

REPOSITIONING LINGUISTICS AND LINGUISTS IN NIGERIA'S TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS FOR MAXIMUM PRODUCTIVITY AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: THE PSYCHOSOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

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Abstract

Linguistics is the scientific study of human language or a systematic inquiry into human speech, including methods of acquisition, the units, nature, instructions, modifications, and the relationship between human language. Language is an important aspect of human life. It is that which makes interpersonal communication and relationships possible in any given environment. No doubt, the quality of human life and socio-economic development in every society depends on the quality of communication among its people. The study of linguistics should, be accorded a high premium in Nigeria's tertiary institutions, especially now that the nation is grappling with myriad issues of national development. Lecturers and students in this field of academic endeavour need to be motivated for maximum productivity and excellent academic performance, which ultimately impacts our national development. Lack of relevant instructional materials, textbooks, internet facilities, hostile learning environment, poor remuneration, and lack of welfare packages for lecturers have continued to contribute to a sharp decline in the quality of teaching and learning of linguistics in our tertiary institutions. Thus, this paper titled "Repositioning Linguistics and Linguists in Nigeria's Tertiary Institutions for Maximum Productivity and National Development: the Psychosocial Implications" examines, among others, linguistics and its current status as an academic discipline in Nigeria's tertiary institutions. Factors responsible for the decline in the quality of teaching and learning of linguistics in Nigeria's tertiary institutions and how to reposition linguistics and linguists in our tertiary institutions for maximum Productivity. The study found, among others, that the volume and quality of research on the indigenous Nigerian languages are declining in Nigerian tertiary institutions. It recommended, among others, that the government and tertiary institutions' management should join forces with the National Institute for Nigerian Languages (NINLAN) and Linguistic Association of Nigeria (LAN) to improve the volume and quality of research on the indigenous Nigerian languages.

Keywords: Linguistics, Linguists, Maximum productivity, Nigeria, national development, psychosocial implications.

Introduction

Language is not only an important aspect of human life but also a fundamental feature that distinguishes humans from other living things on Earth. The ability to communicate in a particular language conveyed a distinctively humanizing trait in the earliest human societies. Ewurum and Umelo (2020) lend credence to the above when they remark that language serves all humanistic purposes and is God's gift to humanity. Uyanne and Motanya (2013), as, cited in Ewurum and Umelo (2020), describe the gift of language as the single human trait that marks us all genetically, setting us apart from the rest of life. Man is naturally a social animal, and language is an instrument of communication with others in society. Through the instrumentality of language, man identifies and makes findings about his environment. Human beings would have been at a loss without language. Life in an environment without language and communication would be boring, drab, awkward, prosaic, and problematic, and no individual will be able to achieve personal goals, fulfillment, tangible progress, and happiness in such an environment. Language helps immensely in solving the ever-increasing problems of human existence (Ewurum & Umelo, 2020). Man's ability to communicate efficiently and meaningfully with others in his environment is tied to language. Thus, language becomes so crucial in our daily life and affairs that it should be well organized and systematically studied to make it more productive and hitch-free in our environment, hence the emergence of this field of academic study called Linguistics.

Linguistics is the scientific study of human language or a systematic inquiry into human speech, including methods of acquisition, the units, nature, instructions, modifications and relationship between human languages (Tiav, 2013). The scientific study of language in Linguistics is actually the foundation on which other disciplines are built because language makes the transfer and acquisition of knowledge possible (Tiav, 2013). As Nwachukwu (2006) in Tiav (2013) observed, the knowledge of language is knowledge in its totality. Language is the vehicle for the transmission of knowledge that helps humans plan, instruct, and evaluate academic programs. Individuals achieve educational, socioeconomic, political, and cultural development through their interaction with government agencies, through various media in the languages that the individual best understands (Olaoye, 2013).

It is regrettable, however, that we cannot harness the benefits of language in the transmission of knowledge in any field of life, when the scientific study of language (Linguistics) is endangered in our tertiary institutions and society in general. Linguists-lecturers and students in linguistic studies have not been accorded the needed motivational support for maximum productivity and excellent academic performance, which ultimately culminate in national development. Production of sound and well-grounded linguists in our nation depends on the quality of linguistic studies in our tertiary institutions. Sound and well-grounded linguists are the bedrock of sound and qualitative communication in all human societies. No doubt, the quality of human life and socio-economic development in every society depends on the quality of communication among its people.

In light of the above, some of the factors responsible for the decline in the quality of teaching and learning of linguistics in Nigeria's tertiary institutions should be urgently addressed by the government and tertiary institutions to reinvigorate and reposition it, especially now that the nation is grappling with myriad issues of national development. Linguistics and linguists, when properly repositioned in our tertiary institutions, can contribute significantly to proffering solutions to our ever-increasing problems of national unity and integration, as well as national development in Nigeria.

It is against this backdrop that this paper seeks to examine “repositioning linguistics and linguists in Nigeria's tertiary Institutions for maximum productivity and national development: The psychosocial implications.

Statement of the Problem

Although Nigeria's diverse linguistic heritage occupies a place of prominence in our national development as well as cultural, economic, socio-political, and educational scheme of things, the scientific study of languages has not been accorded its rightful place in our tertiary education system. Linguistic studies suffer neglect and different forms of setbacks in our tertiary institutions. Observation has shown that linguistics is one of the academic disciplines that enjoys little or no patronage from the government and tertiary institutions in recent times. Linguists, too, are hardly accorded recognition in Nigerian tertiary institutions, let alone in the general society. This is so because they have not been seen as those who have something worthwhile to offer or contribute to our national development. This situation has continued to impinge on the study and development of Linguistics in Nigerian tertiary institutions.

Moreso, most departments of linguistic studies in most tertiary institutions are not properly and adequately equipped to provide students with the basic techniques of linguistic analysis as well as practical tools for communication in the global village. What really can be done to improve the study of linguistics in our tertiary institutions? How do we encourage linguists to put in more effort for maximum productivity? The paper sees these challenges as problems that should be addressed with a sense of urgency so that linguistics and linguists can be repositioned in Nigeria's tertiary institutions for maximum productivity and national development.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of the study is on repositioning linguistics and linguists in Nigeria's tertiary institutions for maximum productivity and national development: The psychosocial implications. Specifically, the study intends to:

1. Examine the current status of linguistics as an academic discipline in Nigerian tertiary institutions.
2. Highlight factors responsible for decline in the quality of teaching and learning

of linguistics in Nigerian tertiary institutions.

3. Highlight the place of linguistics in Nigerian national development.
4. Examine how to reposition linguistics and linguists in our tertiary institutions for maximum productivity.
5. Investigate the psychosocial implications of repositioning linguistics and linguists in Nigeria's tertiary institutions.

A Brief Look at Linguistics and Its Current Status as an Academic Discipline in Nigeria's Tertiary Institutions

Linguistics is simply defined as an academic discipline that is concerned with the systematic investigation of the properties of particular languages as well as the characteristics of language in general. The linguists focus their greatest attention on investigating the processes of language development as well as how human languages are formed and applied to different areas of human life. In various tertiary institutions where there are fully established departments of linguistics and language studies, linguistics and communications or whichever name applicable, special studies and research are centered on specific branches of linguistics such as sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, structural linguistics, computational linguistics, dialectology, and comparative linguistics.

The aim of departments of linguistics in Nigerian tertiary institutions include, among others;

To give the student a scientific approach to the study of language in general, to introduce him to modern linguistic theory –descriptive as well as historical and comparative – and to enable him to undertake the scientific analysis of a language(Omachonu&Wakawa, 2011, P 96).

The first university to establish a department of linguistics and Nigerian languages (now African languages) was the University of Ibadan in 1962. Other premier universities, like Ife, Nsukka, and others, later followed suit in establishing departments for the study of Linguistics and indigenous Nigerian languages. These departments were ardently involved in the study of core linguistic courses in phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics through which a lot of intellectual breakthroughs and advancements have been made in the study of the structure of some indigenous Nigerian languages (Omachonu &Wakawa, 2011). In recent times, many contemporary tertiary institutions in Nigeria have successfully opened up functional and viable departments of Linguistics for the study of indigenous Nigerian languages, awarding degrees in Bachelor of Arts (BA) Linguistics, Master of Arts (MA) Linguistics, and Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D) Linguistics.

Indigenous Nigerian languages are captured in the study map of these linguistics

departments found in our tertiary institutions. Nigeria has over 525 indigenous languages, three (Igbo, Hausa, and Yoruba) of which are the major ones or the national languages. Other ones spoken at regional levels include Ibibio, Efik, Isoko, Edo, Tiv, Fulani, Idoma, Ijaw, Kanuri, Kamwe, Urhobo, Ukwuani, Nupe, and Gbaayi languages.

Today, observation has shown that Nigeria currently suffers from a sharp decline in the use of indigenous languages at home, schools, offices, and in business areas. Similarly, the volume and quality of research on the indigenous Nigerian languages are declining in Nigerian tertiary institutions (Omachonu & Wakawa, 2011). There are little or no significant efforts made by the government to encourage research and development on Nigerian languages in the universities through the provision of research grants and language development funds, as well as the award of scholarships to deserving students of linguistics and Nigerian languages. Currently, linguistics has remained a victim of skewed perception by the general public and those within academia as a course meant for female students and the academically dull ones. It is also perceived as a course that lacks bread-baking potential for students after graduation and therefore cannot afford them adequate opportunity to compete favourably in the labour market with graduates of other courses in the faculty of humanities/Arts. Thus, only a few or an insignificant number of students apply to study the course in our tertiary institutions today.

Departments of linguistics in most universities in Nigeria today could best be described as a weeping department, entrapped in the constant battle for relevance, which makes it to change its name from time to time, add new areas of study outside core linguistic courses, just to shop for students and their parents patronage as well as recognition and acceptance by the general society (Obiego & Eke, 2021). This is an ugly trend that needs to be reversed with a high sense of urgency in our tertiary institutions to reinvigorate linguistics and linguists enfeebled by the challenges replete in the ever-changing world in which our tertiary institutions operate.

Qualities of a Good Linguist

A linguist is simply described as a language expert with the inherent capacity to analyze and aptly explain linguistic phenomena in the languages spoken by people around him or her. He is the language doctor with the requisite skills to handle speech pathology in society. As one highly interested in issues that concern human languages, how they are structured and used by their speakers in practical contexts as well as their relationship with other languages (Tiav, 2013) he must therefore pose the following questions.

- i. Versatility: A good linguist is supposed to be versatile in knowledge of linguistic phenomena in the languages he handles. This will enable him to cultivate a well-balanced attitude of mind in which a problem is viewed from as many different angles as possible (Tiav, 2013).
- ii. Adaptability: A good linguist is always ready to adjust to changes in methods

and ecological realities of the learners' environment in a rapidly changing world in which we are. He needs to be able to teach linguistics effectively amid constantly evolving challenges, changing curriculum, and practices are requirements (Rogers, 2024).

- iii. **Dedication to Duty:** A good linguist is engrossed in his immediate social responsibilities, which Tiav, (2013, p 11) describes as:
 - (i) Presenting as clearly and truthfully as possible the linguist's part of cultural education and
 - (ii) Training specialists whose peculiar point of view can contribute towards contemporary solutions to social, environmental, and government problems.
- iv. **Acquisition of Useful Knowledge:** He must be ready to acquire knowledge very useful for the evaluation and management of human languages cum other social problems (Tiav, 2013).
- v. **Must be equipped with motivational strategies:** As a teacher or a lecturer of linguistics, he must be well versed in how to motivate students to learn linguistics with interest and zeal, even when the learning environment is the contrary. Motivation is an important factor in learning. To motivate is to make or instigate (Rosemberg, 2010). Teachers' motivational strategies, according to Oleabhiele (2020), are techniques that promote the individual's goal-related behaviour. They are instructional interventions applied by the teacher to elicit and stimulate students' motivation.
- vi. **Acquisition of Useful Skills:** A linguist must undergo basic training in the areas of collection and analysis of language data in compilation and interpretation of dictionaries and in verbal communication, both oral and written (Tiav, 2013). Such training will equip the linguist for qualitative classroom delivery and ultimately for the production of well-qualified student linguists in society.

Factors Responsible for Decline in the Quality of Teaching and Learning of Linguistics in Nigeria's Tertiary Institutions

It is, indeed, regrettable that the quality of teaching and learning of linguistics in Nigeria's tertiary institutions is declining rapidly in recent times. Most departments of linguistic studies are ill-equipped for effective and impactful teaching and learning of Nigerian indigenous languages, some of which are becoming extinct. As observed by Udoh (2021), many Nigerian indigenous languages are getting moribund, endangered, and extinct. With the extinction and disappearance of some of these endangered languages, valuable sources and important links for linguistics, historical, anthropological, as well as social reconstruction and interpretation are lost. Blench (2012), in Udoh (2021), in line with the above remarks that Nigeria is said to have the

largest number of threatened languages in Africa.

Today, many factors are responsible for the decline in the quality of study of linguistics in our tertiary institutions, some of which are:

- (I) Lack of relevant instructional materials: There are dearth of relevant and current instructional materials for teaching linguistics, such as textbooks, internet facilities, language laboratory, tape recorders, reliable source of power, television sets, and other teaching aids.
- (ii) Poor remuneration and lack of welfare packages for lecturers: Lecturers of linguistics in most tertiary institutions are poorly paid, and are hardly given any welfare packages as an incentive for motivation and commitment to service. They are poorly motivated due to the low premium placed on the subject by the government (Obiego& Eke, 2021).
- (iii) Lack of well-grounded Lecturers: Most of the lecturers of linguistics are not well-grounded in content and methodology, as well as modern pedagogical approaches to teaching and learning linguistics (Indigenous languages).
- (iv) Lack of Fund: In recent times, funding for Nigerian languages programmes has declined, while attention and funding are diverted to science-based and technology-oriented courses believed to have the capacity to drive the nation's development to greater heights.
- (v) Lack of Orthography/Proper Codification of the Languages: Most indigenous languages lack symbols that are used to represent sounds, which are individually represented by letters and collectively by an alphabet. This simply means that they lack the spelling system of languages or are yet to have well well-developed method of writing letters for spoken sounds and rules for spelling as well as for writing tones (Udoh, 2021). Similarly, most of these languages too are not yet codified as to have standardized models for status planning. These all constitute a grave impediment to their study in our tertiary institutions.
- (vi) Problem of Interferences: Interference, according to Adewuyi, Bernard and Adewuyi (2015), implies the interplay between two languages to produce a different variety. This is to say that there will be the emergence of a new form of language that is a mixture of the two, which is not clearly expressed from the listener's point of view. Interference takes place mostly at the semantic, phonological, and grammatical levels of languages.
- (vii) Lack of linguistic lecturers: In most tertiary institutions today, there are only a few lecturers of linguistics. The few lecturers available in the institutions of higher learning are overburdened with many responsibilities and academic workload,

as seen in the number of courses being handled by each of them. This invariably impinges on their efficiency and the quality of their performance in teaching and learning of indigenous languages in our tertiary institutions.

How to Reposition Linguistics and Linguists in Our Tertiary Institutions for Maximum Productivity

To reposition linguistics and linguists in our tertiary institution for maximum productivity requires that certain practical steps be taken. Some of these practical steps include;

- (I) Provision of adequate and relevant instructional materials: Instructional materials such as pictures, videos, radio, television, tape recorder, textbooks, software and visual aids, play a tremendous role in teaching and learning indigenous languages of Nigeria in tertiary institutions by providing opportunities for learners to understand content, apply learning procedures and develop communicative capacity.
- (ii) Adequate remuneration and provision of welfare packages for Linguistics Lecturers: Lecturers who are well paid as well as given some welfare packages to ease them of some social, financial, and related burdens will certainly perform better or be more productive than those who are not exposed to such favourable conditions of service. According to research carried out by Amalu (2013), teachers' perception of their financial remuneration has a significant influence on their role performance effectiveness. Obi's (1980) research in Amalu's (2013) showed that conditions of service, financial remuneration, reward, praise, and recognition are important motivators in teaching effectiveness. He remarks that poor and delayed salaries can hinder the role performance effectiveness of teachers because that will make them think negatively about their job. When lecturers of linguistics are adequately paid and timely too, and when they are given fringe benefits, such as car loans, residential house loans, quality health insurance, research grants, government subscribed e-library and wifi, fund for excursion, seminars, and conferences, provision of good and well furnished offices, and so on, their productivity will invariably improve.
- (iii) Employment of well-qualified linguistics lecturers: The quality of inputs of universities, the quality of the qualitative level of graduates, the quality of the scientific research, and the quality of community-oriented programs depend on the efficacy of teaching staff. The use of well-qualified lecturers with high capabilities in their areas of specialization plays an enormous role in enhancing the quality of university outputs (Kareem, Mahdi & Alameedi, 2023). According to research conducted by Sokoli and Koren (2017), lecturers are the individuals who are responsible for improving the mindsets and lives of students. These well-qualified lecturers with the most advanced and informed level of education are

necessary to ensure the production of seasoned linguists as well as advanced research in indigenous Nigerian languages. Besides, the government should employ an adequate number of lecturers to handle linguistics and Nigerian languages in our tertiary institutions.

- (iv) Codification of indigenous Nigerian languages urgent step should be taken to ensure standardization and development of a norm or model for most indigenous Nigerian languages. Properly managed and sustained orthographic traditions should be fashioned out for some of our indigenous languages to make possible their literary development. The orthography of a language, according to Udoh (2021) refers to the symbols for sounds, which are represented individually by letters and collectively by an alphabet. It has to do with the spelling system of language, where spelling is the method of writing letters for spoken sounds. These indigenous Nigerian languages should be made to have a spelling system if they must continue to exist and be relevant in the modern scheme of things. Thus, various departments of linguistics in our tertiary institutions should stand up to this very responsibility by synergizing with the National Institute for Nigerian Languages (NINLAN) and Linguistic Association of Nigeria (LAN) to ensure the continuous existence and development of a motley array of our indigenous languages. They should work together to ensure proper orthographic development and the real codification of these indigenous Nigerian languages. Empowering and repositioning these indigenous languages means empowering and repositioning linguistics departments and linguists as there is no linguistics and linguists without indigenous languages.
- (v) Through periodic retraining and updating of linguistic studies lecturers with latest theoretical approaches and innovations in the field of linguistics and language development as well as changes in the curriculum. Organization of periodic workshops, seminars and conferences for the lecturers will boost their efficiency in this field of study (Nigerian languages) as well as empower them with the pedagogical skills to cope with innovations in language teaching and learning (Adewuyi, Bernard & Adewuyi, 2015).

The Place of Linguistics in Nigerian National Development

Linguistics plays a pivotal role in a nation's socio-economic, cultural, educational, political, religious, and technological development. The scientific study of languages to ensure their effective communication and application to practical issues of life is the central concern of linguistics. The linguists explore the country's extreme linguistic fragmentation and diversity to foster inter-cultural, inter-ethnic, inter-regional, and international cooperation among people. Linguistic studies promote qualitative language, which is said to be a catalyst in educational development, an important index of national development (Olaoye, 2013). It ensures the preservation of

people's indigenous languages or mother tongues, as they are commonly called, through the development of their orthographies, syntactical standardization, vocabulary and spelling reform as well as translation through the use of lexicographic strategies, which are said to be accelerators of national development (Olaoye, 2013).

Language is very important in a societal quest for development because people need to share their diverse ideas, experiences, emotions, and interact among themselves to harmonize their goals and pursuits in their environment for meaningful results. Language is fundamentally a system of conceptualization, which facilitates thinking, planning, and determines action for the individuals (Abubakar & Usman, 2017). Crystal (2003), in Abubakar and Usman (2017), states that language is a purely human and non-instructive method of communicating ideas, emotions, and desires through voluntarily produced symbols. National development is, so to speak, the end product of ideas, emotions, and desires communicated via language. The various indigenous languages of Nigeria, which sometimes appear to be potent instruments for the nation's dismemberment, when properly explored, can enhance our national unity, integration and development (Olatunde-Ojo, Enighe & Ogidi, 2022).

The Psychosocial Implications of Repositioning Linguistics and Linguists in Nigeria's Tertiary Institutions

There is no doubt to the fact that when linguistics and linguists are properly repositioned, they will be empowered and equipped to function optimally in our tertiary institutions in particular and in the larger society in general. This means that the perceived cracks in the wall of linguistic studies and research in Nigeria, which make students and the general public have a poor perception of the discipline, have been taken away (Emenanjo, 2007). Repositioning linguistics and linguists will allay the fear and anxiety that loom large in the minds of people in society about the possibility of imminent extinction of most indigenous Nigerian languages (Ayenbi, 2014). It imbues hope and confidence in the linguists and other stakeholders in linguistic studies that their dream for the study of languages and linguistics in Nigeria is achievable, via launching an academic revolution that will reshape and refocus the course and progress of linguistics in Nigerian tertiary institutions (Omachonu & Wakawa, 2011).

Repositioning linguistics and linguists pave the way for effective language planning and policy which play a vital role in national building by promoting a common language that unites citizens and facilitates communication (Udoh, 2021). The psychosocial situation in which many youths and growing persons are averse to using their mother tongues for communication at home, in schools, churches, and in society will be brought under control. This is to say that there will be a change in their communication pattern as they will be willing to favour and identify with the prevailing linguistic attitudes of their immediate surroundings (Oyetade, 2001).

Both students and lecturers in Department of Linguistics and Nigerian

Languages will begin to place value on the discipline and the department itself, teach, learn, and study the course with motivation and pride, as well as with the conviction that their future is bright after graduation as linguists. Indeed, repositioning linguistics and linguists will bring to an end the psychosocial situation of acute shortage of well trained lecturers that discourages and hampers effective teaching and learning of linguistics in our tertiary institutions (Owolabi & dada, 2012).

Summary of Findings:

The study found that the volume and quality of research on the indigenous Nigerian languages are declining in Nigerian tertiary institutions. Lack of relevant instructional materials, poor remuneration, and lack of welfare packages for lecturers were identified among some of the factors responsible for the decline in the quality of teaching and learning of linguistics in Nigeria's tertiary institutions.

The study also found that repositioning linguistics and linguists in our tertiary institution for maximum productivity requires practical steps which include, among others, the provision of adequate and relevant instructional materials such as pictures, videos, radio, television, tape recorders, textbooks, software, and visual aids. The study found that linguistics and linguists contribute to national development by ensuring effective communication of ideas, emotions, plans, visions and desires on which national development is built.

It also found that repositioning linguistics and linguists will allay the fear and anxiety that loom large in the minds of people in the society about the possibility of imminent extinction of most indigenous Nigerian languages

Conclusion

Language is one of the vital and indispensable socio-psychological endowments of man by God, which gives him an edge over other homosapiens, help him to plan, organize and execute tasks with ease and in a well-coordinated manner in his environment. It is based on its overwhelming importance in human life that scholars thought its systematic study necessary in our tertiary institutions. Its scientific study in tertiary institutions is known as linguistics and those who study/studied linguistics are called linguists.

The study of linguistics and Nigerian languages has been submerged in different kinds of challenges that threaten the quality of its teaching and learning in our tertiary institutions. Most indigenous Nigerian languages are not codified; they lack orthographic tradition and are at the brink of extinction. Linguistics and linguists are not motivated to take care of the above challenges. This necessitates the need to reposition linguistics and linguists in Nigeria's tertiary institutions for maximum productivity and national development.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made;

1. The government and tertiary institutions' management should join forces with the National Institute for Nigerian Languages (NINLAN) and Linguistic Association of Nigeria (LAN) to improve the volume and quality of research on the indigenous Nigerian languages as they are declining in Nigerian tertiary institutions.
2. The government and tertiary institutions' management should take urgent steps, such as provision of adequate and relevant instructional materials, like pictures, videos, radio, television, tape recorder, textbooks, software and visual aids, to ensure that departments of linguistic studies in our tertiary institutions are properly and adequately equipped to provide students with the basic techniques of linguistic analysis as well as practical tools for communication in the global village.

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