

ENGLISH LANGUAGE: AN IMPERATIVE TOOL FOR ETHNO-LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL UNITY IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

With her more than one hundred and fifty million people, Nigeria is not only densely populated but equally ethnolinguistically and multiculturally diverse in nature. Before the arrival of the British colonialists, Nigeria used to be an homogeneous entity with various indigenous or local languages. The unification of these various entities in 1914 by the British government brought Nigeria together as an homogeneous entity with the name called "Nigeria" having two broad divisions, tagged the Northern and Southern protectorates. The two protectorates were also dominated by three major indigenous languages -Hausa in the North while Igbo and Yoruba were in the Eastern and Western parts of the Southern protectorate respectively. These three major indigenous languages notwithstanding, there are at the moment, more than two hundred and fifty local or indigenous languages spoken all over the nation with their different cultures. Nigeria is being united through the adoption and use of the English language which the European colonialists imposed on her and her people. Since the imposition of this 'foreign' or 'alien' language, Nigerians have been using English in diverse ways. It is not only used for communication, education and governance, English, has by far, been the most important tool for unifying Nigerians who come from different socio-cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Today, Nigeria has been able to stand as a nation through the use of English. This paper therefore views English not only as a common and most widely spoken language in Nigeria but also an effective tool used by a non-sectarian Nigerian people to foster unity in their linguistic and cultural diversities, thus making English a 'sine-qua-non' for national development.

Keywords: Ethnolinguistic, multicultural, English language, indigenous languages, unity.

Introduction: The Birth of Nigeria

As recorded by Crowther in his book, *The Story of Nigeria* (reprinted 2010), Nigeria was the creation of European ambitions and rivalries in West Africa with France, Germany and other Western colonialists. The country contained not just a multiplicity of pagan tribes but also a number of great kingdoms that had evolved complex systems of government independent of contact with Europe. The great kingdoms included Kanem-Bornu, with a known history of more than a thousand years, the Fulani Empire which ruled the savannah of Northern Nigeria; the kingdoms of Ife and Benin, whose art had become recognized as among the most accomplished in the world; the Yoruba Empire of Oyo, which had once been the most powerful of the states of the Guinea Coast; the city states of the Niger Delta, which had grown in response to European demands for slaves and later palm-oil; as well as the politically decentralized but culturally homogeneous Ibo peoples of the Eastern region and the small tribes of the Plateau. The above tribal and ethnic heterogeneous entities remained so until the arrival of the European colonialists on the shores of West Africa.

Nigeria came into being in its present form in 1914 when the two protectorates of Northern and Southern Nigeria were amalgamated by Sir Frederick Lugard. History had it that sixteen years earlier, Flora Shaw, who later married Lugard, first suggested in an article for **The Times** that the several British Protectorates on the Niger be known collectively as Nigeria, hence, the name 'Nigeria'. Corroborating the above historical record, Ajayi (1964) had presented the Nigerian states especially the period between 1906 and 1912 which preceded the amalgamation as very crucial in the history of Nigeria, for it marked both the beginning of effective administration and the beginning of the rejection of standards and customs that had endured almost intact for many centuries. It was that period, Ajayi asserted, that Nigerians were subjected in large measure to Western influences. It was the period when new economic world was opened to Nigerians while Christianity as the official doctrine of the colonial masters also began to spread through the pagan areas of both Southern and Northern Nigeria. New forms of administration and justice were introduced and education in the Western way of life was made available to a wide range of Nigerians as a result of the spread of Christian mission.

It should however be noted that any country is, in a sense, an artificial creation as Crowther (2010) says;

...In the case of Nigeria, the union was so sudden, and included such widely differing groups of peoples that not only the British, who created it, but the inhabitants themselves have often doubted whether it could survive as a political entity. Fortunately on 1st October, 1960, despite many difficulties that impeded progress towards independence, as well as the differences among its various component groups, Nigeria became a sovereign nation....

Nigeria's borders are contiguous with Benin Republic to the west, Niger Republic to the North and the Federal Republic of Cameroon to the east. Today, Nigeria is divided into six geo-political zones-the North-East, North-West, North-Central, South-East, South-South and South-West respectively. As noted by Crowther, the story of Nigeria, as it is known today, goes back to more than two thousand years. Much of the earlier history of its peoples is contained in myths and legend except in the North, where the Kanuri and Hausa came into contact with the Arabs, that appears to be any written records before the nineteenth century.

In rounding off this historic antecedent, it is pertinent to note without any prejudice that Western economic forces contributed very immensely to the unity of the arbitrary block that is modern Nigeria. The various ethnic groups comprised within its frontiers, have necessarily become more and more dependent on each other as the economy has expanded. Superficially however, unity was given to the new Nigeria by the establishment of the British administration. The unity became unabated till 1960 when Nigeria got its independence.

Language: Origin, Concept and functions

Origin of Language

The origin of language goes beyond mere rhetorics as there are divergent views on it. However, the Bible (Christian Holy Book) in Genesis chapter six, is an intriguing tale that explains the origin of language and language diversity, popularly known as the Tower of Babel story. As the King James version of the Bible puts it, "the whole earth was of one language and of one speech" (Gen. 11:1) but pride filled the heart of men and they were misled into trying to build a city and a tower whose top may reach unto heaven (Gen. 11:9). There and then God cursed them, thus making them speak differently from their initial one language. This story, which one finds difficult to accept hook, line and sinker, may answer the question that thoughtful men and women must have asked everywhere: why is it that all people have different languages? Viewed from the perspective of Lyons (2003:15), the suggestion

that languages might have developed at some point in the evolution of the species, out of a gestural rather than a vocal system of communication, might after all, not be discarded with a wave of the hand. This is based on the fact that all animals communicate through various means, except in the case of man, who is higher than other animals and whose means of communication include speech activities and gestures. This may be the reason for him to conclude that "language did evolve from non - language", which include gestures, signs and para-linguistic activities.

Deviating from Lyon's view is Bickerton's (1981, 1984) Bioprogramme Hypothesis, whose proposition is based on the assumption that man's biological organs as well as his faculty of speech are responsible for language acquisition. Chomsky (1988) whose Innate Hypothesis proposes that language is acquired through man's mental capacity or faculty of speech, corroborates Bickerton's.

From all the above theories, one can without dissipating much energy on trying to unravel the "language evolution mystery", agree with Osoba's (2006:5) view that:

...The framework for language acquisition is the mind as well as the faculty of speech. It is upon this that the building blocks of language, provided by the environment and variable in nature, are laid. It is this framework that one can consider as a pointer to the origin of human language. This special or unique capacity of man to adapt his biological organs for speech production arises out of his inherent traits or attributes such as ability to organize himself and his society as well as his creativity, ingenuity and inventiveness.

It may not totally be out of place to state here that man's quest for the origin of language would be tantamount to a quest for the origin of mankind, it is therefore better to leave it as anything but "**mystery**".

Concept of Language

Odeseye (2001:14) citing Whatmough (1970) defines language as a form of systematic symbolism, a grouping of characters, which are arbitrarily chosen, set by agreement or convention to signify meaning for the purpose of communication. From the foregoing, language is seen as a medium of expression which is very vital in the day-to-day occurrence of human endeavour. Hardly can any normal human being communicate without the use of language, which is used as a method of speech delivery. Language

serves as a means of educating, praising, rebuking, singing as well as preaching. It is therefore imperative that language should be properly understood to bring about peace and harmony in a community where it is used for the overall co-operation of the inhabitants on their economic, political, social and active development of the areas, which they find themselves.

Language is essentially a means of communication among people. It is a vehicle for transmitting meaning, through listening and reading. A person can acquire meaning expressed by others and through speaking and writing, he can convey it to others. Though meaning is conveyed by words, meanings are not in words themselves (Dallman, Bruch, Chan and Deboer (2006). Language is thus at the centre of all human activities because all activities, be it in science, arts, vocational or technical, etc., utilize language as a vehicle of understanding. By extension therefore, language can be said to be an indispensable tool for measuring human intelligence.

The World Book Dictionary (1988:95) defines language as “the speech used by one nation, tribe, other similar large group of people and their expression of thoughts and feelings”. And according to the **New Lexion Dictionary**, the word “language (*Ilugah*) may be loosely used to mean any system of communication. It comes from the latin word “lingua” meaning “tongue”, and a language in all ramifications, is indeed the tongue of the speaker. The concept of language can therefore be summed up with an all-embracing definition of Bell (2012) He describes language as creative, symbolic, and that charged with well-defined functions as:

- (a) The acquisition of the speech habit of a community, that allows the individual become a full member of the society.
- (b) Language equips the individual with greater responsibilities of self-expression
- (c) It is a tool for exploration and analysis of one’s conceptual process
- (d) Language gives us some kind of access to the experience of others through writing, speaking or even, drawing
- (e) Language is man’s chief Instrument for social interaction.

Functions/Importance of Language

Fatokun (2001, p.4) citing Piaget, Vygosky and Brunner, states that “in the stages of intellectual development of man, language plays a very important role as no stage of intellectual development can be successfully attained without the proper language development”. Therefore, the proper development of the skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing is essential and goes a long way in assisting intelligible use of language. The psycholinguistic approach to the study of language stresses that language regulates human behavior. There is no person that is not affected by the way he uses language or the way language is used (Bolinger,-2008) Language permeates culture, education, commerce, politics, science, law and most, if not all aspects of human life.

Buttressing his view on the importance of language as a source of development, Fafunwa, cited in Ogunnaike (2016, p.159) explain thus:

It is our thesis that if a child is to be encouraged from the start to develop curiosity, manipulative ability, spontaneous flexibility, initiative, industry, manual dexterity, mechanical comprehension and the co-ordination of hand and eye, he should acquire these skills and attitudes through language (mother tongue) as the medium of education.

The importance and functions of a language in any society cannot be exhaustive, if we continue to highlight them. However, an important point to note about language is that it is human and this is why human beings are quite different from animals. The fact that man is able to communicate through language distinguishes him clearly from other living species. Language can therefore be regarded as one of the most important properties of humans that forms a communicative tool for the community.

To sum up these functions/importance of language, we submit that it is language that enables us express a worldview that is peculiar and unique to us in a special way and ultimately gives us identity. It is through language that culture is transmitted and shared. If we therefore lose our language, we are essentially losing a way of life, a way of thought, a way of valuing and a particular human reality. And in the words of Fishman, cited by Alaiyemola (2017:157) “If you take language away from culture, you take away its greetings, its curses, its praises, its laws, its literature, its songs, its riddles, its proverbs, its cures, its wisdom, and its prayers”.

The Multilingual Nature of Nigeria-the major linguistic divisions:

Linguistically, Nigeria today is inhabited by a large number of tribal groups ranging in size from a few thousands to millions, speaking among them over four hundred and fifty languages. The majority of Nigeria's inhabitants speak one of the large group of languages which Greenberg (1971) defines as the Niger-Congo family that forms part of the larger Congo-Kordofanian family. The Niger-Congo family, according to Greenberg is divided into a number of sub-families, one of which as far as Nigeria is concerned, is the Kwa sub-family. The Yoruba and Edo-speaking peoples of the South-West and part of the South-South, the Nupe of the North-Central and the Ibo of the South-East speaking languages, classified as Kwa. The Ijo fishing people of the Niger Delta with about twenty groups, notable among them, the Kalabari, Okrika and Nembe peoples, belong to the Kwa sub-family. The Ibo, who occupy the South-East and part of the South-South, best known of whom are the Ibibio and Efik, fall in the group classified by Greenberg as the Benue-Congo family. The light-skinned, nomadic Fulani, who graze their cattle throughout the Northern Nigeria speak a language of the Niger-Congo family, that corresponds more closely to the Western Atlantic language like Serer and Wolof spoken in Senegal where the Fulani first made their home in West Africa. The Hausa, who are physically clearly of Negro stock, speak a language that is connected with the Hamitic languages spoken in North Africa, mainly by people of Caucasoid stock, while the Kanuri who inhabit North-eastern Nigeria, speak a language classified by Greenberg as Nilo-Saharan, linking them with Fezzan and Darfur.

In view of these various ethnic and linguistic groups, the colonial masters decided to pick three major indigenous languages as representatives of the groups, hence, Hausa becomes the major indigenous language of the North, Ibo language as that of the East and Yoruba language as that of the West (Ajayi, 1964), in line with the then three geo-political zones of Nigeria.

The National Language Problem and the Status of English in Nigeria

As earlier mentioned, Nigeria is a multilingual and multiethnic nation. Therefore, the problem of which language to adopt as a national language among its over four hundred languages (Greenberg, 1971; Hoffmann 2005 and Adegbite 2011), has been with Nigerians right from birth in 1914. Considering the fact that a common language for speakers of different dialects or ethnic backgrounds enhances easy and quick communication with all members and as a medium, it enriches their idiosyncracies, the English language was more or less imposed by the colonial masters. However in most cases, governments,

especially in multilingual societies, usually impose a language on a community of speakers as their standard, national or official language, having recognized that the language has potentials for standardization, can be an easy means of communication, will not arouse suspicions, will be economically and politically advantageous, is mutually intelligible and acceptable by the entire citizenry.

Countries all over the world have always adopted a language as a national language having realized that their different languages and in most cases any of their mutually unintelligible dialects will be difficult to use as an official language. Bolinger (1972, p.576) observes that beside many countries in Africa, other countries like Indonesia, Israel, Pakistan, Malaysia, the Phillipines, India, China and many others have had their loosely federated parts pulled together by one language. Bolinger states, "Israel adopted Hebrew as its official language. The Phillipines adopted Tagalog as their national language in 1937 and was made to be taught in all primary and secondary schools with effect from 1940. In Malaysia, Malay was officially established as the national language in 1967 but English continues to be officially recognized in their courts and parliament". In the Western shore of Africa, for example, English remains the official language in Nigeria, Ghana and Sierra-Leone while Guinea and Senegal retain French. The continual retention of these colonial languages is a good proof that, in a multilingual society, it is usually difficult to adopt a national language without the consent of the citizenry.

As noted above, the major legacy bequeathed to Nigeria by its colonial masters - the British people - is their native dialect, the English language. Since the multilingual nature of Nigeria has made it impossible for the adoption of an indigenous language as the official language, English has therefore become a relieving option. Rather than being considered a colonial liability, English is now accepted as an asset in the form of a national and international language representing educational and economic progress.

In the theory of Linguistic Imperialism, Phillipson (1992) classifies global English speakers into two: first being "the core" English-speaking countries. These are Britain, the United States of America, Canada, Australia and New Zealand and second, being "the periphery" English-speaking countries where English serves as national and international language. These are Ghana, Nigeria, India, Singapore, China, Indonesia and Japan.

The constitution of Nigeria (1999, para. 97) posits that English language has become and will continue to be Nigeria's national and official language as it declares

... The business of a House of Assembly shall be conducted in English, but the House, may, in addition to English, conduct the business in one or more other languages that the House may, by resolution, approve...

Corroborating the above constitutional provision on the status of English in Nigeria, the Nigerian National policy on Education (NPE, 2004, para. 10a) states that:

... Government appreciates the importance of language as a means of promoting social interaction and national cohesion and preserving cultures. Thus, every child shall learn the language of the immediate environment. Further - more, in the interest of national unity, it is expedient that every child shall be required to learn English and one of the three Nigeria languages, Hausa, Ibo and Yoruba.

English Language as a tool for Unity in Nigeria

The heterogeneous nature of Nigeria has always been a major problem for unity and development in Nigeria for very many years even after the amalgamation in 1914. Indeed, the ethnolinguistic and multicultural nature almost constituted a cog in the wheel of its progress. However, through the spread of Christianity, offering of various incentives to the natives by the whites, trade, education and more importantly, imposition through persuasion, English language started to dominate other indigenous languages, which predominantly are Hausa in the North, Igbo and Yoruba in the South. It should be noted that before the attainment of independence in 1960, one of the stanzas of the old Nigeria's National Anthem partly reads thus:

Nigeria, we hail thee our own dear native land
Though tribe and tongue may differ, in brotherhood
we stand...

The above lines of the anthem is an indication of Nigerians' consciousness of their various backgrounds, yet they wittingly believe strongly in 'brotherhood' faith to achieve a common goal of attaining the much desired independence from the shackles of the white colonial masters, bearing the adage of 'united we stand but divided we fall' in mind. It cannot therefore, be an overstatement to say that the colonial history has cost native English the ownership of its own tongue, an inevitable loss in the face of the global eventualities in the trend of English acquisition. It is also no gainsaying that in

the case of Nigeria, it has robbed the major indigenous languages (Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba) their pride of place, but it has rewarded Nigerians as victims of colonization with linguistic unification which would otherwise have been unrealizable without the common tongue offered by English.

Jimoh (2001) citing Wallwork, states that English language in Nigeria has been playing various roles which include phatic communion (i. e. a social regulator) for ceremonial purposes, as an instrument of action, for keeping records, to convey orders and pass information, to influence people, to enable self-expression, to enable and embody thought. The sum total of all these is that English language has succeeded in promoting unity and mutual interaction in Nigeria and has strengthened it as a nation.

To further promote the much needed unity, the Federal government of Nigeria established the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) scheme which mandates every graduate to serve in a state other than his/her own for a period of one year after graduation. Throughout and after their service, some state governments employ some of the graduates from other states. By so doing, some of these 'non-indigenes' get married to people not from their own states and this goes a long way to enhance unity.

In its quest to further ensure and sustain unity, the Federal Government has also put up a policy of establishing Federal Agencies and Parastatals in each state of the Federation where 'non-indigenes' are posted to work. It is therefore important for the 'non-indigenes' to work harmoniously with the natives. This has also fostered unity. It is an established fact in Nigeria today that irrespective of the state one comes from, as long as one has resided in any state in Nigeria for six months and one can communicate in English (not minding the quality of such English), one can vote and be voted for. He or she can aspire to become a Governor of a State or at least, a councilor in the Local Government Area he/she resides. Although a language of privileged educated Nigerians, English is playing various roles which include communication, aesthetic expression, a viable instrument of unity and above all, an enhancer of socio-economic development.

Some Factors that influence English Language in promoting Unity in Nigeria:

Communication

The Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary (2015:290) sees communication as the "activity of expressing ideas and feelings or giving people information". Communication as a concept, involves a series of activities and a number of parties doing things in stages. According to Fatuase (1997), these activities go

on between two parties in seemingly endless circle, through a process that includes conception (message whether written, verbal or non-verbal), transmission (channel), reception (decoder), encoding (feedback) and transmission (channel). Communication can be through print or electronic media. The media have made immense contributions to the development of Nigeria. Notable among these contributions is the enlightenment of the general public on the happenings and activities of the people and government on issues concerning their environment and welfare.

In Nigeria, the role played by English language to foster unity through communication cannot be over emphasized. English has always been used for peace settlement in Nigeria. The relative peace and tranquility being enjoyed in Nigeria today is because English has dominated other languages and is being used to communicate officially. Government policies and decisions have always been conveyed to people through communication process in English.

English is dominantly used in both electronic and print media as noted above. For example, most national newspapers are written in English. English is also the medium for periodicals such as magazines, etc. Communication through English language has therefore gone a long way to foster unity as no indigenous language can be used that will be understood by majority of Nigerians.

Political Activities/Governance

In Nigeria today, English has much more influence on politics and governance than any other indigenous language (Hausa, Igbo or Yoruba) or second language (French). For instance, section 91 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999) provides that: "The business of the National assembly shall be conducted in English, and in Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba when adequate arrangements have been made thereof". Perhaps due to the problem posed by over four hundred ethnic members of the National Assembly who could not speak any of the three indigenous languages (Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba) recognized by the constitutional provision, Akindele and Adegbe (2012) observe that: "at the end, the arrangement the country expected the National assembly to make in respect of Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba, could not be made..." This therefore suggests that it is English that has been solely recognized as the language of politics in Nigeria, as it is used in day to day activities of the legislature, and in the some cases, for political campaigns.

In the present democratic dispensation in Nigeria, there is no doubt that every Nigerian citizen is granted right, having reached the required age of eighteen,

to vote and be voted for, by the 1999 constitution. It will therefore not be out of place to say that the knowledge of English has become imperative for any political aspirant who wishes to represent his/her constituency in either a State Assembly or National Assembly as the Constitution stipulates secondary school certificate or its equivalent as the minimum educational qualification. This implies that acquired mastery of the English language to a level that will enable him/her function and contribute his/her quota to the process of legislation in the Assembly is required. The only way to guarantee this is to ensure that the role of English as the language of education in Nigeria is sustained as it is now. This has equally gone a long way to foster unity among the various ethnic representatives at the Houses of Assembly, which by extension, may reach their various constituencies.

As noted, communication is essential in politics. All the process of politics is propagated through language. Intentions and programmes of the Federal and State Governments in Nigeria are transmitted through both the spoken and written forms of English. Government gazettes, publications and parliamentary, debates are also in English. In some cases, local or indigenous languages are used to convey Government's position for the sake of the non-English speaking class. That effort, though fairly effective is quite cumbersome, and this is why English remains the predominant language of politics in Nigeria.

English for Socio-cultural Propagation and Unity

All societies have their cultures which they hold in high esteem as they also have their societal norms and values. All aspects of social development are workable through the art of communication. Members of a society/community communicate and interact through the use of language. The effective language of communication within a community may not necessarily be the native language especially where such community accommodates people of diverse societal norms and cultures, but a language that cuts across ethnic groups. As socialization takes place through contact with the world, language, (and in this context, English) is undoubtedly a facilitator of social change. In Nigeria, English language has been a tool for social activities, and in that wise, people from different ethnic backgrounds come together and become more united, as they make merry and entertain themselves at meetings and social gatherings.

The relationship between language and culture has been celebrated in many writings (Kohler, 1987;; Okarley, 2001; Emenanjo, 2010, Oderinde, 2000). Language has been seen as one of the indices or markers of culture, it is

therefore a vehicle for the transmission of culture. It is an aspect of culture and also a means of preserving it. It is a wrong assumption that a foreign language cannot be used to promote indigenous culture. In Nigeria, English as a language has been effectively used to preserve inventions, knowledge and aspects of people's cultural heritage for onward transmission to generations yet unborn. With the help of English, aspects of our culture are documented in form of poetry, drama and prose.

While talking about the relationship between language and culture, Kayode Omole (2011, p.2) states that “culture refers to the ways of life of a people, including their customs, traditions, ideas, art, values and language. Indeed, language can be described as the repository of culture, since a language cannot express or name an entity that is not part of that culture. Consequently, in the history of any civilization, language usually bears the imprint of contact with another culture”. The history of the English language, for example, indicates that it is the language of the Anglo-Saxons who at one time or the other had come in contact with the Romans and the French, just to mention a few. It will not therefore be surprising that some expressions and words in the English language have French and Latin origins. Omole notes that the relationship between the English language and Nigerian culture is similar to the above situation as many English loan words have now been virtually integrated into many Nigerian indigenous languages. A few examples of some of Nigeria’s major languages are replete with such expressions, though with some morphological modifications as highlighted by Kayode Omole (2011, p.3) in the table:

ENGLISH	HAUSA	IGBO	YORUBA
Window	Hundo	Windo	Windo
Radio	Radiyo	Radio	Redio
Photo	Hoto	Photo	Foto
Bread	Brodi	Bread	Buredi

He notes that whether they are artifactual or psycho-cultural, the copious existence of loan words in Nigerian languages is a measure of the impact of the English language on Nigerian cultures. It has also gone a long way in enhancing the understanding of each other’s thoughts and expressions, thereby fostering unity.

Furthermore, English language in Nigeria is also used for cultural propagation, for example, Theatre Practitioners use it in their various films, to entertain and pass message which often condemn societal vices. Messages

calling for tolerance, patriotism and unity have always been passed across to Nigerians in English and in some cases, in their predominant indigenous language (Hausa, Igbo or Yoruba) depending on the region.

During local festivals, the dialects or local languages used by participants are usually translated into English language for the benefit of non-speakers and visitors/strangers. Such festivals include the Argungu Fishing Festival in Sokoto where Hausa is the predominant local language, the Yam Festival in the East, where Igbo is the major local language, Osun Festival in Osogbo and Agemo Festival in Ijebu-Ode where Yoruba is the predominant local language respectively.

The 1977 World Festival of Arts and Culture hosted by Nigeria in Lagos and attended by some Heads of Governments both in Africa and the diaspora, also made use of both English and French languages not only to welcome dignitaries but translate some of the languages of the participants. The African festival of Drumming held in 2018 and hosted by Nigeria has been used positively and extensively to propagate culture in Nigeria and has therefore fostered unity among the citizenry.

Unity in the Education Sector through English Language:

The National Policy on Education (NPE, 1977, revised 2004) stipulates that English shall be the language of instruction in schools right from the upper primary to tertiary level and therefore should be recognized as not only Nigeria's official language but language of education in Nigeria, while the mother tongue (MT) is restricted to the lower primary school only. The structure of the National Policy of Education otherwise known as 6-3-3-4 system, consists of six years of primary, three years each of junior and senior secondary and four years of university education. Two years of pre-primary education, usually referred to as nursery school, is also available for those who can afford the fees charged by the private owners.

As for its role in unifying Nigerians and particularly its recipients in the education sector, English is the language used in teaching and training. Apart from the quality knowledge and skills imparted by the teacher, these pupils and students grow to become friends as the relationship during school days continues to grow, except where there is communication gap or where there is problem of proximity.

To round off the discussion on the role of the English language in promoting unity from the education sector viewpoint, and considering the magnitude of its benefits from a utilitarian standpoint, which in the main, is to equip the

individual child with skills that will enable him play a useful role in the society, English language has to be retained as an acceptable Nigeria's official language.

English for Economic Gain and Unity

English language in Nigeria has always been used for economic gain and this has further strengthened Nigeria. It will be interesting to note that each region is blessed by 'nature' to produce various farm products which are bought by others as the need arises. For example, the North is noted for the production of groundnuts, maize, pepper, tomatoes, onions, yams, cucumber, water melon and other farm products. The North also provides and supplies cows, sheep, goats, rams, and other domestic animals to virtually every nook and cranny of the country. These are turned to beef which the citizenry eat daily.

The Eastern part of the country also produces, palm oil, fruits of various kinds and vegetables which are supplied to other parts of the country while the West is noted for the production of grain, yam flour, yams, cassava, oranges, melon, cocoa, cashew, tomatoes, pepper and other farm products which add value to the economic growth of Nigeria. Most of the purchases are done using English language as a means of negotiation.

The major Nigerian economic resource, the crude oil, is found in the Eastern and Delta regions. Crude oil has always been the major source of income for Nigeria. The purchase of it is done using English Language to negotiate for prices in accordance with OPEC directive and agreement with producers; however, French (which is also a second language in Nigeria) is also used to negotiate with French-speaking countries that need Nigeria's oil.

On the whole, English language has always been an asset to Nigeria as it is the only means by which Nigeria is economically recognized at the international level. At the home front, English is the only unifying factor whose role cannot also be dispensed with.

Threat to Nigeria's Unity - Some Major Challenges:

Problem of Integration

Political integration in the process of nation building dates back to the colonial period when the various people constituting the geographical area called Nigeria were effectively welded territorially by the imperial order to Britain, thereby resulting to amalgamation in 1914. This created a central authority over an ethnically plural society that is characterized by self - conscious cultural qualities. Integration became problematic after independence in 1960 in terms of the means to regulate structures and processes whereby the

discrete elements in the state are brought into meaningful participation in the political system. The territorial integrity of the new states has come to be accepted by the population but there remains the task of establishing a national political process that will ensure the subjective feelings of the people to the new nation. In other words, integration problem then became how to link the central government with the governed and thereby achieve a value-consensus that will propel the development efforts of the state through the capacity of the people organized for the very purpose. The primordial attachments on the part of individuals however forms the basis for serious disaffection thereby strengthening ethnicity, parochialism and communalism. These permeated the characteristic orientation, nepotism, corruption and even separatism.

The political integration problem that arose from this was how to weld fragmented entities together to become unified national entity out of the desperate groupings whose leaders saw other ethnic divisions as an advantage to themselves. Overtly and obliquely, the politics of Nigeria then took on the character of a tussle among these giants-the Hausa/Fulani in the North, the Ibo in the East and the Yoruba in the West. Each of these groupings behaved and acted like a state unto itself. All these bred civil discontent which naturally finds outlets in seizure, legally or illegally, of the state apparatus. Barely six years after independence, the military struck and took over the political power. Along the line in 1967, the East decided to secede accusing the Federal government of marginalization in the revenue sharing formula. The Easterners claimed that the revenue that came from oil is produced by their region, yet they were not adequately compensated. This led to a war, which almost tore the nation into pieces, and eventually ended in 1970. After military coups and counter-coups, the nation started to enjoy a democratic rule from May 29, 1999, after reconciling, rehabilitating and pacifying people through the use of English language as a means of communication.

Other Security Threats

Boko Haram Insurgency

The insurgency of a group called Boko Haram (translated from the Hausa language to mean "Book is bad or education is not good") is one of the current threats to peace and security with the killings, maiming and abducting innocent citizens. For example, more than 200 Chibok School girls were abducted sine the year 2017 and only 112 of them were released in 2019 to the Federal Government after series of negotiations with the Boko Haram leaders.

The group, always battle-ready and in uniforms, has done more harm than good to Nigeria. Investigations are still on to find out the reasons for their attack on Nigeria, and this has become an issue of global condemnation.

Nefarious Activities of the Fulani Herdsmen

The most recent threat to peace is that posed by the Fulani herdsmen. The Fulani herdsmen are cattle rearers from the Northern part of Nigeria. They move about the country looking for where their cattles will graze. Along the line, they sell cattles and settle wherever they find comfortable. This has always been the practice as they are neither harassed nor disallowed to stay where they find convenient, however, investigations reveal that they are either in support of the Boko Haram group or being sponsored by political opponents of government. Their activities also include killing, kidnapping and maiming of innocent Nigerians especially if their victims are Igbo or Yoruba Christians from the South who are particularly resident in the North. For example and precise on Tuesday, April, 24, 2018, the Fulani herdsmen attacked a Catholic church in Mbalom, a town in Benue State and killed two Priests and fifteen worshippers in an early morning mass. This has always been the trend and it appears the Federal Government is incapacitated in putting a stop to this heinous day by day crime, which is condemned both at the national and international levels.

Conclusion

In this paper, it has been demonstrated that English has always stood as a unifying language in a pluri-ethnic, linguistically heterogenous Nigerian society. English in its present form, as both the official and national language of the country, has been able to positively contribute to the realization of high level awareness, socio-political comfort, and mutual understanding and the harmonious co-habitation of the citizenry.

It has equally been observed that English language in Nigeria has positively enhanced the country's socio-political as well as economic transformation, detribalizing process and the process of de-emphasizing ethnicism. The learning of English is believed to have equally given the learner an opportunity for social mobility within the country and a sense of belonging to the nation, Nigeria. It has also been noted that despite the unifying role of English, Nigeria has equally faced the problem of disintegration, threat to security and peace, all of which have become a day-to-day occurrence, but English has always been the medium of appeal to both the culprits and the victims, and the ready-made arbiter.

English in Nigeria today still serves as the most effective way through which Nigerians (scholars, politicians, legislators, senators, students) from different parts of the country, despite their cultural and linguistic differences, come together, communicate and do business with one another, with a view to moving Nigeria forward.

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