

## **SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING: A SINE QUA NON FOR NATIONAL INTEGRATION**

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### **Abstract**

The goals of any language education in any nation are determined by the overall role such a language is supposed to play among the user. Therefore in Nigeria, the aim of teaching/learning any language as a second language (L2) is to inculcate in the learner the cultural, religious, social values and norms of the native speakers of the target language. This paper is therefore aimed at examining how the learning or acquisition of any given Nigerian Language (Like Hausa, Igbo or Yoruba) as a second Language could foster the achievement of our desired national integration. A brief historical over-view of second language learning in Nigeria is highlighted, including the current trend of aim and objectives of acquiring a second language as well as the merits of learning a second language. An apt summary is given as well as the conclusion. Some recommendations are also made.

**Keywords:** Language, Second language, learning, acquisition, national integration.

There are many sides to language learning, but this paper is concerned with the four basic skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing. Language is one of the factors that distinguishes man from animal. The human language is systematic and more organized than that of animal language. There won't be effective communication without language.

Anagbogu, Mbah and Eme (2010) defined language as “a means which human beings have devised for communicating ideas, feelings, emotions and desires etc through complex vocal or written symbols. From these Scholars’ definition of language, it means that human language is not simple, rather it is difficult because it comprises so many parts or speech. Any means by which human beings use to communicate and understand themselves has served as a language.

The concept of second language learning in Nigeria dates back to 1882 (Oraka, 1987) when the colonial administration enacted an Education Ordinance and code, making the speaking, reading and writing of English Language compulsory in Nigerian schools. It was further consolidated in 1926 when the same administration endorsed the use of vernacular along with English Language (Olagoke, 1979) From then, English Language became a prestigious second language spoken, read and written within the Nigeria School System and beyond. Henceforth English Language became the official second language of education and instructions in Nigeria Schools amidst Nigeria's Indigenous Languages.

According to the National Commission for College of Education (NCCE) minimum standard (2012), the overall objectives of teaching any Nigerian Language as a second language (L2) are:

1. To equip the learner whose mother tongue is not target language with the skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing in the target language.
2. To teach the learner (up to JSS level) the target language.
3. To impact the knowledge and method of teaching a Nigerian Language as a second language, and
4. To teach the second language learner the customs and traditions of the native speakers of the target language.

Thus, the over-riding aim of teaching a second language to any Nigerian learner is to enable the learner acquire skills of the target language in order to express himself/herself in it especially when in contact with the native speaker of the language.

To this end therefore, the issue of second language learning in a developing country like Nigeria is a crucial matter. This is because it is a strong index for social change and the basis for cultural, religious, political and socio-economic progression and national integration of any given society (Ebe, 2005). It is the foundation of social organization and nationalism (Anolue, 1998). This is why the current trend in the growth and development of Nigeria Indigenous languages both as mother-tongues and second language has gone beyond mere speculations. Nigerians and foreigners alike, undertake courses of study in any of the three major Nigerian languages of Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa, either as mother-tongue or as second language at any level of education.

### **The Concept of Second Language Learning**

Language serves as an important moderator of human consciousness and this unique human possession is seen to be one of the greatest gifts from God because of the facilitator role it plays in human existence. Language is an expression of ideas, concepts, emotions, etc conveyed through the use of words. To form words, one has to combine

sound, these words combine to make up sentences, bearing in mind the phono-syntactic rules of the language in question. Regular practice and use of those words make them familiar, attractive, memorable and indelible in the mind of the learner. Hence the learner makes use of every effective element in the language, vis-à-vis dramatic variations in tone, in voice, rhyme and rhythm, purring and snoring words with strong effective connotations (Adewole, 1995).

To this end, the learner of a second language who speaks in the target language is manipulating words in the language to convey his/her ideas.

Thus, a second language learner who speaks in the target language, learns both the phonetic (phonology, syntax and semantics) of the said target language. Therefore, regular use of the second language makes the learner to become so used to the language, thereby becoming competent user of the language in expression. It makes for active participation of the learner in group discussion, which arouses his interest in the target language. Through that the learner imbibes the culture and traditions of the native speakers of the second language.

### **National Integration**

National Integration is the awareness of a common identity among the citizens of a country. It means that though we belong to different castes, religions and speak different languages, we recognize the fact that we are all one. This kind of integration is very important in the building of a strong and prosperous nation. Unity in our country does not mean the kind of ones that comes from racial and cultural similarity. It is unity in spite of great differences, in other words, unity in diversity.

### **Language and National Integration**

Indigenous language or any language is regarded as the bedrock of nation building and national integration. It is the most important tool with which societies are organized and it is hardly possible to talk of national integration without including the language with which the people formulate their thoughts. According Olaoye (2007), second languages especially indigenous languages or languages in general perform the following re-branding role which goes a long way to bring national integration.

- i. **Instrumental Function:** Language is used for getting things done. The Federal Ministry of Information uses English and the Nigerian Indigenous languages as campaign tools for sensitizing Nigerians on the need for national unity. Languages are being used in the training and retraining of civil servants, the academics, the lawmakers, while the politicians are being re-branded through retreats all carried out through the instrumentality of languages. The essence of law-making is to sensitize the nation so that

it will be a peaceful place to live and to create opportunity for justice, fair play and equalitarianism.

- ii. **Regulatory Function:** Language is used for controlling people's behaviour.

### **The Merits of Second Language Learning (In Nigeria)**

Since language espouses the totality of people's way of life, vis-à-vis, the customs, traditions, arts, social institutions, religions institutions, literature, music and intellectual expressions of a given set of people, it follows therefore that the general development and integration of an individual into any society is closely bond with the continued active participation of the individual in the language of the people. To this a number of merits is accrued from such participation. They include:

1. **Tool for Trade and Commerce:** Acquisition of a second language is a veritable tool for trade and commerce. It has been observed that many merchants and business men succeeded today in Nigeria because of their knowledge of a given second language, (Ebe, 2005). A good example of this is the case of Igbo people living and trading in the northern part of Nigeria where Hausa language is the dominant language.

2. **Tool for Career Advancement:** Many people today in Nigeria hold good jobs because they have degree in second languages. For example, an Igbo who has a degree in Yoruba language gets job immediately.

3. **Medium of International Communication:** A competent user of a second language can communicate with persons outside Nigeria. Hausa language is today being used as a medium of broadcast in BBC world, London. It enables Nigerians to communicate effectively and efficiently with the outside world.

4. **Our Knowledge of a Second Language Serves as a Means of Seeing the Wider Perspective:**

Many literary works are written in the second language and through reading them, we increase our own personal culture by looking up to other people with possible more scientific and technologies.

5. Trade fairs, workshops, seminars and exhibitions are successfully organized and hosted in Nigeria because of the participants' knowledge and proficiency in the second language. An Igbo man at one time took part in Kano State trade fair successfully.

### **The Role of Second Language in National Integration**

One of the dominant and pervasive problems in Nigeria and in Africa at large, is the language question. Language, being a potent vehicle of transmitting cultures, values, norms and beliefs from generation to generation, remains a central factor in determining the status or nature of any nation. Language is a nation's most obvious and most

important attribute. There is no such thing as a nation without a common linguistic basic.

It is obvious that English language which is a second language to Nigerians is the language of integration in Nigeria. Amidst the compounding complexities of Nigeria especially in relation to the language question, the only language that indexes the spirit of togetherness is English Language.

The aim of any human community is to have peace and unity. Language is the faithful mirror of the society in other words a language is what shows the true native of any society. This implies that what a language is meant to do in any society is to reflect to the world what that society is all about. The language of any society therefore should give us a perfect knowledge of what that society is all about, this includes: the culture, beliefs, mode of dressing, marriage and every other sociolinguistic information about the society language is also supposed to be seen as symbol of a nation just as the flag, anthem, currency etc.

Another area that language has been helpful in Nigeria is in the area of academics, this is because it has to a large extent helped to bridge the gap between the rich and the poor, the privileged and the less privileged. Hence a second language will serve as a link between the high class and the low-class in Nigeria.

The important role played by language in religion can never be overemphasized, in various religious gathering, English Language has served as the medium of communication hence bringing the people together under the same umbrella.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

From the foregoing, we discover that second language acquisition is a veritable tool for national integration. As has been said earlier, since culture and tradition of any given set of people are expressed through language, a second language learner therefore imbibes such culture and traditions of those native speakers of the second language. Moreover, most languages are rich in literary/literacy device like similes, metaphors, personification etc. the second language learner acquires knowledge of these literary devices of the target language. By so doing, he becomes an active participant in a society other than his/hers. In such a situation, there will be mutual understanding devoid of suspicion, ranchour and acrimony among the native speakers of any language and non-native speakers of same language. The second language so learnt creates room for harmonious co-existence and non-indigenous speakers. It will go a long way to engender the much needed unity in diversity of Nigeria. The incidence of BokoHaram will become a thing of the past.

### **Recommendation**

Against the aforementioned, the following recommendation are made

1. People of diverse language groups across the country should be encouraged to live in places where language other than their mother-tongue is spoken.
2. Language literacy campaigns should be carried across linguistics/language borders.
3. Inter-language (L2) learning should be taken seriously by Nigerians.
4. The government should give financial aid to any second language learner.
5. Books on Nigerian languages should take special note of second language learner.
6. Nigerian language teacher should be encouraged more on the part of second language teaching.
7. The general attitude of our people towards second language learning should change from apathy to love.
8. Henceforth, curriculum designers should be taking note of second language learners while doing their job.
9. Nigeria language teachers should be given refreshers courses.
10. More job opportunities should be created for second language teachers.

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