
A Six-point Argument for Considering Language as a Resource

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Abstract

The philosophical inquiry into language as a resource is crucial given language's current growing significance globally, especially in the digital economy. Hence, this paper presented a six-point argument to further uphold language as a resource to maximise its utilisation in the global economy, particularly in Africa. Specifically, it examined whether language is a means to an end, a necessary condition for the attainment of an end, an intangible matrix, a natural reality, positive and negative, and contextualisable. Anchoring on linguistic capital theory and conceptual analysis, this paper argues that language is not merely a communicative tool, but also a social resource, translatable into economic capital. As a qualitative research, this paper drew its data from existing literature. Subsequently, the findings revealed that the six-point argument is a further justification of the instrumental values of language. Thus, this paper concluded that given the growing strategic importance of language globally, it is crucial to integrate it into the economic template globally, especially in Africa, which is currently experiencing linguistic marginalisation. Thus, it recommended the need to promote all languages, as doing so means sustaining a vital resource beneficial to man.

Keywords: Argument, Communication, Instrument, Language, Resource

Introduction

The contemporary world is continuously experiencing a significant growth in the relevance of language, through conceptualising language as an instrument rather than just a communicative tool. This outstanding growth is evident in the utilisation of language as an intangible asset, as found in the realm of brand and reputation, intellectual property, human capital, organisational culture, and artificial intelligence. Interestingly, these intangible language resources are readily convertible into tangible resources, depicting their status as symbolic and economic capital. Therefore, this paper argues that conceptualising language as a resource is philosophically tenable on several points.

However, it is crucial to note that the philosophical inquiry into the status of language as a resource dates back to Michael Halliday, who described language as a resource for making meaning (Halliday, 1975), a meaning potential (Halliday, 1994), and who further sustained that to learn a language is to learn how to mean (Halliday, 1975; 2003). The notion of language as a resource found a further boost in Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002), who, through his linguistic capital theory, viewed language as a symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1991). Nonetheless, though the above literature and related ones had demonstrated language as a social resource, there is a need to propose some

arguments to buttress their philosophical standpoint further, given the present strategic status of language in the global economy. Hence, this paper presents a six-point philosophical argument to further justify the resource status of language towards its optimal utilisation in the global economy, particularly in Africa.

Research Objectives

Generally, this paper presents a six-point argument to further verify language as a resource to maximise its utilisation in the global economy. Particularly, it:

- i. Conceptualises the meaning of language and resource, and
- ii. Provides philosophical justifications for considering language as a resource

Conceptualising the Meaning of Language and Resource

Language

The word language is from the Latin *lingua*, meaning tongue, speech, language, tongue of land (Gerrard, Littlejohn, 2008). In French, the word that translates to language is *langue*, denoting tongue (Elkaim, 2001). What is common in the two etymological derivatives is that language signifies tongue, which not only represents the organ for speech but also the specific language of a people. Mondin captured the above understanding of language when he defined tongue as a "determined system of linguistic signs devised by a social group to realise communication among the members of the social group" (p.151). Hence, language is "that activity with which man, through vocal or written signs, puts himself in communion with his peers (or with some intelligent being, for instance God) to express his own sentiments, desires, or knowledge" (Mondin, 1991, p.133). Nonetheless, Mondin also offered a definition of language that transcends ethnic barriers by viewing it as a natural capacity or faculty in man. In the above consideration, Mondin notes that "language denotes the function, the capacity with which man is naturally gifted to express himself and to communicate with his own peers through the word" (p.151). Mondin's concept of language, described above, views language as innate and applies to all humans. It is significant to indicate here that Mondin's view of language as an inherent capacity in man corroborates Chomsky (1965), who had earlier viewed language as primarily a psychological phenomenon and subsequently advocated generative and universal grammar, that is, the innate theory of language.

Yule (2022) discussed theories on the origin of language, which focused on the source of language. These theories comprise the divine, natural sound, social interaction, physical adaptation, tool-making, and genetic source (innateness hypothesis) respectively. The divine source theory attributes the origin of language to God or other spiritual entities. It does not have a well-defined singular first proponent. In fact, it was a religio-philosophical belief of the ancient era. However, Herodotus was one of its first advocates. His work contains the experiment carried out by Psamtik 1, who attempted to determine the origin of language. The natural sound source viewed human language as originating from imitation of natural sounds (Müller, 1861). Max Müller advocated the natural sound source, and it embodies the bow-wow and pooh-pooh sound theories. The social interaction source was a brainchild of Bronislaw Malinowski, and it conceived language as emanating from efforts of a group of persons involved in coordinated physical interaction, suggesting that early men could have developed sets of hums, grunts, groans and curses in the process (Malinowski, 1923; Tomasello, 2008; Yule, 2022). It is also called the ye-he-ho theory. The physical adaptation source was propagated by Philip Lieberman, and it holds that with the

transition of early men into bipedal, followed by further development of brain, teeth, mouth, larynx and pharynx, these features were able to produce language (Lieberman, 1975; Yule, 2022; Hijam, 2024). The tool-making source was projected by Kenneth P. Oakley, and it maintains that language is not a sudden emergence but grew out of the same process as obtained in human tool-making endeavours (Oakley, 1949; Yule, 2022; Hijam, 2024). The genetic source was propounded by Noam Chomsky, and it conceived language as innate (Chomsky, 1965). Nonetheless, none of the above theories is without some criticisms. As a result, these theories remain speculations and so require further proof for authentication.

It is also relevant to note that language plays a significant role in human discursive engagements. Heidegger (1973) assigned ontological function to language. However, Mondin (1991) assigned three functions to it: communication, descriptive, and expressive roles. For Medina (2005), communication is the basic function of language. Nonetheless, for Okonkwo (2012), language has three functions: thought, communication, and social identity. In a related development, Nnaemedo (2023) captured the functions of language in what he called the pent-modal nature of language; that is, language as a distinct reality, hood, aperture/gateway, driver/ catalyst, and content.

Nevertheless, outside these nuanced distinctions of the functions of language, there is a broad categorisation of its function, namely based on its intrinsic and instrumental values. It was in the above regard that Michael Halliday viewed language as a resource for making meaning (Halliday, 1975), a meaning potential (Halliday, 1994), and a reality which one learns by learning how to mean (Halliday, 2003). Similarly, Bourdieu (1986, 1991) saw language, not merely as a communicative tool but as a symbolic capital- that is, an instrumental value. Attention is now on how language functions as an instrument, but before then, it is necessary to delve into the clarification of the meaning of a resource.

Resource

A resource is a means of achieving a desired end. This statement means that a resource can be tangible or intangible. So, a resource is a material (tangible) and immaterial (intangible) raw matrix that enables one to accomplish a desired end. The use of the term raw shows that a resource is not in its final stage as far as the end in view is concerned, though it may be an end product when considered from other perspectives. However, about the end in view, it is what makes for the possibility of a reality at issue. It is a potentiality for reality under consideration, and as such, the reality in potency and not in actuality. So, resource, metaphysically speaking, is a potentiality for what the resource user has in view. It is a potentiality yearning for actuality, realisable under requisite conditions. Hence, it offers the necessary ingredients for attaining a desired objective. Thus, Schubert & Knecht (2020) defined it as "positive personal, social and material conditions, objects, means, characteristics or qualities that people can use to cope with every day or specific life demands as well as with psycho-social developmental tasks, to fulfil psychological and physical needs and their own wishes, to pursue life goals, and ultimately to maintain or restore health and wellbeing" (p.3). However, though Schubert & Knecht's definition is laudable, it is lopsided, given that it limits resources to only positive dimensions. Resource, generally speaking, is not limited to positive personal and social conditions. It also encompasses all the means necessary for achieving one's objectives. The end in view can be negative or positive. Subsequently, resources can also be personal, social and material conditions that one can put into negative use. That is why sanctions are placed on offending countries in the event of war to curtail their resource as a way of curtailing and eventually stopping the war. Nonetheless, as this paper considers a resource from a positive dimension, it still aligns with Schubert & Knecht's definition

above.

Language as a Resource - A Six-Point Argument

Given the definition of resource above, it is crucial to discuss how language is a resource. To this effect, this study proposed six arguments as shown below, namely, language as: a means to an end, a necessary condition for the attainment of an end, an intangible matrix, a reality natural to man, which could be put to positive or negative use, and contextual.

Language as a Means to an End

The point above portrays the role of language as a medium in every human interaction. Humans engage in diverse communications with others, whether in private or public discussions. None of these interactive processes and operations is possible without language as a medium, for both sending and receiving of information requires language. The messages people send in the course of their interactions are through language. Likewise, the feedback they receive is possible through language. So, every facet of the communicational process requires language as a necessary and inevitable medium for goal attainment. Hence, just like every other resource, language is an inevitable instrument for achieving every goal. The veracity of the above assertion is more glaring when juxtaposed vis-à-vis Heideggerian view that man speaks always. According to Heidegger (1973), "we speak even when we are awake and when we dream. We always speak, even when we do not use the word, but listen or read, dedicate ourselves to a job, or lose ourselves in idleness (p.27)." From the above Heideggerian disposition, it is apparent that language is not limited to vocal signs; it also includes body clues (body language). The implication is that the concept of language as a means to an end is not limited to verbal and written language. Rather, it embraces all aspects of language. In that sense, even people's unspoken expressions may be louder and more impactful than their public utterances. Hence, one can assert that often action may speak louder than words. Thus, the silence of parents may send a greater message to children than flogging. Similarly, the silence of a grave may communicate more powerfully than the dirge of a poet or the wailing of mourners. However, in all, these body languages are only a means to an end. In the above cases, language serves as a resource for evoking and achieving a desired objective, which may be to elicit a change of heart, provoke sympathy or arouse feelings of regret.

Language as a Necessary Condition for the Attainment of an End.

Language is a necessary condition for the attainment of an end. This criterion defines language as an essential tool for achieving any goal. Whatever is achievable is done in and through language. No operation is possible without the application of language. The above description aligns with Schubert & Knecht's (2020) basic features of a resource, such as functionality and task dependency, relational functionality, evaluation and attribution of meaning, stability and variability of resources, and age and gender-specific functions. It implies that every relationship requires language. It is language that serves to define and express the nature and extent of every relationship. Likewise, it is with language that people undertake every task assessment and achieve their desire for stability.

The above findings validate Austin (1962), who held that humans promise, contract, negotiate, authorise, and order using language. These actions are geared towards stabilising a society. Additionally, the above findings confirm Searle (1995), who saw language as a basic constituent of institutional reality and a rationale for institutional structures. In this case, it is the language that defines institutional structures such as money, marriage, governments, and property. Besides, it is language that establishes the extent of their influence. At the same time, the findings also align with

Habermas' (1984), who saw language as a communicative tool as well as what helps people to create and attain mutual understanding, legitimacy, acceptability, social integration and cohesion. Therefore, language is a sine qua non for all goal attainment, as every achievable goal requires language as an inevitable accompaniment. Without language, therefore, every task becomes stagnant, and disorder and retrogression ensue, as typified by the biblical tower of Babel scenario (Genesis 6).

Language as an Intangible Matrix

These intangible resources are those assets that, though they exist immaterially, produce measurable effects and influence human actions. Instances of intangible assets are brand names and status or reputation, scholars' intellectual or academic property, brand acknowledgement or recognition, human resources or capital, organisational ethos or culture, virtue, wisdom, knowledge, goodwill, software, etc. In the contemporary era, intangible assets play significant roles and are often more outstanding vis-à-vis material assets. For instance, today, there is no gainsaying that software technology has dominated the global economy. Even the invention of artificial intelligence has challenged and significantly altered lots of things in the domains of health science, education, transportation, information and communication technology, and contemporary warfare. Interestingly, language belongs to this category of intangible assets. Thus, though language is a resource, it does not have the same mode of existence as other tangible or material resources, such as crude oil, gold, diamond, etc.

The above submission supports eminent thinkers who have shown the significance of intangible resources, such as Plato, Aristotle, John Locke, Adam Smith, Karl Marx, Pierre Bourdieu, and Michael Foucault. For instance, Plato's (1992) concept of the preeminence of the ideal world vis-à-vis the physical world is a pointer to the significance of intangible assets. The same goes for his view on the superiority of concepts such as justice, knowledge, and wisdom over their material counterparts, such as wealth, possession, etc. Also, Aristotle's (1999) projection of *eudemonia* as the highest good supports the superiority of intangible over tangible assets. As well, Locke's (1988) idea of labour, embodying mental labour, is a precursor of later developments such as intellectual property. It also gave birth to conceptualising knowledge from the pedestal of an asset. The same goes for Smith's (1981) groundbreaking concept of human capital, which considered talents, skills, and education as forms of intangible assets. Marx's (1976) abstract labour theory is also indicative of the significance of non-tangible assets compared to tangible assets, as abstract labour is of greater economic value vis-à-vis material aspects. Bourdieu's (1991) concept of language as a symbolic asset or power is also a portrayal of the critical value of intangible assets. Additionally, Foucault's (1972) view that power can result from knowledge structure and discourse also points to intangible resources and their visible impacts. In all, the arguments of the thinkers above show that resources could be material and non-material, that intangible materials sometimes have a higher premium than material assets or resources.

Language as a Reality that is Natural to Man

Language is not artificial, meaning that language is not something alien to man but a reality natural to him. It stems from man's nature as a *homo loquens*, a being that has a natural endowment for speech. What the above submission implies is that man possesses a natural capacity for language. It is this natural faculty that makes for the possibility of language in the first instance. This faculty

represents the inbuilt category that makes adaptation to different tongues possible. It is the same for everybody, irrespective of diversity in tongue. It is the inbuilt readiness for language that empowers everyone to use language. The term inbuilt readiness in this context signifies the ever-present presence of this capacity for language. This notion of inbuilt capacity for language is biological and transcendental. It is biological, given that it argues that humans have genetic conditions and dispositions that make language possible. At the same time, it is transcendental in that it argues that beyond the biological dispositions, the human mind has categories that make language possible, following the Kantian position.

So, the above view in a way supports Chomsky's (1965) genetic source of language or innate hypothesis, as Chomsky argued that humans have an innate capacity for language. It is this natural capacity that makes for the possibility of language. Without it, speech is impossible. The veracity of the above argument lies in the fact that animals that do not have such a capacity, and are incapable of language, even though they may live in groups or be domesticated among humans. Nevertheless, they cannot adapt to any human language, given the principle that from nothing, nothing comes, as one cannot get something from nothing. Of course, it is contradictory to do so. So, since they do not have the natural capacity for language, no matter the level of training they receive, they will still be unable to use human language. Granted that through classical conditioning, they can be made to respond in certain ways. However, that does not prove that they can use human language as their mode of operation, for it is but a product of instinct, rather than a reasoned behaviour. They only operate within the confines of what has been instilled in them.

Besides, the findings to some degree support Kant (1998), who argued that the human mind embodies a priori conditions or categories for knowledge. These categories comprise four subgroups: quantity (unity, plurality, totality), quality (reality, negation, limitation), relation (substance/accident, cause/effect, community), and modality (possibility, existence, necessity). They constitute the a priori transcendental condition for the possibility of knowledge. The categories make experience possible. They are neither evolutionary nor biological structures, but rather they are mental or rational structures for the possibility of acquiring experiences. Nonetheless, this connects to language as these experiences require conceptualisation, articulation and expression. These expressions are not possible without language. Whatever is expressed is spoken in and through language. Therefore, the rational categories presuppose language as a necessary condition for their operation. The entire connection is captured by Kant (2007), though intentionally, where he states that 'words are sensible signs of concepts' (7: 191). It means that experiences are captured in concepts, and concepts find expression in words through sensible signs.

Besides, the finding supports Heidegger (1973), who argued that speech is not borne of a particular act of will. Rather, he insisted that man is by nature a speaker. However, he does not intend to say that man possesses, besides other capacities, also one of speech. What he meant is that it is exactly language that makes man the living being that he is. The finding also verifies Mondin (1991), who, in his distinction between language and tongue, argued that language does not suffice to have a culture, as it is a generic base for all cultures. In contrast, he maintained that the tongue is culture-specific, being a fundamental element of a culture.

Language as a Tool for a Positive or Negative End

Language can be put to positive or negative use. So, like every other resource, one can use or abuse language. This rationale accounts for certain legislation on the proper use of speech and

expression. That also informs the rationale behind classifying certain expressions as hate speech, etc. The finding verifies Mondin (1991), who argued that language can be an instrument of formation (education), as well as that of deformation and corruption.

As an instrument of formation, language helps to build up a system. In this context, it serves to educate through all kinds of training, both in human resource development (HRD) and human resource management (HRM). In this way, language helps to equip employees with basic skills for organisational growth and self-development. At the same time, it is a medium of impacting organisational culture on employees. Besides, human daily interactions are through language. Through these interactive encounters, people share their experiences, and often fuse their horizons through a shared meaning and understanding (Habermas, 1984). Subsequently, this makes for the possibility of collaborative engagement in common projects and other areas of common concern.

Hence, as a formative tool, language enables people to create and re-create, to construct and reconstruct. It is an instrument of deconstruction. In this context, deconstruction does not signify destruction, but rather dismantling or the act of disassembling a given reality to understand its constituents (Nnaemedo, 2017). Deconstruction is the same as Heidegger's (2011) term, *destruktion* – the act of 'dismantling or liquidating' (Heidegger, 1965). In all, language plays a positive role, which results in a corresponding positive impact on the recipients of the language activities.

In contrast, as a de-formative instrument, language stands as a tool of destruction and corruption. The de-formative use of language is apparent in Socrates's argument against the sophists, whom he accused of using sophistry to overturn truth basically for money and not for the search for truth. Their basic aim is to win an argument by resorting to unacceptable practices and casting doubts on the possibility of objective truth. The specifics about Socrates' rebuke of the sophist are apparent in his dialogues, such as Protagoras and Gorgias. In the contemporary era, indices of misuse or abuse of language are apparently decipherable from diverse internet-related attacks such as cyberstalking, cyberbullying, phishing, doxxing, trolling, swatting, etc. All these are derogatory uses of language which prevent language from serving its desired end, as already described above. Therefore, one can use language constructively or destructively.

Language can be Contextual

A resource can be contextual, given that it varies from place to place. What is considered a resource at one place may serve a different purpose at another place. For example, what is an asset at one place may be a finished product at another place. Besides, a resource may be present at a place and lacking at another place. For instance, Nigeria has crude oil and other natural resources. Nonetheless, these resources are either insufficient in some places or are completely lacking. However, Nigeria also lacks some other resources that others have. Similarly, the meaning and language usage vary from place to place. A word may mean different things in different contexts and locations. For instance, the word pant means underwear or trousers in the United States of America, but stands solely for underwear in British English.

The above submission implies that, just as most resources, language could subsist as a contextual asset. So, like every other asset, language may serve a different purpose in different places. In the above consideration, a people's language can serve them certain purposes that are not readily found in other language groups. Subsequently, any nation that wants to meet up with similar linguistic demand might borrow the resource from the nations that have it, just as people borrow other resources from other nations. It accounts for the reality of cross-cultural vocabulary

borrowings evident in the world today, given that no nation is linguistically self-sufficient. Language groups borrow from each other, as is apparent from many Anglicised Latin and French words. Also, in the Igbo language, many words have been borrowed from Latin and the English language. For instance, the word *Jesu* is a Latin word for Jesus, now adopted into the Igbo language. So, the bulk of the argument in this section is that just as other resources are borrowed, so is the language resource borrowed across cultures.

Conclusion

The six-point arguments validating language as a resource were designed to press that language, far from constituting a communicative tool, also subsists as an asset. Its asset modality is consequent, as presented in this paper, upon its status as a means to an end, a necessary condition for the attainment of an end, an intangible matrix, a reality natural to man capable of positive or negative use, and contextualisable. The rationale for this argument lies in the need to maximise language use, considering the contemporary shift toward language economy, evident in paid language programmes, the use of artificial intelligence, the offer of employment opportunities, the entertainment industry, and so on. It is also a caveat against the denigration of any language, conscious of the fact that all languages, just as every other resource, serve certain purposes to their owners. Besides, it is even more given the uniqueness of all languages, as each language embodies certain unique qualities not found in other languages, which makes for the possibility of cross-cultural vocabulary borrowings. Therefore, this paper concludes that in a bid to sustain the asset status of language in every culture, there is a need to speak out against language endangerment, given that each language is an invaluable resource. Besides, it recommends the need to promote all languages, as doing so means sustaining a crucial resource beneficial to humans.

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