

Language Study

Deprivation and Development of Indigenous Languages: An Evaluation of Cross River State, Nigeria.

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Abstract

Deprivation like poverty is a catch-phrase on every developing economy. The threat (real or imagined) posed by poverty to growth from any dimension is at the root of stagnation, including Language Development. Language development is a task of preparing a language to serve as a vehicle for literacy and education. It is a conscious intervention policy to revitalize languages. Everyone wants clear communication in the development process and this will aid to clearly stipulate how deprivation affects languages development. We used sociolinguistic underpinnings to analysis and explain the vulnerability of Cross River State to poverty and language development. We have been able to come out with the following key findings – deprivation like poverty affects language development. Language growth, because of poverty is stagnant as it concerns most languages and finally language extinction rare its head in areas where poverty strives.

Introduction

On almost every sphere of life, especially in the academic field, people often talk of the dichotomy between theory and practice. The same is true when we apply deprivation or poverty on language development. Critics argue that sustainable language development is desirable in theory as it concern poverty, but that in practice it is generally not realizable. But this criticism is often misguided or misdirected. What is responsible for the under-development of language are factors that are related to deprivation of the citizenry which in effect hinders growth of the orthography of a language, growth of multilingual incursion into the society and growth of language policy of a nation. The difference in theory and in practice will be exposed as the research unfolds.

Poverty as an umbrella word covers much more than one can imagine, especially when it concerns language development. Early language development is noted in interactions children have with their parents, significant care-givers, childcare providers and peers. These early social exchanges both foster developing language skills and provide a vital foundation for children's school readiness and academic achievements. Mensah (2002) indicates that countless studies indicate that social risk factors such as chronic poverty and low parental education which is as a result of deprivation, pose serious obstacles to children's early language development and subsequent school performance.

Aliu (2001) says that, poverty is a phenomenon which has affected Africa's children. These have led to their inability to go to school or at least have good literacy exposure. With deprivation lurking around Africans, there is a strong tendency that

language will be slow in developing. We should be able to postulate on the insidious phenomena of the various reasons of slow language development. When there is vibrancy and education, the language of the particular society grows. Stagnation and extinction are totally ruled out.

Cross River State of Nigeria is a diverse State when it comes to languages. It is located in the southeastern corner of Nigeria. It has about fifty different languages and several ethnic groups which make the divergence very peculiar. The State has eighteen Local Government Areas, with each of them having a minimum of three languages (Udoh: 2003). The interesting thing about these languages is that there are all from the Benue Congo Phyla which indicates that there are still sister languages despite their non-mutual intelligibility. Literacy level in the State is said to be close to 45% and the literate citizens are found more in the urban areas than the rural areas. (Udoh 2003:12).

Because of the multilingual status of the State, it becomes difficult to have any one particular language developing more than the other. Instead the L2 which is Standard English and the Nigerian pidgin strives when it comes to communication. In addition to English, the Efik language which had early contact with English is seen as developed. These developments are viewed from the perspective that the missionaries that visited Calabar in the 1800s took interest in developing the orthography of the language. Books, Bibles, Hymns were written in Efik. Even as early as 1920, Efik newspapers were on sale in the streets of Calabar. This early contact with the European missionaries aided the Efik language developed. Efik had this status running for them till education, exposure and Local Government creation in the 1990s changed the status-quo. Today, Ejagam, Bekwara, Lokaa, Mbembe, Yala, Leggbo, Bette, Ishibori and Mbube have orthographies developed by linguists.

The Language Development Question

This paper is in the premise of sociolinguistics. Sociolinguistics is the study of all aspects of the relationships between language and society (Crystal 2003:422). It is therefore the interaction between language and the society. Language therefore, plays an indispensable role in expressing, sustaining, preserving and promoting cultural values and others norms in the society.

Language, however, being dynamic undergoes change and evolves according to its use by a particular society. English language is perhaps the most dynamic in the world today. In Cross River State, the South Eastern corner of Nigeria, Efik was the most dynamic until recently when several factors brought about the dynamism of the other languages in the State.

This immediately brings us to the issue of language development in Cross River State. Language development is concerned with the designing and implementation strategies for the rehabilitation and optimal utilization of individual languages. It is a conscious intervention policy to revitalize languages. It also has to do with the elaboration and codification of the functions of languages for the educational and communication purpose.

Language development could be viewed from two perspectives. That is, the growth of Language and its development in the society and the development of

Language within an individual. In the case of the later, language development is a progressive phenomenon. It is looked at from the biological axis, that is, the axis where a child acquires language from the babbling stages through the one word stage until actual speaking. This is what Chomsky refers to as the Universal Grammar. Our interest however, has little to do with this aspect of Universal Grammar.

Our interest strongly centers on Language development in the society, in our case – Cross River State. As stated earlier, there exist various indigenous languages which serve as first language or mother tongue to several people of the State. Severally, these indigenous languages have struggled for supremacy over each other to be accepted as the lingua-franca, especially Efik.

Cross River indigenes like most Nigerians are content with speaking English as their lingua-Franca and have done this for forty eight years of Nigeria's independence and even before independence. Moreover, the multi-ethnic situation in the State and the consequent emotional feeling of ethnic identity and fear of marginalization of the less populous minority ethnic groups have favoured the preference for English and Nigerian pidgin because of their neutrality (Udofot 2003). English is thus viewed in Cross River State as an international language that can serve as a neutral lingua-franca for a wider communication within the State and even beyond. It enjoys the status of the official language as it is used in education, government, business, the mass media and literature. Unofficially, it is spoken and used in letter writing as many of the indigenes cannot write in their mother tongue. (Ufot, 2005: 22). The above factors as indicated consequently are some of the reasons adduced for slow language development in the State. The other major factor is poverty – lack, deprivation – amongst others.

Deprivation and Poverty as Hindrances

Social Science literature is replete with attempts by economists to define the phenomenon of poverty. Ndiyo (2008: 12) says that a concise and universally accepted definition of deprivation and poverty is elusive largely because it affects many aspects (including physical, material, spiritual, moral and psychological) of the human life. In very broad terms, World Bank (1996) sees poverty as being unable to meet “basic needs” – (physical: food, healthcare, education, clothing, shelter etc, and the non physical: participation, identity etc) required for a meaningful life. Commonly some people view poverty as a result of insufficient income for securing basic goods and services. Thus, the poor are conceived as those individuals or households in a particular society, incapable of purchasing a specified basket of basic goods and services such as good nutrition, housing, potable water, health care, access to productive resources including education, working skills and tools, and political and civil rights to participate in decisions concerning their socio-economic conditions. Others view poverty in part, as a function of education, health, life expectancy, child mortality, etc.

Having this conceptualism concerning poverty, one can therefore, relate the general lack of these basic necessities especially in the sphere of education, finances, mobility etc. to language development. The threshold of poverty in Cross River State hinders the growth of indigenous languages. These can be explained looking at the following indices: the diglossic relationship of the different languages in the

society of discourse represents the stratified setting where only English can develop. The inefficient provisions for the study of indigenous languages in the State make it impossible for the languages to grow. Since these languages are not studied in schools, as technology develops, no conscious effort is made to ensure that there is meta language development. The weak policy environment, inadequate and insufficient infrastructure, weak technology base, unavailability of credit facilities reduces the mechanism that would have aided the growth of indigenous languages. How easy is it therefore, to analyse poverty as one of the causes of language growth, when several other conceptions can hinder language development? Since our concern is in the region of poverty and language growth, one can also settle for the different indices listed above.

Language growth and educational exposure are seriously linked when it comes to the aspect of hindrances. Lack of good and quality education in a society brings about barriers of different shades and dimensions; these can be seen using the perspective of linguistics, socio-political and geographical contexts. Fromkin and Rodman (1978) insist that linguistic changes are not easily spread and dialectal differences are reinforced in the face of such barriers.

To fully appreciate the hindrances and barriers on language growth caused by deprivation, we need to understand some typical language development task. A language that is developed must have the following: a basic writing system.; convention for spelling, punctuation, word space and writing of loan words; conventions for place names and personal names that is compatible with national convention; A dictionary to standardize spellings and use of terms; appropriate technical terms (metalanguage) to discuss these features of language. Language standardization work between villages or regions.

In the case of education, the development of Appropriate pedagogical jargons and Appropriate terms for many concepts which are eventually introduced in the educational process. If necessary, the development of a system of terms of such things as numbers, counting, time-keeping, currency transaction and ages. All Cross River citizens are content with speaking their mother tongue, but how many are exposed to the language development task above. Further down this paper, we will list out the ones that are attuned to these tasks. There are certain procedures for language development which if not in place in any society, then the various hindrances will raise their heads.

Standardization: This involves selecting the norm particularly where there is the existence of a variety of splinter dialects of a language. In this case, it is necessary to select a standard language from the dialects. In Cross River State, Efik, Ejagam and Bekwara are examples of standardized languages.

Codification/Graphicalization: This is concerned with providing a writing system or orthography for a language. If the standard language so selected does not have a system of writing, vocabulary, grammar, spellings, punctuation, then the language in question is either at the verge of extinction or the language is not in anyway developing. Languages in the Cross River State without codification on graphic are enormous. The kiong, Efut and Akin Languages are examples of languages without codification.

Modernization: This implies translating modern concepts and terms into a language to elaborate its functions beyond basic communication tendencies. This tendency of looking at modernization of the various languages is what Offiong (2003) refers to as language enrichment. His explanations are that a language is enriched when such a language is exposed to education, technology, commerce, religion, politics, culture and geography. Modernization increases the vocabulary to languages which enables them meet their challenges especially in the wake of Global Communication or Information Technology. Efik, Lokaa, Yala, Ejagam, Mbembe, Bekwara, Leggbo, Nne and Bokyi are examples of languages that are exposed to modernization. Several others are not.

Meta-Language Development: This is a process that is concerned with the translation of technical vocabulary into a language, such as legislative terms, concepts from education, medicine, engineering etc. The process equips the language to meet new challenges especially in education.

When these procedures are not in place, the society is prone to language stagnation and extinction. Already in Odukpani and Akamkpa Local Government Areas, alone, Kiong, Bakpinka and Odut are already extinct. This can not be separated from the poverty level of the people which culminated from the lack of procedure mentioned above. The future of majority of the languages spoken in Cross River State is very bleak indeed. Small Communities may disappear in the near future and with them their languages, such communities are threatened, not by foreign languages, but by surrounding Nigerian languages, spoken by larger groups. For instance, the Akam language spoken by a small village between Ofutop and Ikom, forms a minority in an Ejagam-speaking homogeneous majority area. Ejagam and its dialects are spoken in this area, while Akam is a variety of Mbembe, and it may gradually diverge from it and become more like Ejagam by virtue of contact. The unfortunate part is that such languages would not leave any records for posterity as there is no likelihood that they would be described and written down before their imminent assimilating and/or extinction (Udoh, 2003:67). Deprivation basically is one strong factor that encourages this assimilation and extinction.

Factors Responsible for Language Development

Certain factors have been identified to be the source of motivation of decision-making in language growth-invariably language planning. These are linguistic diversity, rapid social change, Linguistics assimilation, linguistic pluralism, vernacularization, internationalism, societal deprivation/poverty (Wardhaugh 1986). Each of these factors hinders certain languages in terms of growth. Our concern is deprivation and poverty which is prevalent in Cross River State. Diversity, pluralism, vernacularism have aided the growth of Standard English in educationally advantage areas and has also aided the growth Nigeria pidgin in other areas of the State. The factors mentioned when placed side by side with poverty, over rides poverty and encourage language growth.

The world is a rapidly changing society. And the languages of the world have to change functionally and structurally to reflect these changes which may be political, social, economic, educational and technological (Akindele & Adebite 2005:75).

The goal of language planning is natural development here perceived in terms of political, socio-economic, educational, scientific, technological, literacy as well as language development. Language development is a target desirable for every Nation, invariable every State. It is the realization that Language planning can help to promote the development of various spheres of life in a Nation that it is embarked upon. Therefore, in order to ensure that Languages of Cross River State develops, conscious language planning comes into play.

In a multilingual community like Cross River, uncoordinated linguistic diversity may result in the creation of many problems like language underdevelopment, ethno-linguistic agitation, breakdown of information and communication gap. The objectives of language planning will coordinate the linguistic resources of the State in order to tackle and check these problems. Such coordination comes in form of status or corpus planning activities as listed in the procedures – standardization, codification/ Graphicalization, modernization and meta-language development. When all the diverse linguistic problems are looked into, then the language underdevelopment mentioned above will be reversed.

Language Planning and Policy Making

A policy is a government statement or the planned course of action, contained in national documents such as the constitution, and the National Policy on Education. A policy is crucial to language planning. If the community in question feels that the task of language planning is of sufficient salience to demand the authoritative attention of the political system, then the issue of language becomes public policy (Akindele & Adegbite 2005:77). If the political system of Cross River State encourages language planning, then a conscious effort should be carried out firstly, to document all the languages in existence in the State. Secondly, ensure that there is on ground, a policy to accommodate language growth in the State. At this planning stage, poverty or deprivation should not be over looked, but all strata of the society should be mobilized appropriately for structural and functional growth of all the languages documented, fore closing poverty tendencies.

The best way to go about this is usually for government to issue a white paper or policy statement on the planned course of action with respect to the language resources in the community. Extractions can be made from the Nigerian National Policy on Education (NPE) which states among other things a national policy on language use in Government, education, politics and so on. If this is done appropriately, all the languages that are at the verge of extinction will be revived. Even those already dead like Kiong, Efut amongst others can be revived.

The policy outline for language planning in the State should contain a general outline of preferred terminal goals which will serve as guides to ensure that all languages are linguistically developed, and these includes the following: a sequence of realizable objectives. These involve the number of languages to be recognized and assigned primary and secondary functions. Ordering of priorities, for instance, if more than one language is recognized, which one should come before which? Will the entire community be involved at once or only those at school initially? Would there be enough resources that would spread on all the objectives in a balance manner? Finally,

is the community capable of meeting these objectives? Ensuring that linguists are well funded to develop the orthographies of languages without approved orthographies. Ensuring that poverty should not be a hindrance to any language in the State. That is, urban and rural funding should be carried out by government without bias. Making sure no language is seen as superior to the other, particularly those used earlier as lingua franca like Efik and Ejagam. Ensuring that all the languages in the State should be given the same status as the official language which is English.

If all of the languages are encouraged, given a fair playing ground, funded by government, introduced in all the Nursery, Primary and Secondary Schools, then we can be sure of a vitalized language growth and development. The issue of stagnation will be totally eradicated. It is at this point, we can agree that language development is the task of preparing a language to serve as a vehicle for literacy and education. And this can be made possible if government of the State emphasizes on the use of the National Policy on Education. With this policy put in place, a conscious intervention has taken place. The designing and implementing strategies for the rehabilitation and optional utilization of individual languages is enhanced. When this enhancement takes place in any of the languages in question, then we are sure of the elaboration and codification of the functions of the language for educational and communication purpose.

Conclusion

If all the languages in Cross River State have orthographies, standard codification, graphicalization, and functional meta-language phenomenon, then we can naturally say that all the languages are developed. But in the present circumstances, because the majority of the rural populace are poor, it becomes a big problem to ensure that all these languages are exposed to the features above. Poverty and deprivation in the rural setting and even in some cases, at the urban setting, poses the problem of language growth. Even using and speaking Standard English as the lingua franca is a problem. In majority of Cross River State, Nigerian Pidgin is mostly used as the major source of communication, because of the multilingual nature of the State and also because of, no one language is developed enough to serve as the lingua franca. This hinges on the fact that no one language is more superior than the other and speakers of a particular language will prefer speaking their language other than the language of the other. The Efik language had the advantage of being used as a lingua franca in the State because of their earlier contact with educationists and missionaries in the early 1800, but it is gradually losing grip of that status.

High mobility from the rural to the urban areas have also been seen to hinder growth of some of the local languages. The children of a particular community end up acquiring other languages as their mother-tongue, and sometimes acquire English as their L1. This is pathetic, because a lot of the languages spoken in the hinterland of the State remain stagnant. And also in some cases are at the verge of being extinct. This paper seeks to identify how deprivation affects language development in Cross River State, how poverty hinders the growth of the languages and how the situation can be changed, so that the identified endangered languages can be saved from extinction because of the socio-cultural relevance of the language to our environment.

Cross River State, like the rest of Nigeria and other African Countries is a multilingual zone. Its linguistic situation is peculiar, which emphasizes hybridization. The thrust of this paper therefore, has been to identify the level that poverty has affected language development. We have been able to show how the internal resourcefulness of government, individuals and agencies have been used to change sliding tendencies of language extinction.

In addition, we can conclude that many of these languages can be developed at the same time, with the collaboration of the speakers of the languages, the government, and institution of higher learning. With government intervention, poverty eradication will help these languages grow. The future of majority of languages spoken in Cross River State is very bleak indeed. Small communities may disappear in the near future and with them their languages. Such communities are currently threatened, not only by foreign languages, but by poverty and not having and following concrete National policy on Education. The lack of an orthography, which is a basic necessity in the course of linguistic development, inhibits growth of these languages.

Also, a few languages are on the right track in the State. The Efik language can be said to be the most developed language. It has a dictionary, orthography, many literary works, a complete Bible translation, a hymn book etc. It was used as a trade language along Cross River Basin. It is believed to be one of the most studied African languages (Cornnell 1991:7). Udoh (2003:68) stipulates that, Efik language has enjoyed the scholarship of the world's prominent linguists like Hugh Goldie (1862, 1968), Thomas Cook (1969a, 1969b, 1985), Okon Essien (1978, 1982) etc. Cook (1985:4) is of the opinion, and rightly so, that Efik studies have influenced very significantly not only African linguistics, but general linguistic theory. The Ejagam language has an orthography, primers 1 – 3 and Ejagam – French vocabulary book. Bekwerra has orthography and a literary programme in progress. Yala has an orthography, primers 1 – 5, some folk stories. Other languages of the state have a lot of descriptive works and gradually literary traditions are being set.

With everything put in place by government, the encouragement of the speakers of the languages, the change of the docile nature of the speakers and ensuring that they overcome poverty, then the languages of Cross River State would be at the verge of development. At this point, we would have left the aspect of theory and would have encouraged the aspect of practice as mentioned earlier.

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