Language, Technology and Democratic Culture: A Sociological Analysis

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Abstract

This paper examines the interplay of language and technology and their collective role in the development of a democratic society, such as Nigeria. The paper argues that language, as a conveyor of meaning, is what enables democracy and technology to make sociological sense, in conceptual and practical terms. It posits that without language, there will be no social understanding and, therefore, no stable environment within which technological innovation and democratic processes can take place. This is because language is the foundation of any socialization process and it takes a largely enlightened population, much more than technological processes, to drive and entrench a democratic culture. Drawing examples from China and Singapore, two of the notable countries that deliver education and development to their people using their local languages, the paper affirms that the more indigenous the language of a social setting, the greater change it delivers. The paper concludes that what makes a developed society work is not necessarily its advanced technology or "advanced" democracy but, essentially, its culturally enlightened and cohesive population.

Keywords: language, technology, democracy, culture

Introduction

It is easy to see the link between language and any sphere of human activity. This is because language is the conveyor of meaning, be it technological or democratic meaning. In its theoretical and practical dimensions, and even in its utilitarian functions, technology uses the vehicle of language – technical and everyday language. And, of course, technology is created to serve humanity

within given social settings, the most self-governing and accountable of such settings being, in popular opinion, the democratic setting. Freedom of speech and of the press is a defining characteristic of a democratic setting and this, recently, has been boosted in many nations by the adoption of freedom of information as a democratic right. All these rights and even the democratic process itself make sense to the people (for whom the parties and the elections are ideally organized) through the use of language.

So, both technology and democracy communicate meaning through the vehicle of language. It is difficult to advance technology and democracy without a corresponding advancement of language. Indeed, without language there will be no social understanding and, therefore, no stable environment within which technological innovation and democratic processes can take place. It takes language to aggregate and express group interests, negotiate political stakes and express political choices. It takes technology to advance these goals by, for example, using technological gadgets to effect biometric capture of eligible voters and digitalization of the voting and counting processes, among several other technological enhancements.

Such technical balloting system is usually effectively deployed in advanced social settings. What makes democracy work in such settings: their technology, their democracy or their people? The point we should note is that what makes such settings advanced is not necessarily their advanced technologies nor their "advanced" democracies but, essentially, their advanced population. A democracy is as good as the quality of the electorate and the quality of the electorate is determined by the kind and level of information available to the people. And information is conveyed through language.

It is the view of this paper that much of the success politicians have recorded in continually taking the people for a ride has deep roots in the average citizen's ignorance of the realities of his social environment and the politician's exploitation of this ignorance through manipulative use of language. To put a stop to this, or at least minimize it, we must as a people make the education of every citizen of Nigeria a national priority. We cannot build a sustainable accountable system upon an unenlightened population. Education increases the quality of the educated, opens them up to wider information, and makes them less susceptible to social manipulation.

Language and Democratic Culture

While not contesting Jack M. Balkin's well-known position that "digital technologies alter the social conditions of speech," (Balkin 2004) this paper asserts that it takes a largely enlightened population, much more than technological processes, to drive and entrench a democratic culture. For our

democracy to deliver peace and prosperity, it must transcend the current trend where it is merely a four-year event to a possible future where it becomes a culture – our own home-grown democratic culture. And we need to pin down what this democratic culture really amounts to.

What is a democratic culture? The concept can be defined as follows:

> A democratic culture is a culture in which individuals have a fair opportunity to participate in the forms of meaning-making that constitute them as individuals. Democratic culture is about individual liberty as well as collective self-governance; it concerns each individual's ability to participate in the production and distribution of culture. (Balkin 2004)

This definition is notable because it is individual-oriented and places key emphasis on meaning-making. Language is about meaning-making. Unless we develop the capacity of the average citizen to make sense out of our currently elitist approach to technology and democracy, we will continue to face grave challenges in these areas. Currently, our indigenous languages are hardly deployed in meaningful communication that galvanizes our people's potential for fruitful participation in nation-building programmes and processes. Yet, attempts are being made to involve them in technology-driven civic engagements, such as voter registration and the current nationwide national ID card registration exercises.

This paper is not opposed to technology. Technology has delivered some very useful inventions, such as the internet and the mobile phone. The internet in particular has proved very useful in making information available to all in the quickest possible time. Google's role in this regard is remarkable. But there are negative impacts of this development that indicate that unless we secure the "nature of man," his capacity for meaning-making and meaning-internalization, he may become a robotic victim of technology. Lee Siegel, a celebrated social critic, thinks that

> All this boosterism and herd-like affirmation is bizarre because the internet is a new mode of convenience, nothing more, nothing less. It has not made society more egalitarian, it has not made modern democratic politics more 'transparent', it has not made us happier. Rather, it has made our appetites more impatient to be satisfied, devised new, speedier ways of satisfying them, and created more sophisticated methods of monitoring and controlling our private lives. (Siegel 2017)

To change the negative impact of the internet, as painted above, what we need to change is not the internet but the meaning-making nature of the internet-user. Language is a very vital driver of change; the more meaningful the language, the greater change it delivers. No language conveys meaning to our people more than their indigenous languages. We can employ indigenous

languages as weapons of change; we can use it to stimulate our technological and democratic development.

Indigenous Languages as Drivers of Technological Growth

Given the foregoing, the connection between language and technological development is in general terms self-evident. Technology is invention through thought. Thinking is done and articulated through language. Therefore, thought, language and technology are inextricably linked. It is through language that we express feelings, and conceive and impart information – even scientific and technological information.

Language is a major means for human communication and is central to training, effective management, and the provision of services. Language could either be a barrier or a facilitator of economic activities. It can be a barrier even in language-based vocations e.g. translation, interpretation, the media, tourism and teaching. In fact, there is no domain of economic activity in which language does not play a role. The degree is only determined by the linguistic character of the community (Webb 2003:61-84). It is therefore paramount for every society to ensure its indigenous language is developed enough to drive technological growth.

To do this successfully, an indigenous language must be fully codified. Linguistic development is partly the attainment of proper codification of a given language. In addition, the language must be in constant use by its speakers. Unfortunately, most Nigerian languages are yet to be fully codified. They lack systematic description and are not documented. It is therefore pertinent for speakers of non-codified languages to note that gone are the days such duties are left solely for government. It is now the responsibility of speech communities to sponsor the codification of their languages. The codification will facilitate development on various fronts. It is only fully codified languages that are taught in schools due to availability of orthographies.

By learning to write their indigenous languages, speakers of such languages can put down their thoughts, including innovative thoughts, on paper and this can be the seed of some technological product. Who knows how many technological initiatives have died unexpressed because of the non-literate status of indigenous inventors? That someone cannot speak a foreign language does not mean he cannot think creatively. We need to develop our indigenous languages to the point where it can be used in introducing our students to science and technology.

Many scientific and technological ideas did not originate in China; yet, through learning those concepts in their native Mandarin language, the Chinese have made enviable scientific and technological strides. Their frontline scientists do

not speak English, French or German. Whatever made them successful scientists they learnt and practised using Mandarin. This shows that linguistic development is necessary for any meaningful and desirable development. If someone thinks China succeeded because of its huge population, what about Singapore, a country of 5.399 million people that has successfully deployed its national language, Malay, in its technological development. There are many Nigerian languages that are spoken by over 5 million people. Are there any Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry or Biology textbooks written in those languages? This writer is not aware of any.

Scientific or technological development cannot be attained by a people who have not developed linguistically. Suffice it to say that all technologically developed nations and societies must have attained linguistic development prior to thier scientific or technological development (Amfani 1999).

The relationship between language and technology differs from place to place. Relationship in terms of the effect of one on the other also varies from language to language. The differences correspond to the level of technological sophistication of the society and the level of codification of the language. The failure of most African governments to develop robustly their local languages for use in generating wealth and technological development has led such countries to failure and stagnation in many areas.

Sustaining Our Local Languages

For the rest of this paper, I will dwell largely on sub-themes related to the need to sustain our local languages, as it is only when a language is in existence that one could relate it to technology, democratic and other cultural expressions.

The current state of our indigenous languages is captured by this remark:

> In spite of the strong emphasis linguists, oral folklorists, writers and experts place on the need for parents to transmit their mother tongues to their children through active usage at home, many people across the world are yet to heed this call. In nowhere else is this negligent attitude more glaring than in parts of Africa, especially among small ethnic groups with minority languages. These minority languages are battling the onslaught of majority languages fostered on them by a multitude of factors not least is rampaging globalization that is fast assimilating and annihilating secure traditional lifestyles and modes of living. (Ajeluoron 2015)

This writer hails from one of the most linguistically diverse parts of Nigeria and, as such, attaches great importance to the fortunes and misfortunes of indigenous languages. Troubled by the fate of minority languages in Nigeria, I wrote a book (Usman 2014) drawing attention to current issues about language

disappearance with particular reference to the linguistic groups of Biu, Borno State, North-Eastern Nigeria. In so doing I thought I could join linguists and other stakeholders to sensitize and urge all concerned to take urgent steps to save our endangered indigenous languages, especially the many minority languages currently threatened with extinction.

Among Nigerian linguists, the most worrisome question currently is: how many languages do we have? For many years now, nobody seems to know (Emenanjo 2003). According to *Ethnologue* (2009) Nigeria has a total number of 527 languages. Out of this number, 514 are living languages; 2 (English and Pidgin) are second languages without mother tongue speakers while eleven (Ashagana, Auyokawa, Bassa-Kwantagora, Fali of Baissa, Kpati, Lufu, Shirawa, Taura, Ajanci, Basa-Gumwa and Teshenawa) are languages with no known speakers.

It is important to note that Nigerian languages vary in terms of numerical strength and social influence. The determination of the numerical strength of languages in Nigeria presents a peculiar problem under the current National Census Policy. As I observed in my book:

> …so long as the current policy on population census which excludes reference to an individual's 'ethnic' and other statistical indices subsist, it will be impossible for interest groups to evaluate the 'growth' or 'demise' of any particular language group on the basis of its 'absolute' population and 'proportion' of its speakers in relation to the total population or any given segment of the total population. (Usman 2014)

I went on to argue that while on grounds of overriding public policy:

> …the exclusion of 'ethnicity' may be desirable and defensible on the basis of the promotion of national unity in diversity; it is an obvious constraint in the evaluation of the fate of ethnic languages at present and in the future. (Usman 2014)

It is perhaps pertinent at this stage to state briefly how I initially came about taking interest in language matters. This interest is linked to my literary career which bloomed after my retirement from the federal public service in 1999. When I embarked on writing *A History of Biu*, a book centred on my community, I came across a statement by one of the pioneer foreign missionaries who came to my area in 1923. He was an American named Albert D. Helser. He narrated how, within two to three years of their arrival in Biu, he and his colleagues had proficiently learnt Bura as a working language. At that time, Bura language was not well documented; the precarious situation of the language made him to express fears regarding its possible disappearance. His words:

> So far as I could learn, no white man had ever spoken Bura when Mr Kulp and I came into Buraland. The natives were blissfully ignorant of any such thing as writing. Mr Palmer a government clerk and a native of Sierra Leone, had learned Bura and had compiled for government uses a brief grammar of Bura done in English. This was now our starter. After three years, St. Marks Gospel, "first" and "second" readers, an Old Testament story book and life of Christ have been printed in Bura. A dictionary-grammar, a translation of the Acts of the Apostles, a book on hygiene and sanitation and a song-book are now (1926) in preparation. (Helser 1926:8)

For that reason, he ominously predicted that "*During the next half-century, the Bura language may possibly give way to Hausa or English***,** but for present and for some years to come, most of our work must be conducted in Bura tongue." (Helser 1926:8, italicized portions my emphasis)

I must say that that prophetic statement about the possible disappearance of Bura language initially frightened me, but after barely seven decades it is turning out to be a true prediction – unless something is urgently done to stop it! I will talk more about Bura language because I believe the case of Bura symbolizes the fate of many minority languages of Nigeria. All of them, like Bura, are threatened.

Kanuri language was the first threat to local languages in Biu area but Hausa has overtaken it as the major threat to all local languages of the area. Like a catfish eating up smaller fishes, Hausa's dominance in Biu area's linguistic stream seemed unchallenged but English, for long warming up behind the scene, now poses almost the same threat as Hausa. Right now, most people in Biu area, including the young and the old, can hardly read and write in any indigenous language or converse fluently without interjecting Hausa or English. Today, almost all speakers of Bura are bilingual. It is difficult to meet someone who speaks only Bura but there are many Bura/Hausa, Bura/English and Bura/Kanuri speakers. The few adults who still speak Bura with passable level of proficiency surprisingly blissfully hope that the Bura language cannot disappear. Yet, the threat of Bura being swallowed up in the future by any of those three languages is foreseeable.

Even in the educational sector, Bura is suffering intense neglect. The Bura primers produced by the missionaries are no longer in circulation. I am not sure Bura literature is taught in any educational institution – primary, secondary or tertiary – in the whole of Borno State nor am I aware that any informal class in Bura-language resuscitation and sustenance is being conducted. But the reversal of this trend is possible. Unfortunately, many minority speech communities appear satisfied with the current state of affairs even when it amounts to their approving the death sentence of their indigenous languages.

Urgent action is required to save Bura language and other threatened minority languages of Nigeria. And this is basically not a programme for government; it is the primary responsibility of the owners of the indigenous languages. The United Nations and UNESCO have warned that the rate at which languages are disappearing across the globe is alarming, and that unless the trend is reversed, the loss in unique cultural values that accompany language disappearance will make the world a culturally poorer place.

It must be mentioned here that one of the major functions of Departments of Languages & Linguistics and the Language Institutes and Centres of Nigeria should be to facilitate the codification of local languages. Speech communities in Nigeria should therefore engage such institutions for this valuable service.

Using Nigerian Languages to Drive Technology

Pasquali (1997:33) has emphasized the importance of using Nigerian languages to drive technological development. And this paper would like to share in detail some of his thoughts on this issue. He says that

> …people must find their own language to articulate the world in their own language and to transform reality in search of their own dreams. This means that technology must be acquired or domesticated through acceptable integration of Nigerian languages. Such languages especially the 3 big sisters, Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba have been used by Microsoft in conjunction with African Languages Technology Initiative (Alt-I), Ibadan to produce a translation of most computer terminologies in them (Amfani Ms). Despite this positive development there are many other languages with millions of speakers where nothing of this sort exist; even with the big 3 sisters, they still need to be developed for an all-round technological development. That means an appropriate technology must take root in the language of the soil and we must see technology as defined by UNCTAD (1977) cited in Adiele (2002:6).

Adiele quoted UNCTAD as saying that technology:

> …involves not merely the systematic application of scientific or other knowledge to practical tasks, but also the social and economic atmosphere within which such application has to take place…Even the attitudes and values of people are, in a sense, part of technology since they affect the capabilities of a nation.
>
> Currently, Information Communications Technology (ICT) has brought about not only new ways of doing things but also the development of its own language which only the initiated could understand. Terms such as text, uploading, downloading, online, tweet etc no longer carry their ordinary English meanings. There are other new terms such as chatting, email, e-commerce, e-banking and some queer

expressions such as BRB (be right back), LOL (laugh out loud).

Technological dynamics have brought changes in the culture of doing things. Ositadimma Nebo, professor of engineering and former Vice Chancellor, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, as well as former Minister of Power (February 2013 to May 2015) recently acknowledged this. Explaining his reluctance to go back to teaching after his ministerial appointment, he said:

> …I have been teaching engineering in the university for a good part of my life, and I think going back now to teach students of the i-Generation – people who now use iPhone, i-everything and with engineering so dynamic – I have to go for a refresher course. Otherwise, I will end up being taught by the students I'm claiming to teach. So I would rather do other more practical things that I believe I can do. (Vanguard 2015:17)

Some encouraging technological approaches are making impact outside the classroom and in remote parts of Nigeria. A Nigeria police officer Mahmood Mohammed Dahuwa was reported to have earned promotion to the rank of an Assistant Superintendent of Police for using a wide range of technologies to identify and track down criminals. Using his technology, he has helped in bringing down the crime rate in Karim Lamido local government area of Taraba State. (Nation 2015:31)

The change in vocabulary comes so rapidly nowadays that even compilers of dictionaries could hardly keep pace. Publishers of English dictionaries are said to wait for about a period of five years for the new words or expressions to firm up before they could include them in up-dated dictionaries. Hausa language has not been spared the effect of technology in its development too. For example, Hausa has coined new terms to keep up with the digital world. Hence *yanar gizo* (spider web) is the name given to the internet while *na'ura mai k'wak'walwa* means computer. Several other languages might have crafted such descriptive terms.

Below, I would like to briefly situate culture in terms of its specific relationship to technology, language and human rights.

Culture and Technology

Transfer and transmission of science and technology is one of the ways of ascertaining the realization of human potential. In the transfer process, we often ignore the fact that science and technology are cultural phenomena. They are the superstructure culture while language is the base. This is precisely why the transfer of science and technology in Nigeria often achieves peripheral results. Bamgbose (1994) aptly submitted that "unless there is technology

culture, the seed of transferred technology will fall on barren ground and it will not germinate." (Obafemi 2012)

As expressed above, there has always been a connection between technology and culture with one having an influence over the other. This influence has been more significant since the advent of the 19th century. Technological development has changed culture positively and in some ways negatively. Positively, culture drives technological development for higher achievement. (Vanguard 2015:17) There is no gainsaying the fact that undeveloped traditional societies have limited capacity to develop technologically. The negative aspects of technology on culture can be seen in the breakdown of family values in the lives of rural dwellers that flock to the urban centres to work in industries and other establishments using current technologies.

Culture and Language

It is said that there are up to two to three hundred and even more definitions of culture. Culture embraces the totality of inherited and innate ideas, attitudes, beliefs, values, and knowledge, comprising or forming the shared foundations of social actions (Mahdi and Jafari, 2015). Numerous definitions of culture suggest that there is no single all-embracing definition. To me, culture is simply the totality of the way of life of a community or society developed over time.

Language is often seen as the flip side of culture. Culture and language are like the two sides of a coin. Viewed in another sense, language is a vehicle of culture. To vividly drive home the relationship, those familiar with temperate climate compare culture to the iceberg while language is the tip of the iceberg. Remarkably, so intimate is the relationship between language and culture that in the event of the death of a language, culture and nearly all that are associated with it also vanish. What may be spared are the more permanent features (materials) of a culture such as the more enduring artefacts (nowadays preserved in museums). Fortunate to survive also may be societal practices (including non materials) that are preserved in writing or by digital means.

Quite significantly, another vivid example of the relationship of language and culture can be seen in expressions of different languages. For example, the expressions of native Hausa speakers will convey Hausa culture while the expressions of Yoruba and Igbo speakers will invariably convey the cultures of the speakers of those languages. It is also noteworthy that though a society may speak the same language, the speakers may not necessarily share the same culture as they may be living in different environments. This explains the slight differences that are easily noticeable among the Hausa of Nigeria and the Hausa of Mali or even our close neighbour, Niger Republic. As is often the

case, a person who grows up away from his place of birth and does not speak the mother tongue is said to have lost the original culture. This is particularly so in the case of a child. If one takes away a child from its place of birth, the child easily forgets the mother tongue and learns the language of the new environment. It is only when a person relocates as an adult that the person tends to resist new cultural influences, having already been formed in character and other cultural practices in his original environment.

Culture and Human Rights

The reference to democratic culture in the topic of this paper introduces ideological connotations in some societies, in the sense of the freedom of individuals to freely express themselves in their languages. In this sense, human right issues bordering on democracy are embedded in the topic. Human rights, including democratic freedoms, are not absolute. Often, many societies consider it needful to impose some restrictions, be they administrative, judicial or technological restrictions, to limit certain excesses in order to protect the overall health of the society. (Balkin 2004) It should be clear that this democratic slant does not in any way mean that people living in non-democratic societies have no culture or rights of their own.

Current thinking in democratic Europe on preservation and promotion of "individual" and "collective" rights, some of which are already contained in the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), centres around five inalienable "personal rights" pertaining to languages. These rights include: right to be recognised as a member of a language community; right to have the freedom to use one's own language both in private and in public; right to use one's own name; right to interrelate and associate freely with other members of one's language community of origin; and right to maintain and develop one's own culture. The "collective rights" of language groups are four. They include: right of groups to have their own language and culture taught; right of access to cultural services; right of equitable presence of their language and culture in the communications media; and right to receive attention in their own language from government bodies and in socio-economic relations (Starkey).

Undoubtedly the rights as outlined, or the ingredients of them, exist in varying degrees in nearly every society. Only that some nations that embrace and raise these ideals to a higher level, to the point of making it part of their culture, go all out to propagate them as an ideology and that, arguably, is the cause of disagreements in many troubled spots of the world today. Indeed, over the last two decades, such propagators have introduced issues of human rights into almost all facets of human endeavour.

Language and Learning

There is a growing realism amongst scholars, especially language experts that linguistic attributes can influence learning. Language is looked at as human capital and the language skills of an individual are interpreted as a source of educational and economic advantage. A reader of a review of my book emailed his experience to me, thus:

> I understand that the more languages one speaks the bigger ones brain. This is largely because one would have access to more words and therefore a richer vocabulary. If this is combined with an art of communication it is an extreme wealth. I recall reading somewhere that the best diplomats are great linguists and communicators. Today code and logarithm writers are predominantly white Cauca- sians, male and western. There is a good percentage of Asian-Chinese, Japanese. And these are the people that control global trade (Oklobia 2015).

Individuals and nations who are not able to use their languages for all main transactions of their daily lives are doomed to life of dependency in the shadow of the languages of the colonizer (Djite, 1993 and Prah, 1996). What this means in reality is that the enforced use of the foreign (European) languages bring about, among other things, a deadly decrease and even total loss of creativity.

This, perhaps, is one of the reasons Nigeria has documented its language policy and policy directions. These largely positive official positions can be found in

- The Constitution of the Federal Public of Nigeria (1979, revised 1989 and 1999)
- The National Policy on Education (1977, revised 1981, 1998 and 2004)
- The Cultural Policy for Nigeria (1988)
- The Nigerian Broadcasting Code (1993, revised 2006), and 2014 – 9 Year Basic Education Curriculum

Unfortunately, the language policy pronouncements contained in these documents, especially those relating to local languages, have remained largely unimplemented due to the stakeholders' lack of interest.

Language Education Policy

As a result of Nigeria's diversity and the need to foster national unity, Nigeria's language education policy was anchored on the foundation laid during the colonial period. That policy states that

> …medium of instruction at the lower primary (the first three years)

> should be in the indigenous language of the child or the language of his/her immediate environment while at the upper primary school, English should be the medium of teaching and the major indigenous languages of Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba, should be taught as school subjects (Musa 2012).

The above policy must have stemmed from the report of the Phelps-Stokes Commission to Africa (1920-1921) that, inter alia, recommended that the "tribal language" be used in the lower primary classes while the "language of the European nation in control" should be used in the upper classes (Lewis 1962). The colonial governments, including the one in Nigeria, started implementing this as a policy. This policy was further reinforced by the UNESCO Meeting of Specialists (UNESCO 1953:47-8) that recommended that "pupils should begin their schooling through the medium of the mother tongue" and that "the use of the mother tongue be extended to as late a stage in education as possible."

This policy has been implemented mostly in breach. That policy was there before I was enrolled into primary school in the early 1950s. I was taught in Hausa (a language of the wider community) during my first two years of schooling in Biu rather than in Babur/Bura (my mother tongue and the language of the immediate community). When I moved on to King's College, Lagos, for my higher school education in the mid 1960s, the college rule discouraged students from speaking local languages. Anyone caught doing so was liable to punishment. With over 500 languages, Nigeria presents peculiar difficulties for educational authorities who are faced with the dilemma of choosing one language of instruction out of several options.

For long there was no authentic educational policy to guide the authorities. It was only 38 years after independence that a National Policy on Education (1977, revised 1981, and henceforth NPE) of the Federal Republic of Nigeria was promulgated and a National Education Implementation Task Force set up to ensure compliance with the NPE's objectives. For the purpose of unification of the various ethnic groups in the country, the language section of the NPE clearly required that each child should be encouraged to learn one of the three major languages (Hausa, Ibo and Yoruba) other than his own mother tongue (NPE 1981:19).

Incidentally, NPE contains the directive on language use in education which states that at the pre-primary level "the medium of instruction will principally be the mother-tongue or the language of the immediate community" (NPE 1981:10, section 2:11(3)). At the Primary level…the medium…is initially the mother-tongue or the language of the immediate community, and at a later stage, English" (NPE 1981:13, section 3:15(4).

The latest revision of the NPE on Nigerian languages as produced by the NERDC is contained in the 2014 9-Year Basic Education Curriculum. The document states that from primaries 1-6 to JSS 1-3, only one Nigerian language is recommended to be taught. The innovation here is that each school was allowed to freely choose which language to teach. By implication in all the villages and communities, the language of the area has a chance to be taught. However, the choice of any particular language is not an easy one in a multilingual-community and cosmopolitan society.

Looking at it closely, the NPE recognizes five categories of languages, namely:

- The mother tongue (i.e. a child's first language).
- A language of the immediate community (i.e. a language spoken by a wider community, and generally learnt and used as a second language by those whose mother tongue is a minor language).
- A major Nigerian language (Hausa, Igbo or Yoruba).
- English – the official language.
- A foreign language (i.e. French and Arabic) (Bamgbose 2000:70).

The country's language policy, thus, favours multilingual learning, and every Nigerian language is a possible candidate for use as a medium of instruction. However, we must also take into account that both pre-primary and primary schools are not all under the direct control of government. Pre-primary schools are in the hands of private institutions and non-governmental organizations. Parents send their children to these schools to have them introduced to English quite early.

Mrs. Maryam Adenike Abimbola, a linguist and Dean, School of Languages, Federal College of Education (Special), Oyo, had identified, among the problems threatening Nigerian languages, parents' complicity "in hindering the propagation of our indigenous languages by preferring to speak foreign languages, especially English, even in the homes." (Tribune 2015:10)

With respect to role of families in language transmission, there is an obvious dilemma among children of cross-cultural marriages. The experience of a couple illustrates this: the man, whose mother is from another ethnic group in Plateau State, is married to a woman whose parents are from distinct ethnic groups (her father is from Nasarawa State while her mother is from Kaduna State). The man is too busy to teach his children his own indigenous language though they can "pick" some words (*Saturday Sun* 2015:20). As an ostensible bail-out from this linguistic complexity, this family's children speak mostly English. But come to think of it, the man has the option of letting his wife teach

their children her own language. After all, that is their *mother* tongue. So, even in linguistically mixed families, no excuse should hinder intergenerational transmission of mother tongues to children.

Another couple narrated a similar experience:

> We have a challenging problem. Personally I am part of the problem because my son does not speak Idoma – my dialect – nor Esan – my wife's dialect. He speaks only English. Now, if he spoke the three languages – English, Idoma and Esan (and pidgin English) – and assuming he becomes a computer code writer, the power at his disposal would be enormous. My point…if our languages become extinct a major chunk of our existence would have died too…you may have discussed only Biu, but you are raising a very fundamental issue about our future as a people – Nigerians and Africans, and not as Euro-composed. (Oklobia 2015)

The promotion of Nigerian languages in the educational system can only be a recommendation and individual families take the final decision on how to implement the recommendations for using the local languages as a medium of instruction in nursery and primary schools.

National Language Policy

Although Nigeria has a National Language Education Policy, there is no national language policy. This is quite understandable. Given Nigeria's diversity and the need to promote national unity, government appears to be wary of giving preferential promotion of one language over the other. This perhaps explains the non-adoption of the 1976 Constitution Drafting Committee's recommendation to the effect that English or any other language may be used in legislative deliberations as the National or State Assembly may by resolution decide. It thus appears that Nigerian languages are left to themselves to survive or die.

However on July 13, 2012, a technical committee made up of representatives from relevant ministries, language institutes, French and Arabic Language Villages, departments of languages and linguistics of tertiary institutions, parastatals, the six geo-political zones, experts and other critical stakeholders, was inaugurated under the chairmanship of Professor Ahmed Haliru Amfani, the former President of the Linguistic Association of Nigeria and a former member of the Governing Board of the Nigerian Educational Research and Documentation Centre, Abuja. One of the committee's terms of reference was to produce a blueprint of a new National Language Policy for Nigeria. The committee is yet to finish its job.

Institutional Contributions

Perhaps it will not be out of place to present to you an overview of some of the principal players that are obtainable in the field in terms of language development and promotion. This overview is by no means exhaustive.

Notable among the tertiary institutions that are in the forefront in the teaching and development of Nigerian languages are the University of Ibadan, Bayero University Kano, University of Jos, University of Maiduguri and Usman Dan Fodio University, to mention only a few. University of Ibadan that has for a long time established linguistic department has also established a Yoruba Language Centre in 2010 to offer studies in Yoruba language and culture. Similarly, Bayero University Kano has established a Centre for the Study of Nigerian Languages.

There is also in existence at Aba, Abia State, the National Institute of Nigerian Languages (NINLAN) that offers diploma courses in linguistics and Nigerian languages (Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba). The Nigerian Army established the Nigerian Army Language Institute (NALI) in Ovim, also in Abia State, with a limited objective of teaching its personnel foreign languages (principally French) to meet the challenges faced by the Nigerian Army in international peacekeeping operations. The Army had earlier established a College of Education in Ilorin (Sobi-Barracks). Run by the Nigerian Army Education Corps, the college had existed for over 20 years teaching languages to army personnel.

The following government institutions, according to a 1996 listing by Elugbe, are concerned with language development:

- University departments of Linguistics and Nigerian/African languages joined by similar departments of Colleges of Education
- Teachers Resource Centres
- A National Committee to advice Government on the production of textbooks
- Federal and State Ministries of Education
- Nigeria Educational Research Development Council (NERDC)
- State Mass Literacy Boards
- National Commission for Nomadic Education
- National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non- Formal Education
- National Institute for Nigerian Languages

- National Primary Education Commission
- Centre for the Study of Nigerian Languages, Kano

Added to this list is Ministry of Culture and Ijaw National Affairs, Bayelsa State (Ohiri-Aniche 2013). Ohiri-Aniche and Haruna (2014) also listed some communities and individuals involved in language perseveration and promotion to include:

- Kay Williamson Educational Foundation
- The Jos Linguistic Circle
- CəLela Promoters and Trainers
- Kambari Language Project
- Urhobo Resource and Language Learning Centre (URLL), Lagos
- Centre for Igbo Arts and Culture, Abuja
- Yoruba Folktales through the Net

The Linguistic Association of Nigeria (LAN) remains committed to not only sensitizing people to the potential extinction of some languages but also assisting communities and stakeholders to arrest the looming danger. LAN has also been advocating a language policy summit to be held along the lines of such countries as South Africa and India to come out with comprehensive and practical recommendations to safeguard our languages and ensure that every one language flourishes. However, a positive response to that effect is being expected from educational and cultural authorities and from the various legislative houses.

Meanwhile, LAN has been prominent in encouraging and working with different speech communities to preserve their languages. In the last three years, LAN has collaborated with the NERDC, the Urhobo (Delta State), the Ijaw (Bayelsa State), and the Jukun (Taraba State) to produce their orthographies and curricula for their primary schools. The efforts made have all been presented at the Joint Consultative Council (JCC) and the National Council on Education. In addition, the orthography for Cl'ela in Kebbi State has also been completed and is due for presentation at the next JCC. Beyond all these achievements, LAN constantly does advocacy work with communities and State Houses of Assembly to urge them to start supporting the production of their orthographies, curricula and primers for use in schools. The postal address of the secretariat of LAN is C/o Prof. Andrew Haruna, Department of Linguistics and Nigerian Languages, University of Jos, PMB 2024, Jos, Plateau State.

Globalisation

In the current state of growing social interaction in the world, it is worthwhile to situate language issues in the context of globalisation. While the UN is making effort to encourage minority language groups not to give up on their own languages, the world body is guilty of entrenching certain major languages over others in its official policy, especially in its policy of making only six out of the over 7,000 languages in the world the official languages to be used during its sessions. As globalization permeates many countries, communities and clans, there's a growing tendency for many speakers of indigenous languages to abandon them for more prestigious and economically useful majority languages.

In one of my books (Usman 2014), the disappearance of African and other languages was traced to the official policies and practices of imperial powers and the subjugation of languages of smaller groups by speakers of the leading major language. I argued that while the linguistic dominance of colonial powers stems from military supremacy, the dominion of a language over others in the same country is usually due to its speakers' huge population and the prestige and privileges that come from speaking that language. Adequate measures need to be taken at the communal level to prevent the extinction of minority languages.

Strangely, even the major languages do not have the chance of surviving in their original forms. As time goes on, they would be subject to infusion and dilution as they influence and are influenced by other languages. For instance, there is a noticeable trend in Nigeria relating to English language. Farooq Kperogi, an Assistant Professor of Journalism in the Department of Communication at Kennesaw State University in Georgia, USA, has identified a developing brand of English tagged "Nigerian English" (as opposed to "British" and "American" English). Kperogi has found the trend serious enough to write a book recently on this subject. A review of his book titled *Glocal English* reveals the characteristics of the Nigerian variety of English as:

> …the fastest-growing non-native variety of English popularized by the Nigerian (English Language) movie industry and the Black Atlantic Diaspora…the book isolates the peculiar structural, grammatical, and stylistic characteristics of Nigerian English and shows its similarities as well as its often humorous differences with British and American English…and demonstrates true comparisons with American and British English with its distinct vocabularies and rules of usage." (Kperogi 2015:41)

In terms of spelling, the original (British) English is gradually giving way to

American English and this is likely to continue as most computer programmed languages carry the American spellings. In fact currently if one uses computer that has American applications it would underline spellings in British English as wrong spellings. Some examples, with American spellings on the right, would include: centre/center, colour/color, labour/labor organise/organize, honour/honor, endeavour/endeavor, and sensitise/sensitize.

This constraint notwithstanding, globalisation has its beneficial effects as remarked by *Transpanish*:

> Although the future admittedly looks grim for some minority languages, globalization doesn't necessarily spell the end for all of them. Indeed, globalization can bring to the forefront the plight of some of these endangered languages, sparking attempts to revive them… (Transpanish 2015)

New Developments

There are some encouraging developments as there are today a few newspapers and magazines published in local languages for mass circulation on a limited scale. Among these are *Aminiya, Leadership Hausa, Rariya, Mujallar Muryar Arewa, Mujallar FIM, Mujallar Manoma, Mujallar Gambiza, Kakakin Harisawa, Ido Mudu* which are published in Hausa in the North while *Irohin* is published in Yoruba in the Western part of the country. Apparently, there are no similar publications in the East. The brief news in some local languages aired by some electronic media establishments across the country cannot be relied upon for any effective language development.

The commercial production of home videos in some major languages, largely through private efforts, is a good development. These have helped in no small measure in generating and sustaining interest in the languages of the productions. Such endeavours should be greatly intensified while speakers of minority languages would do well to replicate such efforts in their local languages.

Another welcome development is a recent action taken by the Lagos State House of Assembly which expressed concern at the threat of extinction of the Yoruba language and passed a resolution urging the state government to direct the State Ministry of Education to ensure the teaching and learning of Yoruba language in the state's public and private schools. (Nigerian Pilot 2015:22)

Similarly, concerned at what it perceives as a pitiable deficiency in effective communication in Izon language among the various age groups in Bayelsa State, the state government embarked on measures that would ensure that all Ijaws become competent speakers of Izon. In so doing, the state government urged parents and guardians to do their best to ensure that their children and

wards could speak Izon fluently. The state government had also made wide consultations following which several books had been written in Izon and were being distributed to public libraries. (Punch 2015:4)

Another encouraging development is that, there is now a competent computer keyboard for typing Nigerian languages. It is the Koinyin Nigeria Multilingual Keyboard, produced by LANCOR Management based in Lagos.

On the international level, the government of Pakistan has introduced a bill that seeks to replace English with the native Urdu language as the official language. (Propakistani 2015)

Conclusion

The effect of technology on language cannot be subject to regulation by any authority as change in language is simply a natural response to advancement in technology that is either being promoted by the society that develops it or accepted by the society that sees the new technology as contributing to the enhancement of its living standard.

Cultural influence can hamper the speedy growth of technology in a given society but not to the extent of stopping such growth. Technological influence, as it permeates, can break cultural barriers and effect changes in a people's way of doing things.

As technology affects a given culture, it affects all aspects of that culture, including its language. Generally, every society has its culture while a democratic society has more clearly defined rights which every member of that society is expected to live by. It is the attempt to propagate such ideals in another society with a different culture that tends to provoke conflicts. In that sense, although it is only proper for culture to evolve naturally and change or sustain itself, this is becoming practically impossible due to globalisation.

Given the government's dilemma in language promotion, the greater initiative would seem to lie with the speech communities and interest groups who would need to take steps to safeguard their languages from extinction. They should endeavour to engage the services of experts to analyse their languages and come up with orthographies of their languages. They should thereafter produce attractive publications that would sustain the interest of their native speakers especially the young ones. That also requires securing the services of trained native language teachers.

It is the responsibility of science and technology, and indeed all of us, including the family, community and special schools, linguists, and policy makers, to be inspired enough to take up these challenges against the erosive forces of language disappearance.

We must have language-specific programmers who would help us to tap into the beneficts of relevant technological developments. We must invalidate the myth that our local languages are not competent and appropriate for scientific and technological purposes. What we need to do, as a matter of conscious national policy, is to establish Language Technology Centres to serve as language laboratories, where findings of technological and scientific research, can be codified into suitable language concepts. Terminologies, modes of expression and vocabularies (in lexical and structural terms) can be in the local languages, chosen from among, in the first instance, the major languages in which the inventions and findings had been carried out. Relevant softwares to support such inventions should be developed.

UNESCO has pointed out certain steps that can be taken to avoid language extinction. They include:

> preparatory work in form of socio-linguistic surveys defining the current situation of the language to be studied and determining the safeguarding measures to be adopted, data collection to study the phonology, morphology and syntax of the language and thirdly preparing language materials (orthography guides, reading and writing manuals, teacher guides, word lists, small dictionaries, grammars). (Usman 2014:65-66)

It is clear that no matter the degree of endangerment of any indigenous language, its speakers, if determined, at family and communal levels, can stop the disappearance of its linguistic heritage largely by ensuring that intergenerational transmission of their mother tongue is implemented in every household. An example of this is the nomadic Fulani who have used this method to preserve Fulfulde for several generations. This is the bottom line. It is the most basic and effective measure. Intergenerational transmission should therefore be considered to be the bloodline of language preservation. Only when an indigenous language is preserved and flourishing can it be an effective vehicle for the growth and development of technology and democratic culture.

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