

# THE ROLES OF NIGERIAN INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES IN THE NATIONAL POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

*Juliana Chizobam Eze*

## **Abstract**

Nigeria as a demonstrative country needs the participation of all and sundry. The surest means to ensure that Nigeria Political process carries all Nigerian citizen in its train is through the massive use of the Nigerian indigenous languages. In this study, emphasis is therefore laid on copious study of the Nigerian languages and extensive use of same in all political activities for national development.

## **Introduction**

Before we delve into the topic of this paper, the writer deems it necessary to discuss some vital issues relating to such topics as the definition of language, issues relating to politics and political process, political groups and finally political slogan.

The generality of the write-up therefore goes to highlight the importance of the indigenous languages in effective execution of the Nigeria political activities for national development.

## **Definition of Language**

Language is a distinctively human system of communication based on oral and written symbols. It is a pan-human development, a behavioral aspect of human beings which serves as a point of differentiation from animals (Olaoye 2002).

Olaoye (2002), further points out that language is a purely human and non-instinctive way of communicating ideas, emotions and desires. It is vocal symbols which permits all people in a given culture to communicate and interact.

Truly, language is a human behaviour that differentiates man from animals; it is learnt by every individual in a defined area. It can be argued that a child learns the language of the community in which he finds himself by constant re-enforcement and equally by the speech actions of those living around him.

In learning a language, the spoken aspect is extremely essential because an individual first and foremost learns to speak his native language for a long time before he can learn how to read or write it. Also all normal human beings usually understand and speak but not all of them can write. These and a lot of other reasons make a spoken language absolutely necessary. There is no gainsaying that having the ability to speak and write a language is of greater importance because it makes an individual to be literate, which in turn endows him/her to have the power of being useful to the community., and the nation at large.

Languages gives man the ability to organize thoughts and thus, enables him to collect, sort, relate and record ideas (Ukaegbu in Arohunmolase (1998).

In reality, it is only through the medium of language that man can interact with his environment, gain experience and formulate thought form that enables him to exist as a human being. Language is one of the things that distinguish man from other lower beings. Human beings express feelings and emotions through the medium of language. Man gathers the information that circulates in his community through language. He sorts them out, relates the ideas to his environment and proceeds to make the right choice that will eventually influence the positive growth or the development of the -community and the nation in general.

Language is so important in human life that its usefulness in the overall development of a people and its community or nation cannot be gain said. It is regarded as an embodiment of people's culture. Now what is culture? It is the:

"totality of the way of life evolved by a people in their attempts to meet the challenges of living in their environment which gives order and meaning to their social, political, economic, aesthetic and religious norms and modes of organization, thus, distinguishing the people from their neighbours" National Cultural Policy (1988:5).

Now from the above definition of culture, it can be argued or pointed out that there will be no culture

without a language. This is because it is through the vehicle of language that the culture of a people is transmitted to the younger generation so as to keep it from dying.

In fact, language is so central to the culture of any community in such a way that when a people loses its language, such a people will be regarded as a people without culture, which in turn makes them to be a people without future and identity.

Language is not only restricted to culture, neither is it only a means of communicating information, it is equally a very important means of establishing and maintaining relationships with other people (Nwadike in Arohunmolase 1998:5). In fact, the use of language in human life cannot be over emphasized.

### **Politics and Political Process**

According to the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English, politics refers to the activities involved in getting and using power in public life, and being able to influence decision that affect a country or society.

On the other hand, a political process can be said to be a system whereby a group of individuals agree to come together to share common ideology, aspirations, rules and regulations for the furtherance or achieving a political success. In Nigerian situation, political groups sometimes cut across ethnic and linguistic barriers, which is evidence that political groups do not adhere to ethnic or linguistic leaning. Similarly, people of the same ethnic or linguistic group may belong to different political groups.

Here we notice that it is not the common language or ethnicity that brings people together to achieve political success but ideas and philosophy expressed through the use of language(s).

It is no gainsaying that the primary objective of Nigerian political groups is to make Nigeria better for the Nigerian people. And so the appropriate thing is to use Nigerian languages in the political process in Nigerian context for the Nigerian people. What we are emphasizing here is that the politicians in their campaigns for vote and in their different activities should use both our major and minor languages, as this will no doubt lead to social appeal and aspirations of the people. Here we can see clearly the relevance of language in the Nigerian political process.

### **Political Groups**

As mentioned earlier, a political group is a group of people that agrees to come together to share common ideology, interest and aspiration to achieve a political goal. Each of the political groups aspires to win majority support from the people down to the grass root level. The way and manner in which they go about this is through the medium of language. Then, it is just right or appropriate that such language must appeal to the aspirations of the masses, and as earlier mentioned, the only language(s), that scores this point is the Nigerian languages.

### **Political Slogans**

One of the major instruments used by political groups to win majority of the people to their side is through the instrumentality of political slogans. The political slogans are effective gimmicks directed at convincing people of the reasons why they should pitch their tents with one political group and shun all other political groups in spite of their persuasions and insinuations. It is not the political symbols nor the flowing gowns of the political leaders, nor the erudite delivery of the political campaigns that sometimes move the people to pitch their tents with one political groups or the other, but the choice of words that appeal to the world and the aspirations of the masses that counts. This is the reason behind some political gurus trying to use adulterated versions of some native languages when they are addressing the masses in order to prove their proficiency in those languages. Some other groups' device the means of choosing an indigene who is proficient and eloquent in the indigenous language to address a political rally for clearer understanding of the subject matter under discussion.

Having gone through all these preliminaries, it is now very proper that we discuss the place of Nigerian indigenous languages in national political development, which is the main focus of this paper.

### **Effective Grass-root Participation**

In the local as well as urban communities, the politicians should make it their duty to go extra mile by ensuring that their political activities penetrate every nook and cranny of every locality in the country. They

should leave no stone unturned by making sure that they reach all the people who are of age to participate in political activities in all local and urban areas.

These they should do by allowing the people to express their views about issues of public interest, and also by making sure that they have the wherewithal to develop their intellects and skills so as to be able in a practical manner, to contribute accordingly to the political well being and progress of the nation. One can wisely point out that language is a major instrument that will aid active participation of all and sundry in politics.

For this reason, it is extremely necessary that our indigenous languages have to be taught effectively in our schools. The government should make more effort to ensure that our indigenous languages are taught accordingly with vigour as specified in the national policy on education. This will make many Nigerians to be proficient in these languages in the near future. When this is achieved, definitely, it will minimize or utterly remove political segregation and marginalization that are inherent in our political system. Rather it will improve active participation by all, and so enhance harmonious living and peaceful co-existence of all the ethnic groups in Nigeria.

### **Political Group as an Assemblage of Cultural Diversity**

In the National culture policy (1988:5), culture was defined as the:

"totality of the way of life evolved by a people in their attempts to meet the challenges of living in their environment which gives order and meaning to their social, political, economic, aesthetic and religious norms and nodes of organization, thus, distinguishing the people from their neighbours."

A critical observation of our different cultures reveals that they inculcate moral norms, discipline, law and order, entertainment and social togetherness among its citizens. Our cultures also approve and admire such virtues as obedience, honesty hardworking, endurance or perseverance, diligence and so on. More over, they condemn or frown at such attitudes as laziness, hatred, stealing, jealousy, greediness, rumor mongering, backbiting, prostitutions, lying and so on.

In the Nigeria polity today, there are a lot of such negative attitudes as hatred, stealing or misappropriation of public funds, corruptions, money Laundering, jealousy, lying, backbiting among political opponents, laziness and greediness within the political groups. Now if our political leaders and all of us as honest Nigerians should wholeheartedly imbibe the positive attitudes inherent in our cultures, and disassociate our humble selves from the negative attitudes highlighted above, the political and all-round development of Nigeria will know no bounds. In fact, within few years from now, Nigeria will be ranking very high in power and glory with the developed countries of the world.

The fact remains (hat, it is through mutual understanding and proficiency in various indigenous languages by many Nigerians that they will come to really understand what our different cultures really entail and appreciate them, since it is undoubtedly agreed that language is the embodiment of the cultures of the people.

In the light of the above assertion, it is just extremely essential that the three major Nigerian languages as well as other indigenous languages that have developed official orthography should be actively studied more than ever before. This is because when most Nigerians: politicians and civilians inclusive are proficient in many of these indigenous languages, or at least in the three major Nigerian languages, they will be in a better position to imbibe the culture of different ethnic groups and practice them. Thus when this happens, the unity and all-round development of this great nations will be enhanced.

The game of football brings people of different cultural backgrounds together and when a team is playing, people give them support irrespective of their ethnic differences. Similarly, in political groupings, people canvas or solicit for support from the entire populace irrespective of their ethnicity or cultural differences. So it is understandable that political groups unifies ethnic groups and so enhances or unifies our cultures. As a result of this, It is imperative that we put more vigour in the pursuance of the study of our indigenous Nigerian languages for a clearer understanding of our different cultures, which will in turn lead to national development of the country.

### **The Use of Nigerian Languages in Politicking as a Means of Enhancing National Economy**

Various ethnic groups have some food items and cash crops that are produced in their locality such as

rice, beans, sorghum, millet, maize, groundnut, carrots in the northern part of the country, rubber, cocoa, banana, plantain, pineapple, oranges in the western part, palm oil and kernel, cashew nuts, pears of different kinds and also oranges etc. in the eastern part of the country to mention just a few.

Each of these farm products can be developed to meet international standards if we can take time to record the way and manner in which they are being produced and processed and equally, improve on them through research using Nigerian languages as a medium. In order to fully realize and tap what nature has endowed us with, we have to really develop our indigenous languages in which the ideas relating to the- production, processing and preservation of those natural gifts originally were conceived. This will enable us to record facts and processes concerning different skills, which will no doubt aid our future generations to continue the developmental process. Language is the most important tool with which society is organized, as it is hardly possible to talk of national development without including the language with which the people formulate their thoughts, ideas and needs (Aziza, in Arohunmolase 1998:263).

The fact remains that for our country to develop economically, our indigenous languages have to be developed and studied exhaustively as this will enhance our technological development and advancement.

Politically, our leaders have to encourage more effective study and the use of these Nigerian languages in various ways so as to achieve the above mentioned objectives of enhancing our national economy through a systematic production, processing and preservation of our food items and cash crops.

Government should also invest on further research on how best to improve the production, processing and preservation of these natural endowments using our local languages as a medium for more profits.

### **The Use of Indigenous Languages in Education for the Enhancement of Nigeria Polity**

A lot has been said about the importance of mother tongue or Nigerian languages in education. In line with this assertion, it was pointed out in UNESCO meeting of 1951 that the teaching and the use of the child's mother tongue aid actualization of his potentials and this enables him to learn faster ahead of a child who has been taught in a foreign or a second language (Akinbobola, in Arohunmolase 1998:29). Moreover Fafunwa (1982:293), believes that mother tongue is as natural to a child as his mother's milk.

There is no gainsaying the fact that the surest means of educating Nigerians is through the medium of mother tongue or Nigerian languages. This makes for a bridge between the school and the home. All life experiences, thought form or patterns are cued through the mother tongue or Nigerian languages. The move towards eradication of illiteracy and poverty from the rank and file of Nigerian populace can only be achieved through the medium of mother tongue. The use of mother tongue is the surest way of reaching unreachable; the illiterate adults, the semi-illiterate adults, the school dropouts, the cattle rearers, and the migrant fishermen in their various places of work. By educating this class of citizens, they will be empowered to make their own contributions towards the political development of the country. The government policies and aspirations can be communicated to them in writing through the mass media using their mother tongues or Nigeria languages. The danger of having to administer illiterate community and poverty-ridden communities will then be a thing of the past. It implies tint by educating the Nigerian citizens through the medium of their mother tongues or Nigerian languages, they will be in a better position to choose the leader of their choice, vote in the party of their choice into power, and make effective contribution towards administrative and political debate from time to time.

V-hen the level of education of the community is enhanced through the use of mother tongue, it will affect other fads of life. The health and the surroundings of the community will be enhanced. Moreover, the economic well-being of the community will be enhanced,-because they would have learnt new methods of nurturing some indigenous products to achieve higher yields. Nigerian citizens would then be exposed to learn different kinds of skills and local crafts through the medium of mother tongue. This will lead to eradication of poverty, which Nigeria government is fighting tooth and nail to achieved within this millennium. If these are carried out, the Nigerian millennium goals would have been achieved.

### **Recommendations**

1. The study of the Nigerian languages should be extensively pursued in all its ramifications.
2. The governments should pursue the implementation of language policy as enshrined in the National Policy on Education with vigour.
3. The government should encourage all stakeholders in the implementation of language policy by

paying enhanced allowances to Nigerian language teachers and award scholarships to Nigerian language students in tertiary institutions.

4. Some of our language cultural practices and displays should be encouraged as an avenue of unifying different cultural groups.
5. Political rallies, campaigns and slogans should be rendered in Nigerian Languages in order to reach the masses at the grassroots.
6. All the new techniques in indigenous crop production, processing and preservation should be rendered in indigenous languages to make for maximum productivity.
7. Parents should consider the benefits of being proficient in oilier Nigerian Languages other their own and the resultant unity and development that will follow suit as a result of this. So it is very necessary that they should encourage their children lo study Nigerian Languages in higher institutions of learning in our country.
8. In this connection. It is absolutely necessary that our indigenous languages have to be thought effectively in our schools. The government should make more effort in other to ensure that our indigenous languages are taught accordingly as specified in the National Policy on Education as mentioned earlier. This will it possible for many Nigerians to be proficient in these languages in the near future. When this is attained there is no gainsaying that it will definitely minimize or utterly remove political segregation ravaging this country and marginalization that are observed or inherent in our political system. Positively it will improve and ensure active participation by all, and also enhance harmonious living and peaceful co existence of all the ethnic groups in Nigeria.

## **Conclusion**

This write up calls the attention of the Nigerian government lo pursue vigorously the massive teaching of the Nigerian languages in all levels of the Nigerian educational system. This is informed by the facts highlighted in the write up on the relevance of the use of the Nigerian languages to achieve unity, mutual understanding and cohesiveness in Nigerian polity. The roles of indigenous languages in the production, processing and preservation of our economic products were emphasized. Such move will reduce the level of illiteracy among the Nigerian populace and also bring the poverty level to the barest minimum. Nigerian populace will be literate enough to make their contributions towards the improvement of Nigerian polity. In this way one of the key focuses of the millennium goals would have been achieved which eventually would lead to national development and advancement.

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