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Nigerian Pidgin (NP) for Peace, Unity and Sustainable Development in Nigeria

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Abstract

The need for peace, unity and development that is sustained is one that has continually been reverberated throughout the nation for a number of decades now. Absence of peace and unity hinders sustainable development, as the existence of these is a prerequisite to achieving sustainable economic development in any nation. Multilingual and multiethnic nature of Nigeria has promoted the divide among Nigerians in this decade more than ever before. There is need for the adoption of a common language acceptable to all. In contemporary Nigeria, we see pidgin bridging the gap in communication between people of different social status, tribes and religious affiliations, thereby building the right atmosphere for peace, unity and sustainable development to thrive. This paper therefore discussed contexts where Nigerian Pidgin is already in use and advocated that its acceptability in these context indicates that it can be turned to a language for wider communication and a panacea for peace and development in Nigeria.

Introduction

A less peaceful and divided world is a much more challenging place to fight inequality and want, as countries facing incessant violent attacks are prone to face poverty at a significantly higher rate. A lot of developing countries constantly battle with one form of unrest or the other. However, while many of these developing countries have made tremendous progress in reducing poverty by taking adequate steps to promote peace, unity and sustainable development, Nigeria is still struggling to achieve this.

The last independence day celebration, which had Nigeria commemorate her 57th year of liberation, was once again flooded with statements from prominent men and women in the country expressing their optimism for a better Nigeria; a Nigeria where all would be committed to building bridges of peace and development. Many of the people who spoke during the celebration expressed hope in a promising and bright future for the country, while reiterating the need for dialogue as a means of resolving all developmental, economic and political challenges facing the country.

Absence of peace and unity hinders sustainable development, as the existence of these is a prerequisite to achieving sustainable economic development in any nation. Peaceful co-existence among Nigerians is a prerequisite for sustainable unity, progress and development of the country.

Without peace, there will be no progress and when there is lack of progress, development is retarded and the human society is subjected to untold suffering and hardship. Without peace, there will be no progress and when there is lack of progress, development is retarded and the human society is subjected to untold suffering and hardship. To achieve this, deliberate attempt to shun acts that breed violence, instability, chaos and war as well as resolve to live and co-exist in peace and harmony with one another must be made. Although peace is not negotiable, it does not mean absence of conflict, but when a people with the culture of peace are built, there can always be a way out of every misunderstanding.

To shed more light on the issue being addressed in the paper, the concepts of peace, unity and sustainable development were examined. Also explicated was the concept of Nigerian pidgin. The paper then explained how Nigerian Pidgin (NP) can be used to promote peace, unity and sustainable development in Nigeria.

Concepts Clarifications

Peace

Peace is freedom from disturbance. It is a state or period in which there is no war. It is the absence of chaos. Peace means tranquillity. It is a state of calm or restfulness. Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia (2018) described peace as harmony; the absence of hostility; a lack of conflict and freedom from fear of violence between heterogeneous people. Peace is when people are able to resolve their conflicts without violence, while working together to improve the quality of their lives (International Alert, n.d.). According to Hardy (2018), peace goes beyond absence of war and violence to the management of conflict as an important opportunity for change and increased understanding. It is a commitment to understanding, celebrating and learning from difference, as well as a commitment not to harm, but to nurture all individuals. In nation building and development, peace is when:

- Everyone lives in safety, without fear or threat of violence, and no form of violence is tolerated in law or in practice.
- Everyone is equal before the law, the systems for justice are trusted, and fair and effective laws protect people's rights.
- Everyone is able to participate in shaping political decisions and the government is accountable to the people.
- Everyone has fair and equal access to the basic needs for their wellbeing – such as food, clean water, shelter, education, healthcare and a decent living environment.
- Everyone has an equal opportunity to work and make a living, regardless of gender, ethnicity or any other aspect of identity (International Alert, n.d.).

Unity

Unity is a state of being united or joined as a whole. Vocabulary.Com (2018) defined unity as “being together or at one with someone or something.” It also defines it as “an undivided or unbroken completeness or totality with nothing wanting.” Unity can further be described as the quality in individuals to do some work as a unit, without jeopardizing the individual interest in any way, as far as the result of the work is concerned (Important India, n.d.). The role of unity in nation building is indispensable. A society is first a unit of a nation, and so, where there is unity in the organisation of a nation, there would be a well-ordered society.

A great chunk of Africa's suffering is linked to Africans' inability to recognize the significance of peace to nation building and economic sustainability and stability. Nation-building is the process of

constructing or structuring a national identity using the power of the state. In Africa, this process is important because it aims at the unification of people within the state so that it remains politically stable and viable in the long run. On this note, the presence of peace enables nation-building to involve the use of populace for major infrastructural development to foster social harmony and economic growth. However, the role of language cannot be overruled in the achievement of these, but with the peculiar language situation in Nigeria, it has become difficult to come to this point as there is no unifying language in the country. The English language which was adopted as the national language has not particularly filled the existing vacuum created by the absence of our own national language.

Sustainable Development

Sustainable development is the organizing principle for meeting human development goals while at the same time sustaining the ability of natural systems to provide the natural resources and ecosystem services upon which the economy and society depend (Crain, 2015 & Sach, 2015). The desired result is a state of society where living conditions and resource use continue to meet human needs without undermining the integrity and stability of the natural systems (Adegbite, 2004). The term emerged in the 1970s in the context of development in poorer nations, especially in the southern hemisphere (Dale & Robinson, 1996 & Schmuck & Schultz, 2002). It is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Brundtland Report cited in Schmuck & Shultz, 2002). Sustainable development takes into consideration social and economic changes that are necessary to approach ecological stability (Schmuck & Schultz, 2002).

The Nigerian Pidgin (NP)

With a population of over 162 million people (July 2011 United Nations estimate) scattered across its 923,768 square kilometers of swamps, forests and savannahs, Nigeria is an amalgamation of ethnically diverse groups of people speaking well over 500 different languages (Esizimotor & Egbokhare, n.d.). The country was first visited by European explorers and traders in the mid 15th Century; a period that marked the beginning of an extended contact between the indigenous peoples of coastal Nigeria and visiting groups of Europeans (Arends, 1994). Although the Portuguese were the first group of Europeans to visit and explore coastal Nigeria, especially around the area now known geo-politically as the Niger Delta, the English took effective control of trade in the region when they arrived in 1650 AD. Prior to their arrival, the presence of the Portuguese who established schools and churches where they taught Portuguese and the doctrines of Christianity in the region, brought their language close to languages of the Niger Delta for an extended period of time. This inherently became crucial to the evolution of what some came to call *Naijá* or *Nigerian Pidgin* which started out as a Portuguese-based pidgin in the Niger Delta (Esizimotor & Egbokhare, n.d.). In the course of time however, change in interest and mission on the part of the English migrants, resulted in change in the language situation in the Niger Delta and with the introduction of English into the Nigerian environment, the existing Portuguese-based pidgin of the Niger Delta started evolving in the new direction of the language of the new politically dominant group, the English (Egbokhare, 2001). After a period of time, the language of the English, supplanted Portuguese as the major lexifier of *Naijá*. By the 1900s, the now stable English-based *Naijá* started spreading across the emerging Nigerian nation.

NP for Peace, Unity and Sustainable Development in Nigeria

Language is the only sustainable weapon that can bind a multilingual nation like Nigeria (Olorunfoba & Falola, 2017). Currently, the English language occupies a very significant role in the formation of national values and integration of the Nigerian nation (Hanna, 2008). More than a decade after decolonization of Nigeria, English continues to enjoy its primacy in our educational system as a medium of instruction. However, can we confidently say that the English language has been an

effective language tool in the integration of our nation Nigeria? Considering the fact that understanding can only be achieved where there is a mutually intelligible language, the role and importance of a unifying language cannot be overemphasized, especially in a multi-lingual society like Nigeria. To this end, many linguists have proposed that Pidgin can come to play when there is need for better understanding in discussions involving a wider society where the choice of English Language as a medium of communication may hinder audience participation.

Pidgin and Contexts of Use in Nigeria

In contemporary Nigeria, we see pidgin bridging the gap in communication between people of different social status, tribes and religious affiliations, thereby building the right atmosphere for peace, unity and sustainable development to thrive. So far, these have been achieved through the following:

- **Radio and Television**

Pidgin builds a bridge between the Standard English that is often not available to the broader masses and the indigenous languages that are too numerous to be broadcasted. This is why the indigenous languages slowly became displaced by Pidgin. It is often used to make clear what something is about, in a way that most people are able to understand. Of course there are also people who cannot speak Pidgin, but the growing acceptance of it influences the media more and more. Therefore, such people are faced with it every day and subsequently get used to it. In addition, NP which was considered a derogatory code and came to be associated with expressions of humour at some point in Nigerian history, is today used also for serious plots and dialogues. Currently, one of the most popular FM radio stations in the country, Wazobia FM, runs all of its programmes in Pidgin.

- **Newspaper and Journals**

Today, NP is accepted as a mean of communication. Several newspapers publish poems, cartoons and whole articles in Pidgin. The usage of Pidgin in press does not only help a typical NP speaker to improve his language, it also gets other readers in contact with it and therefore corrects the impression that Nigerian Pidgin is a language of lower people.

- **Music**

The music industry is not left out in this trend as many Nigerian music artistes sing in Pidgin, in order to reach out to their teeming number of fans from across the country. The use of NP enables them pass their messages to a larger audience rather than to just a selected few. Another advantage of Pidgin is the sound in general. In Nigerian music where Nigerian topics are discussed, a language with indigenous influences and rhythm might be more suitable.

- **Literature**

Presently, a number of literary works has been written using pidgin. Aig-Imouekhuede's poem, "Stew and Sufferhead"; and Ken Saro Wiwa's collection of songs, "Dis Nigeria Self", for instance are written in Pidgin. Not only this, Mamman Vatsa's "Tori For Geti Bow Leg", Ezenwa Ohaeto's "I wan Bi President" and "If To Say I be Soja", are also expressed in Pidgin to communicate to a wider audience. Edwin Oribhabor's "Abuja na hevun, na kpangba an oda puem dem" published in 2010 is another pidgin literary work existing in the body of literature (Esizimotor & Egbokhare, n.d. & Egbokhare, 2001).

Conclusion

This paper has advocated the adoption of Nigerian Pidgin as Nigeria's national language to promote unity in the country. It is believed that a common language will bring about national cohesion,

harmony and unity in the country as well as ensure sustainable development. A national language would ensure that there will be national interest, as well as see that corruption, nepotism and favouritism is eradicated from our society. When there is a national interest that people are attached to, regional and personal interests will be of the barest minimum. A common language would also help to strengthen national integration.

From our daily experiences, we see how the use of the Nigerian Pidgin bridges the gap between the rich and poor, the educated and uneducated, the white-collar job people and traders, people with different religious affiliations, as well as people of different ethnicities in Nigeria. When these gaps are constantly bridged, unity will become inevitable, and sustainable development will comfortably thrive.

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