Mother Tongue, Sociocultural Competence and Native Intelligence: Relevance to Communication and Social Stability

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Abstract

Statistics has shown that about 7,151 languages are spoken across the world today with. Each of these languages is woven into a unique culture. With globalization and civilization, cross-linguistic communication is inevitable; people from different linguistic and socio-cultural backgrounds interact using the tool of language. It is therefore imperative for communication partners to deploy language suitably to avoid offence. This paper addresses the relevance of mother tongue, sociocultural competence and native intelligence to communication and social stability. The purpose of this work is to bring to bear the importance of engaging the mother tongue and appropriately too, in grass-root communication to ensure mass participation in the development process of any given environment. Data for this work is drawn from available literature on the subject and relevant personal observations. This paper found that different linguistic societies have their set of unique norms and values which find expression in their language, the abuse of which results to offence and break down of peace and order. Therefore, this paper proposes that for there to be sustainable development in any society, participants in a communication situation must be interested and willing to dialogue in line with the accepted socio-cultural norms of the language in use.

Keywords: Mother Tongue, Socio-cultural Competence, Native Intelligence, Communication

Introduction

Humans beings come from different socio-cultural backgrounds, they speak different native tongues and of course they exhibit different levels of intelligent quotients. Amidst these complexities in human existence, the fact remains that they are in constant need of intra-linguistic (within same linguistic) and inter-linguistic (cross-linguistic) interaction. It is important to note that for any successful interaction, there has to be effective communication which happens via the tool of language. Lyons (2000) aptly represents this fact when he captured the view of Sapir (1921) that "language is a purely human... method of communicating ideas, emotion, and desires...." The term 'communicating' implies right 'encoding' and 'decoding' process. Therefore, irrespective of the varying socio-cultural and psycho-linguistic depositions of communicants, there is need to use language and adequately too, to create a soft-landing for mutual understanding, especially in a cross-cultural context. This is especially expedient given that the culture (way of life of a people) is embedded in their language of expression. The undeniable fact remains that when people interact, the choice of expression must align with the values and norms of the linguistic community for there to be mutual understanding. No wonder Holmes and Wilson (2017) state that language is the link between personal world (individual thoughts and ideas) and the social world (immediate linguistic community).

Over the years, linguists have been able to establish the interdependent relationship between language and social context. Jimenez Catalan (2007) aptly expresses the web of connection among language, society and thought by mentioning that through language, we contour our view of society, we order our knowledge; we learn new things and, above all we ingest the norms and social models of our community. It is important to note that in as much as native intelligence does not necessarily depend on cultural background or educational opportunism; we express our intelligence in a language and judge those of other in a language too. Moreover, there is always a socio-cultural background against which we can measure one's native intelligence. Given that this is so; native intelligence may be innate but it is expressed-within a linguist environment.

Concepts

Mother Tongue

To some persons and countries, mother tongue means no more than the language of one's ethnic group, that is to say, the language spoken in one's biological place of origin. However, this work favours the other view that mother tongue is same as one's first language, acquired at childhood; one in which a user exhibits native speaker's proficiency. Some linguists have said that it is that language a person has been exposed to from birth or within the critical period (the time window to acquire language in a linguistically rich environment, after which further language acquisition becomes much more difficult and effortful). By this explanation, a child grows to naturally speak the language(s) of his immediate environment. In other words, a child who is exposed to more than one language equally within the critical period will likely acquire native speaker's proficiency in the languages his is exposed to.

In the view of Nordguist (2019) mother tongue is a person's native language - learned from birth. He called it first language, dominant language, home language, native tongue. In as much as these terms are not necessarily synonymous, Nordguist uses them to mean the same language that shapes an individual's linguistic competence. Generally, linguists on the other hand, have referred to it as L_1 and L_2 for second language. Tulasiewiz and Adam (2005) opine that mother tongue grows an individual into a particular system of linguistic perception of the world and participation in linguistic production. The view of these linguists aligns aptly with the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis of linguistic determinism (language determines thought) and linguistic relativism (language influence thought).

Similarly, Denham and Lobeck (2013) attest to the fact that people are often immersed in their native language. This includes both acquiring proficiency in the rules of the language as well as developing deep understanding of the cultural norms which the language expresses. Tulasiewiz and Adam (2005) agree with Denhan and Idoeck (2003) that the norms of one's language build one's linguistic pattern, social integration and self-awareness. Also close to these views is Llama and Stockwell (2010) who claim that people's linguistic pattern signals social and individual identity and more importantly, their conscious awareness of their

personal, ethnic, geographic, political and family identities is often a factor in their language use and relevant in evaluating their competence.

The importance of mother tongue to education cannot be over emphasized. Savage (2019), Akintunde and Akuta (2019), UNESCO 2022, are of a similar view that mother tongue in child education helps a child to better understand concepts and develop literacy and other skills. In discussing mother tongue and multilingual education, Ruth foundation (2023) submits that children learn best via a language they have innate proficiency in, often the mother tongue. There is overwhelming evidence of the benefits of mother tongue in education, however, Savage (2019) identifies the following as advantages of mother tongue in education:

i. Mother tongue enables children acquire skills learn other languages
ii. Mother tongue helps a child to gain personal, social and cultural identity.
iii. Utilizing mother tongue aids children grow their critical thinking and literacy skills.
iii. The children who learn in their mother tongue are inclined to take on a better understating of the curriculum.
iv. Skills acquired in mother tongue do not require to re-teaching when the child moves to a second language.
v. Children who are taught in mother tongue learn faster and love school more given that they feel comfortable in their environment.

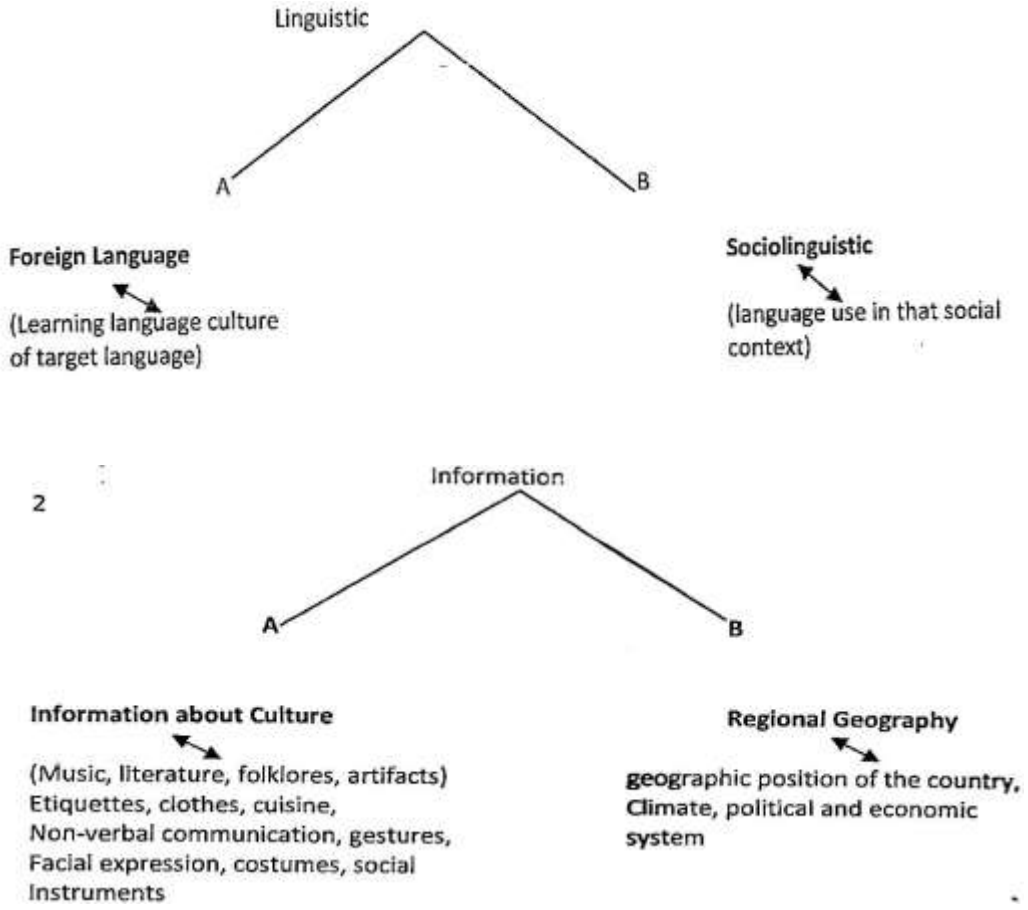
Sociocultural Competence

In the context of social interaction, knowing what to say, how to say it; where to say it; when to say it and to whom is imperative to the issue of mutual understanding. It is this knowledge that sociolinguists consider as evaluation of an individual's social competence in language use. Socio-cultural competence is seen as an ability to communicate in a language appropriately, contextually and culturally. It is the knowledge of customs, rules, beliefs and principles of a given society (Drlikova, 2011). In essence it involves the ability to use specific etiquettes, knowledge and communication techniques in order to achieve mutual understanding with other culture bearers. This is to say that participants in a communication situation ought to engage dialogue in agreement with the accepted socio-cultural norms of the language in use (Rakhimova, 2017). As a

result of this, language cannot be taught and learnt without studying the society where the native speakers live.

Holmes and Wilson (2017) aver that a person's ethnicity, age and gender are indexed by the linguistic features of their speech. What this implies is that the way a person speaks generally signals at least some social information about their background. It is noteworthy to pinpoint out that if language use is not appropriate for a given context, chances are that communication will break down and there would be offence also. Culture is embedded in language and language is used to express culture. Therefore, in the case of cross-cultural communication, language must align with the acceptable behavoural patterns of the speech community. Take for instance, if an Ikwere speaker of Yoruba were to communicate with Yoruba native speakers in Yoruba language, such one is expected to use his language, behaviour and even body language in a manner that shows respect for older people, differently from what is obtainable in own linguistic community. This is why some researchers have explained socio-cultural competence as the formation of skills to represent the native culture of a foreign language in inter-cultural communication. To interact with others in their language, it is imperative to imbibe the cultural skills and norm of their language. Where this is not taken care of, despite the willingness of both sides to communicate, cross-cultural misunderstanding can always happen, since the communication partners do not have certain knowledge about tradition, religious peculiarities, taboos, norms and values or extra-linguistic rules of another culture (Rakhimova, 2017).

In what follows, Rakhimova (2017) highlights social competence as modeled by Russian scientists:



Intelligence

Different views exist on what human intelligence actually represents. Cherry (2022) attest that intelligence is one of the often-discussed topics in psychology, yet it has not unsigned definition. While some have said intelligence is genetic - residing in human genetic variation; others have connected it to certain environmental factors. Nevertheless, intellectual ability is generally regarded as comprising skills required to think critically, see connections between disciplines and solve problem in new or changing situations. Wikipedia comments that through intelligence, human possess the cognitive ability to learn, form concepts, understand, apply logic and reason, including the capacity to recognize patterns, comprehend ideas, plan, make decisions, retail information and use language to

communicate. Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2005) defines intelligence as the ability to learn, understand and think in a logical way about things. In essence, human intelligence is the 'intellectual power of humans, which is marked by complex cognitive feats and high level of motivation and self-awareness (Wikipedia). Cherry (2022) concludes that intelligent involves such mental activities as logic, reasoning, planning as well as problem-solving.

Native Intelligence

Individuals have unique ways of accessing information, comprehending and communicating ideas. While some exhibit superior reasoning ability, others are rather superficial in their approach and reasoning as well. These unique individual traits, scholars have said are not necessarily connected to one's background. According to Gould (1982), native intelligence ability is an innate intelligence which is not unaffected by culture and educational opportunity. This implies that the way an individual tends to understand, communicate and apply concepts, make judgments and reason generally is subject to the individual's innate composition or disposition. Horst (2002, P.1) state that "Native intelligence is the specified complexity inherent in the information content of an artificial system. The artificial system is defined as a system that can be encoded in some general-purpose language expressed minimally as some finite length bit string, and decoded by a finite set of rules a priori".

This surmises that native intelligence aggregates things like potential intelligence, learning ability, system integration, richness, and potential effectiveness of individual behaviours, and intellectual reasoning capability.

Communication

Communication is a natural and fundamental process for human beings, involving a systematic and continuous interpersonal interaction (Emeka-Igbokwe 2020). It is basically the act of sharing information from one person to another or group of people. According to Fredericks (2014) communication is any form (language, gestures, facial expression, signal, mimicry, visual or dramatic art) by which two people exchange information. Minger (2018) defines it as the transfer of information from an originator to a receiver through any appropriate means. In essence, communication provides opportunities for interpersonal interaction and

likely yields desired behaviour change. It is the sum of the things one person does when he wants to create understanding in the mind of another.

Bhasin (2020) proposes that communication has a model which identifies the sender, who is encoder of message and the receiver, who is decodes the message. Bhasin emphasizes that communication process starts with the conceptualization of the message and then further runs through the other processes of encoding, message, channel, receiver and decoding. In addition, Bhasin points out that the process of communication becomes complete when there is a feedback from the recipient of the message as shown in the communication model below:



source: http://www.marketing91.com.

How Mother Tongue, Sociocultural Competence and Native Intelligence Affect Communication and Social Stability

Language is the link between one's innate ability and one's social context. Our potentials and intelligence find expression through language. It is important to re-emphasize that part of what constitute a person's native intelligence, includes knowing what to say; whom to say it to and how to say it in the language that one chooses to use. Bearing in mind that the wrong choice of expression might lead to offence or misunderstanding, it is expedient to get a mastery of the linguistic habits of any target language especially in a situation of cross-cultural interaction because the language of any linguistic community is always in harmony with its norms and values. In the words of Holmes and Wilson (2017, p.12) "the relationship between linguistic choice and the social context in which they are made is sometimes easiest to see when different languages are involved." It is observed that one's innate intelligence could be assessed within a system, by using the

yardstick of its social or cultural norms. As humans, we acquire our first social norms alongside our mother tongue. In this sense, it is implied that mother tongue mean same as first language. Kaplan (1988) researched the ways language and culture influence narrative construction and posits that our first language (mother tongue) has a powerful influence on the way we shape our thoughts and organize our idea. In essence, a well-organized thought line and ideas align with the social standards of a speech community and are expressed in language use.

Language scholars believe that the use of mother tongue in early child education contributes in no small measures to a child's educational success and potential development even when he/she has attained adulthood. Mackenzie and Ozoemena et al (2021) citing Walker (2013) corroborates this view by stating that "children's potentials are often wasted when skill acquisition is attempted without the use of native language which results in lack of development and educational failure." The line of argument of Ozoemena et al justifies the claim of Kaplan (1988) that the mother tongue exerts strong influence on people's world view: it shapes their thoughts and coordinates their ideas. Fafunwa (1974) advocates for the use of mother tongue and explains that mother tongue education, which is a systematic way of training and instructing a child through the medium of first language, is crucial for the development of a nation. For a nation to develop and sustain its development, the citizens must be abreast with the social standards that promote peace and harmony considering that development can take place or be sustained in a chaotic environment. In recent times, youths seem to have lost their social and moral barring: they tend to be drawn to violence and other anti-social behaviour – looting, killing, raping, kidnapping, and abusing of substances; they generally terrorize their environments and unleash horror as they please. Social critics have attributed this phenomenon to the breakdown of family system in our society today. This situation is directly or indirectly connected with the diminishing state of the use of indigenous languages in many Nigerian homes. Savage (2019) opines that children with strong foundation in their first language often display a deeper understanding of themselves and their place within the society, along with an increased sense of wellbeing and confidence. She further states that naturally, this flows down into every aspect of their lives, including their academic achievement.

Socio-cultural competence foresters social stability in the sense that it involves the ability to use specific information about a nation; speech etiquette knowledge and communication technology in order to achieve mutual understanding with other culture bearers (Rakhimova 2017). For any meaningful development to take place or be sustained there must be adequate and effective communication. On the other hand, effective communication can be achieved when appropriate communication mode is deployed for mutual understanding, which itself is an important catalyst to sustainable development. According to Rakhimova 2017, the "main objective of any interaction process is the desire to be understood by communication partners; the efficiency of communication is directly related to the achieved level of mutual understanding between communicants."

Nigeria is a multilingual, multiethnic, multicultural and multi-religious society, with each particular ethnic or religious group operating sets of unique norms and believes. Hence what is socially acceptable in a particular region or environment- may lead to a breakdown of law and order in another; and it all begins with communication. In line with this phenomenon, Rakhimova 2017 opines that intercultural communication provides a high level of knowledge about own culture and culture of other, especially in studying their language. Communication is rooted in culture - acceptable or forbidden norms, in every language, there are values imbedded which must be upheld. Therefore, successful social mobilization for development goals involves a conscious development of high-level socio-cultural competence and native intelligence to succeed in engaging people to participate in their collective social and political development.

Summary

Undeniable is the fact that our concept of the world around us is formed via our mother tongue and through same, we attempt to relate with the world of others. It is therefore imperative to insist on learning the cultural norms as well as the rules of any target language we intend to deploy. Learners and users of other languages should strive to engage their intellects, potentials, reasoning capabilities and their communicative competence in learning or using any target language appropriately so as to develop a solid social-cultural competence and avoid misunderstanding and/or offence when communicating across cultural boundaries. Within a group of people, it is also important to avoid communicating

in a language that is alien to a few within the group to ensure inclusive interaction. Certain expressions may be considered rude or vulgar to some persons depending on their cultural background, hence it is necessary to choose words carefully to avoid offences which could result in communication break and in turn hamper the pursuit of sustainable development.

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