

THE 'EVIL' OF LANGUAGE IN THE SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT OF A NATION

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Annotation: In modern world, language as the attitude of a stateship has either created a solid ground for progressive development or a deep rift between tribes, ethnic groups and nationalities which have for centuries or decades been living on a particular territorial formation. In this article we discuss various aspects of language emphasizing its social and cultural aspects and giving examples from different linguistic groups of European, Asian and African continents.

Key words: foreign borrowings, social development, ethnic conflicts.

INTRODUCTION: Language, as a functional aspect and one of the essential and fundamental elements of the society, plays a vital role in its evolution and

development processes. Language is an attribute of stateship of any group of people or society which contributes to the traditional and cultural enhancement. It is therefore no wonder that it can be considered as the veins of the society through which people's traditions and customs are traversed though there are other conceptual components by which the national identity can be expressed. For example: the attire the people wear, the dish they cook, the religious belief they adhere to, and even the general interrelationship between them. It is through language that many societies vividly identify themselves as a full fledged entity with all the fundamental social links forming a single cluster woven together. The stronger these fundamental social links are and the more sanity the language receives the more stable the people feel within a specific geographical environment. The removal of a single link leads to a total disintegration of the whole web network. When solidly founded we conceive that many a time the geographical boundary can overlap making the language penetrate other social groups. Good and friendly neighbourliness develops binding them into bilateral or multilateral associations.

1. Economic and political aspects of language development

However, many economists and politicians, for example, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, Dr. Adebayo Adedji, Dr. K. Y. Amoako do believe that the economic base and political organization play a more important and major role in the development and stability of a society. K.Y. Amoako [1] argues "that attempts to impose an Asian development model in Africa will ultimately fail. He puts forward the idea of "market-friendly industrial policy" to drive the structural transformation of African economies. But if this vision is to become a reality, governments must develop the capacity to mobilize financial resources, deliver public services and ensure peace and security". K.Y. Amoako [1] had this to say on politics: "Any developing country must have a national platform where the

government and opposition can work together for the national interest.” The more advanced economic and political organization the country attains the more stable it should be. Others, such as Dr. Billy Graham, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby and Desmond Tutu of South Africa, think religion is the best knitting line of stability of the society. Besides, it is well known that religion for centuries has maintained a special connection within a people and, of course, still plays an important role in the perception of the environment of a society.

Every year, Christians ‘troupe’ to Vatican or Jerusalem and Muslims to Mecca or Medina on pilgrimage. The above mentioned aspects of the society determine to a greater extent the direction and development level of a nation where different language usages can exist. There are abound nations which have dozens of languages on the specific geographical area making them poly-ethnic society, for instance, Russia, South Africa, India, Switzerland, China, Belgium and Britain. It is believed that the language is the main tool upon which all these elements are based. So much as the language base is solidified the more stable the society is expected to function. To improve the language basis itself as a fiber, which binds the group of people together as a whole, the economic base, political organization and religious mindful of the people which can be termed as ‘ideological food’ of the society should be at the highest development level.

2. Language as the attitude of a stateship

In modern world, language as the attitude of a stateship has either created a solid ground for progressive development or a deep rift between tribes, ethnic groups and nationalities which have for centuries or decades been living on a particular territorial formation. The end result normally comes as fierce tribal, ethnic and national wars between people. The economic prosperity has done not much to strength the fragile links between people due to the differences in dialects or languages. In fact, it is obvious that the economic state and development doesn’t

always guarantee a watertight bind within the society. It is rather that the economic base and their stratification differences that have triggered many current ethnic conflicts leading to civil wars that we observe today among people and countries, sometimes instigated, fuelled and supported by foreign powers. Based on the language differences, people feel deprived of equal rights and participation in the affairs of a country. The absence of recognition of one group of the other ethnic group normally connected to the differences in languages is very evident in their relationship which leads to struggle for power with the hope that the result will bring the supremacy of one ethnic group over the other and therefore guarantee their survival as an ethnic group of a particular common language which they are proud of and subsequently wish to maintain. C. Small [6] states that “all Rwandans speak almost the same language with slight national variants (kinyarwanda and kirundi) and share the same culture. However, in our perception, this difference creates a basis for conflict when other differences like economic, political and social set in”.

A tragic example was the fierce conflict between the Hutus and Tutsis in Rwanda during the early 90s of the 20th century. On April 6, 1994, Rwandan President, Juvenal Habyarimana (a Hutu) was killed when his plane was shot down by Tutsi rebels. The violence began shortly after the president’s assassination, and Hutu extremists launched their plight to eradicate the entire Tutsi population.

Carla Del Ponte [3] said that “after the post-World War II Yugoslav constitution established the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija within the Yugoslav constituent Republic of Serbia. However, tensions between Kosovo's Albanian and Serb communities simmered through the 20th century and occasionally erupted into major violence, culminating in the Kosovo War of 1998 and 1999, which resulted in the withdrawal of the Yugoslav and the establishment of the Kosovo. The Serbians, Orthodox Christians, speaking

Slavonic language concede that the land belongs to them and that they had done the Kosovo Albanian mainly Muslim speaking people a favour by granting them homage but these ‘foreigners’ are claiming the land as well. Besides, they want to form a ‘great’ Albania as one people and at the same time have applied for observer status in the Organization of the Islamic Cooperation”.

Jacques Parizeau [4], a famous and influential Canadian secessionist politician, in his struggle for independence of the Francophone Quebec Province of Canada from the Federal government admitted in 1997 that he considered that it was the language and "money and the ethnic vote" which influenced the orientation of the vote for the independence and not the ethnic origin. Jacques Parizeau though he had lost his political position and demand for independence in the 1995 referendum, but still endowed with a certain political status, continued to comment very publicly on the current political situation, notably the slowness of the new Bouchard government and its hesitations in the promotion of the independence of Quebec. At the same time he tried to calm the public in one of the radio programs addressing to Quebec's English-speaking community and insisting on “the importance to us of their presence among us and our commitment to respect and defend their rights". He stressed out that “our commitment to take all measures necessary to guarantee in Quebec's new constitution...[that] the identity of their community and their institutions is preserved."

Britain has also for decades been saddled with the secession problems based on languages and territories by the Irish and the Scottish. The most recent one was the independence referendum from the United Kingdom which was organized in September 18, 2014 by the Scottish government, though it was evident that the UK staying within the European Union as a federation gives all the members states economic benefits rather quitting and organizing an independent nation.

Lately, we have been observing the waves of quest for independence in various countries by an ethnic group. For years the regional Catalanian government had been pronouncing the urge to gain independence from Spain but the Spanish government pretended not to hear such a 'nationalist' statement from any semi-autonomous state. This did not stop the Catalonians from persisting for goals and so they conducted a regional referendum. On the October 27, 2017 the Catalanian parliament in line with the regional government promulgated independence from Spain. This led to a political crisis as a result of the organized regional referendum. Soon after that, the Spanish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy dismissed the Catalanian government led by Carles Puigdemont and his cabinet and decided to organize a new election, however, until today (November 2019) the separation issue has not been resolved but it has rather become more acute though new elections had been conducted to defuse the sentiment.

A great number of the Russian ethnic populations were even deprived of legal citizenship in those republics where they had lived and organized their families for decades before the Soviet Union fell apart. The Baltic states are examples of such nations which decided that it was very appropriate to prevent the Russian ethnic population from active political life of their nation. There were many arguments propounded for these policies. One of them was that the political elites in the Baltic States do believe that the Russian Federation will exploit the language possibilities to destabilize the political, economic and social lives of the nations.

The Russian Federation has not been very successful in their goals because their policies have faced not only the elite propaganda of the Russian threat but also a stronghold opposition from the western countries headed by the US. The counter action from the West in the form of information battle, the so-called 'democracy exportation' and the financial support through the so-called human

rights and civil organizations rendered the Russian Federation efforts inactive or totally absent.

According to Ron P. [5] “the current crises in Ukraine are generally attributed to the Russia’s unwillingness to accept the general democratic path of development sweeping the globe and the eagerness of the Russian President V. Putin to gather under his umbrella the independent former Soviet republics and keep them in his empirical hug and control”. These are the propositions propounded by the political establishments of the United States of America and the West, huge massive media supportive brainwashing attitude of the western countries and secret services and their stooges in Ukraine. These are the propositions and illusions, of course, most people believe is the case in the West that have been founded partially due to the ignorance of the people who refuse to fetch the truth themselves and the refusal of the huge western media magnate to portray the truth for their people around the world.

The factional conflict in Libya currently is in the same vein. Since the overthrow of Muammar Gaddafi in 2011, the country has been thrown into a civil war. Although the language generally spoken in this country is Arabic there are ethnic groups - the Toubous and Zawiyas - which were competing between themselves for supremacy of tribal lines. The more dark-skinned Toubous claim they faced discrimination during the Gaddafi era and that the new Libyan authorities continue a campaign of ethnic cleansing against the tribe. The tribal conflict flared up on the eve of the national assembly elections in Libya, which were to be held on July 7, 2011.

Commenting on the tribal conflict, a then London-based activist and journalist S. Chandan [2] told RT in the interview on the 22 October 2011 “Over the deadline” TV program, that “the tribal violence was the result of the absence of national unity in the country”. He further explained that: “All those tensions all

those divisions that the Gadaffi era had kind of united and kind of managed successfully have come out in the open and everyone is fighting everyone for the bit of the crumbs that NATO is throwing at them”. His words described the meddling attitude in the internal affairs of the Libyan people by foreign powers. S. Chandan [6] also conceded that the demise of Gadaffi’s Libya had left the African continent defenseless against Western hegemony. He vehemently stated: “Libya was the veritable shield of Africa and now it has dropped and imperialism of the West is rolling on Africa.”

The first civil war that occurred on the African continent just after the waves of independence struggle against colonial domination took place in Nigeria where the Ibo and other minority spoken language people mainly located in the southern part of the country fought a fierce war (the Biafra war) against the federal government forces because they, Ibos and others, had considered that their interests had been trampled upon by the federal government where the majority positions had been held by the Yorubas and Muslims mainly situated in the northern part of the country. The Nigerian Civil War, also known as the Biafran War or the Nigerian-Biafran War (6 July 1967 – 15 January 1970), was a war fought between the Federal government of Nigeria and the secessionist state of Biafra. Biafra was ‘coined’ as a republic to represent the nationalist aspirations of the down trodden minority ethnic group people, whose leadership felt they could no longer coexist with the Northern-dominated federal government because they spoke another language. This is an example of tribal division built along language differences within a country.

3. Language as a uniting instrument

A close study of the conflicts in the above-mentioned nations reveals that the main source of the national discontent and agitation of the people for secessionism and freedom seems to be targeted at economic and political independence.

However, in our opinion, it is a false representation or rather a misrepresentation of the assessment of issues because the inherent cause and actual cornerstone source is based on language and sometimes followed by religious freedom demand and protests leading to internal rivalries. Even though the igniting elements seem to be economic followed by demands for political reforms which we do often observe, in actual fact, and in most cases, have nothing in common with the whole protest demands.

Observing and recognising the dangers and risks that a language can bring to a country in tribal issues no politician has ever dared to propose openly to the Ghanaian people the introduction of Akan as a national and official language along side with English where about 80% of the population can speak it though there are only three ethnic groups which belong to the Akan language out of the many tribes (9 major languages). The introduction of Akan as a unifying language in Ghana could safely become viable economically, socially and even politically if properly handled and organised amidst tribalism problem that had always been a great burden hindering the development of the African continent. The safe transition could definitely reduce tribal conflicts and disputes. On the other hand it could spark and aggravate the already existing tensions within the society.

However it will be incorrect to state that language brings only problems and troubles. We do have, so far, a clear example of language uniting people together. In some Eastern and Southern African countries, Swahili has become the lingua franca among the following countries: Congo, Tanzania, Uganda, South Africa and Zambia though they still have their local dialects spoken by a large number of people. The Arabic language North Africa has also been relatively peaceful for some time until the recent colour revolution affecting some of the individual nations of the region which had been instigated from outside these nations. Obviously without specific social discontent within the society, there cannot be

any social and political upheavals which develop on concrete social fertile resentment grounds. However the Arabic common language that the Northern states of the Continent have could serve as a resourceful platform for the enhancement of tighter and closer relationships. Similarly, this can be said about the Ewe spoken language which covers a large proportion of the Western African Nations particularly when a regional economic community (ECOWAS) had been formed to ease trade and migration of goods and people. A large population mainly in the southern part of Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Togo, Benin and Nigeria understand and speak Ewe though there are variations. The main language core binds them together as one people which make uniting them quite variable.

At the helm of the 19th century the European countries including Britain, France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Italy and Germany used the language as a colonial method/tool to capture the lands of the African Continent and 'enslave' its people and some parts of Asia. The communication gap that existed on the arrival of Europeans was fully utilized. The native people were convinced to learn the European languages instead of learning the local languages and dialects. Obviously, the arrival of the Europeans on the African Continent also paved the way for some positive elements to the local people. Schools and universities were built. Among the first higher educational institutions to appear on the continent were Makerere University, Uganda, Fourah Bay College, Sierra Leone, the Yaba College, Nigeria, University of Ibadan, Nigeria, University of Ghana, Legon were the brain centres through which the effective and absolute of 'non-return' influence and transference of cultural adaptation of the metropolis. Today English and French still remain one of the leading and official languages of many African countries. It will take centuries to derail the system created by the Europeans centuries ago even if the African countries wish to unite the continent, sweep away the colonial remnants and change the course of development direction to reduce

the effect of partition of the continent and colonialism. The biggest question is whether it is necessary to do in the face of global integration of the world.

4. Conclusion

Language as social phenomenon has been one of the greatest tools in the hands of politicians for many centuries to manipulate and dismantle stateships and it continues to remain so in the modern world. On the other hand, language really serves as the ‘medium’ of cultural exchange and enrichment among nations. The more we learn a foreign language the better we understand and learn to accept, tolerate and value the cultural differences and aspects. So far as we continue to live our cultural enrichment is necessary and therefore cultural penetration interchanges are inevitable for our global society.

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