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## The Linguist and Manpower Development in Nigeria

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### **Abstract**

The role of linguist vis-a-vis manpower development in Nigeria is examined in this paper. A linguist is generally perceived as a good material only for classroom and encyclopedia of linguistic facts to consult. Against this backdrop, this paper apathy demonstrated that linguists can be gainfully employed outside the classroom and contribute to manpower development. The paper shows that linguists in Nigeria are engaged in areas such as documenting endangered languages, working in the field of law as forensic phoneticians, field of health as speech pathologist, creating reading machines for the blinds, developing and teaching our indigenous languages, serving as peace corps members, working internet and other business applications to mention but a few. The discussion in this paper will leave no one in doubt, concerning the contributions of the linguist in manpower development even outside the classroom.

### **Introduction**

Linguistics apathy defined as the scientific study of language is a discipline that is relatively new and most often misunderstood by very many including other professionals in the academia. To some, it is the same thing as English, to others, it is the study of foreign or local/indigenous languages, and yet to some, linguistics is just one's ability to speak many languages. To us in the discipline, linguistics is everything that there is in the science of language theoretically, descriptively, socially and so on. Linguistics attempts to describe language, its nature and behavior. It attempts to discover what characterizes language in general and strive at the same time to study the behavior and structure of individual languages.

Linguistics is the scientific study of language and by this we mean it seeks to study language in a systematic and objective manner like any other science subject does. The scientific study of language in linguistics is actually the foundation and the base of other disciplines because language and knowledge are inseparable. In fact, the knowledge of language is knowledge in its totality (Chomsky 1988, Nwachukwu 2006). A child's language learning or acquisition enables him to know and study things around him. Likewise an adult's

knowledge of language enables him to identify problems in his/her environment and proffer solutions to the problems. Considering the functions that language performs in the society, one will not be overstating the fact that language is ever relevant in human effort towards development. Language is a tool, a means, a channel, an instrument, a product and as well the producer of what becomes of a society at a particular point in time. The essence of linguistic is therefore, to achieve finer and improved human communication. This is because to get someone to do the right thing, you must speak to him in the language he understands (Akase & Omachonu, 2011).

Although linguistics is relatively a popular university subject in Nigeria today, there is a great deal of ignorance among many people about its purpose and nature. It is commonly thought that the purpose of linguistics teaching in schools and universities is to produce teachers of linguistics: we teach linguistics so that we can teach yet more linguistics. Outside the classroom, the linguist is useful merely as walking encyclopedia of knowledge about language(s) (foreign or local languages). The narrow misconception of a linguist as a good material only in the classroom and encyclopedia of knowledge to consult outside has continued to becloud his real contribution outside these confines (Omachonu, 2007). This misconception is however justified in the sense that this is the extent to which the curriculum of 'traditional linguistics' can take one to. This is why Ndimele (1999) sees the need to:

Expand the traditional domain of linguistics beyond just analyzing the structure of individual languages to applying it in solving problems in other areas of human endeavour.

Consequently, there has been a global response to this urgent need to up-date the curricular in linguistics and communication-related programmes, so that they can meet the demands of the changing world. This means that linguistics had undergone series of changes over the years in concepts, methodology and techniques to cover all the disciplines concerned with the study of communication systems. These disciplines include areas in social sciences such as journalism, communication arts, language arts, public relations, advertising, information studies and library studies. Linguistics has now expanded from its traditional domain of analyzing the structure of individual languages to "applied linguistics" – that is applying linguistics in solving problems in other areas of human endeavour.

This paper therefore, examines the role of a linguist in manpower development in Nigeria. This is treated within the content of linguistics as an applied discipline, career outlet for linguists in manpower development.

### **Linguistics as an Applied Discipline**

Applied linguistics is the application of linguistic knowledge, methods and techniques and a way of thinking to the solution of practical problems (Agbedo, 2003). Since applied linguistics deals with the use of linguistic expertise in the solution of practical problem of man in his environment, it becomes obvious that the nature of applied linguistics relevance for any society would reflect the level of development.

Having discussed linguistics as a discipline, who then is a linguist? People very often take a polyglot for a linguist. This is an unpardonable error. A polyglot is one who speaks more than one language or many languages without analyzing them scientifically while a linguist is someone who studies or is scientifically knowledgeable in linguistics (Aitchison, 1972). According to Yusuf (1992) linguistics does not aim at acquiring many languages. A linguist therefore, is a language expert who needs not be fluent in many languages but must have a wide experience of different types of languages. What is important to a linguist in this regard is not speaking the languages but the ability to analyze and explain linguistic phenomena in the languages.

A linguist is interested in issues that concern human languages, and tries to know more about the speech habits of a people. He tries to find out what makes language a unique property of humans, and the relationship between language and thought. A linguist tries to know the mental and physical properties that are involved when one uses language. He is interested in discovering how a language is structured, how it is used by its speakers in practical contexts, how it is related to other languages, how it varies from dialect to dialect, and how it changes from one historical period to the next. Essentially, a linguist is a person who has acquired the knowledge and the technique of describing languages. He describes language scientifically.

To a linguist, all languages are the same and are of equal importance. He does not condemn a language being inferior or superior to another. To him, any system of producing meaningful utterance with which people interact in a society is subject worthy of studying. The linguist does not pass value judgments on language. That is he does not say that one language is good or bad.

He only describes languages as he finds them used by native speakers and leaves the judgments to non linguists.

I conceived of linguists to have two immediate social obligations:

- (a) Presenting as clearly and truthfully as possible the linguist's part of cultural education, and
- (b) Training specialists whose peculiar point of view can contribute towards contemporary solution to social environmental and government problems. The practical value of linguistic education can successfully answer three important questions about the value of a linguist.

1. What can a linguist contribute to the whole area of management of human affairs?
2. What does he offer in the labour market in terms of job capability?
3. Of what practical value is his training?

Linguistics should however, not be viewed like professional disciplines such as engineering, medicine, architecture, pharmacy or law, rather its value lies instead in the intellectual discipline which it gives through its systematic courses. This provides not only the basic or background knowledge that can lead eventually to wide range of vacation, and more importantly, a general attitude of mind in which a problem is viewed from as many different angles as possible.

There are four other qualities that a linguist should possess. These qualities are:

- (i) **Acquisition of Useful Knowledge:** The knowledge acquired here may be put to use in the evaluation and management of human languages and other social problems.
- (ii) **Acquisition of Useful Skills:** Linguistics is unique among academic disciplines in training which it seeks to give its students the four basic communication skills. A linguist receives some basic training in the collection and analysis of language/linguistic data: in compilation and interpretation of dictionaries, and in verbal communication, both oral and written. Such training can be put to use in very many areas of human endeavour including journalism, career diplomats, speech pathologist, film operators, community development officers, curriculum planners, etc.
- (iii) **Acquisition of Useful Mental Abilities:** A well trained linguist learns to make reasoned or critical judgments, to reason both inductively and deductively and to see problems not in isolation but in their total context.

In short, a linguist learns the arts of tackling problems. He is therefore, basically a versatile person who is capable of giving a good account of himself in many different situations.

- (iv) **Training for Citizenship:** A linguist develops an awareness of a sympathetic attitude towards the environmental and cultural circumstances of other people. He should have a sound understanding of his own community and a feeling of belonging to and of responsibility towards it. Neatly summarized, a well trained linguist should be and usually is a broad indeed citizen, who is knowledgeable about language, its structure and analysis and the society that uses language. He has a critical, inquiring mind. He is skilled in the compilation and use of dictionaries and is capable of writing sound collective and interpretative reports. These qualities are in great demand in all careers concerned with the management of human affairs, whether in legislative work, in executive positions, in general public administration or in planning.

Based on this fact, many linguists are found working in different positions in different places of human endeavour thereby contributing to the manpower development of this nation. Some of these areas include the following:

A good number of linguists in Nigeria are working in the area of language development and standardization. Here, they work on the development of orthographies and preparation of dictionaries of our local languages.

Apart from this, they are also found suitable in the teaching of local languages and English language in our schools. They are also lecturers and researchers in the department of languages and linguistics in our tertiary institutions.

Linguists can equally work in courts of law as forensic phoneticians. They are found useful in courts of law where the analysis of recorded utterances becomes possible to identify the speaker. For instance, if an unidentified criminal's voice is recorded in the course of the criminal's discussion with its victim, the victim can tender the recorded discussion in court where the suspect is apprehended. In court, it is forensic phoneticians who can analyze the sounds in the utterance and be able to identify the apprehended suspect as the criminal or acquit him, using the evidence from his analysis of sounds in the recorded utterance.

Some linguists work in hospitals as speech pathologist who have good knowledge of phonetics. They are found useful in the correction of articulatory problems or speech problems or defects. This is so because they have among other things, understand how the organs of speech work for them to be able to diagnose and correct such speech defect bordering on minor articulatory problems. Linguists can develop computer programs for 'speech recognition' through human language speech technology as a specific language and turned into typed texts and so on.

Linguists can also work as news writers, reporters, presenters, public relations officers, editors, book publishers, company administrative officers, diplomats, film operators, translators, curriculum planners, community development officers, career civil servants, computer programmers, social workers, information and crises managers among other areas.

Linguists are equally found useful in creating machines capable of reading aloud to the blind. This could be done in conjunction with computer engineers and software designer. The main conclusion which may be drawn here is that a high proportion of the graduates of linguistics secure employment outside teaching and contribute effectively in such areas.

### **Conclusion**

Judging from the discussion in this paper, one can conclude that linguists have contributed significantly to the development of Nigeria and the world at large. The linguist therefore, will continue to be a resource and a reservoir for manpower development inside and outside the classroom.

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