Language Dynamism and Nation Building: A Focus on the English Language

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Abstract

The dynamic nature of language makes it possible for it to change over time, across space and within a society. Such occasional change and transformation are strong factors that have a significant impact on how a nation survives amidst diversity. Language dynamism has some positive effects on nation building on the basis that the survival of a nation and its success in maintaining a strong national identity depend on the existence of languages which the people can speak, read, write and understand for effective communication. The purpose of this research is to explore the relationship between language change and the evolving nature of a nation's identity with respect to its history and details of language change and interactions. Using the qualitative analysis, the research applies the use of texts, interviews, archival data, content analysis and questionnaires. Changes in meaning and pronunciation, borrowing and invention of new words, updates and revisions of existing texts as well as other forms of language dynamism come together to promote understanding and cohesion among diverse communities. The study and analysis of data exposes different ways and times languages have changed over time, the impact on nation building and possible improvement measures to employ to achieve a stronger national identity.

Keywords: dynamism, cohesion, transformation, diverse, communication, invention.

1)   Introduction

Language is indispensable for a nation because it is the basic means of communication, identity, culture preservation, governance, education and international relations. How language evolves over time plays a crucial role in nation building. Language dynamism is a result of societal changes, cultural shifts and technological advancements. A nation is able to foster unity and innovation when it embraces language dynamism. This involves recognizing and preserving indigenous languages, promoting multilingualism and adapting global communication trends. When a nation achieves these, it can easily engage its diverse population, strengthen its identity and effectively participate in the global community. For the purpose of this study, emphasis is on language dynamism particularly within the context of the English language as Nigeria's official language. This work aims to unravel the dynamic nature of language, its roles and challenges in nation building as well as recommendations for stronger nationhood.

2)   Language Dynamism

Language is a basic tool for human communication. It is the foundation upon which societies are built, cultures are expressed and ideas are conveyed. It is not static but evolves and adapts to the changing needs, experiences and influences of its speakers. Therefore, language dynamism refers to the evolving nature of language which makes it change and develop over time in response to various factors such as cultural, social, technological and historical influences. It is responsible for shifts in meaning, creation of new words and expressions as well as the emergence of language varieties. Language dynamism is a continuous process in any

language which encompasses the ongoing adaptable nature of languages as they interact with society and culture.

Language dynamism is a reflection of the changing nature of human societies and their ever-changing needs and aspirations. Embracing it allows languages to remain relevant and inclusive. Different authors and linguists have various viewpoints about language dynamism which range from the structural aspects of language to its evolution, variations of language and its adaptation to the societal and communicative needs.

In his opinion, William Labov, a sociolinguist, maintains that language is constantly changing due to social and cultural factors. Another prominent linguist, David Crystal emphasizes the role of technology, globalization and social influences in shaping the evolving nature of language. There are several forms of language dynamism, some of which are: change in meaning, language borrowing, slang, updates and revision, evolving grammar, code-switching, invention of new words, and use of emojis.

For change in meaning, the meanings of many English words have changed over time. For example, in the 18th century, the word 'gay' originally meant 'joyful', light-hearted', 'happy', 'full of fun' or 'lively'. Then, it was used to describe cheerfulness and happiness. Currently, all these meanings of the word have become outdated. Now in the 21st century (particularly from the mid-20th century), the same word has witnessed a substantial shift in meaning. It is now used to describe homosexuality or homosexual relationship. Notably, this shift has become well-established and widely accepted in the society of today. Another example is the word 'companion' which was coined from the Latin word 'companionem'- a combination of 'com' (together with) and 'panis' (bread) to originally mean 'one with whom you share bread'. Over time, it has evolved to mean a friend or associate. Meanings can also vary across

dialects. The word 'bonnet' is a good example. In British English, it means the front part of a vehicle that covers the engine while in American English, it refers to a head covering or a type of hat.

In the case of borrowing, languages often borrow words and phrases from one another. This feature is a form of language dynamism. The English language, for instance, records extensive vocabulary which is enriched by loanwords from other languages over centuries. This includes words and phrases from Latin, French, German, Igbo and many others. These borrowed words become an integral part of the English language thereby adding diversity and richness. Examples of loanwords in English and their origins include;

1.   i. Café (French) – coffeehouse or restaurant
       ii. Piano (Italian) – musical instrument with keys that
          produce sounds when struck by hand.
       iii. Okra (Igbo) – coined from the Igbo word 'okwuru'
           meaning a type of vegetable commonly used in cooking.
       iv. Guru (Sanskrit) – a word meaning a spiritual teacher or
           guide but often used to describe an expert or authority in
           any field.
       v. Kindergarten (German) – a preschool or nursery school.

The use of slang is a great example of language dynamism. Slang refers to informal, adopted and non-standard words and expressions commonly used within a specific group, culture, context and period of time. It is often made up of unconventional words, phrases and expressions that may not be accepted in formal contexts. Slang keeps evolving and is greatly influenced by technology, pop culture and regional variations to create a sense of identity among a particular group. Nigerian youths develop their own slang and idiomatic expressions which are continuously changing and

evolving. This showcases language dynamism among the younger generation. Consider the following instances;

2 i. **'Bruh'** – a casual way to address a friend.

   ii. **'Japa'** – to run away or escape from a situation or place.

   iii. **'Get the ball rolling'** – to start a process or action.

Updating and revising texts is a common practice which is aimed at maintaining the accuracy, clarity and effectiveness of written communication over time. Texts and materials that are occasionally revised and updated include academic papers, literary works, educational textbooks, legal documents, news articles, marketing materials, government documents, websites and online content, historical texts, software documentation, etc. The reasons for these revisions include maintaining accuracy, reflecting new information, ensuring legal compliance and adapting to current audience expectations. The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary which was first published in 1948 has undergone multiple revisions and updates to include new words, phrases and meanings, and also adapt to changes in the language. In 2020, its 10th edition was published with the addition of over one thousand new words and meanings.

Grammar evolves over time. The English language, for example, is not static. Over time, there are changes in sentence structure, word usage and sometimes punctuation rules. For example, the word 'they' traditionally represents a third-person plural pronoun that refers to two or more persons or things. Nowadays, it is equally used as a singular gender-neutral pronoun to refer to a person of unknown or non-binary gender. This is widely used at present and has gained acceptance over recent years.

Code-switching refers to when two or more languages or dialects are alternated within a single context or conversation, it is referred to as code-switching. This is a clear reflection of language dynamism. In everyday conversations, too many Nigerians smoothly switch between Standard English, local languages and Pidgin English to express themselves more clearly, to meet the need for specific terminology, to prove social identity and/or group affiliation or to accommodate language preferences. Code-switching is usually carried out by bilingual or multilingual individuals who are proficient in more than one language. It is important to note that code-switching is also practiced on digital or social media. On social platforms like Twitter, Facebook and WhatsApp, most Nigerians use a mix of languages, Pidgin English and even emojis to communicate. This pinpoints the influence of digital communication on language dynamism. Nigerian entertainers and artists are good here as they often apply the use of mixed languages, slang and emojis to engage their audience as well as connect with their fans. This practice reflects the importance of language adaptability for communication and cultural expression. For example, an average Nigerian may say, 'I go chop am' (I will eat it). 'Chop' is taken from the Nigerian Pidgin English while the rest of the sentence is in English.

For invention of new words, it is a process whereby writers and speakers of a language create entirely new words within their language. These new words can be generated from sources like slang, pop culture, technological advancements and global influences. Many of them become widely accepted and integrated into the language. This proves the dynamic nature of language and culture. For example, new words are regularly added to the English language to describe emerging concepts, trends and inventions. Examples are words like the following;

3. i. Selfie – coined to describe a self-portrait photo taken with a smartphone.
  ii. Emojis – small images or icons used in digital communication to convey emotions, objects and concepts.
 iii. App – a short form for 'application' used to describe software programs or mobile applications.
 iv. Blog – a website or online platform where individuals share information, opinions and content.
  v. Vlog – a combination of 'video' and 'blog'. It refers to a blog in a video form where individuals share their thoughts, experiences and information via video content.

Emojis, the small pictorial symbols used in digital communication, originated from Japan in late 1990s. Over time, they quickly spread and became popular internationally. Currently, they are used to express emotions, tone and content in communication. There is now a shift from the traditional text-based communication to more visual forms of expression. This development showcases language dynamism as languages and cultures have adapted to it to meet changing communication needs.

3)   Nation Building

Nation building is equally a crucial and complex process that plays an important role in shaping the destiny of a country. It involves deliberate and challenging efforts to create, strengthen a sense of nationhood among a diverse group of people within a nation. It aims at forging a shared national identity, fostering social cohesion and establishing the foundation for a stable and prosperous nation. Different authors have offered insights into nation building

and their works contribute immensely to the understanding of the opportunities as well as challenges in building and sustaining nations in an evolving world. Some of these views are as follows;

Benedict Anderson (1936-2015): 'Nation building is the process through which a diverse group of people with varying cultural backgrounds come to identify with a common national identity and develop a sense of belonging to the same political community'. Ernest Gellner (1925-1995): 'Nation building is the development of a nation-state characterized by a common culture, shared values and a sense of belonging among its citizens'. Donald Horowitz: 'Nation building is the process of managing and accommodating ethnic and cultural diversity within a country to create a sense of unity and shared citizenship.' John W. Gardner (1912-2002) in his book, 'Self-Renewal: The Individual and the Innovative Society (1963) also explores the importance and adaptability in nation building.

Nation building is not confined or limited to a single aspect but involves a comprehensive approach which touches various areas such as politics, economics, culture, education and social cohesion. The success of nation building depends on a myriad of factors including historical legacies, social dynamics and the collective will of the people to come together and build a better future. Nation building is a continuous and evolving process that can take several years or generations to achieve. It strictly requires very strong leadership and commitment to shared values and goals. It enjoys one major characteristic which is the ability to adapt to changing circumstances such as globalization, environmental issues and technological advancements.

The process of nation building is multifaceted and it strengthens the identity, unity and infrastructure of a nation. Some

key elements that are related to nation building include the following:

1. Governance **-** Building a nation most often begins with establishing and maintaining a stable government which has the ability to enforce laws and provide security. To maintain true governance, a fair and just legal system is very essential so as to ensure that the rights of the citizens are protected and disputes are resolved fairly. Also, effective government institutions and public administration systems must be in place for efficient delivery of service and accountability.

2. Social cohesion and national identity **-** Building a nation entails fostering a shared sense of national identity, culture and history among the diverse population. Disparities are addressed and social cohesion achieved when inclusivity and justice are promoted. In post-conflict divided societies, nation building plays a concrete role by enhancing reconciliation efforts and strategies which are necessary to heal wounds and promote unity.

3. Economic development - Results of strong nation building are evident in many ways. Infrastructures like roads, bridges, schools, healthcare facilities and other utilities are developed for economic growth and connectivity. Sound economic policies are formulated and implemented to encourage investment, poverty reduction, job creation and entrepreneurship. Moreover, skilled workforce through quality education and training is built for sustainable economic development.

4. Participation and Inclusivity - In a nation which holds nation building paramount, citizen participation in decision-making through democratic processes is encouraged as that is a cornerstone of nation building. When this is achieved, a

vibrant civil society which can hold the government accountable and promote civic engagement is formed.

5. Education and literacy - This is a very basic element of nation building. Nation building guarantees access to sound education so as to empower the population with adequate knowledge and skills which help in personal and national development.

6. Security and defense - The safety and security of the nation against internal conflicts and external threats is crucial to prevent destabilization. For the maintenance of order, nation building yields the building of strong and accountable security forces.

7. Globalization - This facilitates cultural and linguistic exchange which results in the spread of loanwords and invented expressions. By this means, some languages become global lingua franca; eg, the English language. This leads to standardization and simplification to aid international communication and relationship.

4)   Positive Effects of Language Dynamism on Nation Building

The evolving nature of language within a nation can have various positive effects on nation building. The relationship between language dynamism and nation building in Nigeria is a complex one. As a multiethnic and diverse nation with over two hundred and fifty distinct languages, the country enjoys some unique opportunities related to language and nationhood. Language dynamism is both a reflection of its rich diversity and a factor which influences nation building. This is so because it embraces the diversity of linguistic

and cultural backgrounds while fostering unity and adapting to the changing needs of the nation. It creates an inclusive environment in which all citizens can participate in the development and growth of the nation and still maintain their individual and collective identities. When properly managed, language dynamism positively impacts nation building by promoting diversity, inclusivity and adaptability which, in turn, contribute to a more resilient national identity. The country's challenge is to harness this linguistic diversity as a source of strength and unity while also addressing potential tensions and disparities. Below are the different ways in which language dynamism is intertwined with the process of nation building in Nigeria:

a) Communication and Integration **-** For the reason of effective communication being essential for nation building, language dynamism plays a positive role by enabling people from different linguistic backgrounds to communicate and collaborate thereby promoting unity and economic integration. Moreover, language dynamism makes it easier for citizens to engage in both local and international discourse and business. For instance, the Nigerian Pidgin English (also known as 'Broken English') is now a widely spoken creole language which incorporates elements of English, local languages and unique expressions. The usage allows people from different linguistic backgrounds to communicate effectively especially in informal settings. This contributes to economic growth and global integration. Also in the entertainment industry, musicians and actors often incorporate multiple languages and dialects into their works for audiences from various regions.

b) Promotion of Indigenous Languages - In recognition of how important the indigenous languages are, Nigeria makes efforts to promote their use and study by adapting and integrating them into various aspects of modern life such as education, media and entertainment. Bilingual education programs and language instruction in indigenous languages like Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba are being practiced in schools. Authors write texts, poems and other literary works in local languages thereby helping to maintain the written form of these indigenous languages. 'Omenuko' by Pita Nwana (1983), 'Olu Omo' by Akinwunmi Isola (1983) and 'Ina Son Ku' by Balaraba Yakubu (1999) are good examples. During storytelling and traditional ceremonies, local languages are used. This ensures that cultural traditions and historical knowledge are passed down to coming generations.

c) Ethnic and Regional Identities - Different ethnic groups have their own languages and dialects which can contribute to forming and building ethnic identities. Language is closely tied to these ethnic and regional identities in Nigeria. It is a continuous process to balance these identities and foster a sense of patriotism and continuity. For example, the names people and places bear are integral to regional identities as they reflect their local languages and cultural heritage. In traditional settings, indigenous languages are used in local governance and institutions. Different ethnic groups and regions may have their own vocabulary related to customs, fashion and cuisine which contribute to their sense of identity and connection to the land.

d) Unity in diversity - Nigeria's linguistic diversity is a source of strength as it reflects the rich tapestry of cultures and traditions in the country. Language dynamism plays a role in fostering unity through adaptation. It highlights the uniqueness and richness of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds thereby promoting tolerance and appreciation for diversity.

e) Cultural expression and exchange - In Nigerian literature, music and arts, linguistic diversity is incorporated. The dynamic nature of language enriches the country's cultural landscape while showcasing the diverse cultural expressions rooted in different languages. Furthermore, dynamic languages can accommodate loanwords and expressions from other languages, hence, promoting cross-cultural interactions and enriching the nation's cultural tapestry.

f)   National identity and pride - The identity of people can be influenced by factors such as culture, history, language and shared values. National pride can also be a source of unity and motivation for citizens. They foster a sense of belonging among the citizens and serve as the foundation for social cohesion and a shared commitment to the well-being and progress of the nation. Language dynamism plays a significant role in enhancing identity and national pride but must be balanced with the preservation of cultural and linguistic heritage**.**

5)   The Challenges of Language Dynamism

While language dynamism is beneficial to Nigeria as a nation with its numerous advantages, it also poses some

challenges. In order to address these problems effectively, there must be a balance between the preservation of language and adaptation to contemporary needs. Some of these challenges include but not limited to the following;

    i.   Educational challenges - Effecting regular changes in languages within the country presents challenges for the education system as maintaining and supporting multiple languages may be logistically and financially challenging. This is because providing quality education in various languages can strain resources. It may also be difficult to create and provide up-to-date materials and ensure that students become proficient in the latest linguistic trend. Also in digital education, creating content in multiple languages and dialects may limit access to online educational resources.

    ii.   Communication barriers - With multiple languages spoken in Nigeria, there are communication barriers among different language groups. Frequent changes and updates in these languages over time also create communication constraints particularly among generations and different linguistic communities within the nation. This can impede effective governance, social cohesion and public deliberations. Differences in language can contribute to inter-ethnic tensions and conflicts especially in regions with a history of ethnic issues. There may also be misinterpretation of words, idioms or other expressions especially when certain words or phrases mean different things in different languages or regions. For example, the word 'enu' means 'up' in the Igbo language and 'mouth' in Yoruba.

iii.   Economic implications and disparities - There are ways changes in languages can hinder nation building by causing negative economic implications. Due to global business and trade, some languages may have greater economic significance than others. This can lead to differences between language groups. Marketing in a particular language may mainly be useful to certain regions leaving out those who speak and understand other languages. Also, language dynamism poses economic implications for the government and businesses that may need to spend on updating official documents, signage and translation services more regularly.

iv.   Social division and political tensions - If language dynamism is not managed effectively, it can bring about social division between the people who embrace the changes and those who resist them. Different language groups have their own cultural identities and may not easily identify with the national identity. There may also be political conflicts and tensions among linguistic communities when language dynamism becomes politicized. For example, elections in Nigeria is often marred with accusations of rigging, voter intimidation and violence. In most cases, political parties use ethnic and regional affiliations to build support. This naturally creates divisions and tensions. Political leaders may exploit the language differences for their gain. Again, the Islamic extremist group known as 'Boko Haram' often fuels tension as the group's insurgency mainly in the

northern part of Nigeria has severally resulted in violence and displacement.

v. Language culture and identity loss - Individuals may experience a loss of identity and cultural heritage when the language they grew up with changes rapidly and frequently. This may create a sense of disconnection from their roots. For example, in the Igbo setting, urbanization and modernization have nearly eradicated the traditional practice of storytelling in the local language. When languages evolve, there is the tendency of losing traditional words, expressions and cultural nuances capable of eroding a society's cultural heritage.

vi. Inequality and language dominance - Marginalization or discrimination of linguistic minorities may be experienced when dominant language groups hold more power and influence. This gives room for inequality within the nation. In Nigeria, the English language is the official language of government, education and business. Its dominance can lead to inequality as people who are more proficient in it enjoy more advantages. Similarly, for example, students, especially those that were bred in rural areas, who speak Igbo language as their first language may face difficulties in education systems primarily conducted in English.

6)   **Recommendations**

Harnessing language dynamism as a source of unity in Nigeria and strengthening nation building involve recognizing the

evolving nature of language and applying it to build a more cohesive and inclusive nation. To achieve this in our nation, the following measures may be taken:

Encouragement of multilingual education - This is optimally complex due to the country's linguistic diversity as Nigeria has over five hundred different languages with Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba being the most widely spoken. It involves using multiple Nigerian languages as a medium of instruction in educational settings. However, the government should implement stronger multilingual education system which allows students to learn in their native languages while gradually introducing English or other foreign languages. This approach can improve learning outcomes and still preserve indigenous language.

Development of inclusive language policies - Nigeria has had various language policies aimed at preserving and promoting indigenous languages. Successful management of language dynamism requires thoughtful and strategic policies to protect the cultural heritage of people while allowing it to evolve. The language policies should be flexible and inclusive enough to address the coexistence of multiple languages and their roles in education, governance and public life. These policies should also allow all ethnic groups to have equal access to resources and opportunities. Such policies must be accessible, have non-discriminatory terms, be disability-inclusive, be free of bias or disrespect towards any religion or faith and cultural sensitive. By implementing inclusive policies and initiatives, Nigeria can harness the dynamism of its languages to promote unity, cultural richness and national cohesion.

Establishment of interpreting and translation services - Professional interpreting and translation services should be established and promoted in order to bridge language gaps in legal, healthcare and other essential services.

Promotion of inclusive education - Inclusive education practices that can foster nation building in Nigeria include admitting students from different backgrounds, cultures, abilities and statuses to study together so as to promote cross-cultural understanding, providing accessible facilities for students with disabilities so that education becomes equitable, formulating curricula that reflect the diversity of the nation, inclusion of extracurricular activities that unite students from various cultures, adequate training of teachers to be able to teach in diverse classrooms and locations. Educational materials and resources should be made available in various languages to facilitate learning and access to education for all Nigerians. Importantly, a subject like Civic Education should be given unique attention among schools as it contributes largely to educating citizens about their rights, cultures, responsibilities and the importance of nation building.

Encouragement of cultural festivals and exchange programs - It is important that the government should occasionally organize cultural festivals and events that promote the diversity of languages, music, dance and traditions from different regions of Nigeria. In the same way, cultural exchange programs are necessary to encourage people to learn and appreciate the languages and traditions of others. Examples of such activities include youth programs, interregional festivals, arts and crafts workshops, tourism programs, academic exchange (especially among Nigerian universities and institutions possibly abroad to foster academic collaboration and cultural understanding), etc. These programs provide opportunities for Nigerians to engage with people from different backgrounds and promote mutual cooperation on both national and global scales.

Promotion of indigenous languages through the media and entertainment industries - Content productions should be made in different languages in movies, radio productions, TV shows, news

broadcasts and music to reflect the nation's linguistic richness. In addition to content production, one very significant point is worthy of note in the name of a popular radio station based in Onitsha – WAZOBIA FM. 'Wazobia' is a Nigerian Pidgin word that brings together the elements of the three major indigenous languages in Nigeria – 'Wa' (Yoruba), 'Zo" (Hausa) and 'Bia' (Igbo). The name symbolizes unity, inclusivity and national identity. WAZOBIA FM sends a powerful message of unity in diversity as all Nigerians from different ethnic backgrounds communicate through a shared platform with Pidgin English which is widely spoken and understood across the nation.

Building of international cooperation - Building and maintaining diplomatic relations with other nations can contribute to peace, unity and cooperation. Nigeria as a nation can improve on this by engaging in constructive dialogue with other nations to address common challenges and promote peace, actively participating in international organizations like the ECOWAS, United Nations, African Union, etc. to enhance cooperation and discuss regional and global issues, collaborating with international partners to tackle development issues and improve economic development, participating in security matters such as counterterrorism, peacekeeping and regional stability, engaging foreign universities and institutions to advance education and research, playing proactive role in resolving conflicts in the region and upholding human rights standards and working with international bodies to address human rights issues.

7)   Conclusion

Language dynamism, as already explained, refers to the inherent quality of languages to evolve, change and adapt over time.

It manifests in various forms such as change in meanings, language borrowing, use of slang, updates and revisions of texts, code-switching and invention of new words as contained in this work. No nation can exist without language as it is an essential element of human society and plays a very crucial role in the formation and identity of a nation. A single nation like Nigeria can have multiple languages within its borders which naturally undergo changes due to certain factors over time and still take certain measures to maintain strong nationhood, hence, the relationship between language dynamism and nation building. The natural evolution and adaptability of languages is quite integral to the process of nation building. While language dynamism contributes positively to nation building, it equally comes with its challenges as enumerated in this study. Improvement measures such as enhancing multilingual education in schools, formulating language policies that are flexible and inclusive, engaging in translation services, organizing cultural festivals as well as exchange programs and accommodating language diversity in media and entertainment among others, when properly introduced and applied, would foster a sense of national identity and unity.

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