

## **MODULE 1      UNDERSTANDING LANGUAGE**

Unit 1	The Concept of Language
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### **UNIT 1      THE CONCEPT OF LANGUAGE CONTENTS**

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#### **1.0    INTRODUCTION**

Language is a very important and indispensable tool available to man for the facilitation of his day to day activities. Whatever language we speak helps to define us as human persons and identify the community we belong to. The ability to use language in speech makes us human persons. In the words of Lewis quoted in Algeo, (1974):

The gift of language is the single human trait that marks us all, genetically setting us apart from the rest of life. Language is, like nest building or hive making, the universal and biologically specific activity of human beings. We engage in it communally, compulsively, and automatically. We cannot be human without it; if we were to be separated from it our minds would die as surely as bees lost from the hive.

Given the above stated importance of language, this unit will consider the meaning of language as well as the characteristics of language.

## 2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- define language; and
- list and discuss the characteristics of language.

## HOW TO STUDY THE UNIT

- a. Read this unit as diligently as possible.
- b. Find meaning of unfamiliar words in the unit using your dictionary.
- c. As you read, put major points down in a piece of paper or jotter.
- d. Do not go to the next section until you have fully understood the section you are reading now.
- e. Do all the Self-Assessment exercises in the unit as honestly as you can. In some areas where it is not feasible to provide answers to Self-Assessment exercises, go to the relevant sections of the unit to derive the answers.

## 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

### 3.1 Meaning of Language

The term language has been variously defined by scholars. According to Sapir (1921) language is a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of voluntarily produced symbol. These symbols are in the first instance, auditory and they are produced by the so called 'organs of speech'. This definition of language by Sapir is restricted to human beings who communicate their thoughts and feelings using the organs of speech.

In their view of language, Stork and Widowson (1974) affirms that all languages are highly developed and sophisticated communication systems, all capable of meeting the demands of the society in which they are used, and the personal needs of the individual of the society in terms of expressing emotions and giving and receiving information. It is clear from the above that one cannot divorce language from society. For an individual to adapt superbly in any society and thus meet his daily needs, the use of language must come to the fore.

Our intention here is not to compare and contrast definitions. We are concerned majorly with sieving out the things that make language what it

is. Indeed, scholars trace the long relationship that exists between language and the human beings. This relationship is expressed in the fact that human beings make language and language makes the human beings. To say that human beings make language implies that language belongs to human beings, who invent and make use of it. On this note, the two definitions we examined above emphasize that of all the animals, man alone has capacity for language. What then do we mean when we say that language makes human beings? We mean that the human being is the human being that he is simply and majorly because he makes use of language. This position is supported by Fromkin et al (2003) who hold that: “the possession of language, more than any other attribute, distinguishes humans from other animals. To understand our humanity, one must understand the nature of language that makes us human.” This connection between language and being human is well-expressed by the Bantu people of Africa. Among the Bantu, new born babies that are yet unable to speak are regarded as things, *kintu*. However, as soon as the child is able to speak, it becomes a person, *muntu*. Thus, to speak a language is the basis for defining and proving our humanity. In this regard, Noam Chomsky cited in Fromkin et al (2003) writes that the study of language is the study of man. Consequently, one who raises question about language raises question about man seeking to discover his essence, his capabilities, his limitations, and so on.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1**

Demonstrate your understanding of the relationship between language and human beings.

## **3.2 Characteristics of Language**

A close look at the definitions of language given above shows that there are some qualities that are unique to all human languages. Here, we shall explore such characteristics which will no doubt, give you more insight on what language is all about.

### **3.2.1 Arbitrariness**

This, as a characteristic of language, means that there is no logical relationship that exists between the sound used to refer to a thing in a language and the thing to which the sound refers. This means that the process of naming an object and the reference to it is essentially that of general agreement or convention. For instance, there is no direct connection between the word *pen* and the object it refers. The same is with the word *seat* and what it refers. Finegan (2008) explaining arbitrariness, made reference to arbitrary signs which include traffic lights, rail road crossing

indicators, wedding rings, and national flag. He maintained that there is no causal or inherent connection between arbitrary signs and what they signify or indicate and so can be changed. We can exemplify the above points in this way: It is a well-known fact that the traffic light sign for stop is *Red*. If the Federal Road Safety Commission decides to use the colour purple as the signal in place of red, it can do so. The relationship is generally arbitrary between words and what they represent.

Students of English who have read that great work of Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, will understand this more. Remember the scene where the young Juliet exclaimed: “What’s in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet.” This tells you that if we had called rose *hand* it would still possess all the qualities it has today. You may think that rose smells sweet simply because it is called rose, but Juliet tells you immediately to banish such thought as the flower would have smelled as such even if it were named *demon*.

### 3.2.2 Discreetness

The sound segments used in any language differ significantly from one another. Speakers of different languages can identify the sound segments in the word of their language even though it appears to be a continuous flow of noise. In the English language for example, there are forty-four discrete sound segments. The difference between the word ‘pit’ and ‘pat’ for instance lies in the sounds that occur at their middle position /i/ and /æ/. If these two sounds were replaced with /ɒ/ as in /pɒt/ and /e/ as in /pet/, the meaning of the words would change. Therefore the sounds /p/, /t/, /æ/, /t/, /ɒ/, and /e/ are all discrete sound segments in the English language.

### 3.2.3 Duality

The duality of language means that it has two levels of organisation; the primary and secondary levels. At the secondary level, the speech sounds are meaningless but at the primary level, they combine to form higher meaningful units. Language comprises strings of noises called speech sounds or phonemes, which have no meaning attached to them. When the speech sounds combine with one another in such a way that they obey the rules of combination in the language they attract some meaning. For example the sounds /b/, /u/, /l/, /k/, /m/, /æ/ /p/, /f/, /l/, /f/ when combined sequentially in the English language can form the words *bull*, *cap*, *map*, and *fish*, respectively.

Besides, duality here could mean also that there are two patterns to language, the spoken and the written version. The spoken version is seen as the real version, since there are many who can speak a language well but cannot write a word of it.

### 3.2.4 Systematic

This characteristic of language means that it follows a laid down rule. In the game of football or any other games, for instance, the inability of the players to follow the set rules either disqualifies or attracts some penalty. The same way human language is like a system and as such the absence or wrong arrangement of any of its components can mar the entire system. Language is made up of sound segments which combine accordingly to form words, and words combine to form sentences. Every language has rules that guide words and sentence formation. In the English language for example, a singular subject takes a singular verb while a plural subject takes a plural verb.

Example: *The boy sings well, The boys sing well* and not: *The boy sing well* or *The boys sings well*. The past tense –*ed*, present tense – *ing* and the third person singular – *s* markers occur after the main verb, and not before it, e.g. *packed* and not *edpack*, *singing* and not *ingsing*, *reads* and not *sread*. At the syntactic level, words are arranged according to laid down rules in the language. For instance, the following are grammatical sentences in the English language: 1. *Musa is reading his books in the library.* 2. *The books are reading Musa in the library.* The second sentence is grammatically correct but semantically wrong and so is unacceptable to the speakers of the English language. This is because books are inanimate objects and so cannot possess human attributes. Let us look at another sentence: *\*to listening are teachers students the their. \*Lecturers the are strike on university.* The sentences are ungrammatical because the words are not arranged accordingly. When properly arranged, the sentences become: 1) *The students are listening to their teacher.* 2) *The university lecturers are on strike.* This shows that language follows laid down rules, and any deviation from the rules result in erroneous or ungrammatical sentences.

### 3.2.5 Specie-Specific

The specie-specificness of language means that man is the only animal that uses language in the true sense of it. This ability of language use differentiates him from other animals. No human being is born with a particular language but man according to Chomsky is endowed with an innate capacity known as Language Acquisition Devices (LAD). This

enables him to acquire language once he is exposed to it. Giving credence to this, the New Encyclopaedia Britannica has it that every physiologically and mentally normal person acquires in childhood the ability to make use, as both speaker and hearer, of a system of vocal communication that comprise a circumscribe set of noises resulting from movement of certain organs within the throat and mouth. This means that it is only man that makes use of the organs of speech in speech production.

### 3.2.6 Creativity

Creativity is a characteristic of language which means that man has the ability to construct as many sentences as possible including the ones he has never heard before inasmuch as he understands the language. One cannot buy a dictionary of any language with all the sentences found in that language since it is not possible for any dictionary to list all the possible sentences. Fromkin et al (2003) are of the view that knowing a language means being able to produce new sentences never spoken before and to understand sentences never heard before. It is not every speaker of a language that can create great literature but anyone who knows a language very well produces enormous utterances if one speaks and understands new sentences created by others. The creative nature of language therefore enables one to generate as many sentences as possible in different context provided one understands the language. Thus, for every sentence in the language a longer sentence can be formed, then there is no limit to the length of any sentence and therefore no limit to the number of sentences. In the English language for example, we can say: *Chike stole the book*. Or *Chike stole the book that the teacher kept in her school bag*. Or *John said that Chike stole the book that the teacher kept in her school bag yesterday after the morning assembly*. Creativity is, therefore, a universal property of language. You can create as many sentences as possible so long as you understand the language.

### 3.2.7 Conventionality

Convention relates to laws that are not written, that come from people's day to day way of doing things. Conventionality as a characteristic of language expresses the fact that there is no intrinsic connection between a word and what it refers. The word, *table*, and the object, *table*, have no intrinsic connection that says that the object must be called table. Rather, it is convention, the fact that more people were using the word to refer to the object that gave the object its name.

### **3.2.8 Displacement**

An important characteristic of the language is its ability to refer to things that are distant from a speaker in time and space. What we mean here is that in using language, you can talk about the present as well as about the past and the future. You can describe what you are doing now as well as what you did ten years ago. You can also talk about the person sitting right here with you as well as one who sat with you three months ago. Other human activities cannot engage distant subjects as such. For instance, you can only kick the person sitting before you and not the person sitting in another place far away from your location.

### **3.2.9 Dynamism**

Dynamism expresses the ability of language to allow for changes in forms and functions. It is this dynamism of language that allows words to acquire new meanings. It also allows newly invented or discovered objects to have new names.

### **3.2.10 Learnability**

Learnability is the character of language that makes it possible for it to be learned. Thus, every language worth the name can be learned by anyone who has interest in learning it and who has put in serious effort towards doing so. Scholars hold that the learnability of language depends on the innate capacity possessed by the human person to learn new languages. This capacity to learn language inherent in man is described as Language Acquisition Device (LAD). With LAD, every human person has the capacity to learn as many human languages as he wishes.

### **3.2.11 Rapid Fading**

Rapid fading refers mainly to spoken words. As a characteristic of language, rapid fading means that words of language, when spoken, do not hover for a long time in the air. It fades away immediately such that one that was absent when it was said would not grasp the words.

## **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2**

List five characteristics of language.

## 4.0 CONCLUSION

Language is a strictly human phenomenon. Its possession is one of the qualities that mark the human person out from other beings in the world. For a thing to qualify as a language it must possess certain characteristics. You were exposed to a number of such characteristics.

## 5.0 SUMMARY

This unit has introduced you to the meaning of language. It has also led you to understand that language is an important index in the definition of man. You were also exposed to the characteristics of language.

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENTS

1. Define language according to Sapir.
2. Explain how the Bantu people of people understand the relationship between language and human beings.
3. What is central in Stork's definition of language?
4. Show your understanding of arbitrariness as a characteristic of human language.
5. Define discreteness.

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## **UNIT 2      FUNCTIONS OF LANGUAGE**

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### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

In the last unit, you studied the definition of language. You also studied a number of characteristics that make language what it is. In this unit, you shall study the functions of language. The function of anything means the job that thing does. God gave man language for particular purposes. A thorough understanding of functions of language will help you, in no small amount, in mastering and having control of any language you speak. This unit examines a number of functions which language performs. Consequently, you shall learn about the following functions of language, referential function, abnatural function, affective function, transmission of culture, medium of thought, phatic function, recording function and identifying function of language.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

By the end of this unit, you shall be able to:

- list the functions of language;
- discuss the various functions of language; and
- differentiate the various functions of language.

## HOW TO STUDY THE UNIT

- a. Read this unit as diligently as possible.
- b. Find meaning of unfamiliar words in the unit using your dictionary.
- c. As you read, put major points down in a piece of paper or jotter.
- d. Do not go to the next section until you have fully understood the section you are reading now.
- e. Do all the Self-Assessment exercises in the unit as honestly as you can. In some areas where it is not feasible to provide answers to Self-Assessment exercises, go to the relevant sections of the unit to derive the answers.

### 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

#### 3.1 Referential Function of Language

Language plays referential function when it communicates information about something. To communicate is the most noticeable function of language and some scholars argue that communication is the purpose of language. It is the foundation of all kinds of expression. A referential user of language only wants to pass information about something. Thus, in referential function of language, language what is said must refer to something that can be seen, felt, touched or conceived by the person to whom the language user addresses. For instance, if you tell your neighbor, *take away your teacup from my table*, you have employed language to perform its referential function because you have referred to an object, *teacup*, that should be placed on another object you referred, *table*. If you are to make the same statement using Igbo language while addressing a Yoruba speaker who does not understand Igbo, you cannot be said to have communicated, and you have not also used language referentially.

In their daily interactions, human beings report, ask for and give directions, explain, promise, apologize, bargain, warn, scold, and so on. Politicians and leaders of government use language to pass information to the governed about their developmental activities to people. Whenever they do this, they are using language referentially. You should bear in mind that in playing its referential function language only seeks to communicate, to bring to the awareness of people what is to be done, what has been done, and the real states of affairs. By this the people are fully acquainted with the basic knowledge of what is happening around them. All forms of education whether formal or informal are acquired using

language. Preachers on the pulpit use language to communicate the word of God to the congregation. Language is indeed the basis for all kinds of communication. According to Eyisi (2000), we use language to express love, hatred, anger, happiness, praise, satisfaction and dissatisfaction, to comment on the political, social, educational or economic situations in the country; to confirm or express religious beliefs, to comment on the weather and even to fill a vacuum when there is nothing else to do especially in the exchange of pleasantries. Human beings, therefore, are naturally endowed with the tendency to always talk, to use words, to employ language for a mutual social relationship with their fellow individuals and for the achievement of their daily objectives for their well-being and for the well-being of their community. People get on well when their communication flow. The same way if there is no proper communication, activities in a given community would definitely crumble.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1**

Demonstrate your understanding of referential function of language.

### **3.2 Abnatural Function of Language**

Communication of information is not the only reason why we use language. Conversely, there are times when you want to hide information from people or at least from a vast majority of people. When this is the case you put such information in codes. Such codes are known to you alone or few individuals who can decode it. When you do this, you have employed language to play its abnatural function.

Language scholars view every language, whatsoever, as a symbol, a public code sort of. For the most part, language as a symbol is devised for communicative purposes. When this is the case, language only targets to make clear what is hidden. However, there are times when language is used as a code to hide something from the public eyes. Such languages are often special languages meant for only a few persons who have access to the meaning of the code. Note that language plays two roles simultaneously here, that of hiding information from a large number of people and conveying information to few persons. Laycock and **Mühlhäusler** (1990) write that abnatural function of language “are attempts to create codes which could provide access to the secrets of the universe and systems for concealment of information, either for the use of small privileged groups or, in the case of some forms of glossolalia, for individuals only.”

## SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Show your understanding of abnatural function of language.

### 3.3 Medium of Thought

That man is a thinking animal is a truth held ever since the time of the ancient philosophers. The most recent formulation of this is found in Arendt (1971) who regards the human person as thought made flesh and writes that:

Speaking out of the experience of the thinking ego, man is quite naturally not just word but *thought made flesh*, the always mysterious, never fully elucidated incarnation of the thinking ability. ... neither the product of a diseased brain nor one of the easily dispelled 'errors of the past', but the entirely authentic semblance of the thinking activity itself.

Despite this identification of the human person as a thinking being, we only become aware of it simply because we have language with which we bring to light the thought content of the human person. The implication of this is that all the mental activities that take place in the minds of men, would have no means of expressing themselves in the absence of language. On this note, Deutscher (2007) writes that it is only language that can free our thinking from inaccessibility. Thus, the human person's invention of language, and their learning of it, is heavily linked to their desire to express their thought.

Indeed, the relationship between language and thought is a little bit wider than we have so far stated it. Thus, it is not only that language is the vehicle for expressing thought, the art of thinking itself is carried out in language. Corroborating with the just noted point, Arendt, (1971) writes that:

Our mental activities ... are conceived in speech even before being communicated, but speech is meant to be heard and words are meant to be understood by others who also have the ability to speak, just as a creature endowed with the sense of vision is meant to see and to be seen.

Algeo (1974) holds that this relationship between language and thought has generated a great deal of speculations. Some believe that language merely clothes thought and that thought is quite independent of the language we use to express it. Yet others believe that thought is merely a suppressed language and that when we are thinking, we are just talking under our breath. In the final analysis, the truth remains that our thoughts are well understood when we put them into language if not they are likely to remain unknown and unknowable. Indeed, the best way for you to appreciate the role of language as a medium of thought is for you to imagine what would happen between a doctor and his patient or between a teacher and his students. The teacher may have so many things in his mind which he will tell the students but without a language he would just stand in front of them and exchange stares. But with the help of language he tells them all that is his mind which he wants them to know.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3**

Discuss in detail what you think is the relationship between language and thought.

### **3.4 Affective Function of Language**

The affective function of language refers to the ability of language to address individuals differently. Language used affectively is intended to express the relationship between a speaker and the person he addresses. Here one is conscious of the relationship he holds with every speaker as well as the environment he finds himself. What is being exploited here is the ability of the same words of language to call up different understanding and meaning in the mind of listeners. For example, a student who comes into the classroom, shakes his best friend's hand and says to him *My Guy, how are you today*, will receive a pleasant reply from his friend who interprets the statement as acceptable and good show of friendship. The same statement made to a lecturer in the same classroom and at the same time by the student will attract serious caution if not outright punishment to the student involved. Thus, the student, without being told, knows that the appropriate form of greeting to his lecturer will be more of something like this: *Good morning, sir. How are you sir?*

Thus, Thomas et al (2004) writes that, "by selecting one as appropriate and not another, you would be exploiting the affective aspect of language and showing yourself to be sensitive to the power or social relationship between you and the person you are addressing." They also hold that:

The affective function of language is concerned with who is ‘allowed’ to say what to whom, which is deeply tied up with power and social status. For example, ‘It’s time you washed your hair’ would be an acceptable comment from a parent to a young child, but would not usually be acceptable from an employee to their boss.

#### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4**

Show your understanding of affective function of language.

### **3.5 Transmission of Culture**

Culture is simply referred to as the people’s way of life. Rules and norms of society are passed on to the younger generation by the old through the use of language. Through language, man is able to trace the history and way of life of his people from the distant past. In the olden days children usually sit around the elders and listen to the stories of their age-long tradition. During most traditional festivals, a brief history of such festival is recounted for the interest of the young. The ritual of repeating the history of such festivals is to help retain the culture of the people in perpetuity. Through language, people get to know why their culture is different from other people’s culture. By so doing, they would have respect and regard for the culture of others.

#### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5**

Explain the function of language in the transmission of culture.

### **3.6 Phatic Function**

Language plays the phatic role when it serves as instrument of initiating and keeping friendly relationship with others. Thomas et al (2004) writes that phatic function of language relates to “the everyday usage of language as *social lubrication*”. It expresses the desire in our species to engage in peaceful relation with one another. We need to open up this relation and keep it going. Thomas et al (2004) give examples of human discussions where language is used for phatic purposes. Thus, if somebody came up this morning to you and said, “*You look cute in your new skirt,*” and you replied, “*Thank you*”, Thomas et al (2004) hold that both of you at the time of this conversation were exploiting the phatic properties of language. In this usage, they write, “no important information is being exchanged, but

you are both indicating that you are willing to talk to one another, are pleased to see one another, and so on.”

Thus, the phatic function of language helps to link people and encourage peaceful and pleasant co-existence. They are about the small talks that help people to avoid conflict and stay together as friends. For instance, in asking somebody, *how are you*, you often do not have the intention of solving their problem if they report that they are unwell. And quite often, such people respond with, *fine, thank you*, not minding their conditions. The importance of your asking how he is and his response to you is that it serves as a way of entering into conversation with him. Other examples of usages where language plays the phatic functions is in the following: *I love you, You look great, Dear Angel* used in letter writing, and *yours ever*, also used in ending letter writing.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 6**

Give two examples of phatic usage of language.

### **3.7 Recording Function**

This involves using language to make a durable record of things that one wishes to remember. It is recorded that the first writing system developed in the Middle East as early as 4000 B.C. During that period, writing system was in form of pictures that represented the things they referred. Later improvements saw the adaptation of alphabets which we continue to use today. Of course, we may not have a way of accessing the history of writing exposed above, if nobody recorded this happening. Recording can either be written or oral. Both oral and written recording can be done with the use of language.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 7**

Identify two ways in which language can be used to record information.

### **3.8 Identifying Functions of Language**

People and things are named with languages. What name a person or a thing is given becomes his or its identity. The implication of this is that language is that tool through whose help individuals and objects assume identity as separate entities living in our world. Filch (1998) supports this view when he avers that every human being has a name and that is what identifies that person. You can imagine a situation where there is no language to name people. In such a situation people may rely on just their

memories to differentiate between individuals. On meeting a new person one is likely to note down his appearances, the colour of his skin, his height, and so on. But this too will be impossible without language for you need language to note that the person is either black or white. Assuming that it is possible to note these things in one's mind by some other means, communicating what you have noted to others is quite impossible. Indeed, language plays important function in identifying people.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 8**

Describe the difficulty identification would have posed to man in the absence of language.

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

Language plays important functions in human society. These functions are so crucial that social organization would have been completely impossible without them. In this unit we considered some of the functions of language in human society. These functions are also what make it impossible for man to ever consider the impossibility of a world without language.

## **5.0 SUMMARY**

This unit has introduced you to the various functions of language. In all, you learnt that language performs referential function. You also discovered that affective functions, transmission of culture, Identifying function, recording function, phatic function, and so on are some of the functions of language.

## **6.0 TUTOR MARKED ASSIGNMENTS**

1. List seven functions of language.
2. Discuss language as medium of thought.
3. Compare and contrast between the phatic function of language and the affective function of language.



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## **UNIT 3 THE ORIGIN OF LANGUAGE**

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### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

In the last unit, you studied the functions of language. In this unit, we shall consider the origin of language. Thus, the question is: Did man always speak? The above question throws us immediately into our discussion of the origin of language. Bearing in mind that language is depicted by philosophers as one of the factors that make us the human persons that we are, we intend in this unit to inquire at what point the human person first made use of language. Indeed, scholarship has not yielded any conclusive answer on the subject. What abound are speculations. In what follows, we shall look at a number of such speculations.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVE**

By the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- identify various theories about source of language;
- compare the various sources of language; and
- criticise some of the theories put forward as sources of language.

### **HOW TO STUDY THE UNIT**

- a. Read this unit as diligently as possible.
- b. Find meaning of unfamiliar words in the unit using your dictionary.
- c. As you read, put major points down in a piece of paper or jotter.

- d. Do not go to the next section until you have fully understood the section you are reading now.
- e. Do all the Self-Assessment exercises in the unit as honestly as you can. In some areas where it is not feasible to provide answers to Self-Assessment exercises, go to the relevant sections of the unit to derive the answers.

### 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

#### 3.1 Divine Source

The Divine source in the origin of language points to non-human and supernatural source of language. This can be found in the mythologies of many cultures of the world. The Hindu, for instance, has a myth about divine source of language. According to this myth, language was a gift from *Sarasvati*, wife of Brahma who created the universe. Among the Egyptians the god *Thoth* gave man the power of speech. The Babylonians believed that the god, *Nabus* offered man the gift of speech. Also, the Acoma tribe of New Mexico hold that their goddess, *Iatiku*, was not only responsible for the gift of language both also has a hand in the multiplicity of languages as the goddess caused men to speak in many tongues in order to limit their chances of quarrel. The Jewish myth about the origin of language is recorded in the book of Genesis where God directed Adam to name all the creatures of the earth. That act of naming the creatures was regarded as the first human speech act.

In essence the divine source posits that language was a divine gift given to mankind by spiritual beings, like God, angel, etc. There is no concrete proof about the divine source of language, but proponents argue that infants left to grow on their own without contact with any language, would still speak and their speech will only be conducted with that original divine language. From this perspective, most human languages that we know today are regarded as corrupt as proponents believe that there can only be one divine language that is the original from which other languages developed. Scientific tracing of this original language has posed difficulty to promoters as efforts in that regard have yielded different results. For instance, an Egyptian Pharaoh named *Psammetichus* (or *Psamtik*) undertook experiment with two newborn babies more than 2,500 years ago in order to determine what the original language was. The children were kept together with goats and were completely isolated from human beings except one deaf and dumb shepherd. In the process of the experiment, the children spontaneously uttered a word, *bekos*. This word was not Egyptian but was identified as a Phrygian word meaning “bread.”

Consequently, the Pharaoh concluded that Phrygian, an older language spoken in part of what is now modern-day Turkey, must be the original language.

However, scholars question the veracity of this claim. They agree that the children might not have picked up this “word” from any human source, but on the contrary no divine source was involved. They may have picked the sound from the goats. Yule (2010) posits that if you remove the *-ko* ending, which was added in the Greek version of the story, then pronounce *beasyou* you would get the English word *bed*, then when you remove the *-d* at the end you will exactly get the sound made by a goat, *be*.

A similar experiment was carried out by King James the Fourth of Scotland around 1500 AD. In this particular experiment, the children spontaneously spoke Hebrew, and this confirmed the King’s belief that Hebrew had indeed been the language of the Garden of Eden. Generally, the problem with this kind of experiment is that none of the purported original languages has been confirmed by subsequent experiments and most children who have been so isolated grew up without any language at all. The consequence of this is that if language actually has a divine source, we have no way of knowing the original language.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1**

Do you consider the divine source origin of language plausible? Give reason for your answer.

### **3.2 The Natural Sound Source**

The natural sound source holds that language emerged as a consequence of early humans imitating the natural sounds around them. Proponents point to a number of onomatopoeic words found in human languages to support this point. Yule (2010) constructs how this would have taken place:

When an object flew by, making a CAW-CAW sound, the early human tried to imitate the sound and used it to refer to the thing associated with the sound. And when another flying creature made a COO-COO sound, that natural sound was adopted to refer to that kind of object. ... In English, in addition to cuckoo, we have splash, bang, boom, rattle, buzz, hiss, screech, and forms such as bow-wow. In fact,

this type of view has been called the “bow-wow theory” of language origin.

Despite the fact that this view seems plausible, critics argue that if we hold onto this theory, it will be impossible to explain how we arrived at words for a number of soundless and abstract objects in our world of experience. Another problem with the natural sound source is the sweeping assumption that “a language is only a set of words used as “names” for things” (Yule 2010). Besides nouns that name, there are adjectives, verbs, pronouns, etc., which the natural sound source of language cannot account for.

## **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2**

Demonstrate your understanding of the objection to natural sound source origin of language.

### **3.3 The Social Interaction Source**

The social interaction source locates the origin of human language in the arbitrary sounds that human beings make in the course of their interaction with one another. Commenting on this, Yule (2010) writes that it is possible that: “a group of early humans might develop a set of hums, grunts, groans and curses that were used when they were lifting and carrying large bits of trees or lifeless hairy mammoths.”

The social interaction source of language has been praised as a plausible explanation of the origin of language. This is because it recognises that language arose in a social context. It takes cognizance of the fact that early people dwelled in groups, and this group living was a necessary factor in the repelling of external attacks. Yule (2010) argues that: “Groups are necessarily social organizations and, to maintain those organizations, some form of communication is required, even if it is just grunts and curses. So, human sounds, however they were produced, must have had some principled use within the life and social interaction of early human groups.” Despite the above noted plausibility of this source, critics still argue that if the sounds arose as a result of social interaction, how do we explain the origin of the sound. Why was one sound favoured more than another? And did all the people involved in the social interaction make the same sound? Why have other animals that live in groups like apes not been able to evolve a language. The difficulty in answering these questions poses major challenge in the validation of the social interaction source of language origin.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3**

Show your understanding of the strength and weaknesses of social interaction as a source of human language.

#### **3.4 The Physical Adaptation Source**

This theory poses that human language owes its origin on the type of physical features possessed by human beings. A simple look at a human being reveals that he is a special creature different from all other creatures known to us. Proponents of this theory hold that the human lips, brain, mouth, pharynx, larynx and teeth are specifically adapted to give man the advantage of speaking. For instance, the flexibility of the human lips, the upright nature of the human teeth, the special design of his mouth which contains a more muscular tongue that can be easily twisted give man the speech advantage unavailable for other animals.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4**

Discuss physical adaptation as a source of human language.

#### **3.5 The Tool Making Source**

Proponents of tool making as a source of language hold that language is a fallout of tool making capacity of the human person. Consider the hand, for instance. Originally, the hand was meant for tool making but scholars argue that in time other functions were imposed on the hand. One of these functions was the use of the hand in making gestures and the manual gestures are taken as precursor of human language. Yule (2010) identifies the connection that exists between tool making and speech ability of the human person. According to him:

Those functions that control the motor movements involved in complex vocalization (speaking) and object manipulation (making or using tools) are very close to each other in the left hemisphere of the brain. It may be that there was an evolutionary connection between the language-using and tool-using abilities of humans and that both were involved in the development of the speaking brain.

## SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5

Show the connection between human language ability and man's tool making ability.

### 4.0 CONCLUSION

The theories of the origin of language provide us with a number of speculations about how languages evolved. The general consensus among these theories is that language has not always been there for man. It came at a point in time of human existence.

### 5.0 SUMMARY

This unit has exposed you to the various positions put forward as possible origins of human language. The divine source, natural sound source, human adaptation source, tool making source of language were explained in the unit for your understanding.

### 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENTS

1. Discuss your objections to divine source of language.
2. Demonstrate your understanding of the position of proponents of tool making as source of language.
3. Compare and contrast the natural sound source of language and the human adaptation source.

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## **UNIT 4 THE LANGUAGE SITUATION IN NIGERIA**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 One Country Many Tongues
  - 3.2 Foreign Languages in Nigeria
  - 3.3 Language Interaction in Nigeria
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignments
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

In the previous chapter, we studied the various theories put forward to explain the origin of language. We treated different speculations such as: the divine source, the natural sound source, the social interaction source and so on. In this unit we shall survey the language situation in Nigeria. We shall show that there are many indigenous languages in Nigeria. We shall also demonstrate that besides these indigenous languages that foreign languages are making inroads in Nigeria.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- discuss the language situation in Nigeria;
- identify the foreign languages in Nigeria; and
- show the extent of interaction between Nigerian languages.

### **HOW TO STUDY THE UNIT**

- a. Read this unit as diligently as possible.
- b. Find meaning of unfamiliar words in the unit using your dictionary.
- c. As you read, put major points down in a piece of paper or jotter.
- d. Do not go to the next section until you have fully understood the section you are reading now.
- e. Do all the Self-Assessment exercises in the unit as honestly as you can. In some areas where it is not feasible to provide answers to



Self-Assessment exercises, go to the relevant sections of the unit to derive the answers.

### **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

#### **3.1 One Country Many Tongues**

Nigeria is a linguistically rich nation. Recent mapping of number of individual languages in Nigeria shows that the country is home to about five hundred and twenty (520) languages. This makes Nigeria one of the most linguistically diverse countries of the world. Indeed, if the record that places the number of languages in the world at 6000 is correct, it means that Nigeria contributes nearly ten percent (10%) to the global pool of language resources. Out of this number, about five hundred and ten (510) are regarded as living languages, that is languages with current speakers and which are still transmitted to children. Two in this language pool are without native speakers as they rely in their being used as second languages for their survival while nine (9) are said to be extinct without any known living speaker.

Despite our disposition in viewing all languages as equal in terms of value and achievements, language scholars have ranked Nigerian languages as either major or minor languages. This ranking as captured by Bamgbose (1993) is based on a number of speakers, status in education, acquisition as a second language, and availability of written materials. While the majority of Nigerian languages are regarded as minor languages, three are regarded as major. The major languages include: Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba (in alphabetical order and not necessarily in order of importance). The three major languages of Nigeria command regional dominance. While the Hausa is dominant in the North, the Igbo in the East, the Yoruba holds sway in the West. We should be mindful that our use of dominance here relates only to number of speakers and geographical coverage.

The majority status accorded to these three languages is enshrined in section 55 of Nigeria's Constitution of 1999, where they are regarded as national languages. They were to be used in the conducting of the business of the assembly. Also, the National language policy captured in the National Policy on Education (1977, 1981) recommends that these three languages should be studied in the pre-primary, primary and post-primary education levels. Students whose languages fall under the minority languages are to study the major languages alongside their minority languages in the junior secondary level.

Palpable tension exists in Nigeria as a result of labeling some languages minor and others major. As expected, this comes from native speakers of the minority languages. This tension is consequent upon the fear of political and cultural domination by the major language groups.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1**

Name the three major languages in Nigeria and demarcate their areas of influence.

## **3.2 Foreign Languages in Nigeria**

Despite the multiplicity of indigenous languages in Nigeria, there exists a number of foreign languages. Out of these, four have continued to make serious inroad into the country. They include: English, French, Arabic, and Chinese.

### **English**

The establishment of the English language in Nigeria is traceable to the colonial era. The British colonial masters came with their own language with distinct forms of vocabulary and worldviews. On assumption of their colonial duties, the British felt that their businesses would be better conducted in their own language. This influenced their insistence that education and government matters should be conducted in English language. Thus, people who needed government jobs with the prestige that goes with them are expected to learn the English language. The access to white collar job and therefore to better living standard which English facilitated meant that most Nigerians embraced it in those early times.

However, with the attainment of independence, there were serious national debates as to the suitability of the English language in conducting national affairs, a foreign language in a foreign land. Opponents of English favoured either the simultaneous use of the three indigenous major languages or the adoption of one. Using three of them at the same time was considered unmanageable and it was difficult to choose which of the three major languages were to be used. In the presence of this difficulty, the proponents of the English language as a lingua franca argued that it is the only language that can be accepted by the generality of the Nigerian populace. They argued that there was nothing wrong with using English as a lingua franca more so as such use also has its international advantages. The debate ended with the insertion of the English language in the 1979 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as Nigeria's official language. Ever since then, English has

retained its place as the lingua franca of Nigeria and is being used in education, court, government and so on.

### **French**

The French language does not command as much speakers as the English language does in Nigeria. Without any colonial past in Nigeria, the attraction which the French language holds in Nigeria is due to the fact that it is the lingua franca of Nigeria's immediate African neighbours. Thus, for easy interaction among the ECOWAS countries the French language is made available to interested students who choose it as optional subject at the secondary schools.

### **Arabic**

The presence of Arabic language in Nigeria today is due mainly to religious reasons even though religious and commercial reasons combined to aid its introduction into the country. Nigeria is home to a large population of Muslims whose official religious language is Arabic. Given the preponderance of Muslims in the Northern part of Nigeria, access to Arabic is restricted mainly to the North. The Muslim child begins early to learn the Arabic language such that before he attains maturity, he is expected to master the basic prayers and rites that are offered in Arabic.

### **Chinese**

Chinese incursion into the Nigerian environment is a recent one. This accounts for the paucity of fluent speakers of the language in the country. Chinese language learning in Nigeria is facilitated by the Chinese government through the instrumentality of the Confucius Centers situated in some Nigerian higher institutions. The attraction which Chinese holds to Nigerians is due to the emerging economy status of China. Many business men and women feel that knowledge of Chinese will facilitate their international business dealings in China.

## **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2**

List the four foreign languages in Nigeria.

### **3.3 Language Interaction in Nigeria**

Here we are concerned with examining the level of interaction that exists between the various languages found in Nigeria. We are concerned mainly with examining the level of translational activities that take place among the languages. An examination of the level of translation that exists between the indigenous Nigerian languages and the English language, and the one that exists between the English language and other foreign

languages was carried out by Eyisi et al (2010). Their findings show that translation of texts from English into Nigerian languages enjoyed a robust time during the colonial and missionary era. It was the era when Ajayi Crowther translated the English Bible into Igbo and Yoruba, and other religious leaders also rendered the Catechism into Nigerian languages. Despite the efforts of Ajayi Crowther and his men or rather due to their efforts, translating from English into Nigerian languages was influenced by evangelical reasons. No original indigenous literature (where it existed) was translated into English during the period.

The 1950s and 1960s was a particularly significant era in the country's history. It was the period when the pioneer educated men and women from the country attained maturity. The country witnessed a period of intense activity in the literary arena. Books were produced in both Foreign languages (FL) like English and Arabic and the indigenous languages. Despite the flurry of activities in Nigerian literary scene in both indigenous and Foreign language publications not much has been done in terms of translation especially between English and indigenous languages. Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) has only been recently translated into Igbo, Yoruba and Tiv nearly fifty years after publication. No other Nigerian language can boast of a translation of that book despite widespread translation in almost three dozen foreign languages. We are unaware of any text written in indigenous language that has been translated into English or into any other foreign language for that matter, except the frantic efforts made by some Nigerian 'Ulama' (scholars of Arabic) like Mas'ud Raji, 'Abdul Fatah Adigun, Ahmad Abdul Salam and Mash'uud Mahmud Muhammad Jimba in translating few Yoruba novels into Arabic. (Oseni in Lawal, 2009). Most recent of such efforts is that of Abduraheem 'Isa Lawal of the Lagos State University, Ojo who translated into Arabic Oloye Olu Owolabi's Yoruba novel entitled *OteNibo*. (Lawal, 2009).

The translational activities involving the English language and other two foreign languages exist in Nigeria due to educational, religious or bilateral reasons. French is offered in some Nigerian secondary schools and tertiary institutions, and so also

Arabic that serves religious purposes especially in the Muslim communities. Translators, therefore, find it lucrative to translate works from English into French or vice versa and from Arabic into English or vice versa, in order to meet the educational needs of students who study those languages, and for the religious needs of Muslims to whom Arabic is particularly essential. So far the level of interaction between Arabic and French, and between Chinese and three others Arabic, English and French is yet to be felt.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3**

Describe the level of interaction that exists among Nigerian languages.

## **5.0 CONCLUSION**

In this unit you have been given an insight into the language situation in our country, Nigeria. You have learnt that Nigeria is home to many indigenous languages. These indigenous languages interact with a number of foreign languages in the country.

## **6.0 SUMMARY**

This unit has exposed you to the language situation in Nigeria. You have learnt that Nigeria is home to more than five hundred (500) native languages, making it one of the most linguistic diversified countries of the world. You also learnt that despite the multiplicity of Nigeria's indigenous languages, a number of foreign languages exists in the country. You were also exposed to the status of these foreign languages, the factors responsible for their entrance into the country as well as the factors that sustain them.

## **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

1. Nigeria is a country with many tongues. Discuss.
2. Show your understanding of the interaction between the various languages found in Nigeria.
3. Discuss the conditions that sustain the presence of the four foreign languages in Nigeria.

## **7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING**

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## **UNIT 5     A SURVEY OF NIGERIAN LANGUAGE FAMILIES**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 What is Language Family Tree?
  - 3.2 Proto Reconstruction
  - 3.3 Nigerian Language Family Trees
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignments
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

The previous unit reveals that Nigeria harbors about 520 indigenous languages. Besides these, there also other foreign languages that are found in Nigeria. In this unit, we shall trace the language families of Nigeria's indigenous languages. These languages fall under three language families. The significant of this can only become clear to you when you note that the whole of Africa is home to four known language families.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- define language family tree;
- state the importance of tracing language family tree; and
- trace the family tree of some of Nigeria's languages.

### **HOW TO STUDY THE UNIT**

- a. Read this unit as diligently as possible.
- b. Find meaning of unfamiliar words in the unit using your dictionary.
- c. As you read, put major points down in a piece of paper or jotter.
- d. Do not go to the next section until you have fully understood the section you are reading now.

- e. Do all the Self-Assessment exercises in the unit as honestly as you can. In some areas where it is not feasible to provide answers to Self-Assessment exercises, go to the relevant sections of the unit to derive the answers.

### 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

#### 3.1 What is Language Family Tree?

Language Family Tree, as a term, emerged in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, the concept of the term predated 19<sup>th</sup> century. Yule (2010) traced the concept to 1786, when a British government official in India, Sir William Jones, noted the strong affinity between Indian Sanskrit language, the Greek and the Latin languages. This affinity relate to similarity in meaning and alphabetical composition of certain words. Focusing on the similarities between the languages, Jones concluded that they were not accidental. He argued that not minding the geographical differences of the languages, they share a common ancestor.

Thus, language family tree emerged in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to capture the fact that languages that seem different to each other have a common source or origin. The source language, therefore, is “the original form (Proto) of a language that was the source of modern languages” (Yule 2010). Cognates provide important trace of relatedness of languages. Yule (2010) defines a cognate as a word in one language (e.g. English) found in another language (e.g. German) that has a similar form and is or was used with a similar meaning.” Cognate involves looking for the ancestral connection of two languages by locating similarities in certain words of different languages involved. Using example of three languages, *Sanskrit*, *Latin* and *Ancient Greek*, we show that similarities in word sounds as well as in meaning entails a common ancestry of languages.

<b>Sanskrit</b>	<b>Latin</b>	<b>Ancient Greek</b>	<b>English</b>
pitar	pater	pate <sup>ˉ</sup> r	father
bhra <sup>ˉ</sup> tar	fra <sup>ˉ</sup> ter	phra <sup>ˉ</sup> ter	brother

Finally, what the language family tree teaches us is the fact that modern people whose languages belong to the same language family tree have the same ancestors. Concretely, it points to relatedness of persons and people separated by long distance and time. Indeed, the fact that similarities can still be traced between languages that are thousands of



years separated from each other points to strong affinity between peoples. The changes that led to the noticed difference happened uncountable years ago and can be linked to wars, invasion, and cultural transmission. Yule (2010) writes that, of all these factors, cultural transmission is the most likely. It occurs as successive generations of related people devise new means of using the languages they inherited. Yule (2010) reasons that:

In this unending process whereby each individual child has to “recreate” the language of the community, there is an unavoidable propensity to pick up some elements exactly and others only approximately. There is also the occasional desire to be different. Given this tenuous transmission process, it should be expected that languages will not remain stable and that change and variation are inevitable.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1**

Discuss the lesson the language family tree teaches us.

#### **3.2 Proto Reconstruction**

A proto language or proto word is the original language or original word from which other languages or similar words of other languages diversified. Proto reconstruction entails the process by which cognates are deconstructed in order to discover the original word of the proto language that metamorphosed into different words of different languages. Yule (2010) identifies comparative reconstruction as the procedure for doing this.

In comparative reconstruction, a language historian uses information derived from the cognates to “reconstruct” what must have been the original or proto form in the common ancestral language” (Yule, 2010). To achieve this, the language historian must stick to certain principles. Examples of such principles are (1) majority principle and (2) the most natural development principle. In the majority principle, one looks out for a sound that appears more in the cognates. Words of different languages that have more of such sounds point the way to what the original word of the original language was like. Writing on this, Yule (2010) holds that if, “in a cognate set, three words begin with a [p] sound and one word begins with a [b] sound, then our best guess is that the majority have

retained the original sound (i.e. [p]).” On the other hand, the most natural development principle assumes that certain types of sound change are common whereas others are extremely unlikely. Again, Yule (2010) gives example of such change as captured below:

- (1) Final vowels often disappear (vino → vin).
- (2) Voiceless sounds become voiced, typically between vowels (muta → muda).
- (3) Stops become fricatives (ripa → riva).
- (4) Consonants become voiceless at the end of words (rizu → ris).

## **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2**

Explain what you understand as majority principle and the most natural development principle.

### **3.3 Nigerian Language Family Trees**

#### **3.3.1 Chadic Languages**

The Chadic is one of the branches of language group called *Afroasiatic*. Besides the Chadic, other language groups that belong in the Afroasiatic larger family include Arabic, Ancient Egyptian and languages of Ethiopia. Language historians point to a common origin of all peoples whose languages fall within the Chadic family. Blench (1999) traces the route of migration of proto Chadic speakers to now dry Wadi Hawar, reaching Lake Chad 3-4000 years ago. The migrants were more likely to depend on subsistence pastoralism and fishing for their survival. The suggestion is that Lake Chad was the point at which they dispersed east, west, and south to account for the branches of Chadic today (Blench 2009).

In Nigeria, the Chadic languages are majorly found in the Northern part of the country with about more than 70 languages. They include such languages as Hausa, Bura, Bole, Tangale, Guruntum, Higi, Bade, Marghi, Kanuri, Jimi, etc. Of all these, Hausa language is predominant boasting of up to 30, 000 native and non-native speakers. Hausa owes its massive expansion around Nigeria to the pastoralist culture of its speakers as well as the establishment of political kingdoms in the Nigerian territory. These were responsible for pushing it down to as far as Adamawa, Plateau, and Kainji.

### 3.3.3 Niger-Congo

The Niger-Congo and the Kordofanian are the two sub-families of the Niger-Kordofanian family. While Kordofanian can be found in Central Sudan, the Niger-Congo is well-spread all over the continent with a reach that covers most of the Southern part of Africa. Indeed, the Niger-Congo family of languages is said to be rooted in Africa and is not found in any other continent of the world. The Niger-Congo family of languages is further divided into the following: *Mande* (example of which are *Malinke, Bambara, Dyula and Mendespoken* in Senegal, Sierra Leone and Mali), *West Atlantic* (example is the Fula spoken in Nigeria, Cameroon, Burkina Fasso, Niger, Mauritania, Guinea, Mali, Senegal) *Kru* (spoken in Ivory Coast and Liberia), *Gur* (example of which is the Moore spoken in Burkina Fasso), *Kwa*, (example of which include Igbo, Yoruba, Akan, Fante, Ijo, Ewe, Edo, Fon spoken in Nigeria, Benin Republic, Ghana and Togo) *Adamawa-Eastern* (spoken in Nigeria, Sudan and CAR, Sango of CAR is an example) *Benue-Congo* (example of this is the Bantu languages, Ibibio, Efik, Tiv spoken in Nigeria).

### 3.3.3 Nilo-Saharan Languages

The Nilo-Saharan languages cover a number of languages spoken in Chad, Libya, Niger, Central Sudan, Nigeria and the Central African Republic, Southern Sudan, northern Uganda and western Kenya, Ethiopia, Zaire and Tanzania. Despite this spread, the Nilo-Saharan languages are the least spoken language family in Africa. In Nigeria, Kanuri is the major Nilo-Saharan language. Another example is the Dendi spoken in Kwara and Kebbi States.

### 3.3.4 The Language Isolate

One of the factors that contribute to the fascination which Nigeria poses to language experts around the world is the existence of a language isolate in the country. A language isolate is an unclassified language belonging to no known language family of the world. So to say, a language isolate is a language family of its own belonging to that family alone because it resembles no language around the world.

The Jalaa or Cen Tuum language, spoken among the Cham in the Gombe area of North Eastern Nigeria is Nigeria's single language isolate (Kleinwillinghöfer, 2001). Analysis of Jalaa shows that it is unrelated to any other language in the world. Blench (2009) suggests that Jalaa is probably a survival from the foraging period when West Africa would

have been occupied by small bands speaking a diverse range of now disappeared languages. Through analysis of Jalaa, scholars conclude that the earliest occupation of what is now North-Central Nigeria must have been that of Pleistocene foragers, and the only trace of these is the Jalaa (Blench 2009).

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3**

“Nigeria is home to a language isolate.” Comment.

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

Language family tree points to interrelatedness of languages. Beyond this it also points at relatedness of people whose languages fall within a particular language family. Nigeria is home to three language family trees out of four language family trees found in Africa.

## **5.0 SUMMARY**

You have learnt the meaning and history of language family tree. You were also exposed to the rich language diversity that exists in Nigeria. You equally learnt the language families of some of Nigerian languages.

## **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

1. Define language isolate.
2. Explain what you understand as proto language.
3. Comment on the Chadic languages in Nigeria.

## 7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

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## **UNIT 6     LANGUAGE AND SOCIETY**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Language and Culture Contacts
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  - 3.4 Language Superiority
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- 7.0 References/Further Reading

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

In the previous unit we studied the different language trees found in Nigeria. In this unit, we shall examine the interaction between language and society. Language exists in society. This existence explains the mutual influence which language and society wield on each other. The nature of this influence is such that while certain social events may bring change in language, language can also influence social change. In this unit, we shall explore the relationship between language and social events.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

By the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- explain how cultural contacts influence language;
- describe the relationship between language and power; and
- appreciate that all languages are equal.

### **HOW TO STUDY THE UNIT**

- a. Read this unit as diligently as possible.
- b. Find meaning of unfamiliar words in the unit using your dictionary.
- c. As you read, put major points down in a piece of paper or jotter.
- d. Do not go to the next section until you have fully understood the section you are reading now.

- e. Do all the Self-Assessment exercises in the unit as honestly as you can. In some areas where it is not feasible to provide answers to Self-Assessment exercises, go to the relevant sections of the unit to derive the answers.

### **3.0 MAIN CONTENTS**

#### **3.1 Language and Culture Contacts**

The world is an interactional space. This interaction is necessary for progress and human thriving. Besides interpersonal interaction involving individuals, cultures also interact. When two cultures interact we say that there is culture contact. The reality of culture contact is such that today there is no such a thing as original culture uncontaminated by other cultures. Language is one of the major elements of culture. More than any other element, language bears testimony to any contacts between two cultures. When cultural contact occurs, two languages struggle for dominance as regards which of them is to be used as the tool of communication in the contact situation. When cultural contact is a consequence of conquest and foreign invasion, the conquerors easily introduce their language in the conquered territory. Knowles (1999) writes that:

Conquest by foreign invaders is inevitably followed by the introduction of the languages of the invaders, and this can take several forms. The new language may take hold permanently, as in the case of Anglo-Saxon ... or the invaders may eventually give up their language, as in the case of the Danes ... and the Normans ... Where several languages are in use simultaneously, they may have different functions: for example, after the Norman conquest English and French were used as vernaculars, and Latin was used as the language of record.

A subjugated language does not just retreat without leaving its traces in the conquering language. This is done by the transfer of the features of the language in the new language. When a language adopts features of another language we say that borrowing has occurred. Borrowing finds its usefulness in expressing some aspects of human reality which a language

lacks words in. Thus, it is one of the major ways of enriching a language. The English language seems to be the richest language in the world and it owes this status to its ability to borrow from a wide range of sources which includes Danish, Latin, German, French and Hindi.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1**

Describe how cultural contact influence change in language?

### **3.2 Language and Power**

Knowles(1999) emphasise the relationship between language and power. According to him, “Language is an important factor in the maintenance of power, and an understanding of power relations is important in tracing the history of a language.” Knowles’ position takes into account the fact that holders of power often impose their language choice on the general populace. This accounts for the role played by the Latin Language in the Medieval history. Latin was the favoured language of the ruling ecclesiastical powers, this means that Latin became the official language of the time. The same was the case in Nigeria. When British colonial forces held political power in Nigeria, they made sure that English was the dominant language of the territory. The installation of a language as the dominant language is usually backed with political and economic prestige as well as the sword of the royalty. In the case of Nigeria, learning the English language offered easy access to power and wealth. People who acquired it were easily rewarded with either of the two or both.

Besides the point expressed above, the language structure of a society easily reveals the power holders in that society. For instance, a society where *Her Majesty* is a common expression easily points to the fact that political power is in the hands of women who influence extant forms of vocabulary. You should observe that the term *Her Majesty*, has a corresponding opposite. Despite the insistence of feminist scholars who argue for the inclusion of feminine equivalents of certain English terms, words like *Chairman* originally has no feminine correspondence and it easily reveals that the society where it originated was patriarchal through and through.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2**

Discuss the relationship between language and power.



### 3.3 Language and Technology

Technology affects the status and development of language in no small measure. This point is attested to by historical facts. For instance, the introduction of printing in Europe “made possible the development of a written language, which became the national standard for England, and later the basis for the modern worldwide Standard English.” (Knowles, 1999). Also the transport system, industrial revolution and the consequent urbanization that accompanied it are great technological innovations that affected human language greatly. These phenomena brought diverse people from diverse background together such that with the passage of time, certain people were made to learn new languages while others were made to abandon their own.

#### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Demonstrate your understanding of the manner in which technology influence language change.

### 3.4 Language Superiority

There has been argument as to which of the human languages is better suited to capture and express reality. For the most of the ancient time, Greek and Latin were projected by their speakers as the superior languages. They were considered most suited for official communication, as well as the language of the learned and the court. However, with the death of Latin and Greek, other languages have been projected by their speakers as the superior languages. The reason for this projection is linked to the undeclared competition for world language. Consequently, English, German, Hebrew and so on have laid claim to being the superior languages most suited to capture reality. This understanding has led to quests to master the superior languages.

You must note immediately that under such situation, as exposed above, most of the other languages were regarded as inferior and worthless. Speakers of the inferior languages are made to feel ashamed of it as speaking it entails public advertisement of their low status. This accounts for the origin of the word, vernacular, in human language. Vernacular is a term that captures the inferiority of a whole language or certain dialects of it. The gravest charge often made against vernaculars is their inability to be deployed in serious matters. This is a false assumption about languages. The truth is that no language, so to say, is a vernacular in

actual sense of it. What are called vernaculars are languages of peaceful people who have never imposed themselves or their cultures on other people (Omazu, 2012). We must add immediately that the assumption that certain languages are superior to others is false. All languages are equal as they are adequate in capturing the reality of the environment in which they emerged.

#### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4**

No language is superior to the other. Debate on this.

#### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

A number of social events influence language. Such events affect the structure and the pattern of a language in ways that are align to the language. This unit has examined a number of such social events that influence change in language. It also showed you how language drives social change.

#### **5.0 SUMMARY**

In this unit you have been exposed to a number of social events that cause change in language. You studied the relationship between language and technology, language and power, language and culture contact.

#### **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

1. Describe what you understand by equality of languages.
2. Explain how technology influenced change in language.
3. Discuss the relationship between power and language.

#### **7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING**

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