CONFERENCE PAPER

BY

E. A. BABALOLA, Ph.D

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
UNIVERSITY OF LAGOS
LAGOS, NIGERIA

PAPER DELIVERED AT THE 10th ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF MODERN LANGUAGES ASSOCIATION OF NIGERIA (MLAN), 26 – 29 SEPTEMBER, 2001

VENUE: NIGERIA FRENCH LANGUAGE VILLAGE, BADAGRY
A language is a conventionally transmitted and acquired system of symbols, and as such part of a civilization. But it is not the only subsystem of a total culture, a complete description of which would show precisely where and how connections are made by each subsystem with the others ….. Social and political evolution, as opposed to biological, both sustain and draw sustenance from language. Without it man is no better off than any other animal; in fact he is worse off, being defenseless. And those men whose use of language is so unintelligent as not to differ from a simple reciprocity of response to stimulus are not notably better off than animals that only resemble man. As an individual, man has no self-defense. The bond between individual and society is supplied by language. (Whatmough, 1957: 164-65)

If we regard language as a body of standards of speech behaviour, a body of organising principles for giving order to man’s behaviour, then, to learn Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba or any other natural language, is to learn the standards for communicating verbal or non-verbal behaviour, and to develop skill in applying them both to shaping our own behaviour and to apprehending the behaviour of others. (Okolo “n.d”: 1).

The functional and significant aspects of language are stressed in the two quotations. The basis of language itself is defined by, and in turn helps to define our common humanity in every context but most especially during the period of movement from barbarism to civilization. Besides, we are told that apart from its usefulness language possesses many forms and levels of attraction or beauty. Hence the illiterate member of society uses language differently from a cultivated individual; the language of this or that social group may, by implication, deserve to be studied and/or promoted because of its current relevance. When one community or class of people using a given language changes its identity, or even stops to exist, it is also unlikely that much value would in time be attached to the same people’s cultural environment as well as their linguistic heritage. This has happened in, for example, the case of Latin which now serves a ritualistic purpose for the Vatican City authorities. Again I can refer to the ancient Egyptian writing known as
Hieroglyphics that black peoples in Africa and all over the world have forgotten about, in their search for new kinds of development. It is obvious, then, that the two passages quoted above will shed light on certain fundamental issues raised in my paper.

Most scholars of Linguistics and African Studies are familiar with the situation of worry about cultural and linguistic pluralism in Nigeria. Each one of the identified four hundred languages of Nigeria is linked to a specific culture, big or small, in the Federal Republic (Elugbe 1989; Asein et al. 1994; Emenanjo 1990, 2000; Ajulo et al. 2000). Apart from this, any Hausa or Igbo or Efik citizen born and reared in Lagos naturally imbibes Yoruba ways of life and shows the capacity to speak if not read and write fluently in Yoruba language. Here a non-Yoruba child's mother tongue and our adopted language – English – will also become part of him/her by the age of nine or ten years. That this is not so in certain cases may be understood as remarkable. Not all Igbo citizens from Lagos and big towns in the hinterland want to teach Igbo language to their young offspring. The townspeople do not cherish using their mother tongue even where it is a more convenient medium for addressing effectively a section of the same ethnic group they belong to. Igbo of course is not a modern language like English or French, and the latter guarantees rapid success in business transactions as well as in college examinations.

In this respect a majority of educated Igbo people, including the traders who use Pidgin English, are worldly-wise or less unprogressive than their fellow Nigerians. Some highly placed individuals in Yorubaland, for example, are always cautious about the absolute rejection of mother tongue and the indigenous educational and cultural insight it embodies (Awoniyi 1982). However, there are others among Oduduwa's descendants who boast that Yoruba can no longer be spoken in their westernized homes. Therefore the business executive's or professor's children are made to learn English from the moment they enter nursery school after a spell in the day-care centres. Above all, Nigeria is a multi-ethnic society in which ancestral languages causing division in the country are bound to die
or be relegated in favour of English. The argument of my paper is that the modern world's consciousness, as regards bilingual and multilingual factors of development politically and economically, is opposed to such views and behaviour. Switzerland, Japan, India, and the United States of America are democratic nations with many languages and cultures, partly dictated by factors of history and geography and partly entrenched by these nations' constitutions for effective governance.

I believe furthermore in the corporate entity known as Nigeria, even though the historians and other scholars guilty of ethnic chauvinism call it a mere "geographical expression" ascribed to the fancy of British colonial rulers. There is nothing very strange or unique about this country's ambition to bring together and harmonize various units that could not possibly exist on their own with regard to land space and limited material resources. Let us not forget that the United Nations Organisation continues to join together peoples of different nationalities, cultures, languages, and standards of economic importance. Its official languages, English and French, are used by most of its member states' representatives. Thus the nations like Russia, China, Portugal, Spain, Italy, Germany, Brazil, Mozambique, Angola and Poland can participate fully in UNO discussions and elections under the watchful eyes of Great Britain, the United States, Canada, France, and Australia. It appears as if Nigeria is alone in bemoaning the fact that the Almighty God has refused to grant her a privilege of one traditional language, one traditional culture, and one rare dictator who may destroy antagonists of this earthly heritage as he announces his one unchangeable claim to a monolithic kingdom.

**Nigerian English in Retrospect**

The designation "Nigerian English" or "English in Nigeria" is applied to a variety of the British people's mother tongue that educated citizens of our country employ for strictly official purposes. This non-African language has since colonial days united the elite class made up of Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, and many other individuals whose mother tongues known as vernaculars remain largely confined to
areas not touched by public service officialdom. In recent times, however, the local brand of English (L2) has gradually displaced a Yoruba or Igbo man's mother tongue (L1) in urban centres such as Lagos, Ibadan, Enugu and Port Harcourt (Dadzie, 1986; Owolabi 1995; Akindele et al. 1999; Igboanusi 2000).

The Nigerian English is now grouped with American English, Australian English, Canadian English, West Indian English, and other “new Englishes” in the former British Empire. These linguistic channels of local and international communication are being popularized by scholars, teachers, lexicographers, and envoys as well as tourists and businessmen. Creative writers and journalists or mass media practitioners are involved also in the propagation of knowledge about English Language outside its native homeland. United Kingdom. Even within the British Isles, there is a tendency to separate the English people's brand from Irish English, Scottish English, and Welsh English (Trudgill et al. 1982). The only problem is that the English Language anywhere in the Commonwealth of Nations helps to give a writer or speaker his/her alien nationality in a way that Standard English has not done to Britons up till today. Except perhaps in the United States and India, English has assumed a popular image of lingua franca for diverse ethnic and sub-ethnic communities in ex-colonies of the British since independence. Talking about the case of Nigeria's inevitable choice of a colonial language of interaction among her different peoples without any common identity, Chinua Achebe (1975:57) once observed:

Nigeria had hundreds of autonomous communities ranging in size from the vast Fulani Empire founded by Usman dan Fodio in the North to tiny village entities in the East. Today it is one country.

Of course there are areas of Africa where colonialism divided up a single ethnic group among two or even three powers. But on the whole it did bring together many peoples that had hitherto gone their several ways. And it gave them a language with which to talk to one another. If it failed to give them a song, it at least gave them a tongue, for sighing. There are not many
countries in Africa today where you could abolish the language of the erstwhile colonial powers and still retain the facility for mutual communication.

There are strong and convincing arguments in support of the existence of English vis-à-vis the multiplicity of African languages and cultures today. But we must also remember that many obstacles confront both learners and teachers of English as a second language in Nigerian society. Hence Achebe (1975:37), on another occasion, issued this note of warning:

**CONFERENCE PAPER**

It is as though the ancestors [of the Igbo, for instance] who made language and knew from what bestiality its use rescued them are saying to us: Beware of interfering with its purpose! For when language is seriously interfered with, when it is disjoined from truth, be it from mere incompetence or worse, from malice, horrors can descend again on mankind.

Whether or not you read the Christians’ Holy Bible, you must have heard of Babel in the Old Testament in connection with mankind’s horrible experience of mutually unintelligible tongues in antiquity. We are all resident in Africa, I hope, and few of us can doubt the intimate relationship between myth and reality in the field of languages. My first visit to Kano in Northern Nigeria, in 1973, taught me and my expatriate friend a lesson that our knowledge of English rather than Hausa could pose some difficulty even at official levels. The statistician in Kano State Ministry of Education was a Canadian, the man had left home by the time we got there. Then our attempt to locate him or leave a message with the Nigerian staying in his quarters, proved useless. My friend and I were ignorant of Hausa Language and the Northerner did not speak English at all. Before leaving Canada the white man would have learnt our most popular Nigerian language and the only international medium of interaction for social, cultural, and economic development in those days. Beyond the schools and government establishments, English plays no important role in Hausa/Fulani affairs. This problem has always bothered the
advocates of English, a non-African or foreign medium of communication, as our lingua franca.

Besides, the reality of English in Nigeria calls for a second thought regarding its efficiency and ability to fulfil our national aspirations. Due to several factors (Deuber 2000), English is fast acquiring a negative image which may not ultimately agree with the excellent Nigerian character at home and overseas. Apart from a subject like Mathematics, at the intermediate examination stage, Nigerian youths often do badly or fail outright in their English Language paper comprising such items as comprehension, syntax and lexis, semantics, and essay writing. English grammar is no longer being taught and taken seriously in primary and secondary schools. Only education graduates from local tertiary institutions can now be employed and labelled as "professionals" by the Teaching Service Commission and National Teachers Institute. It is also true to say that the teaching profession has ceased to attract adventurous youths and other elements into itself everywhere in the modern world. Here in Nigeria it is shunned by Single Honours graduates of Science and humanistic disciplines, so that people of average intellectual capacity who are jobless or handicapped in one way or another invariably find themselves in the classroom. It is as if education and teaching generally are reserved for academic failures, mediocres, and fortune-hunters.

I do not know of any Nigerian University offering a professional diploma course in English as a Second Language. Those Nigerians who can go overseas for a similar programme or for the master of arts degree, hardly come back in order to lecture in English Studies. Recently the University of Lagos introduced a one-year course entitled "Diploma in English for Professionals," to assist mature people mostly outside educational institutions on a part-time basis. This course is done at the pre-degree level and its aim is to provide in-service training for various individuals excluded from our current University degree and postgraduate arrangements. Without such a necessary attention paid to grassroots in terms of language education for Nigerian citizens as parents and guardians, clerks,
technologists, pastors and management executives, it is almost natural to predict that the standard of English usage here will deteriorate further in the next decade (Banjo 1974; Adekunle 1974; Ubahakwe 1979).

So far, all our employers of labour have been complaining about a low level of performance by Nigerian graduates at interviews and the matter has left an impression that these youths are, strictly speaking, uneducated and unemployable. The latter have formed one new organisation called “Association of Unemployed Graduates.” Perhaps I ought to suggest that what they need to face more realistically now than ever is the issue of poor communicative ability in English that everybody from the Old Brigade of academics and intellectuals underlines as not too easy to tackle. A strategy for empowering university, polytechnic, and college of education “products” as job-seekers must take into account the best way to reduce their growing tendency towards illiteracy and narrow-mindedness. Incompetence in English may, therefore, be removed at first from our list of the causes of high unemployment among youths in Nigeria.

The Nigerian Bilingual Experience

If English today is the Briton’s mother tongue, we may then conclude that anybody in Nigeria who learns to use English as a Second Language has already found one sufficient model or standard to emulate (Adeniran 1974; Adetugbo 1986; Metcalfe et al. 1995; Paxman 1999). We may compare and contrast two passages below, in order to see the point we are making here. The texts are taken from separate write-ups in The Punch newspaper of Saturday, 30 June 2001:

Today is the end of the first half of the year 2001 and the citizenry instead of counting their gains are hissing in despondency.

Majority of the citizens say they feel so bad because their lot rather than getting better, is going down with many counting their financial losses since the beginning of the year.
Findings by Saturday Punch showed that majority of the people complain bitterly of rising cost of living, a situation which they say brings further down their purchasing power.

The gloomy situation is far from the expectations of the federal government in its year 2001 budget that promised better living conditions at the beginning of the year. (p. 83)

In juxtaposition with this passage, there is under Saturday Punch Review (pp. 81-82) "the moving story of a twin who lives because her sister died." The story of "Miracle Twin" was first published in an earlier Sunday issue of The Mail, a London-based English newspaper:

There is no doubting the power in her now straight legs as she kicks and wriggles to free herself from her father’s grasp. Her consultants say there is no reason why she should not walk and run like any normal child and she is already trying to crawl.

Gracie is, according to the doctors, bright, alert and mentally ahead of her peers. She is also a beautiful little girl, her heart-shaped face dominated by wide brown eyes, a shock of dark hair and an almost toothless smile.

And her future looks like it will be untouched by her tragic genesis. Specialists who have cared for the child say there is no reason why she should not lead an entirely normal life and have her own children one day.

Rina and Michealangelo look at her constantly, reaching out to touch her and stroke her cheeks and legs. It is clear they adore her but what do they now think of the judges’ decision to overrule them? There is a silence as they watch Gracie, grinning and clowning for the camera. How can they condemn a ruling which gave them this beautiful, bright child? But how can they be grateful for a ruling which robbed them of another, equally loved child? (p. 82)

You must forgive my pride if I say that only those who specialize in English and Literary Studies can fully appreciate the above quotations. The first writing is by one Williams Ekanem, a Nigerian journalist from Akwa Ibom State as I suspect.
It shows therefore an evidence of the L2 user's difficulty with Sentence, Definite/Indefinite Article, Punctuation Marks, Tense and Aspect, Countable/Uncountable Nouns, Ambiguity or Logic (Ogbulogo 1997 and Okoro 2000). Nigerians nowadays seem to have little or no profound sense of lively humour if one recalls the performance of speakers, authors, and journalists from colonial times to the first decade of our nation's independence.

Wit as used for rhetoric and entertainment certainly changes from country to country and from one period to another. But the real owners of English Language have a peculiar grasp of stylistic control that allows for a satisfactory communication. This is what Chinua Achebe, Ebenezer Williams, Peter Enahoro, and others from Nigeria are noted for. My rather elaborate comment on this issue (Babalola 2000) was not presented, unfortunately, at the last conference of Modern Languages Association of Nigeria (MLAN) in the Department of English, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.

Rhetoric and grace cannot be omitted from good speech and penmanship. Humour in Standard English exists as much as it does in American, Canadian, and Australian English. But in Nigerian English, except in the creative writings, humour is gradually disappearing into the background. Let us take for example reporters on Nigerian Television, Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria, and Voice of Nigeria. Their own emphasis is on the news or “message” and nothing else. Frank Oliseh's “tonic” for T.V. viewers on Sunday night was a remarkable initiative even under the military dictatorship of the 1990s. Yet our older people seem to have carried on well with his drollery and satire at the same time that Nigerian children and youths went out for a video film and football tournament.

From my observation, the “news” alone has attracted them to some boring dailies and magazines on market stalls.

Nigerian adolescents as bilingual speakers and authors are clearly estranged from overseas radio and television broadcasting, book publications, or individual private contacts through travel for conferences and training on a routine basis.
The actual cost of providing these facilities is exorbitant and beyond the capacity of ordinary citizens here in this Age of Depression, Debt Burden, or Structural Adjustment Programme. If the National Electric Power Authority (NEPA) can give a regular supply of light to our homes, the situation may then be improved by listening to some 1.1 English users from America and Britain everyday. Personally I am amused and educated each time that I have leisure to enjoy the eloquence and wit of BBC radio correspondents from all parts of the globe. One British newscaster laughed at the famous Camerounian champion of football, Roger Miller, who organised a post-tournament match for his black compatriots not present at the 1994 World Cup in the United States. Pygmies came from rural villages to attend the Yaounde Stadium entertainment, but no provisions were made for their feeding there. So the foreign commentator stated that after two days the stadium was as empty as the stomach of the pigmy. A racist undertone may be detected in this utterance, just like the BBC reporter’s usual display of humour.

The lack of co-operation between English and Vernaculars has eroded a necessary strong basis for clarity and delight in writing as in speech among Nigerians. Achebe’s essays in *Morning Yet On Creation Day* (1975) and *Hopes and Impediments* (1987) are, in my opinion, intended for scholarship as well as pedagogy and amusement. Semantic plus grammatical correctness ought to be balanced with a careful attention to the needs of readers/listeners, which include an effective participation in what the author/speaker is trying to say either on serious or light-hearted occasions.

Nigerians who speak Yoruba and English, or Igbo and English languages are mainly inclined towards Western education and culture. Apart from their Christian upbringing they have been exposed to a broad knowledge of literature, history, geography and other humanistic or social science disciplines. A bias for the sciences, engineering and medicine need not mean a simultaneous decline of interest in linguistic education for competence in speech and writing. Good scholars and
authors embody this interest in broad knowledge – a liberal quality which should help everyone to attain distinction in their speciality. Of course it is said that speech, reading, writing and listening are useful engagements required of adults and students in L1 or L2 situation to achieve a sustained maximum goal of refinement and self-development (Emenyonyu 1978: 1995: 2000).

But instability in the Nigerian people’s education, as in their politics and economy, is fast removing the idea of optimism when you scrutinize any speech by University undergraduates. A prepared address like this one is taken from the Brochure of a recent Guest Lecture. 

The person of ... [name withheld] is no doubt a phenomenon, and a force to reckon with in the academic circuit of this country, and the world as a whole.

Being a seasoned Academic, an opinion-Leader; the author of several widely quoted scholarly books and essays; a Veteran Administrator with enviable record, such as being the Vice Chancellor of the Premier University of Ibadan for two terms; the current Pro-Chancellor and Chairman of the Governing Council of the University of Port Harcourt; the Chairman of Board of Directors of LASEM, a highly respected consultancy outfit in Lagos; and a member of numerous Learned groups and societies, where he had occupied and is still occupying various positions of responsibility, he is indeed a titan whose works and activities have affected the lives of many a scholar in this country.

While his case is not entirely like that of a hero who lives unsung, he obviously presents the picture of a towering giant whose feats and achievements have been incommensurably recognised in relation to his worth. (p.6).

I cannot hide at last the personality being eulogized, since you all know who he is. But you may ask if the given passage is worthy of interest at this biennial conference of MLAN, organised by and for men and women of sound academic learning. My position is that this writing which serves as “introduction” of an
emeritus professor, a great teacher of the English Language and Rhetoric, should
provoke your laughter and worry simultaneously. It is the sort of verbal delivery
ascribed to T. M. Aluko's protagonist, Benjamin Benjamin (alias "Benja-Benja") in
his comic novel, One Man One Matchet. If you have read Aluko's story published
in 1964, you may agree with me that Aluko's prophecy in the early sixties on the
danger of linguistic weakness and buffoonery has become a reality today on a
nationwide scale. The unbridgeable gap between youthful writers of the above
speech and a celebrated man who taught many Nigerian teachers of English in
academic institutions here and elsewhere, is evident at a cursory glance. By an
unhappy coincidence the teacher/scholar's retirement from academic life is marked
by this farcical show in the realm of bilingual African education and oratory.

Multilingualism and Our Dream of National Identity

We have not individually or as a nation been very successful with acquisition
of the bilingual experience especially in education, government, and international
politics. It is common knowledge that ECOWAS citizens from Benin, Ivory Coast,
Senegal etc. do get into United Nations Organisation (UNO) offices more easily than
Nigerians who are nearly a quarter of the African continent's population. A
Benenois, Professor Tidjani-Serpos, is the current UNESCO Director-General. I
doubt whether anybody from this country has ever been appointed to such a lofty
post at the world's key institution. This is perhaps one of the major reasons for
Nigeria proposing in modern days to include French as an international language to
be taught at the secondary school level. A multilingual education involving three
main indigenous languages of Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo was started over a decade
ago but dropped afterwards for unknown causes. Our leaders' will-power or
sincerity in the matter has not been clearly revealed and sustained with vigour. And
yet we are told that mother tongue is the linguistic foundation either in Africa,
Europe, Asia or America.
In order to make this new French project succeed, a number of deliberate and quick steps must be taken by federal and state government agencies. First, the problem of financial inadequacy has to be seriously looked into. The competent language teachers have to be found, just as a language laboratory is indispensable for both young and immature learners of French. In an English-speaking society like ours it is essential that long before they proceed to the Nigeria French Language Village, students quickly undergo ear-training exercises and pass a basic test in grammar, essay, comprehension, dictation, lexis or vocabulary. Occasional trips to neighbouring sister-states, like Benin and Togo, should also be encouraged and paid for by the authorities. I have not seen much of this seriousness even at the University where future tutors of French Language are groomed in a 3 to 4 academic year programme. If there is a meagre cash flow in the French department or unit, of course no effective attempt will be made to improve the student’s performance record outside the classroom lectures, tutorials and workshops.

Not many students of French are able to graduate each academic session from the Federal Universities and Colleges of Education. So most of our French Language tutors have to come from elsewhere, if and when it is brought fully into the secondary school syllabus in Nigeria. But, can the state with no funds support ECOWAS citizens who may volunteer to teach on a temporary basis through bilateral agreements? Then what is at present happening to English Language teachers may repeat itself. The graduates of Education alone are expected to teach in the schools supervised by officials from Ministry of Education. I do not believe that the certificated tutors can handle the number of students involved, neither do they possess the experience and the skill of Single Honours graduates from the Faculty of Arts in each University.

Moreover, the bilingual status of Nigerians (Akinyele 2000) must be considered thoroughly before a multilingual experiment in the secondary schools is launched. Anybody who is not strong in English and at least one of Nigerian mother tongues (Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, Edo, Ijaw, Urhobo, Kanuri and Nupe, just to
mention a few) will hardly do well in another language, even if good teachers exist and laboratory facilities are adequate. The French Government is sure to back up this scheme initially, but afterwards Nigeria needs Francophone nations and the international community to help in solving pedagogic problems in relation to French Language teaching and learning in Africa (Kwofie 1985 and 2000).

Let us remember at all times that a bilingual is someone “able to speak two languages” (Thompson 1996:77) and write in two languages “especially when these are learnt together in childhood” (Hornby et al. 1963:91). Also in Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, “bilingual” is defined as “able to speak two languages equally well” (1987:115). Here the context of social life is very important and the relevance of a national policy of education generally must be identified. We can say categorically that most people in cities and towns nowadays are bilinguals and that multilingualism seems to be inevitable in a place like Nigeria, which is surrounded by French-speaking neighbours such as Cameroun, Benin, Togo, Chad, Niger and to a large extent Mali and Bourkina Faso. Nigerian adolescents who travel out to these Francophone countries are able to play football, or to engage in commercial and similar transactions. What is lacking, however, appears to be a system of formal education in which the French Language replaces Latin and Greek as formerly taught in our pre-1970 secondary schools. I also envisage the idea of University departments of French or Modern European Languages allowing beginners without Ordinary Level credit pass in French to enrol for and major in the discipline. The University of Ibadan did that sort of thing successfully in the sixties, under Professor Evans. Actually there are other languages such as Russian, German and Portuguese at the tertiary level which demand no knowledge of the subjects for entry into the bachelor’s degree programme.

Nigeria as a dynamic and forward-looking black nation can encourage her citizens to know French and improve on her record in scholarship, politics, creative arts, literature, and other fields of intellectual endeavour. But the poor foundation in foreign languages, coupled with a rampant neglect of pedagogy in local ones, is
bound to undermine the Nigerian people's achievements in due course. This will happen if immediate care is not taken to solve the problems we have discussed. In this new age of return to democracy we must eschew lethargy as the bane of national development efforts under our military rule lasting for 26 years.

Both concepts of bilingualism and multilingualism are realistic and necessary to meet our quest for national identity. They can enhance the scope of social interaction, political discourse, and everybody's private aspirations, like academic research and intellectual adventure. As I glanced recently through a 1983 issue of *The Shuttle*, published by University of Lagos students, my anxiety increased in view of what occurred almost two decades ago and is still happening now. One final-year undergraduate student wrote in the journal, in a manner full of stark realism:

There is no doubt that the English Language has come to stay as Nigeria's lingua franca, and so, its importance to every Nigerian cannot be over-emphasised. This explains why the subject has become compulsory in the West African School Certificate Examination. In view of this, teachers of English Language have to work harder to make their students meet the required standard in the examination. It is however sad to note that instead of a higher percentage of passes, more and more students are failing the School Certificate examination in English. (Adewale 1983:60)

The techniques of teaching English as the official European Language in this country may help to reinforce those of indigenizing French, another related medium of instruction and social interaction. Rapid changes in the environment and local awareness of reality, however, do not allow statesmen and education planners to have a total grasp of the basic concerns of teachers and students. Hence this advice from my student is necessary:

There is the need for Principals of Secondary schools to realize that not anybody can teach English. The approach in the days
of traditional grammar should go. In those days, it was believed that anybody could 'teach' English and the logic was since you could teach other subjects through English, you could teach the language. Grammar was learnt outside the context of English reading materials. There is the need to equip the teacher of English and encourage him to work harder. Perhaps, more important is the fact that his load of work must not be too heavy.

(62)

Generally, policy-makers outside the schools do claim to know better than a teacher in the classroom. Therefore the fate of teachers, like that of education itself, will always remain uncertain in Nigeria and in a world where self-interest plus arrogance overrules wise counsel emanating particularly from unofficial quarters.

Conclusion

Native users of a Nigerian language, such as Yoruba do not learn its grammar from teachers, instead they are given it readily in childhood by their parents or family members and the immediate community. However, a skilful teacher and a suitable environment are required for bringing up children and young adults in their application of foreign languages like English and French. It is generally recognised that pronunciation of sounds, words, etc. cannot be done in the absence of classroom instructors and some machines for practical work in a language laboratory. The former Reading Centre at Ibadan University existed not for the learning and teaching of Yoruba, Igbo, or Hausa but of English as a medium of communication. The nature of mistakes attributed to students of English in Nigeria, for instance, is identifiable during regular exercises that are common only among the L2 speakers and writers. Just recently, another final year undergraduate student from the University of Lagos Arts Faculty left this note on a lecturer’s door:

I was here two times today with paul. please sir we have go home till tommorow by God grace.

A teacher's role in facilitating the acquisition of competence in a foreign language is crucial at the junior secondary school. Even at the intermediate and advanced
levels, students rely on their tutors in most of the points that native speakers usually take for granted. Indeed let us remember that no instructor would fail to show one important example of poor logic in the short utterance above. The phrase “please sir” is not connected with the main idea expressed by the student. What we have seen, then, is a case of language embodying an error like inconsistency in the thought-process. Our student is yet to learn to speak and write well in English, although he has no problem with Pidgin English or his native tongue Yoruba.

I have noted a decline in the standard of English as a Second Language in Nigeria. Yet the role of English as a lingua franca in our country with its numerous local cultures and mother tongues, cannot be disregarded in any bilingual or multilingual arrangement to harmonize them and create a sense of order. This is in spite of the fact that teaching and learning facilities have generally become unimpressive, or even obsolete, if compared with those of advanced nations. A postgraduate student of mine has complained, after two years of research, that the same reading materials he used for his bachelor’s and master’s degrees between 1975 and 1985 are available and nothing new could be found in the University Main Library.

I have also admitted that mother tongue is the foundation of education and linguistic sensibility, and that failure to teach our young ones the various local channels of communication at this time is tantamount to cultural and intellectual suicide. The question that bothers everyone is: How large should a class of English learners be to make the exercise of teaching very meaningful? Or how much English can a student speak or write in the short time allocated for each classroom practice? Politicians and educationists are still holding divergent opinions. Smaller classes on the one hand may exclude a lot of beginners, especially those who desire a practical knowledge of English in order to enter the job market or the business world. On the other hand a large classroom filled with too many young students can make effective learning and instruction difficult. A teacher may not possibly go round to meet every student, and short of this individual face-to-face contact the
whole point of pedagogic control plus assessment of students' work is defeated. In any French class it is not ideal to have too many learners; and for the grammar lesson only a small number can be well supervised. So we were about twelve or fifteen undergraduates in a class at the time I took up the French subject at Ibadan in the late sixties.

The situation of undergraduates taking a modern European language as subject of academic study will not differ from that of secondary school students in JSS and SSS, as regards the first stage of linguistic skill acquisition. With excellent arrangements and up-to-date facilities, a period of four to five years is sufficient for a mastery of any of the European languages. But experience has shown that learning Yoruba, Hausa, Igbo, English, French simultaneously leads to poor performance in communication. Since the grammars of those languages tend to muddle up one another in time, they must be kept separately. The belief among experts is that not more than three languages may be learnt and used effectively by an average individual. Hence, by implication, a polyglot is a rare person in any society. Enthusiasm for languages alone is inadequate if it is not matched with genuine talent; but the linguistic power as well as other qualities are never equally distributed in human beings.

Those of us who have succeeded in acquiring both English and French linguistic skills are well placed to advise the Federal and State Governments about the necessity for sufficient preparations, in terms of personnel and equipment, to face the many challenges of this new century. Our so-called "vernaculars" must be given proper integration into the nation's educational system if a bilingual and multilingual programme is to become actualized in our lifetime. Proficiency in this or that mother tongue as well as in English, French or Italian is what can after all justify any of us being called an educated citizen. A high level of competence in the above languages is possible whenever all the parties concerned - government and college authorities, parents, teachers and students - take a definite step to understand their responsibilities and act with utmost seriousness and commitment.
APPENDIX A

I was here two times today with paul. please sir we have go home till tommorow by God grace.

Yours faithfully

---------------------------------------------

APPENDIX B

Dear Sir,

NOTICE OF MATRIC NUMBER ALTERATION AND REQUEST FOR A MAKE-UP TEST OR ALTERNATIVE SUBSTITUTE

I humbly write to notify you of change of my matriculation number from 000102134 to 00102136 and to further request for a make-up test or any substitute (Marking of my exam script over hundred percent) to take care of test and assignment which I could not do in your course.

Being a newly transpered student from University of Benin to Unilag, the bureaucracy processes of the transfer was lengthy resulting to my admission letter coming to me when it was already two days to the examination and at a period I had ante-natal sickness. Though I copied notes from classmates and wrote exams, I did not write any of your test.

I shall be grateful if my request is gratified.

Thanks.

Yours faithfully,
1. From Ben Elugbe's research conducted in the former Mid-West Region of Nigeria, it is evident that more than a conservative number of 400 languages had existed in colonial times. For another study of a comparable situation of Ghana along the same West African geopolitical zone, see J. O. Ellis, *Linguistics in a Multilingual Society*, Accra: Ghana Universities Press, 1971.

2. See in the Appendix.

REFERENCES


