

LANGUAGE AND NATION BUILDING: A CASE FOR INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE

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Abstract

Nation building is seen as the task that rests on the shoulders of the scientists as science and technology determine how developed a nation is. The usefulness of indigenous languages in this great task cannot be undermined because development of any kind cannot be borrowed, it emanates from within. It is through indigenous languages that scientists of any nation communicate their ideas, thoughts, findings and so on to others. This paper therefore focused on how Nigeria will be advanced forward in all facets of her nation building - educationally, politically, socio-culturally and technological through adequate utilization of her indigenous languages. It recommended strategies towards achieving this goal through indigenous languages.

Introduction

Nation building is the bringing together of various ethnic groups to form a nation state, it is not the same thing as national development. It paves the way for national development when satisfactorily achieved. Whenever issues that border on nation building are raised, different opinions are received from different people. To some, it is the government's affair, to others, it is the scientists' look out. Only very few know that language has a very vital role to play in this. The government cannot handle this aspect of the nation alone because there are more to it than meet the eyes. They will then call on the scientists and the linguists. Scientists knowing fully well that science is yet to invent a communication system that is devoid of language will rely solely on the linguists. For scientists to communicate their ideas, thoughts, findings and so on, they need language - the chief means of communication.

The question now is, for a nation to advance forward in her building endeavours, which language does she rely on? Any nation that has the interest of her building at heart should always rely on her indigenous languages. This is because nation building like national development cannot be "borrowed", bought, stolen or even be transferred. It has been developed from within (Alilonu, 1997). If we must build Nigeria there is need to have a rethink on our attitudes towards our indigenous languages. Making our indigenous languages play second fiddle is tantamount to making nation building play a second fiddle in both our conception and perception of things. This will make living in a world of illusion and borrowed life end up in sorrow inevitably.

A nation is like a man that his development starts right from conception. A true discovery of oneself paves way for one's development, Nigeria, in order to be built needs to rediscover herself. This will existence her from her present "pitiabile situation"¹ if she goes about it through the use of indigenous languages (Ezejideaku, 1991).

Foreign language being used in vital issues in Nigeria has deprived our indigenous languages from participating educationally, economically, politically, socio-culturally, and technologically and otherwise (Mong, 1998).

Conceptual Clarifications

For the purpose of this paper, it is necessary to clarify the following concepts:

- i Language;
- » Indigenous Language;
- * Nation Building;
- * National Development.

Language

Language is a free gift of nature. It is a peculiar nature of human beings and societies. It has been defined differently by different people. To Sapir (1921) as quoted by Nwosu - Izumah (1997) Language is purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of voluntarily produced symbols. To Gimson (1980), it is a system of conventional signals used for communication by a whole community. Umcanjo (1997) gave a more detailed definition of language. He sees language as "any code employed for giving, receiving, hiding and distorting information. The mode or medium may be sound, symbols or signs (including silence) functioning singly or predictably and decipherable combinations"¹.

What we should know about language is that, it is the expression of ideas by means of speech sounds combined into words which later graduates into sentence. Language is innate and exists in a speech community. Hence, its communication and identification functions.

b. Indigenous Languages

Indigenous is talking about nativity. Indigenous languages are languages that have their origin from the nation that speaks them. Osasona (1996) opined that indigenous has to do with something that is native or belonging naturally to a people, place or things. Indigenous languages are not borrowed, loaned, bought or transferred. It is from within the speech communities that has them.

c. Nation Building

According to Ajayi (1995), nation building as "the process of integrating diverse autonomous political entities within a state. To Akorede (1997), it is a process whereby subnations transfer their loyalty and commitment from the ethnic, tribal or village community groups to the larger nation unit. To Elaigwu (1985), it involves the process of transfer by the citizens of their commitment from ethnic, tribal or village community groups to the larger nation unit.

The ultimate objective for nation building is to establish social and political harmony necessary for national development. This should be done in such a way that the values and cultures of the ethnic groups involved should not be exterminated. Hence, the use of indigenous languages are paramount.

d. National Development

Many scholars of our time have defined this differently. Chumbow (1982) sees it as the nation's human resources acting on its natural resources to produce goods necessary to satisfy the economic needs of the national community. Izuegbu (1995) defined it as the sum total of all the processes by which a nation is transformed from primitivity to contemporary civilization. Bamgbose (1991), opined that national development is the full realization of human potential and maximum utilization of the nation's resources for the benefit of all.

Satisfactory achievement of Nation building paves way for national development. One can say that both nation building and national development are all about how a nation is transformed from its "Stone Age" to a sophisticated state. To achieve this, our indigenous languages have vital roles to play.

Why Indigenous Languages?

Language is the only instrument of man's development. Any nation that has her building in mind will always have recourse to her indigenous languages. Most, if not all the advanced countries in the universe were built through the use of their indigenous languages. This is because thinking of any-kind is majorly done in one's indigenous language. In the case of Japan, Adeniran (1995) has this to say,

as most protagonists of education in the indigenous languages have remarked ... the secret of Japan's developments is the medium of the Japanese children's education - Japanese language.

From Adeniran's observation, we can deduce that the building of Japan was not only left for the adults alone to handle. Every Japanese was included through the use of their local or indigenous language. Any nation that still allows her indigenous languages to play second fiddle does not have the building of her nation at heart. Indigenous languages of Nigeria should be both the foundation and corner stone of our nation building.

Indigenous Languages And Nation Building

Nation building demands the use of language to handle it. To handle this adequately, Nigerian indigenous languages have to be purposefully utilized. The linguistic pluralism of Nigeria should not pose any difficulty at all. Some indigenous languages (the demolects - Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba) have undergone graphization, standardization and modernization which Ferguson (1968) identified as the three dimensions for measuring language development. The implication of this is that these demolects have been raised to the standard effacing any challenge bordering on nation building. Areas of nation

building through the adequate utilization of our indigenous languages include the followings:

/ ***Education***

Education as a phenomenon means different things to different people. Because of its complexity in concepts and nature, its definition becomes difficult. Awe (1988) opined that education is everything. This means that education is seen in every human endeavour.

For a nation to integrate the various ethnic groups into a nation unit, the citizenry must be properly educated, since no country can develop (or achieve anything) beyond the level of her educational system, (Igborgbor, 1999). The only language that can handle this aspect of nation building very well irrespective of the social class one belongs are the indigenous languages. Why we clamour for nation building is to promote national unity. A foreign language being used in almost at the official matters of this nation cannot assure us of the desired national unity. The National Policy on Education (NPE, 1981) advocates for the use of indigenous languages in our schools to achieve our desired national unity.

In addition to appreciating the importance of language in the educational process and as a means of preserving the people's culture, the Government considers it to be in the interest of national unity that each child should be encouraged to learn one of the three major languages other than his Mother-Tongue.

The three major languages in question are the demolects - Flausa, Igbo and Yoruba. Nation building through education is about the preservation of culture. Going about it through the indigenous languages will enforce this because language is a good custodian of culture.

Politics

Akerede (1997) is of the view that the only instrument for nation building is politics because those that are involved in it are those that share common ideas, interests, beliefs and philosophies. To Mong (1997), for people to be effectively mobilized for political participation, the use of indigenous languages must be employed, language according to her is a unifying factor, hence, a mobilizing factor. It is not possible to convince a rational being or a society for anything without employing the existence of an indigenous language. The use of indigenous languages in politics far nation building discards fear and enthrones trust. Elder statesmen like Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, Alhaji Tafawa Balewa, Chief Obafemi Awolowo and a host of others used our indigenous languages in mobilizing the people to rise against colonial masters with the aim of getting their freedom at the back of their minds. The potency of our indigenous languages in nation building can never be questioned.

Socio-Cultural

The ultimate objective of nation building is the establishment of social integration of the various ethnic groups of the nation state. Any nation that can do this is said to have achieved satisfactory nation building process. This can only be achieved if the linguistic medium is indigenous. To achieve this satisfactorily, the demolects should play key roles.

Culturally, it is often said that language is culture and culture is language. Invariably, this means that language is a good custodian of the culture of the people that speaks it. Lyons (1969) opined that the language of a particular society is an integral part of its culture, and the lexical distinctions drawn by each language will tend to reflect culturally important features of objects, institutions and activities in the society in which the language operates. Nation building through a foreign language will never portray and preserve our culture - our rich heritage. Hence, the need for indigenous languages.

Science Anil Technology (ST)

Nation building paves way for national development. Globally, what determines the development of a nation is hen advancement in ST. ST is not language specific. According to Lbika (1988), since science and technology are societal experiences than language (which of course is used for communication in the society), is indispensable and its role formidable in such a subject as ST. That is why nations are dissected along lines laid down by our native languages.

Language and ST are inseparable. Transferred technology does not yield any result. The earlier we allow the learning of the basics of modern technology in this nation in our indigenous languages, the belter for us.

Conclusion And Recommendations

The efficiency of our indigenous languages in nation building cannot be overemphasized. Without an adequate utilization of indigenous languages, the satisfactory achievement of nation building process will never be a reality. It is only through the use of indigenous languages, the satisfactory achievement of a nation building process will never be a reality. It is only through the use of indigenous languages that emphasis will be placed on the citizenry's value and equal participatory opportunity for all. Language is life. It is evidence in all human endeavours. Hence, it should be given a paramount position in nation building.

The following recommendations are put together for further consideration, (i) The government at all level should ensure the affective implementation of her stand on the National Policy on Education as touching the indigenous languages, (ii) The demolects should be made compulsory at all levels of education, (iii) The Federal Government should create a forum for interdisciplinary interaction between the Nigerian language teachers and their colleagues from other disciplines, (iv) The status of our indigenous languages should be rated above every foreign language in Nigeria, (v) A credit pass in the demolects should be made a University requirement irrespective of the course the candidates intend to study.

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