

11
18

(24) 13

O.M. Ogunbiyi (*Journal of Functional Education*)

THE DEVELOPMENT OF LANGUAGE POLICY
IN NIGERIAN EDUCATION

DR. (MRS.) O.M. OGUNBIYI
FACULTY OF EDUCATION
LAGOS STATE UNIVERSITY
OJO, LAGOS

INTRODUCTION

James Britton (1970) defined language as a primary means whereby human beings construct the mental representations of reality that guide their perceptions and actions. Language policy refers to the decisions of a polity regarding the acceptable language for those who carry out the political, economic, legal and social affairs of a nation or national choice, follows planning for implementation of the policy.

The Missionaries from Europe contributed a great deal to the study of Nigerian Languages. Their main aim was to translate religious matters to the natives. They realised that to understand the mind of the African and teach him the Christian Faith, they must have an intimate knowledge of his vernacular. As far back as 1816 in the colonial era, the Missionaries have realised the need for mother tongue education, as a result they practised later English medium. In 1911 and 1923 the question of how to adapt education to the needs of the environment was discussed in London at a conference sponsored by the government. At the conference it was agreed that children should be taught in their mother-tongue. The Phelps Stokes Commission of 1919 and 1922 also laid emphasis on the adaptation of education to the environment and recommended that the language of the environment should be used at the lower classes while English Language

should be used at the upper classes. *NATIONAL POLICY ON EDUCATION*.

October 1st in 1960 Nigeria gained her independence from the colonial masters. At the time of independence the language of the government, Law, Education, was the English Language. After the independence, the Nigerian government realised the need for mother tongue education as a tool for creating cultural awareness. In 1961, the issue of mother-tongue Education was debated upon in the parliament. A motion was passed on this issue on November 21, 1961. The motion states that "this House Urges the governments to introduce in consultation with the regional governments the teaching of Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo and other Language into institutions of learning throughout the country with a view to adopting one of them as our official language in the near future". The motion was adopted but the issue of lingua franca was not addressed.

The government had tried to develop language policies which could allow indigenous population to become integrated members of the new nation. In May 1965, there was an educational conference held at Addis-Ababa. It focussed on the development of Education in African States. The conference emphasised the improvement of Education be able to communicate effectively with one another.

The National Language Centre was set up in 1971 within the Federal Ministry of Education to see to the issue of Language policy in Nigeria. In September 1976, the introduction of Universal Primary Education, has led to children from different linguistic backgrounds finding their way into the formal school system. In order to make the Universal Primary Education successful, the government had to think of a medium of instruction for the children. Therefore, in 1977, there was a publication of the Federal Republic of Nigeria's National Policy on Education which for the first time set out in clear terms government policy on language in Education.

October 31 to November 4, 1977, there was a language symposium held at Kaduna. The symposium was organised by the National language centre of the Federal Ministry of Education Lagos, Nigeria. Some of the

project in language education which had been going on in the country are as follows:

- (a) The Ife six years primary project
- (b) The primary education improvement project
- (c) The rivers readers project.

Obanya, (1982) stated that there are about four hundred indigenous language and about fifty of these language have been reduced to writing. The early Christian Missionaries who worked in different parts of Nigeria helped to develop the Nigerian mother tongue. Today, three of these mother-tongues are recognised by both the Nigerian constitution (1979) and the National Policy on Education (1981): they are Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba.

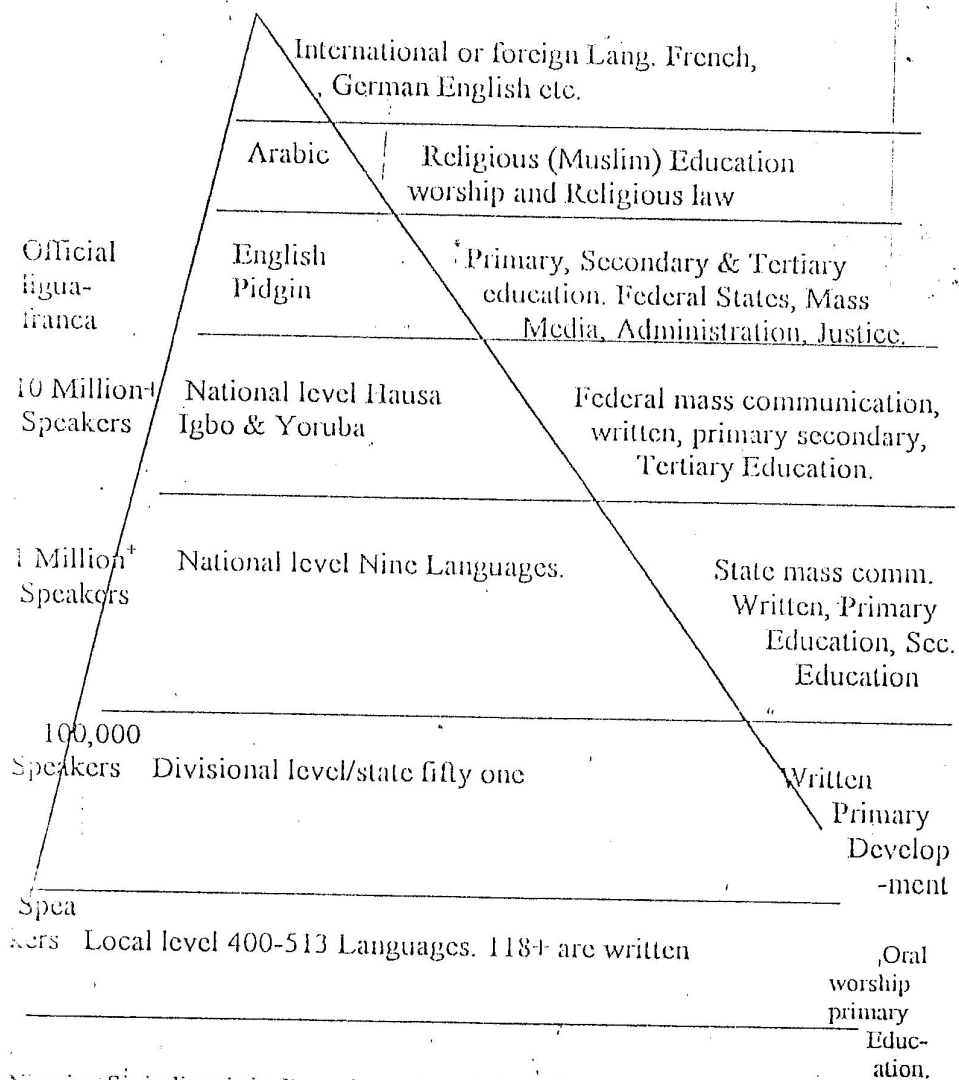
However, inter-ethnic communication through the use of any of the Nigerian 'tribal' languages is not possible. The English Language, therefore, fills a huge communication gap. According to Obanya (1982) English is the Nigerian official language of commerce and a host of others. It is also language the country uses for international engagements. Health (1991) said in nations like Nigeria five language situations exist.

- No linguistic majority i.e. some segments of population may speak a variety of language all or may which are not related.
- There may be a single indigenous language with no substantial literary tradition but spoken by majority.
- There may be a variety of languages, some related and for which lingua franca has evolved which is intelligible to speakers of many of the indigenous languages.

- There may be one or more languages with long standing literacy and religious traditions that are in competition with each other and a choice of one or the other alienates large segments of the national population. Moreover the scripts may differ from each other and from the script of the colonial powers.
- There may be a wide variety of different languages many of which are spoken by only a few hundred speakers. Among these speakers, a Western language pidgin may have evolved which now vies with the colonial Western language as the primary medium of communication.

At a round-table on language and Dialect held at the University of Ibadan in 1975, it was agreed that it would be necessary to regroup languages in Nigeria on the basis not of linguistic comparison but of reciprocal intelligibility. Based on this, a model of the types of languages in Nigeria was devised in a pyramid form as shown below.

O.M. Ogunbiyi (*Journal of Functional Education*)



Nigeria: Socio-linguistic Pyramid. Adapted from Brann C.M.B. Educational language Planning in Nigeria.

Taking a look at the socio-linguistic pyramid, one can take the question; which language is the most suitable in Education policy? Page (1984) gave three options to multilingual societies in their choice of language in Education policy.

These are:-

- To use one or more indigenous language for all educational and other purposes.
- To give equal status to one or more indigenous languages and an international language
- To adopt an international language for all educational and other purposes.

Each of these options has its own implications on the educational system. One has to be very careful in making a choice since language has a direct bearing upon the probable success of literacy instruction. Ure (1981) in his contribution to language policy states categorically that "the mother tongue is the tool for creative thought". It is the politicians and not educators who make language policy decisions, it is important that these decisions be based on an accurate assessment of the relationship between language and national development. The question of language choice in Nigeria is seldom examined in reference to broader statements about the relationship between languages and national development. Such an examination indicates the areas in which the experience of other countries is not relevant to the Nigerian situation. It also suggests the sociological and linguistic factors which should be considered in addition to the political and administrative ones, when weighing the relative merits of various language policies. Regarding the relationship between language and national development Joshua Fishman relates language problems to the type of integration which a nation is attempting to achieve. He identifies two types

Integration: Nationalism and Nationalism. He views Nationalism as successive stages of socio-cultural integration. Such integration is typical of a country such as Thailand where a common nationality is manifest. While Nationalism is viewed as successive stages of political-geographic integration where the main effort is directed toward maintaining or strengthening political unity prior to developing socio-cultural unity. This type of integration is typical of most multi-tribal states in West Africa. Efficiency is the operative word for language choice. On this basis, the choice invariably falls to a language of wider communication. Fishman further postulates that the countries which succeed in achieving both political and social integration, will develop on the basis of the difference in language types and language functions which can occur in any case of national multi-linguism, linguistic pluralism can exhibit a network of very complex relationships.

For a developing country like Nigeria which is also a multi-lingual society, Kolman (1971) suggested two functional respective language policies. The first relates to the patterns of communication that would enable the socio-economics institutions to function most efficiently, effectively and equitably in meeting the needs and interests of the population. The second is how to ensure that different groups within the society, varying in their linguistic repertoires have equal access to the public system and opportunities to participate in it.

Section 1 paragraph 8 of the National Policy on Education 1977, revised 1981 emphasises the importance of language in our educational system. It states that " in addition to appreciating the importance of language in the educational process, and as a means of preserving the peoples' 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, Igbo and Yoruba. Adewa (1995) is of the opinion that if idea is implemented " the policy could yield upwards of 80% of the educated population of Nigerians able to communicate in the name of

O.M. Ogunbiyi (*Journal of Functional Education*)

one or the other of the major languages as first and second language speakers. The National Policy on Education addresses the issue of language teaching at different levels in the educational system and classified the languages available for use into five groups as follows.

- The mother tongue or the child's first language;
- A language of the immediate community i.e. a language spoken by a wider communication and generally learnt and used by those whose mother tongue is a small group language;
- A major Nigerian language i.e. Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba.
- English
- Foreign languages (i.e. Arabic and French).

LANGUAGE POLICY FOR PER-PRIMARY AND PRIMARY EDUCATION

Regarding the Pre-primary level, section 2, paragraph 11 of the National Policy of education states that "government will ensure that the medium of instruction will be principally the mother-tongue or the language of the immediate community and to this end will.

- Develop the orthography for many more Nigerian language and;
- Produce textbooks in Nigerian languages.

This statement of policy by the government has encouraged many Nigerian authors to write in the indigenous language, but in most schools the major medium of instruction is still the English language. The child leaves home for the pre-primary school at about the age of three. Usually at

home the medium of instruction is mainly the mother tongue. He gets to school and the medium of instruction changes from the mother-tongue to the English language right, from this early age, the child starts having some problems with language acquisition. He has not gathered enough vocabulary in his mother tongue before he starts with the English language. Learning can be retarded at this level because of the sudden change in the medium of instruction. At this stage there is no smooth transition between the home and the formal school system.

At the primary level in respect of language, the policy states that "Government will see to it that the medium of instruction in the primary school is initially the mother-tongue or the language of the immediate community and, at a later stage English". According to the government the educational objectives are as follows:

- The inculcation of permanent literacy and numeracy, and the ability to communicate effectively.
- The laying of a sound basis for scientific and reflective thinking.
- Citizenship education as a basis for effective participation in and contribution to the life of the society;
- Character and moral training and the development of sound attitudes;
- Developing in the child the ability to adapt to his changing environment;
- Giving the child opportunities for developing manipulative skills that will enable him to function effectively in the society within the limits of his capacity;
- Providing basic tools for further educational advancement, including preparation for trades and crafts of the locality.

O.M. Ogunbiyi. (*Journal of Functional Education*)

In achieving the stated objectives the role of language in educational development of the child cannot be over-emphasised. The first objective is purely a language issue- the inculcation of permanent literacy and numeracy and the ability to communicate effectively. Dada (1976) in his Doctoral Thesis affirmed that "l'ice on text original sans passer par la tradition.. voilà le comble de la satisfaction". This short quotation briefly describes what it means to be a master or native speaker of a language. Languages being an instrument of communication would be a tool for the user who works, reads or writes without frantically looking for interpreters. "There is nothing like reading an article, or a book, or an exposition in the original language in which it is written". Cookey (1970). The Ife six-years' primary project conducted extensive longitudinal research into the use of Yoruba as medium of instruction throughout the six years of primary school and produced text books in all primary school subjects using Yoruba as the medium. There have also been curriculum projects in the languages of Rivers State and the Itsekiri language.

LANGUAGE POLICY FOR SECONDARY SCHOOL SYSTEM

Section 4 paragraph 18 of the National Policy on Education states that the secondary school should "develop and project Nigerian Culture, Art and language as well as the world's cultural heritage. Foster Nigerian unity with an emphasis on the common ties that unite us in our diversity". The policy further states that: "In selecting two languages (in junior secondary schools) students should study the language of their own area in addition to any of the three main Nigerian languages as listed among the core subjects of the junior secondary school. The core subjects for the senior secondary school include English and one Nigerian language. At the secondary level English fully takes over as language of instruction with all the other languages being thought as subjects including foreign languages which might be taught at the latter part of the school course. At this level language study becomes more academic and learners hardly practice speaking outside the classroom especially when there is no social need to do so Dada 1976). From the

policy statements one sees clearly that Nigerian language is not even a prerequisite for further studies like English. Hitherto many parents encourage their children to learn the English language of the immediate environment. This makes a mockery of the National language policy, except the situation change might not at having a National language in a near future. Language Policy in Higher Institutions: Section 5, 37 (v) of the National Policy on Education states that for Universities to serve as effective instrument for cementing National unity, "Widespread ignorance among Nigerian groups about each other and about themselves will be remedied by instituting a compulsory first-year course in the social organisation, customs, culture and history of our various people. The award of degrees will be made conditional upon the passing of the paper in this course".

Language is the means by which the human personality expresses itself and fulfils its basic needs for social interaction. Right from the Grecian Era language has obtained the pride of place in the teaching and learning process, discoveries, exploration etc. At this level the policy is silent about using our indigenous languages. One of the things the policy makers should know is that culture and language are inseparable.

PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

The policy on using the mother tongues as a medium of instruction has generated considerable controversy involving several highly respected intellectuals as well as the general public. Those who support the policy claim that a child learns best in his or her mother tongue. The policy therefore would promote greater comprehension of school subjects by the pupils. Those who oppose the policy on the other hand, claim that it would limit the scope of the child's knowledge because many significant modern concepts especially in mathematics, science and technology do not have words representing them in the Nigerian mother tongues. They also claim that since the child would eventually learn in English at higher levels of Education, the use of the mother tongue at the beginning could constitute a handicap or even interference with the use of English later. The NERDC has

produced text books based on the new curricular for the three major languages-Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba but there are no textbooks for other school subjects in these languages. The Ife six-years primary project has produced textbooks in all primary school subjects using Yorubas medium. There have been curriculum projects in the languages of Rivers States and the Itsekiri language. These efforts especially that of the Ife project need to be replicated for other Nigerian languages.

The six-year primary project shows that the fears expressed by the critics of the policy are unfounded, for example, it was clearly demonstrated that children taught in the Yoruba language throughout primary school suffered no handicaps in respect of learning in English at higher levels. Also it was shown that the children so taught made substantial affective gains in respect of adjustment to school and personality characteristic". Fafunwa-etal (1989).

Recent events in the National Assembly are indicative of the complex nature of the language problem in Nigeria. The Nigerian constitution stipulates that: "The business of the National Assembly shall be conducted in English, and in Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba when adequate arrangements have been made therefore...." (Part 1B, section 5). In (1985) mentioned that "An attempt to give expression to this clause re-

O.M. Ogunbiyi (*Journal of Functional Education*)

REFERENCES

- Adeniran, A(1995): Language Education Provision in National Policy on Education: A Critique. In Owolabi, K. (ed) *Language in Nigeria*. Group Publishers, Ibadan.
- Adetugbo, A. (1992): *English in Nigeria's National Policy on Education*. Paper Presented at the training workshop organised for Master Trainers in English Language.
- Ala, B.O. (1990): Effects of alternative Language media on the learning of "Family Living" among primary five pupils. Ph.D Thesis University of Ibadan.
- Awoniyi, A. (1995): "Determining Language in Education Policy. The Dilemma in Africa" in Owolabi, K (ed). *Language in Nigeria: Essay in Honour of Ayo Bamgbose*. Ibadan Group Publishers.
- Bamgbose, A (1992): Speaking in Tongues: Implications for Language Policy in Nigeria. Merit Award Winning Lecture.
- Banjo, A.(1995): "On Language use and Modernity in Nigeria" in Owolabi, K(ed) *Language in Nigeria*. Ibadan Group Publishers.
- Brann, C.MB. (1979): "*Educational Language Planning in Nigeria: Problems and Prospects*".
- Dada, A. (1985): "The New Language Policy in Nigeria: Its Problems and its Chances of Success". *Language of Inequality*. Edited by Wolfesn Manes. Published by Mouton, The Hague.
- Daum, A.D. (1985): "The National Language Question. *West African Journal of Education*, Vol. XVII (3), October.

O.M. Ogunbiyi (*Journal of Functional Education*)

Federal Ministry of Education (1981): *National Policy on Education*, Lagos: Federal Ministry of Information.

Federal Ministry of Education (1993): *National Report on Situation and Policy Analysis of Basic Education in Nigeria*. Federal Ministry of Education, Lagos.

Health, S.B (1991): "Language Policy" in *the international encyclopedia of education*.

Olagoke, D.O. (1990): The Tongue and ESL in Nigeria Education. In Ubahakwe, E. (ed). *The Teaching of English Studies*. Ibadan University Press.

Osunkoya, I.O. (1994): *6-3-3-4 Education in Nigeria: History, Strategies, Issues and Problems*. Ibadan University Press.

Owolabi, K. (1995): *Language in Nigeria, Essays in Honour of Ayo Bamgbose*. Group Publishers Ibadan.

Taiwo, C.O. (1972): *The Mother Tongue as a means of promoting Equal Access to Education in Nigeria*. Paris. UNESCO.

Ubahakwe, E. (1974): "Goals in English Language Education in Nigeria. In *Journal of National English Studies Association*. Vol. No. 2.

Ubahakwe, E. (1997): *The Teaching of English Studies*. Ibadan, University Press.

Ubahakwe, E. (1980): "A survey of some Igbo Dialects and its Relevance to Formal Education in Igbo". Ph.d Thesis, Ibadan.