

## **LANGUAGES MATTER: CHINESE LANGUAGE MATTERS NOW**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Language is the greatest attribute that characterizes human beings. It is a vehicle for culture, education, knowledge, learning and training, love.....anything. Language is vital to human existence. It is also a means by which we control, create and preserve culture. Man cannot function well without a language. Language is the most important possession and characteristic of the human beings. It is a system of communication by written or spoken words used by the people of an area. "It makes it possible for men to transmits knowledge across space and time" (Nwadike 2008). It is said that 21<sup>st</sup> century belongs to China and that makes the learning of Chinese language a very important matter now. This study is divided into introduction, what is language, functions of language, Chinese language, Chinese language: taking a global status, and conclusion.

### **1.0 Introduction**

The 61<sup>st</sup> Assembly of the United Nations proclaimed 2008 "International year of Languages" in effort to promote unity in diversity and global understanding. In his address on the ninth International Mother Language Day, 21 Februarys 2008; Koichiro Matsuura, the Director General of UNESCO, outlined the many dimensions of this production and concluded that "it is important that the idea that "Languages matter!" be promoted everywhere"

Reflecting further on this matter, the UNESCO Editorial (2008) observes: “The first instrument of a people’s genius is its language,” said the French writer Stendhal. Literacy, learning, social integration---everything, transfers through language, which embodies national cultural and sometimes religious identity for each person. It constitutes one of the fundamental dimensions of a human being.

Language is the most important possession and characteristic of the human beings. It is a system of communication by written or spoken words used by the people of an area. “It makes it possible for men to transmits knowledge across space and time” (Nwadike 2008). He went further to say, “Through it, people’s culture and world view are expressed. It is a sine qua non” Eva Engholm, a language specialist and educator, has this to say about it:

*Language is the key to the heart of the people. If we lose the key, we lose the people. If we treasure the key and keep it safe, it will unlock the door to untold riches; riches that cannot be guessed at from the other side of the door.*

## **2.0 What is Language?**

Language is the greatest attribute that characterizes human beings. It is a vehicle for culture, education, knowledge, learning and training, love.....anything. Language is vital to human existence. It is also a means by which we control, create and preserve culture. Man cannot

function well without a language. Gomwalk (2000), asserts that language regulates all human activities. Language embodies culture and to understand a culture, one must understand and appreciate the language of the culture as an essential medium of cultural transmission. In line with this, Kuju (1999:37) states that:

*“Language is the surest way through which people can retain and safeguard knowledge, wisdom and the authentic cultures, inherited from their ancestors, as well as hand them to generation after them”.*

Language is man’s most prized identity. When one is talking about one’s culture, the most prominent element of that culture is the language. That is why Ejiobih (2005) says that “Language is human specific. It is the carrier of a people’s culture, norms and values. Every individual in the society naturally would want a sense of belonging and this is usually expressed by the language’. While agreeing with the above, Nwadike (2002) has noted that without a language of its own, a nation becomes merged and lost in the foreign group whose language it is forced to speak.

Anagbogu .et.al (2001) defines language as a means which human beings devised for communicating ideas, feelings, emotions, desire, etc. through complex vocal or written symbols’.

### **3.0 Functions of Language**

Language is very important to man. It can indeed be said to be the only thing that makes man distinct from other animals for he is the only animal that uses language systematically as a means of communication. (Anagbogu et al 2001).

Language is useful in all human activities. Therefore, the function of language cannot be over emphasized. Language is of great help to the man. People greet with language, pray with language, sing with language, write with language, learn with language, and others. Imagine in a day you decide not to speak or communicate with anybody. Maybe after that day you would realize the importance of language.

### **3.1 A means of Communication**

Language is used as a means of communication. This is its most important and its obvious use.

### **3.2 Medium of Thought**

Language is a tool for thinking and even for dreaming. It is observed that when somebody is thinking he makes use of language in his thought. This is also true of dreaming.

### **3.3 Transmission of Culture**

Socialization is achieved primarily through language. This is because it is a means the older ones in a society use to 'teach' the younger ones the culture of their society.

Language is therefore a veritable instrument for socialization.

#### **4.0 Chinese Language**

Scholars think Chinese writing originated almost four thousand years ago and that the spoken language goes back to remote antiquity, making it one of the world's oldest languages. In spite of its great age, Chinese is now one of most widely used living languages. The language is spoken in many dialects within China, as well as in many overseas Chinese communities, especially in Southeast Asia, Europe, and the Americas. And there are more than a billion native speakers of Chinese worldwide. It is one of languages, the United Nation use when conducting official business.

Chinese belongs to the Sino-Tibetan language family. *Hanyu*, literally "language of the Han", refers to the standard Chinese language, and is spoken by the Han, Hui, Manchu, and other ethnic groups that constitute 94% of the population of China. There are fifty six recognized ethnic groups in China, using as many as eighty different languages.

Chinese include variants from seven main dialect groups. The northern or mandarin dialect covers three fourths of china's territory and includes two thirds of its population. Standard Chinese is also known by its official designation, "*putonghua*", literally "common speech". *Putonghua* is based on the northern dialect, using the

dialect of Beijing as the basis for its pronunciation and modern vernacular literature for its grammatical structure.

### **5.0 Chinese Language: taking a global status**

In the seventeen and eighteenth centuries English was the language of the leading colonial nation- Britain. In the eighteen and nineteenth centuries it was the language of the leader of the industrial revolution also Britain. In the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth it was the language of the leading economic power – the USA . As a result, when new technologies brought new linguistic opportunities, English emerged as a first-rank language in industries which affected all aspects of society -the press, advertising, broad communications.

From the above mentioned facts and evidences, English is the global language, but for how long? Considering what makes a language world language, Chinese language will soon assume the status of a global language. It has the most native speakers of the world languages. It is also being used in many other countries outside China. China is known as the fastest growing economy. China is rich in economy, strong in military, high in space and technology. Crystal (1995,112) has this to say in his book titled '*English as a Global language*'

*“The biggest potential setback to English as a global language, it has been said with more than a little irony, would have taken place a*

*generation age- if Bill Gates had grown up speaking Chinese”.*

Crystal forgets that the world will never have only one “Bill Gate”. There must be another “Bill Gate”. Who knows that Senator Barack Obama will be the president of the united states fifty years ago?

Now, china is a world market. China produces virtually everything ranging from shop to ship. Almost everything in the market is made in china. The surprising thing is that they use their language to write instructions and functions of the products. That is a way of promoting their language. One day everybody will have no choice but to learn Chinese language. People want to learn new languages and the language they learn now is Chinese.

The Nigeria central bank governor, Prof Chukwuma Soludo was presenting a paper at the university of Benin which he titled “*Can Nigeria be the china of Africa?*” He highlighted the importance of language in economic development. Yes, Nigeria can be the next China of Africa because Nigeria has the largest population in Africa as China has the largest population in the world but Nigeria has no common indigenous language like China.

## **6.0 CONCLUSION**

All languages are equal and useful to the users. English language is not better than Igbo language or Chinese language. Although, some languages have more language

users and therefore they are more popular than the others. In every period, one or two languages will assume the status of world language. Now, English is taking that position but the Chinese language will soon become a world language.

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