

Language: the Receptacle of the Inherent Philosophy of a Speech Community

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Abstract

Language gives essence to the material life and makes it real, by externalizing the inward knowledge lurking in the unplumbed being of humanness. It is the only vehicle, which can be driven through different media to achieve coordinated result, through coordinated effort. Meaning of life is dependent on the effectiveness of language use; because it is the custodian of the past therefore it has to be jealously guarded before it dissolves into predatory languages. A well-described and developed language guarantees the community a well-sustained human capacity development. Every community develops sustainably, by sustainably developing its language in order to be able to account for continuous evolving linguistic challenges encountered by its users. No society achieves meaningful development without recourse to its language; so no society achieves meaningful development with stranger's language.

Introduction

Every society is constituted with multi-faceted ideologies which represent its belief systems and world views. These form the symbolic reality of its social life, which is expressed through the medium of language. This language represents and expresses the entire philosophical thoughts and culture of that society, to enable them to decode and encode the inherent knowledge of a particular stamp that resides in that society. So, every society is controlled by the social forces of language use, that which help them in interpreting the variegated systems of meanings. In strong consonance with this, McDonald asserts that:

...the insistence of the social life is constituted essentially by the medium of language, rather than by the medium of energy and the transformation of nature. Thus the postmodern theorists join with many theorists who argue that our society is first and foremost a system of meanings, a symbolic reality (4-5).

Language inaugurates where one belongs which also distinguishes one social group from the other; and the world in its entirety. This can be appreciated or observed through linguistic divergence rather than convergence (Crystal 19). It may express articulate and inarticulate (to some people)

thoughts with encoded systems of symbols or gestures to conveying peculiar or particular knowledge or meaning. It is an object of every human experience which detects and facilitates the hidden intellectual thoughts indigenous to the given society, in order to evaluate, interrogate and bequeath relevance on the human person.

Having said, it is obvious that it is the only medium for externalizing and objectifying knowledge and thought processes (Ndianefoo 171); and also to serve appropriately the societal needs. These roles have made it the umpire in facilitating and generating knowledge through the control of the social milieu. Firth has this to say, "As we have seen, language can be regarded as operator, switchboard, and wiring in control of our social currents and power. It is the nervous system of our society" (131). This implies that language is the hub of social behaviour of human interaction where ideologies are conceptualized and developed. In order to enable the users to construct and promote the latent ideas into semiotic transformation for material (or philosophical) import: in which he can manipulate his environment.

Socio-psychological Language Alienation

As some parts of the world witnessed colonial domination by colonial forces, their languages of the colonised were relegated to the background and reduced to the status of vernacular. This engendered socio-psychological mistrust of the indigenous languages by the colonized themselves, because they believe that their language do not have elitists quality to bear the relevant knowledge or technology so, to be free inwardly or involved into the social strata, they must alienate their language to get over from this streak of mental diffidence, which has immersed them (the colonized), especially in Nigeria. And it has being the bane of our undoing, because of our inability to develop our inherent indigenous technical know-how and traditional value system. This situation has weakened our culture and language which has resulted in the depletion of the ozone layer of the cultural universe of the Nigerian peoples; that meaningful cultural development in the country has been stultified (Maduka 93).

So, every language must be described or developed to serve the needful linguistic purposes by being the vehicle of literary expression or *informativity*. It is the social vent, this enables the user to freely associate himself with his immediate language community without being linguistically naïve. Therefore he will be able to integrate himself in the socio-historical process taking place at the time

which tilts “towards enabling human beings to engage in practical social activity “(Wachuku 98). In consonance with that, Jones asserts that:

...shaped in the whole life history of the community as an instruments of communicative mediation of practical activity and a form of generating thoughts, (and) interpenetrates with the ‘natural’ psychological and biological processes..., leading to the formation of ‘verbal thoughts’, (and) natural form of behaviour but is determined by a historical-social process (n.p.).

In fact, according to socio-psychologists, no society is devoid of inherent knowledge, which is inseparable from its language. “Besides, the language is native to the majority of the people thereby, as socio-psychologists would insist, harnessing to the full the inner resources of the people” (Maduka 101). If this is done, Nigeria will be a country of pride both economically and politically. Because, it will endear itself to the committee of nations by proving that its indigenous languages can contribute greatly to the development of civilization by discovering the hidden power of its native languages in human capacity development. Ngugi reiterates this by saying that, “it is axiomatic that the renaissance of African culture (should not lie) in the languages of Europe” (5).

Language in the head

There is a theory which postulates that knowledge is stored in the brain and it is expressed or externalized through medium of language. According to Smith, it is (language) “a theory of the world in the head”, which implies that language is the “store of knowledge in everyone’s brain” (10-13). Smith further posits tripartite reasons for this concept: that the items stored in the brain are beyond the ordinary knowledge; that the language user understands his world. In addition, he (the language user) performs this task like a scientists in a laboratory by conceptualizing some assumptions in his head, and equally conforms or disregards them from practical experience, through the process of experimentation: that this theory is equally like a theory in science (that is, theory of knowledge) (10-13). According, Onochie adds further that... language is appropriately described as existing in our heads that is in the cognitive area of the brain (157). More so, Cazden avers that, “language is knowledge in our heads, speech is the realization of that language in behaviour” (qtd in Thornton 9).

Language and Culture

A wordsmith is a deconstructionist and also an artist who manipulates his language to recreate environment through the spectrum of social structures for immediate practical purposes or needs. Because, the science of culture is resident in the language that which develops the language and develops the user; and the user, will then be able to:

...unshroud, interpret and represent reality. In all its ramification, that is, to select from its bits and pieces of the realistic truth of society, harness them in accordance with his artistic vision and tease out a story from the pool which allows society to see itself mirror itself and observe a refracted presentation of itself, for the purpose of adjustment as appropriate (Yerima, qtd in Ayakoroma 25).

Language is the receptacle of human science and also the system for its transmission for human development. It is the custodian of culture and thereby which unfolds it “as the entire complex pattern of behaviour and material achievement which are produced, learned and shared by members of a community, it believed to be an indispensable tool for full comprehension of” (Ameh 165) human reality. In fact, culture is a way of life that defines a group or society and its languages, and everything about its life. It is the sum of human organizations which tends to control the physical and social environments through physical and abstract entities.

In some cultures, experience of physical matter is treated as primary and also, it used to develop the ways the society thinks and talks about abstract:

We object the abstract by talking about it in physical terms. Therefore an abstract concept such as an argument can be talked about as if it were a physical entity. We ‘put’ an argument or point of views, we ‘move a debate forward’, ‘group’ a point or ‘squash’ “suggestion. We frequently talk about abstractions in terms that bestow them with substance and space, as sometimes demonstrated by the physical gestures that accompany or even replace expressions such as “that went right over my head” (Singh 25).

However, it is the language which has the inherent quality to draw the distinction between these entities (physical and abstract), by asserting that “physical entities are anything we experience through sensory facilities such as sight and touch” while “Abstract entities on the other hand, are not tangible: they do not have substance and space in the sense that physical matter has (sic) them” (Singh 25). So, language is the “*decider*” and ‘*representer*’ of these entities in realizable essence for practical use, by objectifying these ideas or thoughts. In short, language is the centrepiece or the central feature of any community and a reflection of the thoughts, feelings, values, beliefs and the

experiences of a community of speakers” which facilitates all-round development of its users, “be it social, cultural or economic” (Ayakoroma 5-6). In addition, it facilitates interpersonal cognitive communication through shared values and traditions (the fabric of the speech community).

As have said above, that language is central to human existence and also the expression of culture, this stands to posit that culture and development are interwoven. Therefore, language has to be nurtured, described and preserved so as to sustain the users’ traditions and cultures. That is, “when a language is lost, the culture is lost; and a lot culture is knowledge lost; also there is no development without knowledge. On the other hand, a language learnt is knowledge gained; and we know that knowledge is power...” (Ayakorma 8). So far culture is a pendulous socio-anthropological reality which emerges as a shared historical experience of a particular society which develops and changes continuously.

Language and Indigenous Intellect

Language expresses, primarily, in speech the ideas, emotions, thought and culture. The users thereby express their philosophies in speech which is influenced to great extent, by their socio-cultural philosophy. This influence of culture in language is what necessitates the fact “that different languages organize their world differently, and no individuals is free to describe with absolute impartiality what he observes in other cultures because he must be constrained by certain modes of interpretation” (Onwubiko 38). On this note:

The theory of linguistics relatively states that different cultures interpret the world in different ways and that languages encode these differences. Some culture will perceive all water as being the same, while others will see important differences between different birds of water (such as rain, flood water...). The difference in perception will be apparent in the languages, because speakers have to articulate the way they see the world and will develop differences in their languages accordingly (Singh 24).

This principle (relativity) asserts that there is no absolute or systematic way of labeling the world. That community views or names its world according to its *diasyncratic* (its peculiar way of seeing the world) perception, that which is relative and equally differs from culture to culture.

It is believed that language is the outcome of the fusion of culture and environment and the medium in which those two are shaped and communicated in the society. Similarly, Gladstone

affirms that the affinity of culture and environment engenders the form of a language and also the properties which make these forms meaningful:

The universe is ordered in accordance with the way we name it. An Eskimos would think as extremely vague if we told him it was snowing. His language provides him with a universe that encompasses dozens of snowing. In the same way we would consider (him) vague if he made an appointment with us for some time later. To the North American, time is a real commodity. He can waste time, spend time, charge for time, kill time, pass time, and be on time or in time (114).

Moreover, it does not compel the (participants) observers to be influenced by the same physical elements of the same picture of the universe, unless the linguistics background of the observers are related or “can in some way be calibrated” (Onwubiko 38). He further avers that, by explaining with an African proverb, “the stranger who returns from a journey may tell all he has seen, but he cannot explain all”. This implies that no stranger can explain all, unless he shares the people’s language/linguistic nuances (38). That is why it is believed that translation is defective. In this regard, Latin adage asserts that *Taddutore traditore* (a translator is traitor), similarly another French saying states: *Les traductions sont comme les femmes: lorsqu’elles sont belles, elles ne sont pas fideles, et losqu’elles sont fideles, elles ne sont pas belles* (translations are like women: when they are beautiful they are not faithful and when they are faithful, they are not beautiful). So, translation will not be beautiful, if it is faithful or truthful to the words of the original language thereby exposing the inability of the translator to understand the aesthetic phraseology of the native language.

In African traditional setting an individual will feel alienated, if he is unable to communicate effectively in his native language; he is estranged ideologically in the community. When language speaker is said to have achieved communicative competence in his language is when he is able to express himself appropriately in the proverbs and idioms of the language community. These witty sayings are grafted and developed from the culture of that given society.

To become a sage in Africa, you must know a heavy dose of knowledge of idioms and proverbs to “fool the foolish and baffle the stranger, and also the customs of the land” (Munonye 31). These witty sayings, especially proverbs are the distilled wisdom, where African philosophical and moral expositions are reduced in a few words. They are integral part of the mnemonic device in societies, where relevant knowledge which is meant to foster human development is committed to

memory. “Of their nature, they perform an ideological function by making available the ideas and values encapsulated in these memorable and easily reproduced forms” (Obiechina 156).

To be versed in proverbs, riddles and idioms of a give community is to be versed in the indigenous language and knowledge because the community is in these witty sayings therefore the community is their brain: they are drawn from and referred to the community’s “social order and behavior: norms of action and they are all didactic in nature: (Onwubiko 39). He adds further that proverbs present language as being symbolic because “the discovery of the meaning of the words and phrases demands a penetration of the mind of the speaker” (39).

Language and Arts

Here, literary arts (prose, poetry and drama) are what to be discussed. Each has its peculiar means in expressing a particular aspect of human experience. Arts help the individual person to present his inner world through conscious aesthetic art arrangement of tones, words, etc (Ayakoroma 6).

Arts showcase the age long cultures of the people, by bring to fore the peoples’ peculiarities of knowledge and of the worldviews. They are the active repository of these thoughts or perceptions for a given language community. “They are not only integral parts in all aspect of culture, but permeate in all the activities of traditional societies” (Ayakoroma 6). Arts are the repository for social or societal identities and then, language is the receptacle of these societal identities, which are time-honoured; also language is the only medium or vehicle to transmitting them to another, for knowledge development:

Apart from accompanying events, ceremonies and festivals, the arts have been effective media from expressing, emotions, ideas, and topical issues. They transmit cultural heritage from generation to generation, thereby ensuring continuity. They enforce and propagate social norms and values, thus, educating the masses through entertainment (Ayakoroma 6).

In fact, arts stimulate an individual (or society) to develop interest in himself and his society, by being sensitive towards his (or its) culture and other cultures for social cohesion. They sharpen and shape the individual person (or society) by emphasizing the value systems and culture of the society, in order to instill the individual person (or society) the knowledge inherent value, which is embedded in the qualitative dimensions of life for benefit of human person.

To engrave the people's thoughts into the individual, the culture, arts have to be emphasized through the medium of native language; to foster effective socialization of the human person. Adesola reflects the importance of native language by assessing the creative works of Akniwunmi Ishola, whose works are written in Yoruba:

Around each language is a culture and it is the culture that sets certain standards about social interaction. Every culture of the world has acceptable standards of right and wrong. It is the local language that is used to pass it on to the younger generation. You have to socialize the younger ones into the culture... If you want to create a society with acceptable standards of right and wrong, with values such as fairness, justice, accountability and honesty, it is through the language. Every language has a way of doing it. It is not the same all over, such that if you want to make development sustainable, then you must promote the culture in the local language.... The language, the proverbs, names of trees, flowers, plants, birds, animal and so on are put together to train the young ones. The contention is that, when the child is very young, from age one to the teenage, you must build in his mind, images that will guide him throughout his life (23).

Language and Knowledge

Language is an indispensable means of objectifying cultural legacy and also it bears all categories of human socialization. It is the only way to the heart of the people, so if the key is lost, a people is lost and if the key is treasured then it will be used to unlock the treasurer of richness (Olaoye 50). These treasures are the intrinsic knowledge or philosophy of the linguistic community being imbedded in its culture. A culture as we have seen is a complex *superordinate* entity which encompasses law, values systems art and knowledge, all facets of human endeavor or behaviour (Firth 16). In addition, it is "the sum total of the material and intellectual equipment whereby they satisfy their biological and social needs and adopt themselves to their environment" (Paddington 3). For a nation to be virile, it must drive to achieve social stability, robust economy and cultural enviableness, it must develop stable language so:

...in African, the cultural base of mass society which is in reality premised on African languages provides the only credible condition for the development of a society which involves the masses and uplifts them socio-cultural and economically from where they are, on the basis of what they have (Prach 187).

Strevens outlines the relationship between language and science and technology, by asserting that to be "...a scientist or technologist entails learning a number of habits of thought, that these habits of thought directly affect his use of language, and that the scientist can only function as scientist if he learns how to use language appropriate to these habits of thought" (49).

We have known so far that indigenous languages bear the indigenous knowledge by extension embodies indigenous technology, therefore, in the study of scientific and technological concepts especially those indigenous to our culture. What is being stressed here is that in indigenous language study, those aspects referred to as cultures, which include some productive and explorative processes, should not be taught as the theoretical aspects like the parts of speech. Rather, they should be taught in such way the students will "become acquainted with our indigenous technology" (Uguru 105). The study of the indigenous suggests gradualism of traditional gleanings such as food technology, traditional medicine etc. These are the areas which can be explored and developed through effective study of the indigenous languages (Aziza 240). If these are done properly in such a practical way children can internalize these processes and will be able to apply them, and equally, if well-informed advocacy is being mobilized on the study of indigenous "languages many people will be exposed to our indigenous technology" (Uguru 105-106). Therefore, many Nigerian will be informed about our traditional technological know-how. Uguru states that our linguists have a role to play by initiating different practical projects, through the medium of these languages to harness the emergent initiatives of our indigenous experts, in their respective fields (106).

Something must be done urgently to avoid the death or dearth of these indigenous brains. However, a good number of them did not attend any formal education, so they cannot communicate effectively in English. To this effect, a sustained and goal-oriented advocacy or study should be mounted to make a remarkable change in this country, to develop array of technologies. Truly, the more our indigenous languages are described or developed, the more our technology is enhanced thereby bringing it to the fore.

Conclusion/Recommendation

So far, it has been discussed that the language is best use to transfer or transfer indigenous knowledge or technology. It is as a result of the fact that such knowledge or technology is culture-oriented. At this point, it behooves the government to develop the indigenous knowledge or

technology by engaging in scientific processes that is, imparting of science literacy, through the medium of indigenous languages. Then and only then, our technological processes and also, the level of the scientific literacy and technology development will improve meteorically (Ezikeojiaku 116).

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