

## The Implications of Vocationalizing the French Language for a Secured and More Profitable Nation

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### **Abstract**

Vocationalizing Languages in general would refer to the practical application of Languages to day-to-day affairs of the society. Its implication would go far beyond the theoretical nature and curriculum of language, well into the professionalizing of its basic essence; communication. Many today talk of profiting from Language as a vocation. Not just as "word mongers" like media broadcasters and journalists, but also as interpreters, translators, bilingual authors and secretaries of United Nations' standard. People can actually eat-off the mastery of a foreign language such as the French language. This paper "The implications of vocationalizing the French language for a secured and more profitable nation", emphasizes the world of good the proficiency in the language would do the nation and highlights also the rudiments of its acquisition.

**Keywords:** Implications, Vocationalizing, French Language, Secured, Profitable Nation

### **Introduction**

To vocationalize language is to transform language into a profession, an occupation of sort. It is to elevate its status beyond daily mundane use and to exploit its economic benefits. It is also, to see language as a tradable commodity, rather than just a means of communication. Until recently, language use is one of the most undermined aspect of the society. Its acquisition is arbitrary and more of necessity than merely of interest and personal development. In a growing global village, the roles of language, goes beyond the transmission of messages or information. What are the dynamics of language as a vocation in a modern society? This question among others would be subsequently answered in this discourse. Foremost, for better perspective of the title of this paper, contextual definitions and explanations of the key words in the title would be given.

### **Contextual Definition of Terms Employed**

- Implication:** Of the four definitions given by the Microsoft Encarta Dictionary, the first is suitable to the context of this paper i.e. "Something that is implied or involved as a natural consequence of something else".
- Vocationalizing:** Is a direct derivative of the word vocation, which according to the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary means "a type of work or way of life that you believe is especially suitable for you". In this respect vocationalizing is the act of rendering a language into a suitable job.
- French Language:** Yekini (2006) defines this to be "the maternal language of France and the official language of many countries worldwide".
- Secure:** Though "secured" is the keyword to be defined in the title of this paper, "security" as a word holds a broader scope of definition for clarity in the ongoing discourse. Danladi (2013) citing Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia defines security as: A condition ... the degree of resistance to or protection from harm. It applies to any vulnerable and valuable asset, such as person, dwelling, community, nation or organization.
- Profitable:** According to the Oxford Advance Learner's Dictionary means "something that makes or is likely to make money, also something that gives somebody an advantage or a useful result".
- Nation:** In this context means Nigeria.

### **Expected Vocationalized Attributes of a Language**

For a language to boast of a robust existence in a modern society and to rank easily as one of the most sought after for acquisition, it must possess the following qualities among others:

- Dynamism
- Vibrancy
- Viability
- Widely spoken
- Communicable

Though not an exhaustive list, a language must possess the aforementioned for its usefulness in commerce, documentation and education, among other sectors of human society. Language is said to be dynamic when it is adaptable to current trends and changes in communication. As man's thought process changes, so also

his culture. Language is a live thread in the fabric of culture. When a language loses its dynamism it ceases to be relevant in the affairs of men. Vibrancy in language refers to its liveliness. It implies that it is a living figment of man's existence. A dead language ceases to be spoken or used in day to day communication. Language should not be for documentation purposes alone, but must be essentially spoken by an accepted majority of people. Since Latin ceased to be spoken, it died naturally and its memories linger in the catacombs of the church and in the annals of solicitors. The French language is one of its legacy. The viability of a language centers on its lucrateness, its ability to respond to profitability in all spheres of man's livelihood. Its business sense. When a language is widely spoken, it becomes almost indispensable in world class affairs. Truly, the English language is the monarch of this domain. Not because of its linguistic appeal or structural properties, but more of the sovereign politics of its maternal speakers. Yet the French language is a very attractive close rival, spoken by over 300 million people. Yekini, (2006) submits:

*It was principally Britain's 300 year plus' debut in colonization, that gave English language the edge over the French language in wider coverage, and not the richness and beauty of the language.*

Lastly, the communicability of a language refers to its nature of being easily taught and learnt. Its acquisition rudiments. French as a gender prone language in structure, is rich in vowel sounds and easily taught and learnt. The constant barrage of consonants that obstruct free flow of speech, in some consonant ridden languages, is absent in the French language. The Olusegun Obasanjo's administration witnessed a prolific patronage of phone companies in Nigeria. Information and communications technology (ICT) became a reality in the life of an average Nigerian. Telecommunication Networks and the colourful umbrellas of their retailers dotted everywhere. Micro-finance banks sprang up to feed the flames of the growing frenzy. The quid pro quo relationship between the small time business men under these colourful umbrellas and the phone companies was very simple; they get a little something on the side for selling the wares of the companies. Customers also get enough "air time" to call families and friends. Everyone is happy. The argument here is that anything that is properly packaged and marketed could obtain the same result. Especially where there is a strong societal need of the commodity. Even the French language when made available for learning at the grass root level and made required at certain sectors of national affairs, will not only become increasingly acceptable

for acquisition by an average Nigerian, but in a commendable space of time, become also a true working second official language in the Nation.

### **The Security Question**

There is an air of security and safety that exist among people that speak the same language. This issues from individual's feeling of having equal chance of access to information within the group. Information sometimes saves life. Nigeria as an Anglophone West African Nation, bordered all around by francophone nations, should not feel so secured without its citizens having access to information coded in the language of its neighbours -the language which is French. Most times, expressing someone's linguistic deficiency could be delicate, even within Nigeria, we hear people say in Pidgin English "Them go sell you, collect change, you no go know". This statement is to express one's inability to access life saving or problem solving information, due to one's inability to understand a language. It is rather common place now and then, to hear the Federal Government on National News talking about the challenges of terrorism in the border towns of Nigeria. To garner more security in these territories, it is expected that the Nigerian Law enforcement and Security Agencies personnels speak the French language. In this wise, Ademola (2006) posits:

*All Nigerian Security Agencies like Customs, Immigration, Police, Army, Navy, Air Force etc. would perform better in their daily operations, investigations and services with neighbouring francophone countries, if their members (officers) have knowledge of French language with their trainings.*

Furthermore, when terrorism suspects are apprehended by counter terrorist agents, a proper interrogation must be conducted to access information that would lead to a more secured nation. Sometimes, these security agents' inability to speak or comprehend the French language becomes a barrier that jeopardizes proper investigation. As an average Nigerian, it is expected that one speaks French in order to feel more secure, when on travels to the francophone neighbouring countries. Wherever dangerous or problematic situations occur during these trips, it would be easier to extricate one's self with the knowledge of the language. Nigeria as a nation and a political entity, cannot afford to ignore the multiple security needs and opportunities lost over the years, due to its high ranking personnels' and representatives' (Civilian and Military) inability to speak the French language. It is common news that Rtd. Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo lost the United Nations Secretary's seat to the Egyptian Diplomat Boutros Boutros-Ghali. Had he won, he could have used his influence as a

member of the United Nations Security Council, in rendering Nigeria more secured and safe from terrorism, and what a long way we would have come by now in the issue of national security. Rather, due mostly to his inability to speak French (one of the six United Nations' Languages), he lost the seat and the Nation's opportunity as a member of the UN's security council.

### **Learning French for a More Profitable Nation**

French is not just a language of commerce from immemorial, it is also a linguistic vocation in itself. So, one talks of its vocationalization- its professionalism. French can be used merely as a means of communication, just as any other language on earth. Yet, it can be a means of livelihood, which puts bread on the table and much more. So many vocations are derivative of this language and so many lucrative jobs are being created just with the knowledge of the language. The following comes immediately to mind as successful vocations stemming from the knowledge of the language; translating, interpreting, teaching, publishing, broadcasting, journalism etc. Others such as law enforcement, immigration, customs. The Police, the Army, law (Business and International) among others are jobs in which the knowledge of the language is an advantage. A vocation is sometimes referred to as a calling, such as being a Missionary, a Priest, a Pastor, an Humanitarian, an Activist, an Imam etc. In this wise, French becomes a criteria for those that seek foreign missions in francophone zone. The direct or applicative value of French as a linguistic vocation is immense. We can only cursorily mention a few in this paper. Nevertheless, the economic impact and the commercial exponential growth of Nigeria among its West African counterparts will soar, with the knowledge of French in the day-to-day business of the Nation. Nigeria can easily become one of the top 20 global economic giants in the year 2020; which is the vision of the Government. Recognizing this possibility, France as a nation, over the years, has supported, sponsored and organized various linguistic programmes to enable the average Nigerian have access to easy French language learning and education. Furthermore, in order to create firm roots in the development of the nation, France has consistently increased its presence in Nigeria, via the establishment of various industries, diplomatic channels and academic institutions. Salaam (2006) has this to say on these claims;

*France is one of the four biggest trading partners of Nigeria, with no less than 150 French companies operating in Nigeria and almost at every facet of the country's economy. A sound communicative competence in French language by Nigerians would go a long way in opening to them an ample job opportunity in those companies.*

In this wise Nigeria has been advised to take advantage of France's interest in the development of the nation. According to Haddy (2011):

*Nigeria has been charged to borrow from the experiences of France, this has to be done through reading the historical development of France and vigorously implement the vision 2020.*

The economic status of the nation increases when more jobs are created and when the citizens are economically empowered. Many Nigerians, seeing the competitiveness in the Nigerian job market, has gone to be successful expatriates and business men in many francophone countries. Many live as Top dog in these countries and they speak appreciable level of the French language in order to do so.

#### **Acquisition: The Onus of a Would-be Learner**

The basic rudiments of acquisition of the language would traditionally include the following:

- Determination of the level of the learner, which could either be beginner, intermediary or advance.
- Planning the syllabus of the programme and repartitioning it into basic courses that handle the 4 essential linguistic competences (i.e. the ability to speak and understand what is spoken in the language, ability to read and write what is written in the language).
- Choosing the most efficient method or approach to teaching the syllabus. In order to obtain the expected result from the learner, the communicative approach is usually employed.
- Provision of study and teaching materials (i.e. teaching aids) for both teacher and learner is unavoidable. The teacher is expected to have good audio-visual materials, alongside quality textbooks and other print media.
- Ascertaining the duration of the programme, is essential to prepare the learner for proper evaluation and closure. Most programmes last 3 months per contact or module. There could be up to 3 contacts before an average learner could arrive at an appreciable proficiency skill. All 4 linguistic competences are expected to be evaluated to determine a learner's acquisition level.
- Preparation of the study centre or location is essential also. Most times environmental distractions could shortchange the optimum teaching and learning experience.
- Finally, formalizing the registration, attendance, fees to be paid and certification of learners would automatically come to mind. The course

fee of such proficiency programmes ranges from ten thousand to thirty thousand naira (~~N~~10,000 - ~~N~~30,000) depending on the richness of the academic package and certification given to the learner.

The above listed are not in any fixed order of importance or operation. Yet, each item is an unavoidable element in ensuring a successful language acquisition experience. It is widely agreed that nothing good comes easy and that without pain there is no gain. In tandem, it is the responsibility of an average Nigerian to acquire proficiency in the French language. In order to reap the bounties of this linguistic harvest, there must be some sowing. A sowing of one's time, interest, determination and resource. Most Bankers in Nigeria would like to learn the French language, but for time. Most teachers and civil servants but no determination. A lot of politicians, business men and diplomats would love to learn how to speak French, but their interest is not strong enough to attend the first class or take the second lesson. Military and law enforcement personnel also suffer from all three reasons, except resource. Most times, resource is hardly the deterrent from acquiring the French language, because it is relatively cheap to pay for proficiency courses. Centres such as the Alliance Française, the French Language Centres and the French Centre for Teaching and Documentation (CFTD) are strategically found across the Nation. Even, the Nigerian French Language Village (NFLV) organizes such courses at affordable prices. In addition to these, there are universities, colleges of education among others who render these services. Lone rangers such as individual French language teachers, also contribute their quota by organizing group or personal language proficiency classes. In all, with the aforementioned ingredients for a successful language acquisition experience, a capable and effective language instructor should be able to bring a learner to at least medium level of proficiency in about 6 months.

### **Problems**

The other side of the coin is evident at this juncture. It is the duality of existence itself. There is no good without its bad, no merit without its demerit. Therefore, there are problems bedeviling an average Nigerian's desire or endeavour to acquire proficiency in a foreign language such as French. Foremost on this list of problems is the methodology factor. Where a tutor lacks the proper approach to teaching the language, a learner can easily lose interest, get discouraged and eventually drop out of the proficiency class. Various methods over the years have been experimented with in order to obtain the best result. From the traditional method of the middle ages, to the contemporary and more effective communicative method or approach, a balance has been struck. The

erstwhile impediments that made the language appear difficult to learn, such as the "no translation" and "no mother tongue" policy of the direct method has been underplayed. Also, the incessant structural and grammatical drills have been circumvented. Now with the combination of Audio-visual aids and the unrestricted communication between the teacher and the learner, a beginner can actually attain mid-level proficiency almost in no time. This problem lies in the domain of the instructor. Yekini (2011) declares:

*The place of the teaching methodology cannot be overemphasized, since learners feed mostly off the teacher's competency to teach. The preparedness of the teacher must meet with the learner's readiness. The pedagogic aura of the teacher must meet his prowess and ability to impart effectively via a time tested and result trusted methodology.*

Another problem is the attitude of Nigerians towards learning any foreign language, in this case French. Nigerians quickly pick up fads and with the same alacrity drops them as soon as their interest is spent. French language in the early 60s was the "in thing", it gathered fervor more like that of the computer literacy programmes of today, but by mid 70s, the fervour had gradually dwindled into a skeletal presence in the curriculum of primary schools, and came back to the secondary schools' curriculum in the 80s. Nigerians has been known not to go out of their way in learning a foreign language. The two hydra headed problems of quantitative and qualitative tutors and teaching materials, cannot be divorced from the successful acquisition of proficiency in the French language. There are just not enough qualified language teachers in the country. Neither are there enough effective teaching aids. To remedy this problem and to jump-start the status of the Nation as one possessing a second foreign official language, France through the cultural department of its embassy in Nigeria, went into an accord to produce more French teachers, through the Nigeria - France Language Project (NFLP). Yet, several years later, the Nation can still not supply enough manpower to actualize the dream. The Nigerian government Educational Policy in the French language education is laudable. In the National Policy on Education (NPE) provision of the nation, French is recognized as compulsory at primary and junior secondary school levels, while it is facultative in the senior secondary level. In actuality this policy, does not hold sway in the public schools, except for few special Government and private owned schools. The non implementation of the policy and the lack of proper monitoring of these schools' activities, have shortchanged, on the long run, the graduation of efficient French language teachers at the higher institution level.



Individual and group misconceptions about the French language also contribute to the problem of acquisition of the language. Many Nigerians, especially to the North of the Nation, misconceive French as a language only Christians should learn and Arabic as a language for Muslims. Yekini (2011) posits:

*Till date, in the northern part of the country, the French language is regarded as a language of Christianity and Arabic a language of Islam. This thinking is erroneous, since both are neither Christian Religious Studies (CRS) nor Islamic Religious Studies (IRS).*

Lack of awareness creation across the country by the Government, via various media and programmes also is one of the reasons why Nigerians are reluctant in taking the French language proficiency acquisition seriously. Government has not done enough to put the matter before Nigerians, despite France's reminders and attempts to entrench Nigerians into this global linguistic culture.

### **Recommendation**

The recommendations, as solutions to the problems of French language acquisition, towards a secured and more profitable nation, are quite obvious, therefore will not be over-flogged. Inferring from the chronicles of problems, the following are suggested:

- Training more tutors in the best approach to teaching the language.
- Changing Nigerians' wrong notions and erroneous beliefs about the language.
- Creating better nationwide awareness of the need to acquire proficiency in the language, thereby changing the negative and reluctant attitude of Nigerians towards the language.
- Implementing the NPE provision on the language, through monitoring of school's curriculum and activities, thereby encouraging the study of French language in the higher institution and graduating higher numbers of efficient teachers in the language.

If the Nigerian government would do as recommended in this paper, there is no doubt that there will be marked increase in the learners and the teachers of the French language. Then, several aspects of the vision 2020 dream of the nation would come through.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, one feels more secure in the presence of a "language mate". In a case where language differs between two people, or in this case two nations, it is easier to become strange bed fellows. Even in marriages between individuals of different descent and different language, a bilingual capacity of either or both partners would be regarded as an asset to better communication and harmony in the relationship. If France is a partner of Nigeria that invests so much in its development, then it would not be unseemly for Nigeria to acquire admirable proficiency in its language, in order to gain more from the relationship. Nigerians as offspring's of the nation should appreciate the presence and interest of France in the Nation, by endeavouring to be French language literate, despite the inconveniences. The future is brighter, when one speaks a second foreign language. Theodore (2011) concludes: Of great importance is the fact that France has been helping the Nigerian economy in very critical areas other western countries have not been willing to invest in, and which Nigeria considers crucial in its bid for industrial development.

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