The Role of Language in a Democratic Nation Building

By

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Abstract

Language can he used in many ways; one of them is in Specific purpose area Such as social or cultural communication, government decisions, political debate, media which is linked to the ability to express the relevant content. This paper aims to show that language can he used as a tool/or political and social element in the process of building, unification and maintaining the nation in a democratic society. It is also an essential element of national identify. The theoretical framework used in this work is pragma-crafting theory by Acheoah John Emike which views discourse as a pragmatic crafting activity. The work examines the different definitions of language and its functions, democratic society and its characteristics, finally the role of language as a tool in nation building. ft concludes by emphasizing that language is a veritable tool in nation building giving the conducive atmosphere of democracy. It should he explored serious for a formidable nation.

Keywords: Language, Nation-building, Democracy, Society, Pragma-crafting

Introduction

Many people have defined language in different ways, but one common opinion among them is that language is a structured means of communication. To say that language is a structured means of communication alludes to the fact that language is specie-specific. With language man performs several functions in the society. Granted that the quintessence of man's language is communication, that is using language to express certain mental, psychological or sociological properties,

entities or states, it has become increasingly as complex and mysterious as man's environment (moral, political, educational, religious, scientific, philosophical, etc.). It has played a great role in man's existence and is undeniably a veritable tool in the sustenance and control of our social system.

This justifies the claim that, for man to survive there must be co-operation with one another which can only be achieved through communication, which, in turn, is made possible through the use of language. Owing to multi-lingual nature of the Nigerian society, English has become the central language of communication among citizens at different levels. However, the choice of words and use of language in general are determined by the occasion of discourse, purpose, subject matter or persons involved among other factors.

Statement

Language has played a significant role in the rise and fall of civilizations. Language presents humankind with a variety of possibilities. Since language is the portrait of human thoughts, it reflects the quality of thought generated in a society. Competency in language therefore, enables an individual to express his thoughts in the most eloquent way which enhances nation building. The selection of language tools used to express thought reflects the priorities of a person or for that matter a nation. The way language is acquired and then used can make a tremendous difference in the success (or failure) of a person or nation. The quality and quantity of language is a barometer of the intellectual health of the people. Hence this work investigates the areas language has contributed in nation building.

Aim and Objectives

This study aims at analyzing the contributions of language as a veritable tool to building a nation in a democratic society all things being equal. It has the following objectives:

1. To investigate if there is any relationship between language and nation building.
2. To enumerate the roles language plays in nation building in a democratic society.

3. To advocate the areas language needs to be harnessed effectively for nation building

Concepts

Language

Many would define language as a means of communication thereby implying that every means of communication is language. Linguist, however, asserts that language is essentially a human phenomenon. Crystal (1.974), for instance, states that language is essentially a human phenomenon which is complex. It is indeed the most frequently used and most highly developed form of human communication. The implication of this is that language is just one of the several means of communication.

Ndimele (1999) defines language as a communication system in the sense that it associates meaning (message) with a set of signs ie sounds or symbols. According to him, all linguistic units of expression, e.g. sounds, words, sentences etc. are the sin of the objects. online or states of affairs that they represent. The relationship between a sign and the entity it stands for is as signification. For Allorton (1978) language is the fully developed natural human communication system based on speech.

Also, Hall (1988) believes language to be the institution whereby humans communicate and interact with each other by means of habitually used oral-auditory arbitrary symbols.

This underscores the fact that the possession of language among other attributes distinguishes human from animals. Nwala (2015) sees it as an organized and systematic means of communication; a shared code of conduct or behavior by people. Language is the most important aspect in the life of all beings.

We use language to express inner thoughts and emotions, make sense of complex and abstract thought, to learn to communicate with others, to fulfill our wants and needs, as well as to establish rules and maintain our culture. For this study, language is defined as verbal, physical, biologically innate, and a basic form of communication by humans.

All human languages share basic characteristics, some of which are organizational rules and infinite generativity. A common factor in all the definitions above is that language is basically a human phenomenon.

Functions of Language

There are divergent views on the functions of languages. However, the communicative function seems to be obvious. According to Ndimele (1999), there are six communication functions of language. These include informational role, expressive role, phatic role, ideational role and performative role.

Language is not only used as a means of communication, but also as a marker or indicator of the speaker's cultural identity. The identity is communicated through a particular language use during interaction (discourse markers). Certain types of expressions are used to express belonging to a group, but likewise they are sometimes used to exclude, separate or discriminate.

Language function can be classified into four categories: cognitive (related to learners' intellectual development), instrumental (related to the use of language for material purposes), integrative (related to group membership) and cultural (related to cultural appreciation and understanding). In addition to that, language may be also used as a political and social element in the process of building, unification and maintaining o1 a nation and as an essential element of national or cultural identity.

Nation Building

Akoto (2010) defines nation-building as the conscious and focused application of our people's collective resources, energies, and knowledge to the task of liberating and developing the psychic and physical space that we identify as ours. It involves the development of behaviours, values, language, institutions and physical structures that elucidate our history and culture, concretize and protect the present, and insure the future identity and independence of the nation. Nation building is deliberate, keenly directed, focused energetic projection of national culture, and collective action to develop a political and economic system.

From the political perspective, it is in the area of developing and instituting a democratic policy. Nation building thus entails the ability of the nation-state to sustain itself as a sovereign by giving freedom and liberty to its people to use a well laid mechanism or system of lcIrs1ip recruitment and leave a legacy or culture of smooth succession of power to future generation.

From economic context the greatness of individuals is through the success which a nation makes in industrial development for improved production of goods and services, it improves the standard of living of the people and builds the mind of the people together to want continues existence as one nation. Alesina and Reich (2013) conceive nation-building as a process which leads to the formation of countries in which citizens feel a sufficient amount of commonality of interests, goals and preferences so that they do not wish to separate from each other (Alesina & Reich. 2012).

Nation building therefore has objectives and purposes to be achieved. It is to achieve sustainable development through job creation, employment, good conditions of service and welfare packages, and creation of favorable climate for investors (foreign and local) at both urban and rural areas therefore Wikipedia (2019) defines nation-building as the process of constructing or structuring a national identity using the power of the State.

From the forgoing nation building is more than building the physical structures of that entity. It extends to the development of behaviors, values, and lingua franca. Nations thus are built by exemplary men and women and sustained by institutions such as governmental and nongovernmental organizations. In the context of this paper, nation-building is seen as harnessing both human and natural resources for the all-round advancement of a nation.

Democratic Society

The popular view of democracy is the position of Abraham Lincoln, which sees democracy as government of the people by the people, and for the people. Harvey and Harvey (1989) see democracy as a concept that involves among others "setting affairs according to known rules of government, toleration towards minority views, regular elections, freedom of speech and above all, observance of rule of

law". Kolawole (2004) believes democracy is not the absence of military rule nor it is necessarily the presence of civilian administrators, but a situation where political actors and institutions of state are oiled in democratic values, norms and ethos. In this respect, the impact and effects of democracy must permeate all the strata of society and governance. Franceschet defined democracy according to three basic requirements, nonviolence, political participation and control, and political equality (Franceschet, 2009).

Diamond et al. (1989, p. 6-7) views democracy as a system of government "that meets three essential conditions meaningful and extensive competition among individual and groups, especially political parties, for all effective positions of government power, at regular intervals and excluding the use of force, a highly inclusive level of political participation in the selection of leaders and policies, at least through regular and fair election, such that no major (adult) social group is excluded; and a level of civil and political liberties: freedom of expression, freedom of the press, freedom to form and join organizations-sufficient to ensure the integrity of political competition and participation". Essentially, democracy is system that enhances popular participation and fundamental human rights.

Characteristics of a Democratic Society

From the various definitions of democracy above, we deduce that a democratic society is that which offers many benefits to its citizens. It gives them freedom to make choices about their lives, to develop their potential as human beings and to live free from fear, harassment and discrimination. It gives them protection under the law and the right to elect legislators of their choice and to remove them if they do not perform to their satisfaction. It guarantees freedom of speech, religion and assembly. It ensures an independent judiciary where all people are entitled to a fair trial regardless of what they are accused of, a person is presumed innocent unless proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt. Through the principle of the rule of law it guarantees universality of the scope of the law and equality before the law for all citizens.

Freedom of the press makes possible the exposure of corruption, malpractice and incompetence: diversity of media opinion offers alternative interpretations of news and events. A strong democracy encourages an active and outspoken civil

society and robust public debate including dissent and disagreement with government. Such a democracy gives its members many opportunities to participate in public life. A properly functioning democracy also has moral responsibilities to non-citizens, refugees, visitors and other nations. Many of these responsibilities are enshrined in international covenant and agreements.

Furthermore, a democratic society is a society where there is rule of law, one where every person's vote counts equally, elections are decided by the PEOPLE (popular vote), and healthcare is a right not a privilege. These are the benchmarks against which the practice of democracy in a nation must constantly be measured.

This theory is preferred for this study because it explains how language directs education, peace, security, politics and other societal phenomena to evolve meaningful and sustainable development in the nation.

The Role of Language in Nation Building

Cultural/National identity

Language is not only used as a means of communication, but also a marker or indicator of the speaker's cultural identity. The identity is communicated through a particular language use during interaction (discourse markers). There is no gainsaying that people that speak the same language understand one another better and are' bound together better because of the understanding that language ensures. In a democratic society like ours, English language serves that purpose to an extent but our multiple culture makes us stand out as a nation because the people from the different group show solidarity to one another in form of dressing. Intermarriage, identifying with our festivals, Cultural sites and monuments, food etc. these helps to build the nation. It also attracts foreign investors to the country which grows our G.C.1.

The concept of nation is a frequently debated one, but a good starting point would be to describe it as a human collectivity defining itself as historically constituted or desired, the notion makes some claim to autonomy. Key to a conception of nation is the notion of identity as a source of symbol and legitimacy for mobilization toward the task of nation-building. Culture, language, and religion have historically been the central components of national identity.

Educational Empowerment

Education is one of the rights of any citizen in a democratic society. It is the bedrock to development in any society. Au educated society is a developed and powerful society because education gives knowledge and knowledge is power. Language and language studies empower those who are engaged iii them. Language as a means of communication is the corner stone of any educational process (Ige, 2000). It plays a vital role in education as a subject and it is also a medium of instruction. Education, whether formal or informal, is carried out through the medium of some language, and learning at any level is largely verbal (Awoniyi. 1978). Language, whether spoken or written, is the vehicle through which knowledge is imparted and knowledge is power. One of the cardinal points in the Federal Government's National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) is education, and language education is a key tool and bridge to the future (Olaoye, 2004). It empowers children and the youth to take charge of their lives. This involves acquisition of skills and knowledge that would prepare them for the world of work. Education is the most fundamental and important tool for empowerment or for the achievement of social justice and equity. Education is therefore a veritable instrument for promoting empowerment, and best done through the medium of languages. Modern man can hardly contemplate communal life without the instrument of language.

Language and Youth Empowerment

Language is the most fundamental and important tool for youth empowerment. It is a weapon for the uplift of the underprivileged, the marginalized, the un-informed or the illiterates in the society. The culture of reforms initiated by the previous administration is designed to engender sustainable change in democratic governance. This reform is to be carried out through education and language is the tool for doing this. This is one of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that runs through the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS). Youth empowerment is a re-branding enterprise, as the empowered youths are likely to shim corruption, and make positive contribution to national economic growth, peace, security and political stability. Empowerment is the process whereby people are enabled or given the opportunity to improve in order to contribute to positive change. It takes varied forms and dimensions which include activities like individual self-assertion, self- improvement, collective

bargaining or resistance in order to challenge existing power relations (Okeshola, 1995). Self - empowerment takes varied forms such as education, apprenticeship, usurpation, domination and force.

Women Empowerment/Enlightenment

In a democratic society the women are not left out in the nation building. Feminists have advanced the issue of empowerment of women through education as a means of challenging patriarchal ideology of male domination and women subordination. Empowerment entails lifelong struggle for survival and transforming the structures and institutions (e.g. laws, social practice. political process, and religious matters) that seem to perpetuate or reinforce gender discrimination and social inequality. According to Graham-Brown (1991), for the individual, empowerment through education promises an escape from poverty, oppression. It also promises greater social prestige, job mobility and better future prospect. Education empowers through language. Women are taking their place in the hem of affairs of the nation in different spheres of life e,g. politics, business, medicine, education, religion etc. Days are gone when they say that a woman's place is in the kitchen. This is made possible through the power of language, advocacies were made for them to realize their potentials and come out of their shells all thanks to the use of the right words.

Languages, Civic Responsibility and Democracy

The constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria provides that citizens have among others the following: allegiance to the constitution, respect for its ideals and institutions as well as the National Flag, National Anthem, National Pledge, and respect for properly constituted authorities. Other duties include protecting and preserving public property, shuim.ing violence, eschewing corruption and looting of public funds, and contributing to the good name and defense of the country. Citizens have the right to vote and be voted for. They have freedom of movement, speech, association, and the right to human dignity, personal liberty and fair hearing.

Language is an indispensable cultural legacy with which all forms of human interactions are carried out. It is capable of destroying or mending relationships. The creation of a new democratic culture depends on indigenous language for the

articulation of democratic ideals. A given political thought is usually expressed by means of language. It determines the stability and success or otherwise of a given democratic experience. Political contests depend on the use of language, as in violent or abusive language. Songs are composed in abusive diction to denigrate people and their ideals. Campaign language is a social mask for hiding party's selfish motives.

The umbrella as an emblem is a sign language. These symbols communicate deep meaning. The umbrella symbolically represents the provision of a shade or a shelter for protection against adverse weather conditions, poverty and material deprivation (Bako. 2004). Political speeches, slogans and emblems are expected to be goal-directed.

Language and Technological Development

Language is a vehicle of thought and the expression of culture. It expresses a people's way of life, their perception of things and their world view. This embodies their ideals and innovations, which embrace respect for technological and scientific innovations (Ishirna, 2004). Science and Technology are taught and acquired through language; it is what drives every society now.

Language and Media

The media both print and electronics can redeem Nigeria's image through effective language use. Pornographic language, coarse invective and tirade can be replaced with refined diction, polished syntax and semantic finesse. Columnists, newspapers editors, freelance writers should use language to write on and about the virtue of honesty, dedication to duty, moral rectitude, and selfless service to one's fatherland. They should also write biographies of honourable statesmen and women whose exemplary characters could be regarded as legendary. Such writings have the power of moralizing and hence of re-branding the readers for nation building.

Language and Religion

Since language can be regarded as the celestial electricity which illuminates the darkest part of the linguistically blind person, the study of language and linguistics is capable of transforming the citizens, from their primordial barbarity

or pristine primitiveness and reprehensible social misdemeanor, to men and women of moral finesse. A democratic society give its citizens freedom of worship so from religious point of view, the citizens can get spiritual empowerment through what Olaoye (2007) calls knowledge of the language of religious worship. i.e. the language of praise worship, intercession and the use of evocative epithets for spiritual "Rite de passage" leading to spiritual cleansing and rejuvenation. This enables a disciplined and trustworthy nationality.

Indigenous Language and Nation Building

Language is regarded as the bedrock of nation building. It is the most important tool with which societies are organized, and it is hardly possible to talk of national development without including the language with which the people formulate their thoughts. According to Olaoye (2007), indigenous languages and languages in general perform the following re-branding role:

Instrumental Function: Language is used for getting things done. The Federal Ministry of Transformation uses English and the Nigerian indigenous languages as campaign tools for sensitizing Nigerians on the need for the re-branding project. Languages are used in the training and retraining of civil servants, the academics, the lawmakers, while the politicians are being rebranded through retreats all carried out through the instrumentality of languages. The essence being to get these categories of Nigerians imbibe new socio-political, cultural and economic ethos of a new Nigeria.

The essence of law-making is also to sanitize the nation so that it will be a peaceful place to live. and to create opportunity for justice, fair play and equalitarianism. Constitutional reform can only be carried out through the use of languages to control man's egocentric tendencies, greed, avarice and kleptomania. Lawmaking is a language- sensitive activity or exercise. Responsible and responsive lawmaking is to save people from the clutches of slavery, oppressive rule, corrupt leaders, tyrannical rulers, and to chasten men and women of shady character who have given Nigeria a bad name. Implementing legal, political and economic reforms is tantamount to building the nation, and this task is carried out through languages. Misuse or abuse of language leads to perverse justice, insincerity, rape of democracy, deception and corruption.

Regulatory Function: Language is used for controlling people's behaviour, for instance through:

(a) Prohibition, as in "don't cheat", "don't urinate here" don't bribe", "don't take bribe", "don't take what does not belong to you", "don't engage in examination malpractice". "don't join bad gangs". etc.

(b) Through threat of reprisal, especially if behaviour is not stopped, as in "I will punish you if you do that again", "you will go to jail if you don't stop stealing", "you will be rusticated if you don't stop cheating during exams", etc.

(c) Through disapproval of behaviour, as in "that is bad of you', "No, stop it" that is not done here, etc.

Meta-language in Nation Building

Meta-language is defined in Encyclopedia Britannica (1981 'p.5) as the study of a branch of linguistics that deals with the relation of language to other areas of a person's culturally determined behavior, e.g. the study of gestures, facial expression, voice quality, mannerism and other aspects of speech events. Meta-language is the language used to discuss or describe other languages. Language used in describing some technical terms and vocabulary of English is called meta-language. Meta-language according to Olalekan (2001) is designed to take care of medical and scientific terms in English and other international. For instance, the NERDC's sponsored vocabulary of primary science and mathematics in nine Nigerian languages (Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba, Edo. Efik, Fulfulde, Izon, Kanuri and Tiv) is a clear demonstration of the capacity of Nigerian indigenous languages as tools for the development of science and technology.

Language and ICT

English is the vehicle of globalization, and through it came Information and Communication Technology (TCT) which has a pervasive influence on education delivery. ICT, through television, radio and satellite communication, on-i me services, e-mail, computer teleconferencing, has brought the world to the doorstep of the youths and other computer literates. ICT is therefore a source of youth empowerment, and hence a tool for national building. Through the internet and world news, accessed through English, western democracy has become a regular menu on the nation's political agenda. Political and language education, made

possible through globalization, has started to open people's eyes to such issues like the value of peace, justice, freedom, equity, dialogue, compromise, tolerance, reciprocal respect, the essence of following the rule of law, constitutionality and due process, and the need to imbibe the culture of reform. These are some of the ingredients for sustainable democracy and potent tools for nation building.

Conclusion

We have judiciously x-rayed the capability of language in building a nation and attest to the fact that it has everything to do with nation building in the atmosphere of democracy and must be explored very seriously. Language indeed is an instrument of nation-building, however, the roles and dimensions of language in promoting national life is facet-driven, that is, choice of words, speech act selection and sequencing depends on communicative goals in political, religious, administrative and other spheres of national life. Language presents humankind with a variety of possibilities. Since language is the portrait of human thoughts, it reflects the quality of thought generated in a society. Competency in a language therefore, enables an individual to express his thoughts in the most eloquent way that will bring out the best response from his hearer.

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