

EFFECTS OF GLOBALIZATION OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE ON NIGERIA INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES

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Abstract

Growth and development are highly dependent on the communicative competence between and among nations to accomplish communication goals. Factors such as social, political, historical, economical and demography, other than just linguistic, favour the English language and make it enjoy the status of a global language, spoken as either first, second or foreign language across the world. This paper examines globalization in the light of the enviable position the nations occupied by the English language in Nigeria's linguistic repertoire. It argues that Nigerian indigenous languages have been relegated to the background and are in danger of apparent extinction. It identifies and discusses the imbalance in the Nigerian linguistic ecology and suggests possible remedy to the ugly trend.

Keywords: Globalization, Indigenous, Effects, English Language

Introduction

English, an obscure Germanic dialect became a global language in an unprecedented manner. Today, it enjoys a wide geographical coverage. It is spoken as a mother tongue by millions of people in places like Britain, Ireland, USA, Canada, Australia, South Africa and New Zealand; Crystal (1997:3). The English language is a collection of dialects, which differs regionally, socially, and above all individually, despite its linguistic ancestry and properties. This is in agreement with the words of the famous poet, Walt Whitman, "the English language is the accretion and growth of every dialect, race and range of time." British colonization facilitated the spread of English language through its colonies and geopolitical dominance. The influence of the United States as a World Power significantly led to the widespread of English across the globe, so much so that by the 21st century, it became a widely spoken and written language than any other. According to Broughton, et al. (1978), English is by far the most widely used of all the living languages. During the reign of Elizabeth II, the English language was spoken as a first language by people living in the British Isles, numbering between 5 and 7 million. In some other places like Canada, Ireland, South Africa, Australia and Singapore, it is a first and second language. It is also used as both a first language and a second language or foreign language in places like Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Kenya, Tanzania, etc. The amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorates of Nigeria gave rise to the emergence of a country with a multiplicity of languages, ethnic groups and tribes. The choice of English as a lingua franca was quite significant in its unifying role. However, this paper examines the effects of the globalization of English Language on Nigerian indigenous languages.

English Language and Globalization

Major political and economic discourse today centers on globalization. The incidence of inter and intra national communication gave rise to globalization. Globalization means different things to different people. It is a phenomenon that involves the interaction and integration of people into a system, irrespective of the geographical distance. Hurrell and Wood (1995:447-448) lends credence to the assertion when they state that:

The term globalization is often involved to describe the process of increasing which occurs as global enmeshment which occurs as money, people, images, values and ideas flow ever more swiftly and smoothly across natural boundaries. It is assumed to be a process driven by technological advance which will lead to a more and more homogenous and interconnected world. In the new globalized world economy, it is argued, states with co-operate more and international institutions will flourish.

Friedman (2005:5), sees globalization as a concept, which has been evolving in phases. The discovery of the New World by Christopher Columbus in the 15th century marked the first phase that reduced the globe from a large size to a medium size. The second phase evolved in the 19th century during the industrial revolution and further reduced the globe from a medium size to a small size. The most current phase which began in the 21st century has individuals competing and cooperating, distance notwithstanding; shrinking the world from a small size to a tiny size. Simply put, globalization is an on-going process during which humanity, events and culture integrate and interact through a medium. Language is the only medium of communication flow between and among nations. Globalization defines geographical distance and employs language as its pivot. Language is the lifeline of globalization. The English language serves as a global link among different and varying culture. The intrusion of English into the lives of people is globalization. It is also the use of a global common language” (Crystal 1999). Thus, globalization of English is the spread of English. Globalization in the context of language is a worrisome phenomenon as it threatens to wipe out indigenous languages. In line with this, Leedham states that globalization has influenced the evolution of English language.

The establishment of British Colonies in the continents of Africa, Asia, Australia, and North America led to the spread of the English language, which served as an official language for many countries in Asia and Africa. English is commonly spoken in the UK, US, Canada, Australia, Ireland, and New Zealand. Britain and the United States, are the major English Speaking countries who wielded political and economic influence after the Second World War (Hui 2001). The World's non-native speaker to native speaker ratio for English is estimated to be between 2 to 1, and 4 to 1 (Crystal, 1997; Graddle 1997). This simply means that English is widely used as a lingua franca in the world today. The globish nature of the planet recognizes English no longer as the language of specific native speakers in Europe, USA and Australia but as world language and the most used language of all times. This is further reinforced in the words of Crystal (2000) in his statement that “English is a vacuum cleaner of a language, sucking in words from whichever other languages it meets”.

To say that English is currently a global language is to state the obvious, recognizing its varying status as a first language, second or foreign language, official language, lingua franca, national language around the globe. No wonder Verghese (1989:1) affirms the global status of English when he asserted that it is the most widely spoken language in the world which earns it the world language. Current estimates suggest that 1.5 billion people speak English as a first, second or foreign language Crystal (2000), though the number of English language speakers in the globe staggers, the number of people who use English as a second language is enormous. Peter Strevens puts the number around 400 million and is of the view that the non-native speakers outnumber the native speakers by 400 million to 300 million. Rogers (2000:17) lends credence to

this when he says that “English is spoken as a native language by over 377 million people around the world”. According to Crystal (2000), while more than 350 million people speak English as a mother tongue (MT), over 430 million people speak it as a second language. As a mother tongue, English ranks second to Chinese (Broughton et al). It is the third most native language in the world after Mandarin and Spanish. The question is: Is this a sort of linguistic imperialism or linguistic globalization? English became a medium of communication considering its diverse roles.

A brief history of the evolution of English language before its spread across the globe is worth the while. Originally, proto- Germanic, the Anglo-Saxon settles in medieval England used English in the 5th century as old English (dialects from the regions of the Germanic people). The Norman Conquest of England around the 11th century gave rise to an improved version, identified as the Middle English. Further developments transformed the Middle English into the modern English in the 15th century and like wild fire, the English language which evolved from the Frisian language of Germanic tribes, spread through the globe through chains of contacts. As earlier stated, British colonization facilitated the spread of English. Also are the contributions of trade, commerce, arts, formal education, diplomacy, science and technology. Essentially, the world-wide spread of the English language was occasioned by improved means of communication in technological, political, and socio- economic sectors, changing trends in market and world economy, etc. The World Bank recognizes English as a world language and a language of wider communication because it is a language of worldwide use. There is no doubt that the English language functions both inter and intra- nationally, filling in gaps and building bridges. The English language has been one of the portent factors in the development of unity in the country (University Education Commission India). This is also applicable in Nigeria and other West African countries who are multilinguals; like Ghana, Sierraleone, Kenya, etc. The English language wades in where ethnic sentiments portend division.

The communicative role of the English language is also accounted for in its use as the language of international politics. The need for a lingua franca among international organizations and agencies precipitated in the choice of the English language. Some of these organizations include the World Health Organization, the World Bank, the United Nations, UNESCO and UNICEF. The role of English as a world language is quite enormous as substantiated by the British Council which states that English has official or special status in at least 75 countries. In addition to the statistical evidence is the fact that one out of four of the world's population speaks English with a measure of competence. While commending the major advantage of the global language, that of serving as a global communicative link, the negative effect on other hand has a far-reaching effect on the other indigenous languages. Consequently, the evolution of the concept of globalization is not an error; as its integrative factor facilitates world widespread of information. In the light of this, Akere (1982) observes, “from the historical point of view, people have traced the development of English from its pre-colonial and post- colonial imposition to the present day. Others have described it in terms of its functions as the language of formal school education, the language of trade and commerce, of governmental administration, and as the lingua France in a multi ethnic, multi lingual nation.”

English Language in Nigeria

The amalgamation of the northern and southern protectorates gave birth to a nation where people from diverse groups and cultures were expected to co-exist and function in their various capacities. The incidence of multiplicity of languages and culture engendered friction. There were geographical regional, linguistic and cultural barriers; all of which hampered progress and development for the entity called Nigeria. The need to communicate across ethnic groups in a multi linguistic environment gave rise to the choice of English language as the language of communication. English language displaced Portuguese, which was reputed to have been the first European language in Nigeria in the 16th century with the reason that Portuguese activities were limited only to the royal court.

English was imposed on Nigeria as a British colony because in the words of Rev M. Sunter as cited by Omolewa (2008:196)

the natives must and will know English inspite of all well-meaning but diseased notions; it is the language of commerce and the only education worth a moment's consideration.

Other factors considered for the introduction of the English Language in Nigeria include religious activities and colonialism. Adetugbo (1978) and Banjo (1996).

A lingua franca in a multi-lingual environment is much desired to carry on the day to day activities. As a lingua franca, the English language serves as a language of interaction. The English Language is not only Nigeria's window to the world, but it's also the language that has provided a common tongue for the diverse ethnic nationalities within their mutually unintelligible 400 or more languages that are spoken in the linguistic ecology of the country. The roles assigned to the language determines its status. In the same vein, the status accorded the language determines its domains. The English language functions in various capacities as a second language, a national language and an official language. The English language is learnt and extensively used in Nigeria after the indigenous or native languages. As a second language, it is a language of pedagogy. The English language is the language of government, politics and administration; it is an official language. The linguistic feature in the language that assigns it the role of bringing Nigeria together without regard to tribe, religion and culture gives it the status of a national language. This is highlighted by Akindele and Adegbite (1999:52) when they posited that a national language "refers to the language which has the authority of the government conferred on it as the language of a number of ethnic groups in a given geo-socio-political area. The situation that accounts for the accretion of these roles by a non-indigenous language is deeply worrisome. The fear of crises emanating from the choice of one of the indigenous languages is one major factor. Akindele and Adegbite (2005) affirm this when they state that:

The choice of one of the indigenous languages may create some problems. Thus, in other (sic) to allay the fear of domination, there is need for a neutral language that will serve official purposes (p.60)

The English language fosters unity. It is the pivot, which drives the affairs of the nation. It is a veritable tool for integration. No wonder Afolayan cited Jowitt (1991) in his book *The English Language in Nigeria*:

It is unrealistic for anybody in Nigeria today to think that national unity can be forged in the country without recourse to the utilization of the English language.

The Effects of English Language on Nigerian Indigenous Language

Having x-rayed the factors responsible for the development of the English language and its usefulness in Nigeria, this paper argues that its influence on the indigenous Nigerian language is unsavory; an indigenous language is a native language, which functions as a mother tongue. It is the first language acquired after birth.

The World Bank defines it as a local language. Nigeria is a multilingual nation with about 450 indigenous languages with dialects which are mutually unintelligible. Hansford (1976). Gandonu (1975, 1978), identified about 250 ethnic groups in Nigeria. The literature of English identifies Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba as the “big three” and the major ethnic groups in Nigeria which are regionally distributed and serve as regional lingua franca. The knowledge of the English language in Nigeria should at best be an asset and not a liability. We should learn and use English not as a substitute for indigenous languages but for communication with the outside world. This is in agreement with the World Bank report that English is a world language and a language of wider communication. Diala (2002) affirms this when he cites Ngugi's example of Scandinavians and a good number of other people who do not use English as a substitute for their indigenous language.

Scandinavians know English. But they do not learn English in order for it to become the means of communication among themselves in their own countries, or for it to become the carrier of their own national cultures; or for it to become the means by which foreign culture is imposed on them. They learn English to help them in their interaction with English people, or with speakers of English, to facilitate commerce, trade, tourism, and other links with foreign nations. For them, English is only a means of communication with the outside world. The Japanese, the West Germans, and a good number of other people, fall into the same category as the Scandinavians. English is not substitute for their own languages (P30-31).

Though English is linguistically globalized, its use especially among non-native speakers should be taken with a pinch of salt. Considering its current linguistic status, further elevations through role assignment would rob Nigerians of their identity and culture. Language helps us to negotiate who we are and how we relate with one another. In line with this, Lakoff (2000) says “Language is not just words. It enables us to establish ourselves and ourselves as individuals and as members of groups, it tells us how we are connected to one another, who has power and who doesn't”. (p.41). The language of a people defines them and serves as a veritable tool for cultural transmission. Consequently, language helps preserve the cultural heritage of a people. The imposition of a foreign language on the Nigerian child alienates him from his culture because culture finds expression in the language of the people. The problem of cultural alienation is most common among the Igbo tribe of the Nigerian populace. Expressions such as “daa” or “dada” and “dee” or “dede” are honorific epithets which do not have English equivalents but go a long way to expose the culture of the users who employ these expressions as marks of respect for elders and seniors. The significant drop in the use of these expressions which today are tagged “old school” is the effect of a foreign culture. Culture is not expressed in a vacuum but through elements, one of which is dressing. The current trend in the baring of cleavage by the female folk and the incidence of “sagging” and “low waist” by the male folk are some of the effects of the dominance of a foreign language in our psyche. Accordingly, Odebumi (2008) says that language expresses the patterns and structures of culture and consequently influences human thinking, manners and judgment.

Code-switching and code mixing are sociolinguistic phenomena which derive from the inability to stick to a certain language in a speech utterance. In code-switching, an utterance is made in one language and another, in a second language within the same discourse situation. English is code switched with Igbo in “Give me the money, biko”. “E nweghim that amount of money, ugbo a” explains the concept of code mixing where elements of two languages are used in the same utterance. Ethnologists link Nigeria as having 15 endangered languages. The report of a study carried out in 2007 in Imo state and Lagos state to test the Igbo competency

level of three age groups; 1-5, 6-11 and adults shows that seventy percent of children between 6 and 11 years, and ninety percent of children aged five years and below were unable to speak Igbo language. It is estimated therefore that Igbo language will likely become extinct in the next fifty years. The fact that Igbo parents deliberately choose the English language as a means of communication in their homes is worrisome. Grimes (2001) opines that “parents push their children to learn prestigious languages” which according to Ngugi wathiong’ o is enslavement. He says “for me enslavement is knowing all the languages of the world but without knowing your own”. It is a rather disturbing trend that parents are key factors to the extinction of the indigenous languages. What legacy are they actually leaving? Endangerment results in losing the linguistic heritage of a language. The Linguistic Society of America posits that an endangered language is likely to become extinct in the near future. In their opinion, genocide is one identified cause of language extinction. The killing of the Tasmanians by the European invaders in the early 19th century resulted in the death of languages which cannot be accounted for. It is in this light, that the concept of linguicide comes to bear. This is the implementation of policies in an effort to destroy the languages of indigenous people. Environmental factors, and the dominance of English language as a lingua franca among Igbos living outside their region wittingly or unwittingly leads to the destruction of the Igbo language. The integration with English which is a powerful group and the concomitant learning of the English language over and above the Igbo language is a pointer to the extinction of Igbo language. The preference for the English language possibly arises from the need to maintain a societal status to avoid being discriminated against in the society. This accounts for the concept of linguicism which like racism involves unfair treatment of an individual, based on language.

Languages are vehicles of our culture, collective memory and values. They are an essential component of our identities and a building block of our diversity and living heritage (UNESCO). In some Nigerian cities like Lagos, Abuja, Port-Harcourt, etc, it has become near impossible to identify members of an ethnic group through their native language. This could be attributed to environmental factors and possibly the dominant status assumed by the English language as a second language, an official language and a national language. The result of not popularizing Igbo language by speaking and teaching it in schools and homes affect the socio-linguistic development of children. The isolation of Igbo children from their mother tongue and the acquisition of the English language, the second language would gradually lead to first language attrition, a process of gradually losing a native, or first language occasioned by both isolation from L1 speakers and the acquisition and use of the second language. There seems to be a reversal of roles between the English language and the indigenous; languages this is evident in the acquisition and use of the English language by most people residing in urban areas to the degree that such residents can hardly use their native language. The question that arises at this point is: Which language then is the first language? The situation is more worrisome in towns like Aba, Owerri, Enugu, Abakaliki and environs where majority of the inhabitants are Igbos. This is further highlighted in the words of Grimes (2001:32) parents and family member's converse in English rather than in their native language because of their brazen preference for the English language. Apparently, the Igbo language is endangered and at risk of extinction. There have been well known cases where the death of the last survivor of a tribe results in the death of that language.

The Way Out

The loss of a language for whatever reason affects an individual's social and cultural identity, in addition to the linguistic heritage of the community. There is therefore the need for language revitalization which can be realized through documentation. According to literature, globalization plays a significant role here by providing easy access to technology for the preservation of endangered languages. This is however debatable since scientific training can be carried out using indigenous languages. This aligns with the view of the World Bank that policies favouring indigenous languages for scientific training do not necessarily create a language

barrier to international scientific communication. According to the World Bank report of 31st January, 1992, use of indigenous languages at least at the primary level may promote learning of science and related subjects. According to the report, indigenous languages will not develop as language of ordinary scientific discourse unless they are employed for instruction, social and material welfare. To achieve this, there should be a review of the National Policy on Education advocacy for the compulsory teaching of indigenous languages from primary school to junior secondary school level. Parents should ensure that their children attain a level of maturity before enrolling the child in school.

For further revitalization of endangered indigenous languages, conferences, workshops and publications should be organized in indigenous languages. Igbo elites should write and publish books in the language. Also, endangered indigenous languages should be recorded and taught, using modern technology facilities such as the media; print and electronics, alike, should be employed in perpetuating this singular motive of language preservation. Parents are also advised to speak their mother tongues to their children and encourage the use of the language at home. Failure to do so gives rise to language attrition because these children will gradually forget their mother tongue. The implementation of the National Policy on Education which proposes the use of the mother tongue or the language of the immediate community as the initial medium of instruction in the primary schools, emphasizing the need for the English language at a later stage. (NPE: 13) should be vigorously pursued by the government. The roles of the indigenous languages in the early education of children is further emphasized by scholars such as Bamgbose (1976, 1977), and Afolayan (1979).

Conclusion

Through colonization, the European missionaries imposed the English language on the African thus exposing us to a different world where we constantly struggle to find a place in the society. There is no gain-saying the fact that English as a world language has come to stay; being the most recognized and used language in the world. However, as a world language, it should be used in quarters where it is most exigent. Furthermore, there is need to maintain linguistic diversity and multilingualism, necessary for sustainable development. This accounts for mutual co-existence of languages which serve as building blocks of diversity. Finally, the loss of a language affects an individual's social and cultural identity and the linguistic heritage of the community. With this in mind, the family which is the bedrock of the society should encourage its members to interact in their indigenous languages for which they are known and identified. If this is done, our indigenous languages will regain their lost glory in the Nigerian linguistic profile.

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