

HOW AFRICAN INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES CAN “SERVE AN ACTUAL NEED” IN CONTEMPORARY TIMES.

Osita Nnaji for PhD.

Philosophy Department

Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

Email: og.nnaji for@unizik.edu.ng

ORCID No. 0000-0002-4880-0416

Abstract

In this essay, I contend that African indigenous languages can “serve an actual need” in our contemporary time by being careful to intellectualize and internationalize their ideas, concepts and terminologies by African language developers to make them appreciable like other mainland foreign languages. I observed that African indigenous languages are grossly neglected by their users like students, lecturers, parents and the government; who ordinarily should enforce policies that would promote them. This poses a serious threat to most of these languages and leaves them in danger of abandonment and the possibility of going into extinction. I observed also that these predicaments are as a result of negative attitudinal perception of indigenous languages and multilingualism in Africa as a result of arbitrary partitioning of Africa by the colonial powers. I contend that African languages have the same prospects like their foreign counterparts in terms of richness of ideas, terminologies and concepts. I conclude that African languages are treasures yet to be explored and their potentials are yet to be maximized to the fullest. This is why intellectualization and internationalization of African languages will expose these latent potentials and standardize them for international exploration.

Keywords: African languages, indigenous, foreign languages, actual need, Achebe

Introduction

Language usage is of utmost importance for social and economic development of every culture. It is a major vehicle of expressing people's culture and it is equally used to maintain and convey their cultural ties. Language is also acknowledged to be the key driver of meaningful development in any nation. As such, nations are able to develop because language provides an important link between the citizens and their environment. It is this premise that inspires Ayodele to classify language as an indispensable enabler of development.

Language is an important instrument for the development of human beings, as political animals. No meaningful development can take place in a human community without language. As an instrument of communication, language, makes it possible for the people in any environment to interact and co-exist, thus paving way for the continuity of the society. Human beings get equipped for their maximum self-realization and self-development through the use of language.¹

This entails that as a political animal, language is a *sine qua non* for effective decision making and policy executions for continual existence of every society. Every aspect of the society including governance requires language for its efficiency and execution. The necessity of language is captured by Oyemike et al thus "to participate effectively in the democratic process, there must be language in place, to make economic impact language is required, beside air which is a free gift of nature, language is another necessity of life."² This indicates the indispensability of language in the execution and administration of any society.

If language is the necessity of life and a key driver of meaningful development in any nation, then it is unfortunate that there are still existing wide developmental gap between the west and Africa.

¹ O. Ayodele, *Language education: catalyst for promoting social stability, national security and conflict resolution in Nigeria*. Journal of ELT and Poetry, 1(1) 2013, 3

² B. Oyemike, L. Anyalebechi, and I. Ariole, 2017, *Promoting Indigenous Language in Nigeria: Issues and Challenges for the Library and Information Professionals*, *Library Philosophy and Practice* (e-journal). 1472. <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac/1472>, 2017

This is because “Africans are yet to understand the real ingredients needed for development”.³ This missing ingredient is the non-prioritization of African indigenous languages in the transmission of ideas, despite its proven ability in enhancing cognitive understanding in learning. Africans has prioritized foreign languages and entrenched it in every aspect of her life at the expense of indigenous languages which has hindered Africa’s development for decades.

It is on this backdrop that this paper attempts to find ways that African indigenous languages can be valuable and usable like their mainland foreign counterparts both in influence and widespread use. This essay will help in reducing the age long neglect that African indigenous languages started experiencing since colonial times and it will also help in averting the envisaged extinction of these languages. In the first section of this essay, I shall be looking at some of the predicaments that are currently confronting African indigenous languages and the reasons why they have not measured well with their foreign counterparts. In the second section, I will be doing an analysis on the reasons why foreign languages have some degrees of comparative advantage over African indigenous languages. Lastly, I will be considering some growth processes that African indigenous languages need to engage in order to aid their international spread and diffusion.

African Indigenous Languages And Her Present Predicaments

African indigenous languages are undergoing series of challenges which are threatening their survival or possible extinction if nothing urgently is done to remedy the situation. Many factors have been adumbrated as some possible causes of these predicaments but as events passes by these challenges remain unaddressed. However, it was the African educationists who first indicated that the “African child learning difficulty is a linguistic problem”⁴ (Obanya, 1980: 88). What these educationists meant by linguistic problem stems from the fact that the language of instructions on the African child are carried out in languages which they neither understood nor communicate efficiently in. But instead of encouraging indigenous languages that African child are more conversant with, African governments have rather institutionalized foreign languages at the expense

³ J. Adeyemi *Indigenous Languages and the Development Question in Africa International Journal of History and Cultural Studies (IJHCS)*, 2016, 42

⁴ P. Obanya, Pai. “Research on alternative teaching in Africa,” In Yoloeye, E.A. and Flechsig (Eds.), [Educational research for development], Bonn: Deutsche Stiftung für Internationale Entwicklung, 1980, 88

of African indigenous language. They have continuously ignored the advice that “the use of indigenous language is central to the holistic development of any nation”.⁵ The negligence of this timely advice has plunged African continent into an all-round educational, economic and political woe. A country like Japan realized this timely fact and prioritized the development of her indigenous language to accommodate her techno-scientific uniqueness. The breakthrough was massive and impressive that “in less than five decades, Japan which used to be among the third world/underdeveloped countries is now one of the most developed countries in terms of what their knowledge of science and technology offers them.”⁶ The story of Japan is a good consolation and beacon of hope for African if they can learn to prioritize indigenous language in their language policies.

In this section, I will consider certain predicaments that are currently bedeviling indigenous languages in Africa which unfortunately have brought a serious barrier to their development. The first predicament that has continued to hinder the development of indigenous language is the negative attitudinal perception of indigenous languages among Africans themselves. It is surprising to recount that in other climes, people take pride to promote their own local languages but in Africa, the reverse seems to be the case. Africans hardly use their indigenous languages as medium of instruction in schools and other official engagements like business, governance and education. They only manage to use them in their villages or homes for other unofficial engagements like cultural displays, traditional worships, family meetings etc. The current denigration of indigenous languages was reinforced during the independence of most African states because “the language in education policy that was adopted at independence, which is enshrined in the education Act, enhances the importance of English as the language of business and education.”⁷ Because of this constitutional backing, all other indigenous languages were abandoned at the mercy of their users for their survival and sustenance. The level of denigration got so worse that the post-colonial instructors (who

⁵ N. Emeka-Nwobia, *The place of indigenous Nigerian languages in National development. Research on Humanities and Social Sciences*. 2015, 113.

⁶ J. Adeyemi, *Indigenous Languages and the Development Question*, 2016, 42

⁷ W. Wagaba, *Foreign language teaching and learning: Challenges and opportunities at Makerere University Stellenbosch*, Papers in Linguistics PLUS, 2015. 2.

unfortunately were Africans) aided the thriving of the foreign languages by meting out corporal punishment to African students caught speaking their indigenous languages.

To ascertain the degree of this negligence African indigenous languages, Magwa served questionnaires to schools to ascertain the attitudes of Zimbabweans on the use of indigenous languages. This questionnaire made enquiry on the best language that should be used as medium of instruction in (i) schools, (ii) colleges and (iii) universities and also to determine the preferences of the learners, parents, teachers and lecturers. Therein, Five hundred (500) Learners were asked their preference for language of instruction in African schools, the result shows that 304 (60,8%) of the learners who participated in the study prefer English as their preferred language of instruction. Only a meager number of 196 (39,2%) wanted indigenous African languages to be used as languages of instruction in their school.⁸

Just like the learners above, the teachers and lecturers preferred English to be used as medium of instruction in their institutions. The result shows that a total of 135 (67,5%) teachers and lecturers indicated that they would prefer English (as opposed to Shona or Ndebele) to be language of instruction in their school. Similar results emerged from the interviews conducted for both learners and their teachers in selected institutions. The result of the interviews show 60% of lecturers and 70% of learners preferred English as their official language of instruction.

The parents were not different from their counterparts above because 58,6% parents want their children to be taught using English as the official medium of instruction. Unlike teachers, an unexpected number of parents (41,4%) indicated that they would prefer African languages to be used as medium of instruction in their school system.

The major reason why these respondents chose English as the official language of instructions over indigenous language is the perception that English is internationally recognized languages, which also double as the gateway to success. Another argument is that most African states are multilingual nations, so it is only English language that can be neutral when it comes to selecting a language of instruction in their school system.

The remaining parents (30%) that preferred the use of African languages as medium of instruction did so out of patriotism and task Africans not to be ashamed of what they have believing that languages are developed through use. For them “mother-tongue medium of instruction is the norm

⁸ W. Magwa, *Foreign language teaching and learning*, 2015:7

in countries like China, Japan, Britain and American who have successfully developed through the use of their mother tongues as media of instruction in education.”⁹ The Chinese are developing so fast because they use their mother tongue as the official language in both the education and the business sectors. They are not ashamed of using their mother tongue as we do in Africa. It is a true saying that one cannot develop what he or she is ashamed of and what is not put to use tend to loose relevance and eventually go out extinction. We have observed that the prejudice to indigenous language emanates mainly from African elites but these days they are championed by parents belonging to the lower social group by their preference and insistence that their children must receive their education all in foreign languages. These parents pride in their children acquiring these foreign languages and deem it a priceless legacy any parent can give to their children. An elderly parent once said that she is being looked down on because she cannot speak *oyibo* language (i.e English language) and as a result, she made a vow to herself and to those who care to listen that in her next world that she must *tiwaa slate* (be extremely educated in queen’s English).

This quest for *itiwa slate* by all means didn’t start in our contemporary time but rather way back before the post-colonial times. Achebe made a striking observation that contrary to the conventional narrative, it was the desire of the colonialists to teach the African child in their mother tongue rather than impose their language on them. Rather it was “their patriotic parents” who revolted and resisted this move because they prefer their children to be taught in English language. In his own narration “as early as in the 1920’s and 1930’s the Scottish missionaries desired to teach kikuyu children in their mother tongue but their peasant parents started revolting and started breaking away because they prefer English instead of their already accustomed vernacular.”¹⁰ Achebe also cited the historic and influential Phelps-Stokes commission report in West Africa in 1922 where the report favored the use of the native language over English language as the language of instruction in schools. “Also by 1876 in Calabar, some of the traditional African chiefs were not satisfied with the amount of English language taught their children in missionary schools; as a result they hired private tutors for their children even at their own expense at a whooping rate”.¹¹ Achebe used the above proofs to invalidate the fact that the European imperialists forced their languages down the throats of

⁹ W. Magwa, *Foreign language teaching and learning*, 2015: 8

¹⁰ C. Achebe, “The Education of a British-Protected Child,” Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 2009, 106

¹¹ C. Achebe, “The Education of a British-Protected Child,” 2009, 106

unwilling natives but rather it was the natives who went out of their way to embrace these foreign languages and personally enforced them on their children.

Another predicament of African indigenous language is lack of written tradition and the dearth of proper documentation of indigenous languages in oral and written format. It is a veritable fact that foreign languages are enjoying wider audience and larger medium of communication than African languages because of this observed impediment. As a result of this dearth, most of African terminologies, concepts, wisdom has remained oral and most often esoteric. Rettova was particular about this development when she observed that “African languages are often underdeveloped, as far as their modern terminology is concerned; there are too many; and they mostly lack a written tradition, with only a few exceptions (such as the language Ge'ez in Ethiopia, which is however not spoken anymore)”¹² (Rettova 2002:130). In our current contemporary dispensation, African indigenous languages are disadvantaged because our libraries and other technological devices preserve more of documented knowledge resources than undocumented knowledge resources. As a result, it becomes difficult for libraries and information professionals to promote indigenous languages that have not been documented in printed and uploaded form. Rettova however advised that we can overcome this challenge by creating a written tradition in African languages which will fortify the position of African languages and also to enhance “the knowledge of African philosophical concepts”¹³. It is in line with this Rettova’s argument that Bamgbose opined that African indigenous languages need to be developed to cope with domains in which they are hitherto not used. In his words:

In the case of languages that already have a written tradition; it may be necessary to expand their vocabulary by creating terminology to serve adequately in wider domains. While it is true that use of language in newer domains requires language development efforts, the commonly held view that certain languages cannot be used to express concepts adequately in certain domains is false.¹⁴

It is an established fact that lack of written tradition has stunted the growth of African languages and this deficiency gave the early missionaries and anthropologists the leeway of interpreting and translating African concepts within their intellectual limitations. These anthropologists did not write

¹² A. Rettová, “The role of African languages in African philosophy”, (rue descartes, philosophies africaines : traversées des expériences), Presses Universitaires de France 2002, 130.

¹³ A. Rettova “The role of African languages in African philosophy” 2002, 150.

¹⁴ A. Bamgbose, “African languages today: the challenge of and prospects for empowerment under globalization.” Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Proceedings Project, 2011, 4.

to capture the real worldview of Africans but they were rather writing with the intention of pleasing their European audience. These limitations are evident in most western works on Africa where they misconceived and misinterpreted most of Africa's original concepts in their attempts to interpret African worldviews.

The challenge of multilingualism in Africa is another major predicament of African indigenous language. The present multilingualism in Africa can be traced to the mindless and arbitrary partitioning of the continent into different boundaries by the colonial powers. The consequence of this act was grievous because no consideration was paid to the peculiarities and diversities of African languages during the partitioning. This birthed varied language situations in Africa: Anglophone Africa, Franchophone Africa, Lusophone Africa and Arabic Africa and more recently Chinese Africa. As a result of this arbitrary partitioning:

A wide range of distinct ethnic groups became assembled in European protectorates and colonies while other ethnic groups found themselves divided by newly established artificial borders and were separated into two or more territories administered by different colonial powers. Externally imposed, arbitrary borders created extremely mixed populations.¹⁵

This exercise eventually weakened the strength of each cross-border language in their respective territories and subsequently promoted and enhanced the dominance of imported official language thereby debasing the status of the indigenous language. It is regrettable however that these indigenous languages which should have been the instrument of integration thus become an instrument of division, since it is dominated by a different imported language in each territory.

In another turn, multiculturalism could be a serious asset to the development of African continent rather than the perceived divisive tool. Multilingualism becomes an instrument of integration, influence and development when Africans gives it an opportunity to flourish and thrive. It is not a coincidence in contemporary Africa that many African students are increasingly moving within and around the continent and are becoming more and more multilingual in African indigenous languages. Birgit Brock-Utne recounts that in Nima Ghana, 69% of those that he interviewed spoke at least four languages while 41% of these group spoke five languages. These assets and ingenuity has

¹⁵ V. Viera, "Multilingualism in Africa. Challenges and Solutions" (*Institute of Oriental Studies, Slovak Academy of Sciences Klemensova*), Bratislava, Slovakia. 2018, 248

undoubtedly promoted brotherliness, peace and co-existence among Africans. With this development, it is evident that multilingualism promotes co-operation and also an instrument of integration among Africans.

A Tanzanian school inspector tells how he grew up with three different languages (Kimizi 2009). He would speak one of them with his father's clan, another and very different one with his mother's clan – they all lived in the same compound – and Kiswahili with his friends. He could not say which one was his mother-tongue or first language. Adama Ouane (2009), from Mali, the former director of the Unesco Institute of Lifelong Learning in Hamburg, also tells that he grew up with three different African languages simultaneously and, like Kimizi, cannot tell which one is his 'mother-tongue' or first language.¹⁶

We can see from the above that multilingualism is a two edged sword that can be used as a weapon of development and sadly, it could be exploited also as a weapon of conflict. It all boils down to the intention of the users but when it is harnessed properly, it can also be used as a medium of influence to propagate African values in our diverse cultures. An African who can communicate in four and five languages can effectively communicate African values like honesty, diligence, brotherliness to those cultures he found himself without being an agent of division there.

Comparative Advantage Of Foreign Languages Over Indigenous Languages

Languages, whether indigenous or foreign, are inescapable tools in the life of man because there is no aspect of human activities that can be successful without the good use of language. Language is an important tool in the society, because man needs it to share his ideas, experiences, emotions, and interact with other people in the society or in his environment.¹⁷ This important tool in the lives of individual has some degrees of impact in the society that warrants the preference of one language over another. So far, we have observed that foreign languages are given more preferences in our society today than their indigenous counterparts. In this section of the essay, we are going to consider some of the prospects that foreign languages have over indigenous languages that made people to prefer them over indigenous languages.

¹⁶ B. Brock-Utne, "Language of Instruction in Africa- The Most Important and Least Appreciated Issue," (International Journal of Educational Development in Africa), 2014, 14.

¹⁷ M. O. Ayeomoni, "Migration and culture: Implications on Nigerian languages", Internal Journal of English and Literature, 2(9), 2011, 195

Many Africans consider only foreign languages as languages worthy of use for international and official engagements while they see African indigenous languages as mere local languages that should be used for informal engagements. They do not see African indigenous languages as possessing the necessary paraphernalia needed in the contemporary global trends which will enable her to compete in the international community. Amadi outlined some requirements to be considered before a language is accepted as international languages. These are (a) it must have a number of speakers in many nations of the world (b) It must enjoy a widespread use in many countries (c) It must have a lot of literature written and diffused in it (d) It must be amenable to scientific and technological dissemination (e) It must facilitate international communication worldwide.¹⁸ Most of the foreign languages especially English is remarkably uniform throughout the world and its printed material can be distributed internationally without adaptation. Finegan observes that, English spelling holds the distinction of being the most chaotic in the world. Equally, the spread of technology, notably the diffusion of American technologies in the 20th century can be said to be an added reason for its internationalization status.¹⁹

It is regrettable that these prospects are still latent in most African indigenous languages, hence the need for these foreign languages to motivate them in developing theirs to match these height. Many African indigenous language users have denigrated the potential of African indigenous language in attaining such influential status. They believe that modernization is best achieved in an imported official languages because “such a language is already widely used in science and technology hence the experience gained in the use of the language can be copied, particularly through transfer of technology.”²⁰ They don’t know that there are peculiar concepts that are unique to African/s and these concepts can only be captured adequately in African indigenous language. So, using foreign concept to represent African term will either misrepresent or misinterpret such concepts.

¹⁸ P.E. Amadi “The Internationalization of African Languages: A Communication Leap in the Present Millennium”, *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, Vol. 6, No. 4, 2015, 731.

¹⁹ E. Finegan, “English”. In Bernard Comrie, Ed: *The World’s Major Languages*. London & New York: Routledge. 1987, 82

²⁰ A. Bamgbose, “African languages today: 2012, 2

The sociological and political statuses of languages like English, Chinese, French, Russian, Spanish and Arabic are another prospect of the foreign languages over African indigenous languages. These influences that have endeared them to powerful world organizations like the United Nations as their official language. Also these foreign languages have consistently bridged the communication gap among world bodies technologically, politically, culturally, socially, economically etc. Asadu echoes this sentiment albeit limiting her choice to English and French thus: “indeed English and French have become languages of world bodies like UNO, UNESCO and WHO. The United Nations through its General Assembly, stipulates in the resolution of 1st February 1946 that only English and French have the status of working languages; so all other interventions and texts will be obligatorily interpreted or translated into these two languages”²¹ The influence of foreign languages over indigenous languages is so domineering that right now, the condition of accepting aid from organizations like the World Bank is the adoption of certain restructuring policies which includes changing of education policy with the goal of modernization and competitiveness in the global market place. This scenario shows why English language and other foreign languages continue to be the dominant languages in the education sector in many countries.

Foreign languages have been tipped over indigenous languages because they are regarded as the language of globalization. Their preference is hinged on the fact that they facilitate maximum access and participation in the global village by increasing the chances of employment opportunities for graduates. A foreign language like German enables students to compete favorably for international job opportunities such as Secretarial Studies which enables students to meet and interact more easily with people working and living in German-speaking communities.²²

Finally, the rapid widespread and diffusion of these languages in the world is unconnected to their syntactical formations. These foreign languages are mainly in S-V-O language (Subject-Verb-Object) formations. One distinguishing characteristic of this S-V-O formation is that its lay-out is less ambiguous than the S-O-V or V-S-O language formations.

How African Languages Can “Serve An Actual Need” In Our Contemporary Times

²¹ F. Asadu, “Foreign Languages and the Problem of African Identity: The Nigerian Situation.”(Unizik Journal and Arts and Humanities), Vol, 19, 2, 2018, 176.

²² W. Wagaba, Foreign language teaching and learning, 2010, 101.

African indigenous languages as we have observed are replete with many complex challenges. But as awkward or reasonable as these complex challenges are, Achebe advises that we should be bold enough to contemplate on it, deal with it once and for all and if we can, move on. The reason that makes foreign languages to retain their relevance and dominance in contemporary Africa is because “they serve an actual need.”²³ *Serving actual need* means that these languages retain their purpose, influence, resourceful and systemic way of operations in 21st century Africa. In Ghana for instance, though Kwame Nkrumah fought imperialism to a standstill, yet English language was so influential in their conversational economy that against all odds, it was still chosen as the best language for achieving national communication and political unification. The unifying, widespread scope and technologically driven roles of English languages were so profound to the Ghanaians that it compelled them to choose it as their official means of communication. These profound qualities are what we mean in this essay when we say that a language serves an actual need. These profound services are what we believe that has given foreign languages a little edge over African indigenous languages. Following up on this premise, this paper encourages African indigenous language developers to incorporate these prospects from these foreign languages into African indigenous in order to complement their evident deficiencies.

To this effect, African indigenous languages must strive to develop her latent and subaltern linguistic resources and use them to communicate, interact and advance scientific and technological knowledge within Africa. The truth is that most African languages are resourceful and have the flexibility to act as medium of instruction and research both in arts, science and technology. The reservation is rife among critics that the subjects taught in an African language are mainly “soft” subjects like social studies and religion, while mainline subjects like mathematics and elementary science can only be taught using imported official language. This is undermining the potential of African indigenous languages because languages develop through continuous usage and every language has the potential to be used for any purpose. As Ouane & Glanz rightly observed “African languages can be used as languages of education right through to the end of tertiary education. In Mali, for example, one committed professor teaches physics and chemistry in Bamana. It is technically possible for every African language to be used at this level of academic discourse.”²⁴

²³ C. Achebe, *The Education of a British-Protected Child*, 2009, 105

²⁴ A. Ouane and C. GLANZ, *Why and how Africa should invest in African languages and multilingual education an evidence- and practice-based policy advocacy brief*, UNESCO

Through this way also, they will be marching gradually to meet the language internationalization benchmarks. In the world language model, languages that met these criteria are mainly languages that are widely used for international trade and communication. For example, a foreign language like English is currently witnessing an increasing widespread use in the world today because of its S-V-O syntactical formation. Fortunately, Yoruba language shares a little of this syntactic structure with English and French language, so it naturally follows that borrowing the processes responsible for this technical discourse in French and English would contribute significantly towards attaining the same goal in Yoruba and other African languages. This also goes to show that African languages are not that inferior as some narratives have portrayed them to be. They can match many foreign languages in the world in terms of richness in terminologies and concepts. An example of this richness is found in Vidunda, a small Tanzanian language where a linguistic research project on biological terminology shows an impressive richness of wild plant names and existing botanical knowledge.²⁵ So, the S-V-O's synthetic and semantic processes in polysemy, antonym, synonymy, homonymy makes for easy learning and fluidity in communication. It is therefore a worthwhile project for other African indigenous languages to borrow these syntactical and semantic formations from their foreign counterparts in order to expand their scope and widespread reach. Hence "African languages need only adhere to the basic steps necessary for wider recognition and dissemination to be assured a place on the information superhighway. This can be achieved through well-coordinated linguistic efforts aimed at internationalizing the continent's indigenous languages in the present millennium. Such actions would, most hopefully, provide the much needed communication leap for African languages in particular, and the African continent in general"²⁶ To satisfy the need of the global audience, ICT and other computer software applications are required for easy translation of computer terminologies into African languages. Such computer operations need not be carried out exclusively in English, rather hosting some engines like Google Search Engine in Igbo, Hausa, Yoruba or any other African indigenous languages will surely enhance the widespread of African languages to the outside world. It was Mazrui who argues that "an indigenized approach to national

Institute for Lifelong Learning Feldbrunnenstraße, Hamburg, Germany, 2010, 22.

²⁵ K. Légère, 2004. Against the Myth of African languages Lacking Terminologies. In: Joachim Friedrich Pfaffe (ed.). *Making Multilingual Education a Reality for All. Operationalizing Good Intentions*. Zomba: Centre for Language Studies, University of Malawi and GTZ. 2004, 58.

²⁶ P.E Amadi, "The Internationalization of African Languages", 2015, 735).

development cannot be complete without great usage of African languages in the pursuit of scientific, artistic and cultural change.”²⁷ He further asserts that Korea, Japan and Malaysia have developed mainly because of the advantage of their own languages. Africa can develop too if they can adopt this same strategy by taking full advantage of their own indigenous languages. This, they can do by laundering the uniqueness of these indigenous languages and coding their research possibilities in the search engines to the benefit of the international world. When such is accomplished, researchers can utilize this window to further their research potentials in African languages. This is what we call intellectualization of indigenous language.

The intellectualization of indigenous languages is a project that our educational functionaries should vigorously pursue and promote. We have observed that the main problem of an African child is a linguistic problem. This is because the language of their instruction in these early years is mostly a language that is foreign to them. This has proved to be a poor strategy because the use of foreign languages has impoverished the mental state of the African child by alienating them from their indigenous cultures. The indigenous languages on the other hand help the African child to establish both emotional and intellectual closeness with his or her parents in communicating their feelings in their own indigenous language. To avoid what Bamgbose sees as “early exit model” he proposes that ‘a properly planned mother tongue based multilingual education should make provision for the first language to be used as a medium of instruction at least for the entire duration of basic education, while the imported official language is taught as a subject. The advantage of this model is that children will develop enough confidence in their own languages before they make any transition into another language’²⁸

To achieve the above blueprint, a carefully articulated policy on medium of instruction is essential for African indigenous languages to boost their quest in attaining global relevance. This is why the intellectualization of the indigenous languages will help the development of indigenous terminologies to enable them to reach a wider range of domains where they did not cover initially. Fortunately, Globalization has turned the 21st century man into an “internet native”, where information and ideas are shared and borrowed without restrictions. Okere advised Africans not to

²⁷ A. Mazrui, “The Asmara declaration on African languages: A critical reappraisal”. A keynote address delivered at the annual conference of linguistics held at Ohio University, Athens, Ohio, 2002, 198

²⁸ A Bamgbose, “African languages today..2011,7

be scared of embracing these new developments no matter how strange they may look. He insists that Africans should also not be ashamed to borrow other cultures because all cultures are both borrowers and lenders at the same time. Hence, African language developers should also be aware that “it is not a crime to borrow concepts and terminologies from other languages because every culture is in one way or the other indebted to another. The current trend in the globe is bringing the whole world into closer contact and relationship more than we had ever witnessed before.”²⁹

As part of this intellectualization exercise, Africans have explored foreign languages and appropriated them in propagating African indigenous languages. For instance Samuel Ajayi Crowder promoted Yoruba language by translating some part of the bible into the language for Christian evangelism in Nigeria and Sierra- Leon and this exercise has contributed significantly to the development of Yoruba language. Recently too, Profs Cecilia Emeh and Ikechebele Joseph of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, volunteered and translated the probiotic infographics into Igbo language, making it the first African language to be included among other world languages that probiotic infographics has been translated into³⁰. The intellectualization exercise of translating these foreign languages into African indigenous languages have given African indigenous languages more international scope and equally enhanced the spread and development of their indigenous concepts and terminological.

Conclusion

African languages are treasures yet to be explored and their potentials are yet to be maximized to the fullest. This is why internalization and intellectualization of African languages will expose these latent potentials and standardize them for international exploration. When these languages are intellectualized and used for instructions and research purposes at all levels in our educational system, it will serve the need of the century by presenting them for usages in the domain where they were not previously used. These areas include official usages in tertiary education, public domain, in courts, media, and governance and in global business transactions.

²⁹ T. Okere, *Philosophy, Culture & Society in Africa*, Afro- Orbis Publications Ltd, 2005,86

³⁰ Unizik.edu.ng.2022, <https://unizik.edu.ng/probiotic-infographics-translated-to-igbo-language-by-unizik-professors/>

Osita Nnaji for PhD.

Philosophy Department

Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

Email: og.nnaji for@unizik.edu.ng

ORCID No. 0000-0002-4880-0416

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