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The Imperativeness of French Language Studies as a Tool for Tackling Insecurity in Northeastern Nigeria.

Amaechi Samuel Chigozie

Department of French,
Imo State University, Owerri

Abstract

The language and by extension foreign language factor has no doubt been occupying a pride of place in the Northeast of Nigeria and in almost every part of Nigeria at large over a period of time now. The imperativeness of language is indispensable and felt in every sphere of human life as a strong tool in human co-existence. This paper therefore focuses on highlighting the fundamental role and imperativeness of the French language as a foreign language for specific purposes such as in security provisioning in the northeast of Nigeria. It goes further to x-ray and analyzes the dividends of international bilingualism and their possible impacts in security management. It is an indubitable fact that Nigeria is surrounded by francophone countries. The French language seems in very strong term to be a panacea for settling the problems and challenges in the quest and bid to harmonizing, managing insecurity and truly developing a progressing society that is devoid of conflict, fracas and pandemonium in Nigeria.

Keywords: Language, Foreign Language, Bilingualism, Security, Dividends.

Introduction

Over time, insecurity, terrorism and banditry have been an issue of global concern. It is quite indubitable that in West Africa, specifically in the northeastern part of Nigeria. It is a daily affair with constant recurring decimal. All efforts put in lately by the government to curb the nefarious activities of these terrorist groups,

particularly in the Northeast of Nigeria, have proved abortive. It is noteworthy, that in the recent years, many terrorist groups exist in almost every part of Nigeria in varied nomenclature. These groups which carry out their inhuman activities such as kidnapping for ransom, barbaric murdering of innocent civilians especially farmers and religious leaders, destruction of physical properties

owned by both the government and the private individuals, meting out physical attacks on security agents, etc, include; the age-old Boko Haram, the Fulani herders, Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) and bandits.

Citing Aliyu (2021), “*there are lots of terrorism and insurgency’s activities happening all over Nigeria, ranging from kidnapping to extremist’s insurgencies*”. These groups also operate as a network which connects both the terrorist groups in the Southeast of Nigeria; like “the Unknown Gun men”, Fulani pastoralists and other extremist groups from mostly our francophone neighboring countries like Cameroun, Niger and Tchad. Considering the fact that Nigeria is anglophone country and the operation of these terrorist groups, the knowledge of French language therefore plays a very pertinent role in bridging communication barrier. This affirms beyond doubts the submission of a onetime erstwhile “distinguished” Professor Anwuka (Former Minister of State for Education) as far back as 2016 that, the knowledge of French Language is a matter of necessity because we have francophone countries surrounding us. In Onumajuru (2004), “*Le 14 décembre 1996 par les caprices de la fortune politique, le français qui remplissait jusqu’alors le rôle de*

deuxième langue étrangère dans le système éducative du Nigéria fut doté coup du statut de deuxième langue officielle (dans un bilinguisme anglais-français naissant) suivant le discours officiel de discours feu le chef de l’Etat Nigérian, le général Sani Abacha”. It is not enough to learn French but, it is necessary that one learns well and be able to express oneself in communication with others. Oral expression is one of the most important parts of language use. It is no longer a matter of writing; it demands expression especially in periods of emergency.

The French language communicative proficiency is therefore expedient in Nigeria today considering the spate of insurgencies in Nigeria lately and even as it is noted that mostly all the extremist groups from other countries and Boko Haram have affirmed the use of French as their language of communication in order not to create room for operational confrontation by the Nigeria security agencies against such external aggression. Proficiency in any language is a condition for effective functioning in today’s world.

Language: a conceptual explication.

The history of humanity is engulfed with the desire to improve and grow. This has pushed

man into several adventures everywhere in the world with his material cum intellectual baggage. Human expression and interaction do not exist in a vacuum according to social-anthropologists and the reference system of any language is used largely for communicative purposes. Language is therefore the base and keystone to human interrelationship. Language use either in the written or verbal (in other words called oral) form enhance communication within the cultural ambit of the human being. This is obviously an aspect of the human being that distinguishes and demarks man from all other creatures (mostly animals) just as the climate fashions the environment, so also interaction with others and the society, courtesy of language leads to the integration of man for a global world. Saunders (2011) remarked that: *«La langue est présente dans tous les domaines de notre vie et indispensable, elle sert de moyen d'identification et de communication entre différents groupes. C'est un excellent outil pour créer des liens entre des personnes, de cultures et de croyances différentes. C'est beau et intéressant aussi.* Every aspect of human existence demands language for man is a linguistic being. Bloom (1978) sees language use as something that will enable one person to make a reaction when another person has

the stimulus. He went further to say that language use encompasses rules relating to the language for social communication. Hall (1964) on his own part, opines that language is « the institution whereby humans communicate and interact with each other by means of habitually used oral-auditory arbitrary symbols. It is language that distinguishes human kind from the rest of the animals in the world. Language also plays the role of acquaintance between man and his environment. Brooks (1964) noted that, it is through the magic of language that man comes eventually to understand, to an impressive degree, the environment in which he lives and still more surprising, gains an insight into his own nature and his own condition.

Notwithstanding the natural geographical boundaries, language is and has remained the nucleus of human cooperation and interaction. This is made evident in unflinching commitment of humanity to create a platform for a smoother interaction between diverse cultural cum linguistic sphere. Language, the basic tool for effective communication and by extension has been rated by many linguistic scholars as a vehicle driving home social cohesion among individuals within the human society. Since language is specific to man, therefore its

definition is exclusively restricted to humans. This supports the definition of language by Akindele and Adegbite (2005) as “*a system of sounds or oral symbols by which human beings communicate experience*”.

Language is an integral part of any linguistic or speech community which enables effective interaction and binds inseparably any society or group of people. Ergin (1990:3) affirms that : “Language is a natural means to enable communication among people, a living entity that has its own peculiar laws by means of which alone it can develop a system of contracts whose foundation was laid in times unknown and a social institution interwoven with sounds”. Human language according to Fishman (1968); is universal in the sense that all members of the human species have the ability to learn a language better. Wherever man exists, language exists.

The notion of French Language

There is no gain saying the fact that French is a global language. It is the only language spoken with English language throughout the whole. Over the years, it has contributed immensely to conflict resolution processes of the world, international organizations, Africa

and (Nigeria) inclusive. Among the over 38 countries and also over 400million people that speak French all over the world, Africa is not left out. French language is a language introduced by the colonial masters during the colonial era. It is the official language spoken by citizens in all the former French/France colonies. French is among the romance languages of latin origin recognized globally as it is used in International Organizations. With its outstanding inherent values, it is no longer news that French language is no longer belonging to France and her former colonies but instead but rather a general language. In his speech in the opening ceremony of “La Francophonie”, held in Dakar Senegal, March 20th, 2015, François Hollande maintained emphatically that “*La langue française n’est plus une langue de la France ou une langue parlée par les anciennes colonies de la France mais c’est une langue de partage*”. (The French language has today, moved from the language spoken in France and spoken by the former French colonies to a language to be shared by all mankind). This goes to explain that the French language is no longer particular to France and her colonies, it is rather spoken everywhere in the world today.

The French language is seen as having a pertinent role to play in the overall

development of our country Nigeria; for instance, the economic, sociopolitical cum cultural development of Nigeria even as a multilingual nation cannot be adequately achieved without the French language. This could be attributed to the fact that Nigeria is surrounded by francophone countries and NERDC (2017) affirms that « *La langue française est très importante pour l'école, le commerce, l'économie de la nation ainsi que pour le travail, dans les domaines de l'enseignement, de l'interprétation et de la traduction. La philosophie principale du programme français est de fournir à la jeunesse nigériane les compétences nécessaires pour lui permettre d'utiliser « la langue française comme un véritable outil d'expression de soi dans des circonstances pertinentes, d'épanouissement personnel et de réajustement des valeurs* ».

Citing Omonigho (2016) ; a former Nigeria military ruler, the late General Sani Abacha in 1998 declared the French language as Nigeria's Second official language considering the proximity and trans-border activities between Nigeria and her neighboring Countries.

The acquisition of the french Language in Nigeria is of paramount considering its crucial nature and relevance for counter-

terrorism in Nigeria and most especially in the northeast of Nigeria. French language proficiency required in counter-terrorism is due to the fact that many terrorist groups exist in Nigeria, ranging from Boko Haram which could be seen as the grand mother of them all to ISIS and the one known under the name « Bandits ».

It is note worthy that these groups have their members from different parts of these neighboring francophone countries and hence the central language for communication is therefore French language. Despite that learning of French could be for other purposes like (FSP) French for special purposes like in trade, travellers and other better career opportunities, there should be serious attention on learning French for proficiency, that is, to be able to communicate proficiently in conflict resolution, in situations of terrorism, banditry and insurgency which has become on daily basis a matter of grave concern in Nigeria and the Northeastern part in particular. This communication according to Hall, (1964) ; buttresses the incontrovertible fact that language is a process by which information is exchanged between individuals through a common system of symbols or behaviour. This projects the fact that language enhances interaction and cooperation.

Communication is therefore a key to be carefully handled. It is a vital tool for socialization. French language proficiency in Nigeria as anglophone country is a crucial tool for international security policy as that can improve communication and cooperation with neighboring countries. Given the fact that the migration rate into and outside Nigeria is on the high and other diplomatic challenges threatening the peace in Africa at large, there is need to fortify the security agencies with the knowledge of french sa as to confront any possible form of terrorism. It is of paramount that these security agencies in a bid to face squarely the security threat in Nigeria must be exposed to the cultural rudiments and linguistic dynamics of the francophones for free flow of communication and comprehension. Bernstein (1985) agrees that *Communication involves the transmission of symbols and messages from source to receiver, meanings are attached to the symbols by the receiver.* The term « communication » cannot be discussed outside language and vice-versa ; simply because ; one is the strenght of the other. At the begining of communication is language and at the end of language is communication. The basic function of language is to communicate either verbally or in written

forms. Therefore, anything less than communication in language defeats the aim.

Any security agent out to fight insecurity especially in the northeast of Nigeria without a deep knowledge of French language will not only be faced with linguistic barriers but also will be eluded with vital information. In security management, considering language generally as the basic mode of human expression, the French language takes a prime of place in linguistic expressivity among security agents operating in the northeast where inhabitants are faced everyday with terrorism engineered and orchestrated by a conglomeration of perpetrators from nigeria's neighboring countries.

Valdman (1966) affirms that « language plays a role in organizing activity, in focusing on specific aspects of the environment ». the environmental upheaval in the northeast ocasioned by terrorism is one that calls for intensive teaching and learning of French language in Nigeria bearing in mind that the terrorist groups are made up of a reasonable index of native french citizens who lac kat the same time, English language communicative competence. Most information dissemination and retrieval are carried out in french language. Nigerians especially dwellers in

the northeast have been battling with the overwhelming presence of these terrorists who are mostly native speakers of french and hence access information through the imperial language-French.

Towards preserving the status of French language in Nigeria

Language is any code used to give, to receive, to hide, or transmit information or messages. There exist many means through which language could be applied ; they are ; sounds, symbols or signs and by extension silence. Ajiboye (2002) emphasized that when we study language (possibly foreign languages) we are approaching what some might call the human essence, the distinctive qualities of mind that are, so far as we know, unique to man. Language helps man to conceptualize, analyse and translate ideas into meaningful state. The French language according to Mbuko, (2003) was introduced in the 60's following the Yaounde conference in 1961. This conference recommended the teaching of French in Nigerian Secondary Schools as second foreign language whereas the first remains English. This recommendation has been neglected over time.

Okolie (1991) affirms that the status of French language at the international level cannot be compared with that of English

language. The French language is moving faster than English. According to him, the linguistic life of any language depends on the propensity at which it is applied to information dissemination.

In Nigeria, French language learning is of paramount considering strictly the linguistic dynamism necessitating it. Fromkin & Rodman (2013) opine that « *any child, born everywhere in the world, of any racial, geographical, social, economic heritage, is capable of learning any language to which he or she is exposed* ». Many have not been orientated on the necessity of French Language in Nigeria. The language which ought to be held high has been undergoing a harsh level of neglect in almost all level of schools in Nigeria. According to Uwadia (1981), the status of French in Nigeria could be compared to an old woman abandoned by her husband because of her age. Many schools and students do not see the relevance of the knowledge of French and also the need to add it in their linguistic repertoire for effective communication at a step outside the shores of Nigeria. This neglect has lead to a total discouragement of the target learners of the language who now treat French learning as optional. The teaching and learning is not taken seriously, that which is affecting the language here and that supports the

submission by Obinaju (1996), that the French language is dying gradually as a result of the harsh blow of abandonment it has received in Nigeria. Before any language like the French language becomes a veritable tool for either international integration or conflict resolution in Nigeria as our focus has it, it must be accepted by both the learners and or the entire populace. The government and other authorities concerned especially the France Embassy should take up the onus of an unflinching campaign and sensitization of both the teachers and learners in all levels of Schools in order to bring back the vitality of the language in Nigeria.

Language, Language use and Communication

Language is not an isolated phenomenon, it does not exist in a vacuum. Ndimele (2008). It has no independent existence apart from its users and the uses to which we put it. It is a distinctive feature of human nature and its use by a given users fosters interaction and communication. This goes to support the affirmation by Essien (1990) that, *Language is not only one of man's greatest, most complex and most enigmatic possession, it is the quintessence of his humanity, from the dawn of history, he has not only been a homosapiens but also a homoloquens.*

Ndimele (2008) noted that every language is characterized by social dimensions. He went further to x-ray language use based on the « domain » that is the social group, the « participants » that is the individuals using the language for interaction and the « setting » that is the social environment where the said language is being used.

Communication has from the world go retained language as its nucleus. It cannot exist in the true taste of it without the use of language as inevitable too among humans. As a means of transmitting ideas, information and messages from one place/person to another, it uses language as one negligible instrument with which humans pass information. Communication therefore can be seen as a primary process that involves language, gesture and imitation of overt behaviour of others.

Language is therefore seen by Sapir (1921) as a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of voluntarily produced symbols. Hall (1964) on his own part noted that language is “the institution where humans communicate and interact with each other by means of habitually used oral-auditory arbitrary symbols”. Human language is universal in the sense that all

members of the human species have the ability to learn a language better. Webster's Encyclopedia Dictionary (1992:554) sees language "as the organized system of speech used by human beings as a means of communication among themselves". Language begets communication and without language, communication may not take place among humans.

Amberg and Deborah (2009) opine that "language is foremost a means of communication, and communication almost takes place within some sort of social context". The knowledge of French language in Nigeria especially in the Northeast will go a long way in resolving the extant anti-human crisis, fracas and inhumanity to man in Nigeria. Acquisition of the language must cease to be seen as an exclusively academic affairs, a syndrome which limits its spread in Nigeria. It should be seen as vital knowledge for an average Nigerian considering the country's geographical location. That is why Owioye (2010) puts up a two dimension study of the French language saying that French language should be studied also for Occupational Purposes ie "FOP" and French for Academic Purposes ie "FAP". Analyzing French for Occupational Purposes entails a study for professional purposes where security agents are inclusive. The office of a

security guard requires to a reasonable extent language plurality so as to confront the possible linguistic challenges of external aggressors. Language study according to Jacques David (1975) "is more than a mere academic gymnastic which required constant lumbering and keep-fit exercises". It is therefore noteworthy, as a consequent effect of Jacques David's notion for every professional (security precisely) to have a reasonable control of the French language for interactive ability and social relativism. What makes us human is language, and the use of such language either as Monolingual – when it implies the use of a single language officially with a speech community, or Bilingual – where more than one language is used among a political or social group and or Multilingual – where more than two languages are used by either a nation or an individual. Language use therefore is the various ways language is realized in a given society. Ndimele (2007) gives six communicative roles any language plays within a speech community which relates directly to language use. Language according to him plays informational role, expressive role, phatic role, directive role, ideational role and performative role and ludic role. All these roles point at the psychological demands of security agents in their daily

activities. So language is so important not only because of its power of human minds, feelings, reasons and actions, not just because its command gives leadership to certain individuals in a community, not only because a firm grasp of it helps in the building of a solid personality, above all, it is the indispensable instrument for the furtherance of group solidarity, social co-existence and effective communication.

Security provisioning in the Northeast of Nigeria.

Africa as a continent with Nigeria inclusive no doubt seems to be the center of crisis. The disgusting consequences of the daily armed conflicts and insurgencies in Nigeria especially in the Northeast has been a case of general concern. According to Okereke (2005) "The persistence of violent conflicts in Africa has over the decades been a major threat to human security and sustainable development". Nigeria is not isolated here. Destruction of lives and properties in the Northeast of Nigeria has affected the efforts of the government in the bid for even development in the country. It has also rendered many citizens homeless and properties belonging to private individuals, religious institutions and the government destroyed. It is regrettable to say, citing Al-

Azhari (2004) that the African continent in general and certain African countries in particular have been characterized by conflicts and crisis for decades now". This is the case of Nigeria; the rate of insecurity and security challenges is a heavy task facing the government. Nigeria is not at peace and the outstanding result is at the Northeastern part. But a panacea has been proposed which is centered on linguistic approach to set off this unwanted menace. It is true that the two official languages in Africa are English and French but notwithstanding Nigeria as anglophone country is still battling with the optional approach to the learning of French despite her geographical location. Nigeria, bordered by francophone countries is like a shining dot at the centre of a white linen. The ability of a Nigerian to speak French is a gateway to understanding the culture and literature of the French Man.

Insecurity management in the Northeast of Nigeria, considering the fact that Nigeria is surrounded by Francophone countries and also the fact that most of the renowned terrorists are made up of Francophones from neighboring countries, it has become imperative for every security agent to have a full knowledge and control of French language. Communication is very important in security management or as a means of

informative dissemination. It is so disheartening and embarrassing that majority of our security agents have little or no knowledge of French. And that has affected adversely the peaceful co-existence of the Northerners as visible attackers do not communicate in English language.

Obinna (2002) in his article on francophonie noted “*le besoin du français au Nigéria est sans doute l’occasion d’embrasser cette langue pour ne pas être embarrassé par elle*”.

This posits the need to get our security agents schooled and deeply immersed to enhance their french language communicative competence so as to eschew the possible embarrassments they face in the hands of these foreign bandits. Ability to communicate fluently in french for security purposes, demands a good knowledge and control of the french language which is almost a dominant language in Africa. This will help the security agents to comprehend and interpret every move made by these external aggressors. The knowledge of french language would give the security agents the capacity and opportunity to confront and resolve all anti-human crisis predominant in the northeast of Nigeria. Although, this anti-human crisis may occur between individuals or nations.

The knowledge of French language would make the average Nigerian self-reliant in tackling the prevalent linguistic hindrances existing between Nigeria and her neighboring francophone countries. Gaining mastery of French language offers the security agents the psychological wherewithal to fight back at every suspected step by these terrorists and thereby fosters their ability to respond satisfactorily when needs arise.

Conclusion

In every human society, for there to be co-existence in its true sense, language and language use cannot be underestimated. Language is not only inevitable; it is at the same time a viable and reliable tool for day to day interactions and communication of ideas, emotions, desires, etc.

It is true that the linguistic status quo in the Northeast of Nigeria is the use of English language as central official language in Nigeria and the Hausa language including other native dialects that are extant there. The use of French language as a language for communicating ideas has not occupied a prime of place and therefore interaction and or interpretation of the terrorists’ languages is a challenge that has claimed many lives and properties of the northerners.

The French government has made efforts to plant french language teaching and learning centres outside the exercises of the institutional curriculum, for example, the Alliance Française and many other institutes owned and managed by private individuals, but their efforts seem still to be futile judging by the sparing and lackadaisical approaches by the Nigerian to learning it. Therefore, the Nigerian government must step up to compliment the efforts the french government has put in place while seeing the french language communicative competence as that one vital tool for better integration, interpretation and comprehension bearing in mind that the knowledge of french language like other languages fascilitates human relationship between two speakers of the same language and also promotes conversational fluency for social integration. French language being an international language widens the horizons of whoever understands and speaks it. It opens the person's eyes and mind to international realities.

Recommendation:

1. Recruitment of qualified teachers of the French language in our institution beginning from primary, secondary and universities.

2. Providing the necessary study materials or learning tools and language laboratory for effective teaching and learning of the French language in our schools.
3. Gainful employment (opportunities) of French language graduates.
4. Offer of scholarship opportunities to interested French Language Learners.
5. Government of Nigeria, synergizing actions with the French government to establish standard French language learning centres outside the schools.
6. Provision of possible language immersion programmes in France for French language learners.
7. Eradicating dearth of disposition by the learners of the language by creating normative activities to motivate them.
8. Discarding the ill-formed and ill-motivated institutional objectives in our different levels of schools.
9. Availability of appropriate French language learning environment.
10. The National Policy on Education should include the French language learning as a compulsory subject at all levels of our institutions.

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