ARABIC LANGUAGE AS L2 FOR NATIONAL TRANSFORMATION

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Abstract

This paper is about the significance of Arabic language as L2 for national transformation. It tries to explore the significance of Arabic in Nigeria from historical, social, religious and economic factors. It studies Arabic Language as L2 In Nigeria, the Roles of Arabic in National Transformation and Development, Nigerian Language Policy, Weakness of Nigerian Language Policy regarding the positioning of Arabic in the National language Policy, the analyses of other writers regarding the roles played by Arabic language in Nigeria and offers useful recommendations.

Keywords: Arabic, language, transformation, L2

Introduction

Language is a medium of communication among members of society. It refers to the actual act of speaking in a particular situation. It is the system of communication in speech and writing that is used by people of a particular country or area. The definition of language however varies from one category of linguistics scholars to another. Sociolinguists define it as systematic socio-oral symbols with which members of the society interact and communicate among themselves (Olaoye, 2002). Psycholinguists define it as a systematic process for expressing one’s mind. Philosophers also contributed to this body of human endeavour when they defined language as the use of systematic phonetic system for expressing thought and communicating it from one person to another (Olaoye, 2002). Though linguists defer in view of defining the concept of language, all of them seem to agree in two; that language is human and that language is expressive and communicative.

This paper is a look at the role of Arabic as L2 for national transformation in the following key points.

Arabic language as L2 in Nigeria

Arabic language is the language of the Arabs, one of the Hamito-Semitic tribes in Asia. Going back a thousand and some hundreds years ago, the present Arabic was predominantly the dialect of Quraish in Mecca, the tribe settling in the larger part of Saudi Arabia today. Many other dialects, which differ from the dialect of Quraish existed and some of them are still existing today. Hence, there exist many Arabic dialects today. There is Arabic Saudi, Arabic Syria, Arabic of Egypt, and Arabic of Sudan and so on. There is also Arabic for non-Arabic speakers, which is referred to as simplified Arabic.

In Nigeria, Arabic was introduced for the first time into the state of Borno before it was accepted by the other tribes in Northern Nigeria. The Shuwa Arabs, of Borno are to some extent regarded as Arabic speaking people. Hence Arabic is to them a mother tongue and L1 at the same time. Historically, the 1st king of Kanem Empire that embraced Islam was Hummi Julmi b. Selemma in 11th century (Galadanci, 1993). It is also clear from the history that Islam reached the kingdom of Borno long ago before that time. There was established trade relationship between Arabs and the people of Borno through a trade route from Tripoly of Libya through Fazzan and Balama to Kanem empire. It was ascertained that the Army of Uqbah b. Nafi’i one of the Muslim commandants reached the boundary of the empire in 46AH (668AD.) Muhammad Bello also stated that Islam came to Kanem Empire through traders and travelers. Undoubtedly, Arabic was one of the mediums of communication in transaction between Arabs and the people of Borno (Galadanci, S.et al :33). The emergence of Shuwa Arabs as shown
earlier is a very good evidence for that. Throughout the period of Borno empire and Othman empire (1804-1900), Arabic language remained largely the second language L2 and National official language (NOL). In Northern Nigeria, and for social, political and economic reasons, the use of Arabic codes and borrowing words has been largely encouraged by many factors, which include Hieroglossia (religion), Academoglossia (school) and Agoraglossia (market).

In Nigeria today, Arabic language is classified as second language L2. A second language is the one acquired in addition to mother tongue (MT) in formal situation. Unlike English language, and unlike its former status during the Uthman Empire, Arabic language today does not serve as a national official language (NOL), or lingua franca. In terms of use, it is very much secondary. This status is even restricted to some part of Northern and Western Nigeria. Even though English is considered as L2, its status is superior to that of Arabic in terms of use for the fact that English is the NOL of Nigeria de-facto.

Sequentially, Arabic, may be considered as a third language L3 in many parts of Nigeria, like in the Northern states where many languages are spoken, and Arabic learning constitutes only a third part. For instance, in Northern Nigeria, the Fulani man; the Igabra man; the Nufe man; the Igala man or the Kanuri man may consider Arabic as a third language L3, simply because Hausa which is his Regional Official language (ROL) stands as his L2. This statement, however can only hold true to those who do not see any distinction between mother tongue (MT) and first language (L1). Those who see such distinction however, may classify Hausa in this instance to be mainly L1 not L2. The present writer considers Arabic to be L2 because he considers ROL to be mainly L1.

Nigeria being a multilingual nation is mainly exoglossic because its official language is imported. Such nations normally face a lot of problems in its phases of development. The existence of other L2 in Nigeria like Arabic will be of great significance because of the political, social, economic or religious purpose, which L2 normally can serve for the National transformation. It is this significance that this paper attempts to explore.

Arabic in national transformation and development in Nigeria

The roles of Arabic in national transformation and development in Nigeria may be shown in the following factors:

Socio-religious factor:

Arabic language serves a great socio-religious purpose in Nigeria. It is clear from the facts mentioned before that Arabic is an MT and L1 for shuwa Arab of Borno State. This asserts a great impact which Arabic has to the people of Borno.

Similarly, school (Academoglossia), where Arabic is taught has a great impact on the Nigerian social setting. According to Olaoye (2002), The language of Education encourages bilingualism. The teachers' dialects as well as the language behaviour of the entire staff influence the child’s language development. (et al::190). In 1900, Lord Lugard estimated that there were 20,000 Qur’anic schools which was about 250,000 pupils (NBAIS:1994:1). It was reported that Lugard contemplated the use of Qur’anic schools as a basis for the education of the Muslims populace of the Northern states, and favoured the use of Ajami as the medium of learning in this apart of the country. He was however dissuaded, to abandon the decisions later.(NBAIS, et al:2).

In 1996 there were 27,600 pupils in both Islamyyah and Qur’anic schools in the Northern Nigeria only NBAIS, et al:17).

Today, the writer does not believe that there is reliable data on the Qur’anic and Islamyyah schools (schools of Arabic developed to replace the Qur’anic schools) in Nigeria. UNESCO has been making effort to get such data but has not succeeded due to poor method used to accomplish the job. However, all indications show that the total number of Islamyyah and Qur’anic schools today triples the number of Qur’anic schools in 1900.
The number of Arabic and Islamic secondary schools where Arabic is used as medium of instruction for most of the subjects taught have been increasing in a great number. The National Board of Arabic and Islamic studies (NBAIS) had registered 95 schools by 1992. In this year, 2013, the Board has more than 400 accredited registered secondary schools. Many other boards exist in the south of the country serving the same purpose. NBAIS has been making maximum efforts to see to the unity of these schools under one umbrella to ensure effective and positive achievement in the schools’ activities. Graduates of Arabic secondary schools serve as Shariah Judges, Educationists, Diplomats, Imams in community Mosques, Linguists, Translators, media Analysts, journalists and forces men. In the varieties of places they occupy, such graduates play a very vital role given the advantage of Arabic education they acquired.

Today suitable Qur’anic schools and Islamyyah schools are to be integrated into the state boards of primary school as stipulated by the national policy on Education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1998:15). Many states of Nigeria multiply their efforts to achieve the target.

Religious Factor:

Religion is a very vital factor for national transformation. Linguistic influences come from traditional (ethnoglossic) religious as well as external or foreign religions (xenoglossic) such as Islam and Christianity, Buddhism etc. Arabic language is used to a great extent for learning Islamic Religion. Verses of the Holy Qur’an, prayers and Takbirs as well as glorification of God during prayers are all chanted in Arabic. Religious ceremonies like the two idds, wedding and naming ceremonies are such ceremonies where Arabic language play significant roles in their making.

Political Factor:

Arabic has comparative advantage with both English and French. All are U.N., A.U. and O.P.E.C. recognized languages. Hence, the study of Arabic in Nigeria is of great significance in view of the positions it occupies in these organizations. Moreover, Nigeria maintain diplomatic relations with such countries as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iraq, Syria and Libya to mention just a few. Hence, the significance of learning Arabic with this regard to strengthen diplomatic relationship cannot be underrated.

Economic Factor:

The increasing globalization of the world economy and the continuous closeness among the various nations has Arabic language a very significant role in perfecting economic ties. A great number of Nigerian citizens today travel to Dubai, Jordan, united Arab Emirates, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia for business transaction. Unlike the previous years when most pilgrims to Mecca went for religious purpose alone, a great number of pilgrims today take the advantage of Haji seasons for business purposes.

National Awareness:

Arabic language serves as a great tool used for national awareness, and literacy motives. In the Nigerian currency notes, Ajami letters are still used in One Thousand and five hundred Naira for the advantage of those who are not literate in English letters.

Some years back, Arabic letters were inscribed in military and police logos for awareness accordingly. In some universities like Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria; Bayero University, Kano; and Usmanu Danfodio University, Sokoto, the Arabic calligraphies are used in their logos. The essence of using such Arabic letters is to portray the common belonging of the people of the community where such institutions are established. It also provides a sense of belonging and awareness to the Nigerian citizens who are literate only in Ajami or Arabic. In this vein it is very essential to look at the national language policy and see where it affects the significance of Arabic in the national transformation.

Nigerian language policy

Policy is a plan of Action, statement of ideals, etc. proposed or adopted by a government, political party, business, etc. People have
realized that like human and material resources, language resources have to be properly managed to achieve maximum positive results in the process of national development.
Language policy:

Policy is a plan of action, statement of ideals, etc. proposed or adopted by a government, political party, businesses etc (Yemi, 2002) The Encyclopedia of education (1971) defined policy as a statement that is intended to be a binding guide on the actions of those designated by the statement. Such a binding guide is enforceable by the society, which formulates it. For the formulation as well as adoption is through a political process which acknowledge the reality and legitimacy of conflicting interests and desires among its participants. It defined language policy as a binding language guide, which is meant to be enforced by the society that formulated it through a political process (Ogunsiyi et a).

The national policy on education is general education working guide formulated and documented. It touches different levels of education from pre-primary to tertiary levels. In Nigerian policy on education, there is an overall ideology on the national language policy in education. In view of the above, Nigeria has not got a language policy but rather an education policy which touches on some aspect of language. Omolewa (1981) gives a summary of the development in language education in Nigeria.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>Yearly Positions</th>
<th>Languages for literacy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Position of language in literacy education in Nigeria by 1900</td>
<td>Arabic, Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, English, Portuguese, French, German</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Position of language in literacy education in Nigeria by 1946.</td>
<td>Arabic, Hausa, Yoruba, English, Tiv, Nupe, Kanuri, English, German, Efik, Igbo</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above table shows how significant Arabic was in language development in Nigeria those years.

Arabic in the national policy:

The above table has shown how Arabic language was given a great concern in the Nigerian education policy in 1900 and 1946. According to Ogenyil (2002), and Akere in Bamgbose (1995) what eventually emerges as Nigeria’s language policy in education comprised provisions made in the National policy on Education for languages as media for instruction and as subjects of study in the curricula of the various levels of the educational (literacy) system. The categories of languages provided in the NPE are:

i. Mother tongue (MT).
ii. Language of the immediate community (LIC)
iii. Major Nigerian language (MNL) (Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba); and
iv. English and other foreign languages (Arabic and French).

The different categories of languages are indicated in the table here under.

**NPE (1977) PROVISIONS FOR LANGUAGES IN THE CURRICULUM**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational level</th>
<th>languages</th>
<th>Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-pry</td>
<td>1. Mother Tongue (MT) Medium</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. LTI Medium</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>1. MT/LIC (yrs 1-3) Medium</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. English (yrs 1-6) Medium</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JSS</td>
<td>1. English Subject</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
From the above analysis made by Akere in the revised edition of 1981 however, an adjustment was made where Arabic and French were included as non vocational electives in Senior Secondary School (SSS) level with equal status like in Junior Secondary School (JSS). Consequently, the previous tabulation system adopted by Akere can be rearranged as follows:

### NPE (1998: 13-19) provisions for languages in the curriculum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education level</th>
<th>Language &amp; Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre- pry</td>
<td>1. Mother Tongue (MT) Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. MT/LIE (yrs 1-3) Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pry</td>
<td>1. MT/LIE (yrs 1-3) Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. English (yrs 1-6) Subject</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. English (yrs 3-6) Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. MT/LIE (yrs 3-6) Subject</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. French Subject</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JSS</td>
<td>1. English Medium*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. English Subject*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. French Subject*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. MT/LIE (L1 or orally as L2 Subject*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>if it has no orthography Subject*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSS</td>
<td>1. English Medium*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. English Subject*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. French Subject **</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
|                 | 4. ANL (Any Nigerian Lang. that
The table above has shown an increasing awareness of the role the language can play to the National transformation and development. Four subjects including French are compulsory in pry’s, four including French in JSS, two are compulsory in SSS and three including French and Arabic are elective in SSS. This has been the position Nigerian language policy forming the National language Education Policy till 2004 edition.

**Weaknesses and problems of the Nigerian language policy**

From the analysis of the Nigerian language policy revealed in NPE, 1977, 1981, 1988 and 2004 editions the following weaknesses and problems in relation to Arabic become apparent;

1. The policy thinks of the role of Arabic which is culturally, historically and functionally long rooted, to be diminishing and may provably become less than German and Russian in value role.

2. The policy is silent on the MT and L1 role of Arabic is Shuwa Arabs community.

3. The policy does not take into cognizance the significant role being played by Arabic in the Nigerian society as highlighted earlier.

4. Moreover, the policy (Federal republic of Nigeria, 1988:15) contradicts itself by considering Arabic to be elective at SS level when it states that efforts shall be made by the state government to integrate suitable Qur'anic schools and Islamiyyah schools within the formal education system. One should imagine how the integration takes place without integrating Arabic which is a core in Islamyyah system. Another contradiction arises from non-elaboration of the courses expected to be taught in Islamyyah system. The policy statement itself shows that the policy makers were not conversant with Arabic phonology when they pronounced Islamyyah as Islamyya and Qur'anic Kuranic.

5. The items mentioned above indicates the total absence of some professional bodies like NBAIS, NATAIS and other professionals from universities and colleges of higher learning who can give useful suggestions with regard to the position of Arabic in the Nigerian language policy.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, it is clear from the Data above that Arabic language is a very significant language for national transformation and development.

From the historical, cultural economic, social and political points of view, Arabic has been serving very significant role in transforming Nigeria and accelerating its development process. It is clear from the facts mentioned by the writer that the language receives less attention by the government policy. Hence many significant roles of the Language have been ignored.

**Recommendations**

In view of the above the writer wishes to give the following recommendation.
1. Government should invite Arabic professional bodies in making policy decisions on Education and language policy.

2. Arabic professionals in the universities and colleges of higher learning should be included in making decisions on education and language policy.

3. Various factors which include historical, cultural, social, economic and political factors should be put into consideration in decision making concerning language and education policy, rather than relying solely on policy undertone.
References


