LANGUAGE EDUCATION PLANNING AND POLICY: THE WAY FORWARD FOR NIGERIA

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Introduction

The role of language in the life of human being is undeniably a very crucial one especially with respect to communication exchange. Language is such a force that it can greatly bring people together on the basis of common linguistic and cultural affiliation causing them to think and act as one. Language also has great potentials to divide humankind generally and can particularly threaten the economic and political stability of any people and of developing postcolonial countries like Nigeria. As a major instrument of education and knowledge acquisition, Osokoya (2005:406) notes that language determines to a large extent the success or otherwise of any educational programme. However, the language to be used for educational purposes particularly in multilingual societies has always been a matter of concern to educators and language planners. There is always controversy over which language is superior to others and which one to adopt for use in schools as the medium of instruction. Owu-Ewie (2006), citing Ovadraogo (2000), stated that education and language issues in Africa are very complex because of the peculiar multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and multi-cultural situation. According to him, the situation is more severe when the official language of the nation is different from the indigenous languages of that nation. Isyaku (2000:2) referred to a UNESCO (1953) document as stating that *"given that the child is fit and well, the grave handicap that he can suffer... is to be unfamiliar with the language of instruction"*.

The case of Nigeria is not different from the case of any other country colonized by Britain in which the use of indigenous languages for instruction was promoted only during the early years of schooling. However language crisis level varies from country to country and from situation to situation and one of the ways countries tried to resolve their language problems is by formulating national language policies. Then, when these policies are made, it is often the case that they are not distinct and categorical enough and as such are not implementable because of what Alimi (2000) referred to as ethnic loyalty and political interpretation attached to them, at the implementation stage. This explains why the issue of language policy formulation, development and implementation has remained a big challenge in multilingual countries.

Theoretical framework

Several theories and hypothesis are associated with language acquisition, which are considered significant for bilingual education planning and implementation. In this paper, however, the socio-cultural hypothesis is relevant.

The socio-cultural hypothesis is related to Lambert (1974;1977) typology and draws attention to the fact that different types of bilinguality may result according to the socio-cultural context in which bilingual experience occurs. He distinguished between additive and subtractive forms of bilinguality. In additive bilingual situation, both languages and cultures will bring complementary positive elements as in when both the community and family attribute positive values to the two languages. In such a situation the learning or use of a second language (L_2) will not threaten to replace the first language (L_1). On the other hand, subtractive bilingualism will occur when the two languages are competing rather than complementary. It is usually the case, according to Lambert, when an ethno-linguistic minority rejects its own cultural values in favour of those of an economically and culturally more prestigious group. In such a case, the more prestigious L_2 will tend to replace the L_1 in the speaker's repertoire.

From the foregoing, the task of the language policy planner is to ensure that the indigenous language is not devalured in favour of the exogenous one and that the indigenous language is appropriately represented in status planning. Corpus planning in indigenous languages would be such that various aspects of language skills are appropriately coded and standardized. This would ward off any threat of domination by the exogenous language.

Contemporary Language Planning and Language Ideologies

Often, language is a defining characteristic of every distinct group, especially ethnic groups. After the Second World War, many nations that emerged rose up at the end of colonial empires and began to undertake language planning activities. These nations were confronted with decisions as to what languages to be designated as official for use in the formal, political and social functions. Such language planning had to be in line with the desire of the new nation as a symbol of their identity by giving official status to their indigenous languages(s). In linguistically diverse nations, language planning often leads to endless anglings among different language groups, sometimes threating the peace and stability of communities. Hamers and Blanc (1989) note that the solution that was often adopted in the history of the world was to impose one official, national language, usually the dominant legitimized language, upon the population as a whole by devalourizing, ignoring or eliminating the other languages. Today, however, language planning issues often involve deliberate attempts to balance the language diversity that exists within a nation's borders. This again depends on the language ideology adopted by the state.

There are four fundamental language ideologies that could guide language planning:

1. Linguistic assimilation:

In linguistic assimilation ideology, every member of the society, irrespective of native or indigenous language, learns and uses the dominant language of the society in which he or she lives. This is typical of the American "Melting-pot"

ideology where residents are expected to lose their native languages and melt in the American English-only language pot.

2. Linguistic Pluralism:

This ideology recognises and supports multiple language use within one society. In Singapore, for instance, there is shared official language status of English, Malay, Tamil and Mandarin Chinese.

3. Vernacularisaion:

This ideology involves the restoration and development of an indigenous language, together with its adoption as an official language by the state. In Israel, for instance, the Biblical Hebrew language has been developed and adopted as an official language, just like Quechua in Peru.

4. Internationalisation:

This is the adoption of a non-indigenous language as a means of wider communication or as an official language. In this case, indigenous languages receive less attention and recognition than the foreign language. This ideology is often upheld in many multilingual nations like Nigeria. Formerly colonized multilingual nations often adopt this ideology and valourise the language of the colonial powers to the detriment of their indigenous languages.

Language patterns and possibilities in multilingual states

Language domination is always an issue whenever two ethno-linguistic groups are in lasting contact. According to Schermerhorn (1970), when two distinct ethno-linguistic groups with a different cultural and linguistic history come in contacts, one of the groups tends to dominate the other. In such contact situation, Schermerhorn proposed six models of dominations possibilities.

1. The subordinate group will attempt to take control over the dominant group and become in turn dominant.
2. The dominant group allows the subordinate group to maintain cultural distinctness, including language.
3. The dominant group assimilates the subordinate group through persuasion or force, in which case the subordinate group gives up its cultural distinctiveness and adopts the dominant group's values including language.
4. The minority chooses to remain segregated and ghettorized.
5. The dominant group imposes segregation and ghettorisation upon the subordinate group (apartheid).
6. The subordinate group takes control of its own destiny and decides to separate from the dominant group.

Therefore, the language planner in a multilingual state must consider these possibilities and determine which direction each language group is targeting. The language planner ensures that there is stability in language relations and maintenance and makes policies that will discourage language or cultural encroachment. Harmers and Blanc (1989:175) stated that when relations are unstable between language groups, one group begins to assimilate the other and language maintenance begins to breakdown. When a language is assimilated,

it begins to surrender its linguistic and cultural identity and gets absorbed into the larger group. This eventually leads to imposition of values and devalorization, stigmatization and even sometimes eradication of the subordinate language and culture. Group members begin to use the language of another for domains, roles and functions previously served by the first language.

Language Planning Issues in Multilingual States

In more contemporary times, a subtler instrument of language planning is deployed to achieve the same purpose of domination. However, the same language planning can also be used as a revolutionary force by the dominated. There are two main aspects of language planning: the internal and external aspects.

The *internal planning* or what Kloss (1969) called 'corpus planning' includes standardization through artificial neutralization of geographical and social variations or the 'purification' of the language from foreign influences. This would involve reduction to writing of an unwritten language, standardisation of its alphabet or orthography, expansion and modernization of the lexicon through terminology and neology, among others. These are matters of policy and implementation.

The *External Planning* or "Language-status planning", as Kloss (1969) termed it, has to do with official interference with the existing status relations between the languages in contact. The relative status of each language is defined in view of the economic, demographic, social and political power of the speakers. Whether a language is classed by *nationalism* option, for ethnic identification by groups not fused into the larger nationality, or for *nationism* option where a language is selected for national efficiency and interest, is a policy matter.

It has always been the case that, for whatever reason a language is elevated to a national or official status, agitations trial such decisions. The politics is that the elevation of one language suggests the subordination of the other(s). Hamers and Blanc (1989:159) noted that most frequently, the elevated, and most often the language of majority, is imposed upon the less powerful language groups as the only legitimate one. It is for fear of this type of linguistic domination that language conflicts abound. This is a serious issue in multilingual states.

A Brief Language History of Nigeria

Nigeria is a multilingual country with an estimated population of over 140 million, according to 2006 census figures, and has well over 400 distinct languages. In fact, Gordon (2005) stated that Nigeria has 510 living languages, excluding two second languages without mother tongue speakers and nine others that are extinct.

Formal western type of education was introduced in Nigeria by Christian missionaries just before the middle of the 19th century. For about four decades, decisions on language education were taken solely by those missionaries (Taiwo, 1980; Fafunwa, 1974) who believed that the African child is best taught in his native language so that they can be employable by the colonial administrations as

clerks, supervisors, interpreters and non-commissioned officers and also serve as link between the administration and the natives. The missionaries also believed that the interest of Christianity would best be served by actually propagating their religion in indigenous languages. In view of this, the teaching and learning of indigenous languages received genuine attention in those early days of education history.

However, this policy on indigenous language did not go down well with the elites of those days who considered the products of that system as not well suited for the job market of those days whose needs were persons with training in English rather than indigenous languages (Taiwo, 1980). This view of the elite partly influenced the post-colonial government to begin around 1980 to intervene in language education in the country with a view to according English a lot more prominence in it. Over time, the policy succeeded so well that interest in education shifted substantially from indigenous languages toward English, the colonial language. But one consequence of this is the noticeable alienation among the children and adult from indigenous languages and culture. This trend caused agitation for indigenization of education which eventually led to introduction of Nigeria languages and culture into the educational system.

After independence in 1960, the burning issue of a national language began to agitate the minds of many people especially politicians, academics and journalists about which language out of over 400 would be adopted and developed as a national language for use. Debates at the legislative houses generated arguments, palatable and unpalatable, ugly and nasty, became explosive and shook the unity of the country to its very foundations. Iwara (2008:22) noted that it was like a keg of gun-powder waiting to ignite. The major languages were contenders, the minority languages were agitating.

What eventually emerged after this storm was that Federal Government considered the unity of the country important and preferred the indigenous language plus English solution to achieve this. On September 21st, 1978, the military regime of Olusegun Obasanjo elevated the three major indigenous languages: Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba, to the status of national languages along with English which served as the official language of the country and also as the language of bureaucracy at different institutional levels – legislation, education, the law courts, media, commerce and so on, despite clamour for its replacement with an indigenous language. This provision accorded English language a powerful status in the bureaucracy and all tiers of formal education. The situation now is that Nigerians seem to have unofficially settled for English language for all official communications. By implication, English is the lingua franca preferred while among the less educated, Pidgin English is flourishing.

The linguistic situation in Nigeria is characterized by conflicts and rivalry that have made it difficult to get reliable and consistent statistics relating to number of languages spoken, number of speakers or percentage coverage of each. This constitutes a major handicap to linguistic unity in view of the absence of an indigenous lingua franca that could serve as a linguistic bond (Adegbija, 2004). The table below shows an estimated statistics of Nigerian indigenous languages.

Table 1: A Table Showing an Estimated Statistics of Nigerian Languages

s/n	Language Group	Language Type	No of Speakers in Million (estimated)	% of Speakers
1.	Major	Hausa	22	54
		Igbo	17	
		Yoruba	20	
2.	Non-major/Minority: (a) Major Minority	Fulfude, Tiv, Efik, Ijo, Ebira, Idoma, Urhobo, Edo, Ibibio Kanuri, Nupe, Jukun	Between 2 and 8	22.5
	(b) Minor Minority	About 385 others	Under 2	23.5

Source: Iwara (2008:36); Soyinka (2009:8)

The high incidence of language diversity in Nigeria has become that quite a large number of people live along a borderline, where it is convenient for them and their daily activities, to be in possession of more than one language. As people move from one location to another, they learn the languages of their new environments for purposes of daily contact and commerce.

The Language Education Policy of Nigeria

The National Policy on Education (NPE, 2004) provides the following guidelines on language education policy for Nigeria.

1. In early childhood/pre-primary education, the medium of instruction is principally the mother tongue or the language of the immediate community (Sec. 2:14c).
2. The medium of instruction in the primary school shall be the language of the environment for the first three years. During the period, English shall be taught as a subject (Sec. 4:19e).
3. From the fourth year, English shall progressively be used as a medium of instruction and the language of immediate environment and French shall be taught as subjects (Sec 4:19f).
4. At the secondary level; language of environment shall be taught as L_1 and one major Nigerian language other than that of the environment (Sec 5:24a).

Problems and Implications of the Primary School Language Provision

The implication of the provision of the NPE is that the Nigerian child will only be taught in his/her own language at the pre-primary and the first three years of the primary school after which English language becomes the language of instruction for the rest of his/her academic career. In the first three years, he/she is also expected to have been so well groomed in English language that he/she begins to understand it functionally as a medium of instruction from the fourth year. This means he/she should be able to learn it as well as use it to learn.

In the first three years, it is expected that the instructional material should be prepared in the language of the environment for full implementation of the policy. But this is hardly the case as teaching materials are prepared in English language and the teacher now interprets in the indigenous language. The question now is whether the first three years in the primary school will provide enough grounding for the Nigerian child in the indigenous language.

From the fourth year, when English language is 'progressively' used, the child ceases to have any tangible contact at school with the L1 except that it becomes a subject of study like every other school subject. There is a disconnect between the child's home experience and the school experience. So then, a child has the option of offering the L1 as a subject of study or opting out. When the second option is the case, how then will he/she be grounded in the L1. This work believes that abandoning the L1 in the third year is a great disservice to it and amounts to some degree of cultural and linguistic alienation' of the learner from his/her root.

In fact, the NPE emphasis is that English language is a compulsory subject that should be learnt and mastered, a collaboration between government agencies and British agencies to promote the teaching and learning of English language in schools, to the detriment of indigenous languages. Despite the efforts to Anglicize the Nigerian child by instructing him/her in English from the fourth year in the primary school, it is not uncommon for the teacher to revert to the use of L1 as occasion demands to ensure better understanding by the pupils, i.e., if the teacher shares common language with the pupils.

The unspecified provision of English language being 'progressively' used has raised more questions as to what constitutes the 'progression' of the use of English medium. Among the questions on the lips of linguists and educators is whether some of these NPE provisions constitute any serious programme for implementation or merely government intent. For instance, Awobuluyi (1998) wondered why the language of environment or mother tongue should be used 'initially' in the primary school and not throughout the whole primary school period, if it is considered a very important medium for achieving initial and permanent literacy and numeracy.

In such a case, other children from other linguistic backgrounds who find themselves in a mixed language community cannot settle for any indigenous language. It is more difficult in this kind of environment especially when the teacher also has a different linguistic background from those of the children.

Should that community operate the same national language policy? This is an issue that needs to be addressed.

In addition, NPE did not provide measures for checking the implementation of the policy at various levels of education. In the rural areas where basic educational infrastructures are minimal, it may be difficult implementing the "from 4th year English-only policy" as it has nothing to do with their lifestyle. In urban areas, privately owned schools teach their pupils in English language from the pre-primary level. There is visible policy implementation problem as well as enforcement malaise.

It is also observable that the NPE section that stated that Nigerian at the secondary school level should be taught one major Nigerian language in addition to the language of the enviroment (Sec 5:24a) has been completely ignored at the language planning and policy implementation levels. This implies that no Nigerian child in the secondary school would be familiar with any other Nigerian language other than that of his/her enviroment. This is not healthy for national development and integration because it keeps speakers of different languages and cultures further apart from each other.

It is therefore, the opinion of this work that the National Education Policy should be revised to extend the indigenous language use to the whole primary education duration. Education needs to retain the cultural values of the community for a longer period, in the consciousness of young learners. The general outcry now is that societal culture is being eroded by western education. However, the fundamental issue is that western language is used to teach western knowledge and lifestyle which our society has imbibed. As our languages and cultures get assimilated and melt into the pot of our official language, the tendency is to devalue the indigenous languages and cultures to the advantage of the "Prestigious and high status" official language. The death of our indigenous languages is the death of our cultural heritage and values. It must be noted that the culture of any people is best expressed in the language of the people. To compel the Nigerian child to learn at all levels of education in a foreign language is to alienate the child from his/her culture and replace the indigenous values with strange values expressed in foreign official language.

Conclusion

The place of language in education is pivotal to educational attainment particularly in the primary school where it serves as a stepping stone in the overall development of the individual. The degree of attention paid to language acquisition planning is an indication of the extent of seriousness attached to language development and use which has implications on individual and national development. However, a carefully thought out implementable language policy that is aligned with national language ideology and a properly planned programme for actualisation is what is needed for revitalisation. This must take into account the detailed knowledge of language diversity of the state in order to sustain renewed progress in the Nigerian education sector. Any attempt to

deviate from policy objectives is to underline the development of indigenous languages to the detriment of linguistic growth.

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