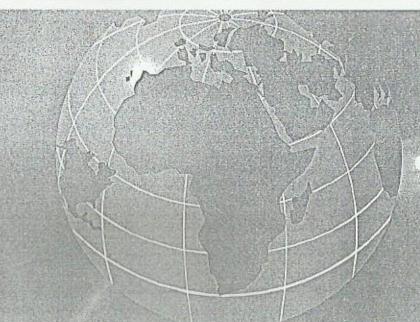
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Literacy and Language for Preservation of Cultural Values: A Sociological Discourse

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Abstract .

This paper examines the importance of language to every given culture. Also, helps the Sociologists of Education, Anthropologists, as well as Culturalists to know the importance of language; thus emphasising that the teaching of indigenous language of a particular society ties down their preserved culture. Moreso, the paper reminds the Sociologists of Education as well as stakeholders of Education the effect of Western Culture especially language on the system of education in Africa. Thus, so much of the Western Culture has been given to us to the extent that we tend to forget

our indigenous language. The implication is that once the indigenous language is being eroded or subdued; our cherished culture will be relegated to the background. This paper therefore explains that the indigenous language of our generation at all levels of formal education should be revisited; as it is, it is the root of culture. It helps to preserve culture and to teach the culture more; inculcating values and to inform the whole world that in Africa, we have a culture of our own. Thus, in this study, the paper asks some sociological questions. As such recommendations were proffered so that through literacy our indigenous language will not die.

Key words: Literacy, Indigenous Language, Culture, Preservation

Introduction

Culture is derived from the German word "Kulture" which means civilisation. According to Odor (2002) and Alagoa (2007), culture means excellence and is of very high level of intellectual and artistic excellence in a person or group. In other words, culture is concerned with the entire essence of human existence and refers to those intellectual and artistic integrity that have been cultivated and nurtured over time, which the people hold firmly. This is why it is being described simply as the entire way of life of a person or group of people. Taiwo (2004) posits that culture relies on the interaction of all society's components, art, learning, institution and ordinary behaviour. Tylor reported in Taiwo (2004) that culture is that complex whole which includes man as a member of the society. In other words, culture describes the aspect of human life because every human society has its own distinctive culture or ways of life which differ; say, for instance, Tanzania and Nigeria. These cultural values include type of food, style of dressing, music as well as language. For instance, the Yoruba tribe in Nigeria eats food like Eba, Amala, Iyan (Pounded yam) and enj oys music like Fuji, Apala as well as Juju music. To this end, Oloruntimehin (2007) maintains that culture is the bedrock of society and it is the fabric with which society is woven together. In view of this, Babawale (2007) asserts

The cultural heritage of Malaysia is what the country used to promote her hospitality industry. China and many of the Asia Tigers are beneficiaries of Confucian ethics, which promote democracy, meritocracy, education and political tolerance.

Confucian ethics propagate a symbiotic unity between the ruler and the people through the concept of benevolent governance, Chinese Confucian ideals emphasise the principles of LI and JEN. LI refers to the value that makes people behave properly in every situation. This is akin to the Yoruba (in Nigeria) concept of *Omoluabi* and the Igbo (in Nigeria) concept of *Ezigbonwa*. JEN compels an individual to treat everyone else kindly.

A cursory look at the above statement reveals the significance of cultural values of which language plays an utmost role in preserving the cultural values of

every given society. In the same vein, Mazrui (2000) basically identifies some functions of culture which include: one - as lenses of perception (it influences how people view themselves and their environment) two - as a spring of motivation (that is what people respond to as incentives or disincentives for certain behaviour) three - as a standard of judgment (what is right or wrong); four - basis of stratification (rank, caste and class); five - means of communication (culture provides language in the literal sense of the legacy of moral and lexicon), six - as production and consumption (that is the ability to produce within Africa. Finally, as a basis of identity (emphasises the concept of 'we' and 'they'). In view of this, Bello (1991) emphasises that culture approximates, as well as serve as an index of the totality of human existence expressing his spiritual, material and serial needs. Thus for literacy to be understood and meaningful in the society, it should take account of the learner's life experiences and this reveals the culture of a given society.

Literacy and Indigenous Education

Hussain (2007) describes education as a process, as a product and as a discipline. As a process, it stands for a set of activities involving the handing down of the norms of a given society from one generation to another. As a product, it is measured by qualities and characteristics of an educated person, and as a discipline, it defines various branches of organised knowledge transmitted in specifically identified educational institutions. Education, therefore, be it formal and informal is simply one aspect of socialisation. It involves the acquisition of knowledge and the learning of skills, whether intentionally or unintentionally. Education often also helps to shape beliefs and moral values (Haralambos and Holborn, 2006). Literacy , is the ability to read and write. It can be deduced that it is one aspect of education clearly shown in both western and indigenous system of education. For example, young people learned their lessons largely by joining in the social group. Knowledge and skills were usually learned informally by imitating examples provided by adults. Although adults sometimes instructed their young, they did so as part of their daily routine. Thus, boys accompanied their fathers on hunting trips, while girls assisted their mothers with cooking and gathering vegetables. This implies that you can have informal education and not necessarily be literate in the real sense (Fafunwa, 1982; Bolarin 2004). In view of this, Hinzen (1979) argues

The general purpose of education is seen to be transmitted from one generation to the next, the accumulated wisdom and knowledge of the society, and to prepare the young people for their future membership of the society and their active participation in its maintenance or development. In view of the present situation of Tanzania and most African countries, their colonial and the primary purpose of education is the liberation of man.

Education, whether formal or informal, is a veritable agent for development and language is the human means of communication (Ogbodo, 2003).

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In the same vein, Jiboku (2002) states that:

One of the basic indices of development in every society is the level of literacy in that society. Literacy education can only be possible if appropriate languages are used at the right level for the intellectual development of man.

To this end, one will agree that liberation of man according to Nyerere is basically the role of language, perhaps the indigenous language which must be embraced for the purpose of identity in the Western world and also to inform the whole world that our culture is our education. In other words, the liberation of man is the beginning of embracing his indigenous education which is reflected in the language of his indigenous environment. Before the advent of colonial masters in Africa there was education, Bamisaye (2009) reaffirms the importance of indigenous education to culture thus:

It is clear that while traditional African education can be rightly considered as an end in itself, westernized education was accepted as a means to an end, of especially material well-being and racial emancipation. Traditional African education operated in collaboration with the social institutions that constituted the life wire of the African child i.e the family especially the extended family, the community and its religion, the system of government, the judicial system and others. Westernized education on the other hand, was provided in schools/colleges which were physically detached from their communities and were run by people communities. In the days of missionary education, children were discouraged from practicing community values because these values were considered either pagan or barbaric. I recall that I was suspended from the boarding house for one week in 1967 because I spoke Yoruba while doing my laundry on Saturday afternoon. This meant that my language which is the social and psychological expression of culture was excluded from the process of education.

In cognisance of the above experience of Bamisaye, one can infer that the way and manners of A frican culture especially in Nigeria was not held high esteem through the indigenous language and in order to preserve Nigerian culture through indigenous language, the National Policy on Education (2004) asserts thus:

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 im 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.

In our contemporary times, there is need to revisit our National Policy on Education and review the curriculum to properly enhanced indigenous language. For instance, as stated in the National Policy on Education, Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo are encouraged in primary schools yet is not gaining ground due to the fact that

everybody want to be a master of western language (English language). It is pertinent to note that indigenous language is one of the components of culture which also preserves the African cultural heritage. Oderinde (2007) reports that English language had come into the curriculum since 1842 when the first primary school was established in Badagry and it really did not start to be properly taught in earnest until around 1930. Ngugi Wa Thiong'o (2009) asks a sociological questions thus: How does one begin to explain this attitude of the African bourgeoisie toward the languages of their culture? In view of this, Banjo reported in Oderinde (2007) reminds that:

The struggle between the promoters of the two languages (English and the indigenous language) in the curriculum has virtually made both what the Yoruba describes as *Ojowu meji* (i.e. two destructive rivals. In point of fact, anyone who has sensibility for words and is ready to read between the line would not fail to perceive violence in the language which the two promoters employ in the controversy. The language of the colonials and the missionaries was very provocative. Even since independence, the language of their successors (the English language and the indigenous language experts) cannot boast of temperance. Indeed, their diction approaches the dimension of predator-victim language. Put differently, one can see an analogy between English – vernacular contest and predator - victim contest where neither is ready to stand the guts of the other.

Basically, the import of this assertion inherent in the predator — victim metaphor is that it is the efforts of the experts to alienate the indigenous people from their culture; thereby making the foreign language an acceptable language in the society

Relationship between Language and Culture

Language is one of the fundamental primordial expressions of cultural differences which identifies and distinguishes a group of people that speaks a particular language from other human races, researches have shown that language and culture share symbiotic relationship, they are dependable upon each other. For instance, in every part of the world, especially in Africa, language represents the culture of the people and language identifies the people.

A strong advocacy has been maintained on the issue of language as an artifact of culture, and as a link between people and their social reality. Huebsch (1986) maintains that, 'no language no history'. Technology and science may control the environment, but they too rest upon language and the passing of information and communication. To this background, Olufade (2009) identifies that:

- (a) human language and thought are inseparable;
- (b) human language is rooted and embedded in culture; and
- (C) the strongest language of multi-lingual speaker dominates his/her thought.

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Here, the culture of an individual person is embedded in indigenous language with he help of other symbols that can be interpreted as language to depict the culture of he society. For instance, Olopade (2009) argues that when a person uses his/her ndigenous language (mother tongue) it is found that the complex idea is easier to grasp and that the level of understanding of the same idea in a second language is generally lower with that of the mother tongue. In view of this, Folorunso (2006) aments thus:

I would like to disabuse the minds of parents, particularly those from Lagos State, who discourage their wards from studying Yoruba. It is very unfortunate that we have more than enough candidates every year from other states who apply to read Yoruba, but the 70:30 admission ratio would not allow us to admit Lagosians who do not apply to read Yoruba. What is more disheartening is that African (or is it Yoruba) intellectuals just sit down theorising and dumping everything that is indigenous as fetish, barbaric and outdated. They are ignorant of their own culture and sad still; they are not very familiar with imported cultures they run after. They are neither here not there.

The discussion above reveals that language has social relevance which stands as the basis for social action facilitating interpersonal and interethnic cooperation, this makes language part of man and culture. In view of this, Oluwole as reported in Folorunso (2006) explains thus:

Our educational system today relegates the development of Nigerian languages to the background. Parents pride themselves in restricting their children from speaking Yoruba. Private schools advertised as 'English speaking' charge high er fees for that purpose. Yet it has been long realised that the philosophy of life, the morality, what a people regard as good and beautiful are all expressed in their own language. Hence, when we lose our mother tongue, we lose our culture.

Basically, the truth behind this information is that if you don't understand your indigenous language, you cannot understand your culture nor preserve it. It herefore connotes that language gives the entire picture of a culture of a particular society and at the same time an instrument to preserve the existing culture.

Some Dominant Chara eteristics of Language

In the description of Goetz (1975), culture is a network (transmitted historically) of meaning embedded in symbols, a system of ideas inherited and expressed in the form of symbols which people communicate, perpetuate and spread the knowledge concerning attitude towards life. Through language, the people's culture is known. Odoemene (2006) describes culture as the totality of values, habits and soc ial behaviours which comprise mode of life and the belief system of a group of people. A further appraisal shows language as communication of ide≅s, information, meaning and feelings. Language is also

iconic, that is, understandable to both the sender and the recipient. In other words, there is thus a binding string between language, culture and society. As the society moves its course, it drags language along which serves as a basis to cultural identity. Language is part of man and a social behaviour, thus, it embodies cultural concepts of the people.

Language is an autonomous entity; it is an indication that language stands on its own without configuration for meaning to be decoded. A language is not inferior or superior to any other language.

Language is a communicative process; Tylor (1985) describes language as full expression of desires, aspirations and morals. In other words, the speaker conveys information, messages and meanings well grasped in indigenous language by the Africans than the foreign language(s).

Language helps in knowledge acquisition. Thus, Odoemene (2006) reaffirms that language and thought are two natural gifts that distinguish man from other animals. Man has the capacity to create, transmit and even change their language but animals depend largely on instinct.

Language as a reflective awareness expresses the uniqueness of the world as the people see it. It brings about cultural and ethical situations as they are. Bishop (1992) asserts that language presents the world in a new way. It helps to preserve our culture while giving our children proper orientation to sustain cultural values. It also serves as a major means of communicating our thought process which helps in subduing the negative influence of a changing society. Thus, a basic proposition of modern sociology is that concepts, ideas, words (languages) and other symbolic systems arise out of the society or group in which they operate—of which culture relates to the beliefs and values people have about societies (Billinton, Strawbridge, Grensides, Fitzsimons, 1991).

Language for Cultural Preservation

Language and culture are important to individuals not merely as a medium of cultural preservation and communication but also as a known powerful force in Nigerian state. This will continue as a trait to other animals who do not have a voice to talk. A spoken language set out a group of people from others. Cultures differ from one language group to another. Adesokan (2007) affirms that, language survives and prospers only to the extent that it is preserved and enriched by each new generation of speakers. Since language represents the culture of the people and the people are identified by their language; they should strive to sustain the relationship between the two concepts. There are distinctive features of custom, belief, knowledge and social institution that characterised every society. These distinctive features are transmitted by learning. Language is fundamental to the learning of culture. Thus, language is fundamental to the learning of culture; without language the human ability to transmit the culture would be minimal. Thus, language and culture go together. Bamisaye (2009) and Pemede (2009) reveal that in sociological studies, language is an important component of culture.

The common sense view seems to be that the function of human language is communication, it does more. Language expresses thoughts that are already there prior to their expression. Since language transcends the individual in favour of his community, it consequently becomes a property and that of our culture. It is through language that we acquire and transmit our knowledge and know how to facilitate certain domination over environment. It stands indeed as the key component and the barometer of our development. Are the G8 or western world not dominating the world through their mono-lingual culture?

Language plays a major role in cultural transmission and preservation (Aluode 2006). It is a means of preserving the people's culture and medium of unification (Fafunwa, 1996). Language in school should be the language of the immediate environment starting from the first level in the school system. According to Aluode (2006), for school curriculum to transmit the culture of a given society it has to teach the language of the culture which is capable of expressing the given society.

Language has a powerful developmental role because it is a tool for learning and an aid to understanding. This implies that language acts as a vehicle for educational development and it is important for the apprehension of an acquisition of knowledge. As a result, children tend to develop into the intellectual life of those around them. The utilisation of language of the immediate environment instruction is therefore of pararmount importance to primary education in Nigeria. Like language, education is a mirror of a society and it depends on the existence of a medium of communication. During the language process of learning and teaching, language is very important for comprehension and acquisition of knowledge. In an ideal educational process, the teacher and students engage in great conversation. With the changes and technological advancement in our society and the entire world today, it will be strange indeed to just consistently ignore the indigenous language which is part of our culture and value system, in alliance with imperialist assertion that our entire past and current value system is fetish and barbaric. The widespread of Information and Communication Technology has not only westernised our value system, but has also almost disorientated Nigerian leaders not to hold on to the cultural values of the society. On this note, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o remarks thus:

> Language is a communication system and carrier of memory - what Frantz Famon calls "bearing the weight of a civilization.

Recommendations

To start with, let our cultural values and practices be encouraged. In the western world, their c-ultural values are always developed, but because they want us to remain primary producers and dumping ground for their finished products, it becomes pertinent to dehumanise and disorientate us through indigenous system of education. Indigenous languages should be encouraged in every sector of the economy. In doing that, Africans especially in Nigeria will be able to preserve their culture.

Also, there is need to re-orientate the younger generation on the importance of indigenous language so that our educational system will not compose a total English speaking community.

Educators, stakeholders, tertiary institutions and other organisations concerned about language and cultural development should intensify research on the best ways to preserve our culture.

Conclusion

In this study, it has been observed that the whole essence of language is that it is part and parcel of our culture. Thus, language helps to preserve every indigenous education of which no language no culture nor preservation of culture and identity. It is sad to observe that most of us especially in Nigeria have relegated our indigenous language to the background. Majority of us prefers the foreign language (e.g. English) to local languages. Our colonial believe is that our cultural heritage which can be communicated through indigenous language is obsolete, primitive and barbaric, In doing this, Ayandele (1978) has described Africans who fails to preserve the culture of Africa as marginal man, which means that we are neither accepted in the culture of the western world nor the culture of our indigenous society and such colonial slavery is growing high and is still haunting us till today. In all, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o reminds us that African culture, it is also a memory, a re-membering of the ancestors, an honouring of the heritage they have left to the living.

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