



THE ROLES AND USEFULNESS OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN THE SOUTH EASTERN PART OF NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Languages play different roles in every bilingual/multilingual and bilingual/multicultural society. The pluralistic attribute of languages has resulted to the society differing tremendously in linguistic and cultural roles. In every bilingual/ multicultural environment, the roles and usefulness of each language are evident. The South Eastern part of Nigeria is a bilingual/bicultural society. The fact remains that Igbo and English languages are the two linguistic natures in this bilingual part of Nigeria. It is very clear that each of these two languages play different roles in building a corporate image for sustainable development, peace and security in the Eastern part and Nigeria at large. Their roles are x-rayed with the aim of exposing the usefulness of each language in the environment. The central idea is that language and culture cannot be separated. In the same vein, language, peace and security are intermingled. Therefore, the knowledge of language helps in building a corporate image that sustains development. This paper is aware that there are problems as well as prospects face by the two languages especially in the area of culture, education and social life. In every bilingual society, the languages perform different roles and functions.

Keywords:

Bilingualism,

Culture,

Education,

Security and Development.

INTRODUCTION

Language is an exclusive human activity which is produced in an organized system by which a particular social group operates. Man's self-fulfillment and aspiration depends on language. Language is the source of human life and power (Fromkin and Rodman 1993:3). This power of language is made manifest through communication in the society. No society can develop and attain peace and security without communication. Communication is the key to peaceful co-existence and organization of every society. Hence language is a unique system of communication. The aim of communication is to affect lives and this makes its meaning central within a linguistic community. Language comes to life in communication and its usefulness is common to the social group. This is because all human activities such as development peaceful co-existence and security of lives and properties are linked and based on the relationships of language in the society. In a bilingual/multilingual society, roles and functions are assigned to language due to its complex nature and it defines that society. Anything it falls to define does not exist in that society. Since languages develop alongside with its users, it is, therefore, very obvious that if the language of society is different, there is no way that society will develop. Nigerian society is multi-lingual in nature with different parts of the country being either bilingual or multi-lingual. The presence of many local languages has made it imperative to have an official language none since the social groups/ tribes are not willing to relinquish their languages for another vernacular language. There is the need to choose a neutral language, hence, English language is accepted by all to serve that purpose. In the south Eastern part of Nigeria, the vernacular is Igbo Language. This paper, therefore, will look at the roles and usefulness of the English language in spite of the fact that there is a language of the immediate environment.

Theoretical Framework

This study looks at the usefulness of language from the sociolinguistic and functional angles due to the fact that peoples' language reflects their concerns, values and activities. Language reflects the collective mind of a linguistic group. Language and society are two vital and intentioned contexts (Ogunsiji and Olaseinde 2018:346).

Therefore, the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis, a sociolinguistic theory by Edward Sapir (1921) and Benjamin Lee Whorf (1956) forms the base for this work. The theory holds great significance in all scopes of language theories. The theory, therefore, states that the grammatical and more verbal structure of a person's language influences how the world is viewed. Language influences and/or determines one's thoughts, that is, perception and expression are taken as one and so speech is the result of thought. Different words mean different things in different languages, that is, there is no one to one translation. To the theorists, society's language influences its culture. Man is constantly linked to others through language. The primary function of language is to convey ideas from one person to another be it information, command or entreaty. Language plays a major role in the regulation and control of the society (Osuafor 2003:2). Man's culture can be considered as a mirror through which the world is viewed and develop a shared meaning of what occurs in the environment. Many scholars have asked the question "How man's language influences his culture?" This and other sociolinguistic puzzles what Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis sets out to unravel. To these theorists, man's language shapes the world view; people who speak different languages view the world differently. The real world is unconsciously built on the habits due to the language of the group. This is because the language habits of one's' community affects ways of interpretation (Adegoju 2007:340). The theory portrays openness, that is, a window through which cognitive process is viewed not as an absolute but free to look at things differently from the original conception. Also, one's environment and culture influences decoding of information.

A closure look at the above analogy of the theory of linguistic relativity by Sapir-Whorf, a clear assimilation and understanding of social groups /tribes in Nigeria becomes easier. The application of the theory can be utilised in describing great numerous misunderstandings, youths' restiveness, security issues and developmental millstones in different parts of Nigeria. This concept of relativity passes across dialect boundaries and delves into the world of language from different local languages in Nigeria and consequently from society to society. Nigeria being a bilingual/multi-lingual society subjects her languages to different roles in different situations. The role given to a language depends solely on the function such a language performs

(Hamers and Biane 2000:2). For Igbo- English bilinguals, the two languages are used for different purposes. This is due to the status each language has occupied in the lives of the people and society at large. The two are affected by environment, context and settings. To x-ray the way the above factors affects language, Jacobson's theory of functions of language (1960) comes into play.

The theory moves beyond vocabulary and grammar to address the importance of language based on the

functions it performs in the society. Jacobson's schema of language involves six function models and each of them determines different functions of a language. Even though there are six aspects/functions of language, it is difficult to find a verbal message that fulfills only one function because different functions are performed according to their hierarchical order. In short communication, one or more of the factors may be absent but lengthy units of languages may activate all of them.

Functions of Language and Their Factors.

Target Factors and Function No.	Target Factor	Source Factor	Function
1	Context	Message	Referential
2	Addresser	Message	Emotive
3	Addressee	Message	Emotive
4	Contact	Message	Phatic
5	Code	Message	Metalingnal
6	Message	Message	Poetic

(Louis 2019: 185)

Emotive or Expressive---Addresser: This language function centers on the addressee by expressing the speakers' attitude and emotive which may be fake or genuine. The addressee achieves this through interjections.

Cognate – Addressee: This center on the addressee. This manifests fully in grammar through evocative and imperative sentences.

Phatic --- Context: Language is use to establish, prolong or discontinue the communication, that is, to maintain contact with the person being talked to.

Meta lingual --- code: The Meta lingual function as a specific subtype of the referential function used to establish mutual agreement on the God (Raster 1997:25).

Phatic- Contact: The Phatic function is used to establish, lengthen or disconnect communication, that is, to find out if the contact is still connected.

Poetic- Message: The poetic function centers on the message totally.

The actual analysis of the function of language begins with determining whether each of the function factors must be present and in agreement in order for communication to succeed. Therefore, relations are established between all the factors especially between the message and the factors.

There are real and thematised functions of language which are linked to different communicative agents. The agents in literary work/text are real/empirical author, the implied author, the narrator, the character, the narratee, the implied reader and the empirical reader. For instance, in a disconnected interaction between characters, the disintegration of the phatic function, that is, dialogue turning to monologues is the same as a phatic dysfunction between the empirical author and reader. The poetic function is activated through dysfunction among characters. This means that the phatic function is thematise or functional while the poetic function is real because it comes from the author. The poetic function in reality is being activated through the thematised functional phatic function (Louis 186:2019).

Notwithstanding the above six functions of language by Jacobosn, language has multifaceted functions in a

multi-lingual/bilingual society such as Nigeria. In Nigeria, there are many local as well as foreign languages. Even though one may say that the foreign languages English, French, Arabic and Chinese are used, English stands out as the language of choice by all tribes. Due to the diverse nature of Nigeria, it is one of the binds keeping the country together. Among the diverse local languages in Nigeria, three languages representing the three major ethnic groups: Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa are prominent. Each of these three languages serves numerous functions alongside the English language.

Igbo language is dominant in the Southern part of the country especially in the South Eastern part. English language interacts with the Igbo language, a language of the Benue-Congo branch of the Niger-Congo language family in all facets of life of the people of South Eastern part. To the people, English is the second language even though small percentage of the younger ones learns it as first language. Due to numerous roles the English language plays, every citizen is compelled to learn and speak it. Both the grammar based and function –based aspects of the language are expected to be mastered by all. Knowledge of these two aspects of the English language helps citizens to improve their understanding of underlining grammar and achieve their function goals. The internal functions of the English language are: expressing needs and likes (persuading), describing people, places and things (defending), describing spatial and temporal relations (analyzing), comprehending text or speech (drawing conclusion), retelling or relating past events (defining), making claims (explaining), making predictions (generalizing), asking information questions (interpreting), expressing and supporting opinions (sequencing), comparing (hypothesizing and speculating) , contrasting leads to summarizing. The Igbo culture and norms determines people's application of the above internal functions of the English language. The aggregate of individual application of the language metamorphosis into the general functions of the English language in the South Eastern Nigeria: Imo, Anambra, Enugu, Ebonyi and Abia States.

The Igbo and English Bilingualism

Igbo society as revealed in its customs, practices and traditions is known to be highly evolutive and open to outside influences. Therefore, English language settled down very well in Igbo society. A typical Igbo society is known to be one whose citizens always persevere in every facets of human endeavor. Retrogressive factors are resisted and shunned for survival. Igbo society believes that giving up is not the best no matter how difficult the situation may seem. The traditional Igbo society has societal value systems such as communal life, family and respect for life and the elders and hospitality. Both the societal values and Igbo language have come into strong marriage with the Western culture through commerce, Christian religion and English language as a result of colonization.

Even before colonization of Nigeria by Britain, there had been a kind of link between Igbo and English languages through slave trade (Baley 2008:80, Etis 1997:73, Chambers 2009:14). It is estimated that 14.6% of the enslaved Africans transported to Europe through European slave ships during the transatlantic slave trade were Igbo's (Linebaugh and Redike 2000:336, Etis 1997:73). These slaves were dispersed in different parts of Europe. Some recorded populations of people of African descent on Caribbean Islands recorded 2,863 Igbo on Trinidad and Tobago in an 1813 census, 894 in Saint Lucia in an 1815 census (Hignman 1995:450), 440 on Saint Kitts and Nevis in an 1817 census, and 111 in Guyana in an 1819 census (Hignman 1995: 455). When the slave trade was abolished, most of the freed slaves made effort to unite with their origin having attained a considerable level of proficiency in the use of English. The Igbo's who returned were able to communicate both in Igbo and English languages.

Also the advert of Christianity is another factor that leads to the Igbo-English bilingual nature of the South Eastern Nigeria. Before the confronting marriage of Christian religion with the traditional Igbo religion, Igbo society has their own religion. The traditional Igbo religion includes belief in a creator god known as Chukwu or Chineke, that is, the creator of earth, an earth goddess called Ala and various deities, spirits and ancestors that serve as protective umbrella to their living descendants. The first interface between Igbo traditional religion and Christianity was marked by antagonism and the rejection of Igbo traditional beliefs as pagan, uncivilized and devilish which led to the rapid growth

of Christianity in Igbo cosmology through the activities of the missionaries.

The missionaries together with other European merchants, explorers, administrations and imperialists opened land to Western development and civilization by introducing new systems of government (Indirect Rule) and religion. The Igbo society was attracted to Christianity because of European idea of establishment of schools, free education and free medical care. The western teachings in schools and churches were done using English language (Nwuba2021:37-38).

Furthermore, colonialism enhances the development of Igbo-English bilingualism. The aim was to use the Igbo-English bilinguals to get to the hinterlands. This led to the system of Indirect Rule being introduced to achieve smooth governance and free flow of communication. To facilitate the achievement of this, schools were built for the teaching and learning of English language. Colonial language policies were put in place and enforced. The effect was that the policies deformed the inter-group relations, social structure, education, traditional cultures and values and the identity of Igbo society for the colonial masters prohibited the speaking of Igbo language in schools and churches. Hence, Igbo-English bilingualism was developed and promoted through the implementation of the above factors. In the present dispensation in Nigeria in general, and south Eastern part in particular, Igbo and English languages play major part in the overall system and is used in different areas of human endeavor. This paper will center only on the roles/usefulness of English language in the South Eastern Nigeria.

The roles and usefulness of English language in South Eastern Nigeria and Nigeria at large cannot be over emphasized. It is a well known fact that English language has established itself formally in Nigeria as the official language. It is a common but useful unifying instrument that binds members of speech communities together in continuous inter-relationships (Bamgbose 1971:97) English language is a factor that brings about socio-cultural identification in the Nigerian environment as well as a foothold for professional interpreters (Adetugbo 1984:10) . The bilingual Igbo speakers being part of Nigeria use English language as second language language constantly comes into contact with the indigenous Igbo language (Ngonebu 2008:14).

Basically English language performs two roles in this linguistic community but the roles are split into many functions. The basic functions are transactional and interactional. Transactional role involves the use of the language to pass information. The people involved in communication are aware of what their intentions are, what the message is and the context in which the information is passed down to the audience. Interaction role involves the use of English to maintain personal relationship and to begin and maintain conversation. These two roles of English language has penetrated various strata in the society as can be found in the entire social, political, religious and educational interactions of the Igbo cosmology in the South Eastern Nigeria. The special roles are discussed under the headings subheadings below:

The English Language in Education

English language has become the linguistic hub of the educational system where it functions as the mirror or the yardstick to measure learner's performance in the society (Obiukwu 2019:1). As a language, it has a great impact on the cognitive development of users (Akindele and Adegbite 2005:57). In this linguistic community, it is the main language of instructions in schools at all levels. The English language is being used both as a subject and as a medium of instruction right from the first day of the pupil in school. (Ogunsiji and Olasnde 2018:355). The use of English language as a medium of instruction more or less affects the thinking pattern of children especially in the urban cities that learns English as their first language (L1). Because language and its culture move together, children through the process of acculturation imbibe English culture loses Igbo identity (Ezenwa Ohaeto and Akujiobi 2013:46). Parents' acceptance of the English language was as a result of the socio-economic gains of educational attainment but this led to the abandonment of Igbo language as parents prefer to send their children to schools where English language is the sole medium of instruction. The belief is that acquisition high level proficiency in English as a second is very important and useful in the present global socio-economic scene. (Ogunsiji and Olaseinde 2018:355). Success or otherwise in the English spells doom or success in ones success or attainment of tertiary education and life in general.

Language of Governance and Politics

English language has become the language of government and politics in the five states of the South Eastern Nigeria. All government transactions and documentations are carried out using English language. Administration of local communities by the traditional rulers most often are documented in English language. At the local, state and national levels, the English language is used to conduct all their business. Official interaction between or among workers is always in English not minding whether or not they come from the same linguistic environment (Ogunsiji and Olaseinde 2021: 346). This use of English language in government has displaced the indigenous language from its former position. This is because the Nigerian government of which these state governments anchored on adjudged the English language as a superior official language. This judgment informed the subsequent placement of the language higher than the Igbo language. Application of English language as an instrument of governance results to an interface with the indigenous and Western political culture, way of life and attitude of the people. This point to the notion of 'language determination' which claims that language determines certain nonlinguistic cognitive process (Ezenwa-Ohaeto and Akujiobi: 2013:46). All electioneering campaigns, manifestoes, speeches, radio and television jingles, sponsored advertisement in newspaper and on billboard by politicians in the area are all in English.

Language of Religion

Even though the local language plays a major part in the religious life of the people in this society, English is the second language that is commonly used in the religious sphere. The religion in South Eastern part of Nigeria is predominantly Christianity. The importance of language in religion is very clear to all. It is in the religion processes that the bilingual nature of this society clearly comes into play. In conducting religious activities, both spoken and written forms are used in Igbo and English languages resulting to constant code mixing and code switching but the religious documents, posters, fliers, bill boards, and radio and television advertisements are all in English language. The English version of the Holy Book: The Bible are commonly use even when the church service is to be conducted in the local language. Also, all religious textbooks and journals are written in English. Therefore, English language enables religious practitioners to disseminate information to

the public. The short and long term effect is that many people who are not very proficient in the English language are denied the benefits accruing from these religious exercises. This in turn has its own counter effect in the life of the youths in the society.

Language of Law

English plays an important role in law and all legal transactions. The constitutions guiding governance in all the states in this sociolinguistic community are documented in English. Proceedings of all the State House of Assembly such as presentation and passage of bills are all in English language. All the court sessions both at the customary, magistrate and high courts are all in English. Local laws in the villages and legal cases such as land disputes even when the local language is orally used; documentation is handled in English language. Since all the people are not proficient in English language, people may sign documents that are at variance with their oral submissions. When this happens, future generations are thrown into a state of anarchy and confusion. A good number of the state legislatures are not very proficient in the English language. Some may not even make any serious contributions not because the people they are representing have no need rather the skill required in such high level legal proceedings are lacking. The effect is that their consent is sort and they accede to the passage of a bill the content is very ambiguous. Therefore, all the functionaries in the modern judicial system must be proficient in English language in addition to any other language (Ogunsiji and Olaseinde 2021:358).

Language of Mass Media

English plays a vital role in mass media. It is obvious that Igbo is being used in this society in all private and public communication, English is fully adopted in different mass media communication to achieve integration, development, peace and secured society. This is evident in all mass media channels such as television, socio networks, newspaper, magazine and journals. Almost all television channels patronize in this society broadcast in English language. About a few are done in the local language. These channels are (NTA IGBOEZUE and TEN ISIMBIDO CHANNELS). Igbo society is well known for communal and social life. No wonder communication in all the social medial handles such as Facebook, Telegram, Twitter, Instagram, Whatsap etc

flourishes within social groups for personal and societal inter-relationships. Sensitive and security information are quickly disseminated via these social media handles.

A Bridge to Language Barriers

English language is used to break language barriers especially in the major cities such as Enugu, Owerri, Awka, Abakailiki, Umuahia and Nsukka where there are presence of Federal establishments and multinational companies. In all federal establishments, the multilingual nature of Nigeria society comes into play. The bilingual nature of this environment helps to overcome the hurdles necessitated by the presence of people of different ethnicities and languages. English language which is domesticated in this part of the country comes into play. People works harmoniously because there is mutual understanding because of the presence of a common linguistic code.

Challenges and Prospects

Bilingual society such as Igbo society in the South Eastern Nigeria is faced with a lot of challenges both by the youths and the older ones. Some of the challenges are language fluency delay, mixed languages, dominance of one language over the other, reading and writing, being passively bilingual, prejudice, cultural and religious biases, and code switching and code mixing. Code mixing and code switching are common language phenomenon. Hardly can people start a sentence in Igbo language and finish it without adding English words or for a full speech to go on without adding fragments of the English language into the communication parlance. This is very obvious in religious communication. Switching codes is one of the features of this specialist language in this society. When in the midst of other tribes or speech communities in Nigeria where there is utmost need for secrecy in the release of classified information, Igbo bilingual finds it difficult to adhere to such security needs due to the fact that every interaction is laden with either switching of codes or mixing of codes.

The dominance of English language over Igbo language has been clearly stated in this paper. Bilinguals in this society prefer to pride and speak in English as a form of social elevation and class distinction. Most people find it difficult to deliver a speech even when they preach in Igbo. Even where it is obvious that majority of the listeners are either

monolinguals or partial bilinguals, English language is still used thereby cutting many people off the communication channel. This should not be the case. Each of the two languages should be given equal opportunity to serve the social needs of the society. There are security issues that are best passed down and assimilated in vernacular. The attention giving to English language in the South Eastern part of Nigeria is gradually diminishing as people has started diverting attention to other forms of societal and economic ladder. People are no longer paying attention to the mastery of the language. The influx of examination malpractices and other businesses have resulted to the stake holders abandoning their duties to few individuals whose aim is to lower the standard of proficiency in English language. The effect is that many youths who are turned out of school every year lack the where withal to fit into the society. These youths are prone to any act of lawlessness and political crime and violence. The lowering of proficiency of English language among the youths affected every facet of the educational system. The society is paying heavily for this and this situation should not be left unaddressed. All forms of examination malpractices should be shunned at all levels of educational system.

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