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REINVENTING THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE
IN NIGERIA IN THE CONTEXT OF
GLOBALIZATION AND DECOLONIZATION

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NIGERIAN LANGUAGE POLICY, GLOBALIZATION AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: THE WHEREWITHAL

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Abstract

In this paper, the author examined the language situation in Nigeria in the light the challenges of the 21st century as posed by globalization. Given that globalization refers to the integration and democratization of the world's culture, economy and infrastructure through national investment, rapid proliferation of communication and information technologies, she investigated how far the language policy in the *National Policy on Education* (NPE 1977, revised in 1981, 1998 and 2004) had enabled the nation to meet the demands of national development, in terms of unity, education, economic liberalization, mass participation in government and, above all, information technology epitomized by the cyber-space. She then observed the need for re-inventing English language in Nigeria in order to empower the people to contribute meaningfully to the development of the nation.

Key words: globalization, language policy, national development,

Introduction

Language plays a pivotal role in any issue relating to national development. It is a means of empowering the society in her quest to attain national growth, development and cohesion. It is impossible for humans to live and interact together without language. No wonder, Akinriade (2000) describes it as the cement of the society allowing people to live, work and play together. Obanya (1993) asserts that communication through language is an instrument for empowering the individuals that constitute a nation to make positive contributions that enhance national development and cohesion. Uzochukwu (2002) asserts that language is a means through which culture is expressed and transmitted. Based on the above assertion, it can be justifiably inferred that language gives expression to people's culture and that human's thoughts and feelings are expressed and modified by language. Language is therefore natural to the human. Every human has the innate ability to process language, which Chomsky (1987) calls the Language Acquisition Device (LAD).

Communication is the major goal of language. Transmission and reception of information between individuals or in a network by the people in a society are achieved through communication. No wonder, Adeniran (1998) notes that all human behavior exists in an interactional situation and has a message value. It is a determining assertion of what an individual, state or community becomes as information relayed affects and changes the behaviour of others. Based on the premise above, it can be conclusively said that communication, as a linguistic concept, can make or mar the development of any society if not properly handled. Development as perceived by Adedeji (1992) is the appreciable amelioration in the economic, social, technological, physical and cultural aspects of life of a people. Oyelaran (1988) observes development to imply the conscious promotion of a well-being and security of persons in such a way that they are constantly able to optimize the realization of their individual potentials.

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The development so described above can only be realized through language. With language, it is evident that the human has the capacity of dealing with changes in all spheres of endeavour in his/her environment. Language enables the human to organize his/her society and face other various challenges of life. This is in support of Akindele and Adegbite (1999) who believe that the quality of a nation can be determined by the quality of her education development, which is invariably determined by the quality of language through which education is acquired. To further buttress the above, Adetola et al. (2001) summarizes the role of language in development as an indispensable tool in enhancing science and technology, food security and agriculture, business performance (advertisement, sales and promotion), education and all other spheres of human endeavour. Okonkwo sums all these up when he stresses the fact that language provides a vehicle for the transmission of technical invention and social conventions within the framework of culturally and linguistically circumscribed linguistic possibilities.

The purpose of this paper, in view of the above assertions, is to examine the need for re-inventing English, which is a world language and a second language in Nigeria so that Nigerians can be empowered to contribute meaningfully to the development of the nation. At this juncture, it is necessary to consider the language situation in Nigeria.

Language Policy in Nigeria

To reduce the gap between the developed and the developing nations or to catch up with the technologically developed nations is the goal of any developing nation like Nigeria. The four major features of this goal are political, social, economical and educational. Education is regarded as the bedrock for these features. For a nation to be developed in all ramifications, education has to be put at the service of the development process, making it possible for individual citizens to be as fully developed as possible, improving their skills, and creating new knowledge. Education is a powerful instrument for forging national unity, especially in a multilingual setting like Nigeria. Considering the different ethnic groups that make up Nigeria, the national goal of forging a common nationality for national development may not be possible. Therefore, the need to develop a virile language policy is inevitable.

There are two important ways to look at the issue of language in relation to political and educational policies in most African countries, Nigeria inclusive. The first way is to consider the language policy statement professed in the nation's constitution by the government, and second is a consideration of the language policy made in the light of education in Nigeria. For instance, there are some language policy statements in the *Constitution* and the *National Policy on Education* and the statements represent the ideology of the Federal Government of Nigeria regarding the language situation in the country. First, let us look at the *Constitution*.

Section 55, of the 1999 *Constitution* reads thus:

The business of the national assembly shall be conducted in English and In Hausa, Ibo and Yoruba when adequate arrangements have been made therefor.

The same thing goes for the state house of assembly as contained in Section 97 of the 1999 *Constitution*:

The business of the house of assembly shall be conducted in English, but the house may in addition to English conduct the business of the house in one or more other languages spoken in the state as the house may by resolution approve.

The approach of the Nigerian government to achieving nationalism is glaringly shown by the sections above as three indigenous languages, Hausa, Ibo and Yoruba and English are suggested as national language.

The 1977 *National Policy on Education* (NPE) contains the following provisions:

(A) In addition to appreciating the importance of a language in the educational process and as a means of preserving the people's culture, the government considers it to be in the interest of national unity that each child should be encouraged to learn one of the three major languages other than his own mother tongue. In this connection, the government considered the three major languages in Nigeria to be Hausa, Ibo and Yoruba. (NPE), Section 1, Paragraph 8).

There are two related positions behind this policy, political and educational. Government has a political ideology of attaining national unity through each citizen's learning his language and also one of the three major languages. On the other hand, there is an educational ideology, that of the enhancement of educational process and the preservation of culture of the individual Nigerian which can be affected through each Nigerian learning his/her mother tongue and one of the major languages (see Ogunsiji 2003:170).

(B) To achieve the above objective (in A above), government will ensure that the medium of instruction will be principally the mother tongue or the language of the immediate community and to this end will :

- a. Develop the orthography for many more Nigerian languages
- b. Produce textbooks in Nigerian languages (NPE, Paragraph 11(3))

The principal objectives of government here are to get other indigenous Nigerian languages standardized or codified. This will help in the writing of textbooks in these languages as well as help in the preservation of the culture of speakers of such languages.

(C) Government will see to it that the medium of instruction in the primary school is initially the mother tongue or the language of the immediate community, and at a later stage, English (NPE, Paragraph 15 (4)).

There is no doubt that every child enters school with at least some degree of competence in one language or the other, which in most cases, is the mother tongue. The choice of the mother tongue (or language of the immediate community) will, therefore, facilitate learning at the early stage as the pupil's transition from home to school is made smooth.

(D) The language component of the Junior Secondary Curriculum reads:

In selecting the Nigerian languages, students should study the language of their own area in addition to any of the three main Nigerian languages; Hausa, Ibo and Yoruba, subject to availability of teachers.

Making pupils to study any of the three major languages is aimed at enhancing the national status of the three languages. The last section, however, does not show that the government is committed to its implementation as the teaching of the languages is hinged on the "availability of teachers", whose provision the policy is skeptical about.

Globalization, English Language and Manpower Development in Nigeria

Globalization can be understood from different perspectives. Komolafe (2003) in Obadan (20003) states that there are several definitions of what globalization means. Some of the definitions are positive, some neutral and others are hostile. Aboyade (2002) defines globalization as being multifaceted, with many important dimensions, economic and social, political and environmental, cultural and religious, which affect everyone in some ways. Lawal (2005) conceives globalization as integrating all the key factors of national development such as unity, education, and economic liberalization, participation in government and information technology epitomized by the cyber-space. It can equally be seen as integrating and democratization of the world's culture, economy and infrastructure through national, investment, rapid proliferation of communication and information technologies.

Obadan (2003) feels that even though the political, cultural, social and environmental aspects of globalization are no doubt important, the economic aspect is perceived to be at the heart of the globalization process. It has received greater attention, especially in view of its rapid pace since five decades and has remained a powerful force shaping world economics, for good or for ill. Economic globalization refers to the process of change towards greater international economic integration through trade, financial flows exchange of technology and information and movement of people

The second millennium was ushered in as the era of globalization with demonstrations in Seattle and Prague, the ratification of such far-reaching trade agreements as the North American Free Trade (NAFTA) and the pervasive talk of multinational markets. Globalization now describes a world with porous borders. Today money, goods and services readily cross national boundaries, instantaneous messages and enormous libraries of information flash across the internet. Television, telephones and wireless communications link people everywhere, political, economic and environmental developments have planetary impact with global warming exemplifying this situation as an effect and as a name (Lawal 2005).

The above global description left significant repercussions in the areas of economic, political and cultural development of third world countries like Nigeria for major trends, as observed by Lawal (2005). These are

1. The emergence of instant global communications made possible by technological breakthrough such as the semiconductor and the communications satellite.
2. The growth of enormous capital markets and vast profits to be made by speculating on the market value of currencies.
3. The wave of deregulation which began in the late 1970s and weakened the control of national governments over economic activities.
4. The creation of international economic institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Trade Organization (WTO).

The debilitating effects of these trends is that national governments, especially in Africa, have seen globalization eroding much of their ability to control their economies as multinational corporations move beyond the reach of national law. There is erosion of national sovereignty, which means a reduction in the power of the ordinary citizens to influence events through the vote. As Lonworth (2002) rightly observes, global rule making like global markets, takes place now in the arena that democracy and the vote cannot reach. Making the global economy responsive to the people who live within it is one of the greatest challenges of globalization.

The major issues at stake now have to do with capacity building first at the technological level of generation, management and dissemination of useful and workable ideas. A nation like Nigeria with a weak scientific and technological base possesses in turn a very weak industrial sector and a weak control in influence. Education plays a pivotal role in strengthening the weak scientific and technological base of any nation because the quality of a nation's education system is one of the major determinations of her political status in the country of nations. In the context of an imperialistic global economy, education is seen in terms of information building capacity in the areas of knowledge and skills acquisition. English Language is a key factor in the process of education. As in global politics and economy, English has become a powerful force that has gained ascendancy not only on the language of the periphery, but also on other less powerful languages of the global center such as French and German. Considering the indispensable nature of this world language, it is rather pertinent at this juncture to examine English language in the Nigerian context.

The Challenges of Globalization in Nigeria

Nigeria, like most developing nations, has and is still experiencing economic problems. According to Uduegbo (2003), the growth in national output has only been minimal in most countries, but it has declined drastically or even stagnated in Nigeria, thus leading to the under-utilization of productive resources. The nation has also experienced, to a varying degree, balance of payment problems accumulated by huge debit service obligations and increased need for foreign exchange resources to finance imports and build up external reserves. Nigeria, like many other African countries, lacks the investment capacity for global trade and investment. Therefore, Nigeria finds it difficult to meaningfully participate in economic globalization and reap the benefits thereof as trade and investment remains the principal key for creating and distributing wealth among and within nations (Akon and Ekuje 2005).

In the context of globalization, human capital development is critical for poor countries like Nigeria. The manpower problem of a modern economy is bedeviled with complications. The supply and demand for manpower have transformed into a complex network involving specialized skills, occupations and profession, which are constantly changing and moving economically across industrial boundaries and even across national frontiers. The essence of manpower development becomes one of ensuring that the workforce is continuously adapted for and upgraded to meet the new challenges of its environment. Nigeria, in order to thrive in the context of globalized economy, must devote a high proportion of its resources to develop its manpower. To keep up with a dynamic economic performance, there is need to invest heavily in human capital, especially in manpower development.

Globalization has thus become a treat to national cultures and identities, environmental degradation and exploitation of workers in a low wage economy. As noted by Komolafe (2003) in Obande (2003), rich companies and powerful trans-

national companies have captured the benefit of globalization, while poor countries have been left behind. No wonder, Udeala and Okafor (2003) note that rising inequality has been a hallmark of globalization. Nigeria has been made weaker by low export prices, unemployment and significant terms of trade decline as well as the heavy burden of external debt servicing and economic mismanagement. Furthermore, as noted by Akon and Ekuje (2004) the economy is mono-cultural with a preponderance on fluctuating foreign exchange from crude oil sales in the world market. To improve on this, Olafunrunmije (2003) states that there is need for substantial diversification so that our revenue earning sources can be varied. The nation must also reduce overdependence on foreign manufactured goods, which drain our earnings. Nigeria should embrace productive economy where every citizen would be fully employed and empowered to be able to finance his/her own business. Finally, Rodric (2003) in Akon and Ekuje (2004) enjoined the policy makers in the developing nations like Nigeria to urgently focus on the fundamentals of training and retaining of human power.

English Language in the Nigeria Context

Nigeria is a linguistically heterogeneous society with an estimate of 250 ethnic groups with about 500 hundred languages. The arrival of European languages only added to the already complex linguistic scenario. However, with the efforts of the early missionaries and later the introduction of British imperialism, the English language gained a foothold on the Nigerian soil and has since become a language of prestige for excellence.

A number of reasons can be adduced for its ascendancy over other Nigerian languages. The first and the most obvious reason is colonialism. The period between 1920 and 1960 was an era of linguistic imperialism. The formation of colonial administration at the period under reference necessitated a middle level manpower in the civil service; learners then were being greatly encouraged and given incentives in the form of scholarship and allowances if they could speak English language. Most importantly, by 1960, English had become a compulsory subject in the school syllabus and a candidate had to pass English for him/her to be awarded an Ordinary Level General Certificate in Education (Akindele and Adegbite 1992).

The language situation in Nigeria is another factor that favours the dominance of English language in Nigeria. Nigeria is a multi-ethnic nation with over 250 ethnic groups in it. Each of these numerous ethnic groups has its own language while most of the languages have dialects as well. This makes inter-ethnic communication difficult. Choosing any of numerous languages as a national language is equally difficult, considering the sensitive nature of the language issue in Nigeria. What can be done to avert any possible breakdown of law and order as a result of elevating one language above another is to look for a neutral language that can facilitate wider communication among the different groups. The English language thus came in handy to fill this gap. There is no doubt that the language is a language of wider communication. Virtually every ethnic group in Nigeria has people, no matter how small the percentage, who speaks English. Communication, an important ingredient of human relations, is guaranteed across ethnic boundaries.

Another reason for the English language dominance over Nigerian indigenous languages is poor language policy. Nigeria's language policy is not good enough as it tends to give a full support to English language. Some of the policy statements of the Nigerian government will show that the government unwittingly favours English language more than Nigeria languages. The roles assigned to the three major

languages are quite minor while other languages classified as minor do not have any role assigned to them. The said assignment of official and national language functions to Hausa, Yoruba and Ibo is merely a statement on paper. Most of the functions assigned to the three languages in their respective areas of influence have been taken over by English. The *Constitution*, a document which guides the operations of the Nigeria state and her people, openly shows the weakness in the nation's language policy plan. A critical look at the statement "... when adequate arrangements have been made therefore "and ... "may in addition to English ..." in Section 55, already cited, one will indicate that it is just a vague statement and a mere statement of intention. No wonder Ogunsiji (2003) observes that policy/planning involves more than composition of planning. It is a continuous process involving the frequencies of planned formation, conducting the planned set of activities in a programmed time scheduled and at the same time preparing the planning system to adjust and correct itself according to the information feedback. One can then ask if Nigeria has got a language policy rather than an educational policy which touches on some aspects of language.

Other reasons adduced for the dominance of English in Nigeria, as noticed by Okedigba (2005) include the attitude of most Nigerians towards Nigerian languages. It is very common to see those who study Nigerian languages being looked down on as people not intelligent enough to study any other 'lucrative' or tasking course. This is not the same with those that study English Language; they are respected and are usually dubbed grammarians. Most parents would do everything possible to ensure that their children do not read any of the Nigerian languages. Furthermore, the hyper-pluralistic nature of the Nigerian society, with its attendant multi-ethnic problems, where loyalty and patriotism to individual tribes appear stronger than loyalty and patriotism to the nation also enforce preference of English language over any indigenous languages.

Considering the above submissions, it is very obvious that the nation's language policy cannot take us anywhere in meeting the challenges of globalization. The language situation on ground already favours English and so efforts need to be geared towards ensuring that the language is supported in Nigeria to fasten the process of manpower development. The only solution to the problem of ethnic clashes is to continue to support and encourage English language as the national language of the country.

Re-inventing English Language for National development.

As noted by Obadan (2003), the political, cultural, social and environmental aspects are perceived to be at the heart of the globalization process. As earlier noted in this paper, human development is one of the most important requirements to ensure the substantial improvement of an economy. Hence, in order to survive in the globalized economy, Nigeria needs to gear considerable efforts towards developing and empowering its citizens.

For people to be developed and empowered politically, economically, educationally, among others, they need information and information requires the effective use of language. As rightly noted by Lawal (2005), English is a key factor in unifying the world and reducing it to a global village. Recent research works on the number of "living languages" in the world shows that out of 5000 of such languages, English is the most widely used. For instance, there are about 300 million native speakers of the language and another 250 million people who even though they have their languages, use English as their official languages. These two categories of

English speakers are present in virtually every continent in the world (Broughton, et al. 1980). English has indeed become a significant factor in national unity in a broad band of nations.

Broughton, et al (1980) also asserts that:

Barrier of race, color and creed are hindrance to the continuing spread of English. Besides being a major vehicle of debates at the United Nations and the language of command for NATO, it is the official language of international aviation, and unofficially is the first language of international sport and the pop scene...

For any manpower development, language is a key tool. It is the chief means by which the human personality expresses him/herself and fulfils the basic need for social interaction with other persons (Jimou 1980). The English language has played this role more than any other language in Nigeria, whether foreign or native, because of the period the language has existed and functioned and its spread and acceptability among the people. If Nigerians must keep pace with the world, they must be adequately equipped to communicate effectively and this requires better mastery of English, which has become a global language. In this regard, the following suggestions should be considered:

1. There is need for proper training of English Language teachers at all levels. Only the professional teachers of English should be made to teach the language. Also, those already trained should be constantly retrained to make them current in the activities of the globalized world. For instance, apart from receiving training within the country, English language teachers should be encouraged to travel overseas, especially to the countries where English language is their mother tongue. This will enhance acculturation and in turn increase their level of productivity back at home.
2. As an official language, the development of English at the basic level should be taken seriously. The importance of primary education in the overall development of the world is much and if the foundation is not properly laid, there is the likelihood to produce a child that would be useless to the nation. Also, because of the heterogeneous nature of language in Nigeria, English Language teachers should be conscious of various language deficiencies. The teacher must skillfully teach English to take care of these deficiencies. English Language teachers should be familiar with the country's philosophy on Education. Nigeria wants learners who would be developed enough to be useful to themselves and the society at large. English language teachers should therefore select language experience that would adequately task the learners' three domains, i.e. cognitive, psychomotor and affective. The teacher should know how to impart and evaluate the four language skills. He must be able to select texts and design instructional aids that relate to the cultural background of the learner.
3. In our tertiary institutions, apart from general service courses like 'the use of English' meant for fresh students, courses like ESP (English for Specific Purpose) should be adequately focused. Different professions need different forms of English; the English needed by market women is different from that needed by nurses.
4. Policy makers and planners should do both 'status' and 'corpus' planning at the same time. English language should be made to function at all levels of education. Pidgin English should be discouraged as it produces a substandard English form which tends to distort intelligibility and brings about an air of inferiority in the global

world. At the corpus planning level, intensive focus should be given to the improvement of the structure of English so that it will be able to serve all the functions assigned to it in the country.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the role of language in national development and how English language conveniently serves this purpose. There is no gainsaying in the fact that English plays a crucial role in Nigeria. These roles are in fact what ensured the survival of Nigeria as a nation. It is a language that enables Nigeria and Nigerians to interact within and outside the world. Without English, as noted by Akuh (2004), Nigeria would have become a Babel of some sort where inter-ethnic communication would have been impossible. The paper has also shed more light on the issue of globalization and the challenges it poses to Nigeria. The trend towards a more integrated world market has opened a wide potential for greater growth and present unparalleled opportunities for developing countries to raise their living standard. Nigeria must rise up to face these challenges in order to maximize all the benefits of globalization, and to enhance human development. Nigerians can be empowered for effective communication through the English language. Since the language has become a global language and Nigeria is not to be left behind in this dispensation, a sound knowledge and mastery of the language is necessary for every Nigerian to be able to contribute meaningfully to national development.

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