

.Research Article

French Language and National Development the Case Of Nigeria

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Abstract:

Many people wonder why Nigeria, with so many local languages and English as the official language, should bother about learning and speaking French language. The government of saniabacha saw the need for Nigeria to speak French when in 1996, he pronounced French as the second official language for Nigeria. Unfortunately, the pronouncement has remained on paper as the policy was never implemented. This neglect has neither helped the country nor its citizens. The role of language in every aspect of life in the society cannot be over-emphasized. Multilingualism has many benefits and Nigeria needs to key in especially as it relates to international languages. French language occupies a strategic position on the international scene today. It is a language of development, industry, trade and diplomacy. It can help promote sustainable economic growth and human development which will in turn, translate into a better quality of life for Nigerians. This paper intends to highlight the role French language can play in national development in Nigeria and the need for the country to become French literate in spite of the presence of English which has been there since the colonial days. These two major international languages can facilitate national development in Nigeria.

Keywords: Language, Development, Multilingualism, Bilinguali ,Growth.

I.Introduction:

Language is a universal activity engaged in by both human beings and animals. It plays a crucial role in relationships, either strengthening or weakening it. Without language, life will be meaningless, static, boring and full of conflict. Language makes for growth of the individual and the nation. Multilingualism is the way to go. According to connectusfund.org, “over half of the world’s population speaks at least two different languages regularly every day. Many countries consider bilingualism to be the norm and may even require a third (or more) language to be learned as part of the schooling process” [19]. Does nigeria, an english-speaking country, surrounded by french-speaking countries, need to speak french? Does she need a second foreign language to grow and develop like other nations of the world? Are there any economic advantages derived from the ability to speak major international languages of the world especially as they promote diplomacy, trade, industry, scientific and technological development? This paper discusses the role of french language in national development of nigeria.

II.Role Of Language In The Society:

Victoria fromkin, robert rodman and nina hyams (2011:284) state that we live in a world of language Because we are always talking and are talked to everywhere, everytime even in our dreams. They believe that “the possession of language, perhaps more than any other attributes, distinguishes humans from other animals”. Language is the source of human life and power. language is used in the family, in religion, in education, in business, in health, or in the workplace, in friendship, or other social interactions. ndimele (2008:3) states that language does not exist in a vacuum. It has no independent existence apart from its users and the uses to which they put it. language is part of our culture. It gives us our identity. According to her, the culture of a people through the vehicle of language controls our behaviour. according to o’grady william, archibald and katamba (2011:1), language is at the heart of all things human. It is not just part of us, it defines us. It is difficult to imagine much significant social, intellectual or artistic activity taking place without the opportunities for communication offered by language. through

language, we express ourselves. We make known to other human beings our emotions (love, joy, annoyance), desires, wants, etc. We use it to teach, to pass on information even from generation to generation. Scientists, technologists, other professionals use language to express their discoveries and the way they affect us.

Language is a code used by a speech community to communicate. It makes for peaceful co-existence and mutual understanding. The importance of the role of language in the society cannot be over-emphasized. It is fundamental to a meaningful existence. One is bilingual when one can speak and understand two languages while multilingualism is the ability to speak more than two different languages fluently. The more languages you can speak, the more you make friends, the more you get on with people, understand them and learn from them.

iii. Benefits Of Multilingualism:

For unesco, cultural diversity and multilingualism play a key role in fostering pluralistic, equitable, open, and inclusive knowledge in societies. Unesco encourages member-states to formulate language policies that encourage linguistic diversity and multilingualism in the society, the media and the internet. This will promote coexistence of different languages. Then conventions, treaties and recommendations can be reinforced at national levels. Being multilingual has a lot of advantages. It has been established that ability to speak many languages helps one to be able to multitask because one constantly switches from one language to another. It leads to having a better attention span and better adjustment to changes in one's environment. Hence, it has cognitive advantages.

On the educational front, a bilingual or multilingual person has an advantage at school even outside his environment. He can easily adjust, understand, and participate in activities. He is less distracted and more focused on tasks. Experts have discovered that bilingual children perform better than monolinguals. Health-wise, studies have shown that bilingualism and multilingualism delay the onset of dementia and alzheimer's disease, help to reduce risk of having a stroke. It has been suggested that the cognitive requirements associated with bi- and multilingual processing provide a form of mental exercise that, through increases in cognitive reserve and brain fitness, may delay the symptoms of cognitive failure associated with alzheimer's disease and other forms of [dementia](#). (raymond m.klein,^ajohnchristie^a,mikaelparkvall^b)

Ability to speak more than one language makes one open-minded. You understand others, you see the world in different ways. You can easily adapt to a new environment. Each language allows you to access a culture that might have a different take on an idea under debate. Speaking more than one language also opens up new opportunities. You adjust to new people, new activities, new hobbies. You understand better other people's culture and there is mutual understanding, peaceful coexistence, you acquaint yourself with scientific and technological discoveries. When you travel, you make friends more easily. You are able to communicate with locals and you enjoy your trips better. Being multilingual makes it a lot easier to travel around the world. It is said that language skills reinforce each other. So, knowing more than one language helps you learn additional languages. When you are bilingual or multilingual your children are so raised and this can pass through generations, resulting in better relationships among people of the world. Above all, when you are multilingual, you are not in the minority. Studies have shown that more than half of the world speaks more than one language on a daily basis. You also have more career prospects available to you.

Multilingualism is therefore social empowerment that helps make you a better and more useful person.

Iv. Nigeria As A Multilingual Society:

Nigeria is a multilingual, multi-ethnic and multicultural country. Ndimele (99) states that the lingual situation in Nigeria is complex and there are different accounts of the number of languages existing in the Nigerian polity. English is the official language, while French was once made 2nd official language. There is equally the pidgin English and what is known as Nigerian English. Wikipedia puts the number at over 500 languages in Nigeria. Ethnologue says 525 and breaks the figure down: 517 are living, 8 are extinct. Of the living, 19 are institutional, 76 are developing, 299 are vigorous, 81 are in trouble and 42 are dying. This linguistic situation of Nigeria creates problems of understanding, cooperation and peaceful coexistence. Another problem is the fact that most of them are developing, in trouble, or are dying according to Ethnologue. Hence, they cannot fully serve their purpose or play the role of languages in development, in advancement and in international relations. We know that English is the official language which is widely used for education, business transactions and diplomacy. During the

regime of general saniabacha in nigeria, french language was declared the second foreign language in nigeria for many cogent reasons. Nigeria is surrounded by french speaking countries. We should be able to communicate with our neighbours. French is one of the working languages of most international organizations to which nigeria belongs. One has to be bilingual or multilingual to hold serious positions in these organizations. But that policy was never implemented.

V. Status Of French As An International Language:

Palet in his article “is french the language of the future?” Cites a study by natixis, an investment bank, as saying that french is likely to become the world’s most commonly spoken language by the year 2050 because it is gaining speakers quickly and will be spoken by 750million by that year. He states that french-speaking populations are growing faster than english and mandarin speaking ones.stein-smith explains that multilingualism is a core value of the eu, which has implemented and supported plurilingualism (mother-tongue plus two) as a pragmatic educational objective.french is one of the major working/procedural languages of the european community. With the brexit, the role of english within the eu has been questioned, with suggestions made that french and german should be the sole working/procedural languages.french is a global language widely spoken around the world, with 274 million native speakers, and is the fifth most-widely spoken language in the world. French is used in international business and organizations. Stein-smith quotes “la langue française dans le monde” as saying that french is the third language on amazon, fifth on wikipedia.a knowledge of french gives one a personal and professional advantage and a tool to access information around the world. It is a language of international communication with international media like tv 5 monde, france 24, rfi and fourth most widely used language on the internet.french language, culture, and lifestyle are gaining importance of the day.many people are speaking and learning french today more than ever before. English is spoken by only 25% of the world population according to british council. With brexit now, its future is difficult to predict. Meanwhile only 36% of native french speakers live in europe, therefore its future is global and its status is impacted by the same global forces that have led to the rise of english. The importance of french and francophone culture can no longer be ignored as foreign language skills are linked to business and

professional success.stein-smith reports that between 2010-2014, “the number of students learning french increased by 2% in north america, 7% in middle east, 44% in sub-saharan africa, and 43% in asia and oceania. It is the 5th/6th most widely spoken language in the world after mandarin chinese, english, hindi, spanish and arabic. It has over 220 million speakers worldwide. It is the official language in 29 countries.it is taught as a foreign language in the education system of most countries in the world. It is the sole language used for deliberations of the court of justice of the eu and also the universal postal union (upu). It is one of the working languages of many international institutions and organizations – oecd, unesco, unctad, ecosoc, fao, unhcr, nato, ilo, ecowas, wto, wipo, unicef, au, wada, fifa, uneca and ioc (see appendix i).france and french speaking countries play an active part in the world economy, accounting for some 20% of world trade in goods. There is therefore, the need to accord the language more attention than is being done now in nigeria.

Vi.French As A Catalyst For National Development In Nigeria:

French is a language of development. Alongside the oif (organisation internationale de la francophonie), it supports the development of the network centres for french as a foreign language in africa (recflea) currently operating in togo, benin, ghana and nigeria. It also contributes to initiatives to facilitate the coexistence of french and national languages.french is the second official language in nigeria since 1996 when the then head of state gen. Saniabacha declared it so. It is surprising that not many nigerians are aware of this. Some nigerians feel that a second official language is not necessary. It is important at this point for us to appreciate the importance of and need to have a good knowledge of at least two international languages. Some of our neighbours do have 2nd, 3rd or 4th official languages. Omonigho is of the opinion that nigeria must join her counterparts in the trend of bilingualism/multilingualism as it, no doubt, has benefits. For decades, nigerians have traded along the west african routes across benin, togo, ivory coast.the nigeria french language village, badagry, lagos state was established by the federal government in december, 1991, as an inter-university centre for french studies. Its mandate includes among others, to explore areas of the practical application of the french language to the nigerian situation and to promote economic, technical and social integration of the african continent. Yet nigeria does not yet

appreciate the need to implement that policy of french as the second official language of the country. As a global language of development, some scientific and technological discoveries and advancements are by the french. Without the knowledge of french, how can nigeria key in? Multilingualism is a tool for social transformation.

With the coming on stream of african continental free trade area (afcfra) in 2018, it is imperative that nigeria learns to speak french because majority of the members are basically french-speaking. According to the african union website, this is a body whose main objectives are to create a single continental market for goods and services, with free movement of business persons and investments, and thus pave way for accelerating the establishment of a customs union. This is in addition to accelerating intra-african trade and boosting africa's trading position in the global market by strengthening africa's common voice and policy space in global trade negotiations. Nigeria is reputed to be the biggest economy in africa. It is a major economic warehouse in africa. If we are to be active and derive the benefits fully, we have to speak french. France is a global industrial power and a major trade partner of nigeria's. Increasing the trade of higher value manufacturing goods through the afcfra will help african nations diversify their exports and build more resilience to price fluctuations. Afcfra will boost intra-african trade by immediately removing all tariffs on 90% of goods. The UN estimates that under afcfra, intra-african trade could increase by 52.3% by 2022.

The Nigerian president, Muhammadu Buhari, in his national broadcast on Democracy Day, June 12, 2020, said "Africa presents a huge opportunity for our export base diversification and we are developing our strategy to grow intra-african trade through the Africa Continental Free Trade Area". This is geared towards more national earnings and national development. Talking about national development, there are indicators among which are gross national product (GDP) and human development index (HDI). According to Phouthonesy, GDP helps policy makers to set development priorities. It indicates only the wealth of a nation but not the real prosperity. He therefore suggests that "development should be measured by HDI, which not only targets the GDP growth but also makes sure that economic growth leads to improvement in people's lives. This UN sponsored development features the true essence of national development." Phouthonesy explains that HDI measures economic growth and quality of life. It

measures life expectancy and access to educational opportunities in countries around the world.

Education and educational opportunities can only happen through language and communication. Ability to speak major international languages like french and english can unlock opportunities in any part of the world leading to a better quality of life and to the well-being of the people. HDI encourages governments to set their priorities right, to spend less on the military and more on education and health because improved human capacity, skilled and healthy labour, are key factors to reformed economy and sustainable economic growth. This has worked in Japan, Singapore, South Korea, China, Malaysia and Thailand. It can also work in Nigeria. Nigerians and Nigeria can equally appropriate the benefits of multilingualism which have earlier been mentioned in this paper for Onuko (2011), french language can contribute towards the societal and technological development of the Nigerian populace. More Nigerians need to be french literate in order to enhance international co-operation and promote bilateral trade agreements with our francophone neighbours. In the African Union, 22 countries speak english, 21 speak french, 12 speak arabic, 6 speak portuguese and 2 speak spanish. Many of them are bilingual or even trilingual. The geographical location of Nigeria necessitates the need for Nigerians to speak french, as she is surrounded by french speaking countries. Even in the ECOWAS sub-region, where Nigeria is a major stakeholder, of the 15 member-states, only 5 are english-speaking. Omonigho insists, and rightly so, that political leaders will interact better and exchange better knowledge with their colleagues without interpreters if they can speak both english and french languages. Knowledge of both languages will be of great value in the areas of national security, diplomacy, conflict resolution, community and social cohesion, migration and identity. Nigerians do participate in peace operations and knowledge of the language is needed. Nigerians who are bilinguals/multilinguals will certainly stand a better chance in appointments to positions in international bodies. Many international companies operate in Nigeria – Total, Exxon Mobil, Air France and KLM. They always prefer workers with the ability to speak two of french, english or german.

Vii. Conclusion:

Omonigho cites Ludwig Wittgenstein "the limits of my language means the limits of my world". Hence the more international languages we speak, the wider our economic and political horizons.

Adelakin states that an average western european speaks three or four languages of surrounding countries. bilingualism and multilingualism have a lot more benefits and nigerians need to appreciate this fact. It is unfortunate that the declaration of french as the second official language in nigeria has not gone beyond paper work. Federal government needs to do more to implement it and encourage people in schools, in their professions and occupations to strive to learn french. Government should be interested in training and retraining french language teachers, and open more french language centres where people can go to learn the language. Ministry of education should ensure that the french curriculum is followed through monitoring and supervision. French language should be made compulsory from nursery to school certificate level. Luckily it is part of the general studies in many tertiary institutions. Facilities and equipment for learning the language should be provided such as language laboratories, audio-visual equipment, book of various categories and levels. there's need for exchange programme between nigeria and her neighbours in the areas of human development and resources, infrastructure, trade and tourism, culture and values. doing all the above will help nigeria take her place in the comity of nations. We agree with adelakin that language is a very valuable resource and those who understand only one go through life with a handicap. It is about priviledge and access, and ofcourse the ability to use it for our own advantage is paramount.

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Appendix I:

Abbreviations and Acronyms:

1. AU - African Union
2. ECOSOC - Economic and Social Council
3. ECOWAS - Economic Community of West African States

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|---------------------------------------|---|--------------------------------|--|---|---------------------------|
| 4. FAO | - | Food and Agricultural | 10.ITU | - | International |
| Organization | | | Telecommunication Union | | |
| 5. FIFA | - | Federation | 11.NATO | - | North Atlantic Treaty |
| International de Football Association | | | Organization | | |
| 6. ICJ | - | International Court of Justice | 12.OECD | - | Organization for Economic |
| 7. ILO | - | International Labour | Co-operation and Development | | |
| Organization | | | 13.UNCTAD | - | United Nations |
| 8. IMF | - | International | Conference on Trade and Development | | |
| Monetary fund | | | 14.UNECA | - | United Nations |
| 9. IOC | - | International Olympic | Economic Commission for Africa | | |
| Committee | | | 15.UNESCO | - | United Nations |
| | | | Educational Scientific Cultural Organization | | |
| | | | 16.UNESC | - | United Nations |
| | | | Economic Social Council | | |
| | | | 17.UNHCR | - | United Nations High |
| | | | Commissioner for Refugees | | |
| | | | 18.UNHRC | - | United Nations |
| | | | Human Rights Council | | |
| | | | 19.UNICEF | - | United Nations |
| | | | International Children's Emergency Fund | | |
| | | | 20.WTO | - | World Trade Organization |