

The Role of French Language towards Development of Nigeria

Kunle Olusa

Department of French
College of Education, Ikere-Ekiti

&

Samson Akintayo

Department of French
Tai Sholarin College of Education, Ijebu-Ode

Corresponding Author: Kunle Olusa

ABSTRACT

French Language, without any iota of doubt plays a vital role towards the development of Nigeria. This paper therefore, examines the importance of French Language and its relevance towards Nigeria taking into consideration that Nigeria is an Anglophone society. Problems facing Nigeria for being unable to make the best use of French especially before its acceptance as a second official language shall be discussed therein. It will also show ways through which French could be used to promote the development of Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Two hundred years is a minute fraction in the history of the evolution of human societies, a process that has been going on for several million years, yet, within that tiny spec of historical time, in the course of the last two centuries, most of humanity has been subjected to process of change, so radical that the character of their societies and the conditions for their reproduction have been altered beyond all recognitions. Although by the middle of the 19th century most of Latin America had thrown off the colonial yoke imposed by Spain and Portugal during their rise as mercantile-capitalist powers and had broken up into formally 'independent' countries. In reality, the gap left by the defeated and departing Spanish and Portuguese rules was failed by the economic imperialism and political control exercised by the USA, Britain, France

and Holland. Pre-capitalist wars and conquest trade and migration have spread technologies across numerous part of the globe, and have indeed been instrumental in bringing about substantial and significant technological changes worldwide.

The Language Problem in Nigeria

Language is basic to all communications the world over. It does not matter whether one speaks or writes Hausa, French, Yoruba, German, Arabic or Igbo languages. Communication is the means by which we pass on from one person to another our ideas, our feelings our knowledge, our requests – indeed every aspect of human life. Without communication there would be chaos and human existence today could have been chaotic.

From time immemorial, and over before the Western form of education and foreign religions were introduced into Nigeria, Nigerian languages have been used: for variety of purposes by the people.

First, the various Mother Tongues have been used for sally communication amongst the peoples. Many of the languages have developed elaborate vocabularies for respect, honor, persuasion, threat and so on. There are also innumerable greeting formulae in Nigeria languages it suit appropriate occasions.

Secondly, these mother tongue knowledge and education were transmitted from one generation and one era to another. Since the languages were unwritten, the people depend on memory to store information. Thereby, oral literature and oral history developed. Poems, chants songs, musical compositions and so on become an invaluable aspect of the people.

There is no gain saying in that Nigeria is an heterogeneous state. In Nigeria we have different ethnic groups with their language differences,

but the three major indigenous languages are Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba, and Nigerians have the problem of accepting one of the three major languages as the national language, this makes it easy for our colonial masters to systematically impose their language i.e. English on us and this is why English is being use as our official language in Nigeria.

French Language and our Neighbors

West African countries were taken over by two different "Warlords" in the name of colonization i.e. Britain and France. The first took care of just four countries i.e. Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone and Gambia while the latter took care of almost all the remaining countries. Each of the colonial masters planted their language in their colonies; this is in practice up till now in the name of "official languages". This is why Nigeria is an Anglophone society today. However, all her neighboring states are francophone countries, such as we have Niger in the north, Cameroun in the east, Benin in the West. In as much as it is believed that no country can survive on his own without having any relationship with the other countries, we now see how difficult it is for Nigeria to exist in isolation, so for the existence and even the growth of Nigeria, French language is strongly recommended for her cooperate existence. This is what Union wan (1984) puts into consideration when he declared:

No state, no nation of the world can, in our time, all itself advance its own development without regard to the outside world affairs; the co-operation of peoples in all sectors of human life has become a 'condition sine qua non' if the progress of mankind is to be promoted and mutual understanding and peaceful coexistence among the nations and peoples of this common world of ours are to be guaranteed. The country is confused about which language to adopt as the national language. This is why the position of the three main indigenous languages i.e. Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba is uncertain. According to Emenanjo (1998), Nigeria does not have an explicit national language policy, but she has made a

number of explicit statements about language issues in the polity. Such statements can be found in the National Policy on Education (N.P.E> 1977, revised in 1979 and 1989 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

French Language as an International Language

Nigeria government has over-concentrated her on one international language, English language of our colonial imperialists at the expense of French language. French is also an international language being used in the world conferences. The importance of French language cannot be overemphasized. Even in sports, all the international sports competitions recognize the importance of French language, this is why commentaries cannot but be given in French language.

Moreover, out of sixteen countries that we have in West African only five speak English while the remaining countries speak French. This is why the international organizations such as United Nations. ECOWAS, O.A.U. etc. use French language as a medium of reaching people in the world knowing fully well that those who speak French language in the globe are enormous, this enable them to gain from their wealth of experience of technology. If Nigeria government in her educational policy makes French language mandatory in our schools at all levels, we will be able to gain tremendously from the technological advancement of the French people.

IMPORTANCE OF FRENCH LANGUAGE IN NIGERIA

Generally speaking, language education according to the opinion of Morakinyo (2005) is concerned with issues as language used in educational institutions and in the overall education process.

Apart from the fact that the Nigerian educational system has received some boost from the likes of Victor Cousin in the area of comparative Education, it is very important to equally note some of the contributions

that are previously made so far in lifting the nation to its greater height. Using French language, the French Government has been able to organize seminars for Nigerians so as to help the nation to achieve her desired objectives. The National Concord (1981) maintains that:

The agreement signed between the center for Management Development (CMD) and the "French Foundation for Management Education" (FNEGE) will enable top executive of the Nigerian. Public sectors to participate in seminars organized in France by ISSEC ("Institute Supérieur des Sciences Economiques et Commerciales").

French as the Language of Moral Instruction

Every individual should learn how to read, write, understand and speak French language. Though, the language can be interpreted in other languages by interpreters or translated into other languages by translators, to pass across a message. Thus, French language is adopted as a means of passing moral instruction to the entire world.

Therefore, if Nigeria is to develop, there is the need for French to be made compulsory at least up to S.S.S level, 'through French language, Nigeria is bound to progress socially, economically, technologically, politically and culturally among other nations.

For an individual to be current in the daily events of the nation, one needs a sound knowledge of French language. French language, through the impact of the mass media, has been able to contribute to the development of the nation by supplying various information to the entire world. The information based on social, educational, economic, technology and political is being supplied daily in French language, thereby allowing a common share of vital information throughout the whole world. This made Adesola (1990) to declare that:

Apart from literature books which expose the features of the French culture, the learners of French should extensively read information issues

drawn from French newspapers and magazines, and steadily listen to radio.

French as Second Official Language in Nigeria

The Nigeria government is quite aware of the importance of French now; this is why the last military government has adopted it as the second official language. The reason for this situation is that the primary aim of French in Nigeria was educational and cultural, but after the Yaoundé convention (1961) in which a recommendation was made that "The Second European language should be considered not only as a means of communication between English speaking and the French speaking countries in Africa but also as an international language with a wider purpose which jointly with the first European language would enable Africa to communicate with other countries throughout the world".

French Technology, Transferable Better in French Language

France is a European country and their language is French which they so much cherish, they are so much proud of it. France as a super power, they use their language in the area of science and Arts to promote learning and Enlightenment. Before the French Revolution of 1789; "Les Savants" were brought together in France to make policy for France because of their economic and political problem that they were facing. Its aim was to co-ordinate research in the natural and social sciences, technology and production. It was also responsible for training younger scholars and publicizing scientific achievements. It played a major role in the scientific and technological achievements of France and many Academics were established in other parts of France. It was organized in four sections (i) Physical-technical and mathematical sciences, (ii) Chemo-technical and biological sciences, (iii) Earth sciences and (iv) Social Sciences. The highest body of the Academy was the elected General Assembly, but power over the allocation of resources and elections was in the hands of the Presidium whose members were

appointed by the state. To be elected an Academician was to gain a position of tremendous influence. It was the Academy that planned the state Universities, Technical Institutes and Colleges.

IMPORTANCE OF FRENCH IN TECHNOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

The contribution of French language to the growth of Nigeria both nationally and internationally could not be over emphasized. The language has made a tremendous impact on West Africa francophone countries and this encompasses all the neighboring countries of Nigeria including the area bordering the French world of today. The language has left an impact on both the vocabulary and grammar of these languages that emanated from the same source i.e. Indo-European language. According to the article published in Nigeria Bulletin on Foreign affairs (1981) Vol. II No 7.

The economic ties between France and Nigeria have rapidly developed during the past few years, and the volume of transactions has increased from 2.3 billion Francs in 1973 (before the world crisis of energy) to 18.4 billion Francs (2.42 billion Naira) in 1980''

This statement shows the role played in the area of economy by France. Thus, the particular bonds held with the French speaking countries of Africa, with regards to the language have favored the exchanges with these countries. However, some French companies such as DUMEZ, SOCA or CFAO, CHEVRON, TOTAL, MICHELIN have invested in Nigeria.

Some French companies through their educational policy that is based mainly on French educational system have been able to contribute to the technological development of Nigeria. Peugeot founding 1792 with the aim of producing Peugeot automobile vehicles has been able to reach almost all parts of the world including Nigeria as at then. The role of Dumez and Public works has greatly influence the likes of Fougerolle,

Spie, and Batignolles in the same area of technological advancement thereby promoting the nation.

Apart from this, the French Government has been able to provide scholarship in so many fields so as to contribute meaningfully to the area of technological advancement towards effective nation building. This is why National Concord (1981) puts it that:

In 1980, the French government provided more than 200 scholarships in the field of geology, medicine, agriculture ... Etc.

RECOMMENDATION

If French language is to continue in participating actively in the Nigeria nation building, it is the duty of the Federal and State Government to pay more attention and give adequate consideration and focus to the acceptance of French language rather than paying mouth service that "French language is now the second official language in Nigeria" at least, it needs to be backed up with actions such as making the language compulsory up to S.S.S. level in the Secondary Schools. Trained and qualified teachers of French language should be employed. Moreover, all the departments of French in our higher institutions and universities should intensify their efforts towards the improvement of the language by organizing workshops seminars and training courses within and outside the country for the bilinguists of French language.

Lastly, the government should try to fund mastering of French language in all tertiary institutions so as to be able to reap the importance of modern French technology in Nigeria.

CONCLUSION

We would like to conclude this paper presentation by reiterating that French language remains the backbone for French technological development in Nigeria. Doing away with French language is like refusing to develop Nigeria and this will make the country to be technically handicapped for life. Whatever is the disposition of

Nigerians or the government, we also, strongly believe the French language is relevant to Nigeria so as to make Nigeria the "Giant of Africa". This could be backed up with the required human and material resources necessary for its well-planned and co-ordinated actions.

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