

The English Language and the Human-Psyche Trafficking: A Discourse on the Context of Superstratum as an Agent of Loss of Tribal Values

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Abstract

Human-psyche trafficking and human physical trafficking diverge: the former leaves one at his social milieu; the latter lifts one to another social environment. The English language, invading Africa, is changing Africa's world-views, wrecking cultural perspectives and gradually overpowering many languages. This bare-faced blow on indigenous languages, pivotal channels for cultural transmission and retention, has made many start thinking in English, acting out English culture, believing in everything English and dreaming of living perpetually as the English. This is the human-psyche trafficking this paper sets out to introduce as a seminal inspiration for further evaluation and onward repudiation.

Introduction

The English language is nearly becoming the lingua franca in Nigeria. The body, the souls, and the spirits of Nigerians nod approval, as evident chase after anything West is conspicuously displayed by many Nigerians, especially Nigerian leaders who, as part of their riches, traverse every nook and cranny of Europe and the United States. This inordinate scramble for Western values and identity, no doubt, is facilitated by the English language, a stamp of integration with the West and the rest of us. This is the superstratal status of English vis-à-vis other Nigerian languages and/or the Igbo language.

The context of superstratum, and how the status of English in this superstratal context is superseding other local languages and satisfactorily overturning the psyche of the people toward their roots are studiously laid out to find out where we are and where we are heading for in this cultural topsy-turvey.

Trafficking and Human Psyche

Webster's semantic suggestions of 'traffic' as bilateral relationship or business transactions include "illegal or disreputable usually commercial activity like the drug traffic" and "communication or dealings especially between individuals or groups" (2003: p.1325). *Human Trafficking* therefore is the illegal or disreputable activity of selling human-beings for a price to be carrying out desired services. Earlier human-trafficking was the physical abduction, conquering and raiding of communities by armed bandits, capturing the inhabitants and disposing of these captives to British traders for onward transportation to America. A trade variously described as Triangular Slave and TransAtlantic Slave Trade. Modern human-trafficking also involves physically transferring able-bodied young men and women to countries outside Nigeria for services like prostitution, factory hands, household servants to the aged and the senile, as well as drug traffickers to drug barons. These

are the palpable denials of the physical body of its tribal root which might be regained afterwards, possibly by one's volition.

On the contrary, the human-psyche trafficking leaves one unperturbed and makes the victim consider himself as moving along with the Joneses. External changes embodying new ideas, new development and new opportunities are readily imbibed without question. Basden (1983) describes this trait of adoption and assimilation of foreign material introduction and behaviourable patterns by the Igbo thus: Discontent with primitive conditions comes only with the introduction of novelties from the outside world, and then, like a child, the Ibo covets what he sees. Left to himself he neither needs nor desires foreign luxuries, but once the possibility of securing them presents itself, be they ever so incongruous, he will not relax his efforts until they become his cherished possessions.

Basden's explanation is an apparent testimony to the blind chase after everything Europe and America, and the obvious consequence of schooling people out from their root, of changing people's thought as regards their cultural values and of making people disdain their language, a veritable vehicle for cultural retention and transmission. These people are not physically removed, but they are psychically overwhelmed in holding out a culture little known in their own enclave. Awoonor and Chukwu lament this psychic trafficking of Africa's ways of life in their poems entitled "Song of Sorrow" and "Song of Loss" respectively.

These Anglophiles basking in their psychic hostage display Anglophile penchant for perpetuating foreign culture. Bright Chimezie's song about a punishment suffered for speaking vernacular in the classroom is evident upon the degeneration local language use has gone. Varied corporal punishments ranging from physical flogging to extortion of money to discourage the use of local languages in classrooms are serious signs of the gradual bartering away of our psyche for Anglicization and Frenchification.

The English Language: A History of Imbalanced Psycho-Social Reception

Portuguese adventurers had contact with Nigeria in the fifteenth century. This contact initiated diplomatic relationship with the Oba of Benin and Portugal. In keeping with the spirit of this relationship, the Oba sent a son of his to be educated in Portuguese ways. Thus, Portuguese is the first foreign language learned and spoken by a Nigerian.

This Portuguese contact left a language legacy which is still sustained in Nigeria today. The name (word) "Lagos" is a derivation from the Portuguese word "Lago" which means natural harbour. However, Portuguese influence in Nigeria was uneventful and completely phased out when the Royal Niger Company

introduced a “Commercial warfare” which unmitigatingly paralyzed other European businesses and sent them packing from Nigeria.

Subsequent to Portuguese contact was the incursion of England to Nigeria’s coast masterminded by her traders in the sixteenth century. This century and the eighteenth century witnessed a massive suppression and balkanization of Africa as decided by European nations at the famed Berlin Conference of 1884/1885.

England took over Nigeria and, through bribery, subterfuge and repression, overran what later became the territory of Nigeria. Lagos was conquered (1851) and ten years later (1861) it was annexed and directly administered to pave way for Britain’s civilizing mission. British protection was given to Northern and Southern Nigeria as protectorates ruled in Lagos and Kaduna. In 1914, these regions were merged by Lord Lugard who defended British mission in his Dual Mandate and directly introduced direct rule in Lagos and indirect rule of overseeing the hinterland communities via their local chiefs and, as in Igbo land, warrant chiefs.

Ever since the inception of British administration up to October 1st 1960, Nigeria’s affairs were discussed and implemented in the English language: British administration manifested in political parties and elections into legislative assembly, in British education system by introducing grammar school learning objectives, in British economic benefits, in British security outfits – the police, the army, etc, in British diplomatic posturing, and in British ways of life which were all effectually conveyed in English. Any one not versed in the English language was and is still considered inferior, undesirable and backward. This brazen psychic domineering influence of British education rearing up overtly through spoken English is confirmed by Buchi Emecheta, a novelist, Olagoke and Olu Tomori, Language experts.

According to Emecheta in her novel, *Second-Class Citizen* (1980), the Igbo accepted school as fish to water. The Ibos never played with that? They were realizing fast that one’s saviour from poverty and disease was education. Every Ibo family saw to it that their children attended school. An intelligent man was judged by the way he spoke English.

Olagoke in *Ubahakwe* (1979) elucidates that the key to decent employment and admissions to post-primary and post-secondary schools are facilitated by the successful performance in the English language, and Tomori in *Banjo et al* (1981) observes the exhilaration in the pursuit, by Nigerians, of acquiring competence in spoken English is the desire to speak like the Whiteman and to read books in English. These confirmations convincingly enunciate the degree of permeation of English into the souls of the nation and the psyche of the citizens.

Superstratal Influence of English upon the Igbo Psyche

It is informative to state that language contact occurs in three situations:

superstratum, *substratum* and *adstratum*. Millar (2007) explains that in superstratal contexts, the language of a socially powerful element in a society influences the language of less powerful groupings as evidenced in a post-colonial experience, where words from the colonizers' language finding their way into the language of the colonized. On the other hand, adstratal influence is where two (or more) languages come into contact, but there is no dominant community, while substratal influence involves influence upon a dominant language by a less dominant one (often one which is losing native speakers).

The English language introduced through trade and missionary activities is nearly transforming into a lingua franca in Nigeria which parades over two hundred and fifty languages with none of the language communities prepared to yield to any of the major languages to be adopted as a common language. As the Igbo tribes cherish novelties and unwaveringly go after them when the opportunity is offered, it is the tribe worst hit by the neglect of its language. According to Hair as Nwadike (2008) acknowledges that the Igbo experienced an upsurge of interest in literacy but it was not a genuine and continuing interest in VERNACULAR literacy. Ibo children having being taught to read vernacular primers, were hurried on by their parents to acquire and read English, the language of opportunity; in this way the Ibo gained a position of power in the colonial and post-colonial social and administrative order in Nigeria, but the Ibo language was neglected.

This neglect is a bizarre psychic perturbation of mortgaging our root for an unknown one, a march towards cultural suppression, and an invitation to ethnic cleansing via English. Parents have distaste for their children speaking vernacular; discussions at meetings are in plain and smattering English as well as code-mixing and code-switching of utterances that should be more appreciated if rendered in Igbo. Herein lies the debacle looming large before the Igbo race and the Igbo language.

The second meaning of trafficking above is communication or dealings especially between individuals or groups. Communication can only be effective if I understand you and you understand me. And understanding a language can only, according to Lado (1978), be effected if "the pattern and values of the culture" of which the language is a part is known. The West do not know our culture and therefore will never learn the vehicle of that culture. Africans and/or the Igbo rushing for everything West by learning English the vehicle conveying Western culture is suggestive of cultural displacement. So, trafficking, implying communication or dealings is lopsided. Storing and using foreign culture is evidence of psychic hostage displaying the illegality and disreputableness of English (the trafficker) in wrecking land and psyche.

Agents of Human-Psychic Trafficking

The West's egocentricism in enslaving Africa presents Africa as a slight unmeritable continent fit for subjugation and servitude. The West's relentless underdevelopment of Africa has witnessed stooges imposed, inventions unsung for, crises sowed, and economy hamstrung. This sabotaging interest was satirized by Radio Nigeria during Ibrahim Babangida's regime. A persona, "Andrew", wanted to abandon Nigeria in search of a greener pasture in Europe or the United States. Though this evoked hilarity and entertainment, it glaringly showed loss of confidence, loss of expectations (dreams) and loss of any thing good coming out from Nigeria. And, where can one find these losses? No other area than where Andrew was "checking out" to.

Intercontinental relations facilitate the instrumental motivation of studying English. The United States came out of the Second World-War in 1945 technologically and commercially super powerful. The English language is the language of the United States. Transacting business with the States is only accessible by the knowledge of the language. Reading medical, engineering and other new discoveries' manuals entails the knowledge of the language of the novel discoveries. The discovery of oil gave momentum to the study of English as the local inhabitants must learn the language of oil explorers and exploiters in the business of oil industry.

The English language is the language of education in Nigeria: the language of teaching, the language of research (field, laboratory and literary), the language of examinations (WAEC, NECO, NUC, NABTECH, RSA, etc), the language of educational ceremonies (matriculation, convocation, ministerial visits, literary and academic memorials, etc). The successful output of these various uses of English is depicted in the production skills - speaking and writing-and the reception skills - reading and listening. These skills –minimal, optimal or maximal □ are all ranks placing Nigerian speakers of English on the pedestal of knowledge of the language which manifests in motley social gatherings. A sordid result superimposing English on Igbo, a language bereft of opportunities and bereft of futuristic edification of anyone socially, educationally and economically.

Igbo reckless rush for novelties is a factor queuing the Igbo language on the dying procession of disappearing languages. The Igbo, according to Basden (1983), covets what he sees and would never relax his efforts until they become his cherished possessions. So, when the English language offered itself as a language of opportunities for survival, parents hurried on their children to acquire and read English, (Hair in Nwadike 2008). Today, we come across parents who glibly defend the English language as the rightful medium for making their children compete favourably with peers or contemporaries within and outside the country. This twisted perception of parents so influenced the thought of many people, secondary school students inclusive, that they describe those unable to speak well, write well,

read well, and listen and understand (spoken) English well as illiterates who would never achieve anything meaningful without this globalizing world language.

The Contact of Super stratum: The Eventual Effect of English on Igbo

The English language has seized the psyche of the Igbo via reading, writing and arithmetic (the 3rs) introduced by the imperial missionaries. Proficient in these “rs” endeared one to his people. This endearment was the ability to speak and write English like the Whiteman. Awooner in *This Earth My Brother* (1981) exposes the ignorance of the Africans about English and their gleeful encomium towards their son, and secretary, who read an address in English to a white administrator. The local people were happy not because they understood the language of the address, but because they had one of their members who could speak the Whiteman’s language. The English language pervading every nook and cranny of Igbo land is gradually squeezing life out of the Igbo language. This “gradual language death”, according to Fromkin et al (2003) is the most common way for a language to become extinct. It happens to minority languages that are in contact with a dominant language. In each generation, fewer and fewer children learn the language until there are no new learners. The language is said to be dead when the last generation of speakers dies out. Already fewer and fewer children are learning and using the Igbo language, a result of the psychic trading of their brains for foreign languages and cultures.

The death of a language is a loss to history and to linguistics. Emegwali (2003) counsels Africans to tell their stories, not the story of the West. The failure to tell African stories of government, social ceremonies and economic engagements will surely invite complete tribal extinct. He stressed that we Africans have to tell our story. We underestimate the power of the story. “What happened to the black people of Kemet”, the travelers asked the old man. “For legend had it that the people of Kemet were black? What happened?” “Ah”, wailed the old man, “they lost their history and they died”.

The disdain for speaking the Igbo language; the distaste for sustaining many enviable cultural practices will invariably make us ghosts of a living dead for our fore-bears, we do not know; our customary lore, we do not know, as we hanker after foreign tunes scarcely lost in us. Lamenting on this loss, Fromkim et al (2003) state that the disappearance of a language is tragic. Not only are its literature, poetry, ritual speech and word structure, its stores of a collective intellectual achievement of a culture and its offering unique perspectives of the human condition lost, but the major medium through which a culture maintains and renews itself is gone as well. Millar (2007) corroborating Fromkin et al says that the resulting linguistic homogeneity [i.e. abandoning for example Igbo for English to ensure integration-emphasis mine] will doubtless carry with it any number of

practical advantages, but there will also be a heavy price to pay in terms of loss of individual and group identity - not to mention the catastrophic loss to linguistics.

Conclusion

It is informative to note, as recorded in the fourth edition of *Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary* (1989) that about three hundred million people speak English as native speakers and many more millions use it as a second or foreign language. The motive for this extensive influence or use might be integrative or instrumental: integrative to make one identify with British cultural values; instrumental to make one do something relating to the use of English like business relations and workshops on technical know-how. These motives are both fundamental, but can one realize when the rain starts beating oneself (i.e. when one begins to learn a language and why), so that one can also know when it stops beating oneself (i.e. when one has attained the height of ones need) to avoid overreaching the bound of reality. Overreaching the bound of reality of regarding Igbo and any other local languages as inferior to English is conspicuous in the prejudicial descriptions of inventions in Africa as black magic. In so doing, the West, through their African middlemen, frustrate technological discoveries, and stealthily ferry these prodigious inventors to Europe and the United States where their foreign cultures stored in sublime brains fertilize these continents. These brains voluntarily or involuntarily drained repatriate little wherewithal for the enrichment of families and erection of similar English mansions. These traps attract the envy of many families who have started showing contempt for Igbo industry and longing for the whites and the whites' resources as the only open sesame for poverty eradication and social standing. This psychic trafficking for foreign cultures and resources for fees to the detriment of one's indigenous culture is inevitably unleashing ghastly blows to the people and the continent of Africa whose ancestors are the true revolutionaries according to Ayittey in *The African Guardian* (1987)

The true revolutionaries of Africa are the illiterate peasants and the chiefs of Africa. They used their brains and created things for themselves without mimicking or imitating foreigners.

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