

CAN RECOGNITION OF LANGUAGE RIGHTS ENHANCE NIGERIANNES?

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Abstract

Language right is an individual/group right. An individual has a right to the use of his native language in particular instances and an ethno-cultural group also has right to her language. For some to build Nigerianness there should be only one language (English). Others argue that people have a right to the use of their native language even in the public square in as far as it does not harm public business. There are Nigerian languages that can to a certain degree be called national even though they are not the official lingua franca of the nation. These are languages such as Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba, etc. These languages are widely spoken and are examined in some national examinations. These languages are equally on national television regularly. Apart from these, most other Nigerian languages are rarely authentically recognized and encouraged. They are at the fringes of national life. While it is true that all the languages that exist in Nigeria cannot be on the same status of acceptability among all, the government has to provide an enabling and non-discriminatory environment for individuals and groups to promote their languages. The paper uses an analytic method to argue and conclude that equal recognition of language rights in Nigeria will enhance Nigerianness. Ethno-cultural groups feel a sense of belonging when their language is recognized.

Keywords: Nigeria, Language, Ethno-cultural, Communication

Introduction

The language of a people is an essential part of their cultural heritage. Remove language out of a culture and there will be no culture. Cultural values, norms, beliefs, and even practices cannot be expressed without a language. Language is a vehicle for communicating and transmitting culture. Language is tied to a people's identity. No two persons or groups of persons can communicate without language. It is through language that man understands and interprets his environment.

It is important to note that in pre-colonial times each ethno cultural group used their distinct language in communication and their language was valuable to them. During colonial times, the British who colonized Nigeria brought their own English Language and through education, the region and nation called Nigeria imbibed English as a language. While English has brought about the ability of the various ethnic groups to communicate with one another, it also brought about people ignoring their ethnic languages. Though the official language of Nigeria is English, it has not made people abandon their native language. There is value in one's mother tongue and so various ethnic languages are still in use. There is nothing wrong with this, the problem arises when one or some languages are privileged over other languages in a federation. Official public channels such as government-owned radio and television stations have programs in such languages as Yoruba, Hausa, Igbo, etc. These so-called major languages feature in national examinations such as the West African Examination Council (WAEC), and National Examination Council (NECO). In primary schools in various localities in Nigeria, pupils are taught in the language of their localities. Some stations in various states and localities do broadcast some programs in the vernacular language of those places. The paper affirms that these efforts are not yet enough and much more can be done to promote all the various indigenous languages to affirm that they are part of the national identity. There are more than 250 language/linguistic groups in Nigeria. Managing and weaving all these into one is not an easy project.

When people from so-called minority ethnic groups in terms of population, notice that their language is not well recognized as those of others, their beliefs, and commitment to the Nigerian project wanes. The central thesis of this paper is that recognition of the language or linguistic rights of all ethno-cultural groups will boost Nigerianness. The paper is written from a critical analytic method. It is written from the vantage point of philosophy. The paper proceeds by making some conceptual clarifications. When that has been done, the paper will examine what impedes Nigerianness, the imperative of language rights, and the relationship between language rights and Nigerianness.

Conceptual Clarifications

The following terms or phrases are crucial to understanding this paper. They are recognition, language rights, enhance, and Nigerianness. The term recognition is used here to mean valuing and affirming a thing or reality or person as worthy and a good thing. When you pay honour and reverence to a thing you recognize the thing or person. What is not recognized is rejected, ignored, or allowed to die. Recognition is not only theoretical but also practical. Take for instance that all human rights instruments such as the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, the Universal Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the African Charter, etc always

mention the duties and responsibilities of state and others in safeguarding and protecting human rights. Recognition of language rights here will imply that the rights are safeguarded, promoted, and facilitated. In speaking of recognition, the paper is keeping in mind Taylor (1992) and his work on *Multiculturalism and 'The Politics of Recognition'*. In that work, Taylor (1992) argues that recognition matters and “misrecognition” of others brings about both individual and group harm.

Language is a medium of communication. Language is made up of words and symbols that carry meanings and ideals among people. Mondin (2007) cites F De Saussure who states that language is made up of a “group of sounds” with a symbols system understood by the speakers of that language. For Mondin (2007) himself, “Language is by definition that activity with which man, through local or written signs, puts himself in communication with his peers...to express his sentiments, desires, or knowledge” (p.133). Adedimeji (2006) cites Adedimeji averring that the non-verbal or verbal system of signs through which human beings exchange ideas and feelings are communicated in language. Language is an enigmatic phenomenon and could even be called mysterious without which human beings cannot fully exist and live authentic lives.

Right is an entitlement that inheres in a person or group of people by the fact of their essential humanity. It is generally believed that rights are not given by society but are recognized and promoted by society. Kusumalayam (2008) says that rights are variously perceived to be claims, entitlements, liberties or freedoms, or even interests. After offering what others perceived to be right, Kusumalayam (2008) propounds thus:

... a right is that which one needs to actualize or realize the possibilities to achieve the fullness of being. Not any possibilities, but those which would actually lead one to the realization or actualization of the purpose or the goal that one have, whatever that is. For a human being, it would mean that which he or she needs to actualize all the possibilities that he or she has to become a full-fledged human person. (p. 35).

Language rights refer to the fact that an individual or a group of people are entitled to have their language used within a proper constitutional and legal framework. People should not be denied the use of their language unless they are misusing the language to harm the public good. The right to language is a cultural group right. It will suffice here to state that group rights as Dyke (1985) asserts are, “simply that a community may have interests, and that some of these interests are compelling enough that they ought to be (and are) classified as rights” (p. 208).

The word, “enhance” here is used to mean boost, support, promote, and protect. Recognizing language rights can enhance Nigerianness. Nigerianness is used as a concept to mean what it means to be a Nigerian, a citizen of a country called Nigeria. Nigerianness as a term is a fluid concept. All that Nigerians hold in common and as a common heritage that can uphold the values of the national anthem and the just values in the constitution can be referred to as Nigerianness. All that enhances the unity and peace of this country contributes to Nigerianness. Nigerianness is quintessential of what it means to be a Nigerian. It is our common heritage, patrimony, and “matrimony” and all that makes Nigeria a nation of one common destiny. Because of inequalities, linguistic injustice, economic discrimination, and oppression that both individuals and ethnic groups have suffered, many no longer believe in the Nigerian project. Some feel they can only be protected in their ethnic enclaves. It ought not to be so.

Obstacles Impeding Nigerianness

What are the obstacles or the factors impeding Nigerianness? Nigeria is an unfinished project. It is not yet fully a nation in the real sense. There are many Nigerians who don't feel an attachment or a sense of belonging to this nation. Daily, there are thousands of Nigerians who want to migrate out of this nation, some legally, others illegally. Nigerians have died in Libya, the Mediterranean Sea, the Sahara Desert, etc. Some young people feel that their so-called nation has abandoned them. They are jobless, and unemployed with all their university degrees. They feel angry and frustrated. Nigerians are wallowing in foreign jails and some have been executed. The daily Nigerian newspapers and news are filled with agitations from almost every section of this nation.

Socio-economic conditions of so much suffering, poverty, and pain affect people's sense of belongingness. The price of basic commodities that people need to live a good life on, is on the increase daily. People's incomes are not rising as expected. Some people are being retrenched as a result of the poor economy. Before now, the minimum wage in this country was N18, 000.00. It has been increased to N30, 000.00. Even that cannot meet up with the rising cost of goods and services. And even this new minimum wage many states have not started to pay.

Continuous and rising insecurity in the land is also a factor that impedes Nigerianness. Terrorism either from Boko Haram or other militant groups on the land has destroyed thousands of lives and properties. Amid insecurity and destruction of lives and properties, some people feel the Nigerian project is a failed project. They feel that those in authority have abandoned them. Corruption and embezzlement of public funds are the order of the day in Nigeria. Money that should have been used for developmental needs is siphoned away. Nigerians are committing suicide frequently.

The rise of ethnic-based and militant groups such as Egbesu Boys, Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni Peoples (MOSSOP), Odua People's Congress, Movement for the Emancipation of Nigeria, Niger Delta Avengers, Indigenous People of Biafra (Ipod), etc are all indications that people are angry with the Nigerian federation. People feel they have been deprived of their rights and justice. You need to read the bill of rights of ethnic-nationalist groups. They spell out their grievances against the Nigerian state and enunciate their rights. There are agitations for autonomy in many parts of the land. Groups like the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) even want outright secession from the Nigerian federation. Regarding their agitations about language, MOSSOP (1990) complained thus: "That the Ogoni languages of Gokana and Khana are undeveloped and are about to disappear, whereas other Nigerian languages are being forced on us." This is in addition to their complaints of being deprived of commensurate benefits of the oils found in their land. MOSSOP (1990) resolved among other things that: "the use and development of Ogoni languages in the Ogoni territory" be given priority by the federal government. The agitations of the Ogoni people have not abated as their environment and culture have been devastated by oil exploration in their territory. The Ijaw Youths (1998) equally complained against the Nigerian federation for the mistreatment and injustice that they have suffered from the Nigerian federation. They declared all land and resources in Ijaw land as theirs. They demanded justice and self-determination. Painfully enough the agitations in the Nigerian federation have not abated. Because of the injustice that they have suffered, many ethnic groups clamour for autonomy and their commitment to the Nigerian project is often dwindling. One of the things that make ethno-cultural groups in the land to be aggrieved is that their language is denied and often suppressed. Many authors such as Okediadi (2008), Gana (2003), Anam-Ndu (2003), Dare (2003) Elaigwu (2010), Otite (2000), Alubo (2006) have all written on the ethnic tensions, militant violence, and cultural agitations that threaten the federation and make it difficult for Nigerians to live in peace and harmony. All these impede Nigerianness.

This paper seriously believes that privileging some Nigerian languages over others to the extent that public funds are expended to promote them to the detriment of others impede the quest for Nigerianness. That the three languages of Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo are privileged over others can be seen in the history of the national languages in Nigeria. Adedimeji (2006) notes the following: when a constituent assembly was convoked in 1977/78 there was a proposal that the three major languages be used; though it was not accepted, the 1979 constitution recognized the three major languages to a certain degree. The Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004) encouraged the use of local languages in primary and secondary schools, though implementation remains a problem.

This paper has nothing against the use or promotion of the three languages. It only argues that to enhance Nigerianness the other languages should be given pride of place and should be promoted at least within their localities. And government at both federal and state levels should invest in them.

The Imperative of Language Rights

Obafemi Awolowo as quoted by MOSSOP (1990) states: "In a true Federation, each ethnic group no matter how small is entitled to the same treatment as any other ethnic group, no matter how large." With this in mind, it should be stated right away that the right to a language is both an individual and a group right. It is acknowledged for instance that every human being has a right to freedom of expression, speech, and association. By implication an individual has a right to the language in which he wants to express himself so far, he is not harming the public good. And in so far as his expression and use of a particular language do not harm basic universal human values that protect the national or global community. The Organization of African Unity (1981) states thus: "1. Every individual shall have the right to education. 2. Every individual may freely take part in the cultural life of his community. 3. The promotion and protection of morals and traditional values recognized by the community shall be the duty of the State" (art. 17). Partaking in the cultural life of your community implies you have a right to the language of that culture a major instrument through which the values and mores of the community are transmitted. The Organization of African Unity (1981) does speak of collective rights when it speaks of all peoples having certain rights, though the concept of people in the charter is limited.

The right to language is also a cultural or group right. Donnelly (2003) rightly notes as follows: "Membership and participation in a variety of social groups is an essential part of a life of dignity" (p. 217). The following statement by Donnelly (2003) is equally right: "If a group's survival requires the systematic denial of the internationally recognized human rights of its members, it is unlikely to deserve even our toleration, let alone support" (p. 218). The advocacy for the promotion of language rights here does not in any way implies that people can use their language in opposition to authentic and cherished values of peace, justice, equity, and equality that the nation should promote. Knowing and expressing yourself in your language gives a sense of identity, purpose, joy, peace, and affinity with your ethnic people. Though as stated previously that affinity should not be used to discriminate against other people or ethnicities.

From the perspective of rights, many human rights instruments affirm cultural or group rights. The United Nations (2007) in the Universal Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples state: "Indigenous peoples have the right to revitalize, use,

develop and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems, and literature, and to designate and retain their names for communities, places, and persons” (art. 13). The United Nations places obligations on states to ensure this right is enjoyed by indigenous peoples. The United Nations (1996) enunciated that people have linguistic rights to have to be taught in their native languages and to have other subjects taught in this language. Though the Federal Government of Nigeria does not agree that this applies to people in Nigeria, many ethnic groups in Nigeria claim these rights as they affirm their indigeneity to the land in Nigeria. This paper affirms that ethnic groups in Nigeria can claim these rights as they are endogenous to the land.

Language is crucial to a people's identity and sense of belonging. Let us examine the imperative of language rights here. Donnelly (2003) rightly notes that cultural rights protect individuals especially those in minority communities against the all-powerful state/the majority community. He notes that areas of personal dignity enhanced by cultural memberships are safeguarded by cultural rights. Language is an important aspect of a people's culture. To suppress or ignore a people's language is to invariably ignore their culture.

Human beings by nature are social and political animals. Aristotle is clear on this. Their social nature cannot be realized without communication through a human language. At birth, the process of socialization begins as parents and the immediate community of the child communicates with the child through language signs or words. The Jewish philosopher Buber is clear that human beings are created for an “I-Thou” relationship. One of the ways that this is expressed is through the use of language among individuals. Modin (2007) rightly notes that one of the symbolic instruments through which man communicates with other men and interacts in his environment is language and this language is proper to man. It could be said that man is a speaking being. And it is through language that we speak. Heidegger argues:

We speak when we are awake and when we dream. We always speak, even when we do not use the word, but listen or read, dedicate ourselves to a job, or lose ourselves in idleness. Speech is not borne of a particular act of will. It is said that man is by nature a speaker, and it is true that man, diversely from plants and animals, is the living being capable of words. Saying this, we do not only intend to say that man possesses, besides other capacities, also the one of speech. We intend to say that it is exactly language that makes of man that living being that he is, inasmuch as he is man (p. 27).

Mondin (2007) rightly avers that: “language is an exquisitely human activity” (p. 134). The just mentioned writer in the same place mentions that it is developed from the minimal language of very small signs from our animal nature. Human language is developed and enhanced by human society. As a human being comes into this life, he cannot be truly socialized outside the language of his immediate environment in the beginning. It is proper that the first or one of the very first languages through which the child should be socialized should be his mother tongue. Recognizing the importance of the mother tongue, the United Nations establish February 21 every year as the International Day of Mother Tongue. The United Nations (2019) has affirmed that:

Languages, with their complex implications for identity, communication, social integration, education, and development, are of strategic importance for people and planet. Yet, due to globalization processes, they are increasingly under threat or disappearing altogether. When languages fade, so does the world's rich tapestry of cultural diversity. Opportunities, traditions, memory, unique modes of thinking and expression — valuable resources for ensuring a better future — are also lost.

The United Nations has emphasized linguistic diversity and multilingualism in both schooling and public life.

The capacity for language is innate in human beings, as Mondin (2007) notes. Without language, there will be no political socialization as Eyisi (2007) writes. The fact is that there are people who are more and efficiently literate and proficient in their local languages and it is easier to reach them in that language than to deny them of their use of that language. Modern technology now makes it easier to translate from one language to another. Government can invest more in this regard to ensure that people have a right to the use of their language. A human being needs to know his culture. A person is born into his culture. Your culture gives you identity. There are things in your culture that are better expressed in your native language. The principal functions of language according to Mondin (2007) are descriptive or representative, existential or expressive, and intersubjective and communicative activity.

There is also the perspective of indigenusness or indigenous rights that should not be ignored in this discussion. This is also related to the question of justice for ethnic people. As Ewelu (2010) notes the contact between different African indigenous languages and European languages was not friendly. The colonial masters imposed their language on Africans. They carved African nations into various groupings not minding their languages. There are nations in Europe that are not as large as some

Nigerian states and they have their language. The argument that a language group in Nigeria is too small to be promoted amid many others does not hold ground. If you were to create many ethnic groups in Nigeria into independent states they can survive. After all, they were all independent on their own before the coming of the Europeans. Writing on the amalgamation of various cultures and languages into one and the injustice this has done, Ewelu (2010) propounds as follows:

Language in Africa becomes a whole political issue (often) with much shade of blood) due to the historical fact of colonialism which amalgamated people of different languages and cultures into a country ('nation?'). Nigeria, for instance, is an amalgamation of the Hausas (over 28 million); the Yorubas (over 25 million) and Igbos (over 20 million); with the Efiks, the Edos, Fulanis, and Tivs each group counting about 4 million; and still over 350 other ethnic groups. The current population of Nigeria is said to be over 140 million. The boundaries of the present African countries (the Berlin-drawn boundaries) were so artificially created that a great number of linguistic communities find themselves belonging to a much larger political body. In some cases, a linguistic community is carved out to two, three or more different countries, for example the Hausas (in Nigeria, Niger and Cameroon), the Yorubas (in Nigeria and Republic of Benin), the Masias (in Kenya and Tanzania), the Wolofs (in Senegal, Guinea and Sierra Leone) etc. This type of *mélange* of diverse ethnic groups into an artificial nation militates seriously against the required development of African languages. The tendency often is to emphasize one or two languages to the detriment of the rest. This approach has created and continues to create tensions and conflicts among the ethnic groups involved. The Tivs of Nigeria, for instance, had to stage a bloody demonstration against the imposition of Hausa language on them in the early 1960s. (pp. 217-218).

Some African philosophers and scholars have argued for decolonization which for them is inclusive of the dethronement of European languages. English which is Nigeria's official language came with colonialism. Writing on the implication of using a language, Whorf as cited in Bell (1993) says:

Particular languages embody distinctive ways of experiencing the world, of defining what we are. That is, we not only speak in particular languages, but more fundamentally become the person we become because of the particular language community in which we grew up

–language, above all else, shapes our distinctive ways of being in the world. Language, then, is the carrier of a people's identity, the vehicle of a certain way of seeing things, experiencing and feeling, determinant of particular outlooks on life.

Commenting on Ngugi and Wiredu, Afolayan (2006) notes:

It is also not under doubt that for the process of rebirth to take off, Africans must start with the initial task of cultural revitalization. Linguistic decolonization is a vital subset of the general need for cultural decolonization. In other words, for Ngugi and Wiredu, in as much as language is necessary for thought, and the latter is crucial in crystalising cultural identities, then Africa has neglected a more crucial deconstruction, the *decolonization of the mind*, seen as the critical confrontation with the “conceptual ontologies” embedded in the foreign languages of domination with which African philosophers and scholars have unwittingly been carrying out the process of cultural reclamation and reaffirmation.

It is not impossible to rid ourselves of European languages. What this paper argues for in the light of globalization is that while using English or any European language to communicate so that all in the nation have a general medium of communication; people's ethnic languages should be encouraged and not denied. By enhancing the language rights of various ethnicities in Nigeria, people can come to have a deeper understanding of concepts, realities, and values from their cultural perspectives, not simply that coming from the English language or the dominant languages. This paper agrees with Asukwo (2009) that: “The colonial languages cannot mirror African thoughts because language is the mirror of culture in which it is used” (p. 33).

The pragmatic reality is that Nigeria is now a nation made up of many nationalities. Nobody here is arguing for separation. But to enhance Nigeria's Nigerianness, the different languages should be promoted within properly agreed legal frameworks and guidelines. When people feel victimized because they are denied the use of their languages or have other languages apart from the official language imposed on them, their sense of Nigerianness is diluted. There are pragmatic values in every language and culture. Mowarin and Tonukari (2006) note the following as some positive values of promotion of language: cohesion among the speakers of the language and positive self-image; continuation of traditional values such as knowledge of medicinal plants, folktales, and folklores. The viewpoint of Reaume (2000) is helpful here. Permit a long quotation from him.

Most people value their language not only instrumentally, as a tool, but also intrinsically, as a cultural inheritance and as a marker of identity as a participant in the way of life it represents. Their language is a repository of the traditions and cultural accomplishments of their community as well as being a kind of cultural accomplishment itself. It is the vehicle through which a community creates a way of life for itself and is intrinsically bound up with that way of life. Participation in these kinds of communal forms of human creativity is an intrinsic part of the value of human life. The particular form it takes for a particular group of people takes on intrinsic value for them because it is their creation. For the group as a whole, its language is a collection accomplishment. An individual member's use of the language is at once a participation in this accomplishment and an expression of belonging to the community that has produced it. Because this participation has intrinsic value, members of a language community identify with that language –they take pride in its use and in the cultural accomplishments it represents and makes possible. This sort of intrinsic value, attributable to particular languages and reflected in the expressive interest in identification with them, comes to the fore when two or more linguistic communities are in contact. It is in being conscious of an alternative to one's own linguistic way of life that one begins to identify the latter as a distinct form of human creativity in which one can take pride. (p. 251)

Language Rights and Nigerianness

No one is against the fact that Nigeria needs to have a common language. No one is against the fact of major ethnic languages being used as a medium of broadcast at a specified time on national radio or television. The point being made is that other languages should also be given an opportunity. Nigeria has more than 250 ethnic groups and languages. It will be difficult if not practically impossible to give space to all the 250 languages. Time and space constraints may not permit that. But because this is a federation there is a need for dialogue and consultation among all on how best to ensure that at least many other languages that are representative of many other nationalities are given space. At least if not at the national level, then at the state or other regional levels or the localities in which those languages are spoken. Since the public fund is used to promote the major languages in the national space, part of the same public fund should be used to enhance local languages at least in their localities.

With this, many more Nigerians will feel an emotional sense of belonging. For instance, the Ogoni people in their bills of rights are not asking for their language to be spoken at a national level or made the nation's lingua Franca. What they are asking for is that it be promoted in their territory. It is a fact of reality that a human being can speak and be knowledgeable in many languages. There is nothing therefore harmful when a child grows up knowing and speaking his native language, the national language of the nation, or perhaps even another major language that is spoken in the country.

While it is true that you belong to a nation like Nigeria because you are born here, that will not be enough for you to function well as an effective citizen. You need to feel a sense of belongingness, and emotional attachment, to enable you to offer your commitment. The marginalization of the languages of so-called minor ethnic groups causes social disaffection and dislocation. The people of marginalized so-called minor languages are also marginalized socio-politically and economically as Mowarin and Tonukari (2006) say. This is not to say that no persons from minority ethnic groups have ever occupied power. One of the issues in which persons from minor ethnic groups feel marginalized is that their languages are not given attention as they ought to be. What the two authors just mentioned states is still true today in 2022, and they argue further that there are persons from minority languages who feel disdain for their languages as their language is said to be not socio-politically and economically viable, and because of this these languages are continuously endangered. This also by implication endangers Nigerianness. Nigeria will be richer for her many languages and cultures.

Recognition of the language rights of various ethnic peoples to use and promote their languages within proper limits does not do away with the need and usage of a common language or the promotion of other major languages. There should be collaboration among all Nigerians and all languages should be cherished and loved. What Mowarin and Tonukari (2006) have said should apply to all Nigerians in terms of speaking more than one language. What Nigeria needs and what will enhance Nigerianness to use the words of Mowarin and Tonukari (2006) is “the attainment of bi- and multilingualism and multiculturalism by its speakers” (p. 88). Nigeria's nation-building process requires not the diminution of some languages but their promotion. The benefits of multilingualism include as the above two authors mentioning another author affirm are: multilingualists “... are less rigid in their attitudes and more tolerant of people of other cultures i.e less hostile and less on the defensive against the unknown than monolinguals... and are less single-minded and less naturally aggressive than monolinguals” (pg 88).

Okediadi (2007) rightly notes that: “though some languages gain more popularity than others that does not make any language superior to the other” (p. 375). It is true that when there is no common sense of national identity and there is no cohesion

among linguistic groups the national interest is vitiated. Enuesike as cited by Okediadi (2007) states that allowing one ethnic, cultural or linguistic group not to dominate another will foster national consciousness and national unity. The nation should act in such a way, as Okediadi notes to ensure that linguistic minorities have no excuse but to promote national cohesion. They will have excuses when they feel dominated, “hegemonized,” and controlled. If the Nigerian state promotes the development and sustenance of all languages in the federation, it is in line with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. In a nation such as Nigeria, there can be linguistic unification while at the same time respecting and preserving minority language rights, as Akinnaso (1994) argues. Ogunmodimu (2015) states:

The linguistic diversity of Nigeria can profit the nation if a multilingual language policy in which all classes of language are given due recognition is embarked upon. It is not the fact of ethnicity and linguistic diversity that constructs social problems in Nigeria; rather it is the politicizing of these differences that is the problem. Therefore ethnic diversity and multilingualism are themes that are inherent part of the nation since its creation. The proposal in this paper is for a language policy that is focused on linguistic equity for both exogenous and indigenous languages. This paper makes an attempt to resolve the majority-minority dichotomy that exists along linguistic line in the nation by allocating domains for different tiers of languages that is found in the nation. Without trying to be simplistic, the author recognizes that the four –tier language hierarchy proposed in this paper is by no means a sacrosanct order on how languages are meant to function in Nigeria. It is designed to be an alternative policy model that can be all-inclusive of Nigeria's multilingualism.

It is true that concerning the use of local languages, there is provision for it to be used in primary and secondary education following the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004) education policy. As with other things Aziza (2016) states that it is bedeviled with problems of implementation. Aziza (2016) equally relates the fact that much investment from the government has been poured into the major languages of Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo. There is need for more attention to equally be given to the development of the other languages to promote equity and linguistic justice to foster national solidarity.

Conclusion

It can be seen from the above that there are many reasons to encourage and safeguard the language rights of various ethnicities. These reasons as seen above include preservation of culture and tradition, promoting a sense of identity, etc. The paper has also noted that the ethnic people have a right to the use of their cultural language both

in private and in public following properly constituted regulations. The paper has also noted the benefits of the use of indigenous languages. Government or the Nigerian state has a duty and responsibility to promote linguistic diversity while consolidating national unity. Multiculturalism or multilingualism is not the enemy of Nigerianness or national interest. The paper concludes that recognition of the language rights of various ethnic groups will enhance Nigerianness as it will promote a greater sense of belonging especially among ethnic minorities. There are certain challenges on how to achieve this and balance multiculturalism, multilingualism, and national identity. Discussion on this is not the subject of this present paper. It will suffice to end by affirming that all languages should be equal in status in a federation whether minor or major. While certainly major languages require more resources to promote, minor languages should not be discountenanced in the process. The promotion of language rights will enhance Nigerianness.

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