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AFRICANA



Volume 5, No. 2
June/July 2011

AFRICANA

Volume 5, No. 2

June/July 2011

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232 Bay State Road
Boston, MA 02210
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Print: ISSN 2155-7829

On-line: ISSN 2155-7837

www.africanajournal.org

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Africana is printed by Country Press, Inc., Middleboro, MA USA

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Language Barrier as the Bane of Development in Africa

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Key Terms: Africa, co-evolution, development, language barrier, *lingua francas*.

Abstract

Attempts to resist the marginalisation of African indigenous dialects remain inconclusive due to persistent dissensus in Africa. Thus, this paper examines language barrier as the bane of development in Africa. Data were derived from content analysis of relevant documents, while the discourse was anchored on Darwin's Theory of Evolution. It is argued that hegemonies of popular languages in Africa have contributed to underdevelopment of the continent, as indigenous initiatives geared towards development remain largely locked in folklore. Africans lack access to the rich heritage of their indigenous languages as a result of the imposition of *lingua francas* such as Arabic, English, French, and Portuguese languages. It is recommended that solutions to the underdevelopment of Africa should be derived from useful traditional values embedded in African indigenous languages. Such languages should be rejuvenated and translated to reflect modern reality. Also, all relevant indigenous perspectives to development must be reactivated.

Introduction

Language is a universal phenomenon which necessitates propagation of cultures worldwide. Its divergence has however resulted in a

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situation in which threats of extinction confront some languages especially in Africa. The imposition of one language over another became pronounced during the eras of slavery, colonialism and globalisation (Akeredolu-Ale 2007; Bamiro 2006; Adamo 2005; Adegbite 2003; Bhatt 2002). This situation resulted in instances where groups share a language but not the same culture (Otitte 2000; Oke 1984). Disconnections between language and culture in a society promote language barrier, which appears to mar efforts geared towards development. Language barrier refers to communication difficulties and misunderstanding among people, who speak in different tongues. Africans have been exposed to language barrier in light of over 2500 African indigenous languages and imposition of several foreign languages such as Arabic, English, French, and Portuguese languages (Ndhlovu 2008; Batibo 2005; Mazrui and Mazrui 1998; Bakindo, Omolewa and Maduakor, 1989).

Experience in many African countries shows that some languages have dominated and some languages have been relegated. The subjugation of several indigenous languages in Africa has affected development of the continent especially as different groups co-exist with divergent linguistic orientations. Based on this situation, Africa has been divided into different zones: Anglophone Africa, Franchophone Africa, Lusophone Africa and Arabic Africa. As indicated by several crises across African sub-regions, endeavors to promote socio-economic development in Africa have not yielded desired results since the colonial era. The West appears to overpower Africa through their ability to control the production of knowledge. The fact that knowledge is derived and transmitted from language lends credence to the main focus of this paper, especially the consequences of language barrier for development or underdevelopment as the case may be in Africa. Next sections of the paper address the following issues: controversies on the evolution of languages, marginalisation of African languages, the dilemma of

language barrier in African development and influences of literacy in lingua francas on development efforts in Africa.

Controversies on the origin of languages

Attempts to explain the origin of language date from antiquity. Classical philosophers such as Epicurus and Lucretius devoted attention to explanation of the creation of names for identification and the development of accuracy in the use of language (Reinhardt, 2008). Also, contributions of Herodotus to the discourse on language origin were recalled by Thomas (2007: 37):

Herodotus recounts the attempt of the pharaoh Psammetichus I to determine which among the peoples of the earth was the oldest. He isolated two children at birth, assuming that their spontaneous speech would reveal the identity of a primordial human language ... The story was abundantly cited in 16th-century literature that conceptualized a first human language. It has also contributed to debate about the *origin of language*, especially during the mid-19th century.

Darwin refined earlier scholarly explanations on the origin of language and popularised an assertion that mind-language co-evolution occurred before the rise of distinct racial groups. This assertion differs from the views of August Schleicher, Ernst Haeckel, and Alfred Russel Wallace, who claimed that language originated after the dispersion of hominids (Alter, 2007). Controversies on the origin of language generate two perspectives, namely: mental monogenesis and mental polygenesis. The first perspective, which is led by Darwin, shed light on early development of language, while the second perspective, which belongs to British anthropologists such as August Schleicher, Alfred Russel Wallace and Hensleigh Wedgwood, argues for late development of language. The argument of the first perspective appears to be more plausible and is adopted in

this paper to situate the relevance of Africa in the discourse on language origin. Alter (2007: 575) noted that:

... Darwin saw co-evolution taking place specifically in the context of racial monogenesis - that is, prior to racial diversification ... Language, therefore, had to have begun in the earliest stage of humanity's emergence in order for that emergence to have been possible in the first place ... he formulated his theory of evolution by natural selection, along with his main ideas about human descent.

Africa has featured prominently in the discourse on human evolution and with Darwin's recognition of co-evolution and racial monogenesis the relevance of African thought in language development should not be dismissed. The fact that all languages develop from simple forms implies that relegation of African languages is not appropriate. This calls for reexamination of marginalisation of indigenous dialects in Africa, a continent that is bedeviled by chronic cases of corruption, unemployment and poverty, among other debilitating conditions. For instance, socio-economic crises in African sub-regions show that sustainable development is urgently required in African. Promotion of indigenous languages can contribute to mutual understanding among diverse groups and entrenchment of sustainable development in Africa. Contrary to this, African languages have been largely marginalised with the adoption of several foreign languages, which Africans are yet to properly understand.

Marginalisation of African languages

Discourses on languages proliferation were derived from two major processes: cladogenesis and anagenesis; the former implies that an original language splits into newer languages during human dispersion across the globe, while the latter entails gradual

modifications of specific languages over a given period (Oke, 1984). The concept of anagenesis is analogous to modernisation particularly in the context of distinctions between an old and a new version of a language. Thus, every language undergoes modifications, thereby expanding the scope of language barriers across cultures. In spite of the fact that Africa is the cradle of human civilisation, several languages have emerged and competed with one another in the continent. Different forces such as slavery, colonialism and globalisation contributed to the domination and subordination of languages across cultures. Oke (1984: 88-89) provided a useful illustration:

This is now happening to various forms of Yoruba and Ibo dialects and, as a result, we have what can be called the standard or central Yoruba (Oyo Yoruba). We can also talk of standard Ibo. (We are aware of the fact that the supremacy of 'Oyo Yoruba' over all other forms of Yoruba dialect has some historical, political or socio-economic connections - this is also true of Hausa language in the north of Nigeria and Ibo in the east.) Following this trend, it seems to us that there will develop a greater harmonisation of Nigerian and West African languages in general: most of the hundreds of languages in West Africa will eventually disappear as a result of greater contact and socio-psychological factors, particularly in view of political and economic realities. Most of the minor languages will definitely give way to the major ones. One major language may even emerge for each country, or at least, one for each region: Yoruba has already emerged in the west of Nigeria, Hausa is predominant in the north and Ibo in the east of the country. This is the trend despite the lip-service paid to all of the languages, even when spoken by only a few hundred older people. We should also point out the factor of extensive borrowing in our discussion of language variation. The influence of the English language, for instance, is felt in every Nigerian language. An average

Nigerian youth could hardly speak a sentence without including an English word. Much has been written about pidgin English, a mixture of local language and English words and expressions.

Similarly, Falola (1999:2) noted that:

...a standard Yoruba language that everyone can understand emerged as a written language during the nineteenth century ... Before the nineteenth century, the Yoruba lived for many years in separate autonomous kingdoms. In the central region there was a handful of centralized states, notably, Oyo, Owu, Ijebu, Ketu, Sabe, Ife, Ijesa, Ondo and Owo, with Oyo being the most powerful until its collapse during the nineteenth century. In other areas, political units tended to be smaller, as among the Akoko, Kabba, Ikale, and Ilaje. As powerful as the Oyo Empire was, it was unable to establish singular political control over the region ... Changes during the nineteenth century were rapid, chaotic, and reformist. Many wars were fought among competing Yoruba states. New important centres of power, including Ibadan, Abeokuta, and Ijaye emerged in the first half of the century; there was also a major population shift from the savannah in the north to the forest edge in the south and east. Also during the century, the circumstances that produced the new intelligentsia began to unfold with the abolition of the slave trade, the return of liberated slaves to the Yoruba homeland, evangelization by foreign missions, the British annexation of Lagos, and the subsequent imposition of colonial rule ... The acceptance of Christianity and Western education since the mid-nineteenth century rapidly transformed the Yoruba and created an educated elite that has played a leadership role in tropical Africa.

The above illustrations provide some clues to inevitability of language barrier and extinction of some languages in Africa.

Emerging linguistic communities in eastern and southern Africa with Kiswahili and Afrikaans are instructive. It is believed that Kiswahili will contribute to integration of diverse communities of east Africa including Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, and Burundi. Also, peoples of southern Africa are encouraged to speak Afrikaans and English as well as other indigenous languages such as Ndebele, Sotho, Swati, Tsonga, Tswana, Venda, Xhosa, and Zulu. Two diametrically opposed perspectives have emerged in relation to the presence of many languages in Africa. The first perspective links multilingualism with several problems including ethnic conflicts, political tensions, poverty and underdevelopment, while the second perspective promotes human right to the use of language. Zeleza (2006: 20) noted that: 'the multiplicity of African languages is often seen as a bane of African unity, whether at the national, regional or continental level.' Alternatively, the use of one national language is associated with economic prosperity and political stability. Scholars have debunked the argument for unilingualism (Ndhlovu, 2008; Batibo, 2005). It has been shown that:

... plurilingualism in itself is not a cause of underdevelopment, but that it all depends on what people do with it. They may use it as a divisive means so that attention is focused on conflict rather than development. Or they may use plurilingualism to disadvantage minority language speakers so that their mental capabilities are inadequately developed and they are left behind in developmental efforts. (Batibo, 2005: 58):

Multilingualism could be an asset rather than a costly obstacle to development. Mazrui and Mazrui (1998: 114) remarked that: 'every language in a multilingual society has the right to exist and to be given equal opportunity to develop legal and other technological limbs to flourish.' Obviously, some local and international languages constitute threats to some African indigenous languages. For instance,

the introduction of Arabic language into Africa has affected development of the continent since 11th century as many people in northern Africa placed emphasis on Arabic literacy and Islamic civilization at the expense of their hitherto indigenous initiatives. Also, European languages such as Portuguese, French and English languages spread to different parts of Africa since 15th century, particularly in the context of trades and missionary activities. These languages competed for recognition from Africans and interfered with idioms of their indigenous languages. Otite (2000: 3-4) noted that:

By the 17th century, the Portuguese influence had been replaced by the Dutch who were also subsequently displaced by the French and the British. The latter became the dominant European power in that region of West Africa, and monopolized to a great extent, the booming trading transactions which involved slaves, pepper, ivory, coral beads, and European manufactured goods including weapons of war. British commercial interests became tactically legalized over indigenous polities in the region, principally through "contracts" and "treaties" forced upon indigenous rulers and politicians by competing large British companies operating in the geographical space which was to become Nigeria. In 1886, a charter was granted by the British Government to George Goldie's group of companies which became known as the Royal Niger Company ... the Royal Niger Company arranged and enforced new treaties. In this respect, they may be said to have laid the foundation for the future British Colonial Government system of indirect rule. The company which successfully excluded the interests of other European powers such as France and Germany from the area, had its charter terminated by 1900 when, through Proclamation No. 1 of that year, Nigeria became a protectorate. But it was not until January 1, 1914, that the northern and southern parts were amalgamated as one country, called Nigeria. The nomenclature, Nigeria,

was derived from the River Niger, and its controversial coinage in the 1890s has often been attributed to Miss Flora Shaw, a British journalist who later married Sir Frederick Lugard.

As shown above, English language interfered with indigenous languages of peoples of Nigeria as it was used in protecting economic interests of few groups including local rulers and the British Government as well as multinational corporations. The fact that Nigeria was coined from English words (the River Niger) is an evidence of subjugation of indigenous languages in the country. None of the words in about 500 indigenous languages in Nigeria was used to describe the country. This situation attracts dire implications as shown in Ndhlovu's (2008: 143) assertion:

... when languages are marginalized and remain invisible in the development matrix, it is the accumulated wisdoms that die – wisdoms about politics, about philosophy, about ideology, about living on the planet earth and successfully doing so. Every ethnolinguistic polity is unique and has a different history from any other. How they interacted with the environment makes each African community a unique people with a unique language, a unique wisdom, a unique ideas and unique knowledge systems, which have the capacity to transform the socio-economic fortunes of the world for the better.

Foreign languages have dominated in Nigeria for several centuries. English language is more effectively used in southern Nigeria due to massive adoption of western education with Christianity; whereas Arabic language and Islam have become popular in northern Nigeria. Bhatt (2002:74) considered the learning and teaching of English in post-colonial contexts as "two sites of ideological manipulation." Adegbite (2003: 185) noted that:

From all indications, it seems that, although a greater number of the elite class still do not have favourable dispositions towards their indigenous languages as they do towards *English*, the seed of the positive realisation of the complementary roles of indigenous languages and *English* in national development has been sown among a few Nigerians. What remains is for these few people to water this seed so that it can germinate and spread among all Nigerians *in* order to enhance collective participation towards national developmental efforts.

Beside the Nigerian experience, English language also dominates in other parts of Anglophone Africa. Adamo (2005: 21) argued 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 ... 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.

The dominance of English on the Nigerian local languages has been established. Bamiro (2006: 23) predicted that: '...Nigeria's local dialects – except Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba – face continuous decline and degeneration, if not possible death.' Conversely, Akeredole-Ale (2007) argued that the death of Standard British English is imminent in Nigeria due to the peculiarities of the local variety of English. Like foreign languages, the above mentioned indigenous languages (Hausa, Yoruba and Ibo) have dominated other indigenous languages in Nigeria, creating a situation whereby many children cannot learn to speak their mother tongues but concentrate on attempting to speak dominant languages in their environment. The Nigerian situation is applicable to many African countries where an individual can speak at least two languages and claim membership of

different linguistic communities. Members of linguistic communities could be in a dilemma if one linguistic community claimed superiority over another. This is the case in Africa where foreign languages overpower African indigenous languages.

Surprisingly, African Union (AU) has adopted a language policy which recommends English, French and Portuguese as official languages of the AU (Ndhlovu, 2008). These languages were used in mobilising Africans during the social movement against colonialism in Africa; their adoption by the AU indicates that they remain influential at the expense of African indigenous languages in the postcolonial discourses on African economic liberation and political integration. Besides, African languages have been marginalised by other African organizations including Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), South Africa's Reconstruction and Development Programme (SARDP), the New Economic Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), the African Renaissance and the Native Club of South Africa (ARNCSA). Wolff (2003) observed that apart from the lip service on the need to protect and promote the indigenous languages, cultures and traditions, there is no explicit political commitment to the use of African official languages. A likely argument for the above development lies in diversity of African languages but this argument does not hold good as shown by Tonkin (2003: 6):

The diversity of language is an asset: it helps build cohesion in small communities and sustains unique cultures, thereby bestowing distinctive identities on individuals and reducing alienation and homogenization. The rich variety of linguistic idioms carries with it an equally rich variety of cultural forms and ways of thought, and maintains for humankind a diversity of devices for coping with the uncertain challenges of human existence.

Also, the benefits of linguistic diversity were described in previous study by Wurm (2001: 13):

Each language reflects a unique world-view and culture complex, mirroring the manner in which a speech community has resolved its problems in dealing with the world, and has formulated its thinking, its system of philosophy and understanding of the world around it. In this, each language is the means of expression of the intangible cultural heritage of peoples, and it remains a reflection of this culture for some time even after the culture which underlies it decays and crumbles ... However, with the death and disappearance of such a language, an irreplaceable unit in our knowledge and understanding of human thought and world-view is lost forever.

It has been argued that African languages are rich in cultural heritage and their systems of ethics and aesthetics make them suitable for knowledge production (Zezeza, 2006). In fact, relegation of African languages is tantamount to violation of human rights in Africa. In its Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, UNESCO (2001) warned against linguistic homogenisation and canvassed support for cultural diversity for the benefit of present and future generations. It has been shown that:

... African communities in the Diaspora constitute an integral part of how Africa continues to evolve and register its presence beyond the traditional confines of geographical boundaries. The advent of advanced information communication technologies is another important aspect that ensures African languages continue to find their place beyond the geographical frontiers of continental Africa. (Ndhlovu, 2008: 141)

African languages remain marginal despite the proliferation of Africans across the world. This situation can be linked with the

continued underdevelopment of Africa in terms of high rate of social problems such as corruption, unemployment and poverty to name a few. These problems can be averted through traditional social control systems, which indigenous languages clearly embody.

The dilemma of language barrier in African development

Every society has practices and processes that constitute development, which can be described as positive changes with progress and self-reliance. Unfortunately, development has been couched to portray the ethos of the West and as such realities of non-Western societies have been misconstrued in development debates (Munck, 1999). Development is understandable through the power of language of a society. In this context, Africans' capacities for development have been misunderstood and ignored. Previous study by Ndhlovu (2008) showed that the contributions of African languages to Africa's development have not been recognised in development discourses.

Europeans lack adequate knowledge of African languages, hence several misconceptions that resulted in large scale colonisation of Africa. Unfortunately, African leaders that could have promoted indigenous languages became representatives of colonial administrators, thereby building a foundation for the imposition of some languages on diverse Africans. For instance, some community leaders who were made Warrant Chiefs in eastern Nigeria during the colonial era spearheaded objectives of colonial administrators. The emergence of Warrant Chiefs was due to a near absence of powerful leaders that could manage many communities in eastern Nigeria. In other parts of Africa where such leaders exist, colonial administrators collaborated with them for effective administration. This process resulted in modifications of African social structure including language and culture. It is noteworthy that only one language was originally used in the world and as a result of this people achieved

remarkable progress in their endeavours as the Bible (Genesis 11.1-8) illustrates with the case of Babylon, an ancient beautiful city. The emergence of several languages followed by language barrier resulted in abandonment of development programmes in Babylon.

Like the case of Babylonians, Africans' pre-colonial histories of development have been interrupted especially with imposition of Western civilisation. The process of Western imposition was comprehensive and resulted in alterations of economic, political, military and cultural systems of Africans. An illustration of relationships between the West and Africa was given by Tucker's (1999:8-13) as follows:

Much of what is generally conceived as African 'tradition' is an invention of colonial powers and missionaries, in collaboration with African intellectuals. Considerable numbers of African 'traditional' customs, rituals and institutions, including the notion of 'tribes', were 'not so much survivals from a pre-colonial past but rather largely creations by colonial officers and African intellectuals.'... Europe and North America have the lion's share of universities and institutes and of the access to information and knowledge that goes with them ... Scholars outside Europe and North America often find it difficult to keep up with and contribute to discussions within their disciplines ... Some cultures and societies find themselves over determined by Western representations to the point that they can no longer recognize themselves in the discourses that claim to portray them. They are saturated with imposed meanings, ambitions and projects. In this process of identity construction there is little dialogue, little exchange of views, little mutual recognition and respect.

The above illustration provides evidence of language barrier and misunderstanding of cultures between Africa and the West. Language barrier and misunderstanding of cultures have fuelled

development crises in Africa. The case of 'Boko Haram' saga in Nigeria is a recent example of fallout of language barrier. Once the language of a society is sidelined, the development of the society would be affected; this was a major argument in the explanation of Boko Haram saga, a recent social movement against Western imperialism in northern Nigeria. Boko Haram is an expression from Hausa language, meaning 'Western education is forbidden'; a militant group including a former Commissioner of Religious Matters formed Boko Haram in Maiduguri in 2002 under the presidency of Mohammed Yusuf, a religious teacher (Avwode, 2009; Ogbodo, 2009). The organisation set up a base known as 'Afghanistan' at a border town close to Niger Republic in 2004 and has attracted a considerable number of followers from several states since its inception.

In attempt to force the Nigerian government to refrain from promoting Western education, Boko Haram militants attacked a number of Nigeria Police Stations on 26th July 2009 and within four days the crisis spread across six states in northern Nigeria (Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Kano, and Katsina) where over 600 persons were reported dead, 3,500 people were displaced and numerous properties were destroyed (Avwode, 2009). Boko Haram militants largely tore their educational certificates and some of them dropped out from schools as a way of renouncing Western education. The crisis was quelled through a joint effort of the Nigeria Police and the Nigerian Army; such effort led to the death of Boko Haram leader and many of his top supporters. While it lasted Boko Haram turned northern Nigeria into hotbed of violence like the situation in the Niger Delta of Nigeria where identity based resource control violence continued to escalate until the Federal Government of Nigeria granted amnesty to militants in the Niger Delta. The growth of militancy in Nigeria signals resistance to the Nigerian state and imposition of Western culture. This resistance is necessitated by mass unemployment, poverty and social exclusion from life supporting opportunities such as governance and rich heritage of indigenous

languages. A situation in which people are compelled to speak a language that does not conform to their culture could adversely affect human capacities for development in the affected society. An African anthropologist discovered that:

The Apache of the south-west desert region of the United States and the Indians in Alaska speak similar languages, and yet their world-view and culture are not the same. Likewise our world-view and culture in Nigerian society are not quite the same as those of English people, despite the fact that English is a major language in Nigerian society (although we speak our own native languages in addition to English). Moreover many ethnic groups or subgroups that speak the same basic languages such as Hausa and Yoruba in West Africa, have their distinctive customs and world-view. On the other hand, a people need not share a common language in order to have a similar culture; we can view West Africa as a cultural zone and yet there are hundreds of languages within the region. (Oke, 1984: 92)

The above discovery introduces limitations in the use of language and culture without blending them. The co-existence of the Hausa language and the Fulani culture has produced a new concept known as Hausa-Fulani of northern Nigeria, although the two groups possess separate cultures. Hausa language has dominated many indigenous languages in northern Nigeria. Similarly, Amharic language was privileged over other indigenous languages in Ethiopia since the colonial era; it has become a defining feature of an Ethiopian national identity (Bulcha, 1997).

Influence of literacy in lingua francas on development efforts in Africa

Virtually all formal organisations in Africa mandate the use of lingua francas such as Arabic, English, French and Portuguese depending on

their locations. Arabic is influential in North Africa; French largely dominates in West and Central Africa; English is limited to some countries in West, East and southern Africa, while Portuguese is widely used in southern Africa especially in Angola, Mozambique and Madagascar. Literacy in these languages has become a source of power in Africa since colonial era (Falola, 1999; Barkindo et al, 1989). The adoption of these languages occasioned by missionary activities and formal school systems affected Africans' identity construction. The acceptance of Christianity and western education promoted English, French and Portuguese in Africa since the 19th century. Also, the acceptance of Islam and Arab civilization was pronounced in North Africa and some parts of sub-Saharan Africa.

These languages overshadow the media of commerce, administration and propagation of African cultures. In most African countries, voter education campaigns and electoral processes are conducted mainly in the above mentioned lingua francas and selected African languages. This situation fuels language barrier and exclusion of many Africans from political processes (Marten, 2006). Africans largely embrace the languages due to their association with power and wealth. Knowledge of a lingua franca is required for social mobility especially in the pursuit of higher education and job opportunities. Literacy in lingua francas became a source of power in a continent where a considerable number of people cannot read and write.

Portuguese, English and French spread slowly as a consequence of trade contacts between Europeans and Africans after the 15th century. These languages had spread across most parts of Africa since early 19th century. Indigenous languages have, however, interfered in the use of these foreign languages, indicating an emergence of new forms of languages such as Creole and Pidgin. Also, some Africans have appropriated the use of these foreign languages in propagating indigenous languages. For instance, one of

the rescued enslaved Africans, Samuel Ajayi Crowther, promoted Yoruba language by translating some aspects of the Bible into the language through Christian evangelism in Sierra Leone and Nigeria particularly since he became an ordained priest in 1843; representing a significant contribution to the development of written Yoruba (Falola, 1999).

The influences of English and French languages on Africans appear to be more widespread compared to Arabic and Portuguese. In the 19th century, English was a minority language in Africa but its use was eventually made compulsory following the establishment of schools and industries. During the twentieth century, the use of English and French became unprecedented and was eventually recognised as the official language in many African countries. In light of this development, African indigenous languages were denigrated and people were discouraged from speaking them in official settings (Akeredolu-Ale, 2007; Bamiro, 2006; Adamo, 2005; Bhatt, 2002; Falola, 1999). The French Policy of Assimilation created *Franchone* among Africans although the policy became Policy of Association after much agitation for protection of African indigenous languages. It is noted that:

French traders had been settling on the coast of the Western Sudan since 1637. Their main settlements were St. Louis and the island of Goree. However, by the early 19th century, the French had succeeded in colonizing more settlements. These were found on the coast and along the Rivers Senegal and Casmance. It was from these settlements that the French traded with the people of West Africa. From the early 19th century, the French wanted to be the only Europeans who traded with Western Sudan. To achieve this, they wanted to control River Senegal ... In 1818, a Young Frenchman called Gaspard Theodore Mollien, was sent into the interior of the Western Sudan. He followed the River Senegal up its beginning. He also saw the beginning

of River Gambia ... In 1828, another Frenchman called Rene Caillie was sent to explore the area. He traveled across the Western Sudan. He started from the French settlements and went up to Timbuktu. From there he crossed the Sahara and arrived at Morocco ... in 1830, the French deposed the Dey of Algiers. Despite the fierce opposition of Algerians, the French occupied the whole country in 1844 ... In addition to their imperial ambitions, the French also saw themselves as civilizers in Africa (Barkindo et al, 1989: 58-59)

African Muslims perceived the European occupation as a great disaster and attempted to resist it, thereby creating "a syndrome of north-south dichotomy" in Africa, which has become a battlefield as a result of conflict of interests between Arabic and European agents of civilization. Between 1903 and 1906, there were numerous Mahdist rising in all part of Muslim West Africa. The most serious cases occurred in Sokoto caliphate. However, the Europeans suppressed all the Mahdist revolts (Barkindo et al, 1989).

Conclusion

This paper focused on language barrier as the bane of development in Africa. It has been demonstrated that relegation of numerous African indigenous languages has resulted in an unfortunate situation whereby intractable social problems such as unemployment, poverty, political instability and violence confront Africans and frustrate their efforts to ensure development. The adoption of foreign languages such as Arabic, English, French, and Portuguese has complicated diversity of African languages some of which assume dominant positions. With this situation, access to local wisdom is declining among Africans despite attempts to promote multilingualism in Africa. The nuanced idioms of African indigenous languages present opportunities that can be explored to salvage Africans from impending doldrums. Language affects development and vice versa. This fact mirrors cases of destructive resistance to imposition of

Western culture in Africa. Addressing the issue of language barrier would provide a panacea for African social problems.

Therefore, the dialectic relationship between African languages and African development should be considered in attempts to reposition Africa. Considering the fact that African cultures affect the adopted foreign languages including English, French and Portuguese, the African versions of these languages should be promoted alongside indigenous African languages to stimulate development. African organisations such as the AU, the ECOWAS, and the NEPAD should reconsider their policies on official languages in Africa to renew the continent's development.

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BOSTON, MA 02215
U.S.A.

PRINT: ISSN 2155-7829
ONLINE: ISSN 2155-7837
www.africanajournal.org