

## The Challenges of Globalization to Linguistic Pan-Africanism and African Development

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**Abstract.** The latest but not the least of the challenges that confront efforts in linguistic pan-Africanism is that of globalization. This study underlines the importance of language in development and highlights efforts being made at different levels towards achieving linguistic pan-Africanism. While being conscious of the dangers of narrow nationalism, the study recognizes a much more damaging danger in the imperialistic and neo-colonial phenomenon called globalization. Working in concert with multinational and world organizations such as World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Trade Organization (WTO), globalization seeks to build a world system in which languages of lesser economies and powers have no relevance. Africa would have to navigate through these realities as it seeks to arrive at pan-African language(s) that would be truly African and serve as springboard for its much needed development.

**Keywords:** Language, pan-Africanism, Globalization, Development, Nationalism.

### 1. Introduction

Scholars are unanimous on the fact that language is the most pivotal element of culture. It is the strongest key of identity. They have also agreed on the reality of the engineering factor of language in education, knowledge acquisition and development. The historical damage done by colonization on African languages is visibly

undeniable. African languages were apparently the worst hit of all facets of the African life by the colonial enterprise. Relegated to the status of the vernacular by the colonizer in an effort at getting at the very nerves of the psyche of Africans, African languages were made to suffer neglect for centuries. In fact, they are yet to fully recover after many decades of efforts by intellectuals, linguists and policy makers.

The Challenges facing pan-African linguistic revival and revalorization are many. They range from increase in nationalism consciousness and revival across Africa due to many factors, non-sustained and uncoordinated efforts, to lack of political will at all levels. The most recent but not less daunting challenge to the pan-African language question is Globalization.

After making inferences into the other challenges, this paper seeks to rest its focus on the various areas at which the phenomenon of Globalization is a clog in the wheels of progress of African linguistic emancipation for progress and development, before concluding that Africa of the 21<sup>st</sup> century needs to redouble efforts if she is to genuinely and successfully wrestle herself out underdevelopment.

### 2. Pan-African Linguistic Dichotomies, Dynamics and efforts

When one considers linguistic pan-Africanism or the language of pan-Africanism, many

questions come to mind, and these questions point to the dichotomies and complexities of the issue of language in Pan-Africanism studies: Why, What, which, how, when and who, are among the many prepositions setting up the questions: Why the need for any Indigenous language(s) of Pan-Africanism? What about the existing colonial languages? How does Africa intend to arrive at any common African indigenous language(s)? What will happen to the cultures of minor languages? Of which importance is ever the need for the adoption of indigenous African Languages given the long history of slavery and colonization? These and many more are questions around discourse in linguistic Pan-Africanism.

Pan-Africanism emphasizes unity beyond identities confined by geographical consideration and narrow nationalism. It emphasizes and champions the need for inclusiveness at socio-cultural and political levels by Africans wherever they may be. Language is central to achieving these laudable objectives of the fathers of Pan-Africanism (Fanon 1967). Language is indeed central to the revalorization and repositioning of the African race for growth and development. In seeking to resolve the language question in Pan-African a few pictures and areas of consideration have been drawn up clearly over the years. Should Africa adopt outright African languages or adopt inherited colonial languages as lingua franca, or settle for a combination of the two options, or for a creolization of specific African languages. *A central Pan-Africanism objective therefore, has been to seek ways of revalorizing Africa-languages, seeking, lingua franca from the creative domestication and blending of colonial languages with indigenous African languages, and simply using the colonial languages in authentically African ways, in the manner artificially employed by Amos Tutuola in the Palm Wine Drunkard and his other novels. Amos Tutuola's writings are an example of how African writers are busy creolizing inherited European languages through promoting intercourse with African languages, and in turn enriching local languages through borrowing.* (Nyamnjoh & Shoro, 2011: 37)

The options around the language question in Pan-Africanism upon which scholars have debated and worked over time are:

- To choose and promote a few already dominant African indigenous languages as languages, of Pan Africanism to replace the colonial languages and made to take pre-eminence over other local languages;
- To keep the colonial languages of English, French and Portuguese as more convenient modes of communication, diplomacy, education and development at the expense of African indigenous tongues;
- To do a combination of options 1 and 2 by keeping the colonial languages as of necessity while working for the development of indigenous African languages for socio-cultural relevance of Africa; and
- To adopt efforts at creolizing the colonial Eurocentric languages by injecting unto them African idiomatic and structural reality, thereby getting languages than both the low and high in the society could use.

The fact, actually, is that each of options has its own advantages and disadvantages, its own merits and demerits. None of them is free of corollary prices and consequences.

These dichotomies have, over the years, elicited discussions and debates. But these, rather than leading to solving the issue, have led to further dilemma and contradictions. Despite the age long debates; the question of language of pan-Africanism, is not yet settled, and does not look anywhere near being settled. This is because results of findings, recommendation from research efforts have not received adequate political will from appropriate quarters. But this is not to say that the language question has lost its value; far from it. If anything, it has received renewed impetus in recent years especially with the revival in consciousness of Africanism. Yet, the solution to the linguistic dilemma in Pan-Africanism doesn't lie in the audio or video tapes of conferences and symposia, not in the shelves of libraries, but in deliberate, decisive, concerted and sustained actions at state, regional and continental levels.

African intellectuals in Africa and the diaspora are busy doing their best in different areas of dichotomy of the language question and according to their convictions. For instance, Ngugi and Fagunwa, by writing in Kiswahili and Gikuyu, and Yoruba respectively, seek to prove that African indigenous languages are also capable and effective vehicles like European language. By so doing, these African scholars work to support the idea that African indigenous languages can well be languages of Pan-Africanism. The challenges they have are those of the time, resources and resolve it would require adopting a very few African languages over hundreds of others, in such a deeply cultural and ethnic continent like Africa. Ngugi in *Decolonizing the Mind* argues that language is at the heart of colonization and if any true decolonization would take place it must also be through language and linguistic politics. Europeans improved their languages to achieve effective colonization, so, some forms of imposition must have to take place for a genuine decolonization of the mind of the African. It is indeed a truly decolonized mind that can stand up for development and progress.

Questions arise to whether African indigenous languages are capable of being vehicles of science and technology. The answer is that there is no language that is incapable of modernity. Eurocentric languages enjoyed deliberate assistance and support from visionary leaders at some moments of their history for them to be at the level they are today.

The option of creolization as epitomized by the likes of Amos Tutuola and Ahmadu Kourouma, consists in creatively appropriately or endonizing colonial languages by infusing them with African symbolism and idioms. Better known as pidgin English or pidgin French, these languages have festered in capital and major cities of Africa, involving both the learned and the unschooled in effective and productive communication. But nowhere has it been elevated to the official status, even though many writers have published works of literature in pidgin.

One of the challenges with this perspective is that Africa has seen many versions being developed across countries. This is because a pidgin is typically local, whereby a European language is infused with local indigenous linguistic ingredients. From Nigeria through Ghana to Sierra Leone and from Uganda to South Africa through Kenya one comes across versions of Pidgin English due to local colorations.

Moreover, such creolized European languages are not capable of winning Africans in diaspora due to their varied and diversified contextualization. However, if worked upon and harmonized, creolization has the potential of gaining ground across African borders faster. Creolized languages are also capable of carrying scientific and technological knowledge if assisted in this regard at appropriate political, legislative, innovative and educational levels.

Another category of Africanizing colonial languages, aside pure creolization, is the one adopted by writers such as Achebe, Ekwensi, Soyinka and Kourouma. These authors, though writing in the colonial languages, rather than writing in pure English or French, as the case may be, they consciously attempt to strand their colonial language and indigenous tongue. These writers see colonial languages as tools for speaking to a larger African audience including Africans in Diaspora. Nyamnjoh and Shoro (2011), in *African Communication Research*, Vol. 4(1): 35- 62, put it more succinctly in their paper entitled “Language, Mobility, African Writers and pan-Africanism”

*...these authors include African symbols, characters, rhetoric, ethos and creative use of colonial language within their texts. Here, the litmus test for Pan-Africanism is not necessarily in how authentically African-language is, but rather, in how creative Africans are in their appropriation of colonial languages to address issues of Pan-African resonance. In this way, colonial languages lose their foreignness through creative local usage.*

Through the efforts of this category of writers it is clear that Africans are not passive consumers of colonial languages. Creativity and other

experiences come to the fore in the process of using colonial languages. This part is germane against the background of an argument, by scholars like Ngugi and Akinwumi Ishola that for African literature to be truly African, it has to be written in indigenous languages. Karim Barber (1995) argues in support of Achebe and others that Africa can't do away completely with colonial languages, because they too have now become depository of African memories in context. Moreover, apart from the fact that a growing number of Africans can now fend for themselves in both a European and an African language, the fact still remains that only a few texts are available in indigenous African languages, and only a few authors have ventured into writing in their local languages.

### 3. Nationalism and Pan-Africanism

Colonial apologists have argued that the colonial enterprise had already sown the seed of Pan-Africanism, as the colonial languages brought together nationalities hitherto divided by hundreds of local tongues and ethnic differences. They claim that through the imposition of a few European languages colonization had united Africans and saved them from tribal wars going on in Africa before the settling of the Whiteman. But they forget or refuse to see the negative effects of the balkanization of Africa at the wake of the Berlin Conference of 1884/85 where Africa was divided not minding the socio-cultural and ethnic affinities of African peoples.

The fact remains that Europe and other continents also have a great number of tongues before the major ones, through sheer historical evolution, took centre stages and became national languages. Even in those European countries till today some minor languages still exist in rural areas at the fringes of their societies. This is to say that if left on their own African societies would have evolved with bigger and stronger nationalities coming to the fore. And thereby major indigenous languages would have emerged by sheer interplay of natural and historical manifestations.

Today, the fact is that though independent countries, each African nation houses within her borders hundreds of nationalities, some of which

are clearly distinct from one another, as well as indigenous languages that are poles apart structurally, idiomatically and semantically.

One of the tragedies of colonization which made many to allude to it as a divide and rule enterprise is the fact that many nationalities are left divided in bits between countries, and in the hands of different colonial systems. But be as it may, in the face of present realities, Africa can strive to get the best for her Pan-African efforts for development and growth. Africans cannot forever continue to cry over the ills of colonization about six decades into political independence. Having said that, given the fact that every nationality has its right of existence in the face of growing consciousness of roots and ancestry, nationalism becomes a potential danger against Pan-Africanism, if care is not taken.

This is what scholars call "narrow nationalism" which is a threat to the ideals of Pan-Africanism envisioned by Nkrumah and others. Franz Fanon (1967) did warn against the dangers of falling for the temptation of excessive ethnic sentimentalism and over consciousness of nationalities. Indeed, it is only with a great sense of flexible inclusion that the objectives of Pan-Africanism can be achieved. In recent years, Nyanjoh (2006), Englebort (2009) and Phaswane Mpe (2001) among others have spoken against the wave of dangerous narrow nationalism and ethnic revival sweeping some regions of Africa. A phenomenon which is capable of easily and quickly reverse the little achievements recorded in Pan-Africanism efforts so far. Crises of citizenship in South Africa, Côte-d'Ivoire and Rwanda, in recent years, with resonance of nationalistic terms such as Makwerekwere (South Africa), Ivoirété (Côte-d'Ivoire) and Hutu-Tutsi (Rwanda), which all point to divides along ethnic and nationalist lines, are grave dangers to Pan-Africanism. Mutual acceptance must take place before any linguistic policy that would involve adopting one indigenous language over the other could be successful. An atmosphere of hatred fanned by narrow nationalism and over bloated ethnic consciousness cannot help national integration,

not to talk of regional and continental integration.

Narrow nationalism can easily jeopardize efforts in Pan-Africanism if conscious steps supported by strong political will at national levels are not taken to stem the trend.

#### 4. Language and Development

Education is the bedrock of development. Self-development and national societal development experience all over the world has proved that countries that build nationhood on indigenous national languages develop better and faster, while nations that have foreign languages as their media of education and research tend to lag behind in development ratings. European countries and indeed northern hemisphere nations fall into the first category while Africa falls into the second category.

The relationship between language, education and national development is deep and diverse. Language fosters unity and readiness to work together for common goals for development, especially when the language is nationality based and the nation is nationality built, unlike the African situation where dozens of nationalities and languages compete for relevance and supremacy in the national sphere. In such a situation, rather than being a chord and bond of national cohesion, languages become instruments of politicking and divide-and-rule in the hands of visionless leaders. Such a situation in turn retards growth and development.

Education is key to emancipation and development, that is why, if Africa is to develop well and fast, a review of national educational policies that places national languages as mediums of instruction, teaching and research, is inevitable.

Kwesi kwaa Prah (2000: ii) avers and rightly so that:

*...The developmental transformation needed to eradicate poverty in Africa is only possible if we can take knowledge and modern science to the masses in their own languages.*

There is therefore the need for linguistic revival and repositioning of indigenous African languages in teaching and research. The use of the language of culture of children enhances assimilation, knowledge acquisition and improves creativity. When children start by learning how to read and write in their mother tongue, they learn not only science but also foreign languages better. The experiment of Fafunwa (1989) in Ile-Ife, Nigeria, in the 1970s remains poignant where two groups of pupils were given instruction from the scratch, one group with Yoruba, the local indigenous tongue, and the other with English. English was just introduced to the first group as one of the subjects. At the end of the experimentation, the group which received instruction in Yoruba did far better in all subjects than the other one, at the school leaving examination after six years. The research effort underscores the fact that children learn better and faster in their mother tongue. This implies that indigenous languages are germane to national education and development.

There is therefore no doubt that the Eurocentric languages of English, French and Portuguese used for instruction in Africa mean a barrier to knowledge for the masses of African children, and to development. If the situation must change for the benefit of Africa and her teeming populations, policy makers at both national and pan-African levels need to work for standardization and harmonization of efforts towards solving the language question. Legislators, administrators, educationists, linguists, researchers etc., all have a stake in this. It must be emphasized that Africa's development, more than ever before, must be research driven. Most developmental efforts have proved fruitless so far because they are not research driven, and where they are research driven, coordination and harmonization of findings have lacked. Moreover, "development research in Africa has failed to make substantial improvement in the quality of life for the majority, mainly because development theory and practice have failed to exploit local languages as media for research and development work" (Kitula Kingei, 2000:25). In fact, no meaningful development can take place without the full participation of the

masses, and the masses cannot fully participate in a language foreign to them and their culture. The importance of speaking to people in their own languages is sine qua non to development. Djité (1990) notes that there is considerable research which clearly demonstrates that less than 15% of the African population of the francophone countries barely function in French, while 90% of the same population functions very well in the widespread African lingua franca such as Hausa, Djula/Bamananka, Fulfulde, Kiswahili and Wolof.

The introduction or adoption of indigenous African languages for education and research has its challenges no doubt, but the long term benefits certainly surpass the challenges. Where English or French have reigned supreme for almost a century, sentiments, complexes, fears, doubts cannot be overcome overnight, no doubt. One of the challenges certainly is that schools compete to give instruction in English or French, as the case may be, because any school that uses a local indigenous language as medium of instruction would not get students, especially in this era where private schools spring up all over the place due to reduced government investment in the sector. No private school owner would take that risk, and governments are no longer building new schools, yet the population of children keeps increasing. One other challenge is the sentiment attached to indigenous languages by their owners due to cultural affiliation and, at times, to ethnic rivalry. Mark Zuckerberg, the Facebook Chief Executive, came to Nigeria in 2017 and eulogized the qualities of one of the main Nigerian languages, Hausa. The uproar that greeted the statement innocently but genuinely made by the technology giant shows that any attempt to adopt an indigenous African language over others must be done with tact and wisdom.

Similar experiences to that of Zuckerberg have taken place in many countries in Africa and the diaspora. In Seychelles, for instance, it is recorded that the introduction of Créole in elementary school as language of instruction was vehemently attacked by the Elite that preferred English and French to Créole viewed as a street language; whereas, Créole is the

language of the masses, spoken by everybody in the society, both the high and the low. (Brock-Ultné, 2001). In South Africa, policy makers seem to have doused possible rivalry among the major ethnic groups by pronouncing all eleven major languages in the country as equal and official languages. And this is fully backed up by appropriate legislative enactment in section 6(1) of the country's constitution (Kamanga, 2001).

In the light of the foregoing, this study emphasizes strong political will at national and Pan-Africa levels, as the examples of Seychelles and South Africa point out. The establishment of Regulatory Boards, Language Academies and curriculum Development Centers which would be given tools and freedom to research and work out policies on African indigenous languages is also recommended. Also, like Obanya (1980) rightly puts it, African policy-makers and Western aid donors should devote more attention to strengthening African indigenous languages as languages of instruction, especially in basic education, to start with, if Africa is not to miss her long overdue development again in the 21<sup>st</sup> century; if Africa is to stand and be counted among societies that have crossed the Rubicon of underdevelopment.

### **5. Globalization and Linguistic Pan-Africanism**

Arguably, the most recent challenge in efforts at achieving linguistic Pan-Africanism is the phenomenon of globalization. Globalization means different things to different people, depending on parameters and interests in focus. A broad and encompassing definition would be that Globalization is the process of intensification of economic, political, social and cultural relating across international boundaries. In that sense we can easily talk of economic globalization, political globalization and socio-cultural globalization. Whether a clear demarcation could be made of these three main classifications, or not, remains debatable. But one thing that this study has established so far is that it is difficult to separate culture/language from economy and politics. Though in the concept of globalization, economy seems to be

the most powerful of all sectors, yet every people, every nationality, every nation cherishes a good range of political and socio-cultural affinities that homogenization efforts of globalization cannot destroy. Though whatever is able to swallow a people's economy is well able to swallow their politics and culture, yet, diversity still remains very much the beauty of nature, and the hallmark of humanity.

The benefits of globalization are many: more transcendent homogenization of institutions, practices and relations for more international trade, more goods and services generally available at lower prices, higher quality goods and services, lower cost and higher standard of living... But behind those seeming glorious advantages of globalization lies a series of less inglorious benefits to some parties or others in the globalized world. The level at which parties tap into the benefits could either be an advantage or a disadvantage. The age long divide of North and South could either be narrowed or widened. The fact of the matter in recent years is that the divide has turned into a gulf, to the extent that many critics view globalization as another form of colonization of the world or a re-colonization of the Third World.

Indeed, the phenomenon of globalization of the last few decades has accelerated and strengthened not only the economic and economic grips on Africa, but it has also consolidated the linguistic penetration and domination of the Black Continent. Through a number of international agreements and world organizations, globalization has reduced the power of states and countries to decide and exercise control on some areas of their existence. The World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Trade Organization (WTO) and similar organizations have effectively taken control of a number of areas of decision making in the world, thereby weakening the state, especially the African state (Brock-Utne, 2002).

One of the implications of the weakening of the state by globalization is the drastic cut in expenditures on education and the encouragement of private ownership of schools,

even the elementary. This is where efforts at reviving and repositioning indigenous African languages suffer a blow. When International Donors dictate what to spend on education, when International organizations put ceiling on how much should go on education and research, they inadvertently kill the fire of educational nay linguistic revival.

Moreover, globalization is carried out through a small number of dominating languages. Robert Phillipson (2001), an Englishman, shows how the forces behind globalization promote the diffusion of English, often to the detriment of the mother tongue of most peoples. In fact, even in France which is one of the European nations that enjoy international linguistic patronage; many universities have adopted English as language of instruction, in order to attract international students, in the spirit of globalization. This is against the old practice where foreign students were required to take French language courses for a period of time before settling down for their studies. If such a thing could happen even in Europe, one could imagine the fate of African countries dreaming of promoting their indigenous languages to eventually replace the colonial languages. Globalization makes such a dream a much taller one indeed. Rubagumya (2003), while writing on the linguistic challenges faced by policy makers in Tanzania states that parents argue that "we live in the time of globalization and that English is the language of the global village" to take their children to private shorts using English as medium of instruction rather than Kiswahili.

So, the point here is that the structural adjustment policies meted out for Africa, as well as capital-led globalization being carried out, have led to a strengthening of the former colonial languages to the detriment of the African languages which most Africans speak. Globalization can therefore not be of any benefit to Pan-African linguistic emancipation. If anything, globalization is a clog in the wheels of progress of linguistic Pan-Africanism. But if Africa is to truly develop within the globalized world, the fact remains that her education and

research efforts must be conducted in the language(s) spoken by most of her people.

The adoption of indigenous African languages as medium of instruction and platform for development does not in any way mean a jettisoning of colonial languages. China, for instance, which is the fastest growing economy in the world, gives instruction to her citizens in Chinese language. But, China is well aware of the power of European languages in the globalized world. That is why China political leaders do not engage in a linguistic competition or imperialism with the rest of the world, instead, their children acquire scientific knowledge in Chinese, their mother tongue, but also learn English, French etc., in order to penetrate the world. Chinese engineers and technicians are everywhere in Africa getting engaged and making money, while assisting in African infrastructural building. They come with some form of proficiency in the Eurocentric language of the nation where they work. Africa can and should as well, without abandoning the relevance of colonial languages, develop a very few indigenous languages to the level of science instruction and research.

## 6. Conclusion

Though Globalization seems to have continued from where colonization and neo-colonization have left the work of inflicting damage to linguistic pan-African drive, hope is not lost over efforts at achieving linguistic pan-Africanism. Africans at all levels of interests need only to deploy needed goodwill and commitment, as well as concerted, sustained and coordinated efforts. On-going works by intellectuals and researchers must continue. Policy makers must know that no genuine development can be achieved when education is still made available to children in foreign languages, and must therefore apply more political will. Nations like India and China are good examples in this regard. They have overcome or are overcoming developmental challenges even in the midst of the same tough globalization challenges, by first overcoming the distraction of internal narrow nationalism

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