

English Language: A Point of Convergence and a Tool for Building a Corruption - Free Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper posits English language as a point of convergence and a tool for building a corruption-free Nigeria. It discussed the effects of multi-lingualism, corruption and its effects on Nigeria and the transfer of our value system from multi-lingual to English language. The paper concludes that the amalgamation of Nigeria's varied positive norms and value systems which are anti-corruption inclined can facilitate a corruption-free nation Nigeria seeks. Consequently, it recommended that these varied norms and value system should be explored in the fight to save Nigeria from the disease of corruption.

Keywords

English Language, Multilingualism, Convergence, Corruption-Free Nigeria, Value System

1. Introduction

Nigeria is a multi-lingual nation of varied ethnic groups. This reason paved a way for English Language to become the nation's lingual franca and a factor for its unification (Akujobi & Chukwu, 2012). The role and influence of English language in Nigeria has been well documented. Atanda and Jaiyeobi (2011) posited that English language plays a central and strategic role in the school system because most school subjects in Nigeria are taught and assessed in it. Dalandi (2013) opined that English is a vital tool for continuing unity and general administration. Bamgbose (1971) as cited in Adedimeji (2004) asserted that:

Of all the heritage left behind in Nigeria by the British at the end of colonial administration, probably, none is more important than the English language. It is now the language of government, business and commerce, education, the mass media, literature, and much internal as well as external communications...

English language assumed its unifying role in Nigeria due to the inter-ethnic tension and disagreement imbedded in Nigerians on the issue of which language should be our lingua franca.

Ezema (2010) submitted that:

It is in order to diffuse inter-ethnic linguistic tension and for the fact that no single indigenous Nigerian language is spoken and understood throughout Nigeria than English, the language inherited from the colonial masters which has been adopted as the official language of the country. The role of English in national life of an average Nigerian is inestimable. In order to participate effectively in the social, political and economic aspects of national life, a Nigerian must attain some level of competence in the language. For him/her to follow intelligently in what goes on in national life, he/she has to read newspapers, listen to the radio, and also listen to and watch television programmes which are largely conducted in English language.

The lives of Nigerians generally has now been infested and influenced by the English language; such that the average citizen is sometimes unable to speak a complete sentence in his/her native language without an English word uttered in between. This implies that English language is central to all Nigerians.

The state of corruption in Nigeria is a malady that has afflicted the nation over the years without cure. The citizens are tired of the situation and seek ways to end the dilemma. Nigeria is also a nation blessed with varied rich culture,

norms and value systems that is anti-corruption inclined. This paper posits that even though English language is a foreign language, it is a platform for unity in Nigeria hence, it can be used as a tool for building a corruption-free nation we seek. It is the view of the authors that our value systems though varied can be amalgamated in English to give the desired break through out of corruption.

2. Effects of Multilingualism

Multilingualism is a situation Nigerians had to contend with latently and constantly in their national lives. This is because it is a societal phenomenon that deals with language existing in a society. It is a sociolinguistic phenomenon that arises as a result of language contact. It is a situation in which two (i.e. bilingualism, specifically) or more languages operate within the same context and it is characterized by factors such as political annexation, marital relation, economic transaction, cultural association, educational acquisition and religious affiliation (Adedimeji, 2004). After Nigeria's independence in 1960, there was no indigenous language in Nigeria that could perform the function English language assumed. Hence, the entire nation fell into a dilemma of not having an official language. This was because no linguistic group had a right to impose itself on any other and every linguistic group whether major or minor feels sovereign and important. Apart from these, other points of disagreement exists.

In an empirical study by Igboanusi and Ohia (2001:125-142) involving one thousand respondents (which include doctors, lawyers, teachers, politicians, civil servants and students) in four minority languages zones in the country it was observed that 74.3% of respondents dislike speakers of Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba and 49.6% of them feel that the speakers of the three major Nigerian languages do not think well of the minority language groups. The study also revealed that most of the respondents (65.7%) showed preference for English as Nigeria's *lingua franca*. 19.3% of the respondents desired that their local languages become Nigeria's future *lingua franca*, while 5.3%, 3.6% and 6.1% of them want either Yoruba, Igbo or Hausa, in the respective order, to emerge as Nigeria's future *lingua franca*. This is rather sad and unfortunate to note that such latent tension which does not make for national progress exists.

Danladi (2013) reported that the 'artificial' combination of the three regions (Northern, Eastern and Western) in 1914 gave the major languages in Nigeria according to the British colonial point of view as Hausa in the northern region, Yoruba in the western region and Igbo in the Eastern region. This craved an edge for English language as the only unifying solution to the newly merged country. Language policy becomes the extraordinary measures to determine values, norms, basis of conduct and loyalties between the forged nations. The multilingual nature of the country which is supposed to be an asset is now a point of suspicion, disagreement, contentions and corruption. Many Nigerians hide under this umbrella and perpetuate various forms of

corruption that has gradually destroyed the nation.

The knowledge of more languages, and the advanced knowledge of multiple languages have also been linked to higher levels of open-mindedness, which has much in common with tolerance ambiguity (Korzilius, Van Hooft, Planken & Hendrix, 2011). People knowing more languages have been found to have higher levels of cognitive empathy. These studies suggest that multilingualism is an enduring factor that can have a small but significant effect on some personality traits (Dewaele & Li Wei, 2013). Corruption can pass for a form of personality trait hence, multilingualism may induce corruption as in the Nigerian case.

3. Corruption and Its Effect on Nigeria

The definition of corruption is varied especially in a country like Nigeria where it has eaten so deep in to the fabric of the nation that the ordinary citizen sees it as a way of life. It is a dilemma that must be tackled if a healthy corruption-free Nigeria is to emerge. Corruption is coined from the Latin word; *corruptus* which in essence means 'to destroy'. Corruption has broadly been defined as a perversion, or a change from good to bad and specifically, corruption or corrupt behaviour involves the violation of established rules for personal gain and profit; it is efforts to secure wealth or power for private benefit (Lipset & Lenz, 2000: 112-114; Dike, 2005; Atelhe & Agada, 2014).

The Transparency International (2014) as cited in Khan (2014), a global coalition against corruption categorized corruption into two:

- a. *According to the rule*: this involves the payment of a bribe in exchange for regular-but-preferential treatment such as payment of documents to be processed quickly – a form of queue jumping.
- b. *Against the rule*: this involves payment to make someone do something that they are not allowed to do.

The effect of corruption on Nigeria cannot be quantified; the rubble of its destruction will be difficult to clean-up. According to Atelhe and Agada (2014), the menace of political corruption leads to slow movement of files in offices, police extortions at tollgates and slow traffic on the highways, port congestion, queues at passport offices and petrol stations, ghost workers syndrome, election irregularities, among others. It also brings about fundamentally distorted public policy, and governance, and adversely harms the poor masses. Further, it misdirects investable capital, and budgetary resources away from the provision of health, education and social amenities etc. Corruption impacts societies in a multitude of ways. It costs lives, people's freedom, health or money (Transparency International, 2015).

Some forms of corruption identified by Atelhe and Agada (2014) are as follows:

1. Bribery, with its Nigerian variant of kick-backs;
2. Nepotism;
3. Misappropriation;

4. The use of contrived security threats to the state or the larger society to obtain approval of extra-budgetary
5. allocation for the personal enrichment of public officials charged with the maintenance of public order; The exploitation of privileged relationship with key public sector managers for the purpose of acquiring
6. competitors business assets;
7. Auto-corruption;
8. Extortion; and
9. Employment patronage.

Corruption has been divided into many forms but the most widely discussed are: political corruption or corruption of greed, bureaucratic corruption, electoral corruption, embezzlement and bribery (Dike, 2005).

According to the Transparency International (2015), corruption can be divided into four main categories: political, economic, social and environmental. From the political point of view, corruption is a major obstacle to democracy and the rule of law. In a democratic system, offices and institutions lose their legitimacy when they're misused for private advantage. It is extremely challenging to develop accountable political leadership in a corrupt climate. Economically, corruption depletes national wealth. Corrupt politicians invest scarce public resources in projects that will enrich their pockets rather than benefit communities, and prioritize high-profile projects such as dams, power plants, pipelines and refineries over less spectacular but more urgent infrastructure projects such as schools, hospitals and roads. Corruption also hinders the development of fair market structures and distorts competition, which in turn deters investment.

Socially, corruption corrodes the social fabric of society. It undermines people's trust in the political system, in its institutions and its leadership. A distrustful or apathetic public can then become yet another hurdle to challenging corruption. In the environmental sense, corruption brings about the lack of, or non-enforcement of, environmental regulations and legislation means that precious natural resources are carelessly exploited, and entire ecological systems are ravaged. From mining, to logging, to carbon offsets, companies across the globe continue to pay bribes in return for unrestricted destruction.

The issue of corruption-free nation is enormous and almost unrealistic. This is because corrupt behavior encourages other corrupt behavior, moreover the culprits go unpunished (Sen, 2000, p.277).

Consequently, many measures have been put in place to control it. Such measures include the use of the mass media to disseminate anti-corruption messages, slogans like 'SAY NO TO BRIBERY AND CORRUPTION', DON'T GIVE AND DON'T TAKE BRIBE among others. Still, we had laudable anti-corruption programmes like War Against Indiscipline (WAI), Independent Corrupt Practices Commissions (ICPC) and Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC). All these and other structures put in place and executed by past government may have contributed their quota in the fight against corruption for a corruption-

free nation but the disease still remains with us and its now contagious.

A way around this malady perhaps is to go back to our culture, norms and values system. Nigeria is a composition of various tribes, people, and culture but with a common voice that repels and frowns at corruption. Every Nigerian has some form of respect for culture and associates with it no matter their educational attainment and status. Nigeria is blessed by a value system in culture that can be harnessed toward the fight against corruption.

4. Value System Transfer from Multi-Lingual to English Language

A nation exists on the basis of mutual identity whose features include language, culture and history. National language is a symbol of national identity (Ajibade, 2011). Culture has a powerful influence on Nigerians because it is a point of making from cradle to adulthood. Nwabueze (2011) opined that it is obvious that our lives in this world started with adherence to strict order and coded behaviour. We are tagged with names, usually according to gender. We are fed the kinds of food which our society thinks are best for us. We are toilet trained, introduced to eating schedules, and taught the proper way to eat, how to be polite, whom to love, and what to fear. The author maintained that:

Implied in the idea of culture is the notion that human beings are systematically taught how to behave, think and feel. This process of learning to become a good member of society is life-long. This learning process is called socialization

..... society exerts pressure on its members to grow up and be good citizens and useful members of society. Society also exerts pressure on all its members, no matter their age, to continue to conform to the norms, values, and laws of the society.

Nwabueze (2011) added that culture is learned when we are socialized into the values, beliefs, and rules of our society. Cultural transmission is symbolic. A symbol is something that represents something else, even an abstraction. Here, too, it should be stressed that culture is transmitted primarily through the symbolism of language.

Perhaps, this language could be English; this is because it is one language Nigerians embrace as a platform for unity since the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorates in 1914. Suppose we amalgamate and transfer our respective ethnic norms, values and laws in English language and call it Nigerian English which may be a front to achieving a corruption-free Nigeria Nigerians want so much.

Again, let us consider the words of Nwabueze (2011) on this issue. He said

Now you are beginning to wonder whether Nigerians really understand the meaning of their cultural tenets, and if so, whether they recognize the tendency or need to

bleach the society to adapt to cultural values, especially in the effort to nurture our democratic process. Evidently, there is a tendency for Nigerians to be ethnocentric, judging other cultures in terms of their own. But that does not create a conflict between our ethnic culture and our national culture because it is ethnic cultures that are utilized for ultimate transmission into national culture

At this point, a question that we may want to address is how do we do this? Amalgamate our varied cultures in a national culture that could fight corruption and raise a new breed of Nigerians that can make impact in our present world where corruption is embraced and forced on God fearing citizens by people elected into public offices under all kind of pressures and demonic influences. A case in hand is that of countries, respected as it were who have given in to homosexuality among other vices that can be viewed as the highest form of corruption. Culture and language are undeniably intertwined; our language reflects our culture (Otto, 2013). This can be interpreted to mean that where good culture lies it will be reflected in the language the people speak. Since norms and value system of a society is embedded in its culture, the people will also exhibit them.

5. Suggestion

Based on the issue discussed, the following suggestion are made:

The government should as a matter of urgency look into setting up a body to amalgamate our norms, values systems and beliefs that are pro-Nigerian and transmit these into the English language structure for the use of all Nigerians in our schools, offices, markets and all endeavours.

The school curriculum at all levels should reflect these common norms and value system that is anti-corruption in form of spoken and written English language.

6. Conclusion

English language is a point of unison and unification of Nigerians. This was due to the multilingual nature of the country which has become a point of tension and disagreement. Thus, a point of convergence acceptable to and useable by all remains the English language. Corruption is almost an incurable disease Nigerians have to contend with over the years. It has infested every sector of our economy. Every government over the years had corruption as a major issues they dealt with but it only grew worst. The nation is rooted in rich multicultural values that can be explored in the fight against corruption using the common plat form of English language. These varied multi-ethnic norms and values system from the different multi-ethnic background when amalgamated into the lingua franca can help fight corruption in every sector of the nation's economy and give the desired corruption-free Nigeria.

Abbreviations

EFCC: Economic and Financial Crimes Commission
ICPC: Independent Corrupt Practices Commissions
WAI: War Against Indiscipline

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