

THE UNIFYING POWER OF LANGUAGE A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF RUSSIAN AND NIGERIAN STATES

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Abstract

The Unifying Power of Language which is generally defined as the method of human communication, either spoken or written, consisting of the use of words in a structured and conventional way, is a force that can never be neglected by any peace loving State. Apart from using language for communication, language is also used for education. In fact, without language, there is no education. The aim of this work is to give a Comparative Analysis of the unifying roles of language in Russian and Nigerian States. The two countries are chosen as case studies because Russia which practices monolingual language is believed to be more united compared to Nigeria that is multilingual. The question this work seeks to answer is on how national unity is fostered by Language. The Russian nation, as a homogeneous nation with time-honoured history and culture, is highly patriotic and strong in esprit de corps. On the other hand Nigeria suffers the misfortune of almost losing its sovereignty because of the struggle for power which is often triggered by ethnic affiliations. The methodology employed in this study is descriptive phenomenological method. Both oral interviews and library materials were used. The study revealed that Language is the chief medium for the communication of civilizations, customs, traditions, habits, wisdom, values and lifestyles of a people, thus using the English Language in Nigeria, while encouraging the learning of mother tongue will help to foster unity.

Keywords: Russian, Nigerian, States, Comparative Analysis, Language, Unifying Power

Introduction

The unifying and dividing power of language has historically been given a high-minded status. Communities world over learn to communicate what unites them through language. Language is so influential that even Linguists cannot say with certainty how many human languages are spoken today.

In this work on the unifying power of language, the study seeks to draw a comparative analysis of Russian and Nigerian states. Russia is chosen because it is monolingual in Nature while Nigeria is multilingual. Russia is and remains the primary language of the Russian people, compared to Nigeria with the influence of language annihilators. Even without physical annihilation and prohibitions against language use, the language of the “dominant” cultures may drive other languages into extinction; young people see education, jobs, culture and technology associated with the dominant language and focus their attention on that language. The largest languages spoken are English, Spanish, Portuguese, French, Russian, Hindi, and Chinese.

In the words of Ehusani (2017), Language is a sacred gift, developed in the course of human evolution. It is the sophisticated instrument of socialization and communication that distinguishes one group of people from the other and sets *homo sapiens* apart from all other living organisms. Language is committed to the care of creation. Language is a formidable instrument for the cultivation and communication of meaning. It is the embodiment of the collective memory and the purveyor of the corporate wisdom of a people. Language is the chief medium for the communication of civilizations, customs, traditions, habits, wisdom, values and lifestyles of a people.

The Nigerian National Language Issue

Nigeria is currently living in an age of widespread crisis of identity and crisis of values which has been made worse by different political crisis ranging from terrorism to tussle for power. This is an age when we seem to be witnessing a general loss of cultural orientation, and particularly for a people who have gone through over a hundred years of economic, political and cultural domination by foreign powers.

Daily, Nigerians wake up to here chains of threats and calls for division of the country which is all anchored on the fact that we have often emphasized on what divides than on what unites us. The large difference in language is a dividing factor in Nigeria. Language is the key to the heart of the people. If we lose the key, we lose the people. The development or adoption of an indigenous language as the nation’s lingua franca, is an instrument for the attainment of genuine unifying factor.

The history of Nigeria cannot be complete without tracing it to prehistoric settlers (Nigerians) living in the area. Numerous ancient African civilizations

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settled in the region that is today Nigeria, such as the Kingdom of Nri, the Benin Empire, and the Oyo Empire. Islam reached Nigeria through the Hausa States during the 11th century, while Christianity came to Nigeria in the 15th century through Augustinian and Capuchin monks from Portugal. The Songhai Empire also occupied part of the region. Lagos was invaded by British forces in 1851 and formally annexed in 1861. Nigeria became a British protectorate in 1901. Colonization lasted until 1960, when an independence movement succeeded in gaining Nigeria its independence. The forgoing thus gave rise to Nigeria's multilingual nature.

In achieving a National Unity, there is need for the emergence of a national language which will aid the communication of the factors that unites us like the national symbols and characteristics of one integral political entity, like the national flag, the national anthem or the national currency. It could even be said that a measure of a country's sovereignty is reflected or embodied in its national language. Monolingual Nations like Russia seems to enjoy more stability in the politics

The Russian Model

Russia as a country has always enjoyed internal stability, a status that has endowed her with the fiat to exert her political influence over other countries. Recent attempts to foster the national unity and patriotism in the Russian Federation show that the concept of a unified language is an important tool and symbol in the creation of the shared experience of belonging. Contemporary language ideological discourses emphasize the universalistic significance of the Russian language as a semiotic resource shared by all nationalities in the Russian Federation, and are also concerned about the need to treasure the purity of Russian. As noted by Prof Lähteenmäki (2016) the significance of the unified language transcends the geographical boundaries of Russia, and Russian is seen as the unifying feature of the 'Russian world', that is, a specific linguistic and cultural space consisting of Russian-speaking people and diasporas scattered around the globe.

Language has so united the people of Russia as against the Nigerian Nation that Russia has a National Unity Day (Ñáüü íàðíáííáí ääèíñòâà) this is a holiday (íòàçáíèê) celebrated in Russia on November 4 (4 íÿáðÿ). As a national holiday, it is an official day off. The history of National Unity Day is quite interesting. It was reinstated by the Russian government in 2005 after being replaced in 1917 by the

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commemoration of the October Revolution (Êòÿáðñêàÿ ðâîëþèÿ), celebrated closer to this date on November 7 (7 ïÿáðÿ) during the Soviet times.

The unifying power of the Russian Language is so influential that even neighbouring countries are contemplating its adoption. Dyakuyu or Spasibo? The controversy over whether Russian should be recognized as an official language of Ukraine is so heated that it has compelled Ukrainian politicians to tear each other's clothes, flip parliamentarians over bannisters, and even provoked the speaker of parliament to tender his resignation.

Discussion of Findings

Findings from primary and secondary sources consulted at the course of this work shows that language is an extremely important tool in any society. Its indispensability nature always necessitates a continuous development. Apart from using language for communication, language is also used for education. In fact, without language, there is no education. As asserted by Nwadike (2003:13) Language is the key to the heart of the people. If we lose the key, we lose the people. Language is an indispensable tool for human communication and national development. There is hardly any human activity that does not make use of language. There can never be development in a society without language. Language is the key sustenance of both the society and the people.

Having rediscovered the above importance of language; the question that confronts the researcher is that in the face of Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba as the three major languages spoken in Nigeria which should be adopted to meet our national need? This question has been an issue since 1961 when parliament debated national language question, till date (Enahoro (2002).

Almost all developing countries were constantly confronted with the problems of ethnic and cultural diversity. The presence of competing ethnic and cultural groups in these countries generally means that the establishment of new nationhood requires the cultivation of a new national identity (Kuo 1985) and language plays an integral role in nation-building and identity formation in these multi-ethnic societies. Many studies of nationalism and the emergence of nations have shown that a broadly shared language is the most significant and critical component in the successful building of a nation.

The Nigerian situation seems to be on the feeble face based on the fact that according to Atta (2008), the number of languages spoken in Nigeria has been

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variously estimated from 150 (Tiffen 1968) to about 400 (Bamgbose 1971). Probably the most authoritative survey is that of K. J. Hansford et al. (1976) which identifies as many as 394 indigenous languages spoken within the territorial boundaries of the country. Afolayan (1977) suggests that the actual number may well be higher considering that on closer investigation the Ijo language in the Rivers state has been found to be seventeen different languages rather than a single dialect. Also, Mobar, which was grouped as a dialect of Kanuri, has now been found to be a distinct language (Bulakarima 1986). In order to ascertain the number of indigenous languages in Nigeria, the Federal Government now plans to map out the country's linguistic topography. This national language survey should involve a thorough documentation of all the indigenous languages, including their location. Until this survey is complete, suffice it to say that Nigeria is a multilingual nation with three of the four phyla into which African languages are classified fully represented within its boundaries.

Therefore, if we go by the European model, does this mean that multi-ethnic nations can never have integrative socio-cultural bonds? The European model is not a realistic approach to adopt without adaptation because the history of post-colonial nations has seen them inherit a demography that has constituted ethnic groups made up of different races, religions, cultural practices and languages. For many of these nations, on attaining independence, they had to struggle with establishing not only "the politico-institutional instruments" but also the "socio-cultural authenticity".

Rupert (1959) draws in the socio-cultural authenticity as a defining factor in his definition of a nation describing it as "a community of people who feel that they belong together in the double sense that they share deeply significant elements of a common heritage and that they have a common destiny for the future. In the contemporary world, the nation is for great portions of mankind in the community with which men most intense and most unconditionally identify themselves, however deeply they may differ among themselves on other issues." Realistically, in a nation made up of diverse ethnic groups, loyalty to the nation does not override all other competing loyalties. "Family, tribe, locality, religion, conscience, economic interest, and a host of other appeals may at any given time and place prevail over national allegiance for particular individuals or groups." (Emerson 1959, p. 97).

Recommendations

1. In the interest of national unity, each child should be encouraged to learn one of the three major languages other than his own mother-tongue. In this connection the government considers the three major languages in Nigeria to be Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba.
2. With so many languages and with their speakers identifying so strongly with them, Nigeria's national language issue may never be resolved amicably in favour of an indigenous mother-tongue.
3. The use of English language as a major unifying factor should be properly emphasized; to achieve this qualified English teachers should be employed into our schools.

Conclusion

The work so far has x-rayed the irreplaceable role of Language in unifying a nation. As have already been recommended, English language needs to be adopted as a Unifying Tool for National Integration in Nigeria. Of the entire heritage left behind in Nigeria by the British at the end of colonial administration, probably, none is more important than the English Language. It is now the language of government, business and commerce, education, the mass media, literature, and much internal as well as external communication. Government thus need to ensure that all her citizenry learn to read and write in English.

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