

Ihafa: A Journal of African Studies 11: 1
June 2020, 239-255

Towards the Globalization of Language and Culture in Nigeria: Stakeholders, the State and Action Steps

Chuka Chukwube
University of Lagos

Abstract

The word globalization and what it stands for is no longer a novel idea in the world of today. However, there is still no universal definition of globalization. This has led to erroneous interchangeable use of the word with internationalization and liberalization. Suffice it therefore to say that globalization is the transcendence of the economic, political, environmental, social and cultural constraints across territories. The task of this paper, essentially, is to ascertain the level of involvement of Africa via Nigeria in this new international economic power and order. This is necessary because Nigeria, particularly, has become a good consumer of information technology which is an essential ingredient of globalization. The issue then is how prepared are Nigerian languages in the challenges of information technology as demanded by globalization. Many relevant materials

Chuka Chukwube, PhD.
Department of European Languages, University of Lagos, Nigeria
Phone: +234 803 322 4599; E-mail: chukachukwube15@gmail.com

were perused with a view to ascertain Nigeria's extent of preparedness in making Nigerian languages globalization compliant. The study observed that though Nigeria, vis-à-vis Africa, has been making frantic efforts in the development of its indigenous languages, a lot is still needed because of the obvious dynamism of globalization. It concludes that though Nigerian indigenous languages are very vital in this context, the study of other foreign languages like Russian, German, Arabic, and Chinese, apart from English and French, should be encouraged and supported. This is based on the understanding that the wider the scope of knowledge of other vital foreign languages, the better.

Keywords: globalization; internationalization; culture; languages; liberalization

1. Introduction

For a clearer understanding of the significance of globalization in Africa in general and in Nigeria in particular, two premises are identified and explored. The first premise is to realize that today's globalization is actually not the first stage of outside invasion of Africa which has not only affected African integral development, but also had negative consequences on the continent. Indeed, globalization can correctly be considered as the *fourth stage*.

In analysing these stages, Henriot (2000) held that the first stage was the period of slavery, during which the continent's most precious resources, African women and men, were stolen away by global traders, slavers, and made to work for the benefit of Arab, European and North American countries. It is estimated that about ten million people were forcefully transported out of the continent

for that purpose. The second stage was the period of colonialism, when British, French, Belgium, Portuguese, Italian and German interests dictated the way to map boundaries, with transportation and communication lines established, agricultural and mineral resources exploited, and religious and cultural patterns introduced. The third stage called *neo-colonialism* which, according to him, Pope John Paul II called the form of political pressures and economic suzerainty, aimed at maintaining or acquiring dominance. The fourth stage is globalization, characterized by an integration of the economies of the world through trade and financial flows, technology and information exchanges, and movement of people.

The second premise, which is the main point of discourse, is globalization. This in the views of Henriot is not working for the benefit of the majority of Africans today. He insists that while globalization has increased opportunities for economic growth and development in some areas, there has been an increase in disparities, and inequalities being experienced in Africa.

While reviewing the analysis and views of Henriot, the task in this paper is to determine the level of development and otherwise of languages of globalization in Africa vis-à-vis Nigeria, and to analyse how the seeming lack of development of Nigeria and indeed Africa is hindering them from benefiting materially from the gains of globalization. Thereafter, we would review the impact of globalization on African economy, politics, culture and technological innovation.

This leads us to the question of whether Nigeria has a language or languages that are developed or otherwise. Nigeria is a country made up of large number of independent nationalities. Emenanjo (2001) states that the exact number of the primordial

nationalities to be found in Nigeria is not known given language shift. Equally unknown is the precise number of languages spoken by these nationalities. It is not arguable that Nigeria is a sociolinguistic giant. According to Ferguson (1965), Nigeria holds within her international boundaries a multiplicity of linguistic and ethnic families which present a fascinating example of linguistic heterogeneity with a picturesque mosaic of some 394 distinct languages. In his own study Osaji (1979) submits that the population of Nigeria, which increases by over a million every eighteen months, is almost entirely African belonging to some three hundred and sixty-eight (368) linguistic groups the principal ones being Fulani, Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba. On the level of development of these main languages, Ferguson (1968) is of the opinion that Nigerian languages are at varying stages of development; from purely local, pre-literate or oral languages to written, national and regional languages with varying corpora of written literatures among other types of texts.

The importance of language in national development cannot be over emphasized. Chumbo (1990) says that the role of the language used as medium of instruction in the educational process is very important because the effectiveness of the educational or training programme depends on whether effective communication has taken place between the teacher and the learner. Thus, education by means of an appropriate language medium provides knowledge, skills and value necessary for man to become an effective agent of change. Much on this, however, would be discussed in the section on language policy of Nigeria in the later part of this work.

Making further clarification on language use in Nigeria, Emenanjo (2001) maintains that they are classified in different ways with different parameters and for different reasons or purposes citing the examples of Adekunle (1972), Osaji (1979), Brann (1977), Olagoke (1980), Williamson (1983), and Emenanjo (1985, 1986). After modifying the classifications of Williamson (1983) and Brann (1986), he came up with the following five broad groups of languages being used in Nigeria:

- i. the “foreign” or ‘exoglossic” languages (or “exolects” or “endolects”); English in its continuum, French and Arabic;
- ii. the “very large” or “decamillionaires” (or “demolects”, i.e. languages spoken by more than ten million people); Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba and Nigerian Pidgin;
- iii. the “large” languages or “millionaires” (or “demolects”, i.e. languages spoken by more than one million people); Edo (Bini), Ibibio, Fulfulde, Izon, Kanuri, Nupe and Tiv;
- iv. the “medium” languages or “centimils” or “ethnolects”, i.e. languages spoken by more than 100,000 people); Idoma North, Nembe, Igala, Urhobo, Bokwai, Kalabari, Ngas, Abuan, Bekwarra, Ebira, Ekejuk, Efik, Kha, Engenni, Junkun or Talcun, Bura, Mambilla, Kaje; and
- v. the “small” languages (or “chtonolects”, i.e. languages spoken by less than 10,000 people) and all other languages used in Nigeria but not listed in (i) – (iv).

Further classifications made on “minorities” or “minor” languages by Agheyisi (1986) show that “minor” languages number about 380

and are “spoken by about 20% of the total national population. She therefore classified Nigerian languages as follows:

- i. the “developed languages” i.e. those with well-established orthographies, standard varieties, long traditions of writing, large and varied corpora of written texts and sophisticated and dynamic metalanguages. Three languages, the decamillionaires belong here;
- ii. the “developing” languages, i.e. those with recent but settling orthographies, fairly recent traditions of writing, incipient standard varieties, some number of written texts and nascent metalanguages. Included in this class are all the millionaires, some of the continents and most of the minorities and
- iii. the “undeveloped” languages, i.e. those that have no standard(ized) orthographies, universally accepted within the culture areas, no standard varieties, no written texts and no metalanguages. Nigerian languages not covered in (i) and (ii) belong here.

It is imperative to refer to these analyses not only to understand the linguistic complexity of the country but also to point out the sociolinguistic profiles of the respective languages with a view to determining the preparedness of the so-called national languages to meet the challenges of globalization. For any country to conveniently and adequately compete in this new world order, it must prove how serious her indigenous languages (and cultures) are developed and used as media of communication in daily living, academic and scientific discourses. According to Emenanjo (2001),

English can help us realize all the fundamental objectives – political, economic, social and educational – of the Nigerian nation. Unfortunately, English is an elitist language spoken in all its elects by not up to 20 percent of the Nigerian population. Therefore, English cannot be the language of mobilization in Nigeria and in Africa because of the low percentage of its users. Study has shown that the few creative works written in the writer's native languages attracted more mass mobilization than ones written in English and French. Notable among such works are Ngugi Wa 'Thiongo's creative works in Gikuyu, the Wolof films of Sambene Oasmane, and Herbert Ogunde's *Yoruba Ronu*. Apart from this revelation, many Africans consider works written in the language of the colonialists or neo-colonialists as *petit bourgeois* luxuries out of the reach of the common man.

Commenting on the need to develop Nigerian national languages, Emenanjo (2001) further expressed his anticipation:

we do hope that the people we are looking forward to, in Nigeria, to perform the magic of technological transfer are not people who know a little English and less Nigerian languages. Before people think we are being mawkish, and stupidly sentimental about the potentials of Nigerian languages as agents of change and national development, we need to once again emphasize the point that good citizenship, creative and responsible citizenry and a technologically sensitive polity can only be realized if the hoi polloi are spoken to and taught in their indigenous languages and not in the exoglossic norm languages of bureaucracy.

Scholars like Emenanjo, using all available channels, have succeeded in drawing the attention of the Nigerian government to the formation of a national policy on education. After all, no country ever develops with a foreign language. Agreeing with this notion, Banjo (1995) says that the choice of a national language is, in turn, expected not only to do a lot for the national psyche but also facilitate national mobilization for development which, in turn, will enhance the production of more wealth and launch the nation into the world's top league of developed nation. In order to ascertain the efforts of the Nigerian government in making her national languages globalization compliant, the review of the Nigerian National Policy on Languages becomes imperative.

2. National Policy on Languages

In spite of all the clamour and seeming importance of a national language or languages for national development and global interactions, Nigeria is yet to have a well-articulated *de jure* national language policy that is contained in one document. However, government's views on this important issue can be found in a number of national documents such as the *Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria* (1999) Chapter II Section 55 subsection 97, the *Government Views and Comments on the Findings of the Recommendations of the Political Bureau*, (1987: 62-3), and the *National Policy on Education* (1998: 9), paragraph 14.

The language policy recognises the multi-dimensional, multi-ethnic, and, ipso facto, the multi-lingual, three-tiered political polity of Nigeria. The policy also provides for:

- i. Mother-Tongue (L₁MT) and/or Language of the Immediate Community (LIC) as the language of initial literacy and of adult and non-formal education;
- ii. The three major (national) languages – Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba as L₂ – as the languages of national culture and integration;
- iii. English – the official language – as the language of formal literacy, the bureaucracy, secondary and higher education, the law courts, etc.;
- iv. Selected foreign languages, especially, French even if now a second official language, and Arabic, as languages of international communication and discourse for which the Federal Government has approved the setting up of “Language Villages”.

In terms of the unstated policy, the policy on languages:

- i. advocates multilingualism as the national goal;
- ii. recognizes English as the de facto official language in the bureaucracy and all tiers of formal education, and to which French is now a co-official language;
- iii. treats Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba as potential national languages which are to be developed and used as L₁ and L₂ all through the formal educational system; all Nigerian languages as meaningful media of instruction in initial literacy and in life-long and non-formal education.

Chapter II Section 22 of the *Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria* (1999) stipulates that Government shall promote the

learning of indigenous languages. Section 22 provides that “the state shall protect, preserve, and promote the Nigerian cultures which enhance human dignity and are consistent with the fundamental objectives as provided in the chapter”, i.e. the Chapter on “Fundamental Objective and Directives principles of State Policy”. Section 58 of the Constitution clearly states that,

the business of the National Assembly shall be conducted in English and in Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba when adequate arrangements have been made thereof.

In the case of the House of Assembly, the Constitution in Section 100 provides that,

the business of the House of Assembly shall be conducted in English, but the House may, in addition to English, conduct the business of the House in one or more other languages spoken in the State as the House may by resolution approve.

Widdowson (1971) holds that in planning a language course, factors such as the special purpose, time, type of pupil and size of class for which the language is to be planned must be considered. According to Taiwo (2001), the first attempt towards solving Nigerian language problems was by Mallam Balla of Adamawa constituency in 1961, when he urged the then National Assembly to employ the use of the three major languages namely, Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba as medium of communication of the house.

The objective of the government in formulating this policy is to preserve people’s culture and National Unity. The aim was

also to evolve a lingua franca for Nigeria. Many Nigerians are of the opinion that Nigeria should not only have political independence but language independence also. They pick holes in using English as the country's lingua franca because, as Africans, we do not think in English. More so, language and culture are inseparable and, therefore, to avoid overriding influence in our culture, an indigenous language is preferred.

There is no gainsaying the fact that the influence of foreign language(s) has adversely affected Nigerian culture. This ranges from the mode of dressing to general attitude to life. Nigerian youths with unquenchable appetite have copied everything European to the detriment of her known norms and ways of life. The use of indigenous languages in private and public places is discouraged and anybody using them is downgraded and considered as either semi or downright illiterate. This attitude has not even changed at schools especially at the early stages of primary and secondary schools where pupils are chastised and sometimes fined for "speaking in vernacular". This has jeopardized the efforts toward developing our indigenous language and has gone contrary to the Nigerian Language Policy which encourages the use of such languages at those levels of learning and in public places.

This trend should be of concern to Nigerian linguists in particular and all other Nigerians because if it is not halted early enough, we all will be losers. Nigeria has become a good consumer of information technology. And this is an essential ingredient of globalization. As we pointed out earlier, with Nigeria continuing to "think English", her hopes to tap all the benefits of new information technology embodied in globalization remains a ruse.

Technological innovation has given concreteness to globalization. Global reach has been achieved by innovations in telecommunications, computerization, air travels, etc. Through its website, it is possible for a company to create big markets irrespective of where it is located in the world. Also, millions of different currencies exchange hands between business individuals and organizations in any part of the world through electronic transfers. Through website also, information about international conferences can be sought without one having to travel. With globalization, there are no longer country differences but customer and people differences because borders have been transcended. It is however important to realize that the extent to which a country can participate in the global market depends on its technological capacity. With Nigeria's technical backwardness and inability to fully develop her national languages which is the bedrock for its human development, there is fear at the level of preparedness of the country for globalization.

At this juncture, it is important to say that today's globalization is fast developing beyond the level that only knowing English and French are adequate. Although the emphasis here is on development of Nigerian language/languages, the advantages of knowing other foreign languages like Russian, German, Chinese, Arabic, etc. cannot be overemphasized.

Attention should also be drawn to the effect of globalization on the cultural life of Nigeria vis-à-vis Africa. Akindele and Ate (2000) have argued that, with globalization, there is the tendency that cultural differences between countries and their people are deemphasized in their interactions. In other words, the culture that will permit globalization to take place will be one that is supra-state

to which no country, nor group of people, can lay claim. In view of this opinion, the question then is whether this does augur well for Nigerian and African cultures? Obviously, the answer is, no. People are never isolated from their inherent cultures. If globalization can remodel, for example, a Nigerian to be a Nigerian in outlook but an American or European in attitude, one cannot agree less that globalization reinforces cultural imperialism – one of the crimes of colonialism. Henriot (2001) argues that traditional African cultures emphasize values such as community, family, respect of life, and hospitality, which is now strongly confronted by the values communicated through Western music, movies, videos, cable and satellite television, advertisements, and the idolized figures of entertainment and sports. If all peoples must jealously guard and defend their cultures, therefore, checks on infiltration of these external negative influences must be strictly mounted.

3. Prospects of Developing Nigerian Languages for Globalization

Emenanjo (2001) correctly observed that the future of Nigeria as a strong, indivisible and virile African nation unencumbered by the many trappings of neo-colonialism lies, to some extent, with how seriously her indigenous languages (and cultures) are developed. Important also is the extent of their usage as media of communication in our work-a-day lives, academic and scientific discourses. As earlier stated, English can help to realize all the fundamental objectives, be it political, economic, social and educational, of the Nigerian nation. This expectation, however, is not fully realized as English is an elastic language spoken in all its lects by not up to 20 percent of the Nigerian population. Therefore, the only option left for the country is absolute resolve to develop

the indigenous languages and make them usable not only nationally but globally. This is a task before linguists and scientists. The idea of seeing users of the indigenous languages as inferiors should be unequivocally condemned. Efforts must be convincingly made by policy makers of the country that the national languages are used in wider scope than it is presently being done. It is quite commendable the initiative of the renowned scientists, Mr. Leo Ekeh, who produced a brand of computer with the naira sign in the keyboard. Many Nigerians are impatiently waiting for more of such innovations. It is only through such challenges that the languages, cultures and peoples of Nigeria can be gradually brought into limelight to fully measure up with globalization.

There should be a national sociolinguistic survey of Nigeria. The exercise will enable Nigerians to know the actual number of languages both Nigerian and others in use in the country. Other vital information about the languages must be garnered with respect to their locations, indigenous and pejorative names, the number of the people that speak them with regard to L₁, L₂, L₃, the extent and degree of their usage in formal education, electronic and print media, law courts, etc. The importance of this was pointed out by Ferguson (1966) and Whitely (1973) who insisted that no meaningful language planning can go in any country, without a reliable sociolinguistic survey in the same way that no meaningful socio-economic planning can go on without a reliable census.

The data from this survey should therefore help in putting in place a more realistic and comprehensive language policy for the country. Further steps must be taken to have the policy contents put together in one document. This will encourage strict adherence and easy referencing. The task of developing indigenous languages of

the country must be a responsibility of both the federal, state and local governments, including educational establishments at all levels. More institutes for Nigerian languages should be established in the country to enable all that need them have ready access. In the interim, the ones in existence should be well funded. Furthermore, awareness campaign should be created on the existence of the institutes and they should be made open/assessable to all who might need their services.

4. Conclusion

One can emphatically say that there are prospects for growth and development of Nigeria's national languages. The action steps outlined in this study, if judiciously adopted, will in no distant time place Nigerian languages in world's collection of useful and usable languages. By then, globalization will be more meaningful not only to Nigeria, but Africa. Meanwhile, it is suggested that more institutions of Nigerian languages be established in the country for wider coverage. Again, while the emphasis is on development of Nigerian languages, knowledge of other foreign languages apart from English and French should be encouraged as the dynamism of globalization is getting wider in dimension.

References

- Adekunle, M. A. (1972) "Multilingualism and Language Function", *Nigeria African Studies Review* 15, 2:185-207.
- Akindele, R. A. and B. E. Ate (2000) "Selected Readings on Foreign Policy and International Relations", *NIIA Enlightenment Course Series* Vol.1, Number 1.
- Banjo, A. (1995) "On Codifying Nigerian English: Research so Far", Bamgbose, A.; Banjo, A. and A. Thomas (eds.) *New Englishes: A West African Perspective* pp. 67-80, Ibadan: Mosuro.
- Brann, C. M. B. (1977) "Language Planning for Education in the 80s: Some Demographic, Linguistic and Areal Factors", Bamgbose, A. (ed.) *Language in Education in Nigeria: Proceedings of the Language Symposium Vol. 1*, 47-61.
- Brann, C. M. B. (1986) *The Role and Function of Language in Government in Nigeria* (Mimeo).
- Brann, C. M. B. (1989) "Lingua Minor, Franca and Nationalist", U. Ammon *Status and Function of Languages and Language Varieties* pp. 372-385, Berlin and New York: Walder de Gruyter.
- Chumbow, B. S. (1982) "Discovering the Link between National Development, Education and Language", B. S. Chumbow (ed.) *National Development, Education and Language in Southern Africa* pp. 241-257.
- Chumbow, B. S. (1990) "The Place of the Mother Tongue in the National Policy on Education", N. Emenanjo (ed.) *Multilingualism, Minority Languages and Language Policy in Nigeria*, Agbor: Central Books Limited.
- Constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999).

- Emenanjo, E. N. (1986) "Language and the National Question: Multilingualism as a National Asset in Nigeria", paper read at the Seminar on the National Question in Nigeria: Its Historical Origin and Contemporary Dimension. Abuja, August 3-9, 1986.
- Emenanjo, E. N. (ed.) (1990) "Multilingualism Minority Languages and Language Policy in Nigeria", *Linguistic Association of Nigeria in Association with Central Books*, Agbor.
- Emenanjo, E. N. (2001a) "Multilingualism: Asset or Liability", Keynote Address at the 10th Modern Languages Association Conference held at Nigerian French Language Village. October 26-29, 2001.
- Emenanjo, E. N. (2001b) "How Many Nigerian Languages Are There?: Issues on the Definition and Identification of Language (mimeo).
- Ferguson, C. (1966) "National Sociolinguistic Profile Formulas", W. Bright (ed.) 309-323.
- Ferguson, C. (1968) "Language Development", Fishman et al. (eds.) *Journal of Applied Behavioural Science*, pp. 27-36.
- Henriot, P. J. (2000) Globalization: Implication for Africa, <http://www.sedos.org/english/global.html>
- Olagoke, D. O. (1980) "Lexical Deviation in Nigerian English", *JLAC Vol. 2, No. 3 & 4*, pp. 35-57.
- Osaji, D. (1979) *Language Survey in Nigeria*, Quebec: ICRD Publications.
- Taiwo, O. (2001) "Trends in English Literary Studies in Nigerian Universities", unpublished monograph.
- Williamson, K. (1983) *Practical Orthography in Nigeria*, Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books (Nigeria) Limited.