

# **The Challenges and Prospects of Hybridizing Aspects of L1 & L2 in the Teaching of Language and Literature in Nigeria**

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## **Abstract**

In a bilingual/multilingual environment, the roles played by the first and second language can be distinct as well as complementary. They are distinct in terms of the function of one being an official language and the other being a local language or language of immediate environment. In the Western part of Nigeria, Yoruba is the local language while English is the official language. The contention of this paper is that in the teaching of language i.e. English and literature, one of the languages can help the other in terms of understanding and use. The central thesis is that language and culture cannot be separated. In the same vein, language and thought are also intertwined. If language, culture and thought are interwoven, it therefore becomes logical and expedient that the knowledge of one language will help the other. That is why the principle of hybridization of elements of the two languages cannot be ruled out. The paper is aware of the fact that there are prospects as well as challenges in trying to hybridize aspects of the two languages in teaching some aspects of language and literature but the fact is that the idea is a worthwhile one.

**Keywords:** hybridization, domestication, first language, second language, heterogeneity.

## **Introduction**

It is a fact that Nigeria is one of the linguistic crossroads of Africa. This is because within the geographical boundary known as Nigeria, there are approximately 400 to 500 distinct languages. While linguistics is the scientific study of language or particular languages, language does not lend itself to easy and straight definition. Many scholars such as Lyons (1981), Mouin (1974), Lehman (1976), and Pearson (1977) have given different definitions a Bamgbose (1971) and there has been one deficiency or the other in their series of definitions. No doubt, language is the primary and most highly elaborated form of human symbolic activity and it is made up of symbols made by sounds produced by the vocal apparatus which are arranged in classes and patterns which make up a complex and symmetrical structure. Scholars do define language in a way that suits their purposes. Therefore, to suit our purpose in this paper, language is seen as the human vocal noise or the arbitrary graphic representation of this noise, used systematically and conventionally by members of a speech community for purposes of communication. It is made up of sounds which have a definite order of arrangement for effective communication. From whichever way we look at it, a society will not be complete without language. We talk of literature when language is put into practical use in series of creative ways to portray our society. Nigeria is heterogenous and there is a very strong linguistic diversity within the Nigerian polity. It is against this background of ethnic and linguistic diversity that a foreign language, English, was introduced to Nigeria in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The new linguistic component may be said to simplify the language situation in Nigeria but in another sense, it has complicated a total linguistic pattern by adding one more language to the already pluralistic ones thereby adding a new dimension of complexity as well. With the inclusion of English, we are in the realm of second language.

## **Second Language in Nigeria**

The English language occupies an important position in spite of the numerous local languages. As a second language in Nigeria, English is being used to enhance our national unity and cultural integration. As the society develops, as the institutions and organizations spread and multiply, as groups interact with groups in the process of modernization, the place of English as a second language gets more interwoven with the life of the people (Adeniran, 1979; Oyeleye, 1990).

The position of English in Nigeria can be conveniently compared with the position of English in Britain, America, Canada, Australia etc where English is the source language. This is to say that while English is native to these countries, it is non-native to Nigeria and many other countries where it is used as the second language (L2) or a foreign language (FL). The non-native category of English can be systematically classified into three prominent bases:

- (a) Manner of acquisition
- (b) Socio-cultural term; and
- (c) Functional term.

With these classifications, it is clear that in Nigeria, English is a non-native language and it is used as a second language by a large number of Nigerians. To a reasonable extent, it has solved the problem of inter-ethnic communication; and it also mitigates the fear of linguistic domination by any indigenous language over others.

The English language as a second language in Nigeria is taught through formal education by teachers and it is therefore transplanted and adopted. It automatically imposes bi/multilingualism on the community of users. Functionally in Nigeria, English meets some of the needs of its users though it does not cover all the life situations. Again, the language has the socio-cultural function of forcing bi/multilingualism, bi/multiculturalism on the users because language and culture are concomitants (Lader,1967; Lyon,1968; Finnocchiaro,1969; Herman, 1988).

The language provides a link in the Nigerian heterogenous community and it can therefore be regarded as a code of communication for diverse linguistic and socio-cultural groups. It is the official language of the people of Nigerians and that is why Adetugbo (1979) observes that as Nigerian official language, English has come to be seen as probably the country's most important language.

As said earlier, the teaching of a language like English in Nigeria has to go through a very formal way if communicative competence is to be attained. The notion of linguistic competence by Chomsky is seen as the innate knowledge which is possessed by an ideal speaker/hearer as far as his knowledge is concerned. This knowledge will therefore enable him to create and recognize the grammatical sentence of his language. The claim cannot be disputed that the knowledge of the linguistic rules of a language is important. Searle (1968:22) states that "speaking a language is engaging in a rule-governed form of behavior". But all the same, the rules governing language use should be seen as incorporating more than the linguistic ones; they also cover sociolinguistic rules and this assumption underlies the notion of "communicative competence" as was explicated by Habermas (1970) and Hymes (1971).

As already highlighted, Nigeria is in a linguistic crossroad when one looks into the state of our language, both local and foreign. Much as we make use of English in Nigeria, our local languages are still there to be attended to and that is why we usually lay claim on our language policy document as it affects education. The language policy on education recognizes the multidimensional and multi-lingual three tier political-polity which tries to capture the multi-ethnic as well as multi-lingual polity embedded on us. Emenanjo (1998) observes some important aspects of the policy.

- The policy provides for the mother tongue and/or language of immediate community as the language of initial literacy at the pre-primary and junior, primary levels, as of adult and non-formal education.
- It also sees the three major (national) languages- Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba at L2 as the languages of national culture and integration.
- English is the official language, the language of formal literacy, the bureaucracy, secondary and higher education, the law court and so on.
- Selected foreign languages especially French and Arabic as the languages of international communication and discourse.

In addition, the policy hammers the following:

- Multilingualism as the national goal,
- English as the de-facto official language,
- Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba as potential national language which are to be developed and used as L1 and L2 all through the formal educational system,

- All Nigerian languages should be seen as meaningful media of instruction in the initial literacy and in life-long and non-formal education.

With all these, we can see what our language policy aims to carry out at the various levels of our education. As usual and as can be seen, Nigeria is bedeviled by implementation. We can then ask ourselves if these policy statements are faithfully carried out; the opposite is the case!

The teaching of language in multilingual situation like Nigeria should take into cognizance our cultural background since language and culture cannot be separated (Lader 1967). As a second language, there is no perfect way the English language can be taught or pronounced the same way the users of English as a first or native language will do it. In the aspects of grammar, the rules can be strictly followed but this will still make our understanding of the language too bookish. There is the need to ensure that communication is not broken down and this can be done by being guided by the linguistic situation in our environment. The teaching of lexical items of English should also take into consideration quite a good number of lexical items which are purely local but which have the English names. Examples are lexical items like bush-meat, headgear, chase, drop, go slow etc. These may not have the meaning to the native speakers of English but to users of English as a second language in Nigeria, the meaning is there. The fact here is that there is the semantic extension in the use of these words or groups of words. We can have expressions like the following:

- (i) Let us branch at the next junction near the College gate.
- (ii) Yes, the driver has to drop us there.
- (iii) There is a girl there I want to chase.
- (iv) Say me well to the new girl-friend of yours.
- (v) Do you please have extra chewing-stick?

These examples have shown that there is an aspect of domesticating the language to meet the needs of the society. The meanings of the underlined words and expressions have been extended beyond their original meanings. We also have examples of expressions like ‘ I am coming’ when actually the speaker is going. Others include expressions like ‘Well done sir’, ‘The guy is a four-one-nine’, ‘ He is my tight-friend’, ‘We will meet in the upper week’, and so on. The meanings of expressions like these have been indigenized in the context of usage. In our teaching and learning, it is advisable to avoid using the examples of words that are purely esoteric in the teaching of our children when there are things that can be easily used in our local environment. Language is creative and as such, new things will be developing everyday; therefore if we are having new Englishes, that are serving their environments adequately well, it is something good. Our languages and environment should continue to guide us and our thinking processes. This is because language and thoughts are closely related and we cannot think beyond the confines of our language.

### **Literary Aspects**

Language and literature cannot be separated because language is the life-wire of literary works. All the genres of literature exploit language in series of ways so as to carry out their messages to the audience. The English language had been exploited optimally by literary writers in Nigeria. We can talk of writers like Wole Soyinka, Chinua

Achebe, Niyi Osundare, Gabriel Okara, Cyprian Ekwensi, T.M. Aluko, Femi Osofisan, Amos Tutuola and a host of others. Language has been used by these writers to perform a lot of roles among the audience. There has also been the effective manipulation and blending of language to suit the audience addressed. Examples are the language of Tutuola on his works, the style used by Soyinka in *Forest of a Thousand Deamons*, Okara's use of language in *The Voice* and a host of others. Writers can deliberately domesticate English language so as to carry out the intended message of the writers as these literary texts have identified in terms of grammar, lexis and the intended message. In these works, we can see direct translations like 'I put my bottom to the ground' in Soyinka's *Forest of a Thousand Daemons*. Although this is a direct translation, the meaning can be deduced easily as a deliberate work of art. A writer can deliberately hybridize elements in English and a local language in such a way that the work will be stylistically relevant and interesting. Works of Amos Tutuola have shown what looks like 'thinking in Yoruba language but writing it out in English'. A work like this definitely has some artistic as well as stylistic importance. Also, readers of such a text who also have Yoruba as his first language will find the work easy in reading and understanding.

Apart from the English language, local languages are also not left out here. We can boast of literary works in the three major languages- Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. The Yoruba listeners and readers will never forget the indelible works of the popular writer- D.O. Fagunwa who has to his credit notable work like *Ogboju Ode Ninu Igbo Irunmole*, *Igbo Olodumare*, *Ireke Onibudo* and so on. In other prominent local languages, writers like these abound. The importance of the use of local languages is noted across Africa and this reminds us of the popular East African writer- Ngugi wa Thiongo who, after many works written in English, decided to be writing in his local language so as to meet his audience.

All these have shown the relevance and importance of writing in both English as well as our local languages. Again, since language and culture cannot be separated, our language will be the best tool that can be used to bring out the message we intend to put across. No other language can portray our culture optimally except our local language. The teaching of literature should not be limited to the confines of the purely the works of the English people.

### **Challenges and Prospects**

Languages, both local and foreign, have lots of challenges as well as prospects in a multilingual setting like Nigeria. In the first place, a foreign language like English, though can be said to be a unifying language, can also be seen as a language of disunity. Disunity in the sense that quite a good percentage of Nigerians from different language groups cannot communicate in English. Only few educated Nigerians can express themselves in English across cultures.

Apart from this, majority of Nigerians today, especially parents want their children to express themselves in English. In most of our private nursery and primary schools, pupils are not allowed to express themselves in their local languages or language of their immediate environment. Even at homes, quite a good number of parents will prefer to address their children in English. The outcome of this is that such children will not be competent in their local languages and at the same time, competence in English

will be lacking especially when it comes to the correctness, rules and grammaticality of the language.

There is the need to disabuse the minds of our people from the wrong connotation people often have for our mother tongues. No language is inferior to the other inasmuch as such a language serves the purpose it is expected to serve. Our local languages should be honoured because if we see our language as inferior, it is like saying our culture is also inferior since language and culture are inseparable.

Much as there are challenges, the teaching and learning of language and literature in a multilingual setting like Nigeria are full of prospects. Trudgill (1983) believes that language is not only for communicative function, it is a very important means of establishing and maintaining relationship with other people. Such relationship between people of different linguistic background is carried out through English language in Nigeria. Also, nationalism views group identity and self-identity. Here, self-identity through group identity will be most impossible without a particular language. By implication, one cannot fight successfully without a particular language of the group. In this connection, English is the second language in Nigeria and it can fortify our group relationship. Again, high status is conferred on the user and at the same time, it opens doors to high technology, science, trade, diplomacy, modern education, and international politics.

The language has become the medium of inter-change between cultures and this medium has no claim any intrinsic superiority, rather, its pre-eminent role developed due to extra-linguistic factors like colonialism, language diversity, minority cases, educational problem and others. Mazrui (1975: 188) observes that the language “is not merely a medium for political exchange in the narrow sense....We regard English language as a unifying force”.

Our local languages as well enhance our culture, social status and the overall development if we are able to put them in the proper pedestal. We hear and see the role that local languages are playing in many technologically and politically developed countries these days. This means that no language can be seen as backward, much depends on how the owners of the language handle their languages.

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