture in Osun State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Agriculture is the second largest source of Nigeria's national wealth after oil and it goes hand-in-gloves with rural development. However, it is the sector of economy with the highest poverty incidence in the country. Several scholars have posited that to enhance the productivity of the rural farmers, indigenous languages should be used in agricultural education and training. The focus of this paper therefore, is to investigate the significance of indigenous languages in agricultural education and training among rural farmers in Osun State, Nigeria, using Focus Group Discussion, observation of rural farmers-professional communication and examination of texts containing vital information for farmers and for making texts in the Yorùbá medium. The study found out that rural farmers and domain professionals do not have adequate knowledge of domain vocabularies. This would result in communication breakdown between them on several occasions. The study recommends an urgent need to localize modern agricultural concepts in Nigeria's indigenous languages to facilitate effective transfer of technical and sub-technical information and knowledge to grassroot farmers.

1. Some Facts about Agriculture in Nigeria

Agriculture is the largest employer of labour in Nigeria and the second main source of her national wealth after oil. African Institute for Applied Economics (AIAE), (2006: 10-11), provides the following statistics in relation to Agriculture in Nigeria:

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6% of the households in agriculture in Nigeria live in rural areas;

- Agriculture accounts for about 35 per cent of the GDP and more than 60 per cent of employment;
- griculture and its allied disciplines have the highest poverty incidence (67 per cent) among all economic sectors, and about 62 per cent of Nigeria's poor are in agriculture. The rural sector contributes 65 per cent to national poverty;
- about 7 out of every 10 farmers are poor and 6 out of every 10 poor households are farmers.

Scholars, including Kranjac-Berisavljevic (2010), are of the opinion that the development of human resources is fundamental to sustainable agriculture. To these scholars, educated, informed and trained farmers are *sine quanon* to success of policies and strategies aimed at improving agricultural productivity. Kranjac-Berisavljevic (2010) observes as follows:

> ... experience demonstrates that sustainable agricultural development is based less on material inputs (seeds and fertilizer) than on the people involved n their use. Investments in scientific and material inputs for agricultural production bear little fruit without parallel investment on people.

The implication is that farmers have to be informed, be educated and be trained. When farmers are informed, educated and trained, they would be able to use new knowledge and new technologies. Copious literatures on agricultural development have emphasized the importance of indigenous languages to agricultural development. Lawal (2015) interrogating Nigeria's inability to break even in agricultural production notes that successive governments' programmes to improve the agricultural sector have failed due to the educational policy that has not factored in the indigenous language towards its implementation. He then advises that if the nation were to really achieve growth and development in this sector, a proactive

measure is to be mounted towards infusing all our agricultural institutes with the local languages and allow most of the foreign ideas and concepts to be at the reach of farmers so that success can be rapidly attained.

In a study conducted by Ugbo (2004) among 210 farmers in the three agricultural zones of Delta State, that is, Delta North, Delta Central, and Delta South, the respondents all agree, among other things, that the use of indigenous languages in the teaching and learning of adult farmers will,

- in no small measure enhance their performance in the areas of agriculture,
- improve effectiveness of teaching new agricultural innovations,
- make them to feel more at home and comfortable with learning,
- bridge the gap between theoretical learning activities and practical farming activities,
- create a natural approach to learning of farming techniques and new innovations,
- promote indigenous technological culture among Nigerians,
- reduce illiteracy among farmers

It is an open secret that communication in local languages would enhance the teaching-learning effectiveness and productivity, the pertinent question to ask is, "Are the local languages sufficiently developed from the point of view of terminology to support transfer of technical and sub-technical concepts in agriculture given the fact that there are almost non existing lexicographic works on the domain vocabularies?"

2. The Current Study

This research investigates the use of indigenous languages in agricultural education and training among rural farmers in the Osun State of Nigeria**.** Relevant information for the study was obtained from rural farmers in the three Senatorial districts of Osun State through Focus Group Discussion (FGD). Thirty rural farmers who had little or no Western education took part in the FGD. The farmers were constituted into three groups of 10 members each. One group per Senatorial district. The FGDs enabled the researcher to investigate the

language(s) through which the farmers got trained by the extension officers, the characteristic features of the language(s) used, their attitudes during training sessions and terms they have for modern agricultural concepts described to them by the researcher in Yorùbá. The researcher also observed some rural farmers-professionals interactions to ascertain the language(s) used and their characteristic features, and responses of the rural farmers to training. Finally, target language works consisting some modern agricultural terms were consulted.

These include Fakinlede (2003), National Educational Research and Development Council (1991), Federal Ministry of Education (1980), Oxford University Press (1970). Some publications of *Rural Development Voices*, (an Agriculture based magazine publication of the Justice, Development and Peace Commision (JDPC) Ibadan Province), several agricultural extension service bulletins and literatures presented in Yorùbá by Institute of Agricultural Research and Training (IAR&T), Ibadan, Agric. Extension and Research Liaison Services ABU, Zaria, Oyo State Agricultural Development and Programmes (OYSADEP), and Osun State Agricultural Development and Programmes (OSADEP) were also examined. These extension bulletins and literatures contain agricultural concepts that are already named in Yorùbá. Consulting them afforded the researcher the opportunity to assess the appropriateness of the terms in Yorùbá.

3. Research findings

The following are the findings:

a. The farmers do not have Yorùbá terms for very many modern agricultural production

processes and concepts. For example the farmers found it difficult to appropriately name concepts such as *breed*, n, (a group of crops of the same stock), *breed*, v, (to produce new crop plants from existing ones of the same characteristics), *breeder*, n, (a person engaged in the breeding of crop plants from existing ones of the same features), *breeder plant*, n, (a crop plant kept for breeding), *breeding*, n, (reproducing crop plants from existing ones of the same features), *cross /cross breed*, n, (a crop developed from two genetically different

plants) even after the researcher had described the concept to them in Yorùbá. Their cognition however became clear after the researcher had suggested naming the concepts as follows:
breed, n.: *ẹ̀dà (ọ̀gbìn)* (lit. copy (of crops))
breed, v.: *sẹ̀dà* (lit. make copy)
breeder n.: *asẹ̀dà* (lit. person that makes copy (of crop))
breeder plant n.: *ọ̀gbìn àmúsẹ̀dà* (lit. crop plant used-for-copying)
breeding n.: *sísẹ̀dà* (lit. making copy)
cross /cross breed n.: *ọ̀gbìn abèjì* (lit. crop of two-in-one)

Again, during the researcher's interactions with the rural farmers, an indigenous term for instance was assigned to multiple concepts. For example the term *ajílẹ̀* (lit. soil awakener) or *amúlẹ́lọ́ràá* (lit. agent that gives soil fat) was given as Yorùbá term the source language terms *fertilizer, organic fertilizer, synthethic fertilizer, compost,* and *manure*. Although the terms belong to the same semantic field, giving them the same label will create negative pedagogical implication.
b. The farmers claimed they receive training in Yorùba but they feel bored during interactions with domain professionals who appear incompetent in using appropriate Yorùbá term to express modern agricultural concepts. They noted further that the professional use English and in some instances mix the code with Yorùbá language to express English concepts in Yorùbá. This finding is in tandem with Fakoya *et al* (2012). According to them,

> Certain technical concepts proved problematic for the extension agents to correctly translate into Yoruba (*sic*) An example is "100 metres". Responses of extension agents for its translation to Yoruba (*sic*) ranged from: iwon ogorun mita (*sic*) (with a phonetic translation of the English "metre" to mita (*sic*)), to "ogorun ibuso (*sic*)"; 100m; and ogorun igbonwo (*sic*). The correct response is ese bata oodurun (*sic*), translated to mean three hundred walking strides, as three walking strides are estimated to constitute one metre distance. Another example is "specialized crates" (for transporting day old chicks). Responses for its translation to Yoruba (*sic*)

> ranged from tiree (*sic*) (phonetic translation of English "tray"), to ile kekere (*sic*) (little house); and kireeti (*sic*) (phonetic translation of English "crate"). The correct response is awon aago akanse (*sic*).

c. Finding (b) was confirmed by the researcher in his observation of rural farmers-professional

interaction. The researcher found out further that that professionals' speech were replete with such phrases as "Y tí àwọn olóyìnbó ń pè ní X" (lit. Y that people literate in English call X)' or "Y tí a mọ̀ sí X ní èdè Òyìnbó" (lit. Y, which is known in English as X)" These phrases are suggestive of inadequate knowledge of indigenous terms for English source terms.

d. It has also found out that some agricultural terms in some literatures in Yorùbá medium

fall short of concept-term connection. For instance, some terms are semantical not transparent; some are too general or incomplete in coverage of concepts defining characteristics; and some are too long to provide for recall. In NERDC (1991), for instance, *pest* and *manure* are designated *kòkòrò ayọnilẹ́nu* (lit. insects that disturb persons) and *ajílẹ́* (lit. awakener of soil) respectively. In Fakinlede (2003), *manure* is designated *ẹlẹ́bọ̀tọ.* In the domain of Agriculture, the designation of *pest* as *kòkòrò ayọnilẹ́nu* fails completeness of coverage test because a *pest* refers not only to an insect but to any animal, human, bird, or organism which attacks and causes damage to crops and livestock. The designation could be modified as *agbógun-toko* (lit. attacker of farm)*; asèpalàra fóko* (lit. agent of harm to farm)*; ayọko lẹ́nu* (lit. troubler of farm)*; abokojẹ́ (*lit. detroyer of farm) to reflect the observation. In the same vein, designating *manure* as *ajílẹ̀* is too restrictive as the term does not cover the characteristics that distinguish it from other types of soil improvers such as *synthetic fertilizer*.

Again, designating *manure* simply as *ẹlẹ́bọ̀tọ* (dung) does not capture the function of the concept as fertilizer or soil improver. As such *manure* could be modified as *ajílẹ̀ ẹlẹ́bọ̀tọ (lit. fertilizer made of dung* or *dung-like)*. Again, in Rural Development Voice (2008), *air-layering*

method, n, (a propagation method in which a growing branch is bent into the soil and the portion that touches the soil is pegged down and covered with humus soil to encourage root formation) is labelled as ?*ojú ẹsẹ̀* (lit. footprint) in Yorùbá. The conceptualized term ?? *ojú ẹsẹ̀ (*lit. footprint*)* is not related in meaning to the sense of the term. The term could be redesignated as *ìgbèèràn afẹ̀kamulẹ̀ (*lit. propagation (of) using-branch-to-enter-soil).

4. The way forward

The conclusion that can be drawn from the research findings is that there is an urgent need to compile, develop and standardize terminologies of modern agricultural concepts in the the local languages to facilitate effective knowledge transfer to and aquisition by the grassroot farmers. The following facts further justify the need to.

First, developing terminologies of modern agricultural concepts would facilitate effective translation of research findings in agriculture, training manuals used by extension officers and other texts and documents containing important information for farmers which are in English language medium. Not only that access to modern agricultural terms in indigenous languages by the extension workers would enhance their effectiveness and promote psycho-cultural bonds between them and grassroots. In other words relating with the grassroots in the language they speak would build confidence in the grassroots since they wold see the extension officers as part of them.

Second, the importance of mother tongue in educational process has long been emphasized by UNESCO. In a report released in 1953, UNESCO (1953:11) asserts pedagogical, psychological and sociological arguments for education in the mother tongue as follows:

> *It is axiomatic that the best medium for teaching a child is his mother tongue. Psychologically, it is the system of meaningful signs that in his mind works automatically for expression and understanding. Sociologically, it is a means of*

> *identification among the members of the community to which he belongs. Educationally, he learns more quickly through it than through an unfamiliar linguistic medium...*

The Nigerian government in keying in to education in indigenous language enacted the National Policy on Education of 1977 in form of transitional bilingual education. Typically, transitional bilingual education involves education in a child's native language for not more than three years to ensure that pupils do not fall behind in such subjects as Mathematics, Sciences and Social Studies while they are learning English. The skills learnt in the native language are then transfered easily into the second language later. The NPE was amended in 1981, 1998 and 2004 to keep pace with the dynamics of social change and demand of education. In the NPE the medium of instruction at the pre-primary and the lower primary levels is the child's mother tongue or the language of the immediate environment (see NPE 2004 section 2, 14c, section 4, 19(e). The researcher's observation is that the benefits of initial mother-tongue education are still being denied millions of children in Nigeria because English is used in early schooling. Given political will, developing terminologies of modern agricultural concepts in the indigenous languages will enable pupils to aquire modern agricultural concepts in their mother tongues.

Third, developing terminologies of agriculture in Nigerian languages would enhance the success of theNPE mass literacy, adult and non-formal education. Section 6 (32) of the NPE (2004 revised edition) says:

The goals of mass literacy, adult and non-formal education shall be to:

(i) *provide functional literacy and continuing education for adults and youths who have never had the advantage of formal education or who did not complete their primary education.*

(ii) *provide functional and remedial education for those young people who did not complete secondary education.*

Given the target beneficiaries of this policy, it is evidence that the policy depends on the use of local languages as medium of

instruction. In order to enhance the skills of the candidates, the capacity of local languages need to be enhanced to express modern concepts that are related to different vocations including agriculture.

Fourth, language is a vehicle of thought. Knowledge of scientific and technological concepts revolves around the ability to think deep. In the words of Ade Ajayi (2004:161), "You can hardly think with any degree of profundity in a language you have not mastered thoroughly". The ability of a language to facilitate scientific and technological thinking, (by developing in its lexicon terms to designate concepts), is the bedrock of scientific and technological advancement for its users. Emenanjo (1996:56) links the success story of the Asian Giants to scientification of their indigenous languages. According to him,

> *The great and developed nation of the world, the industrialized, high performance nations are those in which the total populace (both elite and hoi polloi) have acquired, to a creative and sophisticated extent, the skills of their work a day language for discourse in those languages … to meet all the demands of modern living in science and hi-fi technology, including computer and in the humane and social sciences.*

Okon Essien (2006:12), echoes Emenanjo. According to him, the Japanese language and the Chinese language have always been used by the Japanese and Chinese respectively for all forms of communication. The Asian 'Tigers' like South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, India, Indonesia, etc., have recognized indigenous languages as indispensable tools in national development. These great developed nations of the world have strong agrarian sectors powered by technological innovations and practices delivered and acquired in their indigenous languages. The truth is that the Asian success in agriculture would not have been possible if they have not developed the vocabularies of their languages in different domains including agriculture.

Finally, developing terminologies of agriculture in Nigerian languages would promote the health, survival and revitalization of the languages. Given Yorùbá for instance, scholars believe it is endangered. Owolabi (2008: 5-6) emphatically says " ... ní ti èdè Yorùbá, ohun tó hàn gbangba ni pé ìlò èdè náà ti dín kù láwùjọ" (... talking about Yorùbá, what is crystal clear is that the use of the language has reduced in the society of its users). Cabré (1998: 18) notes as follow:

> *A language that cannot be used in all types of communication is doomed to disappear, and a language cannot be used in all situations unless it has the necessary terminology*. UNESCO (2005) maintains similar position. According to it, *… People whose mother tongue is not (or not sufficiently) developed from the point of view of terminology and special purpose languages (SPL) … tend to be disadvantaged.*

Terminology planning is an internal language development that promotes the health and vitality of language. We are in the age of knowledge diffusion with growing multidsciplinarity of knowledge development, as well as the rising importance of interdisciplinary studies. Domain experts, expèrts in other related and overlapping fields and non-experts now exchange concepts and share competence. This of course has made communication more complex and more demanding. For a language to survive and serve its users as veritable means of communication, determined efforts would have to be geared towards developing subject domain vocabularies. However, with the government's lukewarm attitudes towards development of indigenous languages, domain experts and linguists have to collaborate to develop domain vocabularies as everyone has a role to play in the development of his indigenous language.

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