

A Sociolinguistic Approach to Security Challenges and Sustainable National Development in Nigeria

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Abstract— *The study is a sociolinguistic approach to solving security challenges and enhancing sustainable national development in Nigeria. It argues that language and society influences each other and as such language could be used to solve societal problems. In doing so, the paper x-rays the functions of language in human society as propounded by Halliday and Stubbs. It discusses the multilingual nature of Nigeria, the concept of national development as well as security challenges facing the country. The paper notes that the dominant use English language against the indigenous languages in nearly all communicative domains in Nigeria has failed the nation in its bid to overcome numerous security threats. This may not be unconnected with the low literacy level in the country. As a result, the paper recommends a tripartite language policy vis-à-vis the use of English language, the indigenous languages as well as the Nigerian Pidgin depending on the contextual demand. The paper also advocates the adoption of more indigenous languages, apart from the three major ones- Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba, for use. This will imply a revision of Nigeria's language policy and the constitutional provisions on language.*

Keywords— *Sociolinguistic, national development, security challenges, multilingualism, indigenous languages.*

INTRODUCTION

This study is triggered by the upsurge of security challenges militating against sustainable national development in Nigeria and the need to find solutions to them. Nigeria in recent times has witnessed an unprecedented level of insecurity which has ranked the country low in the Global Peace Index (GPI, 2012), signifying a worsened state of insecurity in the country. The most serious security threats in Nigeria at the moment are those in the category of the violent religious extremism of Boko Haram, the Niger Delta militants, the discontent and separatist call by IPOB and MASSOB, high rate of kidnapping and more recently the herdsmen blood-thirsty attacks that have led to the untimely death of many innocent citizens. While the Boko Haram

terrorists employ tactics such as suicide bombing, organized attacks on police and military installations, terrorizing rural communities, etc. The Niger Delta militants concentrate on destruction of oil platforms using improvised explosive devices (IEDs), kidnapping of foreign oil workers, sabotage of oil facilities, and vandalization of oil pipelines with the intention of stopping oil production in their domain, knowing that about 90 percent of Nigeria's revenue comes from that natural resource. The consequence of this also includes environmental pollution in the area. The separatist agenda of IPOB continue to challenge the unity and oneness of the Nigerian state, and more recently, the herdsmen ruthless killings is shaking the country to its foundation. Rarely do we have a day in Nigeria that a death of an innocent citizen is not recorded.

Insecurity is not a problem that is unique to Nigeria; it is geographically spread across the globe. Countries such as the United States of America, Germany, United Kingdom, France, Kenya, and many others daily face security challenges within their borders. The difference between these nations and Nigeria is how they manage the threats. With the knowledge that a secured environment is a catalyst for national development, the federal government embarked on criminalization of terrorism by passing the Anti-Terrorism Act in 2011. The act proposed, among others, fundamental surveillance, investigation of criminal related offences and heightening of physical security measures around the country in order to deter or disrupt potential attacks. Despite these efforts, the level of insecurity in the country is still high which has been the bane to sustainable national development. Many Nigerians and members of the international community now wonder whether security of lives and properties is achievable in Nigeria.

Our attempt to find solutions to the scourge of insecurity from the linguistic point of view is premised on the view that language plays a vital role in every human society. The power of language is incontrovertible and its influence inexhaustible when it comes to dealing with issues of societal interest. Language is regarded as the key

to the heart of the people (Sapir, 1963). It activates the functioning of the human society (Odebunmi, 2016:4) as the most fundamental medium of communication in any socio-semiotic setting (Eggins, 2004). Language is importantly functional in the lives of people and in the society not only as the most vital endowment of human race and a means of empowering the society in her quest for national growth, but also as a tool which enables man to deal with the challenges in his environment. In other words, language cannot exist without the society; neither can society exist without language; language is part of society as existence of society invariably necessitates the existence of language with which members of the society interact (Adeyanju, 2002).

However, in an effort to find lasting solutions to the numerous vicious attacks and killings in Nigeria, and engineer national development, less attention has been paid to the roles of language. Owolabi (2016:135) points this out by saying “as vital as language is to human existence, little or no attention is accorded it by national development planners”. The little attention has even been wrongly implemented. That is why the government could rely so heavily on English as the language of confronting and combating insecurity in the country when the percentage speakers of it are relatively low compared to the indigenous languages. The UNESCO Report of 2012 puts adult literacy rate in Nigeria at 51%. This percentage equally represents the number of speakers of English with different proficiency levels and is obviously inappropriate for effective communication and mass mobilization of Nigerians against security challenges.

Theoretical Issues on Functions of Language

Theories in linguistics have different conceptions about language ranging from the purely formalist approach, which places emphasis on discovering some of the abstract principles that lie at the very core of language to theories that consider language in relation to its use in the society. There exists a large corpus of literature which emphasizes that language serves different functions in human society (e.g. Jakobson, 1960; Hymes 1962; Brown and Yule 1983). Though, scholars differ in their propositions on these functions.

Halliday (1970) proposes a tripartite function of language called “Meta-functions of language”. The model identifies three functional levels of language. These are ideational, interpersonal and textual. The ideational function of language implies that language serves as an instrument for the expression of the user’s real world, including the inner world of one’s own consciousness. It is a means of expressing one’s experience internally and externally. The interpersonal

function helps to establish and sustain social relations, while the textual function of language allows language to link with itself and with features of the situation in which it is used (Ogunsiji, 2001). In this case, the language user is able to construct “texts” that are situationally relevant and also be able to establish cohesive relations in sentences of discourse. This underscores the relationship between language and society as affecting a wide range of encounters from broadly-based international relations to narrowly defined interpersonal relationships.

In discussing the functions of language in human society, Stubbs (1995) built on the earlier propositions of Jakobson (1960) and Hymes (1962) to propose seven functions of language. The functions include (1) expressive/emotive function (2) directive/ conative or persuasive function (3) poetic function (4) contact function (5) metalinguistic function (6) referential function, and (7) contextual/situational function. According to Osisanwo (2003), the expressive function occurs when language is used to express the inner state of mind of the speaker. It may be an instantaneous reaction to an ongoing event e.g. hurrah! It’s a goal! The directive or conative or persuasive function of language allows the speaker to direct the hearer to carry out an action. It may also be used to persuade or plead with the hearer for an action to take place or not. The poetic function of language allows language users to use it creatively for aesthetic purposes while the contact function of language, also regarded as ‘phatic’ function allows people to use language for brief social or psychological interaction e.g. for greetings or in an attempt to open a channel for communication. The metalingual function is performed when language draws attention to itself for the purpose of clarification on any of its levels. The referential function ensures that the denotative meaning of a word or expression is the physical object which the language user has used it for, while the contextual/situational function of language allows language user to relate his experience to others with regard to the immediate environment. In this regard, language users are able to use it to solve

The divergent propositions of scholars on functions of language converge on the general acknowledgement that language performs numerous roles in the attempt of man to live, work, interact and overcome challenges together in the society. In other words, the dynamism in language affords people the opportunity to use it in different ways for numerous activities (Yule, 1996). Language may be used to construct or destroy; make or mar; create peace or war. Thus, language users adapt it to every prevailing situation in their environment in order to bring about change or solution through interaction.

Language Situation in Nigeria

Nigeria is a multi-lingual, multi-ethnic and culturally pluralistic nation. Scholars have given different figures to the number of languages co-existing in Nigeria's linguistic environment. Iwaloye and Ibeanu (1997) as quoted in Agbedo, C.U (2005) identify fifty-one ethnic units and over four hundred and thirty languages. Bamgbose (1995) estimates about 400 – 515 distinct indigenous languages, Urua (2004) puts the figure at 515 languages, while Essien (2005) arbitrarily indicates 400 Nigeria languages. *Ethnologue: Languages of the World* (2013) puts the total number of Nigerian languages at 527. Eno-Abasi (2003:135) put these divergent views into perspective by saying, "we cannot promptly specify the number of languages spoken in Nigeria" as a nation. Within this multiplicity are the three constitutionally recognised indigenous languages spoken in Nigeria- Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. The diverse languages of the minorities include: Efik, Ibibio, Ijaw, Mumuye, Kanuri, Fulfude, Tiv, Gwari, Igala and Idoma to mention but a few. These indigenous languages co-exist with foreign ones such as English, French and Arabic. Even though most ethnic groups prefer to communicate in their own languages, English, being the official language, is widely used for education, business transactions and for numerous official purposes.

The colonial era marks the beginning of the dominance of English over the indigenous languages and the attendant positive attitude towards it. The English language is the most widely spoken language in the world. It is a language used in about 673 countries globally, (Graddol, 1997, cited from Akere, 2009). Kachru (1985) classifies users of English around the world into "norm-producing" inner circle which made up of native speakers of the language; "norm developing" outer circle, made up of second language users of English; and the "norm dependent" expanding circle comprising speakers of English as a foreign language. Nigerians come under the second and third category.

In the Nigerian socio-cultural and linguistic contexts, English has become a language employed in different domains of usage such as education, politics, religion, administration, foreign diplomacy, commerce, science and technology. In Nigeria today, the English language can be regarded as the mountain top on which people could be seen, heard and respected. This dominant use of the English language in the country and its seemingly ubiquitous influence in different spheres of activities has certainly kept speakers of indigenous languages and Nigerian linguists worried about the future of indigenous languages. Jowitt (2000) retrospectively reflects on the very

proud and positive manner Nigerian elites, irrespective of ethnic group or language, received, learnt, spoke and wrote the English language. According to Jowitt:

Positive attitude to the English language was generally shared by Nigerian elites – lawyers, academics, leading journalists, bishops, army officers during the colonial and post-colonial era, as they hobnobbed at home and sometimes in Britain itself with their British counterparts in the same professions and acquired many of their prejudices and linguistic habits. They were practitioners of highly refined English style both in speaking and writing.

This attitude which recognizes as normal the use of English in all advanced sectors of life in Nigeria is at the expense of Nigerian indigenous languages.

The Constitutional provisions on language as well as the provisions in the National Policy on Education equally favour the domineering use of the English language. The National Policy on Education (NPE, revised 2004) subjected the use of mother tongue to Early child education while the English language is reserved for learning and teaching from upper primary school to the tertiary level of education. The 1999 Constitution of the Federal republic of Nigeria also has some pro-English and anti-indigenous languages provisions such as enumerated below:

The business of the national assembly shall be conducted in English and in Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba when adequate arrangements have been made therefore.

The same thing goes for the state House of Assembly as contained in Section 97 that:

The business of the house of assembly shall be conducted in English, but the house may in addition to English conduct the business of the house in one or more other languages spoken in the state as the house may by resolution approve

The *National Policy on Education* (NPE, 2004) also contains the following language provisions. Section 4, paragraph 15 states that:

Government will see to it that the medium of instruction in the primary school is initially the mother tongue or the language of the immediate community, and at a later stage, English

The language component of the Junior Secondary Curriculum reads thus:

In selecting the Nigerian languages, students should study the language of their own area in addition to any of the three main Nigerian Languages, Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba subject to availability of teachers.

The underlined expressions above indicate government's unwillingness to improve the status and use of indigenous languages. Even, the Constitution provisions which recognise Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba as three major indigenous languages for national use, gives them subservient roles to English in the country. As a reaction to this dichotomy between English and indigenous languages, Adegbite (2010: 42) laments thus:

the 'overuse of English' and 'underuse of indigenous languages' has been the source of our collective failure and the consequent national kwashiorkor. One of the reasons for the language problem is the lack of a comprehensive language policy, while some of the few language provisions that abound are either not well formulated or not implemented.

This English "tsunami", as claimed by Ayoola (2016: 88), has resulted in a growing tendency by the Nigerian elite class to nurture their children as subordinate or incipient bilinguals (with greater 'mastery' of English and poor mastery of their mother tongue (MT) instead of bringing them up as coordinate bilinguals, with good mastery of both their MT and English) This linguistic arrangement remains antithetical to the noble tenets of national development. This act of looking down on ones indigenous language (s) is contrary to what obtains in developed countries where influential world languages exemplified by English, Spanish and French are treated with respect; hence they are treasured, preserved, developed, disseminated abroad and guided jealously. While the developed countries have utilized enormous resources to promote their languages across the world for dominant purposes, the people of the less developed nations have jettisoned their native languages in favour of foreign ones for personal, social and national communication and are negotiating the world through the harrowed lenses of the borrowed languages (Ngugi, 2009). As they fail to cultivate and use their languages purposefully, the languages suffer from attrition and die with all the original values, beliefs and creative resources that should have benefitted the

owners and the world. The dominance of English in Nigeria has consequently resulted to the struggle for survival of some of the so called minority indigenous languages while some are gradually going into extinction in what Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson (1994) described as "linguistic genocide" or "linguicide"

It, however, becomes worrisome that despite the prominence and attention given to the study and use of English in Nigeria, proficiency in it for the majority of those in our formal education system is very poor (Baker 2001; Dada 2006; Fafunwa, 1982; Jibril, 2007; Akere,1995; Adesanoye, 1994 and 2004). Adegbite (2009: 75) notes that despite the high status accorded the English language in Nigeria, competent speakers of the language remain very few. They range between 5-10%. Records of poor performances and usage are given at all levels of education and strata of communication in the society. Furthermore, Bamgbose (2006) argues that if English as a medium produced the best results and children were able to master it as well as other subjects taught through it very well, there would not have been any concern. The reality, of course, is that at virtually all levels of education, performance in English is inadequate and this continues to affect acquisition of knowledge in other subjects. The failure to attain proficiency in English in our educational institutions is transferred into the society thereby rendering English inadequate to meet the societal challenges.

Thus, it becomes obvious that the fight against security threats and quest for sustainable national development may not be won if majority of the citizens are not involved. However, this can only be enlightened and maximally mobilized through the language they perfectly understand which is their mother tongue (MT). This worrisome situation may continue if the language of dialogue with those regarded as constituting security threats e.g. terrorists, militants and possibly the kidnappers is foreign to them. In essence, the linguistic choice to overcome these challenges cannot be majorly rooted in the foreign or colonial language, as the case has been in some formerly colonized nations such as Nigeria.

Sustainable National Development and Security Challenges

Sustainable national development cannot be discussed without clarification on the concept of national development. The term "national development" is regarded as "a victim of definitional pluralism (Lawal and Oluwatoyin, 2011). The concept is said to be rooted in Economics which is a branch of the social sciences and considered as narrow. For instance, Gopinath (2008, p.91)

argues that development can only be measured in monetary terms, and consequently, a developing country is one in which “there is a significant potential to raise the per capita standard of living” of its people. This view is regarded as the hangover from the intellectual segregation that dominates developmental literature in the 1960s and 1970s when most models of development drew their theoretical sustenance from classical economics. This approach allows Cole (1987) to classify nations into rich and poor nations; north and south countries; industrialised and non-industrialised nations; first, second and third worlds; and lastly, developed and developing nations. In this respect, the notion of development has been conceived as purely based on the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and Gross National Product GNP of a nation.

The present-day definition of national development tends to look at wider social indicators. In its simplest form, Obasanjo and Mabogunje (1991) define national development as “a change or transportation into a better state. Asiyabola (2016) defines national development as:

The development in all facets of human endeavours- health, medicine, information, communication, education, justice, politics, trade, aviation, to cite few examples... It is the progress in the well being of the society as regards its policy, economy, science and technology, and relative welfare of the people (p.117)

In this sense, national development is considered as a multidimensional phenomenon which encompasses all spheres of human existence.

Any development that is geared towards the enhancement of individuals in the economy and which would also enhance the development of the nation, such development should be sustained over time. Thus, sustainable national development is the consolidation on the present national development gains for the benefit of the present and future generations. Sustainable national development emerges in the literature and thinking of development policy proposed by World Commission on Environment and Development in its 1987 report and has become so popular that it has attracted attention across disciplines and scholars of various dispositions.

The International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) conceives sustainable development as environment, economic and social well-being for today and tomorrow. Bassey, Ekpah and Edeth (2008) opine that the field of sustainable development can be conceptually broken into three component parts: economic sustainability,

environmental sustainability, and socio-political sustainability. In this regard, sustainable national development is the capability of a particular nation or country to achieve comprehensive improvements or refinement in all ramifications of its existence (economic, political, cultural, religious etc) and maintain or continue the nation’s affairs at that level for a long time. Sustainable national development is the proper utilization of the resources of a nation for the improved well-being of the people now and in the future.

In September 2015, the United Nations General Assembly formally adopted the “universal, integrated and transformative” 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, called Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The 2030 Agenda expresses and reaffirms in multiple instances the commitment of member states to achieve sustainable development for all, taking into account different levels of national development and capacities, different national realities and levels of development as well as respecting national policy space for sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, especially for developing states. The goals are to be implemented and achieved in every country from the year 2016 to 2030. As noble as the goals are, insecurity constitutes the greatest threat to their achievements.

Security challenges in Nigeria are numerous. Security has been defined by *Cambridge Dictionaries* (online) as protection of a person, building, organization, or country against threats such as crime or attacks. Adebakin,(2012) viewed security as freedom from danger or threats, and the ability of a nation to protect and develop itself, promote and cherish values and legitimate interests and enhance the well being of its people. It focuses on physical, emotional and psychological sense of belonging to a social group which can offer one protection. Any situation contrary to this is regarded as a state of insecurity. The *Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* defines insecurity as “the condition of being susceptible to harm or injury”. It is the state of fear or anxiety; lack or inadequate freedom from danger. This definition reflects physical insecurity which is the most visible form of insecurity, and it feeds into many other forms of insecurity such as economic insecurity and social insecurity. However, it has been generally argued that security is not the absence of threats or security issues, but the ability to rise to the challenges posed by these threats with expediency and expertise.

Language and Sustainable National Development

Language and national development are interwoven phenomena. Both are situated and achieved within human

society. It is predictable that once a nation overcomes security challenges, national development is imminent. The basic function of language is communication. Through language, people are able to live and work together, pursue individual and societal goals, settle conflicts, design socio-economic and political plans that would cater for the present and the future. Language serves as a tool for achieving one of the general principles of development. The Stockholm Declaration of 1972 as redefined by Olise (2012) is “ensuring that the basic human needs and reasonable standard of living are met. These include access to education, health and other social services”. Education, health and other social services require language for their realization (Owolabi (2016). Thus, reliance on language is inevitable if people must steer the nation’s wheel towards sustainable development.

Language development is a pre-requisite for national development. According to Afolayan (1994: 250) “the level of effectiveness and efficiency with which a language is developed and utilized determines the level of development of any individual or society.” Furthermore, Asiyanbola (2016:118) discusses sustainable national development from the perspective of sociolinguistic of development. He asserts that sustainable national development is the development of every part of the society. According to him, sociolinguistic of development ensures:

Every citizen benefits from the pillars of modernization such as education, health, governance and economy. The benefits are always through language which is the only means of communication. The sociolinguistics of development implies that all citizens should be educated and made aware of the language facilities in his or her country and how those language facilities would enable them get access to quality health, education, governance, science, technology and economy....

Thus in Nigeria, apart from the above, we expect a citizen to be highly proficient in his/her language and English. Citizens should be able to meet societal challenges and bring about development in all spheres of national life through the active use of languages at their disposal.

Moreover, since sustainable national development can be quantified in terms of realization of certain national aspirations such as political, socio-economic, techno-scientific advancement and cultural preservation, language

is a key instrument for the achievement of these goals. In this case, one cannot but agree with Obanya (1993) who asserts that communication through language is an instrument for empowering the individuals that constitute a nation to make positive contributions that will enhance sustainable national development. Thus, reliance on language is inevitable if people must achieve a sustainable national development.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the paper has tried to establish how the congenital relationship between language and society could be used to overcome security challenges, establish peace, and engineer sustainable national development. Sustainable development should lead to the creation of new Nigeria; a nation where people live without fear for their lives and property; where there is peace and prosperity; where the general welfare of the people is achieved and sustained. It is through the languages in Nigeria’s multilingual environment that the country can get to the root and resolve all threats to security in the society. In order for language to properly perform these roles, the following are suggested.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. It is crucial for government to formulate and implement policies and programmes capable of addressing the root causes of insecurity in Nigeria through the language (s) all the citizens understand.
2. The indigenous languages should be assigned more functions especially in for the mobilization of generality of the people against security threats. This will allow exchange of sensitive information between people who do not understand English and government’s security operatives on the activities of suspected terrorists, militants and kidnapers in their communities.
3. The roles of language(s) in Nigeria to be redefined by revising the national language policy to include other languages, other regions or geo-political zones in Nigeria.
4. The Constitution to recognize three classes of languages in Nigeria henceforth as against the present two- majority and minority languages. It should now include “major minority” languages; they are languages that are minor in terms of population of speakers but have major roles to play in this national task.
5. Pidgin should also be encouraged for national use against insecurity.
6. The media should give equal attention to English language, indigenous languages and pidgin in the process of information dissemination

7. It is also fundamental to make the indigenous languages the language of dialogue with those regarded as constituting security threats to the society e.g. Boko Haram and others.

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