

NATIONAL LANGUAGE POLICY IMPLEMENTATION AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Introduction

The optimum development of the Nigerian nation educationally and in other respects is the desired objective in the formulation of an educational language policy. It is common knowledge that education is a veritable agent for development and language is the human means of communicating the subject. In the words of Afolayan (1995:115) "...the failure of... language education in Nigeria is a measure of the failure of Nigerian development and the causes of that basic failure deserve not only clear identification but also an effective solution". One of the causes of that basic failure is poor policy implementation.

We can assume, on the other hand, that if there were a successful language education in Nigeria, it would be a measure of the success of Nigerian development. Is the present national language policy adequately formulated to achieve that desired success? What level of implementation has been achieved? Is there a link between poor language implementation and retardation of national development?

This paper examines the effect of the national language policy on mother tongue (MT), English as a second language (ESL), and national development. It presents a critique of the educational language policy provisions in Nigeria, which researchers believe would be of help in planning a viable language policy for national development.

Policies and National Development

It is needful to proffer acceptable definitions of policies and development. According to Jenkins (1978):

Policies are ... a set of interrelated decisions by a political actor or group of actors concerning the selection of goals and the means of achieving them within a specified situation where those decisions should, in principle, be within the power of those actors to achieve.

Policies, are meant to be achieved as it would be hypocritical to leave them on paper. "The devising of a language planning policy implies a vision of a future socio-linguistic situation that should be brought about. Yet surprisingly little effort has been made in trying to identify the objective pursued. Language planning policies sometimes seem to develop as an afterthought following a period of socio-political turmoil such as when a country is overthrown" (Daoust, 1997:440).

The full meaning of national development needs to be properly understood because more often than not, the concept is understood to mean material development. In other words, infrastructural or technological development attracts the better part of our attention and focus whenever development is mentioned. Moral and spiritual advancement, which incorporates natural values, is unconsciously down-played in the rat race for material development. Afigbo (1998:17) laments that "to the popular mind, to 'develop' is to evolve efficient and labour saving ways and means of exploiting and enjoying the material resources and endowments of nature. This in turn, is seen to imply the fullest cultivation of the intellectual resources of mankind since without the application of the intellect; the exploitation and enjoyment of the resources of nature would not be possible. In other words, in conventional wisdom, to develop is to evolve and enjoy material civilization". True national development in seeking to achieve material civilization for the majority of the population incorporates steady moral and spiritual advancement in the form of cultural values as inseparable components of development. In Nkom's idea of development, which the researcher subscribes to,

Development, regardless of how it is defined, ultimately entails an attempt to build a better society, a society characterized by greater material prosperity and better life chances for the majority of the

population, a society characterized by significant improvements in the people's capacity to understand, control and transform their own good and that of humanity in general; a society which opens up new opportunities for personal upliftment and cultural fulfillment; a society in which creativity, productivity, fairness and popular participation are enhanced, (Nkom, 1997:223).

Physical or material development, therefore is only a part of full development which includes the moral and the spiritual. Singling out the first and neglecting the second, in the words of St. Augustine of Hippo, results in a situation in which "one may be in full health, accomplished in one art or craft or profession, fed, warmed, sheltered, clothed and loved and yet know one's knowing unrealized, one's radial incompleteness, one's relentless unblestness", (Afigbo, 1998:17).

The Problem of Language Policy Implementation

The biblical account of the diversification of human language holds that humanity embarked on a project of building a tower that would reach heaven. They seemed successfully inching into heaven when God decided to destroy and stop the project not physically but by merely diversifying the language of the people, who, prior to that incident, understood one another linguistically. The tower of Babel incident is relevant as an instance of the capacity of language as an effective tool for development.

Nigeria's *National Policy on Education* (1981 edition) posits that:

In addition to appreciating the importance of language in the educational process and as a means of preserving the people's culture, the government considers 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, Ibo and Yoruba.

What is obvious is that language is important in the education and development of the individual and the nation. Inculcation of national consciousness and national unity is the philosophy backing educational aims and objectives.

Let us examine the laudable language policy stated above. More than twenty years after the policy was put in place and in spite of numerous indigenous language projects embarked upon and sponsored by the National Language Center, we are yet to produce a meaningful number of secondary school leavers who can communicate in any of the three major Nigerian languages other than their mother tongue (MT). National consciousness which encapsulates patriotism, is a product of the inculcation of values through language. Government has acknowledged that unity could be fostered in the multi-ethnic and multi-linguistic Nigerian context through indigenous languages but practical encouragement towards the realization of this objective has up until now been a mirage.

With regard to the Junior Secondary level, government goes on to state in the same policy that in "selecting two Nigerian languages students should study the language of their own areas in addition to any of the three main Nigerian languages, Hausa, Ibo and Yoruba, *Subject to availability of teachers*" (emphasis mine). One of the reasons readily advanced by government for failure to implement the language policy is couched in non-availability of teachers. The truth is that practical steps to produce the teachers have not been taken. At the inception of the Universal Primary Education (UPE) in the 1970s, government envisaged (though myopically) an influx of pupils into the primary schools in the federation. Many teacher training colleges were established and the existing ones were expanded to train teachers, in addition to the panic measure of recruiting auxiliary teachers. In making the laudable policy on education and identifying the need for indigenous languages in propagating education, fostering unity and thus developing the nation, one would think that government should have addressed the envisaged scarcity of teachers of indigenous languages through liberalized scholarship schemes for indigenous language study in our tertiary institutions. Unless this is done, the dearth of indigenous language teachers will, for many years to come, continue to be a major hindrance to the implementation of this aspect of the language policy.

At the Junior Secondary level, the child's mother tongue and

another major Nigerian language other than her/his MT are studied. At the senior secondary level, emphasis is on one Nigerian language, which forms part of the core subjects for WAEC or NECO examinations. The probable choice is usually the mother tongue. What happens to the other Nigerian language studied for three years at the JSS level? For the Yoruba child, for instance, Hausa or Igbo presumably studied at the Junior Secondary has no place in his/her Senior Secondary Certificate Examination since wily nilly Yoruba will be his choice of the required one Nigerian language. Has anyone observed the lip service paid to the core compulsory one Nigerian language by our students and examining bodies? Consider this: One's registration for the certificate examination is invalid without one Nigerian language. On the other hand, one may enter for the Nigerian language among other subjects and deliberately be absent on the day the Nigerian language examination will be taken and still get a valid certificate, having taken other subjects. In the same way, sitting for and failing the core Nigerian language does not invalidate one's certificate.

If the broad aims of secondary education are, among other things, to "develop and project Nigerian culture, art and languages... and... foster Nigerian unity...", as contained in the *National Policy on Education*, one would see why the aims are far from being realized. The aims are not realized because policy formulation and policy implementation are like parallel lines in this context - they never meet; yet a nation's moral, scientific and technological development depends on its attitude to language education. Using the language of the immediate environment or MT as the medium of instruction at the pre-primary and the first half of primary education is insightful; studying the MT as a subject at the upper primary and the Junior Secondary solidifies the foundation laid at the previous stages but adopting the ostrich's head-in-the-sand approach to the indigenous Nigerian language at the Senior Secondary level destroys the foundation earlier laid.

Olagoke (1979:22) points out that the National Language policy is "silent on the place of Nigerian languages in the universities, perhaps because it is assumed that it must be none other than

English...". The absence of a national language policy for tertiary institutions contributes to the running of indigenous language programmes haphazardly. As an instance, while some institutions require students to write their projects in an indigenous language, some other institutions demand projects written in English.

The Nigerian Education Research Council (NERC) and the Metalanguage Project in the three major Nigerian languages produced during 1982-1984 a document containing terms in science and technology in each of the three languages. Without a working language policy in the tertiary institutions and a systematic promotion of Nigerian languages, such worthwhile projects, like the Metalanguage Project, is tucked away to accumulate dust and feed cockroaches.

In the ethno-political Nigerian context, one major constraint to language policy implementation is the deep-rooted mutual morbid fear of dominance among ethnic and linguistic groups. The WAZOBIA (Yoruba, Hausa, Igbo) would want (even if innately) a mutual underdevelopment of the three languages rather than project one as a national language. The second major and the minor language groups would want to know why any of or all the three major languages should be projected rather than theirs. Some of them have even coined TIVNUPEJAW as an alternative to WAZOBIA. Lewis (1981) proffers a solution to the problem:

Any policy for language, especially in the system of education, has to take account of the attitudes of those likely to be affected. In the long run no policy will succeed which does not do one of three things: conform to the expressed attitudes of those involved; persuade those who express negative attitudes about the rightness of the policy; or seek to remove the causes of the disagreement. In any case knowledge about attitudes is fundamental to the formation of a policy as well as to success in its implementation.

Rather than "persuade those who express negative attitudes" or "seek to remove the causes of the disagreement," government has chosen to enact policies and include in the Constitution clauses that are castrated because they lack the accompanying instrument for

implementation. In paragraph 51 of the 1979 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, it is stated that:

The business of the National Assembly shall be conducted in the English language and in Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba when adequate arrangements have been made thereof.

This same clause is repeated in paragraph 55 of the 1999 Constitution. Twenty-two years since the 1979 Constitution, adequate arrangements are yet to be made. "The fact that language has far-reaching implications for national cohesion, cultural identity and the economic advancement of all countries makes government try to decide on ways of treating or managing language resources within their territories. People have come to realize that, like human and material resources, language resources have to be properly managed to achieve maximum positive results at minimum cost in the process of national development" (Adekunle, 995:65).

An effective means of achieving national development in all its ramification is a viable, implementable language policy. Nigeria can achieve scientific and technological advancement through indigenous languages. Patriotism, national values, and national unity could be better inculcated by means of indigenous languages. If Greece and Germany, to mention but two, could use Greek and German, respectively, to advance their nations, Nigeria, in promoting her indigenous languages, can evolve an indigenous national language. The argument posited by some people that our indigenous languages are bereft of scientific and technical terms akin to those of the developed nations does not hold water. No one language in the world boasts of not borrowing from other languages and the essence of the Meta Language Project is to address the problem of acceptable terms in pursuance of technological advancement. Nigeria should do away with the neocolonial burden of promoting the development of foreign languages at the expense of indigenous ones.

In 1997 the Director of the French Language Village at Lagos had cause to "celebrate in a modest way" because the Federal Government's objective of establishing the learning of French in

Nigeria in particular and in Anglophone West Africa as a whole was being achieved. The Village, as at that time, had a "Village bookshop devoted exclusively to selling and supplying French textbooks and other teaching materials, a well-equipped Village Library with self-teaching electronic, multi-media gadgets and more than 15,000 volumes of the most up-to-date books and journals in all areas of French studies" (NUC, June 1997:2). Can this be said of any indigenous language in Nigeria? Today, return tickets are given to French teachers for refresher courses in France or other French-speaking countries while our indigenous languages fight extinction in a nation where the mother tongue is relegated to the background right from the pre-primary stage.

The English Language in Nigeria

The role of the English language in the development of the nation is admittedly enormous. In the absence of an indigenous national language, the English language has forged a weak link among the multi-linguistic communities in Nigeria. It is a weak link because less than 40% of the population can effectively communicate in it. English is Nigeria's second language and as such it is the official language, the language of education, and at present the sole language of business in the National Assembly. As the sole language of business in the National Assembly, the language of the Constitution, the language of privatization, etc. and considering the percentage of the Nigerian population who can effectively communicate in it, the English language is believed, with good reason, by some, to be an instrument of exclusion. In that case, national development cannot run its course smoothly. This fact, considered along with the reality that more than 60% of Nigerians are not literate in their MT or first language (LI) induces the conclusion that the failure of "language education in Nigeria is a measure of the failure of Nigerian development".

The English language is the nation's window on the global village. Fantasizing the abandonment of English for an indigenous national language is similar to locking Nigeria out of the world. What Nigeria needs is a language policy that will vigorously pursue

the promotion of indigenous languages thereby making Nigerians literate in their mother tongue while at the same time making the English language (which is an international language) available to all. In MacRae's (1995:389) words:

Whereas it is, I think, true that English can help national unity as well as technical and educational development and that it opens up the way to industrial, technological and commercial advance, there is a substantial resource implication here for... Nigeria. . English has to be taught in schools; and you have to try to make it available to all.

The resource implications and the cost of implementation should be given their rightful place in language policy formulation.

Conclusion

Multilingualism should not be viewed as an invincible obstacle to national development but rather an asset. If the local, state and federal governments would promote indigenous languages and the English language, national unity and development would be enhanced. It is, therefore, suggested, among other things, that:

- * the national language policy as it affects the Junior and Senior Secondary systems be fully implemented;
- * a language policy for tertiary institutions with reference to indigenous languages be formulated and implemented;
- * the English language be taught and made available to all through proper funding of education by UNESCO standards and through an effective language education;
- * adequate arrangements necessary for the conduct of the business of the National and State Assemblies in the three major Nigerian languages should be put in place without further delay; and
- * the dearth of teachers of the three main and other Nigerian indigenous languages should be addressed.

Language is a positive tool of development and Nigerians should be able to maximally use the indigenous and the foreign languages to achieve their goal. I agree with Afolayan (1995:129) who states that each Nigerian citizen can utilize all opportunities

and facilities offered to him/her locally and internationally only by using both his/her mother tongue and the English language for the growth and development not only of himself/herself but also of multilingual and multi-cultural Nigeria.

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