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### **The Role of the Media in the Development of the English Language in Nigeria**

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#### **Abstract**

The mass media have penetrated deeply into the society making it pertinent that we examine the types of mass media and the nature of the influence the media exert on individuals in the society. The diverse multicultural backgrounds of the English language learners make it imperative for the media to play paramount role in the teaching and development of English in Nigeria. In the recent times, learning takes place within and outside the classroom. The media presently convey more information to learners through the radio, newspapers, magazines, television etc. than those conveyed in the classrooms. This paper reiterated the fact that communication is a vehicle for education, as well as the role of the media in bringing constructive change in the teaching and development of the English language in Nigeria.

**Key Words:** Media, English language and development

#### **Introduction**

The importance of language in any society is inexhaustible. Language stands at the center of human affairs, from the ordinary to the most profound. The language of any group of people is the major carrier of the group's traditional beliefs, customs and history. It is the medium through which the customs and traditions of the society are transmitted to the future generation. This is essentially aimed at achieving a social

situation. English, undoubtedly, continues to enjoy the international status of the world language, being the language most widely spoken, especially outside its place of origin. It is on record that more than half of the world's scientific literature is in the English language Ogunkeye, (2004, p.106) and currently the major language of the internet. The language "functions across the world as the language of power and of inclusion and exclusion in participation in global activities" (Egwuogu, 2011, p. 31).

Another important aspect of the mass media and language development is the nature of various types of mass media. Njemanze (2015, p.84) stated that contents of the mass media cannot be seen apart from the technology of the media themselves; meaning that how things are said and whom they are spoken to, affect the content. Again, today, our world has become a global village, courtesy of the mass media and the internet. The English language over the years has become a language so powerful that the world heavily depends on it for effective and efficient communication. English, however, does not only serve as an international language but has also acquired the status of the largely studied global language of wider communication.

### **Media Conceptualized**

Media is a significant force in modern culture particularly, in language studies. It refers to the way people receive information and entertainment. Media also mean the communication channels through which news, entertainment, education, data, or promotional messages are disseminated. According to Njemanze and Ononiwu (2015, p.84), mass media could be written broadcast or spoken and it is aimed at reaching a large audience. Media include every broadcasting and narrowcasting medium such as newspapers, magazines, television, radio, billboards, cinema-films, advertising, movies, telephone, the internet and more.

The advent of mass media which was not based on print culture opened up new world to even more people. Mass media operating with pictures and sound, most typically film and television, gave really large parts of the population (like immigrants with insufficient mastery of the national language access to culture. Today, electronic mass media provide access to information and entertainment to all those parts of the population which are less proficient in logos-dominated verbal argumentation Njemanze, and Ononiwu, (2015, p.85).

### **Language: Functions and Development**

Language has been defined as "the expression and communication of emotions or ideas between human beings by means of speech and hearing, the sounds spoken or heard being systematized and confirmed by usage among a given people over a period of time" (Webster's Comprehensive Dictionary of English Language Encyclopedic Edition (2004, p.716). Mc Arthur cited in Okoh, (2006, p.6) defines language as "a human system of communication which uses structured vocal sounds and can be

embodied in other media such as writing, print, and physical signs. Considering man's gregarious nature, language remains an indispensable tool, as a means of development and social cohesion, and in the current era of global information technology, it plays a major role, because no technologies innovation is conceived in abstraction, that is, without the input of one language or the other (Dalha & Bashorun, cited in Owolabi & Nnaji 2015, p.125).

Development makes life worth the while, as it is a positive change or improvement in people's living standard. Muhammed, in Owolabi and Nnaji, (2015, p.105), citing World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), considered economic and social development as that which meets the needs of the current generation without jeopardizing the interest of future generations in meeting their own needs. This is made possible because man's language faculty, a cognitive divide between him and other primates, helps him communicate with others in languages that are mutually intelligible. The case of the tower of Babel in the scriptures demonstrates how unity through language can bring about development. Most developed nations of the world are not bedeviled by linguistic plurality, which is the bane of development in many multilingual third world nations, such as Nigeria. Not only that, many inter-tribal strives in the world have been traced to multiplicity of languages, since cultural differences are accentuated and reinforced by linguistic differences (Age, et al, in Owolabi & Nnaji 2015, p.125). Where multilingualism exists, a lingua franca becomes imperative, not only as a Language of Wider Communication (LWC), but mainly as a unifying factor. English is the only unifying tongue among the myriads of languages in Nigeria. Language has been of great importance to man since its development in various aspects of life.

Language is a vehicle or tool for communication. It is man's most basic tool without which it would be difficult for man and woman to live together, to think, to act, and to share ideas together. Language makes it possible for man to engage in social conversation, to transfer ideas, thoughts and feelings in writing through books, and mass communication on media. As a form social interaction, man is the only animal that has evolved and perfected the use of language. Other lower animals have lower order forms of communication which are instinctive responses or reaction to external sound and stimuli. Man has developed and perfected the use of language as a means of maintaining interpersonal, intergroup as well as international relations. Progress in personal and world affairs is basically dependent upon language.

Language is the most vital element for all forms of learning. It is essential for thinking and for abstract reasoning, all of which are active ingredients for learning. The process of imparting knowledge, the transfer of values and attitudes, and the acquisition of skills and competencies are essentially through the instrumentality of language. Language is used for the storage of information and learning artifacts, language is the chief means of producing and storing information and knowledge. Virtually all

knowledge and information in various fields of man's endeavours: arts, science and technology, medicine, agriculture, etc. which can be found recorded and stored in books, journals, newspapers, tapes, films, including microfilms, and computers. Without language man's progress in the storage, retrieval and utilization of information would have been impossible.

Language is the principal means of transferring man's culture and civilization from one generation to another. It as well ensures the growth and continuity of man's knowledge in the form of shaping, understanding influencing thoughts, feelings and reactions of people. Language helps to bring about personal refinement and polish. Skillful use of the language portrays the user as well bred, refined and cultured, and makes behaviour in terms of communication generally well accepted and received by people serving as audience. Lack of skill in the use of language generally portrays the user as crude, unrefined and lacking in proper education. A person without the language power generally finds it difficult to sell his ideas, to convince or influence people as well as events and issues. Skillful use of language is a mark of refinement and civilization.

Language enables man to discover stored or hidden information in various fields of endeavour. It is the chief means of discovering and disclosing the mysteries of knowledge and information in various inscriptions either buried in the ground or kept in libraries and museums. It is the tool, not only for retrieving stored knowledge, but also for decoding, interpreting and understanding such knowledge and information through the use of linguistics and graphic symbols. Language is the principal organ with which man build varied skills, values and competencies necessary for survival. Man uses language to establish bridges of interpersonal relations, to build better human understanding, friendship and co-operation. Recently, man has succeeded in strengthening language as a powerful organ of communication by building and improving language based communication systems and artifacts such as the modern mass communication media including radio, video and television, satellite communication, internet, computer information, E-mail etc. Thus through these organs language has brought the whole world together as a single small family.

### **English Language in Nigeria**

English language in Nigeria is a second language. The advent of the English language in Nigeria was induced by such factors as trading, slavery, colonization and missionary activities. It came through a language contact situation between Portuguese, Europeans and more resulted in the development of a simpler version of the English language of communication: Pidgin. Nigeria is reputed to have over 400 languages, thus ordinarily, Nigeria is a multilingual country. For a multilingual country such as Nigeria to overcome the tower of Babel experience (the confusion resulting from lack of understanding as a result of language diversity), she must cling to the use of one

language. Fortunately, and unfortunately, since the colonial era, that language has been English. The fortunes, functions and characteristics features of the English language in Nigeria are the result of influence and pressures from social attitudes, administrative guidelines and the sociolinguistic realities in the Nigerian speech community. Nigeria has consciously and mostly, unconsciously built a linguistic repertoire to sustain social, political, economic, educational, industrial and technological development in an ultra-multilingual nation. This linguistic network is also needed to facilitate national cohesion and ensure smooth international interaction.

The English language is considered politically as a language of colonialism and, consequently, of imperialism. A conservative Nigeria will sociologically regard the English language as a language which tends to alienate Nigerians from their roots and acculturate them into a counterfeit foreign culture. In spite of the importance of the role of English as a lingua Franca or as a language of communication, the need for a language of national culture to bring together into a unified whole the various traditions of the different segments of the Nigerian community makes people insist on the development of a national language.

#### **Functions of English Language in Nigeria**

According to Adegbite and Akindele (1999, p. 61), English performs three broad functions in Nigeria, viz accommodation, participation and social mobility. First, in performing the accommodating functions, the English language is recognized as a world language, so it performs international functions. It serves as a link between people of multilingual societies of Africa and the outside world. It is the language of international politics, trade and sports, for instance, at the AU, UNO and the Common Wealth. Nigeria has no language other than English for taking part in the deliberations in these organisations. English has also opened the door to high technology, science, trade and diplomacy. All these are made possible because of the large number of English speakers.

English also serves as the official language in the country. It is the language with which the government conducts its business. It is the language that literate people from different ethnic groups use to communicate with one another. English is used as a matter of political expediency. It is retained so as to bring about political stability in the country.

Proficiency in English is generally required for admission to parliament, to the bench and bar, civil service, essential services, etc. The medium of instruction from upper primary to tertiary level is English. In terms of social mobility, the ability to use English enhances both horizontal and vertical mobility of people. Because of the prestige attached to the language, a speaker is considered an illiterate if she/he cannot speak English, even if such a person is literate in the mother tongue. The English language is the language of the institutions left by the colonizer, e.g. education,

technology, administration, judiciary and executive. The business of all these institutions is still largely conducted in the language.

### **The Media in the Development of the English Language in Nigeria**

In recent times, media communication has added new dimensions to the learning of the English language in Nigeria. It has promoted efficiency, flexibility and ability to compete in international communication. In the words of Karlicarin cited in Njemanze (2015, p. 88) the media have been instrumental to the spread and development of English language in Nigeria. It has served as a tool for improving the English language teaching situation and as such it has given a boost to its spread and utilization.

However, with the mass media, people are still using exactly the same means of communication. A newspaper still uses words; a television screen still uses pictures and the spoken word for titles and subtitles. The mass media solicit our attention incessantly with messages addressed to the eye and ear, or both, using the printed or spoken words, still and moving pictures and various combinations of these. The vehicles of these messages, illustrated newspapers, television and cinema, involves the marriage of two languages with wholly different characteristics. However, the audience without the verbal skills and conceptual apparatus that the commentary calls for will see far more than they understand. Words are basic to the communication process whatever the medium. Effective and efficient teaching and development of the English language in Nigeria can be achieved using the following media channels:

- Print media
- Television
- Radio broadcasting
- Digital media and
- Internet

#### **Print media**

This includes newspapers, magazines books letters billboards and hand writing on walls and streets. Newspapers are the potent source of information of any country. Its publication is issued periodically, to convey information and opinions on current events. More than half of the newspapers published in the world and in Nigeria specifically are printed in English. The invention and spread of the printing press was the major factor in the early development of the newspaper invention of new technologies (for instance, satellite and telegraph) enormously facilitated the rapid learning of English. Much of the information available through the international networks is transmitted in English. Through this medium there is positive input in education.

There are different ways of using newspapers in the language classroom. The student may read the articles therein written in English and this could transmit some form of culture into the student or reader. It also helps in reflecting change in the language, morphological, semantic and even stylistic changes and as well assists students, readers and even teachers, where necessary to keep themselves abreast with such changes. It will suffice to say that most newspapers are linguistically up to date and provide valuable linguistic data for the student, teacher and ordinary learner of the English language. Again, it is important to note that most newspapers are veritable sources of many of the verities of written English which many students find important and very valuable for language studies.

Newspapers have always served as very important resource material for reading comprehension. They are used to develop the language skills of students in terms acquiring new vocabularies, new grammatical structures, proper use of punctuation marks, etc.

### **Television**

Television may be the most powerful for many purposes; television can convey a great number of signs simultaneously, it can gain heavy impact from mutually reinforcing gestures, words, postures and sounds and a background of symbolically significant issue. An example is watching movies, with English as the dominant language of communication is of utmost importance to the language student. The visual and critical awareness of the student is increased and thus enhances language learning and development. The student listens to the authentic language as it is spoken by the native speakers in the movie aired by the Television station, the student sees the action of the characters, listens to what they say (their words) and thus matches actions with words and gets a better grasp of the language. Any student, teacher or learner of the English language who engages himself in watching movies, in the television, for the purpose of language learning would grasp the accent, voice, body language, correct and appropriate lexical items, correct phrases and syntactic structures of the language. Television is thus considered a useful information technology gadget which impacts on society in general and enhances amplified learning, marketing, commerce, education, leisure, and culture all across the world.

### **Radio Broadcasting**

Radio broadcasting is a popular medium all over the world. The BBC is a major source of news and information. Its world service is primarily in English. Crystal has noted that, 49% of the world's radio receivers were in these countries where English language has a special status; but what such figures say in real terms about exposure to English is any one's guess (Njamanze & Ononiwu 2015, p.91). Radio broadcasting enhances speech production and other mechanics of pronunciation. A similar function is being carried out by Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) programme triggered

“Learn your Grammar”. This programme teaches the English language using the four language skills of listening, reading, writing and speaking. Students pay attention to accent, choice of words, listening, sound patterns, favourite demonstration and more. Thus the wide range of TV programmes enhances the language learning skill of participation. With the introduction of satellite and cable televisions, individuals can now see programmes directly from their countries of origin. People are exposed to digital technology in virtually all facets of day to day existence and it is not difficult to see that this is having an impact on the teaching and learning approaches.

### **Digital Media**

Digital media is another mode of learning which is easier to use because people with their fingertips can traverse the world. By contrast the new media is interactive, manageable and distributed via digital information processing machines. As such, it values much greater neutrality. Digital media represent a profound change from previous (analog) media. This has enhanced the learning of the English language too.

### **The Internet**

The internet has affected people across the world. Its penetration in schools, homes and effects has been spectacular in rich countries, but some developing countries like ours have also seized on it. In these countries the subscribers are increasingly dependent on basic browsing, E-mails, messaging for job hunting, trading and many of other practical speculation.

Teaching through the use of the digital media or the internet in particular help the teacher to intend to a wider range of audience at a given time. Remarkable aspect of these technologies is that their common link is English. This link has established a unique relationship between language and technology. Despite its uniqueness people feel uneasy to cope with the perverse technology and its powerful language.

Media provides teacher and students with creative and practical ideas. They also provide students with a lot of language practice exercises through activity using newspapers, magazines, radio, TV, movies, internet, etc. and task which develop reading, writing, speaking and listening skills.

### **Conclusion**

Every nation desires development, but most often, when issues of development are discussed, leaders hardly ever give consideration to language. This is unfortunate, because language plays a key role in development, especially when properly deployed in the mass media of communication. People’s awareness must be raised to enable them partake in matters of development and the mass media of communication can help create the needed awareness through appropriate language choice and its proper use.

This will contribute positively and meaningfully to the development of man and the society at large through the media's surveillance and interpretive roles.

Ever since the establishment of audio lingual and audio-visual methods of teaching, the media has influenced the process of education. TV, radio, books, newspapers, computer, internet, etc. have transformed the teaching methods and techniques. Among several aids, tape recorder or video tapes are the most common aids used in a classroom, especially the English language class. Media technologies have great promise and are changing learning.

It has also increased the effectiveness of learning by helping the learner to assimilate the idea presented to them in a more meaningful and intrusive manner. This paper thus, concluded by advocating for the adoption of the media channels in the teaching, learning and development of the English language in Nigeria.

The onus of the media lies on getting the attention of the listener(s) by providing information addressed to the ears and eyes or both. Similar activities are performed by the new media technologies which have variously contributed to the easy assimilation of language studies and development. Moreover, media has the potential to attract students thereby making learning more feasible, entertaining and interactive. It has also broadened their access to education especially language learning and improved the quality of education delivered.

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