

FRENCH LANGUAGE AND SECURITY IN NIGERIA: AN EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

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DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.33912.11529

Abstract

Language is a primary mode of human expression. This attribute delineates humans from other animals. With the use of language in its oral and written forms, humans are able to communicate and express their feelings within the cultural norms. Human languages are prone to enhancing socio-cultural, political, economic and scientific activities of the people in an organized society. They are instrumental to our social interactions and meaningful communication in all ramifications. Nigeria is a country where diverse indigenous and foreign languages are spoken but with English as her “Lingua franca”. As an Anglophone country, Nigeria is bordered by French speaking countries to the East, West and North. For a good working relationship and productive communication with her French-speaking neighbours, the Nigerian populace, especially the security agencies require a good knowledge of French language. Security is the live wire of every society as any breach usually constitutes a very serious menace to its political, economic and social development. This paper examines the empirical role of French language in the Nigerian security architecture. The paper also looked into a brief history of French language in Nigeria and why the teaching and learning of French language should be taken seriously considering its social, political and economic benefits. The paper equally examines the concept of security and the relationship between French language and security in Nigeria. With the recent spate in insurgency and terrorism in the country, French language in particular, should be considered as a tool for enhanced security and maintenance of peace. The paper adopts empirical method as the frame work of analysis and concludes that the importance of French language within the context of military operations cannot be overemphasized.

Keywords: French, language, security, empirical, Nigeria

Introduction

Nigeria has more than 450 indigenous languages, making her the most multi lingual country in Africa (Adegbija, 2004). According to the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria only three (3) of these languages, Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba are regarded as major languages and are so recognized.

Language is the primary mode of human expression which distinguishes humans from other animals. With the use of language in its oral and written forms, humans are able to communicate and express their feelings within the cultural norms. The potential of language in the private and public domains of humans indicates its centrality in the sociology and the economy of the society. Different opinions have been formed by scholars and linguists about the meaning and nature of language. These definitions of language are wrought with some ideological and semantic differences. According to Elugbe «it is impossible to find a definition against which we could not raise at least one objection” (42). Sesan quoted in Olayinwola postulates language as a mechanism of control. In his view, language is «“the sole machinery used by man to manipulate and control his bio-cultural sphere and linguistic domains at micro and macro levels” (71). Man is able to control his environment through the ability to communicate meaning through what is said in terms of order and instruction. Through the use of language, man has been able to maintain decorum and orderliness as against what is obtainable in the world of other animals. Sapir (1970) defines language as a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of a system of voluntarily produced symbols. In essence, language is a means or process of understanding the experience, ideas and emotions of others. It should be noted that language does not develop in vacuum; it cannot be separated from culture. It is part of the culture of the people and the only available means by which the members of a society communicate. We could say that language is an embodiment, a component of culture and a central network through which the other components are expressed. Ajiboye (2002) buttressed the above view when he said that language is a critical element of culture through which it reveals its fascinating power. All these inform the goals of learning a language as the ability to use it, understand its meaning and connotations, ideas and achievements.

Recently, the Federal Government of Nigeria made it mandatory for men of the Nigerian armed forces to learn the three (3) major languages in Nigeria so as to make it easy for them to communicate with the citizens when posted to such areas on assignment. This brings us to understand why Ogunbuyi (1998) insists that language is the key to the heart of the people. If we lose a key, we lose the people;

if we treasure the key and keep it safe it will unlock the door of untold riches which cannot be guessed out from the other sides of the door. Language could be summarized as an element of culture and a medium of communication among humans. In the words of Reuben Abati (2016) 'Language connects people. Language defines and strengthens.' The language of focus in this paper is French

The concept of security

The concept of security has been defined by various institutions and individuals using various yardsticks. It is an essentially contested concept on which no consensus exists. Security is not an independent concept. It is always related to individual or societal value systems (Brauch 2003). Every author talking about security assigns different meanings to the term. Based on the assumptions of the realist theory of international relations – that security is the dominant concern for states, that force is the major instrument, that governments preserve their unity as they interact with one another – security is achieved once threats to security can be prevented or at least managed (Nye 1988). Contrary to realist theory, social constructivism perceives security as resulting from the interactions of various actors, with social values and identities shaping these relations. Security is accordingly intersubjective; constituted by a process of interaction and negotiation. Once the perception of security has changed, and the fear of one another is overcome, security is achieved (Ulusoy 2003). Wolfers postulates that "Security, in an objective sense, measures the absence of threats to acquired values, in a subjective sense, the absence of fear that such values will be attacked" (149). This is summarized as the distinction between security in an 'objective sense' which is the absence of threats and in a 'subjective sense' which is the absence of fear. With both components in place, security is said to be achieved. Security cannot be achieved at the expense of others. Actors deprived of security are possible threats. Security can only be achieved by combined efforts (Booth 1999). In this view, security means that a certain degree of trust between actors originating from a certain level of predictability needs to be achieved by sharing commitments.

There have been various interpretations of security. In general, security has been understood to be synonymous with the accumulation of power. It has been regarded as a commodity, and power as the means of achieving it (Van Buuren 2010).

In defining security, Ehi (2009) in Bello & Ayelaagba identifies two main tendencies; first, the state –centered concept of security which views security in terms of defence and survival of the state. Second, security involves freedom from danger or threat to a nation’s ability to protect and develop itself, promote its cherished values and well-being of her people.

Kofi Annan talks on the new trends insecurity today which has to do with the protection of lives and properties. In his words:

In the wake of these conflicts, a new understanding of the concept of security is evolving. Once synonymous with the defence of territory from external attack, the requirements of security today have come to embrace the protection of communities and individuals from internal violence. The need for a more human-centred approach to security is reinforced by the continuing dangers that weapons of mass destruction, most notably nuclear weapons, pose to humanity: their very name reveals their scope and their intended objective, if they were ever used. (43)

With the continuing danger posed to human lives, there is the call for more attention on the security of human lives and properties the world over. Human security focuses on the survival and the well-being of people. It goes beyond the absence of conflicts and war. It deals with the freedom of humans from all forms of wants and fear. Anan continues by defining what human security entails;

Human security, in its broadest sense, embraces far more than the absence of conflict. It encompasses human rights, good governance, access to education and health care and ensuring that each individual has opportunities and choices to fulfill his or her potential. Every step in this direction is also a step towards reducing poverty, achieving economic growth and preventing conflict. Freedom from want, freedom from fear, and the freedom of future generations to inherit a healthy natural environment -- these are the interrelated building blocks of human – and therefore national – security. (Press release May 8, 2010).

In the above definition, our attention is drawn to the fact that preventing conflict, freedom from fear forms part of the building blocks for human and national security. That means human security is not dependent on the presence of war and

conflicts. The quest for securing lives should not be left until such lives are endangered rather, measures should be taken to avoid this conflicts.

According to Licoln Chen “The term human security...focuses the concept of security on human survival, well-being and freedom.” “...we conceptualize human security as the objective – the ultimate ends – of all security concerns. In this schema, other forms of security, such as military security, are not ultimate goals. Rather, these other forms of security are simply means for achieving the ultimate objectives of human security.” (139). The ultimate security goal of every government should be on the survival, well-being and freedom of her citizens and not military security. This does not mean that military security should be left out but that security should not always be about arms and ammunitions. We shall therefore examine the role of language, specifically French, in ensuring security and also stress the need for a working knowledge of the language by the Nigerian security personnel.

The Emergence of French Language in Nigeria.

French language is a foreign language taught in Nigeria, an Anglophone country. The country is bordered by francophone countries: Niger Republic in the North, Tchad in the North-East, Cameroon in the East and Benin Republic in the West. For effective communication and working relationship with the neighboring countries, Nigerians need the knowledge of French language. The French language became widely known in Nigeria in 1960 with the growing need to interact with her francophone neighbors. It was subsequently included in the secondary school curriculum. Scholarships were awarded to students of Unity schools and one year abroad program for those in institutions of higher learning by the French government to encourage the study of the language. Inyang (2010) in Bello& Ayelaagba (2015) opined that with the cooperation of the French government, French centers such as Centre for French Teaching and Documentation, Alliance Française, Centre International d’Etude Française; Pilot schools and the Nigerian French project were established to promote the study of the language.

In 1998, the Government of the late General Sanni Abacha directed that French should be adopted as the second official language of Nigeria. At that time, the government said that the decision was informed by the need to boost Nigeria’s socio-political and economic relations with its neighboring countries which are all French-speaking. As a result, changes were effected in the county’s National Policy on Education (NPE) in 1998. The policy introduced the study of French language

in the primary and secondary school curricula as a compulsory subject. Section 1 sub-section 10 (b) of the *National Policy on Education* states as follows:

For smooth interaction with our neighbors, it is desirable for every Nigerian to speak French. Accordingly, French shall be the second official language in Nigeria and it shall be compulsory in Junior Secondary Schools (10). It didn't just end there, in 2002, the Nigerian government took a fundamental policy decision making French the second official language in Nigeria. And it was also made a core subject in both junior and senior secondary school curriculum Igonor 2011.

However, political instability and government's seeming lack of interest has been a principal impediment to the implementation of the language policy in Nigeria. This only goes to confirm the statement that previously agreed policies are often abandoned or neglected by new regimes, thus truncating proper implementation (Adegbija, 2004, Adesola, 2014, Olajide, 2011) in Olayinwola (2015). Still in 2016, the Federal government re-stated the new status of French language across the country to the effect that "all levels of the country's education system, from primary up to tertiary, must offer courses in French language". (Daily Trust, 2016).

French Language and security

So many researchers have written on the vital role of language either as a tool for maintaining peace and security or as a tool for socio-cultural and economic growth. Vygotsky (1987) wrote "language plays a role in organizing activity in focusing on specific aspects of the environment". Talking about the Nigerian Armed Forces involvement in peace keeping operation, Agwai (2004) quoted by Sabo (2011) has this to say "Nigeria has since independence in 1960 contributed troops and participated in peace support operations (PSOs) in different theatres of conflict around the world". Still on the important role of the Nigerian Armed Force in peace keeping operations in the world, Gandu (1996) is of the opinion that "Nigeria is a giant in Africa and holds an important place in current arrangements for maintaining regional security and peace. As such, the country is increasingly being drawn into peace keeping operations in troubled zones not only in Africa, but in other crisis areas in the world... such operations in non-English countries would clearly be more effective if the Nigerian peace keepers were bilingual" 250. We strongly agree with this researcher that for effective and successful operations, the Nigerian troops should be equipped with other operational languages like french aside the English language. Adegboye (2005) recommends that "because of language importance during peace keeping operations amongst others, literacy in French by officers, not only of the Nigerian Army but of the Nigerian Armed Forces

should be seen as one of the challenges that should be met before the next decade". Adebisi writes "The knowledge of foreign languages is an asset to the individual and his country. Since the knowledge of foreign languages is, like every branch of knowledge, not readily acquired especially at the time of need, it is essential that every literate Nigerian strives to be literate in foreign languages, especially the major ones of the contemporary era". For the interest of peace, co-existence and national development, every Nigerian should learn at least one foreign language and some of the indigenous languages. Adeyanju quoted in Gandu (1996) states that "competence in French language will increase the ease of contacts of various levels with speakers of the language outside the country... it will serve as a window on the international world and to facilitate socio-cultural, intellectual and economic contracts with neighboring francophone countries on the one hand and other French speaking countries the world over" 249.

The geographical location of Nigeria as a country has made French language learning necessary in the country. We reiterate that the importance of French language in Nigeria for social, political, economic, security and international relations cannot be overemphasized. Onyemelukwe (1995) observed that Nigeria needs the knowledge of French so as to have a healthy relation with her francophone neighbors. Furthermore, Onyemelukwe and Adie-Offiong described Nigeria as: "an Anglophone country in a sea of Francophonie" (38).

Speaking to the Daily Champion African News (2005) on the importance of french language in Nigeria and for Nigerians; an educationist Binbo Fisayo stressed the need to be able to speak and also understanding a second international language, especially the French language. In the same vein, Reuben Abati insists that 'Nigeria cannot effectively perform its leadership role in the sub-region if its people do not speak or understand the language of their neighbors'. (<http://www.voicesnet.com/displayonedoc.aspx?docid=199434>)

Security and French Language in Nigeria: An Empirical Security Analysis

Security is the live wire of every society as any breach of it usually constitutes a very serious menace to its political, economic and social development. In order to maintain peace, avert or prosecute war in the event of the outbreak of one, nations usually set aside robust security budgets. In spite of several measures undertaken to maintain peace and avert war, however, breaches such as communal crisis, insurgency, cross border conflicts and full scale war are rampant in many parts of the world and Nigeria has not been spared this scourge. Attempts to curb these conflicts and security challenges through the

use of arms and ammunitions have not always produced the desired results. For instance, the war against Boko Haram in the North Eastern part of Nigeria with its attendant woes and destructions has dragged on for too long in spite of the recent relative success recorded by the Nigerian military against the insurgents. Even after the guns are silenced, there is no assurance that the war can be declared to have come to an end. The heart and mind of the aggressors have to be won and surviving citizens caught up in the theatre of war have to be re-assured of their safety. This is where the role of language as a plausible means of averting war through intelligence gathering from the grass root and interaction with the people, 'winning' war through enlightenment of and interaction with the people and sustaining peace through the potent weapon of continued dialogue with the people in relevant language/languages comes into play.

Over the years, cross border crises have proved difficult to manage with the use of only arms and ammunitions. There is therefore need to dialogue for intelligence gathering; need for troops to acquire competence in languages predominant in the theatre of war and in the neighboring countries for reasons earlier stated. Since French is the language of our neighbors. The Nigerian government alongside the Nigerian Army authorities have come to realize its importance to our military personnel. This probably explains why the Military authorities recently made French language compulsory for all Army personnel through its incorporation into officers' promotion examinations. French language is an assessed subject in some career courses and examinations for Nigerian Army personnel.

Furthermore, because of the importance attached to language competence the Nigerian Army authorities have made it mandatory for its personnel to learn the three (3) major Nigerian languages in one year. Brigadier General Sani Kukasheka Usman (Director Army Public Relations) while addressing the press said that the study of foreign and local languages is a world-wide practice among armies in which officers and soldiers are encouraged to be multi-lingual. The Policy, he stated, will foster esprit-de-corps and better communication with the populace and enhance information gathering, civil-military relations, increase understanding between militaries when operating abroad and assist officers and soldiers to perform their duties professionally. Also, as part of the efforts to enhance communication between Nigerian Army and other French speaking West African armies, the Nigerian Army commissioned a standard computerized French Language laboratory in Lagos. The Chief of Training and Operations,

Nigerian Army, Major General Jack Nwaogbo, said this move is born out of the need to eliminate the communication barrier between the Nigerian Army and its French speaking neighbors. He added that it was observed that eighty-five percent of the Nigerian contingent in Mali on a peacekeeping mission were faced with the challenge of speaking French, the local language of the Malian people. It is "the need for Army personnel to communicate fluently with Francophone speaking counterparts during peacekeeping missions which led to the provision of the French Language Laboratory" (Voice of Nigeria, 2013)

There is just no over stating the importance of French language to the Nigerian Armed forces. In the same vein the Ghanaian Armed forces (GAF) has made it compulsory for its personnel to learn and understand French language. Speaking on its importance, its Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) Major General Peter Augustine Blay, noted that as Ghana was surrounded by French-speaking countries, it would be prudent for personnel of the GAF to take the learning and speaking of French serious. "it makes a lot of sense to be able to speak the French language for our own interest, and for an enhanced international cooperation." <http://www.modernghana.com/print/250554/1/soldiers-ordered-to-speak-french.html>

Human languages are prone to enhancing socio-cultural, political, economic and scientific activities of the people in an organized society. They are instrumental to our social interactions and meaningful communication in all ramifications. They give us sense of belonging; create room for social identity, integrity and empowerment. Human languages are dynamic to meet up with evolving social-political and economic values as well as challenges in various domains of life. Language is a system of communication, and therefore a vital tool for the maintenance of peace and security in a nation. On the other hand, peace is not a one-time act. Cease fire is therefore a step towards peace attainment. True peace is built over time, with different processes and approaches. In this process, language can be used as an instrument to strengthen the ties between individuals and communities through listening, negotiations, mediation, arbitration, adjudication and information regarding the dangers of illicit associations that can be a threat to the peace and security of the people. This paper therefore defines the concept of language as a system of communication and a channel for the attainment of peaceful coexistence in Nigeria.

The security personnel can create an enabling environment among the residents through the use of effective communication, so they can be sensitized on the

dangers of harboring strangers with unknown identities. Finally, the task of rebuilding the areas destroyed by the activities of the insurgents also depends on the confidence reposed on the locals to expose the dissidents who may further cause disasters and bring setback. This can be achieved through the use of effective communication.

Language plays a key role in maintaining peace and security both locally and globally. It takes understanding of the language of an environment to effectively carry out any successful key operation. The personnel of the Nigerian Armed Forces have become key players in many peace support operations all over the world and so need to be multi-lingual.

Benefits of French Language

The teaching and learning of French language in Nigeria holds a lot of benefits to the country and her citizens in every sense of it; politically, economically and socio-culturally.

Socio-cultural Benefits

The study of French language needs to be taken serious by Nigerians and by our security agencies because of its socio-cultural benefits. Knowing the culture and civilization of a people could bring about intimacy and better rapport. When one knows about a country, one can easily relate with the citizens of that country. Buetas (1976) in Suleiman (2017) opines that there is no serious-minded organization political, scientific, philosophical or even athletic which does not have the ambition to associate with other groups, sharing its idea outside its national boundaries. Therefore, the language promotes inter-personal relationship among the speakers.

Political benefits

French is a language of politics; it is as useful as English language. In the field of politics, Nigeria sometimes finds it difficult to agree on some political issues with some of her French-speaking counterparts. Many lives are being lost every day due to the political crises which might have been amicably settled. The Francophone Countries expect Nigerians to speak and write the French Language, being the giant of Africa. Some of the officials in the French-speaking countries in Africa even say it openly that they expect Nigerians to learn to speak and write French as the leader of all African Countries. Most political and international positions require some level of competence in some vital international languages one of which is the French language. It is equally necessary to take note that French

language is a language of conflict resolution and peace-making. Language is necessary to promote absolute comprehension to settle the rising problems both nationally and internationally. Therefore, Nigerian security personnel and those in politics need to learn the language in order to achieve political values.

Economic Benefits

Language, culture and economy are quite inseparable because of their intimate relationship. In the process of learning French as a foreign language, one learns French culture and tradition. A good knowledge of French language may serve as catalyst for economic empowerment and development for Nigerians. Trade relation between Nigeria and her Francophone counterparts would be more cordial if the Language barrier is removed. Nigerian Custom Officers face a lot of problems along the francophone-Nigerian border lines every day; and unless some of these Nigerian custom officers speak and write French, some of these problems will persist and our trading activities with the francophone Countries will continue to be seriously affected.

The economic empowerment function of French does not solely depend on the contingency of Nigeria to neighboring countries such as Republic of Benin and Togo that speak French as official language. Aire (1993) argues that: the importance of French language to us in Nigeria is not only due to our country's contiguity to French speaking countries as France the mother country of these neighboring francophone countries, has long since realized the necessity to disseminate her language in Nigeria because of its importance to her economy.

Therefore, one of the principal functions of learning the language is for economic purpose. Interested Nigerians can easily venture into business with the neighboring francophone countries.

Most Nigerian youths are now aware of the facts that one should not solely rely on one's course of study. The employment situation in Nigeria has never given any room for relying only on your area of specialization. Therefore, French can serve as a booster to one's dream of getting good jobs in both national and international establishments and companies. There are establishments that are keenly interested in employing people that can speak and write French. It is therefore recommended for the Nigerian youth to have a knowledge or mastery of the language to enhance their employment in such international establishments.

In addition to these benefits, we add that french language will foster unity and enhance security between Nigeria and her neighbors. Security is a very important

aspect of the human life and governance. The absence of security brings about fear, intolerance and instability. Every individual craves to be secured and countries vote huge amount of cash on the security of lives and properties of the people and the country at large. Security is a subject that concerns everyone and can therefore not be overlooked.

Other Benefits

According to Ajiboye (2002) French language plays a crucial role in the official lives of most African states. This is because 22% of the world's French is in black Africa alone. Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco account for 11% of the world's official use of French, Africa as a whole account for 33% of the French used for official or administrative purposes in the world. In relative terms, it could be argued that outside France, which in any case, does not constitute more than 50% of the total output of French, Africa is the most important center of French practice in the world.

French is spoken by 274 million people throughout the world. It is the fifth most widely spoken language after Mandarin Chinese, English, Spanish, and according to estimations, Arab and Hindi. French is the fourth most common language (used) on the internet; the second most used language for international news in the media; the third most used language in business; the second leading working language of most international organizations and the second most learned language in the world with 125 million students and half a million of French teachers abroad' (<http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/french-foreign-pol>)

Recommendations

This paper has attempted to highlight the importance of French language to the operators of Nigerian Security outfits. It is recommended that

- Efforts should be intensified to make our Armed Forces personnel to key into the learning of French language so as to make them relevant for peace-keeping and peace-support operations globally
- Personnel of other para-military security outfits like the Nigerian Immigration Service, the Nigerian Customs Service etc should also be encouraged to learn French language so as to ease interactions with our francophone neighbors thus making them more efficient and effective.
- The Federal Government should endeavor to ensure the actualization of the teaching of French language in our primary and secondary schools so that many more of our youths will be afforded the opportunity of being exposed to the language and thus reap its benefits.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted an examination of the implications and importance of French language to the Nigerian society with focus on the Nigerian Armed forces. It is no longer news that men of the Nigerian armed forces are faced with language barrier which impedes the success of their operations in the field. The Nigerian Army has made moves to encourage personnel to learn to speak French language, with hope will be sustained. It is also hoped that other military arms like the Nigerian Air force and Navy will do same. The Nigerian police, Customs, immigration and other para-military institutions would also take seriously the learning and speaking of French language. This is to eradicate or minimize the problem of language barrier faced by our security agents. As mentioned in the paper, maintaining of peace and security is not always about arms and ammunitions but sometimes communication. Speaking a language of the people will help them in intelligence gathering, averting of conflicts and also in sustaining peace. Language enhances trust and good communication between actors involved. The learning and speaking of French language by Nigerians will also go a long way to promoting good trans-border relationship; be it economic, political or socio-cultural interactions between Nigerians and its neighboring countries. Therefore, importance of French language to Nigeria and Nigerians can never be over emphasized.

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IGWEBUIKE: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities. Vol. 8. No. 2, (2022)
ISSN: 2488- 9210 (Print) 2504-9038 (Online)
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ISSN: 2488- 9210 (Print) 2504-9038 (Online)

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