

**Deconstructing Development Discourse: The
Linguistic Imperative for Nigeria**

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Introduction

Arguably, after the Second World War, no word in the English vocabulary has attracted so much attention, engaged so many discourses and which has been so pervading in economic, political and socio-cultural discourses than the word 'development'. The presence of this word is so strong and so widely used that the word has become in itself, a magic wand if not the source and the essence of life. Indeed, it appears that merely invoking that magic word, all of the world's problems would be solved. The word has become the preoccupation of many individual, local and national agencies as well as major international organizations. How did this word become so pervasive and powerful? What might be the history of this word which has become a buzzword that has defied definite definition and clear conceptualization in spite of its popularity? What has given this word its complex characteristics and understandings both in national and global plans, policies and programmes? Is the variable and changing and expanding meaning of the word simply a matter of semantic elasticity or semantic bleaching?

In this presentation, we shall attempt to address some of these questions by interrogating the construct called 'development' and defining the nexus between language and 'development' within the Nigerian, socio-cultural, economic and political milieu. In doing that, we shall underscore why the efforts at national development have been hampered because of the inability to come to terms with the linguistics of development and development linguistics. Central to the discussion is the language factor in development discourse and what Nigeria needs to do to rethink its development paradigm not only by understanding and contextualizing the term 'development' but to understanding that language matters in development discourse and that as long as the language factor is not placed at the centre of development discourse, the yearning for national development will remain an agonizing mirage.

Historicization of 'Development' and 'Development' as a Construct

Barely four years after the Second World War, precisely on January 20, 1949, President Truman of the United States in his inaugural address, unintentionally introduced a construct which will define international discourses for a very long time. It wasn't the birth of a new word, but the birth of a new construct. The international academic career of the term 'development' vs. 'underdevelopment' in the words of Rist (2010, p. 19) was launched as a 'public relations gimmick thrown in by a professional speech-writer' as a fourth point to spice President Truman's Inaugural Address as recounted by Louis J. Halle, one time staff in the US State Department (Rist, 2010, Escobar, 1995, Sachs, 1992). Excerpts of the fourth point are captured below to situate the discussion:

...Fourth, we must embark on a bold new program for making the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas.

More than half the people of the world are living in conditions approaching misery. Their food is inadequate. They are victims of disease. Their economic life

is primitive and stagnant. Their poverty is a handicap and a threat both to them and to more prosperous areas....

The United States is pre-eminent among nations in the development of industrial and scientific techniques. The material resources which we can afford to use for assistance of other peoples are limited. But our imponderable resources in technical knowledge are constantly growing and are inexhaustible....

Our aim should be to help the free peoples of the world, through their own efforts, to produce more food, more clothing, more materials for housing, and more mechanical power to lighten their burdens....

Greater production is the key to prosperity and peace. And the key to greater production is a wider and more vigorous application of modern scientific and technical knowledge.

Only by helping the least fortunate of its members to help themselves can the human family achieve the decent, satisfying life that is the right of all people.

Democracy alone can supply the vitalizing force to stir the peoples of the world into triumphant action, not only against their human oppressors, but also against their ancient enemies-hunger, misery, and despair.

It goes without saying that President Truman had no clear idea of what the construct 'development' entails except that it held the promise of international happiness; it held the hope for a brighter tomorrow for the poor and the colonized. It became a construct which brought the 'developed' and the 'underdeveloped' into a partnership of 'mutuality'. This new construct, unintentional as it was, held great promise that with more money and the needed political will, the ravages of war, the poverty and diseases of those of the south of the hemisphere, their hunger, misery and despair will be addressed. From thence, the world set to work, indeed, the 'developed' world appropriated to itself the divine duty of bringing to the 'underdeveloped' world 'development'. Whatever endeavours perceived by rich countries, so long as it was considered to 'improve the lives of poor people', were justified in the name of 'development'. The word 'development' assumed the force of doing by saying. The quarrel of the Cold War of that period found repose in the altar of 'development'. If the Capitalist West was not reconciled with the Communist East, they were one in agreement with the construct, 'development'. Whether it was restrictions on trade barriers, dumping of goods from industrialized countries, hiring of foreign experts (paid in foreign currencies), building classrooms, launching literacy campaigns, providing military hardware (which increased armed conflicts among poor nations), awarding some scholarships for foreign studies, cheap export of raw materials and importation of expensive goods, etcetera were all justified provided the catchword 'development' was used.

So, as Naz (2006) argues, development functioned as a 'powerful mechanism for the production and management of Third World in the post-1945 period'. The expression 'Third World' was just a euphemism for 'poor' countries which were variously labeled 'underdeveloped' 'less developed' 'developing' and the 'South'. These were countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America,

the Caribbean and the South Pacific. Whatever was done to bring about economic, social and political change in these countries was synonymous with ‘development’. This may have informed the definition of development as ‘the process by which poor countries get still richer, or try to do so, and also to the process by which rich countries still get richer’. This also underscores the categorization of Sachs (1992, p. 6) that development entails ‘looking at other worlds in terms of what they lack, and obstructs the wealth of indigenous alternative’. Development therefore from the point of view of Truman’s 4th Agenda was the problematization of poverty and engaging in the politics of poverty as discussed in Arturo Escobar’ (1995), *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*. This must be understood with events of the post-World War II. In 1948 for instance, the World Bank labeled countries with annual per capita income of less than \$100 as poor. The current index is \$1.25 per day. So, development was and is seen as the eradication of poverty through economic growth. As Naz (2006, p.68) argues, ‘poverty became an organizing concept and the object of a new problematization’.

Unfortunately, this perception of what ‘development’ means has pervaded more than half a decade down the line. It is therefore not surprising that two major approaches have characterized development discourse viz: the modernization and dependency theories. Modernization in the words of Naz (2006, p.65) refers to a ‘total’ transformation of a traditional or pre-modern society into the types of technology and associated social organization that characterize the ‘advanced’ economically prosperous and politically stable nations of the western world’. Those who perceive development as modernization favour free market forces and look up to ‘development’ as the instrument which comes from outside to transform the inside. In other words, ‘development’ is that which is not home grown or indigenous and that which is external from the outside. So, for these kinds of people, we can measure ‘development’ with the quantity and quality of exotic goods and services (including infrastructure) from outside the receiving country. Thus, the more foreign and modern we are, the more ‘developed’. This is what informs the message you read on some billboards for ‘development’, with the effective use of the prepositions ‘From’ and ‘To’ which define the rhetoric of development discourse. For example:

From the People of Japan

To the People of Nigeria

The dependency development school on the other hand is a reaction to the modernist school. The dependency approach sees ‘development’ for what it is; the forces and factors of domination and exploitation and draws attention to the Matthewan Effect. That is, those who have more, more will be given, and those who do not have, even the little they have will be taken away from them and given to those who have. In other words, those who have, more will be given so that the have nots will continue to wallow in their want, disease, misery, poverty, primitivism and dependency. Viewed from this lens, the Third World is represented ‘as a child in need of adult guidance’ (Naz, 2006, p.68) for whom the advanced economies graciously and in the spirit of humanitarian service and charity attend to. As Naz (2006) puts it, “Development is always presented as a humanitarian and moral concern, an ethical obligation on behalf of the rich to help and care for those less fortunate” (p.74). The proponents of this school argue that ‘development’ cannot close the gap between the poor and the rich. According to UNDP statistics quoted in Rist (2010, p.26)

“the gap between the 20 per cent poorest and the 20 per cent richest of the world has more than doubled over the last 40 years of so called development aid”.

We can represent the rhetoric of development discourse in these polarities as shown in Table 1

From	To
Subject	Object
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Giver/Donor • Rich, developed, industrialized • Prosperous, progress • Stable, Democratic • Advanced, First World, North • Dynamism, Healthy, Secure • Fear of poverty and the poor • Defined by possession with no lacks • Reduced population growth • Controller and Owner • Producer and Expert of scientific and technical knowledge 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Receiver/Recipient • Less developed, primitive • Poverty, Lack basic needs • Undemocratic, Stagnation, Unrest, instability, danger • Third World, South • Misery, suffering, disease, hunger • Defined by lack, no possession and place of absences • Population explosion • Place of intervention • Consumer and Waiter for transfer of technology

Table 1: The North-South Rhetoric of Development Discourse Divide

Defining and Deconstructing Development Discourse

Development is a complex concept with many different and sometimes contentious definitions. The inability to delineate the meaning of development clearly is borne out of the fact that development refers to a set of beliefs and assumptions about the nature of social progress. It does not refer to anything precise and this is why it is a very elusive construct. The word ‘development’ as a construct or discourse has no fixed meaning in most Nigerian languages. In most Nigerian languages, the term roughly translates into such words as ‘growth’, ‘maturation’, ‘advancement’, ‘modernity’, ‘improvement’ or as a word that has something to do with being ‘white’ or ‘western’. The term has nothing to do with ‘poverty’ ‘disease’ ‘want’ or ‘lack’ except by implication.

The complexity and contention with the term as ‘construct’ arise because development cuts across many facets of life. Often, people talk about human development, economic development, business development, development in relation to biology, psychology, science and technology, politics, culture, and many other dimensions. Sometimes also, growth (which is a natural process) is mistaken for ‘development’ or used synonymously. Whereas growth is a quantitative physical process of becoming large or longer, development is a process in which something transforms into a different stage; from a simple inadequate stage to a complex state both

quantitatively and qualitatively. This kind of understanding equates 'development' with 'improvement'. So, when we improve the way we do things, perhaps improvement from handheld tools to mechanization of farming, we can call it 'development'. Perhaps, when we change our cars from one low cost brand to another that we have to pay through our nose, it can be called 'development'. In this sense, development means whatever is expensive and exotic.

Even those who profess to know what the term means demonstrate their confusion as they continue to refine their understanding by refining the word 'development'. From its international history, development was initially equated with economic growth which was the main assumption of the 1950s. The term has passed through phases with each phase having a catchy adjective to make the term more alluring and enduring. Thus, the term metamorphosed from 'endogenous development', 'human' development, 'social' development, 'millennium' development and now 'sustainable' development. The change in slogan over the years clearly shows that 'development' needs sanctification for left alone, it is sterile bordering on a cliché'. The impression seems to be that as we change the focus of development, we move towards a better understanding of the slogan. Unfortunately, it points out the fuzzy nature of the concept and our collective unwillingness to interrogate the term critically in order to precisely define the meaning(s) of 'development', a term which we assume as Rist (2006, p.22) reasons is "a modern shibboleth, an essential password for anyone who wishes to improve their standard of living".

Many of the definitions of development point to the commodification of development within the concept of human capital and human resources as prerequisites for prosperity which development protagonists preach. This has led to the commodification of the human person which is partly responsible for the abuse and devaluing of the human person through prostitution, child and human trafficking, ritual murder for money, and the increasing spate of kidnapping for ransom. The thinking is that with more money, development becomes in the words of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) an endeavour "to lead long healthy lives, to be knowledgeable, to have access to the resources needed for a decent standard of living and to be able to participate in the life of the community." This definition however underscores certain assumptions and implicitly identifies certain variables which constitute development. From this definition, 'to lead long healthy lives' and 'decent standard of living' are considered critical components of development. It is therefore possible to characterize the parameters to measure national development to include:

- Standard of life and quality of life (when standard of life is revealed by Gross National Product (GDP) and per capital income while quality of life is measured in terms of):
 - Nutrition
 - Life expectancy
 - Child death and birth
 - Food distribution
 - Prevalence of disease
 - Creativity
 - Innovativeness
 - Originality of thinking in economic, scientific and cultural expressions

National development is therefore a measure of how far a country fairs within the indices outlined above. In order to realize high standard of living and quality of life, Umo (1986) in Eminue (2005, p.556) defines development as "...a process by which a higher degree of self-reliant economic growth in a society, sustained over a long time, is associated with substantial reduction in poverty, unemployment, inequality and external dependence." The point needs to be stressed that for development to be encompassing, development must be seen beyond economic growth to include socio-political and cultural dimensions. This thinking informs viewing development as a process or state of sustainable socio-cultural, economic and technological transformation of a society - the complete transformation of the socio-cultural, political, economic, and belief systems of a particular society to suit its present needs. Such a view sees development in terms of human development or human capacity. In this perspective, development is seen as freeing people from obstacles that affect their ability to develop their own lives and communities. Thus, development is seen as empowerment. In this context, development is about the people taking control of their lives through expressing their own demands and finding their own solutions to their problems. This perception of development anchors development on the new paradigms of development which ties development with such concepts as community initiative, indigenous knowledge, popular participation and the democratization of development. In this paradigm, language is central to development especially the Mother Tongue or indigenous language to the society in particular.

The tragedy however becomes manifest when we view development through western lenses and values within the globalization of western civilization through new forms of discourses and global language. These are the issues taken up by Peters (2007) in her book, *The globalization of western cultural revolution*. In a subsection titled, 'the new global language and the global cultural revolution', Peters (2007), list some of the new global consensus expressed through a new language which include words and expressions such as:

'globalization with a human face, world citizenship, consensus, sustainable development, partnerships, civil society, NGOs, good governance, participatory democracy, quality of life, education for all, equal access, women's empowerment, sexual and reproductive health and rights, informed choice, gender, gender equality, equal opportunity, equal and universal access, clarification of values, capacity building, best practices, corporate social responsibility, human security, cultural diversity, the rights-based approach, peace education, parliament of children...(pp.23-24)

We can add more to this list such as *poverty, poverty reduction, poverty eradication, social capital, community participation, social protection, Faith-based, peacebuilding, fragile states*, and lots more. These are words and expressions which have been deconstructed and are prevalent in the lexicon of the new global language to which the term 'development' has fallen. These and many of such words belong to the *Development Dictionary*. The fact remains that these nuanced ethnocentric words and discourses stand on the altar of deconstructed western cultural civilizations. They have no direct cultural and linguistic correlates with African linguistic and cultural categorizations and orientations.

Why Language Matters in Development Discourse

Those who engage in development and development discourse know that development has a language and to speak and do development, one must adhere to certain rules of statement and take actions as prescribed in the guidebook of development 'experts' (Naz, 2006). This is imperative because, as Foucault (1980) points out, discourse is the 'delimitation' of a field of objects, the definition of a legitimate perspective for the agent of knowledge, and the fixing of norms for the elaboration of concepts and theories' (p. 199). If development is a discourse and discourse is the 'delimitation of a field of objects', and these objects constitute a field of knowledge propagated by language, we cannot but acknowledge the power relations in development discourse through the use of language. Foucault (1991) underscores the relations in these words: 'There is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations' (p.27). In other words, the discourse of development needs to be understood with the intrinsic and irreversible relationship between power and knowledge (Naz, 2006). Thus, the interest in understanding development discourse is not an esoteric concern with words and discourses nor is it to devalue the presence of poverty and the suffering of millions which are the defining objects of development discourse.

Language matters in development discourse because understanding the representations of the objects of discourses is a critical part, in the words of Naz (2006, p.70), 'of any attempt to change prevailing conditions and relations of power'. The point being made is that language defines and dictates power relations in the world. This is the relation which informs the view that the concepts of the 'Third World' and 'development' are historical constructs on one hand and the institutionalization of development on the other. This construction opens a particular aperture of seeing and acting upon the world. It is this understanding which informs the deconstructionist definition of the purpose of development as 'the general transformation and destruction of the natural environment and of social relations in order to increase the production of commodities (goods and services) geared by means of market exchanges to effective demand' (Rist, 2010, p. 23). Development do not only turn human beings into resources or commodities but reveals poignantly that 'economic growth – widely hailed as a prerequisite to prosperity – takes place only at the expense of either the environment or human beings' (Rist, 2010, p.24). Refer to earlier reference to the commodification of the human being.

"Language is at the centre of human activity, self-expression and identity" (UNESCO, Bangkok, 2012, p.1). For Wa Thiong'o (2009, p.21), "Language is more than just a means of communication; it is the essence of our being, the very core of our soul as an African people, the medium of our memories, the link between space and time, the basis of our dreams". This is the position of (Zezeza 2006) who sees language as "the carrier of a people's culture' and that language 'embodies their system of ethics and aesthetics, and it is a medium for producing and consuming knowledge, a granary of their memories and imaginations" (p.20). Language therefore bears 'the weight of a civilization' and to allow a language to die is the 'destruction of the base from which people launch themselves into the world" (Wa Thiong'o, 2009, p. 22).

What the foregoing suggest is that we cannot talk about development without placing language as central in development discourse because 'language is a granary, a repository of the world-

view of its speakers, it is this particular language that best contains and expresses belief system – socio-cultural, political, economic and technological- of any society’ (Zezeza 2006). Language indeed, as Ndhlovu (2008) asserts “is a window of opportunity to our understanding of the dynamics of African development, and African world-views and philosophies of life” (p.148). This conception echoes the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis which describes the concept of linguistic relativism and determinism. In the words of Sapir (1929) quoted in Bodomo (1996),

Human beings do not live in the objective world alone, nor alone in the world of social activity as ordinarily understood, but are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society. It is quite an illusion to imagine that one adjusts to reality essentially without the use of language and that language is merely an incidental means of solving specific problems of communication or reflection. The fact of the matter is that the 'real world' is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group...We see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose certain choices of interpretation (p.26).

Nigeria’s Linguistic Landscape

Evidently, Nigeria presents the most diverse and complex linguistic landscape in Africa. As reported by Lewis, Gary & Fennig (2013), Nigeria has 529 languages; 522 are living languages; seven of these are extinct; and 11 have no known speakers. Egbe (2016) presents the language distribution in Nigeria as shown in the table below:

Languages	Family Group	No. of Speakers	% of total population
Hausa-Fulani	Afro-asiatic	28m	20%
Yoruba	Niger-Comgo	35m	25%
Igbo	Niger-Congo	28m	20%
Other ‘minority’ languages	Diverse	49m	35%
English	Indo-European	44.4m	30%
Nigerian Pidgin	-	No known figure but widely used	No known figure but widely used
Arabic	Asiatic	-	15%
French	Indo-European	-	5-10%
German, Italian, Russian, Chinese	Indo-European/Sino-Tibetan	Minimal presence	Minimal usage

Table 2: Classification of languages in Nigeria

The table reveals that the three major languages put together account for 65% of the languages used in Nigeria; the so called ‘minority’ languages account for 35% of the linguistic population in Nigeria while English accounts for 30%. Nigerian Pidgin English which is widely used as a lingua franca has no established population or percentage of users in Nigeria. Although these figures may vary due to population increase, the pattern of distribution may not be radically different. The table also reveals that Nigeria is multilingual and that most of her citizens are either bilingual or multilingual. Lewis, Gary & Fennig (2013) quoted in Egbe (2016) report that out of the 529 languages in Nigeria, 22 are institutional; 80 are developing (that is, they are at initial stages of development); 358 are vigorous (that is, they are neither developing nor endangered); 20 are in trouble; and 42 are dying.

Given the linguistic plurality in Nigeria, how is it that Nigeria has tended to create a linguistic tripod with regard to undue reference to the three ‘major’ indigenous languages? How does the linguistic situation in Nigeria promote or hamper national development? What are the best responses to the linguistic Babel in Nigeria for the sake of national development? These are the issues the rest of this paper will consider.

Looking Beyond the Linguistic Tripod

There is no national language policy in Nigeria. What we have are language provisions in the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and the National Policy on Education.

Language and the Legislative Structure

The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004) stipulates in Chapter 5, subsection 55 that “The business of the National Assembly shall be conducted in English, and in Hausa, Ibo (Igbo) and Yoruba when adequate arrangements have been made thereof.” In subsection 97 of the same document, it provides that: “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 of the languages spoken in the State as the House may by resolution approve”.

Language and the Educational System

The Nigerian government recognizes education as an instrument for national development and therefore makes specific language provisions to facilitate instruction and learning from early childhood/pre-primary education through secondary education to the tertiary level as contained in the National Policy on Education (NPE). The National Policy on Education (2004) Section 1, subsection 10 acknowledges the importance of language ‘as a means of promoting social interaction and national cohesion; and preserving cultures’. The provision therefore stipulates in Subsection 10(a) that

... every child shall learn the language of the immediate environment. 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

In Subsection 10(b), the NPE provides that:

For smooth interaction with our neighbours, it is desirable for every Nigerian to speak French. Accordingly, French shall be the second official language in Nigeria and it shall be compulsory in primary and Junior Secondary Schools but Non-Vocational Elective at the Senior Secondary School.

Section 2 subsection 14(a) provides that government shall ‘ensure that the medium of instruction is principally the mother tongue or the language of the immediate community’. Accordingly, government is expected to ‘develop the orthography of many more Nigerian languages, and produce textbooks in Nigerian languages’. For the basic education, Section 4, subsection 19(e and f) stipulate that

The medium of instruction in the primary school shall be the language of the environment for the first three years. During this period, English shall be taught as a subject. From the fourth year, English shall progressively be used as a medium of instruction and the language of immediate environment and French shall be taught as subjects.

For secondary education, English remains both the medium of instruction as well as one of the core subjects in addition to language of environment which will be taught as a first language as well as one major Nigerian language other than that of the environment to be taught as a second language. French and Arabic will be taught as non-vocational elective subjects. Although the NPE is silent on the language provisions for tertiary education in Nigeria, we are aware that English is the medium of instruction and studied as a discipline including French, Arabic and some foreign languages as well as few indigenous Nigerian languages. We are also aware that English, French and in some universities Arabic are studied as compulsory general studies courses through the provisions of regulatory bodies such as the National Universities Commission (NUC), National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) and National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE).

Towards a Language Policy for National Development

The implication of all these language provisions are multiple and critical to national development. First, by making Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba as possible languages for national discourse in the National Assembly, government is only shy from declaring these three languages as ‘national languages’. The political, socio-cultural and linguistic vituperations which will follow such a declaration are best imagined. The current socio-political and linguistic crossfire among the nationalities which inhibit the linguistic space mentioned about is a pointer to the linguistic acrimony among the ‘big three’ should any one of them is chosen as the national. The lack of the political will is apparent. Secondly, the declaration of French as Nigeria’s second official language has its own implications with regard to implementation just as the teaching of Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba as ‘national’ languages on one hand and the use of the language of the immediate environment for instruction on the other call for concern. Thirdly, the promise of developing orthographies of many more indigenous languages to realize the use of such

languages as the language of instruction in early primary education remains a monumental challenge. In addition, the huge financial and human cost to support and sustain mother tongue education and multilingual education as the National Policy on Education seems to promote are issues that government has not addressed seriously. Against all of these odds, the question then is: Which language for national development?

When we view development from its broader and more comprehensive dimension, the language factor weighs in heavily on issues of development thinking in every society. If development involves the appropriate transformation of the socio-cultural, political and economic systems of a society and if language is seen as a repository and a tool for the expression and communication of these socio-cultural, political and economic belief systems of the society, then it goes without saying that a successful conceptualization and implementation of societal transformation can only be achieved through the use of the mother-tongues, the languages indigenous to the society, and the languages which the people demonstrate more competence and facility.

Nigeria is in a linguistic dilemma. Nigerians, especially the younger generations on whose shoulder the development of Nigeria hang, have a language deficiency. These Nigerians are neither proficient nor literate enough in their mother tongues; they are neither taught in their mother tongues or the language of the environment for many good reasons; they are not proficient nor fluent enough in English, which is Nigeria's first official language to engage in critical and higher level thinking required for national development; they are not proficient in French, which is Nigeria's second official language to enable them think and act critically in response to development discourse; and they also do not demonstrate adequate proficiency to carry out national discourse or serious intellectual and academic engagement in the so called 'major' languages-Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. Even those who come from these three ethno-linguistic enclaves have not shown sufficient pride in the development and promotion of these so called 'major' languages. We cannot find in any serious intellectual and critical discourses or scientific and technological literatures in these languages. Has any Nigerian completed a robust Ph.D research in any of the science, technology, engineering or mathematical disciplines using any known Nigerian indigenous language at home or abroad? At the end of the day, Nigeria is at the middle of nowhere linguistically speaking. Nigeria is indeed in a linguistic island.

Scholars in development linguistics have underscored the place of language in development and why language matters in development. The 2000 Asmara Declaration on African Languages and Literatures pointed out clearly that "effective and rapid development of science and technology in Africa depends on the use of African languages" adding that "modern technology must be used for the development of African languages". It is in line with this thinking that one cannot but agree with Mazrui (2002) when he declared that

... No country has ascended a first rank technologically and economic power by excessive dependence on foreign languages. Japan rose to dazzling industrial heights by scientifying the Japanese language and making it the medium of its own industrialization...

Mazrui (2002) poses two critical and compelling questions about Africa's development and future viz: Can Africa (Nigeria) ever take off technologically if it remained so overwhelmingly

dependent on European languages for discourse on advanced learning? Can Africa (Nigeria) look to the future if it is not adequately sensitive to the cultural past?

As if to answer these questions, Prah (1993, p.50) provides disturbing responses in these words:

The dilemma in Africa with regards to language and development is that ... the elite which is entrusted with the leadership in the development endeavour is created in, and trapped by the culture of western society, favours the reproduction of entire western images in African development. The elite in effect sees Africa from outside, in the language, idiom, image, and experience of the outsider, in as far as the African mind is concerned. It is unable to relate its knowledge to the realities of African society. It is estranged from the culture of the masses, but realizes almost as an afterthought, that development as a simple replication of the western experience is 'mission impossible'

The above scenario is the aftermath of the computer metaphor which Wa Thiong'o (2007) explores when he laments the obvious linguicide (starving and killing a language) faced by most African languages and the fact that the memory bank of most African elite fed with western linguistic and cultural diets merely seem to respond to the injunction: "Get a few of the natives, empty their hard disk of previous memory, and download into them a software of European memory".

The Imperatives for Nigeria

- **Linguistic Egalitarianism or Localized Trilingualism**

In order to avert linguicide in Nigeria, Nigeria needs to promote linguistic egalitarianism so that every language is given an opportunity to thrive no matter the number of its speakers and the political and economic underpinning which may come to play. This accords with the views of Mazrui & Mazrui, (1998, p.114) that "every language in a multilingual society has the right to exist and to be given equal opportunity to develop legal and other technological limbs to flourish". What is therefore required is for Nigeria to develop a language policy which promotes linguistic egalitarianism or Bodomos' 'localized trilingualism' given the tripartite administrative structure (local, state and federal levels) of Nigeria at the worst. This is not an invitation to make Hausa, Igbo or Yoruba national languages. Far from it! It is a proposal which recognizes three languages in this order: first, at the local or community level, one language should be promoted; at the state level another language if not the one used at the local level; and at the national level another if not the one used at the state level. Those interested in international interaction would need to learn an international language that would facilitate their interaction. The trilingual approach should aim at attaining fluency and proficiency in the language used to the extent that users of the language develop sufficient competence to use the language for critical and higher and advanced level thinking at any of the levels..

- **Right of Language and the Right to Language**

Nigeria is multilingual and multicultural. As a nation, we need to make the best use of multilingualism even though some scholars hold multilingualism as the cause of the many ethnic conflicts, political tensions, poverty, underdevelopment and economic backwardness of Africa (Zezeza, 2006, p.20). Other scholars such as Batibo (2005) point out that “plurilingualism in itself is not a cause of underdevelopment” arguing that

it all depends on what people do with it. They may use it as a divisive means so that attention is focused on conflict rather than development. Or they may use plurilingualism to disadvantage minority language speakers so that their mental capabilities are inadequately developed and they are left behind in developmental efforts (p.58).

Recognizing the *right of language* and the *right to language* are issues of human right. The right of language represents a collective right whose violation according to Ndhlovu (2008) “automatically affects entire speaking communities”. The *right to language* on the other hand equates the right of the individual to use one or more languages of choice. In other words, it is the right of every individual to “use the language one is most proficient in, as well as the right of access to the languages of empowerment and socio-economic advancement” (Mazrui & Mazrui, 1998: 115). Therefore, as Ndhlovu (2008) argues “if, for political, economic or other reasons, a person is denied access to a language that is crucial to ensuring his/her upward social mobility, then that person’s individual *right to language* will have been violated and this constitutes a form of marginalization”.

- **Enlightened and Pragmatic Language Policy for Nigeria**

Sustainable development is rooted on indigenous knowledge; it is communal, collective, and participatory. Development is not a matter of technological transfer nor is it the importation of finished products or memorizing foreign knowledge. The quest for the rapid industrialization of Nigeria, the emphasis on science and technology, and the overall development of Nigeria cannot be realized if the language question is not in the front burner. As a nation, we must admit that language matters in national and sustainable development. We need appropriate language legislations, commitment to language development, and a steadfast political will to develop and implement an enlightened and a pragmatic language policy for Nigeria.

It might be instructive to note that some of the countries which have made appreciable strides within the last five decades have had to face and address the language problem. India for instance has 1,652 languages with 22 regarded as official languages. But Hindi and English are national languages. Malaysia has 136 languages but Malay is used as the national language even though English is still used. In Singapore, a multiethnic and multilingual country like Nigeria, the government has recognized four official languages namely: Malay, Mandarin, Tamil and English but Malay is the national language even though a variety of Singaporean English known as Singlish exists. .

- **Linguistic Conversation (Translation) and Translanguaging**

While we wait for such a language policy, we must look beyond economics of development and the economics of language. We need to promote translation studies as well as translanguaging (using multiple languages in a text) so that Nigerian languages can talk to one another and also talk to other African languages as well as with global languages. There is a great need for partnership among the intelligentsia, writers, publishers, translators, financiers and governments at all levels to increase the visibility and vitality of Nigerian languages in development discourse. We must engage in massive and sustained translation of past and current intellectual production from and through the ages into our local languages. Wa Thiong'o (2009) sums it up in these words:

We must produce knowledge in African languages and then use translation as a means of conversation in and among African languages. We must also translate from European and Asian languages into our own, for our languages must not remain isolated from the mainstream of progressive human thought in the languages and cultures of the globe (p.95).

Conclusion

The hope of Nigeria's development, the hope to be counted among the developed spaces of the world, the hope not to continue in the dialectics of the 'development of underdevelopment' in the words of Walter Rodney, and the hope of sustainable development beyond 2030 rest on the linguistic choices we make as a nation and as individuals. As a nation, in spite of divisive divides and polarizations along ethnic, religious and primordial poles, government needs the political will and sincerity of purpose to address the language dilemma in Nigeria and commit to the demands of language development for accelerated national development rather than continue to bask in the current linguistic ambivalence.

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