

VERNACULARISM AS IDEOLOGY

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Abstract

Exclusion has become a cultural element of our species. The barricades serve to set one apart, to differentiate one from one's fellows. The aim is to dominate. Terminologies, backed with elaborate theories legitimizing this division are churned out as an afterthought to suit practice. Deconstructionists point at this as proof of the ephemeral nature of all exclusivist endeavours and show at once that their only purpose is the creation of social conditions and states of affairs that oppose reality. Vernacularism is an example of the human person's exclusivist tendency. As applied to language, vernacularism categorizes certain languages as inferior in relation to other languages. This paper undertakes a critical study of vernacularism in language. Through a process of deconstruction, the paper shows that vernacularism is an ideology, and therefore a social construct. The paper exposes factors that construct vernacularism and argues that such construction is intended for domination and exploitation

Introduction

Metaphysical anthropologists, among other specialists, are fascinated by the phenomenon of language. This fascination is enhanced by the subsequent realization that language is one of the identity markers of the homo sapiens. Thus, to speak or to possess the ability to do so is to be human. This line of thinking is at the background of Martin Heidegger's (1973: 21) declaration that it is "...exactly language that makes of man that living being that he is, inasmuch as he is man." The core of this reveals immediately the equalizing role of language

among humans. It points at once to the natural and unqualified egalitarianism established between human persons simply because they make use of language.

Besides its role as an identifying element of the human persons, language also plays the role of window of understanding of the human person. The human person is an epistemological milieu that poses unparalleled challenge to understanding. Hence, the belief that the human person is an impossible study, popularized by Mondin, is attenuated by the phenomenon of language. Language is the major means through which any attempt can be contemplated for it holds the key to the understanding of the being of the human person. It offers the hope and indeed fulfils the hope that the being of the human person can be assessed. The mystery in all this is that, in any attempt at studying the human person, the subject of study, the instrument of study and the end of the study are the same. This position holds if it is held steadfastly that the human person is identified by the fact that he makes use of language. Thus, to study language is to study man.

If it is accepted that language is a defining element of the human person, then the last point of the preceding paragraph takes one back to the beginning as it reminds us again of the equalizing role of language established by nature. If social relations reveals anything contrary to this reality, to the fact that all human persons are equal on account of their possession of language, this should be taken at once as one of the human person's attempt to thwart reality, to relegate the real and assume the zone of the unreal as the real. The foregoing discourse, therefore, serves to introduce the kernel of this study. This paper intends to pursue an argument that proves the preposterousness of an alternative way of thinking which tends to suggest that human languages are graded and as such engaged in unequal relationship with each other. The argument is that the labelling of some languages as vernacular

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because they are considered inferior to other languages is mere chauvinism built on unsubstantiated assumptions and social practices.

On Vernacular and Vernacularism

From its earliest usage, vernacular has remained an expression of inferiority and debasement. *Verna*, the Latin root word from which vernacular was derived was used by the ancient Romans to designate home grown slaves. The home grown slave was the product of a careful and selected inbreeding between two 'good' and healthy slaves or between a healthy female slave and her master. In terms of manners and industry, the home grown slaves were considered to be better than other slaves since their births resulted from a careful process of selection. Thus, in the slave markets of the ancient Rome, the home grown slaves commanded higher prices than their imported counterparts accessed through wars, colonial invasion, or piracy. More than other indices, it was the Latin language ability of the *verna* that gave him or her the edge over others including his non-*verna* mother as he "could be trained in more valuable skills that relied on literacy in Latin." (Howard 2005, 175).

Notwithstanding his market value and general utility, a *verna* remained a slave and his identity as a human being was well stuck at the periphery. Indeed, the Roman conception of a slave was the same with that of the Greeks as portrayed in Aristotle's theory of slavery. Aristotle felt that slaves were mere things. He taught that some people were naturally fashioned for slavery. Still in line with his general ethical outlook which focuses on virtue, Aristotle holds that to be categorised as a natural slave, one must exhibit incurable inferiority in intellectual, leadership and moral abilities.

Only through guesses and conjectures can the manner in which the *verna* of slave translated into the *vernacular* of

language be deciphered. To arrive at this, attention must be paid to the historical development of Latin language, and especially to the fact that the same language was differently available to the various classes of the Roman society. It must also be recognized that the version of Latin language accessible to the slave, *verna*, was considered inferior to the type used by his master. With very few exceptions, the Roman slaves lacked the type of education cultivated by the Roman citizens that turned them into a “cultured” personality, a civilized man, with appropriate manners of speech and behaviour. The slave communicated in vernacular. In actual sense, the vernacular was a mere accent of the Latin language unmitigated by the advantages of formal education. The slaves were rated lowly and the language with which they communicated, the vernacular, was considered unedifying.

Today, vernacular no longer refers to a language used exclusively by slaves. This transformation began with the translation of the word across borders penetrated and conquered by the Romans in such a way that tongues different from their own were referred to as vernacular. Research shows that this understanding was already in full force by the time of Cicero. Thus, vernacular became the language of barbarians. The Roman conception of a barbarian as a man of no culture (where Romans assumed erroneously that their own culture was the only culture) played important role in giving vernacular the meaning it took later and to which the word continues to be associated. The only contemporary contribution to the understanding of the term is its transportation into other fields like architecture, medicine, and so on. However, whether in medicine, architecture or language, it is the same meaning that the word vernacular plays up in the human mind whenever it is uttered.

Now, one may poke directly at the heart of the present concern by raising the question, what is vernacular? Kingston

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(2003, 48) gives an answer which he holds is a fall out of America's attempt to address the overlooked architecture of the common man. He writes that vernacular is “an umbrella term for anything which is not high style.” In architecture, taste, whether high or low, is determined mainly by one omnipotent factor, wealth. High style, sociologists hold, is the exclusive culture of the elites, and some privileged bourgeoisies. The elites of each culture are always juxtaposed with the peasants or artisans of the same culture. Thus, while the elite culture is high style, the peasant culture is low style. In this sense, the low style culture becomes an indictment of the peasants for their underachievement. In as much as Kingston's definition seems to capture certain characteristic element of vernacular, it is wrong to hold tightly to it as it gives the impression that vernacular, that is the low culture, always exists side by side with the high culture in every society. From this perspective still, both are subcultures of a super-culture which both belong to.

Zelinsky's definition closely mirrors that of Kingston as he designates vernacular as “the product of the spatial perception of average people, the shared, spontaneous image of territorial reality, local or not so local, hovering in the minds of the untutored.” (Zelinsky 1980, 1). What Zelinsky does here is portray vernacular as an effortless adoption of common practices within one's geographical limitation. This adoption is presented as the habit of the illiterate and unlearned members of a society who may exist side by side with learned members of the same society. The emphasis here is that both literacy and illiteracy engender in their possessors dissimilar mannerisms. It is the mannerism engendered by illiteracy that Zelinsky conveniently calls vernacular. While we may concede to this meaning in architecture (Kingston's work was based in architecture) and other fields (Zelinsky writes from Geography), we must state at once that it does not capture the

heart of the term in language. Keep in mind that the word originally referred to language and that its ascription to other fields is only a recent transposition.

What then is the meaning of vernacular as applied to language? Bauman (2008, 32–33) took the descriptive route to provide an answer. He writes that vernacular is a:

Communicative modality characterized by: (1) communicative resources and practices that are acquired informally, in communities of practice, rather than by formal instruction; (2) communicative relations that are immediate, grounded in the inter-action order and the lifeworld; and (3) horizons of distribution and circulation that are spatially bounded, by locality or region. The vernacular, furthermore, can only be understood in dynamic relation to the cosmopolitan; they are opposing vectors in a larger communicative field. If the vernacular pulls toward the informal, immediate, locally-grounded, proximal side of the field, the cosmopolitan pulls toward the rationalized, standardized, mediated, wide-reaching, distal side.

Bauman's description that vernacular is characterized by "communicative resources and practices that are acquired informally, in communities of practice, rather than by formal instruction" gives the impression that only languages not yet codified in alphabets and not included as part of any academic curriculum qualify to be regarded as vernacular. It is exactly this understanding that animates Žižek's submission that "there is no pure *logos* without writing." (Žižek 1993, ii).

In Bauman's description, there is an obliteration of an understanding of vernacular prevalent in the mind of many

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persons who have recently used the term as reference to a language. What Bauman fails to understand is that many languages that have attained literate status are still referred to as vernacular. More recently, the author of this article came in contact with a literature that refers to all Nigerian languages as vernacular despite the fact that a good number of these languages are well-standardized languages with elaborate vocabularies and other linguistic attributes. In the same way, Mputubwele (2003, 276) labelled all non-European languages, albeit African languages in the Congo (former Zaire), about 250 or 300 of them, as vernacular languages. This only helps us to question Bauman's submission that vernacular refers only to languages that are undeveloped and illiterate. It is this understanding that vernacular does refer only to illiterate languages that propelled Wright to pen the following words:

Past or present, someone speaking in the vernacular might invoke proverbs but rarely abstract theories or learned quotations (other than the Bible or similar religious texts). Vernaculars deal with matters in the here-and-now, with daily life rather than with theoretical abstractions. These are decidedly the languages of the street and the home used to barter for goods, joke with friends, comfort a child, praise a meal, taunt a foe, entice a lover. (Wright 1998, 477).

What Wright suggests is that a vernacular language can never be used in the complicated and specialized fields of endeavour like technology, science, international relation, politics, philosophy, jurisprudence, and many other areas desiring serious intellectual devotion and discipline. This is at the core of the charge made against African languages by Kehinde (2009, 77) who feels that "most African languages ... have not

been well-equipped to handle the concepts and terms of modern sciences and technology.”

An alternative view is provided by Sheldon Pollock who knows that the present understanding of vernacular transcends the view of it as an illiterate and undeveloped language. He defines it from the perspective of provincialism and shows his understanding that even literate languages are currently referred to as vernaculars. Look at this citation taken from his article, “The Cosmopolitan Vernacular,” where he writes that “vernacular intellectuals define a literary culture in conscious opposition to something larger; they choose to write in a language that does not travel and that they know does not travel-as easily as the well-traveled language of the cosmopolitan order,” (Pollock 1998, 8).

Note immediately Pollock’s observation that the vernacular is a lame language incapable of moving beyond its native environment. It is a handicapped language, rooted and immobile. More than anything, it is this perceived immobility that defines the vernacular status assigned to language today. Pollock seems to have transported us immediately into considering the circumstances upon which the non-vernacular languages travelled. Once more, we must allude to history if we must ascertain the circumstances that propelled languages to travel. Historical facts and empirical evidences reveal that Greek, Latin, French, German, English, Portuguese, and Spanish are the languages that may be regarded as the travelling languages in that they can boast, either presently or in the past, of at least 1 million speakers and appreciable number of literature written in them outside their environments of origin. The conditions that exported these languages outside their immediate environments related to the imperial and colonial ambitions of their owners. Consequently, the languages became instruments of conquest and subjugation. Thus, when Pollock regards certain languages as incapable of

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travelling, his charge is not against the languages *per se* but against the owners of the languages who lacked the military ability as well as imperial and colonial ambitions to transport their languages outside their borders.

Taking cognizance of the foregoing, the belief that there are languages suited only for the homes, the village squares, drinking bars and market places is what, in the context of this paper, is regarded as vernacularism. Vernacularism expresses “belief” in the gradation or classification of languages. It represents a class to which certain languages are lumped. Bourdieu (1977, 165) informs us that all forms of classifications play a political role for they serve as instruments of domination. In this brief moment, the study is guided by the insight provided by Bourdieu. From this insight, vernacularism as a term only serves to reproduce the state of affairs described by vernacularism in the minds of men, and to ensure adherence in such states of affairs. It is intended to produce in the minds of adherents that the belief that some languages are naturally inferior to others is a self-evident truth. It insists that a major way to demonstrate the truth of this self-evidence is to examine the world of science, technology, philosophy, medicine, etc., and consider the languages whose words name and whose vocabularies conceptualize the major terms of these signs of the highest human achievements.

Ideology

Hoffman and Graham (2006, 4), see all ‘isms’ as ideologies. This insight they offered was a source of sole influence in regarding vernacularism as ideology. The formulation of the word, ideology, stretches back to the French revolution when Cabanis and Antoine Destutt de Tracey coined the word, ideology, and defined it to mean “a science of ideas,” (Hoffman and Graham 2006, 4) “a theory of ideas,” (Althuser 1994, 120). The emergence of the term in the aftermath of the

French Revolution may have influenced Habermas to hold that “there are no pre-bourgeois ideologies.” (McLellan 1995, 2). What Habermas seems to aver is that since the French Revolution that inspired the coinage of the word was a bourgeois Revolution, both the concept and idea of ideology have the same historical origin. A counter to this view is provided by Hoffman and Graham (2006, 3) who argue that the history of ideology is coterminous with the history of state formation. They toe a line that seems to identify earliest political philosophies as instances of ideology. In this sense, they argue that both Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas’ works, for examples, qualify as ideology since they were “ideas that impacted upon society and moved people into action in relation to the state.”

The view that the search for a history of the concept or idea of ideology as embarked upon by Habermas as well as Hoffman and Graham is a futile exercise is held by Althusser (1994, 121) who argues that “ideology has no history.” Althusser accepts that he borrowed his phrase from Marx and Engel who were the first to formulate the view that ideology has no history. However, while Marx and Engels view ideology as a non-existent phenomenon, an illusion, without a place in history, Althusser gives the formulation a new meaning and writes that the expression that “ideology has no history,” is his own way of capturing the eternity and *omni-historicity* of ideology. Althusser clarifies (1994 122) that his own usage of the expression is to portray the fact that ideology is “omnipresent, transhistorical and therefore immutable in form throughout the extent of history.”

It is not only the history of ideology that is problematic. The conceptualization or definition of the term has also posed challenges. Two traditions stand out in the attempt to define ideology. These traditions have given rise to what Longhin (2012, 286) following Bobbio, calls two meanings of ideology:

the weak meaning and the strong meaning. The first tradition was inaugurated by Cabanis and Tracey with their definition of the term as the science of ideas. This definition portrays ideology as a value-neutral concept concerned only with understanding the structure of ideas. The neutrality of this tradition, vis-à-vis values, is the ground upon which Longhin based his categorization of this first tradition as weak meaning of ideology. This categorization only stands if value is the only measure of strength of a phenomenon. But the understanding of ideology from this perspective of the formulators of the word is buried only in epistemology and not value. Thus, when Terry Eagleton (1994, 179) writes that “consciousness is essentially contemplative” he actually captured the mind of the formulators of ideology.

The second tradition which is mainly a critique of ideology and portrays ideology as a value-laden concept and which Longhin refers to as strong meaning of the term was inaugurated by Napoleon. Hoffman and Graham (2006, 3) write that Napoleon was the first to imbue ideology with some negative characteristics which paint the picture of the term as dogmatic, prejudiced, blinkered, closed, totalitarian, intolerant, false consciousness and exclusive. These characteristic attributes of ideology inform Napoleon’s dismissal of the term as “a cloudy metaphysics that ignores history and reality.” (McLellan, 1995, 5).

It is this negative description that has stuck in the subsequent definition of the term. In Samuel Huntington’s definition we find a careful but unsuccessful attempt to avoid the negatives that are prevalent in this definition of ideology. When Huntington (1951, 454) declares that “by ideology I mean a system of ideas concerned with the distribution of political and social values and acquiesced in by a significant social group,” he paints a picture of ideology as a term whose only concern is with proselytization of values but his definition

is silent on the tension that always accompanies values. By linking ideology with values, Huntington presents it as a worthwhile venture, desirable in itself because acquiescence to it promotes not only the good of the individual but also that of the whole society. However, a further analysis of Huntington's position as his essay progresses shows that ideology inaugurates, for its adherents, the earthly counterpart of the heavenly paradise of religion. From this perspective, ideology enables members to win and redistribute social gains to themselves. At the end, if religion is intended to secure heavenly kingdom for adherents, ideology intends to secure the earth for the benefits of adherents. Consequently, it can be said that Huntington imbues ideology with the same character possessed by religion.

This connection between ideology and religion is not new as some scholars have even considered religion as an instance of ideology. As Althusser (1994, 120) shows, the same connection may have been at influence when Marx, in the nineteenth century, defines ideology as "the system of the ideas and representations which dominate the mind of a man or a social group." If Marx and Engel go on to dismiss ideology with the same words with which they dismissed religion it is because of the similarities which they discover in them. Althusser (121) captures Marx and Engels's dismissal of ideology thus:

In *The German Ideology* ... Ideology is conceived as a pure illusion, a pure dream, i.e. as nothingness. All its reality is external to it. Ideology is thus thought as an imaginary construction whose status is exactly like the theoretical status of the dream among writers before Freud. For these writers, the dream was the purely imaginary, i.e. null, result of day's residues', presented in an arbitrary arrangement

and order, sometimes even 'inverted' – in other words, in 'disorder'...Ideology, then, is for Marx an imaginary assemblage [bricolage], a pure dream, empty and vain, constituted by the 'day's residues' from the only full and positive reality, that of the concrete history of concrete material individuals materially producing their existence.

Althusser's exposition of Marx and Engel's understanding of ideology shows that ideology is the transposition of the imaginary on the real. Hence, the ideologist is not content to leave ideas in the world of forms where they were abandoned by Plato. He brings them into the world and wants the world to be organized according to them. This thinking lies behind Althusser's (123) definition of ideology as "a 'representation' of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence."

Having settled this, Althusser goes on to discover the reason for this transportation of the imaginary into reality. He attributes the formulation and sustenance of ideology to few privileged individuals or groups who see ideology and the misrepresentation of reality it inspires as instruments of domination and exploitation of others. The mind is targeted as the starting point of this domination. In the matrix of this whole interaction, two S(s)ubjects emerge wherein the Subject assumes the role of the superior whereas his sub-other, the subject becomes a natural inferior. Once that is achieved, controlling the individual 'subject' to perform actions intended by the exploiter "Subject' becomes a mere consequence.

Thus, the ultimate aim of ideology is control. Based on this, Huntington argues that ideology appears under different names depending on who assumes control of the social and economic space within a historical situation.

Liberalism is the ideology of the bourgeoisie, socialism and Marxism the ideologies of the proletariat, and conservatism the ideology of the aristocracy. Conservatism thus becomes indissolubly associated with feudalism, status, the *ancient regime*, landed interests, medievalism, and nobility; it becomes irreconcilably opposed to the middle class, labor, commercialism, industrialism, democracy, liberalism, and individualism. (Huntington 1951, 454).

The consequence of this reduces all men to (S)subjects and all social relations to products of ideology, and all histories to struggle between ideologies. It also means that there is no position of innocence upon which one can stand to challenge any prevailing ideology for to counter an ideology is to produce a new ideology for only ideology can wrestle with ideology. Althusser is so exasperated by this circuitous web that he finds no way out of it. His declaration that 'man is an ideological animal by nature,' is uttered out of frustration that there is no way out as every attempt seems to encircle one more and more, and what seems like an honest effort to liberate mankind becomes an innocent effort that invents a new ideology. If this were to be the case, then all forms of ideology as well as all dominations they inspire are justified.

The only way out of the web is to negate Althusser's position that ideology has always been a constant index of human history. If ideology, as has been shown, is a creation of man, we must look towards an order that transcends human creation. We must make reference to state of nature, particularly as popularized by Rousseau and Rawls. These two versions of theory of state of nature emphasize the state of equality devoid of domination prevalent in the state of nature.

Thus, the state of nature is the original position, a positionless point from which humans operated in a state of perfect equality.

Rousseau provides an argument that establishes his firm belief in the sanctity of nature and its ways and we may argue that it is this sanctity that ideology erodes. The view of ideology which we have concentrated on is one that views it as domination. Domination establishes inequality. Rousseau equates inequality with evil and hold that evil was absent in the state of nature. Thus, to hold that ideology is coeval with the history of man is to foist upon man the heavy weight of the original sin. He writes that it is “an incontestable maxim that the first movements of nature are always right. There is no original perversity in the human heart. There is not a single vice to be found in it of which it cannot be said how and whence it entered.” (Alberg 2001, 774). What Rousseau actually holds is that sin, evil, inequality, and we can include ideology since we consider it as generative of inequality, has a history. Rousseau sees the emergence of society as the starting point of this history. The pre-societal world is a world of individuals concerned with how to cater for their immediate needs whereas society created a world that bound men together and set up a group of men that sought to appropriate to themselves the aggregate labour of the whole unity. Rousseau comments thus on how the origin of inequality, domination and evil is linked with the emergence of society.

But for man in Society ...it is first of all a question of providing for the necessary, and then for the superfluous; next come delights, then immense wealth, and then subjects, and then Slaves; he does not have a moment of respite. What is most singular is that the less natural and urgent the needs, the more the passions augment, and, what is worse, the

power to satisfy them; so that after long prosperity, after having swallowed up many treasures and desolated many men, my Hero will end by ruining everything until he is the sole master of the Universe. Such in brief is the moral picture, if not of human life, at least of the secret pretensions of the Heart of every Civilized man. (Cited in Alberg 2001, 779).

Rousseau does not feel that only his Hero is corrupted in the process of entering into society. The process also affects every man since, according to Meier (Cited in Alberg 2001, 782) "in becoming sociable humans become "slaves" , they become "evil" and they begin to live in the opinions of others." Rousseau does not feel that a return to the state of nature is the ultimate answer to this quagmire. Despite the freedom which entrance into society deprives man, Rousseau also feels that the same society made it possible for him to escape all the limitations of the natural animals. Henceforth, Rousseau's duty is centrally how to retain what is good in the state of nature in the human society that succeeded it. The general will which he recommends is meant to take care of this. What the general will seeks to eliminate is the control of a man by another man's opinion. It also seeks to transcend all the limitations and error of judgment to which a single man acting alone as was the case in the state of nature could subject himself to. The relevance of Rousseau is not related to his recommendation of the general will. A thorough analysis of the content of the general will reveals that it is only a metaphysical jargon. Rousseau spoke of will as a physical object that can be assembled and measured at every point where need calls for it. He also presumed that (assuming the assembling of wills is possible) individuals contributing their wills will desire an uniform object as to push the general will in one direction.

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Indeed, Rousseau's relevance lies in pointing out to us that all sorts of domination and inequality, and therefore ideology are products of time.

We must now turn towards John Rawls, an author who Robert Nisbett acclaimed as the long awaited successor to Rousseau (Pojman 2003, 130). John Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* can offer a solution on how to solve the problem of ideology and its consequent domination. Rawls' argument is on how to ensure equality of persons but since groups can be regarded as persons writ-large, what applies to persons can also be applied to groups. Rawls advocates that to avoid domination of any kind we must inquire what people were to choose for themselves and others in a hypothetical state of ignorance where they are unaware of advantages that will accrue to them. Rawls argument supports the claim that if men do not know what their place in terms of wealth, status, race, power, etc. is to be in society they will choose that society be ordered in such a way that will benefit everyone equally (Rawls 1971, 21). What this means is that men, when not concerned with their own selfish interest, are capable of taking the right decisions. Thus, we take from Rawls the understanding that the organization of society outside the encircling dictates of ideology is possible.

Vernacularization: Process and Interests

As the predominant practice among humans is that most groups are identified by their languages we are invariably led to the conclusion that people are the languages they speak. This connection between speech and identity is what comes into play when we refer to the English person as one who speaks the English language. Similarly, the Igbo person is one who speaks the Igbo language, and so on. Thus, since people are identified by their languages, they subsequently assume status assigned to their languages. They are collectively great

and powerful as far as their language is considered great, and collectively common and ordinary as far as their language is considered common and ordinary. This understanding is at the background of Pierre Bourdieu's understanding of language as symbolic power. (See Bereketab 2010, 150).

Bourdieu's insight goes beyond the general view of language as a communicative tool. Scholars who emphasize the communicative nature of language assign it two functions, the emotive and the significative, whereby language expresses human feelings and describes states of affairs, respectively. From Bereketab's analysis of Bourdieu, we understand that besides its role as instrument of communication, language also plays political power role. Bourdieu specifically considers the manner in which language brings social reality into being and in legitimizing this reality as self-evidence, and unquestionable reality as an instance of political power role of language. Ideology as a term falls under this understanding.

Another ground in which language manifests itself as a political power is in a situation of language contacts. Bourdieu (1991, 5) regards the milieu for this contact as linguistic market. He writes that "linguistic market creates the condition for an objective competition in and through which the legitimate competence can function as a linguistic capital, producing a profit of distinction on the occasion of each social exchange." Bourdieu's argument is that it is through this "objective competition" that a language distinguishes itself and emerges as a legitimate language in the midst of other languages. What Bourdieu intends to describe is the process whereby a language vernacularizes other languages because it has outclassed them in linguistic market. It is this that renders such language the advantage of becoming official languages when others are labelled vernaculars.

Bourdieu errs in thinking that the emergence of a particular language as legitimate language is hinged on the

demonstrated competence of the language which he feels manifests as a result of objective competition. He neglects the economic, political and military capitals that such language brings into the linguistic market that enables it to outcompete the others. Thus, Bourdieu's analysis is blind to the historical conditions that made it possible for the so-called legitimate languages to assume their status. The emergence of Greek, Latin, French, English, and so on, at one time or the other, in the history of mankind as legitimate languages has everything to do with the military arsenal, economic advantages, imperial adventurism of the Greeks, the Romans, the French, the English, and so on. Thus, legitimization or vernacularization of a language has much to do with having, with a people's place in the system of technology production, with their consumptive ability as well as with their military capability in relation to other peoples. In all this, we must accept that there is a connection between being and having, where having determines being, and non-having results in non-being. Thus, during language contacts, a group commits all of its military and economic advantages into constituting its language as a power of control and domination. When such language is legitimated or 'officialized' it confers advantages to all who has mastered it, giving them exclusive access to both economic, political, and symbolic power. Bereketeab (2010, 152) writes that:

Acquiring legitimate competence in the conversation with the official language confers upon one a capital, a capital that optimizes the standing of the individual in the commonly shared and coveted market. Bourdieu seems to try to tell us that it is the uneven distribution of the legitimate competence of the legitimate language that spawn discrepancy in capital and power relation among social actors and groups.

The general advantages conferred by the mastery of the “legitimate language” produce envy in the minds of those who have not cultivated it. But since they lack the military, the economic and political means of installing alternative, the only option left for them is to force themselves to master the legitimate language. Bereketgab submits that failure to do this will reduce them to positions of losers who have not only lost the use of their own language but also the opportunity to draw from the economic and political resources of their society, placed in the hands of people who have acquired the legitimate language. The amount of mental, financial and epistemological resources committed into the acquisition of the “legitimate language” means that the same resources are not available for other languages.

The consequence of this is that the scramble for the “legitimate language” is what vernacularizes other languages. Now, we are closer to the truth. And we shall express this closeness in this manner: no language is naturally inferior, rather the so-called inferiority of languages that reduces them to vernaculars is a product of policies initiated to favour the language of possessors of power. An innocent mind may not easily grasp the reason behind this practice. Anderson (1996, 11) leads us to believe that there is a connection between ideology and interest. This connection reveals that every ideology is fashioned to promote and protect an interest. Consequently, vernacularism as an ideology has a number of interests that it seeks to promote, it is also these interests that promote it. In their discourse on the language of the periphery, where language of the periphery is a term invented by the authors to mean vernacular, Ashcroft et al (1989, 8) draw attention to the role political power plays in the vernacularization of a language. Their submission that “the language of the ‘peripheries’ was shaped by an oppressive

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discourse of power,” shows an understanding of power as a factor that brings about vernacularization.

Thus, in the most visible sense of it, the vernacularization of a language is intended to reduce the prestige of a people, to make them realize that their language is incapable of expressing certain realities. If you call to mind the relationship between a people’s identity and their language, you may also move further and realize that the vernacularization of a language also serves to rub it on the owners of a language that they too are naturally inferior to the owners of the “legitimate language”. What is then anticipated is the natural subordination of the inferior to the superior. Another interest that drives language vernacularization is economic motifs. Any person who uses a language different from his mother tongue as language of instruction and official communication easily understands this point. The number of textbooks imported from the country who originally owns the language as well as the direct exchange of goods facilitated by the use of a common language eloquently shows that the vernacularization of a language affects positively the economy of the official language.

Vernacularism and Language Endangerment

Bourdieu (1977, 170) writes that the relationship between language and experience is mostly hidden from us, and that we only come to appreciate this relationship during crisis moments in which everyday order is challenged. The crisis moment that precipitated this article is the discovery made by UNESCO that about 50% of the world’s 6000 languages are endangered such that an average of one language disappears every two weeks. If nothing urgent is done, UNESCO (2012) holds, all the endangered languages will disappear by the end of the 21st century. UNESCO’S suggested solution was that

well-planned policies that will arrest the drift be formulated and implemented.

UNESCO's effort in calling attention to the danger is quite commendable and more commendable is their effort to document such endangered languages. A search through the internet reveals that, due largely to UNESCO'S interest in the subject, a number of conferences have been organized around the topic in the last few years. Unsurprisingly, and in a bid to answer UNESCO'S challenge most of the conferences focused on documentation of endangered languages and finding solutions to the problem of language endangerment. However, corresponding amount of resources are yet to be committed into deciphering the reasons why languages are endangered. Discovering this will help in stemming language endangerment.

Considering that vernacularism, as we have shown, is a belief, a false belief sort of, we shall not neglect its capacity to influence behaviours. Knowing that language endangerment is a consequence of human practices, it becomes easier for us to suggest that vernacularism is the belief system, the super ideology that influences acts which endanger languages. Thus, when people abandon their languages for another, it is because they believe that the favoured languages are better suited to serve their needs than the one being abandoned. The point just made goes to the root of the problem. The advantages that will accrue from enacting policies that will help arrest endangerment, as UNESCO suggested, will be eroded if there is no conscious effort to counter vernacularism and show it as what it is, a false belief. For example, policies may entail government programmes that will ensure that such languages are taught in schools to pupils, but this will not produce fluent and proud speakers if the student is not meant to reconsider the identification of the language being taught to him as a vernacular. Thus, the first place to begin is to show that the

word, vernacular, as attributed to language means nothing. This must also go hand-in-hand with equal redistribution of social, economic and political capitals, hitherto reserved for the official languages to all languages. What this means is that an applicant seeking employment in the Nigerian Federal Civil Service, for instance, will not be expected to demonstrate proficiency in English language once he can show mastery of any of Nigeria's about 400 languages. One who understands the complicated nature of Nigerian society may feel that this is a radical solution but it is not more radical than the introduction of English language in the same territory about a century ago. The argument that is being offered is that the redistribution of capitals and premiums, hitherto reserved for official languages, will generate not only proud speakers but also writers in the same language.

Conclusion

I have initiated an argument to show that what is regarded as vernacular in language has no real existence outside social relations. The implication is that vernacular as well as vernacularism is social construction. I have emphasized that political and economic power are central in creating language vernacularism. Egginton's (2010, ii) reference to the words of an aide to former George Bush of America shows the manner in which power calls certain practices into being.

We're an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you're studying that reality—judiciously, if you will—we'll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that's how things will sort out. We're history's actors ... and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do.

Thus, it is left for us to decipher the true relation that exists between one language and another. And such true relation is expressed in the fact that all languages are equal and that the perceived unequal relationship attributed to languages entails a misrepresentation.

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