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WITTGENSTEIN ON LANGUAGE VARIATION, THE HEGEMONY, AND INTER-DEPENDENCY OF INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES

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Abstract

Purpose: In this essay, we argue that, language is multifaceted, interdependent, and autonomous in its indigenous applications to meanings and reality and for different culture and people.

Findings: The multifaceted roles of language in the development of humanity are readily perceived in the different languages in the world, and in which each culture or community interpret or describe meanings and reality. However, Wittgenstein had in *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, insisted that the function of language is single, definite and must observe the rules of syntax; else we make nonsense of the symbolic nature of language. He agrees with the Logical Positivists that for language not to mislead and misinterpret meanings and reality, it must be analytic and as such must picture or mirror the state of affairs. He insisted that, “whereof we cannot speak, thereof we must be silent”. In the later period, the emphasis shifts dramatically to the actions of people and the role their linguistic activities play in their lives. Thus whereas in the *Tractatus*, language is placed in a static, formal relationship with the world; in the later work (*Philosophical Investigations*), Wittgenstein emphasizes its use in the contexts of everyday social activities of ordering, exercising, advising, requesting, and measuring concern for each other. These different activities are thought of as so many “language game” that together make up the form of life.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy: Therefore, to resolve the conflicts and politics of language development and superiority, (international or local) humanity needs to acknowledge the flexibility and inter-dependency of languages on which development, trade-relations, science, and religion strives.

Keywords: *Indigenous Language, Hegemony, Inter-Dependence, Language Variation*

Introduction

It is often argued that languages are neither individuals nor social groups that can be involved in competition or conflict. This argument clearly shows that it is individuals or groups that are in conflict over language choice or status rather than languages being in competition or conflict. In other words, although languages are said to be in contact, it is the speakers of such languages who experience the conflict that results from language contact situation. This rivalry experience

was the focus of Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigation. Here, he argues that instead of putting or placing language in a static, formal relationship with the world, rather, language as a therapy should be used in the contexts of everyday social activities of ordering, advising, requesting, measuring, counting, exercising concern for each other, and so on. For him, the different activities are thought of as so many 'language game' that together make up a form of life. He says, "*for since I began to occupy myself with philosophy again, sixteen years ago, I have been forced to recognize grave mistakes in what I wrote in that first book*"¹. The point here is that we should not be thinking that language is one thing or the other and whereof the language used do not represent meanings in the other person's context and purpose, therefore it is meaningless. Agama buttresses this point when he says:

*The contextual nature of language remains that every language has meaning. Without meaning, language will be useless. Meaningfulness must meet some criteria, and the plausibility of the criteria depends on the context of the language uses that is why some words have meaning in some language and do not in others. Given a speaker – hearer situation meaning is context – dependent because a word derives its meaning from how it is used*².

Thus, language variation has positive and negative implications for the development of languages. While it is true that the positive results in language variation outcomes, language loyalty, language maintenance, and language promotion, the negative aspects of language variation sometimes manifest in the form of language attitudes, superiority of whose language is better, stereotypes, and hostility. We argue therefore that contrary to the conflicts that arise in the variation of languages, indigenous languages are as meaningful as the others because they represent the foundation on which peoples' culture, developments, and beliefs are established. The research paper adopted mostly qualitative methods. By qualitative method, literatures of different philosophers of language were consulted, (see the references).

The New Wittgenstein

Recall that in *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein had argued that a meaningful language usage must capture the state of affairs for which the language represents. One major challenge of such a static picture-theory understanding of language is that languages describing problems of metaphysics or ethics would be thrown away for they do not mirror the structure of the state of affairs that it represents.

However, with the appearance of Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations, has analytic philosophy adjusted itself to a new point of view? It was still concerned with language, as were logical atomism and logical positivism. But now the analyst would see the nature of language in a different light. Wittgenstein, who had provided the most impressive systematic statement of logical atomism in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, had shortly and thereafter repudiated a considerable part of his book on the grounds that the theory of language upon which that book was based was now seen as inadequate. According to Wittgenstein, "it was inadequate because it assumed that language has really only one function, namely, to state facts, ... that sentences for the most part derive their meanings from stating facts"³. He observes that contrary to his thought on language as playing one function; language rather has many functions besides simply

“picturing” objects. Language, he says, always functions in a context and therefore has as many purposes as there are contexts”⁴. This implies that the world is in a linguistic pluralism. It will be possible to say:

In language (8) we have different *kinds of word*. For the functions of the word "slab" and the word "block" are more alike than those of "slab" and "d". But how we group words into kinds will depend on the aim of the classification,—and on our own inclination”⁵.

Supporting the view of a linguistic pluralistic reality, Oyeleye says, “the indigenous languages are mainly used in very close interactions such as, define father-son, brother-brother, friend-friend, husband-wife and such other close familiar relations. They are used to cultivate intimacy or enhance an already existing one. Thus, for an authentic socio-cultural expression, the indigenous language is the preferred candidate. In contra-distinction, he says, the English language is the recognized medium in political, business, and diplomatic circles, and also in higher education”⁶. His view on the linguistic pluralism of the world is also supported by Igboanusi. According to Igboanusi, the conflict among Nigeria’s indigenous languages seem to relate more to competition. The conflict between English language and Nigeria’s indigenous languages relates to issues of survival of the indigenous languages rather than that of competition”⁷.

This is the context in which Wittgenstein says that we are all victims of the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language. Our incorrect picture of language is produced by grammatical illusions. To analyze grammar might lead one to discover some logical structure in language. But would that justify the conclusion that all language has essentially the same rules, functions, and meanings. In other words, to say that all languages state facts and contain a logical skeleton is derived not by observation but by thought. Such an assumption could not have been drawn by someone who does not understand the rules, functions and meanings of the language in question.

Philosophy recognizes diversity, and in generalizing and abstracting these differences, it relies on its tool (reasoning) to explain and understand the real nature of things. In every area of philosophy, we raise questions, which in turn border on the nature of the meaning of a particular kind of sentence. Thus, the philosophy of language is very relevant to all the other areas and types of philosophy. This is because the philosopher of language is interested in how language relates to the minds of both those who speak and interpret language. This is where the issue of successful translation of words into other words comes in. Philosophers of language are interested in how language and meaning relate to truth and the world. Here, they are not particular with whose language or sentences are actually true or not true, but with what kind of meaning is expressed and whether what is said captures the truth in context. According to Jimoh,

*We cannot overemphasize the remarkable role of the use of language in relation to human beings. Language is a vehicle of human thought and enables human thinking to be complex and varied as it is. We can describe the past with language and speculate about the future with language. This enables us to deliberate and plan in accordance with our beliefs about how things stand. Language is an instrument of understanding and knowledge; it makes it possible for us to escape cognitive imprisonment here and now*⁸.

Basically, for an effective communication, there must be a kind of knowledge transmission between the speaker and his audience. This becomes more glaring in a situation where there are competing and powerful political and linguistic blocking in the world's existing sphere, each bent on bringing its political and linguistic agenda into focus. It is therefore not surprising that amid the multilingual language dialects in Nigeria, "Nigeria has become a major contributor to the development of English worldwide as an international language of globalization, and also to the revised varieties of English all over the world with their own distinct identities"⁹.

The English Language and Its Historical Emergence

We choose the English language for an examination of its emergence because it's majorly the language that seems to place superiority over other languages. This view supported by Mackey, as quoted by Oyeleye, saying, "only before God and the Linguist are all languages equal... everyone knows that you can go further with some languages than you can with others"¹⁰. This view looks away from the functional aspect of language to a superior and how global a language has become. It is the above linguistic picture that has compelled this work to revisit the historical surroundings of the English language.

According to Oyeleye, "several account in historical linguistics point to the fact that English as a language has witnessed transformation/transmutations through invasions, subjugation and colonialism"¹¹. Present day England was originally occupied by the Celts whose language was called the Celtic language. By 43 AD, Julius Caesar led the Roman forces to invade and conquer England, thus making it a colonial territory of Rome. "The Roman soldiers occupied the territory for a fairly long time, providing security for the inhabitants and warding off constant and sustained threats to the inland from the Picts and Scots"¹². The period 43-410 AD witnessed the Roman occupation during which time Latin was imposed as the official language and, by implication, the language of the elite and the ruling class. The Celtic language was however common among the masses, especially in the villages and other rural areas. By 410AD, the Roman legions withdrew from the island, giving way to the invasion of the Anglo-Saxon. "It was the Anglo-Saxons that really exerted profound social, political, and sociolinguistic influences on the hitherto apparently homogeneous Celtic-speaking people of England"¹³. As time went on, other external forces came to destabilize and overrun the island. "Three Germanic tribes were particularly noticeable in this destabilization process: They were Jutes (449 AD), The Saxons (447 AD), and the Angles (547 AD)"¹⁴. In 449 AD, the Celtic warlord, Vortigean, with military help from the Jutes was able to checkmate the continual attacks of the Picts and Scots. However, not long after the defeat of the Picts and the Scots, other Germanic tribes (the Angles and the Saxons) in conspiracy with the Jutes, invaded England and occupied the fertile land of the island. This large scale invasion transformed the linguistic landscape of Britain. Though belonging to different tribal groups, the invaders spoke dialects of the same language. They were therefore able to communicate intelligibly and freely among themselves. "With time, the various dialects soon coalesced to become what was first referred to as Englisc. Later it became what is today known as English"¹⁵.

The preceding account clearly demonstrates that the English language is not after all a monolithic language. "It is in fact a potpourri of different languages"¹⁶. Each of the different

groups that invaded and occupied Britain at one time or the other left their own linguistic marks on the today's English language.

Here are some samples of these linguistic marks from the invading groups:

1. Celtic influence on the English language is evident in the names of some English towns taken over from Celts- 'London' and 'Leeds' especially. And rivers- such as Thames, Avon, Ouse, Exe, Stout, Waye etc. The Celts who appeared to be on a higher cultural level than the British were also skilled in metallurgy and words like iron and lead were borrowed from them. Other Celtic towns include Kent, Cantion, Devon and Dumnonli.
2. From the Roman overlords and their prestigious Latin were borrowed quite a number of words, many of them having to do with war, trade, building, horticulture, food and metallurgy- words like will, tile, chalk, mill, iron, lead. Trading terms: pound, mile, cheap, monger and mint. Fruits: apple, plum, cherry and pear. Culinary terms: Kitchen, pepper, peas, cheese, butter, kettle and dish.
3. Words peculiar to the Germanic tribes are words that have to do with ships and seafaring- ship, sail, boat, keel, sheet, stay, float, and sea itself.
4. The French language that displaced English for about two centuries as the official language after Norman Conquest also left its obvious linguistic marks. Majority of the French loan words reflect their cultural and political dominance. Thus we have words to do with war, ecclesiastical matters, the law hunting, heraldry, the arts and fashion.
 - (i) Words denoting titles of ranks- baron, count, duke, marquess, peer, and sovereign.
 - (ii) Words denoting administration- chancellor, council, country, crown, government, nation, parliament, people, and state.
 - (iii) Words to do with the law courts- accuse, attorney, court, crime, judge, justice, prison, punish, sentence, and verdict.
 - (iv) Words reflecting French dominance of ecclesiastical life- abbey, clergy, parish, prayer, relic, religion, saint, savior, sermon, service, virgin.
 - (v) Words attesting to French dominance in the arts and fashion- apparel, costume, dress, fashion, art, beauty, chant, colour, column, music, paint, poem, romance.

Other French words borrowed into English denoting mental and moral qualities include charity, courtesy, cruelty, mercy, and obedience¹⁷.

Thus, the thrust of the above historical account is to lend credence to our claim that English language, just like other language is not a monolithic language; rather, it is a conglomeration of several languages. Therefore, considering the above socio-historical conjunctures that heralded the emergence of English, one would be correct to say that the language does not belong solely to a particular ethnic group, or to a particular geo-political entity.

Again, it is correct to say that no language is more important than the other. This is true because each language at one point in time would have borrowed words from other existing language in order to have a complete meaning and serve in its socio-economic intra-activities. For instance, the Igbo name for dictionary is *okowaokwu*. *Okowaokwu* is not strictly speaking, a direct

equivalent of dictionary because it connotes an explainer or a narrator. Words also like Encyclopedia do not have direct word in Igbo language but could be expressed in value and functionality. Hence, just like Latin and French languages helped and lend English language in its emergence and functionality, so also it is with some other languages who had borrowed words, expressions, proverbial in forming a complete linguistic turn and meaning. Languages are being transformed, reshaped in its meanings and meaning potentials, that is, they are being turned to fit and capture the new surroundings and reality though still in full communion with its ancestral home.

The Hegemony and Survival of Indigenous Languages

In this subsection, we shall analyze and present how indigenous languages are hegemonies, and as such, there is need to sustain their role in socio-cultural relevance. It is a statement of fact that the first language encounter of a growing child is his or her indigenous dialect (language). For instance, in Igbo cultural settings, a growing child begins to understand and interpret reality in Igbo language. He or she begins with knowing the Igbo words for; *Nna, Nna m or mpa m, mama, mama m, bia, nri, nwanne m*. In Yoruba, the child begins also to know how to pronounce Yoruba words and there meanings. In Yoruba, the child begins to know the meaning of *baba, iya, aburo mi re*-(this is my brother or sister). This is the situation in all indigenous languages were a child begins his or her first encounter with life. The Chinese would do so in Chinese language so also the American or British.

This view on the role and relevance of indigenous languages enjoys Oyeleye support when he says, "... the indigenous languages are mainly used in very close interactions such as, define father-son They are used to cultivate intimacy or enhance an already existing one"¹⁸ Language is a vehicle of human thought and enables human thinking to be complex and varied as it is. Language variation goes along with people's understanding of belief, economy, and metaphysics. Language is a tool of philosophy. It will be difficult to conduct the business of philosophy and other human related activities without it and communication would be nearly impossible without language.

Philosophers of language prioritize their inquiry into the nature of meaning. They want to explain what it means to "mean" something. Along with these is also the issue of how we compose sentences into a meaningful whole out of the meaning of its part. According to Jimoh, in relation to the use of language, "philosophers of language try to understand what the speakers and the listeners do with language when they communicate. They also investigate the social implication of language. For instance, how we create, learn, and speak languages"¹⁹.

However, the real problem with the pluralistic language situation is how for instance, a non Igbo speaking person who has or needs to undergo a study in Igbo culture. How would communication take place and very effectively? Would he or she first learn how to speak Igbo dialect (language) before continuing his or her studies? Or would the study be learned in transliteration (i.e. teaching the student in his or her own native language but using synonymy or equivalents in transliteration)? Here, Igboanusi has this to say:

...to determine the attitude of students, teachers, parents and administrators towards bilingual education (that is education in the child's first language and English) he

carried out a large-scale survey. The results demonstrated that the respondents preferred education in both English and the L1 and were not positively disposed to the use of only one of them. It is felt that bilingual education would allow school children to be competent in both English and their Nigerian indigenous languages²⁰.

Language is a powerful linguistic weapon used by man to manage strategic interactions in a given society. In a human society, the power of language is first embodied in an individual (or family, which is considered as the smallest sub-unit of the human society), and subsequently represented in a larger human society. In the words of Bloom, as quoted by Ogunsiji, “language is the preeminent mode of expression provided in a society to embody and make public what is otherwise internal and private to the individual- the beliefs, desires, and feelings we have that are our intentional state. Language makes these contents of mind public, in an expression, so that other persons can know them”²¹.

Of all the symbols that are available to human society, language is the most organized and the most powerful because it is the means through which human rationality is expressed and communicated to one generation to the next. Through language, human beings are privileged to pass across the state of their minds, such as love, hatred, despair, success, agony, and joy, among others. The world would be non-existent without language. According to Enahoro:

All the languages of Nigeria have equal validity or if you place equal lack of validity, before the law and under the constitution. No linguistic group has the right-the moral or constitutional right-to impose its language on any other linguistic group in the country. One might even go further to say that no collection of linguistic groups have the collective right to impose their separate languages on the other linguistic groups in the country. Any attempt to impose any particular tribal language or languages on the country is fraught with grave dangers for the peaceful development of the Federation. Government should not confer on some Nigerian languages the potentiality of instruments of domination over Nigerian groups²².

The above statement could be said of the different languages of the world. Even though he has been criticized for defending the minority languages in Nigeria because his indigenous language belongs there, but one sees some important point he made which could hinder development if not adhered to. The point here is that each language is as important and dependence as the other. Though, some languages are made to be the official languages in certain contexts that have not denied the importance of other languages in matters of expression of beliefs and socio-economic activities.

The Inter-Dependency of Languages

By inter-dependency of languages, we mean a set of words which are not original to some language structure but is seen used as if it were indigenous to such languages. For instance, the word kindergarten is a German word but is found in the English dictionary. The hegemonic status of the English language in Nigeria and in some other countries that were colonized by Britain is not to present English language as superior or independent from other indigenous languages. Again, in the religious setting, the word Amen is used in all languages as a concluding word for prayers and supplications. The word “Amen” is neither original to English

language nor Igbo language. Both English and other languages make their prayers through God by the word “Amen”. This simply shows the level of inter-dependency of languages. According to Blommaert, as quoted by Ogunsiji, “in the face of a widespread societal dismissal, degradation, denial or animalization of multilingualism, sociolinguistics has since the 1960s been making the claim that multilingualism is a positive thing in societies. It represents the richness of cultural diversity in language and so enriches society, and it is beneficial for individuals too”²³. The major advantage of the multilingualism of humanity is that individuals, groups, and cultures seem to adapt and acclimatize with other people’s way of life. Although Mandarin Chinese, Hindi/Urdu, and Spanish have more native speakers than English, they have neither the global influence nor the multi-functional use that characterizes English today. The politics of English as a global language has further enhanced its dominance in Nigeria. “As the dominant language of books, newspapers, airports, international business, academic conferences, science and technology, sports, music, and diplomacy, among others”²⁴, there is need for the development of “the indigenous ‘language capital’”²⁵ in order to spread resources beyond the few Nigerians who are literate in English.

Conclusion

It is no longer a gainsaying that humanity is in a multilingual structure, in a situation where every language is both autonomous as well as inter-dependency with one another. One of the implications is that each human language, be it *Igbo*, *Yoruba*, *Akan*, *Spanish*, *German*, or English is as useful and important as the others. Most importantly is that the speakers and natives of such languages is also part and parcel of humanity and therefore should not be seen as less human or rational. Therefore, to resolve the conflicts and politics of language development and superiority, (international or local) humanity needs to acknowledge the flexibility and inter-dependency of languages on which development, trade-relations, science, and religion strives.

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