



LANGUAGE AS A MEANS OF SUSTAINABILITY: EXPLORING THE INTERSECTIONS OF LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY, CULTURAL PRESERVATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS

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Abstract

This article explores language as a means of sustainability, focusing on its interconnectedness with linguistic diversity, preservation of culture and ecological awareness. Language, a fundamental aspect of human, social, economic and environmental sustainability, plays a pivotal role in driving and influencing cultural identity (both intangible and tangible cultural heritage), social integration and ecological consciousness. It is, therefore, surprising that language is neglected in the conventional sustainability discourse. However, employing qualitative research based on Leech's five characteristics of language (informative, expressive, directive, aesthetic and phatic) and a critical review of extant literature, this study examines the vital role of language in contributing to the goals and targets of sustainability. The study employs purposive sampling method in the selection of twelve (12) Respondents, four (4) each from Obinze Military Barrack, Umuanunu Community and the Sustainable Environmental Studies Department in FUTO, all in Owerri West LGA of Imo State. The study reveals that language serves as a repository of collective memory, safeguarding cultural identities from erosion. Linguistic diversity fosters social cohesion and empathy, void of cultural stereotypes. The study concludes that language shapes perceptions and behaviours toward sustainability by encoding ecological knowledge and influencing public attitudes through language-based environmental campaigns. Moreover, culturally sensitive language was found to strengthen the corporate-community relationship and trust among communities, especially in the Barrack where multilingualism plays a role. Therefore, this study recommends integrating language within relevant projects and reminds sustainability advocates that diverse language use and respect for culture are crucial for sustainable global transformation.

Keywords: Language; Sustainability; Culture; Social integration; Environmental awareness

Background of Study

In recent decades, the concept of sustainability has gained significant attention worldwide, as societies seek to address challenges that threaten ecological stability, economic security, and social well-being. Traditionally, sustainability discourse has been dominated by three core dimensions: environmental, economic, and social sustainability (United Nations, 2015). However, Maffi (2001) among other researchers, suggests that true sustainability can be achieved by incorporating cultural structures, especially linguistic diversity, as a basic component. Language, the ultimate mode of communication, is also the only channel of transmitting cultural knowledge, values and practices that impact sustainable development.



The variety of languages and dialects used by different populations is a primary contributor to cultural diversity. Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson (2008) argue that languages are a means of comprehending and engaging with reality in unique manners, particularly for indigenous peoples and locals. For these people, languages accompany their territory, care for nature, and identity in a national framework. Each language carries sets of information necessary for the protection of nature and for fostering societal harmony. Due to globalisation, urbanization, and policies that promote a single language, linguistic diversity is increasingly under threat. This decline is a knowledge loss that jeopardises cultural conservation and sustainable development (Brenzinger & de Graaf, 2006).

In addition, social integration, infrastructure, and environmental awareness—key elements of sustainability—are extensively influenced and shaped by language. The discourse in each society affects the way people understand environmental issues, the way information about the environment is communicated, and the way they participate in conservation (Mühlhäusler, 2003). As reported by Berkes (2008), traditional ecological knowledge that is usually stored in indigenous languages is critical for biodiversity conservation, as it contains millennia-old knowledge about the ecosystems and natural resources. Besides, Linguistic diversity and cultural respect are essential for social cohesion and the development of sustainable communities, as they foster a sense of inclusivity, mutual understanding, and respect among different cultural groups (Piller, 2017).

Despite its clear connection to sustainability, language is often overlooked in mainstream sustainability discourses and policies. The dominant approaches to sustainability often focus on economic and environmental dimensions, with limited attention to the social and cultural aspects of sustainability that are closely linked to language and communication. The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) implicitly acknowledge the importance of inclusivity and cultural respect but do not explicitly address language as a core element of achieving sustainability (UNESCO, 2016).

This study aims to provide a comprehensive and original research-based perspective of language as a means of sustainability by exploring its role in preserving cultural identity and heritage, promoting social integration and cohesion in multicultural societies, and raising environmental awareness. This study will focus on how language is used to communicate information and values and the impact it has on shaping the way societies perceive and interact with the environment. This research employs Leech's (1981) five characteristics of language (informativity, expressiveness, directive function, aesthetics, and phatic function) as a framework to measure the features of language and provide an analysis of their influence on sustainability practices and goals.

Objectives of the Study

1. To explore the role of language in preserving customs and traditions
2. To investigate how linguistic diversity and cultural respect can promote social integration and cohesion in multicultural societies
3. To examine the impact of language on environmental awareness and how it shapes people's perceptions and behaviours towards ecological issues and
4. To analyse the influence of language on corporate social responsibility (CSR) and its effectiveness in promoting ethical business practices that support sustainability goals.

Research Questions

1. How does language contribute to the preservation of cultural identity and heritage?
2. In what ways does linguistic diversity promote social integration within diverse communities?
3. How does language influence environmental awareness and shape public perceptions of ecological issues?
4. What role does language play in corporate social responsibility, and how does it affect the communication of sustainability initiatives?



Significance of Study

This study is significant for several reasons:

Cultural Preservation: It highlights language as a tool for preserving cultural heritage and identity, which is critical for maintaining diversity in an increasingly globalised world. Understanding language's role in cultural sustainability can guide policies that protect linguistic diversity and cultural heritage.

Social Cohesion: By examining how linguistic diversity promotes social integration, this study provides insights into how language fosters community bonds, inclusion, and understanding in multicultural societies. This is vital for policymakers and educators seeking to build cohesive, inclusive communities.

Environmental Advocacy: This study underscores the importance of language in environmental awareness, showing how linguistic expressions and narratives shape ecological perceptions. Environmentalists, educators, and campaign designers can use this insight to craft language-sensitive approaches to raise environmental consciousness.

Corporate Responsibility: The research sheds light on how culturally sensitive language can enhance CSR efforts, fostering trust and transparency between businesses and local communities. Businesses can use these findings to improve their communication strategies, aligning their sustainability practices with the cultural values of the communities they serve. Overall, the study contributes to the field of sustainability.

Theoretical Framework

This study uses Geoffrey Leech's (1981) five functions of language—informative, expressive, directive, aesthetic, and phatic—as a framework to explore language's contribution to sustainability. Each function reveals unique ways language interacts with cultural preservation, social integration, and environmental awareness, highlighting its role in a holistic approach to sustainability. The informative function of language is crucial for sharing knowledge and disseminating information, especially on ecological and cultural matters. In the context of sustainability, language serves as a vehicle for transmitting environmental knowledge, scientific discoveries, and cultural values. For instance, indigenous languages often convey specific ecological knowledge about local flora, fauna, and ecosystems, fostering community-based conservation practices (Berkes, 2008). This function underscores language as a tool for environmental awareness, aiding in educating communities on sustainable practices and bridging generational knowledge.

The expressive function of language allows individuals and communities to articulate emotions, values, and identities. This function is critical in preserving cultural identity, as language enables people to express their unique cultural heritage and worldview. For marginalised or indigenous communities, language loss can result in a loss of cultural pride and identity (Fishman, 1996). By facilitating the expression of cultural practices and beliefs, language contributes to cultural sustainability, helping communities maintain a connection to their heritage and fostering social cohesion and self-worth.

The directive function of language is used to influence behaviour, making it an essential tool for mobilising communities around sustainability goals. Through language, leaders, educators, and policymakers can encourage sustainable actions and compliance with environmental regulations (Mühlhäusler, 2003). For example, public campaigns on recycling, conservation, or energy efficiency rely heavily on directive language to guide community actions. The directive function



also plays a role in establishing social norms around environmental protection and cultural preservation, empowering individuals to contribute actively to sustainability efforts.

The aesthetic function of language pertains to the beauty and artistic expression embedded in cultural practices, literature, poetry, and other forms of verbal art. Language contributes to sustainability by preserving and celebrating the artistic expressions of diverse cultures, enriching humanity's intangible cultural heritage (Maffi, 2001). The aesthetic function encourages the appreciation of linguistic diversity and helps sustain cultural identities by showcasing the unique beauty of each language. Additionally, it fosters environmental appreciation, as many indigenous narratives, songs, and stories embed ecological wisdom that reinforces connections to nature and encourages environmental stewardship.

Finally, the phatic function of language is centred on building social relationships and maintaining social bonds through communication. This function supports social integration by fostering inclusive dialogue, promoting cross-cultural understanding, and reducing social barriers in multilingual societies (Coulmas, 2005). In sustainability contexts, the phatic function is essential for engaging diverse groups in dialogue on global issues like climate change and cultural preservation. It facilitates a sense of belonging and collective responsibility, which is critical for community-based initiatives and cooperation across linguistic and cultural boundaries.

Applying Leech's Framework to Sustainability

Using Leech's language functions, this study will explore how language supports various sustainability dimensions. The informative and directive functions emphasise language's role in spreading environmental awareness and guiding sustainable behaviour, while the expressive and aesthetic functions focus on preserving cultural identities and artistic heritage. The phatic function highlights language as a tool for social cohesion, crucial for fostering inclusive, sustainable communities. By examining these functions, this framework underscores the need to integrate language more fully into sustainability discourse, recognising it as a fundamental resource for achieving a socially, culturally, and environmentally sustainable future.

Literature Review

Linguistic diversity refers to the variety and uniqueness of languages within specific regions or communities, and it plays a pivotal role in shaping and preserving cultural identity. Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson (2008) argue that linguistic diversity is foundational to cultural identity, as language acts as a repository of collective memory, cultural knowledge, and values. For many communities, language is a primary marker of identity, embedding worldview, historical experiences, and social practices that define a people (Edwards, 2009). When linguistic diversity diminishes due to globalisation, dominant language policies, or cultural assimilation, it often leads to an erosion of cultural identity, as languages encapsulate unique ways of understanding the world and relating to others (Crystal, 2000).

Fishman (1996) highlights that language loss is closely tied to cultural loss, particularly in indigenous communities where cultural heritage is passed down through oral traditions. He emphasises that language revitalisation efforts are crucial for maintaining cultural identity, as languages are central to expressing and sustaining a group's values, beliefs, and historical memory. For instance, in Native American communities, efforts to revitalise languages like Cherokee and Navajo are seen as part of broader cultural preservation initiatives, as these languages carry knowledge of tribal customs, myths, and practices that are unique to those cultures (Hinton & Hale, 2001).



Furthermore, Maffi (2001) introduces the concept of “biocultural diversity,” where linguistic diversity is interconnected with biodiversity, especially in indigenous communities. Languages often encode ecological knowledge specific to local environments, thus helping communities maintain sustainable practices and a harmonious relationship with nature. This interconnectedness between language, culture, and nature emphasises the importance of linguistic diversity for both cultural and environmental sustainability, highlighting how language embodies a culture's relationship to its surrounding environment.

In the view of Mühlhäusler (2003), language plays a crucial role in shaping environmental perceptions and raising awareness about ecological issues. Language is essential in ecolinguistics which investigates the intersections of language, environmental awareness and people's attitudes towards nature, language is essential and influences environmental consciousness and attitudes toward nature. He argues that people's perception of ecological issues depends significantly on linguistic choices as some parlanges have more ecologically descriptive metalanguages than others, thereby providing speakers with better understanding of their natural environment.

Particularly, local dialects play significant roles in promoting sustainable practices as they embody the right erudition and metalanguages specifically used in describing ecosystems, biodiversity (Berkes, 2008). For instance, Igbo language has such languages for describing nature and its occurrences, just like Huntington (2000) observed that specific natural phenomena and different seasons can be expressed Alaskan native languages, revealing the people's deep understanding of their ecologies. This type of understanding occasioned by the structure of their language promotes conservation principle and the consciousness that steers balanced interactions with the environment.

Furthermore, environmental awareness campaigns stimulate behavioural change and attitudes are a result of language choice. The use of metaphors, narratives and environmental terminologies in discourse greatly influence the value placed on the ecosystem (Stibbe 2015). For instance, using economic terms such as “natural resources” to describe the environment may promote a commodified view of nature, whereas phrases that emphasise interconnectedness or stewardship foster a more sustainable mindset. This highlights the power of language in framing ecological issues and shaping collective environmental consciousness. Moreover, Pinner (2019) notes that language education can promote environmental awareness by integrating ecolinguistic elements into curricula, encouraging students to critically examine language's role in shaping ecological attitudes. By analysing language's influence on environmental discourse, educators can raise awareness among students and foster a generation that is more conscious of environmental issues.

Sustainability which is traditionally discussed in the context of environmental, economic, and social dimensions cannot be achieved independent of language. However, the role of language is an emerging yet often overlooked aspect. According to Mühlhäusler (2003), language is central to how communities perceive and interact with their environment, shaping both ecological attitudes and behaviours. Maffi (2001) also emphasises the concept of “biocultural diversity,” where linguistic diversity is seen as interconnected with biodiversity, as indigenous languages often encode extensive knowledge about ecosystems. Hence, linguistic diversity is essential for preserving cultural identity, especially for communities whose traditions and knowledge are transmitted orally. Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson (2008) argue that languages are repositories of unique cultural heritage, housing the “cultural DNA” of a society. Indigenous languages hold a wealth of knowledge about sustainable living and environmental conservation. Fishman (1996) highlights that language revitalisation efforts are crucial for sustaining cultural identity, especially in minority communities where language loss equates to cultural erosion.

Significantly, language serves as a medium for social integration, promoting cohesion in multilingual societies and helping bridge cultural differences. Coulmas (2005) suggests that



multilingualism fosters greater empathy and understanding, facilitating coexistence in diverse communities. In a study by Piller (2017), it is shown that language can support social sustainability by reducing exclusion and fostering a sense of belonging among marginalised groups. Additionally, languages act as social tools for sharing environmental practices and policies, which is necessary for sustainable development across diverse sociolinguistic landscapes (Evans, 2010).

The role of language in promoting environmental awareness is well-documented, particularly through indigenous knowledge systems. According to Berkes (2008), indigenous languages often encapsulate detailed ecological knowledge that can enhance biodiversity conservation. For instance, Huntington (2000) explains how Alaskan native languages contain terms and expressions that describe specific environmental phenomena, reflecting the communities' deep understanding of their local ecosystems. Moreover, Leclère (2018) discusses how language influences environmental perceptions, as communities with a rich ecological vocabulary may demonstrate greater environmental stewardship.

Incorporating language and cultural awareness in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is increasingly recognised as essential for sustainable business practices. Matten and Moon (2008) argue that culturally informed CSR practices are more effective, especially in regions with diverse linguistic landscapes. Husted and Allen (2006) emphasise the need for CSR strategies that consider the local language and culture, as this fosters trust and engagement in host communities. By respecting linguistic diversity, corporations can strengthen their social license to operate and contribute to sustainable development in a way that aligns with local cultural values.

While existing literature underscores the importance of language in cultural preservation and environmental awareness, there is limited research connecting linguistic diversity explicitly to sustainability frameworks (Pennycook, 2007). Additionally, more empirical research is needed to measure the impact of language-focused sustainability initiatives, particularly in multilingual and indigenous communities (Brenzinger & de Graaf, 2006). Future studies could benefit from cross-disciplinary approaches that combine linguistics, ecology, and cultural studies to build a holistic understanding of language's role in sustainability.

Methodology

A qualitative research methodology is adopted to capture the nuanced relationships between language and sustainability practices across cultural and environmental contexts by exploring participants' perceptions regarding these concepts. Purposive sampling method was used in the selection of twelve (12) participants, who are all above forty years, four (4) persons each, in 34 Artillery Brigade Obinze Army Barrack Owerri, Umuanunu Community in Owerri West LGA Imo State, and the Sustainable Environmental Studies (SES) Unit of the Centre of Excellence in Sustainable Procurement, Environmental and Social Standards (CE-sPESS), Federal University of Technology, Owerri, Imo State, Nigeria. All the case studies are in Owerri West Local Government Area of Imo State. The two communities represent varying degrees of linguistic diversity; Obinze Army Barrack have speakers of different Nigerian languages and the general language is Nigerian Pidgin and English, Umuanunu is an Igbo speaking Community with Nigerian Pidgin and English-Speaking residents, while SES is a department with established corporate social responsibility, and they relate with communities to promote cultural sustainability and environmental awareness. By examining specific cases within communities, the study seeks to identify patterns of how language fosters cultural identity, social cohesion, environmental consciousness, and ethical business practices. This approach enables a detailed understanding of language's role across diverse social and ecological landscapes, making it ideal for analysing cultural and linguistic variations.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with key stakeholders, including community members, cultural leaders and environmental advocates. Interview questions were designed to capture



participants' views on how language influences cultural preservation, social integration, and environmental practices. Data from interviews are analysed descriptively, incorporating Geoffrey Leech's language functions to identify how language fosters cultural preservation, social integration, environmental awareness and CSR thereby, understanding how language shapes and contributes to sustainability.

Ethical Considerations

The researchers obtained informed consent from all participants prior to data collection, explaining the purpose of the research and ensuring they understand their right to opt-out at any time. Moreover, the identities of all the participants remain anonymous for confidentiality. Finally, the researchers were very sensitive to the issues of cultural norms and practices while engaging with the participants.

Data Presentation

The interview questions cover the four key areas of Preservation of Customs and Traditions, Linguistic Diversity and Social Integration, Environmental Awareness and Corporate Social Responsibility. We present the questions and summary of responses from each community in the tables below:

Obinze Military Barracks

Questions	Responses
1. How does language shape your cultural identity? Can you share examples of how language has been used to promote cultural preservation in your community?	Language is central to our cultural practices. We use it to express our values and beliefs. Yoruba is my language, a key part of my identity. Yes, I speak it to my children and tell them folk stories and traditions of my people. We read our bible and pray in Yoruba, so they speak it.
2. In what ways does linguistic diversity affect social integration in your community? What initiatives have you put in place to promote respect for linguistic diversity among community members?	In our barrack, we have people from different linguistic backgrounds. While it can be challenging, it also enriches our community. Our languages help us maintain our cultural heritage, especially during community events where we sing and dance in our native tongues. and we also encourage the learning of other languages spoken within the community. Cultural exchange programs help foster respect and appreciation for linguistic diversity.
3. What role does language play in environmental awareness campaigns in your community? Can you share some examples?	Language plays a big role in how we communicate environmental issues. We use Pidgin and English language to ensure everyone understands the importance of protecting our environment. Yes, we keep waste baskets and post public notices at strategic corners. For instance, "do not urinate here, no dumping of refuse, post no bill" etc.
4. How does language influence the communication of sustainability initiatives in your community?	In our sustainability initiatives, we use English language which everyone understands, whether it's through community meetings or public announcement.



Umuananunu Community

<p>1. How does the use of your native language contribute to the preservation of local customs and traditions within your community? Any examples?</p>	<p>Through Igbo, our native language, we pass down stories, proverbs, and cultural practices that define our identity and beliefs, teaching younger generations about our history and the importance of our traditions. Language not only shapes our identity but also influences how we perceive and interact with our environment. It's a powerful tool in sustainability efforts.</p> <p>We use Igbo in various cultural ceremonies and storytelling sessions, as it captures the essence of these cultural practices. For instance, during the New Yam Festival (Iri Ji), Igbo is used to narrate the history and significance of the festival, ensuring that younger generations understand and appreciate their heritage.</p>
<p>2. How does linguistic diversity influence social cohesion and integration in your community?</p>	<p>While Igbo is our primary language, linguistic diversity within our community can sometimes lead to challenges in communication. However, we've learned to embrace this diversity as a strength, using translation (to English) to ensure everyone is included. We encourage community members to learn and speak Igbo, the language of the immediate environment for social cohesion and integration.</p>
<p>3. How do you believe language shapes the way your community perceives and engages in environmental issues?</p> <p>Are there particular words or phrases in your language that convey ecological concepts more effectively than in other languages?</p>	<p>We use our local language to teach children about the importance of preserving our environment, like not cutting down trees unnecessarily, especially economic trees.</p> <p>Igbo contains rich proverbs and sayings that emphasise living in harmony with nature and convey ecological concepts effectively, which help shape our community's environmental consciousness. For example, "anyi na-echebe ala" (we are protecting the land), osisi niile awugh nku (not every tree is firewood), anyi na-agwochasi iyi anyi (we cleanup our stream often) are powerful phrases used in environmental campaigns.</p>
<p>4. Do local businesses in your community incorporate cultural and linguistic considerations into their CSR initiatives, how?</p> <p>Can you provide examples of successful collaborations between local businesses and community leaders that promote both cultural preservation and environmental sustainability?</p>	<p>In our community meetings, language is crucial for ensuring everyone is on the same page regarding sustainability projects.</p> <p>Local businesses often incorporate Igbo cultural and linguistic elements into their CSR initiatives, such as using Igbo in community outreach programs or sponsoring cultural events.</p> <p>One successful collaboration involved a local business partnering with our community to develop a sustainable farming project. They worked closely with community leaders to ensure the project was culturally sensitive and communicated effectively in Igbo.</p>



SES (CE-sPESS) FUTO

<p>1. How do you see the relationship between language, cultural traditions, and environmental stewardship in the communities you work with? Any examples of how these are communicated through local languages?</p>	<p>We recognize the connection between language, cultural traditions and environmental stewardship and their importance in promoting sustainability. Traditional ecological knowledge is often communicated through local languages, emphasizing sustainable practices. In our work, we've seen how Igbo proverbs and stories teach important environmental lessons. For instance, the proverb, "A tree does not make a forest," highlights the importance of community and collective action in environmental conservation.</p>
<p>2. How do you promote respect for linguistic diversity as a means of fostering social integration in your initiatives? Have you encountered any barriers related to language that hindered community participation in environmental projects? If so, how did you address them?</p>	<p>We promote linguistic diversity by using multiple languages in our outreach efforts and ensuring that all community members can participate in environmental initiatives. Language is a tool for us to communicate our CSR initiatives effectively. We tailor our message to resonate with the communities we work with. When language barriers arise, we use translation services and work closely with community leaders to find solutions that ensure everyone is included and informed.</p>
<p>3. How does the language used in your outreach efforts affect public understanding of ecological issues? Are there specific linguistic strategies you employ to engage diverse audiences in environmental advocacy?</p>	<p>We've seen firsthand how language can bridge gaps in understanding between different communities and help in promoting environmental consciousness. The language used in our outreach efforts significantly affects public understanding. We tailor our message to be culturally relevant and accessible, often using Igbo to convey key environmental messages. We employ linguistic strategies such as storytelling, proverbs, and local idioms to engage diverse audiences in environmental advocacy.</p>
<p>4. How do you collaborate with corporations to ensure that their CSR efforts are culturally sensitive and linguistically inclusive? What role do you believe language plays in shaping corporate accountability regarding environmental sustainability?</p>	<p>Our research shows that when sustainability messages are communicated in local languages, they are more effective in reaching and impacting the target audience. Hence, we collaborate with corporations to ensure their CSR efforts are culturally sensitive and linguistically inclusive. This involves working closely with them to develop messaging and programs that resonate with the community. Language plays a crucial role in shaping corporate accountability. By communicating clearly and effectively in the community's language, corporations can build trust and demonstrate their commitment to environmental sustainability.</p>



Data Analysis

1. Language and Cultural Preservation

The data reveal that language is essential to cultural preservation. Participants in Obinze barracks and Umuanunu admitted that cultural norms, identities and values are better conveyed with the use of indigenous languages as there are some natural phenomena that lack the corresponding English equivalent. For example, respondents from Umuanunu community noted that more than being a medium of communication, language embodies their philosophy, ideology and heritage. Hence trying to translate this natural heritage into English at times, makes them lose their true meaning and places less value on them. This finding brings Fishman's (1996) argument to line, he observed that language loss poses a threat to people's cultural identity and continuity. The analysis revealed that languages like Igbo, with rich oral traditions are sources of cultural sustainability and community history, which helps in connecting them to their past, preserving language, maintaining their present connections and future pride. Leech's expressive and aesthetic functions of language are highlighted here as people transmit their ideology and cultural heritage, which describes them and strengthens their mutual pride and identity. This study pushes for the preservation of people's norms and values evident in their linguistic and cultural diversity, as this is critical in preserving their heritage amidst globalization, which favours dominant (most times, foreign) languages at the expense of indigenous ones.

2. Language and Social Integration

Language emerged as an important facilitator of social integration within multicultural contexts. For example, the interviews conducted in Obinze Military Barracks suggest that multilingualism enhances respect and understanding among different groups because all participants speak at least three of (English, Nigerian Pidgin, Igbo, Efik, Igala, Yoruba and Hausa) languages. People from diverse cultures are exposed to linguistic diversity through which they learn other people's language and culture thus, interact with one another, fostering inclusion and cohesion. This supports the argument made by Piller (2017), which states that language is integral for achieving social cohesion and creating inclusive environments. The emphasis on social bonding and relationship-building, in connection with the phatic function of language, was predominant in this case. The study demonstrated that cultural festivities and community interactions at the bilingual and multilingual level promoted empathy and cooperative behaviours, dismantling stereotypes, and constructing a shared identity. In promoting social integration, language also encourages peace instead of cultural conflicts thereby fortifying community relations which are crucial for social sustainability.

3. Language and Environmental Awareness

Another key objective from the analysis was language's impact on environmental awareness. Participants from both communities often referred to specific ecological expression in their language (idoi - flood, iyi-stream, ifufe – wind etc). This finding substantiates Berkes (2008), who requires that indigenous language captures traditional ecological knowledge critical to conservation practice. For instance, participants noted that the application of some words and expressions in their language (and English in public notice, for those in the barrack) encapsulates thoughts regarding environmental management and eco-friendly land use, impacting their observation and interaction with the natural environment. This finding concurs with Leech's informative function whereby language serves as a tool for conveying knowledge. Through linguistic descriptions of nature, individuals acquire in-depth understanding of ecosystems and sustainable living. Directive language used in ecological campaigns was also discovered to influence behaviour towards conservation and sustainable living. These results underscore the importance of language in engendering environmental awareness, as language is a medium for ecological knowledge transmission and guiding towards sustainable living.



4. Corporate Social Responsibility and Language

The study also explored how language influences CSR, especially in terms of ethical communication and cultural sensitivity. From the interview responses of SES Department representatives, they explained that language (of the immediate community) is used strategically in communicating sustainability goals to the public. They affirm the use of culturally sensitive language in CSR initiatives to promote better relationships with local communities and show respect for cultural values. This finding concurs with Husted and Allen's (2006) argument that CSR activities rooted in linguistic and cultural sensitivity are more efficacious and well-received.

Here, Leech's directive and informative functions come into play, as language helps the communities and the SES department to guide public behaviour and inform stakeholders about their environmental and social responsibilities. Through language that evokes cultural values and constructions of identity, SES department encourages social integration and environmental awareness to build trust with stakeholders. The analysis reveals that language in CSR can transcend cultural differences to facilitate partnerships in favor of sustainability goals.

Discussion

The findings of this study underscore the importance of language as a foundational element in sustainability efforts across cultural preservation, social integration, environmental awareness, and CSR. In the realm of cultural preservation, language serves as a repository of collective memory, safeguarding cultural identities from erosion. Socially, language fosters cohesion, with multilingualism promoting inclusivity and understanding in diverse communities. Environmentally, language shapes perceptions and behaviours toward sustainability by encoding ecological knowledge and influencing public attitudes through language-based environmental campaigns. Corporate social responsibility also benefits from linguistic sensitivity, as culturally aligned language use strengthens trust and community relations. The functions of language identified by Leech—informative, expressive, directive, aesthetic, and phatic—are evident across these dimensions, revealing language's comprehensive role in promoting a sustainable world. The study highlights the need for sustainability frameworks to integrate language as a critical resource, not only for communication but as a driver of cultural respect, social inclusion, and environmental stewardship.

In conclusion, these findings call for policies that recognise and support linguistic diversity as part of sustainability efforts. By valuing language, sustainability advocates and policymakers can foster a more inclusive approach to sustainability, where cultural heritage, social cohesion, and ecological awareness are harmonized for the benefit of current and future generations.

Summary and Findings

This study investigated the role of language in promoting sustainability, focusing on its contributions to cultural preservation, social integration, environmental awareness, and corporate social responsibility (CSR). A qualitative approach was used and data gathered through in-depth interviews with the help of Leech's five functions of language (informative, expressive, directive, aesthetic, phatic) as a theoretical framework to inform the data. The results demonstrate the transformative role of language for sustainability through building cultural identities, forming societal interfaces, raising environmental consciousness, and following fair trade business ethics. In specific terms:

1. Preservation of Language and Culture: Language was found to be important in the preservation of culture. All the respondents maintained that their mother tongue holds their values, histories, and unique worldviews. Language acts as a vessel for culture, which is used to pass on traditions, stories, and practices from one generation to another. This aligns with the expressive



and aesthetic functions of language, which are in keeping with its function in preserving cultural diversity. Loss of language, by the research findings, has the potential to wipe out not only words but also lifestyles and cultural identities.

2. Language and Social Integration: Multilingualism within communities turned into an empowering tool of social integration, enabling speakers from various backgrounds to talk respectfully and empathetically to each other. Phatic language (language for bonding) became critical to enable a sense of community and belonging. Participants emphasised that multilingual communication enables respect, reduces cultural stereotypes, and builds an inclusive society. Language thus enables social sustainability by imparting cohesion and preventing cultural fragmentation.

3. Ecological Awareness and Language: Language was also found to be accountable for its role in shaping ecological awareness and conduct. Native languages often contain ecological understanding incorporated within them, offering groups the suitable land and resource utilization. Language's directive and information functions were evident in green campaigning, where language raised awareness and generated conservation conduct. By representing ecological knowledge and casting sustainability messages, language serves as a middleman between humans and nature, promoting environmental responsibility culture.

4. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Language: Culturally sensitive language was found to strengthen the corporate-community relationship and trust among communities, especially in the Barrack where multilingualism plays a role. The directive and informative roles of language helped firms to communicate their sustainability actions and ethical business practices more effectively, especially when using language in line with local cultural values. Our respondents reported that firms which use cultural and linguistic context in communication build stronger, open relationships with communities, and hence social and environmental sustainability.

Conclusion

The findings of this study demonstrate that language is a fundamental component of sustainability. It not only preserves cultural identities and promotes social cohesion but also influences environmental perceptions and corporate accountability. The study suggests that sustainability frameworks should incorporate language as a critical resource for fostering inclusive, culturally aware, and ecologically responsible societies. Understanding linguistic diversity is essential for creating a world where sustainable practices are both respected and widely adopted.

Recommendations

Future studies could explore language's role in specific sustainability sectors, such as climate adaptation and environmental justice, for a more targeted understanding of its impacts. These insights contribute to the broader discourse on sustainability by highlighting the often-overlooked role of language in achieving cultural, social, and ecological harmony.

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