The Roles of Language in Religion, Arts, and Education for Modern Realities

By

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Abstract

Language is the natural means of expressing feelings. It plays notable roles in the lives of human being and non human being. With language in audible or written form, religion, arts and education among others are made to promote national development. This paper reviewed several definitions of basic concepts like language, religion and education as expressed by authors of varied opinions. It also posited that there is the need for language experts multifarious roles in promoting Africans language, cultures and tradition making appropriate use of language, several roles as feature of human being. Promotion of teacher education programmes with language at the centre page was also part of the recommendations put in place in this paper among other notable suggestions.

Introduction

Language is the art of human communication in repeatable oral or literary codes, coded through data previously stored up in the learning process (Umukoro, 2009). As an instrument for interactions and relationships in any human endeavor, co-existence with others is impractical without agreed symbols of communication. Language is the weapon against confusion and pandemonium in any society. According to Misbahu (2015), "language is the root of human development for achievement of minimum and maximum benefits" while Eghokare (2004) is of the opinion that "language permeates all aspects of human endeavours. It is a vehicle of culture and experience. It is the store of ideas. Language provides for us different ways of looking at the world in addition to empowering us to think in different ways. Misbahu quips that the definition above has undoubtedly shown the common stand that language is man's primary means of self-expression. Thus, language reflects both the individual characteristics of a person, as well as the beliefs and practices of his or her community. Languages are rule-governed systems made up of signs. Therefore for an outsider to learn the language of a community, he must learn the signs and sounds that are meaningful and those that are not. Language is the foremost a means of communication, and communicational most always takes place within some sort of social context. This is why effective communication requires an understanding and recognition of the connections between a language and the people who use it. Although those who study language may disagree over a precise definition because they dispute some concepts, such as whether or not language must have a written and/or oral component, yet there is a general agreement that language is a rule-based system of signs. Banjo (1981) has said that "we learn language so that we may be able to speak it, but we study a language so that we can discover how it works, even though we may never be able to speak it." Language rules, however, are not enforced by any authority figure; language police do not exist. Instead, language rules are conventions. This means that they come into existence through common practice by users of the language rather than through the imposition of an authority figure. As a

result, members who use the language conventions of their particular community may not even be conscious of following them. According to Amberg and Vause, the most basic convention of any language community is the acceptance of a set of signs that convey meaning. These signs could be sounds words or punctuation marks on a page or even silence in a conversation; any of these things is able to carry meaning. To be successful, signs work on two different levels. First, signs indicate the phonic or graphic or visual elements, the physical medium that gives a language form, and then on the second level. Conventions are the unspoken, unofficial rules within a particular community that are accepted and followed by members who may not even be aware of them.

Adeniyi (2015) describes language as the system of communication used by the people of a particular country or profession. He further states that the development of culture and the habit of living and working are made possible with the use of language. According to Kolawole (1999), language whether spoken or written, is the most important vehicle for human communication. This is particularly the case in a formal educational setting such as a nursery or primary school. Much of the teaching and learning activities in schools are carried out through the use of language, and the verbal and nonverbal exchanges that daily occur between teachers and learners are enhanced or thwarted by communication. The major key to the success of the whole of educational process can therefore be described as the promotion of good language and communication.

According to Banjo (1981), language has been hailed as the hallmark of humanity, the ability that separates humans from animals. As humans in society, we use our language ability continuously to embrace ideas, share our feelings, comment on the world, and understand each other's minds. Language can be defined as an organized system of arbitrary signals and rule-governed structures that are used as a means for communication. Language occurs both receptively and expressively through reading, listening, writing, and speaking. In order to become fully functioning members of school and society, children must learn the elements, the rules, the structure, and the conventions of this system. Our working definition of language encompasses five structural components: phonology, semantics, syntax, morphology, and pragmatics. Phonology refers to the sounds and the intonation patterns that are associated with spoken language. Semantics encompasses the words of a language and the meanings associated with those words. Syntax describes the grammatical rules of a language—how words combine into phrases and sentences. Morphology refers to the rules that govern the use of morphemes. Morphemes are the smallest units of meaning in a language, including the prefixes and suffixes that mark syntactic and semantic information, such as number (i.e., plurals), gender, and tense (i.e., past, present, or future). Finally, pragmatics is how we adjust our speech to our audience and use language toward the goal of communication. To better address typical and atypical language development as well as strategies of prevention and intervention, the five structural components of language may be simplified into three essential aspects of communication: content, form, and use (Bloom & Lahey, 1978). Content refers to the semantics of language—the concepts and ideas that are encoded in words. Form is the way in which meaning is represented, including speech, sign language, and writing. In the context of spoken language, form encompasses phonology, morphology, and syntax. Finally, use refers to the

function of language in context. Although each of these aspects of language can be identified separately, they are inherently interconnected elements in communication (Bloom & Lahey, 1978). Language problems may arise when there is a disruption within any one component of the model or in their integration. The following sections consider the typical development of each of these aspects of language.

Ambergand and Vause, (2016) assert that today, about 6 900 languages are spoken throughout the world – more than 2 000 languages in Africa, 1 000 in the Americas, more than 2 250 in Asia, about 220 in Europe, and more than 1 300 in Australia and the Pacific. These languages can be grouped into more than 90 language families. A language family is defined in the following way: a group of languages with a common origin. The common origin is postulated to have been a single language, referred to as a proto-language that was spoken at a certain time in the past. Through the ages that proto-language broke up into dialects. As time went by, these dialects become increasingly more different from each other, ending up as different languages, primarily due to geographical distance. These languages developed dialectal differences, and the whole cycle was repeated, many times. The major language families in the world are Afro-Asiatic (353 languages spoken in Africa and Asia), Austronesian (1,246 languages spoken in Asia and Oceania), Indo-European(430 languages spoken in Asia and Europe, and in European settlements in other parts of the world),Niger-Congo (1 495 languages spoken in Africa), Sino-Tibetan(399 languages spoken in Asia), and *Trans-New Guinea* (561 languages spoken in New Guinea and adjacent islands). Linguists have developed quite reliable methods to reconstruct protolanguages– for example, *Proto-Indo-European* – spoken before writing was introduced.

There is a dichotomy in discussing relationship between language and education namely : language of education and language in education. Language education deals with the ability of the natural language to be studied as a subject on the school curriculum. According to Awobuluyi (2009), language education features on one hand as a subject on the school curriculum and accordingly can be discussed like Physical Education, Science Education, Economic Education etc. Abimbola (2015:658) corroborates Awobuluyi that language education is a branch of applied linguistics. It is the teaching and learning of a foreign or second language.

Awobuluyi (2005) further states that language in education on the other hand, and completely unlike any of the other subjects on the curriculum, serves all over the world as the medium of instruction in all subjects. As language of education, English the official and second language of most Nigerians is being taught in all schools in Nigeria. Although, at the inception, pupils were taught in their mother tongues.

Language and Arts

Arts is about representation of language – with or without the use of words. According to Adeniyi (20015:58), art is a practical demonstration of skills that emanates from the mental development through imagination, creativity and aesthetics. It is the expression of our emotion, a medium of communication and can be described as the work of man to show zeal and create beauty for his everyday life. Shafer (2010) sees it as a way of communicating an idea, paints, sculpture or dance. So, the goal of any art is to communicate idea - a means of self-expression of inner feelings or idea about things, people and the

environment in general. Adeniyi (2015:23) says "art is the father of science" for the fact that great scientific inventions or discoveries began as creative thoughts nurtured in the fertile imagination of an artist. This means, arts exist to identify the problems of life, while scientists proffer solutions. "Art emanates from the soul of man, the centre of his being, in which resides his divine quality as the zenith of creation" (Sofola, 1994:2).

Two eminent divisions of arts are visual and non-visual arts. Visual art is divided into fine art and applied or industrial art while non-visual art is divided into performing art and literary art. Performing art is further divided into drama, music, and dance. Literary art includes literature, poetry, writing, folklore, and journalism. It is important to state that theatre arts is the melting pot of fine art, drama, dance, music and media arts (Adeniyi, 2015).

Language and Arts are interwoven in many ways. Non- visual Artists especially express themselves either through their second or official language or in their mother tongue. Drama, music, and dance; literature, poetry, writing, folklore, and journalism are all either acted, displayed or written via language. The three prominent literary genres- prose, poetry, and drama are expressed through language.

According to Amberg and Vause (2016) ,in many parts of the world – France, India, Zimbabwe, and elsewhere – cave drawings and bone carvings have been discovered that were made during the archeological period referred to as the *Upper Paleolithic* in Europe and Asia and the *Middle Stone Age* in Africa. Roughly, this period lasted from 35 000 until 10 000 BP (= before present). Some researchers interpret these drawings and carvings as the earliest precursors of writing. The relevance to us of such claims is that writing depends upon language, since it can be defined in the following way: Writing is a set of visible or tactile signs used to represent units of language in a systematic way. On the basis of this definition, writing is much younger. It is tempting – and quite reasonable – to propose that those ancient drawings and carvings cannot have been made by humans without language, but they do not constitute direct evidence of language. Writing in the strict sense started around 5 300 BC in Mesopotamia with the *cuneiform* writing system, and the first language ever written was Sumerian. About 300 years later, the *hieroglyphic* writing system appeared in Egypt. In China, writing started not more than 1 000 years later, around 4 000 BP. In the Americas, the oldest writing system is that of the Maya civilization, and the oldest documents have been dated to 2 200–2 100 BP. However, most languages in the world were not written down until the 19th and the 20th century. It is almost an understatement that language must have existed for a considerable time before humans started to write, so that nobody would question the claim that language is much more than 5,300 years old. Still, it is important to remember that we do not have any documentation of language from an earlier date.

Language and Religion

Religion is a system of belief in one or more gods, or these beliefs in general. Man expresses his religion in his language. Moreover, no religion can exist without a form of communication either verbally or non-verbally. Co-existence of any religion with others is a mirage unless there is atmosphere of sharing, and airing of views opinions, and convictions. Language is the instrument that is used to pass doctrinal issues from the leaders to the followers. Even in religion circle, there are times of disagreement, and scuffles. In such situations, the timely weapon is language

for discussions and amicable resolutions of issues.

Religion and language connect at structural level. No religion is acquired without the medium of language because religion involves learning a new set of vocabulary and syntax. For instance, a Christian would say "I am sick" when he is seek as a confession of *faith*. While in Islam and Judaism "Salam" and "Shalom" both meaning *Peace*!, is used in exchanging greeting and pleasantry. Religions possess certain common features with languages:

i. Language and religion requires child-like dispositions to follow the rules involved. This disposition makes it more permanent.
ii. Religion and language are structurally related. So, any attempt to speak standard modern English often coincides with a loss of religious faith.
iii. The grammatical similarities among languages find a parallel in religions. Experts have talked about *deep structure* in religion which shares communality with grammarians' *Universal Grammar (* Tupas,2009)
iv. Languages and religions evolve like living organisms. Christianity evolves from Judaism (and has many denominations); Islam has so many denominations (Siffism, Hammdist, Shittes, Boko Haram among others.). So also , in language, from one generation to another, vocabulary and syntax evolve, especially, as there is contact with other cultures.

Different religions ascribe greatness to God using different appellations. Without a common language, communication with the creator would have been impractical. Next most important point to this is the effective relationship among the worshippers of any religion. Essentially, a religious leader must be an effective speaker; a careful and cautious issues presenter. Okunlola (1999) sees relationship as an integral part of ministry, and that no minister can successfully fulfill his or her ministry outside relationship which could be marred by the instrument of language and communication. Thus, the role of language in national peace and security is indispensable. For example, in Nigeria, to experience peace, religious leaders must eschew words that can break the fragile peace of the nation. Rather, utterances of concord and accord must pervade their speeches.

Through language, christians and muslims virtues are elucidated. For example, during the recently concluded 30 days of Ramadan, Arc. T. W. Agbaje, National President, Jamatul Islamiyya of Nigeria/Overseas in *The Guardian* of 20 May, 2017 states thus: "EID-EL-FITR is a season of blessings, because it is on this day that the strict restrictions (abstaining from food, drinks and pleasure) of the preceding month are lifted"…Surely, it would be an affront to Allah, if anybody, after thanking Him for completing that spiritual training, returns to sin against Him! Such a person has not known the meaning and purpose of 'Eid-El-Fitr, which provides an opportunity for us as Muslims to thank God for His blessings. It is also a time of spiritual stock-taking. After the month of Ramadan, a Muslim can ponder over the strength (or weakness) of his will power. Actually, it is a period of sober reflection…" Thus, the on-going argument on the relevance of Religion Value and Moral (RVM) recently introduced into Secondary School

curriculum should not be turned into a crisis.

Language and Education

Education is any means of passing across the belief or expectation of a society to the next generation. The national vision, which is to emerge from a subsistence economy into a modern economy where citizens will enjoy high standard of living, high life expectancy and contribute positively to a peaceful world, is the major task of education.

Moreover, Okedara (1997:14) asserts that " language is a method, a means or systems of sharing ideas, thoughts, feelings, experiences and so on." The multilingual and multi-ethnic nature of the evolving or developing nations constitutes "a source of cultural strength but it is a potential source of weakness." (Whitely, 1971:10). Since the time that assertion was made, the phenomenon has continuously called for a linguistically technical approach as the linguistic proliferation presents threats to the unity among the diverse ethno-linguistic groups of various nations. The relevance of language in fulfilling the lofty vision cannot be overemphasized especially when one considers a UNESCO report by Popoola (2017), where Africa is stigmatized as "the only continent where majority of children start school using a foreign language". Thus, phenomenon has made the effects of education weaker than in any other parts of the world and has led to "Africanization of Poverty" (Tabatabal, 1995).

Language policy remains a delicate issue as the choice of an indigenous language over another has continued to generate mixed reactions. However, with full realization of the importance of language in education and development, and in order to maintain national unity and to preserve the people's culture, the Federal Government of Nigeria made provision for language in the National Policy on Education which was first published in 1977 and revised in 1981, 1 998, 2004, 2008 and 2013.. It is worthy of note that most language policies and innovation decisions were driven more by political than linguistic motivations (Kennedy, 2013).

The first reliable move to formulate a National Policy on Education, after the independence in 1960, came up in 1969 and has been known as the 1969 National Curriculum Conference. Various professionals had criticized a legacy which was perceived to pay little attention to the production of needed manpower for national development as well as indigenous languages. The targets according to Fafunwa (1974), among other issues, were

a) national philosophy of education
b) goals of primary education
c) objectives of secondary education
d) the role of teacher education
e) education for living
f) purposes of tertiary education, and
g) control of public education.

In December 1977, the policy was established to re-orientate and restructure the nation's educational system - as it has influenced the control of education in Nigeria and has been adjudged the most laudable legacy laid down to future generations by the Federal Government as it stated interalia: Government appreciates the importance of language as a means of promoting social interaction and. national cohesion, and preserving cultures. Thus, every child shall learn the language of immediate environment. Furthermore, in the interest of national unity, it is expedient that every child shall be required to learn one of the three Nigerian languages: Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba (NPE, 1998; 2004; 2013).

Thus, the National Policy on Education, as at today, recognizes five categories of language as noted by Bamgbose (1992/ 8):

a. the mother tongue
b. a language of immediate community - a second language (learnt) by those whose mother tongue is a smaller language
c. any of the major Nigerian languages (Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba)
d. English
e. a foreign language (especially French and Arabic)

Some problems have been identified. in the implementation of the National policy as it relates to Language in Education:

1. The idea that each learner, at the Junior Secondary level, should learn an additional local language to his mother tongue appears to be nebulous.
2. Unavailability of qualified teachers to teach both the indigenous and foreign languages in states or geo-political zones that are not the domain of each of the languages.
3. The quality of teachers available for teaching the various languages, especially for the fact that most teachers of English, as an example, are L_2 speakers with imperfect ascent and mastery of both written and spoken forms. So lack of models has been a problem in teaching Arabic and French.
4. Over ambitious syllabuses being used for teaching and examination constitutes a problem. The policy expects too much even from primary school pupils.
5. Absence or disappearance of indigenous languages in institutions and schools (especially in Private Schools) poses a great danger to the teaching and learning of indigenous languages.
6. The special equipment that ought to aid learning, especially foreign languages by listening to tapes, watching videos, recording their own speeches and so on, in order to enhance the communication efficiency, are not available.
7. Finance challenge. Finance has been described by Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary as money used to run a business, an activity or a project. Fund has been the major constraint amplified by most of Nigerian educational and language development institutions.

The challenges to language policy are enormous. According to Kaplan and Baldauf (2007), language specialists do not have the appropriate impact on language policy practice as, for example, medical professionals have on health policies. For instance, no other professional can become a Minister of or Commissioner for health, who is not a medical doctor. Also, while Ministry of Health exists at all levels, "… I know of no Ministry of Language ..." (Kaplan and Baldauf, 2007). The major problems of the National policy according to British Council Report (2013) is that most policy makers often fail to understand how difficult it is to conduct, state education in a language that few learners and not all teachers have mastered.

The nexus among language, arts, religion and Education in modern realities

The role which language plays in Arts, Religion and Education is enormous. It remains the oil that lubricates human existence. In literature, language is paramount because it is an instrument of literary expressions. The literary genres

that we have in folktales, legends, myths, drama, prose, poetry etc. all exist in language. Many of the cultural arts non-verbally express peoples' cultures, beliefs, history and struggles. In education, language is both language of education and language in education - being taught as both a subject and employed as a medium of instruction. Politically, language is the weapon of communication and deliberations in any political gatherings, while religiously, it is sine qua non to worship in all religious centers.

Conclusion and Recommendations

For the fact that the future development of the nation-state called Nigeria lie in the quality of national language policy and practices (especially language of instruction), the following recommendations are hereby offered:

i. There is need for language experts to be prepared to engage with language and development problems and also be aware of attitude that underline them. We need theories that can be applied to social problems -producing evidence-based research. Such research which findings can be communicated to users in intelligible ways without either alienating or confusing the users. By this, language experts will be able to engage with the politicians rather than commenting from the sidelines.
ii. There is need to understand the movements in development studies especially the use of social models. There are three different stages in development namely traditional, contemporary and emergent (Tupas, 2009).
iii. Teacher education programmes need to produce teachers who are grounded in the various languages.
iv. All effort at ensuring the standardization of our Indigenous languages have to be strengthened till they or any of them meet(s) up with the challenge of being used as medium of instruction. This is important because "local context and local issues are crucial to language planning and development.
v. Language professionals should explore the already existing interest in the learners and teachers regarding their role in the curriculum. There is the need to focus on their language and how they express their views as a matter of major concern.
vi. Finally, there is the need to promote language in, as or for development especially when there is a clear language need assessed at local level. By this, the government will consider the appropriate and relevant role of all languages in development, not just English.

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