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THE INFLUENCE OF LANGUAGE AND CULTURE IN THE BEHAVIORAL PATTERN OF NIGERIANS TOWARDS NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

ONWUEGBULE CHINYERE GIFT
Department of Languages, School of General and Basic Studies
Akanu Ibiam Federal Polytechnic Unwana Ebonyi State
glorytrend@gmail.com
+2348035001318

Abstract

Language is a value system that marks the identity of a people, their way of life and defines the whole essence of man and his environment. It is a vehicle for transmission of culture, beliefs, value system, norms and institutions. It unites a people and creates a special bond amongst them. The diversity of languages spoken for example in a multilingual setting like Nigeria; with over four hundred languages, in no small measure affects or influences the behavioral patterns of Nigerians towards National development. This also affects the way the different ethnic groups react to the Languages, Cultures, Beliefs, Values and Norms of the other ethnic groups. The people's behavior to one another's Language is as a result of how they perceive and accept them due to the distinct nature of Nigeria Languages. Ethnic and Language intolerance laced in tribal sentiment has exposed Nigeria to deep seated ethnic distrust and rivalry thereby stifling national Development. This study was carried out to review the challenges encountered as a result of the diversity of Languages spoken by Nigerians and its impact on National development with emphasis or focus on Politics, Security, Religion and Marriage as well as proffer solutions for progress and continuity of national development.

Keywords: Language, Culture, Behavioural Pattern, National development.

Introduction

Language does not exist in a vacuum. It is highly contextual and situated within a society of people with culture and belief system. Every human is born into a speech community involuntarily and is expected to speak the language, learn and adapt to the norms, culture and ethics of that community. Different ethnic groups have a cultural heritage that is distinct from other ethnic group which is passed from one generation to another through language whether spoken or written. Just like Agbedo (2009) explains that language is a unique medium through which the culture, beliefs, moral values and other important aspects of a society is handed down to the young ones from generation to generation. Language exists as an aspect of culture because it is a means of expressing a society's tradition. It is a value system that marks the identity of a people's way of life.

Every single need of man in and outside of the society depends on language at large. It is a vehicle for the transmission of culture, values, norms; beliefs etc. Language unites people together and creates a special bond amongst them. Sapir (1929) observes that language is a guide to a society's reality. The real world is to a larger extent unconsciously or consciously built up on the language habit of the people. Language difference engenders cultural

difference as people view and comprehends the society from different perspective based on their belief system. Thus the relationship between language and culture cannot be ignored in the history of any society. The relationship between language and cultural heritage is so intertwined in the growth and development of people within a given society. Language is an imminent part of cultural development of individuals and groups that speak it. It no doubt constitute the most important and precious possession of its speakers identity and reality. Language promotes social connection while culture aids our learning of how to connect with others. So language is the source and essence of culture.

Nigeria, a multilingual nation with diversities of languages and rich cultures is supposed to bask in the glory of its diversity; unfortunately it is not because the difference in languages and cultures has caused a spate of conflicts amongst Nigeria citizens as they view one another as strangers. This has posed a lot of problems to national development. A Hausa man sees himself as a different individual from a Yoruba or Igbo because of the distinct nature of their culture and language code and symbols. This brings about tribal sentiments, unity in antagonism as well as insecurity. Onyema (2010) quotes Okonkwo who parodies the first Nigeria national anthem "though tribe and tongue differs in logger heads we stand". Language and tribal sentiments has birthed Political tensions, insecurity, distrust and incessant killings amongst Nigerians as they perceive other ethnic groups as a threat.

An overview of language and culture

Igbokwe (2008) defines language as a system whereby people from the same speech community and culture interact and express their ideas, emotions and desires by an acceptable symbols. This definition is to an extent in line with Bloch and Trager (1942) that language is a system of arbitrary symbols by means of which a social group cooperates. Hall (1968) is also of the view that language is an institution whereby humans communicate and interact with each other. Elugbe (1990) further stated that language is one of the most enduring artifacts of culture. People can always have their culture traced through their language.

The relationship between language and culture cannot be overemphasized as language provides the content as well as expresses culture. Language and culture are deeply rooted as it is used to maintain and convey culture and cultural ties. Since culture is referred to the way of life of people in all ramifications such as tradition, values, norms, customs etc, culture is a product of thought of the mind and it is fully harnessed and sustained through language. Kanungo (2006) posits that culture is an essential tool in comprehending how social systems changes because culture influences both the norms and values of such system and the behavior of such ethnic groups in their interaction within and across systems. Hantrais (1989) states that culture is the beliefs and practices governing the way of life of a society of which a particular language is the vehicle of expression. People's perception about life and society are dependent on the culture which has influenced them overtime. Lee (2006) considers culture as a set of values and beliefs that people share with others in a particular community giving them a sense of belonging and identity. This is in line with Walsham (2002) that culture is a shared symbol, norms and values in a social organization. The characteristics and patterns of people's behavior within a community define their culture. Bodley (1999) reviews that there are three aspects of culture which is; what people think, what they do and the material products they produce. This is further strengthened by Femi and Wale (1999) that language is connected to culture in three major levels; namely:

1. Language is an aspect of culture.
2. Language is an instrument of thought. It helps to concretize thoughts and also to explore, discover, extend and record the experience in culture.
3. Language expresses culture. It is the only way by which the social experience and values of a group of people are perceived and understood.

The question is: does language and culture determine the way we structure our society's reality and national development?

National development and growth in Nigeria is increasingly becoming complex and intricate due to peoples' monolingual and monoculture structures faced with the realities of operating within a multilingual and multicultural society. Language and cultural diversity makes ethnic groups see themselves as distinct individuals thus creating impediments to commerce and industry as various ethnic groups' pursue selfish and sectional interest. The challenges and the influence of language and culture in the behavioral pattern of some Nigerians towards national development are discussed below:

Political challenges

Language and cultural diversity in Nigeria largely controls or influences how people think and talk and also determines what they oppose or support. Politics in Nigeria has been a tussle in the multilingual setting of Nigeria. There are generally tribal sentiments especially if the person vying for a certain position is of same tribe. Some people will rather vote on the basis of fellow kinsmen rather than competence. For instance a Hausa man can vehemently refuse to vote for an Igbo man just for the fact that they do not share same language and culture even if the said Igbo man is the better candidate than the Hausa man. This can stifle national development in no small measure. For example, the outcome of the just concluded party primaries for presidential aspirants for the forthcoming 2023 general election was clearly based on tribal sentiments. Some party delegates were believed to have voted based on language and cultural bias. It is a major challenge for a nation like ours that election processes have become a religion and tribal affair. For example, Peter Obi of the Labor Party, Ahmed Bola Tinubu of the All Progressive Congress and Atiku Abubakah of the People's Democratic Party etc are contesting for the presidency of Nigeria in 2023. Tribal sentiment is at the fore as many Nigerians are ready to vote for the candidate of same ethnic group and not ordinarily on who is actually fit for the job. This is largely as a result of the language and cultural difference shared by these individuals. This affects development as the unqualified keeps holding on to power with little or no agenda for national development. Some individuals are not receptive to having a person from another language group lead them. There is likely the challenge of mutual suspicion among the divergent ethnic group.

Every ethnic group is highly self-conscious about their language, heritage, beliefs and culture and will protect and sustain it at all cost. For instance if an Hausa man in power wants to implement Hausa language as a national language, other ethnic groups may translate the adoption of Hausa language as political domination and exploitation to make them second class citizens. As long as some ethnic groups feel marginalized by other ethnic groups they won't give in their best for national development. National development remains a challenge as there is also an inability of government and private bodies to fight corruption in politics. It is rare to see a tribesman prosecuting fellow tribesman for corrupt practices. Employments

and awards of contracts are highly politicized and tribal based. Even an employer would rather have someone from same language as a staff and in sensitive positions than someone from a different ethnic group. Difference in language and culture has culminated to distrust and lack of confidence amongst Nigerians.

Insecurity challenges

The development of any nation is built on unity, mutual intelligibility and understanding amongst the citizens. Some of the insecurity issues faced in Nigeria today are considered biologically, linguistically and culturally. Insecurity is at its peak because of language differences, religious differences and ethnic intolerance which have generated violence acts were innocent souls are killed on dailies. There are disparities between the Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba. None of these tribes wants to identify the other as brothers. The fragility of the current security challenges such as kidnapping and banditry is largely championed by tribal sentiments and language difference. To bridge the cap of cultural and language diversity in Nigeria government should come up with workable plans to foster peace and harmonious co existence to promote ethnic strength in our diversity.

Religious and Marriage challenges

Language and culture is an integral part of human existence. It is quite difficult for someone to give up ones language and culture for another because of conjugality. It is not so common to see an Igbo woman or man exchanging vows with a Hausa or Yoruba vice versa. The multilingual nature of Nigeria has restricted intermarriage on the premises of the differences in religion, Languages and cultures. Some Nigerians are of the view that as long as they do not share language and cultural similarities with other ethnic group they remain total strangers to them. There is an egocentric sentiment between the various tribes towards their cultures and these different tribes have a stereotyped view of the culture of others. For instance it is ideal for a Hausa woman to cover up from head to feet to show decency this is not so with other ethnic groups.

No ethnic group would want the other to impose their culture on them because an average Nigerian is proud of his culture and bias towards another. Getting married to another ethnic group means learning the culture and language of that ethnic group consciously or unconsciously. The language and cultural differences which exists among the various linguistic groups in Nigeria in the estimation of social values and customs militates against national development.

Conclusion

National development cannot be actualized without the full participation of the nation's citizens. A nation thrives where there is peace, unity and oneness. The difference in language and culture is what makes Nigeria unique and should not be a thorn. No man is an island; people need people to survive by omission or commission. Nigeria needs the collective efforts of her citizens to develop. The diversity of Nigerian languages and cultural heritage should be a synergy for progress and not for tribal sentiments, suspicion and threats.

Government should also set realistic polices that promotes unity and peace to encourage people from different ethnic groups to selflessly give in their best to build a strong and indomitable nation.

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