

Multilingualism in Fostering Democracy in Nigeria: Prospect and Challenges

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the features of current multilingualism complexity through a selection of issues relating to its role in second language acquisition [L2]. The paper paid attention to multilingualism in fostering democracy; prospect and challenges in multilingualism which is use of two or more languages either by an individual speaker or by a community of speaker. Multilingualism is becoming a social phenomenon governed by the needs of globalization and cultural openness. Before now studies have focused on some aspect of multilingualism. Hence, this paper extensively investigates some aspect of multilingualism, factors that influence the use of multilingual, prospect and challenges. The tools used were theoretical and research perspective. The data collected was based on the availability and accessibility of materials. The paper recommended need for multilingualism to be used to foster democracy in our nation and the country at large.

Keywords: Multilingualism, Democracy, Second Language, Bilingualism

INTRODUCTION

Multilingualism is a subject of debate in the very same way as the definition of language fluency [1,2,3]. On one end of the linguistic continuum, one may define multilingualism as complete competence and mastery of another language [4,5]. The speaker would presumably have considerable knowledge and control over the language so as to sound native. On the opposite end of the spectrum is the speaker who knows enough phrases to get along as a tourist using an alternate language [6,7]. Since 1992, Vivian Cook has argued that most multilingual speaker's fall somewhere between minimal and maximal definitions. Cook calls these people multi-competent [8,9]. There are several languages spoken by people in heterogeneous societies. A heterogeneous society is a diverse society in term of race, religion, culture and languages [10]. In Africa many languages abound Ghana for example has over 20 indigenous languages; Tanzania about 135 languages, Kenya 70 different languages while in Ethiopia has 50 languages. Nigeria is one of the most multilingual countries in the world with over four hundred (400) languages more than one thousand (1000) dialects spoken by a population of over one hundred and eighty million (180,000,000) people. Nigeria's multilingual nature is very complex with many minor languages. In bilingualism language distribution is not

observed in states like Delta, Kogi and Enugu which have cross-border contact [7]. It is impossible to tell which language is used in these given settings. While in bi-part linguicism [more than one] is a language situation where more than one language is intelligible to a group of mono-lingual speakers. An example are the Igbos who share common boundaries with Rivers state and Delta state. The geographical location where two or more languages are used side by side Okeagba in Akoko northwest of Ondo state. They speak five different languages in this place which include Owon Afa, Owon Aje, Owo Ldo, Owon Oye, and Yoruba. Another location where languages are used side by side in Nigeria is Takum in Taraba state where some people speak Jukun, Kutch Lchi, Lamba etc. In Kwara state alone we have about twenty different languages. The establishment of trade and commerce by Europeans and Portuguese in exchange of goods and services helped greatly to develop heterogeneous societies. The introduction of western education by the coming of the missionaries helped to inform people on how to read, write and solve some arithmetic. They contributed a lot to the multilingual phenomenon; especially through their studies on the indigenous languages and the development of orthographies for these languages. The implementation of

government policies and civil service rule helped in forming heterogeneous

societies.

MULTILINGUALISM

Multilingualism is a situation whereby people in a speech community speak more than two languages. Nigeria is a multilingual society in that the National language policy subscribes to three major languages alongside English. As such a typical Nigerian is expected to speak his mother's tongue, one of the officially approved major language plus English. Nigeria, therefore, produces an interesting linguistic situation that attracts attention not only in term of its social structure and political integration, but also even more significantly, in terms of the actualization of the ethnicity based aspiration within the context of the genuine development of the country as a whole [8] defines the term multilingualism as either the language use or competence of an individual or the language situation in an entire nation or society. It means the use of more than one language or to have competence in more than one language. The ability of an individual is to use language well and show some sign of perfection in the language spoken. A person is multilingual if he/she knows several languages; a document or message is multilingual if it is presented in multiple languages. Nigeria is one of the multilingual countries whose

multilingual nature is very complex with many minor and less major languages. Multilingualism refers to an occurrence regarding an individual speaker who uses two or more languages, a community of speakers where two or more languages are used, or between speakers of different languages. Multilingual speakers outnumber monolingual speakers in the world's population. A multilingual person, in the broadest definition, is anyone who can communicate in more than one language, be inactive (through speaking and writing) or passive (through listening and reading). More specifically the terms bilingual and trilingual are used to describe comparable situations in which two or three languages are involved. A generic term for multilingual person is polyglot. Multilingualism could be rigidly defined as being native-like in two more languages. It could also be loosely defined as being less than native-like but still able to communicate in two more languages. In view of the above definition one may agree that multilingualism plays a vital role in fostering democracy in Nigeria. The use of multilingualism has contributed immensely to the socialization process in our country Nigeria.

MULTILINGUALISM AND LANGUAGE CONTACT

[6] in his book titled: Multilingualism asserts that multilingualism is a perfect fact of life around the world, a circumstance arising at the simplest levels, i.e. from the need to communicate across speech communities. In order to foster democracy multilingualism is a societal phenomenon that deals with languages existing in a society. When many languages exist in a society, such society is said to be multilingual in nature. Appel and Muysken (1987), states the fact that varieties of the

same language may be in use, in a given situation, the idea of language contact transcends dialectal frontiers. It is an issue which concerns two or more distinct and independent languages. It is evident that language contact is a situation that concerns two or more languages co-existing in a particular society. Language contact phenomena results into some phenomena, such as code mixing, code switching, language shift, language loss, interference and language transfer.

REASONS FOR LANGUAGE CONTACT AND MULTILINGUALISM

There are many reason why language come into contact and developed into the situation known as multilingualism which foster national democracy in Nigeria:

- i. People migrate from one country to another.
- ii. As a result of war which make people relocate to a safer place. E.g. Boko

- Haram.
- iii. People in search for education E.g. from the south to the north or northern to the southern region
- iv. People transact business from one state to another .E.g. Yoruba from Oyo to yola on a business venture.
- v. Inter-marriage brings people together E.g. an Igbo man married to Hausa lady

or Yoruba man to an Edo lady.

SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF MULTILINGUALISM IN FOSTERING
DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIAN.

i. Multilingualism is a choice by the people or it may be as a result of migrations from one place to another in search of better life.

ii. People that has interest in foreign languages.

iii. There are people who find it necessary for their day to today activities such as business, information, gathering foreign films or books.

iv. The ability for people to acquire language for immersion.

v. Multilingualism occurs among immigrants and their descendants. There original language may be lost after some period of time because of the replacement of other language that have greater prestige.

vi. Expatriate are usually multilingual.

vii. Some people that reside in border areas between two countries where each language is seen with equal prestige.

viii. Among parents who maintain different languages there is tendency for the children to be multilingual.

ix. Among children from rich communities where a switch from one language to another is considered prestigious.

Favorable Conditions for Multilingualism to Foster Democracy in Nigeria;

- A. Diglossia
- b. Pidgin
- c. Creole
- d. Polyglosttism

DIGLOSSIA: According to Encarta Encyclopedia {2008}, diglossia is the existence of a formal literary form of a language, considered more prestigious, along with a colloquial form used by most speakers and considered of a low status. It is a language with high and low forms. The term diglossia has been defined in a number of ways. [8] for example, distinguishes it from bilingualism, which refers to individual's ability to use more than one language. He sees diglossia as the distribution of more than one variety to serve different communicative function in a society. Diglossia exists not only in a multilingual society which

officially recognizes several languages, but also in societies that employ several dialects, registers, and functionally differentiated varieties of whatever kind. It includes the study of language diversity, which refers to any degree of diversity right from the most subtle stylistic differences from or within the same simple language to the most complex form of diversities. Diglossia could be used to refer to the functional distribution of high and low varieties of a language within the society. Fergusons describes diglossia as a kind of bilingualism in a society, in which one of the languages is (H) has high prestige, and another of the language is (L) has low prestige. Also as the pioneer scholar of Diglossia, he has observed that native speakers proficiency in the high prestige dialect, will commonly try to avoid using the vernacular dialect with foreign. Diglossia, therefore involves the allocation of role to various languages that exist in a particular society. PIDGIN: It a simplified language that develops as a means of communication between two or more groups that do not have a language in common. In a situation such as trade, Pidgin is native of any speech community but it is learnt as second language. A Pidgin language is a reduced language that result from extended contact between groups of people who share no language [6]. Pidgin has restricted communication at functions since it cannot be used in formal communication or in an academic discourse. It is a grammar not structurally flexible as that of fully fledged language and its vocabulary is reduced basically to trade. CREOLE: A Creole language has a jargon or a pidgin in its ancestry. In contrast to Pidgin, Creole is often defined as a pidgin that has become the first language of a new generation of speakers [7].

Cartelization occurs when a pidgin becomes elaborate in terms of function, vocabulary and grammar, then language birth takes place and creole is born [5]. This means that the speaker uses it not just for trade but all interaction that would normally require the use of first language. This new variety of pidgin has developed and attained some level of sophistication. This process is noticeable in some places in Nigeria in which English based pidgin has developed over the years and gradually become creolized in some parts of the country like Edo, Delta and River

FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO MULTILINGUALISM IN FOSTERING DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA

[7] enumerates the following factors:

i. Historical or Political Movement: Imperialism or colonialism are examples of factors that contribute to multilingualism. In this case the use of language is spread to other countries and these result in the coexistence of different languages.

ii. Economic Interest: This is a result of migration of weak economics of some nations resulting in movement of the populations to other countries, thus giving birth to the development of multilingual and multicultural communities in the host countries.

iii. Social and Cultural Factors: This involves the identity and the desire for maintenance and revival of minority

ISSUE ON MULTILINGUALISM THAT FOSTER DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA

This is the ability of an individual to speak multiple languages. It results or forms language contact that exist in societies where different languages co-exist in specific patterns. It is a current linguistics phenomenon in almost all regions of the world. Nigeria is a good example of a multilingual nation. [8] describe it as a social phenomenon with aspect of its study:

i. Individual versus social dimension,
ii. The number of languages involved and
iii. The level of proficiency in the different languages. Sociologists have often viewed multilingualism from three perspectives namely:

i. The societal

Prospects of Multilingualism in Fostering Democracy

i. It promotes interactions

ii. It promotes Exposure

States where native speakers' use pidgin. POLYGLOTTISM: A person who speaks several languages is called a polyglot. It is clear that the definition of what it means to speak a language. A business man who cannot handle complicated negotiation in a foreign language may not be able to write a simple letter correctly. A five year old English child usually must be said to speak/English fluently but it is possible that he cannot handle the grammar as well as some English students of the language do and will surely have a limited one language" means.

languages. This interest creates situations in which two or more language co-exists and are essential in everyday communication.

iv. Increasing Communication: to extend relationship among different part of the world and the need to be competent in language of wider communication. This is the case with the development of new technologies and science for instance. English is the main language of wider communication and millions of people who use other language as well.

v. Education: second and foreign language are part of the curriculum in many countries of the world.

vi. Religious Movement: That result in people moving to new location.

ii. Individual/personal perspective and

iii. The interactional

The distinction is that at the individual level, bilingualism and multilingualism refer to the speakers' competence to use two or more languages. At the societal level, the term bilingualism and multilingualism" refer to the use of two or more language in a speech community and it is not important that all the people in the community must be competent in more than two languages which will help to foster democracy in Nigeria and the world at large.

iii. It help to Exchange ideas

iv. It improves vocabulary

v. It also help to ease communication
Challenges of Multilingualism in
Fostering Democracy

- a. It slow learning process down
- b. It causes language death

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, from the foregone discussion one may say that multilingualism plays a vital role in societies and states rather than individuals. It is as a result of multilingualism that the speakers outnumber the monologue speakers more especially in a countries like Nigeria where people speak more than two languages in each settlement which foster democracy in our country Nigeria. The national language question

always arises in a multilingual society .This national question is also in existence in Nigeria as a multilingual country. The major concern of this is the need to foster democracy in Nigerian as whole. Multilingualism, is a societal phenomenon that deals with languages existing in a society. When many languages exist in a society, such society is said to be multilingual in nature and it helps in fostering democracy.

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