



International Journal of English Language & Translation Studies



Journal homepage:

<http://www.eltjournal.org>

Language Preference among Nigerian Undergraduates and the Future of English

[PP: 52-65]

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History

The paper received on:

23/10/2014

Accepted after peer-
review on:

25/11/2014

Published on:

07/12/2014

Keywords:

Language Preference,
Language Choice,
Nigerian English,
English-only Fluency,
Nigerian Undergraduates

ABSTRACT

What will be the future of English in Nigeria? Put more apprehensively, will the English language die in Nigeria in the near future? These questions are answered by reporting on the language preference at home of some Nigerian undergraduates in order to gauge the future of English in Nigeria. The investigation sought to determine the language(s) most preferred for communication at home among Nigerian undergraduates. From a sample drawn from students in a private Nigerian university, 66.7% identified English as the most frequently used language at home while 64.1% indicated fluency in English against other languages spoken in Nigeria including the indigenous major Nigerian languages (Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba). On order of fluency among the languages sampled, 18.5% indicated an English-only fluency, which reveals that some section of young Nigerians are moving towards a monolingual English-only proficiency. This discovery has implications for the future of English in Nigeria. Several factors may account for this emerging trend. However, the premier position occupied by English in Nigeria and the expanding use of English world-wide clearly support the continuous growth and visibility of English as the language of choice among Nigerian undergraduates at home. This is without prejudice to several declarations and policy statements in favour of Mother Tongue education and usage in Nigeria. The paper concludes that the emergence of a new generation of Nigerians who use English as a first language in a non-host second language context is sowing the seed for further nativization and entrenchment of English in Nigeria.

Suggested Citation:

Egbe, G. B. (2014). Language Preference among Nigerian Undergraduates and the Future of English. *International Journal of English Language & Translation Studies* 2(4), 52-65. Retrieved from <http://www.eltjournal.org>



1. Introduction

Language is a human right anchored on the right to freedom of speech. This awareness underscores the reservation expressed by some post-modernist scholars, who on the altar of cultural nationalism stress the need to give every language the opportunity to grow and develop. This school of thought sees language as “the carrier of a people’s culture, it embodies their system of ethics and aesthetics, and it is a medium for producing and consuming knowledge, a granary of their memories and imaginations” (Zezeza, 2006, p. 20). Therefore, the death of any language is a great and an unimaginable loss of knowledge, culture and human memory. And for Thiong’o (2009), it is language which bears ‘the weight of a civilization’ and to allow a language to die is the “destruction of the base from which people launch themselves into the world.” (p. 22). For him, “Language is more than just a means of communication; it is the essence of our being, the very core of our soul as an African people, the medium of our memories, the link between space and time, the basis of our dreams” (Thiong’o, 2009, p. 21).

Proponents of language rights as human rights often present two sides of the rights: the *right of language* and the *right to language*. The right to language represents a collective right whose violation according to Ndhlovu (2008) “automatically affects entire speaking communities”. The *right to language* on the other hand equates the right of the individual to use one or more languages of choice. In other words, it is the right of every individual to “use the language one is most proficient in, as well as the right of access to the languages of empowerment and socio-economic advancement” (Mazrui and Mazrui, 1998, p.

115). Therefore, as Ndhlovu (2008, p.138) argues “if, for political, economic or other reasons, a person is denied access to a language that is crucial to ensuring his/her upward social mobility, then that person’s individual *right to language* will have been violated and this constitutes a form of marginalization” . It is against this consideration of the right to language and the prestige placed on certain languages through policy and advocacy within a multilingual context like Nigeria, that this paper investigates the language preferences of Nigerian undergraduates at home among the following languages: English, the Major or Minor Languages, Nigerian Pidgin English, and non-Nigerian languages (French, Arabic, Chinese, German, etc)..

1.1 The Linguistic Landscape of Nigeria

Nigeria presents one of the most complex ethno-linguistic situations in Africa. This has historical explanations traceable to the fusing of many ethnic nationalities into one country under British colonial rule. Since the 1914 Amalgamation, the stress and tremours which have threatened the continuity of the social and political configuration or what has been labelled the ‘geographical expression’ called Nigeria can be interpreted from ethno-linguistic dimensions. With an estimated population of over 150 million, Nigeria is the largest nation in sub-Saharan Africa accounting for approximately 25% of the subcontinent’s population. Nigeria has 529 languages; 522 are living languages; seven of these are extinct; and 11 have no known speakers (Lewis, Gary & Fennig, 2013). These languages are spread broadly throughout the thirty-six states and the Federal Capital Territory of the country. Three ethno-linguistic groups make up over half of the total population. These three ethno-linguistic groups own the major indigenous



or endoglossic languages which dominate the Nigerian linguistic landscape (Orekan, 2010) if we exclude English for the time being. Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo constitute the major indigenous languages in Nigeria. Table 1 below presents the linguistic landscape of Nigeria showing available statistics.

Table 1: Classification of languages in Nigeria

Languages	Family Group	No. of Speakers	% of Total Population
Hausa-Fulani	Afro-asiatic	28m	20%
Yoruba	Nilo-Saharan	35m	25%
Igbo	Niger-Congo	28m	20%
Other 'minority' languages	Diverse	49m	35%
English	Indo-European	44.4m	30%
Nigerian Pidgin	-	No known figure but widely used	No known figure but widely used
Arabic	Asiatic	No available data	15%
French	Indo-European	No available data	5-10%
German, Italian, Russian, Chinese	Indo-European/Sino-Tibetan	Minimal presence	Minimal usage

Table 1 above shows that the so called 'minority' languages account for 35% of the linguistic population in Nigeria while English accounts for 30%. The major languages put together account for 65%. Whether this translates to language choice and preference in Nigeria remains to be seen in this study. What is important at the moment is that Nigeria has a plural and complex linguistic landscape. It is evident that the linguistic plurality in Nigeria has two strands: the endoglossic which accounts for indigenous Nigerian languages and the exoglossic which accommodates the foreign languages in Nigeria. There is a third component which is the vastly used English-based Nigerian Pidgin. The implication of this linguistic diversity is that many Nigerians are bilingual or multilingual. The existence of monolingual Nigerians as this study would reveal should present some curiosity to linguistic scholars.

1.2 Multilingualism and Language Preservation

The multilingual landscape in Nigeria engenders linguistic struggle for survival. In fact, it is estimated that out of the 529 languages in Nigeria, 22 are institutional; 80 are developing (that is, they are at initial stages of development); 358 are vigorous (that is, they are neither developing nor endangered); 20 are in trouble; and 42 are dying (Lewis, Gary & Fennig, 2013). It is against this background of language endangerment that governments and peoples of the world strive to preserve and protect their languages no matter how small the population of speakers may be or the prevailing political and social conditions. It is for this reason that many cultural nationalists resist and speak against the murderous march and expansionist tendencies of the bigger and more widely used languages which threaten to kill, and sometimes do kill, smaller and minority languages.

The threat of language death is real in Nigeria as the above figure shows. However, in Nigeria, the question of an indigenous national language to replace English has received several and mixed responses and attention. In line with the 2000 Asmara Declaration which made a strong case for African languages and literatures, several pronouncements and policy thrusts in Nigeria point to the direction of mother tongue education and the promotion of indigenous languages. For instance, Section 55 of the 1999 Constitution states that: "The business of the National Assembly shall be conducted in English and in Hausa, Ibo and Yoruba when adequate arrangements have been made therefore". Section 97 of the same Constitution states that "The business of the House of Assembly shall be conducted in English, but the house may in addition to English conduct the business of the House in one or more other languages



spoken in the State as the House may by resolution approve”.

The 2004 revised National Policy on Education provides that early and lower primary education should be conducted in the language of the immediate environment or the mother tongue while in upper primary, the mother tongue will be taught as a school subject with English as the language of instruction. During this period, the policy provides that the three major languages as well as French and Arabic would be taught as school subjects through secondary school. In fact, in the 2007 Benchmark Minimum Academic Standards (BMAS) issued by the National Universities Commission (NUC), the regulatory agency for university education in Nigeria, French or Arabic has been made a one semester compulsory general studies course in all Nigerian universities. What the various policy statements and provisions show is that Nigeria does not only recognize the importance of mother tongue education but also has explicitly endorsed the endoglossic and exoglossic linguistic complexity of the country and officially entrenched multilingualism with all its advantages and drawbacks.

However, in Nigeria's pluralilingual situation, it may appear that the government has unwittingly pitched the English language against the three 'major' languages; the major languages against themselves; and the major languages against the 'minority' Nigerian languages. In the fierce linguistic competition coupled with the lack of a clear and an implementable language policy in Nigeria, the languages are at each other's throat and the coast appears clear for the English language to continue its dominance in the daily, educational, social, political and economic life of Nigerians. The emergence of French,

Arabic, and gradually Chinese also contesting for space in the Nigerian linguistic landscape has added more spice to the Nigerian linguistic cocktail. This is without overlooking the widely used lingua franca, the English-based Nigerian Pidgin.

Over the years the Nigerian government has responded with institutional interventions to address Nigerian's multilingualism and seeming language crisis. These responses have implicated huge financial and human resources to maintain Nigeria's multilingual mix. So far there are four major institutions involved in language activities in Nigeria. These include: (a) the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council with a Language Development Centre which develops and promotes Nigerian languages; (b) the National Institute of Nigerian Languages in Aba which is concerned with building the capacity of teachers to cope with teaching Nigerian languages in schools through teaching teacher educators; (c) the Nigeria French Language Village which is involved in building the capacity of Nigerians in French; and (d) the Nigeria Arabic Language Village which addresses Moslems and others who require competence in Arabic. Unfortunately, there is no English Language Centre or Institute except for the occasional professional training programmes sponsored by the British Council.

One may wonder why the Nigerian government is so interested in promoting multilingualism. First, Nigeria by its ethno-linguistic configuration is multilingual. With 522 living languages the choice of one language is contentious thus it is a difficult decision for the Nigerian government to choose to promote one and only one language. Secondly, there is a strong bond between language and ethnicity and in



Nigeria, language defines ethnicity thus according to Bodomo (1996, p.2) “language has a symbolic function”. From a human rights point of view Mazrui and Mazrui, (1998, p. 114), “every language in a multilingual society has the right to exist and to be given equal opportunity to develop legal and other technological limbs to flourish”. Thirdly, there are strong arguments which favour multilingualism as an asset especially for international trade and commerce as the Japanese, Chinese and Russians have shown. These people use English for trade negotiations but fall back on their local languages for consultations which give them advantage over their unilingual Western negotiators.

However, while some scholars do point at multilingualism as the bane of the many ethnic conflicts, political tensions, poverty, underdevelopment and economic backwardness of Africa (Zezeza, 2006), other scholars such as Batibo (2005, p. 58) argue that “plurilingualism in itself is not a cause of underdevelopment” pointing out that:

it all depends on what people do with it[multilingualism]. They may use it as a divisive means so that attention is focused on conflict rather than development. Or they may use plurilingualism to disadvantage minority language speakers so that their mental capabilities are inadequately developed and they are left behind in developmental efforts.

Fourth, the ability to defend borders is another reason in favour of multilingualism. In this vein the need to promote French and Arabic in Nigeria can be appreciated given Nigeria’s neighbours and the religious insurgence in some northern parts of Nigeria. It is for defence purposes that the American Defence Language School for instance teaches over 400 languages at any one time in spite of the fact that United

States of America is monolingual. In Nigeria, there are ongoing efforts to establish a Nigerian Defence Language School.

It does appear that what the Nigerian government is doing is to appropriate the resources of multilingualism which ties up with multiculturalism and the diverse ethnic nationalities in Nigeria by opening the linguistic space for every language, indigenous or foreign, to thrive. It is in this scenario that English finds itself in Nigeria. It is against this situation that one investigates the future of English in Nigeria *vis-à-vis* other competing languages in Nigeria. This is the motivation for this study which seeks to identify the language choices and preferences of Nigerian undergraduates at home using samples from a private university in Nigeria.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Language Choices, Preferences and Constraints

Bilingualism and multilingualism naturally motivate language choices, preferences and constraints. Indeed, when a speaker has competence in more than one language, chances exist that such a speaker will choose when to use one language and when to resort to the other. Adams, Matu & Ongarora (2012, p. 100) assert that “When people have command of two or more languages, they make a choice as to when and where to use a certain language. The choices speakers make of when to use what language rests on their attitude concerning the language of choice”. So attitude or feelings define the domain of use of a particular language to serve a particular purpose. Thus the debate on what motivates language choice is situated in domain analysis as posited by Fishman (1968). ‘Domains’, according to domain analysis, are “institutional contexts in which one language is more likely to be



appropriate than another and are to be seen as constellations of other factors such as topic, location and participants” (Adams, Matu & Ongarora 2012, p.100). For Akindele and Adegbite (2005, p. 26-27) domains include: participants, situation, topic and function/purpose. Participants cover language proficiency, language preference, socio-economic status, age, education, sex, etc., kinship relation, attitude, and power relation. Situation covers location, presence of mono/bilingual and degree of formality/ informality. Topic includes type of vocabulary while Function/Purpose include status raising, creating social distance, excluding someone, making request, giving commands and so on.

However, the debate on language choice is not as straight forward as it seems because issues of language choice are complex and not easily explainable especially when psycho-social factors play major roles. Indeed, one cannot provide a completely satisfying explanation as to why speakers make the choices they do with regard to language. Buda (2006:1) opines that “Sociolinguists have long been fascinated by the phenomenon of bilingualism and the complex language switching patterns that often accompany it. Many bilingual speakers are able to switch from language to language with ease, sometimes in mid-sentence. Attempts to define such patterns have not, however, met with much success”. While Buda (2006:2) agrees that “anyone who can speak two or more languages well enough to communicate his or her thoughts and emotions is free (if circumstances allow) to exercise choice”, (p. 2), he asserts that “choice of language is dictated primarily by the milieu in which the speaker finds himself” (p.1). He therefore posits that language choice is a subject of two

categories of factors: preferences and constraints. Preferences take into account language fluency, convenience, comfortability and conformity, peer influences and/or rejection, cultural/ethnic identity/heritage, and utilitarian considerations. Constraints on the other hand centre on linguistic congruity (speakers sharing the same language), linguistic etiquette (inclusion and exclusion constraints) and psychological factors (reactionary or reflexive).

It is important in discussing language choices, preferences and constraints to share the sentiments of Buda (2006) who notes that some factors may exhibit the characteristics of both preferences and constraints since a negative preference such as intense dislike of one language may become a constraint just as a positive constraint may as well show some of the characteristics of a preference. Rather than a strict line between preference and constraint, he posits “a continuous gradation between positive forces directing choice towards a specific language, and negative forces directing choice away from that language” concluding that “Language is, after all, a medium for interaction between people, and the use of language will reflect the infinite complexity of human relationships” (Buda, 2006, p. 11).

2.2 English in Nigeria

Historically speaking, the English language has been in existence for a little over 1, 500 years (Jowitt, 2008, p.1). What is interesting is that within a space of over 200 years especially within the twentieth century, the language has grown and expanded exponentially with non-native speakers now outnumbering native speakers 3 to 1 (Power, 2005, p. 41). Conservative estimates put up by Crystal (1997) and quoted by Jowitt (2008) reports that the



number of those with 'a native or native-like command of English is about 670 million, those with 'reasonable competence' in English is about 1,800 million while those who may be described as 'middle-of-the-road' is put at 1,200 million to 1,500 million. What the estimates reveal is that one-quarter of the world's population use and can use English. In Nigeria, it is estimated that about 30 per cent of its population use English representing about 44.4 million which places Nigeria as second to India and as the most important ESL country in the world (Jowitt, 2008) and the first among the Black race.

The development of English in Nigeria is characterised by three major stages: the first stage (1400-1842); the second stage (1843-1914) and the third stage (1915-present). Awonusi (1994) and Adegbite (2010) expand on the features of these stages. While the features of these stages are not the present preoccupation of this study, it is important to note that beginning from the second stage which coincides with the colonial period to the present, there has been increasing usage of English in Nigeria and a decline in the use of Nigeria's mother tongues in spite of policy provisions meant to boost the indigenous languages. Similarly, this study does not intend to examine the dialectics of Kachru's (1997) Inner, Outer, and Expanding Circles of world Englishes, or Yoneoka's (2006) English Umbrella constellation or Schneider's (2007) 'Dynamic model' which accounts for the process of growth and stabilization of English varieties (foundation, exonormative stabilization, nativization, endonormative stabilization and differentiation) across the world. The fact is that a variety of English known as Nigerian English is one of the major dialects of world Englishes used in Nigeria.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Questions

This study is guided by the following questions:

- a) Which languages are Nigerian undergraduates more fluent at and use more frequently at home?
- b) Are there Nigerian undergraduates with English-only fluency?
- c) What are the implications of the languages used by Nigerian undergraduates at home especially those with English-only fluency?

3.2 Study Population and Sample

Given the multilingual situation of Nigeria, this study was conducted to identify the languages Nigerian undergraduates use at home. The population used for the study were students of Veritas University, Abuja - a non-public faith-based university in Nigeria located at its take off campus in Obehie, a town lying between the commercial town, Aba and the oil-rich city of Port Harcourt all in South East Nigeria. In 2014, the university moved to its permanent site in the Bwari Area Council of Abuja, Nigeria. The University draws students from virtually all parts of Nigeria. One hundred and sixty-two students drawn from 100 and 200 level students of the University were randomly sampled. It is important to note that most students who attend non-public schools, especially universities, in Nigeria are from homes or have sponsors who are somewhere in the middle rug of the socio-economic scale because the schools fees charged in non-public schools are much higher than what is charged in government-funded schools. The sample chosen for this study may implicate on some of the findings.

In this study, we identify Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo as the three 'major' languages while the other Nigerian



languages are regarded as the ‘minority’ languages. The non-Nigerian languages (see Table 1) include others except English which is left alone as the official language of Nigeria. Nigerian Pidgin is also identified as a distinct language in the linguistic landscape of Nigeria.

The sample population were administered a questionnaire to elicit responses that would reveal the language preferences of students bearing in mind the age distribution of the respondents, their family background in terms of educational and economic status as well as the languages they were fluent in and the languages most frequently used at home. The findings of the study are reported in frequencies and percentages.

In this study the emphasis was on the language used at home including the languages of parents and guardians because as Veltman (1983) points out in Adams et al (2012, p.103), “the language used by parents has the strongest impact on the language chosen by their children”. This factor has implications for language development and endangerment because when the forms and functions of a particular language diminish or increase, it points to the death or growth of a language respectively.

3.3 Theoretical Framework

The choice of information on the home language is borne out of ethno-linguistic vitality theory which informs the process and analysis of this study. Ethno-linguistic vitality theory provides socio-structural factors to account for language maintenance and shift within a community. Landweer (2008) outlines eight variables which guide ethno-linguistic vitality theory which include the following: relative position on the urban-rural continuum; domains in which the language is used; frequency and type of code-switching; population and group dynamics; distribution of speakers

within the speech community; social outlook regarding and within the speech community; language prestige; and access to a stable and acceptable economic base. In designing the questionnaire and discussing the findings of this study, these variables were considered especially the following: relative position on the urban-rural continuum; domains in which the language is used; population and group dynamics; and language prestige.

3.4 Limitations

Research into language choice is often hampered by the very instruments used to collect data: interviewing and questionnaire. Interviewing involves observation and recording which affect spontaneity. Questionnaire may allow for spontaneity but may mask responses. Respondents may not themselves be very conscious of their language usage as well as that of their parents or guardians and so may provide responses which portray a positive social or cultural light. This, of course, may taint the findings of the study which is acknowledged as a limitation. Secondly, there was no way to corroborate the respondents’ claims on parents’ language preferences, choices, fluency levels as well as economic/educational status. However, these limitations do not affect the findings of the study in any significant way since the primary purpose of the study is to ascertain the language preference of the respondents (Nigerian undergraduates) not the that of their parents/guardians with a view to gauging the future of English in Nigeria.

4. Analysis and Discussion

The findings of this study are reported in frequencies and percentages to respond to the research questions which guide the study. Table 2a below report on the languages used by respondents in order of fluency at home. The table reveals that respondents identify English as the language



they are more fluent among other major and minority Nigerian languages including Nigerian Pidgin English. From a sample of 162 used, 108 respondents representing 66.7 % identify English as the language they are more fluent at. In the same vein, Table 2b reveals that English is the most frequently used language at home among the respondents sampled. 104 representing 64.1% use English more frequently at home. This finding is not surprising because the respondents revealed that their parents and guardians also use English more frequently at home as reported in Table 3.

Table 2a and b: Distribution of languages used by respondents

Languages	Female	Male	Total (n 162)
English	69 (42.6%)	39 (24.1%)	108 (66.7%)
Major Nigerian languages	17 (10.5%)	23 (14.2%)	40 (24.7%)
Minority Nigerian languages	3 (1.9%)	7 (4.3%)	10 (6.2%)
Nigerian Pidgin English	3 (1.9%)	1(0.6%)	4 (2.4%)
Non-Nigerian languages	-	-	0 (0.0%)

Languages	Female	Male	Total (n 162)
English	63 (38.9%)	42 (25.9%)	104 (64.1%)
Major Nigerian languages	21 (13.0%)	23 (14.2%)	44 (27.2%)
Minority Nigerian languages	6 (3.70%)	8 (4.4%)	14 (8.1%)
Nigerian Pidgin English	1(0.6%)	-	1(0.6%)
Non-Nigerian languages	-	-	0 (0.0%)

Table 3: Distribution of languages spoken by parents/guardians of respondents in order of fluency

Languages	Father	Mother	Total (n 324)
English	91	93	184 (56.7%)
Major Nigerian languages	51	54	105 (32.7%)
Minority Nigerian languages	16	15	31 (9.4%)
Nigerian Pidgin English	4	-	4 (1.2%)
Non-Nigerian languages	-	-	0 (0.0%)

It is important to report on the educational level of the parents/guardians of the respondents because it sheds some light on the distribution of the languages more frequently used by the parents /guardians of the respondents reported in Table 4.

Although some respondents did not provide information on the educational level of their parents, from Table 4 below, 93.5% of the respondents' parents/guardians have either a diploma or a university degree with their fathers having a slightly higher percentage. However, 91.3% of their mothers have a diploma or a university degree. This may explain why over 80% of the respondents were exposed to English before the age of five as reported in Table 6 below and partially account for why some of the respondents as shall be reported later have English-only fluency.

Table 4: Educational level of parents/guardians of respondents

	Below School Certificate	Diploma	University degree and above	Total
Educational level of father	7 (4.3%)	15 (9.3%)	140 (86.4%)	95.7%
Educational level of mother	14 (8.6%)	24 (14.9%)	124 (76.5%)	91.3%
			93.5%	

The findings of Table 4 closely tie up with the report of Table 5 below which indicates the annual income of the parents/guardians of the respondents. Table 5 reveals that 76.2% of the respondents had parents/guardians whose annual income was between N1million to N5million. This brackets the parents/guardians as belonging to the socio-economic class which Adegbite (2010, p.37) describes as an "elitist group of major significance". This group constitutes the educated or middle class elite made up of the 'careerists' or professionals which constitute about 15% of the nation's population. How this implicates on the future of English shall be considered in the discussion section.

Table 5: Annual income of parents/guardians of respondents



Annual income of parents/guardians	Below N1m	Below N5m	Over N5m
	64 (43.5%)	48 (32.7%)	35 (23.8%)
	76.2%		

This study also provided data on the age of acquisition of English by the respondents. Although 11 respondents did not indicate the age of acquisition of English, 137 or 84.6% of the respondents revealed that their exposure to English started before age 5. This is instructive because age 0-5 is regarded as the most active period of language acquisition and the most receptive age for language learning. This is reported in Table 6 below.

Table 6: Distribution of age of acquisition of English among respondents

	Under 5 years	Over 5 years	Over 10 years
Age of acquisition of English	137 (84.6%)	20 (12.3%)	5 (3.1%)

Table 7: Distribution of respondents with English-only fluency across gender

	Female	Male	Total (n 162)
English-only fluency	16 (53.3%)	14 (46.7%)	30 (18.5%)

One of the interesting findings is the discovery that some Nigerian undergraduates are fluent only in English. That is, they are monolingual even when their parents are not. From the sample used, 30 respondents representing 18.5% have English-only fluency in a multilingual environment. This phenomenon, reported in Table 7 above, clearly shows that some young Nigerians are monolingual in spite of the existence of over 500 languages in Nigeria. The distribution of those with English-only fluency does not show any significant difference across gender. While the male gender had 46.7%, the female gender had 53.3%. The percentage of Nigerians who demonstrate an English-only competence adds to the population of the

world who speak only one language. In fact, it is estimated that out of the 750 million speakers of English, 300 million use it as their first or native language (Buda 2006, p.1).

The findings of this study show that Nigerian undergraduates prefer to use English at home against other Nigerian languages, whether these languages are labelled major or minority, as well as other non-Nigerian languages. The language choice of these young people is also true of their parents and guardians. There is therefore an obvious preference for the use of English in a domain as informal as the home among educated Nigerians. What is also interesting is that among the educated Nigerian population, there are some young Nigerians who are only fluent in the English language. In other words, their only means of communication is English. Take away English from them and they have no effective means of communication. This is against the backdrop of living in a multilingual country. These findings raise some issues for the language situation in Nigeria which will be discussed later.

However, the preference for English is explainable. English performs a number of micro and macro functions in Nigeria. At the micro level, English is used in casual and family interactions, classroom discourses, education and literacy, mass and popular media, business and commerce, translation and interpreting. It is the language of law, politics, religion and worship, medicine, and the internet especially social media usage among the young. At the macro level, English has been assigned very lofty functions. It is the major official language. In the provisions of the Nigerian Constitution and the National Policy on Education already cited, English is the language of instruction; the language of



transaction of government business and administration. In the discourse on the choice of a national language for Nigeria, English features prominently.

English confers an elitist status to Nigerian citizens who have the facility and ability to use it fluently even in forms considered pejorative rather than none at all. English is appreciated in Nigeria as a global language and the exulted medium for Nigerians desirous of international communication and business success. English for many Nigerians confers educational, social and even economic status/advantage. It is against this world language, this overpowering linguistic giant that the many indigenous languages co-exist along with some foreign languages such as French, Arabic, German, and Chinese especially which is gradually making an inroad in Nigeria. Obviously, English enjoys an advantage and the indigenous languages are in with an unfair competitor.

From the findings of this study, it seems that most educated Nigerians are not very enthusiastic about the use of their mother tongue or the language of the immediate environment in spite of government policies and programmes aimed at the promotion of indigenous languages. This appears to be one of the fallouts of urbanization where many Nigerians through the urban centres abandoning their local communities considered only good enough for festive and ceremonial visits. Other socio-economic variables such as marriages where the husband and wife including relations or in-laws of the husband and wife do not share a common Nigerian language promote English as the language of choice. The hiring of house-helpers and care-givers who themselves may be compelled to use only English with those put in their charge add to the value of and premium on English as the language of

choice in Nigeria. The preference of parents and guardians for the straight-for-English-language-of-instruction model especially in non-public nursery and primary schools even among schools in rural communities, no matter the quality of English, is a strong factor influencing the preference for English and the English-only fluency demonstrated by some percentage of Nigerian undergraduates investigated in this study.

4.1 Implications

The preference for English has implications for national development. The indigenous languages have a long and difficult struggle compounded by globalization and the demands of the new media and the new world. It is a linguistic war likely to leave the indigenous languages weaker and as victims. This would be unfortunate though because there is a strong nexus between language and national development in Africa. Lamenting the dilemma, Bodo (1996, p. 8) and Prah (2002) contend that the

... elite in effect sees Africa from outside, in the language, idiom, image, and experience of the outsider, in as far as the African mind is concerned. It is unable to relate its knowledge to the realities of African society. It is estranged from the culture of the masses, but realizes almost as an afterthought, that development as a simple replication of the western experience is 'mission impossible'.

While the argument persists that development in Africa will remain stunted so long as Africa continues to use languages that are not the languages of the indigenous people (Bodo, 1996, Thiong'o, 2009, and Adegbite, 2010) language preferences, policies and programmes continue to tilt towards English as the language of choice of most Nigerian undergraduates who are supposed to constitute the next generation of elite to drive development in Nigeria. The emergence of a new generation of English-



only fluency Nigerians clearly problematizes and complicates the indigenization of knowledge, mass participation, and the promotion of heritage culture regarded as the drivers of development. Ironically, the case of Nigeria will echo the sentiments of some scholars in Thailand who hold the view that if English language competency and programmes are not improved and the university abandons English in teaching, scientific development will be postponed by another generation (Bodomo, 1996).

The argument seems therefore to be that Nigeria needs to continually seek ways to improve competence in English and design programmes to promote English language learning and teaching in Nigeria realizing that many educated Nigerians and the upcoming generation of Nigerian elite have demonstrated a preference for English even at home. If we abandon English now, we shall be delaying development and denying the destiny of some Nigerians whose only means of communication is English. Despite the sentiments and the evidence in favour of mother tongue education (Smits, Huisman & Kruijff, 2008; Ouane and Glanz, 2010; Ball, 2011), English remains the language of choice for most, if not, all educated Nigerians. Since language is a human right and the right of self-expression is basic, what do we do with that critical segment of citizens with an English-only fluency in Nigeria? Definitely, such persons cannot abandon English as their main means of communication. To deny them the use of English is to cut off their tongue!

The emerging language scenario in Nigeria appears to be one in which those Nigerians with English-only fluency will have English as their first language and therefore are more likely to raise children who will have English as a mother tongue in a non-native environment. This is the

direction English is moving in Nigeria where at the moment we have English language used in a non-host second language context (Adebite, 2010). This is the direction in which Nigerian English will move and thrive. This direction equates Nigerian English with other established varieties of world Englishes. In other words, this development punctures the categorization of world Englishes into the 'inner', 'outer' and 'expanding' varieties where Nigerian English is regarded as belonging to the outer circle while varieties such as British and American English are regarded as belonging to the inner circle. Besides, this development aligns with those models which do not contextualize and categorize English in terms of nativeness, history, and geography but favours a categorization that describes varieties in terms of levels of proficiency (internationally effective, nationally effective, locally proficient, and locally ineffective) while all who use English look up to that international variety known as English as an International Language (EIL) as presented in Modiano (1999a, and 1999b) and Burt (2005).

If there are generations of Nigerians born to homes of English-only fluency and they give birth to children who are born and raised in English-only monolingual homes, the English they use cannot be said to be their second language. When that time comes, the English used by such speakers would have passed the endonormative standardization stage. English would become their first and only language and such children cannot look elsewhere to another variety of English for standardization. What such children need would be to look up to that 'ideal' variety called 'World Standard English' to which users of other varieties of world Englishes



also look up to for the sake of mutual communication and international intelligibility. Perhaps, as this group of Nigerians with English-only fluency transverses the globe for lifelong opportunities and career choices, they might be constrained to learn a second or additional language to meet their global communication needs. Until that happens, such Nigerians have their future defined and shaped by English, their language of choice not out of necessity or any social constraints but the language of the circumstances of their birth and home for which they neither have a choice nor control.

5. Conclusion

The study has indicated that the elite class in Nigeria including their children and wards prefer to use English as the language of choice for communication at home. The study revealed an emerging and growing percentage of young Nigerians who are English-speaking monolinguals. While the study admits some limitations in terms of the size and composition of the sample population, there is need for a cross-institutional study involving undergraduates in public schools and to expand the population to cover greater part of Nigeria to collaborate the current findings. Such a study will provide a warrant for a dependable generalization of the findings of this study regarding the pervading use of English and indeed ascertain the inevitability of entrenching English in Nigeria in the foreseeable future.

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Cite this article as: Egbe, G. B. (2014). Language Preference among Nigerian Undergraduates and the Future of English. *International Journal of English Language & Translation Studies* 2(4), 52-65. Retrieved from <http://www.eltjournal.org>



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