

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

Most cultures have stories which seek to explain the origin of life and to explain why things are as they are in the world today. The story from Genesis would have us believe that linguistic diversity is the curse of Babel (Genesis 11:1-11).

And the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech... And they said to one another... Let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth. And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men builded. And the Lord said, behold, the people is one, and they have all one language,... Let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech. So, the Lord scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city. Therefore, is the name of it called Babel; because the Lord did there confound the language of all the earth.

In primordial time, people spoke the same language. God, however, decided to punish them for their presumptuousness in erecting the tower by making them speak different languages. Thus, multilingualism became an obstacle to further co-operation and placed limits on human worldly achievements.

Most communities in the world are multilingual. In these communities, there is more than one language that plays an important role, and many or all of the individuals in such communities are at least bilingual. Here, the context you find yourself determines the kind of language you use.

When you talk of language choice in any country, one bears in mind the multilingual societies. In monolingual countries, there is no worry about choice of language to use, they only have to use the language available to them.

One of the most obvious problems associated with newly formed multilingual communities, for example, in countries such as Australia and Canada which have seen considerable immigration from different parts of the world, is that of cross-cultural communication. Sociolinguistic research has made it clear that to communicate successfully in a language other than your own, it is not enough to learn the phonology, grammar and vocabulary of that language. You also have to learn how to use it appropriately in particular social situations according to the norms employed and accepted by its native speakers.

Potential multilingual speakers are people with a strong interest in a foreign language, people who find it necessary to acquire second or third language for practical purposes, such as business, information gathering or entertainment.

Multilingual speakers outnumber monolingual speakers in the world's population. In a multilingual society, not all speakers need to be multilingual. When all speakers are multilingual, linguists classify the community according to the functional distribution of the languages involved.

The researcher observed that before an individual thinks of language choice, there must be some motivational factors. Motivation and investment in this process, by the individual, will depend on the value attached to prospective gains accompanying proficiency in the relevant language. He also observed that language choice is affected by utilitarian considerations. A speaker may feel that the use of a particular language will place him in an advantageous position either within a group or within a wider social context. If

his antagonists in a discussion or argument are less fluent than he is, this will clearly serve to give him a valuable edge. The perceived advantage does not have to be in relation to other individuals. It may be for purely personal considerations that a person chooses to speak a particular language. A student of a foreign language may prefer to use that language whenever possible, with the sole intention of improving his ability.

Acquiring an additional language, second, third or fourth, will be greatly affected by the social, political and economic environment within which the acquisition process takes place. Learners of additional languages are either born into or transferred to (as a result of migration) a multilingual context. Those born into such a situation usually accept the need for multilingualism as a natural phenomenon and hence can easily see the importance and the gains of achieving a high level of proficiency in the various relevant languages. Those transferred to a multilingual context as a result of immigration, have some difficult choices to make:

Maintenance of the heritage language in order to preserve the culture and ethnic identity.

Acquisition of the new national language in order to gain equitable access to the new country's resources.

Acquisition of a language of wider communication, such as English for academic and professional purposes.

Finally, acquisition of another local language, which is needed for interaction with neighbours or fellow workers at the workplace. In this kind of situation, language choices may require certain "prices" to be paid by the learner.

Communication is only possible if both speakers share the same language, and there is little to gain from addressing someone in a language which they do not understand. There is an almost universal taboo upon the use of a language which might exclude one or more members of a group from a discussion, even if the subject of that discussion has no direct relevance to that person or persons. For example, a group of Igbo speakers may be discussing plans for a farewell party for one of their work-mates who is about to retire. Another person, one who does not work at the same company, who does not know the gentleman in question, and who will not be invited to the party, joins the group. This new comer, moreover, does not speak Igbo. It is now incumbent upon the group to continue their discussion in a language which that person can understand. Having to change the language of the discussion to one which may be a second or third language for a majority of the members can, of course, have a stultifying effect upon the course of the discussion, making it more difficult to express thoughts and ideas. In this case, however, the exclusion constraint takes precedence over the language preference of the group majority. In extreme cases, the requirement for a common language might force all of the speakers to adopt second or third languages. The search for a common language may sometimes prove unsuccessful, and a group will have to choose the language which allows participation of the greatest number of people.

### **STATEMENT OF PROBLEM**

The focus of this research work is on those factors that affect language choice in a multilingual community or society.

Keen observation and study have shown that there are many things that make people to think of language choice.

### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

These questions have been posed to guide this study:

What are the problems facing individuals when trying to make language choice in a multilingual society?

What do we mean by language choice?

What are the factors that affect language choice?

To what extent do these factors affect language choice?

### **PURPOSE OF STUDY**

The purpose of this research work is to identify those things that affect people's language choice in a multilingual society. To examine the problems individuals encounter when trying to choose a particular language.

### **SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

The importance of this study is to reveal those factors that affects language choice in a multilingual society or setting.

### **LIMITATION OF STUDY**

This research work is limited to a multilingual society. It is restricted to factors that affect language choice in this kind of society mentioned above. The constraints associated with time shall not allow the researcher to stretch his hands to evaluate all the factors.

## **FACTORS AFFECTING LANGUAGE CHOICE IN A MULTILINGUAL SOCIETY**

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