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## Multilingualism, Security Challenges and National Development

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### **Abstract**

*This study considers multilingualism, security challenges and National Development in Nigeria context. One of the universal phenomena that have distinguished the country Nigeria from many other African countries is multilingualism. This attribute is uniquely located among the various ethnic groups across the country. The paper establishes the imperativeness of language in national development, stating that multilingualism is language situation where more than one language is spoken in given speech community; revealing that a speaker can also be seen as multilingual when mark with the ability of speaking more than two languages. The study highlighted how multilingualism has negatively affected the security state of the Nigeria, stating that it has not only succeeded dividing Nigerians and weakening the central unity. But it has also reduced the effectiveness of the individual security functionality through the limitations arising from lack of understanding among security activities. As such, other than maintaining as strong desire towards achieving the national goals and values, it has encouraged linguistic based groups that build ethnic interest as opposed to the national interest hindering development in the country. The researcher further formulates three linguistics approaches in multilingual settings that can be of help in Nigeria, to ensure a good use of the riches embedded in multilingualism. These includes, understanding and utilising the multilingual riches among the various groups of people, introducing a balance in the use of languages as equal roles are assigned to languages and also integrating (rather than separating) development of both linguistic and cultural resources. These approaches will be applicable to any multilingual setting and relevant to the development of Nigeria also. Such will enable a national development bringing profit to all Nigerians.*

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**Key Words:** Language, Linguistic, Multilingualism, National Development, Security Challenges

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### **Introduction**

Centuries have proven through daily human endeavour that language is a basic requirement and an indispensable tool in the human society. Obiegbu (2015) opined that “Language and society are so much related”. Indeed, virtually nothing can be effectively achieved in any human society without the effective use, and understanding of one another through language. According to Emeka-Nobia (2015) “language is a conduit for transmission of people’s cultures, norms, ideas and beliefs. The repository of a people’s identity and way of life is encapsulated in their language as well as transferred to the people and newer generations, via the means of language”. This means that such ideas could be security wise or a developmental model or

approach and strategy, language remains the only tool which can be the channel of transmitting such ideas.

The above notwithstanding, the language situation in Nigeria society is a big challenge that leads to many other challenges in the country. Multilingualism in Nigeria with its various and differing cultures, ideas, understandings and opinions has badly affected our society with a crippling experience leading to increase misunderstandings as bedrock on security and national development. For any development plan of a country to succeed, the communication element has to be added and carefully planned. Communication-language should interplay with the various segments of the development plan to promote and achieve holistic national development (Anaeto & Anaeto, 2010). On this sound footing, Omoloso and Abdulrauf-Salau (2013) argue the importance of language as a fundamental element of human communication.

In the area of mass media - mass mediating messages, the media's powers of sharpening the people's perception of reality on issues bordering on national security and sustainable development in general can obviously not be achieved without the use of language. While scholars generally agree on the fact that the media is a useful vehicle in promoting development, one issue remain unresolved. However, is the matter of what roles are assigned to which particular language in the media?

Imagine an uncontrollable linguistics situation in Nigeria where there are many indigenous languages with varying degrees of developmental status and a number of the people speaking among others. Nigeria is the most multilingual nation in Africa, with about 400 to 500 indigenous languages which have various status-developed, developing and underdeveloped (Emananjo, 1993; Aziza, 1998).

This paper seeks to bring forth the imperativeness of language to effective security and national development, revealing how multilingualism with its attendant challenges has a crippling effect on the security and national development in Nigeria.

### **Conceptual Clarifications**

**Multilingualism:** Multilingualism represents a linguistics situation whereby more than two native languages exist in a speech community. This speech community may be a few group of people, state or a country. Crystal (2011) agrees that it is a term used in sociolinguistic to refer to a speech community which makes use of two or more languages, and then to the individual speakers who have this ability in contrasts to monolingual situation. Similarly, Matthews (2007) also maintains that a multilingual situation qualifies a person having equal control of more than two native languages, it could be a community in which more than two languages are native. Nigeria therefore, exactly fit into this kind of a community. In that there are more than 400 hundred languages in Nigeria. Some of these languages include: Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, Tiv, idoma, Igede, amongst others.

**Security:** According to Francis (2005), security is a state of being safe and the absence of fear, anxiety, anger, poverty and oppression. It is the preservation of core values and the absence of threats to these values (cited in Ahli, 2011). Imbighe (1990) opines that security is the freedom from threats to a nation's capability to defend and develop itself, promote its values and lawful interest. Security is a provision in practice in a society that allows order and people for the good of the people. This state of being allows the flow of all kinds of activities which allow development to be a daily experience of the people. Is a state where people and properties are kept in safety. For Zabadi (2005), security is a state in which people or things are not exposed

to danger or physical or moral aggression, accident, theft or decline. When the situation is contrary reverse is experienced in the society. The opposite of security is insecurity where people, property and the entire development of a place or country is threatened.

**National Development:** Development generally can be seen as a gradual growth of something. So that it becomes more enhanced, stronger, perfect and secured. National development is a phrase that shows the increase and growth in values and various goals as well as sector of a generation. It has to do with growing in various areas and sectors of the nation. While speaking on development in the area of communication, Omoloso and Abdurauf – Salau (2013) argue that development communication is concerned with planned use of communication resources to pursue developmental goals. National development considers the nation's set goals and values and ensures a continuous growth in various areas of the set goals. In like manner, the security of any nation is a relevant factor to ensure the planning and execution or the pursuance of its goals. The means of planning and execution is therefore, so important that cannot be overemphasised.

### **The multilingual situation in Nigeria**

The Nigerian state is pluralistic in nature, that is, it is a multi-ethnic state or nation-state with over 400 groups of diverse ethnic and religious identity, every group is dissimilar to another based on the uniqueness of cultures, languages, religious and values systems (Aluko, 1998; Oja, 2006). The language difference has been one of the major reasons for security challenges in the country. As the confusion caused by differences in language is a very serious threat to the unity in every society or country to be able to effectively ensure security and progress in its environment. The differences in the entire language group in the country with dissimilar values and pursuit has weakened the central unity and creates more crisis than unity of purpose to fight a national course.

The ethnic intolerance is root to incessant recurrence of ethno religious conflict, which have birthed copious ethnic militia: the Bakassi Boys, O'dua People Congress (OPC), the Egbesu Boys, the Ijaw Youth Congress (IYC), the Arewa People Congress (APC), the Igbo People Congress (IPC) and the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), amongst others (Salawu, 2010).

Most of the above groups are linguistics based, and each of them has a desire to achieve their individual goals which is contrary to the national goals and values. Their varying approaches and means of fighting have always created unrest contributing to the security challenges of this great country, Nigeria. The pursuance of these varying goals introduces a carefree attitude to whatever contribution they would have made to build national security and development.

The multilingual nature also weakens the security system of a country. While other scholars may look at the weakness in terms of less power located at the central governing security strategies and weapons, is noteworthy also is look at the convergent language nature of both security personal and the population. This is because in spite of the central weakness there are linguistic clicks formed among security personnel that affect the accurate functioning or demonstration of their security actions. This may be a deliberate action spring from groups reasoning but it could also unconscious natural tendencies interrupting the flow of security members based on misunderstandings and limitations arising from their linguistic backgrounds. Rufai (2000) points out the impediment in communication that impedes understanding and harmony that encourages distinctiveness and the same time discourages sense of belonging.

Language is not the only tool or means for ensuring security or handling the security challenges in a country, but it plays a major role of uniting people in ideas and practices at difference levels. Such a situation will direct and continually build people towards a sustainable development in the country. Hence, people will be united in ideas; national goals will be valued above any other desire. Such environment will encourage development in all levels or sectors of the nation. Kater, Iro and Kasim (2015) agree that language “is means or principal weapon for growth and development through the expansion of thought”.

It should therefore be understood that as a means or a principal weapon it also has ability to destabilise a people if not properly harnessed or used. Language can make or destroy a people, group or a nation at large. In Nigeria for instance, language is one of the major reasons determining the behaviour in the political affairs. Some languages are rated above others, such that it is believe that the leadership of Nigeria should only come from such specific ethnic groups. The attempt to view it differently to such highly esteemed languages as abnormal and unethical. To some extent, it is looked upon as a “political or leadership sin” for people from minority languages to become leaders in this country.

The elevation of some few languages in the country has created sociolinguistic imbalances among the numerous existing languages. Some languages are relegated to the background, their important role and pride which is equal to national identity is lost. Hardly can you hear such a language spoken everywhere even among the indigenous people. In fact, some languages are completely affected to such an extent that people from such linguistic background feel ashamed of identifying with such languages. It is on the same premise that some languages are termed language shift (Holmes, 2008).

On the contrary, languages like Yoruba, Igbo and the Hausa considered as the major languages, these languages also constantly fight among themselves trying to prove which language among them should be the most reputable, respected and highly rated. These struggles for more identification has never at any time added anything to neither development nor the security benefits of the country. It rather stimulates factions leading to disunity among the people eventually.

### **Approaches towards Effectives Utilization of Multilingualism in Nigeria.**

It is not of place to observe that multilingualism is a two edge sword phenomena. The situation in Nigeria presently made it look like an irretrievable evil, but it also has its positive side, if only the right approach is given. The researcher therefore formulates some few approaches for a positive handling of a multilingual nation as follow:

1. A balance multilingual practise.
2. Utilising the multilingual and the multicultural riches of a nation.
3. An integration of linguistic and cultural resources for development.

The idea of a balance multilingual practise is liken to the practice of a balance bilingual society. In a Balance Bilingual Society (BBS) two languages exist, and both are recognised to be of equal status. Again, Akindele, and Adegbite (2005) maintain that, the multilingual society has more than two language recognised officially and these languages serves various roles simultaneously without any restriction from government policy. For example, a country like Singapore has so many languages: English, Malay, Mandrin and Hoklein whose functions are not officially restricted to any domains (Wardhugh, 1986). This practice was possible in their country because they have different communities and groups and they had no central

languages. Here in Nigeria, this practice can be implemented as English language will be demoted or given no place in the country so that the indigenous languages will be assigned equal roles in the various communities of the ethnic groups. This will remove the idea of supremacy of owned language over another.

Utilising the multilingual and the multicultural riches of a nation is one of the ways of harnessing the benefit of multilingual society. According to Agbedo (2009), language is the pivot on which all human activities, ranging from the most prosaic to the most profound revolve. As an exclusively human activity, the seemingly inexhaustible potentials of language are continually exploited by man for business transaction, exchanging banter, swapping games and gossip as well as discussing and explaining issue. Language as an instrument and the institution of culture is said to be an inexhaustible potential used by mankind to display potentials by handling many things. The human society needs an understanding that, you can't eliminate any existing language by super imposing your own language on other languages. The linguistic potentials are an exhaustible. They have the capacity of developing, displaying and demonstrating their capability in viable human transactions. It is clear that the effective collection of these rich potentials from different language in a nation will rather be an advantage for its development. Then multilingualism will be beneficiary rather than a destructive experience.

An integration of linguistic and cultural resources for development is another tool for accommodating linguistic variance in the given society. This will go a long way for resolving even security challenges and promoting national values and cultural systems in a particular nation. Hence, every language has an enumerable content or potentials integrating these capabilities we serve a great benefit other crisis in the country if language and the cultural riches are integrated the society will gain unique identity and image which will in turn enhance nation building. The same has the capacity of uniting the people which can pave way for progress among the people.

The above approaches will rather help Nigeria and Nigerians to gain from its multilingual nature. These approaches will enable the country to look at the many languages as a blessing and not a curse. It will reduce the struggle and competition among languages. Each language will be given its place for functionality and recognition at different levels.

### **Conclusion**

Language provides humans with the possibility of communicating ideas transmitting values, feelings and goals from one person to another. These ideas may border on issues of security, nation building and development amongst others. In Nigeria however, multilingualism with its attendant problems has badly contributed to the security challenges and development among the people. It is clear that the difference in languages have also encouraged the uprising of linguistics based groups which have more individualistic goal than the national goal for security and development. It is however, not impossible that multilingualism may not bring about a good result for a national development, but rightful approaches must be put to use to enable a functional and beneficial multilingual situation. This paper establishes that language is imperative to national development and resolution of security challenges.

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