The Implantation of Western Individualism in the Teaching of Kinship Terms to Nigerian Students

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Abstract

This paper is a contribution to the argument that teaching a language to non-native speakers may translate into cannibalization on the learner's culture if the teaching is not made environment-sensitive. The paper also points out how, in an apparently innocuous manner, this process can result in a major shift in the worldview and life ways of the people. The paper derives from the personal experience of my initial exposure to English kinship terms in a second language situation in Nigeria, in which our African cultural peculiarities were not taken into consideration. It thus presents the contrasts between the 'Received Meanings' of selected kinship terms and their meanings in the Nigerian cultural milieu, and shows the grave wider implications of imposing 'Received Meanings' on the non-native African learner. It suggests that the teaching of English in the non-native environment be made malleable to the various functional domains of the language, including especially the cultural peculiarities of the learner if the much-cherished global cultural pluralism is to be sustained.

Introduction

This paper originates essentially from personal experience in the early days of my exposure to English kinship terms at the primary school in Nigeria, where English is a second and official language. We had been

taught in the then Civics class in the late 1960s (now Social Studies at the primary and junior secondary levels, and Citizenship Education, etc., at the tertiary level) that the father was the head of the family. In the multiple-choice examination that came at the end of the term, one of the questions went thus: "The … is the head of the family: (a) mother (b) father (c) grandfather (d) uncle". I settled for option "c", which was "grandfather", and I was 'rightly' marked wrong. Other kinship terms were similarly taught to us in their strict 'Received Meaning' contexts without any reference to the existence of our different African understanding and applications of the terms, let alone helping us to embrace and use the two versions in their different but appropriate situations in spite of the fundamental differences between the two systems, as will be seen in this paper.

My failing this question became a long-lasting source of contemplation. I was not totally convinced, even then, that I was wrong and the teacher was right. Recently, when I reflected on the large-scale shift of many educated, especially middle and upper class Nigerians from pre-colonial system of African communalism to the Western-type individualism, it became clear to me that the difference between the primary school teacher's preferred option for head of the family and mine was not a simple and innocuous teacher-pupil palaver. It was the beginning of a conscious and systematic operation of cultural imperialism, which spells a predatory grip of the colonizer's culture on that of the colonized, and which has now been given the more decent-sounding name of cultural globalization. Making us, young Nigerian pupils then, to accept that the father was the head of the family even where a grandfather still existed, was to adjust us away from our African ways of life to the ways of life of those whose language, English, was the medium of instruction in the school. This point hardly needs any explication to those who know the enclitic relationship between language and society, especially as it is being studied either as sociolinguistics in the humanities or as the sociology of language in the social sciences. This early encounter with these kinship terms, "father" and "grandfather", their differences in describing the African world of my youth, and certain subsequent manifestations in the social and economic life of my Nigerian society of today, are thus the motivation

for this discourse. It follows, therefore, that many of the illustrations and examples in the paper will be drawn from introspection since I write from personal experience as a member of this preyed-upon culture.

Kinship terms, generally, constitute a nexus between social studies (or sociology/anthropology) and linguistics. While these represent concepts describing society's units in social studies or sociology and anthropology, they also feature in semantics and sociolinguistics, both of which are aspects of linguistics. Accordingly, to accept the 'Received Meanings' of these terms is to accept the Received notion of the terms as units of one's society. Approaching this subject from the linguistic flank, this paper is an additional voice in the argument that teaching a language to non-native speakers needs to be made sensitive to the physical and cultural environments of the learner to avoid this tendency of one culture cannibalizing on another or others. Before examining the differences between the 'Received Meanings' of kinship terms and their meanings in the Nigerian cultural milieu, it is necessary to expatiate further on the relationship between language and society as the basis for the succeeding discussion.

Language and society

The relationship between language and society, or between language and culture, has been so explored and with so much done and written on it that it appears there is nothing new to say on the subject. Yet, it is always a necessary springboard to the presentation of any fresh insights on the subject. Echoes of this relationship appear in as early a work as Dr. Samuel Johnson's *A Dictionary of the English Language*, in which preface the author remarks, "for it is incident to words, as to their authors, to degenerate from their ancestors, and to change their manners when they change their country" (Johnson, 1755). The significance of this statement is that even such a purist of English as Dr. Samuel Johnson did recognize the fact that "words" must "change their manners when they change their country", or, in our present discourse, their environment. After Johnson, anthropologists Frantz Boaz, Edward Sapir, Benjamin

Lee Whorf (who was not, though, an anthropologist by training), and Bronislaw Malinowski were later to emerge with various studies, which concretized the mutual relationship between language and culture, or language and society. Malinowski's student, J.R. Firth, was later to develop on his teacher's findings to become a major pioneer contributor to today's studies in sociolinguistics. Edward Sapir's findings were also built upon by his later disciple, Benjamin Lee Whorf, and a combination of their contributions became the well known Sapir/Whorf hypothesis of linguistic relativity and determinism. The major difference between these earlier studies mainly by anthropologists and subsequent ones by such linguists as William Labov, Peter Trudgill, R.A. Hudson, Joshua Fishman and Uriel Weinreich is that the earlier studies emphasized the nexus between language and society as wholes, while the subsequent ones stressed on the internal structure of language phenomena as replicating social structure.

While these pioneering anthropological and linguistic investigations looked at the connections between language and society as non-ideological, unmarked entities, some of the subsequent studies examined language as a tool that can be manipulated by members of the society to achieve certain political, economic and cultural ends. In the aspect of culture, for example, even Sapir had noted, "language dose not exist apart from culture, that is, from the socially inherited assemblage of practices and beliefs that determine the texture of our lives (1949b: 7; see also 1949a: 34)." Ankie Hoogvelt's assertion, "No society can successfully dominate another without the diffusion of its cultural patterns and social institutions (1978:109)," further validates this point. For imperialist Britain and her proxies in the colonies, therefore, the English language as a bearer of English culture was a veritable tool in the linguistic and cultural cannibalization of the colonized peoples in order to keep them in the empire's control in perpetuity.

This cannibalization seemed to have followed the same pattern in the different places that Britain exercised imperial control. The Kenyan writer, Ngugi Wa Thiong'O, for instance, recollects the experiences of his generation as pupils in the hands of British teachers whenever they were caught speaking an African language:

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 waste paper basket, which were then passed from one mouth to that of the latest offender. Humiliation in relation to our language was the key. (1993: 33)

And from colonial India, the Indian sage, Mahatma Gandhi, maintains similarly, "If any boy spoke in Gujarati which he understood, he was punished (1969: 140)". The situation was not different in Nigeria. Indeed, here, punishments of this sort are still being meted out by Nigerian teachers to students whose tongues 'stray' into their mother tongue at school, some forty-eight years after the nation's independence. These punishments today include caning of, paying of fines, and cutting of grass by, the 'offenders'. It is in this kind of environment, where teaching and learning are done in utter contempt for, and disregard of, the cultural peculiarities of the learners that such conflicts as between the 'Received Meanings' and the roles of kinship terms, and the non-native learners' understanding of the same terms would arise.

Africans and the English are different in many ways, one of which is in their various languages and cultures. Africa has very many different indigenous languages, and each of these differs from English in its own peculiar ways. Northern Cross River State of Nigeria, where I was born into, for instance, has a multiplicity of distinct languages and many more dialects. Even each of these clusters of neighbouring languages and dialects would relate to the English in its own unique ways in the aspects of syntax, phonology, lexis and meaning, let alone the whole 500 or so languages said to exist in Nigeria. For this reason our discussion here will draw heavily on the resources of the Bette-Bendi language, which I am most conversant with, for examples and illustrations. In this Bantu language, the expressions "sorry" and "it's a pity", for example, have clearly different meanings from what they have in English. In Bette-Bendi, and indeed in many Nigerian languages, the differences between these two expressions are not explained on the basis of the agentive, that is, in terms of who inflicted the pain on the sufferer but on the basis of whether the injury to the victim has to do with his/her physical body or with general non-physical vicissitudes

of life. Similarly, pronominalisation in this Nigerian language is also quite different from what we have in English, and each language, of course, reflects its speakers' value systems and worldviews. But while these differences and several others do exist between the various individual African languages and English, there is quite some reasonable consonance among sub-Saharan African languages in their meanings and applications of kinship terms, all of which depart from their 'Received English' meanings. The following discussion of Bette-Bendi kinship terms and their Received English Meanings would therefore also reflect the situation between the Yoruba, a major Nigerian language, and English.

English and Bette-Bendi kinship terms

Trudgill (1983: 27) notes:

> …the social environment can also be reflected in a language, and can often have an effect on the structure of the vocabulary. For example, a society's kinship system is generally reflected in its kinship vocabulary, for example, that the important kin relationships in English-speaking societies are those that are signaled by single vocabulary items; son, daughter, grandson, grandfather, brother, sister, father, mother, husband, wife, granddaughter, grandmother, uncle, aunt, cousin.

But, in their work, *The Sociology and Politics of English in Nigeria* (1999: 7-9), Akindele and Adegbite present the following picture of kinship terms in Yoruba:

> In Yoruba, kin relationship is signaled by father, mother, grandfather, brother, grandmother, sister and no distinction is made between aunt and uncle, nephew and niece, and cousin. They are not reflected in the Yoruba lexicon. This shows the difference between English and Yoruba.

The two authors then present the following as the meanings of father, mother, and sister in Yoruba:

FATHER: father, uncle, male cousin of parent;
MOTHER: mother, aunt, female cousin of parent;
BROTHER: brother, uncle, nephew, male cousin of parent;
SISTER: sister, aunt, niece, female cousin of parent.

The situation in Bette-Bendi follows the Yoruba pattern to a great extent but departs from it in some aspects. The Bette-Bendi expression "unwai indeye/unwa andagi" translates directly into English as "child of my mother". The "child" may be male or female, and may not necessarily share a mother or even father or grandfather with the speaker. This expression is what represents English "brother", "sister" or "cousin" in Bette-Bendi. And in Bette-Bendi, unlike in Yoruba as shown above, one's niece or nephew is subsumed under "daughter" or "son". In other words, the terms come under "child", not "brother" or "sister" because the niece or nephew is considered one step lower in the family's hierarchical structure. However, as Akindele and Adegbite have said of Yoruba, there is also no distinction between "brother" and "sister" in Bette-Bendi. Following the format provided by the two Yoruba-speaking authors, we now present the Bette-Bendi meanings of kinship terms:

FATHER: father, uncle, male cousin of parent, age mate of father, any member of one's community old enough to beget one;
MOTHER: mother, aunt, female cousin of parent, age mate of mother, any female member of one's community old enough to beget one;
BROTHER: brother (no distinction between full-blooded and step-brother), male/female cousin, any male/female member of one's community of same age range as one;
SISTER: sister, (no distinction between full-blooded and step-sister), male/female cousin, any male/female member of one's community of same age range as one;
CHILD: daughter, son, nephew, niece, cousin young enough to be one's biological son, any member of one's community young enough to be one's biological child.

In addition to these meanings it is necessary to accord special attention to the terms "father" and "grandfather" in Bette-Bendi.

"Father" and "grandfather" in Bette-Bendi

In the Bette-Bendi pre-colonial world (which life ways overlapped the early colonial period and even beyond in some cases), the grandfather was known and addressed as "Ibibai", "Abba", "Adidah" or "Adah", which meant "Lord". He was the head of the family and under him were his children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, nephews, nieces, grandnephews, grandnieces and younger cousins and brothers and sisters. Indeed, in most cases the whole community called such a "lord" simply by any one of these titles. This explains why in this world there was no single vocabulary item for "father" in the sense in which we had "ibibai", "Abba" "Adidah" or "Adah". The same went for the female equivalents, which were "Iya" or "Iye", which stood for "mother": these actually referred to the female equivalent of "Lord" and not direct, biological mother of one. Children, generally, called their fathers or mothers by their first names (mothers by the new names they were given by their husbands on getting married), and called them by any of these grandfather's titles only if the gap in age between parent and child was wide enough for grandchild-grandfather time frame. As such it was very common for a man's older children to call him by his first name while the much younger ones called him "Ibibai", "Abba", Adidah" or "Adah". Where one's grandfather was still alive, one's direct father was seen more as a "big" brother than as a father without, of course disrespecting the father. The grandfather remained the head of his family, and the family (or compound) continued to take orders and instructions and advice from him even when he had become so weak that he now depended on these younger ones for his sustenance. And since polygamy was the norm, no distinction of kinship differences on the basis of motherhood by such terms as half-sister or half-brother existed.

In this we now see the differences between the 'Received Meanings' and applications of English "father" and "grandfather", and their meanings and applications in the non-native Bette-Bendi environment.

These differences are very fundamental because the terms stand for the different ideologies of two different human societies. "Father" is the head of the family in the Western nuclear family sense while "grandfather" is the head of the family in the African extended family sense. The Western ***nuclear*** family is the smallest unit of a Western society, which places emphasis on individualism, while the African ***extended*** family system is the smallest unit of an African society, which places emphasis on ***communalism***. This also explains why the meanings and applications of kinship terms in Africa appear infinitely elastic. Thus, a Kenyan and Nigerian or Ghanaian or Cameroonian or South African who meet outside Africa would consider one another "brothers" or "sisters" or "father" and "son" without meaning to be fraudulent. The 'Received Meanings' of most kinship terms therefore simply dissolve into something else once they arrive from their native environments. It is for this reason that making an African child to adjust to the English meanings of these words in his/her own environment is tantamount to feeding his/her language and culture into the mouth of another language and culture.

Perhaps we should throw some more light on what we mean by African communalism. According to the African scholar, John S. Mbiti, "…a person does not exist all by himself; he exists because of the existence of other people." The philosophical formula about this says, "I am because we are, and since we are therefore I am (1975: 102)." He further elucidates (1975: 109):

> For the African peoples the family includes children, parents, grandparents, and other relatives such as brothers, sisters, cousins and so on. All relatives have duties and responsibilities towards one another. Everyone knows how he is related to other people in the clan and neighbourhood. The idea of the family also extends to include the departed, as well as those who are about to be born …. The individual does not exist just alone: he exists because others exist. He must, therefore, play his full role in that interdependence of existence.

In the Bette-Bendi world, the ideology of communalism is articulated in these short poetic lines:

> If it's a kernel we find
> Let us share it among us all;
> If a palm nut we find
> Let us share it among us all;
> One mouth's itching for excess
> Would lead to witchcraft.

In addition, there are several other epigrammatic sayings which underlie this philosophy, just three of which are:

1. Rejoice if you are hailed as one rich in people.
2. The river went alone, and hence, flows crookedly
3. The duck fowl says when they behold one another as group, nothing but the pride of kindredhood follows, demonstrated by their jerking of necks.

And from the Igbo, also of Nigeria, the elderly character, Uchendu, in Chinua Achebe's novel, *Things Fall Apart,* expresses this communal ethos as follows: "We do not pray to have more money but to have more kinsmen. We are better than animals because we have kinsmen. An animal rubs its aching flank against a tree, a man asks his kinsmen to scratch him (1958: 117)." And it is this same vision that the Yoruba-speaking leading Nigerian poet, Niyi Osundare, had in mind when he entitled a recent poem, *People are my clothes.* In these examples, therefore, we find manifestations of African communalism, which contrasts with Western individualism, where a family begins with a direct biological father and ends with the direct biological children.

It is, hence, only logical that as the African society begins at the extended family and ends in communalism with elastic meanings and applications of kinship terms, so does a typical Western society begin at the nuclear family and end in individualism, which is a fertile ground for the capitalist ideology. It is, therefore, no innocuous teacher-pupil palaver when an African child is made to accept that the father, rather

than the grandfather, is head of the family. It is a conscious laying of the foundation for a major shift in the social ideology and vision of that child and his/her society.

Forty years later: The national language policy and the realities

Forty years or so today, since my days as a primary school pupil in the late 1960s, no discerning mind who is genuinely interested in the affairs of Nigeria would doubt that the country's flag independence, which was proclaimed on October 1, 1960, has failed; nor would anyone fail to see that the nation has lapsed back into the more lethal grip of Nigerian comprador-politicians under a merchant capitalism that derives its supplies of goods from the industrial capitalisms abroad. Operating under the healthy-sounding name, 'Reforms', the government has indeed progressively deformed the economy by auctioning the nation's enterprises to various foreign interests and the local compradoriat on the advice of the Breton Woods international finance institutions. This has brought the Nigerian economy in line with the rest of the current world economic structure where 80% of the nation's wealth is in the hands of 5% to 20% of the population, while the majority languishes in penury, disease, illiteracy, unemployment and hunger. Indeed, until very recently in Nigeria, as in some other underdeveloped economies, more of the annual budget went into the servicing of the nation's debts to the Breton Woods institutions than to the provision of basic social services, such as health care, education, food production and technological development of the country.

The neo-colonial character of the economy, interestingly, replicates in the failure of the successive neo-colonial governments of the country to evolve a language and cultural policy that would address the implantation of Western individualism and culture that we witnessed in our school system in the days of colonialism and immediately after. As such, in the characteristic nexus praxis that holds between language use and society, these changes in the once-polycommunal society's social and cultural patterns have replicated in the structure of language use in Nigeria, especially the English language, and in particular, kinship terms. In the first place, one consequence of this new economic profile

is that the traditional middle class has generally collapsed into the lower class with just a few of its membership escaping into the upper, super-rich class, commonly through stealing from the public treasury once one holds a political office. Following this, the few remnants of the middle class who still have access to some means of survival have had to cut down on their social responsibilities to the lower class members of their extended families or communities. Instead, they now cater to only the members of their nuclear families in line with the individualism-based nuclear family system of Western societies.

This new order reflects in the Bette-Bendi language, especially in the emergence, now, of single vocabulary items for "father" and "mother" (in a number of cases, though), and in the death in this language of the old terms for grandfather and grandmother such as "Ibibai", "Abba", "Adidah" "Adah" (for grandfather) and "Iya" and "Iye" (for grandmother) as erstwhile signifiers of these grandparents. In place of these older honorifics, single items have been borrowed from the imperial language, English, into Bette-Bendi, to stand for "father" and "mother". "Father" is now "Papa" or "Upapa" and "mother" is now "Mama" or "Umama". Where a grandfather, great-grandfather or grandmother or great-grandmother is alive, s/he is now called descriptively as "Upapa ukaindi" or "Umama Ukaindi", with "Ukaindi" simply meaning "the bigger" or "older" one. Today, male children who bear "Adidah" or "Adah" must have been named after their grandfathers on either side, while the same goes for female children who bear "Iya" or "Iye". More recently, even "Papa" and "Mama" are being fast replaced by the more infantile "Daddy/Dad" and "Mummy/Mum".

The findings of this study do validate the seemingly contradictory positions of both Ankie Hoogvelt in his book, *The Sociology of Developing Societies* (1978), and Keith Bosley's in his Introduction to Elias Lonnrot's Finnish classic, *The Kalevala* (1999). In his book, Hoogvelt maintains, "No society can successfully dominate another without the diffusion of its cultural patterns and social institutions, nor can any society successfully diffuse all or most of its cultural patterns and social institutions without some degree of domination (1978: 109)." Thus far this study tends to be confirming that this diffusion

has already taken place in Nigeria. But Bosley, in the Introduction just cited, argues, "…the movement of language and culture is most often like wave motion, whereby a wave travels but the water merely goes up and down (1999: xix)." The question then is: Have Nigerians' cultural patterns and social institutions, particularly as in kinship terms, been diffused through domination, or are they, like water in Bosley's analogy, merely going up and down?

We had already seen that there is a considerable shift in the meanings and applications of kinship terms, and we linked this shift to the new economic ideology of the Nigerian society, which is shifting from its earlier communal to the Western individualistic pattern. This is in tandem with Hoogvelt's thesis. But a close look at what is happening would reveal that Bosley's argument is also no less true, since a considerable residue of the old order has remained to show the uniqueness of Nigerian culture. The first noticeable innovation is in the introduction of two different meanings for each one of the 'Received' kinship terms: papa; mama; brother; sister; aunty, and the meanings are indicated by different stress patterns on each one of the 'Received' kinship terms: papa; mama; brother; sister; uncle; aunty. The words and the different patterns are as follows:

Pàpá: (Formal usage: one's biological father)
Pápà: (Informal way of addressing/fond name for biological father or way of addressing just any older male, sometimes in a derogatory sense)

Màmá: (Formal usage: one's biological mother)
Mámà: (Informal way of addressing/fond name for biological mother or way of addressing just any older female, sometimes in a derogatory sense)

Bróthèr: (Formal usage: one's biological full-blooded or step-brother or any male member of the extended family)
Bròthér: (Informal way of addressing a biological brother or way of addressing just any member of one's extended family or one's community or just any person at all as a sign of goodwill)

únclè: (Formal usage: one's biological uncle of the nuclear or extended family)
ùnclé: (Informal way of addressing one's biological uncle or way of addressing just any older member of one's nuclear or extended family or society at large; also pupils' name for their male teachers)

Sístèr: (Formal way of addressing one's biological full-blooded or step-sister or any female member of one's extended family)
Sìstér: (Informal way of addressing one's biological sister or any female member of the extended family)

Aúntŷ: (Formal way of addressing one's biological sister or any older female of one's extended family)
Aùntý: (Informal way of addressing one's aunt or polite way of addressing just any older female member of one's extended family or community or society at large; also pupils' name for their female teachers).

The second trend that is emerging in the use of kinship lexical items in Nigeria is a form of semantic shift. The former near-infinite elasticity in the application of some of these terms has ceased or been shifted in a certain way. This special way is that the erstwhile elastic interpretations and applications now hold mainly for the uncles, aunts, nephews, cousins, nieces of other middle-class or upper-class families as it had been in the past, while the single vocabulary senses of the terms are applied to extended family members who are on the lower rung of the economic or social ladder. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to state that kinship terms in Nigeria are today sharing with the adjective the element of gradability, such that we can have "brother, more brother, most brother; uncle, more uncle, most uncle; aunty, more aunty, most aunty; sister, more sister, most sister," all according to the social and or economic standing of the kin being addressed, with the old element of sanguinity being pushed to the background. Thus, the lower-class member would be "uncle", the middle-class "more uncle", while the upper-class member is "most uncle" even though all three relate to the nephew or niece in question on the same biological pedestal. When, in

time, these tendencies manifest more clearly, they will become a major contribution to the understanding of the relationship between language structure and social structure.

It can thus be seen that both Hoogvelt's and Bosley's positions are correct in the Nigerian situation. The nation's cultural patterns and social institutions of the polycommunal society have been diffused essentially on account of foreign domination. And this diffusion has conduced to the economic domination; but it is also true, as we have seen, that enough residue of the erstwhile African or Nigerian cultural patterns and social institutions has remained to identify this world as still truly African, and not any other, even within the framework of the transition from the African extended family-communalism pattern to the Western-type nuclear-family-individualistic order. The unfortunate thing, however, is that the resulting cultural and linguistic hybridism reflects more of the Western than the essential African cultural values and communal ethos. The presence of a language policy, which specifies function domains for the various languages in the multilingual country, would have certainly controlled and restricted the influence of English as a non-indigenous language with its different ideological peculiarities from those of Nigerians, as we encounter in the use of kinship terms, for example. But the absence of such a policy makes English the language of communication in both formal and informal settings in the country, thus enhancing the ubiquitous nature of its influence.

At this point it is necessary to examine in a nutshell the neo-colonial Nigerian government's policy on language, especially to see what position the policy accords English as a language of our former colonizers, and to understand how this privileging of the 'foreign' language has conduced to the fundamental cannibalization on the people's cultural patterns, particularly as reflected in the semantic shifts in kinship terms. In doing this, it is necessary to make certain modifications and clarifications. The first is that none of the three-tier domination and dehumanization of the African was achieved without the cooperation of some Africans themselves; and none of these stages of the evils done to Africans was not condemned, and even resisted, by some Whites. There were African middlemen in the Trans-Atlantic

Slave Trade and there were also White abolitionists. There were Africans who taught, promoted and protected Western culture and languages; and there were also a few Whites who, in their teaching of African pupils here, stressed the need for the teaching process to insulate African languages and culture against diffusion. One such example is cited by Oluwole Oyetade. He quotes the late Nigerian sage, Chief Obafemi Awolowo as follows:

> The principal (he was English) of the College in my time, the Rev. E. H. Nightingale, B. D., suffered a good deal of unjustified criticism. Essentially his view was that we should be proud of anything that was indigenous to us; our language, our culture and our style of dress. The official language in the classrooms and in the dining room was English. But in the College compound you could speak any language you liked as long as you were understood.
>   (cited in Igboanusi, 2001: 18).

But ironically, the Nigerian community then kicked against this for the reason that the White principal was slowing down the children's "progress" since, as it is even today, they needed this "progress", especially in the English language, in order to enhance their social and economic status. And, finally, the present neo-colonial economic vandalization of the continent under the aegis of the economic and cultural globalization is succeeding in its destructive sweep mainly because the treacherous political leaders of today are willing to and are gleefully leading every foreign interest to the cache of our treasures, and supervising the looting. It, therefore, follows that self-centred economic advantage has always been the determining consideration among the Nigerian pre-colonial and neo-colonial elite, and political leaders in their dealings even with foreign partners on behalf of their own people.

The English language and Nigeria's language policy

The normal trend of events is that the language of an imperial power begins to wane in importance especially among the erstwhile colonized

once the domination is ended on the political and economic flanks. In nearly all the cases the break with the imperial language is facilitated or supported by the former colony's deliberate policy. Hardly, in recent world history, has the collapse of a world power been unaccompanied by the dimming in importance of the official language of that power. This partly explains how the Greek and Latin languages paled into relative insignificance as those empires' fortunes sank. Britain herself had to systematically jettison French and winnow out as much of its influences as possible from English when the language resurrected after Norman domination. Logically, therefore, the English language was ripe for replacement in the former British colonies following the attainment of independence by those societies.

This replacement was achieved in varying degrees among the former dominated countries with Africa making the least effort in this direction. Three reasons account for this dismal failure – the lack of will by most of the continent's political leaders to evolve policies to promote indigenous languages, and the multilingual nature of most African countries. The third reason has been the progression of the English language towards becoming a global language. This third reason has made even some of the countries that had achieved great success in replacing English, typically Malaysia, to reverse themselves by policy decision in order that they remain relevant in the scheme of world affairs. The luck English has had is that it has been the one language of two successive world powers: Britain and the United States. Thus, what would have befallen the English language following the sinking economic fortunes of Britain can only now be seen in the rising status of the American variety of the English and the growing unpopularity of the British code, especially following the increasing ubiquity of the computer, which spelling is dominantly American.

In Nigeria, the three inhibiting factors of multilingualism and multi-ethnicity, lack of political will by leaders and the cynosure character of English have especially worked in favour of English and against the promotion of indigenous languages. The government's policy (or lack of it) and attitude to this situation have been so repeatedly discussed, criticized or condemned that there is hardly anything new to say on it

(see Asein; 1985; Emenanjo; 1990; Bamgbose; 1991; Bamgbose; 2000; Bamgbose & Thomas; 1995; Igboanusi; 2001; Ushie; 2005; Udofot; 2007). Because of this assumption that most readers are familiar with the problem, just a few statements on it might do. The first is David Jowitt's summary of the difficulties posed to promotion of indigenous languages by the multilingual character of the nation:

> It is possible to say that, in general, Nigerians perceive language as a mark of ethnicity, and that, where their perceptions of the political aspirations of the major ethnic power blocks are concerned, the promotion of the ethnic language connotes the promotion of the corresponding ethnic group itself. The result is that advocacy of the promotion of a particular language to some kind of "national" status is viewed with suspicion by those who do not fall in the category of L1 speakers of that language, and government policy that appeared to favour it would encounter serious, and potentially most damaging, opposition…. If the policy is one that favours all three major languages [sic] together, the suspicions of those who belong to the three corresponding ethnic groups may be allayed (at least temporarily). But it is likely to arouse the bitter hostility of those who belong to minority groups.. Such a policy is felt to pose a threat their very ethnic identity and survival.
> (Bamgbose et al., 1995: 42).

On governments' own failure to formulate effective and workable language policies, Bamgbose notes, "…African language policies are generally characterized by avoidance, vagueness, arbitrariness, fluctuation and declaration without implementation (1991: 8 – 9)." And on the near-indispensability of English to African nations, he again states, "Whatever they do with their indigenous languages, they will need a major world language for access to higher education, science and technology; and this same language will serve as their window on the outside world (1991: 5)."

The net result of Nigeria's multilingualism and the problems this poses to pro-indigenization language policy; government's own failure

to evolve a workable policy; and the evolving global status of English is that this language has continued to rise in importance at the expense of the indigenous languages. Thus, Babajide notes, "Today, in Nigeria, English is used in most situations: home, office, market, etc. for all imaginable communication and interactions: formal, informal, cordial, casual, etc. (Igboanusi, 2001: 4–5)." But the questions remain: Should we continue to hang onto English, using it for all conceivable occasions and neglecting the indigenous languages? How can we guarantee the continued survival of these indigenous languages if we stop using them? And, must the mastery of the English language come at the expense of our own cultures and life ways? Can there be some acceptable middle position between these extreme alternatives of dropping English (if this can ever be possible in our situation) and losing the larger world on the one hand, and having English at the expense of our indigenous languages and cultures, on the other hand?

Function domains and the teaching of English to non-native Nigerian learners

In his book, *Moving the Centre – The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms,* Ngugi wa Thiong'O argues:

> Scandinavians know English. But they do not learn English in order for it to become the means of communication among themselves in their countries, or for it to become the carrier of their own national cultures, or for it to be\come the means by which foreign culture is imposed on them. They learn English to help them in their interactions with the English people, or with speakers of English, to facilitate commerce, trade, tourism, and other links with foreign nations. For them English is only a means of communication with the outside world. The Japanese, the West Germans and a good number of other peoples fall in the same category as the Scandinavians: English is not a substitute for their own languages.
> (1993: 30 – 31; see also Bamgbose, 1991: 5).

As observed by Ngugi, the idea of having domains in the use of language is not new in many parts of the world. In many places where English is used not as a mother tongue, it is taken for granted which situations it should be used; but in Nigeria and indeed in many other English-speaking African countries, the language has virtually taken over in all the domains of linguistic communication, including in the family. In her recent inaugural lecture at the University of Uyo, Nigeria, Professor Inyang Udofot presents the following rather hilarious illustration:

> An illiterate neighbour of mine whose grandchildren made so much noise because of a continuous chattering in English once screamed, "Yak nkop nkpo mmuyom iko mbakara ndufo ami – nonsense (Let me hear with your noisy chatter in English – nonsense!)."
> (2007: 10 –11).

Two things feature here: the chattering of Nigerian grandchildren of the same grandmother in English even in a family setting (in when all the grandchildren speak and understand the Nigerian Ibibio language); and the helplessness of even the complaining grandmother as she code-mixes, "Nonsense!"

To reverse this trend, this paper proposes a three-tier function domain for linguistic communication in Nigeria, two of which would have some implications for the teaching and learning of English in the country. The three domains are: (1) English for communication and interaction with the outside world; (2) English for communication and interaction with fellow Nigerians who speak different indigenous languages; and (3) indigenous languages for communication and interaction in all non-formal settings among those who share any of the nation's five hundred or so languages.

Teaching of English to non-native Nigerian learners

Before going into any further discussion of what issues should be taken into account in teaching English or any foreign language to Nigerians, it is necessary to explain that though the process of imparting the English

language may have affected the culture, language and life ways of the Nigerian learners, this was a contributory rather than a sufficient factor in the changes that have been reported in this paper. There was also the role of religion, specifically Christianity, and the economic factor, which entailed that the better one's mastery of English was, the higher the learner's chances of getting lucrative means of livelihood. Of the three tiers of domains of language use proposed above, it is the first and the second that fall within the orbit of the present discourse; and of the two levels the first calls for the teaching of English to Nigerians in its 'Received forms'. Whatever teaching methods and conditions there are, which could help the learner to go as close as possible to the native speakers' level of proficiency, it is desirable that they be applied so that the learner is prepared for the use of English at the global level. The second tier, which is English for communication and interaction with fellow Nigerians who speak other indigenous languages, is quite realizable and needs to be further elucidated. It refers to what is generally known as the "nativization" or "domestication" of English in Nigeria. This implies the teaching, learning and use of English in its non-native environment in such a manner as to reflect the cultural peculiarities of that environment.

Cultural environment, broadly speaking, comes in two forms. There is the physical cultural environment, which is exemplified by such concrete phenomena as the flora and fauna, the seasons and the various other forms of material culture. There are also the intangible aspects of one's cultural environment, which take the shape of beliefs system, religion, taboos, worldviews, marriage traditions, family systems, etc. In this context it is necessary that while teaching the Nigerian students about the features of a temperate climate such as summer, winter, fall, spring, snow, lilacs, daffodils, etc., their teaching should emphasize even more the flora and fauna of their own tropical world. Similarly, they should be exposed to the different worlds in which polygamy thrived and those in which monogamy thrived; the beauty in/problems with communalism and the beauty/risks in individualism; the basic differences between African traditional religion and Christianity. And in the specific aspect of language, they should be helped to understand the cultural implications of learning a language that expresses a different culture from one's. For instance, they should be made to be

able to recognize the prejudices inherent in the differences between the malevolence of "black magic" and the benevolence of "white magic" as linguistic terms; and the innocence of a "white lie" as against the fiendish nature of a "black deed". Above all, they should be able to interrogate the negative attributes of words such as "blackleg", "black book", "black sheep", "blacklist", "blackmail", "black spot", "black guard", "black mass", "Black Maria" and "black market". These were images which in subtle but effective ways, conduced to creating in the African the self-debasing impression that he was necessarily inferior and less refined, and should accept his position either as a slave or as a colonial; and now in the neo-colonial era, as one whose economy must be guarded and "protected" by the all-knowing and benevolent non-Africans.

The above are some of the broad issues to consider in teaching English to non-native speakers, such as Nigerians. Accommodating freely influences from the learner's cultural environment in shaping the non-native tongue for purposes of intra-national communication and interaction is what nativization or domestication is all about. Several authorities have acknowledged the necessity or inevitability of domestication. We had seen earlier in this paper that even the English purist, Dr Samuel Johnson, had observed, "it is incident to words…to change their manners when they change their country." We had similarly referred to the L1 English teacher in Nigeria, Rev. E. H. Nightingale, who had insisted that Nigerian children should be taught and brought up to "be proud of anything that was indigenous to them" especially their language, culture and style of dress. And from India, the novelist, Raja Rao, predicted in the 1950s:

> We cannot write like the English. We should not. We cannot write only as Indians. We have grown to look at the large world as part of us. Our method of expression therefore has to be a dialect which will some day prove to be distinctive and colorful as the Irish or the American. Time alone will justify it.
> (cited in Bamgbose et al., 1995: iv)

The Nigerian novelist, Chinua Achebe, also echoed the same position, "But it will have to be a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit its new African surroundings (1964: 62)." And in her inaugural lecture cited above, the Nigerian professor of English, Inyang Udofot, suggests the name "Ninglish" for this variety of English in line with such other world Englishes as Minglish (North German variety), Singlish (Singaporean variety), Manglish (Malaysian variety), etc. She then concludes (2007: 53):

> There is no point for a Nigerian to stress himself or herself trying to speak English as a British or an American. He or she should speak the Nigerian variety which is one of the recognized varieties of world Englishes. Let the British and the American recognize the Nigerian accent too and try to listen and understand the Nigerian.

There is already in existence a considerable volume of publications on Nigerian English usage. Amongst the well-known is a work by this title by David Jowitt of Bayero University, Kano, Nigeria. A few of the common Nigerian departures from the 'Received Meanings' and usage are upliftment (for uplift); trouble shooter (which is used here in its opposite sense of the 'Received Meaning' as arbiter); kinship terms (to some extent), the word "sorry", where "It's a pity" would be preferred by the native speaker, and a large number of Nigerian expressions that result from the taboo phenomenon in language.

The position of this paper, therefore, is that all the above aspects in which Nigerian English departs from the 'Received' version should be recognized and incorporated into the teaching and learning process in the country. This way, typically Nigerian usages as they reflect in kinship terms should be recognized and accepted as legitimate aspects of Standard Nigerian English rather than the Nigerian learner being made to 'adjust' away from these senses of the terms. Specifically, Nigerian learners should not be discouraged from using terms such as brother, sister, mother, father, uncle, niece, nephew, aunt, etc. in their original African senses of the words. The teaching of this variety need not, however, be separated from the teaching of the 'Received' version

but be made to operate in a sort of cline of usage, which begins at the 'Received' forms and continues to the Nigerian domesticated variety. The learner should, of course, be told consistently when it is appropriate to use what variety. This is how to make the teaching of English to be sensitive to the learner's environment. And this sensitivity to the peculiarities of the non-native learner's cultural environment, worldview and life ways appears the only way by which the much-cherished cultural pluralism of our world can be sustained as against the linguistic and cultural cannibalization that Gandhi, Ngugi and the present contributor experienced. And the challenge of reversing the trend rests squarely on the shoulders of our "post"-independence leaders and their various policy-making agencies.

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