

THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE IN COMMUNICATING THOUGHT: TOWARDS A BALANCED EDUCATION FOR HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Learning, via the instrumentality of language, is the essence of education. Education itself is the bedrock of development which anchors nonetheless on human development. The global structure of the contemporary world fraught with multiplicity of languages makes learning stagnant in which case, limited education makes holistic human development virtually a mirage. Thus, the global community makes individuals isolated in mind and expression, more or less positioned in an imbalanced state. This crisis spirals around human interaction with the environment which anchors on the ability to understand, interpret and relate to the environment in most objective way. That is to say, to the extent of clarity of man's understanding and lucid interpretation, that evokes suitable relation to the positive demands of his environment. Being pivotal in human relation, language becomes of necessity, the instrument of education, where the positive development expected from education depends on the proper use and ability to speak many languages. Such diverse language exposure brings cultures close for human development. This work applies conceptual analytic method in unveiling the target of language both in understanding and learning, where meaning becomes an aid; aid in terms of proper thought representation and communication in the task of education for human development.

Key Words: Language, Thought, Communication, Development, Education

Introduction

Chomsky (1978) notes that, "it is quite natural to expect that a concern for language will remain central to the study of human nature.." where man's ability to speak informs his possession of memory and thought. With language, he exposes his thought pattern irrespective of the vergueness of the though pattern, as the case may be. For Ladusaw (2017); "Meaning seems at once the most obvious feature of language and the most obscure aspect to study. It is obvious because it is what we use language for – to communicate with each other to convey 'what we mean' effectively. But the steps in understanding something said to us in language in which we are fluent are so rapid, so transparent, that we

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have little conscious feel for the principles and knowledge which underlie this communicative ability". It is this expansive structure of language that originated the questions of semantics which encompass several different investigations, namely

- how each language provides words and idioms for fundamental concepts and ideas (lexical semantics)
- how the parts of a sentence are integrated into the basis for understanding its meaning (compositional semantics)
- how our assessment of what someone means on a particular occasion depends only on what is actually said but also on aspects of the context of its saying and an assessment of the information and beliefs we share with the speaker.

However, this work does not solely dwell on semantics, but focuses on the problem of understanding in learning. Close examination of most words reveals that they have many different contexts and the rules which combine them into sentence meanings will frequently yield several possibility for interpretation. Interpretation informs response of an individual either in action, speech or understanding, towards meaning.

In the educational sector, when information is not properly represented in the mind of the learner, the learning process becomes problematic and misrepresentation of information becomes a clog to proper education and proper human development. Towards resolving the problem, the work studies language and habit of thought enquiring on how representative, language is to thought pattern. The clarity of thought advances learning which is the essence of education. The ability to communicate properly with language promotes education of the society on human development and interpersonal relationship, sharing sameness of meaning and understanding. Furthering the study, the work advocates for multiplicity of language in Nigeria for higher and better understanding of different cultures in today's global world for better human development.

Language and Habit of Thought

In Wikipedia's explication, language "consists of development, acquisition, maintenance and use of complex systems of communication, particularly the human ability to do so; and a language is a specific example of such a system" (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Language>). The explanation implies two specific facts, namely;

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language is an exclusive product of human beings and language usage is conventional amongst humans. The first fact which is peculiarity of language to human quality informs the coinage of the *latin* word '*lingua*' which mean '*tongue*' and its '*usage*'. Literally put, it is the usage of tongue to unearth the mind. For Chomsky (1968), "it is fair to suppose that the major contribution of the study of language will lie in the understanding it can provide as to the character of mental processes and the structures they form and manipulate". The second fact addresses the differences in human mind apprehension of reality as well as natural environmental differences in human society. Chomsky notes also that anyone concerned with the study of human nature and human capacities must somehow come to grips with the fact that all normal humans acquire language. For Lyons (1981), the differences in reality bring about the differences in language resulting to an estimated number of 5000 and 7000 languages in the world. Fundamental in these facts of language is the cognitive ability of humans to learn and describe the patterns in reality and use of systems of complex communication in terms of utterances to represent thought. Thus, Trask (2007) maintains that the definition of language entails different approaches and understanding of language. They also inform different and often incompatible schools of linguistic theory.

Aside linguistics, it is paramount to ascertain the influence of the habit of thought on language as it informs the process of learning in education. The relationship between language, thought and reality has occupied philosophers, linguist, anthropologists and psychologists for centuries. For John Locke, the English philosopher; "Our senses, conversant about particular sensible object, do convey into the mind several distinct perception of things according to those various ways wherein those objects affect them. And thus, we come by those ideas we have of yellow, white, heat, cold, soft, hard, bitter, sweet and all those which we call sensible qualities". (*Essay Concerning Human Understanding, Book 2, Chapter 1*)

Locke exemplifies in the statements what many philosophers and psychologists felt about how we think, how we perceive reality as well as how reality reflects in our language. 18th Century German Scholar and diplomat *Wilhelm von Humbolt* in his approach equates language and thought as inseparable, as language completely determines thought (Brown, 1968). In clearer analysis, Phipps (2001), opines that language and society are so intertwined that it is impossible to understand one without the other. There is no human society that does not depend on, is not shaped by, and does itself shape language. This statement best

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defines the relationship between language, thought and reality, for language not only shapes the way reality is perceived, reality also shape language. Hence, conventionality of language structure and content.

Concerning the relationship between language and thought, two schools emerged in debate for and against the precedence of thought or language, namely, *lingualism* and *language of thought'*

Lingualism

Lingualism affirms the belief that the absence of language is the absence of thought. This is to say, to think is to think language. Advocating this view, Davidson (1996) opines that while the mental is not reducible to the physical, every mental event can be paired with some physical event - that is, every mental description of an event can be paired with a physical description of the very same event. Taking language as physical reality, he speaks of the mental as *supervening* on the physical in a way that implies a certain dependence of mental predicates on physical predicates. Succinctly put, events that cannot be distinguished under some physical description cannot be distinguished under a mental description either. Thus, this approach questions the possibility of developing language outside the mind where the mind learns reality through language. However, since separability of mind and language seem almost impossible, the second school *language of thought* emanated.

Language of Thought

This is a hypothesis that describes the nature of thought as possessing "*language-like*" or compositional structure which is also known as "Thought Ordered Mental Expression" (TOME). For Tillas (2015-08-2016), simple concepts combine in systematic ways (akin to the rules of grammar in language) to build thoughts. That is to say, in its most basic form, thought, like language, has syntax. This theory was propagated by American philosopher Jerry Fodor. The theory asserts that thinking takes place in a language of thought (LOT). For Fodor (1975); "cognition and cognitive processes are only 'remotely plausible' when expressed in a system of representations that is '*tokened*' by a linguistic or semantic structure and are operated upon by means of a combinational syntax". Simply put, syntax as well as semantics has a causal effect on the properties of the system of mental representatives. These mental representations are not present in

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the brain in the same way as symbols are present on paper; rather, the LOT is supposed to exist at the cognitive level, the level of thoughts and concepts. Thus, the theory implies a strongly rationalist model of cognition in which many of the fundamentals of cognition are innate.

Not derailing to the field of cognitive science as *language of thought* led Fodor to, the essence of recognition of this theory is to infer the import of the mental structure on the spoken words about reality as well as human actions. The order of the mind is seen from its expressions in language and action. That is to say, the mental structure informs the human apprehension of reality and how he orders reality. For instance, the Thought "John is tall" is clearly composed of two sub-parts, the concept of John and the concepts of tallness, combined in a manner that may be expressed in first-order predicate calculus as a predicate; 'T' ("is tall") that holds of the entity "j" (John). A fully articulated proposal for what a LOT would have to take into account greater complexities such as quantification and propositional attitudes (the various attitudes people can have towards statements; like I might believe or see or merely suspect that John is tall).

The above analysis informs a correlation of the mind and perception cum action. There is causal relationship between our intentions and our actions. Because mental states are structured in a way that causes our intentions to manifest them by what we do, there is a connection between how we view the world and ourselves and what we do. That is why the popular adage states that '*when you go to Rome, behave like Romans*'. Also, allusions of people's behavior like addressing someone as *Frenchman, Italian man, English man*, has not only to do with ascription of language but also a pattern of thought and behavior. Noting this fact, it becomes of utmost importance to analyze the import of language in learning process which is the essence of education.

Import of Language in Learning and Communication Process:

Having identified the relationship between language and our thought pattern, this section of the work enquires the effect of language in the process of learning. The essence of education is for people to learn about something, be it scientific enquiries or any form of artistry. Language becomes the vehicle that conveys a thought pattern that could be novel to the student, for the corollary effect of behavioral change. For Mudenda (2017); "The primary medium in the learning process is language. All that a learner at any level of the education system is

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expected to grasp is either heard or read." At every level of one's life or career path, one's knowledge can only be expressed through words or written language. However, the fact is that language development can either negatively or positively affect one's learning process. The limitedness of one's language vocabulary limits one's exposition and acquaintance with learning especially in a world of lots of innovations and discoveries. When we consider language as being a common item in the process of education, we bear in mind a child growing up. Whatever he or she hears has a greater effect than what he/she sees. Then he/she begins to learn to speak through listening to sounds created by people around them. Eventually they start attaching meanings to those sounds which is later related to written text. This process is informed from the predisposition that human beings are born *tabularaza*, being exposed only to mother tongue.

However, at higher level of learning, the ability of an individual to speak multiple languages suppresses the limitedness of particular languages to the expositions of learning. As Mudenda notes that as an individual increases one's ability and use of language, they eventually increase their ability not only to learn, but also to share knowledge with others around them. It is fascinating to see how in recent years educational experts around the globe have started to focus on the language dimension when it calls for schools to meet the demands of modern knowledge societies.

To understand the cognitive and language challenges of modern competence-based school education, Thurmann (2013), categorized the manifold functions of language in learning as follows;

- Language as a constituent component of higher-order thinking skills and a necessary precondition for successful content learning
- Language as a tool for making meaning
- Language as a filter for assessing learning outcome.

When language is functionally addressed as above in the process of learning, the learner is expected the following;

- to comprehend and fully understand the meaning of an utterance, a passage, a text
- to negotiate meaning and communicate knowledge
- to reflect on the learning process and the learning outcomes

- to transfer information from one representational system to another (e.g translating facts from a topographic map into a coherent spoken expository text)
- to partake in socio-scientific discourse
- to make use of generalisable knowledge and skills for solving problems and tasks in private and public life beyond the context of formal education.

Arriving at the above expectations of learning situates the direction of education which is the end point of learning. Be it academic or social education, the intention is nonetheless, achievement of human development.

Human Development Through Education

King (2011), at the *Education World Forum* in London, asserts; “Education is fundamental to development and growth. The human mind makes possible all development achievements from health advances and agricultural innovations to efficient public administration and private sector growth. For countries to reap these benefits fully, they need to unleash the potential of human mind. And there is no better tool for doing so than education.” Although formal education is supposed to start from primary education, it has been found that the science of brain development shows that learning needs to be encouraged and often, both inside and outside of the formal schooling system. Pre-natal health and early childhood development programs that include education and health are consequently important to realize this potential. In the primary years, quality teaching is essential to give students the foundational literacy and numeracy on which life long learning depends. Adolescence is also a period of high potential for learning, but many teenagers leave school at this point, lured by the prospects of a job, the need to help their families, or turned away by the cost of schooling.

The cost of schooling and priorities in terms of preference of a society informs level of investment of a nation on education towards human development. Mostly the case, education is not *learning for all*. Learning for all means ensuring that all students, and not just the most privileged or gifted, acquire the knowledge and skills they need for human development. Major challenges of access remain for disadvantage populations at primary, secondary and tertiary levels. *Learning for All* promotes the equity goals that underlie *Education of All* and without confronting equity issues, it will be impossible to achieve the

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objective of learning for all. Although achieving this goal will be challenging, consciousness of the fact that the project will drive the youth's employability, productivity, health, and well-being in times to come, will help ensure that their communities and nations thrive.

But how can a society (like Nigeria) give a high priority to education when all considerations are geared towards the economy? Such a society has no balanced knowledge of assignment of roles towards development. Thus, in the words of Wellstone (2016); "Education and Democracy have the same goal; the fullest possible development of human capabilities. The literacy rate of a country determines its prosperity and economic health. Relating to educational roles of human development, certain prospects needs to be considered;

- **Overcome Social Prejudice:** Probably, this is the most crucial benefit of education. Social evils and beliefs can really hold back the growth and development of a society and a country. So to overcome this and understand and explain things with logic and reasoning, educated minds are very essential. An enlightened mind can lit up a thousand more. Education used in proper way also helps to reduce crime and restore law and order.
- **Nuture Talent and Pursue Dreams:** Every human being has dreams and aspirations. So, education is a medium to pursue and fulfill them. It increases the knowledge of a person in different fields of studies. It helps to determine a path to follow and express ones talent to the world.
- **Enhance Creativity and Imagination:** Education opens up new ways and ideas to ponder. It cultivates a young mind to think out-of- the box and explore different things in life. Education also helps to know about things and stay healthy, fit and follow a productive lifestyle.
- **Contribute to a Bigger Growth:** Education is a way of academic excellence and paves the path for economic growth of the country. Research and development in sectors like technology, medicine and others, breakthrough innovation and progressive mindset- all of these are fruits of education which takes a nation and its people forward. Educated people contribute towards advancement in every sector.
- **Knowledge, wisdom and Exposure:** Education opens up every channel of knowledge and wisdom. It exposes us to a whole new world of information, invent new things and know how we can make our

surroundings a better place to live and get our lives to a greater and better height.

It is very important to understand that education is the real asset that can develop an individual as well as a nation. People and leaders should join hands to make education, not only a fundamental right for all, but also the guiding light, which can take mankind ahead through any phase of darkness. In the words of Nelson Mandela; "Education is the most powerful weapon, which you can use to change the world." But how can one be educated in a multi-cultural world with a limited language? This is an education problem in a country like Nigeria.

Limited Education in a Limited Language Country: Nigerian Case: Since language has been identified with thought pattern of a people, it is consequent to deduce multiplicity of thought patterns from multiplicity of languages. That is to say, differences in languages informs differences in *weltansuaum*(worldview). As people differ in their worldviews, so are their approaches to reality and thus, development. The implication is that contemporary education demands ability to know, speak and understand as many languages as possible. That is project known as *multilingualism*.

In Rao's (2018) explication; "multilingualism is a social environment in which people speak more than one language. It is not uncommon to find multilingualism across the globe. There are only a few countries in the world which have monolingualism." His submission informs the rudiment of education which the modern world of today demands. Multilingualism affects the cognitive domain of the learners in a positive manner as it has been proven that a multilingual thinks more analytical than the monolingual given exposure of two worldviews. Dealing with another culture enables people to gain a more profound understanding of their own culture in which case creativity is increased. But what is the Nigerian disposition and condition to issue of languages.

The rigid disposition of Nigeria towards language learning stems from ethnic intolerance in Nigerian political sector. Ethnical superiority struggle has relegated the effort of learning the regarded inferior minorities cultures including their languages. As Nigeria has more than 200 ethic groups with different languages, it becomes problematic to coordinate these languages not to talk of introduction of the external world languages. Thus, education in Nigeria suffers. Ibrahim & Gwandu (2016) observe; "Despite the fact that the government

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through the National Policy on Education can be said to favor the use of two or more languages in the educational system, implementation of the multilingual provisions has been a serious issue." OLagbaju (2014) articulated the factors responsible for the poor implementation of the polices as follows:

- Multi-lingual challenge,
- Negative attitudes of students
- Lack of circulation materials
- Ambiguities in the policy
- Parental factors
- Teacher quality

Of essence is emphasis on individual and collective disposition of Nigerians to multilingualism. For example, in Nigeria, an English speaking country, President Muhammadu Buhari went to Dapchi Secondary School to commiserate with them on the abducted school girls by *bokoharam* terrorist group. In public media he succeeded in communicating in Hausa language to the students in secondary school who expectedly should be eloquent in speaking English language. This action informs the Nigeria executive government's level of discouragement to multiplicity of language even to the said '*lingua Franca*'. At this dismal state the ability to have consideration of other foreign languages becomes inconsiderate.

Thus, the level of educational performance of Nigerians within and outside the country becomes adequately poor with regards to development. In Moja's (2000) observation; "Concern has been raised about the decline in the quality of the Nigerian high education system. The quality of education offered by higher education institutions at the present time has deteriorated substantially. The poor quality of many Nigerian university graduates has accelerated. As a result, there is high unemployment amongst graduates especially in fields such as engineering. There is also concern about the lack of recognition of Nigerian degrees by overseas universities".

When failed policies have failed the people in terms of education, the result is poor human development. But what can be done to solve these problems of human underdevelopment in Nigeria?

Enhancing Multiplicity of Languages in Education Sector: Recommendation for Human Development in Nigeria

To read and write in more than one language especially foreign languages is simply a citizenship certificate in today's global village.

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In Agbedo's (2013) indication; "For those serious minded-nations that have recorded significant progress in this delicate balancing act, multilingualism is more of an asset than a liability. However, the reverse seems to be the case in such countries like Nigeria that appear roundly confounded by the realities of multiplicity of languages to the sorry point of surrendering to the centrifugal forces that gnaw at the soul of the Nigerian nation." This problem has distrusted the very tool of education towards whole and entire project of human development. However, to proffer solution to the problem, there is need to consider the benefits of multilingualism from three approaches, namely: *child benefit*, *brain benefit* and *social benefit*.

Child Benefit: In recent years, the *Centre for Imagination Studies* (CIS) reports that nearly 30 percent of Arizona children and teens speak a language other than English at home. Many children navigate language fluidity as they communicate with individuals in and out of their home (www.swhd.org). Children who learn multiple languages simultaneously are known as dual-language learners. While learning new languages is an achievable skill at any age, mastering multiple languages is a skill best learned from birth. It is during the earliest years of life that rapid developing brain connections form a child's foundation for successful language, thinking and social skills. In *Southwest Human Development* (2018) recommendation; "Children who learn multiple languages during the most critical years of brain development are more likely to later show proficiency in varying areas."

Research shows that children who are exposed to more than one language are more likely to be able to take on the perspective of a speaker's intended meaning (as explained prior on language and meaning). Meaning leading to cognitive power, bilingualism and multilingualism in young children have long been observed, but have not scientifically tested until recent years. Proceedings of the *National Academy of Sciences Study* (NASS) give a glimpse into the minds of 7-month-old infants raised learning two languages. With combination of neuroimaging techniques and scientific studies into language processing of infants, it was found that bilingual infants improve cognitive skills higher than monolingual counterparts. In the study, Kovacs and Mehler (2009), exemplified that: "Whereas both monolinguals and bilinguals learned to respond to a speech or visual cue to anticipate a reward on one side of a screen, only bilinguals succeeded in redirecting their anticipatory looks when the cue began signaling the reward on the other side. Bilingual infants rapidly suppressed their looks to

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the first location and learned the new response." This scientific study leads to the brain benefit of multilingualism.

Brain Benefits: There have been a number of international studies on the subject, which indicate that the ability to use more than one language brings an individual a considerable advantage. The report of the research team appointed by the European Commission, *The Contribution of Multilingualism to Creativity*, presents the first known macro analysis based on the available evidence, which has been conducted by searching through several studies and giving particular attention to recent research on the brain. From the analysis, Marsh (2006) informs; "The research report brings forth six main areas where multilingualism and hence the mastery of complex processes of thought seem to put people in advantage. These include learning in general, complex thinking and creativity, mental flexibility, interpersonal and communication mental diminishment later in life". One of the central cerebral areas highlighted in the research report is the one responsible for memory function. People rely especially on the short-term memory when thinking, learning and making decisions. Multilinguals seem to be able to have an advantage in handling certain thinking processes since it is obvious that enhanced memory have a profound impact on cognitive functions. Learning from the study, one can conclude that the recently published study shows that even though it could be difficult to prove the existence of a direct causal link, it is likely that multilingualism produces a special advantage in utilizing a person's brain capacity as creatively as possible. Such positive creativity creates social benefit.

Social Benefits: Apart from the individual benefits, there are also social benefits of multilingualism. The ability to speak more than one language would give an edge, interculturally. In addition to cognitive advantages, dual-language learners have a special opportunity to forge a relationship with their family's heritage. Language fluidity allows family interaction to transcend the surface, diving deeper into meaning and understanding. Because of this connection and appreciation, dual language learners are better able to maintain strong ties with their family, culture and community.

Expressing the cordially in exchange of languages, Sachdev (2016) explains; "When people are expressing their inner emotions; be it love, anger, hate; they do so in their own language. One would be amazed to see the changes in them at this point if only we knew their language, and be able to understand them." The observation informs the crisis the contemporary people deal with in the

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challenges of social media. Misunderstandings in context of statements, allusions, idiomatic expressions, and worst of it, not been able to read a language, limits our communication with the global world. We live in a world which promotes thousands of cultures, each having a different language and thus, it is extremely critical that we should be acquainted with languages more than just our mother tongue. To really understand the true meaning of someone's existence, one need to understand their thoughts and their culture which begins with understanding the language.

Apart from social communication benefits the creativity in multilingualism could manifest in technological development and professional career path. Multilingualism creates job opportunities both within and outside the learner's country. In the same vein, as the world advances in technology, it accommodates those who are conversant with technological nations languages. In Draxler's (2015) observation; "Today, new forces are at play. Languages are transformed by technological advances that transcend borders and redefine how we communicate- and with whom."

Since technology is constantly advanced, knowledge of the language of the nations that originated a particular technology is beneficial to a multilingual which can be advanced to develop a native technology. For instance, *Qatar* as a country was able to survive the blockage imposed on them by the *Emiratis* due to their industrialized openness to wider world for a larger business development. Conversant with western technology, they are now able to develop technologies that will aid their production system like agriculture, recycling and air space travels.

In any case, it is said that two good heads a better than one. Hence, more than one language is best in any form of development. Nigeria is till battling to write and speak eloquently the English language they made their lingua franca. French language which is added to it, spoken in our neighboring country is another language hurdle to jump. But the education ministry in the country claims they are working hard. It is really a human developmental sorry state; if the reverse is not the case.

Conclusion

Crises erupt in Nigerian and many other countries due to personality disorder created by lack of education. The disorder in personality informs absence of balanced education which creates an enabling society where people are not free

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from *Hobbessian* state of nature. Balanced education involves the inculcation of rationality, where consideration of every side of issues towards judgment is sacrosanct. It is within the consideration that individual and cultural differences are taken note of towards action. But how can these differences be learnt? It is from the knowledge of the mind, background and worldview of people towards their actions and belief system. Such are encoded and expressed in their language. Therefore, to be balanced in person is to know more than oneself and one knows more than oneself when he or she knows the language of the other.

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