Ogba Culture, Language and Barriers to Persons with Special Needs: Implications for The Humanities.

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Abstract

Culture and language are two inseparable factors in the life of a people. On this premise, it is often said that cultural perception of a people is conveyed in their language. Referring this assertion to the Ogba people of southern Nigeria, this cannot be overemphasized. To this end, Ogba people use to communicate feelings, ideas and thoughts about events and phenomena around them. Unfortunately, Ogba language has some derogatory terminologies with which it addresses persons with special needs. this denigrative attitude towards persons with special need placed them at the lowest ebb in the society. The purpose of this study therefore, is to highlight how Ogba culture applies language as a barrier to persons with special needs. Here, the descriptive analytical method is employed in the discussion. To this end, various fowl and derogatory terminologies are used by Ogba to refer to or describe persons with special needs. The study concludes that the removal of those cultural barriers will improve the perception and status of persons with special needs not only in Ogbaland but also among their neighbours.

Introduction.

Every organism whether human or non-human, interacts with one another. In the process, each equally influences the functioning or operations of the other. This idea of interaction and cross-cultural influence, without mincing words, governs human relations.

As human and non-humans communicate, feelings, ideas, symbols, perceptions and decisions are passed from or transmitted to and fro. However, the way and manner these messages are coded, encoded, and decoded go a long way in demonstrating the general atmosphere at that particular point in time or at every point in time.

However, whatever level of interaction that goes on within any given environment, is determined by the cultural prescriptions or determinants as the case may be. Therefore, different cultures have different ways of expressing, transmitting, interpreting and drawing conclusions on any item of communication. (Emeka and Okafor 2012) (Otite and Ogionwo 2006) In this way, language which remains one vital medium of communication, might be culturally based. Every culture equally has words used to describe people and their circumstances. While some language expressions are friendly, some are awful. Others are derogatory while some others more are spiteful. In one sense, language is used to praise a king. However, another language is also used to deride a pauper.

The purpose of this paper is to highlight how Ogba cultures applies language as a barrier to persons with special needs. The descriptive analytical method is employed in the discussion. Here, various fowl and derogatory terminologies are used by Ogba to refer to or describe persons with special needs. The study concludes that the removal of those cultural barriers will improve the perception and status of persons with special needs not only in Ogbaland but also among their neighbours.

Theoretical framework. This study is hinged on theory of linguistic relativism expoused by Sapir and Whorf. In the discussion, Sapir and Whorf try to establish the relationship between language and culture. They contend that language as an essential component of culture, is the very key to understanding cultural prescriptions. In their view, whatever expression, thought or interpretation we make of any cultural practice has to be within the given cultural milieu.

Further, Sapir avows that "The real world is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habit of the group". According to him, "One sees, hears and otherwise experiences very largely as one does because the habit of one's community". Predisposes certain choices of interpretation.

Benjamin Whorf (1956) sums the above position when he reaffirmed that "language conditions our world view. In his words, different speakers view the world along the different lines laid down by their respective language"

In view of the above, Akindele and Adegbite (2005) note that, language is connected to culture in three major ways" (i)it is an aspect of culture. (ii)it is an instrument of thought and (iii)language expresses culture.

Language and special needs persons. The cognitive process of language acquisition is very complex. Fromkin, Rodman and Hyams (2014) submit that "To understand or appreciate this process, one need a closer examination of all the processes associated with language acquisition (the cognitive abilities and expectations are as old as the human society itself).

In their view, the brain is the most complex organ of the human body. This is because, all the different parts of the body derive their function from the brain. According to psycholinguistic, the study of the biological and natural function of language is called "neurolinguistics".

In another respect, early in life, children exhibit potential capacity to acquire language. They try to mimic or imitate older members of their family. By doing this, language learning takes place. Expousing this position further, Fromkins, Rodmans and Hyams(2014) write "All children acquire the grammatical part of their language in approximately the same order". Early in life, they demonstrate a good mastery of the phonological, syntactic and semantic systems use of their communicative language. Here, language acquisition is inborn. As it were, the society to which a child is born, has a lot to give him in terms of interpreting the social significance of the said language.

Supporting the assertion that learning a new language has to do with natural instincts, Akmajian, Demmerp, Farmer and Harnish(2010) observe that although, speech and language function can be taken over by the right hemisphere, there is evidence that the right hemisphere, does not have the same potential as the left. On this premise, it is apparent that the left hemisphere of the human brain, is connected with the act of language acquisition than the right. As a result, any defect on the left hemisphere, is bound to affect not only speech production but language acquisition in general.

Ogba language and persons with special needs.

Ogba language and cultural practices do not reserve any positive position for persons with special needs. To talk about these class of persons, derogatory terms are used most of the

time. In this regards, words like *"oru"* (crooked*), "Nkpor"* (broken to pieces), *"iynoo'uga"*(limping), "illee' enya 'ya elu" (mentally deranged*) "imme enya gnay gnay gnay"*(mentally uncoordinated), "enye ornu nnwa" (disfigured lips), *"enye ezee nke"*(one without some teeth) *"enye uku nkwaa"*(hobbling on the leg). "*enye immi mfo"*(one with a patched nose) "*enye ntin nkpo*" (hearing impaired) *"okpu ya alli"*(a cripple) *"enye enya kpo*" (blind) Enye-eka mkpirikpi an (armpuchi) Enye-ekpuazu (a hunch back), enye-ekpuolu (someone with guoiter), Ishi-uku (big head), enye-kpurukpu (short person).

Ogba culture equally has so many idiomatic expressions and proverbs to denigrate persons with special needs. Some of these according to Obodoegbulam(2017) run thus.

Ogba version

Enye kpo
Enye immi mfo je ede ikpo,
Choonia mfe obor rava mmiya.

English translation

He who takes a person with a bad nose
Should arrange a cup with which
He will drink.

Ogba version.

Enye kpo enye enya nkpor
Je ede ikpo,chonia henordun ovo nadi.

English Translation.

Whoever that takes a blind person to a function,
Should do well to get the person a seat.

Ogba version.

Obuka enye eze nke
Ku wa wor kpashi wor okan ya orun,
Obu ka okan nwuyen ka,
Nda ezee obor taba.

English Equivalent

If a toothless person insists that farmers must cultivate maize,
When the maize matures, with which teeth is he going to eat the maize.

Ogba version.

Owneri hee imeni enye uku nkwa,
Modifor obuka,
Ma orkor vikoshii odudu.

English translation.

Whatever you do to a person with a bad leg,
He will show you his anus on his way out.

Ogba: Ka orvoma ka enyera korni ndemadu ya orha, ma, enyerah ka ovorshi yar orgba gaa.English: It is not bad to have a mad person in the community but whose compound or lineage will such come from.

An analysis of the barriers placed by Ogba language on persons with special needs, reveal that the language and culture, have no pride of place for them. As indicated above, persons with special needs in Ogba culture are seen as objects for demonstrating negative thoughts, perceptions and feelings.

The picture Ogba culture paints of persons with special needs is that they are in all ways incapable of helping themselves. Thus, if they cannot help themselves, they cannot in any way contribute to the development of the wider society.

To an average Ogba, these class of persons are so incapacitated that it has placed them at the lowest ebb of the society. In Ogba culture, Obodoegbulam (2019) notes that Ogba religion sees some persons with special needs as embodiments of impurity. As a result, such fellows are treated with disdain. They are not supported to assume any public position. This is irrespective of their achievement. They are seen but not considered or included.

In the social sphere, Ogba culture make persons with special needs a laughing stuck. Those who are hearing impaired are gossiped in their presence with the feeling that such persons will not hear them .

In a similar manner, signs and gestures are employed to scorn the visually impaired. Under certain circumstance, these non-verbal cues are used to discuss this category of persons knowing very well that they will not notice what is going on around them.

As it were, the negative perception described above extend to all levels of persons with special needs in Ogbaland . Ogba culture and language do not see special needs people as belonging to the society. Instead, they are perceived and treated as belonging to and having a separate world.

Implication for the humanities: On a general note, man is the greatest creatures of Super-natural. He is endowed and differentiated from the lower animals with a rich history, culture, religion, language, arts and craft man as a social being, enjoy the potential of entertaining himself, through the appreciation of his social environment. His sagacity places him in a position to explore the ambiance of his natural environment.

The history of human societies reveal that great men come and go likewise empires and emperors. Wealthy individuals come and go but their legacies remain. In all, there is something common to everyone which is that man is a transient being whether as a prince or pauper, man generally understands that he is answerable for his deeds on the last day. Man is aware that death is real and that after life, the memories of his activities remains.

According to social scientists like Davis (2015), man is a social animal that, needs the next person for his happiness and survival. Human culture indicates that through interactions, the strong can carry the weak along. It is an incontrovertible fact that without the weak, the strong will not see anyone to test his strength. Without the vulnerable, the advantaged will not find no yardstick to measure his position. No individual is completely independent just as no one is completely helpless. In nature, there is an innate potential for positive contribution to the society.

Man being a religious animal, knows that there is an unseen power. In the opinion of Omorogbe (1993), this Super-natural force controls the sub-conscious nature of man when his strength fails. When he cannot answer or comprehend the turn of events around him, he rests his expectations on his maker.

According to Aristotle, all men whether strong or weak, rich or poor, are the handworks of this unseen power. Religion exposes the dependent nature of man and that his pride is nothing but vanity. His humility before God makes him realize that beyond man, that is where the power of God begins.

Inspite of the above, Ogba religion has no positive position for persons with special needs. As noted earlier, they constitute objects of impurity. Relating the above to the treatment given to sufferers of certain diseases, the story is not different. In the view of

Obodoegbulam and Opuwari (2020), Victims of ailments like measles, small pox, chicken pox, leprosy and elephantiasis were taken to the forest and will only be re-integrated if they recover

Obodoegbulam, (2017) holds that humans without mincing words, apply language as the only means of communication.

Language serves as a unifying force between individuals, groups and nations. It brings people that are far together. It articulates and represents the thought pattern of a people. Language application in verbal or symbolic form, distinguishes humans from plants. Though lower animals do communicate, they are on their own equally demonstrating the animalistic tendency.

Different societies and cultures have different languages. According to Ogunleke, (2016) when you speak a language that someone hears, it goes to his head. When you speak the one he understands, it goes to his heart.

Taking the humanistic nature of man to the creative arts, the creative and performative arts are essential elements of humans. Man by nature admires beauty. He likes to express himself through arts and craft or through his performance. These personal outputs, give him the parameter to evaluate himself as a social animal. Ogba people express their nonverbal cues through creative arts.

The humanities despite every argument, do not discriminate any individual. In the humanities, individual differences is recognized and appreciated. It is understood that everyone must not have everything in the same way or quantity. Skills, talents, intellectual capacity social and psychological make-up differ. This perhaps is what made the humanities total.

The way forward. To remove the language and cultural barriers against persons with special needs in Ogbaland, this paper makes the following suggestions.

(i)The use of those derogatory terminologies to refer to persons with special needs should be discouraged.

(ii)Ogba people in particular and the wider society in general, should show a better understanding towards the challenge of these special needs persons.

(iii)The potentials rather than the short comings of persons with special needs should be emphasized.

(v) Any obstacle that will work against maximizing their potentials should be removed.

(vi) All the social stigma associated with physical, social or emotional incapacitation should be removed to enable persons with special needs realize their potentials and self-worth.

Conclusion:

In the light of the above, it is apparent that Ogba language is integrally bound up in Ogba culture. Unfortunately, Ogba culture has no prominent place for persons with special needs . An average Ogba person sees himself as a complete being who lacks nothing. Therefore, anything to the contrary, the person is on his own.

However, it is obvious that life does not begin and end in Ogbaland. Today, Ogba people travel to other places and some have seen that disability is not inability. In those places, these class of persons are contributing their little quota towards the development of their society.

In Ogba, some persons with special needs have demonstrated high physical, social, psychological, mental and intellectual ability. On this premise, a continuous denigration of this class of persons, some of whom are specially gifted will deprive Ogba society in particular and humanity in general of their invaluable contribution. Besides, the dignity of the human person is an inalienable right which every individual is entitled to.

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