

SUSTAINING NIGERIAN CULTURAL VALUES THROUGH LANGUAGE RE-ORIENTATION

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ABSTRACT

Language is not just a core and strong instrument for sustaining cultural values but the four cardinal points that mobilize support for national development. This paper uses the methodology of double approaches. It employs language which is the visible face of culture. To this end, both language and culture are inseparable in their functions. While culture seems to be the powerful human tool for survival, language uses culture to express people's feelings, thoughts, hopes, beliefs and aspirations as a group. This paper unveiled essence of sustaining the nation's unity on the rock – solid foundation of language and cultural re – orientation. There is no doubt that a genuine Nigerian traditional values equipped with functional language will serve as the springboard to the much needed development.

INTRODUCTION

The valuable terms in this paper that need clear and vivid clarification include language, re-orientation, Nigeria, culture and values.

A careful analysis of these concepts would not only serve to bring up their interconnectedness, but lay to rest the challenge of the need for reconstruction, reposition or realign either or both of the two variables, language and culture.

i. LANGUAGE

The term, language, is a means of communication and a visible face of culture. It is a process of sharing our beliefs, views, thoughts, emotions, feelings and philosophies. Language is a true representation of human speech, gestures and signs that are learned and accepted by a given group of people.

Language is a man's most prized possession. It is his major vehicle for self expression and a mark of his personal and group identity. It is an integral component and at the same time a product of culture. Culture determines the education of the

people, and through language, the culture of a given people is transmitted from generation to generation. The dressing patterns, habits, different types of food and their modes of preparation, ways of expressing joy and sorrow, hate, or anger, songs and dances, technologies, transportation, and even ways of healing diseases are described and transmitted through the language of the group (Nnadi, Anyanwu and Izuagba 2001: 37).

Bloch and Trager in Nosiri (2011:5) define language as “literary vocal system, by which social groups co-operate”. This means that language is the major means of communication among humankind. Broadly speaking therefore, language is the essential precursor of social interaction and behaviour. Nnoli (1978) in Nosiri (2011:5) opines that; “without such a symbolic medium of communication shared by individuals, frustration, stress, anxiety, lack of trust and insecurity characterizes social relations”. He further stresses that, when a lack of communication takes place in an atmosphere of intense socio-economic competition and communal exclusiveness, the situation will be very worse.

Language is a formidable instrument of communication of vocal character by which human experience is analyzed in a given community. It is pertinent to note that a language may have a little coverage. The number of people that speak the language does not disqualify that language as an effective instrument of communication. There are about 450 languages in Nigeria thus making the country a multi-lingual society. With the exception of the three major languages, Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba, each of the other languages occupies a restricted area.

Language as the main vehicle of culture travels far and near, often regardless of political, religious boundaries. A language of national or international status serves a larger community than a language of small community. Languages borrow from one another to express cultural practices, concepts, new technologies and institutions that are not indigenous to a particular community or society. Such cultural exchange

enriches not only language and culture but also what Sengbor (1964:15) called “civilization”.

Uzoezie (1975) in Nosiri (2011:4) contended that English language later became the medium of communication between the imperial powers and their host communities due to the fact that earlier, there had been some political tension and group agitations over which one to choose among the varieties of languages in Nigeria as a generally accepted language of communication. Ogu (1991:2) argues that Nigeria’s experience under British rule made her to adopt and appreciate English language as the official language of education and business transactions thus the study of English language has been made compulsory in Nigerian schools at all levels.

ii. RE – ORIENTATION:

Bellingham (2007:83) in the discourse postulates that, re-orientation is “something that takes place in the society, for the society and by the society”, this cultural reorientation is very vital. The stress, therefore, is more on cultural renaissance, renewal, refinement or purification than on mere cultural vital. For, as it were, it is simply impossible to practically relieve the patterns of the life of our nation forebears who lived a couple of centuries ago in our contemporary society which is virtually suffused in high – technology.

In another development, re-orientation refers to changing once again, a position or attitude, relative to the situation or circumstances. Robinson (1999:971) in Egbunu 2011. In other words, the state of being redirected differently, rearrangement or realignment intellectually or emotionally. It denotes change in thought pattern, inclination or interest (Mish 1990:832) in which case it is **veterring** to the symbolic relationship between Nigeria culture, language and modernity. To this end, we shall only give a benign look at the past with all its cultural baggage with the aim of living our lives forwards and understanding them backwards, not in the sense of adopting

so-called atavistic cultures and thereby anachronistically repudiating our present opportunities.

iii. NIGERIA

There is little or no need to dwell so much on this concept. It suffices to say that people have lived in the region that is now known as Nigeria since 9000 BC. Most of these people are known to have practiced agriculture. Kingdoms emerged in the northern savanna, prospering from trade ties with Northern Africa. At roughly the same time, the south also had cities which were sustained by agriculture and coastal trade. These systems changed radically with the arrival of Europeans in the late 15th century, the rise of the slave trade from the 16th through the 19th century, and by colonization by Britain at the 16th century, Nigeria achieved independence in 1960 from the British colonial masters. Compared with other parts of West Africa, Nigeria was slow to feel the penetration of Europe. Unlike in Ghana and Senegal, no European fortifications were built along the coast, and Europeans – mostly British – came ashore only brightly to trade weapons, alcohol, and other goods in return for slaves.

In 1807, Britain abolished the slave trade and enlisted other European nations to enforce the ban. The British Empire no longer had American colonies whose economic growth depended on slaves, and moreover the rise of industrialization meant Britain needed Africa's raw materials more than its people.

Consequently, trade in products such as palm oil, which Europeans valued so much as an industrial lubricant, replaced the trade in humans.

The nation with about 450 languages with diverse cultural beliefs and practices was said to be governed by Britain via indirect rule, a system in which native leaders continued to rule their traditional lands so long as they collected taxes and performed other duties ensuring British prosperity. This rule continued until late 20th century when Nigerians found many ways to oppose rule. Local armed revolts, concentrated in the middle belt, broke out sporadically and intensified during world war (1914-

1918). Workers in mines; railways, and other public service often went on strike over poor wages and working conditions including a large general action in 1945 when 30,000 workers stopped commerce for 37 days. Anger over taxation prompted other conflicts especially the popular Aba Women riot in 1929.

Nigeria became independent on October 1, 1960. At the helm of affairs were Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe as president and Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa as Prime minister. Regional and ethnic tensions increased after independence. The census of 1962 and 1963 fueled bitter disputes, as did the trial and imprisonment of leading opposition politicians, whom prime Minister Balewa accused dubiously of treason.

The coup of January 1966 had an ethnocentric cast that aroused the suspicious of Northerners. In addition, failure by Major Johnson Aguiyi Ironsi to meet Northern demands for the prosecution of the coup plotters further inflamed Northern anger. Given the bitterness of the civil war, the restoration of peace and the reintegration of the Igbo into Nigerian life were remarkably rapid. Aiding the resumption of normalcy was a booming oil trade. Elections for the Second Republic were held in July 1979. Most parties relieved votes along ethnic groups or lines, the exception being the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) which commanded supports from all corners of the world and won most legislative seats.

In 1999, legislative and presidential elections were held and Olusegun Obasanjo was elected as President. The military administration handed over power to Nigeria's new civilian government in May, and the country adopted a new constitution which led the Commonwealth of Nations lifting its suspension of Nigeria's membership to coincide with the resumption of civilian rule.

iv. CULTURAL

This concept simply refers to as people beliefs, customs, songs, ideas, values and principles of life. It is the totality way of peoples' life.

Mondin (1985:145-6) in Egbunu (2011:17-19) opines that culture has three meanings and three principal uses, elitarian, pedagogical (educational) and anthropological thus:

In the elitarian sense, it signifies a great quantity of knowledge, either in general or in some particular sectors. In the pedagogical sense, it indicates the education, formation, and cultivation of man: it is the Paideia of the Greeks process through which (the child, the you and the admit) comes to full maturation and realization of his own personality in the anthropological sense, it significant that totality of customs, techniques, and tribe, a people, a nation: “It is the movement of living proper to a society”.

The pedagogical and anthological sense would be more of the reference of within which this would be situated that which Tylor refers to as “that complex whole which includes knowledge and other capabilities and habits acquired by human beings as members of society” (Shorter, 1998:22) it comprises many aspects, namely, language, knowledge, human institutions, technology, beliefs, traditions and customs (Chuta, 2008:23). This phenomenon can be split into three basic objectives. Material culture, Social Culture, and Mental Culture. Culture is therefore inside and outside, above and beneath all experiences of the human person. This underscores the need for trapping from the personal reminiscences of our cultural patrimony.

v. VALUES

Value in this context is the desirability of a thing, often in respect of some property such as usefulness or exchangeability. Worth, merit, or importance, it also depicts the importance and lasting beliefs or ideas shared by the members of a culture about what is good or bad and desirable or undesirable values have major influence on a Persons behavior and attitude and serve as broad guidelines in all situations.

According to Robinson (1999:10) value is an “abstract ideas which define what is considered important, worthwhile and desirable within a given culture”. Norms are the rule of behavior, which reflect cultural values. Values and norms work together to shape how members of a culture should behave within their surroundings. Values and norms are deeply embedded, but can change over time, it is dynamic.

Egbunu, F.E. (2011:10) made a clear distinction of value in one of his papers presented. He postulates that permanent value are values that are important to the society, temporal values are merely attitudes that are fleeting and unstable. Society depends more or less on stable values which may be termed traditional values. One these values (general shared), social order depends. They are invariably considered legitimate and binding on the society in question and “act as a standard by means of which the ends of action are selected” (Abercrombie, Hill and Turner 2006:373).

RICHES INHERENT IN LANGUAGE

Nduka (2006:211) sharply informs us that sociologists have identified some functional prerequisites which are necessary for the continuity or survival of the human society, namely, the family, the school system, the economy the political system, the health or welfare system and the religious/moral system. Thus, while the family ensures the reproduction of the population, the language is geared towards the foster a sense of identity. When language functions in this way, it is hardly informative to the user but for identity of a person, group or thing.

Language is an instrument of thought as it is used to evoke a sequence of thought most times when we are alone we speak our thoughts, the reason for doing this is that it helps us to concentrate little wonder before we perform some functions or say certain things we first of all go over them in our mind.

Language usually used to regulate or control persons, things and events. Language is used to set rules and regulations guiding people’s behaviour and actions. It is also through the instrument of language that we approve or disapprove human

behaviour or actions. The regulatory function of language is effectively utilized in the society to ensure orderliness, compliance to directives, norms or mores and so on.

Language keeps the channel of communication open, or to signal friendship. Everyday in our lives we use phrases like “pleased to meet you” “How do you do”, “Good morning”, “Bless you”. These we may refer to as ritual exchanges about health, welfare of the other person. These phrases do not communicate ideas in the real sense, rather we use them most times, to maintenance comfortable relationship with the people we meet. There are situation where if we fail to use some of these phrases it will look as if we are unfriendly, uncaring, indifferent or not human. Take for instance, you are in a ‘bus stop’ waiting for a bus with other people (who are not close to you) the person standing closest to you sneezes, it is appropriate you say “Bless You” as it will look awkward if you fail to say something. If appropriate language is used in an appropriate situation the much needed development and unity will begin to shoot up.

RENAISSANCE OF INDIGENOUS NIGERIA CULTURAL VALUE

In the Nigeria traditional ambience, there exists a long standing system of bringing up the younger ones traditionally. In the traditional mode, the moral physical social, spiritual and economic considerations in relation to the needs of the society are very consequential and central.

The traditional values are principally expressed and transmitted by means of oral traditions such as myths, folktales, rituals, proverbs, folksongs, dances, pithy saying, social institutions and works of art.

WHICH WAY FORWARD?

The one billion naira question at this moment is “where lies the way forward”? How do we achieve the feat of having a truly rich language, culture and values? We should be able to integrate our dialects and adopt or produce a standard language which is taught in all our schools, in which our literature including Bible translations

are published, in which it is now possible for people to interact without dialect inhibitions, in which we can worship in one language, and in which our public meetings are conducted. As can be well attested to from the above findings, we need to fear that common action to enrich our language will diminish our wealth of variety; if will, on the contrary serve to enrich our creativity that will lead to proper personal development and positive physico-moral, socio-economic and psycho-spiritual disposition to significantly contribute to the overall development of our nation.

The era of schooling just for the sake of certificate is long past. Our highly cherished cultural values ought thereby to be readily embraced more than ever before and to also be formally adapted by education experts for the restructuring or repackaging of our educational curriculum. This could be done especially by way of utilizing local materials.

Educating our pupils on the history, culture and traditions of our forebears should not be considered as an optional extra. So also the need to consciously develop salient Nigerian cultural practices cannot be gainsaid. The pristine Nigerian cultural practices such as story-telling, use of proverbs, myths, legends, folklore, folk songs, cultural dances or dressing and even cuisines would richly serve to fill ever-widening lacuna being created through western education which somehow devoid of ethical and cultural education. This would go a long way to enhancing our cultural independence. And this indeed is the necessary prerequisite for economic, socio-political and other independences.

We may also need to resolve as lovers of our language and culture to improve on learning the mother-tongue thoroughly by ourselves so as to pass it on to our children. More so, to agree on giving our children not only *theophoric* native names but also, the axiomatic and ethically laden names.

Government at all levels, non-Governmental Organization and other collaborative agencies should encourage more than ever, women education because,

as it is normally expressed, to educate a woman is to educate a whole nation in a whole generation.

The government is also called upon to greater commitment to the course of education and the propagation of our cultural values, by creating the enabling atmosphere for proper learning for both teachers and pupils by means of appropriate remuneration, motivation, supply of infrastructural and teaching materials. More so, pupils should be provided with the opportunity for high-tech and globalized form of education by use of internet resources or other scientific apparatuses, which would enhance greater creativity.

Parents and guardians also should work closely with their children, exposing them to stories of the past, songs, folk-lore and other culturally-related books should always be available for children to read. They should also be sincerely committed to their wards' education especially in eschewing practices which smirks of criminally aiding and abetting misconducts.

CONCLUSION

We are not under any illusion when we think that Nigerians achieve true and full development by means of cultivating the lives of people in line with their naturally endowed culture. By so doing, we can be doubly assured of contributing something quite original to the development of the entire humanity.

Culture remains a veritable tool that moralizes the habits of the young one with a view to having a better place to live. By utilizing the values embedded in the culture with all its continuities and discontinuities we are sure of attaining unimaginable heights in personal and co-operate development.

Language which serves as a visible face of culture is like a baton in a relay race. It has to be passed on before an all – round success is achieved. Our educational system, traditional institutions, political office holders clergymen and women owe it a duty to go into the business of building people up as there are already too many factors in the demolition business in our present day society we ought necessarily to

admit the centrality of the fact or of change in both our cultural and system of transmission. This calls for some reorientation, readjustment or creation of a new order, if there must be holistic change.

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