

AFRICAN LANGUAGE, ITS ROLE AND THE GLOBAL FUTURE

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Abstract

In this era of intense communication, one might find oneself speaking to students throughout the country or even across the globe and one may well be in classes with people from other cultures, language groups and countries. In business, government, and education, speakers increasingly operate on an international stage and must become users of language so as to be able to communicate across cultures. Communication is said to be successful only when the hearer/reader recognizes and understands the speaker/writer's intention, but jeopardized when the speaker's intention and the hearer's interpretation do not correspond. Many a time, interact-ants mean more than they actually say. It is speakers who communicate meaning to listeners. An understanding of the context in which utterance is used is important so that the hearer can identify the underlying meanings produced by the speaker. For the speaker and the hearer to communicate, language is important. Language is a vital means of human communication. Through its ideologies, feelings are shared. It is the pivot around which every human activity revolves. In Africa, language is a powerful means employed by humans in communicating ideas, convictions, cultures, experiences and opinions. It is a tool for conveying information at all times from one person to the other or from generation to generation. In human relations, language is used in conversation basically to share past and present ideas, or pass information. African languages are not left out in performing the above roles. This study focuses on African language and the global future. It discusses common languages spoken in Africa, African languages as global instrument, global world, global future and the future of globalization. This paper advocate's appropriate language use by all people in all quarters. People have to be conscious of linguistic choices they make and ensure that they are used in the appropriate contexts. Communicative competence theory forms the theoretical stand point for this paper. It uses descriptive method. The paper reiterates that people should be competent so as to use language appropriately in the right context in order to access the global future. This is because, for one to go global, language is the key.

Keywords: African, Language, Global, Global future, Globalization

Introduction

Language is a “system of meanings” (Bloor and Bloor, 2004). This means that, when people use language, their language acts produce or, or more technically, construct meaning. At this point, language is seen as a study of how meanings are built up through the choice of words. Language consists of a set of systems, which offer the speaker or writer an unlimited choice of ways of creating meanings. When people use language to make meanings, they do so in specific situations; and the form of the language that they use in discourse is influenced by the complex aspects of those situations. Most of the language use is acquired without conscious attention, but some situations require such complex language production that training is necessary. Training here helps one to be competent in language use at all situations. Similarly, language whether written or spoken is for the purpose of communication by real people in actual circumstances. Both written and spoken languages are equally valid as objects for communication analysis. Communication is an “interactive process through which meaning is negotiated in real time” (Bloor and Bloor, 2008). Speakers or writers attempt to communicate with their listeners or readers and expect them to respond emotionally or intellectually. According to Anya (qtd. in Okolie, 2007) “without language, thought would have remained an isolated aberration and man’s ability to communicate makes possible the development of a social life and a culture”. Literacy increases the mobility of the individual mind by widening his experience and imaginative capacity to enter into new situations or at least to envisage them with a degree of certainty. It is all the more so when one can read a global language. The spread of literacy through global language has been obviously a major source of change in human life and society, bringing about changes in culture and social habits.

Furthermore, African language means “indigenous languages spoken in the African continent” (www.igi.globa.com). The diversity of Africa’s languages is evidenced by their populations. In total, there are at least seventy-five languages in Africa which have more than one million speakers. The rest are spoken by populations ranging from a few hundred to several hundred thousand speakers. Most of the languages are primarily oral with little available in written form. The languages of Africa are broken down into four large families (Phyla), with an additional Austronesian family spoken in Madagascar, the four continental language families are: Niger Congo, Nilo Sahara, Afroasiatic and Kholsan. The role of these African languages is numerous. They help in business transactions, commerce, and industry.

Global world connects different regions, cultures and people into a unified and interactive masterpiece which continues in the future to come. Similarly, we measure time and co-ordinate our activities in terms of seconds, minutes and fractions in terms of rotation of the earth (days) or orbit around the sun (a year). “The present is not a point on a line, but an

indefinite boundary” (Bhaskar, 1994). We know that causal processes are temporal, which means that all eras and epochs come to an end at some points and the future is dependent on the eras and epochs that have come and gone. The world is undergoing immense changes. Never before had the conditions of life changed as swiftly as they have changed for mankind in the last fifty years. Explaining global world was possible because of communicative competence and appropriate language use by all people in all quarters.

Conceptual Clarification

In other to carry out this study, there is need for conceptual clarification on major terms used in this study as such will get a better understanding and insight of the terms. The terms have been listed in the key words.

African

This means “relating to Africa or its people, customs, or languages” (www.merriam-webster.com). It also means individuals who trace their ancestry to indigenous inhabitants of Africa.

Language

Language is often the conventional system for communication, a system for conveying messages. According to Izevbaye (1995), language is a “representation of the dynamic process sustained by the interaction of creativity and a responsive audience”. This means that language changes and people in their creative manner interact with it especially in the midst of audience. Language refers to that human attribute that not only aids communication but interaction between people, in totality, it is a system of symbols that are used to express meanings. Adeyemi (2011), surmises that “language is a dynamic system by which people interact”. This means that language is a process for the production of meaning by at least two people which may occur either as spoken or written and which functions in contexts of situation and culture. Through the use of language, human beings concretize their reality in the worlds of knowledge and action. Furthermore, “language is a symbol system based on pure or arbitrary conventions...infinitely extendable and modifiable according to the changing needs and conditions of the speakers” (Robins, 1985). This definition selects some symbols for its selected sounds. Syal and Jindal (2008) opine that “language is infinitely modifiable and extendable”. This means that words go on changing meanings and new words continue to be added to language with the changing needs of the society. Through language, we transmit and express our group values, beliefs, and customs and then pass them to the future generation. Little John and Foss (2008) explain that individuals “internalize many of the rules of language and draw on them to guide their actions”. This means that language guides people’s actions and behaviors.

Language has been identified as a potent instrument for transformation, moral training and overall change in behavior modification. Humans have the gift of creativity in language to capture the uniqueness of each context and language situations. Examining the way people use language in different social contexts provides a wealth of information about the way language works, as well as about the social relationships in a community and the way people convey and construct aspects of their social identity through languages. Hornby (2000) is of the opinion that language is “speech and writing that is used by people of a particular country or state”. Going by this definition, it will be safe to say that language can be expressed in speech and written forms. “Our language changes to meet the needs of people” (MacCallum, 1990). This definition shows that language is not only central to man but also flexible, adaptable, and productive. Therefore, language cuts across the social structure of a people and that the study of the people’s language can reliably predict the social situations under which the language is generated.

Global

The word “global” is an adjective and means something that pertains to the whole world. Global was first recorded in 1670-80 (www.dictionary.com). African languages are systems of communication in the whole world. We can use global to describe something that happens in all parts of the world or affects all parts of the world.

Future

This means time that will come after the present. It is also something that will exist or happen in time to come. The future is rooted in the past.

Globalization

This is the process of interaction among people, companies, and governments worldwide. Globalization is also a term used to describe how trade and technology have made the world into a more connected and independent place. It captures in its scope the economic and social changes that have come about as a result.

Theoretical Studies

This paper adopts the theory of Communication Competence. Communicative competence theory was developed by Dell Hymes in (1966), as a reaction to Noam Chomsky’s (1965) linguistic competence which focused on correctness in grammar; that is, knowing and adhering to the rules of grammar. According to Hymes, having an accurate knowledge of the grammar rules of a language is not enough to make the learner competent in the use of that language for communication. The learner also needs communicative competence which entails knowing what to say, to whom, in what circumstances and how to say it. In other words, communicative competence refers to the language user’s grammatical knowledge

of his language and as well as his social knowledge about how and when to use this language to accomplish specific communication goals. Communication competence is also helpful in this study because, it is one who is competent enough in the global English that will be able to allow this language to influence his own language, culture and others. Similarly, the English language teacher also needs to be competent in the processes of teaching the language especially the global English.

Methodology

The study was largely library-based and depended exclusively on secondary documents. In relating the work, the researcher adopted descriptive approach.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study is to:

1. Explain some Common Languages spoken in Africa?
2. Discuss African Languages as Global Instrument.
3. Examine Global world and Global Futures.
4. Discuss the Future of Globalization.

Common Languages spoken in Africa

The languages of Africa are broken down into four large families (Phyla), with an additional Austronesian family spoken in Madagascar, the four continental families are: Niger Congo, Nilo Sahara, Afroasiatic and Khoisan.

Niger Congo

Niger-Congo has approximately 1,350-1,650 languages which is the largest of the four. It is also the largest language family in the world. The Niger Congo languages inhabit Western, Central, Eastern and Southern Africa. The most widely spoken language of Africa, Swahili two million (200m), Yoruba forty-five million (45M), Igbo thirty million (30m), Fula thirty –five million (35m) all belong to the Niger Congo family.

Afroasiatic

The next largest family is Afroasiatic with about 200-300 member languages in Africa. The Afroasiatic languages in Africa are found mainly in the Northern regions of Africa, including Northern Nigeria (Hausa), Southern Niger, Somalia Niger, Somalia Ethiopia, Eritrea, and in the North African countries of Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia.

Nilo-Saharan

This is the next in size with about eighty (80) languages. These occupy Eastern Africa and the North Eastern region of African, namely: Uganda, Tanzania, Kenya, Chad, and Sudan.

Kholsan

This is the least in size with between forty-seventy (40-70) members. It is believed to be the oldest of the four language families, it is found mainly in Southern Africa. The above population numbers are approximately from various population census statistics. Africa is home to an estimated 1000 to 2000 languages spread across the continent (alp.fas-harvard.edu).

African Languages as Global Instrument

Owing to the fact that in African scholars have some or a certain high-level command of languages, the researcher's assessment of the global African languages is that, they are extremely useful and clear as they are used by translators for easy comprehension by anyone who can speak them. Their usefulness have increased as they have become increasingly spoken around the world. African languages are universally judged by clarity, consistency and how engaging they are. They are especially important for how they can be understood across the world. Their goal is to make writing, speaking, reading in Africa less ambiguous and effective.

Global World

According to Lunsford (2005), "in 1967, when guru media Marshall McLuhan referred to the world as a global village, the phrase seemed unfamiliar and highly exaggerated". Almost four decades later, his words are practically a cliché, part of our everyday language. People today often communicate instantaneously across vast distances and cultures. Businesspeople, complete multi-national transactions with ease, students take classes at distant universities through the web, and grandmothers check in with family members across four or five -or six time zones. Global world also refers to a state of global interconnectedness and interdependence, where people, economies, and cultures are increasingly connected through various forms of communication, transportation and trade. Global world connects different regions, cultures and people into a unified, interactive masterpiece. The concept of a global world brings to mind the image of earth as seen from space. It is a sprawling network of ideas, cultures and economies each pulsating with its unique rhythm yet harmoniously intertwined. The most important is that the global world is about the recognition of our shared arms against shared challenges like climate change, pandemics, and social inequality. It is the realization that a tree falling in the Amazon Rainforest can indeed be heard across the globe, reverberating in the rising sea levels in the Maldives or felt in the declining biodiversity in the Australian outback. The global world is a testament to our shared experiences, interdependences and collective aspirations. It is a world that shrinks and expands breaths and pulses, evolves and revolves in the palm of our

collective hands. The global world challenges questions, understands, and grows. It dares us to imagine a world not defined by borders and differences but by our shared humanity, mutual respect, and joint destiny. In its truest sense, the global world is a journey and a destination, a challenge and a promise. It is the stage upon which humanity's most daring play is being performed, and we all have a part to play (www.quora.com).

Global Futures

Global futures refer to on-going and emerging planet-scale processes, and to their efficacy and real effects, rather than to abstract clock-time. What, then, are the relevant global processes which are open towards the future? They include war, technological change and world economy, all these are related. For example, Karl Jasper (1953) states that the world-war II was the beginning of world history; it was the first truly global war. News of battles around the planet were shared instantly through modern systems of communications and News reporting. The future of the world economy involves a wide array of issues, many of which revolve around the rate, composition and distribution of economic growth. Human population and per capita growth have major effects on the planetary resources and biosphere, transforming the conditions of life on the planet earth. Many anticipate a ~~spite/~~ ~~or~~ spate of conveying trends. The underlying tendencies may also result in a collapse or catastrophe. Global futures also concern long-term speculations about possible metamorphosis of humanity into something different, perhaps into something technologically more able or spiritually higher (www.researchgate.net).

Future of Globalization

The world would undergo a positive change which will possess the following features: healthy competition, improved productive efficiency, increased volume of output, income and employment, better living standards, greater availability of information through language and modern technology. Similarly, goods which were available to few markets only are now available to other markets, mobility of products and services will also be enhanced due to globalization. Globalization has helped people reach new customers in new markets around the world, it has also helped to expand people's sourcing opportunities and offer a larger selection of goods and services. Expansion often increased competition, more legal challenges and greater data challenges are noted also.

Conclusion

This article is about "African language, its role and the global future". The paper explored common languages spoken in Africa, African languages as global instrument, global world, global future and the future of globalization. Some recommendations are also offered in

order to underscore the practicality of the investigation. Language is a master key and very important way to open up the lives of all African people in the world. It is very difficult to achieve a good life without being competent in language which is a clear environmental and socio-political factor that distinguishes man from other animals. Humans in their own manner are seen in the analysis of this study, carried away easily by the African global languages they have learnt, acquired or studied especially for the purpose of living. Language as we know is man-made; this is because man decides to give names to objects, facts and actions to solve his communication barriers. Man has decided to learn, acquire or study African global language to expand his scope of communication with foreigners. This is because language facilitates empowerment which is essential for the participation of African people in all aspects of their developmental process. Furthermore, language provides the expertise or knowledge usually required for the key positions which are used in the formation of policy ~~form policy~~ in all fields. Therefore, it is of particular importance for people. No language is superior to the other, no matter the level of usage. Therefore, Nigerians should strive to learn African languages thoroughly in order to be able to associate themselves globally because language is key to whatever one wants to do globally, without knowing it well, one may find it difficult to associate freely with the global world.

Recommendations

African languages have come to stay and Africans have accepted them as their own. Therefore, the researcher recommends that:

1. African languages should promote workshops in different areas of African countries among people.
2. Learning these languages should be the number one priority of Africans.
3. Language curriculum should be designed in the way it should engage these African languages. Studies and subjects that will add and expand the horizon of the learners' knowledge in the African languages should be taken seriously.
4. Only earned progress and elevation in these African languages should be venerated and promoted in order to make for quality knowledge in the learners.
5. Some African languages must be taken as core courses by providing instruments that could make their study interesting.
6. There should be new orientation in handling African languages so that learners should be interested in taking them seriously.
7. The government, corporate bodies and non-governmental organizations should join resources to bring into reality our endeavors towards improvement in the introduction of teaching aids that will help the teachers to improve their teaching of the African languages.

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