AL-HIKMAH JOURNAL OF THE HUMANITIES
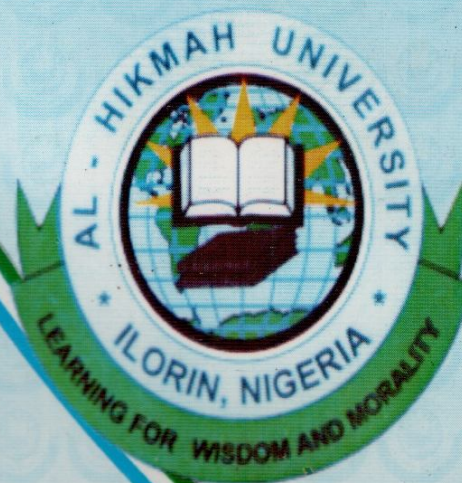
AL - HIKMAH UNIVERSITY

ILORIN, NIGERIA

LEARNING FOR WISDOM AND MORALITY

AN APPRAISAL OF THE LANGUAGE PLANNING
PROBLEMS OF THE DEVELOPING NATIONS.

Mahfouz A. Adedimeji and Waheed O. Salawdeen

Abstract

Language is known to perform various functions and its role in the development of any nation is very crucial. A nation cannot exist without a common language. This is because national development transcends the narrow confines of socio-economic frontiers. Even within this socio-economic construct, language is still very crucial because of the symbiotic relationship between literacy and development. Literacy occurs through the language skills, the receptive (listening and reading) and the productive (speaking and writing), transforming human potentialities into high productivity and improved standards of living. This paper highlights the problems associated with language planning such as language choice, national language, etc. in the developing nations, especially of Africa, with relevant data. It submits that a quest for development outside a well-formed language policy may retard developmental progress.

Introduction

Language is a nation's most obvious and most important attribute. There is no such thing as a nation without a common linguistic basis.
Isayev (1977:192).

A language problem arises principally in a multilingual setting, which the developing nations represent. This is not to rule out the possibility of a language question even in a monolingual setting (i.e. problems of regional, social dialects and the influx of immigrants). But developing nations suffer most severely under the yoke of language related problems: the problem of choosing the language of education, language of communication, official

language, national language, etc. For the historical fact that colonialism had forcefully brought many peoples/'nations' together in new heterogeneous nations of diverse linguistic and historical backgrounds, the developing nations are finding it difficult to solve the resultant problem of "the curse of babel" created by the colonial masters in such compulsory marriages.

For instance, according to the UNESCO language figures of 1987 and Encarta population figures of 2008, a developing nation like Kenya has a population of 37,953,838 and speaks 35 languages; Tanzania, 40,213,162 (with 113 languages); Sudan, 40,218,455 (has 133 languages); Zaire, 68,008,922 (speaks 206 languages); Ethiopia, 78,254,090 (with 92 languages) and Nigeria of 138,283,240 population (parades well over 400 languages). This situation of multiplicity of languages is not peculiar to countries with large population, as above, alone. Cameroon, with just a population of 18,467,692 speaks 183 languages, Ghana, 23,382,848 (speaks 57 languages). Cote d'ivoire with 18,373,060 people has 58 languages, Angola with 12,531,357 people parades 58 languages while Congo, with just a population of 3,903,318 has 29 languages (Bamgbose, 1991; Microsoft Encarta, 2009).

The developing nations of Africa, like other developing nations of the world, have to cope with such questions as: what language will be adopted as the medium of education and instruction? What should be the criteria of making a choice? How will a nation function without a language (or more) that can be used for national communication? Which language should be the language of administration? If several languages are selected for use in education, what will be the cost of language development work involved? Addressing these questions with the seriousness they deserve is the challenge of education in the 21st Century, part of which is that "education must become indigenized and steeped in the conceptual or definitional system of indigenous African culture" (Maison, 2007: 39).

Such questions constitute language problems. Thus, the problems militate against national development/integration. For instance, Schwarz (1965:39) observes that:

> *Differences between indigenous languages keep the people apart, perpetuate ethnic hostilities, weaken national loyalties and increase the dangers of separatist sentiment.*

His view is corroborated by Alenxandre (1972:88), who highlights

the disunity, mutual suspicion and nepotism in multilingual contexts. He says:

> Each language is intimately related to a tribal culture, thus use of a local language reinforces attachment to a tribe, thereby going against the current of national sentiment.

Background to Language Planning Problems

The long years of colonial rule on the soil of Africa resulted in the creation of artificial nations of divergent ethno-linguistic groups. After independence thus, rather than move forward like other nations of the world, the developing nations are trudging behind in the endless quest for 'oneness' and 'national integration' which means "creating or strengthening within the borders of a country a collective sentiment of belonging together irrespective of individual or subgroup differences" (Alexandre,1972) as cited in Bamgbose (1991:10)). Without recourse to logic or history, the colonialists hewed members of the same linguistic communities apart and administratively married them to other ethno-linguistic groups. The situation created a source of distrust, disharmony and disaffection among the new nation-states such that the continual existence of such countries depend on the force of might institutionally provided by the colonialists to entrench their own interests. Bickering, conflicts and wars have often trailed the Independence of several developing nations as linguistic heterogeneity fans the embers of discord and mutual suspicion. This situation has been captured by the foremost African Statesman and former President of Tanzania, Julius Mwalimu Nyerere, who sounded a note of caution: The boundaries which divide African States are so nonsensical that without our sense of unity they would be a cause for friction. We have no alternative but to start from the position which we inherited from the colonial partition of Africa. There is no country which does not include areas which would come under another political unit if any principles of geography were considered. (cited in Mbeki, 2007:9) So fluid is the linguistic geography that Nigeria shares eight languages with Benin Republic, sixteen with Chad, five with Cameroon and three with Niger (Capo, 1990: 2).

Generally, towards fostering this "collective sentiment", many developing nations have devised measures of reinforcing the concept of

'unity in diversity'. Such measures include: power-sharing formula by zoning political appointments, legal requirements for a multi-ethnic base for political parties, special programmes aimed at bringing young people together like Ghana's Young Pioneers, Nigeria's National Youth Service Corps and ideologies designed for promoting national consciousness like Kenyatta's "Harme" in Kenya, Nyeyere's "Ujamaa" in Tanzania, Banda's four cornerstone of unity, loyalty, discipline and obedience in Malawi and Buhari/Idiagbon's War Against Indiscipline in Nigeria, among others.

Essentially, colonialism is the root of language problems developing nations face and neo-colonialism is entrenching the heritage. In Nigeria, the calls to convene a Sovereign National Conference where various ethnic groups/regions would decide on re-structuring the country or probably correcting what has been branded "the mistakes of the founding fathers" have been deliberately ignored (Oladesu, 2002:14) by successive Nigerian rulers.

The Problem of National Language

Language is one of the chief means by which a person learns to organize his experiences and thought. For any nation not to be in linguistic wilderness, a coherent language policy facilitating the choice of the national language is highly important.

What is a national language?

According to Awobuluyi (1999), a national language is "a language by which a nation can identify itself and by which it can differentiate itself from other nations".

The term has been variously used to refer to any language, native to a country; and given some measure of recognition by the government; and most importantly, any language native to a country and recognized by the government as an instrument of serving socio-cultural integration, particularly, at the national level (Elugbe, 1990:10; Bamgbose,1991:34; Adedimeji, 2006a:255).

The most important factors for choosing a national language are nationism versus nationalism, vertical integration, acceptability, population, language status and development (Bamgbose, 1991:19). Others include being a language of unity and being one relevant to the political context. Approaches to the selection of a national language range from the gradualist

32

(evolutionary/democratic) to the status qou(let-the-sleeping-dog-lie) and the radical (revolutionary/dictatorial).

The problem of what language to use as a national language in a multilingual setting is thus a serious problem to the developing nations. Fishman (1971) predicted that preference will be given to using a Language of Wider Communication (LWC), often foreign, so as to bring the nation together, rather than the adoption of an indigenous language, giving it all the necessary development and using it as the language of administration and instruction. He divides the decisions by the countries into three types in his chapter, "National Languages and Languages of Wider Communication in the Developing Nations" in Whiteley (1971). These are:

(i) **Type A Decisions (exoglossic policy):** This is the type of policy decision taken by countries which have no Great Tradition that the population can invoke to achieve integration. These decisions are governed by the concern for 'nationism' and the choice is an LWC as a permanent national symbol as in Ghana, Cameroon, Gambia, etc.

(ii) **Type B Decisions (endoglossic policy):** This is the type taken by countries, which have one Great Tradition and hence, their language choice is informed by nationalism where an indigenous language emerges as the official language. But since efficiency is also desirable, a LWC is chosen to function temporarily e.g. Ethiopia.

(iii) **Type C Decision (mixed policy) :** This decision is taken by countries that have several Great Traditions. Within the conflicting claims of various traditions, a compromise is made between national integration and ethnic identity. Such a compromise is provided by a LWC which these countries are likely to opt for e.g. India and Malaysia (Bamgbose ,1991:21).

An Overview of Language Planning Problems

Language Planning problems in the developing nations are just the natural consequence of the dearth of good language policies. The problems as noted by Bamgbose (1991) are "avoidance, arbitrariness, fluctuation, vagueness". These are briefly discussed thus:

(a) **Avoidance** of language policy formulation is an effective strategy of the developing countries because it frees the government from the

Political consequences which any pronouncement may cause. This

avoidance strategy is the norm in many developing nations of Africa. In Sierra Leone, Sengova (1987:528) observes that,

> *No official documented statement on national language policy appears to exist, but convention and practice have formed themselves into an operative yet elusive language policy.*

In Senegal, for instance, the linguists worked against all odds on Wolof and prepared its materials but the government denied them the permission to use the materials in schools in furtherance of the avoidance strategy.

(b)   **Vagueness** of policy formulation is the creation of a 'catch all' formula that may be interpreted in a flexible manner. As the situation in Nigeria is, apart from the policy being vague, implementation is not given any attention. Vagueness of policy formulation can be best exemplified by Kenya, which adopted Swahili as her national language. The motive behind such was political: the ruling Kenyan African National Union saw Swahili as a symbol of nationalism. But the vagueness lies in the recommended implementation steps. It was stated that all Kenyans must speak Swahili at all times with one another; that it should be given greater prominence than English in schools; that all civil servants were to pass an examination in Swahili, just to mention a few. These recommendations, which are deficient of sufficient details, could not be implemented and apart from Swahili being spoken in the parliament, the life of Kenya still revolves around English.

(c)   **Arbitrariness** of policy formulation is another problem. The feasibilities of such policies are not tested. The decision may be taken by a military ruler or a ruling party. A pronouncement on language matters is very delicate. If necessary preparation and implementation processes are not on ground, mere pronouncement will certainly end up in dismal failure. We can cite the case of Somalia as an exemption to this rule (Omamor, 1994). In other developing countries, arbitrariness always results in failure.

(d)   **Fluctuation** in language policy, another problem, is due to factors like

34

change in government, revision of party policies, new ideas from commissions of inquiry, etc. The case of Ghana provides a good illustration in this regard. Before independence, like other former British colonies, the country had a mother tongue education policy involving the use of an indigenous language for the first three years of primary education. However, in 1951, under the Accelerated Development plan, a change was made from the three year mother tongue education. English was to usurp the role in the second year, while the mother tongue would just be a subject taught, not a medium of instruction. Some changes were also effected in 1956, 1960, 1970 and 1974, which eventually led to what Botchway (2007: 227) refers to as " the Westernization of the Ghananian consciousness", defined as "the process in which Ghananians are forgetting their own culture and history."

In Nigeria, fluctuation has also manifested in the language components of the various constitutions. The Richard's Constitution of 1946 is the first to raise the language question. It acknowledges the Nigerian linguistic pluralism and attempted to foster unity by recommending two levels of language usage: "The language of government would be Hausa in the North and English in the West and East" (Akinnaso, 2006). This provision was controversial as it gave an edge to Hausa language in way that was unfair to the other regions. This provision was adopted and retained by the McPherson's Constitution of 1951. Littleton's constitution re-addressed the language provision of adding English as a co-official language of the North and made English, for the first time, the language of federal administration. In other words, while English would be serving the central government and the Western and Eastern regions, the Northern region would be served by Hausa and English. Thus, in the colonial era, there were constitutions in 1914, 1922, 1946, 1951 and 1954.(Adedimeji: 2006b)

The Independence Constitution of 1960 was based on Littleton's Constitution and it affirmed the utilitarian role of English as the official language of administration in section 54 ("the business of Parliament shall be conducted in English", it states) with no recognition of any Nigerian language. There was no change to this policy in the Republican constitution of 1963. Based on the recommendation of the National Policy of Education

(1977), the 1979 constitution created an official multilingual policy and for the first time, the major three Nigerian languages were given constitutional recognition. This recognition was maintained until 1998 when French was conscripted by military fiat to be a second official language. The 1999 constitution is faithful to the 1979 constitution in terms of recognizing the Nigerian languages.

Appropriate Language Planning: The Only Solution

Language planning, according to Gupta and Ferguson (1977) refers to

> *those planned activities which attend to the valuation of language resources, the assignment of preferences to one or more languages and their functional ordering and developing the language resources and their use in a manner consistent with the declared objectives identified as planned targets.*

It is a species of social engineering and, as such, is commissioned by those in power. The five aspects of language planning are purification, revival, reform, standardization and modernization (Nahir, 1977).

To Ezikeojiaku (2002), orthographization, graphization, standardization, modernization and popularization of languages are the crucial stages in the language engineering process, while to Capo(1990:1) language planning involves codification, standardization, modernization, development, reform, etc. It also involves orthography design, corpus planning, materials development and encouragement of language use at all levels.

Using the framework of Capo (1990), codification means writing, a more embracing term than graphization, which appears to be restricted to devising alphabets or any other writing system; whereas codification encompasses the production of primers, books of spelling, grammar books and dictionaries just like standardization. Modernization is the expansion of lexicon to include modern terms and terminologies. It is "the creation of and adoption of new words in order to allow the languages cope with the demands of abstract and precise notions needed in philosophy, law, science and technology (Capo, 1990:1).

Development encompasses modernization but above that, it includes

36

the rehabilitation and optimal utilization of aspects of language that have been underutilized as a result of several historical factors that had rendered those aspects disabled as victims of glottophagy the linguistic manifestation of the residues of colonialism and impacts of neo-colonialism. Reform, on the other hand, consists of all efforts directed at the preservation and standardization of language such that it is able to function well in a changing world.

Based on the definitions above, it is certain that the language problems of the developing nations have arisen from lack of appropriate language planning. This unfortunate situation is articulated by Adegbija (1994:140) thus:

> In many parts of Africa, language planning policies have been ignorantly formulated, haphazardly and hastily implemented, when implemented at all, incoherently coordinated and carelessly and care freely evaluated.

It is argued that when good language planning decisions are taken, the language problems will be solved. To facilitate the appropriateness and effectiveness of language planning decisions in Africa and all the developing nations, the following five contexts have to be put into consideration, as in Adegbija (1994).

(a) **The language context:** This has to do with multilingualism and factors affecting it.

(b) **The socio-political context:** The political situation of a country makes the policy makers to "cling to the apron strings" of their colonial masters. In Nigeria, English is used in all fields because of the sensitive political situation in the country.

(c) **The psychological context:** Mutual suspicion exists among various linguistic groups. The majority and the minority ethnic groups are at loggerheads, more often than not.

(d) **The administrative/governmental context:** This involves political stability and instability. Political instability makes continuity of language related matters difficult, change of government always results in change of programme.

(e) **The educational context:** Attention should be given to the

37

educational level of the less than 30 per cent or so literate Nigerians, still less than 5 per cent is literate in indigenous languages. This situation must affect or influence language planning decisions.

Thus, language planning appears to be the 'almighty formula' in solving language problems. It is only when it is well articulated and well implemented that the hydra-headed problems associated with language in the developing nations will be nipped in the bud.

Suggestions and Recommendations

In consonance with the suggestions of language scholars, we shall emphasise the following recommendations as a way out of the problems that are associated with language planning.

(a) Since the developing countries are basically multilingual, there must be understanding, recognition and respect for all cultures/languages. A situation in which majority language speakers look down upon the minorities is not congenial to result-oriented decisions.

(b) The various foreign languages being used in the developing nations should be viewed in the normal perspectives. They should be considered to be playing a temporary role because language cannot be separated from culture. Undermining the indigenous languages perceptually, as the situation exists in many developing nations, may result in language extinction and cultural pollution.

(c) The policy makers should tackle language problems by providing the necessary logistics to facilitate meaningful results. A problem is never solved by shying away from it.

(d) The attitudinal disposition of many citizens of the developing nations in relation to language has to change. While high premium is placed on economic and political matters, linguistic issues are regarded as trivial. But it is language that differentiates human beings from animals. The basis of human distinctiveness should be accorded due regard and treated as a matter of political expediency and national pride.

(e) There should be effective machinery for constantly assessing the situation on every aspect of the contextual variables. Such machinery should evaluate the impacts, imports and effects of language policies constantly.

(f) Serious efforts should be geared towards codifying the languages of

Africa by edifying such languages with literary works. A situation in which only forty-four out of hundreds of Nigerian languages, as observed by Emenanjo (1990:91) are codified is worrisome. The varieties associated with language and culture will allow the appreciation of cultures different from ours.

Conclusion

In spite of the enlightenment brought about by *Language Problems of Developing Nations* (Fishman et al. 1968) which reflects the topic of this paper, language problems still persist. A major reason for this is that language issues are treated with apathy and negligence as attention is wholly given to some other areas. This situation does not facilitate the formulation of appropriate language planning with which the problems will be solved. Rather, many questions are still begging for answers creating further problems.

This paper has thus focused on the description of language planning problems of the developing nations, citing some relevant examples especially in Africa. It highlights the significance of language planning, which unfortunately is not receiving adequate attention of the concerned countries, in solving such problems associated with language. It ends with suggestions and recommendations considered to be germane to the resolution of language problems. It is foregrounded that, as Ali Mazrui (cited in Isola n. d.:48) puts it, "no country has ascended to the level of a first rank economic power by excessive dependence on foreign languages," and as such, we must plan our languages and get them "revitalized by integrating them into the education system, beginning from the primary level" (Isola, n. d.:61).

References

Adedimeji, M. A. (2006). "Politics of Language." In Saliu, H. A. et. al. (Eds.) *Democracy and Development in Nigeria: Social Issues and External Relation.* Vol.3. Lagos: Concept Publications, pp. 286 300.

Adedimeji, M. A. (2006b). "Multilingualism and the Challenges of Development in Africa: The Nigerian Experience." Paper presented at the 32nd Annual Third World Conference at Swissotel Chicago, Chicago, Illinois, USA. March 16-18.

Adegbija, E.E. (1994), "The Context of Language Planning in Africa: An Illustration with Nigeria". In Rutz, Martin (ed). *Language Contact and Language Conflict.* Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Akinnaso, N.(2006) "Language and Constitutional History" In *The Guardian Lagos, Retrieved from* Ttp://www.guardiannewsngr.com/editorial_opinion/articleh 04. on February 4.

Alexandre, P. (1972). An *Introduction to Languages and Language in Africa.* Trans. from French by F.A. Leary. London: Heinemann.

Alexandre, P. (Trans) (1972). *An Introduction to Languages and Language in Africa* By F.A Learry. London: Heinemann.

Amenumey, D. E. K. (Ed.) (2007). *Challenges of Education in Ghana in the 21ˢᵗ Century.* Accra: Woeli Publishing Services.

Asein, O. S. and F. A. Adesanoye (Eds.)(1994) *Language and Polity: Essays on Language and Society in Africa.* Ibadan: Johnmof Printers Limited.

Awobuluyi, O. (1997). "The National Language Question in Nigeria" Lecture delivered at LISA Week '97 University of Ilorin.

Bamgbose, Ayo (1991). *Language and the Nation.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Botchway, De- Valera N. Y. M. (2007)./"Redefining Education for Liberation from Western Cultural Imperialism: A Challenge for Ghana in the Twenty-first Century." In Amenumey, D. E. K. (Ed.). *Challenges of Education in Ghana in the 21ˢᵗ Century.* Accra. Woeli Publishing Services. Pp. 217-228.

Cobarrubias, J. and Fishman J. (1983). *Progress in Language Planning.* Berlin: Louton.

Elugbe, B. O. (1990). "National Language and National Development". In Emenanjo, E. N. (Ed.) *Multilingualism, Minority Languages and Language Policy in Nigeria.* Agbor: Central Books Ltd. and LAN.

Emenanjo, E.N. (Ed.) (1990). *Multilingualism, Minority Languages and Language Policy in Nigeria.* Agbor: Central Books Ltd. and LAN.

Ezikeojiaku, P.A.(2002)."The Role of Government in Indigenous Language Development in Nigeria: A Micro-Study of Igbo-Speaking Areas." In

Lawal, A. et al. (Eds.) *Perspectives on Applied Linguistics in Language and Literature*. Ibadan: Stirling-Horden Publishers. pp.278 291.

Fishman, J. (1971). "National Language and Languages of Wider Communication in the Developing Nations" in Whiteley, W.H. (ed.) 1971). *Language Use and Social Change*. London: OUP.

Fishman, J.; C. Ferguson and J. Das Gupta (Eds.) (1968). *Language Problems of Developing Nations*. New York: John Wiley.

Gupta, J.D. and Ferguson C.A. (1977). "Problems of Language Planning" in Rubin, Joan et al (eds.) *Language Planning Processes*. The Hague: Mouton Publishers.

Isayev, M. J. (1977). *National Language in the USSR: Problems and Solutions. Moscow*: Progress Publications.

Isola, A. n.d. "Rebuilding our Cultural Bank of Images". In Balogun, S. and D. Omotoso (Eds.). *80 Glorious Years of Soun Ajagungbade III J.P. CON*. Ibadan: Celebrity publications Limited in Association with St. Paul's Publishing House.pp. 42-62.

Maison, K. B. (2007). "The Indigenous African and Contemporary Education in Ghana: The Challenges of the 21ˢᵗ Century". In Amenumey, D. E. K. (Ed.) (2007). *Challenges of Education in Ghana in the 21ˢᵗ Century*. Accra: Woeli Publishing Services. Pp27-45.

Mbeki, T. (2007). "Unity and Integration of Africa". A Lecture Delivered by the President of South Africa at the University of Cape Coast, Cape Coast , Ghana, July, 2004.

Microsoft Encarta Premium (2009). Electronic Encyclopedia Microsoft Encarta Inc.

Schwarz, Jr., F. A. O.(1965) Nigeria: The Tribes, the Nation or the Race- The Politics Independence. Cambridge, Mass.:MIT Press.

Nahir, M. (1977). "The Five Aspects of Language Planning" in Rubin, Joan et al (eds.) *Language Planning Process*. The Hague : Mouton.

Oladesu, E. (2002). "Revisiting the Mistakes of the Founding Fathers". *The Comet,* Lagos. October, 2. pp. 14-15.

Omamor, P. A. (1994).' Language Planning: Theory and Practice in some African Countries" in Asein, O. S. and F. A. Adesanoye (Eds.) *Language and Polity: Essays on Langusge and Society in Africa*. Ibadan: Johnmof Printers Limited.pp. 33-63.

Sengova, J.(1987). "The National Language of Sierra Leone: A Decade of Policy Implementation". *Africa* Vol. 57 No.4. pp.519-530.

Whiteley, W. H. (Ed.) (1971) *Language Use and Social Change*. London: OUP for the International African Institute.