



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### LANGUAGE EDUCATION: CATALYST FOR PROMOTING SOCIAL STABILITY, NATIONAL SECURITY AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN NIGERIA

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#### ABSTRACT

This paper is an excursion in political linguistics, and it tries to answer the research question: what is the role of language education in the promotion of social stability, national security and conflict prevention? The paper therefore tries to show how language education can be used for mass communication, for carrying out dialogue, for mass literacy and political mobilization. Languages, whether indigenous or foreign, are used for teaching all disciplines in the curricula of educational institutions. These disciplines, if well handled especially with the use of indigenous languages, can provide knowledge which promotes and inculcates the right moral values such as reciprocal respect, tolerance, accommodation, self-esteem, hard-work, self-actualization, independence, resourcefulness and self-reliance. From the theoretical framework and data analysis it was found that language education is a veritable tool for youth empowerment; it is capable of providing some form of social security for the educated youth. Youth unemployment is a source of social instability and national insecurity. Civic education teaches people about their civil rights and responsibilities, while the social sciences provide social skills and social security. Language is however the weapon for achieving all these goals. This paper illustrates the relationship between language and politics, education, linguistic ideology, and mass communication, and how they promote social stability, national security, and conflict resolution.

**Key Terms:** Political linguistics, empowerment, linguistic ideology, exoglossic, ethnocentrism, stereotype, linguistic prejudice

## INTRODUCTION

Some preliminary definitions of key terms in this multi-disciplinary topic may be necessary at this juncture. Social stability is about societal attribute or quality of being firm, steadfast, unchanging or unwavering. It is a state of balance or equilibrium in the society. It may be in the area of politics, religion, economics, health or well-being. It also pertains to issues such as peace, good governance, and sociopolitical and economic order which promotes national development. National security means freedom from anxiety or fear, or a state of being free from danger or injury. It is about protection of life and properties of a nation's citizenry. It also entails provision of basic amenities or welfare facilities, such as food, shelter, water, electricity, good roads, good health-care facilities, provision of jobs, good education and a good take home pay. Conflict is a state of opposition between persons and interests. It is an open clash between two opposing groups or individuals. It also means a disagreement or argument about something important. Having defined the key terms, this paper discusses how social stability, national security and conflict prevention can be promoted by language education. The central plank of this paper is an excursion in political linguistics.

In political linguistics, language is an important instrument for the development of human beings, as political animals. No meaningful development can take place in a human community without language. As an instrument of communication, language makes it possible for the people in any environment to interact and co-exist, thus paving way for the continuity of the society. Human beings get equipped for their maximum self-realization and self-development through the use of language. Language is, therefore, the only road to acquiring education in a meaningful way. Literacy education can only be possible if appropriate languages are used at the right level for the intellectual development of man. Genuine literacy efforts must empower the individuals, to cause further positive change in the society. Only a changed socio-economic and political order can reduce a nation's level of illiteracy, and increase her chances of prosperity. Prosperity guarantees socio-economic security. Social stability is also assured. In all of these, language is central to any educational enterprise.

Although this is a review paper, it nonetheless has its methodological approach which takes care of review of literature, framework of analysis, interpretation and discussion. Areas of interests are the role of indigenous languages, politics and ideology, education, arts and humanities, literature, bilingualism/multilingualism, language loyalty, dialogue and communication.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND ANALYSIS

### The Role of Languages

This section presents the review of literature which is the platform for the framework of analysis. Languages, whether indigenous or foreign (exoglossic), are indispensable tools in the life of individuals. This is obvious because there is no aspect of human activities that can be successful without the effective use of language. Language, according to Agbedo and Omeje (2010), is the surest way to retain and safeguard knowledge, wisdom and societies' authentic cultures. Indigenous languages, for instance, perform many functions which have to do with the promotion of social stability. Some of these are instrumental functions; people use their indigenous languages to express their feelings, emotions and thoughts, and to state their needs. Since civil rights and liberties are pre-conditions for social stability which guarantee freedom of speech and assembly, indigenous languages are veritable tools for promoting social stability. Language also performs political functions. The objective of all political organizations is the maintenance of social order. People are taught their civic or political responsibility through their Mother Tongue (MT). Political Education and grass root mobilization are done through MT (Oloaye, 2008).

### Politics and Ideology

The extension of indigenous languages into the domain of national politics enhances mass participation in governance. It is also true that language barrier hinders active participation in politics. If people understand each other's languages, political wrangling and bickering would be reduced, and unity will reign. The use of indigenous languages is therefore the vehicle for mass participation in national politics.

Languages and politics are central to human existence, as they constitute the basis of beingness for individuals and the societies. Disuse or misuse of indigenous languages leads to linguistic trauma which is said to be a source of political crisis which leads to socio-political instability (Olaoye, 2012).

According to Agbedo (2010; 292) linguistic ideology is “the self-evident ideas and objectives which a group holds concerning roles of language in the social experiences of members...” It is “a variety of integrated assertions, theories, goals that attempt to guide collective sociopolitical beliefs and actions regarding language choice in communication systems”. What this means is that a nation imposes a language on its people at the expense of other languages, thus giving the chosen language more recognition and more respect. The speakers of the chosen language have more sociopolitical powers over and above the speakers of the other languages. This leads to linguistic or language prejudice called linguistic bias..

Linguistic bias involves an individual, a group of people or even a nation making judgments about people’s wealth, education, social status, character and other traits based on the choice and use of language. This is a source of social instability. The solution to linguistic trauma is the implementation of the United Nation’s Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights. The linguistic rights of the individuals must be respected. To this end, there is an urgent need for Federal Government of Nigeria to have an urgent re-think on the current national policy which tends to accord undue primacy or recognition to foreign languages to the detriment of indigenous languages. Government should therefore confer unfettered linguistic power on the generality of Nigerians through the instrumentality of their respective Mother Tongues.

Language is by far one of the greatest, most complex and most enigmatic possessions of mankind. It is the quintessence of man’s humanity without which individuals and nations lose their mental and cultural heritage (Essien, 1990). Language and politics possess enormous power in preventing social instability. In Nigeria, many of the socio-political and ethnic crises were caused by language problems. Language allows people to communicate with each other, to be heard and understood. It also has the ability to heal or to harm, to praise or belittle, to promote peace or even glorify hate. Politics, on the other hand, is concerned with power: power to make decisions and to control resources (Jones and Wareing, 1999). Politics can be mediated by language in order to achieve democracy, development and peace. Wars, conflicts, and anarchy still persist in human societies as a result of nations’ failure to use language appropriately.

### **Language Education**

Language education is a tool for economic empowerment. Indigenous languages help in faster skills acquisition which also guarantees gainful, self-employment which contributes to economic empowerment. The overall national policy on social development (social stability and social security) emphasizes adequate social investment through education, which is a function of language. Language and education are tools for poverty reduction which also guarantees social stability. Economic empowerment is a function of poverty reduction (Okebukola, 2010). The relationship between language, education and poverty has been well established (Okebukola, Ibid). One cannot talk of economic empowerment, self-reliance, self-sufficiency and poverty alleviation without talking about education. Education is concerned with human development which includes the cultivation of a literate citizenry who can participate in the sociopolitical, economic and cultural life of the nation (Olanrewaju, 2010).

No nation or individual can make progress in this modern society without literacy. Literacy is very vital to the efficient functioning of the individuals. It is also a vital tool for national development and integration (Olajide, 2002). Realizing the importance of literacy in the promotion of socio-political stability of the nation, the Federal Government of Nigeria embarked upon many literacy-related programmes, but unfortunately these efforts have not yielded the expected dividends, because of unstable political climate, weak socio-economic base, misplaced priorities and values, poor education system and apathy on the part of the elites.

Language is the vehicle of literacy, and literacy guarantees social stability. There is therefore a close relationship between language, literacy, education and social stability. Literacy education is an important factor in the development of every nation. According to Jiboku (2002), one of the basic indices of development in every society is the level of literacy.

Education tries to remove, discourage or prevent religious fanaticism, suspicion, ethnic prejudice, religious intolerance and discrimination. It teaches the virtues of tolerance, accommodation, reciprocal respect and co-operation. Civic education teaches such topics as civic duties, responsibilities, freedom of speech and worship, civil liberty and rights of individuals. The rights of women, right of the minorities, affirmative action, freedom of assembly, privacy, due process are also taught in civic education. Social issues such as abortion, suicide, child abuse, violence, poverty, terrorism, immigration, health insurance, population, are discussed. Civic education therefore helps in the prevention of social instability or crisis, and national insecurity. Education helps in the promotion of self-discipline, moral integrity, probity and accountability. Education provides an individual with knowledge and skills with which he can be gainfully employed. Good job with handsome salary provides social security, but education without employment leads to social instability and national insecurity. A good language education programme is therefore a compulsory desideratum as a preventive measure against social instability and national insecurity.

### **Arts and Humanities**

Language Arts, Social Studies and Creative Arts as subjects or disciplines also have a fundamental role to play in crisis prevention. According to Obanya (2002), Language Arts is all about enculturation and communication skills which can be regarded as a key for the mastery of other curriculum domains. Social Studies are a tool for socialization and the exploration of the human condition. Subjects like Political Science, History, Geography, Economics, Religious Studies, provide knowledge on social issues and human social activities embarked upon by individuals or even a nation in their efforts to conquer and control their environment. Creative Arts is for self-expression and fuller understanding of human feelings and emotions. Language is the tool used in teaching all these social science subjects whose philosophical objectives are acquisition of knowledge, ideas and skills which people need in their day-to-day life encounters, particularly problem solving matters, prevention of social instability, national insecurity and crisis. The creative arts, through artwork and writings, paintings, sculpture, drawings and designs portray the horror of war, famine, arson, bomb blasts, and other man-created calamities.

Both the artists and artistes play a vital role in crisis prevention and management. They represent the voice of the people. Their songs, music and artwork criticize societal ills, and extol the virtue of justice, equality, good governance, moral rectitude, peace and togetherness, and the imperatives of dialogue and consultation. The virtues of peaceful co-existence, tolerance, accommodation and good neighborliness are preached through the mass media. The avalanche of information, news and ideas disseminated through the social media, that is, the television, radio, films, drama sketches, poetry, video, newspapers and magazines, is used to educate, inform, warn and sensitize people. Such pieces of information are capable of dousing tension, assuaging frayed nerves, warning people of the danger in anti-social activities, and guiding people on crisis prevention and even crisis management.

### **Language and Literature**

Language is one of the highest gifts given to man by his creator for controlling the universe (Newman, 1977). It is intimately tied to man's feelings and activities. Language is tied to religion, culture, education and ethnicity. Language loyalty is a subtle source of social instability or conflict. Language as a symbol of identity can also be seen as a tool for the domination of the masses by the privileged group. It is a major divisive factor in modern societies, as it is used as a propaganda device by corrupt politicians. According to Dantumbishi

(2010), language is considered as a weapon for the control of scarce resources, as political power is controlled by the political elites. This is a potential source of conflict or crisis.

Language, religion and ethnicity are intricately interwoven. Religion plays a vital role in politics, and language is the tool used. The political class has been manipulating Nigerian society using religion as a scapegoat (Usman, 1979). Linguistic/ethnic affiliation and religious extremism breed terrorism. Ethnicity has found sanctuary in politics because the society has been poisoned with capitalist ideology (Dantumbishi, 2010, *ibid.*). An efficient language education programme can certainly educate people on the danger signals in an unbridled ethnic chauvinism, religious bigotry, political brigandage and social misdemeanor.

Literature however serves as a mirror-image which brings out, to the fore, the destructive effects of excessive ethnocentric behaviour, sociopolitical malfeasance, linguistic stereotype or prejudice, all of which promote instability and anarchy. Through literature, people read about anti-democratic practices, corrupt leaders' administrative tendencies, and the consequences of dictatorship, insensitivity, high-handedness and other ungodly acts like rape, looting, assassination, sodomy, armed robbery, bombing, arson, murder and kidnapping. Literature raise to ridicule such acts as immorality, wickedness, cheating, discrimination, victimization, dishonesty, marginalization, economic sabotage, money-laundering, crude-oil theft and terrorism thus promoting social stability, security and peaceful living.

### **Bilingualism and multilingualism**

Nigeria is a multi-ethnic, multilingual and multicultural nation. Baba et al. (2010) assert that most of the conflicts experienced in Nigeria can be linked to identity or ethnicity, the strong index of which is language. Language is thus being condemned as an arch culprit in conflict generation. Nigeria has to contend with the daunting challenges of linguistic and cultural pluralism and the management of violent conflicts arising, partly, from the strong, divisive force of ethnic cleavages. This is so because multilingual nations have failed to convert their languages and cultural resources to advantageous use. Multilingualism and multiculturalism provide a nation with the much-needed tonic for the exploration of the environment. Crystal (2000) says that languages play a key role in holding people together as a community, thus enabling people to colonize their planet.

There is unity and strength in diversity. Linguistic and cultural diversity enables a nation to accomplish what it takes to survive in a harsh environment. Diversity is a necessary pre-requisite for successful humanity. In a multi-lingual setting Ivanov (1992:23) says that "each language constitutes a certain model of the universe, a semiotic system of understanding the world, and if we have 4000 different ways to describe the world, this makes us rich".

The possibility of various cultures coming together, made easy by multilingualism, enables its people co-exist and profit from the environment. Each culture brings with it, and shares with others, a unique way of exploiting and adapting to the environment. This approach to living, called communitarian synergy, helps in the prevention of crisis. Language houses human knowledge, therefore the more languages we are able to speak the more knowledgeable we are, and the wiser we become in solving our social problems. Since the sum of human wisdom is not contained in any one single language, there is no single language which is capable of expressing all forms of human comprehension (Pound, 1960). A nation's wealth of languages can be used positively in cross-fertilizing ideas. Language is used in recording and preserving human history. It is the archive of history. Through language, one brings to life the deeds of kings and emperors for younger generations. Languages, as the pedigree of nations, afford people to know about the causes of past socio-political and economic instability and insecurity, and how stability, national security and conflict prevention were tackled. Baba et al. (2010) assert that language is integral to the identity, history and people's world view, and it is the heart of the people. It is believed that if national development and prosperity facilitate peace, and that

languages facilitate the former, language education can then be seen as a means of preventing and managing conflict. If languages can be used as a catalyst of peace and prosperity, then multilingualism cannot and should not be seen as an agent or source of conflict but rather as an agent of conflict prevention and resolution.

### **Language Loyalty**

Nigeria is rich in languages and cultures. Before the advent of colonialism, Nigerians were very proud of their languages and culture which bound them together. These languages promoted stable socio-political, religious and economic development. There was mutual trust, reciprocal respect and unity, and the community values and identity were appreciated. Unfortunately, colonialism brought distorted identity and the erosion of cultural values. Nigerian languages were supplanted by foreign languages and cultures. Language loyalty shifted from the indigenous languages and culture to foreign ones. This brought about enforced language loyalty to English. Nigerian government and some African nations find it difficult to make progress in education which they cannot deliver in their local languages. Political instability and socio-economic down-turn therefore stemmed from colonialism (Idowu, 2008).

Nigerian elites have been identified as culprits responsible for language and educational failure. Their culpability is in respect of their nonchalant attitude towards the development and use of indigenous languages. The promotion of English leads to linguistic and social inequality, which also leads to prejudice and injustice (Olaoye, 2007). In Nigeria, much attention is being paid to the development of the major and dominant languages, while the minority languages are neglected. This is also a source of social inequality which leads to social instability and national insecurity. This lack of justice and fairness affects negatively the identity and self-image of speakers of the minority languages. Typology of language loyalty has been identified. Oyetade (2001) and Dada (2006) identified three types:

- (a) Ethnocentric group –people who are loyal and committed to their ethnic group, their languages and cultural heritage.
  - (b) The exocentric group who rebel against ethnocentrism and prefers the out group, and
  - (c) The ambivalent group who are unsure of their identity.
- Groups (b) and (c) pose some problems to the promotion of national stability and security. Adegbite (2008) calls type (a) and (b) indigenized group or Anglicized/Americanized/Westernized group.

These linguistic stereotypes breed prejudice and insecurity. For the promotion of social stability, national security and prevention of conflict, English language in Nigeria should complement rather than dominate the indigenous languages. English should function as an inter-ethnic and international communication tool (Adegbite, 2004). The domestication or indigenization of English Language, according to Akere (2006), is inevitable.

### **Dialogue and Communication**

Dialogue, in Arts/Humanity and Social Sciences, is defined as a talk between two or more people. It is an exchange of opinions or thoughts in an effort to reach agreement or mutual understanding. It is an activity engaged upon by government or those in authority with their citizens or workers. It is a political weapon used for conflict prevention or for conflict resolution. Language is the tool of dialogue. Dialogue affords people the opportunity to present their opinions, ideas, feelings, expectations, apprehension, fears, aspiration and wants to the other party in order to prevent strike, conflict, crisis, misunderstanding, and to arrive at a position that is beneficial to all parties involved. Language is a powerful too for a successful dialogue.

Communication, either through print or electronic media, is a double-edged sword. It can achieve tremendous success if well organized and used. It can also be used to foment trouble if used negatively. Language is the soul of communication, and Mass Media is the channel. Mass Media communicates information on government's day-to-day programmes of activities. It is used to inform, educate, warn, advice,

persuade, dissuade, mobilize and entertain people. Lack of adequate information breeds suspicion which also leads to tension, strike and insecurity. Adequate information given at the right time removes suspicion, builds confidence, douses tension, and is capable of preventing social instability, national insecurity and crisis. Over-sensationalism whips ethno-religious sentiments or emotions which can trigger ethno-religious and socio-political crisis. Language of finesse rather than vitriolic or prussic diction can turn a devil-incarnate to a refined man and can also turn a belligerent and war-torn nation to a haven of peace and tranquility.

### CONCLUSION

It is incontrovertible, judging from the various author's findings, claims, assertions and governments' pronouncements that languages, arts, social science and education play a vital role in the promotion of social stability, national security and conflict resolution. Indigenous languages and English Language in Nigeria have been used as tools for mass literacy campaign, media of instruction in the educational institutions, and as weapons for political mobilization, dialogue and mass communication. Whether it is in music, creative arts, drama, poetry, the social science disciplines or general education, language plays a pivotal role. These subjects have been found to be capable of teaching religious morality, civil rights and responsibilities, moral rectitude, probity and accountability, resourcefulness, hard-work, creativity and economic self-reliance. Through these disciplines people learn the virtues of tolerance, accommodation, self-esteem and economic independence, all of which help in the prevention of instability, promotion of national security and conflict resolution.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the aforementioned claims and assertions on the pivotal role of language education, in the promotion of social stability, national security and conflict prevention, the writer recommends that:

- The federal Government should have an urgent re-think on the current national language policy which tends to accord undue prominence or recognition to foreign languages to the detriment of Nigerian languages.
- Mother tongue education should be more vigorously pursued; mere lip-service to the implementation of MT education policy is counterproductive.
- Nigerian educated elites should be made to change their negative attitude to MT education.
- State governments should be empowered to implement free education at the primary school level, and subsidize secondary school education
- Education should be tailored towards skill acquisition at all levels of education. Entrepreneurial curriculum should be designed and implemented at the three levels of education.
- Civic education should be made compulsory at both the primary and secondary school levels.
- Language education should be made compulsory at both the NCE and undergraduate levels for all teacher- trainees.
- Federal Government should encourage language loyalty, i.e. loyalty to Nigerian languages through the deliberate cultivation, propagation and promotion of our native languages in the writing and publication of books by Nigerian authors.
- The teaching of literature at both the primary and secondary school levels should be encouraged. School libraries should be well stocked with books on literature. Literature in English should therefore be made compulsory for all SSS students.

- Bilingual/multilingual education policy should be promoted, as this brings about national integration and unity in diversity. Multilingual education policy should cater for minority languages to avoid ethno- linguistic prejudice.
- English language should not be made to supplant or dominate the indigenous languages, but rather should, as much as possible, be domesticated.
- Government should provide free flow of information at the appropriate time, and encourage dialogue in all its policies.
- Mass media should be highly responsible in their reportage, especially in their use of language. Responsible journalism should be the media practitioners' watch-word.

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