

African Cultural Anthropology, Social Justice, and Human Rights

SUDERSHAN EARLA

Lecturer-in-English

Hindu College

Guntur

Email: searlas@rediffmail.com

Abstract:

The significance of language to human existence was covered in this Article. It claimed that language satisfied the fundamental need for human contact on both an individual and a group level. Though a common word, culture was frequently misinterpreted and applied incorrectly. Consequently, the study explored the essence of culture. It was emphasised how closely language and culture are related. The article considered the abundance of languages on the African continent to be problematic. The history of colonialism in Africa combined with the ongoing globalisation trend made it difficult for the continent to develop efficient language planning and policy. The report concluded that Africa desperately needed a robust language policy, regardless of the aggravating circumstances. Since languages are cultural messengers, policies should recognise the importance of preserving and advancing African cultural values via the use of the native tongues. It is important to recognise that linguistic human rights, which include the right of every person to communicate with others in his or her native tongue, are a fundamental component of democratic processes. The conclusion of this paper cautioned against the uneven development of African nations that favoured science and technology. The development of the linguistic resources on the continent needs to get equal priority.

Keywords: *Language Policy, Indigenous African Languages, Cultural Values, Linguistic Human Rights, Globalization etc.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Any human community has always had delicate issues surrounding language. Language-related issues are given top priority and relevance by the majority of people and governments worldwide. The majority of countries worldwide has developed and is zealously defending their language regulations. Language is taken very seriously because of the important roles that it plays in every human culture. Linguistic functions mostly serve communication purposes. Without a question, the most basic component of any society is the capacity for individual and group communication. This fundamental need for communication is underscored by the diversity of human society. The role language plays in the creative ability of people is invaluable. Emphasizing this special role of language, Vuolab (2000), points out that

Our imagination would not produce such an endless capacity for creating new ideas if we human beings had no language... Without it a human being would not be able to explain or teach any idea or technique to the next generation. Without a human language no technical wonders would exist.

Vuolab's observation, as highlighted above, not only stresses the creative role of language but its pedagogical importance as well.

There is no way to measure the whole impact that languages have had on human development. As Adekunle (1995) correctly points out, governments everywhere attempt to determine how to treat or manage language resources within their borders because language has profound effects on cultural identity, national cohesion, and economic development. To put it briefly, every country's efforts to improve language standards and usage need to be considered sacred.

Language and Culture:

There is a tight connection between language and culture. It is important to define the term "culture" in this context. In general, the word's definition is overly restrictive. For many people, culture is merely the clothes that people wear to dances and festivals. According to Ngugi (1972), certain African academics, artists, and

politicians have a limited understanding of culture since they only consider folklore, dances, and drumming from the jungle.

The word "culture" is broad. It alludes to a people's manner of living in general. It is a people's entire way of life, reflected in their institutions and structures related to technology, economy, society, and politics, as well as in their norms and values. According to Ngugi (1972), culture is a way of life that a people have created as part of their collective effort to survive and make sense of their entire surroundings. Using the same term again, Ashcroft (2001) views culture as

A description of a particular way of life, which expresses certain meanings and values not only in art and learning but also in institutions and ordinary behaviour. The analysis of culture, from such a definition, is the clarification of the meanings and values implicit and explicit in a particular way of life.

In truth, culture encompasses every facet of a man's existence, including everything that helps him survive, which includes both sociological and physical elements. As a result, material and non-material culture are included in the two components of culture.

The worldview of a people is shaped by their culture. On the other side, the language that people use reflects their worldview. The intimate connection between language and culture is explained by this fact. Ochs and Schieffelin (1984) have highlighted that language acquisition occurs in a social environment and that a child absorbs a great deal of social information while they are learning a language. This is because of this.

It's also important to recognise that children's language is developed in meaningful and socially acceptable ways. A language's vocabulary accurately captures the culture of the society in which it is spoken. Language's very structure has a close relationship to culture. Thus, learning a language has to be viewed as a process of combining linguistic code knowledge with socio-cultural understanding. Stated differently, the acquisition of socio-cultural knowledge is closely linked to the linguistic coding qualities. Language and culture are two social processes that are linked.

The condition of the native African languages:

Without a doubt, the situation for the native African languages is not good. These languages are considerably behind their counterparts on other continents in terms of usage and development. Because of the languages' developmental stage and distribution, very little is known about them outside of the small communities in which they are spoken. Most native African languages have not yet been transformed into written or reading forms. Furthermore, in the places where they are used, they are not given the official status. Numerous factors are impeding the efficient utilisation and advancement of African languages.

In actuality, the abundance of languages in the African content is problematic. Language planning in Africa has significant difficulties due to the continent's multilingualism and close proximity of language communities. Language planning is a laborious task because of the vast array of African languages, the wide variation in the number of speakers, and the lack of relationship between language communities and state borders. The continent's language planners and policy makers have found this aspect to be genuinely unmanageable.

An further significant element that has contributed to the unfortunate state of events regarding African languages is the unfavourable language policies of African national governments towards these languages. Many governments throughout the continent approach language planning from a strictly functional standpoint. These countries believe that fostering widespread participation in political and economic activity requires a virtual monolingual policy. Focus is being placed on one or two languages in order to accomplish this goal. These languages are designated as national or official languages. Other language speakers face pressure to adopt the so-called official or national tongues or give up their right to actively participate in government affairs.

Although a sizable portion of society may be able to participate in political and economic activities thanks to such a program, it ignores the linguistic human rights of those who speak other languages. Furthermore, the policy determines the kind and degree of a person's involvement in politics and the economy based on their proficiency in the official or national languages. This is a flagrant breach of a person's linguistic human rights as well as an obvious disregard for linguistic variety.

Since the majority of people are denied the opportunity to actively engage in government, the strategy is also anti-democratic. It creates a conflict between the government's interest and the freedom of an individual or group to speak in the language of their choosing. Linguistic human rights abuses happen anytime a language or its speakers are marginalised for any cause, independent of the agent causing such marginalisation, as correctly noted by Gutberlet (2005). African languages and their speakers are being marginalised by the current language policies of several African national governments.

The unfortunate situation of African languages can be attributed to a number of factors, including the continent's history of colonisation and the ongoing processes of globalisation. From the fifteenth century until the latter part of the twentieth century, Europe colonised the majority of African nations. To the disadvantage of their native culture, the majority of Africans were forced to embrace and absorb the culture of their colonial overlords over this protracted period. Africans adopted western culture, which was reflected in the language and other facets of national life. The colonial experience led to the perpetuation of the idea that European languages are more important in African linguistic contexts than native African languages.

The processes that lead to nation-states becoming more interdependent across social, political, economic, and geographic barriers are referred to as globalisation. Large-scale international business transactions and a growing reliance on communications technologies define this interaction. The processes of globalisation encourage monolingualism and work against the preservation of mother tongues, which poses a possible threat to linguistic human rights. Local customs, such as speaking the native tongue, are compelled by globalisation to adapt to the needs of the dominant global societies. Globalisation has consequently led to a focus on cosmopolitan languages like English, French, German, etc., at the expense of the languages used in less developed nations.

A Favourable Change in Attitudes about the Indigenous African languages is required.

Based on the aforementioned assessment of the condition of indigenous African languages, it is imperative that a robust and supportive language policy be implemented to safeguard these languages. The national governments of Africa should, above all, recognise the need of upholding linguistic human rights. These rights include the freedom to communicate in one's native tongue during all interpersonal communications as well as the practical competence to do so. It is insufficient for a state to merely tolerate several languages on its territory. States ought to take the lead in implementing administrative policies that support people's and communities' proactive language use.

It is time to reevaluate most African governments' positions on linguistic diversity. These regimes view allowing linguistic variety as a danger to the state's political unity and geographical integrity. It is thought that promoting linguistic diversity could cause various groups to strive for their own kind of statehood, which would then cause social unrest and political strife, ultimately leading to the collapse of the state. In contrast, minority groups are usually forced to express their collective right to self-determination, which leads to social and political conflict, because they are denied human rights, including linguistic human rights.

The need of preserving the native African languages is further highlighted by the necessity of safeguarding African cultural values. Language and culture are intertwined, as this essay has already shown. Since language is one of the means by which culture is preserved and conveyed, it is an essential part of culture. Maintaining a diversity of African cultural traditions, including traditional ecological knowledge, depends on the efficient development and use of the continent's indigenous languages. In actuality, language policy and planning have to include protecting the diversity of languages spoken throughout the world. It is imperative that African languages are not permitted to become obsolete or extinct. It should be born in mind that as languages disappear, humanity loses knowledge about the world it lives in.

II. Conclusions:

The use of language is crucial in all facets of human life, including social, political, economic, and so forth, as this essay has shown. In the heart of human development, language plays a crucial role as an identity identifier for both individuals and social groups. The process of the continent's political, economic, and cultural decolonisation depends heavily on the native African languages.

The president of Tanzania declared Swahili, an indigenous African language, to be the official national language of the nation. For the first time in history, Julius Nyerere spoke on Republic Day in Swahili in 1962. According to Abdulaziz (1972), Nyerere's comment on this symbolic gesture highlights the significance of speaking in the native tongue in the following ways:

...Today we have been given the freedom to talk in our own language. We shall now enter the field of discussion with confidence, with no doubt as to the real meaning of what we are saying, nor whether we are correctly understood by others.

This comment highlights the many advantages of speaking one's native tongue. As of right now, Africa is seeing an unequal distribution of efforts focused on the advancement of languages and science and technology. The best course of action would be to give equal weight to both subjects because science and technology cannot flourish in a nation unless they are taught in a tongue that the kids can easily understand.

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