

# The spread of the English language in the French-speaking countries of Africa: the case of Senegal

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## Introduction

Of the four main international languages used in the African continent, namely Arabic, English, French and Portuguese, two only -English and French- have gained considerable power inside and outside the African states. English and French are, according to Ball (1997:5), the most important international languages today.

English, is first, the most prestigious and the most internationally used language in the world today. Crystal (1997:3 ff) writes that one quarter of the world population use or understand English. Apart from its use as a mother tongue in six countries (the USA, the UK, Ireland, Canada, Australia and New Zealand), English has official or second language status in more than 70 countries; it is one of the most widely taught foreign languages in over 100 countries. "This is far more than the status achieved by any other language in the world", concludes Crystal.

According to Crystal (1997), English has succeeded in imposing itself as the world's standard means of communication in areas such as international relations, the press, advertising, broadcasting, cinema, popular music, tourism, etc., to name only a few. In international relations, English is the official language of all the structures of the United Nations : it is used by its organs, specialised agencies, regional commissions and expert bodies. English is also used in the major international political gatherings and several scientific and sporting organizations.

In the fields of the press, advertising and international broadcasting, English also has primacy over the other international languages. First, one third of the world's newspapers are published in the Anglophone countries and in English. The five top papers in the world (*The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Times* and *The Sunday Times*) and the most important international academic journals

are also published in English. Second, thanks to the present economic power of the USA, English is the language of American products. Many terms of American English origin are currently part of the French lexical stock. English is the language of the top advertising agencies in the world, all US-owned; it is also the official language of the international advertising bodies. Third, also thanks to the top position of the USA in international broadcasting followed by Great Britain, English has a strong presence in both television and radio. The USA has, indeed, the largest number of international radio and television broadcasting stations in the world.

Cinema and popular music are also English-dominated today: about 85 per cent of the world film market are controlled by the USA. The Oscar system, the most popular cinema festival in the world, is American; and it is held in English. Other festivals (Cannes in France, *Fespaco* in Burkina Faso and others) use more than one language among which is English. English is, in addition, the main language of the recording industry: songs in English are heard almost everywhere in the world. Popular singers in most countries use English in order to gain international reputation. Baaba Maal, one of the most popular singers of Senegal, describes the importance of English for international cooperation as follows: "Si on veut collaborer avec le reste du monde, il faut apprendre l'anglais" (*Sud Quotidien*, 1998 : 7), (you must learn English if you want to work with the rest of the world).

Finally, English is the language of tourism, especially the tourist services. Transportation, accommodation, catering and most attractions everywhere use English. Furthermore, since the Anglophone tourists go to all the destinations, travel agencies and tour operators all over the world find it necessary to hire English translators.

## Why this expansion of English in the world?

Several factors account for this new phenomenon. According to Cheddadi (1996:34), the history of modernity, the recent evolution of the conflicting forces, with the present American domination of the world, added to the current necessity to have an easy and standardized means of communication at the international level are some of the most important ones. English seems to be the language that meets those requirements today. To quote Crystal (1997 : 110), "it is the language in the right place at the right time".

As to French, Ball (1997: 4) writes that it is the language of the fifty-two member countries of the French-speaking world. It is used as a mother tongue in France, Belgium, Switzerland, Luxemburg and Canada. It has official status in twenty-eight countries, namely the former French colonies of Africa and Asia and the Overseas Departments

and Territories. As a foreign language, French is taught in the schools and universities of many countries.

## **English, the more powerful language in Africa**

Between English and French, English is the language “with the greater external power” in Africa, writes Ronald Wardhaugh (1987:173). In spite of the important progress made by French during the colonial and postcolonial periods, English is attracting more people and governments in this continent. Crystal (1997) gives two examples of French-speaking countries in which recent decisions have been taken on the change of the French language status; they are: Rwanda and Algeria. Rwanda, first, decided to give English official status in 1996. The latter became the language of official meetings, of education and business despite the fact that this country is still a member of the French-speaking world. As to Algeria, English also replaced French in 1996 as the chief foreign language taught in schools and higher education institutions.

English is thus winning more and more converts from the Francophone countries of sub-saharan Africa which, as claimed by Wardhaugh (1987:175), “are finding it necessary to link themselves to the English-speaking world”. Senegal is one of those countries.

## **French and English in Senegal**

Senegal is regarded as the most distinguished of the Francophone African states thanks to its three centuries of contact with French (Picoche and Marchello-Nizia 1989: 123-124; Wardhaugh 1987). As in Mali, Cote d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso or Togo, French is in Senegal the official language of Government, Law, Education, Media and Business. It also serves as a vehicular language among the educated and the non-educated population<sup>1</sup> alongside the six national languages: Wolof, Pulaar, Seerer, Joola, Soninke and Malinke.<sup>2</sup>

Despite the French influence, and many resources which are provided by the French government in order to maintain the teaching and use of French in this country, a Senegalese is strongly motivated to learn English due to the country's recent ties with the English-speaking world. English is nowadays increasingly used and learnt by the Senegalese community. In 1998, Roger Budd (n.d.:2), the former Director of the British Council/ Dakar and supervisor of the British Council's English Language Centre

declared: “[There is] a growing need and demand for the English Language in Senegal”. The same view was expressed by Josiane Founou, an instructor in the centre (*Sud Quotidien*, 1998: 4):

Il y a un besoin pressant (de l’anglais) au Sénégal. Les gens veulent apprendre l’anglais et se former. Nos différents cours d’anglais pour adultes, les enfants, dans les entreprises, sont très prisés. Notre bibliothèque riche de 3.000 ouvrages est régulièrement fréquentée par les Sénégalais”.

(There is an urgent need (for English) in Senegal. People want to learn English and train themselves. Our English courses for adults, children and business are the most selected by the students. Our 3,000 volume library is regularly used by Senegalese readers).

The necessity for learning and using English in Senegal is felt in several domains. Some of them which are discussed below are namely: (i) Music, tourism and entertainment; (ii) Science and technology; (iii) Commerce and industry; (iv) Media and communication and (v) Education.

## **Music, tourism and entertainment**

The increasing interest manifested towards English at the expense of French in Senegal is mostly encountered in cultural activities such as those involving popular music and other forms of entertainment. One example to illustrate this point is Aissatou Diallo, a Senegalese female singer who sings in English although her audience is expected to understand the local languages or French. When asked why she does so in a National Television broadcast (*RTS, Midi Première*, Saturday, May 31st, 1997), the star advocated the supremacy of the English language:

Je chante en anglais parce que j’ai suivi ma formation de journaliste dans les pays anglophones, mais aussi parce que je ressens plus de confort en chantant en anglais qu’en français. Aussi, dans le cadre de ce que l’on appelle ‘Global Culture’ ou Culture Universelle, la langue anglaise sera sûrement la langue dominante. Cette langue a déjà pris une grande avance sur le français aujourd’hui.

(I decided to sing in English because, first, I was trained as a journalist in the English-speaking countries; and, second, I feel more comfortable when singing in English than in French. Furthermore, English will be the most predominant language within the framework of the so-called “Global Culture” or universal culture. Today, this language [English] comes before French).

Diallo grew up and received her elementary and secondary education in Senegal, in French. She speaks and understands the local languages and French. But, in spite of this linguistic background and of the fact that she sings for a French-speaking audience, she deliberately chooses English. Like Diallo, more and more young people now feel "more comfortable" in English than in French. The use of the English terms and expressions is a fashion in Senegal, especially in the youth circles.

The two major factors which have contributed in the development of English in Senegal are "rap music" and tourism. Originating from America, rap music is currently popular in Senegal. Several bands have been created by young people in Dakar and in the provinces. They sing either in English or in a mixed language (Wolof plus English, French or the local languages). Damou Djolof, Bamba-j-Fall, Daraa-j, Bidew Bou Bess and the Seck Sisters are a few of the popular ones.

Also important, the Festival du Jazz de Saint-Louis is annually hosted in the Northern town and draws many foreigners. Musicians and fans of jazz from all over the world, particularly from the Anglophone countries, take part in this international event. On the same occasion, tourists from different places also visit the town of Saint-Louis. Communication with the local population mostly takes place in English and French translation. As regards tourism, it is worth mentioning that Senegal is an important international destination in West Africa. It attracts many tourists from both French and English-speaking countries. English is the language often employed in communication with all the non-Francophone tourists.

The positive attitude towards English is observed among the youth in spite of the efforts made by schools to maintain French in the area. English, the medium of the first power in the world (USA) helps the youth to be tied to the American realities and culture: "L'anglais est la langue de l'avenir; il nous rapproche des Etats-Unis." (English is the language of the future; it keeps us closer to the United States), most young people would say. It is a symbol of freedom, of development and of modernity.

As stated by Wardhaugh (1987:174), "to be thoroughly civilised in French language and culture is no longer a priority for the Senegalese". A lot of young Senegalese including university graduates face unemployment; the knowledge of French is no longer of much help in this field. English, on the contrary, helps them to keep up-to-date and offers more opportunities to find a job, inside as well as outside the country. This is why most of them turn to English.

## Science and technology

The situation of language use in science and technology in Senegal (and the Third World) is the same as the one found in France itself: thanks to the power and the superior quality of American scientific research and technology, English has become the language of science and technology for everybody including the Francophone and the French researchers. Although French is still present in most of the key disciplines such as Arts, Mathematics and Medicine, the decline of this language is particularly more acute in the scientific disciplines. M. Froissart, the French Professor of Physics in Collège de France wrote in *Le Monde* (1981:14) "Le français n'est plus la langue de ma discipline". (French is no longer the language of my discipline).

*Le Monde* (1981) also reports the following figures concerning books and scientific journals in France after the 1980s: more than 80 per cent of the periodicals used by the French researchers were in English; only 47 per cent of the journals published in France were in French. More surprisingly, in the *Bibliothèque d'Orsay*, the most important state library in Paris, more than half of the books available were in English and, of all books borrowed by students, 90 per cent were also those written in English. Still in France, the knowledge of English was necessary in order to read and understand the research work published in the Social Sciences. *Le Monde* (1981) mentions that when presentations were announced in French, most people in France did not attend conferences and workshops. Today, the influence of the English language is very visible there.

The reasons for this supremacy of English in Sciences and Technology are mostly economic. First of all, the financial means assigned to scientific research by the French Government are very much restricted whereas numerous private American institutions award substantial grants to the French universities and public institutions to carry out research projects. Second, because of lack of motivation in France, most French researchers move to the United States where a conducive environment and working conditions await them. The frequently cited example is that of R. Guillemin, the medical Nobel Prize (1977), laureate who decided to settle in the United States. Finally, the American universities are more numerous and have more students and staff than the French ones; their budgets are also more substantial than in France.

So, while French and German were the languages of science and technology before World War I, these languages are on a decline in this field today. The Anglo-saxon language is numerically, economically, scientifically and technically superior. Psychological reasons also account for the supremacy of English. Baillie (1996:29) writes that

most French researchers also drop French in favour of English since to them, English represents all that is new, young, efficacious, attractive and scientific.

This situation also prevails in the Third World universities and research centres, including in those of Senegal.

## **Commerce and industry**

The most significant influence of English is noticed in business. English and technology characterize the business world today. English is the principal medium used in business all over the world. It is a means for accessing information in texts and journals published in English and also trade and technical co-operation with many regions.

In West Africa, more particularly, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was founded in 1973. Its objectives were namely "to facilitate the economic integration and co-operation of the countries with a view to improving the well-being and standard of living of people in the sub-region..." (Mbaya, 2000 : 124).

ECOWAS includes the Francophone, Lusophone and Anglophone countries. In this area, English is the most important language of foreign relations and the most taught-foreign language in Lusophone and Francophone countries. Since the main goal pursued by ECOWAS is economic integration and cooperation among countries, the use of English-French or English-Portuguese bilingualism appears to be the most appropriate tool in order to increase communication among the member states. Consequently, there is a need for a trained cadre capable of using English in foreign affairs, in trade, in banking, in tourism, industry or in agriculture. This need is felt in many settings: professional meetings, formal and non-formal discussions, telephone conversations, letter writing, electronic mail, etc. (Mbaya, 2000: 125).

As regards Senegal itself, it is a member of the ECOWAS. Nowadays, this country is more and more reliant on trade with both the Anglophone countries of (ECOWAS) and those of the world (the USA, the UK, Japan, Thailand, Korea, etc.). Products from those countries are imported in Senegal. They range from small items like body lotions, creams and perfumes, to the large and most expensive products like radio and television sets, video and tape recorders, computers, cookers and refrigerators, cars and spare parts, etc. The Senegalese market is filled with those products. On the other hand, Senegalese business men need to export local products such as fish, oil, peanuts, etc. to other countries. The knowledge of English is needed.

Furthermore, as stated in *Jeune Afrique Economique* (1997:120), in Senegal, the knowledge of English is a main job requirement in the private sector:

L'expérience professionnelle et les diplomes quels qu'ils soient ne suffisent plus pour obtenir un poste dans les entreprises. Il faut avoir en plus un bon niveau dans la langue de Shakespeare.

(Professional experience and diplomas, whatever they are, are no longer sufficient in order to find a job in the firms. It is necessary, in addition, to have a good knowledge of English).

The knowledge of English is helpful in several activities, notably in exchanging information, in transactions and various commercial regulations, etc. Regular in-service training and improvement in English are strongly encouraged as stated in *Sud Quotidien* (1998: 7): "Dans les entreprises, un accent particulier est mis sur l'anglais et plusieurs programmes de formation et de recyclage sont organisés".

(Special emphasis is placed on English in business and several training and in-service programmes are implemented).

Due to this prominent position of English in both international and West African business communication, the government of Senegal has designed Business English programmes in higher education and in secondary institutions.

In higher education, the programmes designed in the Universities of Dakar and Saint-Louis (see below) focus on the teaching of English for use in the private sector, especially in business and tourism. The main goal is the training of the students in foreign languages based on the needs of the job market. After their graduation, students are given the opportunity to work with companies instead of joining the now saturated teaching sector. As regards secondary schools, Senegal boasts the two most prestigious comprehensive institutions in West Africa, namely the Institut Maurice De la Fosse of Dakar and the Lycée André Peytavin of Saint-Louis. Business English and English for Science and Technology are taught in these schools to future secretaries and auto mechanics.

Business English is also taught in private institutions such as the British Council, the British Senegalese Institute, the American Cultural Centre, etc. The British Council provides, in addition, the necessary information on the practice of business through



books, CD-Roms, video tapes, audio cassettes and the internet. As stated by Budd (n.d.:10), the Council "is (also) increasingly acting as the meeting point for information exchange between British and Senegalese exporters".

## **Media and communication**

In the field of communication and media, despite the fact that Senegal is a French-speaking country, the necessity for using and understanding English has been felt by the community for diverse purposes: for reading newspapers in English, listening to radio and watching television broadcasts, communicating with the external world, etc.

Many English newspapers from all over the world are available in the Senegalese bookshops and libraries. Readers consequently need to understand English in order to be able to read them.

As to television and radio broadcasts, in particular, thanks to the advent of satellite communication, English-speaking channels are also available in Senegal. Most Senegalese, especially the youth, are interested in those channels and broadcasts. As a result, they feel the necessity to learn and understand English. Another field where the knowledge of English is most needed nowadays is electronic communication. People in Anglophone as well as Francophone countries use the internet for reading or sending messages, or for any kind of research. This technology, as we know, is English-dominated.

To this end, as Wardhaugh (1987: 165) claims, English, rather than French, appears to be a language of greater value in Senegal. There is more and more awareness on the national level that it is the means by which different countries have to employ to raise their voices and put forward their claims and demands on the world forum. It is the language of prestige and progress which is surely winning converts from French in the Francophone countries of Africa and Senegal in particular. The loss to French in the Anglophone countries is not comparable. Although countries like Nigeria and South Africa show interest in French, people are not so motivated in learning the latter as the Senegalese are in learning English. The latter strongly believe that English is useful to them; that is why they are ready and keen to learn it.<sup>3</sup>

## English teaching and learning

The Government of Senegal is now encouraging its citizen to acquire competence in English in order to be able to communicate internationally. English is taught in this country in public as well as private institutions.

In public education, English is given priority among foreign languages taught at the secondary level such as Arabic, Spanish, German and Russian. The Senegalese pupils are motivated to learn English hence they prefer it more than any other foreign language. A survey carried out in the schools of Dakar (Nakoulima 1999) provides evidence of this fact. When asked to write the different languages (mother tongue and others) in order of preference, the majority of pupils put English in the second position, immediately after their mother tongue (Wolof, Pulaar, Joola, etc). Arabic came in the third position. Rather ironically French, was in the last position for almost everybody. Furthermore, in order to encourage the practice and improvement of oral English by the students, almost every school has an English Club. The president of the BSI English Club reports the following (*Sud Quotidien*, 1998): "Les clubs d'anglais nous servent de cadre d'expression en améliorant notre anglais car nous sommes dans un pays francophone" (the English clubs are an appropriate setting for improving our oral English because we are living in a French-speaking country).

In tertiary education, the English departments have been created in Dakar and Saint-Louis. In Université Gaston Berger de Saint-Louis, English is taught in the Faculty of Arts, principally in two departments (the Department of English and the Department of Langues Etrangères Appliquées). It is also taught to the students of French, Sociology, Geography, Law, Economics and Mathematics. In Mathematics, the students are convinced that the knowledge of English is necessary for the understanding of their subject of specialisation and for reading books and journals of Mathematics (Diagne, 1998). In the Department of Langues Etrangères Appliquées, English for Specific Purposes (ESP), that is, Business English and English for Tourism is taught. Those English programmes aim at providing the Senegalese with much needed skills in English to cope with international communication.

Apart from public education, English is taught in private language centres. The three well known centres of Dakar are: The British Council Language Centre, The British Senegalese Institute and The American Cultural Centre. Of the three centres, The British Council is the one which is the most deeply involved in this activity. As described by its former director, its aim is to promote the English language as an essential tool for socio-economic and technical development (Budd, n.d.). The centre runs

four English courses, namely, Business English, Young learners' English, General English, and English for Specific Purposes (ESP), intended for senior members of the Prime Minister's Office. Candidates are registered for each of the four programmes.

The British Council also deals with the management of two projects funded by the Government of Great Britain in partnership with the Ministry of Education of Senegal. These are the project on the training of English teaching advisers and production of textbooks and the English for Employment Project with both the universities of Dakar and Saint-Louis. The second project was designed to make the university language instruction more relevant to the job market.

The British-Senegalese Institute (BSI) was formerly run by the British Council. Now it is run by the government of Senegal alone. The Director is appointed by the Ministry of Education. The BSI also provides evidence of the Senegalese's interest in English. Mamadou Kandji, the former director explains (*Sud Quotidien*, 1998):

Il ya une forte affluence des étudiants, des fonctionnaires... lors des inscriptions dans notre institution. La structure est aussi très sollicitée par les entreprises de la place qui poussent leur personnel à apprendre l'anglais.

(Our institute is full of students, civil servants... during the registration time. A lot of applications also come from the local firms which encourage their staff to learn English).

As regards The American Cultural Centre, it runs English teaching programmes under the supervision of the USA Embassy. Senegal has also many private training centres owned by the Senegalese citizens.

Apart from the English language centres, let us mention two English conferences, the Annual Conference on American Studies organized by the American Cultural Centre of Dakar and the West African English Language Conference (WAELC) jointly sponsored by the British Council and the United States Information Service. The American Studies Conference gathers experts from Senegal and West Africa in order to share the findings of their research works on American life and civilization. Around a hundred people participate every year. WAELC also gathers experts and teachers of English from several countries of West Africa (Anglophone, Francophone and Lusophone) in order to discuss English language teaching problems encountered in this area. Emphasis is placed during this conference on the problems of ELT in this part of the continent and ways of finding appropriate solutions, and also on how to coordinate teaching

activities in all those countries. The most important achievement of WAELC 95, for example, was the fact that, for the first time and, in spite of the linguistic differences that characterize their respective countries, teachers of English from West Africa got together in order to assess their profession.

As can be seen, the English language is sinking its roots deep in the educational system of Senegal.

## **Conclusion: the future of French and English**

As a result of the growing popularity of English in the French-speaking countries, fear and unrest have prevailed on the part of France and the Francophone countries of the world. Leaders in those countries have consequently appealed for a strong and firm action in order to encourage and maintain the use of French in most activities as illustrated below by one of them (Cheddadi, 1996: 35):

Il convient d'élaborer la meilleure réponse possible aux dangers actuels d'uniformisation, d'envahissement et d'étouffement des autres langues par l'anglais

(It is convenient to elaborate the best response possible to the present day dangers of uniformisation, invasion and suffocation of the other languages by English).

Several measures have been taken in order to encourage the use of French especially in education and in scientific research.

Thus given, on the one hand, the spread of the English language in France and in the French-speaking countries (including Senegal), and, on the other hand, the strong reaction by the same countries in order to maintain French, the following conclusions can be drawn as to the future of French and English in Senegal :

- it is difficult to predict total domination of French by English in a very old French-speaking country like Senegal; nevertheless, coexistence of both languages in this country is likely to continue and the influence of English is likely to become even stronger.
- French will still be used as the official language of administration, education and law in Senegal due to the role played by France in education and to the financial means used to promote the latter in this country.

- the use of French will sensitively decrease in the non-formal sectors and in all the activities patronized by the young people (sports, music, art, etc.) which will be profoundly affected by the English language;
- as a symbol of freedom, unification and hope, English will be the language of the younger generation. Its main features will be code switching and code mixing (pidginization and borrowing from French and the local languages);
- due to the growing number and importance of private English teaching institutions, to the accessibility of the English-speaking media and the popularity of the internet in this country, more people, especially the youth, will be encouraged to learn and speak English;
- and last, in the field of scientific research, efforts have been made in order to encourage the use of French thanks to the funding of the researchers' individual and collective projects. However, the use of English will also be a necessity since Senegalese universities have signed partnership agreements with many American universities which involve student training, staff exchange, book supply, collective research work, etc. <sup>4</sup>

In a nutshell, the expansion of the English language is likely to be grow within Senegalese society. Resistance on the part of French will depend on goodwill and much effort, especially in the non-formal sector where French is easily supplanted by English. The decline of French is also likely to be reinforced by the expansion of and the recent great interest manifested towards the Senegalese languages (Wolof, Pulaar, etc.), especially by young people. To end this discussion, let us quote Picoche and Marchello-Nizia's prediction (1989:139) ten years ago concerning the future of French in Francophone Africa : "Si la France ne veille pas á garder á sa langue un statut scientifique et technique, l'Afrique francophone passera, sans doute un jour, á l'anglais..." (if France does not assign a scientific and technical status to its language, Francophone Africa will one day turn to the English language). Senegal is not an exception.

## Notes

1. The variety of French used by the non-educated is called "Français langue d'Afrique" (African French). It is a pidginized dialect of French which includes features from the local African languages.
2. Wolof is the most popular. Nowadays, it is used by more than 80% of the Senegalese population. It is also used in Gambia and in parts of Mauritania.
3. Here is a declaration by a correspondent of Radio France Internationale (RFI) on the use of French in Nigeria in the Tribune Nigériane broadcast of June 27th, 1997 (7.30 am):

Le Nigéria a introduit l'apprentissage du français à la radio et la télévision car le français deviendra bientôt la deuxième langue officielle du pays. Mais, même si le français intéresse pas mal de gens ici, il est loin d'être semblable au cas de l'anglais dans les pays francophones; c'est-à-dire, le Bénin, le Togo, le Sénégal. Les gens parlent plus l'anglais dans ces pays qu'on parle le français au Nigéria!

(Nigeria has introduced the learning of French on radio and television because French will soon become the second official language of the country. However, although people are attracted by French in Nigeria, the situation is different from that of English in the French-speaking countries like Benin, Togo, Senegal, etc. In these countries, people speak more English than Nigerians speak French!)

4. For example, the Université Gaston Berger de Saint-Louis has signed partnership agreements with several American universities.

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