The English Language as a Vehicle of Discourse for Development in Nigeria

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Abstract

This work on the English language as a vehicle of discourse for national development in Nigeria contains an analysis of the place of English in Nigeria. Definitions of language, the English language, communication, discourse and development are provided in order to explicate development in the aspects of the Nigerian educational and religious systems. Aspects of the citizens' lives that have been affected by poor use of the language; nay, features of the English language that engender lack of development have been discussed. As a corollary, suggestions have been provided to turn lack of development to concrete development so as to make life comfortable for the ordinary citizens of the country.

Keywords: language, communication, definitions, development, education, religion like/as discourse, theory, multimodality, multilingualism, Nigeria.

1.0 – Introduction

We seem to claim to know[1] how to define language. Yes nswe do. So, we claim to know language consequent upon which we explain how it works. I do think, however, that we do not really know what language is let alone knowing how to define it or how it works. Is that not ironical because it is an object that we all use everyday as normal human beings? The question is, therefore: How is it possible for someone not to be able to define an object that is so close to him or her as he uses it everyday? In some way, I am tempted to think that the complexity of language reflects the complexity of God. In this regard, we all know that language is a complex phenomenon. Yet, we think that it is a simple object. It is not (I wish I could write 'it isn't' instead of 'it is not' – can you see the difference here?). The difference is conceptually that which is formal and informal!

More often than not, many Nigerians simply show that they understand what language is by defining the concept as a means of communication. That definition is correct! What worries me, nevertheless, is that if you ask such Nigerians what communication is – they produce answers that will suit, very conveniently, what language is! Such a contradiction, at least pedagogically, worries me. By pedagogy, I mean that teachers at various levels of educational development have failed, perhaps, to define language clearly as well as the concept of communication. Or, the concepts are defined but their differences are not set apart clearly. Most educators are very much pre-occupied with definitions such that they often neglect to clarify differences between concepts that are inter-related. As much as I would have wanted to drop the topic here in order to go to define the English language, discourse, development etc., which is my pre-occupation, I wish to describe very briefly the concept of language and differentiate the concept of language from communication. I would do a brief description of the two topics and refer my reader to an earlier publication of the subject because it is more comprehensive.

2.0 – Definitions

Language, to me, is a resource for meaning by which at least two people communicate with each other which occurs as either spoken or written and that which functions in contexts of situation or culture. I may define the concept also as a tool (or vehicle) by which normal human beings establish interpersonal relations through the exchange of messages in order to build a world of knowing and doing. To differentiate it from communication, we need one or two definitions of communication. To my knowledge, communication is the process of the exchange of information (or messages) that are linguistic and non- linguistic. Or, communication is the vehicle of the exchange of message in forms of language and non-language resources such as symbols, signs, gestures, drawings, pictures, photographs including technologically-medicated processes. The four definitions above in this section have attempted to define in twos those of language and communication. Already, differentiations have begun to manifest in the definitions. In order to establish further the differences between language and communication, the following two concentric circles may be used:

Fig. 1: **The Interface of Language and Communication**
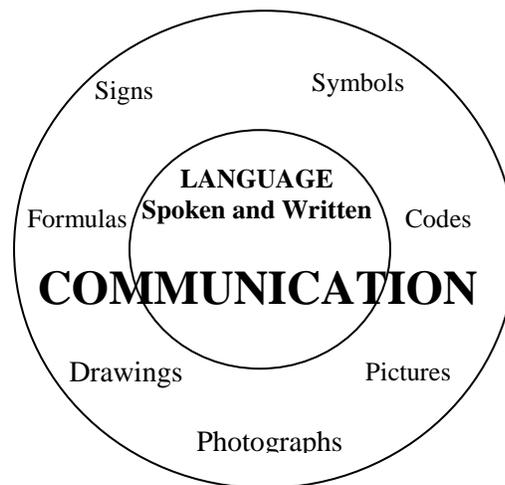
Differentiations between language and communication may be drawn from the drawing above in two main ways: ordinarily and mathematically. Ordinarily, one may see that language is smaller in scope than communication or, conversely, communication is wider in scope than language. Mathematically, the difference may be explained in terms of either a 'set' [subset], intersection or fraction – both being explicit concepts in the discipline. Pedagogically, such differentiations are very important in order that learners will conceptualize the concepts properly instead of being confused because of lack of clarity, particularly in areas that are blurred. In this regard, language is delimited, at least pedagogically, as both spoken and written expressions. Even though both of these sub-concepts of language form a part of communication, communication has, in addition to them, other sub-concepts such as signs, symbols, photographs, pictures, gestures, formulas, codes etc. (for a detailed description of this topic, see Daramola (2006:348-360). There is, however, a caveat. It is concerned with an interface between what is purely and partially symbolic. The alphabet, for instance, is purely symbolic whereby the letters do not actually represent their meanings. Its letters are also linguistic because they have tacit meanings in their linear/syntagmatic organizations.

Having discussed very briefly the difference between language and communication, a brief definition of the English language is provided. Beyond the dictionary definition of the language, I propose three criteria for its definition. The first criterion is concerned with its origin. The second is its spread, and the third is its importance in the world today. The English language may be defined, therefore, as the means of communication that originated in England but was spread to many parts of the world as a result of imperialism and its twin sister – colonialism. Today, it is the most widely used and important language in the world. From a longer period of its existence than in England, it may also be defined as a means of the exchange of information by the Anglo-Saxons in its old form as West Germanic in the 7th century before the Norman Conquest in the 11th century. Moreover, it developed mainly on eastern dialect spoken in London from where it spread to many parts of the world. It is used all over the world as any of first, second, third or foreign language. In Nigeria, for example, it is used as a second language. In

sum, it is used in Nigeria as the country's official language in government, education, business, politics, most of mass media and religious worships etc. (for details see Bamgbose, 1982, Adetugbo, 1984, Adegbija, 2004). It was Bamgbose (op.cit.) who introduced the concept of standardization even when the English language in Nigeria is still to be well described (see also Awonusi 1987; 1990; Dadzie 1986; Okoro 2004a). Whereas, codification processes should have been the focus of many scholars even as many more scholars have begun to accept, unequivocally, the viability of Nigerian English (see Okoro, 2004b; Daramola, 2004).

Discourse is a component of Discourse Analysis (DA) which is a discipline on the same academic pedestal as stylistics, conversational analysis, textlinguistics, computational linguistics etc.(Daramola, 2008; 2010). Discourse may be seen from the 14th century French description as *discours* and Latin as *discursus* which means conversation, talk, a dialogic rendition, a lecture, a sermon, a treatise. It is used occasionally for language and usage. In linguistics, it refers to a piece of connected speech or writing that is longer than a conventional sentence (see McArthur 1992:316). As a discipline, DA was defined by Stubbs (1983: 1) in Schiffrin (1987: 1) as:

> An attempt to study the organization of language above the sentence or above the clause, and therefore to study larger linguistic units, such as conversational exchanges or written texts. It follows that discourse analysis is also concerned with language in use in social contexts, and in dialogue between speakers.

Language scholars know very well that one of the reasons for the introduction of the discipline of Discourse Analysis was as a reaction to the Chomskyan sentential (Transformational Generative Theory) postulation of language. Zellig Harris (1951; 1952), Chomsky's teacher, had anticipated as early as 1952 a period of learning language when scholars will examine language above the sentence (Schiffrin op.cit. p.7). Even the emergence of theories such as Speech Acts (was later combined with Pragmatics), Scale and Category Grammar (later advanced to Systemic Functional Theory) were developed by their chief exponents to avert the then impending tragedy of Chomskyan sentential grammar. Discourse, and essentially Discourse Analysis, is therefore a veritable linguistic model that may assist language scholars to discuss issues of local and national importance as we have before us in this conference. At the heart of any country's national life is language and in our own contextual situation, the most important linguistic tool of discourse at the local, national and international levels is English.

In a similar way to other disciplines in tertiary institutions, ideas on and about language development or, preferably in development studies, cover both theory and practice particularly from the perspectives of multi- and interdisciplinary fields. Succinctly put, such studies cover ideas about how development should or might occur, and real-world efforts to put various aspects of development into practice. Potter's ([2008:67-71] from Hettne 1995) suggested that 'development' involves three sub-concepts 'Development Theories (DT)', 'Development Strategies (DS)', and 'Development Ideologies (DI)'. Consider his definition, as provided below, which combines both the concept of a theory, generally, and development theories specifically. Consider the following quote:

> Following the general definition of a theory as a set of logical propositions
> about how the real world is structured, or the way in which it operates,
> *development theories* (italics, his) may be regarded as sets of ostensibly
> logical propositions, which aim to explain how development has occurred
> in the past, and/or how it should occur in the future.

A close examination of a theory and development theories above depict some close relationship between them. Perhaps such an observation is expected because of the uni-directionality of the concepts – their theoretical relevance. The word development draws a line of distinction between the two perspectives of theories and the delimitation of a theory to the present, while development extends to its future on the pedestal of predictability. Furthermore, development theories can either be *normative* or *positive*. Normative Development Theories (NDT) generalize about what should happen or be the case in an ideal world. Positive Development Theory (PDT) is concerned with what has generally been the case in the past. DS may be defined

> *as the practical paths to development which may be pursued by international*
> *agencies, states in both the so-called developing and developed worlds, non-*
> *governmental organizations and community-based organizations, or indeed*
> *individuals, in an effort to stimulate change within particular nations, re-*
> *gions and continents.*

Furthermore, Hettne (op.cit.) defines DS 'as efforts to change existing economic and social structures and institutions in order to find enduring solutions to the problems facing decision-makers'. According to him, that is, Hettne, the term 'development strategy' implies an actor, normally the state. Different agendas or strategies reflect different goals and objectives. They concern social, economic, political, cultural, ethical, moral and even religious influences. Development ideologies, both in theory and practice are concerned with the promotion of economic growth. In most cases, it is predominantly concerned with social, ethnic, cultural, ecological and any other dimension of the wider process of development and change. They are developed, no doubt, to change patterns of behaviour especially of the leaders and their followers and to reduce inequalities in the society.

Other than the above descriptions of levels of development in the society, I am of the strong view that the English language is dying very fast in Nigeria. The death of English in Nigeria cannot be noticed easily by a non-linguist who does not demonstrate very deep interest in the use of the language. One, the population of those who claim to use the language in one way or another is substantial in the country. Two, the linguistic concept of the death of languages is not easily seen on the linguistic firmament in the country. To say, categorically, that a language is 'living', there must be native speakers who use it. English is so vast in the world today that there are varieties of its native speakers all over the world. Notable ones are England, United States of America (USA), Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. In small communities with few speakers of some languages, they can die especially with the emergence of new diseases that take their tolls on people. A language is considered to be dead when there is no single speaker that uses it. It may have, however, an existence if it occurs in a   recorded form (see Crystal 2010:380-387).

As much as my observation of the dying-status of English in Nigeria is concerned, I may need a new definition of the death of a language that suits the Nigerian situation or modify the existing one. Unlike the occurrences of language death among, say for example, many aboriginal 'tribes' in Australia with as few as twenty speakers of a language, Nigerians cannot see the death of English in their midst because of the large population of its speakers. It is my submission in this paper, nevertheless, that many Nigerians who speak and write the language do so in such a tragic way that one can favourably describe its use as almost dead. We are very familiar with various comments in the media of graduates from tertiary institutions who can neither speak nor write the language to the standards expected of them. In a specific manner, many young users in the urban centres in Nigeria such as Lagos, Abuja, Port Harcourt, Kano Kaduna, Enugu, Owerri etc. live very tragic lives linguistically. This is owing to the fact that they neither use their mother tongues intelligibly nor the English language that they claim to know how to use, coherently.

3.0 - A Conceptual Framework: Discourse on Discourse

From a meta-linguistic perspective, the concept of 'Discourse on Discourse' may be defined as an integration of the theory of discourse with a linguistic entity. In this way, the English language as a vehicle of discourse is applied to the theory of discourse towards the explication of the role of English in Nigeria. Beyond the concept of Discourse Analysis (DA) is the relevance of Systemic Functional Theory (SFT) with reference to its Interpersonal Metafunction (see Halliday 1975, 1994). The Interpersonal Metafunction is demonstrated in clauses as a recognizable proposition that is explicitly addressed to a particular person. Furthermore, the declarative mood is selected regularly by one or both participants in the universe of discourse. Using multimodality to explain some aspects of the concept of Interpersonal Metafunction, Matthiessen (2007: 1- 62) opines that language is used to express meanings that inhere and constitutes the social system. Succinctly, multimodality may be expressed from 'above', that is, from the vantage point of the context of culture in which they operate. It may also be expressed from 'below' because it is concerned with the lowest level in terms of both the 'channel' (e.g. graphic) and 'medium' (e.g. written). Viewed from below, language consists of different semiotic systems that operate in different realms – that is, in different modalities. Viewed from above, language operates in the same realm – the realm of meaning whereby the content plane moves towards that of context. There is, therefore, an interaction of context, content and expression as seen in Fig. 2 below:

Fig. 2. Multimodality: Differences in Expressions

'Above'

Context

Content
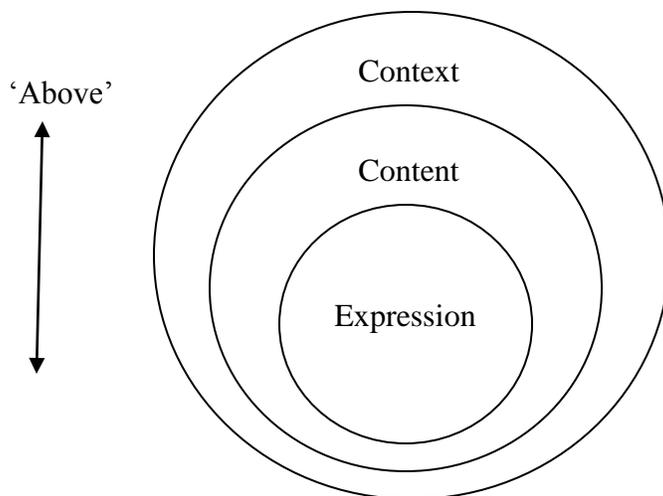
Expression

'Below'

As a medium of expression in multimodality, as an example, intonation is complex. It can be deconstructed into both tone contour (continuous pitch movement) and tonic (location of major pitch movement). The expressive resource of intonation into two modes may be deployed by the grammars of many languages. Also as a medium of expression sequence of language is complex as it can be deconstructed into relative sequence of paired elements such as subject and Finite (realizing mood type) and Subject and Complement (possibly with Predication). The content as various types of expressions may be realized along with defined contextual configurations of meaning.

For the development of any nation, interpersonal relations, as a concept manifests in various shades of interactions. Beginning from one person to another in the society, it operates from members of government to the ruled as they plan for and execute projects for the development of the country.

4.0. Textual Analysis

An examination of the dialogue below as a piece of discourse between two educated adults is expressive of very poor understanding and use of English in Nigeria. It may provoke communicative and linguistic thoughts that slow down development of a nation educationally.

Text 1: Yes/No and Tag Questions

1. Speaker A: You're welcome to my party, my brother.
2.   "   B: Thank you very much, my sister.
3.   "   A: What would you like to drink?
4.   "   B: Any soft.
5.   "   A: That means you don't want Guinness (Foreign Extra Stout)!
6.   "   B: Yes, it's a hard drink!
7.   "   A: You won't want to mix it with soft drink, say, coca-cola?
8.   "   B: Yes, I won't want to.
9.   "   A: It's even very bitter to taste, doesn't it?
10.   "   B: Yes, it does!

There is perhaps no better example of poor use of English in Nigeria than the common use of yes/no or polar question even among university graduates. Similarly, the tag question presents such a poor usage of the language. In the above example, the uses of 'brother' (1) and 'sister' (2) is understood only in the Nigerian socio-cultural milieu as the participants in the universe of discourse may not be related biologically. There are obviously inadequate intonation patterns whereby questions which are orthographically marked as questions might not be so indicated in actual usage. The normal contraction of 'you're'(1), 'don't'(5), 'it's'(6 and 9), 'won't' (7) and 'doesn't'(9) is not often used by many speakers of English in the country.

My concern is here is the use of yes/no and tag questions. We begin to see very clear examples of poor usage in (6) where the use of 'yes' ought to be 'no'. The correct answer ought to be: 'No, it's hard drink!' In the continuation of the wrong answer, the use of 'yes' (9) is used. The correct answer is: 'No, I won't want to.' Both speakers A and B exhibit its poor usage in (9) and (10). The question tag 'doesn't it?'(9) ought to be 'isn't it?'. Similarly, 'does' (10) in the answer tag ought to be 'it is'. There are, however, a number of very good features of spoken expressions in English in the text such as ellipsis of 'drink' (4, 8 and 9) ; contrasts in 'soft' (4) and 'hard'(6) drinks and 'mix' (7) that illustrates 'practice' concerning 'drinks'. All of these are illustrative of expressions, contents and contexts respectively.

I wonder, quite often, why this simple grammatical lesson was and is not taught and learned properly in the educational system in Nigeria so as to avoid this unsavoury error! Historically, such a poor teaching and learning processes of the concept pre-dated Nigeria's independence. Pedagogically, one teacher in the distant past coined the following song as a warning or guide to a such mis-use of the problem that I have highlighted in Text 1 above. Examine Text 2 below:

Text 2: Wherever You Go (1)

1. Wherever you go,
2. Wherever you be,
3. Do not say yes
4. when you mean to say no!

I believe very strongly that a very devoted teacher coined this Text 2 a very long time ago so that learners are reminded to answer the yes/no question properly. Examine Text 3 to see what Text 2 has been turned to recently by the so-called modern teachers.

Text 3: Wherever You Go (2)

1. Wherever you go,
2. Go go n go.
3. Wherever you be,
4. Sisi Eko.
5. Do not say yes
6. when you mean to say no!

The modern version (Text 3) of the old version (Text 2) is not only laughable of modern pedagogy but also tragic. Firstly, the text had been made unnecessarily longer – six clauses instead of original four. Secondly, lines 2 and 4, which are the additional clauses, may be entertaining to primary school children but obviously are pedagogically inexactitude. I suppose that 'Go go n go'(2) is a repetition of the word 'go' although it sounds like the name of a bird 'ogongo'. 'Sisi Eko'(4) is obviously an absurdity. What, for goodness sake, does 'sisi Eko; which is translatable to 'Lagos (Eko) lady' have to do with how learners are made to remember how to answer questions correctly. The only plausible answer is sheer entertainment! I wonder if Text 3 can ever achieve its purpose of 'a reminder' other than its entertainment value!

Text 4: Like and As

It is observable, very clearly in the last six or seven years, that there is an increase in the use of *like* and a corresponding decrease in *as* by many Nigerian users of English – educated and non- educated alike. Such a usage occurs especially when the latter; that is, *as* would appear to be a more grammatical option than the former, that is, *like*. These two lexical items have diverse manifestations of grammatical meaning depending on contexts of use. Examples are 'Like I said' instead of 'As I said'. 'As I said' is used in the sense that the same entity is referred to. That is, it is used in the nature of the mathematical expression which means that X shares the same characteristics with Y. *Like* in 'Like I said', should be, however, a word that is comparative but it is not. That is, it ought to be used in the nature of the mathematical expression which means that X shares *similar* characteristics with Y. It does not refer, however, to the same entity as 'As I said'. Other more grammatical usages of *like* in other structures as demonstrated in this paper, may mean 'like/as', 'as if', 'about', 'such as', 'double entry', 'question-related', 'zero-marker'*,* and even 'meaningless utterances'. Examples are as follows:

Text 4.1- like/as

1. *Like* I said earlier, your children need very strict discipline.
2. *Like*, for example, the government has the responsiblity to defend its people who
    who are scattered all over the world.
3. It is *like* the principal said that any students owing school fees will not be allowed
    to write the first term examination.

Text 4.2.- as if

1. Currently, it is *like* the world is following the trend towards the eradication of Swine Flu.
2. It was *like* the driver collaborated with the kidnappers.
3. What does he want? It is *like* he is tired of the game.

Text 4.3. about

1. After *like* eight years, God gave them a child!
2. I was in Abeokuta for *like* eight years.
3. Needs are compulsory things we have *like* food, shelter and clothing.

Text 4.4 such as

1. It is a question *like* why does a particular person behave the way he does?
2. Unsaturated fats are found mostly in vegetables, peanut, olive oil, and fishes *like*
    tuna and salmon.
3. The researcher may ask questions *like* what is my reason for embarking on this
    research work.

Text 4.5 double entries

1. *Like* I was there for *like* three months.
2. Then *like* yesterday but *like* today, things aren't as good.
3. It is *like* the Muslims are moving *like* Christians do.

Text 4.6 question-related

1. *Like* what cut-off mark will give me admission? (e.g. into a tertiary institution)
2. What is *like* having a good father?
3. It is *like* you like food too much, eh?

Text 4.7. zero-marker

1. I was *like* trying to sing for the choir.
2. I'm *like* very happy to hear the news.
3. *Like* what cut-off mark will give me admission?

     Basically, in Text 4.1 like/as above, *as* may be used to replace all occurrences of *like* in formal settings. This is owing to the fact that the word *like* is not used as a comparison but rather as reference to the same entities in all of the numbers. As long as *like* is replaced with *as* in any of the texts, it refers to what is referred to rather than a comparison. Texts 4.2 are concerned with 'as if'. Unlike like/as which does not have meaning of comparison, directly, the presence of *as* in *as if,* is indicative of some element of comparison. Most importantly, all uses of *like* in the texts may be replaced with *as if,* again in formal contexts. They are not referential. In Text 4.3.most of the uses of *like* are concerned with time directly or a period of time. All of them belong to this group because they may be replaced with *about.* There is no element of comparison and reference in them. Most of the texts in 4.4 establish the meaning, not of comparing two items, but of listing – providing a listing of items or examples. The group is not referential in meaning. Most of the items in Text 4.5.may be eclectic in nature because they may admit of a number of varieties of uses of *like* It may characteristic of the group belonging to zero-marking. In order words, it may be unnecessary in the item. Varieties include their being replaced with other elements such as *about, such as, as, as if* etc. In this regard, elements in the group may or may not be referential. Texts in 4.6 are all in the interrogative form. Forms may be zero-marking or meaningless utterances. All of the texts in Texts 4.7 do not need to include the word *like* in them. The clauses do not function as comparisons in whatever form.

Text 5.0 – Multilingualism

     In the Nigerian society, the influence of multilingualism is pervasive. Nigeria has about five hundred and ten languages. The occurrence of many languages contributes to the importance of English as the language of national unity. As good as Nigerian Pidgin (NP) can be in the socio-political and economic lives of the country, many Nigerians believe that it has set back the development of standard English in the country. Features

of some of the choruses demonstrate the pervasive influence of the socio-cultural influence of multilingualism.

Text 5.1. Yoruba/English Variety

1. Inu   mi   dun   wipe   mo je onigbagbo
   stomach PREP. sweet PRON. I   VB. Christian
   I am glad I am a Christian.
2. Inu   mi   dun   wipe   mo je   omo Olorun
   stomach PREP. sweet PRON. I VB. child God
   I am glad that I am a child of God.
3 Congratulations,   ore   mo'wo   re   wa
   congratulations   friend bring hand PRON. Come
   Congratulations my friend bring your hand.

Text 5.2. English/Yoruba/Igbo Variety

1. Jesus na you biko (Jesus, you are the real One, please God)
2. Oga patapata (The highest Master)
3. Na you biko (You are the real One, please)
4. Oga patapata (The highest Master)

Both Texts 5.1 and 5.2 are illustrative of bilingualism which though are acceptable and unavoidable in the Nigerian linguistics practice, many people are of the opinion that they do not augur well for the development of standard English in Nigeria. Both texts contain English, Yoruba and Igbo. Other varieties contain as many as languages in Nigeria depending on where the church is located. That is, we have Hausa, Birom, Tiv, Isoko, Urhobo varieties and many more. Indeed, many choruses occur in Nigerian Pidgin or/and mixed with other languages in Nigeria. In Text 5.1. the English language is annoyingly intrusive because it is the only one in the chorus. That is, the word 'congratulations' is the only English word! In Text 5.2. the first word *Jesus* is also intrusive because it is the only English word in line 1 of the chorus. The utterance within which it functions is Igbo. In line 2, the utterance is Yoruba. Line 3 consists if Igbo utterance. Line 4 is, again, Yoruba. The functionality of bilingualism in these choruses may not be understood by non-linguist.

5.0. Discussion

        For lack of space in this work, our examples are reduced drastically although there are numerous examples that we may use to support the argument for the decadence of English in Nigeria. Most importantly, the decadence is pervasive in all aspects of life – government, politics, religion, business and the mass media. The discussions on definitions are continuous because of the intricacies of the definitions of terms and concepts. Concepts are not easily determinable because of individual's experiential reality. Experiences of life are as numerous as are human beings. Figure 1 above has begun the debate on definitions of language and communication. Whatever the definition

that anyone offers, my stress is on the pedagogy of setting apart differences and similarities between the two concepts.

Unfortunately, I cannot offer any definition with which to support my proposition above that the language is dying very fast in Nigeria. This is owing to the fact that many Nigerians ironically believe that they use the language well although experts believe that they do not. The negative effect of poor use of English is, however, evident in all areas of life such as the recruitments of workers, re-training of newly employed but inexperienced members of staff, retention of members of staff in business and organizations, promotion exercises, admissions into schools of various types etc.

We have discussed a school of thought concerning the concept of development which, essentially concerns growth that makes life easier to understand by people and live communicatively.

6.0 - Conclusion

I have attempted, in this work, an analysis of how the uses of English in Nigeria may engender lack of development. Examples that I have used provide explicit problems that hinder the effective use of English. These examples are seen in dialogic situation, the recent but informal (more often than not, used in formal contexts) uses of 'like' perhaps exclusive to Nigerian situations, multilingual uses that create code-mixing and code-switching situations, sociolinguistically. To engender development in Nigeria, we need to improving, drastically, the teaching of English in Nigeria. From the primary (elementary) to secondary and tertiary institutions, there must be a new dimension to the teaching of English. Adult education departments in our tertiary faculties of education must reach out to illiterate members of the Nigerian communities to bring about literacy to their lives. As expected, the core essence of any literacy programme is language and, in the Nigerian contextual configurations, it is obviously, the English language.

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