

STRONG ADVOCACY FOR THE COMPULSORY INTRODUCTION OF ONE EXTRA NIGERIAN LANGUAGE TO COMPLEMENT ONE'S TRIBAL LANGUAGE.

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Abstract

This paper dwells on the strong Advocacy of compulsory one extra Nigerian language. The Nigerian Government at various times has proposed various forms of language policies to encourage and stimulate the growth and development of her over 400 Nigerian languages, in order to free its citizens from the yoke of an imperial language, i.e., English. Nigerian should learn how to speak at least one extra Nigerian language to ease and connect Nigerians. It even emphasized the use of mother tongue as it is our identity. Using observation method I observed that despite the fact that the language policy on education emphasized the use of mother tongue at these levels as a medium of instruction, the English language continues to dominate our indigenous language (mother tongue) because it has been adopted at the kindergarten and nursery school levels. As a way to protect Nigeria's indigenous languages, there is need for proper implementation of the indigenous language policy in the kindergarten and nursery schools, not just being hypocritical about it. Consequently, a standard curriculum should be developed as well as utilized for this level and must be properly supervised by government agencies to ensure compliance and quality control. The paper concludes that implementing the policy on indigenous language teaching and use in the early child education stages can enhance nation building. When we see the need of embracing our indigenous language we will encourage ourselves to learn at least one extra language to add to our mother tongue and when we do that we will create an opportunity to make Nigeria one again.

Keyword: Strong advocacy, compulsory, extra Nigerian language.

Introduction

Language is an identity card, notably, the language of people is a definite way of identifying such people apart from them mentioning their tribe you may identify their tribe from their name that is to say language is part of culture. Put in another way, language is the identity card people travels with for proper identification. When one loses one's identity card, it becomes an uphill task to locate such person's root/family in case of any eventuality.

Strong advocacy of compulsory one extra Nigerian language is a way of saying that Nigerians should support secondary schools to teach one or more extra Nigerian language and to make it compulsory for all the students in the school. We have three major Nigerian language which are **Igbo, Yoruba, and Hausa**. There're said

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to be the major Nigerian language because of their population not that other languages are not important.

Learning more than one Nigerian native dialect is important because it will help you to mix up with people from those tribe without being isolated. The same way we are thought English in school which is said to be our lingua franca we should also be thought how to speak at least the three major Nigerian dialect even without us going to mix with people from that tribe to learn their language from them just as we are not going to Britain to learn English.

Most people refuse to use their native language because they feel is only the old women in the village that should make use of it which is not supposed to be so. French is now very popular and is thought in Nigeria because they polish their language and also raise it up to be known by others as a unique language.

More so, we are told Nigerians are one, but we have this common issue of neglecting people because of dialect, if someone is not speaking your dialect you seems to neglect that person, and most times because the other person is using his dialect the next person will feel offended. With these frustrating issues we should encourage learning of other dialects as compulsory subjects in schools to settle the issue and to create a bond in Nigeria.

However, dialect is a strong attracting instrument that can join two persons and develop trust among them with no time.

Concept of strong advocacy of compulsory one extra Nigerian indigenous language

Nationhood is a phenomenon that is achieved with much work. Most often, the different ethnicity that make up a nation struggle and compete for prominence. The issue is further compounded if the supposed nation in question is one that has been colonized for a very long period with culturally as well as linguistically diversified neighbouring countries roundabout it. Linguistic diversity tends to lead to a low level of communicative integration, making modernization a long and difficult process in these countries. This is as a result of the potential conflict between loyalty to one's ethnic community and loyalty to the wider national community. Nigeria is one of such multi-ethnic countries in West Africa. Consider the case of state creation, where up to fifty (50) ethnic groups are foisted together, with each ethnicity vying for prominence.

Envy, wrath, dissension, rage, conflict, clashes, battles, killings and bloodshed become prevalent in such areas. But Anyogo and Odey disagree with this. Having conducted a research on Benue State as a case study, they conclude that when people co-exist, speaking several languages together, there is bound to be greater unity. The unity is brought about by the mutual intelligibility they enjoy of the several languages that exist in the community. This also could be said of Nigeria as a nation state if Nigerians, in addition to their mother tongue, learn to speak two of Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa. This will further enhance a collective loyalty to the wider national community. It is worthy to note that implementation of

policies that support this quest will facilitate the actualization of Nigeria as, not just a country but, a nation.

Olu Obafemi maintains that people cannot talk of national growth and development without language at the fore front. If you imagine today the power of language as a sole vehicle of ethnic identity, in a multi-lingual country like Nigeria, it will become obvious that language is central to national growth and development. The question continues to linger as to which language to adopt to propel our nationhood and motivate our citizenship towards development. (Obafemi 8)

Therefore, in a bid to build our nation, we have not only assimilated the English language but have allowed it to gradually eclipse our indigenous languages, starting from the minor to the so called major indigenous languages. Because of this, Harrison Adeniyi, using Matthias Brenzinger's theory of "Language Contact and Language Displacement", cries out that: The overbearing influence of English in Nigeria is so prevalent and pervasive that it has caused the death of some minority languages and is also threatening the so-called majority languages. (1)

As a result of this influence a Yoruba man can say something in his language and when asked to interpret it, will tell you, "If I say it in English, it will not mean the same thing as in Yoruba." On the same vein, how does the Igbo person interpret "ỤmụỌkpụ" or "Nwadiana" to a non-Igbo person? This illustrates that there are some expressions one can give in one's language, which may be hard to convey in a foreign language, even after they have been translated or transliterated. This is the man's identity. No wonder theologians will say that the old King James Version of the Bible is the only rendering that is very close to the original Greek/Hebrew writings of the Bible. Most words are not accurately represented semantically when translated from one language to the other. Some may argue that since some meanings are lost while translating from an indigenous language to a foreign language for expression, why use the indigenous language in the first place? One's language is their identity; that someone showed you his/her identity card does not make you a bona fide owner of the identity card. Therefore, one learns other languages in order to have access to the habits of thought of the owners of the languages. This leads us to the notion of bi/multilingualism. According to Ile, "bilingualism or even multilingualism is not a vice, but a virtue." (64) Ayakoroma citing Ikara submits that:

A genetic classification of African languages in terms of their origin and development from earlier languages shows that out of the four major language families, three are present in Nigeria. This clearly shows the multilingual diversity of the Nigerian society. The large number of languages and ethnic groups and the absence of clear and coherent national language policy are some of the main factors for this. Nevertheless, the three major languages, Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba, are recognised constitutionally as national languages and are taught (along with a few other languages) at primary and secondary school levels. The official language is

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English, though in recognition of the fact that the country is surrounded by Frenchspeaking countries, the learning of French has also been encouraged. (11).

The above quotation is deliberately long as it brings a holistically more embracing idea of the multilingual diversity of the Nigerian society. From what Ikara is saying, as quoted in Ayakoroma, several languages and ethnic groups exist in Nigeria; yet there is no clear and coherent national language policy to cover its multilingual nature. Emenanjo concurs with Ikara in Ayakoroma as he reiterates that “it is common knowledge that Nigeria does not have a well-articulated and explicit national language policy that can be found in one document.” (1). There cannot be a well implemented policy if there is not first a policy put in place. Now, if only Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba are recognised constitutionally as national languages, what happens to the rest of the languages? Again, these languages are taught or rather implemented to a reasonable extent only at the primary and secondary school levels; what about the early childhood years – kindergarten and nursery school levels? It is pertinent to know that one can learn as many languages as possible as Vildomec clearly states that: Multilingualism is a purely socio-linguistic and socio-cultural phenomenon in which more than one language co-exists simultaneously. It is also possible to have multilingual individuals like Harold Williams who is said to have spoken 58 languages, Ziad Farrah who could speak and read well over 50 languages. (qtd. in Anyogo and Odey 85)

Benefits of speaking Nigeria’s three major languages

1. You will have more job opportunities

There are certain jobs you cannot apply for if you cannot speak these three languages. And you know that these jobs come with fantastic salaries and bonuses. For example, you cannot work for BBC Hausa, if you cannot speak Hausa whether you are a veteran broadcaster or not. Besides there’re certain customers that may come to an organisation or business centres that will be unable to speak or hear English, so in this case if you are not the type that can speak at least this three major dialect you won’t be accepted to work in those places.

2. Improve your competitiveness

Speaking a second or third traditional language makes your curriculum vitae stand out and can boost you to the top of the interview list with potential employers. You are very competitive. If you can speak the people’s dialect you can easily involve in a successful marketing among the indigene.

3. Can earn more money

The financial returns of learning an extra Nigerian language can help you earn more money. You can freelance as a translator thus making more quits on the side.

4. Get to try on different personalities

You cannot be pigeonholed if you speak these languages. Hence, you can easily shift from one personality to another depending on which language you and your friends are speaking. You will have an all-rounded set of qualities that makes a person. More so, you will be outstanding, and will meet different personalities you would have not met if you were not multilingual.

5. Opens up social and cultural opportunities

Speaking another language allows you to interact with different people and understand the perks of other cultures. This means that you have better chances to make friends, explore different ways of life and be able to blend with different lifestyles.

6. Improves problem-solving

Being multilingual in traditional languages can improve your brain functions like the ability to focus attention and perform mental tasks. Thus, people who speak more than one Nigerian language can process information more efficiently.

7. Help keeps you safe

Have you been in a dangerous situation in which you do not speak the same language with the people involved? Well, persons who are multilingual do not need to worry because their ability to speak and understand whatever they are saying can save you. However, do not be too hasty to respond because this can also be fatal.

Conclusion

Since it has been proven that one can master as many languages as possible, it is suggested that one learns more languages, if one desires to share in the intimacy of the semantic import of those languages. This helps you to enter into their habits of thought. Looking at the importance of language we are told that it is desirable for every Nigerian to speak French for smooth interaction with our neighbours.

Accordingly, French has become a second official language in Nigeria and has been made compulsory in primary and junior secondary schools but Non-Vocational Elective at the Senior Secondary School. Is it not rather off the wall that the policy encourages the study of the French language and the compulsory mastery of the English language in our school systems, while we gradually send our indigenous languages into extinction? The argument may therefore arise that in order to build a nation, a national language is imperative.

It count all the way? However, we are not looking at building just a nation; what kind of nation are we building? No matter how fluent we speak the English language, we would still be referred to as the non-native speakers of the English language, the second language learners (L2) and a multilingual nation.

Recommendation

Is it not better then to take pride in our multilingualism by teaching our indigenous languages to our children at the early childhood/pre-primary schools, who are the leaders of tomorrow, instigating the notion of nation building early enough in them, putting a touch of self-esteem to it and making Nigeria one and a better country.

Following this fact, this paper recommends that a National Language Policy on Education be put in place, vis-a-vis the indigenous language usage stated in the policy. A language policy because this unity is made possible via language; and on education because it is the vehicle through which knowledge is transmitted from one individual to another. It further recommends that wherever a child is from, in addition to learning the mother tongue, the child should learn the language of the environment and any two of the national languages; and that government should endeavour to implement this language policy on education in the early childhood/pre-primary schools as it will help foster an early sense of belonging and national identity.

It suffices here to say that teaching different indigenous languages prevalent in Nigeria would not be out of place if it starts from the early childhood/pre-primary schools. By the time the child is out from the secondary school, s/he must have had a good command of at least three indigenous languages. This can foster inter-marriage; hence a stronger relationship is initiated towards nation building. At this juncture, we begin to relate as one people, with one purpose – to build a nation of different people, with different languages, who are altogether united in diversity.

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