Indigenous Languages for Global Peace: The Yourba Example

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Abstract
Language is a human natural endowment that can be used to socialize and unite people in the society. It is a strong attribute that differentiates human beings from other beings. Language is a potential tool for human development and achievement of maximum benefits, peace and unity. The Nigeria government is aware of this strong factor and appreciates that language is a unifying force that can promote peaceful co-existence and secure national unity in Nigeria. Through the Language experts Nigeria government formulated a language policy as contained in National Language Policy of Nigeria. It is believed that the study of our indigenous languages will ensure national unity and integration as a way of achieving maximum development. The paper therefore considers the role an indigenous language and discusses how Yoruba language as one of the indigenous languages can be harnessed to address the national questions which border specifically on national unity, sustainable peace, mutual understanding and overall development of the Nigeria nation. Recommendations are also made on the need to improve the study and learning of our indigenous languages.

Keywords: Language, Global Peace, Peace Education, Yoruba Language

Introduction
The whole world today is be-deviled by one act of conflict or the other, ranging from terrorism, political differences, religious intolerance and so on. The relationship between language and education is symbolic and very significant in enhancing peace and the overall development of any nation. Language is defined as “the system of communication in speech and writing that is used by people of a particular country or area” (Hornby 2005:829). In other words, education is seen as the ‘aggregate of all the processes by which young adults develop the abilities, attitudes and other forms of behaviour which are of positive value to the society in which they live’ (Fafunwa 1974). The Federal government of Nigeria, aware of the importance of language and education as veritable weapons and central pillars to ensure unity, integration, mutual understanding, peaceful co-existence and viable development, set out goals for an educational system that would give every citizen opportunity to develop his intellectual and functional capabilities. It is based on this fact that the Federal government formulated a National Policy on Education, in order to achieve the aims and objectives set out in its goals by making use of indigenous languages. Although there is no document which can be presented as ‘the Nigeria Language Policy, it can only be seen or read from some of the provisions in the National Policy on Education: published in 1977, 1998 and 2004. Another
one is in the offing. The nation deserves a truly national language for mutual understanding and national unity. In order to have a united nation, the philosophy of education in Nigeria emphasizes unity, peaceful co-existence, mutual understanding and national integration. It states that:

Nigeria’s philosophy of education is based on the integration of the individual into sound and effective citizens and an equal educational opportunity for all citizens of the nation at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels both inside and outside the formal school system.

The policy further clarifies issues on how to achieve these national objectives:

For the philosophy to be in harmony with Nigeria’s National objective, it has to be geared towards self-realization, better human relationship, individual and national efficiency, citizenship, national consciousness, national unity as well as geared towards social, cultural, economic, political scientific and technological progress (NPE 1998:3).

It is noted that this policy statement emphasizes national consciousness, national unity, individual and national efficiency, effective citizenship, better relationship, all round progress and development in all spheres of life. The government therefore recognizes the importance of language as a unique weapon to achieve these aims in her educational goals and states clearly in National policy on Education (FGN 2004) that:

In addition to appreciating the importance of language in educational process, and as a means of preserving the people’s culture, the government consider it to be in the interest of national unity that each child should be encouraged to learn one of the three major languages other than his own mother tongue. In this connection, the government considers the three major languages in Nigeria to be Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba.

According to the policy statement it is believed that the use of indigenous language in education would create the spirit of true nationalism in the heart of every Nigerian, thereby promote peaceful co-existence. Nigeria as a multilingual national has so many languages in existence. It will be difficult to say the exact number of languages we have and that are being used in Nigeria. Many scholars and linguists have given different numbers. Hansford Kier, John Bendor, Samuel and Ron Stanford (eds) (1976) and Bamgbose (1992:2) have put the figures of Nigeria languages between 349 and 400 respectively. Nigeria languages can be classified into three group as given by Greenberg (1963) namely:

a. The major languages
b. The medium languages
c. The major or minor languages

The classification is done in consideration of the number of usres and their ways of coverage. Bamgbose has given three groups as:

a. Major languages
b. Main Languages
c. Small group languages

These languages can equally be classified as developed, developing and underdeveloped. The division of these languages into different groups as seen above indicates different languages scholars view.
The Major Languages in Nigeria are Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. They are the most developed as they have been reduced to writing and are used as media of instruction in the primary schools. Not only these, they have reasonable number or used as well as may written materials on them.

*These three major languages are estimated to be spoken Either natively or as a second language by about 60 to 70 percent of the population (Bamgbose 1991:2).*

The three can be regarded as fully developed with a good number of literature in them. These languages have several dialects or local varieties. They are firmly or widely spoken outside their areas of origin as trade language, lingual Franca, in education and in mass media. The Main languages or Medium languages are referred to as developing languages because their orthography have recently been developed or are being stabilized (Ayodele, 2004). They are officially recognized as important ‘national language’ whose usages are limited to their area of origin. They are Edo, Kanuri, Tiv, Efik, Igala, Nupe, Fulfude, Ijaw, Itsekiri, Isoko, Ibiobio, Gwari and Izor to name just a few. They have not yet developed the status of a national languages. The Minor languages or minority languages are also referred to as underdeveloped languages in the sense that some of them have not been reduced to writing. The languages under this group include Ogori, Kataf, Ishan and Jeenjo these are I lie languages that are striving for recognition and are in crisis for survival.

Till today, English language remains the official language and medium of instruction in our schools. The government later introduced the teaching and earning of French language in our schools as second official language. The language situation in Nigeria therefore create an atmosphere of conflict between foreign and indigenous languages making effective implementation of having a 'National Language of our own like mere paper documentation but not practicable, Oladipo (2005) classified Nigerian languages into two linguistic groups namely: Indigenous and foreign languages also referred to as endoglosic and exoglosic languages. In the context of this paper, the use of indigenous languages to foster national unity, mutual understanding, peaceful co-existence and maximum development is our focus.

**Indigenous Language**

Indigenous language in not erroneously referred to as verracher by some schools, Indigenous language context of this paper is any of Nigerian native languages for private, public and educational use indigenous could be described as the language belonging naturally to a particular group of people regarded as the original inhabitants of an area (Hornby 2005:759). Indigenous language is also referred to as 'Mother Tongue' and transmitter of our cultural heritage and mark of our national ideality. Uzochukwu (2002:10) citing Bamgbose (1996) describes it as:

*the language which a group of people considered to be the inhabitants of an area acquire in their early years and which normally becomes their natural instrument of thought and communication*.

There are many Indigenous language in Nigeria, they include: Igbo, Efik, Edo, Ibiobio, Kanuri, Fulfude, Idoma, Tiv, igala, Nupe, Izoh, Ebira, Ogori, Esan etc.
Indigenous Languages in Nigeria

Nigeria remains a complex state with her multilingual nature. Linguistically, it is affirmed that Nigeria has about 400 indigenous languages (Bamgbose 1971). Multilingualism is a term used to describe a linguistic situation where many languages coexist within a single polity and are kept in constant contact by politically and economically determined interests (Alilonu 2005).

Out of these numerous indigenous languages only three are recognized and given the status of major languages in Nigeria. They are: Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba languages. The choice of these three languages are not political nor arbitrary but rather based on the fact that they are far more developed in linguistics and literature than the rest. They are fairly and widely spoken outside their areas of origin as trade language, lingual Franca, media of instruction in education and in mass media. English language on the other hand has assumed the status of a Nigerian language; it is a language of upward mobility in the country. It is being used in almost every situation and fluency in it has socio-economic and political advantages. It remains the language of elites, is widely used in higher domain and it is a sine qua non to the survival of individuals in Nigeria, as well as to the development objectives of the country. English language remains the major means of development at the national level while indigenous languages in Nigeria are used to promote national development.

The Role of Indigenous Languages in Peaceful co-existence and Unity: Yoruba Language experience

The whole world is faced with one security challenge or the other, it is not an overstatement to say that national unity, mutual understanding peace and stability can be achieved through the use of our indigenous languages. Unity is the sole agent of peace, national stability and development in any given society. Language remains one of the unifying forces that bind people together in contact and interaction for mutual understanding. Language serves as instrument of social interaction, and also as a medium through which relationships are established, extended and maintained. The use of Yoruba language as one of the indigenous languages in Nigeria in the area of communication will promote ethnic and group relationship, and will maintain the unity of the Nigerians.

In order to promote unity and peace, Federal government stipulated in section 1 paragraph 7 of the National Policy on Education (FRN) (2004 that the objectives of Nigerian languages in National Education Objective should be:

i. The inculcation of national consciousness and national unity.

ii. The inculcation of the right type of values and altitudes for the survival of the individual and the Nigerian society,

iii. The training of the mind in the understanding other world. The acquisition of appropriate skills, abilities and competencies., both menial and physical, as equipment for the individual to live in arid contribute to the development of his society.

By this, the role of our indigenous languages cannot be ignored to promote national unity. National unity means peaceful co-existence among various units and sub-groups that formed a nation. This national consciousness and national unity can only be achieved through understanding of the language of communication (Ilori, 2006:5).

In education, Yoruba language can be used to foster national unity, its inclusion in the school curricula will go a long way to solve the problem that is specifically hanged on peaceful co-existence, unity and integration. Teaching and learning of our indigenous language are currently taking place at primary, secondary and tertiary institutions. The children will be
able to speak and min in the language of their immediate environment electively and efficiently. The teaching of Yoruba language as second language has gone a long way to bring about unity among some units and groups in Nigeria. The statement of the policy stipulate that a child should learn one of these three major languages, that is, Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba languages beside his/her mother tongue. If properly implemented the Nigerian child will be able to interact and feel free in any part of the country he/she finds himself. Language spoken will no more be a barrier to social interaction, economic transactions and mutual understanding among ethnic groups in Nigeria.

The use of indigenous languages is very important in nation building; the building of any given society cannot be separated from the language which binds the people together. The language use of the society ensures mutual understanding among the citizens. It is a force that creates room for cooperation which makes people to live together in peace and harmony and her fore paves way for landmark development of a nation. These indigenous languages (Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba) therefore serve as national languages in contact and interaction among people in national economy, education, press, radio, television politics, etc.

Yoruba language is seen as one of the indigenous languages that serves as potential tool for forging national unity. It is also stipulated in the Nigerian constitution that wherever practicable, the business of the National Assembly could be conducted in one of the major Nigerian languages while at the state level one or more other languages spoken in the state, could be used (Nigerian Constitution 1984 Pp. 35-46).

Nigeria indigenous languages remain the means of socialization and acculturation. It is obvious that positive attitudes must be developed toward healthy social relationships at all levels. Indigenous languages and Nigerian culture are interwoven. Therefore there are needs to develop the right type of values and attitudes by individuals for comfortable living in the Nigerian society. It is observed that Yoruba as a tribe has some cherished cultures which much more values can be derived from than from the imported culture. It is believed that this culture will help the total well being of our younger generation. Yoruba language can also be harnessed in conflict resolution if one considers the multilingual nature of the country. It will create room for easy usage.

To our politician the use of people’s indigenous language is paramount. In politics, the use of our native languages should be adopted. The politicians should use our indigenous languages to address the electorate, during campaigns and rallies. Our political campaign slogans should be prepared using our native language. This will make the language use accessible to them and they will know and decide whom to vote for. The political participation of the masses strongly depends on their level of political awareness. Party manifestoes should he written in our indigenous languages so that the masses will have interest in the programmes and activities of the political parties. The use of Yoruba in this captain will definitely bring about democratic development. Owolabi (2006:15) says:

... good governance cannot be achieved unless those who make laws at all levels of government and those, who implement them can function maximally in a language they are proficient in. and. similarly, unless those for whom laws are made can understand what their rights' and obligations are As long as the language of governance is accessible only to the educated elites, majority of citizens will be excluded,
thereby making nonsense of participatory democracy. Consequently, the only viable alternative is for Nigerian linguist's to be used in many domains hitherto dominated by English (Bamgbose. 2005)

Our indigenous languages should be used in administering government polices and programme. Efforts should be made to provide indigenous alternative to some slogans, terminology and other political jargons that are alien to our languages. Bringing the government policies to the grassroots through the people’s language will go a long way in enhancing peace and political tolerance.

Conclusion

It has been established from this work that the use of our indigenous languages will ensure national unity, mutual understanding, peace, stability, peaceful co-existence and maximum development. The use of one of these major languages will give room for mutual understanding and cooperation among the citizens of this country. The use of these indigenous language should be encourage in our educational system as other developed nations recorded success in the use of indigenous languages to foster unity, development and peace stability in their domain. A review of other multilingual settings globally has revealed that many countries have in each case successful adopted an indigenous as her national language. Among such countries across the global are: India, China and the Former soviet union. The high technological and educational growth of these countries is attributed to the successful implementation of policies particularly politics. This leads to their economic as well as their technical advancement.

Unlike India which has an ancestral attachment to Sanskrit, Nigeria has a remarkably different sociolinguistic configuration from India. This may not allow an easy choice of an indigenous language as a National language, but a good number of these indigenous languages may be developed to the status of a language of administration, politics and education in at least their regions.

References


