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Sub-Saharan Africa

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This chapter examines the nature of the relationship between language and ethnic identity in sub-Saharan Africa. First, we examine the correlation between language and ethnic identity before colonial rule. Second, we investigate the interplay between language and ethnic identity during colonial rule. Third, we examine the period after colonial rule, paying attention to such issues as language in education, prejudices and stereotypes, language in the mass media and in religion, and how language and ethnic identity are pertinent to the important question of the selection of national languages in densely multilingual sub-Saharan African countries.

The issue of language and ethnic identity relationships provides considerable insights into the link between language and culture. Close and systematic attention to the relationship between language and ethnicity illuminates processes of cultural change and continuity (Fishman et al. 1984). Every language carries a distinct and weighty ethnic baggage.

In sub-Saharan Africa, there is a strong emotional attachment to language and ethnicity. Language is seen as the storehouse of ethnicity: Each ethnic group expresses and identifies itself by the language it speaks, and its cultural paraphernalia is shaped by its language. Sameness of language and ethnicity creates a bond of acceptance and provides a basis for togetherness, for identity, for separateness, for solidarity, and for brotherhood and kinship. It is not unusual to hear a Ghanaian, Nigerian, Ugandan, Sierra Leonian, Cameroonian, or Togolese refer to somebody as "my brother" simply because they share the same language and ethnic group background. This feeling of solidarity is much stronger when members of the same group meet one another in a strange land (e.g., in a different country or in a different part of the world, such as in Europe or North America). Such ethnically and language-conditioned friendship and solidarity is commonplace in sub-Saharan Africa. Language and ethnic enclaves are commonly created in big towns

in Africa because members of the same ethnic and language group tend to flock together, like "birds of a feather." Nevertheless, language and ethnic affiliation are not necessarily always coterminous. There are people who speak a particular language but do not necessarily identify with the ethnic group that the language represents. On the other hand, there are others who love to identify with a particular ethnic group but cannot speak their language.

Language and Ethnic Identity before the Ethnic Revival

Before Colonial Rule

Africans lived predominantly in distinct ethnic and linguistic groups prior to their coming into contact with the outside world—particularly with Europeans. Thus, before the modern political map of Africa was drawn in the late nineteenth century, the various ethnic groups lived in a state of autonomy vis-à-vis each other. Each ethnic group had its own government (political and administrative institutions), its unique language, and often its unique cultural values. The various ethnic groups constituted "states," with members speaking the same language. The Akan of Ghana, for example, saw themselves as a state, and the Akan language performed a dual function—it both brought the Akan people together and set them apart from other peoples. Each African language thus acted as an instrument of self-manifestation and of intraethnic communication. Each language, in effect, constituted a binding force that linked families (nuclear and extended), lineages, clans, and the entire ethnic group together. Thus language constituted the storehouse of ethnicity, with each ethnic group expressing and identifying itself by the language it spoke.

Within the large linguistic group, individual dialects of the language, to a similar extent, led to the creation of smaller, often more cohesive, small units. Generally speaking, therefore, within ethnic groups, language acted as a symbol of the group's uniqueness, as well as of the group's cultural heritage.

In sub-Saharan Africa, it was almost impossible to talk about language without talking about ethnicity. They were intricately bound together and almost always pulled in the same direction. Language was often a passport to ethnic origin, just as ethnic background was indexical of language. Ethnic roots were usually deep and were weighty in the bestowing of favors in interpersonal relations and the according of privileges at the individual and group levels. At the group level, membership in a big language and ethnic group almost always connoted power and potential for dominance of those who belonged to smaller ethnolinguistic groups.

Ethnicity and linguistic affinity thus strengthened the groups and consolidated their walls against invasion by outsiders. Specifically, speakers of the same language who belonged to the same ethnic group had a feeling of solidarity or 'weness' (i.e., belonging) and therefore stuck together in times of strife and happiness. This is not to say that unity of language automatically engendered an allover

unity. The Akan of Ghana, for example, fought among themselves more than they did with the other ethnic groups in Ghana.

An unfortunate sociopolitical and ethnolinguistic situation which developed from sharing a language was exclusionism. Specifically, the togetherness of the in-groups who had identical linguistic habits and ethnicity led to the exclusion of people who were linguistically and ethnically different. The exclusionism often led to various degrees of indifference and xenophobia (reinforced by ethnic prejudices), as well as shades of reaction ranging from mild amusement to indifference and, in extreme cases, to hostility toward other ethnic and linguistic groups. Such prejudices resulted in stereotypes of other ethnic groups and, on occasion, of languages. Thus, in some parts of Africa, there was an inclination to form ethnic rather than linguistic bonds (Bamgbose 1991). Despite the fact that the language of the nomadic Fulani of Nigeria and Cameroon is endangered, they have continued to exist and to identify themselves as an ethnic entity, united and different from other ethnic groups.

The immense political and economic importance of some African languages of wider communication (e.g., Douala and Fulfulde in the Cameroon, Hausa in Nigeria and Niger, Akan in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire, Bambara in northwestern Africa, Wolof in Senegal, Sango in the Central African Republic, Lingala in the Congo, Swahili in Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda, Zulu and Xhosa in southern Africa) meant that such languages were used beyond their original boundaries or spoken areas. With the "contact" situation, such languages of wider communication became instruments for overcoming the boundaries of ethnicity, especially for individuals who, in addition to their own languages, could function in any of the languages of wider communication. Access to the culture of speakers of the languages of wider communication was thus gained by members of other ethnic groups, who through trade, conquest, demographic submersion, and so forth, learned another language.

In view of the fact that such attributes as power, superiority, prestige, and dominance were associated with such languages of wider communication, several attitudes (favorable and unfavorable) toward the languages and the speakers of such languages developed. Such attributes as weakness and inferiority, associated with the smaller languages and the speakers of such languages, also fostered several attitudes. Speakers of small languages who felt threatened or intimidated responded with either resentment (which led to divergence from the language of wider communication and its speakers) or convergence.

During Colonial Rule

With the arrival of the European traders, explorers, missionaries, educators, colonial officers, and, in certain areas, settlers, new and larger communities made up of people of different ethnic and linguistic backgrounds were created. New political frontiers cut through ethnic groups and led to situations in which the inhabitants were torn between ethnic and linguistic allegiances and allegiance to the state. The Ewe in Ghana, for example, were torn between allegiance to Ghana and to Ewes in the neighboring state of Togo. So also the Nzema and the Brong

(Akan groups) in Ghana were torn between Ghana and other Nzema and Brong (Abron) in Côte d'Ivoire. This situation obviously led to political problems. The European languages (especially English, French, and Portuguese), as well as Arabic and major indigenous African languages such as Swahili, Hausa, and Lingala, however, transcended and still transcend ethnic barriers.

The colonialists' unwillingness to learn the languages of Africa led to the imposition of European languages as official languages. The educational policies of the colonialists, as well as the policies of their religious institutions (Christian missions), led to the propagation of foreign languages like English, French, Portuguese, and so forth and to the marginalization of the African languages. Apart from the native courts, in which the African languages were used by chiefs and other customary leaders who presided over customary litigation matters, European languages were used in the law courts. Ultimately, even local African political institutions conducted most of their deliberations in the European languages.

Boadi (1971: 49) rightly points out that another circumstance that may have led to the imposition of European languages on sub-Saharan Africans was the practical aim of establishing cohesion in political units that the colonialists had won either by conquest or treaty. The governments saw European languages as instruments of unity and of nation building. Specifically, each colonial administration thought of its language as a unifying element for the distinct ethnic and linguistic groups it had colonized and was administering. Given the fact that very few people in the colonies went to school at that time, one can also argue that if the colonial languages did unify the people at all, they could only have unified those who had formal education and were literate in those languages. In a country like Cameroon, in which two European languages—French and English—existed, the relationship between language and ethnic identity, as well as between language and national identity, was extremely visible. The dichotomy between French and English Cameroonians seems stronger than that between the local African native and national languages. The majority status of French allowed for its dominance over English, and this resulted in animosity in the domains of politics, economics, and even education (Beatrice Wamey, personal communication).

The language policy of the Germans in Tanzania can be seen as the complete opposite of that of the British, because, unlike the British, the Germans were quick to recognize the importance of Swahili, the local lingua franca, in the lives of the people and therefore encouraged its usage. What is interesting, though, is that the German policy is often criticized as being ethnocentric. Specifically, it is often asserted that the Germans' ethnocentric values prevented them from sharing knowledge of German with the Africans (see Hoben 1991 for some details).

Prior to the ethnic revival in sub-Saharan Africa and in particular during the colonial period, competence in spoken and written English was a passport to prestigious and relatively well-paid employment (Obeng 1997). English helped to promote personal careers and acted as a social status marker. In view of the tremendous prestige the European languages enjoyed before the ethnic revival, they became very popular among those with Western education, as well as among those without Western or formal education. The European languages were viewed favorably, whereas the African languages were looked down on as inferior. Even people

without any formal education often mixed their local languages with a few European words to show that they were not as "illiterate" as those with Western education might think.

In most anglophone sub-Saharan African countries such as Botswana, Malawi, Ghana, and Nigeria, much prestige was attached to English before the ethnic revival, and this facilitated the consolidation of the position of English in the academic curriculum. In Ghana, for example, the Methodist mission schools, which provided education almost entirely in English, looked down on the Basel mission (now the Presbyterian Church) schools as unprogressive because of the comparatively high value the Basel mission placed on the vernaculars. In most parts of West Africa, students who spoke West African languages on the school compounds were punished. In Ghana, for example, students who spoke a Ghanaian language on a school's premises were disgraced by having a board with the inscription "I'm stupid, I spoke a vernacular on the school's premises today" placed on their chests. Other forms of punishment, including being asked to cut grass or fetch water to water the school's garden, were meted out to "offenders" against the language "policy."

The situation was worse in French-speaking African countries, because in those countries virtually no African language was taught in schools. The African languages were treated as though they did not exist. Unlike in the British colonies, in which some African languages were reduced to writing, in the francophone African countries, little attempt was made to write these languages, let alone include them in the educational curriculum. The factors mentioned above go a long way to show why the European languages remained and still remain the dominant languages in most African educational institutions.

Language and Ethnic Identity after the Ethnic Revival

The 1960s and 1970s were marked by a blossoming of ethnic revival movements in sub-Saharan Africa. Politically, this era was marked by the struggle (peaceful as well as armed) for independence.

The ethnic revival brought with it several changes in the attitude of Africans toward the linguistic, political, socioeconomic, and cultural legacies they received from their colonial masters. In Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo) and Togo, citizens with European names were forced to replace them with African names. There was also "Africanization" in the naming of some countries. Congo Kinshasa became Zaire, Gold Coast became Ghana, and Upper Volta became Burkina Faso.

Among African Catholics, Latin was replaced by African languages during Mass, as encouraged by the Vatican. In the former British colonies, a heightened awareness of African languages was evidenced by the policies on language in education and on language use in politics. In most of francophone Africa, the ethnic revival did not result in any effort beyond raising ethnic consciousness about ethnic languages.

We will now examine the correlation between language and ethnic identity in sub-Saharan Africa after the ethnic revival under six subheadings—education, politics, prejudices and stereotypes, mass media, religious life, and the selection of national languages.

Education

In most anglophone African countries, African languages were used in the first three years of primary education in the public schools. However, it was expected that they would be replaced by English from fourth grade through university level. However, in reality, the African languages were used side by side with English up to the end of elementary school. Here are some of the reasons for this state of affairs. Some teachers were not very proficient in English and therefore felt more at home with the African languages than with English. Also, most of the pupils in the upper primary grades and even in the junior high schools still had a weak command of spoken and written English. The only reasonable option left for the teachers was to teach in the African languages. In the privately owned or mission primary schools, the medium of instruction from the beginning was often a European language. In schools meant for expatriate personnel and for well-to-do Africans, the medium of instruction was solely English, because in countries like Ghana, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone, such children mainly sat for international examinations (Obeng 1997). In view of the above-mentioned problems, the ministries in charge of education in some African countries officially encouraged the use of African languages for the first six years of primary education when deemed appropriate. In Ghana, for example, language policy EP. 439/II/221 of February 1, 1971, stated, "It is now Government policy that the main Ghanaian Languages at present provided for in the curricula of primary and middle schools should be used as the medium of instruction in the first three years of the primary school and where the subject makes it possible, in the next three years as well."

In the secondary schools (particularly the junior high schools), the official language policy in most of the anglophone countries suggested that English was to be used except during African-language lessons. Even at this level, however, it was not uncommon to see teachers explain certain salient points in a Ghanaian language, since some of the teachers' competence in the English language could be called into question and the pupils or students knew very little English.

The Ile-Ife project in Nigeria is a good example of the many important achievements brought about by the ethnic revival as far as language in education was concerned. In that project, students of St. Stephen's "A" School were taught in Yoruba at various levels of their education. The students performed better both in Yoruba and in English than did their fellow students who studied only in English. Although this project was later discontinued, it created a sociolinguistic awareness among politicians and educators; for once they realized the advantage of mother-tongue education over studying in a foreign language. The Tanzanian experience, although motivated primarily by the "communalist" ideology of President Julius Nyerere rather than by ethnic revival per se, is also worth mentioning. The predominant use of Swahili as a medium of instruction at most levels of pri-

mary and some secondary schools led to massive increase in the literacy rate. In fact, it made Tanzania one of the most (if not the most) literate countries in sub-Saharan Africa.

The medium of instruction in most universities in sub-Saharan Africa even after the ethnic revival was still a European language. In Ghana, however, it was a requirement of the university that every first-year student should take a course in African studies. A Ghanaian language (other than the student's mother tongue) had to be studied. In Tanzania, Nigeria, Ghana, South Africa, Zimbabwe, and some other sub-Saharan African countries, several universities established departments of African languages and literatures. It is also worth pointing out that immediately after the ethnic revival, some African countries, including Ghana, established tertiary institutions in which only African languages were taught. In the School of Ghanaian Languages at Adjumako (Ghana), for example, six Ghanaian languages were taught in the languages themselves.

In francophone sub-Saharan African countries, however, the picture was quite different from what obtained in the anglophone countries. The colonial French policy of "total assimilation" led to the superimposition of the French language and several aspects of French culture on the peoples of the colonies (particularly the educated), even after the ethnic revival. In Côte d'Ivoire, for example, it was not until 1972 that the idea of adapting the curriculum to include indigenous languages began. Even after the discussion began, Ivoirians had to wait for five more years (until 1977) for a law—the Educational Reform Law—to be passed that brought the policy into effect (see Kwofie 1977 for details). To date, apart from Dyula, Bété, and Baoulé, most indigenous Ivoirian languages do not have established orthographies. A variety of French called *popular French* or *Francais du Treichville*[1] gained popularity at the expense of African languages after the ethnic revival. Many politicians, business people, and ordinary Ivoirians identify with this variety of French rather than with the indigenous Ivoirian languages. The Ivoirian situation was similar to what obtains in quite a number of francophone sub-Saharan African countries. In most such countries, even after the ethnic revival, French continued to be the language of work, trade, and school, whereas the indigenous African languages were reserved for use in the home, particularly in the village. In fact, as Kwofie notes, most parents insisted that their children use French even while conversing with their friends. Some parents even insisted on their children learning French prior to learning their native language, as a guarantee of a prosperous future. A number of francophone sub-Saharan Africans even identify French as their first language (Kwofie 1977). In conclusion, French (both standard French and popular French) continued to play a significant role in the lives of sub-Saharan Africans even after the ethnic revival.

Politics—The Judiciary, the Executive, and the Legislature

In most sub-Saharan African countries, European languages continued to be used at all levels of the Western-based judiciary even after the ethnic revival, although there existed interpreting facilities where necessary. However, in Tanzania, Swahili

was used alongside English in the lower courts. In countries like Zimbabwe and Ghana, in which Native Authority Courts existed side by side with the Western-based courts, the Native Authority Courts used African languages.

With regard to the executive function, most sub-Saharan presidents continued to speak to their people on national radio and television in the European languages which were recognized as official languages in such countries. Only a few presidents, notably President Julius Nyerere of Tanzania and Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya, are known to have used Swahili and Kikuyu, respectively, on a few occasions. Even those who preached against Western imperialism, such as Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, addressed their people not just in English but in complex and often difficult-to-understand English. It is a common joke in Ghana that a member of President Nkrumah's Convention People's Party is alleged to have told a politician in the opposition United Party that although Nkrumah spoke long and incomprehensible words, they preferred to listen to him than to that politician who spoke simple and easily comprehensible English. In effect, linguistic incomprehensibility was preferable and politically more suitable and acceptable. In francophone African countries, as well as in former Portuguese colonies such as Mozambique and Angola, European languages were used by the executives in addressing the people. The Organization of African Unity (OAU), an association of independent African countries, did not adopt any sub-Saharan African language. Rather, such European languages as French and English became the medium through which the association's business was conducted.

As far as the legislature is concerned, apart from Tanzania (which is known officially to have encouraged the use of Swahili), sub-Saharan African countries continued to use European languages in their parliaments, constituent assemblies, legislative assemblies, and district assemblies. In fact, use of a European language in the above-mentioned branches of government was stipulated in the constitutions of most sub-Saharan countries. In Ghana's 1969 constitution, for example, Article 71(d) stated that a Member of Parliament must be "able to speak and, unless incapacitated by blindness or other physical cause, to read the English Language with a degree of proficiency sufficient to enable him to take an active part in the proceedings of the assembly." This by implication suggests that people who were nonliterate in English were excluded from any meaningful political activities. In fact, in most sub-Saharan African countries, politicians whose level of competence in the European language (recognized as an official language and hence the language of administration) was low became the object of ridicule by their fellow politicians and sometimes even by others who were themselves nonliterate in such European languages. Although in some countries competence in a European language is no longer a requirement for active participation in high levels of government, government business continues to be done primarily in the European languages. This by implication suggests that politicians or potential politicians without communicative competence in an official European language are unofficially still excluded from holding political office.

In some countries, attempts made by some members of the legislature to pass motions on the possible use of African languages as official languages have in past

met great opposition, because such motions were seen as an attempt to elevate one ethnic group above the others.[2]

Prejudices and Stereotypes

After the ethnic revival there was the feeling in some sub-Saharan African countries, particularly Ghana, Tanzania, Kenya, and the Republic of Guinea, that ethnicity was not a major problem or a hindrance to development in view of attempts by political leaders to encourage their members to put national interests over and above ethnic feelings and interests. In fact, there was even talk (particularly from Ghana's first president, Kwame Nkrumah, and the then Guinean president, Sekou Tourre) of unifying all the independent sub-Saharan African nations into one political unit (to be called the United States of Africa), along similar lines as the United States of America, and adopting an African language, possibly Swahili, as an official language. To play down ethnic feelings and to encourage Kenyan nationalism, President Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya took note of the relevance of language and culture in nationalism. In 1974, he took a decision to make Swahili the national language of Kenya. Not only did he, by his decision, preempt the growing dominance of English over the local Kenyan languages, such as Kikuyu and Luo, but he was also initiating a bond which he felt would hold the newly independent Kenyan nation together. In neighboring Tanzania, President Julius Nyerere, in an attempt to foster national unity over ethnic diversity and to bolster his African model of communism (Ujamaa or communalism as he called it), encouraged the use of Swahili at the official, national, and educational levels. Use of native African languages of wider communication in Kenya and Tanzania may have helped unify people of different ethnic origins only to a very limited extent, since local people continued to view themselves as different from those in other localities.

What these politicians failed to see was the fact that the almost irrevocable bond between language and ethnicity resulted in the development of enduring stereotypes of those who share a language and an ethnic identity. In Nigeria, for instance, some commonplace stereotypes are of the Ebiras as noisy; the Hausas as self-loving, domineering, and carefree and hating Western education; the Yorubas as gullible, unreliable, and betraying; the Idomas as promiscuous; and the Igbo as lovers of money. The situation is not different in any other African country. In Ghana, Fiscian (1972) found such stereotypical images as of the Ewe as hardworking, the Ga as aggressive, and the Asante as loyal. Amonoo (1989) notes that the scrawls and graffiti in the Balme Library copy of *Universitas* identify the Ewe as tribalistic and inward-looking, the Ga as barbarous, and the Asante as "Kalabuleic" (corrupt).

The ethnic consciousness had thus brought with it a reawakening of resentful feelings; some members of some ethnic groups thought of themselves as superior to all other peoples and hence looked down on languages other than their own and on the people who speak such languages. The ethnic revival did little to discourage resentment of members of other ethnic groups; it did little to promote interethnic understanding and friendliness beyond the official level. In most cases, some ethnic groups became associated with a large number of discriminatory, prejudicial,

and stereotypical images, and people discouraged members of their ethnic groups from having anything to do with such stereotyped groups. In South Africa, for instance, owing to a sordid apartheid and racist past, ethnic and language identities are socially marked, racially sensitive, and often powerfully loaded. In spite of the official end of apartheid, ethnic and language loyalties and identities remain solid, potentially divisive, and socially rancorous. Consequently, a white person who belongs to the Afrikaner ethnic group, and who therefore speaks Afrikaans, still perceives himself as master over the black Xhosa. For the white person, identity with Afrikaans and membership in the Afrikaner racial group is emblematic of being in charge, being in control, and being naturally qualified for the best of the best in South Africa. To a very large extent, the same is true of the white English-speaking South African. For the black South African however, in spite of Nelson Mandela's presidency, belonging to an ethnic and language group that is racially black connotes possessing the identity of the oppressed, the downtrodden, the belittled, and the marginalized. Although the sociopolitical landscape is gradually beginning to change, perhaps at a snail's pace, membership in one ethnic and language group rather than another is still heavily loaded, racially sensitive, and politically charged. Although it is largely true that race is at the root of such cleavages, the fact remains that they have been perpetuated, sustained, and maintained by the distinctiveness of language and ethnic identity.

In effect, although several different ethnic groups may be "clumped" together in one polity, the sub-Saharan African situation points to the fact that there may not be a strong sense of political belonging. In countries in which little or no emphasis was put on the African languages and the intent was to "unify" the people through one or another European language, the consequences were disastrous. The continued use of the European languages created a form of dejection in the masses, who by default were excluded from participation in public activities, from the labor market, and from decisions affecting their own lives. Such people had no choice but to intensify their links with their ethnic groups, which were linguistically and culturally accommodating.

The strong ethnic feelings and hatred toward members of other ethnic groups often resulted in civil strife. In some cases, there were secessionist attempts (e.g., the case of Biafra in Nigeria) or scares (e.g., the Antor secessionist scare in Ghana in the late 1950s). In other cases, strong ethnic feelings led to "ethnic cleansing" (Rwanda and Burundi) and civil war (Liberia). Although people could, with some difficulty, live together as members of one nation, they were unable to feel as one. After all, each ethnic group had specific characteristics, such as language, food, origins, religion, and so forth, that distinguished them and set them apart from other ethnic groups. They continued to see themselves as distinct ethnic groups living together under the same broad political institution or unit. Thus, although politicization may help change ethnicity into nationism, in sub-Saharan Africa, the situation has sometimes been slightly different. The sometimes overly strong ethnic bonds exhibited before and after the ethnic revival oftentimes threatened the unity of many a nation.

The ethnic revival and the accompanying strong ethnic feelings also brought with it political exclusionism and unique voting patterns during political elec-

tions. In most independent sub-Saharan African countries, politicians could count on the votes of members of their ethnolinguistic groups even if they (the politicians) were professionally incompetent.

Mass Media

The ethnic revival made an important contribution to language use in the mass media in general and in the fields of radio and television broadcasting in particular. In quite a number of countries, attempts were made to decentralize radio and television broadcasting through the establishment of smaller radio stations in order to broadcast in African languages. In Ghana, for example, there were radio broadcasts in such Ghanaian languages as Akan (Twi and Fante), Ewe, Ga, Dagbani, and Nzema. Other languages which were later added to the aforementioned languages in radio broadcasting are Dagare, Kusaal, and Gurenne. There was also a radio broadcast in Hausa, a Nigerian language of wider communication in northern Ghana and in the inner cities in southern Ghana. In Nigeria, the ethnic revival brought tremendous linguistic awareness. This resulted not only in the use of Nigerian languages on radio and television but also in the giving of lessons in various Nigerian languages to adults who were absolute beginners. This practice, in principle, was aimed at helping to break the numerous ethnic and cultural barriers and thereby help to resolve the prejudices, stereotypes, fears, and resentments of one ethnic group toward the other. Whether or not the desired aim was achieved is a question which there is insufficient information to answer. It ought to be pointed out, though, that this linguistic enterprise did very little to diminish the use of the English language. In fact, English continues to play an important role in the socioeconomic and political lives of Nigerians.

The ethnic revival also brought with it the establishment of newspapers in the African languages for the propagation of political, social, and religious ideas. In Ghana, for example, the Akan language paper *Nkwantabisa* was launched. The *Catholic Standard* also devoted space to such Ghanaian languages as Akan, Ewe, and Ga. In Nigeria, the Hausa language paper *Gaskiya Ta Fi Kwabo* has existed for well over a quarter of a century.

In francophone African countries, the picture was quite different, since very little emphasis was put on African languages as far as the mass media were concerned. French continued to be used extensively. In the print media, the propagation of political agendas, political education, trade, and commerce all continued to be written in French. Little attempt was made at reaching those nonliterate in French, and this obviously led to the exclusion of the mass of the people from the day-to-day information flow in their respective countries. However, both Cameroon and Niger broadcast radio programs in some local languages.

Religious Life

Another area in the lives of sub-Saharan Africans in which one could see the interplay between language and ethnic identity after the ethnic revival was religion. In the Republic of Congo, Nigeria, and Ghana, there was a high degree of "Africani-

zation" of Christianity, and aspects of African culture, including language, began to be incorporated into Christianity. The Africanization led to the use of African languages in church sermons (including the replacement of Latin in the Catholic Mass by African languages). In some Africanized churches (e.g., the Africania Mission in Ghana), libation prayer (an act which was considered demonic before the ethnic revival) was performed in Ghanaian languages during church services.

In addition to the incorporation of African languages and cultures into Christianity, the ethnic revival helped to encourage the translation of religious literature into African languages, especially in anglophone sub-Saharan African countries. Obeng (1997) notes that in Ghana, for example, over twenty Ghanaian languages (including Akan—Akuapem, Asante and Fante—Ga, Dangme, Ewe, Nzema, Dagbani, Frafra [Gurenne], Sisala, Dagaare, and others) have been used for Bible translations. The Jehovah's Witness group began to publish its religious pamphlets *Awake* and *Watchtower* in some African languages, and the Presbyterian Church devoted some space in its monthly newspaper, *The Christian Messenger*, to Ghanaian languages like Akan, Ga, and Ewe. Similarly, in Nigeria, the Bible (especially the New Testament) has been translated into numerous local languages, and the Koran has been translated into Hausa.

However, it must be noted that most of the churches, especially those in the urban centers, continued to use European languages in their services even after the ethnic revival.

Language, Ethnic Identity, and the Selection of National Languages

A national language is the language used for national identity. It is a source of pride for citizens of a nation. It is a symbol of national identity and a mobilization and rallying point. Every bona fide national language is emblematic of the spirit of a nation and is seen as a unifying force. Fasold (1984: 77) views a national language as:

1. The emblem of national oneness and identity
2. Widely used for some everyday purposes
3. Widely and fluently spoken within the country
4. The major candidate for such a role, since there is no alternative, equally qualified language within the country
5. Acceptable as a symbol of authenticity
6. Having a link with the glorious past

Many believe that a national language should be a language indigenous to a particular nation.

In sub-Saharan Africa, generally, the issue of language and ethnic identity has made the selection of a national language a very sensitive one. Many circumstances may be responsible for this. Multilingualism and mother-tongue loyalty are attributes for which Africa is so distinctively noted. The fact that in most African countries no one major language is generally understood and loved by all is another major impediment for the selection of a national language. Many people are

emotionally attached to their mother tongues and are unwilling to countenance any impression that another language is being imposed upon them, no matter the guise in which such imposition may occur. The fact that many people have a strong attachment to their language and their ethnic group origin has made it difficult for national languages to emerge. Many of the indigenous languages that should have qualified for such a role are not considered to be ethnically neutral. Instead, the ethnic partiality of most languages and the fact that they show the identity of particular language groups by their traditional ethnic association makes it difficult for languages that could symbolize national identity for sub-Saharan African countries to emerge. East African countries, such as Tanzania in particular but also Uganda and Kenya, to a lesser extent, have adopted Swahili as a national language, even though its use has been somewhat hampered by ethnolinguistic politics.

Infighting and sociopolitical rancor among major language groups have stifled the emergence of bona fide national languages that could be symbols of identity in most African countries. In Nigeria, for instance, although the constitution recognizes Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo as coofficial with English, it is very obvious that the English language performs most official and quasi-national roles. However, being bereft of any Nigerian cultural or ethnic flavoring has made it difficult for English to effectively perform the role of a national language.

Given the strong attachment to mother tongues, it seems likely that in most sub-Saharan African countries, European languages will continue to function in the dual capacity of official languages and quasi-national languages. In fact, as Adegbija (1994) rightly points out, attitudes continue to be positively skewed in favor of European languages, even in national affairs.

The argument has sometimes been proffered in some quarters that in view of the fact that local varieties of European languages in Africa have developed, the European languages can indeed be taken to have an African aura around them and so may not be as ethnically neutral as one may think. In many anglophone countries, for instance, local varieties of English have developed. Thus one frequently hears of Ghanaian English, Nigerian English, Kenyan English, Ugandan English, Gambian English, and so forth. Each of these varieties has a distinct local vocabulary, which may not be understood in other countries. Some people have therefore argued that these European languages have become nativized and so could be used for expressing national identity. However, no matter the degree to which they have been indigenized or nativized, many Africans would still have difficulty in accepting European languages as a symbol of their identity as a nation.

An alternative suggestion that has sometimes been made as a solution to the problem of selecting a language that can serve as a symbol of national identity is that pidgin varieties of European languages should be selected as national languages in Africa, as is the case with Tok Pisin in Papua New Guinea and Bazaar Malay in Indonesia. As Bamgbose (1991: 29) argues, pidgin is an attractive candidate for national-language status because it does not suffer from the elitism associated with English. For this reason, it is considered as satisfying the requirement of "authenticity and vertical integration." The apparent neutrality of pidgin varieties has also been used to argue for their acceptance as national languages or

symbols of national identity. However, the fact that a pidgin's cultural characteristics are difficult to specify makes it difficult for it to be a symbol of identity in Africa. Pidgin varieties of languages in Africa are easy to acquire, even at the grassroots level. Nevertheless, in most African countries, pidgin varieties are seen as low, unimportant languages and so have been given no place in national life. To be considered as a symbol of ethnic or national identity, pidgin varieties would have to be seen as possessing deeply native roots within Africa and would have to possess indigenous rather than imported "raw materials." It is precisely because pidgin varieties lack the "son of the soil" quality that they cannot serve as a symbol of identity. Moreover, most pidgin varieties in Africa are stigmatized, have a low status, and are associated with non-Western-educated people. Consequently, they lack prestige and cannot be the emblems of ethnonational identity, as most African languages are.

Summary

In most parts of sub-Saharan Africa, there is a considerable close connection between language and ethnicity. The sense of ethnic self is created and perpetuated by language. Ethnic and linguistic identification were at the forefront of the sociopolitical and cultural lives of sub-Saharan Africans before and immediately after the ethnic revival. This state of affairs will most likely continue as long as ethnolinguistic minorities continue to feel marginalized, belittled, suppressed, and trodden on. There is no doubt that the bond of ethnicity will continue to be created by language and vice versa.

On the whole, it might be observed that sociocultural life in sub-Saharan Africa has a predominant, hard-core ethnic and language overload that many a time overarches life and, in some instances, determines privileges, positions, achievable heights, goals, and aspirations. Willy-nilly, ethnic identity is preserved through language, and ethnicity has been one of the many tools and strategies for the assertion of superiority and the denial of, or protest against, being labeled ethnolinguistically inferior. In opposing a motion on the selection of an indigenous Ghanaian language as a national language by a member of Ghana's Second Republican Parliament, A. G. De Souza said, "Mr Speaker, language is a solemn thing. It grows out of life, out of its agonies and ecstacies, its wants and weariness. Every language is a temple in which the soul of those who speak it is enshrined" (quoted by Amonoo, 1989: 42). Amonoo quotes another member of Parliament who also opposed the motion as saying "To attempt to adopt one particular language as a national language is trying to elevate one tribal group above the others" (1989: 42). The above quotations not only show the emotional attachment people have to language and ethnicity but also show people's preparedness to oppose the imposition of one language or ethnic group over the other. Based on the close connection between language and ethnicity, we would want to agree with Solé's (1995) assertion that the language of a people is often endowed with the highest and innermost expression of their identity cores.

Questions for Further Thought and Discussion

1. To what extent did the ethnic revival influence the use of African languages in sub-Saharan African educational institutions?

2. It is sometimes said that language and ethnic identity are inseparable in sub-Saharan Africa. How true is this statement?

3. Discuss the role played by African languages in the various branches of government before and after the ethnic revival.

4. If you were asked to advise a sub-Saharan African government on the selection of a national language, would you recommend an African language of wider communication or a European language? Give reasons for your choice.

5. Given the advantages of mother-tongue education, why do you think some parents in some sub-Saharan African countries still want their children to be educated in a European language?

6. "Strong attachment to one's ethnic group or one's language leads to the development of prejudices and stereotypes." Discuss the above statement.

7. Discuss any two language and ethnic identity issues in sub-Saharan Africa before and during colonial rule.

8. Did the ethnic revival play any significant role in the use of African languages in religion and in the mass media?

Notes

1. A variety of French, the phonology and syntax of which are markedly influenced by Ivoirian languages.

2. See Ghana National Assembly Debates, 1961, 25: 210–234 and Ghana Parliamentary Debates, 1971. 6(35–37): 1514–1606.

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