

**LANGUAGE REORIENTATION AND POLICY IMPLEMENTATION FOR
NATION BUILDING: THE CASE FOR IGBO LANGUAGE**

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Abstract

It is possible to argue that language is the only cultural economy unique to human beings. It is a medium through which humans have expressed their thoughts, imaginations, creativities, aspirations, desires, emotions, among others. One can also say that nation building can be possible through language, especially when the language acts as a unification factor for most ethnic groups in a specific nation. While nations are products of the human will and imagination and the institutions that sustain their collective effort, local languages could act as valuable resources that need to be developed and managed properly and optimally. One devastating blow on the development of the Nigerian nation and its economy is linguistic imperialism perpetrated by the West and ignorantly being promoted by Nigerians. This gives the erroneous impression that foreign languages are superior to other languages, especially the local languages. This has led to the abandonment of native languages in favour of foreign languages. This paper therefore argues that for proper nation building to take place there is need for a proper reorientation of the mental consciousness of Nigerians especially the NdiIgbo towards the potential benefits of Igbo language. This could only be achieved through efficient implementation of language quality and policies.

Introduction

Sapir (1921) has argued that the survival of the human society has been made possible mainly through the vehicle of language. World languages represent an extraordinary wealth of human creativity. They contain and express the total 'pool of ideas' nurtured over time through heritage, local traditions and customs communicated through local languages (Maja 2007). According to Bamgbose (1991), language is a powerful symbol of society particularly if its potentials are fully recognised and exploited. It can be a key contributing force towards nationhood and national development if properly managed. In today's world, skills, industriousness, productivity and competitiveness are the determinant factors of national greatness. Not even the possession of nuclear weapon is enough to make a nation great without reference to the industriousness and creativity of its citizens. Since the time of Adam Smith (1776), every serious nationalist and politician has come to know that the wealth of a nation is not based on the wealth and opulence of its rulers, but on the productivity and

industriousness of its citizenry. Nations are built by men and women who have the will and vision to accomplish greatness, not for themselves, their immediate families and friends, but for their country. Nation-building refers to the process of constructing and structuring a national identity using the power of the state. This process aims at the unification of the people within the state, so that it remains politically stable and viable in the long run.

Language has frequently been considered an integral part of nation-building. This is based on the fact that all human endeavours start with language; to plan, articulate and prosecute. Policy making is the bedrock of every administration. Government at all levels always strive to develop policy in terms of laws and regulations aimed at addressing crucial needs in education, health, social welfare and many others for the benefit of the citizens. But oftentimes, the implementation of such policies has been the problem of each successive government in the country. Implementation on its own part is the process of moving an idea from concept to reality. It refers to the building process rather than the design process. Of the languages that are spoken in the world, the most significant for our early emotional and cognitive development is that through which we first learn to name our personal universe and by which we begin to achieve a common understanding with our parents, and the broader community or friends and school. It is the language of childhood, of intimate family experience and of our early social relations (Matsuura (2002). It is to be noted that by reason of our colonial experience, there is a clear evidence of the hegemonic influence of foreign languages like English and French, whereby African languages suffer marginalization and negligence in terms of acquisition, learning and use.

Reorientation refers to changing once again a position or attitude relative to the situation or circumstances (Robinson 1999:971). In other words, the state of being redirected differently, rearrangement or realignment intellectually or emotionally. This paper therefore argues that there is need for a proper reorientation of the mentality of Nigerians especially the Igbo race towards the richness and potentials of their language. The work is organised into sections which includes introduction; language as a natural resource; language equality; nation building; language and nation building; language policy and implementation; nation building and leadership challenge; language reorientation; conclusion and recommendations.

Language as Natural Resource

It has recently been discovered that languages like other resources such as land, mineral products and cash crops, are part of the natural resources of many countries and could be consumed locally or exported to other countries (Skutnabb-Kangas 2000). Some developed countries have utilized their languages in such a way that less developed countries struggle to identify with them. In recent times, Nigerians invest huge sums of money to travel to developed countries to learn their language. To speak a foreign language in Nigerian seems more honourable than to speak a local Nigerian language. There is a mad rush by Nigerians especially the Igbo people to become fluent speakers of foreign languages and by so doing boosting the economy of nations that own such languages. In institutions of higher learning in Igbo land, for example, many students enrol to study foreign languages, but the reverse is the case with Igbo language. The few students studying Igbo language in higher institutions today are victims of one disappointment or the other.

Indigenous languages need to be looked at not as stumbling blocks but as potential natural resources. So much is hidden in every indigenous language waiting to be harnessed to shoot Nigeria into socio-economic boom. Jernudd and Das Gupta (1971) observe that the most proper way to look at language is to regard indigenous languages in a country as

valuable resources and like mineral and wildlife, African languages also need to be developed and managed properly and optimally.

Language Equality

As late as 20th century, even linguistic scholars were adamant in their belief that English was a superior language in terms of elegance, efficiency and sophistication. Furthermore, people assumed that small-scale, non-western cultures characterized by their simple technology "suffered from, a diminished capacity to express complex or abstract ideas". Following the lead of Franz Boas, such a view is no longer relevant. Studies conducted of several small scale languages have demonstrated, time and time again, that they are no less capable of expressing a wide range of ideas in high-technology societies.

All languages, regardless of 'beauty' or elegance accomplished the same thing. They express ideas, exhibit displacement, provide a system of communication and convey thoughts. Every language is equally expressive; there is no linguistic superior language. Some linguists say that all languages are equally great and are unique. Hence, each language is a unique response to the human condition and each is a living heritage we should cherish. We believe that all languages are unique and helps identify who we are as a people and as individuals. Every language has got its own syntactical lexical and phonological features. We may compare one language with another but can't say one language is superior or inferior to another. The perceived attitude of superiority of English over our language makes English enter into our private lives and soon we start communicating with friends and family in English leading to slow erosion of our own linguistic heritage. This low status accorded to local languages started as a result of linguistic imperialism which is the "transfer of a dominant language to other people".

Viriri (2003) maintains that language reflects a unique view of the world, pattern of thought and culture. Every language represents a special way of viewing human experience and the world life. Consequently, on International Mother Language Day, all languages share equal recognition, for each is a unique response to human condition and each is a living heritage we should cherish.

Nation Building

Early conception of nation defined it as a group or race of people who shared history, tradition and cultures, sometimes religion and usually language (Stephenson 2005) Nation-building is a normative concept that means different things to different people. The latest conceptualization is essentially that nation-building programs are those in which dysfunctional or unstable or "failed states" or economies are given assistance in the developmental infrastructure, civil society, dispute resolution mechanisms as well as economic assistance in other to increase stability. Nation-building refers to the efforts of native nation to increase their capacity for self-rule and self-determined, sustainable community and economic development. It involves building institutions of self-government that are culturally appropriate to the nation's challenges. Nation-building also incorporates developing the nation's capacity to make timely, strategically informed decisions about affairs and to implement those decisions.

Nation-building is an evolutionary process. It takes a long time and is a social process that cannot be jump-started from outside. One of the problems with outside actors is that they come and they go. While, for instance, it may be considered useful for an outside military occupation or peacekeeping force to provide the temporary stability and security necessary in order to proceed, the question of whether this is the best method remains. If a military stays too short a time, expectations of a dependable place for the foreseeable future may not

develop, and other people will be unlikely to invest in the future, if on the other hand, a military stays too long, people will rely on the security provided by outsiders and fail to develop their own institutions for providing it.

Nation-building that will be likely to contribute to stable international peace will need to emphasize the democratic participation of people within the nation to demand rights it will need to build the society, economy, and polity which will meet the basic needs of the people so that they are not driven by poverty, inequality, unemployment, on the one hand, or by a desire to compete for resources and power either internally or in the international system. This does not mean only producing formal institution of democracy, but also the understanding culture which recognizes respect for the identities and need of others both within and outside. Nation-building involves the development of human rights - political, civil, economic and social and the role of law. It also means development of sewer systems, roads and jobs. Perhaps most importantly, it means the development of education.

Nation-building has many important aspects. Firstly, it is about building a political entity which corresponds to a given territory; based on some generally accepted rules, norms and principles, and a common citizenship. Secondly, it is also about building institutions which symbolize the political entity institutions such as a bureaucracy, an economy, the judiciary, universities, a civil service or civil society organizations. Above all, however, nation building is about building a collective imagination of belonging. It is about building the tangible threads that holds a political entity together and gives a sense of purpose. Even in these days of globalization and rapid international flow of people and ideas, having a viable nation remains synonymous with achieving modernity. It is about building the institutions and values which sustain the collective community in these modern times.

In reality, the greatness of a nation has to be earned and is not determined just by the size of its population or abundance of its natural resources. China and India have the largest population in the world, but they are only now rising as important global players. On the other hand, Japan has few natural resources, but has long managed to turn itself into a global economic power house. In today's world, skill, industriousness, productivity and competitiveness are the determinant factors of national greatness.

Nation Building and Leadership Challenge

Nations are built by men and women who have the will and vision to accomplish greatness, not for themselves, their immediate families and friends but for their country. Nations don't happen by historical accidents; rather, they are built by men and women with vision and resolve. It is always a work in progress, a dynamic process in constant need of nurturing and re-invention.

Leadership is a crucial factor in nation building and it should be understood in two important ways: we need a leadership that will not only leave its foot prints on the sands of time, but one which by dint of hard-work, fair-play, dedication and commitment, will live forever in the hearts of Nigerians. Leadership is not everything, but it is an extremely important factor. Unless we have leaders with ability, integrity, commitment and vision, we cannot succeed at nation-building. We must not relent in this struggle for quality leadership as it is the key to building our nation. Nation-building never stops and true nation builder never rests because all nations are facing up to new challenges.

Language and Nation Building

The survival of any nation and the success of its drive towards nation state are predicted upon the existence of a language that its people can speak and more importantly

read and write. Bamgbose (1991) points out that language is a powerful symbol of society, particularly if its potential is fully recognised and exploited, it can be a key contributing force towards nationhood and nation building if properly managed. Languages are also valuable as collective human accomplishments and on-going manifestations of human creativity and originality. This is buttressed by UNESCO's argument for language preservation, that..., "The world's languages represent an extraordinary wealth of human creativity". In addition, language may also be used as a political and social element in the process of building, unification and maintaining a nation and as an essential element of national identity. National consciousness which encapsulates patriotism is a product of the inculcation of values through language. Government has acknowledged that unity could be fostered in the multi-ethnic and multi-lingual Nigerian context through indigenous languages but practical encouragement towards the realization of this objective is still farfetched. When indigenous languages are used, people can participate fully and more meaningfully in the economic life of the nation. Thus, such languages need to be looked at not as stumbling blocks but as potential national resources. As with other resources, they need to be allocated in areas where they can render the optimal utility (Fishman 1971; Jernudd and Des Guputa 1971). In this way, each nation should look for the optimisation of the use of its national linguistic resources at the least possible cost. Stressing on the role of language in nation-building, Kamba (1998) opines, "To rob people of their language is to rob them of not only their confidence and dignity but also of their creativity". This is because indigenous knowledge can only be conveyed in the language of the people who possess such knowledge; thus people's lives can only be conveyed fully and vividly in their first language.

Language Policy in Nigeria

Policies are a set of interrelated decisions by a political actor or group of actors concerning the selection of goals and the means of achieving them with a specified situation where these decisions should in principle, be within the power of those actors to achieve. Policy making is the bedrock of every administration. It is geared to address public needs and issues of importance to government. Government at all levels always strive to develop policy in terms of laws and regulations at addressing crucial needs in education, health, social welfare and many others for the benefit of the citizens. But often times, the implementation of such policies have always been the problem of each successive government in the country. Crystal (1990:174) believes that language policy should be understood as a systematic attempt to resolve the communication problems of a community by studying the various dialects it uses and developing a viable policy concerning the collection and the use of different languages.

It is common knowledge that Nigeria does not have a well articulated and explicit national language policy that can be found in one document (Emenanjo 2009). This confirms Afolayan's (1977) observation that there is no known special document of Nigeria that deals with language policy of the country except the 1977 Federal Republic of Nigeria's *National Policy on Education* where there are aspects relevant to the learning of various languages within the school system. Yet language is indispensable in the human society. The language policy of Nigeria as enshrined in section 51 of the Nigerian constitution of 1979 and 1989 can at best be referred to as mere government's statement of intention towards achieving nationalism. It says,

Government appreciates the importance of language as a means of promoting social interaction and national cohesion; and preserving cultures. Thus every child shall learn the language of the immediate environment. Furthermore, in the interest of national

unity it is expedient that every child shall be required to learn one of the three Nigerian languages: Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba.

Obanya (1979) has hinted that language is a vehicle of communication, a unifying and an instrument for learning and teaching. If languages are so important, one then begins to wonder why the government of Nigeria has not come out with a concrete language policy that will adequately cater for language and the communication processes in the nation. No wonder some people, particularly the Igbo toy with their indigenous language as everybody claims to be an authority in it with little or no competence and literacy.

Language Policy and Implementation

The inculcation of the right type of values and attitudes for the survival of an individual and Nigeria society, and the training of the mind in the understanding of the world around are best done and realised in the languages in which the individual is most familiar (i.e. local languages). Hence, government saw it fit to prescribe that the medium of instruction of the primary school is initially the mother tongue or the language of the immediate community and at a later stage, English (Aminu 1986).

It has to be borne in mind that language is both the content and the subject of education. By this we mean the subject for learning within the formal education process and also the medium of learning whatever is to be learnt. To achieve the nation's educational objectives, the government intends to ensure that the medium of instruction at the lower educational level (i.e. the primary school level) is initially the mother tongue or the language of the immediate community of the learner. To achieve this, the government states that she will develop the orthography of many more Nigerian languages and produce textbooks on them. The reality is that many years after this policy had been made; the government has not been able to fulfil her promises. This is an indication of lack of seriousness and commitment on the part of the government.

As a matter of fact, the functions assigned to the three major local languages in the National Assembly can be regarded as very unrealistic. This is because apart from the English language, the three major indigenous languages are never used in the National Assembly. Even at the pre-primary school level where the policy states that the mother-tongue or the language of the immediate community should be used initially, and English at a 'later stage', the policy is not followed especially in the private nursery and primary schools. The fact that there is yet no official national language in Nigeria apart from English language can be traced to the lack of seriousness and sincerity of purpose on the part of the government over the issue of language in the country. Our leaders are yet to come to term with the importance of language in nation building.

In education matter as in other areas, Nigeria is one nation that is very rich in policies but very low and deficient in implementation. Formal education in Nigerian language, AKU (Yoruba) began way back in 1831. Yet, up to now not much progress appear to have been made in education in Nigerian languages, irrespective of the 1926 Education Edict of the colonial government and the many noble sentiments and variant activities of the Linguistic Association of Nigeria. This lack of commitment of the country's leaders in the contemporary period has greatly hampered the success of the government in selling its policy to the citizenry. Often times, very good policies have not succeeded in having the desired effect on the people because of poor implementation of such policies.

Language Reorientation

One of the adverse effects of the language imperialism in Nigeria has been the erroneous impression it has left on the minds of many Nigerians (especially the Igbo people) that foreign languages are superior to local languages. This informs the presence and dominance of foreign languages through which education is carried out in our country. Even, some of our higher institutions of learning have welcomed foreign languages, budgeted very heavily for them and even displaced the indigenous languages. It is no longer news that our national assembly has adopted the inclusion of French language as Nigeria's next national language after English language. Worse still, no incentive or encouragement is given to teachers and students of our indigenous languages. This ill-treatment has therefore led to the Igbo people preferring and abandoning their native tongue for imported languages. Most urban parents and their children associate imported languages with upward social climbing, good jobs, bureaucratic and political power as well as high and better education. They therefore do not maintain their local language which they associate with the village and primitiveness. But as Franz Fanon rightly observes, "To speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization"

When we speak foreign languages we are throwing our weight behind that culture thereby supporting foreign civilization. The foundations of this mentality which were laid during the colonial reign have assumed even more direct and powerful dimension today. Language and education are more visibly employed as tools of economic domination in neo-colonialism. The destruction of a language is the destruction of a rooted identity for both groups and individuals (Fishman 1991:4). Along with the accompanying loss of culture, language loss can destroy a sense of self-worth, limiting human potential and complicating efforts to solve other problems, such as poverty, family breakdown, school failure and substance abuse. After all, language death does not happen in privileged communities; it only happens to dispossessed and disempowered people who most need their language which is part of their cultural resources to survive. Given the place of language in human co-existence and creativity, there is an urgent need for a grounded reorientation of our people on the uniqueness of their language without which the issue of nation-building will continue to be a mirage.

Recommendations

As Banjo (1977) has advised, we recommend that the decisions to have a language policy should be reached by both the federal and the state governments. Each state should be given a hand to decide its own components of language policy. The governments should review their activities towards indigenous language use in Nigeria. They should insist on the use of local language at the lower level and this means forcing all the private schools to obey the constitution or be closed down for, approving schools that do not work in accordance with the policy of the nation on education amounts to building and destroying at the same time. It should be noted that when the next generation does not consciously acquire a language young, that language is on its way to a silent goodbye.

Some of the measures taken by other countries in order to retain and maintain their languages should be applied in the Nigeria's case. For example, Mexico forbids advertisements in foreign languages, especially English. Indonesia tries to remove all Dutch words from their Bahasa Indonesia, and Brazilian business men do not respond to letters addressed to them in Spanish (Panganiban, 1960).

There is need to monitor and supervise the activities of every administration to be sure it is in line with the constitution and policies that will move the nation forward. If not, that administration should be called to order. As Emenyeonu (1995) says, mother tongue is both a

scientific and pragmatic medium for achievement of a re-orientation and decolonization of a people's mind. It is perhaps much more needed in the Nigerian and African setting than anywhere else in the world.

Conclusion

This work has looked at the issue of nation building and policy implementation. The work shows that nation building involves building institutions of self-government that are culturally appropriate to the nation and that are effective in addressing the nation's challenges. It is a collective responsibility which could only be carried out by men and women who have the will and vision to accomplish greatness, not for themselves, their immediate families and friends but for their country. The work argues that language represents an extraordinary wealth of human creativity which is very crucial in building a nation. The work reveals that most developed nations of the world rose to their exalted positions through the use of their indigenous languages. Countries like Japan, South Korea, China, India, and Malaysia had successfully made meaningful impacts socio-economically through effective and sustained usage of their indigenous languages.

The paper posits that no language is superior to the other, that all languages, regardless of beauty and elegance accomplish the same thing. Recent studies conducted on several small-scale (indigenous) languages have demonstrated time and time again, that they are no less capable of expressing a wide range of ideas in high-technology societies. Linguistic imperialism perpetrated by the west which is ignorantly being promoted by Nigerians especially the Igbo people has led to our people abandoning our native language for imported ones. The paper therefore advocates nation building through the inculcation of the right values. This can only be done through a proper reorientation of the mentality of the Igbo people towards the potentials of their language. The government should honestly address the issue of nation building by first rising to the linguistic challenge in the nation and revisiting the "vague statements on language" contained in the Federal Policy on Education.

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