

## **LANGUAGE CONTACT AND LANGUAGE CONFLICT: THE CASE OF YORUBA-ENGLISH BILINGUALS**

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### **Abstract**

*The complex dynamics of a language contact situation can really not be explored in just one paper. Thus, the present paper examines only an aspect of the Yoruba-English contact situation with regards to the individual personalities involved. Generally, competitions and conflict, both in the individual and in the society as a whole, can be regarded as a natural concomitant of situations of languages in contact.*

*The paper describes the linguistic situation in Nigeria with particular reference to level of use and level of prestige of two languages, English and Yoruba. Using questionnaire data from 300 individuals, the investigation reveals that speakers of all ages use English almost exclusively for official matters. For unofficial matters, the use of English appears to correlate negatively with age: the older participants use Yoruba more while the younger participants use either both languages or English more. The result also shows that the younger generation may not be proficient enough in Yoruba to pass it onto the next generation. The paper concludes that the Nigerian government should take this situation seriously and modify its language policies with respect to languages other than English. Languages such as Yoruba and Hausa should be mandatory in schools.*

### **Introduction**

Bilingualism is widespread among Nigerians. This is a pointer to the country's multilingual and multiethnic nature. The number of languages in Nigeria has been variously classified (see Hansford, et al, 1976; Adekunle, 1976; Agheyisi, 1989; Blench and Crozier, 1992, among others). Although the number cited in each classification may vary, this inconsistency notwithstanding, what

becomes patently clear from the different classifications is that Nigeria is extremely linguistically diverse. Indeed, as evident in Table 1 below, in the Ethnologue's 12<sup>th</sup> edition (see <http://www.sil.org/ethnologue/> in Yuka 2002) Nigeria happens to be one of the 22 most linguistically diverse countries in the world.

**Table 1: The 22 most linguistically diverse countries in the world (in terms of number of languages)**

Over 500 LGS	Over 200 LGS	Over 100 LGS
1. Papua New Guinea 850	1. Nigeria 410	1. Philippines
2. Indonesia 670	2. India 380	2. Russia
<b>Total</b> 1,520	3. Cameroon 270	3. USA
	4. Australia 250	4. Malaysia
	5. Mexico 240	5. Peoples' Republic of China
	6. Zaire 210	6. Sudan
	7. Brazil 210	7. Tanzania
	<b>Sub total</b> 1,970	8. Ethiopia
	<b>Total</b> 3,490	9. Chad
		10. New Hebrides
		11. Central African Republic
		12. Myanmar (Burma)
		13. Nepal

In Nigeria today, according to the 15<sup>th</sup> edition of the Ethnologue report for Nigeria (see [http://www.ethnologue.com/show\\_country.asp?name=Nigeria](http://www.ethnologue.com/show_country.asp?name=Nigeria)), there are about 510 living languages co-existing with one another. It is interesting to note that apart from the many indigenous languages, which are of course the mother tongues of Nigerians, non-indigenous languages such as English, French, Arabic, German and Russian also exist. English has become a second language in Nigeria, while Pidgin English, with probably the largest number of speakers, has also emerged as a result of the contact of English with the indigenous languages.

Nigeria, no doubt, is a nation that has witnessed a cross-current of linguistic activities due to her inherent multilingual nature coupled with her colonial experience under the British. However, for the purpose of this essay, two of these languages in use in Nigeria (Yoruba and English) have been isolated for close study and analysis. This is premised on the fact that any time there is language contact, there must be language conflict. Indeed, languages in contact are often languages in competition and there is no language contact without language conflict (Igboanusi & Oha 2001:125; Egbokhare 2004:509). Moreover, the resolution of the crisis thus generated by the contact may have more far-reaching effects than one might have wished.

This paper is of the view that the issue of language contact and language conflict exists at three distinct but interrelated levels viz: the social, psychological and linguistic axes of the contact situation. The social aspect is concerned with issues like language choice or language use, the psychological aspect has to do with language attitude as well as language and ethnicity, while the focus of the linguistic aspects is on code-switching, interference, etc.

Each aspect is an area of investigation all by itself. Therefore, the paper examines the social and psychological aspects of the language contact situation. The paper discusses one major problem of multilingualism in Nigeria, which as of today has been left unresearched. Once the problem is placed in its proper perspective, then a permanent solution will emerge with time as long as we do not relent in our efforts at finding a lasting solution to the problem.

### **Language contact and language conflict**

Anytime languages come in contact a number of things actually come in contact like the people who speak these languages as well as their cultures. Language contact is described as a phenomenon whereby two or more distinct languages are spoken within a speech community. 'Two or more languages' according to Weinreich (1974:1), are 'said to be in contact if they are used alternately by the same persons'. Yusuf (1999:159) is of the view that 'language contact should be seen in the broad sense of contact between two cultures that can be as a result of conquests, wars, migration, colonization, etc.' Whenever two languages come in contact within an individual or a community such an individual or host community inevitably becomes bilingual (cf. Crystal 1997). Notice however that bilingualism and bilinguality are relative terms that accept very loose definitions. Thus, the need to ask how (genuinely) bilingual are these bilinguals produced by the contact situation. We hope to answer this question with the data presented here on the Yoruba-English bilinguals of Nigeria.

### **The contact between Yoruba and English**

The English language is spoken by a large number of people who make up the country, Nigeria. Among these people are the Yoruba who occupy the south-western part of the country and number between 20 and 25 million. Yoruba is spoken by 22 million second language speakers in other countries of the world (Igboanusi & Peter, 2005: 77; Gimes 2000:202).

The Yoruba language has been classified as one of the major languages in Nigeria simply because of the population that speaks it. The language has been developed to the point of being a school subject from the primary school to the University level mainly in the southern part of the country.

The English language was introduced to the Yoruba speech community by the Europeans (mainly Portuguese) as far back as 1821. The introduction of English took place in Ile-Ife and other West African countries around this time (i.e., 1821) due to the establishment of trade contact between the Europeans and the Africans. Apart from the traders and explorers, others who introduced the English language into the Yoruba speech community were the missionaries to Africa. Thus, following trade contact, was religion. The Europeans after establishing their trade also brought their religion (Christianity) into the community that is under study.

The contact of English with Yoruba brought about a simplified form of English known as 'pidgin'. Pidgin, however, is regarded as the corrupt form of English because its grammar is very different. It has no defined standard grammar or model. Indeed pidgins do not have noun-verb agreement endings. Pronunciations tend towards a pattern of consonant followed by vowel clusters.

According to Bamgbose (1995:13) Pidgin is a 'contact English'. To Odumuh (1987:10), 'The colonial administration remained the single greatest carrier of English language and culture'. Odumuh observes further:

*The language of the Colonial Administration (the civil service) was English. Not only did the administrators help to 'spread' English language using bureaucratese and officialese: but more importantly in their homes they again did in their interaction with domestic staff—guards, gardeners, stewards, etc. In India these were the nurturing places, which manufactured Butler English; in Nigeria they were responsible for the rise of Nigerian Pidgin, non-standard Nigerian English, and Nig E (p.11).*

Pidgins "are formed when speakers of one language engage in trade with speakers of another, or work on plantations managed by speakers of another, and neither knows the other's language" (Le Page 1977:222). Pidgins are no one's mother tongue. They are used primarily in trading or plantation situations. Thus, Pidgin English is a blend of indigenous languages of the West African coast and English. Pidgin English is learned and used informally in Nigeria in a conscious attempt to participate in communication process in this multilingual society. According to Igboanusi (2002:86) "The influence of Nigerian Pidgin (English) is so overwhelming in recent times that even its most vocal opponents are often forced to use it because of the need to communicate with those who cannot understand English, especially if they are from different linguistic groups".

Thus, the simplified structure of Pidgin and its adaptability to local situations make it possible for both literate and non-literate Nigerians to use it. In cities like Lagos and Abuja or States such as Edo, Delta and Rivers which are heterogeneous pidgin serves as a lingua franca. However, in Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa speech communities pidgin is considered as a trade language.

Creole is a standardized form of pidgin. It arises when a pidgin language becomes the native language of new generation of children. During the bleakest days of slavery in the western world, only pidgin languages were available as common languages among the several diverse slaves taken from Africa to the sugar cane plantation in America and they became the basis for the mother tongue of new generation. Creole can be considered a mother tongue of the Caribbean, some South Americans and Sierra Leoneans of West Africa. It is a standard language with its own pronunciation pattern, rules of grammar, lexicon and meaning (Akindele & Adegbite 2005).

At the independence of Nigeria in 1960 the government adopted English as the official language of the country. Indeed, until recently, English was recognized as the only official language in Nigeria. It is the language of administration, instruction and communication in every sector of the country. At this point it became very essential for Nigerians (including the Yoruba) to learn how to use the English language. Thus, the people became bilinguals.

At the dawn of independence, Nigeria hoped for an all round development. Unfortunately, this has not been actualized because of the spate of conflicts. One of the conflicts already identified in literature that has hindered unity and socio-cultural development in Nigeria is language conflict. Language conflict in Nigeria is not only a phenomenon that exists among linguistic minorities; it also exists within individuals. This fact will emerge as we consider the data.

### **Statement of Problem**

The community under examination in the present study presents an occasion for the discovery of additive bilingualism or subtractive bilingualism. The bilingualism is widespread among Nigerians. Additive and subtractive types of bilingualism were first defined by Lambert (1975). According to Lambert, 'Additive' bilingualism refers to a bilingual situation which results in the acquisition of both mother tongue and second language skills, while subtractive bilingualism results in the loss of mother tongue skills while paying greater attention to learning and using the second language. However, as noted by Oyetade (2002:52) "on top of the indigenous languages of Nigeria is a superstructure of exoglossic languages. Chief among them is the English language. It is the official language, the language of education and upward social mobility, language of wider communication or international language and language of inter-ethnic communication. Its knowledge is therefore most valued in Nigeria". Thus, it is the main thrust of this paper to find out if the social and psychological forces that are responsible for the prominence of English among Nigerians have given rise to absolute bilingualism or subtractive bilingualism. Absolute bilingualism here means perfect bilingualism or ambilingualism—a mastery of two languages by an individual.

The main objectives of this study, therefore, include the following:

- i) To investigate the pattern of bilingualism among the Yoruba;
- ii) To examine the process of code maintenance among the Yoruba;
- iii) To examine the attitude of the Yoruba toward English language and their mother tongue.

### **Methodology and Procedure**

The instrument used for data collection for the study is the questionnaire supplemented by participant observation method. Since the study was intended to get to the root of causes factorial to language attitudes of respondents, informants

had to be drawn from only the Western part of Nigeria where the researcher could easily assure the informants of his positive disposition towards their language for them to agree to answer the questions objectively.

Subjects for the study comprised three hundred (300) respondents. The majority of the respondents were contacted in their schools and offices. In addition, households within this geographical zone were randomly selected and from each household the husband, the wife and one or two of their children above the age 11 years were given the questionnaire to complete so as to ensure a good representation. Again, it afforded us the opportunity to observe first hand the language behaviour of these respondents in a natural setting. The respondents included professionals (teachers, doctors, lawyers, politicians and nurses), civil servants and students. Variables for the study included mother tongue, occupation, sex, age and level of education. Virtually all the respondents were literate in English and Yoruba which is the common situation in Western Nigeria.

The instrument for the study was a twenty-eight point item questionnaire with sections A, B, and C. Section A was intended to elicit information on demographic variables. Section B of the questionnaire was meant to gather information on the language background and the language behaviour of respondents with various interlocutors. Section C aimed at eliciting information on the views, opinions and attitudes of respondents in respect of the languages in the community's repertoire. Section C contained some open-ended questions since as opined by Adegbija (1994: 54) "attitudes . . . like many aspects of life, are far more complex than merely agreeing or disagreeing with particular statements". For the analysis of our results, we used simple frequency counts and percentages.

### **Demographic Information**

There are 300 respondents in all. Of this population, the males constitute 44.67 percent while the females are 55.33 percent. We present the age distribution of the respondents in table 2 below.

**Table 2: Distribution of Respondents by Age Groups in Percentages (N = 300)**

Age	Number	Percentage
11 – 20	93	31
21 – 30	67	22.33
31 – 40	75	25
41 – 50	34	11.33
51 and above	31	10.33
Total	300	100

The age of the respondents ranged between 11 and 75 years with the adolescents (11—20) constituting the highest percentage in the sample. However, a clean break into two generations, that is, youths versus adults, will give us two

age groups of 11—30 and 31—75 which results into a neat 50 percent for each group.

There are three categories of people according to levels of education. There are those who have below The West African School Certificate (WASC); those who possess WASC or its equivalent, and those with post secondary education. The West African School Certificate Examination (WASCE) is taken at the end of 6 years of secondary school education in Nigeria which is an ordinary level certificate equivalent of the Cambridge Certificate.

### Findings

The bilingual status of our respondents is not in doubt in any way. In one of the questions in the section B of the questionnaire, respondents were asked to indicate the number of languages they speak out of these four: English, Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo, from the results 82.67 percent of the respondents are bilingual (English and Yoruba) while the remaining 17.33 percent are multilingual having the knowledge of Hausa or /and Igbo in addition to the first two. Respondents seem to be of the opinion that of all the languages in use in Nigeria from which one may choose, only two are very essential—English and Yoruba. That is, any other choice like pidgin or Arabic for Muslims, are but variants of this choice. Besides, the researcher did not enlist non-Yoruba indigenes at all for participation.

Next, we tried to examine the process of code-maintenance among the Yoruba through these questions:

- i) How frequently do you use your mother tongue?
- ii) In which of these languages do you discuss official matters as well as unofficial matters? Respondents’ responses to these questions are presented as tables 3, 4 and 5 below.

**Table 3: Respondents Self-Report on Mother Tongue Use in Percentages (N=300)**

Age	Not at all	Occasionally	Regularly
11—20	5.4	56	38.6
21—30		16	84
31—40	-	12	88
41—50	-	41	59
50+	-	-	100

**Table4: Respondents Self-Report on Language Use in the Official Domain in percentages (N=300)**

Age	English	Yoruba	English / Yoruba
11—20	81	-	19



21—30	93	-	7
31—40	80	-	20
41—50	97	-	3
50+	97	-	3

**Table 5: Respondents Self-Report on Language Use in the Unofficial Domain in Percentages (N=300)**

Age	English	Yoruba	English / Yoruba
11—20	31	51	18
21—30	15	75	10
31—40	13	75	12
41—50	18	58	24
50+	-	65	35

The pattern of language use evident from the foregoing is that of semi-exoglossic bilingualism. Semi-exoglossic bilingualism refers to bilingualism involving English and indigenous languages. Indeed, every participant in the study is bilingual in English and Yoruba.

However, with respect to the regular use of the mother tongue we discovered a split between the young and the old. For instance, while those above fifty years use the mother tongue regularly, only 38.6% of the youths under 20 years do this. Again, while no respondent above 50 years of age used English for unofficial matters, at least 31 percent of the adolescents do this while 18 percent normally code-switch making a total of 49 percent that are using English unofficially in some forms. Thus, the present situation where the regular use of Yoruba (MT) decreases with age holds implications for language maintenance, shift and death.

In Table 4, we discovered a preponderant use of English in the official domain even across the ages. If the official domain witnessed such a preponderant use of English, we expected the same situation to be true of Yoruba in the unofficial domain (table 5) which of course includes the home. This, however, did not happen. Language mixing (Yoruba and English) as widely reported in answer to question number 9 of the questionnaire has taken over this domain. Indeed, code-mixing also has implications for language maintenance and shift. In the next two tables (6&7), we present the analysis to question numbers 9 and 11 of the questionnaire. Question 9 says “what changes have you noticed in your mother tongue recently? While question 11 says “how did you come to speak English?”

Notice that the two questions were designed to capture the competence of our respondents in the two languages. A direct measurement of the proficiency of our respondents through self-rating scales becomes difficult here for some reasons.

In the first place, the English language is a status symbol of education and civilization in Nigeria. Hence, if these subjects were asked directly to rate their abilities in this language, they would be obliged to rate themselves very high even when this is artificial. Secondly, Yoruba language happens to be the mother tongue of these respondents which means they already have a particular mindset with regards to their abilities in this language.

Consistent with the objectives of the research, we were thus able through these simple, yet penetrating questions (9&11) to establish the abilities of the respondents in both languages.

**Table 6: Respondents Self-Reports on Yoruba use and Maintenance in Percentages (N=300)**

Age	Less spoken especially among the youth	Always spoken code-mixed with English	People are no longer comfortable speaking it	Renewed interest in it by scholars in Nigeria	No essential change / I don't know
11 – 20	23	45	5	2	25
21 – 30	46	51	2	-	1
31- 40	29	63	4	4	-
41-50	26	71	3	-	-
50+	32	55	13	-	-

**Table 7: Respondents Self-Reports on mode of English acquisition in percentages (N=300)**

Age	Acquired it naturally right from birth	Learned it at school through teaching	Picked it up in the neighbourhood
11 – 20	8	92	-
21 – 30	2	98	-
31- 40	1	92	-
41-50	-	100	-
50+	-	100	-

As evident on Table 6, 90 percent of the respondents know that the contact of English with their language has adversely affected its use as well as their proficiency in it. For instance, 32 percent of the adults who are over fifty years are

of the view that Yoruba is now less spoken, especially among the youths, 55 percent opined that Yoruba is always spoken, code-mixed with English. To about 13 percent of this age group, people are no longer comfortable speaking it. Only about 2-4 percent of the respondents made a positive comment which is that scholars in Nigeria now have a renewed interest in it. Table 6 simply presents a gloomy picture of the Yoruba language maintenance situation in this community.

Table 7 simply shows that the learning of English by these respondents is after the acquisition of the mother tongue. Thus, linguistic interference (or negative transfer of the forms and meanings of structure of the native language and culture to the target language (cf. Wilkins 1982:199)) is a major obstacle to their perfect mastery of the English language. Indeed, question number 13 of the questionnaire says: Do you speak one of the languages more fluently than the others? 97 percent of the respondents said yes. What is more, Yoruba was picked as the one better known. However, Table 6 has sufficiently revealed the deteriorating standards of the Yoruba language in this community. As a participant observer who speaks the two languages, it is no exaggeration to say that the results presented in the two tables reflect the true position of things in the community. The tables have simply confirmed our observations.

In other words, there is a correlation between language use and language proficiency. It is expected that an average Nigerian who has a considerable minimum education, will be able to speak English, the official language of the country to an extent, pidgin to a certain extent and his mother tongue efficiently. To another who is not so educated he would at least be able to use his mother tongue efficiently and a pidgin language. The third set of people who can be vast in only one language are mostly the aged members of the community who were not exposed to formal education at all. Since this study is situated in south western Nigeria where Yoruba happens to be the mother tongue, we expected the respondents to be proficient in English and Yoruba since they are all educated. Thus, we conclude by saying that while the bilingual status of these subjects is not in doubt, their proficiency and efficiency in these two languages are subject to doubts as a result of the source of their knowledge.

The foregoing has simply revealed how language use in this community has in turn affected proficiency in each of these languages depending on matrices of proficiency such as the domains of use, respondents' ages and sources of knowledge.

### **Ethnicity and Language Related Attitudes**

In order to be able to draw a safe conclusion based on our findings, let us consider the language attitude of our respondents. Since language attitudes can only be ascertained through the use of indirect question (Baker, 1992), the attitudinal questions posed to our respondents are of these types:

- i) Is it necessary for your children to learn Yoruba?

- ii) Can you or your children speak Yoruba like your parents and grandparents?

We present below as tables 8 and 9 respectively respondents' answers to these two questions.

**Table 8: The need for children to learn Yoruba in percentages**

Age	Yes	No
11 – 20	95.7	4.3
21 – 30	94.0	6.0
31 – 40	95.0	5.0
41 – 50	85.2	14.8
50 <sup>+</sup>	100	-

**Table 9: Yoruba Ability generation-wise in percentages**

Age	Yes	No
11 – 20	8	92
21 – 30	45	55
31 – 40	40	60
41 – 50	26	74
50 <sup>+</sup>	35	65

Responses from subjects on these two attitudinal questions are both positive and negative. For instance, virtually all the respondents across the ages wanted their children to learn Yoruba. The reason they gave for this is “for cultural continuity”. Thus, the respondents are quite conscious of the link between language and culture. Indeed, the few who picked “No” did not quite understand the question for they gave reasons such as “it (Yoruba) is acquired and not learned” for picking “No”.

However, in table 8, a different picture from that of 7 has emerged. The table depicts a negative attitude in that majority of the respondents can no longer speak Yoruba like their parents, with the youths (11—20) mostly at fault. Their reasons for this defect include the influence of education, civilization and the environmental factors.

Responses to these questions based on ethnic identity, language shift and maintenance present a case of incipient language shift and maintenance at the same time. The positive attitude displayed towards the English language by Nigerians could be attributed to some factors such as education, civilization, colonization and globalization.

Two other questions used to probe further into the hidden language attitudes of our respondents are:

- i) Would you like English to remain Nigeria's official language?

ii a) If no, would you prefer a Nigerian language to be chosen as Nigeria's only language?

b) If yes, which language?

In response to (i), 99 percent picked "yes" and gave "for unity sake" as their reasons. In (ii a), the response here is 100 percent "No". Majority reasoned that to pick one of the three languages will lead to pride on the part of the tribe whose language was chosen. Their answer is very important to our study, since it is a pointer to the psychological state of the Nigerians. To answer the other part of the question (ii b), 99 percent picked the Yoruba language while the remaining one percent preferred Hausa. Those who picked Yoruba said it was because it is their ethnic language while those who picked Hausa said it was because it has the highest number of speakers.

## Discussion

The present result in line with Crystal's (1997) assertion reveals that bilingualism is the common experience of individuals in a multilingual community. Moreover, this is semi-exoglossic bilingualism coupled with language mixing which, in line with the assertion of Ruiz (1995) and David, et al. (2003), promotes language endangerment. Indeed, code-mixing/switching as revealed in works such as Gumperz (1976), Gumperz and Hernandez-Chavez (1975), Scotton (1979), Poplack (1980), Myers-Scotton (1993, 1998, 2004) among others is a common experience among bilinguals the world over. The Yoruba—English bilinguals here present yet another opportunity to test for this basic assumption about the speech of a bilingual. What is more, linguistic incompetence or lack of facility in that language on a certain subject (cf. Ahukanna 1990, Akindele & Adegbite 2005) has been adduced as one of the reasons behind code-mixing/switching, especially when it involves 'late' or 'adult' bilingualism. Furthermore, the result reveals that Nigerians are not learning any other indigenous language in addition to their mother tongue, in spite of the multiplicity of indigenous languages in Nigeria. This could be traceable to the fact that:

- English is compulsory for every Nigerian, since it is our official language and an international language;
- The utilitarian value (socially, economically and academically) of the English language vis-à-vis any of our indigenous languages is high;
- The overbearing status of the English language over the indigenous languages in Nigeria today makes even mother tongue learning a perfunctory exercise. Our finding here corroborates that of Adegaju (2002: 129) who notes:

*It is a common knowledge that most (educated) Yoruba parents force their children to adopt English as the first language and the only language that matters for interactional and academic purposes. The indigenous language, if the child would learn it at*

*all, would come very much later after the child must have supposedly acquired enough English to sustain his/her academic endeavours. The indigenous language—Yoruba—then becomes an alien song to the child.*

Thus, any indigenous language learned or acquired (Yoruba or not) comes through environmental factors and not for any other reasons. Indeed, the dichotomy often made between the instrumental and integrative motivation for learning a second language (Gardner and Lambert, 1972; Oyetade, 1990) becomes relevant here. Instrumental reasons for learning a second language focus on utilitarian purposes such as job requirements or social mobility or out of necessity. On the other hand, integrative motivation centers on the wish to become a part of the native community of the second language. This results in acculturation and additive bilingualism (Lambert, 1967) or bilingualism with biculturalism, whereas instrumental motivation leads to bilingualism without biculturalism. On bilingualism and biculturalism, Akindele and Adegbite (2005:43-44) declare as follows:

*. . . language reflects, expresses and records culture. The possession of a language inevitably means the acquisition of a culture. However, while we can say that a monolingual person is essentially monocultural not all bilinguals can be said to be bicultural (except a coordinate bilingual), since bilingualism and biculturalism are not co-extensive (cf. Haugen 1956). Indeed, a monolingual person may be bicultural in some circumstances, (e.g., some second or third generation immigrants with two cultures in the U.S.A.) The extent of bilingualism may determine extent of biculturalism, but not always. Relationship between the extent of bilingualism and biculturalism can be demonstrated in four ways in terms of the High (H) and Low (L) scales thus: H-H, H-L, L-H, and L-L.*

The above excerpt succinctly captures the interrelatedness of language and culture. Aellen & Lambert (1969) provide an example of adolescent children of English—French mixed parentage in Montreal who are bilingual and bicultural at the same time. Such children cannot manifest any abnormal tendencies like personality disturbances and social alienation.

The situation of a Yoruba—English bilingual is however distinct from that of English—French in that bilingualism and biculturalism can only exist consequent upon the mode of acquisition of these languages, that is, whether acquired in a native speaker environment or not. Of major interest to the studies of bilingualism and biculturalism is the issue of how the lack of cultural background could affect linguistic knowledge and vice versa. A by-product of this opinion is whether a second language can be effectively learned without an exposure to the second culture. Better still, could the second language be totally learned in a non-

native speaker environment? In this regard Robert (1960:89) says “just as accuracy in phonology is best as an incident by-product of the learning of actual conversations, and as syntax and morphology are best learned not by analysis but by imitation and practice, in the same way knowledge of cultures is best imparted as a corollary or an obligation to the business of language learning”. In other words, both culture and language are inseparable, in spite of the fact that these are two separate entities. What Robert is saying in essence is that there is no way a second language learner can be said to be a true bilingual unless he or she knows the two cultures very well. Beardmore (1982:20) in his view says “the further one progresses in bilingual ability the more important the bicultural element becomes since higher proficiency increases the expectancy rate of sensitivity towards the cultural implication of language use”. Thus, to make matters worse, virtually all the three hundred respondents here agreed to have learned the second language, English, in Nigeria which is an indication of bilingualism without biculturalism. Very germane to our discussion of bilingualism and biculturalism is the problem of conflict of identity that often confronts a bilingual. The point being stressed here is that the fact that a person is bilingual often leads him or her to question the role that languages play in his or her life. In essence, bilingualism no doubt has effect on personality development and intellectual capacities of a child (cf. Dada 2005; Igboanusi and Peter 2005).

The conflict of identity in a bilingual as discussed revealed these three groups based on their self perception

- 1) The ethnocentric group—made up of those committed to their group and its cultural heritage.
- 2) Those who have rebelled against their ethno-cultural group in preference for the out group; that is, they have now assumed the outlook of the preferred group.
- 3) The most problematic group whose members are ambivalent and not really sure of their identity (Child, 1943; Gardner and Lambert, 1972). The term “anomie” has been used to describe the members of this third group. These are the people who are not sure to whom they owe their allegiance; the community under study lines up with this third group. The data reveals a situation in which youths in this community still yearn for more of the other language (English) Incompetent language usage either with respect to  $L_1$  or  $L_2$ , the order is inconsequential, in Nigeria is evident in works such as Banjo, 1970; Bamgbose 1971, 1982; Spencer, 1971; Wilmot, 1979; Odumuh and Gomwalk, 1986; Adegbija, 1989; Oha, 1997; Adegoju, 2002; Igboanusi, 2004; Dada, 2005; etc). The dominance of English and the low value accorded Yoruba, which in turn leads to the trend and desire to bring up children as monolingual speakers of English in Nigeria, corroborate Igboanusi’s (2004) findings

on Igbo usage among native speakers. Hornby (1977:5) citing Weinreich (1953) argues that:

*Many factors may potentially affect the relative status or strength of an individual's two or more languages, such as age and order of acquisition, usefulness and amount of opportunity for communication, degree of emotional involvement, social function, as well as literary and cultural value.*

Virtually, all these factors identified by Hornby (1977) as well as those already identified here, seem to have favoured the dominance of English over indigenous Nigerian languages. It is pertinent to ask at this juncture whether multilingualism is an asset or not in Nigeria. That is, the data before us simply represents the predicament of a major indigenous language in Nigeria, a consequence of the multiplicity of indigenous languages in Nigeria coupled with the incontrovertible status of English as the only official language in Nigeria.

The setbacks suffered by the Yoruba-English bilinguals as evident in the foregoing can only be captured with the term *semilingualism*—this is a situation whereby competence in both languages will not fully develop. We care to ask: why do the respondents code-mix even when speaking Yoruba?

The truth is that those bilinguals can no longer express themselves adequately in Yoruba. What a shame! The language of a society is expected to be adequately sufficient and capable of describing every linguistic function within the context of such a society. A language must be capable of meeting the domestic, social, interactional and commercial needs of its society without any form of shortcomings. Any language that cannot fulfill these obligations is not worthy to be employed as the language of interaction at any level of the community's existence. Thus, these respondents themselves are to blame for code-mixing. It is not as if the language itself is deficient in anyway. Code-mixing as evident in this data is a measure of the respondents' proficiency and efficiency in their two languages. Indeed, they are no longer here nor there.

At this juncture Fakuade (2004: 19—20) becomes adequate:

*Nigeria is an English – speaking nation, and the basic Federal policy on education is to recognize the need to prepare Nigerian children/students to function successfully in an English speaking nation. This policy ranks English language the only medium through which Nigerian children can be educated. The implementation, as today, has produced, to some extent, mediocre English performance while ignoring home language skills.*



Indeed, how else do we explain the declining performance of Nigerian youths in the School Certificate Examination every year in spite of the fact that a credit pass in English is required for admission to any higher institution in Nigeria?

Table 10 below presents statistics of performance in the school certificate examination, which indicates an average failure rate of about 64.3% per year between 1995 and 1999.

**Table 10: Secondary School Certificate Examination in Nigeria Performance in English in Percentages**

Year	Credit above	&	Ordinary	Fail	Total
1995	12.4		27.7	59.9	100
1996	11.33		24.03	64.62	99.98
1997	6.54		26.77	66.67	99.98
1998	8.47		21.49	65.53	95.49
1999	9.71		22.59	64.91	97.21

(Source: West African Examinations Council, 1997; 1999 in Bamgbose 2006)  
 Bamgbose (2006:22-24) explains:

*Statistics collected for the years 1995 to 1999 show not only a massive failure in English, they also show declining performance in the five years. Since at least a Credit in English is required for admission to universities, colleges and polytechnics, only an average of about 9.7% of all students per year may be said to have done well in English to merit admission. The rest either have an ordinary pass or an outright fail. Failure rate is an average of about 64.3% every year and, allowing for incomplete or unavailable results in 1998 and 1999, the failure rate appears to get worse from year to year . . . Given that English is the medium of instruction for other subjects, it is not surprising that performance in other subjects is almost equally as bad . . . Should we, like an official, who shall remain nameless, ostrich-like seek refuge in the excuse that it is due to an “overloaded curriculum” or should we rather call a spade a spade and put the blame where it truly belongs: that lack of competence in English affects performance in all subjects taught through the medium of English?*

As already evident in this paper, the spread of English language, in Nigeria is correlated with the spread of Christianity and Western Education. After independence, English remained a colonial legacy, graduating from its use as

language of administration to the rank of the most prestigious and the most widely used language in the country. Today, the English language in Nigeria functionally outweighs all of the country's indigenous languages. Its functions include that of a national language, an official language, a lingua franca plus its use in mass media, commerce, religion and education.

However, the use of English as a medium of instruction in Nigeria secondary schools is limited to the classroom. In most of these schools, English is compulsorily spoken only during school hours and a fine is imposed on pupils who speak the mother tongue. Unfortunately, however, by the time these pupils gained admission to their respective secondary schools, all of them must have acquired a good mastery of their mother tongue. They can talk easily and at great length, about the world around them using this mother tongue. Hence, in spite of the imposed restriction, whenever the teacher is not around, the pupils revert or switch to the indigenous language. This shows that the pupils find it relatively comfortable or easier to converse in their mother tongue than in the English language.

The deficient skill of the secondary school students in the English language is manifested in their inability to code-switch effectively as can be observed in their everyday conversation – even on the streets. When switching from English to their mother tongue, there is usually no flaw. But when it becomes necessary for them to switch from Yoruba to English, there is usually a lot of hesitation accompanied by “em, em,” and they usually resort to interlarding.

The level of competence and usage of the English Language in Nigeria is marked by the big gulf existing between Yoruba and English semiotics. At each linguistic level, therefore, social and cultural interference has a constraining influence on Nigerians' performance and competence in the English language.

The present analysis boils down to the fact that no language learning can be divorced from the culture of the learners, since the English language is superimposed on Nigeria which has social values that are quite different from those of Britain or America, there is bound to be a completely different pattern of cultural outlooks manifesting itself in the language. This explains why the English language in Nigeria is influenced by Nigerian culture. It also explains why Nigerians are constrained in their efforts in learning the British English. No wonder Arize (1992:20) submits as follows:

*. . . (language) is a powerful cultural pattern of education as language introduces the child into the world. Without language the child's worlds will be narrow and meaningless. We hold the strong view that the child's first language should be the mother (father) tongue before any other language is taught to the child. This is to ensure that the child imbibes the cultural norms and values of the society before he develops into maturity.*

It is already evident that the data here is an excellent parade of a reverse of Arinze's position vis-à-vis the mother tongue. As subjects suffering from subtractive bilingualism the respondents no longer possess a true first language, as a matter of fact what they now have can be described as two second languages, a situation borne out of language contact and language conflict.

Imagine a situation where 94:33 percent of the respondents are of the view that their children should learn their language for cultural continuity only for the analysis to reveal that they themselves can no longer use this language like their (fore) fathers. How then will their kids learn Yoruba thoroughly? The die is cast; language endangerment or linguistic genocide (i.e., "(actively) killing a language without killing the speakers (as in physical genocide) or through (passivity) letting a language die" (Fakuade, 2004:4), a by-product of this language conflict, is subtly at work even on a major Nigerian language, although language maintenance is still equally in place.

The split commitment of the respondents with respect to their languages reveals the fact of internal language conflict within these individuals. The mother tongue being what it is—a symbol of cultural identity, a marker of solidarity among its speakers, a vehicle of values and even the history of its speakers—cannot be easily jettisoned by its users, more so in its home front, thus the little maintenance efforts depicted by the data here. However, the overbearing influence of English language with respect to some languages of the world (Yoruba inclusive) has come to tell on the attitudes of these bilinguals as far as their mother tongue is concerned. When our self-seeking and proud attitude is of this dangerous dimension in matters of language use then something drastic needs to be done by the government as well as the community of users of these oppressed languages.

The present analysis is a pointer to a deeper problem. Thus, I reiterate here as in Dada (2005) that Nigerian youth mean well after all, thus the split commitment here between Yoruba and English. Indeed, they do not want the world to leave them behind at all costs. The cost this time is the forfeiture of a thorough mastery of the mother tongue since its socio-economic value in the global village is too minimal. Their craze for civilization cum westernization has only resulted as mentioned already in *subtractive bilingualism* as far as their language use is concerned. This is a situation whereby the youths don't have native speaker competence either in L<sub>1</sub> or L<sub>2</sub>. What a shame!

No doubt, there is value in knowing and in being educated in more than one language, however, with the present analysis, we hasten to ask; how do we now enhance the creativity of the Yoruba-English bilinguals in the mother tongue and by so doing sustain and maintain their linguistic heritage as well as their cultural diversity. In reference to language contact and language conflict in Nigeria, there is a sense in which the Yoruba language can be rightly said based on the present data to have been conquered by the English language. The Yoruba-English language conflict therefore falls within the scope of glottophagic conflict (i.e., language conflict arising from the suppression of the minority language by that of

the majority (Calvet 1974 cited by Nelde 1992: 391)). No wonder the English language has been referred to in the literature as a killer language (cf. Price 1984, Yuka 2002).

The Yoruba-English language conflict as presented here reflects that of indigenous languages in Cameroon vis-à-vis English and French (Yuka, 2002). In each instance, the minority language has been suppressed by the majority language.

## **Conclusion**

As evident from the foregoing, Yoruba can be said to have its fair share of this phenomenon of language conflict in Nigeria in that this indigenous language can now be seen to be competing rather unfavourably with a foreign language. Although Yoruba, within Nigeria, enjoys an enviable status of a national language in addition to Hausa and Igbo, the truth is that Yoruba-English bilinguals suffer internal language conflict, which is a situation that should be considered inimical to the development of this mother tongue and its speakers as well as to the development of the nation as a whole. To make matters worse, as it is for these major indigenous languages so it is for the minor ones. The English language buffets and restricts them all, makes demands on them that they do not want to bear. Yet even the most unjust, undeserved, and pointless suffering is an opportunity for growth. It is an opportunity to respond in a way that can turn these indigenous languages into powerful tools of their owners which can compete favourably well with any other language in the world.

The co-existence of Yoruba and English language in western Nigeria portrays a linguistic map that is very attractive for further sociolinguistic study. Meanwhile the present paper recommends a rigorous education or re-orientation of Nigerian youths on the need to remain loyal to their cultures and languages in a world that is just governed by only one language (English). For our youths to be what they ought to be, they need the guidance of their parents, their communities and that of the nation. It is in this regard that parents, the community of language users, as well as our government must wake up to the challenge of making bilingualism additive rather than subtractive in a multilingual nation like ours. Thus we recommend as follows:

- Languages such as Yoruba and Hausa should be mandatory in schools up to the senior secondary school level.
- The monopoly presently being enjoyed by English as a basic requirement for admission must be broken by a corresponding basic requirement of Yoruba for admission to higher institutions for certain courses.
- A credit pass in the Secondary School Certificate Examination in languages like Yoruba and Hausa must be required from every teacher trainees before being given any official appointment.

- The government should increase the admission quota of applicants for Nigerian languages in Nigerian universities.
- Courses in indigenous languages should be run in our universities free of charge.
- Graduates of such disciplines should be given automatic employment immediately after graduation.
- New entrants into the federal or state civil service and parastatals must either have a credit pass in their mother tongue at the Secondary Certificate Examination or obtain a Certificate of proficiency in it from a higher institution.
- 

These and some other measures not stated here are necessary if our government will rejuvenate native speaker interest in these indigenous languages.

Therefore the paper concludes that Nigeria's language policy as it exists today may lead to the ruination of the state given the progressive erosion of the country's cultural and historical heritage consequent upon the internal language conflict being experienced by her youths. Thus the paper is a clarion call on the Nigerian government to reassess its language policy.

**APPENDIX**  
**QUESTIONNAIRE ON LANGUAGE USE AND LANGUAGE ATTITUDE IN**  
**NIGERIA**

This questionnaire is designed to examine the attitude of Nigerians toward English Language and the Nigerian languages with special reference to Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo.

**SECTION A**

1. Age: 11-20 { } 21-30 { } 31-40 { } 51+ { }
2. Sex: Male Female
3. Occupation
4. Level of Education: Nil Primary Secondary Post Secondary
5. What is the name of your town/ state?
6. Which Nigerian language is your mother tongue/first language?
7. How do you come to be speaking this language?
  - (a) I acquired it naturally right from birth
  - (b) I learned it at school through teaching
  - (c) I just picked it up through interaction with people in Nigeria
8. How frequently do you use this mother tongue?  
Not at all Occasionally Regularly
9. What changes have you noticed in your mother tongue recently?
  - (a) Less spoken, especially among the youth
  - (b) Always spoken, code-mixed with English
  - (c) People are no longer comfortable speaking it
  - (d) Renewed interest in it by scholars in Nigeria
  - (e) No essential change/don't know
10. Do you speak English too? Yes No
11. How do you come to be speaking English?
  - (a) I acquired it naturally right from birth
  - (b) I learned it at school through teaching

(c) I picked it up through interaction with people in this Nation after growing up

### SECTION B

12. How many languages do you speak?
13. Do you speak one of the languages more fluently than the others? Yes No  
English Yoruba Hausa Igbo Mix of Eng./Yoruba Mix of Eng./Hausa Mix of Eng./Igbo
14. If so which language do you speak more fluently?
15. If not, which language do you speak more ?
16. Which language do you speak in discussing official matters?
17. Which language do you speak in discussing unofficial matters?
18. Which language do you speak at Work/School
19. Which of the languages would you like to be the mode of instruction in schools in Nigeria
20. Is it necessary for your children to learn your mother tongue? Yes No  
If yes, why?

### SECTION C

21. Would you like English to remain Nigeria's only official language?  
1. Yes No Why
22. If no, would you prefer a Nigerian language to be chosen as Nigeria's only language?  
Yes No
23. If yes, which language? Yoruba Hausa Igbo  
Briefly justify the reasons for making the language your choice.
24. Can you or your children speak your mother tongue like your parents and grandparents?  
Yes No  
Any reasons for this ?
25. How would you rate your use of English (Spoken and written)?

- |     | British English  | American English | Nigerian English |      |
|-----|--|------------------|------------------|------|
| 26. | I believe Nigerian English usages distinguish/differentiate us from the Britons or Americans.                      |                  |                  |      |
|     | Yes  | No               |                  |      |
| 27. | I believe the use of Nigerian English shows that we are not as competent as the Britons/Americans in using English |                  |                  |      |
|     |  | Yes              | No               |      |
| 28. | Which languages will you suggest to be a national language in Nigeria?   |                  |                  |      |
|     | English  | Yoruba           | Hausa            | Igbo |
|     | Why?   |                  |                  |      |



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