

THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE IN EDUCATIONAL GLOBALIZATION

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Abstract

Language is a vehicle for the expression or exchanging of thoughts, concepts, knowledge and information as well as the fixing and transmission of experiences and knowledge. It is based on cognitive processes, subject to societal factors and subject to historical change and development. Language awareness can be used to achieve a meaningful and socio-linguistically-informed education. Globalization is the process of international integration arising from interchange of world views, products and other aspects of culture. In the globalized world, English language has become a tool for communication, the language of business and the standard of a person's ability. English language skills have become one of the important factors that can decide the success of one's life. It has become even more of the world language. The increasingly worldwide use of English raises a number of pedagogical and political issues that have to do with the understanding of English language itself. The study is on the role of language in educational globalization. This research adopts descriptive analysis and secondary source for data collection. The basic problems or challenges facing language in educational globalization and solutions were highlighted. It was discovered that language plays a vital role in educational globalization.

Keywords: Language, Education, Globalization, Development, English Skills, Preservation.

Introduction

Crystal (1997) asserts that a language achieves a genuinely global status when it develops a special role that is recognized in every country. The definition hinges on the special role which Crystal describes as serving as the native language of the majority (such as English does in the United States or Australia). It serves as the official language thereby achieving the status of the priority foreign language (i.e. the foreign language of choice for children in schools).

In academic contexts, Swales (1987) estimates that more than 50% of the Milieus of academic papers published each year are written in English. The percentage was growing year by year. English is currently the undisputed language of science and technology and scientific journals in many countries are now switching from the vernacular to English. Graddol 1997, Block and Cameron, 2002, Crystal (1997) state that in specific disciplines, English appears to be the universal language of communication. For example, 98% of German physicists now claim English as their defacto working language. They are closed followed by Chemists (83%). Biologists (81%) and Psychologists (81%)

Concepts

Busmann (1996) defines language as a vehicle for the expression or exchanging thoughts, concepts, knowledge and information as well as the fixing and transmission of experiences and knowledge. It is based on cognitive processes, subject to societal factors and subject to historical change and development.

Nwadike (2002:58) opines that:

Language is the key to the heart of the people. If we treasure the key and keep it safe, it will unlock the door to untold riches, riches which cannot be guessed at from the other side of the door.

Akmajian, Demers, Farmer and Harnish, (2006:9) regard language in the traditional phrase as “a mirror of mind”. This does not mean that the concepts expressed and distinctions developed in normal language use give us insight into the pattern of thought and the world of “common sense” constructed by the human mind. A human language is a system of remarkable complexity. To come to know a human language would be an extraordinary intellectual achievement for a creature not specifically designed to accomplish this task. A normal child acquires this knowledge on relatively slight exposure and without specific training.

Nkamigbo (2009) posits that globalization is producing new ways of thinking about everything including language; and language is implicated in one or more significant ways in every major development that is discussed under the heading of globalization. Globalization needs and produces new channels, networks and practices which are not dependent on geographical proximity rather on language. Globalization in relation to language portends “a global common language which offers unprecedented possibilities for mutual understanding and thus enables us to find fresh opportunities for international cooperation (Crystal, 1993 in Okwudishu, 2003).

In the globalized world, English has become a tool for communication, the language of business and the standard of a person’s ability. As the importance of international trade has increased rapidly, governments and companies are concerned about employee’s English skills. Therefore, having English skills has become a standard of awarding promotions and salaries. In addition, English skill is also important for entering better universities. Universities require students to have good English skills. For example, universities give additional grades to people who have high grades on English texts such as TOEFL, TOEIC and TEPS in Korea. English skills have become one of the important factors that can decide the success of one’s life.

Language Education in our Globalized Classrooms

Yiakoumentin (2002), asserts that the coming together of peoples led to enhanced levels of linguistic diversity in education which is manifested in the co-occurrence of multiple linguistic varieties in the classroom. This emerging reality is characterized by new opportunities and also by new challenges, opportunities because multiple varieties gain vices in educational settings which were once less linguistically diverse and challenges because new pedagogical approaches are called for to better serve today's speakers.

Most importantly, the challenge is for the co-occurrence of multiple languages not to be suppressed but to be promoted such that monolingual students, emerging bilingual students and multilingual students alike can be equipped with multilingual competences. Students who arrive at school as monolinguals should have opportunities to learn additional languages from their multilingual counterparts and from the curriculum.

Current research in many educational settings worldwide points to the fact that when supported, transnational learners employ language practices which resist homogenizing tendencies (Garcia et al 2006). Despite the usual stipulation to use a single standard linguistic variety exclusively, these learners use their different varieties concurrently to serve their learning purposes.

Nevertheless, current educational policies largely fail to acknowledge and to subsequently harness the emerging reality of linguistic variation. Although the rhetoric of these policies seem to reflect positivity towards multilingualism. It is clear that language education policies ought to be reassessed to meet the local, regional, national and global needs of today's citizens. There is no doubt that linguistic diversity becomes more complex as a result of globalization, technology and transnationalism.

It is time to eliminate the linguistically-intolerant language policies and to embrace educational frameworks that reflect today's realities, ensure language rights and avoid marginalization of linguistic groups. UNESCO has a central role to play in providing international frameworks for educational policy on the important issue of which language should be used as the medium of instruction.

Globalization and Role of African Language for Development

Negash (2005), states that indigenous African languages are largely eliminated and marginalized from use. Instead of investing in and using their linguistic, cultural and human potential, African government and the elite still continue to channel away their resources and energies into learning 'imperial' languages that are used by a tiny minority of the populations. Against the backdrop of constraining global forces and Africa's internal problems (wars, repression and general economic misery). African languages could be the most critical element for Africa's survival and cultural education and economic development.

Africans do well by investing their linguistic, human and intellectual energies into the development of their languages which are used by the majority of the masses, instead of channeling their resources and energies into learning the imperial languages that are used by a tiny minority of the population.

Preservation of Languages

It is much more difficult to restore languages once they have been murdered. Recent research claims that in prehistoric times, there were probably between 31,000-600,000 languages in the world (Skutnabb – Kangas 2000:31) but only 6,000-7,000 languages remain in the world (Crystal 2000:305). Out of these, about one-third are in Africa, the figure varying between 2035 and above (Hein and Nurse 2002:1). African languages can be grouped into four major groupings: Afroasiatic, Nilo-Saharan, Niger-Congo and Khoisan. The Niger-Congo group contains 1,436, Afroasiatic 371, Nilo-Saharan 196 and Khoisan 35 languages (Heine and Nurse 2002:1) each of them representing the richness of Africa's linguistic and cultural diversity that orients, shapes and defines the identities of their speakers.

African languages are in bad shape, and it is doubtful whether they can survive the imminent threat of "global uniformity" and serve the interests of their communities in meaningful ways. In the international arena, they are sidelined and in danger of extinction in their own kinds of origin. We see linguistic destruction because of their stagnation, speakers' decline and negligence. Linguists examine the state of language by evaluating their present situation according to how their present condition is assessed 'safe' or 'not safe' in terms of their continuity to the next generation of speakers.

Languages are said to be extinct 'when they have no speakers left'. They are classified as moribund when they are 'no longer being learned by children' due to the absence of intergenerational transfer of language from parent to child, which in turn may be caused by lack of numbers speaking a language or the absence of society's official recognition for that specific language's status. Two widely cited examples in this category are Latin and Giiz, but there are also abundant examples from Africa the indigenous languages of America, Alaska, South America and Australia. The category of endangered languages recognizes a few more distinctions, according to Stephen Wurm, the differentiation between is as follows:

- a) Potentially endangered languages are socially and economically disadvantaged, under heavy pressure from a larger language and beginning to lose children speakers.
- b) Endangered languages have few or no children learning the language and the youngest good speakers are young adults.
- c) Seriously endangered languages have the youngest good speakers age 50 or older-languages are labeled safe when they belong to none of the above mentioned categories.

The lack of a well-weighted pragmatic assessment about every language or cluster of languages does not allow giving a detailed picture of how African languages fare in the light of the above categories. But according to the recent publication there is no doubt that many of the African languages that were reported to be there prior to the era of colonization and some after are already moribund or dead. They are already moribund or dead due to complex convergence of socio-linguistic processes and other overt political and ideological factors.

A great majority of the existing languages of the continent are potentially endangered or deprived because they are used neither in schools nor in other official public and state domains. By contrast, only seven African languages are officially recognized as

lingua franca in 16 African countries. Ayo Bambogese (social dynamics 1999:16-17) makes the following balance on the basis of the criterion of the selection as national instrument.

Arabic (Algeria, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Sudan and Tunisia), Swahili (Tanzania, Kenya), Somali (Somalia): Amharic (Ethiopia), Sotho (Lesotho); Tswana (Botswana); Tigrinya (Eritrea).

African languages are sole official languages in three countries (Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia) and joint official languages with English or French in seven (Botswana, Burundi, Lesotho, Madagascar, Rwanda, South Africa and Tanzania (SD 1999:16). This assessment is too generous because including Arabic in this summary provides a glaring yet inflated picture. The given figure significantly diminishes depending upon the degree to which a claim for Arabic, a major international language and the home language of millions of Arab peoples, is made as an exclusive African language.

It is noted with pride that despite all the odds against them, African languages as vehicles of communication and knowledge survive and have a written continuity of thousands of years. Colonialism created some of the most serious obstacles against African languages and literatures. These colonial obstacles still undermine independent Africa and continue to block the mind of the continent.

Problems

Tied to this, is the fact that African languages are not represented not even symbolically in the United Nations (UN) and its other institutions. The United Nations (UN) and all its other agencies have no requirement for an African language, all the other continents are linguistically represented in the UN and Europe have the lion's share of that situation (Ngugi 2000:159). The stymieing role of the African elite including political leaders and University Professors who have become accomplices in sustaining Africa's linguistic disaster.

Bamgbose, quoting Webb (1991:5) has put it thus:

Individuals who are educationally, economically and militarily/politically superior are rewarded with access to the best goods and services, rights and privileges and the most powerful and prestige. One consequence of this, is that the languages they speak are similarly different with some of the languages becoming instrument of power and others powerless (Bamgbose 2000:16)

Mazrni, who connects the potential role of indigenous languages to Africa's struggle for democracy and human rights, discusses in detail the motives of the African middle classes (both diasporic and home-based (to cling to the imperial languages). He believes that they are afraid to do away with the linguistic barrier (the Western linguistic prison) because accepting linguistic partnership with the masses will eventually deny them power and control over them by exposing them to what he refers to as the potential 'semantic challenges' that may ensue from the audience. Brock-Utne warns that while western donors champion equal partnership on paper the same time they appear to be foes to Africa's genuine empowerment.

African languages do not have harmonized orthographies which constrains their use for modern purposes. This is certainly a serious problem. While languages like



Tigrinya and Amharic have long standing native alphabet (Giiz), most African languages have not been able to develop their own alphabet of writing and several others have been handicapped by lack of standardized variants. There are genuine recent examples in Africa that can be used as model precedents for others. The best example is Somali. The Somali language was ‘an entirely oral’ language until 1972, but it is now also a written language with a standardized system of writing (Andrezejewski and Amdrezejewski 1993:1). Similarly, most languages of Eritrea which did not have followed suit and are today being taught in schools using the Latin alphabet.

English as a Threat to Linguistic Diversity

Globalization is inextricably linked to the dominant role of English and the growing literature on English as an international language. Crystal 2003; MC Kay 2002; Sharifan 2009 attest to the widespread recognition that English is the lingua franca. A number of factors offer English unprecedented power including:

- The economic and political dominance of English-speaking countries (United States, United Kingdom, Australia, Canada).
- The employment of English as the lingua franca on the internet
- The retaining of English as a working language in many post colonial countries.

English is the language of business and the language in which most of the technical and scientific knowledge is distributed. English is perceived as the language of mobility and its presence in educational systems all around the globe is hence immensely prominent. English today is unique; When L1 and L2 speakers are taken together, English is the language with the greatest number of speakers and at the same time, the language with the widest geographical distribution (MCKay 2012). In addition, English is used by many kinds of speakers for diverse purposes. Some learn English as a foreign language (as part of their compulsory education) but do not use it in their daily lives. Others are motivated to learn English because they believe that English is associated with economic and technological advancement. Others yet strive for English acquisition because as a South African teacher bluntly put it, “English puts bread on the table” (Probyn et al, 2012).

As English continues to spread, concerns have been voiced as to its undermining linguistic and cultural diversity (Phillipson 1992, 2003; Skutnab-Kangas 2000) for instance, argues that the powerful presence of English has obliterated the language tolerance that one characterized India. The author explains that English pushes the major languages (including Hindi) into positions of relative weakness and these languages in turn, further marginalized the minor and tribal mother tongue.

Language Education and the Challenges of Globalization

However, the importance of the personal experience, language repertoires and life trajectories of individuals even within their language communities as well as within and across the various spaces (including virtual spaces) where communication takes place. As Busch observes:

... the meaning that speakers attribute to languages, codes and linguistic practices are linked with personal experience and life trajectories, especially with the way in which linguistic resources are experienced in the context of discursive

constructions of national, ethnic and social affiliation/non-affiliation.

Research on multilingualism in the United Kingdom, for example has shown how speakers code-switch into language varieties not generally thought to be theirs, thus crossing and overcoming social or ethnic boundaries (Rampton 1995) and how young multilingual language users ‘translanguage’ creatively, going between and beyond different linguistic structures and systems, “[...] bringing together different dimensions of their personal history, experience and environment that attitude belief and ideology, their cognitive and physical capacity into one coordinated and meaningful performance, and making it into a lived experience’.

Yiakoumetti (2002) observes that globalization and trans-nationalism are undoubtedly enhancing linguistic diversity in educational settings and have created a new and common classroom reality. The researcher identifies this emerging reality as transglossia, the many language practices of transnational groups in functional inter-relationship. It suggests that current educational approaches largely fail to harness it. Indeed, may act even to distinctly disadvantage students who are speakers of varieties other than that which is socially pre-eminent, while only a very few favour maintenance of languages and cultures which are associated with minority, indigenous or non standard varieties. Yiakoumetti argues that only by building on the actual language realities found in today’s globalized classrooms and by promoting linguistic diversity can we move closer to the ideal situation of equal linguistic rights.

Tamim’s work looks at languages in education and the dual system of education in Pakistan, which is marked by the use of English in private education and vernacular in government schools. Her research is based on the findings of two different qualitative studies carried out in Pakistan, where she conducted 45 interviews (16 secondary school final year students and 29 graduated with at least 2 years of college education) in two of the country’s provincial capital. The findings reveal a projections of shame and guilt, the participants’ discursive construction of self and local identity. Tamim argues that the dual system of education in the country perpetuates symbolic violence which cuts into the very existence as human beings of those involved. Those who succumb to domination are more successful, yet the success at the cost of self-derision and dislocation of self. Although there was unofficial use of Urdu, the national language within private education classroom for pragmatic reasons both teachers and students conveyed a strong sense of conflict as they found it useful but rejected its utility. Thus the dual education system of private and government education added yet another dimension of language to the class divided society, where the participants discussed fear and inhibition in the use of local language in their struggle for ‘distinction’.

Conclusion

Recommendations focus on the role of language educators, the importance of teacher training which highlights current socio-linguistic challenges, the need for language planning to be informed by the specific linguistic landscape in which it is to be employed and the place of English in today’s world.

English has become a lingua franca in a globalized post-colonial world, of linguistic pluralism and multiculturalism as well as of the expectations associated with the effects of recent mobile technologies and social networking have led to a reassessment

of language education policies and the need to meet local, regional, global requirements to ensure language rights and to avoid the marginalization of linguistic groups. The impact of globalization on the youths have been a stumbling block to the development of the educational system. The influence of globalization on the indigenous languages in Nigeria has very serious implications for the education of the Nigerian child in the 21st century. Globalization is readily increasing in today's world. This increase in globalization has many effects on African languages both positive and negative. These effects on language in turn affect the culture in many ways. With globalization allowing languages and their cultures to spread and dominate on a global scale, it also leads to the extinction of other languages and cultures.

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