# SEEDS ON FERTILE SOIL: THE IMPACT OF LANGUAGE ON NATIONAL COHESION AND DEVELOPMENT – A MULTIDISCIPLINARY APPROACH

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**Abstract**

The role of language as a tool in the attainment of national cohesion and peace as well as industrial and socio-economic development of a nation cannot be over-stated. Where there is no language, there will be no development. However, language does not, itself, guarantees development. It is humans that energise development and humans haves to be prepared through language use. Moreover, when-language is not productively used, it becomes destructive. Thus, for language to be productive, it must be seen to be communicating the intended meaning and receiving the expected reactions so as to serve as a vehicle for achieving a nation's set goals. These set goals could be education, national unity, psychological identity, socio-economic and technological development, etc. This paper uses Systemic functional Linguistics approach to language study and also draws on insights from Walter Rodney's theory of development, which is centred on the development of man, to present language as a valuable tool that develops the intellectual capacity of humans who in turn energise national growth and development through technological inventions and innovations as well as social order and political stability which are also tenets of national growth and development.

## Introduction

Language is the complex system of signs and symbols used by humans to communicate. It is language that gives the human being a superior distinguishing ability that makes him truly human and an advanced animal (Banga and Suri, 180). Language can be said to be the oxygen of social interactions, societal cohesion and continuous existence as well as growth; it is the electricity that powers continuous human survival, cultural preservation, civilization and human development. Language and, speech in particular, is what differentiates humans from animals. It is also the oxygen for the attainment and sustenance of peace, societal growth and national development. Ogli in his evaluation of language says it is vital in the exchange of ideas; it is a constant because it is impossible to establish joint efforts of people in the struggle against crippling effects of climate change; the production of material wealth. It is impossible, therefore, to achieve success in the productive activities of society without language (117). But all this can only be possible through the instrumentality of language, although no nation has completely achieved all these aspirations today, nations of the world are still striving for their actualization. Indeed, language is central to the continuous survival of the human race, growth and civilization. Thus, Banga and Suri give the major functions of language to include the following:

1. Language is the primary vehicle of communication
2. Language reflects both the personality of the individual and the culture of the society.
3. Language makes possible the growth and transmission of culture, the continuity of societies, and the effective functioning and control of social group (182).

The growth and development of nations in the present world is mainly measured by their infrastructural development, economic prowess, military powers, political stability and international diplomacy – that is – the soft power to influence international socio-political affairs of the world or parts of the world. While all these indicators are clear

representations of physical development, the most salient and basic but, often, overlooked indicator of a nation's growth is the intellectual and skills capacity of the citizenry. Such skills and intellectual capacity are both products of language activities. Hence, Walter Rodney's theory of development which is man-centred is also pivotal to this study.

Language is a vital tool for human communication but communication is not an end in itself, rather it is the functional impact and the effect it brings to bear in harnessing human potential to bring about a better environment, safe living conditions and human growth that matters. This effect could either be positive or negative depending on how language is deplored. Language is central to human growth and development, and interestingly, the development of man translates to national development. According to Agwu language is the sole universal means of communication among all peoples of the world. Thus, Agwu observes that language provides a critical rallying point as well as an unmistakable form of identity for its users. In today's world, language serves as a vehicle through which nations can rise to global prominence and recognition. This is because for wider communication in a world that has virtually become a global village, language does not only facilitate, but also enhances and promotes cross- cultural activities, economic transactions, and ultimately, growth and development (1, Mazrui 49). Communication, as already stated, is not an end in itself but a vehicle which is used in achieving the set aspirations that birth initiative, creativity, innovation, cooperation and development among people as well as within and between nations.

Language can, thus, be seen to be a physical reality, although it is only physically felt when an action is carried out at its prompting. In other words, language can only manifest itself physically when, by its prompting, an action is carried out. Thus, Huxley's view cited in Santana that "Language is nothing existing in itself: it cannot be verified. The only thing you can verify is innumerable linguistic acts… language manifests itself as speaking, the *activity of speaking*. Language is thus something performed by speakers" conforms to the proposition that language is not just a psychological reality but also a physical reality,

and that we can see it in the activities it carries out (504). Whenever human beings are communicating, they have objectives to be accomplished or aspirations to be achieved. In the case of a nation, these aspirations could be national unity, or what Aristotle calls "the adherence of minds", that is, the identity of its unique characteristics, the communal spirit of its citizens and patriotism for the purposes of socio-economic interaction; education and national growth.

Language is the first and the most important work tool that humans use to initiate and propel the growth and development of nations. As economists say, a genuine choice is made on entities which are similar in value; not those which are not at par. To use Economic concepts, one cannot have things which are equal without an opportunity cost. Specifically, national unity, education and socio-economic development on one hand, and language use on the other, are similar but not exactly equal. In fact, language is the vehicle which facilitates the sharing of developmental ideas, the attainment of qualitative education, the promotion of initiative and innovations, socio-economic development, unity and the attainment of growth which are the real indicators of a nation's growth and development. It is imperative to note, also, that national cohesion and development are only possible in an atmosphere of peace, but there can be no peace without the effective utilisation of language skills to negotiate for it.

## Theoretical Framework and Research Methodology

This study is based on the perspective of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) which views language as a functional human artefact with meaning-making potential and also draws on insights from Walter Rodney's man-centred theory of development to evaluate the role of language as a tool for the development of the human being and how humans, in turn, engineer national cohesion and the growth and development of nations through language. These two theories are relevant to this study because SFL, like Rodney's man-centred theory of development, places high premium on human beings and their use of language as the focal point in the growth of societies. Halliday is of the

view that language has evolved to analyse, explicate and provide insights into human communicative needs to ensure that human needs are met in terms of functional meaning-making. Thus, he says "language is functional in the sense that it is designed to account for how the language is used and language has evolved to satisfy human needs; and the way it is organized is functional with respect to these needs" (39). In other words, SFL views language is a tool that human beings use to satisfy certain needs and some of these needs are the preservation of culture, social interactions, communal bonding as well as societal growth and development.

Rodney's theory of development also places the individual at the centre-piece of the growth and development of society. But, again, the skill set individuals use in solving societal problems is a product of language. This might also be the motivation for Coffin to posit that "one of the main purposes for Halliday ... in developing SFL has been to create a theory for solving a range of problems faced by potential 'consumers' of linguistics" (94). And it is a given that the consumers of linguistics are human beings and the society.

The study adopts a qualitative research design by relying on the corpus of existing literature as part of the sociolinguistics aspects of Halliday's SFL which views language as a tool for solving human problems. Halliday captures the relevance of SFL in solving human problems thus, "the value of a theory lies in the use that can be made of it, and I have always considered a theory of language to be essentially consumer oriented" (7). While Coffin states that "one of the main purposes for Halliday ... in developing SFL has been to create a theory for solving a range of problems faced by potential 'consumers' of linguistics" (94). The study also draws on insights from Walter Rodney's theory of political development which places man at the centre-piece of the development of nations. Related works are also reviewed and relationships are established between the subject matter and the key concepts in the study for the purposes of explaining the role of language in the development of the human being and how humans use the

knowledge acquired through the impact of language to engineer the growth and development of nations.

## Definition of Key Concepts

**Language** is basically a system of conventional symbols – spoken, gestured or written which human beings use to communicate with one another. But different linguists define language differently. For example, Banga and Chaman define language as "the ability to acquire and use complex systems of communication, particularly the human ability to do so, and a language is any specific example of such a system" (181). While Ogli says it is "a complex system of communication or the ability to learn and use that system" (116). It is the complexity of the human language that has given the specie the unique ability to denature and domesticate it for developmental purposes. Emeka-Nwobia defines language as "the key that is capable of bringing about the development of a people." He further observes that development can come in form of economic growth, technological development, availability of social infrastructure and social stability, etc." (2). All the indices of development mentioned above are valuable parameters of evaluating a developed nation, but they are all initiated by humans as musings, shared as knowledge, reinforced as intellect and executed by means of communication via language.

Language is thus a system of communication in speech and writing that is used by people of a particular country or area. It is a system of sounds and written symbols used by the people of a particular country, area or tribe to communicate with each other; an ability to use words in order to communicate. Whatever is a said of the description and the meaning of language would be incomplete if mention is not made of its semiotic and kinesiological aspects. Thus, the Encyclopaedia Britannica vol. 6, presents a very useful description of language by saying that "language consists of vocal sounds to which meanings have been assigned by cultural conventions; often, it is supplemented by various_gestures." This means in its original rustic form, language existed in its oral form for millions of years before it was ever committed

to writing. From the above definitions, it can be deduced that a nation's growth and development is hinged on the availability and effective use of language. This also conforms to the assertion of Mkwinda-Nyasulu that "where there is no language there is no development" (213).

**Nation** – a nation in modern terms can be defined as a group of people who share some similar characteristics such as language, culture and history and who live in a particular area under one government with clearly defined boundaries and sovereignty, for example, Nigeria, Ghana or Britain. It is an aggregation of persons of the same ethnic family, often speaking the same language or cognate languages. M. H. Johnson quoted in Adamova and Lojek defines a nation as a group of people who live in a specific territory and wish to create their own state..., expressing their feeling of mutual affiliation and joint fate (98). The www.dictionary.com defines a nation as "a large body of people associated with a particular territory, that is sufficiently conscious of its unity to seek or to possess a government peculiarly its own." One very important characteristic of a nation is the sentiment of communality or patriotism. The citizens must live together and have a patriotic zeal which must rob-off positively on the nation. A nation is more than just a geographical expression or a political entity. It is a spiritual principle motivated by two phenomena: joint identification with a broad heritage of memory, and the desire to live together and form a cohesive community.

Moreover, there must be a community of interest groups, religion, language, culture, economy and tradition which are the factors that bring people together and engender and foster unity among human beings. Hence, awareness, territory, history, culture, language and religion all count in the characterization of a nation, although there is hardly any case of a nation with a clear-cut and homogenous character in terms of this list of possibilities.

**Technology** – this is the application of scientific knowledge for the purpose of making life easier and more comfortable for man. It is the use of scientific knowledge for practical purposes or applications, whether in industries or in our everyday lives, and that is what makes

technology meaningful. Wahab says technology is connected with obtaining certain results, resolving certain problems, completing certain tasks using particular skills, employing knowledge and exploiting assets (62). Thus, whenever we use our creative knowledge to achieve some specific purposes, we are using technology. According to the Merriam-webster.com "technology is the practical application of knowledge especially in a particular area, or a capability given by the practical application of knowledge; a manner of accomplishing a task especially using technical processes." Lovell (1998) and Bozeman (2000) cited in Oguchi observe that "the concept of technology does not only relate to technology that embodies in the product but it is also associated with the knowledge of information of its use, application and the process in developing the product" (43). Technology, therefore, encompasses a huge body of knowledge and tools that ease the use of natural and economic resources as a way to produce goods and services efficiently and innovatively. Technological progress is essential to the economic growth and development of individuals, communities and nations. The more advanced the technology, the more quickly the local economy grows as well as the international recognition that a nation gains. But again, it is language that nurtures, conditions and hones human intellect to initiate, share ideas and instantiate these developmental projects.

G**rowth and Development –** growth can be interpreted to mean **development** because it is one of the synonyms of development. Indeed, when a nation is growing that nation is said to be developing. Development, thus, implies positive and impactful progress of man. Accordingly, Walter Rodney states that "development in human society is a many-sided process. At the level of the individual, it implies increased skills and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material well-being" (1). Development, therefore, means the growth of the individual who, once developed, becomes an agent of development to a nation. This is why Sylvester-Jose-Tidiane Mana in a United Nations report on Human Development and the Environment in the new Millennium defines development as "meeting

the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to set their own needs and as a process of change in which the exploitation of resources, the direction of investment, the orientation of technological development, and institutional change are all in harmony and enhance both current and future potentials to meet human needs and aspirations" (211).

## Language, Man and Development

Whenever 'development' is mentioned, the things that most likely come to mind are the physical evidence of development such as social stability, good roads, electricity, standard and affordable hospitals, schools and other infrastructure like airports, towers and beautiful buildings or some other engineering masterpieces, although all these are indicators of growth and development, development also has another important component which is philosophical in nature but fundamental to the development of a nation; the growth of man. Development is a progressive thing and not just a function of the physical evidence but an aggregation of the tangible and the intangible indices of growth such as the mental capacity of the citizens and what they are capable of doing with the knowledge they have acquired through language resources.

Without prejudice to all other components of development, its most cardinal component is the psychological one – that is – it is the total transformation of the human being right from the mind to the physical that really determines how developed a nation is. In fact, the human being is the centre-piece of development because he must be developed first before he can become the catalyst for physical development. Human beings also intervene negatively to dislocate development; when they are not properly developed, the process of development is skewed, thus, they becomes agents of destruction. There are many examples of the destructive tendencies of humans when they are not well developed and morally refined. In Nigeria and other African countries, for instance, the activities of the Islamic State of West Africa Province (ISWAP), Al-Shabab, Boko Haram terrorists, the

Niger Delta militants, the Fulani Herdsmen, the unknown gunmen, Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and some unattached and undefined lunatics, etc., are clear negative effects of underdeveloped humans. Again, it is language which is used in psychologically shaping humans via indoctrination into agents of destruction when they are not well trained. Thus, whatever is said of development, language must be at the core of it all.

The social outlook of a nation is determined by the language its people habitually use. Hence, language is indispensable for the development and unity of any nation. In this regard, the role of effective communication becomes very instrumental in the preparation of the individuals who are the catalysts of the growth of nation states. It is also through language that the human need for interaction both at individual and at collective level is satisfied.

## Growth and Development of Nations

Development, as earlier stated, has to do with improving the skill set and capacity of the citizens; their well-being, ensuring their freedom and increasing their economic security. Generally, development means bringing about qualitative improvement in the lives of people by providing greater quality of life (provision of infrastructure and other social amenities for human survival) for human beings within a society. But whatever nature of development a country or nation experiences, it is human beings that engineer such development. All the inventions that amount to indices of development such as good roads, structural edifices, aeroplanes, computers, automobiles, ships, etc., are made possible by humans. Yet whatever a nation achieves through development, it is brought about by the human brain. The brain is, therefore, preeminent in the equation of development. But the human brain cannot be developed without education which is, itself, acquired through language use. Thus, it could be said that language is the code or codes used by nations of the world to achieve the goal of nationalism without which development will, forever, remain a mirage.

Again, there is something uniquely identifiable and intricately tied to national consciousness and development through language. Language becomes part of the mental make-up of the individual in a country and the vehicle through which the spirit of togetherness is fostered, harmonised, sustained and harnessed for national growth. Language, then, enhances the spirit of nationalism and propels individuals who have acquired education and knowledge to contribute to the growth of their nations. Indeed, there is something intangible, something of essence which unites a nation; language, and it is only when a nation is united that it can witness development. Thus, the instrument for uniting people and nations is language. What this means is that technological development and national growth are impossible without human organization and the social system that supports it. Moreover, the only tool that brings about human organization and the coordination of social relationships is language. Hence, it is safe to say that language is the fundamental factor that engineers social cohesion, societal organization and technological advancement all of which help to bring about the growth and development of nations through the agency of human inventors who are, themselves, prepared to energise development through language activities.

The value of a language, then, depends on what an individual, a community or a nation chooses to do with it, or what such an entity wants language to do for it. Language can be made to perform certain tangible activities. This is why there is a linguistic theory of Speech Act. According to the theory, the value of "the unit of linguistic communication is not the symbol, word or sentence ... but rather the production of the symbol or word or sentence in the *performance of the speech act*" (Searle 16). In other words, language is a tool that man uses to do tangible things in the world.  The view of language as an indispensable tool for unity and human development goes back to the Bible story of the tower of Babel which explicitly explains what man can achieve through a unified language and how development cannot be achieved without language. In the Bible account of Genesis chapter 11:

5 – 7, we are told that united by a common language, humans had set out to construct a tower to heaven so that, whenever they wanted, they could use the tower to go to God. The tower project was succeeding until God became uncomfortable with this human desire and aspiration and decided to truncate the tower project by confusing their language. "Then the Lord came down to see the city and the tower which these men had built, and he said, "Now then, these are all one people and they speak one language; this is just the beginning of what they are going to do. Soon they will be able to do anything they want! Let us go down and mix up their language so that they will not understand one another." God came down and confused their language; splitting their once single and simple language into many different incomprehensible languages and the tower project failed. The above biblical account underscores the power of language in bringing about unity and development to a group of people who are focused on their set objectives, and how difficult it is to harness human efforts when there is no common linguistic unit of communication. Like the biblical babel, language has continued to be a vital tool for technological innovations and growth of nations in our world today.

Today language has linked the world together even more than the biblical era of the Tower of Babel. The advent of information and communication technology (ICT) is, by far, one of the world's most renowned technological inventions ever made by humans, perhaps second only to the radio transistor which is also a technological invention engineered by humans. All these inventions are, interestingly, innovations that use language to inform, educate and bring about, yet again, more development to individuals, communities and nations. This, again, makes the human being the centre-piece of development in any society.

National development is, therefore, centred on the development of the human being. Conversely, when you remove the human being from a nation there will be a void or an empty nation and if you take away effective use of language from man, the process of development will be skewed because rather than contribute positively,

the human being would become an agent of destruction. If we agree that this is true, then, the major trigger to be captured is the human mind which the human being uses to energise development. This mind set also seems to be the motivation behind the operational motto of certain agencies of the Federal Government of Nigeria which are solely focused on developing individual citizens. For example, the Citizenship and Leadership Training Centre's (C&LTC's) motto says *Build the Man, Build the Community* while that of the National Orientation Agency's (NOA's) War Against Indiscipline (WAI) Brigade says *Build the Man Build the Nation*. In other words, it is only when the citizens are built through the instrumentality of language use that they can contribute their quota to the growth of a community or a nation.

## Language, Technology and Development

The relationship between language and national development is intertwined because it is language that brings about technology and aids the developmental strides of a nation. But technology is an aspect of development and it is, in fact, an undeniable fact that technological developments affect the ways we use language. David Crystal believes that technology has established a linguistic revolution called "internet linguistics" (6). For instance, the coming of the Internet and electronic channels of sharing knowledge and information such as Telegram, Telephone, Google, X-Twitter, Zoom and Facebook, etc., have greatly affected how we use language today. In other words, technology has brought about new words that have become the main stay of everyday usage. One of the keys and clearest ways to see this is with the name Google. Since the early 2000s, for example, the term 'to google' which first came to prominence in 2002 when the American Dialect Society declared it word of the year, and later in 2009 when they also declared it to be the word of the decade, google has become a generic word meaning "to search the internet" with any search engine, not just Google itself. Google has thus become our collective memory.

According to www.theconversation.com "Google has now become our collective global memory and googling is the process by

which we access those memories. This is simply a process that we have always engaged with called "transactive memory," in which we turn to people around us, usually people we know, to help us recall facts and memories.  In addition, the invention of the Gutenberg Press also allowed us to outsource people to books. The difference between books and google is that google is now always with us, it has a vast database of information and it is getting increasingly better at letting us access information with just a click. This in turn has had a dramatic effect on what human beings are able to achieve through language not only as individuals, but also as communities and as nations.

There are many other technologies and, particularly, Internet innovated words such as *blogging, download, broadband, home page, hotspot, meme, login, twitter*, etc. that have become common everyday words that we use in our phatic communication and even in our official writings. In this sense, we can say that, although language is central to any equation of human and national development, technological advancement has also helped to modify and enrich the effective utilisation of language.

## Conclusion

Language is the most important tool used in developing man while man is the main catalyst to social order as well as the technological growth and development of nations. Any nation, therefore, that wishes to attain social order, economic growth, technological and industrial development must first of all have a national language that is common to all its citizens.

This study has thus justified the fact that language is the key to national growth, and development and that for any nation to achieve its full developmental potential, language must be accorded its pride of place in developing the man who will, in turn, serve as a catalyst to the growth and development of the nation.

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