



# Language Attitudes and the Issue of Dominance: The Nigerian Experience

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**Abstract:** Globalization is affecting all facets of life. With eco-tourism and telecommunication technology providing information for all and sundry, our attitudes are bound to be affected linguistically. Ranging from the linguistic bias of an English woman who objected to the checking of a pronouncing dictionary because “the way I speak is English” Hayakawa (1964) to “there has never been a language spoken by so many people in so many places” (Crystal 1997) the English language seems set to dominate the world as ‘an only language’. Fishman (1996) Kachru (1997) Bamgbose (2004) and Daramola (2004) have all expressed concern about the dominant status of the English language with a threat towards other languages in diaspora. This paper appraises the attitudes of the Nigerian elites vis-à-vis the dominating figure of the English language over the indigenous languages. It remarks the love-hate relationship stemming from the conflicting sentimental and instrumental attachment to the use of English in Nigerian education. The paper concludes that Nigeria as the largest black democracy in the world should evolve a more robust language planning policy towards the functional expansion and revalorization of the indigenous languages as extolled by LICCA.

**Keywords:** Language Attitudes, Dominance, Indigenous Languages

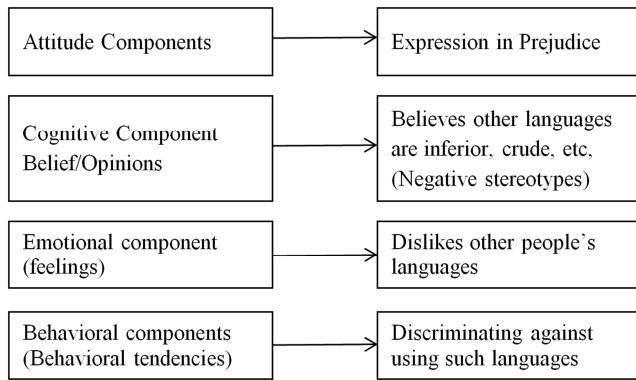
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## 1. Introduction

In Nigeria, the educated ones exhibit a love-hate attitude towards the English language. While they seem to admire their children’s high level of proficiency in English, they still complain about adopting the English language as a lingua franca. Adeyanju (1989:16) has described this attitude as resulting from the conflicting sentimental and instrumental attachment to the use of a language. Many educated Nigerians extol the use of the English language because they use it as a vehicle to achieve their own goals. To secure admission into any university, candidates require a credit in English. Juicy appointments and promotions are extended to those who have demonstrable ability in English. On the other hand, this same group of Nigerians dreads to realize their national aspirations in a borrowed tongue, which the English language represents. This is due to the primordial attachment to one’s own language, which makes people feel that their heritage is involved.

## 2. Language Attitudes

Language attitudes are worldwide phenomena that have not been given adequate attention in socio-linguistic studies in Nigeria. Many linguists are so much concerned with other realms that they are not bothered with a fluid, amorphous and complex studies on attitudes. A critical assessment of the situation, however, reveals that we need to develop a corpus of relevant linguistic, social and educational data for language planning and development by carrying out more multi-level studies on language attitudes. Attitudes are generally seen as having considerable psychological implications among human beings. Smith (1982:11) sees attitudes as very important because they determine what we notice in the environment, how we code the information we gathered about what we notice and how we respond. This implies that there are three components of attitudes. These include: Cognition (belief), Emotion (feelings) and Behaviour (action). These components act together to elicit a sense of positive attraction or otherwise towards other people as illustrated below:



**Figure 1.** The Components of an Attitude as expressed in Prejudice Towards Other People's Languages.

Source: Adapted from Renald Smith (1982 p. 11) - *Psychology: The Frontiers of Behaviour*. New York: Harper and Row Inc.

Adegbija (1992 p. 1) has a more encompassing definition of language attitudes, which he describes as: evaluative judgments made about a language or its variety, its speakers, towards efforts at promoting, maintaining or planning a language or even toward learning it. In our view then attitudes could be observable or internal or both simultaneously, temporary or lasting; or of a surface level or deep rooted nature. Implicit in this definition is the wide range of feelings, perceptions and predictions involved in the study of language attitudes. Scholars in the field are thus challenged to engage in various researches that will avail policy makers with solutions to language related problems. Various sub-themes that are possible include: Attitudes to language use, Attitudes towards learning and teaching of a language, Attitudes towards language varieties, Attitudes towards speakers of other languages, Language shift and language dominance, Language policy and development and Attitudes towards foreign and indigenous languages. The thrust of this paper is on attitudes to the use of the English language in Nigeria, particularly, in the realm of education and the danger this portends for our indigenous languages, which are being dominated.

### 3. The Nigerian Sociolinguistic Landscape

Views are divided as to the exact number of indigenous languages spoken in the country. Adekunle (1976:28) and Brann (1978:101) put it at more than 400. Another says it is between 250 and 400 (Onwubu 1976:48), while Lamb (1981:68) observes that "Nigeria has a predominantly Muslim north and a largely Christian south It has more than 250 ethnic groups who speak more than 100 mutually unintelligible Languages".

This inaccuracy that characterizes language inventory in Nigeria has been a source of discomfiture for language planning endeavours in developing countries. One major obstacle facing socio-linguists and language developers in ascertaining the number of languages in Nigeria is that many

of these languages are not codified. They are largely oral languages and there is no way of using linguistics to specify them as either languages or dialects of other languages. The Nigerian government's subtle elevation of some languages to the national language status has led to generalization in classifying Nigerian indigenous languages as either major or minor. The language policy enunciated in the National Policy on Education (NPE) first in 1977, revised in 1981 without any modification and currently reviewed in 2005 in the light of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) holds that:

Government appreciates the importance of language as a means of promoting social interaction and national cohesion; and preserving culture. Thus, every child shall learn the language of the immediate environment. Furthermore, in the interest of national unity it is expedient that every child shall be required to learn one of the three Nigerian languages: Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba.(NPE 2005 p 9)

This categorization, according to the government, is informed by the geographical spread and numerical strength of these languages. It is important to state here that many linguists hold the view that all languages are the same in so far as they satisfy intra-ethnic communication. We should realize that every indigenous language symbolizes the yearnings, goals and ultimate expression of the people's attitudes and traditions. This policy of institutionalizing three national languages is often referred to as the WAZOBIA programme. A boost has even been given to the term by the popular acceptance of a currency note in the land, (the fifty Naira note) as "WAZOBIA".

The policy, which proclaims federalism, extols three languages in a myriad of languages. The general feeling is that the trilingual policy protects more narrow interests than national interest. Unoh (1987: 30) identifies three groups into which Nigerian languages could be classified with a view to exposing the partisan choice of three as national languages. Group A consists of the three major Nigerian languages: Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba each spoken by more than 10 million people but presumably written by less than 10% of the nation's speakers. Group B consists of nine relatively less widely spoken state/regional languages viz: Edo, Efik, Ibibio, Fulfulde, Igala, Ijaw, Kanuri, Nupe, tiv, and Urhobo. The number of speakers of each of these languages varies from 300,000 to 2 million. Group C is made up of other local Nigerian languages spoken in districts, divisions and local government areas with number of speakers varying from 1000 to 100,000. Our argument here is that the choice of Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba as national languages is not based on spread of usage or number of speakers. More Nigerians speak other languages than the speakers of the three national languages put together. As far as the Nigerian policy is concerned presently, languages in group C are in the most pathetic state of underdevelopment. They not only lack the political power to aggregate their linguistic yearnings but they are also deficient in motivating people for formal study and development. The Nigerian language policy thus instilled in the citizenry a bilingual orientation despite the country's multi-lingual structure outfit. Nigerian bilingualism generally

involves two languages – English (the official language) and one indigenous language. Thus, we have Hausa/English, Igbo/English, Yoruba/English and other (M.T's) English bilinguals.

The nature of multilingualism in Nigeria where English enjoys an almost unrivalled dominance over the indigenous languages that are rich and varied poses a serious challenge because of its implications for the socio-economic, educational, cultural and political development of the country (See also Oloruntoba-Oju 1993).

In the Nigerian context, multilingualism should be taken to mean a situation where there are many indigenous languages spoken by a correspondingly large number of ethnic groups competing for national identity and survival. Added to this is the existence of a foreign language (English) used as an official language. This pluralistic setting and the attendant multilingualism and multiculturalism are potent educational

tools for forging national unity and identity. However, the realization of such a laudable goal would require a bold and dynamic language policy, which respects the socio-linguistic profile of Nigeria.

Adekunle (1995: 58) looks at the communicative realities of the Nigerian setting and submits that Nigeria is an ultra-multilingual nation in which the rich linguistic resources can be categorized into: (1) the indigenous languages, (2) the English language, (3) Pidgin English, and (4) foreign languages (French and classical Arabic). There are bound to be overlaps in the domains of use of the languages above. Due to language shift and language loyalty in English and the indigenous languages respectively, it is still difficult to measure, accurately, the purview of multilingualism in Nigeria. Adekunle assigns roles and functions to the various languages operating in Nigeria as summarised in the table below.

**Table 1.** Roles and functions of languages.

Language Categories	Cultural Identify	Inter ethnic Communication	Science & Technology	Education Literature and Arts	Official Use and Mass Media	National Identity	Inter-national Communication
English	-	**	**	**	**	-	***
Indigenous Languages	***	**	-	**	**	-	*
Pidgin English	-	***	-	**	**	-	*
French	-	-	-	*	*	-	**
Arabic -	-	*	-	*	*	-	*

\*\*\* = Very high frequency use

\*\* = High frequency use

- = Not so frequent use

Adekunle, 1995 p 58

While the above raises some questions, it has helped to classify, to some extent, language use into roles and functions. For example, the use of English maintains its dominant position featuring prominently in international communication, official use and mass media, education, science and technology and inter-ethnic communication. This corroborates Bamgbose (2004) argument on languages with wider domains whereby African countries formerly under British colonial rule use English as an official language and language of higher education, while African languages are given restrictive roles in primary education and cultural realms. However, it is surprising why the study rated nothing for the use of indigenous languages in the domain of science and technology despite the technicalization of some Nigerian languages and even with the “looking inwards” campaigns that have led to local inventions and crafts based on strictly indigenous materials. Obinabo, D. (1980) has formulated technical terms and written *Science Texts in Nigerian Languages*, used in Igbo environment. The inclusion of languages of special status is very relevant in that Nigeria now offers scholarship to students in higher institutions to study French, and the language is seen as a dynamic world language making it expedient to produce people who can speak French and help to facilitate international contact between English speaking and French speaking countries. Arabic is encouraged because it fulfills the indigenous needs of many Nigerian citizens. Ability to read classical Arabic (Quran) is a requirement for Islamic spiritual sanctity, since

the medium of worship is in Arabic.

We can identify from the above discussion that the Nigerian government is yet to come out with a workable language policy that will assign specific roles to the various languages in use in the country. It is imperative, therefore, to have a defined socio-linguistic profile of Nigeria that will make provisions for the linguistic needs of the people along these lines:

1. Language of intra-ethnic communication
2. Language of inter-ethnic communication
3. Language of international interaction
4. Language of special status (Foreign language)

The implication of this is that the true multi-lingual nature of Nigeria will be properly defined so that the roles of these languages in the broad national objectives can be assessed.

#### 4. The Place of Indigenous Languages in Nigerian Education

The National Language Policy section 3, paragraph 15 (4) stipulates that: “Government will see to it that the medium of instruction in the Primary school is initially the Mother Tongue as the language of the immediate community and at a later stage English”. Discerning observers would note that such pronouncements are couched in non-specific terms. The nature of language treatment process here is steeped in indeterminate items such as ‘initially’ and ‘at a later stage’.

This lack of seriousness on the part of government in language policy implementation has led to a potpourri of do-it-your-own-way where every educational community applies the policy to suit itself. For example, where the community is linguistically heterogeneous as in Lagos and Jos metropolis, the 'Straight-for-English' or 'Early English Medium' where English is used from the first day in school as medium of instruction is adopted. In linguistically homogenous settings like Ibadan and Kano, the M.T. (Yoruba and Hausa respectively), or language of the wider community is used as a medium of instruction in the first three years as required, and English taught as a subject. However, some schools find it convenient to continue using the M.T. beyond the stipulated years claiming that students are more at home understanding the concepts being expressed.

A complex dimension has now been introduced by a mushroom of private schools now using the English Language as a medium of instruction and expression in all domains. In my interaction with some proprietors of these schools, they claim that parents are happy to see their children speak English in the first day in school. In the first place, many educated Nigerians speak English to their children even before the school age. It will be to the chagrin of such parents seeing their children using indigenous languages in a school setting. Some schools, including government owned ones, even label their classes with 'DO NOT SPEAK VERNACULAR' tags. They go to the extent of imposing fines on recalcitrant pupils who want to speak their local languages. This smacks of the colonial language policy, which elevated English to the detriment of our indigenous languages. It is unfortunate that decades after independence, educated Nigerians still glamorize the use of a foreign language far above their indigenous languages. Adegbiya (1991:20) expresses our frustration by revealing that:

It is an open secret that many highly placed and wealthy Nigerians including presidents, governors, ministers, commissioners and businessmen who can afford it usually prefer to train their children abroad where the standard of English and education are considered very good ... This could not be said of Nigerian institutions where the standard of English is considered poor and failing. p 20.

Professor Olaniran's chilling account in Sunday Tribune of 25<sup>th</sup> December 2005 captures the grim extent to which English Language predominates over our indigenous languages, in education. He mentioned that in any English assignment "the teacher gives a number of strokes for all the questions missed. He gave me 21 lashes and when I reported to my father he endorsed the action". Ironically the use of a foreign language rather than enhance academic performance actually contributes to its decline. Researchers like Fafunwa (1975) and UNESCO (1953) have established that it is axiomatic for a child to be educated in his mother tongue. It is sad to note however, that the Nigerian education system flagrantly disregards these lofty postulations. High failure rate has dogged our students' performance not only in the English Language examination but also in other examinations where instructions are given in English. Many Nigerian universities do not offer admission to prospective undergraduates without a credit in Senior Certificate Examination English. A case was reported of a candidate who applied for a degree programme in Yoruba but was denied admission because he does not have a credit in English. This is somebody with seven credits including a distinction in Yoruba. Adeosun (2005) submits that over 80% of Nigerian candidates who sat for the Senior Certificate Examination in English between 1993 and 2001 failed to attain credit pass, thus, forfeiting their admission into the universities (See Table 2).

**Table 2.** Statistics of performance of Nigerian students in English May/June SSCE (1993-2001).

YEAR	NO. OF CANDIDATE	CREDIT	PASS	FAIL	ABSENT
1993	496,685	66,176 (13.3%)	145,545 (29.3%)	285,023 (57.4%)	4,833 (1.0%)
1994	524,294	74,157 (14.1%)	159,900 (30.5%)	290,237 (55.4%)	5,713 (1.1%)
1995	464,270	57,588 (12.4%)	128,450 (27.7%)	278,202 (59.9%)	2,701 (0.6%)
1996	516,196	58,533 (11.3%)	124,041 (24.0%)	333,614 (64.6%)	3,471 (0.6%)
1997	618,139	40,488 (6.5%)	165,533 (26.8%)	412,118 (66.7%)	4,294 (0.7%)
1998	636,777	53,990 (8.5%)	136,873 (21.5%)	417,312 (65.5%)	3,849 (0.6%)
1999	752,233	73,531 (9.7%)	171,098 (22.6%)	471,393 (64.9%)	3,827 (0.5%)
2000	784,129	84,932 (9.8%)	172,158 (21.4%)	523,117 (65.9%)	3,922 (0.6%)
2001	1,025,027	267,251 (26.07%)	316,767 (30.9%)	441,009 (43.02%)	15,074 (1.45%)

Source: West African Examination Council, Abuja – Nigeria.

Are we not therefore toying with the academic progress of our youths if we deny them higher education because they do not pass a foreign language? What is the justification of

extolling the almighty English above our educational goals that enjoin our citizens to develop their talents to the optimum? Adeosun (2005) therefore opines, "a way out of

this mass failure is that the Mother Tongue should be encouraged as it has been found to enhance performance in English". Ikara (1982:51) buttresses the role of M.T. in education when he states that:

No foreign language can take the place of the M.T. and no system of education can afford to disregard it without serious detriment to the mental development of the child. Thought and language go together as soul and body. The child thinks and dreams in the language through which he acquires the early experience of life. This naturally happens to be M.T. and for this, the M.T. becomes the first condition of schooling for the intellectual development of the child.

Bamgbose (2005) attempts to explain the undue emphasis placed on the use of English in the educational, political and administrative domains by many African countries. These countries first designated imported European languages as official language and make it to permeate all facets of lives of the people. It was revealed that out of 65 languages designated as official in 53 countries, French is 21 while English is 19. Only 3 countries have an African language as the sole official language. A new trend has even emerged in Nigeria, where some aspects of our cultural domain have been infested by our contact with English. Our music, food, dressing and postures are being increasingly anglicized. A visit to any of our University campuses will show that foreign jazz music is preferred to the local 'Fuji' and 'Apala'. Our local delicacies like 'amala' and 'gbegiri' are losing ground to fried rice, salad and toast bread. Youths find it difficult to greet their elders traditionally and a prospective bride does not see anything bad in extending a handshake to her future in-laws!

Many culturologists and concerned citizens are now getting worried about the predominant non-use of indigenous languages in many domains particularly in education. We may sooner or later find ourselves in a linguistic cul-de-sac whereby Nigerians would have sacrificed their heritage on the altar of globalization. Mamman's article of March 3, 1985 in *Sunday New Nigerian* advises that:

For the survival of their languages, Nigerians should forget their differences and unite for the common goal, a goal of waging war against English Language, a war of decolonizing our languages before our next generation will one day wake up to find themselves speaking English as their only language. It would be unfortunate and shameful if the situation gets to that stage for the generation to come will have no cultural heritage (linguistically) to hand over to their own children except the foreign one.

It is therefore apposite that the speakers' attitudes towards their own languages will preserve such for edification or condemn it to perdition. When people talk of 'ours is ours', it must be total. Language loyalty should, thus, be seen as a social and communal responsibility. Where the speakers demonstrate the zeal to develop their languages in both spoken and written forms, they will record appreciable success if such languages could be codified, elaborated and institutionalized, by using them in educational, social, religious and cultural domains. Where this is not done the

languages will remain at the level they left them, endangered or even die out in favour of another dominant language.

The dominant status of English over our indigenous languages is bound to continue given the observable linguistic and non-linguistic indices. Apart from the fact that the local languages receive brickbats from individual and collective actions as mentioned above, there are institutional and corporate bottlenecks that must be removed if we want to develop our indigenous language far beyond their present distressed state. Bamgbose (1983) was rather too optimistic when he surmised that:

The recent language policy decision in respect of the use of Nigerian Languages in the national and state assemblies and their use as media of instruction from the earliest years of formal education will in time lead to an enhanced status for Yoruba as well as several other Nigerian Languages.

This is sadly untrue because over twenty years after such optimism many of our indigenous languages are still restricted or excluded in major aspects of lives of the citizenry. None of the houses of assembly conducts its session in the three major languages designated as national languages. Attempt to encourage such usage is met with undisguised hostility. For example, the Lagos State House of Assembly was reported in *The Guardian Newspaper* of December 10, 1999 to have rejected the use of Yoruba in its deliberation because "the Yoruba language is not appropriate for the conduct of business... Besides, its use is capable of demeaning and reducing the intellectual capacity of the legislators". This is an all-Yoruba legislative chamber making laws for a population consisting of 75% Yoruba speakers! Many people have wondered why Nigeria cannot evolve a virile policy that will allow these indigenous languages and the English language to be used as languages in contact and cooperation. Laws and fiats that have been promulgated in the past are mere paper tigers full of contradictory and escape clauses. What is the value of using English as official language when 80% of Nigerians do not speak it? One can infer that our present political, social, cultural and educational inadequacies is traceable to our inept language policies because it is a dangerous thing to be governed in a language the citizenry does not speak efficiently. Nigerians find it difficult to reap the dividends of democracy as access to government and governance is denied millions of them. Little can be achieved in a democracy using English in 36 states of the federation and the Federal Capital territory Abuja, and jettisoning the use of national languages as enshrined in our constitution. Nigeria will do well to borrow a leaf from South Africa, which according to Bamgbose, (2005) recently introduced the Telephone Interpreting Service for South Africa (TISSA scheme). The intention is to involve all citizens in the governance of the State such that anyone can call a government office and speak in his or her language, which is automatically translated into any of the country's languages. The Minister for Arts and Culture remarked on the occasion, that "government must provide services and information in the languages spoken by the citizens"

## 5. Made in Nigeria English

Several instances have been cited of the inadequate usage of the English language by the so-called Nigerian elite. English will continue to present endless challenges to its users. There are intra-lingual and inter-lingual errors leading to several Englishes littering our society. Apart from the Nigerian English (NE), the one regarded as Educated Nigerian English (ENE) we have Yoruba English (YE), Hausa English (HE) and Igbo English (IE). These varieties are as a result of interference from the corresponding mother tongues in what Adegbija (2004) terms as:

*The domestication of English in Nigeria... there is the day-to-day contact of English with many indigenous languages. This has created the need for new ideas and modes of thought to be expressed in new ways that are not available in the native variety of English (p 22).*

He identifies several levels of domestication such as: "Coinage (Cash madam, go slow), Hybridization (bukateria, kiakia bus), Analogization (arrangee, decampee) Direct translation (bushmeat, long leg), Affixation (awoism, zikism)"

In this paper, part of my concern however, is to pinpoint the extent to which proper communication and concept formation will be affected in the use of English by Nigerians. As may be expected, not all Nigerians react in the same way to uncoded form of messaging, thus, engendering confusion in interpretation. Some people can give a restricted interpretation for 'bush meat' as (cheap spice girls) while others can give an elaborate interpretation as (pepper soup delicacy). In addition misrepresentation of ideas is possible in the following Nigerian English experience:

1. Slow Men at Work – This is a sign displayed for motorists in order not to overrun the road maintenance staff but wrongly interpreted as an insult. People sometimes poke fun at the workers who are ridiculed for being too slow due to poor working tools thereby causing inconvenience to motorists who are usually impatient and full of road rage. The lack of appropriate punctuation compounds the problem.
2. Speak off head is used to refer to ex-tempore presentation. Many Nigerians are fond of asking school children to recite the national pledge 'off head'. The correct usage should be 'off hand'.
3. A trouble shooter is regarded as a troublemaker instead of the opposite, a peace-maker or someone who ensures peace and orderliness.
4. Round up is used to "bring to a close" instead of "round off"
5. Black box recently misused by a senior police officer to refer to some black boxes belonging to victims of a plane crash. The import of the correct usage being the 'flight recorder' is lost on many users of the term.

The above illustrates the poor state of our communication as we forge ahead in our unequal rivalry of English and our indigenous languages. In an attempt to unduly arrogate

higher roles to a foreign language we end up not only misusing the language but also misunderstanding valuable concepts.

## 6. Towards Revalorization of the Indigenous Languages

While we are still in a linguistic quagmire as far as the national language policy is concerned, efforts should be made to give impetus to our indigenous languages as we strive for national progress. More research is needed to sensitize individual and corporate entities to optimize the use of our national languages as enshrined in the constitution. A more positive attitude should be cultivated by our elite towards the functional expansion of our languages. Bamgbose (2005) opines that:

There is nothing sacrosanct about our use of English for governance. But for the fact that we do not have a language in common to all the ethnic groups that make up the Nigerian federation, we would have been better off carrying on the business of governance in a language that we know best and share with the majority of our people who are not able to read or write.

The federal government and organized bodies should revive the moribund language centres and encourage language development activities. There should be some enforcement of the language policy that each state assembly should conduct debates and deliberations in the constitutionally recognized national languages apart from English. Orthographies of many local languages should be developed and more terminologies evolved to carry the weight of modern experience. With the advent of information technology, the indigenous languages should be given their right of place. Apart from the fact that Google has listed Yoruba in its search machine, a pioneering initiative known as the Kamusi project has been launched by Yale University in America proving that technology is not the preserve of just the English Language. This enterprise is aimed at translating African Languages and learning/teaching Kiswahili on the Internet. Websites on local language centres and relevant information are now accessible in the interest making the web a new space for African languages. Other languages listed to benefit from the Yale Experiment are Nigeria's Hausa, Uganda's Luganda, Kenya's Kikuyu, Burundi's Kirundi and Somalia's Somali. The Internet now serves as a platform for Africans to communicate with friends and relatives in their indigenous languages now being given a new breath of life and safety net from the brink of extinction.

The mass media are also a means of propagating and consolidating the enhancement of our indigenous languages. Broadcast, debates and dramas should be carried out in these languages so that we can further preserve our identity. It is disheartening to note that 70% of the programmes aired on our radios and televisions are laden with English. Despite the National Broadcasting Corporation guidelines stipulating

high percentage local content, many media outfits find it convenience to flout such directives. With the deregulation of the broadcasting industry, many private owners prefer most of their programmes aired in English. This must change if we want our indigenous languages to develop beyond the present state. Private contributions like those of Yeye Olade of African Heritage Research library, Ibadan will boost the status of the local languages if nurtured to fruition. A black American, who returned to Nigeria for language and cultural rejuvenation, she pioneered a sociolinguistic experiment, which recognizes pure Yoruba as the correct form of communication. In an article in "The Guardian" of August 3, 2005, she describes expressions like 'Kilo happen,' 'kosi problem,' 'Kení nice day,' etc as 'an attempt to give prominence to English which is a ready-made weapon of British-American cultural imperialism that tends to destroy not only African languages but also attacking other languages worldwide' (p. 65). She recommended the French government measures, which threaten to sack French broadcasters who pollute French with English in general French conversation. She advocates a 'War Against English Words Entering Yoruba' and enjoins clubs and organizations to float 'Best Yoruba Speaker Award' which must be sponsored at local and national levels. She opines that notable writers like Nobel Laureate Wole Soyinka should have bilingual publications of their works. While some scholars may see Yeye Olade's position as avant-garde or xenophobic it is possible that a moderate adaptation of her recommendations will go a long way in giving an impetus to the enhancement of our indigenous languages. Ajulo (2000) has given some insight into the possibility of the empowerment of African languages following the European experience. He submits that:

The Europeans had been compelled by their historical circumstances to master the ancient languages like Greek and Latin in which the best thoughts of the age were expressed. That includes fields like literature, philosophy, politics mathematics and natural science. The extant books in the two languages were enthusiastically translated into the emergent European national languages. That led to the enrichment of the modern European languages, inherited by contemporary Africans. It is now incumbent on Africans themselves to translate the extant European books in all fields of African languages in order to enrich their own languages (p. 232).

It is my belief that the indigenous languages should be saved from the edge of the precipice into which globalization is pushing them. The challenges of promoting national languages should be the concern of all and may take a long time to fully yield desirable outcomes. Nigerians should not be daunted in their efforts to rejuvenate their own languages. Achebe,(1986) exemplifies with the report of a Japanese professor who recalled that:

*My grandfather graduated from the University of Tokyo at the beginning of the 1880's. His notebooks were full of English. My father graduated from the same University in 1920 and half of his notes were filled with English. When I*

*graduated a generation later my notes were all in Japanese. So it took three generations for us to consume Western civilization totally via the means of our own language (p. 6).*

The clarion call is that we should take the bull by the horns and put in place a robust and enduring language treatment programme that can stand the test of time. We should institute singular and bilateral relationships towards the empowerment of the indigenous languages in Nigeria. Such an intervention is being spearheaded by Professor Ronald P. Schaefer of Southern Illinois University in Edwardsville, U.S.A. who has tried to save Emai, a 2000-year old Nigerian Edoid Language from extinction. The professor of English has recorded about 70 oral tradition stories by village elders and storytellers in the community. Though about 30,000 people in South Central Nigeria speak Emai, it never had a written grammar. Professor Schaefer affirms that: 'we transcribe the stories in a phonetic form and tried to develop a writing system. We are now in the final stage of compiling a 10,000-word dictionary. We hope to have it done by next fall'. (The Guardian 1<sup>st</sup> April 1997). As a mark of accomplishment, he won the YEAR 2000 PAUL SIMON OUTSTANDING SCHOLAR AWARD, and as Manning (2000:8) acknowledges:

Professor Schaefer has been able to document Emai with a range of descriptive and interpretive linguistic studies. He has accomplished this work in cooperation with a colleague from the University of Ibadan, Nigeria, Professor Francis O. Egbokhare, a former undergraduate student of Professor Schaefer's at the University of Benin, Nigeria.

## 7. A Babel City of English

Our discussion so far has revealed the unprecedented level to which the English Language has permeated the educational, socio-economic and political facets of Nigeria. Being a part of the global community, we cannot be alienated in what is increasingly becoming a Babel city of English. Globalization has come to reinforce the paramount role of English in the world's heritage. All major goods and services across the globe are accessed in English even in countries that do not use English as an official language. The notion is that if you want to have a greater number of consumers, you must speak the world's language of commerce and technology, which is English. The biblical account of the tower of Babel is being replayed as the global community inches towards that of one language and one speech. With the Internet e-commerce, mass tourism, telecommunication technology and multinational corporations conducting all their transactions in English it will not be far for our shrinking world to be living in a Babel City of English. Meanwhile, the British Council continues its globalization efforts and the marketing of the English Language (Phillipson, 1994:16). The situation gets more compounded when we realize that distressed languages are disappearing at an alarming rate. A look at the World's top ten languages shows that English occupies the second position (See figure 2).

1	Mandarin Chinese	-	726
2	English	-	427
3.	Spanish	-	266
4.	Hindu	-	182
5.	Arabic	-	181
6.	Portuguese	-	165
7	Bengali	-	162
8	Russian	-	158
9	Japanese	-	124
10	German	-	121

Source: The Cambridge Encyclopaedia of Languages

**Figure 2.** World's top ten Languages (1<sup>st</sup> speaker estimates given in millions).

However, when we consider the use to which English is employed by the speakers of the other languages who have it as their L2 coupled with the fact that English L1 speakers have no pressing need to learn Mandarin Chinese, Spanish, Hindi, etc as those speakers learn English, then the undisputable dominant role of English as a global language is confirmed. Again, it is estimated that a quarter of the world's population presently speak English because it is essential in their profession and their personal lives, while three quarter of the world's mail is carried out in English, 80% of cyber communication on the Internet is in English. TIME magazine of July 7, 1997 quoted David Crystal as saying that "a language becomes powerful when a nation becomes powerful... there has never been a language spoken by so many people in so many places. Wave dollar bills in front of someone and they will learn complicated spellings and grammar" (p 43). The historical, socio-economic and political fortunes of Britain and United States are so greatly intertwined that the United States is seen as the arbiter of world English. Dogged by the survival of the fittest aura whereby linguistic natural selection takes place due to economic superiority, military might and social importance, many indigenous languages all over the world are becoming increasingly endangered. Concerned citizens are advocating that we should further encourage the use of the local languages. The Guardian Newspaper of 23<sup>rd</sup> December, 2005 reported that during the National Festival for the Arts and Culture (NAFEST) held in Ogun State, Nigeria, UNESCO scholar, Professor Akinwumi Ishola submits that:

Globalization from the western point of view is just creating market for their products. What we should do therefore is to make our own culture attractive to the younger generation. We should encourage the children to speak their own local languages like Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa, Urhobo and others (p 36).

*Other parts of the world also pursue indigenous language revival with fervent fervour stressing that when a language is lost, a people's identity is lost. In what is similar to 'tiwantiwa' (ours is ours) initiative in Yorubaland in Nigeria, where cultural excellence is accorded everything Yoruba, TIME magazine of July 7, 1997 reported that Northern Ireland has*

*launched a resilient language policy tagged 'Sinn Fein' (Irish for Ourselves Alone) which instils in the people a gesture of self-esteem and national identity. This bold attempt has led to a resurgence of the Irish prestige and cultural awareness with the establishment of the first Irish language television channel TeilivisnaGaeilge (TnaG) running popular programmes in music, drama, sports and documentation in Irish. TnaG spokesman remarks, "We've been able to prove that something indigenous doesn't have to be backward-looking" (p. 44).*

## 8. Conclusion

Although language attitudes are difficult to interpret, the levels to which they can affect language policy and language development should be studied in depth to enable linguists to arrive at informed decisions that can guide educators, politicians, philologists and sociologists map out strategies to enhance our indigenous languages. While we acknowledge the important roles English plays in our personal and national aspirations, we reiterate that our indigenous languages should not be left to perish on the altar of globalization. With the present stable democratic setting, Nigerians should optimize the dividends thereof and make concerted efforts at individual and corporate levels to allocate more roles to our local languages. The military era of haphazard language policies that create escape routes for implementers should be consigned to history. Our people should not be governed solely in a minority language, which the English language represents. When linguists quip that language is a city to which everybody brings a stone, Nigeria should be able to identify a stone that belongs to it.

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