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**Indigenous Languages as Catalyst for Improving and Enriching Cultural Values
Secondary School Students in Lagos, Nigeria**

by

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Abstract

Languages are indeed the pedigree of nations, therefore when a language dies or disappears, it means that speakers of the language have lost their touch with the past which is an indispensable element of human co-existence. Language is that veritable instrument that transmits past events and people's actions (culture) to the present and even future generations. Without language, such an ancestry is cut off and shattered. The cultural values of the Lagosians (people who live in Lagos) would have been totally eroded if not for the continuous use of the indigenous languages. Indigenous languages are therefore regarded as catalysts for improving and enriching cultural values particularly among High School students in Lagos state, Nigeria. This study, therefore, examined the indigenous languages as a catalyst for improving cultural values among High School Students. The study adopted a descriptive survey to sample students from three chosen schools. A questionnaire was designed and used for data collection. This study concludes that parents, government as well as curriculum planners should encourage indigenous languages in the education industry.

Key Words: Indigenous languages; Cultural Values; Pedigree of nations; Language preference

Introduction

Language is fundamental to every culture. Language and culture are intertwined to the extent that the maintenance of one also sustains the other. Culture is expressed through language, and language is the carrier or promoter of cultures. In a nation like Nigeria, with diverse ethnic groups, different languages and cultures exist. The Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba have different languages and cultures. It is through language that each ethnic group expresses its cultural values. The same thing applies to Lagos state where we have two major languages. That is, Yorubas and Ogu. The Yoruba people are in majority all through the state while the Ogu people cover just about two Local Government Areas. Meanwhile, Yoruba language is one of Nigeria's three major languages and also the language of wider communication in Southwestern Nigeria. However, each of these ethnic groups has its different indigenous language through which their cultural values are expressed.

Nevertheless, the indigenous language and cultural values assessed in this research is the Yoruba language because the speakers of Yoruba are in the majority. One needs to appreciate the fact that Yoruba language is a die-hard language which has saved Lagosians from facing out their cultural values in the face of the English language and culture. It is advisable that the use of Yoruba language in our various daily communications is encouraged in order to promote and preserve the ways and manners of Lagosians.

It is observed that a lot of foreign influences have been felt in most High School Students in Lagos state. As a result of this, their linguistic and cultural attitudes have been affected. Were it not for the existence of the indigenous language (Yoruba), children would have turned the greeting system to 'handshake' and 'hi-hi situation' instead of bowing, kneeling and prostrating for the elderly ones.

Despite some strict penalties imposed on High School students who speak "vernacular", we still have a good number of such students that continue to use it. Although it is painful that most of students do not use the Yoruba language correctly as it was used by their forefathers because they lack some realistic and factual ingredients of the Yoruba language like the use of oral poetry, witty sayings, proverbs, chants, ways of greetings, attitudes toward elders, the value system and the right atmosphere the owners of the Yoruba language would have expected. It is better for parents and Government to encourage the use of Yoruba language (indigenous) in our public and private schools.

Folorunso (2006) posits that "Our language is part of our culture; if we lose our language, we lose our culture and vice versa" (p34). High Schools students are still correctable before they go into higher institutions where it may be extremely difficult to control them on the choice of language.

Language and Culture

Language and culture move hand-in-hand. They can be regarded as and are intertwined in such a way that the moment you relegate one, the other is rendered useless. The language of a people is used to express their culture, and the culture of a people is expressed through their language use.

In view of this, UNESCO (1983) asserts thus:

Languages are humankind's principal tools for interacting and for expressing ideas, emotions, knowledge, memories and values. Languages are also primary vehicles of cultural expressions and intangible cultural heritage, essential to the identity of individuals and groups.

The assertion above reveals that, our values are expressed in language. Culture, according to Ajala (2006) citing Taylor (1891) is defined as:

that complex which includes knowledge, beliefs, arts, moral, customs, tools and other capabilities acquired by man as a member of society and which are learned and passed from one generation to another

The various definitions further show the inseparable relationships that exist between language and culture. So, failure to speak the indigenous languages, in the High Schools Nigeria amount to relegating those languages as well as our cultures to the background. It is no wonder there is moral decadence among our youths today because most of them are interested in foreign culture. They want to speak and behave in foreign ways without paying attention to indigenous language and culture.

In any Yoruba land, Yoruba language is the core language of communicating the Yoruba culture. It is an asset and above the colonially inherited English language. It helps the Yoruba group speak into one's vision, mission and programme in the Histo-philosophy of Omo Oduduwa (Aja-Akpiru, 2008). Geertz (1975) says, "through language, the people's culture is known". People's cultural background can be easily traced through the use of their indigenous language.

Ogun (2008) opines that language is a cultural tool for the easy identification of a people. It should be allowed to be learnt from birth to adulthood for the promotion of a people's culture and tradition. Funny enough, were it not for the sake of some resilient students that insist on the use of Yoruba language on school premises, the support given to English language in our curriculum would have driven the indigenous language to a crash. The English language is a threat to indigenous languages.

The English language is now a dangling carrot trapping most people in Yoruba land to forsake their language and culture. It is very sympathetic that our indigenous language and moral values are gradually passing away. Folorunso (2006) maintains that:

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 advertise as 'English Speaking' charge higher fees for that purpose. Yet it has been long realized that the philosophy of life, morality, what people regard as good and beautiful are all expressed in their own language. Hence, when we lose our mother-tongue, we lose our culture. (p. 34)

Therefore, we must not lose grip of our indigenous language because our language is part of our culture and our culture is part of our language. Let us therefore encourage the use of Yoruba language on school premises among our High School students to instill morals into them and sustain the future of our language.

Indigenous Language and its Effect on Cultural Values

Odor (2002) identifies two types of cultural values: They are:

- (a). Material cultural values
- (b). Non-material Cultural values.

Material cultural values include all that the people of a particular society have created or developed for their own use and comfort and which they can be identified with. These include the acts and patterns of building houses, the fabrication of local tools or implements for farming, fishing, hunting and finally the different patterns of dressing amongst the people.

The non- material cultural values predominantly include language, attitudinal values and beliefs, philosophy, literature and festival of the people. The non- material cultural values refer to those aspects of human activities that are transmitted from generation to generation through process of socialization.

Cultural values are formed in four ways which are:

- 1). Environmental Adoptions
- 2). Historical factors
- 3). Social and economic evolution
- 4). Contact with other cultural values.

Fafunwa (1983) identifies seven aspects of traditional education among the Yoruba people including:

- (a). Developments of later physical skills
- (b). Respect for elders and peers,
- (c). Intellectual development,
- (d). Vocational development,
- (e). Community participants,
- (f). Development of ethnical character and
- (g). Promotion of cultural heritage.

Culture has to do with the beliefs and attitudes about something that a group of people share, which are, to a large extent, preserved and transmitted by the language through which they interact. Thus, the way of life of the people is intimately bound up with their language. Language, therefore, is a medium of communicating thoughts, emotions and exaltations. That is, for effecting understanding among men. It has a role to play in preserving the attractiveness, sanctity and building nature of cultural heritage in our society. Since culture binds people together, language binds people more closely together. It means that culture cannot be effectively displayed without language.

It should be noted that no foreign language can be used effectively to bind the culture of Yoruba together. UNESCO (1983) in Odunsi (1994) noted that there is no foreign language that can adequately and effectively take the place of the indigenous language and to disregard the indigenous language will be tantamount to jeopardizing the mental development of the child. It is unfortunate in Nigeria today that the percentage of children having interest in the indigenous language is low compared with those interested in the foreign languages. In other words, language being the medium for communicating thoughts, emotions and exaltations has a role to

play in preserving the cultural heritage in our society. The relationship between language and culture is so close that when one is separated from the other, there is always a vacuum. So, it is a big error to use a foreign language to practice indigenous culture or to practice foreign culture without our indigenous language. The resultant effect is always unpleasant because a round peg cannot best fit into a square hole. Hence, there is need to encourage and embrace our indigenous language and culture.

Fafunwa (1983) observes that the stand of government is hinged on the fact that it realizes the role of indigenous language in national integration, the promotion and preservation of culture. This is the reason why in Europe, North America, Russia, Japan, China and other developed countries, education of the child is done through the indigenous language for primary, secondary and university education.

But painful enough, despite the efforts of government in promoting the indigenous language in Nigeria, most of the students in the secondary school appears not to be interested in learning Nigerian languages (Makinde 1999, citing Awoniyi, 1978).

Statement of Problem

It has been observed that virtually everybody that goes out for formal education nowadays is interested in using the language of instruction in school. This is no other language than the English language. As such, most of the students think in their indigenous language but express themselves in their second language (English). No wonder, grammatical, phonological and semantical errors abound in their English utterances.

Similarly, when people learn foreign culture and practice it on an indigenous environment, usually odd and calls for unnecessary attention. Therefore, in order to revive our indigenous language and culture, we need to encourage people to use and practice it.

Research Questions

- a). Could the interference of the western education on indigenous user affect the mindset of their cultural values? b). Would it be really appropriate to promote foreign language over an indigenous language?
- c). How do we encourage those that are still good users of the indigenous language to convince the learners of such language?
- d). What are the roles of parents and government in the propagation of this fight for promotion of the use of indigenous language?

Significance

This research is significant because it will allow government to know the havoc that has been created by excessive support for a second language against the indigenous language in our H. Schools.

It will also remind education planners to adjust time table in favour of indigenous language in the curriculum.

Finally, it will alert parents and guardians that there is the great need to encourage their ward to speak and know the correct use of indigenous languages, or else, there will be language and culture lost.

Method of Data Collection

Questionnaire was designed for this study. These questionnaires were distributed to students in 3 selected High Schools in Lagos State with the help of 3 research assistants and some High School teachers. The schools are:

- i). First Zion High School, Ikotun
- ii). Newtrend High School, Ijegan
- iii). St. Saviour High School, Ikotun.

Data Analysis

The data collected were analyzed using the descriptive and inferential statistics. A total of 100 questionnaires were distributed but 80 retrieved and 60 analyzed. The other 20 copies were discarded due to non-completion on the part of respondents.

Results and Discussion

In this section, hypotheses formulated for testing were presented. A total of sixty questionnaires out of the eighty were analyzed.

Table 1: Demographic Data of Male and Female Respondents

Sex	No of respondents	Percentage %	Cumulative Frequency
Male	29	44.3%	48.3%
Female	31	51.7%	51.7%
Total	60	100%	100%

Findings:

The table 1 shows that the number of male students that responded is lower to that of female students. This can be explained further that in most of our High Schools, the percentage of female students is always higher than that of male.

Table 2: Students' Preference of Language

Sex	Language Preference	Frequency	Percentage %	Total percentage
Male	Eng to Yoruba	16	26.7%	100%
	Yoruba to Eng	13	21.7	
Female	Eng to Yoruba	20	33.3%	
	Yoruba to Eng	11	18.3	

Findings:

It is observed from the above analyses that majority of our High school students prefer the English language to Yoruba. The situation is more common among the female students than the male students. The reason why majority of High School students prefer the English language to Yoruba could be due to the importance government attaches to the study of English language in Nigeria. Female respondents have higher preference for English than their male counterparts. This could be due to the fact that females normally engage in verbal activities more than the males, and by nature, they are more fashionable than the males. However, we have some of them who still have interest in their indigenous language. So, hopes are not totally shattered.

Table 3: Gender Perception of Language Simplicity.

Sex	Language Simplicity	Frequency	Percentage	Total percentage%
Male	English is simpler	16	26.7%	100%
	Yoruba is simpler	13	21.7	
Female	English is simpler	20	33.3%	
	Yoruba is simpler	11	18.3	

Findings:

As demonstrated in table 2, the same thing is realized in table 3 where most students find the English language simpler to speak, read and write. Some of the students stated that they avoid speaking Yoruba because of the tone markers. Others said, it is just too difficult to read and write. Therefore, they rather go for the English language. Some of them complained that their parents usually speak the English language to them at home and while in school, speaking of vernacular is prohibited. As such, there is no room for having interest in the Yoruba language.

Table 4: Students Perception of Language and Culture N=60

Variation	Sex	Frequency	Percentage	Total percentage%
Support for the use of English and indigenous language in school	Male	25	41.7%	100%
	Female	23	36.3%	
Culture preference (Greetings and dressing) 1. Yoruba-English 2. English -Yoruba				100%
	Male	15	25%	
	Female	21	35%	
	Male	14	35.3%	
Indigenous language is the best to express our culture	Female	10	26.7%	100%
	Male	22	36.7%	
Governments and Parents supports are needed to improve on language and culture	Female	28	46.7%	100%
	Male	29	48.3%	
	Female	31	51.7%	

Findings:

A close observation of the analyses in table 4 points out that the High school students are aware of the fact that the use of both indigenous and English languages in schools is necessary to serve as a balance.

In addition, the table reveals the ignorance of students who prefer using the greetings and dressings of the western world to that of their traditional ones. Most of them hate kneeling prostrating to greet parents and elderly ones, hence, they prefer the English salutation of "daddy" or "mummy" or a warm handshake and embracing. Also, majority of them prefer skirt and blouse, jeans and top or the half naked way of dressing which they call fashion to that of "iro and buba" or "soro and buba or agbada".

Furthermore, in the third column of table 4, it is observed that most of the students feel that the best language to express our culture is our indigenous language. It must be noted that there is a way we can think in African concept and express it exactly in a foreign language.

Finally, all the respondents are of the opinion that both the Government and parents are expected to encourage the use of our indigenous language. This is the only vehicle that can convey our culture to the appropriate destination. Therefore, Government must fully support the use of indigenous language in our High schools as part of the curriculum without framing out any punishment for such users. At the same time, parents are expected to debunk the idea of not speaking their indigenous language to their children.

Conclusion

From the findings above, it is clear that western education and foreign cultural imitations are responsible for the cultural vices we have in our society. Furthermore, since the medium of transmission of culture can only be done through language, we observe that most of our High School students are in support of foreign culture, hence their preference of foreign language. This can be regarded as near- language-shift. The implication of this is that if the situation is not arrested on time, there will be complete language shift.

Tadopede (2010) observes, in his research that language shift is commonly found among educated elite. It starts with code-mixing and gradually grows into avoidance of the mother tongue. The moment this happens, the culture is not reckoned with. Therefore, there is the need to balance the use of both indigenous and foreign languages in our High Schools. Failure to do this will result to what Tadopede (2010) refers to as linguistic alienation where students are lost in their mother tongue yet they cannot speak the foreign language smoothly. This is what Enuesike (1994) and Ngugi Wa Thongo (2009) described as linguistic genocide.

Recommendations

1. Parent should uphold the use of their indigenous language so that their children can have interest in it.
2. Government at all tiers should encourage the use of indigenous languages in the day-to-day running of their affairs.
3. Ministry of Education should direct curriculum planners to give equal time to the indigenous languages teaching of English and indigenous languages.
4. Seminars should be organized on the importance of indigenous languages and culture.
5. Government at all tiers should encourage interested learners of indigenous languages by giving them scholarships.
6. The electronic media should do more in the area of promoting indigenous languages and cultural practices that could arouse the interest of the younger ones toward our indigenous cultures.

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