

## INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE EDUCATION AND THE CHALLENGES OF INSECURITY IN NIGERIA

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*This paper sets out to discuss the significant roles that indigenous language education can play in finding the lasting solution to the numerous socio-political that are threatening the ever-sustained security of our beloved nation. It is an incontrovertible fact that language is an indispensable instrument of culture; in fact, it keeps and preserves the culture of any given community. If none of the nation's heterogeneous cultures preaches violence, then language should not be underestimated. In conclusion, the paper urges the concerned authority to project, embrace, encourage and empower the indigenous languages and their teachers so that more can be achieved in promoting secured atmosphere in the country.*

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### **Introduction**

The state of security in our nation in these present days is unmistakably pathetic. The country whose citizens have been co-existing many decades ago on the basis of love and unity suddenly found herself in the trauma of tribalism, communal crisis, socio-political war, religious imbroglio and a host of others.

Another aspect of insecurity that the nation is experiencing as of now is economic insecurity which gives birth to devaluation of naira, scarcity of food, joblessness or mass unemployment. All these factors are the internal tragedies that are retrogressively affecting the development of our beloved nation.

Although both the government and the concerned citizens are working round the clock to drastically find lasting solution to these catalogues of problem but this paper tries to examine other dimension in which the government can be supported in overcoming these challenges. This now brings us to the roles that indigenous languages can play in transforming, orientating and educating the masses on the need to live in peace and harmony.

### **The Nation's Security Challenges**

Macmillan English Dictionary defines security as safety from attack harm or damage. It further illustrates that it is a situation in which one can feel confident and safe. Some of the contemporary security challenges in our country today are:

**TERRORISM:** Njoku (2011) defines terrorism as the practice of using or willing to use violent action in order to achieve political or force a government to act in certain direction. Example of this is Boko haram menace.

**MILITANCY:** Which is defined by Ahule (2012) as an act of using or willing to use violent or strong pressure by a group of persons to achieve socio-economic or political change (as we have the activities of militants in Niger-Delta of the country).

**UNEMPLOYMENT:** This is a situation where people are able and ready to work but cannot find job to do or rather create any for them (Ogunmosunle 2011).

**POVERTY:** Abbah {2012} describes as level social and economic inequalities that exist between individual in the society.

**INSECURITY:** That is defined Ahule (2012) as a strong feeling of not being safe or protected against attacks or danger on lives or properties of person.

All the above mentioned are conspicuously manifesting in soci-political existence of Nigeria. **They are manifest threats and failure to keep them under permanent control could trigger war.**

### **Indigenous Language**

Language: Many scholars have tried to define language from different linguistic perspectives. Some see it as purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, desires by means of voluntarily produced symbol (Sapir 1920) certain linguists have observed that human beings used language to record experiences, express emotion, perception and responses to the experience of others. Sapir defines language as a vehicle for conveying the culture and traditional of the people that owns it. With the series of definition given by the linguists what is clear about language is that it cuts across the human and non-human behaviour and it is characterized by complex and flexibility interchangeability, contextuality, arbitrariness utilization of vocal and auditory channel and ability to grow openendedness.

Nigeria boasts of numerous ethnic groups. These are Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo. Although we have numerous dialects and ethnic minorities that are embedded in each of the aforementioned ethnic group but the trio are the most popular in the country as a whole. The Yoruba people are easily found in South-West axis of the country using Yoruba language as medium of communication.

The Hausa occupied the Northern part of Nigeria and their major language is nothing but Hausa language. Igbo people dominate the South part of the country and they are the custodian of Igbo language culture. The languages being spoken by the major tribes that constitute the nation that is call Nigeria today are referred to as kept and treasured.

### **Language and Culture**

Oyedeji (2007) observed that language and culture are inseparable as each throws light on the other. Culture serves as the reservoir of peoples identify such as customs, attitude, norms, values and beliefs and all these are encoded and conceptualized in the language of the people which is indigenous.

Ogden and Richard (1993) quoted Malisnowku and Adeyanju (1989) that, “Language is essentially rooted in the reality of culture, the tribal life and custom of people and it cannot be explored without constant reference to those utterance.”

Therefore, language and culture is just a mixture of air and water. That is inseparable. No wonder, Brumfit (1983) sees culture as language habits, customs, beliefs and values as well as the literary, written and unwritten art form or expression of people. In conclusion we can clearly deduce that language is culture itself is language.

### **Roles of Indigenous Language in Solving insecurity**

The three major indigenous languages are used to sermonize or orientate people towards exhibiting desirable attitude in the society. As earlier mentioned none of the three tribal cultures and beliefs preaches violence, hooliganism and war. The monarchs, community leaders, and elders, when holding peace meetings or negotiation with their

subjects can make use of philosophic proverbial and rhetorical languages that could convince the aggrieved ones on the need to think and live in harmony with their people. For instance, among Yoruba there are proverbs, story, metaphorical composition and historical analogies that could be used to avert wars and violence:

omọ olóm ọ là á rán níṣé dé tòru tòru  
 (Another person's child is compelled to return from errand even in the mid night)  
 Ogun kì í ṣe iyán  
 Ogun kì í ṣe èk ọ  
 Iwájú ogun àfí bí iná  
 Èy in ogun kò rọrùn

War is not like pounded yam  
 War is not like pap  
 War front is like fire  
 Back or front

Its consequence is always unbearable to people that are intended to be used to foment trouble. The saying tries to enlighten that the initiators of troubles would never include their wards in the trouble but they will want to use others that are not related to them. The second axiom is explaining the dreadfulness of war and warns that people should prevent wars. With these few philosophical saying a rightful thinker, who is really cultured with African customs and norms will definitely prefer peace to violence.

Secondly indigenous languages consist of moral ingredients that prepare a child (from the adolescent age) towards being a useful citizen to his nativity and the country at large. These moral ingredients are mostly found in indigenous oratures such as home training (“Èk ọ ilé”) folktales (Àlọ) proverbs (owe) moral songs (orin akónil ógb ọn) poem (ew i) story or phrase (itàn àròṣo). A child that is groomed with all these at tender age till he is matured will not suddenly wake up and become a notorious being in the society but the nonchalant attitude of the concerned people towards the study of indigenous languages in our schools has made some of these moral imparting equipment to elude our children. The dividend is what we are experiencing today. For instance in the yester years in our primary and post primary schools there were poems that discouraged children from being a thief or a lazy boy. Examples of these poems are:

Kín ni n ó folè ṣe  
 Láyé tí mo wá?  
 Kín ni n ó folè ṣe  
 Láyé tí mo wá.  
 Kàkà kí n jalè  
 Ma kúkú dẹrú  
 Kí ni n ó folè ṣe  
 Láyé tí mo wá?.

#### Translation

what will I do  
 With stealing in my life?  
 (2ce)  
 In this life of mine  
 instead of me stealing.  
 I prefer to be a slave  
 what will I do with  
 Stealing in my life?

The poem is basically teaching us that being a thief is the worst, the poet now suggested that becoming a slave or servant is better than being a thief. In the other verse the poet concludes that if a thief is caught he either goes to jail or get killed. All these are not in our curriculum again then our schools and society at large are producing a battalion of youths that are morally bankrupt.

Insecurity is not applicable to violence or war alone it could be social or economical. When a nation's economy is doomed it amounts to economic insecurity which could easily bring about unemployment (as we are witnessing today) Poverty, inflation and a host of others. Indigenous languages have played a prominent role in alleviating the problem of unemployment in this country (although it may not be widely noticed by the government and the public) many people earn their daily bread through the artistic utilization of oral literatures. Today, these people are not looking for white collar job instead they have become successful entrepreneurs and employers of labour. For example, people like Chief

Ayílára (Ajóbíwé) Yemí Èlèbu ibon and Láńrewájú Adépòj ù are waxing stronger daily in entertainment industries. Therefore indigenous languages are sources of employment opportunity for those who can discover its relevance.

Furthermore, our indigenous languages contain some African literatures that are spiritually and constitutionally used for checks and balances in our sociopolitical endeavors. Examples of these are iwúre (prayer blessing), èpè or àásán (curses), ògèdè, ofò or àyájó. All these are spiritual and ritualistic utterances that are used when the need arises. They are used to unfold mysteries, detect the truth and punish the culprit. For instance curses are retained on anybody or group of people that disturb the peace of the land and when this is done “things” must happen.

If our Western philosophies, ideas, and strategies have failed us to catch the evil doors in our society let us go back to the traditional way of solving problems. Let our leader so go to the shrines of Ògún, (the god of iron) Şàngó (the god of thunder) and Èşù láàlu) (the vagabond minstrel) to swear if they are clean from the calamitous atmosphere that envelops the country. The above mentioned African “verses” are not mere words themselves but when the authorities utter them things usually happen. The people that are fomenting trouble are black; like us, they eat, drink and walk on the land of the black then let authorities invoke the gods of the land to judge them definitely the evil ones will reap their sow

Another noticeable role that indigenous language can play in the security angle of the nation is comprehensive interpretation of intra-tribal culture that contains customs and norms that forbid war, violence, terrorism and others. No other language or literature can better teach the people all these desirable attitudes except the indigenous languages which is better understood and comprehended by the speakers. We Africans decode our culture through our indigenous languages; if our culture is well understood and practiced our people would not be deceived and acculturated by foreign doctrine (which could be political or religious) that preaches wars and violence. Investigation has revealed that, no part of Hausa, Yorùbá or Igbo culture embraces killing of innocent people, kidnapping, and terrorism. In the olden days our heroes and heroines jointly fought for independence. They were living in unity. They took the composition of the national anthem as their watchword and then the nation

was at her best. When we started disregarding our languages (calling them vernacular) we are gradually losing our culture as a result of this we are ignorantly becoming slaves to terrible philosophies and doctrines that are totally incompatible with ours. We became extremists to the religions that are not ours we listen to preaches and teachings that are detrimental to our co-existence now the result is terrorism, tribalism and social crisis.

### **Recommendations and Conclusion**

Having discussed the vital roles that the national indigenous languages can play in the security challenges the paper therefore recommended the following to the government and the concerned citizens that:

The three major indigenous languages should be brought to lime light as being reviewed and suggested by the National Policy on Education that:

1. every primary school child be taught in his mother tongue or language of his immediate community;
2. mother tongue be used as medium of instruction in pre-primary education;
3. every junior secondary school student should learn one major Nigerian Language(Hausa, Yorùbá, Igbo) in addition to his mother tongue; and.
4. at the senior secondary school (SSS) level, only one major Nigeria language is to be studied.

The main objective of this is to foster unity. Constant follow up and proper monitoring will make this objective achievable because some educational institutions are still afro-phobic to indigenous languages. Enough motivation and encouragement should be given to the individuals who are keen or promoting the indigenous language because they are the ones holding the pillars of our culture to avoid total collapse. Late President Ahmed Sékou Touré of Guinea once declared in Conakry in 1978 that people renouncing the use of their language are doomed to stagnation and even retrogression; and to disappear completely as a people. Nigerian government should set a day aside as indigenous language day where those people that have in one way or the other contributed immensely in promoting Nigerian languages and culture would be publically awarded. This also will encourage more research on the importance and the efficacy of speaking studying and leaning of indigenous languages. Also it will be a revival operation for our dying language and culture.

In our community political matters especially during meetings and deliberations indigenous language should be the medium of communication using foreign language to express or discussing indigenous matters is first a mere display of individual linguistic ego which may not be well deciphered by the listeners. African issues and matters should be settled in African ways.

Henceforth, any political aspirant should be made to swear and be sworn to political positions using verses of his/her local traditional beliefs to swear. For instance, among the Yorùbá, the instruments of oath taking or swearing are symbols of Ògún (iron, gun or cutlass), Sàngó and others. If any of these is used to swear, people dare not default, else, the culprit will get “guide action”. Holy Bible and Quran should not be used again because these holy books do not want sinners to die but to repent.

Before the white men came with their britonocratic constitution, African languages and culture were already enriched with traditional norms which served as their own constitutions. Then, peace and harmony were the order of the day until every costume and norms of Africans were westernized

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