

Literature, the Media, and the (Dis) Integration of Languages: The Hausa Language in Focus

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Abstract

The level of endangerment a language faces is relative to the degree of its resources viz a large and active speaker population; a thriving literary tradition complemented by a widespread and flourishing readership, and the prestige accorded the language by its speakers. In this sense, most languages of the world face one or the other forms of endangerment. This paper however, explores a form of endangerment emanating from within the resources of the language itself. It observes an ironic even if pathetic situation, where the very resources of a language, particularly its Media and literary tradition have its thriving practices marked by a propensity for appropriating words from other language(s) considered more prestigious because of the socio-economic, educational, and political standing it enjoys globally. This, the paper argues is as threatening to the pristine existence of a language as other forms of endangerment. Consequently, it suggests borrowing across dialects of the language family than to opt for appropriating words from other foreign and prestigious languages, particularly for words that exist in the repertoire of either the language or in any of its dialects. For example, the persistent use of the English derivative 'chanji' from the English 'Change' where an equally two-syllable word of the same semantic implication exist in Hausa, 'Sauyi'. This obnoxious and depreciating practice largely characterizes the use of the Hausa language in our films, literary texts especially of the popular culture genre and other popular media. The practice of unnecessarily substituting a linguistic item in a language with an equivalent from another language is often injurious to the wellbeing of the former as soon its speakers gradually lose the sense of those substituted linguistic items.

Keywords: endangerment, language face, English derivative, Media and literary.

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INTRODUCTION

Language endangerment, simply recognised as a threatening death faced by a language precipitated by its moribundity and depreciating self prestige, is a phenomenon that has been characteristic of human history and development. It, however, gained global socio-linguistic, political, and cultural prominence with the attention it draws from various scholars from the 1980s through the 1990s to the present. The overwhelming alarm raised by linguists all over the world over the threatening possibility of most of the world's 6,000 to 7,000 languages, except about 10% of those, disappearing [1] immediately alerted the United Nations cultural body, the UNESCO to the need for a concerted action to check the world's impending lost of the mass of its cultural and linguistic heritages.

The imposition of the English language, through British colonial domination, on the linguistic space of Nigeria, particularly in the North, witnessed a

skewed and lop-sided linguistic interaction between English and the other indigenous languages. The hitherto fast developing Ajami script, a phenomenon that evolved out of the age-long semiotic discourse between Arabic and other indigenous languages, viz Hausa, Kanuri, Fulfulde, and Nupe among others, was the immediate and most important casualty of the colonial-induced importance and prestige of the English language over the indigenous languages. Though it would sound banal to recount some of the negative implications and paradoxically some positive ones too, of the imposition of the English language over the indigenous languages, however, one negative implication of the contact between English and Nigerian languages has been the much-talked about language endangerment, a language condition which, if left unchecked, may eventuate in the extinction of the affected languages. The moribund state into which the English language has sent many indigenous languages has, fortunately, spurred scholars and some discernible

native speakers of those languages into a deliberate and collected process of revitalization and rejuvenation of their dying languages through a concerted programme of documenting the resources of their languages; effort at enhancing intergenerational transfer of the languages; developing a thriving literary traditions, and employing the languages in all forms of the media.

The processes of language revitalization and rejuvenation which this paper recognises as language integration, involve the institutions of the media and literature.

The Media, Literature, and the Integration of a Language

The media, and this includes all channels and forms of communicating to a wider audience within and across communities, primarily plays a couple of roles significant to the well-being of a language. It is, in the first place, a form of documentation, as it gets involved in a conscientious effort at collating and recording the myths, legends and the lore of the people, and disseminates same to the younger generations of the speech community. The media does this through films (Home videos, DVDs, and the Internet YOUTUBE), the radio and television stations, the Press, community centres, and other media channels.

Therefore, when people of a given speech community, particularly those whose languages' continuing existence and well-being is threatened by the monstrous presence of another more 'prestigious' language, set out to preserve and revitalize, and in the language of this paper, re-integrate their language, they resort inevitably, to the media, among other channels or instruments of language preservation and propagation.

Unfortunately, this paper observes that the deployment of the media in the onerous task of preserving and propagating a language as a panacea against moribundity (condition of being moribund) has ironically turned into a channel for the disintegration of those languages. The deplorable state of most indigenous

languages vis-a-vis the media is worsened by the development in the ICT which easifies desktop productions of DVDs and other home videos which often are not produced by conscientious, focused, and well-educated producers acutely aware of their responsibility to their cultural and linguistic heritage.

It is important to note at this point that this paper's view of language takes after M.A.K. Halliday's [2] which argue that.

Language is as much a product of evolution as we are ourselves, we did not manufacture it. It is an evolved system, not a designed system: not something

separate from humanity, but an essential part of the condition of being human. These natural languages: then sufficient to enable us to interpret both facets of our wider environment, the social order and the natural order: these were, after all, construed by generalizing and abstracting from the micro-environments in which language had evolved all along (136).

It, therefore views language as significantly an inseparable element of humanity: definitive and peculiar of the human race. In this sense, language transcends the mere idea of a communication tool or channel; it is an essential part of humanity, which developed alongside the human race. Consequently, a view of language short of this may be flawed and suffer from want of an important consideration of language: 'language as an evolved system, not a designed system.'

Further, this view of language locates it within the cultural milieu of a speech community. In fact language is, in this instance, a repository of a people's culture. The implication of this view of language is that people are, in large measure, defined by the very resources of their language, therefore, any depletion or corruption of those resources may impoverish the language of its resources, thus precipitating its relegation and subsequent moribundity.

The phenomenon of the depletion and corruption of the resources of a language, according to the observation of this paper is, again unfortunately and inadvertently promoted by the very media with which it sought to revitalize and re-integrate itself, and by also the very literature by which it tries to showcase its literary tradition. The literature of a people is a bank, a repository, a holding of the people's essentials as humans and as a speech community. Therefore, their literature should, in a way that does not temper with the aesthetic creativity of their art, at every of its twists and turns, reflect those definitive, peculiar and essentializing elements of a people as humans and as a community.

However, with a community like the Hausa, its literature, particularly of the popular culture genre, seems to place its literary values elsewhere, it certainly is not in the representation of an authentic Hausa speech community in all its historical, cultural and linguistic ramification. Here, we have a literature which is conspicuously preoccupied with the Hausa middle class; and the middle class in its banality assumes, in its everyday dialogue unnecessary and needless borrowing, through code-switching and code-mixing, from the English language, perhaps as a showing off of its 'educatedness'. This expression of the triviality of the middle class is deprecatory as well as dismissive of the cultural values and prestige of the indigenous languages. The 'vogue' soon catches up with the younger generation of the common folks who are avid

readers of those literary artefacts, and as this spread among the folks on the street, the farmsteads, and the country sides, the language soon begins to lose its culturally bound and historically valuable elements.

The ordinary speech of the Hausa middle class is inundated in borrowed English words and short expressions which do not, in anyway, add or enhance the communication process, rather it impedes it, as it draws a level down one or the other party in the dialogue, particularly where one of the parties is of the ordinary class unfamiliar with the 'prestigious' English language.

A few examples of such needless borrowing could be found in the novel of Sadiya Garba Yakasai, *Budurci*, as could be found in many other novels of its kind. The speeches of her characters are sprinkled with direct English words; words that have immediate equivalences in Hausa. The resort to such words (untranslated in most instances), is simply an expression of the trivial indulgence of the middle class. This is evident in the fact that the words borrowed are not without their Hausa equivalence. Examples;

1. Quality----- Karko
2. Theatre room-----Dakin fida.
3. Doctor-----Likita.
4. Rape-----Fyade
5. Sky-----Sama/Samaniya
6. Family planning-----Tसारin iyali
7. No-----A'a
8. Little sister-----Yar Kanwa/ Karamar

Kanwa

In her other novel, *Mugun Kulli*, we find expressions in English that are fanciful but needless;

- i. 'I'm in the Bank of the North' ----- Ina Cikin Bankin Arewa.,
- ii. 'Aisar, I love you'-----
Aisar, ina sonki.
- iii. 'Please forgive me'-----
(Don Allah) Ka/ki yafe ni.
- iv. 'Ten days later'-----
-- Bayan kwanaki goma.
- v. 'Doctor, tell me directly'----- Likita,
ka gaya min kai tsaye.
- vi. 'Who is this person?' -----
- Wane Mutum ne wannan?

The argument against this practice is not with the writers' apparent creative ethos, but with the simple but profound implication it would have in the sustenance and propagation of Hausa words and expressions among the younger generation of Hausa speakers, as the literature of a people is supposedly the immediate repository of the very best in a people's language and culture. Yet, popular Hausa literature chooses not to protect the pristine state of its vocabulary and syntactic aspects, but to indulge in unnecessary resort to borrowing English words even where their

equivalences are readily available in Hausa. This paper further contends that innocuous as this practice may seem for now, it stands the possibility of posing the greatest threat to the fund of Hausa words and vocabulary that have evolved with the Hausa people as a speech community.

Outside the institutions of literature and the media, this linguistically obnoxious practice has, unfortunately, spread to the level of the larger Hausa speech community, where words from English have ostensibly replaced the traditional Hausa words, which raises the spectre of the pertinent question: Why do languages borrow? In the contention of this paper, borrowing is primarily resorted to in order to fill a lacuna, a gap in the vocabulary of a given language, a lacuna that could have ensued from contemporary developments in all aspects of human aspirations, as well as contact with more advanced and diverse civilizations. However, in the case of our observed phenomenon, borrowing in this instance is needless, self-contradicting and denunciative of our traditional Hausa vocabulary. Take, for example words like 'change' from which the Hausa 'canji' is drawn. The reason behind the Hausanization of this English word. I'm yet to comprehend, and have so far remained perplexed by the mere fact that the Hausa language is not short of a word similar in its syllabic count: two syllables and similar semantic implication, and that word is 'sauyi' or 'huhure' (Sokoto dialect). Yet, the spontaneous word in the mouth of most Hausa speakers describing any alteration in human condition, perspective, or aspiration is 'canji'; 'Sauyi', its abandoned cousin has gradually become moribund and, will sooner than later be consigned to the archives of obsolete and forgotten words. We can then see that the borrowing of 'change' and its Hausanized equivalent is not occasioned by any linguistic necessity, yet it has been let in only to consign to gradual death the indigenous word of similar semantic import.

Similar borrowings considered needless and self-deprecating include;

1. Dirty----- datti -----
dauda/kazanta.
2. cup ----- kofi ----- moda.
3. Pillow ----- pilo/hilo ----- matashin
kai
4. Bucket ----- bokiti -----
lajiga/alkindir
5. Skirt ----- siketi ----- Fatari
6. Judge ----- Joji ----- Alkali
7. Set/Setting ---- Seti -----
Daidaita/daidai.

The Hausa entertainment industry, particularly the musical segment bestrides the two oppositional divides of integrating and/or disintegrating their primary language through their performances.

While a great number of contemporary Hausa songsters are heedless of their primary responsibility to the preservation and promotion of the Hausa language and culture through their dubious importation of various languages and cultural heritages in their compositions and performances; a few but significant ones among them chooses not only to preserve and promote the language and culture of the Hausa people, but to even more importantly revive some dead and forgotten Hausa words and expressions. At the forefront of this revivalist effort among the Hausa songsters is the Kano-based Aminu Ladan Abubakar, aka Aminu ALAN WAKA, whose songs are replete with forgotten or even unknown Hausa words and expressions, at least to the present generation of Hausa speakers. Words like 'bubukuwa', daurin kamunga', kawalwalniya', 'kufai', and many other revived Hausa words are found in his songs. The same ambivalence characterizes the relationship between the Hausa language and its film industry. The industry, at the beginning of its mass production and mass appeal, largely drew its resources from the fund of Hausa language and culture. This symbiotic relationship ensured that films produced then remain culturally, linguistically, and artistically Hausa. Productions such as ' *Sumbuka, Sangaya, Zarge, Kara da Kiyashi* and a few others have succeeded in representing authentic Hausa language and culture in their productions. Unfortunately, since the early 1990s productions, the cultural and linguistic perspective of Hausa films has gone haywire. Most films' claim to being Hausa films can only be justified by the film's use of the Hausa language, though laced with a heavy dose of the English language.

CONCLUSION

It is the contention of this paper that the process of borrowing from across linguistic boundaries is a legitimate survival strategies adopted by languages to supplement their stock or inventory of words, particularly where such words are missing from their holdings. However, borrowing acquires notoriety when it is resorted to on other fanciful grounds rather than to attend to a linguistic necessity. In this case it becomes not a way of enhancing the resources of the borrowing language, but to consign the resources of the borrowing language, particularly those semantically similar to the borrowed words to the dust bin of moribundity.

The literature of a people as well as those media resources available to a speech community should attend to the revitalization, preservation, promotion, and the integration of those speech communities' linguistic resources.

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