

ENGLISH AND FRENCH STUDIES AS MEDIUM
FOR CULTURAL INTEGRATION

by

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LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL INTEGRATION IN WEST
AFRICA

Language is essentially a social activity and the contexts for the use of language are determined by various parameters in the context of situation. (Halliday 1975, Hudson, 1980).

Language is intimately tied to man's feeling and activities and it is bound up with nationality, religion, and feeling.

De Saussure (1962) defined Language as, "la partie sociale du langage" elle n'existe qu'en vertu d'une sorte de contract passé entre les membres de la communauté.

Similarly, Lado (1974) explained that language does not develop in a vacuum. According to him, a language is part of the culture of a people and the only audible means by which the members of a society communicate.

Language therefore, is both a component of culture and a central network through which the other components are expressed.

Generally speaking the use of language essentially is to facilitate communication, to promote understanding between language originator and language recipient, and to enable useful, appropriate and efficient action to take place. (Moody, 1970).

This importance of language is more fundamental when a country is bordered by other countries speaking a different language other than her own. This is the case with Nigeria, an Anglophone country, surrounded by francophone countries. To the North, North East, East and West are Republics of Niger, Chad, Cameroon's and Benin respectively, for effective communication and intention with our neighbouring countries, therefore, it is important that Nigerians learn to speak the French Language.

French could be regarded as one of the important foreign languages on the African continent today. French and English are the two most important language used by most countries. Most of these countries need to interact in order to form unifying bodies for their economic, political and technological advancement in the modern world.

The French language is one of the five official languages of the United Nations Organization (UNO) and one of the three official languages of the Organization of African Unity (OAU). Apart from the above-mentioned organizations, most countries in West Africa are members of other international organizations where French and English are used as media of communication. Some of these organizations are Organization of Petroleum Exporting countries (OPEC), Economic Community of West Africa States (ECOWAS).

Essentially, then, for any meaningful and effective interaction and communication at the global level, the teaching and learning of French and English languages may then be considered as very important if our leaders are bilingual in both the English and French Languages, they will be better armed to carry out their linguistic tasks at all international organisations. Communication is the only tool for interaction between two or more people. Language, be it oral, literal or symbolic is the means of communication.

According to Adetugbo (1980) "all human societies and institutions are made possible only by man's possession of language. Without language, there would be no orderly society at all neither will there be progress that emanates from exchange of ideas through language (Odusina, 1989).

Languages are of three kinds, depending on the roles they play in a community or area. There is the mother tongue, which every individual grows up to speak naturally. There is the second language, which is the languages, though not indigenous to a community, plays an important role in the social, professional and educational lives of members of that community. Finally, there is the foreign languages, which is a language that one learns purely out of choice in addition to one's mother tongue. The speaker of a second language (L2) lives in a country where the languages (L2) is not a native language of the indigenous inhabitants. Stevens (1978) while discussing the second language situation sees it as one in which the language has special status in the community – as the medium of instruction in sectors of the educational system as the official language in courts etc.

English, though not a native language is widely used for a variety of purposes in Nigeria. The same is true of Gambia, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Ghana and British Cameroun – former colonies in West Africa. It is the language of government business and commerce, education, the mass media, literature, much internal and external communication (Bamgbose in Spencer (ed) 1971). Above all, many creative literary activities are carried out in English; Novels, Travelogue, diaries, poetry, and plays are written in English. Soap Opera on radio and televisions stations are also in English.

Given the current wave of communication revolution and advances in communication technology. "English, the primary vehicle of international communication is a passport to international or universal cultural uniformity and cohesion (Hague, 1983:6).

In other areas like Togo, Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Ivory Coast, French is the second language. The first step in ensuring one's ability to communicate in international circle is the acquisition of the skills of any of the major world languages.

Adeyoju (1996) underscored the importance of a good knowledge of English, for international communication in his statement.

"The English as a second language, teacher must not only seek to develop civilized values in the students but must also prepare him for living in Britain, America or any other

foreign country. He could give a lot more time to the teaching of English cultural content in its aesthetic, moral, spiritual and social values. The teacher should make him see how that community operates, what it holds dear, and what kind of behaviour it disapproved of, which are acceptable in tribal countries".

Even though a minority of people in West Africa uses English, it still enjoys a great geographical spread as a language of communication and learning.

This paper highlights the cultural integration in West Africa through English and French Language studies.

CULTURAL INTEGRATION

Culture has been defined by Biobaku (1982) as

"That complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, laws, customs and any other abilities acquired by man.

Culture accordingly encompasses those conventional understandings and practices which give a people their uniqueness and thus render such a people distinct from others".

The definition of culture implies that every culture is subject to the process of change. Cultural interaction or contact according to Ikegulu (1986) could result in cultural influences, which could in turn result in the assimilation, adoption and accommodation of aspects of other people's cultures. The end product could be cultural refinement, advancement or integration. Contact between Ferdinand Oyono explores the terrible, woes of the African French Cameroon's in the colonial era in his book *House Boy*. The hero of his book was completely assimilated in the culture and teaching of the colonial masters with a rare degree of gullibility and faith. He ended up as disastrously as he did in the hands of those he had sworn to serve.

Achebe's "Things Fall Apart" is set in the Igbo Society of Nigeria in the early colonial era in which communities of different ethnic groups, the colonizers usually influenced by imposition of their own culture.

Even nation for example has its culture and through migration, trade, marriages, conquest and other vehicles of change, there is interaction, which tends to bring people together. There are evidences, (historical) that through the process of integration, inferior culture bows to superior culture.

THE ROLE OF ENGLISH AND FRENCH STUDIES (LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE) IN CULTURAL INTEGRATION

Since the blend between English Language and Literature, English studies and French language has provided students with communication competence and an awareness of the use of these language in literacy medium. Literature provides an additional way in which the student is exposed to the elasticity of the languages. It offers practical application of all that the student encounters in his language lessons.

Most West African playwrights and novelists such as Amata Aidoo, Ferdinard Oyono, Chinua Achebe, Ene Henshae, Wole Soyinka, Camara Laye, Benard Dadies, Mariam Ba etc. Have used drama and novels in promoting cultural revival and integration. Drama's most important contribution to cultural integration lies in the alerting of Africans to the difficulties that lie in wait and encouraging them to adjust their relationships with other people in the society. That species of plays that deal with or exploit the variety of myths, beliefs, ideas and ways of life that bind a people in the hope of, among other things, widening their experiences, making them aware of their lapses surging, changes and giving them a deep vision of life. According to Vincent (1979) the "raw materials" of drama is people interacting in a society and that society must be alive. In Amata Aidoo's play "Dilemma of a Ghost" though talks about conflict between the Western and African culture, content wise, it also highlights certain cultural norms which are still binding today in most West African countries and which conditions the attitudes and activities of our people. It is common for example for parents to

marry for their sons', daughters of close family friends even when the daughters are still toddlers. All these cultural norms are transmitted through the medium of English language.

Ene Henshaw's plays usually dramatize the 'clash' of traditional culture and foreign western culture often represented by Christianity. The ends of his plays are generally sensible and what prevails at the end is what brings sanity and benefit to the people. His plays are steeped in the world of traditional culture but have attraction for both the young and the old. The book deals with the way of life of the people in those days. It offers the non-Igbo reader an insight into the psychology of the people and the ways of life of the people.

Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and The Jewel* also trails the idea of progress and civilization pitted against traditionalism. Lakunle represents a decadent and ridiculously superficial idea of civilization. Rather, he is affected by the worst ideas of Victorian enlightenment. Baroka on the other hand cannot be said to represent tradition although he is the opposite of Lakunle. A great deal is revealed in the play through mimes and the flashbacks enriching our experience and giving the play an anchor for the feelings of the traditional village is all around in the world of the play. The cultural educational force of *Anowa* is in another direction. One of the dominant themes is the oppression of the individual by society and the dangerous consequences this tyranny could lead to. This play is steeped in traditional values and beliefs set as it is in the last decade of the nineteenth century. According to Vincent, it's cultural relevance for the present day were in the fact that it deals with timeless emotions of society that continues to ruin members of any community. One question that remains unresolved is whether *Anowa* succumbs to the pressures of society or nature and why his passionate love does not tide her over their temporary frustrations.

Camara Laye in his book "L' enfant Noi" tries to describe the African way of life. He portrayed the African culture, power and authority through his father's actions. His description of the initiation and circumcision ceremonies brings out the rich culture of the West African people.

On the other hand Mariam Ba in her book "So long a letter" describes the position of the woman in the African society.

Literature in form of drama or prose's an agent of cultural integration. It is not merely an instrument for transmitting or preserving society and beliefs and making people aware of their traditional education but a way of adjusting that culture and therefore the people in the light of contemporary experience to achieve full and unimpeded development as member of society. One seems to agree with Vincent when he says that the extent to which drama highlights or employs the synchronic aspect of culture is integral to its instructive role.

1. By reading some of these texts, one gains knowledge of the people of Nigeria, Ghana, America, Cameroon and the colonialists in Africa.

The setting of the stories in time and space extend from America to Africa and the nineteenth century to modern times. According to Ikegulu, the realistic portrayal of the people, places, events and situations serves to transport the interested reader from the here and now. The imagination of the reader is taxed as he has to picture the world of the story and ask some thought – provoking questions, which will, enable the reader to think along lines that are beyond the immediate scope of the story.

Readers are able to assess and react to situation presented in the stories and identify with some of the characters. Through the exposition of the events and people both in the society and the world around English studies goes on to encourage more decent attitudes which helps to make a society a better place to live in.

Onoh believes that through drama in English, African artists have succeeded in bringing about a fruitful interaction and integration of European, America or Western cultures with African culture, to the mutual interest and benefit of an integration world culture.

PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS IN THE USE OF ENGLISH STUDIES IN CULTURAL INTEGRATION

There has been a wide debate on the suitability of the use of English as a vehicle of cultural communication and integration.

According to Unoh, (1982) antagonists of the use of English have given such arguments.

1. English is foreign to West African culture and therefore is ill equipped and unsuitable for the propagation of West African culture.
2. Such usurpation of the roles and functions of indigenous languages has weakened the desire to develop local languages.
3. The use of English tends to attach much importance to British and American cultures with which English is associated with. According to Ikegulu (1986) grave as these problems highlighted may be, the use of English has fostered the emergence of a national culture that has boosted the spread of national consciousness, facilitated transnational interactions and provided a base for the development of a national identity. English is the language of communication in some parts of West Africa in areas like Ghana, Sierra Leone, Gambia.

Even in French speaking West African countries English is still studied by some students in tertiary institutions. Communication in English has aided the colonized countries in West Africa in the emancipation, propagation, integration, assimilation and advancement of their culture by facilitating inter-cultural and cross-cultural communication among them and other nations of the world. In teaching drama in schools, certain cultural norms of other societies are highlighted which condition the attitude and activities of our people. The educational impact of these plays can only be measured in terms of what changes they make on our ways of seeing the world.

Also in teaching comprehension in English and French for instance, passages that highlight the cultural identity of different ethnic groups in West Africa have been used and attempt has been made to bring out the similarities between the various cultural groups with a view to emphasizing the areas that unite us.

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