

THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE IN NATIONAL RE-BRANDING: A SOCIOLINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Language, whether indigenous or foreign, is a marker of identity. The language that a man speaks, the names he bears, the songs he sings, the tribal marks on his cheeks, his country's national anthem, coat of arms and national flags are symbols of personal and national identity. Language education policy, which shapes a man's global and local view and perspective, is instrumental in any national rebranding project. The author posits that there is a correlation between indigenous language and national rebranding project. Language is the shaper of ideas, and dissects nature along lines laid down by our language. In support of this theory of cultural relativism and linguistic determinism, the author posits that the rebranding of a nation can only be achieved through a rebranded language policy, and a well planned and implemented multi-lingual education system. Transformation agenda, in any nation, is best accomplished through the utilization of indigenous languages and literature. The author believes that the battered image of Nigerians and Nigeria can be redeemed by indigenous literary works which are rebuttals of the obnoxious negative branding of Nigerians. National rebranding has the objective of re-orientating Nigerians to imbibe a new spirit of patriotism, a new spirit of abhorring or shunning corruption and following the rule of law. The author has proved that the role of Mother Tongue, and andragogical or political education can rebrand Nigeria. The Federal, State and Local Governments therefore have a role to play. These change agents must also work hand-in-hand with parents, traditional rulers, opinion leaders, religious leaders and educational institutions for an effective rebranding enterprise.

Keyterms: Brand, Branding, Rebranding, Cultural Relativism, Linguistic Determinism, Global Views, Moral Re-armament, Mental Decolonization.

INTRODUCTION

Let us first consider what the terms "brand", "branding" and "re-branding" mean. The word "brand" is an industrial term which means a type of product made by a particular company. Branding therefore means putting a name-tag on a product, on something or even on somebody, a person, a group of people, an animal, a community or even a nation. Branding may connote describing somebody as being somewhat bad or unpleasant, especially in an unfair manner. Re-branding is sometimes, somewhat derogatory as it entails some messy work of removing dirt, stain or blemish from something or somebody. It is however a cleansing project, which could be done through environmental sanitation, moral purification, moral re-armament, political re-orientation, attitudinal purging, mental decolonization, cultural re-awakening or rejuvenation, spiritual purgation and perhaps

atonement.

Re-branding project and its essence

What is this re-branding project which Nigeria is embarking upon, and what is its essence? It is common knowledge that Nigeria has been given all kinds of brand names in the Western Media. Nigeria's name has been bastardized both at home and abroad. The media – foreign and local- have portrayed Nigeria in bad light. Nigeria media practitioners have not even helped the matter. The daily media menu offered to the readers are offensive, prussic, unpalatable, odious to the ears, and distasteful. Banner headlines such as two hundred (200) children died of polio or malaria, or guinea worm, in some parts of Nigeria, fifty (50) girls died of VVF, three (3) LGAs submerged by floodwater, Governor XYZ made away with 2.5 billion Naira, Ten Billion Naira scan rocked Ministry of XYZ, EFCC haunts ex-senators, NEPA ex-boss is on the run, police arrested five drug barons, customs

had a duel with smugglers, ten criminals jumped bail at Kirikiri Prison, fifteen trailer-loads of LGAs' fertilizers disappeared, and so forth. Then the western media add their own news of woes, such as Obama snobs Nigeria, the World Court rejected Nigerian nominees, Scotland Yard haunts twenty Nigerian illegal immigrants, carnage on Nigerian roads, sectarian and internecine war ravaged some Nigerian communities, ballot papers snatched at gunpoint, collapsed buildings killed thirty in Lagos, militants blew up two oil pipelines, terrorists burnt down churches and police posts, etc. What a worrisome image. But are the media practitioners telling lies? The electronic media have done their own damage too to Nigeria's image. Pornographic films, Eurocentric songs and dance, Americo-centric sub-culture are the daily menu, while trigger-happy hoodlums and militant youths, rapists, drug addicts and boko haram insurgents are the daily dramatic personae on the local television. The Nigerian film industry has also not measured up to expectation because Nigerian culture is also portrayed in bad light; cultists, armed robbers, erring government functionaries, corrupt politicians, fetish pastors and ritualists parade the scene with their brazen faces. They are presented as though they are sacred cows who cannot be caught by the long arm of the law. This is a negative image which calls for re-branding. What then is the essence of re-branding? Nigeria and Nigerians need to be re-branded to remove the shame that has enveloped the nation. The toga of shame or infamy put on by Nigerians needs to be shed-off through national re-orientation, self-directed attitudinal change coming from the hearts, moral penance, spiritual re-birth, democratic re-education and character cleansing. Attitude to work and to public properties has to be changed. Selfless service to the nation, rather than the philosophy of grab-grab, needs to be encouraged and rewarded. The local media have a big role to play. The media both print and electronics can redeem Nigeria's image through effective language use. Pornographic language, coarse invective and tirade can be replaced with refined diction, polished syntax and semantic purity. Columnists, newspapers editors, freelance writers should use indigenous languages to write on and about the virtue of honesty, dedication to duty, moral rectitude, selfless

service to one's fatherland, and also write biographies of honourable statesmen and women whose exemplary characters could be regarded as legendary. Such writings have the power of moralizing and hence of re-branding the readers.

Theoretical Framework

Mother Tongue (MT)

Indigenous language or mother tongue is regarded as the bed-rock of nation building. It is the most important tool with which societies are organized, and it is hardly possible to talk of national development without including the language with which the people formulate their thoughts, ideas and needs. According to Olaoye (2007), indigenous languages perform the following re-branding role:

Instrumental Function: Language is used for getting things done. The Federal Ministry of Information uses languages (English and the Nigerian indigenous languages) as campaign tools for sensitizing Nigerians on the need for the re-branding project. Languages are used in the training, retraining of civil servants, the academics, the lawmakers, while the politicians are being re-branded through retreats all carried out through the instrumentality of languages. The essence is to get these categories of Nigerians to imbibe new socio-political, cultural and economic ethos of a new Nigeria. The essence of law-making is also to sanitize the nation so that it will be a peaceful place to live, and to create opportunity for justice, fair play and equalitarianism. Constitutional reform can only be carried out through the use of languages. The essence of this is to re-brand Nigeria and Nigerians. It is to control man's egocentric tendencies, greed, avarice and Kleptomania. Lawmaking is a language-sensitive activity or exercise. Responsible and responsive lawmaking is to save people from the clutches of slavery, oppressive rule, corrupt leaders, tyrannical rulers, and to chasten men and women of shady character who have given Nigeria a bad name. Implementing legal, political and economic reforms is tantamount to re-branding the nation, and this task is carried out through languages. Misuse and abuse of language lead to injustice, insincerity, rape of democracy, deception and corruption. Politicization of language use is the stock-in-trade of corrupt government. The word "corruption" which is

synonymous with economic sabotage/suicide, national calamity, fraud, moral decadence, mortal sin, anti-Christ practice, terrestrial and celestial scourge, omnipresent/omni temporal curse, is given ridiculous watered-down terms as mal administration, economic mistake, judicial error, legislative miscalculation, professional incompetence, constituency affairs, administrative failure. What a funny malapropism!

Regulatory Function: Language is used for controlling people's behaviour, for instance through:

- Prohibition, as in "don't cheat", "don't urinate here" "don't bribe", "don't take bribe", "don't take what does not belong to you", "don't engage in examination malpractice" and, "don't join bad gangs".
- Through threat of reprisal, especially if behaviour is not stopped, as in "I will punish you if you do that again", "you will go to jail if you don't stop stealing", "you will be rusticated if you don't stop cheating during exams".
- Through disapproval of behaviour, as in "that is bad of you", "No, stop it!" and "that is not done here!".
- Through emotional blackmail, as in "eh! You will kill your mum", "you will kill the ministry like that" and, "you will give the provost hypertension"!
- Through categorization of behaviour governed by rules and sanctions, as in "that is not allowed here" and, "its taboo here", it is an abomination".

Interactional Function: Languages are used for carrying out speech act illocution, such as for persuading people, dissuading, advising, warning, commanding, directing, guiding. These are re-branding terms which carry perlocutionary force.

Political Functions: Political linguistics is designed to train people in the art and science of political campaign, grass root mobilization, electioneering gimmicks, and sloganeering. Political linguistics is a useful tool in political education. Citizens know more about their fundamental human rights, and the responsibilities that go with privileges.

Child-Rearing Function: Language is a powerful weapon for child-rearing practices. Using precepts and rules of speaking or linguistic etiquette, children are initiated into their parents' speech community. Through songs, folktales,

proverbs and adages, children are taught some moral lessons, how to speak with moral finesse, how to respect other's opinions and views and, how to engage in constructive criticism and dialogue.

Transmission of Knowledge and Culture: Knowledge and cultural values are transmitted through language, particularly Mother Tongue. The inculcation of the right values and attitude to life is done through MT. Mother Tongue education is therefore a tool for the national re-branding project. Still on the role of indigenous languages, Bakare (2000) asserts that MT has the capacity to develop children's curiosity, manipulative ability, spontaneous flexibility, initiative, industry, manual dexterity and mechanical comprehension, all leading to self-confidence, resourcefulness, creative reasoning and, all-round development.

Mother Tongue Education and Youth Empowerment:

MT Education is the most fundamental tool for youth empowerment. It is a weapon for the up-lift of the underprivileged, the marginalized, the un-informed or the illiterates in the society. The culture of reforms initiated by the previous administration is designed to engender sustainable change in democratic governance. This reform is to be carried out through education, and language is the tool for doing this. This is one of the Millennium Development Goals that runs through the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDs). Youth empowerment is a re-branding enterprise, as the empowered youths are likely to shun corruption, and make positive contribution to national economic growth, peace, security and political stability.

Framework of Analysis

Linguistic And Educational Andragogy

Andragogical education is a learner-centered approach, which sees the child or learner as quite educable. It thus prepares child-friendly methodology whose goal is communitarian, participatory and altruistic. Learning is to bring about positive change in the learner. This type of education humanizes the learner, and develops his critical and creative thinking. Language is however the tool for achieving andragogical educational goals. Products of this school of philosophy become better and well-cultured

politicians, better lawmakers, better leaders, responsible democrats, and well re-branded homo-sapiens. Nigerian languages are veritable instruments for the full empowerment of Nigerian youth.

Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights

The linguistic equivalent of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights is the 1996 Universal Declaration of Linguistics Rights. These rights are:

- The right to be recognized as a member of a language community.
- The right to the use of one's language, both in private and public life.
- The right to the use of one's own name.
- The right to associate with one's own language community.
- The right to maintain and develop one's own culture.
- The right for one's language and culture to be taught.
- The right of access to cultural services.
- The right to an equitable utilization of one's language in the media.

These rights, Ogunranti (2000) believes, have conferred on all Nigerians, through their MT, the right and opportunity to actively participate in party politics, express their feelings and emotions through the media. These rights are ingredients of empowerment, and the linguistics studies can be regarded as a useful source of empowerment eventuating in total re-branding of the people. Empowerment through language education promises the youth an escape from intellectual and economic poverty, and hence from oppression. Applied linguistics for instance is capable of acculturating the youths in the art of speaking, especially public elocution skills, phatic communion skills and illocutionary acts. In political linguistics the youths learn about linguistic and cultural taboos such as diplomatic stealing or computer wizardry called yahooism, another name for internet robbery, and other vices such as rape, avarice, squandermania, cultism, duping, looting, etc- all of which are vehemently disapproved of in the community. Shunning these vices can lead to linguistic and cultural re-branding of the youths. This is because the cultural sanctions that go with the

breach of language and cultural etiquette are very heavy. Since language can be regarded as the celestial electricity which illuminates the darkest part of the linguistically blind person, the study of language and linguistics is capable of transforming the youth from their primordial barbarity or pristine primitiveness and reprehensible social misdemeanour to men and women of moral finesse. From ontological point of view the youths get spiritual empowerment through what Olaoye (2001) calls knowledge of the language of religious worship, that is, the language of praise worship, intercession and the use of evocative epithets for spiritual "Rite de passage" leading to spiritual cleansing and re-branding.

Language, Literature and Culture

Indigenous language, literature and culture are inseparable as tools for national development, and as veritable tools for national re-branding. There is no literature without language. Asade (2000) asserts that literature is the matrix of the socio-cultural ethos of the people, and the weapon of sustenance. In literary language, satire is an artistic weapon for sanitizing the society. Literature through language, warns people of dangerous and anti-social practices, ridicules people of mean and despicable character, criticizes such evils like corruption, injustice, nepotism, bribery, economic and political sabotage, oppression, colonialism and neo-colonialism, dictatorship, racism or colour segregation, literary theft, money laundering, examination malpractice, cultism, armed robbery, militancy, abduction, drug peddling, human trafficking, political thuggery, election rigging, arson, sectarian crisis, looting and extra-judicial killing. Good poetry, songs and music, especially those ones which extol good virtues and deride ignoble actions are capable of correcting societal ills.

Language behaviour is rule-governed, and any breach of language and cultural rules attracts sanctions. People's world view is determined by one's language and culture, and this lends credence to Sapir-Whorfian (1921) hypothesis of cultural relativism and linguistic determinism. Language is thus a shaper of ideas. people dissect the world through the instrumentality of our indigenous languages. Language adaptation however brings about

language growth and development, and this in turn affects man's language and cultural re-orientation, socio-political and economic out-look and modernism. For instance new words and expressions have entered into the lexicon of the indigenous languages through linguistic globalization. There is knowledge explosion through mass communication and information technology, and all these lead to advancement in science and technology which have a formidable re-branding role to play in nation building. Computer appreciation is now being made easy through the construction of indigenous languages keyboard which has linguistic facilities such as tone markers-diacritics, circumflex, tildes, cedillas, umlaut and special orthographies. The youths become empowered through all these linguistic facilities. An empowered youth is a re-branded youth.

Onomastics and Re-Branding

Naming, otherwise known as onomastics (Emenanjo, 2004), is a sociolinguistic and anthropological practice or a cross-cultural tradition in the ethnology of mankind. Names, whether derived from places, events, things, animals or objects are linguistic and cultural tools for communication, for branding and re-branding people. Onomasiology – the scientific study of names and their semantic import – tells one about the origin of names, the namers and the namees. It provides evidence about language change diachronically and synchronically, provides information on the sociolinguistic, religious and economic backgrounds of the people. Names are being used to trace a lost race or community, to identify tribal allies and enemies, to control human excesses and bring orderliness into the society. Children, the youths and even the adults are given names (branding) according to their physical, psychological traits, their behaviour or the circumstances surrounding their birth, or even events, stories, around them. After naming or branding children, their behaviour during their development gives them new names. This is re-branding. A child with bad character is branded as a vagabond, a never-do-well, a bastard, a rogue, the incorrigible. The youths who misbehave in the society are called names such as felons, criminals, accursed, while female youths who lack discipline or those

who talk glibly or are harsh are called viragos, termagants. Those who have itching palm for money are called kleptomaniac. A nation that refuses to grow or develop is called a backward nation, while one which revels in cheating and financial irresponsibility is called a corrupt country. Re-branding, in a positive sense, is a salutary project, and it involves socio-political, spiritual, economic, physical and environmental cleansing.

Nigerians are responding positively to government's clarion call for support in the country's re-branding project. Amnesty is now a re-branding political lexical item used by the Federal Government in resolving the seemingly intractable Niger-Delta problems. The erstwhile belligerent militants whose ethnonym (i.e. ethnic name) has been changed to an alteronym (i.e. name given to an ethnic group by other people in order to cast aspersion on people) now more than ever deserves a better re-branding name. But really a sarcastic alteronym (ethnolinguistic stereotype) such as "Nyamiri" for Igbo money desperado, "ljebu" for Yoruba hand fistled people or any person who finds it difficult to part with money, "Munchi" for Tiv people with passion for covetousness or expansionism, while "Gambari" is a sarcastic name for Hausa people despised by the Kanuri. The term "corrupt nation" is Nigeria's alteronym given to her by Amnesty International and some international communities. Sarcasm has the capacity to change a person, people or a nation so derided; it has a purging potency. Sarcastic alteronym is a badge of opprobrium that forces people to make a bonfire of their damnable behaviour and turn a new leaf. This is the power of language.

Discussion

English Language in Nigeria

Nigeria is a multilingual nation where English Language has acquired the status of a second language to many people, while it is a third language to others. It plays a significant role in education, politics, government administration, the judiciary, economy and legislation. English today can be regarded as the lamp with which the youths can travel through the education tunnel (Ige, 2000). It is even now being referred to as one of the major Nigerian languages (Ogundare 2004). This is because its role as a

unifying or integrating force is obvious. It is a compromise language of communication in a multilingual setting since political resistance has foreclosed the choice of an indigenous language as a Lingua Franca. English according to Adekunle (1974) is the linguistic and symbolic embodiment of political power and authority. English Language has to be used side-by-side with the Indigenous languages for an effective national re-branding project.

English and Globalization

English is the vehicle of globalization, and through it came information and communication technology (ICT) which has a pervasive influence on education delivery. ICT, through television, radio and satellite communication, on-line services, e-mail and e-learning, has brought the world to the door-step of the youths and other computer literate people. ICT is therefore a source of youth empowerment, and hence a tool for national re-branding. Through the internet and world news, accessed through English, western democracy has become a regular menu on the nation's political agenda. Political and language education made possible through globalization has started to open people's eyes to such issues like the value of peace, justice, freedom, equity, dialogue, compromise, tolerance, reciprocal respect, adherence to the rule of law, constitutionality and due process. These are some of the ingredients for sustainable democracy. They are potent tools for the Nigeria's re-branding project.

Englishization of the world, and particularly the pervasive influence of English on Nigeria's polity, has an unsavoury consequence. Lawal (2006) asserts that English language in Nigeria behaves like an overbearing monster bestriding the nation like a colossus, launching its devastating missiles on Nigerian languages. According to the author, English is the most adventurous and adulterous of all languages today. It behaves, in its brazen penetrating force, as a rapist, not sparing even French, another malevolent aggressor. Homogenization and hegemonization are the goals of English Language expansionism. Linguistic hegemony is manifested in three ways: (a) linguistic genocide (a linguicidal trait), a situation where English is monopolistic, totalitarian and destructive, decimating or killing Nigerian languages; (b) linguistic imperialism, a

situation where English becomes a dominant language linguistically, politically and economically; and (c) linguistic opportunism, a situation where English dominates and controls other languages that cannot compete with it. Englishization is, after all, not a dare devil project as it has both integrative and instrumental functions. It is essential for participation in global democracy and inter-national trade and economy. It has also enriched the vocabulary of many Nigerian languages. It is therefore another potent source of empowerment and national re-branding.

Language Planning and Documentation

The language question in Nigeria is like a recurring decimal which has defiled all mathematical ingenuity. The multiplicity of languages and dialects in Nigeria require Federal government's serious commitment to language planning and documentation. Multilingualism brings about the problem of language loyalty which also sometimes results into political instability. The choice of a Lingua Franca among the Nigerian autochthonous languages is still a mirage, and this gives Nigeria a bad name. The development of a sense of nationalism, in a country with about 400 indigenous languages, is a very difficult task. Nationalism and nationalism are difficult to achieve in Nigeria because Nigerians have allegiance to their ethnolinguistic groups. This leads to ethnic chauvinism, tribalism, sectionalism, sectarianism, divisionism, and an eventual collapse of a nation-state. Nigeria therefore needs to be more committed to a pro-active language planning, for the purposes of language purification, language revival and standardization all through orthographic reform and modernization. Through these exercises, Nigerian languages can get re-branded, and then contribute better to national development. Language revival, for instance, helps in preserving language from extinction. Language documentation as a salvaging work (Akinlabi and Connel 2007), is a sure way of salvaging endangered Nigerian languages from total extinction. Language planning and documentation should therefore be part of the national re-branding project.

Conclusion

The re-branding of national languages leads to the re-branding of their speakers, because multilingualism is

capable of removing ethnic stereotypes, nepotism and other ethnic-based corruption. Having analyzed the role of mother tongue, andragogical and political education, the linguistic rights of the citizenry, the role of literature and the efficacy of onomastics, the author is convinced that indigenous language has a great role to play in the national rebranding project. The author believes that a well-planned and implemented multilingual and multi-cultural education policy is capable of bringing about national integration, altruistic nationalism, unity in diversity, socio-economic and political stability and sustainable democracy that will correct or change Nigeria's image before the eyes of the international communities. In conclusion, the paper suggests that indigenous languages with English Language can form a powerful tool that is capable of re-branding Nigeria. However, the Federal, State and Local governments have to work hand-in-hand with all stake holders – parents, traditional rulers, opinion leaders, religious leaders and educational institutions – for an effective national re-branding project.

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