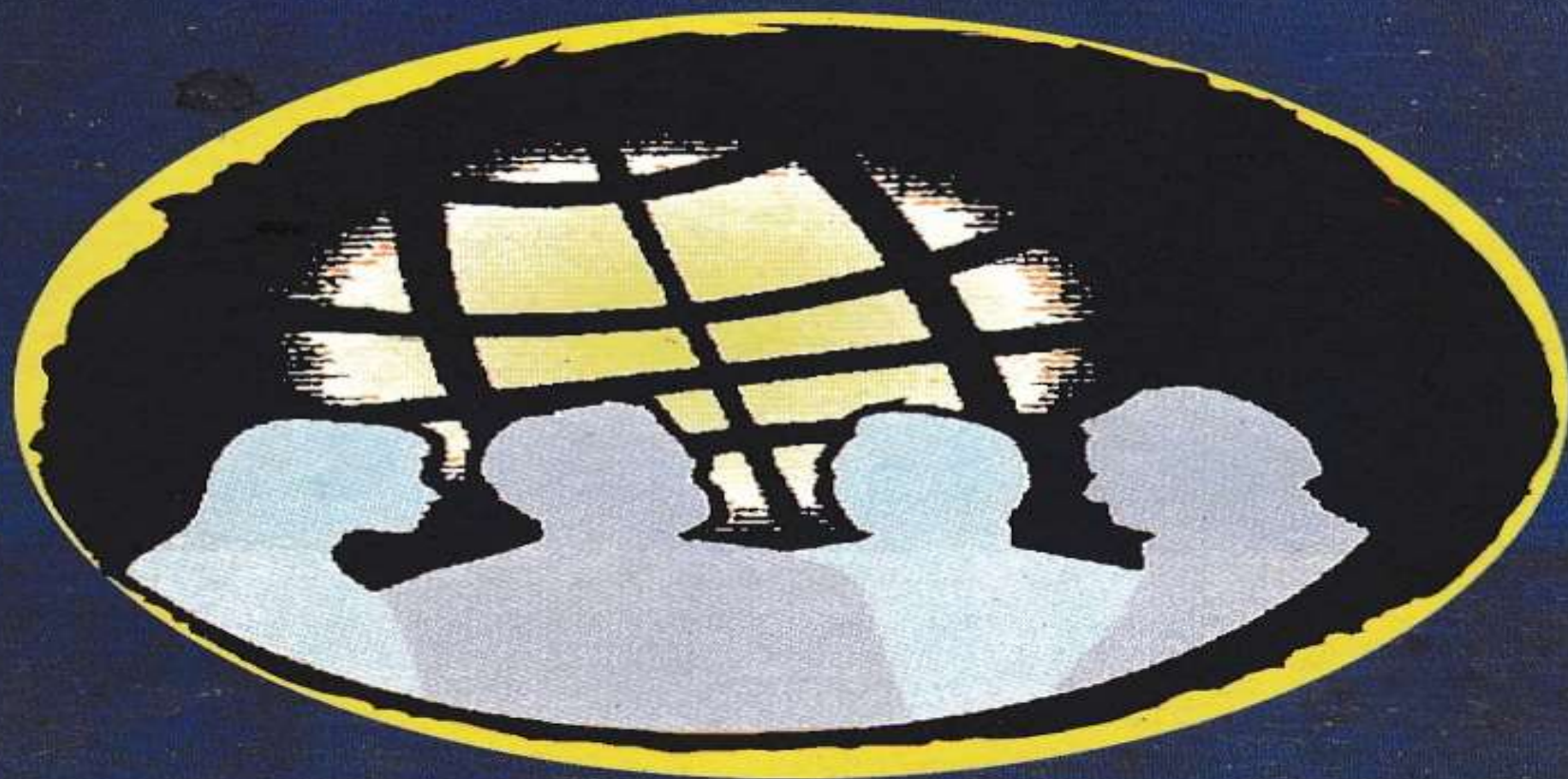




# *Language and Nationhood: New Contexts, New Realities*



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## Neo-Coloniality and Language Policies: Nigeria as a Paradigm

*Joseph A. Ushie*

### Introduction

The advancement in science and technology in Europe which followed the European Renaissance of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries engendered an unprecedented bifurcation of the human race into two: the so-called "pre-scientific" and the scientific world-views. Essentially, the scientific world-view objectifies the external world. This implies that this perspective sees Nature as an object, as "it" and "subject to mechanical laws" while to the "pre-scientific," Nature is considered "sacred" and addressed within the framework of "I" and "Thou" relationship. The "pre-scientific" world-view thus sees Nature as a fellow subject to be communicated with and consulted, not controlled (Hoogvelt, 1978:114).

Evidence of the pre-Renaissance and pre-industrial sameness of the human world-view exists in the ancient oral traditions of the various races of the world. Among these have been the North American Indian legends, Elias Lonnrot's great Finnish epic, *The Kalevala*, the works of the Greek Homer, the Asian *Arabian Nights* and several others, and the many African oral narratives, especially folktales.

But following the Renaissance, the emerging scientific community proceeded to invent the ship, the gun, the printing press and sophisticated means of communication. Armed with these fresh fruits from science the scientific man set sail to the imagined other half of the world – the "pre-scientific" lands in Africa, Asia, and the territory now known as North and South America, essentially as a conquistador. Thus was the foundation laid for the dichotomous concepts of today such as mother



country/colony, the centre and the periphery or the metropolis and the Other. In all this Africa received the most lethal blows in the form of the notorious slave trade, the exploitation of her material and human resources, the severance of her peoples from their cultural heritage, values and beliefs, and in the arbitrary partitioning of the continent into states among contending European economic interests without regard for the cultural and linguistic commonalities among the people so yoked together.

It is necessary to stress, however, that Europe's adventure into, and subsequent truncation of, the social structures of Africa were not primarily racist-motivated. It was indeed predicated more on economic than on racialist planks. For one, even within Europe, there were groups such as the Humanitarian, the Liberal and the Marxist, which were outside the mainstream current of the capitalist enterprise, and which opposed colonialism. And on the African side, there were the treacherous middlemen who reaped pittances from their role in the slave trade (Young, 2001:73). These species of middlemen were later to reincarnate into local compradors in the present neo-colonial days.

But the internal contradictions within the industrial world later resulted in the two World Wars to which the human and material resources of the colonies were once more enlisted. Participation in these wars (especially the Second, 1939 – 1945) by men from the colonies helped in galvanizing the agitation for independence across the world beginning from the 1940s till the first non-racial election that terminated the Apartheid system in South Africa in 1994.

### Neo-Coloniality and Post-Coloniality

The general trend in the aftermath of colonisation has been for the former colonials to rebuild themselves anew based, essentially, on their pre-colonial heritage while absorbing some of the healthy experiences of colonial strand of their heritage. In the economic sphere the path to true independence has been autarky. This entails a community's self-sufficiency in the production of its needs. No society really attains this completely, but striving towards it does impel a former colony from being a consumer-based economy to becoming an industrial state. This is the principle behind the success recorded by such nations as Japan, China, India, Malaysia, Taiwan, South Korea, all in Asia, and South Africa in Africa. Although not all these examples were necessarily former colonies, they all were initially a part of the "pre-scientific" segment of the world.

In India, for example, the shift in the people's tastes from foreign to home-made goods was inaugurated way back in 1905 as encapsulated in the term "Swadeshi" (Quayum, 2003:30).

While these countries have realised the need to make their economy production-based, the vast majority of other former colonial nations, especially in Africa, have continued as faithful consumers of whatever comes from the advanced economies. And the lethal strings tethering these countries to the industrial world have been the usual international financing agencies including the World Trade Organisation, (WTO) the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Neo-colonialism thus refers to a situation in which ersatz political freedom is granted a colony while economic independence is withheld. Hoogvelt (1978:74) clarifies that neo-colonialism "refers to this retention [of individual and corporate property rights across national boundaries] and their further extension of economic control and influence by the ex-colonial powers after they had surrendered political state power." As such, "foreign capital is used for the exploitation rather than for the development of the less developed parts of the world" (Young, 2001:47).

Regrettably, most African states, including Nigeria, are neo-colonial societies and their political class is interchangeable with the surrogates of Western capitalism who control their nations. Thus, just as their forerunners could sell ten men for a bottle of whisky, these reincarnations of the African middlemen of the slavery era can sell their entire countries for as low as a house in Europe, or America. Eskor Toyo gives us a precise image of the situation:

The benefit of neocolonialism to the imperialists is that they are able to continue the exploitation of the country by operating under the umbrella of a so-called 'national' government. The benefit of neocolonialism to the indigenous bourgeoisie is that they thus acquire a Powerful economic, military and political ally for their own participation in the exploitation of the people and the country.

(200:13; see also Ngugi, 1993:65)

These are some of the features of neo-colonial states as opposed to those of post-colonial ones, which look inward in their tastes, and work towards economic self-dependence. And, these countries, mainly in Africa, are those which Ali Mazrui describes as having "borrowed the wrong things from the West – even the wrong components of capitalism" (Osundare, 2002:30). Certainly, therefore, both post-colonial and neo-



colonial societies bear signs of torture from foreign domination, but while the post-colonial ones bear scars, the neo-colonial ones bear fresh reeking wounds.

## Neo-Coloniality, Language and Culture

In focus here is E. B. Tylor's definition of culture as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and many other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of Society" (Mitchell, 1979:45). This definition shows culture as an all-embracing concept. It includes such vital, all-time essentials of humankind as knowledge, morals, law, art and custom. Sapir's understanding of the phenomenon as "what a society does and thinks" (1949b:218) strengthens its significance. Culture, therefore, defines and represents a people such that absolute confidence in their culture is an index of the degree of their vulnerability to influences from external forms of knowledge, morals, laws, art and custom. Confidence in their culture is often suggested as one of the reasons why the Europeans failed in their bid to colonise territories like China, Japan and, to a good degree, Ethiopia. This position earns credence if we consider Hoogvelt's assertion that "No society can successfully dominate another without the diffusion of its cultural patterns and social institutions" (1978:109).

Embedded in each of the ideational, interpersonal and textual functions of language is culture. Language, then, is the medium through which such forms of culture as knowledge, science, medicine, folklore and other forms of non-material culture conveyed. Sapir, once more, asserts that "language does not exist apart from culture, that is, from the socially inherited assemblage of practices and beliefs that determines the texture of our lives" (1949b:07; see also 1949a:34).

The deepest appreciation of this significance of language, and hence culture, remains the well-known Sapir-Whorf hypothesis of linguistic relativity, which maintains that all observers are not led by the same physical evidence to the same picture of the universe, unless their linguistic backgrounds are similar, or can in some way be calibrated (Hudson, 1980:104).

Whether one agrees or disagrees with this hypothesis, developments in humankind's evolutionary path bear abundant evidence of its enclitic attachment to its language and culture. In our modern era, this shows in the zeal with which some former colonies pursue programmes of cultural

and linguistic renaissance as a necessary ingredient for their growth and development. In the aftermath of the Norman Conquest, for example, the Renaissance Englishman argued fervently against the continued use of foreign languages such as French and Latin, despite the common ancestry of these two languages and English in the Indo-European phylum. The then Head Master of the Merchant Taylor's School, Richard Mulcaster, for instance, declared:

For is it not in dede a mervellous bondage to becum servants to one tung for learning sake, the most of our time, with losse of most time, whereas we maie have the verie same treasur in our own tung, with the gain of most time? our ownbearing the joyfull title of our libertie and fredom, the Latin tung remembering us of our thraldom and bondage? I love Rome, but London better, I favor Italie, but England more, I honor the Latin, but I worship the English.

(Baugh & Cable, 1978: 203)

Still from this spatio-temporal milieu, Sir Thomas Elyot maintains:

If physicians be angry, that I have written physicke in englishe, let them remember that the grekes wrate in greke, the Romains in Latine, Avicenna, and the other in Arabike, whiche were their own proper and maternall tongues.

(Baugh & Cable, 1978:205 – 206)

In the end, the English language did not only re-emerge as the language of all forms of communication and interaction in England, it became the language of the British Empire and, ironically, has today fed itself into a global giant on the languages and cultures of other lands.

As a comparatively smaller state sandwiched between two stronger Sweden and Russia, Finland was first made a province of Sweden in 1155 a.d. After a six hundred years sojourn in this status, her Eastern neighbour, Russia, made her an autonomous Grand Duchy in 1809, from which position Finland emerged about a hundred years later, in 1917. A relic of this domination is found today in Finland's bilingual situation in which both Finnish and Swedish are official languages. But today the Swedish-speaking population which was about 13% of Finland's total head-count by 1900 has reduced to about 6%. Finland's 760 years sojourn in the political belly of her more powerful neighbours has therefore not obliterated her linguistic nor cultural identity. The country thus exemplifies Keith Bosley's metaphor in his Introduction to Elias Lonnrot's epic, *The Kalevala*, that "the movement of language and culture is most often like



wave motion, whereby a wave travels but the water merely goes up and down" (1989:xviii – xix).

Malaysia attained independence in 1957, and, as far back as the 1970s the language of instruction in Malaysian schools has generally been Bahasa Malaysia. Today, both English and the indigenous Bahasa Malaysia are used in the country. This is proof of a people and country that know and appreciate their language and culture, and who are prepared to preserve, protect and project same.

C. T. Maduka (2003:14) also offers us the examples of Luxembourg (which was formerly dominated by the French and the Germans, the Vietnamese (formerly colonized by the French) and the Welsh, all of who have fought doggedly for the survival of their languages and cultures in spite of their colonial experiences.

And in Africa, Tanzania adopted Kiswahili as her official language about thirty years ago, and, according to Ikiddeh, "less than three years after the historic announcement, the sign that greeted the visitor at the gates of the University of Dar es Salaam was already in Kiswahili (Chuo Kikuu)" (1983:71). Ikiddeh also reports that otherwise technical and abstract concepts such as Junior Research Assistant, Department of Electrical Engineering and Mathematics have been successfully named in Kiswahili.

Even among the English-speaking advanced economies, notably Britain and the US, one finds how each country clings to, preserves, protects and projects its own variety of English in spite of most of them (the white Americans and white Britons) being members of the same race and having just about the same culture. Our last illustration of committed protection of linguistic rights is the report by the BBC Online Network of Friday, July 2, 1999, which informs of the boycott of a meeting of the European Union by Germany and Austria to protest the plucking off by the former Finnish Prime Minister, Mr. Lipponen, of German from English and French (which enjoy a higher status than other EU languages in the Union).

All the illustrations above represent either former colonial powers or former colonies that have realised the true path to self-recovery after foreign domination. The former colonies among these examples are therefore those that can be described as "post-colonial." And, not accidentally though, these are also the countries that have wrested their economies from the deadly grip of international financing bodies such as the World Bank, the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

On the other side of the divide are the neo-colonial states. Among these, there is hardly any sincere commitment to the need to preserve, protect and project their indigenous languages and cultures. Most of these neo-colonial states are in Africa, and the attitude to their indigenous languages can be gleaned from the table below:

USE/LEVEL	COUNTRIES
1. No use	Cote d'Ivoire, Benin, Angola, Mozambique, Zambia, Cape Verde
2. No use with Experimentation	Cameroon, Niger, Sierra Leone, Senegal, Mali
3. Early primary	Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya, South Africa, Uganda, Madagascar, Zimbabwe
4. Full Primary	Tanzania, Somalia, Ethiopia
5. Secondary	Somalia, Ethiopia
6. Tertiary	No example, except in the case of metalanguage for teaching the language itself, e.g. Swahili in Tanzania, Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba in Nigeria, Akan in Ghana, Shona in Zimbabwe.

Many of these countries, however, have ersatz language policies which are "generally characterized by avoidance, vagueness, arbitrariness, fluctuation and declaration without implementation" (Bamgbose, 1991:9).

One of the major reasons for this state of affairs is the high degree of multilingualism among African countries. Kenya, for example, has 35 languages for her 20.6 million people; Sudan has a population of 21.55 million and some 133 languages. There are 113 languages in Tanzania for the country's population of 22.49 million while Democratic Republic of Congo's 29.93 million people speak 206 different languages. The population of Ethiopia is 43.35 million and the country has 92 languages, while Nigeria with a population of 120 million has over 400 languages. The same situation replicates in even African countries with smaller populations. Cameroon, for example, has 239 languages for her 13.5 million people. In Ghana, the population is 13.5 million and there are 57 languages while Cote d'Ivoire has 58 languages for her population of 9.81 million (Bamgbose, 1991:2; Yuka, 2001:143).



The second major factor is the presence of imported foreign languages, which have come to serve as trans-ethnic and trans-lingual media of communication and interaction among the peoples with different indigenous languages. Thus, while the English language rose to replace French as the official language and language of education in Britain after the Norman Conquest, neo-colonial African states feel helpless before the English language, French or Portuguese today. And in this situation, the neo-colonial societies consciously or unconsciously feed their own languages and cultures into the bellies of the industrialised economies, just as they feed their material and human resources into the same bellies. Two of the contributions to the book, *Language Attitude and Language Conflict in West Africa*, have confirmed this suicidal attitude of Nigerians to their indigenous languages. In the first by Adeyemi Babajide (2001:5), 113 out of 150 respondents confirmed that they use the imported English language "Almost always" in "formal, informal, cordial, casual" situations at home, in the office and at market places." On the other hand, only 47 respondents indicated they "Hardly always" use the language in the same situations.

Similarly, Oluwole Oyetade (2001:18) talks of how students were withdrawn from Nigeria's Eastern Schools because "vernacular" was introduced, and, also how, ironically, a white principal of Nigeria's Wesley College was criticised by Nigerians for encouraging the students to be proud of whatever was indigenous to them, including the use of their mother tongue once outside the classroom and the dining room. He also reports a more recent situation in which teachers of indigenous languages were laid off as such languages were "not regarded as essential." Neither is the situation different in neighbouring Cameroon where Yendzemo Yuka reports that the indigenous languages have been "assessed as unprestigious, old-fashioned, inferior, uneducated" (2001:145). These kinds of attitude to a people's own language constitute cultural and linguistic suicide.

In addition to this suicidal inclination is what Louis-Jean Calvet describes as "linguistic cannibalism." According to him, this is "a process inherent in any colonial dominance [which refers to] how languages are described, how social communication is organized, the system of word-borrowings, the names people give each other, feelings of guilt at using native languages, and so on" (1998:ix - x). The Kenyan writer, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, for instance, recollects the experiences of his generation in the hands of British teachers whenever they were caught speaking African languages:

We were often caned or made to carry plaques inscribed with the words, 'I am stupid' or 'I am an ass.' In some cases, our mouths were stuffed with pieces of paper picked from the wastepaper basket, which were then passed from one mouth to that of the latest offender. Humiliation in relation to our languages was the key.

(1993:33)

The Indian sage, Mahatma Gandhi, says similarly of the Indian schools of his days: "If any boy spoke in Gujarati which he understood, he was punished" (1969:140). Incidentally, punishments of this nature are still being meted out to students whose tongues "stray" into their mother tongues, while in school, in some Nigerian secondary schools today. These range from caning to cutting of grass. These experiences therefore exemplify the neo-colonial, as against the post-colonial, nature of the society.

But, as it is often the case that people complain of injustice only when they are victims, John Haynes argues against Ngugi's insistence that the African writer write in his/her mother tongue:

The idea that Africans might one day speak English, or some other western language, as their first language, distresses him profoundly; though such a transition has frequently occurred and is a *normal* way for languages to evolve ... English itself being an example ... It is distressing for a Kagoma man in Northern Nigeria to see that his grandchildren now speak Hausa, but it is *unwise* to infer from this that they cannot fully express themselves, or their culture, in Hausa; or that they have been culturally 'taken over' by Hausa ...

(1987:106, my italics)

If, as Haynes asserts, "it is unwise to infer ... that [Kagoma children] cannot fully express themselves" in Hausa, then it follows that the "unwisdom" began with the Renaissance Englishmen who insisted on speaking English rather than French despite the two languages' common ancestry in the Indo-European phylum, and whose progeny have kept the battle for dominance going between English and French till date. Secondly, it further means that the Englishman, Rev. E. H. Nightingale, who was the principal at Wesley College in Nigeria, and who encouraged his Nigerian students to "be proud of anything that was indigenous" to them was "unwise." Thirdly, for Mahatma Gandhi, the effect on him of his use of the foreign language, English, rather than his mother tongue, Gujarati, was not so slight and inconsequential as Haynes would estimate. On the contrary, Gandhi notes that:



This English medium created an impassable barrier between me and the members of my family, who had not gone through English schools, my father knew nothing of what I was doing ... I was fast becoming a stranger in my own home. I certainly became a superior person.

(1969:140 – 141)

The African cultural milieu offers a similar experience. Till date, much of Africa operates the extended, as opposed to the western nuclear, family system. The implication of this for the Africans is that many of their indigenous languages characteristically neither need nor have single-term equivalents in English for “uncle,” “cousin,” “nephew,” “niece,” “aunt,” “in-law,” etc. In Bette-Bendi as in many other Nigerian languages, for example, the term “father” stands for both English “father” and “uncle” on both maternal and paternal sides. Similarly, “brother” includes one’s brother(s), cousin(s), and, sometimes, even more distant blood relations such as members of the same village or even country, depending on where the interlocutors are. Other kinship terms such as “mother,” sister, etc. are similarly extended semantically.

Furthermore, under the nuclear family system, the father is the head of the family; but in a typical African extended family system, the grandfather or even great-grand-father remains the head for as long as he is alive. But, today knowledge of the English language, which, in Nigeria, is interchangeable with literacy, has created the middle and upper classes whose life style has shifted from the African-indigenous to the European. To this class, therefore, a cousin is a cousin in the English sense of the word, and so are other kinship terms, “brother,” “uncle,” “mother,” “aunt,” etc; and this signals their shift from the extended to the nuclear family system. Thus, innocuous as these differences may appear, they have metamorphosed into a situation in which the educated middle class now display the habits and dispositions of Western individualism as opposed to communalism that is African. We therefore see that contrary to Haynes’ criticism of Ngugi, it is indeed not altogether “unwise to infer from this that” one’s grandchildren will not “fully express themselves, or their culture” in a strange language if they are not encouraged to learn their mother tongue.

The question of the African educated elite ushers us into another form of linguistic cannibalism, which is class-based. Just as the “Third World” surrogates of industrial capitalism feed themselves fat on the sweat and blood of their countrymen, the elite of these neo-colonialist societies who owe their status mainly to mastery of foreign languages

would want the status quo to be maintained. This class existed even during the Roman and Norman colonization of Britain, and it was the class that rose to defend the Anglo-Saxon linguistic and cultural heritage. The difference, however, is that the African equivalents of these Prometheuses who “had been sent to wrest fire from the gods,” have become captives “contented with warming [themselves] at the fireside of the gods” (Ngugi, 1993:107). Ayo Bamgbose observes similarly:

Apart from lack of political will by those in authority, perhaps the most important factor impeding the increased use of African languages is lack of interest by the elite. They are the ones who are quick to point out that African languages are not yet well developed to be used in certain domains or that the standard of education is likely to fall, if the imported European languages cease to be used as media of instruction at certain levels of education (2000:2; see also 1991:4)

This class-based linguistic cannibalism seems to be rearing its head in Malaysia, a post-colonial country, as well. In a BBC (Online) News report of Saturday, December 14, 2002, for example, Jonathan Kent says of the country:

It’s often been said that the great fault – lines in Malaysian society are between the races – but the English issue redraws them. For the middle classes of each ethnic group are relatively well versed in English. The divisions illuminated by this latest debate are not between Malay, Chinese and Indian but between have and have not.

The net result therefore is that knowledge of English has, like knowledge of science and technology, created two worlds out of neo-colonial societies and even some post-colonial ones. These are the literate, economically strong on the one hand, and the illiterate, economically weaker ones on whose tongues our languages and cultures still breathe, on the other. In Nigeria as, perhaps, in many other countries, this privileged class constitutes the minority and is put at about 30 percent of the population (Elugbe, 1990:10). Yet this English-empowered group has minoritized the majority who make up 70 or so percent of the society. Hence, minoritization here is not predicated on numbers but on power and status.

A global assessment of modern western civilisation, beginning from the European Renaissance till date should thus not miss this point that one of its negative effects on humankind has been its divisive nature. It



first split the world into the scientific, industrial versus the "pre-scientific," underdeveloped; and now its most global language, English, has also become the dividing line between the have and the have not of many lands.

## Nigeria's Language Policy

Following Ayo Bamgbose (1991:111), we take language policy to refer to "a programme of action on the role or status of a language in a given community." Noss (25) as quoted by Bamgbose (1991:111) breaks language policies into three types:

official language policy, which relates to the languages recognised by the government and for what purposes; education language policy, which relates to the languages recognized by education authorities for use as media of instruction and subjects of study at the various levels of public and private education; and general language policy, which covers unofficial government recognition or tolerance of languages used in mass communication, business and contacts with foreigners.

With a population of about 120 million and an estimated 400 or more indigenous languages, Nigeria naturally cannot escape the usual problems associated with language policies in multilingual settings. In examining the country's language policy in this paper, we will restrict ourselves to the first two – official and education language policies – for the reason that these two are officially documented while the government is generally indifferent to the third.

Nigeria's official language policy is contained in sections 55 and 97 of the country's 1979 constitution. In section 55, the Constitution provides that "the business of the National Assembly shall be conducted in English, and in Hausa, Ibo [Igbo] and Yoruba when adequate arrangements have been made therefor." And in section 97, which relates to State Houses of Assembly, the Constitution says:

The business of a 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 weaknesses in the above provisions are rather too obvious. For one, English remains the first language listed. Secondly, in the case

of the use of indigenous languages in the National Assembly, implementation is predicated on "when adequate arrangements have been made," a rather timeless condition. As such, although this provision was carried over from the country's 1979 Constitution, "adequate arrangements" are yet to be made for the use of Nigeria's languages of her three majority ethnic groups in the legislative house 26 years today. In addition to these observations, sections 65 (2), (a) and 106 (c) of the same constitution somewhat betray even more clearly the country's inclination towards English. These two provisions expect a candidate to either the State House of Assembly or the National Assembly to be "educated up to at least School Certificate level or its equivalent," a condition that, in the Nigerian educational environment, necessarily entails literacy in English. All the provisions examined here therefore make the prospects of using any indigenous language in the legislative houses a mere idle residue in the country's constitution.

The same fate awaits the indigenous languages in the Nation's education language policy. Embedded in the National Policy on Education, the policy provides that:

Government appreciates the importance of language as a means of promoting social interaction and national cohesion; and preserving cultures. Thus every child shall learn the language of the immediate environment. Furthermore, in the interest of national unity it is expedient that every child shall be required to learn one of the three Nigerian languages: Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. For smooth interaction with our neighbours, it is desirable for every Nigerian to speak French. Accordingly, French shall be the second official language in Nigeria, and it shall be compulsory in schools.

(1998:9)

Although the conventional jussive "shall" is used in all the clauses in the policy statement, there is additional emphasis in the case of the newly introduced additional foreign language, French: "and it shall be compulsory in schools." This then is additional evidence of a country whose language policy is tilted towards the preservation, protection and projection of imported foreign languages over indigenous ones. Indeed, Oyetade (2001:22) reports that "in recruiting teachers or allocating teachers to schools, English and Science teachers are given priority [while] appointment for indigenous language" teachers is not considered essential.

In sum, Nigeria's language policy is an apt paradigm for neo-colonialist language policies, whose main feature, once more, is that they consciously make for the feeding of the nation's indigenous languages, and hence cultures, into the omnivorous jaws of the advanced economies.



## Implications for the Languages of the Ethnic Minorities

Since its formulation, Nigeria's language policy, both as in the constitution and for education, has been repeatedly criticised, especially by professional linguists. One perspective from which the policy has received severe critical knocks has been its implications for the languages of the minority ethnic groups, and a leading voice here has been Professor Okon Essien. His contribution, "The Future of Minority Languages" (1990:155 – 168) for example, has so sufficiently perforated the policy that this paper will simply adopt its frame of argument as the starting point. He points out, for instance, that "in an accurate head count" the speakers of the languages of the minority ethnic groups would collectively outnumber any one of the three majority ethnic groups. Yet he lists nine main privileges which the country's language policy gives these three languages, but denies those of the ethnic minority groups. Among these privileges are the three's being prescribed for use in the country's legislative houses, their being taught in schools beyond the Junior Secondary School, their being exclusively enriched with legislative vocabulary, their being the only languages in which Nigerian Television Authority's newscasters bid their audience "Good night" after each broadcast, etc.

Essien also makes reference to the Statement of Policy of the International African Institute in London, especially its provision that

The child should learn to love and respect the mental heritage of his people and the natural and necessary expression of this heritage is language. We are of the opinion that no education which leads to the alienation of the child from his ancestral environment can be right, nor can it achieve the most important aim of education, which consists in developing the powers and character of the pupil. Neglect of the local language involves the danger of crippling the pupil's productive powers.

(1990:159)

Based on this, he argues that instead of the one-way provision that the children of the minorities should learn the languages of the majority ethnic groups, it should be reciprocal. He identifies with Ime Ikiddeh's postulation (1983:74 – 76) that the country adopts the former USSR paradigm, in which all languages were accorded equal rights and were official languages. This implies that the speakers of the languages of the majorities should also be made to learn at least one minority language in

addition to their own as a way of achieving the national cohesion sought for by the National language policy on education. Essien concludes that "the mental, educational and cultural aspects of language are too grave for any community to ignore its language."

More recent publications and experiences have further strengthened many of Essien's arguments. Nigeria's daily, *Daily Sun*, of November 6, 2003, for example, culled the following report from *Daily Mail*, a foreign tabloid:

Schools are being encouraged to teach pupils in their native tongue despite calls from the [British] Home Secretary for immigrants to embrace Britain's language, ethos and values .... Education Minister Stephen Twigg, however, believes lessons in the first language of pupils from ethnic minorities will help them succeed .... In a pilot scheme at White Hart Lane School in Tottenham, 30 Turkish children learn GCSE Science in their home language for some of their lessons, separate from other pupils. Headmaster David Daniels said the grades of those who took their exams in the summer exceeded expectations.

(*Daily Sun*, 2003:32)

If teaching immigrant minorities children in their mother tongue in Britain can receive this kind of encouragement, it becomes difficult to understand why Nigeria's minorities children should, by policy, be denied the same opportunity in their own land of birth.

Furthermore, Herbert Igboanusi and Isaac Ohia's study (2001:129) for instance confirms that "only 24.8%" of their respondents who speak Nigeria's Language of Minority Groups (LMG) "had favourable attitude towards having knowledge of one or more of the three major languages as being useful to them." They also report that "743 or 74.4% of [these] respondents did dislike speakers of the three major Nigerian languages." This attitude is, ostensibly, traceable to the element of hostility to or neglect of these minorities languages in favour of the majorities by the nation's language policy.

In sum, the situation of Nigeria's smaller-group languages exemplifies Schiffman's observation that "each linguistic state, having driven out the perceived oppressor and established its own linguistic regime, turns out to be an even more ferocious oppressor of its own linguistic minority groups" (ccat.sas.upenn.edu~haroldfs).

What, however, makes the Nigerian situation much more tragic is that the elite of the country are aggressively protective of "the perceived oppressor" even as they are oppressing their own linguistic minorities most ferociously.



Nevertheless, trends in sociolinguistic studies have confirmed that coercion in matters of language learning is almost always counter-productive. The minorities-friendly posture of Soviet's language policy is said to have made "more and more Soviet people" to learn the majority Russian. The Soviet's linguistic egalitarianism is replicated in Finland, and is yielding the same results: Independent Finland's new Constitution protects the Swedish-speaking minority, in that it made both Finnish and Swedish national languages of equal official status, stipulating that a citizen be able to use either language in courts and have government documents relating to him or her issued in his or her language, and that the cultural and economic needs of both language groups be treated equally (reference.allrefer.com).

This linguistic egalitarianism shows up in the existence of two institutions of higher learning which are exclusively Swedish-speaking - the Abo Akademi University, in Turku, and the Swedish School of Economics and Business Administration, in Helsinki. But this minority sensitive language policy may have rather promoted the learning of Finnish by the minority Swedish speakers as their number is said to have reduced by half in the past 50 years (www.helsinki-hs.net).

Similar genial relationship without coercion resulted in the fusion between the Northmen (who founded Normandy) and France in about the 10<sup>th</sup> century, and in the adoption and adaptation of the language and culture of the latter by the former (Baugh and Cable, 1978:108). And, in Nigeria, the absorption of Fulfulde speakers into the Hausa language was not on account of coercion by the Hausa speakers. This kind of language disappearance as with Normandy, Swedish and Fulfulde is akin to euthanasia, of which the killer is not usually held liable in spite of his/her being responsible for the death. Linguistic euthanasia of this sort is, therefore, different from linguistic cannibalism, which comes in the forms of ethnic majority versus ethnic minority, developed versus underdeveloped societies, or have versus have not.

Already, the impact of this neo-colonialist language policy on the languages and cultures of Nigeria has begun to ignite alarm from a number of voices. In the words of C. T. Maduka:

The clouds are thickening; unless drastic steps are taken to reverse the situation, very soon Nigerian languages and literatures will disappear from the cultural map of the world.

(2003:14)

And from Eno Urua:

Nigerians may find themselves in a situation where it is possible for them to get by in Nigeria without the need to have the ability to be literate or even speak any Nigerian language. The situation may already be with us!

(2003:59)

Finally, in a study involving over 60 poetry collections by Nigeria's emerging writers, Ushie observes, among other features, a gradual deracination in the output from the group:

the majority of the new voices do not consciously deploy their African heritage in their works as did their predecessors. One can hardly find in this generation a replica of Okigbo, Soyinka, Clark or Ojaide in the exploration of African myths and legends; nor can one encounter the equivalents of Osundare, Eneke or Osofisan in the deployment of the proverb or the folktale.

(2001:365 - 366)

The Nigerian situation, bleak as it is, might well be just a paradigm for most of the other neo-colonial nations in the global divide between the industrial capitalist world and the so-called "Third World" nations, especially former colonies.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, we have attempted to correlate the management of each society's material and human resources with its language policies. The following three broad suggestions will conclude the paper.

1. From both the sociolinguistic perspective and political trends in the world today, linguistic egalitarianism at all levels of human society is the most genial and acceptable solution to language conflicts. Politically, this is the option that rhymes with the noble principles of democracy, true multiculturalism, justice and fair play in our world of today. And, from a sociolinguistic perspective, all languages are equal, irrespective of the number of speakers, since each serves the unique communicative, interactional and cultural needs of a particular group; and each is a bearer of its speakers' identity. Linguistic egalitarianism does not, however, rule out the need for a global language. For, were this presentation to be made in my



Bette-Bendi language rather than in English, it would have needed some extra effort and resources to get it across to all the listeners and readers. Neither does a minorities-friendly language policy stop languages from being born, growing, or dying. The point is that at the national level, for example, any truly post-colonial language policy must specify functions for global or foreign languages to allow space for the indigenous ones to thrive.

2. Learning a language other than one's own is like house-breaking. A house-breaker does not normally waste his labour at a door that would open into emptiness or junk. It follows that if any linguistic community wants to attract non-native speakers to its language or dialect, the community must first stock the language with tempting wares in the form of scientific and technological information, a rich literary tradition and a healthy economy. This is what is meant by the language of an important people being important as well. In the heyday of military rule in Nigeria, Ogoni, a minority language with just about 500,000 speakers, suddenly became very important. For confronting the General Abacha's regime on human rights and environmental issues, nine of the ethnic group's members, including the writer and activist, Ken Saro-Wiwa, were hanged in one day in 1995. This increased the international community's sympathy for the group, and hence granting of political asylum for its members was generally liberalised to enable them to escape from the military regime. Suddenly too, some members of the other ethnic groups in Nigeria became interested in acquiring the Ogoni language to earn themselves exit from the country. Furthermore, the luck, even of English in its rise today is not necessarily that it is the language of the world's former leading economy, the British Empire. Rather, its fortune consists in its being the language of two successive leading world economies – the British, then the American. Even then, the rising profile of the American dialect over the years from its former humbler status is a reflection of the rise in the political and economic importance of the United States. Were America and Britain to be represented by two different languages, so would the U. S. language have been gradually eclipsing Britain's. Any language community, minority or majority that wants its language to survive and grow must therefore enrich it in other aspects of life as well, in addition to government's language policy guaranteeing its use in education and government.

3. The third suggestion, which is towards enforcing the second one, is directed at the notion that some languages are incapable of conveying or expressing scientific and technical terms. For, as Dr. Hyder notes, "Examination of any technical or scientific journal in English, French, German, Russian, or Chinese shows clearly that such technical terms are really international in usage" (Mazrui and Mazrui, 1995:25). It follows that such terms can be adopted and adapted into any other language, African, Asian, or European. This was how the English language had enriched itself with terms from Latin and French, following the Norman Conquest. Such borrowing of lexical items does not endanger the life of the borrowing language since, linguistically speaking, a language loses its identity only when it borrows its syntax and sounds from another. Language groups which want to develop their languages are therefore encouraged to borrow freely from other languages irrespective of whether such lending languages are of the classical heritage, African, Asian, the Caribbean or Latin American.

These suggestions need to be urgently considered as a necessary condition for the health of nationhood within the present framework of multiculturalism and globalisation if these frameworks are not to become the burial sites for the languages, cultures and other resources of the less developed societies.

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