

THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE IN THE PROMOTION OF CULTURE AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Ayibo Philemon

Department of Philosophy
Pope John Paul II Catholic University, Lublin, Poland
philemonayibo@yahoo.com: +48739509723
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Abstract

This paper deals with the unique connection that exists between culture and language as essential properties of social/rational beings. It is a critical appraisal of the social importance of language in the self-actualization of human beings and cultural/national development. The overreaching goal of this paper is to demonstrate not only how language serves as an indispensable tool for comprehending reality but also as a fundamental instrument for expressing, conveying, and preserving shared cultural traditional values, beliefs, and customs. The aim of this paper is to propose from the philosophical point view, solutions to the problem of the use of language and the clash of cultures in modern civilizations. It is hoped that this work would stimulate and promote a deeper appreciation of the value of language and culture and as well as promote respect and high regard for the culture/language of others.

Keywords: Culture, Language, Humanity, Racism, Society, Values

Introduction

Philosophy treats culture and language as great windows through which we can look into the mystery of humanity. The topic on the interaction between language and culture has taken the center stage of many recent contemporary philosophical debates. This relation between language and culture is often given substance by the analysis of professional philosophers, sociologists, cultural, theological, and philosophical anthropologists. The history of philosophical reflections about culture and language is as old as philosophy itself. The problem of culture and language has a long, complex and parlous history; no generation overlooks it. It is commonly agreed among the Western philosophers that from ancient Greece to the modern era, philosophy has been at the basis of culture and language.

The treatises of the Greeks (Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics, etc.,) and the writings of Augustine of Hippo, Boethius, Thomas Aquinas, Ockham, Locke, Berkeley,

Leibniz, Herder, and Humboldt, were not only essentially and prevalently of a philosophical character, but also embraced scientific elements.¹ In the *Cratylus* for instance, Plato explored the relationship between names and things and engaged in what today would be recognized as a philosophy of language. It seems also that Aristotle speaks of language for the first time, in any case before speaking of it in the *Organon*, in *De Anima*, and within this work itself in the part devoted to sensible knowledge: the sense of hearing and its object.²

Thus, the main thrust of this paper is to reflect on the beauty of culture and language and to launch the reader into a philosophical understanding of the meanings, role, and properties of culture and language. We also intend to demonstrate how culture, through the instrumentality of language which effectuates communication and actuates humans as a social/rational being. Our basic claim is that culture is an indispensable and inevitable tool that leads a human person to self-actualization, and a necessary tool for the transmission and preservation of culture and national development.

Further, we intend to examine some of the social problems that arise from the influence of culture and language. Many social ills and problems such as racism and discrimination, as we shall see in this essay, are situated within the problems of culture and philosophy of language. Hence, this essay focuses on the following very important questions. What is the essence of culture/language and their contributions to human development? How does language complement culture? What are the root cause of racial discrimination (racism) and ethnic/cultural or tribal discrimination (ethnicism)? How can racism and ethnicism be eradicated from society? What differentiates one culture/language from another? Do superior/inferior or good/bad cultures and languages exist? Is a universal (global) language/culture possible or it is simply a mirage? Our approach, strictly speaking, is of providing an understanding of the various aspects of language as a set of cultural practices, that is, as a system of communication that goes on between individuals of the same social group. This belongs to the scope of linguistic anthropology, "which is a new area of investigation"³. The field of

¹ Battista Mondin, *Philosophical Anthropology* Translated by Mirosław A Cizdyn, (Bangalore: Theological Publications, 1998), 30.

² Lamber U. Nwauzor, "The Specificity of Linguistic Anthropology in the Thought of Alessandro Duranti," *Zeszyty Naukowe KUL* 3, no. 243 (2018), 167-185.

³Lambert U. Nwauzor, *The Function of Language in the Actualization of the Social Nature of the Human Person in the Linguistic Anthropology of Alessandro Duranti* (Lublin: John Paul II Catholic University, 2017), 4.

linguistic anthropology as defined by Alessandro Duranti, “is the study of language as a cultural resource and speaking as cultural practice”.⁴

Clarification of Key Terms

We should begin our discussion properly on the role of language in the promotion of culture and national development by first of all clarifying the key concepts (culture and language). Stating clearly the context in which they are applied in this discourse will not only give us a vivid sense of direction but also save us from many ambiguities.

Culture

The word “culture” comes from the Latin verb *colere*, in which, according to Battista Mondin, three meanings and functions are concurrently implied (elitarian, pedagogical or educational, and anthropological). In the first meaning, culture refers to a great quantity of knowledge, either in general or in some particular sectors.⁵ In this sense, culture is used with bodies of knowledge of different kinds. For example, someone can be said to have a vast scientific/academic, philosophical, artistic, literary culture, or can be simply said to be cultured in any of the aforementioned bodies of knowledge.

The second is the (pedagogical) function, education, or the cultivation and formation of gifts or natural faculties in the physical-technical sense. This is the process in which a person from birth to adulthood comes to the full realization and maturation of his/her personality. According to Lombo and Russo: “The prevalent idea here is that of formation received from educators and of self-formation. Hence, when we speak of a cultured man, we mean a man formed or conformed to an image or model of the human person (thus, a man may be fully developed from the physical or natural point of view but maybe uncultured from his spiritual formation)”⁶

The third meaning and function (anthropological) of culture signifies the social life of human beings. It encompasses the totality of customs, techniques, and values

⁴ Alessandro Duranti, *Linguistic Anthropology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 1.

⁵ Mondin, *Philosophical Anthropology*, 145.

⁶ Angel J. Lombo and Francesco Russo, *Philosophical Anthropology: An Introduction* (Illinois: Midwest Theological Forum Downers Grove, 2017), 260-261.

that distinguish a particular social group, a tribe, a people, a nation, from another.⁷ This is the common and arguably the most comprehensive definition of culture that sees culture as the total way of life of a people. This totality includes their shared traditional or cultural beliefs and customs which defines the entire identity of the community. This can be depicted in their arts, music, and other cultural beliefs and practices regarding life, death, marriage, religious belief, forms of worship, and a gamut of others.

Our interest is in the last two meanings of culture, particularly the third one. The two are closely related to each other; sometimes, they are used synonymously. Our goal is to examine how language can express and promote the growth and development of culture as well as the society within which this culture is practiced. From what we have said so far, it becomes clear that culture, strictly speaking, is an attribute proper only to human beings, and that it is a very broad concept that cannot be reduced only to the scope of learning, education, or academic qualification.

According to Lombo and Russo: "What culture does is to establish an intimate relationship between the bodily sphere and the spiritual sphere, between what is shared and what is individual, between what is universal and what is personal. The cultured individual, on the one hand, conforms to universal human traits and, on the other, is individually unique. Culture, understood in this sense, is not achieved by merely applying a technique (didactic, pedagogic, mnemonic) or by transmitting a body of knowledge".⁸ To this view, the main goal of culture, therefore, becomes the ultimate realization of the individual in all his/her dimensions and capacities. Mondin expresses this point in a more profound way when he says that "the objective of culture- in the anthropological sense -has always been that of making a person, a fully developed spirit, able to bring to the complete and perfect realization that project which providence has consigned to him".⁹

⁷ Mondin, *Philosophical Anthropology*, 146.

⁸ Lombo and Russo, *Philosophical Anthropology*, 261.

⁹ Mondin, *Philosophical Anthropology*, 148.

Language

Language is generally defined as “a set of arbitrary symbols by which users in a particular society communicate”.¹⁰ Beyond the level of being a set of arbitrary symbols (vocal/written), language is also a body of arbitrary signs (vocal or applied) by which we communicate. That is why we talk of the sign language for the dumb and deaf, and with signs, we beckon on the audience for one thing or the other, and further use a lot more bodily actions for other things in the realm of effective communication without as much as uttering a word.¹¹

In another context, language is said to be arbitrary because there is nothing intrinsic in the object or thing we talk about that indicates or stipulates or controls the language we use to talk about it. Instead, language is a body of filtered labels that enable members of a particular society in which native language is used to communicate effectively. These bodies of language labels differ from one native group to another or from one body of knowledge to another.¹² Things or objects in themselves do not have inherent names; it is the human being that names them through the instrumentality of language. This diversity is what gives the language a conventional character. Hence, the effectiveness of language rests on an unspoken agreement among users that certain definite labels will be used in certain definite ways to ensure effectiveness in the language. There is sometimes some mystery behind the origin, nature, and function of human language.

According to Mondin, "Language is by definition that activity with which man, through vocal or written signs, puts himself in communication with his peers (or with some other intelligent being, for instance, God) to express his sentiments, desires, or knowledge. Language is an exquisitely human activity".¹³ Language is strictly speaking, proper only to human beings. According to Noam Chomsky as cited in Ike: "Language is the 'essence of man', the distinctive qualities of the mind that are unique to man, the quintessence of man".¹⁴ It is this special property of language that distinguishes human beings from other animals. Language is a source of power because it enables people to acquire and express knowledge. And

¹⁰ Ike Ndubisi, *Language and National Development: The Nigeria Experience* (Abuja: Wilbest Educational Publishers, 1998), 1.

¹¹ Ndubisi, *Language and National Development*, 1.

¹² *Ibid.*,

¹³ Mondin, *Philosophical Anthropology*, 133-4.

¹⁴ Ndubisi, *Language and National Development*, 4.

knowledge is equally said to be power according to Francis Bacon who taught that it is through knowledge of nature that human beings will conquer it.¹⁵

Mondin explains how language is proper to humanity by demonstrating that there exists at the animal level, a form of language which is very elementary and yet to be articulated. Unlike the human language which is systematic, developed with an extremely complicated fabric of articulated sounds, that form the various tongues like German, Italian, French, English, Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo Swahili, Polish, English, Russian, Chinese, etc., elementary or 'animal language' consists of merely very small signs that enable animals of a particular species to meet their fundamental needs.¹⁶ Language is for human beings a vehicle for self-actualization, for expression/communication, and the development and preservation of one's cultural community.

There exists an important distinction between language and tongue. Language denotes the function, that universal capacity with which people, unlike animals, are naturally gifted to express themselves and to communicate with their peers through the word. "This is an innate capacity which comes to all men, in the same way, irrespective of their culture, race, or nation. It is a universal gift to man by his nature as a rational being".¹⁷ The tongue, instead, "is a determined system of linguistic signs and devised by a particular social group to make communication possible among the members of that social group".¹⁸ The conventional character of language demands that it must be meaningful. During communication, the language used by the speaker to convey a message must be understood by his/her audience or listener. To speak to someone in a language that they do not understand is nothing but a linguistic absurdity.

From the above distinction between language and tongue, we notice that the difference lies in the fact that language is of universal dimension while the tongue is of a conventional character. Language, unlike the tongue, can be said to be natural and not artificial or invented by human beings. It is inherent in human nature and intrinsic to being. Language does not suffice to have a culture because it is of the generic base which is common to human beings. According to Mondin, "More than bound to the knowledge of things, language is bound to the freedom

¹⁵ Stephen Gaukroger, *Francis Bacon and the Transformation of Early-Modern Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 121.

¹⁶ Mondin, *Philosophical Anthropology*, 134.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 151

¹⁸ *Ibid.*,

of men. It is human; it owes its origin and its progress to our freedom. Language is our history, our heredity".¹⁹

The tongue in contrast is 'artificially' invented by people of a social group to suit their purpose. It is not an individual who creates the tongue but a creation of the entire social group: it is a work of art of the group as a group, and it reveals the personality and the unique values of that group as distinct from other groups. The social group reflects itself in both the material (sounds or the printed word and arts) and the spiritual/semantic (meanings) aspects of the tongue. It necessarily belongs to a culture and it is exactly the tongue that constitutes the primary fundamental element of culture. Where there is not a language, there can be no society. People can't live together without a tongue that binds them together in communication with one another. Without a tongue, a culture cannot develop. The tongue, therefore, becomes the prime element that makes the individual go beyond him/herself and put him/herself in communication with others.²⁰

From this analysis, the tongue becomes not only the carrier element of a culture but also becomes the first condition and primary requirement for the existence of a society. Through an accurate analysis of the daily use of the tongue of a social group, its culture comes to light. This distinction between language and tongue is in principle very clear, but sometimes in practice, people use the terms interchangeably, and more often language is used for the tongue. For this work, we shall apply the use of language even in places where the tongue should be used, without distorting the meaning of what is said.

Among the three principal (descriptive, communicative, and expressive) functions of language, the communicative is recognized by everyone as meeting the main function of language. Language is essentially said to be that instrument with which a human being serves themselves and communicates with their peers. Following the thought pattern of the personalist philosophers, Mondin gives the communication a strong sense by seeing communication as intrinsic to a person as an intersubjective being.²¹ To this view, a person is seen as a being that is not separated from the rest of the world but instead in dialogue with it and as an open being who realizes him/herself in communication and relationship with others.²²

¹⁹ Ibid., 152

²⁰ Ibid., 151

²¹ Ibid., 136

²² Ibid.

Language as an Instrument for Cultural and National development

Cultural development

It is very necessary for us here to buttress and reiterate the point that language as an element spoken by a social community plays a vital role in the transmission of cultural systems. First of all, language and culture are similar in the sense that they have the same goal of leading people to the proper actualization of themselves and the understanding of realities surrounding their immediate environment about the ultimate purpose and meaning of life. This sameness in goal reveals the strong connection that exists between language and culture.

Regarding the dynamic nature of language, Lambert expresses language to be “the most dynamic or adjustable and powerful cultural and intellectual tool that has been constructed by human beings. In its function, it reflects on the world as it reflects upon itself. Language can be used to talk about language. Language allows its speakers to communicate very clearly and distinctly what is being done with words in everyday life; otherwise, there would not be any written or spoken account of something that has been observed”.²³

As a language, culture is dynamic. Scholars remind us that cultural traditions and practices are not static or fixed but that cultural traditions and practices elsewhere are subject to adjustment, they change with novel circumstances and challenges. Female genital excision in Africa, for example, is a case in point. Although this form of circumcision (which involves painful clitoral mutilation, with no obvious personal and hygienic benefits) is still practiced in certain regions on the African continent, it has been outlawed in a vast number of African countries. While other customs such as virginity testing and male circumcision remain very popular, many urbanized and progressive Africans now view them as outdated and indeed immoral, stating that they constitute a violation of individuals' dignity and psychological and bodily integrity, and they ought, therefore, to be abolished.²⁴

Besides the function of language as a medium of social interaction, it gives identity to people of particular cultural groups. Language becomes a screen board for identifying a particular cultural group. Language is a powerful force behind the pluralistic nature of human culture and society. Almost all the cultural groups that

²³ Nwauzor, *The Specificity of Linguistic Anthropology*, 174.

²⁴ Horsthemke Kai, *Animals and African Ethics* (Uk: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 1.

exist are named and identified under the umbrella of the language that is spoken among themselves. This cultural character trait of language is traceable in most cultures of the world. Italians for example speak their Italian language, the Polish people speak the Polish language, the Germans speak the German language, and the French people speak the French language, to mention but a few.

No tribe has ever been found without a language that is peculiar to it. A cultural group can't exist without a language. Communication is what in general creates and maintains the social bond that unites people of a cultural group. This expresses the conventional nature of language in the sense that it is peculiar to particular people. The first prerequisite for understanding or penetrating the culture of a people is through learning the language. Even children that are born in a different culture must begin by learning the language of that social setting before they can adopt the values of that society. Language does not exist apart from the people.

The African continent is a typical example of a society that perfectly expresses this conventional character of the language. In African society, we see a beautiful image of the vast linguistic, tribal, and ethnic diversity. On the African continent alone, approximately one-third of all human languages are spoken. At least 1500 different languages are spoken in Africa, with a corresponding tribal and ethnic diversity. While some of these languages are spoken and understood across national borders, every African state is host to at least a few but often a large number of different languages that are not spoken and understood by all of its citizens.²⁵

Coming down to Nigeria, the most populous country in Africa, we see a very rich cultural diversity of over 250 ethnic groups. In Nigeria, three groups stand out as being the country's largest and most influential. The first of these groups is the Yoruba, located mostly in the southwestern part of the country around Lagos. The second is the Hausa, located mainly in the north. The third large ethnic group is the Igbo, who are dominant in the southeast. Other ethnic groups abound in Nigeria but are much smaller and less influential than the three primary groups. Some of the other ethnic groups are the Edo located in the west, the Ibibio and Ijaw located in the east, and the Fulani, Kanuri, Nupe, and Tiv located mainly in the North. Because of the diverse cultures, varieties in language also are great. Nearly

²⁵ Kai, *Animal and African Ethics*, 15.

250 distinctly different linguistic groups are found within the country.²⁶ Nearly all the cultural groups in Nigeria are named after the language that is spoken by their members. For example, the three major tribal groups are named after their languages. The Yorubas speak the Yoruba language, the Hausas speak Hausa language and the Igbos speak the Igbo language.

One of the difficult things to do to someone is to attempt to undo them of their cultural formation and language. These are the two elements that accompany an individual even when they move away from their original cultural setting to another one. Language is so much part of a human being to the level that it becomes almost inseparable from their nature. However, the easiest way to attempt to stripe someone naked of their culture is to deprive them of access to the language of their culture. This is the technique that most colonialists adopted in their colonization activities. The strategy of imposing another's culture or language on someone of a different culture is automatically a step towards initiating the person into a culture that is not their own.

Western colonialists imposed their language and cultural values on Africans. They dominated the African cultural values by imposing theirs upon them. They made Africans believe their western culture and its values were superior to African culture which they described as inferior/evil. They created a false impression that the black race is inferior to the white race. They associated the black skin and anything black with evil and misfortune. Ugly events such as death, accidents, and natural disasters were tagged as black. For instance, a Saturday in which someone dies is described as black, meaning 'evil Saturday'. The images of the devil even in religious art is always that of a black man with black horns, with a very angry face and with dirty teeth, while the angels are depicted as white, beautifully adorned and decorated. An average black African has been hypnotized to see and associate anything black with evil including his/her black skin. It is this kind of mentality that has pushed many African women into using bleaching creams to tone their skin to look more like white people

A lot of false and derogatory literature, written long ago it is true, by many western scholars including Hegel, depict Africans as sub-humans (without a soul) and lacking rationality. Hegel's dialectic project, which was based on a cultural framework upon which he constructed a philosophy of history, excludes Africa

²⁶ Phillips A. Douglas, *Modern World Nations: Nigeria* (USA: Chelsea House Publishers, 2004), 65-66.

from the scheme of things and the universal history of the world. From Hegel's perspective, Africa is said to be unhistorical, an undeveloped spirit– still involved in the conditions of mere nature; devoid of morality, religions, and political constitution.²⁷ Similarly, in a more modern qualitative research, titled: '*Morality in Africa: Yesterday and today. The Reasons for the Contemporary Crisis*', Van der Walt embarked on a conceptual analysis of the reasons for moral decadence in Africa. In his analysis, he claims that African ethics is intrinsically weak because it is shame-oriented as against the strong western ethics which is guilt-oriented. He bluntly describes Africans as lacking the sense of morality, truth, and justice.²⁸

These and many more of these types of racist ideas have gone into records and have been documented for future generations to read, assimilate and hence live on prejudices that have been inherited from the past generations. No one can deny the historical fact that many African native societies were subjected to colonial oppression and exploitation by the various countries of Western Europe. Some scholars have noted that before the advent of Western culture and civilization, Africans had a certain set of values, which served as the standard of judging what is good or evil, worthy of praise or blame, respect or dishonor, and achievement or collapse. Our contact with the western and secular values which were transmitted through the means of an imposed foreign language destroyed our treasured values. According to Kwame, the cultural life of most black Africans remained largely unaffected by European ideas until the last years of the nineteenth century when they came in direct contact with Europe.²⁹

Oliver and Atmore asserted that this colonial encounter was "blasting destruction of African traditional cultures and establishments. It was an interlude which radically changed the direction and the momentum of African history".³⁰ Similarly, Mbefo states: "Contact with western education especially with its scientific explanation has banished mystery and sacrality from the peoples' consciousness. In its place, there is a new mentality, namely, the one who does not dare does not win. A society built on this new foundation has no respect for tradition and the

²⁷Ronald Kuykendall, "Hegel and Africa: An Evaluation of the Treatment of Africa in the Philosophy of History," *Journal of Black Studies* 23, no. 4(1993), 571-78.

²⁸ Van Der Walt J B "Morality in Africa: Yesterday and Today the reasons for the contemporary Crisis," *Die Skriflig* 37, no. 1(2003), 51-71.

²⁹ Appiah A. Kwame, *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 173.

³⁰ Roland A. Oliver and Anthony E. Atmore, *Africa Since 1800* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 270

customary authority of the pre-scientific culture".³¹ Western influence on African culture gave Africa a cultural shock and thereby making Africa lose her bearing and link. Many scholars have claimed that the scramble and partition of Africa, post-colonial hangovers, and the effects of secularism are among the factors responsible for the menace of corruption, cultural disintegration, and underdevelopment in most African states.

On a positive note, the Rhodesian Nationalist, Ndabaningi Sithole, generously acknowledged that colonialism had some positive impact on Africa: "It has given Africa a new vigorous industrial pattern, a new social consciousness, new insights, and visions. It has created a new environment. It has annihilated many tribal and linguistic barriers and divisions".³² Colonialism brought about the unity of language and effective communication among many African states. English and French languages have become official means of communication in most African states and these languages have enabled them to connect and interact easily with the rest of the world. So too, Arabic has done in some of the predominantly Muslim countries of North Africa.

Contrary to the above view, Walter Rodney, in his book *'How Europe Underdeveloped Africa,'* denies that Europe ever contributed positively to the development of Africa in any way. He argues strongly that colonialism and the international capitalist system have been the principal agencies for the underdevelopment of Africa over the last five centuries. In his words: "It appeals to the common sentiment that 'after all, there must be two sides to a thing'. The argument suggests that, on the one hand, there was exploitation and oppression, but, on the other hand, colonial governments did much for the benefit of Africans and they developed Africa. We contend that this is completely false. Colonialism had only one hand – it was a one-armed bandit."³³

National development

Language plays a special role in national development. Through its instrumentality, the members of the community can communicate effectively concerning the state of affairs of their nation. They can plan together on effective ways with which they harness the natural resources of their nation for the growth and development of everyone. In his appraisal of the role of native languages, Kola

³¹Luke N. Mbefo (1996). *Coping with Nigeria's two-fold heritage*, (Onitsha Spiritan Publications, 1996), 60,

³² Oliver and Atmore, *African since 1800*, 270.

³³Rodney Walter, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (London: Bogle-L'Ouverture Publications, 1973), 321.

Owolabi using Nigeria as a point of reference asserts that "the use of Nigerian native languages, particularly in specialized domains, is a *sine qua non* for national development".³⁴ He says also, "that rapid and technological, political, social and economic empowerment of the vast majority of Nigerians is necessary to enable them to 'utilize scientific and technological knowledge in creating wealth, self-reliance of and equality of life' and to contribute meaningfully to national development, can only be possible through the media of their native languages but not through imposed foreign languages such as French and English".³⁵

Some scholars have shown deep concern about the effectiveness of English, French, and other foreign languages which have become the lingua franca of most African states. Many scholars have asked whether these languages are relevant for the national and cultural development of those countries in which they are spoken as imposed official languages. One of such special and cynical views is expressed by Mabel Osakwe Using English in Nigeria as a point of reference, Osakwe opines: "English has hindered genuine nationalistic concerns and social-cultural integration on the grounds of efficiency in administration and science and technology".³⁶ Mabel rightly argues that foreign languages should primarily be windows on Africa and not the other way round because no nation has had a breakthrough through the instrumentality of an alien language.³⁷ A foreign-adopted language/culture can never be as effective in function as the original language of a social group. It cannot take the first place because each language as we have mentioned earlier is fashioned based on the values and customs of its native speakers and not of another group.

Ultimately, language means more than just an act of linguistic communication that aids in cultivating, transmitting, conveying, and preserving culture and its shared traditions, values, beliefs, and customs. It goes beyond to serve as a medium for understanding individual intentions and temperaments within the family or society. Certain words and expressions go deep to demonstrate one's situation and feelings. Language has a value that goes beyond certain words and utterances. For example, when someone commits an offense and apologizes, they say "I am sorry" to the one or the authority they have offended. The act of seeking pardon expresses

³⁴ Owolabi Kola, Nigeria's *Native Language Modernization in Specialized Domains for National Development: A Linguistic Approach* (Ibadan: MaiiJoe Soft Print, 2006), 3.

³⁵ Ibid.,

³⁶ Mabel I. Osakwe, "Growing English and National Growth: The Nigerian Experience," *Abraka Humanities Review* 1, no. 1(2005), 13-26.

³⁷ Ibid.,

their interior sense of guilt and regret the wrong committed and possibly their desire for restoration. Most words in a language are loaded with meaning that serves both the communal and individual purposes. Thus, language or communication essentially involves the expression of the true attitude or intention of the speaker. Any attempt to do the contrary may lead to deception and lying. In this sense, a truth which is the essence of language is lost.

The Possibility of a Universal Language and Cultural system

The answer to the question of the possibility of a universal culture and language is contextual. There are certain attributes of both culture and language that can be said to be universal or common to all humans. Although culture has been defined as the total way of a people, and language as a systematic means of communication among a particular social group, there are elements of culture and language that portray some universal elements in them.

Ironically, the same language, which is said to be conventional, seems to give a universal feature to culture. Some people and nations speak the same tongue, for example, the British, English Canadians, Irish, Americans, Australians, etc., all speak English but possess different cultures. Many people insinuate that shortly, English will become a universal language of all humans. This is to say that merely speaking the same language does not guarantee the universality of a culture from the objective point of view.³⁸ Culture goes deeper than just language, it must be accompanied by customs, beliefs, and other specific traditional values that are peculiar to a given social group. In society, there are customs with regards to everything: food, clothing, education of children and moral formation, care of the sick and the aged, sexual initiations and marriage, festivals, religious practices and beliefs, social, political, and economic norms as well.³⁹ These elements exist in every culture but they are treated differently according to the traditions of each group. But, it suffices to say here that human experience and needs are universal elements in every culture.

Humanity and human nature are one and universal. Cultural life is not discussed in isolation or about animals and trees but human phenomena. To this effect, culture, like other human phenomena, springs from seemingly simple questions that surround the meaning of human existence and experience. All cultures are

³⁸ Mondin, *Philosophical Anthropology*, 151.

³⁹ Lombo and Russo, *Philosophical Anthropology*, 261.

built on those universal human aspirations, wonders, quests, and yearnings that bother on the questions such as: What makes honest actions right and dishonest ones wrong? Why is death a bad thing for the person who dies? Is there anything more to happiness than pleasure and freedom from pain? Who is a human person? What is their origin, purpose, and end? These are questions that naturally occur in the course of our lives, just as they naturally occurred in the lives of people who lived before us and in societies with different cultures and technologies from ours. They seem simple, yet they are ultimately perplexing. Every sensible answer one tries to give proves unsatisfactory upon reflection. Most cultures are structured toward arriving at the solutions to the depths of these problems. A universal culture, therefore, must be the one that reflects on corporate human existence and experience and the human quest for meaning and purpose in life.

Regarding the universality of language, Rene Descartes, the founder of modern philosophy believed in the existence of a universal language as the basis of diverse languages that human communities use. This is seen by Chomsky Noam as a precursor of the theory of innateness of linguistic capacities which is inherent in all human beings. The inherent capacity in each human to invent, speak, and understand a language is seen by Chomsky as a universal language.⁴⁰

In the reality of culture and language, we come to see how universal truths can be diffused into particular societies through the instrumentality of language. History shows that there have been societies that attributed considerable importance to the value of courage in war, respect for the divinity, burial customs, and so on, all the way down to modern societies in which the values of well-being and health seem to predominate (one sign of which, among others, is the proliferation of magazines and television programs dedicated to this subject).⁴¹

Superior versus Inferior Cultural Systems

Diversity is a beautiful and a good thing, as expressed in the popular adage "Diversity is the spice of life". The tendency has been to conceive diversity as inequality and sometimes as evil. I think this is where the problem of cultural clashes begins when one social group begins to feel that its cultural values are superior to that of others. This breeds the notion of the existence of superior versus inferior culture. It is this cultural misconception that brings cultural segregations

⁴⁰ Chomsky Noam, *Reflections on Language* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1975), 4.

⁴¹ Lombo and Russo, *Philosophical Anthropology*, 267.

of all kinds, cultural crises that lead to intercultural wars and violence. History provides us with a long record of intercultural/ inter-tribal and racial wars. To date, a lot of wars and violence around the globe are caused by cultural factors. Three of Nigerian scholars, Akeju, Ayedero and Fasoro have strongly argued that “crises or wars pervading the world are products of culture”.⁴² What is the root of the social ills of racial and cultural discrimination? I cannot pretend to know for certain the real answer to this important question. But I think the kernel of it all is that such cultural and social ills like racism and ethnic (ethnicism) discrimination arise from the same psyche, namely, the lack of appreciation of another culture that is not yours. One imagines that one’s culture or language is better than the other one and so begins to act with disdain towards it.

Good versus Bad Cultural Systems

The question of the existence of a bad or good cultural system is a subject of valuation and moral judgment. But who authenticates and determines the validity of a particular culture as either good or bad? Who can say if a culture is good or evil? Do there exist absolute criteria to formulate a judgment of this type? Who determines or justifies the legitimacy of polygamy over monogamy? According to Mondin, anthropologists find it difficult to respond to questions of this moral value. Instead, philosophers and moral theologians have attempted to answer these questions based on natural ethics and revealed word respectively.

The criterion for determining a good from a bad, or lesser good, culture lies in the fact that culture is humanity on a large scale. Thus, the measure that should be used to judge the validity of a culture should be analogous to the measure with which the individual being is judged. Therefore, “the culture of a society is good or evil, ethically, according to how it favors or obstructs the interior spiritual growth of its members”.⁴³ By implication, any culture that does not improve the human person positively is bad. What is judged here as improving the human person is culture, which brings an individual to the truth of ultimate realities about him/herself, the world, and the divine. Culture should make human life worth living by providing each person with a sense of meaning and purpose.

Conclusion

⁴² Oluwadare A.Akeju, Taiwo M. Ayedero and Joseph O.Fasoro, “Philosophy and Culture as Quest for Global Peace,” *International Journal of Philosophy* 7, no. 4 (2019), 151-159.

⁴³ Mondin, *Philosophical Anthropology*, 171.

This study has thus far brought us to the forefront of the staring fact that due to individual freedom, the human being's existence in the world is never merely spontaneous or natural but always cultural. A person freely orients their existence concerning specific values and not just as a univocal response to their vital instincts. The fundamental elements that constitute and transmit culture include language, customs, and values. Having examined the unbreakable connection that exists between language and culture and how language influences the growth and preservation of that culture, we assert that, despite the problems and challenges involved in this relationship between culture and language, they remain necessities for the development of the human person and his/her society. Hence, every value that promotes the dignity of culture and language must be respected and preserved at all costs by every society. Values of self-respect and respect for the dignity of the human person and his/her culture must be taken with utmost seriousness. Cultural diversity must be viewed as a beautiful ground for healthy human co-existence and not as machinery for division and disunity.

To arrive at a comprehensive understanding of the culture that leads to harmonious human existence, scholars must adopt a methodology that brings about the mutual appreciation of cultural differences. No culture is perfect. Every culture has something to offer just as every culture needs something outside of itself. Tosam has argued that “Western culture has a lot to learn from African indigenous cultures, if she can be open and tolerant as other cultures have been to Western culture because every culture is a borrower and lender”⁴⁴ The existence of divergent moral views and cultural orientations should be seen as avenues for discovering the complex nature of the human person. This would also lead to the development and well-being of the human being and society.

Akeju, Ayedero and Fasoro have argued and proposed that systematic analysis of philosophy and culture could be used as theoretical and critical tools for the realization of global peace. They are of the view that the crises being witnessed in the world can be alleviated if there is a concerted examination and understanding of philosophy and culture since crises or wars pervading the world are products of culture. Hence, the praxis of enhancing global peace needs the theoretical and systemic examination of culture and philosophy.⁴⁵ The above proposal must be

⁴⁴ Jerome M. Tosam, “The Relevance of Kom Ethics to African Development,” *International Journal of Philosophy* 2, no. (2014), 36-47 doi: 10.11648/j.ijp.20140203.12 Accessed 27/11/2019

⁴⁵ Akeju, Ayedero, and Fasoro, *Philosophy and Culture*, 151-159.

taken as a serious task by contemporary philosophers if they wish to combat and alleviate the global wars that are caused by cultural and racial factors. It is a responsibility to promote cultural dialogue and harmony.

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