



Critical Drivers of the Expansion and Influence of the English Language in Northern Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper is a historical overview that traces the origin and development of the English language in Northern Nigeria, a multilingual and multicultural region in a nation with over 500 indigenous languages, the majority of which are in the North. It examines the historical, social and political factors that influenced the introduction and spread of English in Nigeria and in Northern Nigeria, as well as the roles and functions of English in the Nigerian society. The paper adopts a chronological approach to analyse the different phases of English language usage and spread in Northern Nigeria, namely: the pre-colonial era, the colonial era and the post-colonial era. The data for the study were derived from textbooks and scholarly articles in journals. From the study, it was noted that the spread and influence of the English language in Northern Nigeria are a result of the prestige attached to English, the multilingual nature of the North, political inclusion, and colonial compulsion.

Key Words: Expansion, Dominance, English language

Introduction

The history of English language usage in Nigeria can be traced to the 16th century during the colonial era (Oreoluwa 2013). The history can be traced to the advent of the English language in Nigeria to facilitate trade or business relationships, first between the Portuguese who traded in ivory and slaves. Secondly, trade between the British, who took over the trade in slaves from the Portuguese.

It is believed that the English language came into Nigeria in the 15th Century but became functional in the 19th Century. According to Onyema, “the exact advent of the English language in Nigeria happened during the 15th Century (precisely 1472) in Calabar, Warri and Brass” (13). He further noted that these contacts predate the “trans-Atlantic slave trade and the first trade language spoken along the coast of Nigeria was pidgin. Pidgin, he asserted, was a mixture of indigenous languages, the Portuguese dialect of



English and the Portuguese language. This mixture was essential for communication to enhance trade. The variant of English which was spoken by these traders was also referred to as “Coastal English” and “Patua English”, that is, Pidgin or broken English(14).

In 1841, the British, who took over business from the Portuguese, introduced the English language for communication purposes in the Southern and South-Western parts of Nigeria. According to Onyema, the first group of Nigerians that sent their children to England to study the English language were the Efik traders (in the present Cross River State). He further states that, “schools were also established in the coastal areas where the teaching of English-reading and writing was given prominence” (15). In 1882, the English language was spoken by some Nigerian Elites and their Children and was accepted and implemented as the main channel of instruction and communication. Places like Lagos, Abeokuta, Badagary and Bendel had lots of English language speakers, and it was common among the elites.

The English language has a significant historical presence in southern Nigeria that predates its introduction in the north, largely due to earlier colonial and missionary activities by the British in the South. Initially, English was exclusively reserved for the education of the children of Emirs and Chiefs in the north, effectively excluding the general populace. As noted by Taiwo (2009, p. 4), “English usage was restricted to educating the children of the Hausa/Fulani feudal class.” Even after the 1914 amalgamation of the Northern and Southern regions, English continued to play a more prominent role in the South. The colonial administration actively promoted its use among the general public. Furthermore, the constitution of 1954 clearly stipulated the use of English in the National Assembly and in the regional assemblies of the West and East, while designating Hausa as the language for the Northern House of Assembly. This distinction underscores the differing attitudes toward English language usage in these regions. After the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates, the status of English changed markedly. It became accessible to anyone enrolled in the Western



education system in the north, thereby reinforcing its status as the language of those who pursued Western education.

Essentially, the emergence and spread of the English language into the shores of Nigeria can be summed up thus: Pre-Colonial era (period before the missionary activities), Colonial era (period during missionary activities) and Post-Colonial era (period after the amalgamation of the southern and northern protectorates).

Post-colonial era (period before the missionary activities),

Historical records have shown that as early as the 15th century, the Portuguese sea traders and pirates found their way to the West African Coast for their trade expedition, and Portuguese was the first European language to be used in Nigeria. The Portuguese opened a sea port in Gwarto ancient Benin Kingdom, as their relationship with Nigeria was quite cordial. The cordiality developed to the extent that the Oba of Benin in the 14th Century sent an ambassador to Portugal, and Portugal in response sent some agents to Benin (Crowther 57). To transact business, the two parties had to communicate, and since neither understood the language of the other, they had to learn. Nigerians had to learn Portuguese to enhance their penetration of the European market.

Christopherson (284) states that during this period, many of the Negroes learnt Portuguese...the so-called Negro-Portuguese, which was a kind of Pidgin Portuguese. Crowther (1962) affirms that, then, a section of the Benin royal palace spoke a language quite unintelligible to the ordinary Bini and this language was suspected to be Portuguese. Even in present-day Pidgin English usage in Nigeria, we still have a handful of Portuguese vocabulary items like pikin 'child', boku 'many', etc.

Portugal, for a number of years, enjoyed a monopoly of trade in West African Coastal areas unimpeded, but was later challenged by other European countries like Britain. An English sailor, Thomas Windham, was reported to have visited Benin with the son of an English sailor, Nicholas Lambert, in 1553, and Windham had to return to England because of incessant malaria attacks he could not tolerate. He left behind many English seamen (Spencer 10). Initially, trading activities between the West African



countries and the Europeans were that of gold, ivory, pepper and malamute, but were later shifted to illegal trade in human beings called the slave trade.

The period between 1450 -1850 witnessed a heavy traffic in slave trading on the African continent by the major European countries. These years of interaction between Nigeria and Europe, brought the culture of the two countries closer and English language got its foothold in Nigeria through the activities of Nigerians who were taken away for slavery and had returned to Nigeria, and also those who were at home but learnt to speak English so that they could work as clerks or interpreters for the European companies in Nigeria. Ajayi (89) reports that by the 18th century, English was the only European language spoken by Calabar traders. This early interaction between the Europeans and Nigerians and their languages set the stage and had a long-lasting influence on the variety of English used in Nigeria today, like the Portuguese Pidgin, the English Pidgin and the Anglicisation of some Nigerian names.

Colonial Era

British colonialism began under the pretence of policing the slave trade. Britain outlawed slavery in 1807 and pushed for forms of “legitimate commerce” such as palm oil and cotton, and in so doing developed an internal infrastructure to facilitate these markets. By the 1820s, the British had made connections with the Sokoto Caliphate, whose highly structured society, aristocracy, and religion struck colonial administrators as more “civilised” than the war-torn groups they encountered in the South. With the discovery of quinine in the 1850s, colonial explorers and missionaries who had been unable to enter the southern interior due to the risk of malaria began contacting a wider range of groups; the British then had treaties and trade policies in place throughout the North and the South. In the 1850s, the British used trade policies to influence African politics, including deposing rulers who stood in the way of the lucrative palm oil trade.

The year 1843-1914 witnessed serious missionary activities and the influx of European missionaries into Nigeria to take the gospel to the pagans and the unbelievers. These missionary activities led to the abolition of the slave trade in West African regions,



and many Nigerians taken away into slavery returned to Nigeria and other West African sub-regions. Awonusi (53) reports that some of these Nigerians, particularly the Yorubas locally known as ‘Akus’ in Sierra Leone, returned and settled in Lagos and Abeokuta, where they were known as Saros and Krios, and they freely used the English language in their new settlements.

For the European missionaries to share the gospel with the pagans and the unbelievers in Nigeria, they had to preach the gospel in a language or languages understood by the local people. Since the European missionaries did not understand the Nigerian languages, they had to use Nigerian interpreters, who eventually taught the people how to read the Bible, which is written in English. The missionaries, in their effort to reach out to people, established schools where children were trained and the basic subject was the English language. Adetugbo (77) avows that the English language dominated the curriculum under various sub-heads such as reading, writing, dictation, composition and grammar.

Post-Colonial eras (period after the amalgamation of the southern and northern protectorates).

Missionaries’ activities in Western, Eastern and Northern Nigeria Western Nigeria

Western Nigeria was receptive to missionary and colonial incursion, except in a few instances as in places like Lagos and Ijebuland, where the colonial overlords from Britain had to use force to capture the areas. Rev. Freeman of Wesley Mission arrived at Badagry in 1842. Rev. Townsend, in charge of the Yoruba CMS Mission, visited Badagry and finally settled in Abeokuta in 1843. In 1844, Rev Crowther, a former slave, with two assistant teachers, was ordained by the CMS Mission to be in charge of the Yoruba regions in Nigeria. The Methodist Mission sent Rev Annear and Mr. Bickersteth to start a church in Abeokuta, and the Baptist Convention settled at Ijaiye in 1853. With these the Western Nigeria was set for missionary activities Unya, 2022).

Eastern Nigeria



In Eastern Nigeria, mostly in the Calabar region, the missionary activities were also booming as the Presbyterian Mission settled in Calabar in 1846. Rev. Hope-Waddle landed at Fernando Po on his way to Calabar. The Methodist Mission settled in Ibibio land, Qua-Iboe Mission in Etinan and the Scottish Mission in Itu and Bende, while the CMS and the Roman Catholic Mission settled in Igbo land. In Igbo land, the activities of the missionaries were slow as they were not too receptive to foreigners. The Arochukwu oracle, which the Igbos worshipped, was a major challenge to the missionaries' penetration of the Igbo land; as such, in 1902, the colonial administration had to bombard the area to ease their penetration. Another obstacle to missionary penetration of the Igbo land was Chief Nana, whom the colonial administrators sent into forced exile in 1894 before the missionaries could penetrate the area. King Jaja of Opobo, who was hostile to the missionaries' penetration of the Niger Delta region, was also sent into exile to Ghana in 1887 before the Niger Delta and Methodist Mission moved in in 1892. It was also difficult for the missionaries to establish their presence in some parts of Benin because of an underground movement called 'the Ekumeku Secret Cult', which made it difficult for the missionaries to cross the Niger bridge through Asaba; they only penetrated this area after the group was crushed by the colonial government.

Northern Nigeria

Northern Nigeria comprises 19 out of the 36 states in Nigeria. The states are: Adamawa, Bauchi, Benue, Borno, Gombe, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Kogi, Kwara, Nasarawa, Niger, Plateau, Sokoto, Taraba, Yobe, and Zamfara. For this study, the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) will be considered as part of the North because of its linguistic relationship with the languages of Northern Nigeria, and because it was part of the states of Northern Nigeria before it was carved out.

In the North, the colonial activities were slow because of its monolithic feudal structure. During the slave trade period, the Hausas taken away for slavery were those from the serfs and 'talakawa' or the classless people, while the Masu Sarata Na Asali (hereditary office holders), the Masu Sarauta na Cafka (holders of the office of allegiance)



were not tampered with. Those Hausas from the classless group who were taken for slavery on their return after the abolition of the slave trade could not penetrate the ruling class to teach them English, as was done by the southerners and westerners who returned to their areas. Also, the British did not use much force, bombardment and exile in the north as was done in the western and southern Nigeria; rather, it compromised its position by discouraging missionary education in the north. The only school set up in Bida in 1903 was only allowed on the understanding that the English language would not be taught until the children attain proficiency in their vernacular. The few schools located in the north were established by the colonial government and not by the missionaries. These schools were meant to train only the children from the Hausa Fulani feudal class. When the North was eventually penetrated, the British were responsible for the establishment of schools using Oxbridge teachers to teach in them.

After WWII, the British began to see that colonialism was no longer pragmatic in Nigeria, and responded to the protests from returned ex-servicemen who had fought alongside the British in the war by instituting a series of changes meant to develop a federal government. In 1954, the Lyttleton Constitution cemented a federal system with three self-governing states under weak central control. This included a large northern state and smaller eastern and western states, which reflected the three regional units managed separately and differently by the colonial administration. While they loosely corresponded with major ethnic groups, the borders were not intended to demarcate ethnicity, and they arbitrarily cut across ethnic and linguistic communities. As the British never prioritised fostering unity among Nigeria's disparate peoples, colonialism left Nigeria deeply divided (Adiele 13-29),

Factors that led to the Spread of English in Northern Nigeria

The amalgamation of the Southern and Northern Protectorates in 1914 resulted in the formation of Nigeria, which necessitated the use of a common link language due to the country's diverse linguistic landscape of over 500 languages. In this context, English emerged as a crucial element of Nigeria's education system, having been introduced



through Christian religious teachings. It became imperative for effective communication and national cohesion. The following are factors that aid in the spread and usage of English in Nigeria.

1. Trade and Commerce

One of the major factors responsible for the emergence of the English Language in Nigeria is contact through trade or commerce, which has been discussed earlier in this paper. Even though trade started first with the Portuguese in the 18th century trans-Atlantic slave trade and trade in Ivory were a boom with the Portuguese before the contact between Europe and Nigeria, which brought the English Language to Nigeria. The British took over the slave trade business in 1730 and ensured that the slaves they took from West Africa learnt the language of their captors, English. In 1807, when the slave trade was abolished, most freed slaves returned, settled and used English freely to communicate. According to Onyema (15), “many slaves freed from free-town in the 1830s came back to their original homes in Lagos, Badagry and Abeokuta and settled down to teach the English, the new language of possibilities and opportunities, to their families and relations. Trade in other resources such as palm produce, cocoa, rubber and other raw materials took over after the abolition of the slave trade. This new trade took the English Language to the hinterlands thereby leading to its spread to numerous trade routes opened by European Explorers.

2. Abolition of the slave trade

The abolition of the slave trade played a crucial role in the expansion of English in Nigeria. Freed slaves who had learned English returned to their homes in West Africa, including Nigeria, and effectively introduced the language. Many of these individuals had received formal education in English, equipping them to take on significant roles. Consequently, they were employed by missionaries, trading companies, and British colonial administrators as messengers, interpreters, bookkeepers, clerks, and teachers, solidifying the presence of English in the region. Jowitt (2019), Teilanyo (2011), it is



clear that the major key factors to the spread of the English Language are the freed slaves and those who served as interpreters for Portuguese and British traders.

3. Missionary Activities

Missionary Christian missionary expedition of the 19th century, which introduced English as a medium of education and evangelism activities, also led to the spread of the English Language in Nigeria. Missionary activities came after the abolition of the slave trade and brought about the birth of Christianity and Western Education in Nigeria. The Roman Catholic missionaries were the first missionaries who come into Nigeria with the Portuguese explorers in the 15th century. The British Government sought the services of missionaries to fight the trade in human cargo. Onyema (17) states that, “Christian Evangelism in Africa can be seen as an exercise in absolution and restitution designed by the European”. He further asserts, Christianity was introduced so that “its attendant benefits in order to ask for God’s forgiveness for subjecting the Africans to both physical agony and mental anguish” (16).

In 1843 and 1914, missionary activities in Nigeria were in full force because their main aim was to preach and convert indigenes who were unbelievers. To achieve this goal, they needed a language to communicate in effectively. Consequently, they used freed slaves who were exposed to Western education and converted to Christianity as both interpreters and translators. Schools were later established and indigenes were trained as catechists, Priests, teachers, clerks and so on, while the locals, on the other hand, learnt this language of commerce, Christianity and civilisation.

In the schools established at that time, English was basically the language of introduction in these schools since the missionaries did not understand the language of the locals. It was the main subject taught, and how to read the Bible. According to Ogu (71), “these missionary schools carried the Bible with one hand, and with the other hand, they carried the Latin grammar”. The “introduction of educational certificates and examinations both encouraged the learning of the English Language and helped to implant it in the minds of the people”, Onyema (19). The activities of missionaries to a



very large extent are the key factor that led to the widespread spread of the English Language in Nigeria. According to Ogu, Nigerians saw in the ability to speak and write the English Language the solution to their social and economic problem.’ (qtd. in Onyema 21). And thus embraced the English language. At this point, the schools established by the missionaries taught the standard variety of the English language.

4. Interpreters

Interpreters trained by Portuguese and English traders helped in the spread of the English language. Ogu (68) asserts that, “American-Liberians, who made their way into Nigeria to serve as clerks, interpreters, and go-between for European traders, won respectability for the English Language and thus facilitated its spread”. The spread of English was also enhanced by the native indigenous interpreters, many of whom were trained abroad, and later served as professional interpreters to slave traders and ship captains.

5. Colonial rule

The colonisation of Nigeria in the 20th century consolidated the implantation of English in the country as the official language of government, law, business and education. The colonial government started in about 1821, which was trade and the establishment of ‘legitimate trade’ (Ogu 26). In Africa. It was to give the European Government protection and support to their traders and missionaries, as well as to ensure peaceful terms for the conduct of ‘legitimate trade’ and to fight slave traders. Thus, in the 19th century, the colonisation of Africa became a reality and was fully implemented. Due to the colonial rule, English was a merger of the northern and southern protectorates, governed separately by the British Colonial Administration.

However, in 1914, the two protectorates were amalgamated as ‘one administrative unit called Nigeria’. (Okeke and Nwulua 26). The new unit called Nigeria was then governed by Lord Fredrick Lugard as the Governor-General. As part of the educational policies of the colonial administration, the English Language was given supremacy over indigenous languages.



According to Adetugbo, “English language dominated the school curriculum during the colonial era. It was studied under various sub-headings like reading, writing, dictation, composition and grammar” (77). Since English was adopted as the language of administration, it was also used as the language of instruction from primary to tertiary levels. It was also a requirement for securing employment in Nigeria. Thus, it became securing employment in Nigeria. Thus, it became not just a language of governance but also not just a language of governance but also education and a Lingua Franca.

The English language, as the language of the colonial administration, was also implemented as the Lingua Franca of Nigeria, considering the multilingual nature of Nigeria. The English Language served as the unifying factor among Nigerians. It was a common means of communication among the diverse Nigerians.

Although English Language is the second Language, it also dominates most Nigerian Indigenous languages, because of the communicative, administrative and instructive roles it plays. It is the official language of Nigeria. Okeke and Nwulua assert that “English Language, which was the language of the colonial administrators became a common language not just between the colonial administrators and the indigenous people but also among the speakers of the different ethnic languages” (26). They further add that English Language is a “bridge language for inter-ethnic communication among educated Nigerian”. The English Language promote national integration in Nigeria.

The spread of English in the Post-colonial era

In the postcolonial era, the spread of the English language is influenced by factors such as Education, government, commerce and industry and the media. Their influence on the spread is characterised by the roles and functions they played after independence.

1. Education

In education, English undeniably plays a crucial role in Nigeria. It is the primary language of instruction across all levels, from primary schools to tertiary institutions. To gain admission into Nigerian universities, students must excel in English, which is a



mandatory subject at every stage of their education. Specifically, earning a credit in English on the West African Examination Certificate (WAEC) is non-negotiable for consideration into tertiary institutions. The Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) made the decision to make Nigerian indigenous languages optional, which has, conversely, led to a significant decline in student interest in these vital languages. Nonetheless, English remains an essential subject in the general studies curriculum at Nigerian tertiary institutions. Although Nigeria is recognised as an English-speaking country where secondary and university education occurs in English, many Western universities impose an additional requirement on Nigerian students. They must complete the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) or the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) to be considered for graduate studies. This underscores the persistent importance of English in the global academic landscape. The reason for the insistence on writing this test, notes Kachru (102), is “to sell a particular model of English, to make a market for teachers (or “experts”) from one’s own country, to seek foreign students from particular regions of the world for the study of English, and so on.”

2. Government

English language is spread through government activities as it functions as the language of government. It is the language common to all the ethnic groups in Nigeria, considering the different languages amongst Nigerians. All government activities are carried out in the English language; all official correspondence, such as memoranda, circulars, drafts, briefs, instructions and directives are issued in English. The Nigerian constitutions from inception till now are written in the English language, and all judicial proceedings are conducted in English. Basically, all official materials and official transactions are done in the English language.

3. Commerce and industry

Commercial activities are carried out in the English language in most localities in Nigeria, especially where there are different ethnic groups. Businesses are conducted in the English language, such as board meetings, stock markets and banking transactions.



4. Media

In the media, the English language is widely used, especially in print and electronic media. Although in some states their indigenous languages are employed, the English language is still dominant and extensively used. The influence of Nigerian literature and media has produced many acclaimed writers and artists who use English as their medium of expression. For example, Nigerian authors such as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Wole Soyinka and Ben Okri have won international acclaim for their works in English.

The influence of the English language is evident across radio and television, published books, newspapers, video films, advertisements, and social media. Most radio and television programs are broadcast in English because stations and channels must remain relevant and connect with audiences on both local and global scales. Nearly all printed newspapers are in English, and among major Nigerian newspapers—such as The Telegraph, The Sun, The Punch, The Guardian, ThisDay, DailyTrust, Vanguard, and Premium Times—only Premium Times publishes content in Hausa. The Nigerian film industry, known as Nollywood, predominantly produces films in English. While there are films made in various Nigerian languages, the overwhelming majority are in English. Notably, many of these English-language films incorporate phrases from Hausa to showcase cultural elements effectively. Though the film industry in Northern Nigeria produces most films in Hausa, the economic reality of reaching a wider market has compelled the industry to either have English subtitles or use English. In a recent interview with BBC Igbo on February 19, 2022, veteran Nollywood actress Chioma Akpotha made it clear that the relatively low production of films in Igbo stems from their lack of profitability compared to English films. This economic reality discourages producers from investing in Igbo-language films, as the audience is simply too limited compared to the broader appeal of English-language productions. This is the same case for film producers in Northern Nigeria.



Other factors that contributed to the spread of English in Northern Nigeria include:

5. The Multilingual Nature of Northern Nigeria

The multilingual nature of Northern Nigeria, which has about 140 languages and dialects, makes English serving as a lingua franca for inter-ethnic and inter-regional communication expedient. Though the North has Hausa as the most widely spoken language, other languages like Kanuri, Fulfulde and Tiv also have a large population of speakers. Here is a list of languages in Northern Nigeria according to Blench (2019). The list is not exhaustive.

North West

Jigawa: Hausa; Fulfulde (Fulani); Kanuri (esp. in the east); Bade/Ngizim pockets.

Kaduna: Hausa; Gbagyi/Gbari; Southern Kaduna Plateau cluster incl. Tyap (Atyap), Jju (Kaje), Gworok (Kagoro), Ham (Jaba), Adara, Ninzo, Ayu, etc. (LGA-level list in source).

Kano: Hausa (standard variety is based on Kano); Fulfulde; Kanuri minority.

Katsina: Hausa; Fulfulde.

Kebbi: Hausa; Fulfulde; Kainji & Songhai area languages incl. C'Lela (Lelna), Kambari, Dukawa, Reshe, Kyenga, plus Zarma/Dendi along the Niger.

Sokoto: Hausa; Fulfulde; minorities incl. Zarma/Dendi; small Kainji pockets (e.g., Ut-Ma'in/Kamuku).

Zamfara: Hausa; Fulfulde; (localised minorities reported in LGAs).

North East

Adamawa: Fulfulde; Bachama/Bata (Bwatiye); Kilba; Kamwe; Mbula-Bwazza; Jibu; Mumuye (south); with numerous other Biu-Mandara/Adamawa languages.

Bauchi: Hausa; Fulfulde; **South/North Bauchi** Chadic clusters (e.g., Zaar/Sayawa, Boghom, Guruntum, Warji, Miya, Polci), plus Jarawan Bantu pockets.

Borno: Kanuri (Yerwa/Central); Shuwa (Chadian) Arabic; Bura-Pabir; Marghi; Tera; Wandala; Mafa; Glavda/Guduf-Gava; Afade; etc. (detailed by LGA in source).

Gombe: Hausa; Fulfulde; Tangale; Tera; Waja; Cham; Dadiya; Bolewa; Awak; Tula; Lunguda; etc. (LGA-level list in source).

Taraba: Extremely diverse: Jukunoid (Wapan, Jukun Kona, etc.); Mumuye; Kuteb; Chamba (Daka/Leko); Yandang; Ndola; Tiv; Mambila; Ichen; Wurkum; Jenjo; and many others (LGA-level table in source).

Yobe: Kanuri (Yerwa/Manga); Bade; Ngizim; Bole/Ngamo; Karai-Karai; Bura-Pabir.

North Central (Middle Belt)

Benue: Tiv (majority); Idoma; Igede; with smaller groups such as Etulo, Nyifon, Orring, Basa, Jukun (Wannu) (LGA-level table in source).

Kogi: Igala; Ebira (Anebira); Okun (NE Yoruba); with Nupe-related groups (Kakanda, Kupa), Bassa/Bassa-Nge, Gbagyi, etc.

Kwara: Yoruba (statewide); Nupe (Edu, Patigi); Bariba/Baatonum (Baruten); Bokobaru/Busa/Boko minorities (Kaiama). (LGA list in source).



Nasarawa: Eggon; Mada; Gwandara; Alago; Gbagyi; Koro/Migili; Eloyi; plus Tiv, Goemai/Kofyar spillovers (LGA-level table).

Niger: Nupe (dominant in the southeast); Gbagyi/Gbari (centre/west); Kainji languages (Kamuku, Cicipu, C'Lela, Kambari, Dukawa, Reshe, etc., esp. Kontagora/Mariga/Borgu axes); Bassa-Nge/Bassa-Kontagora; Hausa in the north. (Detailed LGA list in source).

Plateau: Massive Plateau-family diversity: Berom; Anaguta: Bache: Tarok; Ngas; Mwaghavul; Mupun; Goemai; Ron; Kulere: Izere; Rigwe; Pyem; Montol; Mship: Pan/Kofyar; Fyem; Bo-Rukul; Horom; etc.

FCT (Abuja): Indigenous **Gbagyi/Gwari**; heavy presence of national lingua francas (Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo; English official).

6. Globalisation and Modernisation

Globalisation and modernisation of Nigeria refer to the process of integrating Nigeria with the rest of the world and improving its economic, social and political development. This process has increased the exposure, spread and demand for English in science, technology, commerce and culture in Nigeria. Kachru asserts that English is the language that performs the most functions because it “provides access to most important scientific, technological, and cross-cultural domains of knowledge and interaction” (97). Indeed, the globalisation and modernisation of Nigeria have increased the exposure and demand for English as a language of science, technology, commerce and culture.

The internet is a major source of information, communication and entertainment for many Nigerians, and it has encouraged the spread of English- it is the dominant language used. According to a 2019 report by the Nigerian communication commission (NCC), Nigeria has over 122 million internet users, which is about 61% of its population. English is also the language of innovation, research and creativity, which are essential for Nigeria's modernisation and development. Many Nigerian scientists, engineers, entrepreneurs and artists use English to access global knowledge, collaborate with peers and showcase their talents to the world.

Conclusion

The power of English in Nigeria has inspired widespread aspiration to learn and speak it. The perception of English as both a “necessary evil” (Unegbu, 2015) and as a language embodying “the knowledge of everything” (Slabbert, 1994) has entrenched its dominance,



often “on the graveyard of other people’s languages” (Ngũgĩ, 35). Consequently, while many Nigerians profess competence in indigenous languages, true fluency is increasingly rare.

This paper has explored the multifaceted roles of English in Nigeria, demonstrating its status as an indispensable tool within the nation’s socio-political, educational, and economic landscapes. It functions as the language of governance and administration, the principal medium of instruction, a facilitator of both domestic and international commerce, and a key driver of media and entertainment. Furthermore, the imperatives of modernisation and the pervasive currents of globalisation have solidified English as a crucial bridge between Nigeria and the wider global community.

This dominance presents a paradox: while English has undoubtedly expanded opportunities for national integration and global participation, it has also accelerated the decline of indigenous languages and, by extension, the cultural identities they embody. To address this linguistic imbalance, deliberate efforts toward the preservation and revitalisation of indigenous languages are imperative. Such efforts—through education, policy, media, and community initiatives—are not only necessary for cultural survival but also for ensuring that Nigeria’s linguistic diversity continues to enrich, rather than be eclipsed by, the power of English.

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