

ISSUES IN

**LANGUAGE
AND
LINGUISTICS**

PERSPECTIVES FROM NIGERIA

(Volume 1)

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Examples at the lexical level

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Section H

Language and Development Issues

CHAPTER FIFTEEN The Implications of Language Skills for Development in Nigeria

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1.0 Introduction

The world we live today is significantly different, in a number of ways, from that of our fore-fathers. The main factor for this difference, it appears, is the amount of information available to us. The techno-scientific progress man has made, and the meaningful impacts of novel trends in information gathering and dissemination have made the world shrink to a level of global family. Language, the chief medium of communication, has played a dominant role in defining, constructing and analysing the world. Language is the bedrock upon which all human development is based. As human development is an endless process in the contemporary world, language has become so sophisticated that the only way to retard development is to avoid using it (Oyeshile, 180). In other words, language is the basis of all development, and it is the most important feature that makes us human (Trask, 1).

As a result of the significance of language and its utilitarian values, regarding communication of ideas, emotional expression (as the case of expressing frustration), for social interaction (i.e. greeting others), sheer power of sound (alliteration), control of reality (as there is in magic and incantation), recording facts, as the instrument of thought and for the expression of identity (i.e. the signaling of who we are and where we 'belong') (Crystal, 13), mastery of language has always been construed as a sign of depth, erudition and oratory. Language, according to Thomas (30), is like nest building or hive making – the universal and biologically specific activity of human beings. "We engage in it communally, compulsively and automatically. We cannot be human without it, if we were to be separated from it, our minds would die, as surely as bees lost from the hive".

There is a correlation between linguistic versatility and development in all its ramifications. This chapter addresses the nature of language and explicitly discusses the highlights of the four skills underpinning it. With a focus on the English language specifically, the language of unity, integration and education in Nigeria, the state of which is said to be 'dismal' (Babatunde, 2002, p.140), we submit in this chapter that total development in Nigeria will be a mirage if

deliberate efforts are not made to encourage and stimulate a more result-oriented process of availing all Nigerians effective skills of communicative competence in the English language.

2.0. The Skills of Language

Language is made up of four component skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Listening and speaking are primary skills that one first encounters in life: a normal child acquires these skills or "knowledge on relatively slight exposure and without specific training" (Chomsky, 4). Reading and writing are secondary skills that one learns later in life, particularly at the school. While listening and reading are receptively used, being the skills by which one interprets life and receives knowledge and information, speaking and writing are productive skills by which one expresses oneself and produces information for various functions.

As Francis Bacon once wrote, "reading maketh a full man, conference (where listening and speaking take place among participants) a ready man, and writing, an exact man", proficiency in language skills is a determinant of how civilized, educated, able and capable one is in virtually all areas of human endeavour. The extent to which one performs in job and promotion interviews, oral and written examinations, electioneering campaigns and the use of language in the mass media, among others, all of which are based on these skills determine how successful one is, or will be, in life. This section not only examines what these skills involve but suggests how to master them for self development. Developing oneself linguistically is a criterion for human development, socio-political development, indeed, development in all its ramifications.

3.1. Listening

Though often taken for granted, listening is by far the most useful language skill, if the parameter of frequency ratio is used. Paul Rankin had found, as far back as 1926, that out of the 70% of the waking time adults spend on communicating, writing occupies 9%, reading, 16%; speaking, 30%; and listening 45%. Rankin's research result has been recaptured this way: we listen to a book a day, we speak a book a week, we read a book a month and we write a book a year. A more recent survey suggests that 53% of waking time is spent on listening (Adler, et al., 106). Listening is the most frequent form of communication, and is one of the most "difficult skills" of the four skills of language or communication (Lubega, 175).

Listening involves the decoding of utterances, paying attention to what is being said, and making sense or meaning out of the spoken language. Components of listening are hearing, attending, understanding, remembering

and responding, each of which is significant. Listening in any context involves:

- i) predicting what the talk is about
- ii) guessing the contextual meaning of unfamiliar words and phrases
- iii) identifying and retaining relevant points
- iv) recognizing discourse markers and cohesive devices
- v) understanding the speaker's inferred meaning and attitude to what he is saying
- vi) separating facts from opinion and
- vii) understanding the speaker's pattern of thinking and presentation (Adetugbo, 8).

Listening is not just hearing. Hearing is the process by which sound waves that strike the eardrum cause vibrations that are transmitted to the brain. Whereas, listening occurs when the brain reconstructs such electrochemical impulses into representation of the original sound and then gives them meaning (Adler, Rosenfeld & Towne, 108).

That many students in English as a Second Language (ESL) context, like Nigeria, have poor listening skills is due to a number of factors. These include marginal attention to listening in the school system; limited exposure to standard spoken English, home environment and personal attitude. But as the centrality of listening cannot be overemphasized, it is essential that good listening habits are learnt, if one finds oneself to be deficient, at any level of education and even after formal education.

3.2. Speaking

Speaking is the second skill of language which involves expressing oneself orally and clearly. Speaking is a complex skill involving the art of using organs of speech to generate meaningful sounds for the purpose of communication. It is a physical activity that results from the precise movements and manipulation of the muscles that have to do with speech, i.e. speech organs (Lubega, 188). The ability to express oneself clearly, correctly and effectively has been said to be the greatest of all powers that one can possess. To communicate meaningfully in English, the most useful language in the global world of today, one has to familiarize oneself with English phonetics and phonology, through which the proper pronunciation of phonemes and words, is acquired just as one knows stress patterns and intonation.

It is significant to note that as the English language has twenty-six letters for written expression, it has as many as forty-six speech sounds or phonemes. Generally, there are twenty two vowel sounds and twenty four consonant sounds in English. These are five long pure vowels, seven short pure vowels, eight diphthongs, two triphthongs, nine voiceless consonant sounds and fifteen voiced

consonant sounds (Ofuya, 144). A good mastery of all the sounds is crucial to good oral delivery. The best way to learn speaking as a skill in a language is to select an appropriate model, the right target accent or standard spoken variety of a language.

Seven factors are necessary to be borne in mind in effective speaking. These are adaptation (speaking should be structured to achieve the purpose behind it), thought (good speaking is a product of good thinking. One should always resist the temptation of talking before thinking as the maxim should be: think before you talk), language control (being competent in the use of language; using the right word for the right idea intended), clarity (words and expressions should be clearly articulated with appropriate stress and intonation in order to avoid ambiguity or communication breakdown), persuasiveness (the object of most oral communication is to let the listener identify with one or see a phenomenon from the speaker's perspective) completeness (speaking should be complete in all occasions. A speaker should not say less or more than is required in a communicative event) and goodwill (the goal of speaking should always be the promotion of mutual understanding, dissemination of information or distillation of knowledge and all that bring cooperation and friendship) (Olasehinde, 24).

3.3. Reading

Reading, the third language skill, involves abstracting information or meaning from written or printed matter. According to Unoh (11), reading is "a complex language-processing behavior that entails interpreting or getting meaning from written or printed materials". He goes on to describe good reading as an art involving understanding or comprehension not only of the literary sense of meaning, or printed materials, but also of the meaning implied by the author's mood, his tone, his intent, and his attitude towards his subject, his readers and even himself. It is a skill that involves the mobilization of the eyes, the mind, the brain and indeed, the complete nervous system. As a major source of receiving information, the role of reading in character formation, educational process, professional advancement and mental alertness cannot be underestimated. It is said that readers are leaders. Reading operates at two levels: the level of symbol identification and the level of concept formation (Obah, 145). This is otherwise broken down to the four-step process of reading, as follows:

- (a) seeing the printed word,
- (b) understanding its meaning,
- (c) becoming involved with the notion of the material, and
- (d) integrating what is said into one's total experience. The goal of reading is mainly comprehension.

The two types of reading commonly discussed are intensive and extensive

reading, both of which are applicable to students and non-students. Intensive reading involves a thorough reading of a material with a view to understanding the minute aspects of the intended and unintended ideas. As Grellette (22) puts it, "it aims at arriving at a profound and detailed understanding of the text: not only what it means but also how the meaning is produced." To read intensively is to study. Extensive reading, on the other hand, "is a broad-based approach to reading in which the reader seeks to be acquainted with general information on a particular subject" (Babatunde, 53). This involves longer materials than intensive reading as it ensures proper intellectual development as it widens a reader's horizons. The target is to have a general idea of the text being read, enabling relaxation and enjoyment because much is not required from the reader after reading. Intensive and extensive readings are interrelated, and are thus better seen as complementary.

Factors that affect reading include the personality of the reader, the place/environment where reading takes place, time, the material being read and other global factors like motivation, health, physical well-being, etc. (Adegbija, 2-5). Approaches to reading include skimming (glancing through a material to identify what is of relevance to one's interest or searching for needed information from a given text), scanning (careful reading of identified portions of a skimmed material. Scanning enables the reader to determine whether a material is worth being read or not) and speed reading (otherwise known as fast reading, that is, reading with such flexibility that allows more materials read within a particular period) (Abubakar, 103). Speed reading is constrained by poor reading habits such as vocalization, sub-vocalization, finger pointing, head movement, regression, etc.

3.4. Writing

Of all communication skills, writing is the most enervating, perhaps, the most edifying. It is the tripartite process of an encoder giving conventional codes to the decoder so as to bring about some desired objectives (Adedimeji, 3). Writing is considered the most difficult and tasking of the four communication/ language skills because the process of "writing calls for the writer's presence of mind in simultaneously thinking, organizing and writing. He also reads, being his own first audience as he writes" (Babatunde, 185). Writing is also a complex process that requires a great deal of discipline and skill, borne out of the mastery of other communication skills. In our world of today, there is no escape from writing. Journalists, authors and other professionals make a living out of writing, and those whose source of livelihood is not writing necessarily would make applications, write letters and reports, and prepare memoranda via the written medium. They also engage in sundry activities requiring some forms of writing.

Every piece of writing must have a three-part structural pattern: a beginning

or introduction, middle or body and an end or conclusion. Writing also involves three stages: pre-writing, writing and re-writing/ post writing activities. The pre-writing stage is made up of a number of activities out of which five are central. These are brainstorming (thinking of what to write by listing, clustering or asking relevant questions regarding an idea) selecting a topic, gathering materials, formulating a thesis and outlining. (Adedimeji, 8). To Obah (232), these pre-writing activities are selecting a topic, formulating a point of view, searching for facts, analyzing and arranging the facts and drawing up an outline. The writing stage is the stage of composition. Whether it is essay writing (the types of which are descriptive, narrative, expository and argumentative), letter writing (formal, semi-formal and informal) or report writing (whether formal/ technical or informal/non-technical), the writing stage involves the stringing of sentences and paragraphs together. At this stage, the writer is guided by the six Orwellian questions (cited in Kennedy, Kennedy & Aaron, 534):

- What am I trying to say?
- What words will express it?
- What image or idiom will make it clearer?
- Is this image fresh enough to have an effect?
- Could I put it more shortly...

At the post-writing stage, three activities are involved. These are revising, editing and proofreading. Revision concerns aspects of focus, paragraphing, organization, content, point-of-view, purpose, audience etc. The aim here is to ensure that such aspects are taken care of so that the composition/ writing is clear, consistent and clearly focused. The process of revision "stimulates thought" to re-arrange, remove, add, separate or merge paragraphs. Editing involves making improvements in sentence structures, diction, grammar and punctuation (Adedimeji, 9). Proof-reading is the last stage here; a slow and methodical reading that concerns checking spellings, typographical errors and omitted letters during typing. As Hacker, (22) observes, "Although proofreading is dull, it is crucial. Errors strewn throughout an essay are distracting and annoying". All effort should be made by the English language users, especially in Nigeria, to observe the stages of writing conscientiously.

4.0. Implications of Language Skills for Development in Nigeria

Development of nationhood involves a positive and progressive transformation of the entire societal superstructures from primitive, conservative mode of perception and behaviour to modernity. Rodney (1978) construes development as that concept which involves skill and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material well-being. It is a multi-dimensional process that involves the organization of the

entire economic and social system. To the economists, development is considered as a process of improving the quality of human life which involves raising the standard of living of people (income and consumption level of food, medical services, education and other infrastructural development); creating social, political and economic system and institutions which promote human dignity and respect; and increasing peoples' freedom of choice of goods and services (Ajibade, 186).

Development has often been construed in purely economic terms with major indicators being Gross Domestic Products (GDP), rate of poverty, national income, net barrier terms of trade, aggregate net resources flows, agricultural estimates, industrial estimates, as well as central government current deficit/surplus, among others. (Bello, 181-183), the notion of total development engenders an aggregate of economic, social, human, moral, cultural, educational aspects. According to Rodney (1), "development in human society is a many-sided process", thus, achieving total development is not limited but is all-inclusive. For instance, economic development without moral development is unmeaningful, while cultural development without socio-economic development is void. Education is the main catalyst; the principal purveyor of development. According to Idowu (61), developing a nation, for instance, Nigeria involves;

the emergence of a nation from a primitive state through progressive advancement in sustained socio-politico-economic growth and stability to improved standards of living for the citizenry...the basic indices of national development are therefore seen in the sustenance of the nation's geo-political, socio-economic growth and systems that guarantee improved standards of living for all citizens. In most civilized countries of the world, the most important instrument of achieving a sustainable national development is education.

In the light of the above, and the focus of this chapter on the need to highlight the various implications of the four language skills to the total development of Nigeria, what is first striking is that education is impossible without language. Education is mainly achievable through the instrumentation of language. It is as a result of this that language, as an agent of education, is seen in functional formative perspectives in forming, informing, reforming and transforming man and his society (Adedimeji, 2005). In other words, without language and the knowledge of its skills, there is no education; and without education, there is no development.

Prominent among the objectives of national development plan in Nigeria, as enshrined in the National Policy on Education (FGN, 1981), are to achieve:

- a free and democratic society;
- a just and egalitarian society;
- a united, strong and self-reliant nation;
- a great and dynamic economy; and
- a land of bright and full opportunities for all citizens.

The foregoing is an indication that 'the mind' is central too. It is often said that language shapes and sharpens perception. Developmental processes are informed, formulated and expressed by language. So, language when used effectively, triggers and influences people's sense of direction towards or against a particular course of action. Invariably, language becomes an indispensable and strategic tool of actualizing the developmental dreams of a given society. It is a medium through which people can be mobilized from a state of inertia to that of dynamism and action. Powerful leaders are noted to have used language masterfully to alter the course of history by mobilizing their people towards laudable goals.

Since a good use of language is predicated on a sound mastery and utilization of its four basic skills, it is imperative to give each of them the deserved attention as veritable tool of accomplishing desired national goals – especially from the perspective of the social function they perform. In essence, listening and speaking; reading and writing as language skills are crucial in accomplishing the goals of national development plan in Nigeria. Concerted efforts are therefore needed to effect social change through an effective utilization and harmonization of the skills.

4.1. Skills of Oracy

Every language is primarily oral. The skills involved here are listening and speaking. These skills in any language are interrelated as they are not mutually exclusive. Listening is a skill which, when adequately developed, would enhance national integration. Cultivating 'listening ears' is a necessity in the polyglossic Nigerian context so that the concerns of the minorities would be heard and addressed, thereby giving them a sense of belonging and making them participate fully in the political process. A listener is able to discriminate the slightest changes in meaning as induced by a change in the phonostructural rudiments especially when utterances are made with peculiar accent, pitch or intonation. Through effective listening, one is able to achieve the following:

- Understand and appreciate human differences;
- Perceive issues from the perspectives of others;
- Avoid misconceptions and misinterpretations which pose a serious threat to
- the fragile thread of unity in the country.

On speaking, it is axiomatic that good speakers are conscious of the inherent power of utterances; and so, 'mill' their utterances, and 'season' them to the taste of the listeners such that the intended purpose would be achieved. Among others, a good speaker differentiates easily between 'permissible' and 'ideal' utterances in different communicative circumstances. This enables him to further guard against:

- infelicitous utterances which can instigate or cause disaffection among fellow citizens;
- unintelligible utterances especially in the age of globalization now. Adequate mastery and use of speaking skills has a tendency of facilitating interaction within the context of the global village. Good speakers tend to have limitless boundaries of audience. Smashing barriers and connecting with others are a crucial component of jump-starting Nigerian economy and achieving other forms of development.
- personal and regional affectation. Certain linguistic traits which are exclusively peculiar to a given terrain or personality can inhibit smooth interaction with others who do not share similar experience or habit.

The foregoing implies that a sound development of primary / oracy skills, in an individual, is a catalyst for national development. In Nigeria, especially, as a developing nation with over four hundred (400) languages we still contend with trying to develop orthography or script for over two-thirds of the languages in existence in the country. Even in cases where there are languages with already developed (and in-use) orthographies, the largest chunk of the users of the languages are illiterates. This makes the oracy skills in English the only alternative available to most Nigerians in order to harmonize and integrate. It is unpleasant to note however that these primary skills have not enjoyed a serious attention of the Nigerian school curriculum. They have, to a great extent, been taken for granted. Perhaps, several unsuccessful attempts at wooing foreign investors to Nigeria have been due to linguistic disconnection between the interactants

4.2. Skills of Literacy

Information dissemination via media activities involves the use of prints: newspapers, magazines, journal articles and periodicals, internet, etc. Such provides invaluable information on current trends in all facets of human endeavor and they are the factors which have compressed the world into a global village. One of the indices of measuring a nation's human development potential is literacy rate. Limited literacy essentially translates to limited productivity and

limited development.

Reading is a skill which enables one to 'download', synthesize and transform bits of information got from printed materials into tangible indices of development. Scientists, farmers, engineers, even artists of various forms need to be aware of the current trend in their various fields of specialty. This would enable them improve on their tools, methods and applications in a bid to improve national productivity in the long run. When reading is not done, stagnation occurs, and development is thwarted. Nigeria has a poor reading culture, and even many students read only to pass, not to get informed or educated. There must be an institutionalized approach to imbuing reading culture in Nigeria. Some of the strategies for this are subsidizing print materials like paper, ink, printing machines, etc. and encouraging writers by giving them due recognition and honour so that the younger generation would like to emulate them.

Writing, like its twin skill of reading, is also essential. The world is where it is today, a zenith of development, based on the findings that were documented and implemented. From music to engineering, from architecture to programming, from arts to science, writing is both a means and an end. According to Day (ix), while underscoring the essence of writing for scientists:

There is no question that the goal of scientific research is publication. Scientists, starting as graduate students, are measured primarily not by their dexterity in laboratory manipulation, not by their innate knowledge of either broad or narrow scientific subjects, and certainly not by their wit or charm; they are measured, and become known (or remain unknown), by their *publications*.

As there is a symbiotic relationship between one language skill and the other, the development of writing skill can be facilitated or hindered by the level of inputs got from all of listening, speaking and reading. Writing is the least spontaneous of all the skills. It is a slow process; hence much is invested in it. Productive opinions, inventions and discoveries can be dispatched via writing which has an additional, authentic storage and retrieval advantage. People read books, journals, newsprints, articles, bulletins on billboards to get informed as a basis of modifying their behaviour. All of these are related to the socio-economic, educational, cultural and political development of individuals and societies. Products of good writers enjoy extensive patronage, and this is determined by the quality of the skills displayed by the writer in the writing process. The progress of a nation can also be measured by the richness of its literature, the versatility of its scholars, scientists and artists.

5.0. Conclusion

This chapter has examined the nature of language, an onion bulb exhibiting

different levels (Adedimeji & Alabi, 29) and highlighted the centrality of the four language skills in achieving development in Nigeria. It is maintained that development is only possible where people consciously activate their listening, speaking, reading and writing skills, and deploy such to effect positive change in the society. The teaching and learning of English language in a country like Nigeria is imperiled by what Aliyu (347) refers to as "over-populated and ill-equipped classrooms, poorly-paid teachers, unmotivated...and poorly-prepared students, hurriedly written textbooks, uncoordinated litany of policies and documents and old-fashioned bureaucracy resistant to change". As the only alternative to development is underdevelopment, the restructuring of English language pedagogy in Nigeria is considered not only expedient but urgent, so that Nigerians can also function effectively in the unfolding global village where the need for communication, networking and connection with others is becoming increasingly pervasive. The means through which this goal of development will be attained is through the language skills which constitute vehicle of education, civilization and total development.

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CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Language and Politics: An Introductory Insight

Abaya, Angulu Samson

1.0 Introduction

Several scholars have defined language differently to suit the context of their work. Language will be defined in this chapter according to Sapir's (1921), which sees language as a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of voluntarily produced symbols. Similarly, Block and Trager (1949) cited by Abaya (2008), distinguish language as a system of arbitrary vocal symbols by means of which a social group cooperates. However, Chomsky (1957) cited by Oyeleye (2004) posits that language enables us to influence one another's behaviour, and to influence it in great detail and thereby makes human cooperation possible. The possible interpretation of these definitions is that language is human, and serves as instrument of interaction.

According to Perloff (1998) politics is "the science of how, who gets what and why". He goes further that, "it is a process whereby a group of people, whose opinion or interest are initially divergent, reach collective decisions which are generally regarded as binding on the group, and enforced as common policy." Wareing and Thomas (1999) opine that politics is concerned with power: the power to make decisions, to control resources, to control other people's behavior and often to control their values. And that it is all around us all the time. It should be noted that every definition of the concept points towards the direction that politics has to do with human rivalry in an attempt to meet one's individual or group aspirations. Largely, politics is a highly interactive activity that is solely dependent on language. In other words, both language and politics have a symbiotic relationship. It is therefore our position in this chapter that politicians use language to either sway or beguile the people.

Having examined the key words of 'politics' and 'language' as entities, it is pertinent to look at the main thrust of the chapter, language and politics, will be variously referred to as political language or political discourse as a concept especially from the perspective of scholars of language and politics. Largely, the aim of this chapter is to provide insight into the inner trappings of the concept of political language in order to avert misgivings especially on the part of non-linguists.