

LANGUAGE POLICIES, NATIONAL PHILOSOPHY AND SOCIAL REALITIES IN NIGERIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIO-CONFLICT RESOLUTION

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Abstract

The paper is a critique of the Nigerian National philosophy/objectives on the one hand, and the political and educational language policies generated from the philosophy and objectives on the other hand. In corollary, the paper draws people's attention to the incongruence between the theory and practice of both the philosophy/objectives and the educational and political language policies. It is against this backdrop that various recommendations were made with regard to the implementation of the Nigerian National language policies embedded in the National Policy on Education (NPE) 1981 and 2004; and 1979/1999 Federal Constitution of the Republic of Nigeria so that what is actually on paper would eventually see the light of day and made practicable. In addition, implications were drawn from the analysis and discussion towards encouraging an enduring peace and unity in the multilingual- multicultural Nigeria using practical triglot literacy approach.

Keywords: Nigeria, philosophy, language, policy, realities, socio-conflict

Introduction

Nigeria can be described as a bilingual, bicultural, multilingual, multiethnic and multicultural state. It can be described as bilingual because of the presence of a set of mother tongues (MTs) and the second language, English. It can also be described as multiethnic because it comprises about 400 ethnic groups with individual languages, thereby making the country multilingual. Nigeria can be described as bicultural because of the presence of the indigenous Nigerian culture and the English culture. It can as well be described as multicultural because of different multiethnic groups with their different cultures. With the bilingual, bicultural, multilingual and multicultural nature of Nigeria, it cannot be referred to as a nation with a homogenous linguistic culture but a heterogeneous linguistic one (Akindele and Adegbite, 2005, pp.28-53). As a result of this multiethnic, multilingual and multicultural nature, the 36 states of the federation do not see one another as belonging to a nation most especially in the way they treat non-indigenes. It is the main concern of this paper to analyze and discuss the incongruence between the national philosophy/objectives on the one hand and the educational

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and political language literacy policies generated from the former. In other words, this paper is interested in the mismatch or incongruence between what is on paper in form of a policy that should guide the practice and the actual social reality which should be a reflection of the policy. This is critical in order for us to give recommendations that could minimize or solve some linguistic and non-linguistic challenges culminating sometimes into socio-political conflicts affecting Nigeria and Nigerians.

National Philosophy and Objectives: Theory and Practice

The national philosophy and objectives are patriotically and eloquently articulated in both the National Policy on Education (NPE) 1981 and 2004. First, the national philosophy from which the national objectives are generated state thus: The overall philosophy of Nigeria is to:

- (a) live in unity and harmony as one indivisible, indissoluble, democratic and sovereign nation founded on the principles of freedom, equality and justice.
- (b) promote inter-African solidarity and world peace through understanding.

(NPE, 2004; p.1)

It is from the above philosophy that the following national objectives are generated:

- i. a free and democratic society
- ii. a just and egalitarian society
- iii. a united, strong and self reliant nation
- iv. a great and dynamic economy
- v. a land of bright and full opportunities for all citizens

(NPE, 1981; p.7; 2004; p.1)

One can rightly fault the above philosophy and objectives with respect to the way and manner non-indigenes are treated when it comes to employment and other socio-economic and political opportunities. While indigenes of a particular state are treated as 'sons and daughters of the soil', the non-indigenes although Nigerians from another parts of the country, are treated as outcasts that should not be given permanent appointments or higher political or socio-economic enhancement posts. For example, some youths, after finishing their National Youth Service

Corps (NYSC), were denied jobs in the states of their national service on the basis of being non-indigenes of the state where they did their primary assignments. Those that were given jobs were given contract appointments while they were denied of permanent employment.

In the same vein, a political aspirant cannot aspire to stand for election in order to acquire a particular political post in a state which does not belong to him/her. This is contrary to the definition of a citizen as somebody who has been living in a place and participating in the socio-economic and political activities of the place for at least the past three years (Hornby, 2005). It is stated in black and white in *The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria* (henceforth TCFRN) that a person could be a citizen of Nigeria by birth, marriage and naturalization (See Chapter III, Clause 25). Also, under Clause 40 (Right to Freedom of Movement), it is stated that "Every citizen of Nigeria is entitled to move freely throughout Nigeria and to reside in any part thereof, and no citizen of Nigeria shall be expelled from Nigeria or refused entry thereto or exit therefrom" (TCFRN, p.30)

As a complement to this, we have it under "Right to Freedom from discrimination" (Clause 41) that "A citizen of a particular community, ethnic group, place of birth, sex, religion or political opinion shall not, by reason be discriminated against only that such a person:

- (a) be subjected either expressly by, or in the practical application of, any law in force in Nigeria or any executive or administrative action of the government to disabilities or restrictions to which citizens of Nigeria of other communities, ethnic groups, places of origin, circumstance of birth, sex, religion or political opinions are not made subject; or
 - (b) be accorded either expressly by, or in the practical application of, any law in force in Nigeria or any privilege or advantage that is not accorded to citizens of Nigeria of other communities, ethnic groups, places of origin, circumstance of birth, sex, religions or political opinions.
- (2) No citizen of Nigeria shall be subjected to any disability or deprivation merely by reason of the circumstance of his/her birth (TCFRN, p.41)"

Similar to the case of discrimination, in most of our higher institutions such as polytechnics, universities and colleges of Education, academic and non-academic posts were more often decided along tribal lines. How can we continue to experience these in a free and democratic society? Why do we have preferential treatment in a just and egalitarian society? Is our country a land of bright and full opportunities for all citizens when non-indigenes are treated as outcasts in their own country just because they are living in another state other than theirs? All these posers are telling us that the National philosophy and objectives that are generated from it are just on paper but not in practice.

Educational Language Literacy Policy and Social Realities

The educational language policy derived from the National Philosophy and objectives is also very ambitious; however, little or no effort is made by the government to implement the policy which reads thus:

In addition to appreciating the importance of language in the educational process, and as a means of preserving the people's culture, the Government considers it to be in the interest of national unity that each child should be encouraged to learn one of the three major languages other than his/her own mother tongue. In this connection, the Government considers the three major languages in Nigeria to be Hausa, Ibo and Yoruba.

(NPE. 1981;p.9)

The same language philosophy is also entrenched in NPE, 2004 but in another manner thus:

10. (a) Government appreciates the importance of language as a means of promoting social interaction and national cohesion; and preserving cultures. Thus every child shall learn the language of the immediate environment (LIE). Furthermore, in the interest of national unity, it is expedient that every child shall be required to learn one of the three Nigerian languages: Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. (b) For smooth interaction with our neighbours, it is desirable for every Nigerian to speak French. Accordingly, French shall be compulsory in primary and junior secondary schools but non-vocational elective at the Senior Secondary School.

(NPE. 2004: p.5).

The policy is well articulated; that is, the necessity for each Nigerian child to study one of Hausa, Igbo or Yoruba in addition to their mother tongue (MT). However, the Government is not serious about this language literacy policy. There has been no provision for teachers of Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba in the states where these Nigerian second languages (NL2) are not spoken as language of immediate environment (LIE). For example, there is no provision for teachers of Hausa and Igbo in Yoruba-speaking states; no provision for teachers of Igbo and Yoruba in Hausa-speaking states and no provision for teachers of Yoruba and Hausa in Igbo-speaking states. So, this trilingual (triglotic) or WAZOBIA language literacy policy is only on paper but not in practice. In corollary to this, some NYSC teachers were made to start the implementation of this policy but these young men and ladies were jettisoned immediately they finished their one year national service in 1993. Even those that wanted to continue the programme were either given temporary (contract) appointment or totally discouraged to go back to their respective states (Atoye, 1994; pp.11-24).

The Nigerian parents from various ethnic groups do not help matters either with regard to the promotion of indigenous languages as they vehemently discourage their children in using mother tongues even at home where such a language should be given the pride of place. More ludicrously enough, Nigerian parents now deliberately give foreign names to their children. Instead of bearing Emeka, Amaka, Oladunjoye, Akindele, Ali, Babangida and Jega for example; they prefer Patience, Providence, Faith, Favour, Perpetual, Freedom, Perfect, Goodluck and Councillor which are English names.

Even recently, two colleagues from Department of Linguistics and African Languages, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife; on the completion of their PhD (Yoruba) went ahead to enroll for M.A.(English Language) of the Department of English, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife. When they were asked their reason for their strange action, one of them said that he had observed that among the newly established universities in the country, none of them has Department of African or Nigerian Languages not to talk of Yoruba Department. Thus the two colleagues have realized the "non-marketable-ness" of Nigerian indigenous languages such as Yoruba as disciplines at least in comparison with English which is an international language.

In addition to this incident, in 1999; a group of NCE graduates were employed as Graduate Assistants in the College of Education Language Programme, Ikere-Ekiti and after the completion of course combinations such as English/Hausa, English/Igbo and English/Yoruba in the same college. The College Authority had wanted to sponsor these candidates for B.A. (Igbo), B.A. (Hausa) and B.A. (Yoruba) in the Universities where these courses are offered. To the chagrin of everybody, the gentlemen and ladies deliberately turned down the offer to embrace degrees in English Languages and Literature without being sponsored in the university. All these instances are pointing to the likely endangerment of our indigenous languages which are the anchors of African culture.

The item (b) policy (NPE 2004) about making French a second official language in Nigeria is very reasonable, knowing fully well that most Nigeria's neighbouring countries such as Republic of Benin, Cameroon, Cote di Voire, Senegal, Mali, Niger and others have their official language as French. However, the way French is being taught in Nigerian secondary schools is not supportive of this laudable policy. In the first instance, not many teachers of French are available in schools. The few that are available find it more favourable or convenient to teach English Language which is a popular subject or Literature in English. At the end of the day, majority of them usually ended up not being able to perform well as teachers of French, English and Literature since a 'Jack of all trades' is always a master of none. The government's effort on the implementation of the policy on Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba, on the one hand; and French, on the other hand, as popular languages in Nigeria respectively *is more of a ruse than of reality*.

In the words of Ogunsiji (2003:169-175), the critique of the educational language policies could be summarized under the following headings: "comprehensiveness, functionality, and consistency". As argued by him, on examination, the NPE fails woefully the test of comprehensiveness in that some clauses or phrases in the said document are vague and open to different interpretations depending on the ideological position of those to implement it.

In addition, the policy also failed the test of functionality since there is confusion of the idea of political ideology of unity in diversity and the populist egalitarian educational model apparent in the document vis- a-

vis the role the English language has been playing in the political, economic, administrative, judicial and educational life of the nation. In term of consistency, the underlying educational ideology for populist egalitarianism is inconsistent with the provision of the educational policy in respect of English. For example, the paragraph that contains the language aspect illustrates very clearly the lack of internal consistency found in the overall policy.

On the role of English, Ogunsiji (ibid) identifies in the policy three problems: *underrating*, that is, failure to provide for English at all in most of the aspects of education—only prescription as the medium of "latter stage" of primary education. For example, there is no where English is mentioned as the main language of education after lower primary education but this fact is only implied from the document. There is also the problem of *overrating* with regard to the use of English as a medium of instruction right from nursery to tertiary level; and last, *self deception*, in that English is not wholly used as the medium of instruction in post-primary schools since the teachers sometimes make recourse to the mother tongue (MT) or language of immediate community (LIC) in teaching the students or pupils as the case may be.

Ogunsiji (2003)'s view is in synchronicity with that of Sonaiya (2007) which states that "despite the elitist policy of the colonizers who introduced European languages into the African school system, the current situation in most African countries is such that only a very small minority of the population posses a level of competence in these languages which might be even minimally comparable to that of native speakers. That is, in spite of almost a century of the languages being taught in many schools across the continent, only a handful of people can be considered as real users" (p. 319). All these submissions above are pointing to the reality that despite the pride of place given to English in Nigeria, not many people have appreciable competence in the language. And, the linguistic competence of the few that have the knowledge of the English language cannot be matched with that of native speakers in term of the four factors of language standardization: acceptability, intelligibility, grammaticality and appropriateness.

Nigerian Political Language Literacy Policy and Social Realities

Nigerians are very good at setting up of committees in order to fashion out a particular consensus or agreement. In addition to this, they

are also very good at keeping documents that contain laudable programmes that may not see the light of day or put into use in the day to day social activities. One thing is to have an agreement put on paper after the thorough discussion and consensus of the country's 'egg heads' in various fields of human endeavour, put on paper such as the *NPE* 1981 and 2004; and the 1979 or 1999 *Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria*, while another thing is to implement the agreement or policy already put down in one national document or the other in form of policy. The fate that the educational language policy suffered is quite similar to that of the political language policy of Nigeria documented in the 1979/1999 Federal Constitution of Nigeria. The following are the extracts:

- (a) The business of the National Assembly shall be conducted in English and in Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba when adequate arrangements have been made therefore (P-51).
- (b) The business of a House of Assembly shall be conducted in English but the House may in addition to English conduct the business of the House in one or more other languages spoken in the state as the House may by resolution approve (p.91).

In the two extracts above, prominence is given to the English language in the states' Houses of Assembly and also in the National Assembly (Senate and Representatives). There is no use of Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba in the National Assembly, while very few states in the south-west and northern states only made recourse to their respective indigenous languages on few occasions. Both the tenets of educational language policy and political language policy are intertwined. It is what one knows or has its knowledge that one uses. How many indigenes can make use of any of the national languages fluently without code switching into the English language? There is nothing bad in the two policies (educational and political), but the Government's effort and good-will in order to train, hire and transfer teachers to the states where they are needed to teach these national languages is lacking. The government is not ready to finance the educational language policies with material and men. It is only interested in the sing-song and documented policies that might never be fulfilled or see the light of day.

This unseriousness of the Federal Government can further be seen in the last clauses of the two items above, for example:

- (a)when adequate arrangements have been made therefore
- (b)as the house may by resolution approve

The questions that arise from the above clauses are: when will that arrangement be made? Who are the people that will make the arrangement? When are we going to have the resolution? Who will make the resolution? What percentage of the house will approve of the resolution before it is binding? That is to say that the government is not in any way serious about the utilization of any of the three national languages or all of them in the proceedings of the National Assembly in the centre or Houses of Assembly in the states right from 1960, the year of Nigeria's independence, up till now.

Suffice it to say that there are a lot of advantages if they are fulfilled as they would make the National philosophy and objectives real and achievable. If Nigerians are intelligible to one another in terms of the indigenous languages they use, they are likely to achieve a lot educationally, politically, socially, economically and culturally. If a Hausa individual can communicate in one of Yoruba or Igbo, he/she might be able to live together peacefully with his/her Igbo counterpart who is able to communicate in Hausa or Yoruba. And, the occurrences of political and religious riots, reflecting in forms of 'Maitatsene riot or Boko Haram insurgency' of any kind that is very rife in the Northern part of the country might be minimized or reduced drastically.

Ways Out

The national philosophy/objectives and the educational/political language literacy policies are well articulated in both the NPE 1981 and 2004 on the one hand, and in the 1979/1999 *Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria* on the other hand. However, there should be serious efforts and good-will on the part of the three tiers of government (Federal, State and local government) to make the language policy and the overall national philosophy and objectives achievable. Despite the well articulation of the language policy, there is need for vigorous and serious provision of facilities, equipment, manpower and finance for the implementation.

Furthermore, the youths of Nigeria should have the opportunities to work in whichever state of their interest if we call our country a democratic one and if our national philosophy and objectives well entrenched in NPE 1981/2004 are anything to go by. In corollary, the equipment of each Nigerian youth with a second language (NL2) other than his/her MT will enable them to live and work elsewhere other than their native environment. This is, however, dependent on the interest and seriousness of the government in promoting this WAZOBIA trilingual language policy.

In addition, there should be serious efforts on the part of the three tiers of Government to make the language policy workable. Our indigenous languages should be seen as an inestimable part of our culture and consciousness. The three languages that have been hitherto identified by Nigerian linguists as popular and national (Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba) should be treated in like manner. Teachers of the languages should be trained and posted to states where they are needed. In other words, teachers of Igbo and Hausa should as a matter of fact be posted to Yoruba speaking states. Teachers of Hausa and Yoruba should be posted to Igbo speaking states (the Eastern parts of Nigeria). Teachers of Igbo and Yoruba should be posted to Hausa speaking states. Inter-marriage between couples of different language speaking parts of the country could be encouraged by the government most especially those in the NYSC scheme. The Northern youths may also benefit from the programmes of amnesty drawn up by YarAdua and Jonathan regime as stipends could be given to any Nigerian youth starting from age 18 years who has not been given any employment. Reformatory homes and trade centres should be established to educate the youths on the unity, handwork and progress of the people of Nigeria. The governments should be ready to pay some stipends to Nigerian youths that are unemployed and efforts should be made to create employments for Nigerian youths since devil finds work for idle hands.

Presently, there is no serious financial commitment and good-will on the part of the government; hence it seems to have jettisoned what is in NPE (1981) and (2004), only for us to remain as we have been linguistically since 1960, the year of our independence. However, it is on record that the Constitution of Nigeria has been recently translated into the three Nigerian national languages (Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba)

(Adewole, 2007). We are waiting helplessly for the implementation of these versions to be at least occasionally used in the National Assembly (Senate and Representatives) and the states' Houses of Assembly. Without being skeptical, we hope it would not be an effort in futility when the translated versions are not in use.

Similarly adequate textbooks should be provided in the three popular Nigerian languages and made available in the states where the national second languages (NL2) are being introduced. If the three languages are being handled the way we have suggested as different from the present nonchalant attitude of the government, the languages are likely to be used as languages of instruction in the nursery and lower primary schools. And, this will enable our children to embrace their MTs, language of immediate community (LIC) and national languages which are a repository of our culture and ways of life. It can as well be gradually used to teach science and technology which have been hitherto taught in English. It can also gradually lead to the use of them in the National Assembly and states' Houses of Assembly.

According to Jubril (2007):

"the most important task before African linguists in the present time, therefore, is to embark on rescue "African" linguistics, which should be a combination of action research, advocacy and activism to mobilize the communities to work together to develop, preserve and use these languages so that an important part of our culture and identity is not lost while we watch helplessly" (p.285).

The above excerpt is emphasizing the promotion of our indigenous languages. Parents should be in the forefront of this promotion, followed by the school. The language policy of both the home and the school should be changed in favour of our indigenous languages. This is not underrating the English language which is the official and the language of education in Nigeria. Our indigenous languages from which three have been identified as national languages should be promoted if we do not want them to be totally extinct since they have been endangered already.

More importantly, Nigerian university graduates, after finishing NYSC, should be given the opportunity to work in their state of primary assignment if they are willing, and should be treated like other Nigerians

in the state, their state of origin notwithstanding. The practice of giving them contract appointments instead of permanent ones should be changed in the name of national unity, equal opportunity, democracy, egalitarianism and humanity. And, if this practice is equally encouraged, Nigerian youths would be encouraged to learn and use other languages other than their MTs and not only that, be able to identify with and tolerate other tribes aside from theirs in Nigeria since there has been a cross-lingual effect and advantage as proposed in the educational policy.

Conclusion

The paper critically identifies the problems of non-synchronicity between the Nigerian national philosophy /objectives and their practice in the social life of Nigerians. It also examines the language literacy policies entrenched in the educational and political documents generated from both the national policy and objectives viz -a -viz their implementation. It is against this premise, that the paper recommends both linguistic and non-linguistic approaches towards solving or minimizing social –political conflicts emanating from the multiethnic, multilingual, multicultural, multi-religious and multi-ideological standing of Nigeria.

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