

# **SOCIOLINGUISTIC RESOURCES AND PEDAGOGIC RESOURCEFULNESS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF NIGERIAN LANGUAGE**

By

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## **Abstract**

There is little or no material on sociolinguistic resources and pedagogic resourcefulness in the development of Nigerian languages. This paper addresses the role of sociolinguistics in the teaching and learning of Nigerian languages. This study which is essentially expository draws on various researches on language and Nigerian indigenous languages as well. The paper anchors on the theoretical framework of sociolinguistic perspective of language education. From this study, it is apparent that sociolinguistic resources and education enterprise can play a major role in the development of indigenous languages in Nigeria. It can be argued that lack of sociolinguistic resources/knowledge and pedagogic resourcefulness/functional teachers can become a barrier to the development of Nigerian languages. Ostracizing the languages of the environment and disengaging them from education enterprises can go a long way in undermining the development of the Nigerian languages. The paper concludes that major problems confronting the development of Nigerian languages can be anchored on three basic parameters viz lack of adequate sociolinguistic resources, lack of resourcefulness on the part of language teachers and lack of language elaboration technique on the part of the teachers.

## **Introduction**

Language being what the members of a particular society speak, is pivotal in the development of any modern nation or society. Sociolinguistic is the study of language in relation to the society. That is, language and society are not independent; it can be argued that any reference to language must include a reference to the society that speaks that language. One of the crucial role of a sociolinguist is to examine the relationship between language and society with the sole aim of identifying the social functions of the language and the ways of enhancing and expanding it's vocabulary. In spite of the pivotal role of language, its development has not only been taken for granted most often, it is also grossly misunderstood (Ikekeonwu 2011). The true picture of language situation in Nigeria can be captured in the words of Wardhaugh (1987) that a pervasive myth about sub-Saharan Africa is that it was like a tower of Babel before European colonization has come and gone, yet the language situation does not seem to be better. It has rather become worse by the introduction of English and French as unifying languages. The attitude of the speakers of Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba, have been towards English especially in formal situations. The continued dependence on English and French by Nigerians is a reflection of a deep feeling of inferiority complex and lack of confidence (Babawale 2013). Babawale argues that the moment the Africans (Nigerians inclusive) begin to use their language to produce cars, machines and

other products, that is the time they would start to develop. This implies that Nigerians must expand their vocabulary to capture the new terms from science and technology, and to fill other lexical gaps in their vocabulary. The crucial question is how this can be achieved without involving sociolinguistic resources (sociolinguistics) and pedagogical resourcefulness (i.e. teachers of language) in language academics in this Nigerian nation. Many people-educated and non educated alike assume that the use of English language in formal and sometimes in informal situations in Nigeria will solve the problems of equal access to knowledge, divisiveness, poverty, underdevelopment, and language diversity. Conversely, it can be argued that English as a medium of instruction in Nigerian schools, and lack of sociolinguistic and pedagogic resourcefulness have become a formidable and impenetrable barrier to knowledge acquisition by ostracizing the languages of the many Nigerian environments and by disengaging them from the business of education. These acts go a long way in effectively undermining and stunting the growth of languages of the environment to a level of near incapacitation. The spiral effect of prioritizing exoglossic languages against the languages of the environment is unmistakable, but as Gusan (2013) laments, "No Nigerian society has ever acculturated modern knowledge to its cultural and environmental context. Holmes (2008) also draws attention to the fact that nothing benefits a country more than the treasure of the language and culture of its various people because in doing so it fosters intergroup understanding and realizes greater dividends in the form of originality, creativity, and versatility. Regrettably, Nigerians often do not consider language as an important symbol of a minority group's identity. For instance, in Nigerian society, many people especially the young adults believe that it is a waste of time and resources to go to school to study their language. With this mindset many young adults as well as parents discourage their children and relations from embarking on any indigenous language programme especially in institutions of higher learning. Igboanusi and Ohia (2001) in favour of this point remark that minority languages in Nigeria are often neglected. The speakers of Nigerian languages seem to be aware that their languages do not often function in gaining upward social mobility, and developmental purposes. They seem to believe that government's national language policies in general and minority language development in particular are often viewed with suspicion. Bamgbose (2006), Ohia and Igboanusi (2001), Agbedo( 2011), affirm this point.

Sociolinguists argue that language can be maintained and developed by various steps such as selection, codification, elaboration, and security of its acceptance (Holmes2008). In this paper, we would relate some of these steps/theories to the Nigerian languages. We would also establish basic and practical ways in which teachers of languages could be more resourceful

### **The Language Situation in Nigeria**

Nigeria is a multilingual nation. For some reasons, the estimates of the indigenous languages in Nigeria range from 250 to 500 (Fengan 1994, Agbedo 2007, Amfani 2009, Ikekeonwu 2011). These indigenous languages have various dialects. Out of these numerous languages, the government recognizes three as the "major language status" that is, Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba. The three languages are regarded as regional lingua Franca: That is

Hausa in the North, Yoruba in the West and Igbo in the South-East. However, the political arrangement as regards some languages as major and others as minor does not seem to augur well with the speakers of the so-called minority languages, for the fear of being marginalized (Ogumsiji 2001). In addition to the numerous different languages in Nigeria are English, French Arabic German, Russian and Pidgin English. All these languages but pidgin are taught in school. English enjoys the status of a second language used extensively and across ethnic boundaries. French, Arabic, German, Russia serve limited purposes. pidgin English flourishes mainly in commercial contexts especially in cosmopolitan cities like Lagos, Abuja Port-Harcourt Warri etc. As it is now, none of the indigenous languages (Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba) enjoys either the linguistic spread or national acceptability to be regarded as a truly national language. These are only national languages in theory. The English language enjoys dominance in the fields of administration, education commerce and industry, inter-ethnic, and international communications among others.

As mentioned earlier, indigenous languages in Nigeria are categorized into the major and minority languages. The major languages are generally the more focused upon in the school system, especially at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels. The minority languages are often subcategorized with some rated higher than the others. For instance, Ibibio, Edo, Igala, Tiv are rated higher than itsekiri, Nupe, Etulo, and Jabba (Ikekeonwu 2011). Two basic criteria rank high in the assessment or ranking of the languages. These are:

- The number of speakers - the three major languages have more native speakers than the minority ones.
- The level of codification and general development.

Agbedo (2011) argues that one sure step in this direction is a language policy that emphasizes the developmental aspect of all Nigerian indigenous languages irrespective of their individual status. Such a developmental emphasis focuses on the modernization and standardization of all local languages such that their speakers receive basic education that affords them unrestricted access to the nation's economy, political dispensation and the opportunities to participate in them. Having seen the language situation in Nigeria, it is clear that the potentials of the indigenous languages for broad based mass literary and knowledge acculturation have never been exploited properly.

Gusan (2013) also recommends that there is the need for a proactive approach to the issue of development which must involve a sound linguistic policy that sees the utilization of indigenous languages as languages of instruction in schools. In that connection, we must accept that we have a responsibility of a language policy which confers linguistic empowerment on the generality of Nigerians through the instrumentality of their respective mother tongues. It can be expected that a decision to accord official status to the three macro languages (i.e, Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba) will not meet with opposition. In other words, we should not rely on preserving individual cultural and linguistic identities only. We must as well put in place sociolinguistic approaches (such as vocabulary and acquisition expansion) in our indigenous languages for the enterprise of education. In this regard the Nigerian language policy must be redirected towards the improvement and maintenance of indigenous languages and their proper utilization for the attainment of developmental goals.

## Sociolinguistic Perspective of Language Education

The involvement of sociolinguistic academies/teaching is the first port of call in any serious study of language. This is because without the existence of human society there should be no language. It is the people in the society that make use of the language. In other words, language in relation to the society should be the focus of any meaningful study of language. Sociolinguistic information can usefully illuminate/identify the knowledge which underlies people's ability to use language appropriately in their own community. The focus is also in multilingual communities where language contact and multilingualism is the norm. In a multilingual nation like Nigeria, knowledge of sociolinguistics will expose the teachers to the fact that in a multilingual community, children should learn their ethnic language fast, and later add other languages for purposes such as education, and for communication with a wider range of people in a wider range of contexts. This to a large extent enhances language development. In other words, the sociolinguists'/teachers' aim is to move towards a theory which provides a motivated account of the elaboration of the use, acceptance and institutional support in a community/society. The above perspectives should form the basis of our illustrations in this study.

### Elaboration of Use

The wider the domains in which the minority language can be used, the greater the chances of its security. Extending its functions for use in new domains also involves developing the necessary linguistic resources for handling new concepts and contexts. For instance, Nigerian languages especially Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba have capacities for assimilating words, terms and expressions from other languages and cultures. In Igbo language for instance, there are such words as *commission*, *keke*, *computa*, *foon*, *profeso*, *dokita*, *intanet*, *cusor*, *rula*, *indomie*, *Okada*, *radio*, *televishon*, *macronie* among others. The above terms were originally unknown in the language, but are now in relatively common use because of the elaboration of the vocabulary and extension of its use. Basically the development of the language to a large extent reflected the expansion and extension of the power of the speakers, teachers and learners of the language, that is, elaboration of vocabulary and use.

Furthermore, a good number of terms have been borrowed into the Igbo language from Yoruba and Hausa due to lexical gaps. Terms that have been borrowed into Igbo language from Yoruba include: *agboro*, *eba fou fou*, *agbada* 'occasion dress for men', *wayo*, *ashebi*, *jigida* etc. Terms that have been borrowed from Hausa into Igbo language are shown in the table below: The terms below, borrowed from Hausa into Igbo language refer to foodstuffs. Some of the pronunciations are made to conform to the phonotactic rules of the Igbo language, example: *yabasi* and *guzo*.

### Acceptance

Acceptance involves positive attitude of the speakers of the language towards that language. Sociolinguists should also make organized effort to secure language acceptance. For instance, the status of the language and its new variety is important, hence, people's

attitudes to the variety being developed must be considered. Steps must be taken to capture its acceptance and prestige, that is, to encourage speakers, teachers and learners to develop pride in the language and show loyalty towards it. An effective education system can be a very powerful means of extending the functions of Nigerian languages. Spreading proficiency in each variety of the language and giving it status increase its acceptability in different contexts.

### **Institutional Support**

Support for language development from bilingual speakers can enhance the language development. Institutional support in line with Holmes (2008) can be sought for in domains such as education, religion, law, administration and the media:

- The use of the minority language in education, that is, bilingual educational programmes, using or teaching the minority language in school, in pre-schools, and in after school programme
- Support by the law and administration, that is, the right to use the language in court, and the House of Assembly in dealing with government officials,
- The use of the language in places of worship - for services, sermons, hymns, and chants,
- The use of support for the language in the media, that is, TV programmes; radio programmes, newspapers and magazines.

The assertions above, suggest that for the Nigerian languages to be more widespread, one would need to use them move extensively in educational institutions of all levels. There is obviously the need to engage linguists especially sociolinguistics in the enterprise of education. In this regard, the Nigerian language policy must be redirected towards the

services of sociolinguists in language planning policies as well as curriculum planning.

### **Recommendation**

The development of spoken and written languages can be fostered through the input of sociolinguistics in educational research; social equality can be enhanced through sociolinguistic education. The study of language education should include the processes involved in language learning and language teaching. In other words, the ways in which language and literary skills can be fostered are through education. Since language can be seen as a social maker of gender, class, and ethnicity, Verhoeven (1997) notes that ways in which classroom experiences may contribute to equality in school learning process should be emphasized.

Hausa	Igbo	gloss
Albasa	yabasi	onions
Kwunu	kwunu	Local drink from millet
gasau	guzo	A type of beans
kanda	kanda	A brand of meat
suya	suya	Roasted beef

Table showing the terms borrowed from Hausa to Igbo

In language pedagogy the following teaching processes should apply: language, communication and taught, acquisition of communicative competence (grammatical, discourse, strategic and sociolinguistic competence) should be duly taught. Local languages in Tertiary Educations should be encouraged.

### Summary of Findings and Conclusion

It is worthwhile to note that this study has revealed at least three generalizations from language and sociolinguistic theory. The first is that we can involve sociolinguistic experiences in the teaching and development of Nigerian languages. This is important because language development in school involves not only the elaboration of a grammatical system, but also the ability to use language as an instrument for teaching and learning and the ability to use language in various contexts. The second generalization is the importance of utilizing indigenous languages as languages of instruction in schools. The third generalization borders on the elaboration of the use, acceptance and institutional support of the indigenous languages in educational enterprise. The study conforms to Verhievens (2000) assertion that the sociolinguistic study of language should produce guidelines for Teacher-training where language should not be defined from an economic or technological point of view. Instead, the social context of language should be emphasized, taking into consideration socio-cultural aspect of development and the concern of different communities and individuals, and their proper utilization in the enterprise of education/schools for the attainment of development goals. These groups must involve the potentials of indigenous language for domestication of knowledge and broad based sociolinguistic knowledge for the development of Nigerian languages.

In his own view, Bamgbose (2006) notes that the principle of Nigerian educational language policies are based on equal opportunity to access to the language of education, thorough grounding in the child's own language; thorough mastery of English and bilingualism in two Nigerian languages. Equal opportunity to access the language of instruction can only be enhanced when linguists, sociolinguistics, and language teachers involve indigenous languages and lingua Franca in the enterprise of education. Thorough grounding in the child's language is achievable only when education in local dialects is allowed up to the tertiary levels. While linguists have obvious expertise in developing the form of a language, the task of promoting the variety will require a number of skills and resources which are not specifically linguistics. Sociolinguistics has a role to play in gauging the relative advantages and disadvantage of different varieties from the point of view of their likely acceptance, elaboration and institutional support.

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