

INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE TEACHING AND THE INTEGRATION OF DEVELOPMENT ORIENTED GOALS IN CAMEROON.

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ABSTRACT

This paper is a discussion on how the dissemination of skills, knowledge and know-how through indigenous languages can bring about meaningful development. It encourages the integration of global issues in the teaching of indigenous languages with specific concerns to Cameroon and offers proposals on how development-oriented lessons can be conceived and made possible to learners. The paper is going to contribute in portraying the values of indigenous language education in the development of skills and know-how of learners. The paper is partitioned into four sections: Section 1 is a discussion on the trend of indigenous language teaching in Cameroon. Section 2 gives a review of the syllabus of National Languages for Secondary general education. Section 3 dwells on the need for development oriented goals in indigenous language teaching. Section 4 gives practical suggestions on how such lessons can be conceived integrated into indigenous language teaching.

Keywords: *Development, Indigenous language, teaching, culture, integration.*

INTRODUCTION

Indigenous languages, otherwise known as mother tongue, local, or national languages are often looked upon as inferior, primitive languages which cannot be used to transmit useful knowledge (Mutaka & Attia, 2007). In Cameroon, there are over 250 indigenous languages (Gordon 2005), but the languages of education are French and English. Given the above situation, the question that comes to mind is: What is primitive? Is it the language or the knowledge that is transmitted through the language? Teaching in indigenous languages is not a rejection of the importance of other foreign languages used for the dissemination of scientific discoveries at the era of globalization. Instead, it will facilitate the learner's learning capacity. For close to three decades, mother tongue development and education has been relegated. Since then Cameroonians have different attitudes towards indigenous language teaching.

However, nowadays, these attitudes have changed as both the government and its citizens have come to realize that indigenous language education is not only practicable but also very essential in laying a foundation for national development. When we talk about "development," we usually think about economic development. This is due to the fact that, as an aftermath of western colonialism and the phenomenon of globalization, money has become the most visible value to determine, sometimes wrongly, whether an individual or a group of individuals are developed or not. But we know that economic development is only one side of a multifaceted coin. Other sorts of development needs should take into account: (a) cultural development, that is, for the individual or a group of individuals to become aware of the cultural richness of

their own community and actively participate in its maintenance and growth; (b) social development in the sense that an individual or a group of individuals are able to react as "civilized" people, not giving way to their "primitive" urges for example by fighting physically when provoked by their neighbors; (c) health-awareness development needs, for example, being aware of the necessity of fighting the spread of AIDS, knowing first-aid treatment in case of an accident, learning traditional treatment of one's cultural community for certain diseases, etc. (Mutaka & Attia, 2007).It is in this light that it is expected that if development-oriented ideas and issues of global concerns are integrated in school programmes it will help to bring a real revolution in the ways of reasoning of our learners. This article shall discuss how ideas that aim at achieving development can be transmitted to learners with the indigenous language being the main medium. But first, the trend of indigenous language teaching in Cameroon shall be examined.

1) The trend of indigenous language teaching in Cameroon

The history of Cameroon shows that the teaching of indigenous languages started way back in 1884 when the British missionaries opened up schools in the Victoria region of Cameroon, today known as Limbe. Motivated by their desire to evangelize Cameroon, the missionaries became interested in the promotion of national languages, which were seen as great facilitators in their evangelisation mission. Unfortunately, the years after independence, precisely in 1961, the reunification of the two sections of Cameroon (West and East Cameroon) brought an end to the promotion of indigenous languages in West Cameroon. The promotion of indigenous languages did

not constitute one of the priorities of social, cultural, economic and political development that Cameroonians were called up to usher in for the initial take off of the new and young state. Several reasons were advanced for this. (Mba & Chiatoh, 2000). However, these reasons do not constitute the focus of this paper.

By the 1970s, there was the reemployment of indigenous languages in education with the appearance on the scene of some Cameroonian linguists who were interested in the development of indigenous languages for they considered these languages as vital instruments of education and development. This led to the creation of Operational Research Programme for Language Education in Cameroon, (PROPELCA). This organisation, which aimed at carrying out research on the teaching of Cameroonian languages alongside the official languages, received orientation and assistance from UNESCO and the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL). The birth of PROPELCA with its bilingual nature (mother tongue/official language) education led to the selection of pilot languages for the experimentation of the bilingual model (its acceptability, smooth integration into the official language program and mother tongue education pedagogy). The pilot languages selected were Ewondo and Lamso. Later on in the experimental phase, more languages like Fe'efe'e, Yemba, and Kom were included. An evaluation of this experimental phase of the project by Professor John Caris (1987) revealed that the programme was a success. The results of this evaluation marked the beginning of the initial generalisation phase of the programme to cover 20 languages (Chiatoh and Mba, 2000. P.4).

Apart from PROPELCA, many teams of actors, researchers and other institutions are now mobilised to put into practice new directives that are instrumental in research on indigenous languages. It is worth noting the contribution of a number of partners to codify and standardise Cameroonian languages in order to make them be used adequately for literacy and teaching programmes. These partners include: Summer Institute for Linguistics (SIL), The Department of African Languages and Linguistics, University of Yaounde 1(DLAL), Cameroon Association for Bible Translation and Literacy (CABTAL), Center for Applied Linguistics(NACALCO), and the Ministry of Scientific and Cultural Research. Their activities are not only instrumental but have given impetus in the promotion of indigenous languages in Cameroon. Thanks to these institutions, a lot of literature is produced and published in the local languages and training courses are organized through seminars. These seminars help participants acquire basic skills in linguistics and literacy. PROPELCA trains people each year for language projects that already have primers in some local languages. The institutions send in teachers who are trained to teach their language in their respective communities. Writers' workshops are also organized by SIL and CABTAL at village levels to train villagers to produce their own pedagogic materials.

In 2008, a text was signed by the minister of Higher Education creating the laboratory and department in charge of teaching and promotion of national languages and cultures in the Higher Teachers Training College (HTTC) in Yaounde. This was followed by the implementation on teaching national languages and cultures in five pilot government secondary schools, namely:

Government High School Leclerc in Yaounde (Center Region).
 Government High School Akwa in Douala (Littoral Region)
 Government High School Bafang (West Region)
 Government High School Garoua (North Region). (Nkenlifack et al:2011)

This new philosophy led to the recruitment in 2009 of 40 students in the department in charge of teaching and promoting national languages and cultures in HTTC in Yaounde. Presently, the following indigenous languages are taught in some pilot schools in Cameroon:

Table 1: Indigenous languages taught in some pilot schools in Cameroon

Pilot schools	Regions	Indigenous languages
Lycee Classique et Moderne de Ngaoundéré	Adamawa	Dii
Lycée General Leclerc de Yaoundé	Center	Ewondo and Basaa
Lycée d'Akwa Douala	Littoral	duala
Lycée Classique Moderne Garoua	North	Fufulde
Government High School Njinikom	North West	Kom
Lycée Classique d'Ebolowa	South	Bulu
Lycée Classique de Bafang	West	Fe'efe

Elsewhere, Tasah (2013) talking about the situation of local languages in Cameroon makes mention of the fact that 7 local languages are taught in primary school since 2006, while 8 are taught in secondary school since 2009.

2) Review of the syllabus of National languages for Secondary General Education

The implementation of the teaching of national languages and cultures in some government secondary schools has led to the putting in place of new syllabuses. The syllabuses that were drawn up by the inspectorate General of Education in the Ministry of Secondary Education since 2012 were given new orientations and were in accordance with the major guidelines for education in general and secondary education in particular as they are enshrined both in the 1988 law to lay down guidance in Cameroon and in the 2009 Growth and Employment Strategy Paper(DSCE). These new syllabuses had to undergo many changes notably; a shift from skill based approach to competence based approach through real life situations; a shift from a school cut off from society to one that prepares citizens for a smooth insertion into socio-cultural and economic activities; and a shift from an evaluation of knowledge to that of competences necessary for sustainable development. (Syllabus of National Languages for Secondary General Education. MINSEC 2014: p.4)

These changes and orientations led to a shift of paradigm within the curriculum reform process thus leading to the adoption of the competence based approach through real life situations. The syllabuses designed for the first cycle of Secondary General Education(forms one and two/6e and 5e) are broken down into 5 areas of learning, each of them containing a given number of disciplines, has a weekly workload and the quota with respect to the total number of hours on the timetable (32 hours) with the following distribution:

Table 2: Areas of learning and weekly workload of national languages

Areas of Learning	Weekly workload	Quota
Languages and Literature	10hours	30%
Science and Technology	08hours	25%
Social Sciences/Humanities	06hours	20%
Arts and National Cultures	04hours	15%
Personal Development	03hours	10%

From the above table it could be seen that out of thirty two hours weekly workload for the different areas of learning, four hours are allotted for the teaching of arts and national cultures. This area which touches directly on the present paper, has two main disciplines notably; Arts and National Cultures. Each of these disciplines has expected outcomes at the end of the first cycle. Artistic Education has as expected outcome to; Observe and appreciate works of art, carry out an artistic activity, gradually acquire the love for personal expression and creativity, dramatise, recite texts(poems, tales, proverbs, etc)relating to various areas of society. National Languages and Cultures on the other hand, has as expected outcome to; Demonstrate a mastery of Cameroon cultures, demonstrate a mastery of basic rules in writing Cameroonian languages as well as basic grammatical notions applied to these languages, demonstrate a mastery of one of the national languages at 3 levels: morpho-syntax, reception and production of simple oral and written texts, etc. (Syllabus for National Languages, MINSEC 2014:10)

This syllabus has been designed to help learners acquire skills in different disciplines. However, it is also important to note that the competences are accompanied by other skills which could be referred to as cross cultural competences related to intellectual, methodological, social and personal areas of learning. Consequently, it is imperative to implement these syllabuses not in isolation but as interrelated subjects that should be developed through teaching/learning activities. The fundamental goal of these syllabuses at the end of the first cycle is to enable the learner to be self-reliant, to be able to keep on learning throughout his/her life, to contribute to sustainable development and become a responsible citizen. It is to meet up with this target that it becomes imperative to think of the possibilities of intergrating development oriented goals in indigenous language teaching.

3) On the need for development-oriented goals in indigenous language teaching.

Cameroon is looking forward to becoming an emergent nation by the year 2035. Its secondary education sector faces many challenges. There is the need to harness multilingual resources of Cameroon for accelerated and sustainable socio-cultural, economic and technological development in the 21st Century. One of the significant ways this can be done is through literacy in indigenous languages - the language of the people considered to be the original inhabitants of an area. Such reasoning is motivated by the vital role language has to play in a society. With language, people not only expeditiously communicate, they also express values, knowledge, beliefs, ideas, ability to do things and world views. Many people can best express their thoughts through the language they acquired in their early years and which normally becomes

their natural instrument of thought and communication. In fact, to use Whorf's words printed in Hymes (1964):

The forms of a person's thoughts are controlled by inexorable laws of patterns by which he is unconscious. These patterns are the unperceived intricate systematizations of his own language....And, every language is a vast pattern system, different from others, in which the personality not only communicates but also analyzes nature, channels his reasoning and builds the house of his consciousness.

Situating this within the context of this paper, it means that learners will unconsciously, first of all, think in the indigenous language, then the thought is finally transferred to English, French or whatever 'civilized' language. Consequently, the indigenous language can be used to revolutionize the society if well integrated in the school curricula.

Cameroon has many indigenous languages and this is often seen as a hindrance to the development of the country. Several reasons may tempt people to believe that development cannot be tackled from the multiplicity of indigenous languages. One of them may be, and rightly so, the thought that the presence of many languages means the presence of many tribes and consequently tribalism. True, there cannot be any significant development where there is tribalism. Another reason could be the attitude people have towards indigenous languages and education. A good number of parents still have negative sentiments towards having their children learn indigenous languages in school instead of an official language; some parents think for example that it is unwise for knowledge to be imparted to their children in a

language that they will not be able to use outside their territory. A third reason may be the choice of language since every Cameroonian will want his or her language to be taught. A nation that wants to develop must not look at things from that direction. Rather, it would be better to reflect on how to mobilize resources and make good use of the existing languages. Nowadays, attention is being paid to the importance of development issues and concepts, including some integration of national languages into curricula. This is simply because people have come to know that language is an obstacle to the acquisition of useful knowledge. In Cameroon, more work needs to be done in terms of integrating development issues into indigenous language education. Development is seen as a contentious concept and this is clearly demonstrated by the multiplicity of approaches within the field of development studies. However, there appears to be some consensus that, development does not just involve the narrow-minded calculation of Gross National Products and per capita incomes, but the complete transformation of the socio-cultural political and economic beliefs and systems of a particular society to its present needs. (Bodomo, 1999)

It is in this broader, more comprehensive view of development that the language factor weighs in heavily on issues of development thinking in every society. If development involves the appropriate transformation of the socio-cultural, political and economic systems of the society and if language is seen as a repository and a tool for the expression and communication of these very socio-cultural, political and economic belief systems of the society, then it goes without saying that a successful conceptualization and implementation of this

societal transformation can only be achieved through the use of mother tongues or the languages indigenous to the society. It is against this backdrop that the writer thinks integrating development concerns into indigenous language teaching in schools will enable students; tomorrow's resource persons for grass-root development to achieve maximum participation in terms of ideas and information they receive and provide from their lessons. They will be able to react to new ideas in the most intelligent ways possible. An important goal of the indigenous language in the educational system at this level should be to ensure that school graduates are well grounded in the indigenous languages and can use it to speak and write about any grade level theme, be it health, religion, science, economics etc, so that they serve as indigenes of the society more competently. A student graduating with the General Certificate of Education, if he or she is to be useful to his/her region, should be completely literate in the language spoken by the vast majority of indigenous people of that region. As a future agent of technology transfer, of general development, the student must be able to carry out a sustained spoken and written communication on his/her chosen field-arts, science or technology etc. This is possible within our educational systems. The challenges that lie ahead of language teachers in terms of molding our students to achieve these goals are rife. Needless saying however that this can also only be possible with the support of government as it is the case recently.

Discussion on the need for development goals will always feature among current issues because, the idea of development and even developing countries in itself had often

been misunderstood by our predecessors. To explain this misunderstanding, Bodomo (1999) says,

When people speak of developing countries, they immediately think of economic backwardness. To deal with that, projects are conceived and technicians and money sent. When the projects fail, blame is put on the social and cultural practices of the people. Only rarely do people (from the donor countries) realize that the language barrier is the culprit which prevents new ideas from taking roots.

To set back things on the rails, we must begin in the classroom to give a new orientation to this concept. The classroom is of course a convenient place of imparting information, changing concepts and developing many educational skills. Following Mutaka (2007) each development-oriented goal is development per se. This could be true to an extent because as a general overview, a language unit that integrates development components such as peace, health, education, environmental protection, climate issues, and culture, will likely include opportunities for participants to share their experiences in terms of contents and know-how and to participate in cooperative learning tasks. Specific skills can be explored and several ideas in development activities can ultimately help students to improve their ability and proficiency in indigenous languages.

Furthermore, it is a misconception to think that economic, social and political development can only be bettered just by cheer hard work by the citizens of a country speaking whatever language, be it French or English. All these can as well be achieved through indigenous languages, and the

indigenous language teachers occupy a privileged position in influencing their students because they can make their students think, talk and write about their development-oriented concerns such as peace, culture and prevention of AIDS. From childhood, intellectual awareness and development rely on language and logical activities. This awareness and development that guide our thought portray our languages and cultures. They constitute the base for the construction of our own way of seeing the world, the perception of ourselves and the universe.

Students should be able to talk development issues in the indigenous language. Indigenous languages lay good foundations for future creativity in arts, culture and sciences. For instance, in a classroom, when looking for sources of talk, whether guided or free, it is apparent that many of these will come from the type of activities the teacher chooses. A reading text on an interesting or relevant topic such as health or culture may be much more productive and will certainly generate much talk in the language and influence the student's vision of life.

In the past, most language books used teaching materials from already developed countries such as France, United States, and United Kingdom. Recently, African countries (Cameroon inclusive) have started to address development issues. Unfortunately, the integration of development issues into the curricula is rather timid. Didactic materials are still not common. Integrating development issues into indigenous language learning not only educates learners about their becoming self-reliant in future in their own country and throughout the world, it also makes indigenous language

learning more relevant to the classrooms. To attain this goal, the teacher can go ahead to include books in the target language which are not necessarily in the official programme. In the same way, he is capable of introducing new ideas that are not in the current official texts but which are useful to the students.(Mutaka2005).The next issue we want to look at is how indigenous language teachers can integrate development-oriented goals into their teaching.

4) Practical suggestions on how to integrate development -oriented goals in teaching

Each lesson on the indigenous language has a goal or aim. These aims are of course according to the aims the teacher wants to achieve in his lesson. Discussions and activities that address developmental issues, the ability to think about development in a less developed or developing setting due to economic backwardness is important to teachers, especially those who teach indigenous languages. For instance, just discussing and asking questions about AIDS in the learners' mother tongue indicate to them the importance of learning about the disease and its prevention in their own language. This will spur up discussion by learners concerning other diseases. It is a good method of introducing a basic vocabulary lesson and raising awareness and prevention at the same time. It is important to note here that the teacher should lay emphasis more on the speaking than the writing skill because most students even at this stage, are still in the process of identifying some symbols in their mother tongue, unlike the former skill which some acquire even before primary school. The teacher therefore needs an appropriate methodology such as the one below;

Step 1

Each student finds out about various diseases in the target indigenous language: the different appellations, the manifestations, the method of prevention as well as cure. They could ask their parents, neighbors, guardians, friends, other teachers outside the classroom. Students write down the information.

Step 2

Each student reports his or her finding to the class and then expresses it in his or her own words using the indigenous language as main medium of communication. Particular attention is paid to words that are new or strange to most of the students.

Step 3

A word wall is then made to display vocabulary words in the target language, such as names of diseases, means of contamination, how to prevent them, good health habits etc. Alternatively, the teacher can write on the chalk board or place a paper on a classroom wall and write some key words as they are presented or discussed by the students.

Step 4

Students can use information gathered to act sketches on the most common or most dangerous disease, the manifestations, how to handle a patient who is affected by it, etc. The teacher could as well integrate oral lessons that can be characterized by activities such as tales, proverbs, games with songs, dances, poems for reciting, cultural practices and modern realities and riddles. It could also be through drawings and painting and the painting explained orally to

learners using their L1. Drawing and painting are forms of cultural creativity which are manifested quite early in the life of any people. Right from the kindergarten, children's talents in drawing and painting can be uncovered and developed. African societies that practice the dyeing of cloth and pottery do create remarkable forms and models which have deep roots in community life and that have their own technical and even meta-language. The drawn and painted forms can be explained to learners through the indigenous language so that they too can start their creative development in that area. What is true in the areas of painting and drawing is also true in the arts such as pottery, basket making, sculpture, woodwork, etc(Tadadjeu&Mba2000). Aspects of climate change such as drought, environmental hazards such bush fires, flood can as well be made vivid by means of drawing and painting. In this way, learners could talk about their causes and prevention with their teacher in the target language and this will help to give the desired orientation. Assoumou (2005) gives practical suggestions on teaching proverbs as follows:

Step 1: Introduction

Teacher tells students that they are going to study a proverb. He starts by lead-in that gets to the proverb itself.

Step 2: Presentation

Teacher tells proverbs to students and asks them to learn by heart, then individually.

Step 3: Analysis

Teacher asks students questions on the meaning of key words in the proverb, its social implications etc.

Step 4: Summary

The teacher makes the students repeat the proverb and proceed with the significance and pedagogic importance.

Step 5: Application and evaluation

The teacher asks students to recount a story, an anecdote that will illustrate the proverb

The teacher asks students to look for similar proverbs in their languages or other languages.

Further practical suggestions on how these activities can be realized in a lesson are found in Asoumou and Mutaka (2006).

Obviously, industries for textiles, mining automobile foster development in developed countries. Indigenous students learning indigenous languages in a less developed country can also be excellent sources of development. They may not know that, but teachers can help students to learn how to be self-reliant by encouraging them to share experiences they gather from their grandparents, older neighbors, religious leaders or community centers - as long as those students feel comfortable sharing the knowledge acquired with their classmates. The backgrounds of students are varied, just like their talents and experiences. Some students will best express what they are capable of doing only in their mother tongue. The teacher should, through his lessons, help students of an indigenous language to convey their values and talents. They should be able to tell their mates how to weave baskets, how to fish, how to rear chicken, rabbits, etc which they may practice back at home during vacations. Many students venture into such activities after having heard about them. When they are capable of carrying out any of these activities, they tend to do it and raise funds that will help them.

CONCLUSION

The role of language as an instrument for development cannot be ignored. Yet the desired objective for indigenous languages to be used as instrument to achieve development is still to be met in Cameroon. The main interest here has been to point the need and to show that having ideas that are aimed at improving the livelihood of the students at the back of the mind while teaching indigenous languages, is one means through which misconceptions vis-à-vis indigenous language and development could be changed. The putting in place of the syllabus of national languages in secondary education in Cameroon is a giant step towards attaining the set objectives of teaching national languages and cultures. However, this requires strong implementation and follow up. Indigenous languages have come to stay in Cameroon. It will be interesting to take advantage of them in order to better the nation which is in a developing process. So far, the above discussions have been an effort to let us see the importance as well as the possibility to realize development goals if teachers, who have a very vital role to play, can use these languages to inculcate ideas that influence students positively. English and French have as well come to stay, but we must not think that development can only be achieved through these languages. While we ponder on the most appropriate ways of integrating these development-oriented goals into indigenous language teaching, the challenges of producing didactic materials to meet up with these goals remain a major one.

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