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TITLE:
**AFRICAN LANGUAGES AS TOOL FOR
DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA**

ABSTRACT

- Language drives learning; learning drives knowledge; knowledge drives development; bundles of indigenous knowledges are encapsulated in indigenous languages. This lecture argues that genuine and sustainable knowledge for the development of a people is best acquired through their languages. It starts by raising some questions relating to assumptions on the problems in African languages and development in Africa. It attempts to highlight the possible causes of the problems, suggest solutions and expose efforts so far made by scholars and institutions in providing enabling environment for the empowerment of African languages for development in Africa. It concludes by making some recommendations.



INTRODUCTION

- This presentation is more of an advocacy on the significance of African languages to African development and particularly geared toward generating areas for further research on this topic.

PROBLEM QUESTIONS (1)

- How far has Africa fared in terms of development and economic independence?
- What developmental results is learning for knowledge acquisition in colonial languages in Africa yielding?
- What benefits is governing African nations in colonial political systems and languages in Africa giving to the continent.
- How can death in installments of our languages, cultures and traditions be halted?
- Why the reliance on foreign experts in spite of African huge human resources?
- What are the effects of, for instance 143 in Nigeria (40 federal, 42 state and 61 private, with 13 specialising in technology and 6 in Agriculture) on the development of the country? Polytechnics and Colleges of Education are even more in number. More are still in the pipeline. (Premium Times, March 9, 2020)

PROBLEM QUESTIONS (2)

- Why are African graduates not as creative through learning in colonial (foreign) languages as their counterparts who learnt in their indigenous languages? Is it the languages of instruction or the curricula?
- Why is there so huge unemployment rate in Africa?
- In the past, without modern education in foreign languages, how did Africans survive? How were the trans sahara trade and the routes managed across linguistic and cultural boundaries? There were experts in Engineering, Arts, Music, theatre and Business. How was the Egyptian pyramid built? How were such outstanding figures like the following able to excel in business and governance: Madam Tinubu, Queen Amina, the various Alaafin of Oyo Empire. Not too far away, through which media did the following get their education: Lamidi Fakeye (sculpture), Moses Olaiya[Baba Sala] and Adebayo Salami[Oga Belo] (theatre), Odolaye Aremu, Haruna Isola and Sunday Adeniyi[King Sunny Ade](Music) and several others all over Africa.

CAUSES OF PROBLEMS

- Lukewarm attitude of Africans toward everything indigenous to them, such as languages, religions, cultures. This attitude is negatively affecting the efforts geared toward empowering African languages in becoming languages of instruction.
- Some scholars claim that:
- African languages lack lexical items and vocabulary to express scientific and abstract ideas and notions.
- With many languages in most African countries, there will be difficulty in choosing a language of learning/instruction.
- Non-implementation of existing policy statements in some government documents such as:
- The Nigeria Constitution, National Policy on Education, Nigeria Broadcasting Code.

SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS (1)

- Is it still possible to learn in African languages? Yes. What does it take to be possible?
- Terms are being developed in many languages in Africa to cope with expression and discussion of ideas and notions that are foreign to certain languages (see Yusuff, 2008, for the Yoruba language).
- Languages, as many as they could be, have geographical area of coverage in terms of users. Therefore, some languages may be national, some regional, some state-based and some local government-based. Each will be used as language of instruction in its domain, at least up to first three years of education, while the English and/or French will remain subjects to be taught. This is already a policy in National Policy on Education in Nigeria. But it is not being implemented.

SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS(2)

- African languages are NOT as many as had been claimed by Eurocentric anthropologists and linguists. There are many cases of one people speaking one language but segmented into 2 or 3 countries, with the language bearing different names in their countries of domiciliation. Examples abound in East Africa. Yoruba, for instance is known by various names like Mofoli, Ajase, Anago (especially in Benin Republic). More efforts need to be put into re-categorization of African languages.
- African languages be developed to become languages of instruction, while colonial languages be limited to being subjects of study. Tanzania is the only country in Africa that has an African language Swahili as its official language.

EFFORTS SO FAR (1)

- My thesis titled 'Lexical Morphology in Yoruba Engineering' 2008, University of Lagos- in which I mentioned sources (speakers), resources (internal linguistic mechanisms) and strategies of empowering languages, using the Yoruba language as an example. I concluded thus: 'every living human language whose speakers are linguistically patriotic has the ability, capacity and capability to develop to meet whatever communicative challenges that may face it|'.
- Falaiye, in a presentation, in 2019, calls our attention to the 'colonial linguistic legacy (Mazrui and Mazrui 1998) on the categorization of Africa into Anglophone, Francophone and Lusophone, but not to colonized Asia; 'colonial linguistic determinism' (Ngugi Wa Thiog'o 1986) on the danger of dominating a people's language; proficiency in the language of the oppressed leading to estrangement from his language and culture(Fanon 1967, Mazrui and Mazrui 1998); anglophonisation of African Studies itself and the prestige enjoyed by the English language viz-a-viz the discrimination suffered by African languages as languages of instruction.
- English-Yoruba Glossary of HIV, AIDS and Ebola-Related Terms.
- Metalanguages in Nigeria (for Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba)
- Quadrilingual Glossary of Legislative Terms

EFFORTS SO FAR (2)

- Primary Science and Mathematics Terminology in Nine Nigerian Languages
- Orthographies and Unified Orthographies
- Learn Africa (formerly Longman) efforts
- National Language Policy Technical Committee (Southwest Coordinator)
- British Council, in conjunction with UNICEF efforts.
- The UN has set aside February 21 as International Mother Language Day
- Legislation is being done in some states in Nigeria. Examples are Lagos, Oyo, Ogun in Yoruba, and Imo in Igbo in the south. Most states in the north do so in Hausa. The case of Lagos is particularly heartwarming. Yoruba has legislated as official language.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Learning in the mother tongue: learners' language provides direct reference to ideas and concepts, and also provides foundation to learning other languages. This is contrary to the general belief, especially in Nigeria, that the use of indigenous languages prevents the child's competence in the English language. The support of governments at all levels is needed here.
- Parents should communicate with their children in their indigenous languages, even if the marriage is mixed. Research has shown that a child has the capacity to learn as many languages as s/he is exposed to.



CONCLUSION

- Countries who have thrown away the garb of colonial languages are without doubt doing better. A good example is India, colonized by the British.
- Who is to blame?
- The elites in Africa, though few in number, are policy makers and implementors. They are agents of neocolonialism and imperialism because they are benefitting from them.
- Through learning and instructing in African languages, we can build Africa for the benefit of Africans.