
Globalization, terrorism, and the English language in Nigeria

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The other face of English in the world

THIS PAPER examines the concept of globalization in relation to terrorism, and argues that the 'imposition' of the English language on the world, Africa, and in particular Nigeria (through the media, information technology, and other means of propaganda, and under the guise of globalization) is a form of linguistic terrorism. It consequently views *globalization* as another name for imperialism and domination by the West, and argues that the continued use of English in all spheres of life will make the Nigerian state stagnant, if not indeed retrogressive, rendering growth and development elusive. As a step in the direction of a cure, it therefore advocates renewed interest in the adoption of an indigenous national language for Nigeria.

Introduction

Globalization has become a well-known term that has been brandished around for about two decades, but especially since the beginning of this millennium. It is often mentioned in everyday discourse, in the media and on the Internet. Many people have variously sought to define it and some have argued that globalization is a new process arising from the revolution in information and communication technology (ICT) that has brought human beings and human societies closer together than ever before, turning the world into a 'global village'. Others regard it as an old process, claiming that a set of processes that changes human interaction and brings about growing economic inter-dependence has been a part of humanity since the collapse of the tower of Babel.

My concern here is not to discuss whether

globalization is a new process or not; rather, it is to discuss *globalization* as a term that has lately acquired popular usage, and to argue that it is simply another name for imperialism and domination. I view the imposition of the English language on the world via the media and information and communication technology, under the guise of globalization, as in effect linguistic terrorism. Finally, I argue that Nigeria should not allow herself to be a victim of this form of terrorism, adopting instead an indigenous national language while promoting all our local languages.

The concept of globalization

There is a doubt that the world today is faced with a radically new global order in which social, economic, political, linguistic and technological changes are combining to produce new challenges and opportunities, as well as new uncertainties and worries. Although it is widely acknowledged that we are living in an 'Age of Uncertainty', one thing is certain: that this is the age of economic, linguistic and cultural globalization.

Since *globalization* has become such a profile term, as used by scholars and the press alike, it calls for clarification and critical evaluation, especially when it comes to a discussion of the relationship between language and globalization. I shall therefore examine the concept in detail.

Globalization has been defined as 'a set of

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processes changing the nature of human interaction across a wide range of spheres including the economic, political, social, technological and environmental' and perceived as 'the process of integration of the world community into a common system either economic or social' (Erinosho 2004: 9). That is to say, globalization is a process that brings about changes and integration in human communities. But the question is: Are such worldwide changes and integration yielding positive results for all the world communities or just a few powerful and domineering countries in the West?

Furthermore, in discussing the concept of globalization, Tikly (2001:151) notes that there are three approaches to the definition of this term:

- 1 The *hyper-globalist approach*, which is premised on the fact that we are entering a truly global age involving the triumph of global capitalism and global culture in both governance and civil society at large.
- 2 The *sceptical approach*, which argues that the logic of global capitalism has led to further polarization between 'developed' and 'developing' countries.
- 3 The *transformationalist approach*, which suggests that, although we are indeed experiencing unprecedented levels of global interconnectedness, we may not necessarily be entering a totally new 'global age' of economic, political and cultural integration.

This third approach sees globalization as a historically contingent process replete with contradictions. As such, although globalization is resulting in interconnectedness and some level of integration in some areas of the economy, politics and culture, it is also resulting in the greater fragmentation and stratification of some societies, especially in the developing world.

All these definitions and approaches are premised on one 'fact': that the world has become a 'global village'.

Although I do not deny that globalization has some advantages, we must begin to appraise the impact and negative influences that globalization has on Africa in general and Nigeria in particular rather than accept it hook, line and sinker, as is currently the case, in Nigeria. And we must do this without looking at the economic and political implications alone but most importantly at the linguistic implications.

Globalization as cultural imperialism and linguistic terrorism

Globalization is an imperialist policy imposed on all countries. This assertion is based on the reality that it is the so-called developed countries of the West that dominate 'global' organizations which they themselves set up and whose interests those organizations represent and serve, a reality clearly evident in the manner with which the English language has been imposed on the countries of the world. Linguistic imperialism is the assertion of linguistic hegemony of powerful nations over other communities, a state of affairs from which the hegemon profits. Today, what we see is that America and Britain have become the 'police' of the world, including through the imposition of the English language worldwide. These nations have been successful at manipulating and monopolizing other countries because English has become the 'lingua franca' of the world. This feat has been achieved subtly, and the 'developing' nations have not been sensitive enough to resist such subtle form of terrorism.

Why do I say this?

The ICT revolution has facilitated the production and dissemination of information across the world because English has become the lingua franca of the Internet, satellite television stations, and other media. News and information are transmitted around the world in minutes, if not indeed seconds. Since the West packages the bulk of the world's information, it also dominates the production and management of that information. As a consequence, the world is forced to consume, in English, what these managers of information give them – in a so-called 'globalized' world. Tune to the Cable News Network (CNN), where even information on Africa for Africans is broadcast in English. Yet the continent of Africa, with Nigeria as its 'giant', has failed to rise up to the challenge of a one-sided flow of information, as a consequence of economic handicap which has in turn constrained technological development. One wonders what kind of integration or interconnectedness the process of globalization entails when the net flow of information, knowledge, values and norms runs only one way, is one-sided, and is largely in one language. Is the aim of preaching globalization to integrate Western values, norms, literature, language and culture into the entire world, and not vice versa? Is the pur-

pose to make linguistic captives of nations of the world and thus perpetuate cultural imperialism?

One of the worrisome things about globalization is that it is actually about Americanization and/or 'Britainization'. America is the world power, and so every nation, in order 'to belong' and have access to information and knowledge, must subject her citizens to learning and speaking English. This has not just begun: the foundation for the entrenchment of English in the world was laid in the 18th century with the rise of the colonial era, a point that will be discussed further below. The trend now, as discussed above, is a subtle but deliberate effort to further terrorise other nations with a net-flow of norms, values and cultures that are entirely alien especially to African societies, and especially Nigeria – all through language.

Recently, *The Global English Newsletter* (from the English Company (UK) Ltd. and the British Council's *English 2000* Project) was released. This newsletter is 'designed to utilize the British Council's Market Intelligent Service to monitor the changing role of English in the world' (Raley, undated, recently downloaded from the Internet, p. 2) and the council also commissioned the linguist David Graddol to write an imagined account of the linguistic scene in 2050. This Raley sees as a 'thoughtful and responsible management strategy' of 'an important resource'. Of course, this 'important resource' is English.

The *English 2000* project is known for testing the global market for English language teaching in order to identify the hottest growth areas. The British Council is also known to give financial and other assistance to countries that have promoted and are promoting the English language. This process of entrenchment of the English language and by implication English culture is a subtle but deliberate effort to perpetuate the English under the guise of globalization. But in reality the role that globalization is playing is simply to transmit and diffuse alien values and norms to Africa so that African societies can then downplay those values and norms that are indigenous to them. While the West is influencing and reshaping Africa's hitherto cherished values and cultures through their language, Africa is unable to influence the West. The Western influence is so strong that indigenous languages and cultures are seen as inferior to the English language and its cul-

tures. This is cultural imperialism and linguistic terrorism. Terrorism does not necessarily involve acts of violence and force, but can be subtle. It can mean systematic use of intimidation, especially in order to coerce. So-called 'globalization' is simply terrorism that has been given a beautiful, colourful cloak to wear. One wonders then why the West pretends to fight terrorism when they themselves are terrorists!

The spread of English in Nigeria

The English have terrorized Nigeria with their language for about five centuries. First contact with the English language appears to have been at some point before the beginning of trans-Atlantic trade, when a few Englishmen came to the coasts of Benin and Calabar in 1553 (cf. Banjo 1996, 15). The trans-Atlantic slave trade enhanced Nigeria's close contact with both Englishmen and the English language. With the abolition of the slave trade in the second half of the nineteenth century, Nigeria had still greater contact with English, because explorers with the need for an economic alternative to slavery began to penetrate into the hinterland. As they penetrated the hinterland of Nigeria as explorers, traders, and missionaries, they carried the English language with them.

It is worth noting that the activity of missionaries rapidly enhanced the spread of the English language. Schools were built, clerks and interpreters were trained as an attempt to smoothen the course and hasten the spread of Christianity, western education, and colonialization. By 1903, the whole of Nigeria had effectively come under British rule. Eventually, schools were founded both by the government and the missionaries and through formal education came the spread of English language in Nigeria.

The English language became more entrenched in Nigeria when, in 1882, there came an education ordinance that declared English the language of instruction in schools. Consequently, by the second decade of the 20th century, English had become a status symbol to such an extent that Nigerians were anxious and willing to learn the language and the culture of the foreigners and had begun to ignore their indigenous languages, considering them 'neither very extensive, nor of a high quality' (Omolewa, 1975). All such developments gave the language a strong foothold in Nigeria.

According to Omolewa, the high status of English was deliberately engineered by the British to promote their language, and the people of Nigeria absorbed the language and the culture associated with it in a wholly uncritical manner. However, the political climate in the 1940s brought about a change in the attitude of many Nigerians towards their government, their language, and their culture. Gradually, there emerged dissenting voices regarding the marginalization of the indigenous languages and promoting nationalism. After independence, the English language was no longer so idolized, but because of its value worldwide it was still studied and seen as necessary for international communication and economic development.

The West, however, noting an increasing apathy towards English, not only in Nigeria but also in other parts of the world, gingered up its efforts to dominate the world once again in every way, including linguistic, whence emerged the campaign for globalization in the 1990s. Of course, the world has never been even and is still grossly uneven in technological, economical, industrial, and political power, but, in order to perpetuate the status quo, the West continues to plunder the weaker nations, and the easiest way to do this is to terrorise the world linguistically and culturally – an activity in which it has so far succeeded. However, the nations of the world, especially African nations and particularly the Nigerian nation, must resist this linguistic terrorism and cultural imperialism.

The implications for Nigeria of linguistic terrorism and cultural imperialism

Language represents the concepts, thoughts and culture of a people. Since language incorporates everything about the culture of a people, it is the very being of the people. Wilhelm Von Humboldt (1767–1835), a German diplomat and scholar, stated this succinctly when he says: 'Language is the outward manifestation of the spirit of the people: their spirit is their language; it is difficult to imagine any two things more identical' (quoted in Salzmann 1998:39).

This is to say that language constitutes a representation of the whole world that a creature senses and experiences. In other words, what we represent must be indexical of our world-

view, our experiences and our culture, otherwise communicative and expressive tendencies and capabilities are hampered. This is the trauma that Nigerians have been subjected to. We are forced to communicate in a language that represents a culture that is alien to us. Many more unfathomable language-based problems have been brewed as a result of this, in the educational, political, economic and social life of Nigeria.

There is no contention that the cognitive and mental skills of many Nigerians are far below its potential. This is because cognitive development such as the ability to recognize relationships between events and the ability to understand abstract concepts and manipulate them effectively in arguments can occur effectively only in a language that the learner knows very well. In Nigeria, English, which the learner does not know very well, is the language of teaching and learning. As such, learners do not achieve their full potential. The high premium placed on the learning of English at the detriment of the indigenous languages has contributed to a low level of educational achievement in the individual as well as the underdevelopment of Nigeria. Imagine, just a handful of Nigerians can be said to be functionally literate in English after about 142 years of English teaching and learning in Nigeria. This is because the language we have been forced to adopt is alien to our experiences, culture and worldview. It is strange to our spirit.

Further, Nigeria's economic development is not encouraging. One of the reasons is linguistic in nature. English is the dominant language of economic activities whereas less than 20 percent of the Nigerian population know it well enough to participate in the economic life of the nation. Hence, language is a barrier to the meaningful participation by the majority of the people in the economic life of the nation, keeping the majority out of the mainstream of economic life, and therefore rendering the Nigerian economy morbid.

The political terrain in Nigeria is as bad as, if not worse than, the other two that have been discussed. Even in this democratic dispensation, the basic values and beliefs of democracy are not operational partly because there is minimal meaningful participation in political decision-making. One of the reasons for this is that the language of politics in Nigeria is a language that the majority of the people do not understand. Kole Omotoso (2004) in a recent speech,

lamented that 'Africa is the only continent where people are managed and administered and governed in languages which up to 80% of the population neither speak nor read.' Consequently, the political arena has been left dominated by a few who have wreaked total havoc on the country. Le Page encapsulates it well when he says that whenever the language of the government, of politics and of law differs from that of the masses, plans for economic, political and industrial development are more difficult to make because of the language barrier between the ruler and the ruled. He further states that a 'community which is governed through the medium of a language other than its own feels itself to be to a certain extent disenfranchised' (Le Page 16).

Nigerians have been so brainwashed, so terrorised and intimidated via globalization that they have become totally disenfranchised and disillusioned. They have become linguistically and culturally alienated. And when a people are alienated from their language and culture that means that the very being, the spirit and the identity of the people are being eroded. Such a people consequently lack a sense of direction and focus, often becoming victims of crime, poverty, chaos, lawlessness, and underdevelopment. All these and more are the characteristics of the Nigerian nation.

Recommendations

Certainly, Africa is the biggest victim of globalization as it is practised by the Western world. What can we do to resist this act of subtle terrorism and cultural imperialism that is sweeping across the globe? What should we do to curb the embarrassing trend whereby Nigerians have an exaggerated opinion of English and a shamefully low opinion of their own indigenous languages? What do we do so that Nigerians will no longer be Nigerians 'in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect' (Bamigbose 97), but Nigerians who have self and national pride, and identity?

One of the things we must do, and must do fast, especially in Nigeria, is to wake up to the realization of the need for an explicitly stated and practicable national language and national language policy. A national language is a symbol of cultural and national identity, of power, and of self-reliance. We cannot achieve a maximum level of development in Nigeria by

continuing to use a language that is foreign to us. Therefore, Nigerians must come together to adopt a common indigenous language as a sign of their independence and national pride. A national language, like a national flag, symbolizes political and cultural identity. Noah Webster, the great American lexicographer, reminds us that, as 'an independent nation, our honour requires us to have a system of our own, in language as well as in government' (Bram, 1955:56). If Nigerians must recapture their lost honour and self-esteem, these words of Noah Webster should caution us and make us reluctant to solve our linguistic problems by adopting English as our national language.

We must adopt an indigenous national language as well as develop and take pride in the other local languages. Our indigenous languages must be used for teaching and learning while English is taught as a subject (as in Japan and China) because we know that we need English for international communication. The local language(s) should also be used in politics and in every sphere of the Nigerian life so that we will no longer be alienated from our spirit. If our language and our spirit are not severed from us, then there is hope for development.

Nothing is truer than what Tunde Odunlade said in a speech at the commissioning of the Marguerita Lucretia Omotoso Library and Information Centre in Ibadan on 5th August 2004, that 'any development that is not man centred, that does not make its language the pivot of its development is epileptic' and 'if you remove language from its people, all you have left is mere geographical expression'.

Conclusion

I wish to state clearly that globalization as it is practised, in its one-way traffic flow, is an administrative technique and a conspiracy by the West and their Nigerian and other sycophants, a conspiracy aimed at the eventual obliteration of the nation's identity and pride, thus rendering it a 'mere geographic expression'. This subtle terrorism and cultural imperialism must be resisted. We must, as a matter of urgency, purge our system and our very being free of the domination of English people and their language, and rise up to the challenge of adopting a common indigenous language as a sign of our corporate integrated development and freedom. ■

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