

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

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THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF ENGLISH IN NIGERIA AND THE CHALLENGES OF GLOBALIZATION

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Abstract

Adopting the principles of phenomenology, a communication theory that derives from a Greek word meaning 'observable' (Littlejohn and Foss, 2005), the author of this paper described the English language situation in Nigeria. He submitted that the Friedmanian flattening of the world and the vast changes that such process of globalization engenders should change perspectives and allow the adoption of Global English (GE) in English teaching and learning in Nigeria. A diglossic situation of Nigerian English (NE) and GE co-functioning in Nigeria for proximate/ intermediate (local and national) and ultimate (global) communication was proposed as an appropriate paradigm in order for Nigerians to compete well in the still unfolding flat world.

Key words: phenomenology, globalization, Nigerian English, Global English, diglossia, language, communication, World Englishes, varieties.

1. Introduction

The most important and enduring colonial legacy, the English language, has undoubtedly dominated the Nigerian linguistic horizon like a colossus. English language in Nigeria today is what Nile used to be in ancient Egypt, a source of livelihood, a mainstay of national identity and economy in agriculture and maritime activities among other uses. It can be reasonably surmised that as Nile, the longest and the most famous African river, used to be described in relation to Egypt, the maxim holds that "without English, there is no Nigeria".

Against the backdrop of numerous intranational and international functions that English performs in Nigeria, nothing can be more curious and off the radar of reality than the submission of Adesanoye (in Ker, 2002:116) that for anybody to be defending the propagation of the English language "is for him to be possessed either of ordinary courage or egregious bravado". The seed of English was sowed by the colonialists, its tendrils watered by the nationalists and its plant nurtured faithfully by successive Nigerian governments and policy makers such that it has become an *Iroko* (oak) of some sort: unshakeable, indisputable, irresistible and indomitable.

Even far beyond the Nigerian multilingual context and its positive effects on the entrenchment of English language in Nigeria, the language is the foremost world language. The global ascendancy of English is phenomenal. Roughly 700 million people spoke it 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 Kachruan concentric Inner (English as a mother tongue) Outer (English as an additional institutionalized language) and Expanding Circles (English as a foreign language) 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). The implications of this global spread are that one out of every three persons in the world speaks English and there is a concomitant diversification and stratification of English from its different historical, sociolinguistic and literary contexts with various forms of pronunciation, vocabulary, syntax and discourse (Kachru, 1985; 1997) among World Englishes (WE) speakers.

Like other World Englishes, the English language used in Nigeria has its own identifiable features. The extent to which these features are variant or deviant, standard or non-standard, has preoccupied, since about fifty years ago, scholars who have tried to characterize Nigerian English, from Brosnahan (1958) to Okoro (2004). This paper overviews, based on the principles of phenomenology, the reality of English language in Nigeria. It is submitted that with the world becoming increasingly smaller with the dynamics of globalization tilting towards convergence, more emphasis should be placed on Global English (GE) so that Nigerians will be able to compete well and profitably in the global scene. Research has established negative attitudes to World Englishes (varieties of English across nationalities) and the communication challenges they face which warrant a global standard (Halleck and Moder, 1995; Rubin and Smith, 1990; Brown, 1992; Rubin, 1992). While the paper does acknowledge the relevance of Nigerian English (NE) as a mark of distinctiveness, the vast implications of globalization and the dotcom burst on economy, politics, culture and language should generate appropriate response from language educators in Nigeria. This is because in the not too distance future, it is not only speaking or using English that will matter but how it is spoken or used.

2. Phenomenology and the English Language in Nigeria

Phenomenology derives from the Greek word *phenenamon*, its root being phenomenon. In scientific and general use, phenomenon is a thing that appears or is perceived or observed ... or change as perceived by any of the senses, or by the mind" (*Oxford English Dictionary*, 1971: 772). It is the science of phenomena as distinct from that of being (ontology). Phenomenology simply means "letting things become manifest as they are" (Littlejohn and Foss, 2005: 38). It is a term current in philosophy, science, architecture, communication, etc. As a philosophical concept, phenomenology was first espoused by Immanuel Kant, the German philosopher (1724-1804) in his critical philosophy of epistemology (or theory of knowledge) of Transcendental Idealism and his moral philosophy of the autonomy of reason. Edmund Husserl, the chief proponent of modern phenomenology, built on the work of Kant to expound phenomenology as a product of conscious experience (Adedimeji, 2006a).

As a theory of communication, phenomenology features "direct experience as the way in which human beings come to understand the world" (Littlejohn and Foss, 2005). Its three principles have been summarized by Deetz (1973) in his article "Words without Things: Toward a Social Phenomenology of Language" viz.: (a) knowledge is conscious (b) the meaning of a thing consists of the potential of that thing in one's life and (c) language is the vehicle of meaning. The next part of this section discusses how these principles pertain to the English language in Nigeria.

(a) *Knowledge is conscious; it is not what is inferred from experience but is the product of conscious experience.* Without experiencing how English is used in Nigeria through physical interaction with Nigerians, this first principle stipulates that there can be no true knowledge of how English is used in Nigeria or Nigerian English. In other words, Nigerians and other nationals who have experienced the day-to-day linguistic communication among Nigerians and read widely in the area are those that can legitimately claim knowledge of how English is used in the country. As such, denying the concept of NE smacks of the unawareness of the large body of works on the subject.

(b) *The meaning of a thing consists of the potential of that thing in one's life.* In this light, the potential that English holds as an individual's window to a one-third of

humanity makes it a crucial matter. The world is different from what it used to be before the implosion of the dotcom burst and the medium through which one can be a bonafide participant, a global citizen, is the English language, especially of a global variety. The RP accent, for instance, which is taught to foreigners in Outer and Expanding Circles including Nigeria is used by only 3 percent of the population of England (Hughes and Trudgill, 1979). Learning and teaching just the RP accent thus does not appear to hold potential for one in the flat world.

(c) *Language is the vehicle of meaning, and "we experience the world through the language used to define and express that world"* (Littlejohn and Foss, 2005:38-39). There is obviously a world of difference between how English is used in Nigeria and in other World Englishes. A seemingly simple question, "My friend, where is Anini?", addressed to an Inspector General of Police, has been found to be susceptible to five interpretations and ten meanings based on thirteen semantic and pragmatic presuppositions prevalent in Nigeria (Adegbija, 1988:153-158). Based on their findings on the vast variations in the semantics of 'okay' (ok) in Nigerian English and the negative implications of such for inter-cultural /international communication (the essence of speaking another language at all), Adegbija and Bello (2001:96) offer a cautionary note:

Nigerian speakers of English need to be keenly sensitive to the fact that although they speak English, and may be using English lexical items, the meaning they intend their words to have may not always be those which speakers of English in other contexts will derive from their utterances.

Their suggestion that speakers of English all over the world should gain a better understanding of the distinctive features of the peculiar cultural and linguistic backgrounds of where different varieties of English are being used is rather problematic. The question of "how" and how many varieties of WE should one then learn in a world becoming increasingly homogenous, flattened and globalized are fundamental. What is considered urgent, for Nigerian users of English, as well as other WE speakers is the learning, teaching and practice of GE, a hybrid variety of standard national varieties of English of NE, American English (AE) and British English (BE).

Thus, based on this third principle of phenomenology, and the centrality of language in harmonizing humanity, a global variety with the formula $GE=AE+BE+NE$ is suggested as the standard variety to be learnt in Nigeria. This means that the 'linguistic rights' of the Nigerians will be guaranteed and they will only have to *step up* to GE for international communication, the initial process of which Awonusi (1994) reports. The Inner Circle of English speakers would mutually need to *step down* from their linguistic idiosyncrasies that make perceived communication problems prevalent among native and nonnative speakers of English (Crittenden 1994). Such mutual linguistic empathy and the resultant creation of a common discourse would enhance understanding, cooperation and meaningfulness in the global community and at the same time advance the calls for "communicative responsibility" being clamored for in informed circles (Kubota 2001, Brown 1993 and 1995, Brown and Peterson 1997).

It is evident that the English language in Nigeria exhibits certain distinctive features that cannot be ignored. This is as a result of the social, ethnic and linguistic constraints posed by the second language context. These contextual constraints have

pitched scholars into two camps: the variation school and the deviation school. While the variation school affirms the existence of a distinct variety of English referred to as "Nigerian English", the deviation school considers "Nigerian English" anomalous while upholding the banner of standard British English as the "ideal" even though their own "speech and usage provide ample evidence of its (NE) existence" (Bamgbose, 1982:9). What is incontrovertible is that the use of English in Nigeria is characterized by idiosyncratic norms reflecting the Nigerian environment. This variation or deviation, occurs at all levels of linguistic analysis. The phonological, morpho-syntactic, semantic and pragmatic features of NE have been examined in varying details by Bamgbose (1982), Alabi (1994), Ufomata (1996), Jowitt (1991), Odumuh (1987), Adegbiya, (1989), Ofuya (1996), Alabi (2001) and Babatunde (2001), among others. These features are means through which Nigerians use another tongue rightly or wrongly to convey their own meanings.

3. Globalization: the Emergence of a Flat World

Globalization is a multifaceted phenomenon conceptualized by various people based on their backgrounds. Some focus on the economic aspect and emphasize the global economic outlook and others concern themselves with the global cultural aspect, or how it has affected their socio-cultural patterns. While globalization can also be viewed from a political angle, the structure of the unipolar world and the American-dominated world government, others equate globalization with advanced technology, especially in the fields of communication and transportation. It is in respect of this diversity that Andrews (2006) submits that there are economic globalization, political globalization, environmental globalization, socio-cultural globalization and there is indeed a linguistic globalization - "a global common language" (Okwudishu, 2003:3). Globalization is a pervasive concept that has generated a lot of interest. In 1998 alone, 2822 academic papers as well as 589 new books were written on the subject (www.globalizationguide.org).

As a matter of fact, globalization is only a buzzword, a catchphrase, that describes increased mobility of goods, services, labor, technology and capital all over the world. Ruud Lubers, a Dutch academic, conceptualized it 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. In essence, globalization is viewed as an advanced stage of growth and predominance of Western civilization in thought, worldview, values and attitudes to life as well as the unprecedented increase in the empowerment of Western culture. The reality of globalization is articulated in a rather alarmist manner by James Kurth in the Templeton Lecture on Religion and World Affairs (cited in Reidhakrishnan, 2004):

Globalisation is often described as a process: steadily progressing over time, pervasively spreading over space and clearly inevitable in its development. But globalisation is also a revolution, one of the most profound revolutions the world has ever known. Indeed, globalisation is the first truly world revolution. All revolutions disrupt the traditions and customs of a people. Indeed they threaten a people's very security, safety and even identity. The world revolution that is globalisation in some measure threatens the security of every people on the globe.

Globalization is not a new concept. According to Phillip Emeagwali, a Nigerian-American computer scientist extolled by former US President Bill Clinton, as "one of the great minds of the information age", globalization "began 400 years ago with the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade". It has only accelerated now because "the internet and cell phone now enables you to communicate instantaneously with any person on the globe" (Emeagwali, 2003). To Friedman (2005), the world is only witnessing globalization on a large scale now. There are thus three great eras of globalization: globalization 1.0 (1492-1800) that shrunk the world from a large size to a medium size through the linking of the New World and the Old World by Columbus; globalization 2.0 (c1800-2000) 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. This leveling of the global competitive field that globalization 3.0 engenders makes him conclude that the "world is flat" (Friedman, 2005:5; Adedimeji, 2006b) against the notion of the belief that it is round. He identifies and discusses "the ten forces that flattened the world" which are:

1. 11/9/89 – The fall of the Berlin Wall
2. 8/9/95 - Netscape, digitization revolution and public web browsing (Internet)
3. Work flow software
4. Open-sourcing
5. Outsourcing
6. Off-shoring
7. Supply-chaining
8. In-sourcing
9. In-forming
10. The steroids.

Globalization as a complex process has generated controversies with pro-globalization and anti-globalization groups and individuals flexing their muscles. While critics of globalization see it as the breakdown in human structures, destroying the bonds of reciprocity and mutual dependence, creating economic imperialism by multinational companies/ global financial institutions and the indoctrination of rejecting one's identity, oneself and substituting such with the artificial values of advertising and the media, advocates of globalization see it a remarkable development for empowering individuals and nations (with China and India as examples), improved human relations through connection and networking and accelerated development. Whichever side of the debate one belongs to may be immaterial, what is important is that globalization is an inevitable revolution in which the people of the world are caught. It is a reality which should be approached without emotionality. Globalization is all about change; and the only thing only thing permanent in life is change, and those who are slow with change will be changed.

4. The Challenges of Globalization for English in Nigeria

The following African proverb, translated into Mandarin, was posted on the wall of ASIMCO Technology in Beijing, China (Friedman, 2005:114):

Every morning in Africa, a gazelle wakes up
It knows it must run faster than the fastest lion or it will be killed

Every morning a lion wakes up
It knows it must outrun the slowest gazelle or it will starve to death
It doesn't matter whether you are a lion or a gazelle
When the sun comes up, you better start running.

The first challenge that globalization poses for the use of English by Nigerians is that of "running" in order to catch up with the rest of the world, in terms of standard. There is need for workshops, seminars and in-training programs for our English teachers in order to equip them with modern teaching methods and coordinate their teaching delivery. According to Ker (2002:121), "English is not poorly learnt and used in Nigeria because it is not a Nigerian language. It is poorly learnt and used because of poor teaching". Without continuous training, through which teachers are updated, the English language pedagogy will continue to be in a "dismal" state (Babatunde, 2002a). As Igboanusi (2002:23) also submits, the challenges of teaching English as a global language make it desirable for Nigerian teachers of English to be retrained.

Secondly, on the question of which variety to teach, it is obvious that in the context of a global world, the suggestion of Odumuh (1987:58) concerning "a variety of Nigerian English which is in fact being used in the country" used by "educated" Nigerians seems to be outdated. There is more need than ever before to set global standards so as to attain educational objectives. An empirical study conducted by Babatunde (2002b) reveals that more than fifty percent of respondents believe that British English and American English (48.7% and 3.6% respectively) are the varieties suggested by the Senior Secondary School (SSS) English syllabus content (p.79). It also shows that "Nigerian English variety is the one mainly in use in the SSS" (p.82) while the teachers "are not perceived to be good models" (p.91). This situation is a paradox, occasioning an "uncomfortable ambivalence with respect to the English language being used" (p.92). It is evident from the foregoing that setting the NE variety as standard is not ideal for teachers and students. The idea of Global English, "a perspective of English as a world possession, rather than a possession of those countries where it is an ancestral language" is the current approach (Gupta, 1999:71). If English is not a possession of its original owners, its users as a second language cannot be justified by insisting on their own variety in all instances.

Therefore, globalization compels the teaching and learning of GE in Nigeria, an English that exposes users to British and American (the two most important mother tongue) varieties or Anglo-American standard (Igboanusi, 2002:24) and the standard Nigerian variety, the formula of which was presented earlier as $GE = AE + BE + NE$ for Nigeria. This is expedient because practical experiences abound that educated Nigerians, graduates of Nigerian Universities have communication problems outside Nigeria not because they don't speak English, but because the variety they speak is hardly intelligible to native speakers and others. And in a world that is getting smaller, where interaction transcends profoundly regional and national boundaries in everyday life, GE should be the variety to be taught.

Also, globalization calls for enhancing the language development status of NE, a component of GE. It should be reiterated that the concept of GE is not meant for the annihilation of Nigerian usage for Nigerians, which is impossible anyway. Rather, Nigerianisms should be codified, standardized so as to project the language, cultures and literatures of Nigerians. Achebe (1975:102-102) expresses the point being made:

The price a world language must be prepared to pay is submission

to many different kinds of use. The African writer....should aim at fashioning out an English which is at once universal and able to carry his peculiar experience.

The thrust of the argument here is that GE should co-function with NE in Nigeria, the former for the sake of active participation in the tiny world occasioned by globalization and the latter for national distinctiveness and cultural assertiveness.

For the Nigerian languages, deliberate effort should be made not to allow them to die. Their language engineering processes of orthography, graphization, standardization, modernization and popularization (Ezikeojiaku, 2002) should be embarked on for the preservation of the Nigerian cultural and linguistic mosaic, using the latest available technologies offered by the flat world. As such, Nigerian languages will be serving as the medium of intra-ethnic/ proximate communication, NE for proximate /intermediate communication and GE for ultimate/ international communication; and in the Friedmanian flat world, there are no barriers in national and international communication as "the playing ground is leveled".

5. Diglossia in Nigeria: Global English versus Nigerian English

The foregoing discussion implies that another diglossic situation is urgent for Nigeria. Diglossia, a French word deriving from *diglossie* was first used by Charles Ferguson in 1959 as an English word to mean "a particular kind of standardization where two varieties of a language exist side by side, throughout the language community with each having a definite role to play" (Chukueggu, 1989:2). To Mario (Chukueggu, *ibid*), it is simply the co-existence in the same area of a colloquial idiom of inferior prestige side by side with a more learned language. Wallwork (1978) considers diglossia as a linguistic situation that is in some ways similar to bilingualism. Four languages, for instance are illustrated as exemplifying a typical diglossic situation by Ferguson, having High (H) and Low (L) varieties. These are Arabic, Greek, Swiss German and Haitian Creole.

	High	Low
Arabic	Classical	Colloquial
Greek	Classical	Colloquial
Swiss German	German	Swiss German
Haitian Creole	French	Creole

The differences between high and low varieties appertain to function (H is for formal use, L is for informal usage), prestige (H is more prestigious, elitist while L is ordinary, common and less prestigious), acquisition/learning (H is learnt at school, L is acquired from home environment), standardization (H is standardized, L is not as such), grammar (H has acceptable grammar, L features variant and deviant grammatical structures) and lexicon (H features more words - the superstrate - while L adds new words as substrates). As far as phonology in the diglossic context is concerned, a general statement is not representative: phonology in diglossia may be closely related as in Greek: it may be moderately different as in Arabic or Haitian Creole or divergent as in Swiss German. The phonology of Global English and Nigeria English should be moderately different. The various linguistic situations in Nigeria that have diglossic propensities are:

1. The Nigerian languages and its varieties, especially Pidgin.

2. Nigerian languages and their varieties/dialects.
3. English and Nigerian languages.
4. Global English and Nigerian English (being proposed).

At the level of functionality, GE will be serving international communicative functions mainly thereby addressing or redressing the existing difficulties that educated Nigerians face when they communicate with non-Nigerians/non-Africans within and outside Nigeria. This variety may still be found useful for intranational programs involving foreign participants or targeting international audience.

In terms of acquisition/learning, NE will be naturally acquired from the Nigerian socio-cultural contexts. As such, curriculum planning and implementation should be geared towards the teaching of AE and BE or Anglo-American variety. Just as millions of Nigerians speak Nigerian Pidgin without being formally taught, Nigerian English will be naturally acquired as the teaching of AE and BE progresses.

Regarding grammar, standard AE and BE grammars are the same with only negligible differences in few spellings and lexemes. At the context of speech, variations may be accommodated but in writing, standard should always be maintained while spelling and lexical conventions should be uniform in usage. The suggestion that GE has no phonological inventory, no specific lexis and no specific grammar (Igboanusi 2002; Gnutzmann 1999:158) is considered faulty on the premise of the fact that there must always be a standard, which is Anglo-American for the world. While it is unrealistic and futile to speak a second/ foreign language like a native speaker, being exposed to the native speaker variety would boost comprehension of the accents of native speakers and other non-native speakers elsewhere. As such, British and American spellings, lexemes and their standard grammars should serve as the basis or be the bulk of a truly GE in the present global village. The emergence of globalization warrants a little shift from WE (World Englishes) or what is pejoratively referred to as "English languages" (McArthur 1998:118) which are not usually mutually intelligible to a GE that is intelligible to all.

Efforts should be geared towards standardizing NE further so that its utilitarian value as a medium of national communication will be enhanced. Standardizing NE is a prerequisite to the phasing out of Nigerian regional varieties of Hausa English, Igbo English and Yoruba English. Within these regions, it is still possible at present to identify Sokoto English, Kanuri English just as Enugu English versus Warri English can be differentiated from Ibadan English, Ekiti English, *etc.* across the three major ethnolinguistic divides.

6. Conclusion

The English phenomenon in Nigeria is in an apparent state of "confusion" and it is agreeable and desirable that "the least Nigeria should do now is to arrest the diversity and confusion" concerning the language (Babatunde, 2002a:140). One major concern "in informed educational circles" as Akere (1995:196) submits is the extent to which the variety and quality of English being taught and used in the school system can serve Nigeria's educational goals and objectives. The emergence of globalization has especially made the issue more critical and the need to evolve a standard variety for classroom instruction more urgent. The adoption of GE as a standard variety is considered a necessary catalyst to bringing Nigeria, like the rest of Africa, from the "unflat" world of underdevelopment to the "flat world" of development (Friedman, 2005). In a world becoming increasingly tiny, emotional attachment to "Nigerian English" brazenly displayed in some quarters may not really help the goals of

education such as our national ethnic-linguistic sentiments are not realistic in dislodging the English from its admittedly arrogant pre-dominance over the Nigerian indigenous languages.

This paper has attempted an overview of the English language in Nigeria. Relating phenomenological principles to the state of English language in Nigeria, it suggests that globalization, a revolution of sort that has swept the world over with the dotcom burst, compels an urgent review of English language pedagogy in Nigeria. Another diglossia is proposed for Nigeria with GE (a hybrid of AE, BE and NE) being the standard variety that the English language curriculum is geared towards and NE being standardized to serve domestic proximate/intermediate communication purposes while GE will be for international interactions. While GE is adopted, it needs to be reiterated, the essence of NE being its component is that it does not mean that Nigerians have to eat and drink the culture of McDonald and Coca Cola at the expense of the pristine Nigerian national values.

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