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Youth Language as a Transnational Phenomenon: The Case of French in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study sets out to enquire if the French language could be seen as a youth language in Nigeria. It adopts conventional approaches to youth language studies and carries out an empirical study on how the French language has fared amongst Nigerians since it became the country's second official language in 1996. After an exhaustive review of related literature, the study adopts the sociological, sociolinguistic and transnational theories to explain the concept of youth language as a transnational phenomenon that has established itself in Africa through Western European influences. The study has two phases: a first phase to determine those who connect with French in Nigeria, involves a sample population of 80 persons, including 40 youth and 40 adults of both sexes and different nationalities from four of Nigeria's six geopolitical zones (North Central, South East, South West, South South); and a second phase to determine the nature of French language speech patterns by the youth. This involves only the 40 youth. Using the quantitative and qualitative methods, this study makes a careful analysis of the questionnaire administered to the sample population. The findings reveal that most adults of 36 years and above in Nigeria show little or no interest in the French language, while most young people of between 12 and 35 years of age in Nigeria are so deeply attached to the French language that they have now adapted its use to suit their purpose as a distinctive communication code peculiar to them.

Keywords: Adult, French, In-group, Transnationalism, Youth, Youth language.

INTRODUCTION

If Chomsky (1957) cited in Igbeneghu (2012), Benveniste (1974), Okon (2002), Samovar et al (2010) and Samoh-Yong and Samoh-Yong (2014) define language as a system of symbolic substitution and all ranges of linguistic description peculiar to humans that enable a human being to share his/her experiences and inner states with others in a given social context, then

"youth language" will refer to all patterns of language used by way of symbolic substitution and ranges of linguistic description peculiar to groups of young people in a given socio-cultural context (Androutsopoulos, 2005).

That is if "youth" or "young people" refer not only to adolescence of 12 to 17 years (Craig, 2003), but also to teenagers of 13 to 19 years (Androutsopoulos, 2005), young adults of 20 to 24 years (Pujolar, 2001, and Auer & Dirim, 2000 cited in Androutsopoulos, 2005).

However, considering the peculiarities of Third World countries in South-East Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa and South America with high rates of unemployment and dependency among young people, Tyyskä (2005) and Furlong (2013) refuse to peg specific age ranges to youth; they rather relate "youth" to biological processes that define social positions given to individuals between childhood and adulthood in different cultures and societies based on their degree of dependence or independence. It is in the light of the above definitions that this study sticks with the UNESCO (2015) definition of youth as that period of a person's life between the dependence of childhood (not below 12 years of age) and the independence of adulthood (not above 35years of age).

Therefore, "youth language" as defined above will refer to the system of symbolic substitution and ranges of linguistic description peculiar to in-groups within the age range of 12 to 35years in a given socio-cultural context. Consequently, the terms "symbolic substitution" and "ranges of linguistic description" open up this study to broader perspectives and categories of "youth language" which Albrecht (1993) cited in Androutsopoulos, 2005, describes as generally comprising the ways of speaking that are characterized as "bad language" in media reports, dictionaries, etc. because they are "deviant" and "exotic" in their context of usage.

Craig (2003) goes beyond Albrecht's description of the spoken form of youth language to include the written form and uses the English language as a case study to explain how the written form of language has been deformed by Instant Messaging (IM) techniques like phonetic replacements ("ur" for "your", "you are" , "you're"; "luv" for "love", etc.), acronyms ("lol" for "laughing out loud"; "omg" for "oh my God", etc), abbreviations ("pple" for "people"; "bc" for "because", etc) and what he calls "inanities" (neologisms, slang, etc) to produce a variant of the written form of youth language in English.

Without going to specifics as Craig (2003) and Albrecht (1993, cited in Androutsopoulos, 2005) have done, Androutsopoulos (2005) mentions such similar general categories that may embody "youth language" as the spoken language, face-to-face interaction and personal e-mail where slang may be created, words formed or borrowed and where there could be semantic shift(s). Overall, "youth language" may be likened to a class language which is developed because of a desire to establish an identity apart or a distinct speech code that defines closeness or in-group relations and thus functions as a basis for youth categorization and formation of group boundaries that can

be sources of intergroup tension and conflicts (Samovar et al., 2010). "Youth language" became noticeable as a deviant speech form amongst young people in the middle of the 20th century, and attracted the attention of scholars because of its peculiar code-switching nature that defied standard language use in such European languages as Italian, German, Swedish, English, French, Spanish and Portuguese. Though Androutsopoulos (2005) situates its appearance in the last decades of the 20th century, there is evidence that it occurred earlier when its usage was stigmatized as deviant (Cohen, 1955).

Through globalization and transnational contacts, the phenomenon penetrated African countries, including those with dominant national languages like Senegal (Wolof), Cameroon (Camfranglais), Central African Republic (Sango), Congo Brazzaville (Lingala), Ethiopia (Amharic), Kenya (Sheng), Zambia (Shona), Zimbabwe, Malawi and Tanzania (Kiswahili). So, from Senegal to Somalia and from Niger to Namibia, down to South Africa, almost all Sub-Saharan African countries have been affected by the phenomenon of youth language. This has been through symbolic substitutions that may result in code-switching, code-mixing, vowel-drop shortenings, vowel-drop replacements, acronyms, abbreviations, slang, etc.

In Nigeria, with its heterogeneous cultural and multilingual setting that includes about 527 languages (Nzuanke, 2012), "youth language" takes different forms. There is Pidgin English (Nigerian Pidgin or NP) which has held sway as a language of communication amongst Nigerian youth from different ethnic backgrounds. This is especially so in isolated linguistic communities with dissimilar cultures like in South-South Nigeria, made up of Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo and Rivers States; parts of the North-East (Adamawa, Borno, Gombe and Taraba States) and some North Central States, including Benue, Plateau and Nassarawa States. There is, however, evidence that even in homogenous cultural and linguistic communities like the North-West (Hausa-Fulani), the South-West (Yoruba) and the South-East (Igbo), Nigerian Pidgin (NP) is used amongst youth in schools, the market, church, public places (football fields, film halls), etc. (Adesola, 2013).

Another type of language variant which is common amongst Nigerian youth is code-switching or code-mixing. Depending on the language combination or codes of the speaker, this variant may generate bilingual or multilingual linguistic outputs like English-Efik, English-Igbo-NP, English-Hausa-NP, English-Yoruba-NP, Igbo-Hausa-NP, Igbo-Yoruba-NP, Hausa-Yoruba-NP, etc (Onyemelukwe, 2004). Though this linguistic situation is a reality in Nigeria because of the existence of linguistic and cultural communities in Nigeria that are related to those languages, there has been an apparent gradual shift in youth language learning interest since the mid-1990s in favour of the French language.

There is no gainsaying that this apparent shift in interest may have been due to the:

1. Presidential declarations of 14th and 31st December, 1996, making the French language Nigeria's second official foreign language;
2. Generous publicity given to the new policy by the Nigerian and foreign press;
3. Desire for adventure by the youth who are always attracted to new ways and things as these may provide an opportunity to create a new in-group fellowship; and
4. Dream for new career, travel or study opportunities provided by the French language both locally and internationally.

Whatever the reason(s) may be for the youth to turn towards learning the French language, will it be appropriate today to say that the French language has taken centre-stage or pride of place amongst the youth in Nigeria? This study, therefore, seeks to show the degree of penetration of the French language within the ranks of the youth in Nigeria through such transnational channels as globalization and international co-operation seen in terms of contact between non-State actors and the role played by French language centres, Alliances françaises and French cultural centres in this light.

METHODOLOGY

In seeking answers to the question above, this study outlines the history of French in Nigeria before examining the French language as a transnational youth phenomenon in the country. It equally adopts the trend in current youth language studies that applies the inductive and deductive methods to investigate the effect of society and social relations on the language used by youth in a given socio-cultural context. While the inductive method provides a basis for empirical inquiries from primary sources through observation, interviews and administration of questionnaire to 80 respondents chosen at random (40 young persons of between 12 and 35 years of age, and 40 people of 36 years and above) for the quantitative analysis of the study, and through observation and interview of only the 40 youth for the qualitative analysis, the deductive method provides the study with secondary data to support and/or explain whatever evidence that was drawn from the primary sources.

The questionnaire contains 15 questions, ranging from why and who study the French language to how and where it could be studied. The observation and interviews were carried out almost simultaneously at the locations chosen by the different respondents or groups of respondents.

For reasons of convenience and some balance, the 80 respondents were drawn from four of Nigeria's six geopolitical zones that have a heterogeneous cultural mix. They are:

- Abakaliki (South East) = 20
- Badagry (South West) = 20
- Calabar (South South) = 20

- Lafia (North Central) = 20

The 40 young persons were a mixture of Christian and Muslim pupils, students (tertiary, secondary school) and workers. Naturally, all of them were literate enough in the English language, the language in which the questionnaire was designed and the interviews conducted. Amongst the 40 persons above 35years, we had a mixture of Christians and Muslims, essentially workers, including tertiary and secondary education teachers and a handful of university students. In both groups, there was parity in the gender mix.

Literature Review

Though no study has yet been carried out on "French as a youth language in Nigeria", several other studies have been carried out on "youth language" as a phenomenon in different languages (including French) from several perspectives. The very early perspectives mentioned by Cohen (1955) examined non-standard use of language by the youth. Such language use was often stigmatized as bad or deviant. Then came the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s when linguists sought to understand, define and explain the occurrence of such "deviant" language amongst youth in terms of vernacular (Labov, 1972), linguistic recreation/regeneration (Mbangwana, 1991; Kotsinas, 1997; Androutsopoulos, 2005 and Mensah, 2013), deceptive cognates (Onyemelukwe, 2004), slang (Craig, 2003). At the turn of the 21st century, the perspective shifted to consider "youth language" in terms of socio-cultural and linguistic processes that hinge on a search for identity and sense of belonging amongst youth. This occurs either within a given spatiotemporal location (Maira, 2002; Bennett and Kahn-Harris, 2004; Helve and Holm, 2005; Cole and Durham, 2007; Chun, 2009; Tetreault, 2009) or within a psycho-cultural and temporal location as in the "decent-indecent" cultural conception or stigmatization of a girl or female youth in relation to traditional (American) versus modern (immigrant) values of acceptable/unacceptable language codes (Skapoulli, 2009).

While the studies carried out by Maira (2002), Bennett and Kahn-Harris (2004), Helve and Holm (2005), Cole and Durham, 2007; Chun, (2009), Tetreault (2009) and Skapoulli (2009) look at the speech patterns that youth develop in their transnational social relations as post-immigrant youth who seek linguistic accommodation to "relocate" their percents' original cultural heritage from a "home" that may vaguely exist in their subconscious to their new European or American setting, Alim (2009) approaches the issue from another perspective; that of the "hip-hop" vernacular projection of globalization with a psychic or virtual view to pull down conventional national ethno-linguistic boundaries. To Alim, this will make way for "transnational" youth relations that are boundary-free.

Clearly, all these studies, be they pure linguistics (Cohen, 1955; Labov, 1972; Mbangwana, 1991; Kotsinas, 1997; Craig, 2003; Onyemelukwe, 2004;

Androutsopoulos, 2005; Mensah, 2013) or transnational (Maira, 2002; Bennett and Kalm-Harris, 2004; Helve and Holm, 2005; Cole and Durham, 2007; Alim, 2009; Chun 2009; Tetreault, 2009; Skapoulli, 2009) focus on youth as a medium of social relocation in identifying with or belonging to an in-group. Apart from Tetreault's works that tilt sometimes towards transnationalism, most studies on "youth language" vis-à-vis the French language are purely linguistic (Conein & Gadet, 1998 cited in Androutsopoulos, 2005; François-Geiger & Goudailler, 1991, etc). Works by these authors examine respectively discourse items in suburban Paris and non-standard word-formation types like clipping and redundant suffixes and transposition of phonemes or syllables as in "femme"→"meuf" (Androutsopoulos, 2005). This pattern is also evident in "Camfranglais" which is "a composite language variant, a type of pidgin that blends, in the same speech act, linguistic elements firstly from French, and secondly from English, Pidgin English and other widespread languages in Cameroon" (Kouega, 2013:15). In "Camfranglais", "mère" (mother) becomes "rémé", "père" (father) becomes "répé", "sœur" (sister) becomes "résé", etc.

Inasmuch as our study adopts a transnational perspective and considers the French language as a possible platform for creating and seeking in-group relations among peers studying the language in and out of Nigeria, it posits that French language learning by young people in Nigeria may also be a means of transnational linguistic grafting by which some youth in Nigeria may chart a new socio-economic course for themselves.

Theoretical Framework

This study will be based on three approaches, namely: the sociological approach, Basil Bernstein's sociolinguistic theory of language codes and the transnational approach. The sociological approach involves direct observation of the phenomenon of French as a youth language in Nigeria. Using the approach, this study designed and administered a questionnaire that would help to establish not only the category of persons who study French in Nigeria, but also how and where such persons study the language. The questionnaire also addressed practical issues like the French language learners' favorite music, personal learning methods, etc. Basil Bernstein's (1971) sociolinguistic theory of language codes seeks to demonstrate that as people use a set of codes when they interact in a given socio-cultural setting, the symbols or codes tend to create assumptions of a sense of belonging to that particular group. This view is explained in Stephen Littlejohn's (2002) definition of a code as a set of organizing principles behind the language employed by members of a given social group. In this paper, therefore, Basil Bernstein's theory will help to analyze and explain how relationships established within a French-speaking social group may affect the way that group uses the French language in its interaction with members of the larger community.

For its part, the transnational approach will help to explain the presence and role of non-State youth actors in this process of pulling down conventional national boundaries to establish what Norbert Elias (1991) calls a "society of individuals" or a global village. Put simply, this is called relations of complex interdependence (Keohane and Nye, 2001) which connect individuals to the society. On a personal note, such relations give the individual a sense of belonging to the global human community.

French in Nigeria

According to Nzuanke (2014), the history of French in Nigeria dates back to the 18th century when French traders set up a coastal trading post at Ughoton in the ancient Benin Empire in 1788. Evidence of this early French contact with Bini natives subsists in the local Bini language with traces of French words like:

"ekuye" a corruption of the French word "cuillère" (spoon);
"itaba" a corruption of the French word "tabac" (tobacco);
"boku" a corruption of the French word "beaucoup" (much/many).

Indeed, the French language was formally introduced as a subject in the school curriculum nearly a hundred years after the initial contact between French traders and the people that made up the former Southern Protectorate. French was taught alongside German in the very first secondary school in Nigeria (CMS Grammar School, Lagos) founded on the 6th of June 1859. The subject was also later introduced in Wesley High School and Training Institution (which became Methodist Boys High School, Lagos) founded in April, 1878, and Methodist Girls High School, Lagos founded in 1879 (Nzuanke, 2014).

The real objective for including French in the curriculum of schools at that time is not very clear because it was not until early in the 20th century (between 1910 and 1914), more than fifty years after its initial introduction into the school system, that Nigerians started taking the French language in certificate examinations (Nzuanke, 2014).

Though it is neither listed as one of the languages present in Nigeria (Nzuanke, 2012) nor captured by the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (cf. Article 55) as one of the country's official/national languages (besides English, Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba), the French language has, nevertheless, been recognized in the country. Today, for transnational and geopolitical reasons, French has been made compulsory in Nigerian primary and secondary schools (cf. Article 10(b) of the National Policy on Education, 4th Edition, 2014). Similarly, many tertiary institutions in the country have made French a compulsory elective for 100 and 200 level students.

In addition to these formal structures that encourage the teaching, learning and spread of the French language in Nigeria, other specialized national structures for the teaching of French include eight French language

centres funded by the respective state governments in Akure (Ondo State), Bauchi (Bauchi State), Benin City (Edo State), Calabar (Cross River State), Ibadan (Oyo State), Ilorin (Kwara State), Uyo (Akwa Ibom State) and Yola (Gongola State). These centres are complemented by such transnational structures as nine Alliances Françaises in Enugu (Enugu State), Ilorin (Kwara State), Jos (Plateau State), Kaduna (Kaduna State), Kano (Kano State), Lagos (Lagos State), Maiduguri (Borno State), Owerri (Imo State), Port Harcourt (Rivers State) and two French cultural centres in Abuja (Federal Capital Territory) and Ibadan (Oyo State).

There are several other private centres that are involved in French language teaching and promotion across the country. Some of these are the Trinitas Language Academy, the Hephata Foreign Language Consultancy Services in Calabar, and the Bi-Language Centre, Ikate, Surulere, Lagos all in Nigeria.

French language as Youth Language in Nigeria

This study seeks to determine the extent to which the French language could be considered as "youth language" in Nigeria in terms of its degree of penetration and usage within the ranks of the youth; that is, if it could play the role of a symbolic substitution with ranges of linguistic description used amongst young people of between 12 and 35 years of age within their respective socio-cultural contexts in Nigeria.

To achieve this, the study administered a questionnaire which was divided into two sections. Section One contained questions relating to respondent's bio data. That is personal information about nationality, age, literacy level, status (pupil, secondary school students, tertiary institution student, worker, business person) and religion. Section Two, entitled "You and the French language", contained 11 questions relating to the status of the French language in Nigeria, level of respondent's knowledge of French, why and where respondents would like to study the French language, the kind of language companies they keep, their musical preferences, the kind of educational system they prefer, etc. All the 11 questions of Section Two of the questionnaire had four options (1-4) as possible answer choices for the respondents.

Youth in French language practice in Nigeria

As indicated earlier, the sample population was made up of 80 persons divided into two major groups. That is 40 young people of between 12years and 35years, and 40 adults of 36years and above. The study was conducted in two phases: firstly to determine the category of people (only adults, only young people, or a fair mix of all) who may be more inclined towards the French language; and secondly to establish the nature of the French language speech pattern adopted by the youth in Nigeria.

The first phase involved a questionnaire which was shared equally amongst those two groups, that is 40 for each group. The study ensured gender balance of 40 male and 40 female respondents of different age ranges. All the 80 questionnaires were returned by the respondents, perhaps because the researchers were always on hand to pick them up at the time of filling. No attempt was made by the researchers to guide or condition the thoughts or choices of the respondents. All of them had an acceptable level of literacy in English, at least enough to read and understand the content of the questionnaire, which was designed in English.

The second phase involved only the 40 young people who were observed and interviewed separately in different locations. Most, that is 28 (or 70%) of the 40 young respondents fell within the range of 14years and 27years. 10 or 25% of the 40 young people were below 14 years of age. 33 or 82.5% of the 40 young people were students, while the others were either workers, business people or primary school pupils. Among the adult population, many of the respondents, 30 or 75% of the 40 were between the ages of 36 and 46, while the other 10 were above 46years of age. Eight (or 20%) of the adult population were full-time university students while the rest of them were either workers or business people.

Overall, it was an unfair religious mix because only 19 or 23.75% of the entire 80-person sample population was Muslim. The rest was essentially Christians with only four persons identifying themselves as animists.

Analysis of Respondents' Answers

The analysis will centre mainly on respondents' answers to questions contained in Section Two of the questionnaire because, technically speaking, it is the section of the questionnaire that is directly related to the objectives of this study. The section contained 11 questions, beginning with question five and ending with question 15. Nevertheless, reference will be made to elements of Section One of the questionnaire to explain the occurrence or possible reasons of certain answers or behaviour of respondents to certain questions in Section Two.

Question 5: Respondent's perception of the status of the French language in Nigeria.

From respondents' answers, it was discovered that 30 young people (12years to 35years), that is 37.5% of the entire sample population chose option one (an official language) as their response to indicate that they considered French as an official language in Nigeria. Similarly, 20 adults, representing 25% of the sample population also chose option one as their response to indicate that they considered French as an official language in Nigeria. Out of the 20 adults who chose option one, there were eight full-time university students. This could be an indication that there is a clear awareness amongst university students that French is an official language in Nigeria.

This is especially so, because the 10 young people who chose option three (something special to Nigeria) were below 14 years of age and still in primary and secondary schools.

The perception of the 10 youngsters may also be explained in relation to the enthusiasm and excitement they said they felt each time they were called out to go for French lessons after normal school hours. They were amongst those who chose options two and three as responses to Question 8.

Still for Question 5, only five adults or 6.25% of the sample population chose option two (a language like other foreign languages) to indicate their apparent apathy to the existence, teaching and learning of the French language in Nigeria. Conversely, 15 adults or 18.75% of the sample population chose option four (a language for Nigeria's future) to indicate perhaps that French is a language that could be used to equip the younger generation that should pilot the nation's affairs in the near future.

The response could also indicate that the language may not yet have a very serious impact on the nation's affairs presently because it is not firmly rooted in the country's linguistic landscape. Therefore, with the current official dynamics and awareness that seem to make the French language a centripetal force for the younger generation, it is expected that overtime, their numbers would grow to produce a wide spread that should build a strong French cultural and linguistic base that would firmly implant the French language and culture in Nigeria.

Question 6: Respondent's level of knowledge of the French language.
This question generated very interesting responses. While five respondents (6.25%), all youth, of the sample population, indicated they could read, write, understand and speak the French language (option one), 25 of them, that is 31.25%, indicated that they could hardly understand the French language (option four). Interestingly, 15 of the 25 who chose option four (can hardly understand French) were the same adults who indicated in their responses to Question 5, that French was a language for Nigeria's future. They did not provide answers to Questions 7, 8 and 12.

Did these 15 adult Nigerians consider themselves as part of Nigeria's past and therefore saw no reason why they should bother to know even the rudimentary elements of the French language?

To the same Question (6), 20 respondents (25%), all youth, indicated that they could only read and write the French language (option two). 30, that is 37.5%, including 15 youth, chose option three (can only exchange greetings in French). Of the 15 young people, 10 were under 14years of age. Out of the 15 adults who indicated that they could only exchange greetings in French (option three), eight were full-time university students who had taken or were taking elective courses in French in the university.

From the responses obtained for Question 6, it could be inferred that all the youth had acquired at least some fundamentals like the greeting and question modes in French.

Question 7: Why does the respondent study French?
10 respondents, that is 12.5%, all youth, chose option one (to be bilingual). Similarly, 10 respondents (12.5%), still all youth, went for option two (to fit into a French-speaking environment), while 20 respondents (25%), all young people, chose option three (to get a good job in future). Interestingly, all 40 adults (50%) of the sample population did not seem to know why they study or could study French as they opted for none of the responses.

The behaviour of the respondents in relation to Question 7 seems to show, at face value, that the French language is simply a business for young people. If the attitude of the adults as per their reaction to Question 7 is compared with the choice of option three in Question 6, where 15 adults indicated that they could only exchange greetings in French, then it could be deduced that even the rudimentary knowledge of the French greeting mode acquired by the 15 adults might have been accidental or forced as may be the case of the eight adults (undergoing studies at the university) who apparently take the French language as a compulsory elective course.

Question 8: In which context would respondent like to study French?
While 10 adults (12.5%) went for option one (formal school setting), 10 others, also 12.5%, chose option four (any private language centre). The other 20 adults (25%) chose no answer, perhaps to indicate that they had absolutely no need to study the French language anymore. 15 of these 20 adults had initially indicated an almost similar negative attitude in their responses to Questions 6 and 7 above.

The 10 adults who chose option one and the 10 others who went for option three said they did so just to indicate that if they had the opportunity, perhaps they would have accepted to study the French language in those respective contexts.

10 young people (12.5%) opted for option two (formal language centre) and the other 30 (37.5%) thought they would like to study French in an Alliance française.

In both cases, the motivation for the youth may have been of two kinds:

1. For the Nigerian youth: to meet and make new friends, especially amongst the foreign young people (Beninese, Cameroonians, Europeans, Americans and Asians) who patronized the Alliance française, while for the non-Nigerian youth, it may be to meet and interact with young Nigerians (for those who chose option three); and
2. To have access to ultra-modern audio-visual language-learning facilities that abound in the Alliances françaises and some of the language centres.

The motivation of the youth to meet and mix with other African, European, American and Asian young people may be aimed at:

a) Either competing with or learning from them;
b) Seeing if the other foreign youth also faced the same language-learning challenges faced by the average youth whose French language learning environment seems hostile;

c) Interacting with other foreign youth and perhaps creating in-groups that would set them apart as a "special superior caste" amongst their local peers and siblings.

The 10 young people who chose option two (formal language centre) were all below 14years of age. Though their motivation may have been veiled under peer-group pull to meet with other young people within their age brackets from other schools or places, it was also deduced from out-of-questionnaire discussions with these youngsters that they did not yet feel sufficiently confident and comfortable with their knowledge of French to want to attend lectures at the Alliance française which they considered to be their next port of call, after the language centre.

Nevertheless, the bottom line in both situations that concerned the youth is that there is an inherent desire to interact with other young people from different horizons with similar interests like creating in-groups that set them apart at different levels of their interaction.

Evidently, this falls in line with the ideas of Nortert Elias (1981:70-71) in relation to his "society of individuals" in view of creating a global village which in the words of Keohane and Nye (2001:270) could build relations of complex interdependence that connect individuals to the society in such a way as to give the individuals a sense of belonging to the global human community.

Inasmuch as access to ultramodern audio-visual language facilities may have been another motivator and source of attraction to the youngsters who chose to study French at either the formal language centre (option two) or the Alliance française (option three), it was not seen by them as indispensable since, according to some of them (in verbal conversation), to a certain degree, those ultramodern audio-visual language learning facilities distracted them with the abundance of fascinating features to which they had access. The tendency, they said, was for them to focus more on the fascination of the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and less on the French language acquisition process.

Question 9: To which category of Nigerians does respondent think French will be important?

In all, 60 respondents(75%), including all the 40 young people, chose option one (the youth), while 10 respondents (12.5%) thought French should be important to every Nigerian (option two). Five other adults (6.25%) chose option three (only workers), while the remaining five had no answer.

The choice of option one (the youth) by 60 respondents, representing 75% of the entire sample population is quite shouting and tends to give an indication of the perception that Nigerians currently have of the presence of the French language in the nation; that is a language that would be more interesting and beneficial to the younger generation.

This view is corroborated by statistics for the past 20 years gathered from the French language Centre in Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria,

where generally less than 5% of those who register and attend French classes each year are adults of 36 years and above.

All the information and statistics are supported by Okon (2002:64-65) who holds strongly that French as Nigeria's second official language will be of great benefit to the 21st century generation of Nigerians because they will be bilingual (English-French) and consequently:

- have a greater intellectual development with a wider general knowledge;
- improve themselves culturally since they will be in contact with French/Francophone customs, norms and ways of thinking;
- deepen their understanding of the way(s) in which the English and French languages work, since a good knowledge of one of the languages will enhance the learning of the other;
- enable the new generation to communicate in writing and/or by word with speakers of French; and
- contribute to better international relations.

Year/period	**Total registration**	**No. and percentage of students under 36years**		**No. and percentage of students of 36years and above**	
1994/1995	51	50	98%	1	2%
1995/1996	78	76	97%	2	3%
1996/1997	89	86	96.6%	3	3.4%
1997/1998	87	85	97.7%	2	2.3%
1998/1999	74	72	97%	2	3%
1999/2000	85	83	97.6%	2	2.4%
2000/2001	91	90	98.9%	1	1.1%
2001/2002	150	146	97.8%	4	3%
2002/2003	186	182	97.6%	4	2.2%
2003/2004	256	250	98.9%	6	2.4%
2004/2005	380	376	98.9%	4	1.1%
2005/2006	378	376	99.4%	2	0.6%
2006/2007	527	524	99.4%	3	0.6%
2007/2008	712	706	99.1%	6	0.9%
2008/2009	589	583	98.9%	6	1.1%
2009/2010	341	335	98.2%	6	1.8%
2010/2011	434	430	99%	4	1%
2011/2012	403	398	98.7%	5	1.3%
2012/2013	434	431	99.3%	3	0.7%
2013/2014	528	525	99.4%	3	0.6%

Source: Statistics were obtained in January, 2015, by these researchers from the registration forms at the French Language Centre, Calabar in Nigeria.

Question 10: Through which other personal methods/means does the respondent study French?

30 young people, that is 37.5% of the sample population chose option one (phone-radio), while 18 (22.5%) including 10 young people under 14 years of age and eight adult university students, chose option three (magazines/books). 32 adults, that is 40% of all respondents had no answer to the question.

Respondents' reaction to this question shows two trends:

1. All the youths tend to go the extra mile in their quest to acquire the French language and so make concerted efforts in that regard. Even those under 14years of age who may not yet be very acquainted with phones and radio sets, read other books as indicated in their response.
2. The adults seem to have given up on the need to acquire the French language. Evidently, the eight adults who make an extra effort with their books/magazines may have been doing so just within the context of their academic work as they had shown in their responses to Questions 6, 7, and 8 that they had little or no motivation to learn the French language.

Question 11: Which group of people does respondent always relate with?

Here, 30 adult respondents (37.5%) went for option one (colleagues/friends/people who generally speak English), while the other 10 adults (12.5%) chose option three (colleagues/friends/people who speak Nigerian Pidgin). All the 40 young people, representing 50% of the sample population went for option two (colleagues/friends/people who generally speak French).

In a way, the three options taken by the respective groups of respondents tend to define their company and possible in-group formation. The respondents all tend to want to interact only with those who share a given language in common with them. The dividing lines are so clear and no one seems to pretend about his/her language relational preferences.

Respondents' reaction to Question 12 below, clearly buttresses this point.

Question 12: In which context would respondent speak French?

20 young people (25%) went for option one (at school) and the 20 others went for option two (language centre/Alliance française). No adult respondent made a choice.

The reaction of all the 40 young people to this question seems to be an indication of the formation of in-groups and social relations that go beyond family circles. The young people seem to have found ready platforms at school and/or Language Centres/Alliances francaises to interact with a code that will be meaningful only to initiates who may neither be parents nor siblings, except where the latter were also initiates.

Yet, the fact that all the 40 young respondents refuse to speak the French language at home shows that they do not find group intimacy and

solidarity to use the language in the context of the home. This presupposes, therefore, that there is no in-group base at home where that distinct speech code (the French language) could be used to define respondent's closeness with a family member.

Clearly, the responses of the young people tend to lend credence to the relational choices made by the youth as indicated in their responses to Question 11 above.

Through an analysis of Basil Bernstein's theory of language codes, Atherton (2002) explains the behavior of respondents to Questions 11 and 12 by distinguishing Bernstein's restricted code from the elaborated code and suggests that the restricted code is better suited than the elaborated code for situations in which groups of speakers share deeper intimacy and more closeness like among friends, classmates, age mates, kith and kin and other closely knit groups. To him, therefore, Basil Bernstein's restricted code, like French in this case, can create a deeper in-group feeling resulting from an awareness of being part of that particular language group as do our youngsters in this study.

The no-choice option taken by the 40 adult respondents could, for its part, be an indication that they have little or no interest in speaking the French language anywhere, since, in any case, their abilities in the language seem to be limited.

Question 13: What are respondent's musical preferences?

Of the entire sample population, 30 adults, representing 37.5%, chose option one (English/Nigerian), while the other ten adults (12.5%) apparently had no interest in music as they chose no answer.

All the 40 young people (50%) chose option three (a mixture of English and French) to indicate their growing bilingual identity.

Though it is surprising that none of the young people chose option two (French music) which seemed to agree with the general trend of their perception in relation to the French language, it however gives food for thought as their current orientation seems to be a transition phase which must be managed with caution.

This is because what passes for French/Francophone music in Nigeria is generally popular Franco-Agrobeat music from Cameroon (makossa, bikutsi, assiko, etc), Congo (dombolo, rumba, etc) and Côte d'Ivoire (coupé-décalé, mapouka, etc) that correspond more or less to Nigeria's traditional highlife music.

So, the younger generation which is cut off from typical sub-Saharan African village settings (where such beats are generated) and concentrated more in urban centres will generally only be comfortable with what they are used to: hip-hop, rap, reggae, pop, etc.

This, too, may be a consequence of the lack of promotion of African traditional highlife music and/or pure French music on Nigeria's airwaves (radio and television). These are not only a sure means of collapsing the

world into a single unit, they are equally a powerful weapon that makes world cultures, economies and public authorities to generate transnational images, sounds and messages that shape and reshape thought, social reality and ideologies at the international level (Said, 2000:430).

Question 14: Which system of education would respondent prefer to further his/her studies aboard?

Responses from respondents were more or less fairly predictable with all the 40 adults (50%) going for option one (English system) which represents the entire English-speaking world. The 40 young people in the sample population were evenly divided between the French system (option two) with 20 respondents (25%) and the Bilingual system (option three) with equally 20 young respondents (25%).

The 40 adult respondents who opted for the first answer (English system) indicated that they did so because they did not seem to see any clearly desirable benefit(s) that could accrue to them if they had to venture into a strange, unfamiliar world where they would be required to spend or waste time to start learning a new language code. They preferred to dine and stick with the devil they knew best, maintaining that it was past the time for them to make any meaningful use of such a language and would rather encourage their younger ones and maybe kids to avail themselves of such opportunities.

Part of this view was expressed in their responses to Question 15.
The choices of the young people seem irreversible and a clear reflection of the globalized perception of these young people who are prepared to take advantage of any good opportunity that comes their way to equip and better themselves to face the challenges of their own very existence.

Question 15: As a parent to which type of school would respondent send his/her children?

60 respondents or 75% of the sample population chose option one (Bilingual English-French); 10 respondents (12.5%) chose option two (purely English-speaking) while the remaining 10 respondents (12.5%) went for option three (purely French-speaking). Of the 60 respondents who chose option one, there were 30 adult and 30 young people. The responses of the 30 young people apparently followed the pattern of their thought as noticed during the investigation. For the 30 adults who also opted for the first answer, the reason may not be far-fetched as it seemed to coincide with the thinking of 15 of these same adults (that French was a language for Nigeria's future) when they responded to Questions 5 and 9.

Nevertheless, the general impression gotten from this investigation is that even adults perceive the advent of French as Nigeria's second official language as a chance and a choice for the youth since they (the adults) did not have the kind of opportunity and orientation the young people currently have.

In summary, it could be stated that from the observed behaviour and responses of all the respondents in the course of this study in relation to Questions 8, 9, 11 and 14, there is a clear indication that French in Nigeria is the in-thing of the youth who have seemingly taken advantage of their overwhelming presence and involvement in its learning to create in-group bases that set them apart in their respective socio-cultural contexts.

Creativity in youth linguistic practice

This analysis is based on the observation of the French language performance of the 40 young people who made up the sample population for this purpose. Of course, there is no gainsaying the fact that their performance is a direct consequence of Nigeria's heterogeneous linguistic landscape that includes Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba, Nigeria Pidgin (NP) and multiplicity of other national and local languages (527 in all) that are jostling for space and provide clear evidence of an apparent linguistic saturation that makes the young people's physical and mental environment very hostile to the in-coming French language. This explains, perhaps, why adults (36 years and above) who, over time, may have been encumbered by all these languages, find it difficult to accommodate the latest arrival, the French language.

Consequently, the natural pattern of occurrence of French language performance by the youth will include Anglicization, deceptive cognates, mastered set expressions, monosyllabic/telegraphic features and code-switching/code-mixing. Strangely enough, from our observation of the performance of the 40 respondents, there was no single evidence of code-switching or code-mixing. This, we discovered was an unconscious act which resulted from the fact that respondents did not consider such mixture to be "French enough". In the following analysis, we shall examine some of the creative strategies in youth linguistic practice.

Anglicization

This may be defined as the twisting of an English word with a French intonation to make it sound French. For instance, the verb "to wipe" in the sentence "Wipe the board", may, for want of the French equivalent of the verb "to wipe", be expressed in a French structure as follows:

"Wipez[**whypay**] le tableau', instead of the standard French: "Effacez le tableau". The common noun "tableau", like other common nouns in French, can be easily known because their equivalents are generally learnt as common objects within learners' immediate environment. This pattern occurred several times in the utterances of young people in different forms and social contexts as listed in the examples below:

(1)

Base sentence in English	**Youth French in Nigeria**	**Standard French**
a).Drive the car	Dryvay la voiture	Conduisez la voiture.
b).Move the car	Mouvay la voiture	Démarrez la voiture.

The above utterances occurred in Abakaliki as four respondents (two males and two females) of between 20 and 24 years entered a car driven by one of the males on their way to school. The other three, aware that they were late for their lectures, yelled out those utterances to their circumstantial driver who only responded by smiling and speeding off with the car. The same utterances occurred in Lafia, though with only three respondents (two females and a male) in the car driven by the only male respondent.

(2)

Base sentence in English	**Youth French in Nigeria**	**Standard French**
a).Type the message	Typay le message	Tappez/Saisissez le message.

This utterance occurred initially in the observed behaviour of female respondents as they shared jokes and toyed with their mobile phone sets in hostels in Badagry and Calabar. But it also occurred in Abakaliki and Lafia during break time chit-chats and petit arguments amongst male and female respondents.

(3)

Base sentence in English	**Youth French in Nigeria**	**Standard French**
a).Kick the ball	Kikay le ballon	Tirez le ballon.

This utterance was found to be common among male youth respondents who played in the same soccer teams in Badagry, Calabar and Lafia. They were challenged through teasing by the researchers that they couldn't play football. They were later encouraged to play in the same team against different opponents without being aware that their on-the-field utterances and behaviour were being monitored.

Set expressions

These are expressions that have a fixed form and are generally learnt by rote as they are. Examples include: complaining of hunger, of thirst, of pain, telling time, etc, as in:

(4)

English	**French**
a). I'm hungry	J'ai faim (literal meaning: I have hunger).
b). I'm thirsty	J'ai soif (literal meaning: I have thirst).
c). I'm tired	Je suis fatigué(e)
c). I've a headache	J'ai mal à la tête [**geh mal a la tet**].
d). I've stomach ache	J'ai mal au ventre **[geh mal o vontr**].
e). It's 6 o'clock	Il est [**eh**] sixt [**siz**] heures [**air**].

These utterances were almost always systematic and occurred across the board in respondents' regular evening conversations after class hours in Abakaliki, Badagry, Calabar and Lafia with evidence of mutual comprehension. These are standard French expressions which, from observation, have become part of respondents' French linguistic repertoire as some drove home (Abakaliki, Lafia), moved either to the hostel or canteen (Badagry and Calabar).

Deceptive cognates

Deceptive cognates are generally words from one language that are mistaken to mean the same thing in another language because of their similarities in sound or spelling. Between English and French, the examples are legion. For instance:

(5)

English	Meaning	French	Meaning
a).Order	1).To order 2).Make a request	Ordre	Order as in orderliness/instruction
b).Chance	Opportunity/opening	Chance	Luck

gainst the backdrop of the above examples, the following utterance occurred frequently when the youth (male and female) in Badagry, Calabar and Lafia went to eat in the canteen/restaurant. It was discovered that such utterances had become conventional and mutually comprehensible amongst the respondents within the context of canteens, restaurants and other such eating places. Thus, we have:

(5.1) "J'ai placé un ordre" to mean "I placed an order".

This utterance merely juxtaposes English lexical items in French to convey a message which is expressed in standard French, thus:

(5.2) "J'ai passé une commande".

In standard French, "J'ai placé un ordre" is meaningless. What comes closest to it will rather mean "to impose/put order". It is expressed thus:

(5.3) "J'ai mis de l'ordre" (I've put/imposed order).

Monosyllabic/Telegraphic features

It transpired in our enquiry that those youth speakers of French who were mere debutants (especially those below 14 years of age) with very limited vocabulary, often resorted to gestures and monosyllabic/telegraphic features to put across a message. For instance, to tell a co-respondent that they were on their way to school, this category of respondents simply emitted utterance 6 (a) "Nous… école".

(6)

French language utterance	**English translation**	**Intended meaning/message**
Nous,… école	We,… school	We're going to school
Moi,…marché	Me,…market	I'm going to the market

Similarly, when one of them wanted to go to the market, utterance 6 (b) "Moi,…marché" was used. To most of the respondents, a grasp of some common nouns in French was enough for them to communicate with their peers effectively, that is if communication means encoding and sending a code to a receiver who decodes it accurately.

Utterances such as those recorded above mostly occur in telegraphic modes because of respondents' low proficiency and sophistication in French to produce complex sentences in conversations with their peers. On the whole, they clearly encapsulate the message of the speaker in the circumstance and agreed with Basil Bernstein's (1971) sociolinguistic theory of language codes since the young people use a set of codes when they interact in a given socio-cultural setting to create assumptions of a sense of belonging to that particular group.

Unfortunately, because of the lacunae we just highlighted, conversation in French with most of the young people was drab with lots of gap fillers and gestures with the hands, especially among those below 14 years of age. This trend was noticed in the French language performance of a female respondent who recorded in Phase One (Question 6) that she could read, write, understand and speak French (option one).

Though there were as many female and male respondents, no gender discrimination was noticed in the in-group formation as male and female related and bonded closely and freely within in-groups. The same behaviour was noticed amongst the youth in-groups in relation to race and nationality.

This brings to the fore the role of non-State youth actors in building a "society of individuals" or a global village in transnational relations of complex interdependence (Norbert Elias, 1991; Keohane and Nye, 2001).

CONCLUSION

This study which is based on a combination of the sociological approach, Bernstein's sociolinguistic theory of language codes and the transnational approach, sought to establish whether the French language as it functions today within Nigeria's body politic is of interest to all or to some Nigerians; that is about twenty years after it was adopted as the country's second official language. This inquiry became necessary because from observation, everything seemed to point to the fact that the French language was more patronized by Nigeria's youth (between 12 and 35 years) who appeared to have caught an irreversible fancy for the language.

Thus, taking a cue from the traditional trend in current youth language studies that tend to investigate the effect of society and social relations on the language used by youth in a given socio-cultural context, this study investigated 80 people of diverse nationalities and races as its sample population, chosen at random from four (North Central, South East, South West and South South) of Nigeria's six geopolitical zones. This was with a view to establishing in concrete terms if the French language in Nigeria could be seen as a youth language given the fact that it is mainly studied and used by and amongst youngsters as a code when the latter want to veil many of their likes and dislikes as well as many of their ambitions and fears (Kouega, 2013:9) from non-French language users.

For obvious security reasons, the researchers could not go to the North East and North West geopolitical zones of Nigeria.

After a careful and an exhaustive examination and analysis of the responses provided by all the 80 respondents, it was discovered that:

i- adults from 36 years and above show little or no interest in the French language;
ii- those who are enthusiastic about the French language are young people of between 12 and 35 years;
iii- one motivation for the young people is to make new transnational friends and establish contacts amongst their peers;
iv- the young people who use French in Nigeria want to establish an identity apart;
v- they see the French language as a separate code for defining closeness or in-group relations.

This study went further to investigate the nature of the spoken French used by young people in Nigeria because, as a foreign language (L2 or L3) which is only beginning to create its sociolinguistic base in the country, the French

language, has already, naturally, developed clearly distinguishing speech types or class characteristics of slang, colloquial or non-standard usages that form part of the repertoire of young people who are involved in French language learning in Nigeria.

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