

FRENCH LANGUAGE EDUCATION: A TOOL FOR SOLVING SECURITY CHALLENGES IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Language is a basic requirement and an indispensable tool to solve security problems in human society. It has been noticed that nothing can be achieved in any part of the world without effective use of language. Language is instrumental to our social interactions in all ramifications. Nigeria as an Anglophone country is bordered by the francophone countries to the north, east and west with seventeen (17) out of the thirty-six (36) states sharing borders with the four countries. For a good working relationship and productive communication with francophone neighbours, the Nigerian populace especially the security agencies require a good knowledge of French language. This article examines the brief history of French language education in Nigeria and the security challenges bedeviling Nigeria. The article also x-rays the role of French language Education to solve the security challenges in Nigeria. With the recent spate in insurgency and terrorism, kidnapping, banditry and other forms of security threats in the country, French language in particular, should be considered as a tool for enhanced security and maintenance of peace. The article suggests among others a compulsory learning of French language by the Nigerian armed forces and other security agencies and concludes that the importance of French language within the context of operations cannot be overemphasized.

Keywords: French, language, education, security challenges, armed forces.

Introduction

It has been established through daily human activities that language is a basic requirement and an indispensable tool for the existence of human society.

Without the effective use and good understanding of a language nothing can be meaningfully achieved. In fact, Okeke, (2012) believes that ineffective use of language can threaten national security as it causes disagreements, hostilities and unhealthy rivalries. Thus, the possession of language, perhaps more than other attribute, distinguishes humans from other animals. To understand our humanity, one must understand the nature of language that makes us humans (Fromkin et al, 2003). Language is very important because it enables us to speak and be understood by others who are intelligible in the same language. There is no doubt that language of wider communication provides a country of multilingual orientation with possibility of communicating ideas, transmitting values, feelings and goals from one person to another Babalola (2019). These ideas may border on issues of preservation of life and property; mutual trust, confidence and comfort in the language village that is regarded as a nation.

According to Agbede (2009) language is the pivot on which all human activities, ranging from the most prosaic to the most profound poetic dexterities, revolve. Language, as an exclusive human activity, the seemingly exploited potentials, by man for business transactions, exchange of banter, swamping game, as well as discussing and explaining issues are made possible through the use of language. Obiegbo (2015) says that language and society are so related. Corroborating with Obiegbo, Oyediji (2007) observed that language and culture are inseparable as each throws light on the other. Culture serves as the reservoir of people's identity such as custom, attitude; norms, values, and beliefs and all these are encoded and conceptualized in the language of the people. Indeed, virtually nothing can be effectively achieved in any human society without effective use and understanding one another's language. It is a means and principal weapon for peace, growth and development of any nation. Every normal human depends, in all his activities, on the use of language to do things. Finegan (2012) opines that people use language principally as a tool to do things." Request a favour, make a promise, report a piece of news, give direction, offer a greeting, seek information, extend an invitation, request help and do hundreds of other things."

Language as a tool and reservoir of culture is said to be inexhaustible weapon used by mankind to develop potentials and activate the latent resident natural endowment in man. It should therefore be noted that as a means of principal weapons, it also has the ability to destabilize people if not properly used. In fact, language can make or mar any organization or country. As it was in the Biblical story, when the people were united and understood one another's language, the building of the tower of Babel was in progress, but immediately they did not

understand another's language confusion set in and the work was stopped. According to Anthony (2018), the tool of language is acquired or learnt by man for improved understanding of other cultures, places and daily emerging concepts that constitute our dynamic world. Language also develops every individual and opens window of opportunities for profitable jobs that guarantee comfort and satisfaction in competitive and ever increasing challenging world. Ndimele (2015) states that language does not exist in a vacuum, it has no independent existence apart from its users and the uses to which they put it. Language is prone to enhancing socio-cultural, political, economic, and scientific activities of the people in an organized society. It is instrument to our social interactions and meaningful communication in all ramifications. It gives us sense of belonging; create room for social identity, integrity and empowerment. Language is dynamic to meet up with evolving socio-political and economic values as well as challenges in various domains of life. Language is a system of communication, and therefore a vital tool for the maintenance of peace and security in a nation. In this process, French language can be used as an instrument to strengthen the ties between individuals and communities through listening, negotiations, mediation, arbitrations, adjudication and information regarding the chargers of illicit association that can be a threat to peace and security of people.

Concept of Language

Language is a phenomenon that distinguishes human beings from lower animals. Human beings express themselves using a system of vocal conventional signs characteristics of the interaction of one or more communities of human beings. Language, depending on the goal and purpose of the enquirer can be viewed from different perspectives. The major part of being human is the variety of ways in which we communicate through language by using sounds and words in speaking, singing or writing to others and reading what others have written (Bamidele & Adama, 2019).

Crystal (1994) sees language as species specific. He defines it as human vocal noise (graphic representation of thin noise in writing). Sapir (1921) in Afolayan and Bamisaye (2006) look at language "... as a purely human and non-instructive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires as a means of voluntarily produced symbols" while Osinsawo (2003) in Bamidele and Adama (2019) define language as "the human vocal noise or arbitrary representation of the noise used systematically and conventionally by members of a speech community for purpose of communication". Kluekon (1972) in Bamidele and Adama (2019) define language as "the body of word and combination of words used by a nation,

people or race for the purpose of communicating thoughts”. Going by these definitions, language is seen as purely a means of communication, thus laying emphasis on the communicative value of language (Dada, 2004). Accordingly, language is universal phenomenon peculiar to mankind. Human beings are only animals that acquire a highly developed and complex system of communication. Language as a linguistic endowment is one major distinguishing features between man and other animals.

Language is important because skilled communication underlines the most successful human interaction while failed communication can lead to unpleasant misunderstanding, rights and security challenges. Aniga (2011) sees language as a vehicle of interaction, intercommunication and practical tool for state administration in both modern and ancient times. This article therefore defines language as a system of communication and channel for interaction and attainment of peaceful coexistence in Nigeria.

French Language Education in Nigeria

Language education is the teaching and learning of any language, either as foreign or second language in a school; it is also the formal acquisition of communicative skills by an individual (Umolewa, 1978). Therefore, French Language Education draws special attention in Nigeria because of the country’s historical background, geographical location as well as its heterogeneous nature (Ademola, 2009). The teaching and learning of French language in Nigeria dated back of the 19th century. It was in 1878, that Wesley High school included the teaching and learning of German and French language in its curriculum (Ademola, 2009). However, French language education was not officially introduced into the secondary school curriculum in Nigeria until King’s College, Lagos and Government College, Ibadan Championed the teaching and learning of French as a foreign language in 1956 (Timothy-Asobe, 1999).

The teaching and learning of French language at the tertiary education level was seen to be indispensable as Nigerians who studied French language at the secondary schools would have to further the study of the course to the higher level. The University of Ibadan, University of Lagos, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University) and Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria introduced the teaching and learning of French language in their curriculum (Falade, 2008). This was immediately after Nigeria’s independence. Still at the higher education level in Nigeria, some institutions known then as Advanced Teachers’ College, which include Adeyemi College of Education, Alvan

Ikoku College of Education and University of Lagos College of Education also introduced French language into their curriculum (Ademola, 2009).

An Overview of the Security Situation in Nigeria

Security gives the import of safety of lives and properties of individuals. Longman Dictionary of contemporary English (2021) defines security as things that are done in order to keep someone or something safe. Security involves some activities geared towards the protection of a country, building or people against attack; danger etc. According to Olakooba, Awodun and Adebawale, (2017) security is a situation whereby the populace and the citizens are protect ted against attack or danger. Anyanwu (2019) submits that security is a major requirement for the development of human beings and society and it is considered the most basic need of human beings. Ojo (2019) asserts that through history, Nigeria has gone through devastating times and that conflicts and violence has killed thousands of people. Also, Mohammed (2015) posits that since the return to democracy in 1999, Nigeria has witnessed various backwardness in her socio-political, economic, education and some other activities so that meaningful existence has given way to violence, ethnicity, religious crisis, political violence and politically motivated assassination. These issues have threatened the survival of Nigeria as one of the most important countries of the world in terms of natural and human resources.

Nigeria is totally in disarray today as far as its security situation is concerned. This can be seen in militancy in the Niger Delta where billions of dollars were lost through attacks on oil installations and thousands of people were either maimed or killed completely. It can also be seen in the rising of Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and Eastern Security Network (ESN) in South East where many people are killed every day. It can also be seen in sustained kidnapping across the length and breadth of Nigeria where it has become a business venture. Above all the defining face of security challenges in Nigeria today is the political and religious violence in North-Eastern part of Nigeria been perpetrated by Boko Haram insurgency. This started with 2011 post-election violence in Kaduna and other northern cities and continued with bomb blasts in Suleija and Abuja at the police Headquarters and the UN building (Mnda, Jembe & Tyonongo, 2021). With all the efforts of the security agencies, the terrorists have continued to rack the Nigerian security. For example on the 28th of March, 2022 they attacked the Abuja Kaduna bound train, killing many people and taken other 65 persons for ransom. As that was going to stop there the Kuje prison attack on 5th July, 2022 is the last straw that broke the camel's back. The military has swung into action to bring the perpetrators to justice. More recently, the issue of banditry and cattle rustling have

reared its ugly head with farmers/ herdsman clashes, has made the security situation very precarious indeed. This has seriously affected socio-economic activities on most business enterprises have closed, schools shutdown, health care grounded and water supply, electricity and other forms of social services stalled. The adverse effect of the level of security challenges on national development is very clear, emergency of many IDP camps, crisis, increased crime level and violence.

French Language and Security Challenges in Nigeria

One of the fundamental issues that made French language known language in Nigeria is the custom of signing the Governor's book contained in a gate house at the entrance to the Government House in Lagos (Faniram, 2016). The declaration of French as second official Language of Nigeria during Late General Sani Abacha's regime in 1996 paved more way for recognition of French Language education by some of the policy makers (Ademola, 2009). The Minister of Education under the Military Head of state, General Sani Abacha declared at the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs, on December 14, 1996 that French would be introduced as a second official language and studied compulsorily in the primary, secondary and post-secondary levels of our educational system. The National Policy on Education (Revised 2004) officially states the status of French Language in Nigeria as follows:

For smooth interaction with our neighbours, it is desirable for every Nigerian to speak French. Accordingly, French shall be the second official language in Nigeria and it shall be compulsory in the Primary and Junior Secondary Schools, but non vocational elective at the Senior Secondary school.

The above statement has become imperative due to the fact that seventeen (17) states in Nigeria have borders with the Francophone countries of Benin, Niger, Chad, and Cameroun. The seventeen states are: Adamawa, Benue, Borno, Cross-River, Jigawa, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Kwara, Lagos, Niger, Ogun, Oyo, Sokoto, Taraba and Yobe respectively. Agber (2004) posits that "47.2% of Nigeria share boundaries with francophone countries"

Looking at this relationship between Nigeria and her Francophone neighbours in terms of solving the security challenges bedeviling the country, the use of her neighbour's lingua franca is a means to attaining security challenges in Nigeria. Security is effective with the use of the generally accepted language for communication. Thus, for effective communication and cordial working relationship with the neighbouring countries where it is believed that Boko Haram

insurgency, banditry, kidnapping and other forms of security threats are coming from; Nigerians need the knowledge of French language

In spite of several measures undertaken to maintain peace and avert conflict, breaches such as insurgency, cross border challenges or conflicts, are rampant in Nigeria. Attempts to curb these security challenges through the use of arms and ammunitions have not always produced the desired results. For instance, the war against Boko Haram in the North-eastern part of Nigeria with its attendant woes and destruction has dragged on for two long in spite of the recent relative success recorded by the Nigerian military against the insurgents. Even after the guns are silenced, there is no assurance that the war can be declared to have come to an end. The heart of aggressors has to be won and the surviving citizens caught up in the theatre of war have to be re-assured of their safety. This is where the role of French language as a plausible means of averting war through intelligence gathering from the grassroots and interaction with the people ‘winning’ war through enlightenment and interaction with the people and sustaining peace through the potent weapon of continued dialogue with the people in relevant language comes into play (Michael, 2022).

Over the years, cross-border security challenges have proved difficult to manage with the use of arms and ammunitions, there is therefore need to dialogue for intelligence gathering; need for Nigerian troops to acquire competence in language predominant in states bordering the francophone countries for reasons earlier stated. Since French is the language of our neighbours. For this reason, the Nigerian government alongside the Nigerian Army authorities has come to realize its importance to our armed forces. French language functions as communicative, informative, interactive, socio-cultural, diplomatic, economic and educative tool. Developing passion for French language by Nigerian armed forces and the security agencies will help them communicate better during their various military operations abroad, especially those on security operations at the borders between Nigeria and other francophone neighbours. This probably explains why the military authorities recently made French language compulsory for all Army personnel through its incorporation into officers’ promotion examinations. French language is an assessed subject in some career courses and examinations for Nigerian Army personnel (Michael, 2022).

Also, as part of efforts to enhance effective communication between Nigerian Army and other French speaking West African armies, the Nigerian Army commissioned a standard computerized French language laboratory in Lagos. The chief of Training and operation, Nigerian Army, Major General Jack Nwaogbo,

said this move is born out of the need to eliminate the communication barrier between the Nigerian Army and its French speaking neighbours. He added that it was observed the eighty five percent of the Nigerian contingent in Mali on peace keeping French, the local language of the Malian people (Michael, 2022). It is “the need for the Army personnel to communicate fluently with francophone speaking counterparts, during peace-keeping missions” which led to the provision of the French language laboratory” (Voice of Nigeria, 2013).

There is just no over stating the importance of French language to the Nigerian Armed forces. If more security personnel learn the French language they would be better equipped in intelligence gathering in order to frustrate the terrorist’s despicable plans. More importantly, the acquisition of proficiency in French language in Nigeria which has the potential to also prompt a better understanding of the way of life in francophone Africa, is therefore and appreciates better understanding as a basis for maintenance of national and regional peace and security cannot but be made difficult. Language plays a key role in maintaining peace and security both locally and internationally. It takes understanding of the language of the environment to effectively carry out any successful key operation. The personnel of the Nigerian Armed Forces and other security agencies have become the key players in many peace support operations all over the world and so need to be multi-lingual.

Suggestions

This paper has attempted to highlight the importance of French language and suggest the following:

- The federal Government should endeavor to ensure the actualization of the teaching of French language in our primary and secondary schools so that many more of our youths will be afforded the opportunity of being exposed to the language and thus reap its benefits.
- Personnel of other Para-military security outfits like the Nigerian immigration service, the Nigerian customs services, the Civil Defence among others should also be encouraged to learn French language so as to ease interactions with other francophone neighbours thus making them more efficient and effective in tackling the security challenges.
- Efforts should be intensified to make our armed forces personnel to key into the learning of French language so as to make them more relevant for peacekeeping and peace-support operations naturally and globally.

- French language workshops should be organised for teachers and public speakers to enable them acquire the correct rhetorical devices for different speeches.
- The Nigerian armed forces and other security agencies should liaise with the Nigerian French Language Village (NFLV) for training and retraining of the armed forces in Nigeria.

Conclusion

This article has attempted to explain how French language can be used to solve Nigeria's security challenges. Security is a cherished value to many Nigerians. Yet, many do not care any longer, about new developments but go about igniting conflicts and insecurity which stall development. The problem is exacerbated by our ever-porous border and the ineffective use of language. It is therefore no longer news that man and officers of the Nigerian Armed forces are faced with language barrier which impedes the success of their operations in the Nigerian borders with their francophone neighbours. They have also made moves to encourage personnel to learn to speak French language bearing in mind the enormous benefits with hope it will be sustained. It is also hoped that other military arms like the Nigerian Air force and Navy will do same. The Nigerian police, custom, immigration and other Para-military institutions would also take seriously the learning and speaking of French language. This is to reduce to the barest minimum the problem of language barrier faced by our military in tackling the security challenges. As mentioned in the article, maintaining of peace and security is not always about arms and ammunition but sometimes communication. Speaking the language of our francophone neighbours will help them in intelligence gathering, averting a conflict and also in sustaining peace. The learning and speaking of French language by Nigerians will also go a long way to promoting trans-border relationship, be it political, economic, or socio-cultural interactions between Nigerians and its neighboring countries of Benin, Chad, Niger and Cameroun. This will be a plus, to attaining border security as well as national security.

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