



AN OVERVIEW ON MULTILINGUALISM

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ABSTRACT

The article gives a brief analytical survey of multilingualism practices, its consequences, its benefits in education and discussions on the appropriate ways towards its achievement in education. Multilingualism refers to speaking more than one language competently. Generally, there are both the official and unofficial multilingualism practices. A brief survey on multilingualism practices outside Africa indicates that Canada, Belgium and Switzerland are officially declared multilingual countries. Likewise, countries like South Africa, Nigeria and Kenya experience multilingualism in Africa. Multilingualism exhibits both the political and the linguistic consequences. The linguistic consequences include the development of a lingua franca, creation of mixed languages within a linguistic milieu, enhances cross cultural communication strategies and cross-cultural communication skills. Benefits of multilingualism practices in education include the creation and appreciation of cultural awareness, adds academic and educational value, enhances creativity, adjustment in society and appreciation of local languages.

KEYWORDS: *Bilingualism, Diglossia, Language, Multilingualism, Triglossia.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Humans need an organized medium of communication in any given social set up. This medium is normally referred to as language. Though it appears difficult to clearly define the term language due to its social complexity, it is generally agreed amongst linguistic intelligentsia that it is a system of symbols designed for the purposes of communication. This system involves a collection of entities organized into a whole and arranged in such a way that they work together to achieve a particular function. Language as a medium of communication amongst humans possesses numerous attributes such as being governed by rules, is a system and performs such functions as giving information, expressing feelings and emotions, establishing rapport, exercising authority and an identity marker. As humans use more than one language then terminologies such as bilingualism, trilingualism and multilingualism arise the term multilingualism which is the focus of this article is derived from two Latin words namely “multi” that means many and “lingua” that means language[1], [2].

Thus, multilingualism is referred to as the ability of a speaker to express himself or herself in several languages with equal and native like proficiency. However, it has been realized in

both the written and verbal communicative practices that proficiency in one language usually tends to dominate in a multilingual set up as compared to the others. Multilingualism can also be regarded as the co-existence of several languages within a society. These several languages can be official or unofficial, native or foreign and national or international. Sometimes multilingualism is used interchangeably with bilingualism that refers to the ability to speak two languages with native like proficiency. Multilingualism is considered in this article as an inclusive terminology comprising bilingualism (ability to speak two languages proficiently), trilingualism (ability to speak three languages) and there is also instances whereby one speaker has the ability to speak even more than three languages. Since the prefix 'multi' refers to more than one, both bilingualism and trilingualism will therefore technically refer to more than one language. As we use several languages, we become multilingual. Any given country or society is generally considered as a multilingual one if its members or citizens are multilingual[3], [4]. The multilingual citizens on many occasions tend to show identifiable full range of communicative competence in several languages in place. However, there is a rare perfect multilingualism in practice. The rare perfect practice occurs because even if we acquire both or several languages in place, there is always a notable tendency that one language will always dominate over the others which are considered subordinates. The tendency that shows a clear functional differentiation of two languages is generally referred to as diglossia. In this case, one language regarded as a low variety (L) may be used at home or informal environments and the other regarded as a high variety (H) is used in specialized formal functions. There are also instances whereby functional differentiation of three languages is involved. This tendency generally gives rise to triglossia. A glimpse of triglossia can be witnessed in Kenya whereby English is regarded as a high variety[5].

1.1.Survey of Multilingualism Practices:

Multilingualism practice manifests itself in both Africa and the rest of the world at large. However, the general state of multilingualism in many societies and countries tend to be either official or unofficial. The official multilingualism is normally overtly enshrined in the country's constitution and practically applied in among others the education sector functions, national and international official engagements. The education sector functions include teaching and learning in primary, secondary and also tertiary institutions. Official engagements involve parliamentary proceedings, judicial activities, local and also international conferences among others. The unofficial multilingualism is not necessarily and clearly entrenched in the country's constitution. However, this trend is generally unavoidably practiced amongst close or neighboring ethnic communities as they interact amongst themselves during their daily activities such as trade and commerce, games and sports and the religious functions. For example, some members of the Luo community living around the shores of Lake Victoria in Kenya have the ability to communicate in the Luhya language of the Luhya community neighboring them on the Western part of Kenya and vice versa. This is happening when the two communities meet during activities such as sports, trade, politicking and even religious matters. Africa has a mixed situation of multilingualism practices. Whereas some countries are officially multilingual, others are generally unofficial. However, despite the existence of these mixed situations in Africa, currently multilingualism practice is seemingly becoming a norm. The practice is increasingly spreading from one nation to the other though with modifications to suit the education system of the countries concerned. For example, Kenya embraces official multilingualism whereby English is spoken as official, Kiswahili as both national and official, and native as indigenous languages constituting over forty tribes. Though there are other European and Asian languages in Kenya like French, German, Hindu and Chinese among others, English is predominantly introduced through formal Surprisingly, despite the fact that many African countries attained independence over fifty years ago from the political tutelages of foreign colonizers and tend to have numerous indigenous languages some of which serve as a lingua franca, they still ended up adopting the foreign languages of the colonizers as official namely English,

Portuguese and French. Thus, from the general survey foreign languages contribute to official multilingualism in Africa with may be an exception of South Africa.

1.2. Consequences of Multilingualism:

The consequences of multilingualism are numerous ranging from linguistic and socio-political. Linguistic consequences of multilingualism include among others the creation and growth of lingua franca that normally develops because of the need for cross group communication. For example, Kenya has Kiswahili as a lingua franca. There is also a lingua franca called Lingala in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Multilingualism practice creates the development of mixed languages mainly due to intense language contact. As a result, speakers therefore tend to involve a mixture of languages during verbal communication. This contact may also result into the creation of slangs. These slangs are generally caused by urbanization, migrant labour and also industrialization as was witnessed in Kenya in the creation of Sheng. Multilingualism practice generally develops cross linguistic communication strategies like code switching and code mixing. When people switch from one language used at homes to the other outside the home environment then code switching occurs. This is witnessed in countries like India where switching is witnessed between English, Hindu/Urdu, Bengali and Tamil. Generally, where bilingualism or multilingualism exists, speakers normally tend to use these languages alternately as commonly witnessed in Belgium, Switzerland and China. Kenya and Tanzania among others as does the Portuguese language in Lusophone countries such as Angola and Mozambique. Multilingualism practice tends to create the development and general acquisition of cross-cultural communication skills. In this regard people tend to learn different skills of the languages in place especially speaking, reading and even writing. These cross-cultural communication skills enable one to gain both the communicative and discourse competencies. Besides the linguistic consequences, there is also a political consequence that relies on the economic and political order of the society. This in the long run creates the majority and minority languages. Some of the majority languages become more powerful than others[6], [7].

1.3. Benefits of Multilingualism:

Before discussing benefits of multilingualism in education, I have found it necessary to give a glimpse of how many people speak more than one language. I have also stated briefly which languages are spoken by more than 50 million people and the state of indigenous African languages in reference to multilingualism practices. It is estimated that over a billion people in the world speak more than one language fluently. However, with the increased population of people in the world the number of bilinguals may be currently twofold. This increased number of speakers is probably attributed to the regionalism and internationalism principles that are now embraced by many countries especially in the field of trade and commerce, innovation and also the technological advancements. These principles call for the speakers to be proficient in the working languages to effectuate communication. Languages namely Chinese, English, Russian, Spanish, Hindu, Portuguese, Bengali, German, Japanese, Arabic, Urdu, French, Malay-Bahasa, Italian, Teluga and Tamil are generally spoken each by approximately 50 million people as first languages. These languages tend to be official in many countries in the world thus contributing to official multilingualism practices. Generally, recent estimates show that there are about 7000 languages in the world and Africa tends to have more than half of this. However, many indigenous languages in Africa that constitute somewhat unofficial multilingualism also tend to lack orthography.

1.4. The Way Forward:

In order to achieve multilingualism practices in education whether formal or informal, the following recommendations can be put in place as the way forward: Revisit the official language policy Act in a given country to help in strengthening multilingualism practices in the country concerned hence showing its significance in the fast-growing world. This has

worked well in other countries for example, Bilingual Education Act 1968 in USA and Official Languages Act 1969 in Canada that established English and French as official languages at the federal level across Canada. The policy also worked in California where Bilingual-Bicultural Education Act 1976 was enacted to aid the school children whose primary language was not English. In USA, bilingual education policy assisted non-English-speaking children to integrate with the speakers of English hence developing reading and speaking fluently in both languages. These children were Spanish speaking Puerto Ricans and Cubans in the East; Orientals and Chicanos in the West; French and Portuguese speaking children in New England; American Indians mainly in the South West; and also, Aleuts and Inuit (Eskimos) in Alaska. The other nations that employed the bilingual education programmes are United Kingdom, Philippines and Sweden. Multidimensional communication skills should be used both in primary and secondary levels for the purposes of getting the learner access to both content and skills. This will help the learner to acquire and retain the content and various communication skills. For this to be fruitful, multilingualism in education calls for the involvement of language education communication skills which is an essential tool for the development of the learner's speaking and writing abilities. Application of communicative language teaching focusing on linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse, socio-cultural, social and strategic competences and drama can help in the achievement of multilingualism in education. These can be realised by continuous use of these competences in education. Furthermore, grammar translation, direct method (teaching using the target language), reading method, use of audio lingual and audiovisual approaches can also be applied in teaching languages in a multilingual set up. Encouraging the use of indigenous languages in education besides the national and official languages enhances multilingualism. This fact has been clearly stated in the UNESCO report of 1953 that education is somewhat most effective through mother tongue instructions. This is happening because speech communities already have the communicative competence and also assigned appropriately various lexemes to the objects in their physical and cultural milieu. Thus, learning a different language may not be difficult but will always be supported by the knowledge gained from the first language.

1.5.Evolution With Intervention:

Now consider the situation where some societal influences other than simple competition intervene in the use of languages. Assume that the societal influences or interventions are implemented to counter the arbitrary increase or decrease of either language in a bilingual population. Let $\bar{P}_A(y_A)$ and $\bar{P}_B(y_B)$ be the payoff functions for A and B speakers in a (y_A, y_B) -population, respectively, defined in terms of societal influences and interventions, with \bar{P}_A decreasing in y_A and \bar{P}_B in y_B , meaning that the smaller the population percentage of a language, the more incentive or less penalty the speakers of the language receive. Here, incentive means more benefit from the society such as more work opportunities or public supports, etc., and penalty means less advantage in the society such as less access to public education or discouragement from the public, etc. Then, the payoff function for a general (x_A, x_B) -speaker in a (y_A, y_B) -population can be defined in terms of the average use of A and B by this speaker: It is not so hard to prove that the strategies in (a) and (b) are evolutionarily stable while the one in (c) is not (see Appendix C). This means that under competition, one of the languages is expected to die eventually while the other takes over the whole population. The co-existence of the two languages is not sustainable[8], [9].

1.6.Dynamics with competition:

According to the theory on constrained optimization, as a KKT point of the potential maximization problem in, if an equilibrium strategy for the game in is a local maximizer, the Hessian projected on the null space of the active constraints at this strategy is necessarily negative semidefinite; conversely, if the projected Hessian is negative definite, the

equilibrium strategy must be a strict local maximizer of the potential maximization problem. Thus, the evolutionary stability of the equilibrium strategy can be justified by the negative definiteness of the projected Hessian at the strategy (Appendix B). The game in has three possible equilibrium strategies corresponding to three fixed points of, as given in. It is easy to see those strategies (a) and (b) are evolutionarily stable (Appendix C). In either case, one language dies while the other takes over the whole population. If $s_A > s_B$, the chance for (a) will be greater than (b), and if $s_B > s_A$, the chance for (b) will be greater than (a). For (c), it is easy to verify that the projected Hessian at this strategy is always positive definite (Appendix C). It follows that the strategy can never be a local maximizer of the potential maximization problem in, and can never be evolutionarily stable[10].

2. DISCUSSION

The competition-only model as described in the Evolution with Competition section predicts that between two competing languages, if based only on competition, one would eventually die while the other takes over the whole population, and the co-existing state is unstable. This result is not so surprising, for it has already been discussed in previous studies, although from different perspectives. On the other hand, the intervention-only model as described in the Evolution with Intervention section shows that if controlled only by interventions, it is possible to prevent either language population from becoming too large or too small, and keep the population in a stable co-existing state. By combining the two, the model with both competition and intervention as described in the Evolution with Competition and Intervention section gives a more complete description on the evolution of multilingual populations when it is under the influences of both language competition and societal intervention. It predicts that languages may co-exist stably in multilingual forms if appropriate interventional strategies are employed. In addition, the interventional measures may not only be able to prevent language extinction but also direct populations to desired equilibrium states.

3. CONCLUSION

When foreign and indigenous languages are included in the multilingualism practices in education, then we should always try to avoid imposing these languages to the people. A keen measure and clear framework should be taken into account because imposing languages to people is dangerous and may cause tensions amongst different ethnic and or speech communities. Furthermore, as you impose a lingua franca and or foreign languages to people without developing also the indigenous languages then this may lead to language death. There are more than 3,000 languages spoken in the world today that are at the point of dying and some are already extinct. In Kenya for instance, Suba, Elmolo, Oropom, Lorkoti, Yaaku, Sogoo, Kore, Segeju, Omotik, Kinare, Bong'om, Terik, Dahalo and even Burji are considered dead. Causes of language death may include among others the following factors: imposition of languages on the others, language colonialism, foreign language dictatorship and assimilation of languages. The assimilation of tribes and language colonialism is witnessed in Kenya whereby the Ndia has been envisaged by the Kikuyu and Suba by the Luo. Other ways of language death include crude suppression of native languages as was the practice by the colonizing states. This was witnessed even beyond Africa whereby Vlaams (Flemish), a Dutch dialect was suppressed during the Middle Ages. The experience of language death is not only in Kenya but also manifested in Uganda where six of its indigenous languages are dying, Tanzania has eight dying languages and Nigeria, Cameroon, Sudan and Ethiopia are listed as having the highest language mortality. The revival of these dying languages can be done by the incorporation of multilingualism practices in education and the production of both monolingual and bilingual dictionaries. In a nut shell, depending on the composition of the society, multilingualism practice in education should embrace the indigenous, national, official and foreign languages as equal partners in the language policy development and education.

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