

# **WHAT DOES GLOBALISATION PORTEND FOR THE FUTURE OF ENGLISH IN NIGERIA?**

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## **Abstract**

The world of today has shrunk from its previous small size to a tiny size due to a number of factors critical among which is the linguistic globalisation of English. A crude language and amalgam of the dialects of the Jutes, the Angles and the Saxons, the English language which was obscure some 1,500 years ago has effectively become a global language. This paper overviews globalisation and the English language in Nigeria and the functions it performs within the context of its roles as a major international language. The paper reports four and identifies five additional factors accounting for the reality of globalisation and Englishisation through which geographical boundaries have been shattered through enhanced interaction in English medium. It submits that globalisation is associated with language death and more Nigerian languages will die on its account for English to enjoy its domineering status, though the future of the English itself in the country, though bright and conditioned by language maintenance factors and the Anglo-American linguistic hegemony, will be constrained by the pervasive influence of increased Nigerianisms and geolinguistic diversity.

Keywords: English, globalization, future, functions,

## **Introduction**

In spite of its humble beginnings as dialects of three Germanic tribes, the English language emerged after the Second World War as the true global language. As Crystal (1997) observes, there has never been a language so widely spread or spoken by so diverse people as English. There are over three billion speakers of English across the three Kachruan concentric circles and there is no world country capital where a sizeable number of people do not use it. The influence of the language, the history of which is just about 1,500 years when it developed from the dialects of the Jutes, the Angles and the Saxons, traverses all aspects of modern life and it is quite improbable to be replaced very soon. According to Crystal (1997), 85 per cent of international organizations make official use of English, at least 85 per cent of the world's film market is in English and about 90 per cent of published articles are written in English.

Besides the fact that “no language is more widespread geographically than the English language” (Hui, 2001, p.130), more than 80 per cent of all scientific papers are first published in

it with over half of the entire world's technical and scientific papers and periodicals written in the language. While Zai, Zheng and Zhang (1999) report that five of the largest broadcasters (CBS, NBC, ABC, BBC and CBC) reach a potential audience of about 300 through the English language, the broadcasts of the CNN and Aljazeera, which were not highly influential or existent in 1999, reach today about 800 million world audience. Computer programmes, software and applications are often written only in English and 85 per cent of the international telephone conversations are conducted in English, which is indisputably the language of medicine, electronics, space and the Olympics (Zai, Zheng and Zhang, 1999).

The pre-eminence of English is especially assured in multilingual countries where ethnic rivalries and “language war” are the rule rather than the exception. In Nigeria, the most important colonial legacy is English (Bamgbose, 1971) and opinion leaders, such as Enahoro (2002), believe that all the languages of Nigeria have equal validity, or equal lack of it, before the law and under the constitution and “no linguistic group has the right – the moral or constitutional right – to impose his (sic) language on any other linguistic group in the country”, a situation that evidently guarantees the future of English in the country. This paper examines the functions that make English the most powerful language in Nigeria and investigates the factors that are responsible for its global dominance as well as its globalisation. The paper projects the future of English as bright based on the extant Language Maintenance factors and the roles it performs submitting that globalisation is actually a threat to the Nigerian languages and a boost to the increasing pervasiveness of the Anglo-American linguistic and cultural hegemony.

### **Globalisation and the English Language in Nigeria and Beyond**

Globalisation is described by Ruud Lubers (cited in Adedimeji, 2009a) as “a process in which geographical distance becomes a factor of diminishing importance in the establishment and maintenance of cross-border economic, political and social-cultural relations” which goes along with the empowerment of Western culture. To Robertson (1992, p.8), “globalisation as a concept refers both to the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole”. According to Emegwali (2003), the revolution engendered by globalisation, “began 400 years ago with the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade” and it has only accelerated now because “the internet phone now enables you to communicate instantaneously with any person on the globe” (Emegwali, 2003). More than any other factor, the world is

becoming smaller and smaller as a result of the globalisation of English and communication in it across intra-national, national and international boundaries.

Buttressing the historicity of globalisation as a new term referring to an old concept, Friedman (2005) insists that the world is only witnessing globalisation on a large scale now while identifying its three great eras of globalization: globalization 1.0 (1492-1800) that shrunk the world from a large size to a medium size with the linking of the New World and the Old World by Columbus; globalization 2.0 (c1800-2000) that arose when national companies made the world shrink from a medium size to a small size and globalization 3.0 (around 2000, still unfolding) the dynamic force of which is the power of individuals to compete and collaborate, irrespective of geographical boundaries and which is shrinking the world from a small size to a tiny size (Friedman 2005:5). The tremendous impact of globalisation on the world has thus engendered the entrenchment of the Anglo-American culture with the English language emerging as “a global common language” spoken by more than two billion people of the world today (Kubota, 2001; Okwudishu, 2003; Adedimeji, 2009b).

It was in 1553 that the actual Nigerian contact with the English language began and the contact was reinforced years later with the infamous Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade through which several Africans were forcefully subjected to the terrible life of slavery. The official termination of slave trade in 1883 and the repatriation of many Africans to Liberia and Sierra Leone, among other parts of Africa, engendered the further dominance of English as the former slaves returnees served as models for Africans who were fascinated by the civilisation and development of the white man, the colonial master. Several strategies, including the tripodal forces of Commerce, Christianity and Colonialism, or Bible, Business and Bullet “combined to exploit the African’s soul, his goods and his land” (Fafunwa, 1974; Abubakre, 2002) until it became a *fait accompli* that “a ‘good’ citizen in Nigeria and elsewhere between 1850 and 1860 meant one who was African by blood, Christian by religion and British or French in culture and intellect” (Fafunwa, 1970, p.17).

The combination of such factors identified as contacts, commerce, Christianity, codification, colonialism, constitutions, certification, commissions, communication and contextualisation has accelerated the growth and pre-eminence of English in Nigeria such that the continuous existence of Nigeria will be analogous to the nineteenth-century Wales, the

slogan of which was: “if you want to get ahead, get an English head” (Williams, cited in Bamigbose, 1991:20; Adedimeji, 2004, 2010).

That the world has become a global village is a truism of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and that English is the official language of the global village square. Hui (2001) identifies four aspects of what accounts for the internationalisation of English as the historical, the geographical, the political and the economic. Quoting him extensively here is deemed important:

- a) Historically: The English language, as well as the English culture, spread to Asia, Africa, North America and Australia, with the establishment of the British colonies in those four continents.
- b) Geographically: In this world, there are six continents inhabited by human beings, of which Europe is greatly influenced by the English language, while North America and Australia are completely occupied by the English language. Besides, in many countries in Asia and Africa, English is an official language. No other language has such power.
- c) Politically: After the Second World War, both the United States and Britain, the two major English speaking countries, were amongst the most politically influential countries.
- d) Economically: Since the end of World War II, the United States has been the most powerful country economically with the most advanced science and technology. As a result, it has also become the most powerful country militarily. Britain has been amongst the most developed countries in the world.

Other aspects of this development foregrounded or taken for granted but that can be highlighted properly here are the linguistic, the military, the educational and the cultural.

- a) Linguistically: The English language has ascended not only to being the language of unifying language in Nigeria but also the language of unity in the world. For instance, roughly 700 million people spoke it around the world in 1982, an increase of 40 percent over a period of 40 years and a total representing more than one seventh of world’s population, having replaced French in the world of diplomacy and German in the field of science and technology. The total population of English speakers across the is now over two billion, with the English speaking population of Asia alone being greater than the total populations of USA, UK, and Canada (Kubota, 2001; Adedimeji, 2009a).

- b) Militarily: The scientific and technological ascendancy of the English speaking countries has also made the military hardware of the world to be mainly “English”, though attempts are being made to domesticate them. Words like *bomb*, *explosives*, *bullet*, *gun*, *rocket*, *missile*, *tank*, *attack helicopter*, *drone*, etc. could only have equivalents or near equivalents in several world languages. The military innovativeness and defence infrastructure of the English countries, say United States, Britain and Canada far outweigh the rest of the world combined.
- c) Technologically: The advent of Information and Communication Technology that is largely responsible for the integration of the world is credited to the English-speaking countries of the United States and Britain. The actual concept of web browsing, called World Wide Web, a system for creating, organising, and linking documents so they could be easily browsed, is traceable to the innovation of the British computer scientist, Tim Berners-Lee, through the website he created in 1991. The creation of Netscape in California, which went public on August 9, 1995 as the first mainstream browser, creating the whole culture of Web browsing for the general public marked the beginning of the internet as we now know it. Similarly, the rollout of Windows 95 as described by Friedman (2005, p.57) is another catalytic event which reinforced “the dot.com stock bubble” and “this development, in turn, wired the whole world together, and without anyone really planning it, made Bangalore a suburb of Boston”. Through the English speaking world, the whole world is now clicking with a new internet language and web culture created facilitating a recent culture of Yahooing, Facebooking, Twittering, Youtubing, Flickering, Skyping, BBM-pinging, among other platforms through which documents, data, photographs, videos, instant messages, voice messages and so on are shared.
- d) Educationally: The English speaking countries have managed to be the most reputable destinations for higher educational pursuit all over the world. Through sponsorships, scholarships, fellowships, or just admission offers, more educational opportunities have been opened to millions of world citizens by the English speaking countries, mainly the USA, Britain, Canada and Australia such that those who pass through their educational mill do not come out the same. There is educational affiliation and emotional connection to the universities and countries that train them

to occupy positions of influence and authority in their various countries and there is therefore a kind of intellectual servitude and relative mental slavery that permeates the rank of a significant number of the “educated” and “civilized” English speaking elite.

- e) Culturally: The English-speaking world determines the global culture through a wide spectrum of activities from music, media, movies, games, fashion to sports. Musically, the Americans set the pace and their famous musicians are promoted as the best in the world through their ubiquitous media. With the growth of the pop-culture and pop music, various world languages and musicians are Americanising their music and Nigerians, Arabs, Indians, Koreans, Chinese, all rap taking after the American influence. The media resources of the English-speaking countries are more sophisticated in terms of size and reach than their counterparts all over the world and the English language remains the world’s dominant media language such that if it is not reported in English, the world does not know. The American film industry, called Nollywood is the biggest in the world, and curiously though Nollywood is a city in California, the cultural pervasiveness of the United States has made other world film industries to be carved after that of the United States: hence Bollywood (India from Bombay), Nollywood (Nigeria), Ghollywood (Ghana) are some of the film industries. In games and sports, the situation is the same and in terms of cuisine, the whole world is a market to McDonalds, Coca Cola and other American culinary and other products. In greetings, even the illiterates say hello to receive phone calls.

### **Functions of the English Language in Nigeria**

The English language performs two general functions in Nigeria: intra-national and international. At the intra-national level, it is the language of education, media, science and technology. It is also an official language as well as a *lingua franca* to Nigerians. It is the language of education as well as a school subject, from the primary to the University level of education. English is the language of integration or unity. Amidst the compounding complexities of Nigeria especially in relation to the language question, the only language that indexes the spirit of togetherness is English. More often than not, activities conducted in

indigenous languages are reprobated as being ethnic or tribal, except in cultural celebrations or entertainment displays.

This explains why even during the First Republic and even during the colonial era, when English had not attained its present level of ascendancy in national and international affairs, political parties were formed in English. Though, the parties had regional bases, the fact that they were named in English entailed their collective import. The Northern Peoples Congress (NPC), the Action Group (AG), the NCNC (National Council of Nigerian Citizens, after the excision of Southern Cameroon), National Elements Progressive Union (NEPU) etc. were formed to integrate all Nigerians and give them a sense of belonging. This trend has necessarily survived till today with all the national political parties formed and sloganeered in English.

The integrative role is not limited to politics or political parties alone but virtually all strata of Nigerian life. In sports, the function of English as its language gives room for integration as it remains the only area that the syndrome of ethnicity/tribalism has not permeated. Most Nigerians do not care whether the national team is made up of members of the same family, not to talk of an ethnic group, as long as they can deliver the goods of goals. The use of English facilitates the absence of ethnic sentiments in this regard.

English is also acceptable to all – even to those who clamour against its irresistible dominance. It is the language that is not fraught with suspicion in any formal or literate context. During the military regime of General Sani Abacha for instance, there was an allegation or insinuation that the apex ruling military council meetings were sometimes conducted in Hausa which the second-in-command, General Oladipo Diya did not speak, at a time that the relationship between them became frosty. It is the only language that does not generate suspicion or fear of a ‘hidden agenda’ in inter-ethnic relationships or transactions.

English also serves as the language of nationalism, concerned with political integration and efficiency (Bamgbose, 1991:20). It is the language that brings all the supposed ‘nations’ of Nigeria to function as one. It is often noted that each ethnic group is a nation on its own right with the Hausa nation, the Ibo nation, the Yoruba nation, the Edo nation, Jukunland, Tivland, Urhoboland, Ogoniland etc. as examples. But, the cohesion of all under the subsuming Nigerian nation is possible through English. In other words, without English, the ideological ethnic groups like Oodua People’s Congress (OPC), Egbesu Boys, the Arewa People’s Congress (APC) Ijaw

Youth Solidarity (IYS), Bakassi Boys, and other militant groups would have found more justification for desiring to secede from the Nigerian federation.

Ironically, it is also the language of nationalism. This is because the love for the country as a whole has to be manifested through the language intelligible to all and sundry. This reason accounts for why nationalists like Herbert Macaulay, Ahmadu Bello, Obafemi Awolowo, Nnamdi Azikiwe had to use English as a weapon of nationalist struggle. A nationalist is a nationalist based on expressing his patriotic views in English. If English is not used to express the same ideas for which he is known as a nationalist, he becomes an ethnic jingoist or a tribal apologist. It is the language of authenticity in Nigeria today as well as the language of prestige. It is the language of ascendancy on the socio-political ladder.

As a Language of Wider Communication (LWC), English is used for phatic communion, ceremonial purposes, instrument of keeping records, information dissemination, self-experiment and embodiment of thought among the various linguistic groups of Nigeria. The common linguistic basis that constitutes a requisite for the existence of any nation is provided by English. So with English as the common tongue to all the ethnic groups, the collective sentiment of belonging together despite the individual or ethnic differences is forged.

Related to the roles discussed is the fact that Nigerianism or collective identity is stamped on national institutions through the medium of English. The Army, the Navy, the Air Force and the police that all safeguard the territorial integrity of, and peaceful existence in, Nigeria are controlled with English (unadulterated or adulterated). The National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) is aimed at bringing together Nigerian youths with a view to reinforcing the sentiment of oneness. The constitution of Nigeria is written in English to create a level-playing ground for all Nigerians to play, though the metalanguage for the teaching of each of the three language and their legislative terms was being developed (at a time in the past) in the three major languages.

Writing in English by Nigerian literary artists has also created a distinctive Nigerian literature marked by its own characteristics imbued with features of inter-cultural communication and cooperation. English is also the language of international relations and diplomacy – the language that mirrors Nigeria to the world. And in fact, there are obvious national symbols such as the national flag, the national anthem, the national day/independence day, the national associations as well as several national monuments all of which are designed in English and all

of which ‘assert’ that English is the foundation of the magnificent structure called Nigeria. If English is removed, it is agreeable, the whole nation automatically crumbles.

Moreover, English today serves as the official language of Nigeria, the language used for running the affairs of the government, fostering nationalism. It lubricates the channels of governmental activities. It is considered the rallying point of all Nigerians as a lingua franca. In a country that has over 500 languages, the English language performs a unifying role. This unifying function is accentuated by Afolayan (as cited by Jowitt, 1991) in his 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... (it) has been the language of the creation of the entity itself, and also the language of its politico-economic unification and administration...

English is the language of the press, with 80% of radio and television broadcasts done in English and more than 90% of newspapers and magazines in Nigeria published in it (Adegbija,1994:148). The media as well, as noted by Medubi (1991:10), had aided the spread of English because of its being “entrenched as the official language of communication” in the electronic and print media.

The status of English in Nigeria is high given the vast reaches of its functions: it is the language of business, technological processes, commerce and industry. It is the language of creativity as well as the language of inter-ethnic relations. Accounting to Ofuya (1996:139) “about 90% of the textbooks that are available to Nigerians in the world are written in English”, advocating “mastering what we cannot avoid” for all Nigerians.

At the international level, English serves as our window to the outside world; it is the language of diplomacy and international relations. As a member of the global, continental and regional bodies (United Nations, African Union and Economic Community of West African Countries ECOWAS), the vehicle of international cooperation is English. It is the language of the internet, international media, correspondence and sports. Like what obtains for many other countries, it is the language of science and technology, the language that drives or controls the world, the language of power because as Lackoff (2000 p.41) observes, language is not “just words”. “It enables us to establish our selves, 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". The English language is associated with power.

### **The Future of Globalised English in Nigeria**

In language future discourses, the issue of Language Maintenance (LM) and Language Death (LD) are of fundamental importance. While LM factors entrench, establish and nourish languages, LD factors reduce the aspects of language functionality resulting in its eventual extinction. LD factors are only applicable to Nigerian languages, which are vulnerable to shift and death in the age of globalisation while LM factors mostly apply to the English language (Adegbija, 2004).

LM factors that will make English to be stronger and powerfully influential in future are its historical significance to the unification of Nigeria, attitudes of the people (which are generally quite positive for its roles earlier discussed) and the multi-lingual setting, where ethnic/tribal suspicion of different linguistic groups will make English to grow. The English language is admired for its utilitarian value among Nigerian and there is no doubt that without English today, and in the foreseeable future, the educational system as it is known in Nigeria will collapse. Thus, the future of English is very bright in Nigeria.

Moreover, there is going to be, as it is, the peculiar idiosyncratic Nigerian English, marked by Nigerian contextual flavour and aura, a peculiar variety conforming to the Nigeria socio-cultural context. In essence, creativity will bring many forms of "Nigerianisms" in Standard Nigerian English. Education and information technology will increase affectation and MT interference will decrease with improved educational system, which UBE programme tends to achieve in the present political dispensation.

Finally two forms of dominance will brighten the future of the English language, the cognitive dominance will make people to excel in English more than their own indigenous languages and the functional dominance will make English to transcend its official quarters, get used in informal circles (like homes and parties) at the expense of the Nigerian languages. There is all possibility that whoever does not speak it in Nigeria will be regarded an outcast in future.

As *The Economist* (1996) put it, English continues to be the world standard language, and there is no major threat to the language or to its global popularity. The implication of the globalisation of English for the future of English in Nigeria is that of mixed blessing at the levels of quantity and quality. More people will use the English language but there is no

assurance that its quality will be retained by a vast majority, which is why Babatunde (2002) submits that the English language in Nigeria is a “state of confusion”.

### **Conclusion**

Hasman (2000) submits that worldwide, over 1.4 billion people live in countries where English has official status and one out of five of the world’s population speaks English with some degree of competence. Today, as predicted, the number of people who speak English either as a second language or foreign language has exceeded the number of native speakers as a result of the Englishisation of the world. The functions of English will continue to dominate its existing areas of influence in countries like Nigeria where national pride like linguistic identity is often sacrificed fortunately or unfortunately for political expediency and other countries not as complex as Nigeria because of globalisation and the combination of the historical, geographical, political, economic, linguistic, military, technological, educational and cultural factors that strengthen it.

This paper has noted that the future of English is assured in Nigeria and many influential Nigerians will be more influenced by the Anglo-American linguistic and cultural influences a situation that spells doom for the Nigerian linguistic and cultural heritage. Millions on the other hand will realize the need for English but will not be able to attain more than its basilectal or mesolectal varieties meaning that standard will be sacrificed as it English becomes global with several standards emerging resulting in what (Mc Arthur 1998, p.118) refers to as “English languages”. It is in this respect that the various varieties of English used in Nigeria have to be harmonized such that as English is the window of the country to the outside world, international intelligibility will not be sacrificed at the altar of domestication and nativization (Adedimeji, 2007). It is also expedient that Nigerians, despite the irresistible forces of globalisation and the unbalanced war it wages on indigenous languages innovate strategies and ways, through technology and creativity, by which national languages will continue to endure.

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