GLOBALIZATION AND THE WEST AFRICAN SUB-REGION: THE ROLE OF FRENCH AND ENGLISH

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Abstract
This paper examines the role French and English Languages could play in the present efforts by West African States to come together for a more effective management of their human and material resources. To achieve this, the effects of globalization on Africa, the integration efforts of the West African Sub-region, and the obstacles language barriers are presenting are considered. Based on these, the need to orient French and (even) English Languages towards servicing areas of need as in Science and Technology, Information Technology, Law, Banking, Hotel and Tourism etc, is stressed. The paper also recommends strategies for achieving effective integration in order to promote development at all levels of need within the Sub-region.

Key words: Globalization, Integration, Anglophone, Francophone

Introduction

Our decision to address this issue rather than any other is borne out of the fact that for Nigeria, as is true for other Anglophone States within the Sub-region, French Language has enjoyed some good patronage for decades now with its teaching and learning going on at almost all levels of education: nursery, primary, secondary and tertiary. For all these decades, this teaching has always aimed at making students learn, understand and speak the language well enough to relate with the French and the Francophone on general levels. No attempt seemed to have been made until recently towards tailoring the French taught to suit specific needs in the different nations' economies. It was just French for its own sake and no more!

Today, with the advent of globalization, ‘‘the great economic event of our era-now bringing unprecedented opportunities to billions of people throughout the world’’ (Awake;2002:3), the need to integrate and form stronger economic groups in order to tap fully from the positive sides of this new world order, cannot be overemphasized. It is now imperative that French language for Anglophone states must be oriented towards specific purposes as they apply to each member state within the West African Sub-region if any meaningful progress is to be made across our borders, economically, politically and socially etc.

For us as Anglophones then, French for specific purposes is a sine qua non if we must contribute meaningfully to the integration efforts within the West African Sub-region. Let us hope that what this paper comes up with, discussing globalization as a new challenge to Africa, French/English Languages and integration efforts in the West African Sub-region etc, will give us all enough food for thought, and cause us to reappraise our role in the present scheme of things with a view to repositioning ourselves for the challenges West African integration may be placing before us as the ‘‘Giant of Africa’’.

Globalization: Definition and Explanation

Globalization is a hydra-headed term, easier described than defined because it is a phenomenon that is still unfolding with differing consequences for different countries, classes and other social divides. For now, one could count on few broad concepts around which gravitate so many other definitions. The first is that globalisation is synonymous with internalization. This notion gives globalization away as a growth in international exchange and interdependence. The second idea looks at the concept as liberalization. Here, globalization would refer to the process of discarding government-imposed restrictions on movements of capital, goods and services between countries so as to create an open, borderless world economy. The third notion matches globalization with universalization or the process by which objects and experiences are easily shares around the globe. Globalization is also viewed by some

as westernization or modernization. Here, it equates to a dynamic and movable force, causing the interventions of the West namely capitalism, industrialism, bureaucracy and others to spread the world over with disastrous consequences for existing cultures especially in the developing countries.

Finally, one could also talk about globalization in terms of ‘‘de-territorialization’’. Under this fifth concept, Geography is reconfigured such that ‘‘socials space is no longer wholly mapped in terms of territorial places, territorial distances and territorial borders’’ (Jan Aart Scholte, cf. Labdo 2003:8).

In more concrete terms however, Hoogvelt (cf Labdo, 2003:8) defines globalization as ‘‘intensification of worldwide social relations’’ which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa. Again, Kahyana (2004), drawing from Randal and Theobald (2001), views globalization as the ‘‘multiplicity of linkages and interconnections’’ that transcend nation-states and by implication the societies. Obinaju (2004) also views the same concept from the angle of ‘‘internationalization, liberalization and universalization of relations, goods and services. This way, she says, it appears essentially as an ‘‘economic term’’. One must also note this dissenting view in *Awake* (2002) which condemns globalization as ‘‘the mother of the world’s ills’’, while others hail it as holding the key to solving most of the world’s problems. So we can see that globalization is really a hydra-headed term, generating different meanings, feelings and reactions for different peoples.

The truth however is that with globalisation, there is no hiding place any longer and nations must move together from now on, share goods and services as well as experiences in research and technology, in order to reduce hunger, poverty, achieve faster development across the globe, thereby making the world a better place for one and all. For according to Eduard Shevardnadze, president of Georgia;

> We, the people of the Earth, are one large family. The new epoch offers new challenges and new global problems, such as environmental catastrophes, exhaustion of resources, bloody conflicts and poverty. (Awake, May 22, 2002:3)

Integration and Merging

The merging of the goals just stated above is what integration and merging of efforts are all about. In other words, integration has very close ties with globalization. It is in fact the latter's ''essence'' its ''raison d'être'' since it seeks to bring a number of things; peoples, goods, services, information, etc. together for optimal performance. Through integration of ideas, researches and programmes, nations especially in Africa, can achieve what would have been otherwise impossible if they had to do it individually. The L.N.G (Liquefied Natural Gas) project in Nigeria is a case in point, where countries like Benin Republic, Togo, Ghana, Sao Tomé and Principe among others, have by process of integration, become major beneficiaries.

The Obasanjo Administration in a bid to encourage the said Sub-regional integration went out of its way to grant loans totalling 40 million dollars to Ghana and Sao Tomé and Principe for different projects. (The Punch, Thursday Sept., 2004:9). Ghana, to tidy up its L.N.G project preparatory to the take-off of supplies from Nigeria, Sao Tomé and Principe, to maximise the exploitation of her carbon deposits for the benefits of the Sub-region. The peace-keeping efforts by ECOMOG need also be mentioned, while the successes recorded regularly against notorious crime syndicates, child and women traffickers and smugglers are thanks to the collaborative efforts of the Nigerian Security Personnel and their francophone counterparts. To achieve this, they integrate information they have on these operators, and act finally as a team from one ''global village''. The results are as astonishing as they are relieving for men and women who had been facing harassments from such criminals.

According to one of the retired chiefs, Nigeria's Inspector General of Police, Mr. Tafa Balogun, addressing West African Police officers on trans-border crimes in the Sub-region;

> At present, terrorism has not become an issue in West Africa, but we must be proactive so that we are not caught unawares. We have to design ways to checkmate terrorism in the Sub-region (The Punch, 2004:8).

As one is well aware, about fifteen (15) nations now make up the West African Sub-region after Mauritania's withdrawal. Out of these, about five (5) only are English-speaking. The rest speak and use French or other languages for their official and other needs. How many of the police Chiefs present at the meeting could speak and write both English and French well enough so as not to need assistance through Interpreters and Translators? One can only guess! Not up to half perhaps. This is where the role of French and English comes in. The Chiefs must be able to talk and understand themselves and take top-level decisions that will be known only to them for security purposes. French for specific purposes is therefore a must for the Anglophone States. So also is English for the Francophone States.

Dwelling further on the gains of globalisation, NEPAD had been involved in the establishment of about 600,000 ''e-schools'' (electronic schools) across the Continent. According to the e-Africa Commission Deputy Chairman, Dr. Henry Chasia, about sixteen (16) countries would benefit from the first phase of the programme. They include; Nigeria, Algeria, Burkina Faso, Cameroun, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Gabon, Ghana, Kenya, Mali, Mauritius, Mozambique, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa and Uganda. *The Punch* of Sept. 21, 2004, stated also that:

> The implementation of the NEPAD e-schools initiative was intended to lead to a steady and sustainable process in which young African graduates from primary and secondary schools would be equipped with skills to enable them function as equals in the emerging knowledge economy and Information Society of the 21st Century (30).

Quite an ambitious project for NEPAD, and a plus for globalization one must agree, given Africa's rather low-level knowledge of science and technology as well as the use of the key languages that Information Technology exploits for now in the continent-English and French!

The most important thing here though, is that what NEPAD is doing at the continental level, should also be practicable at the sub-regional level. Indeed, the West African Sub-region needs to intensify efforts towards getting the masses off economic, scientific and political poverty through integration of efforts from member states. To do this effectively, language barriers must be broken for the pockets of knowledge and wealth within the region to become common property to be managed by bodies and commissions set up by member states. Wherein therefore the need for ‘‘French and even English for specific purposes’’ within the Sub-region.

The Role of French and English

It is not our intention here to develop and present blue prints or some form of curricula for the different roles French and English languages play for effective integration in the Sub-region. Simire (2002)a and (2002)b have done this. It is rather to bring forward and sensitize us again on the need to get back to the drawing board and try to change the methods, the focus and mission of French language teaching in Nigeria, and may be also in other Anglophone states within the Sub-region. This we can do by embracing French for specific purposes (FOS) which is a new trend in French Language education today. This new trend marks a turning point in the life and adventure of French language as earlier taught in our schools and colleges, but mostly in our Universities.

Over the years, since 1963 in fact, (Simire, 2002), Departments of French had contended themselves with producing graduates who can in all fairness, speak and write French even to the admiration of the French themselves. Such graduates are normally able to philosophize and theorize over Corneille, Racine, Voltaire, Rousseau, Balzac and Zola, or Gide, Sartre and Camus etc on life and life-related issues. They can twist their tongues, stretch their necks and roll their ‘‘r’’, sometimes rather exaggeratedly, and gesticulate; all in a bid to come close to what is referred to as ‘‘Le français impeccable’’ or ‘‘Le français de France’’.

Unfortunately, most of these ‘‘maîtres de la langue française’’ have ended up, in the majority, in the classrooms as teachers, teaching and churning out more graduates who in turn end up like them. Only very few, in the strictest sense of the word, have been able to move into larger society to do business with the language in companies and organisations. Mrs Marie-Fatai Williams of the ELF-Chevron Nigeria, Violet Arene, the Akunwafors, the Anabas and the Alimoles in the Foreign Service etc. are a few examples of these. This category of graduates of course has not been without some retraining to suit the needs of the organisations they serve.

In other Anglophone states within the Sub-region, the story may be hardly different for the graduates of the Universities of Legon and Cape Coast, those of Fura Bay College and the University of Gambia etc. But the aim was to help move our economies forward, and to narrow the communication gap between us and our Francophone neighbours as well as participate effectively in world organisations such as UN, OPEC, AU, ECOWAS etc.

The above efforts are laudable but have the desired results been achieved? Our answer here is ‘‘NO’’, because it is a known fact that majority of French graduates in these states operate at the elitist level; as teachers mainly, in the secondary schools and the Universities. It is also a fact that in Nigeria for example, not up to ten (10%) percent of the over one hundred and seventy (170,000,000) million people the country can boast of, understand and speak French. In fact, many out of ignorance do not even see why they should learn this language instead of the local ones. This refusal or ‘‘non-acceptation’’ according to Ezeafulukwe and Ijioma (2014:143) has been working against Governement’s efforts to improve the status of the Language. Consequently, a good look at the personnel we parade in many international oriented outfits show a very disappointing figure in the number of officers of such outfits that can speak and write French. Check out our border posts starting from Seme, Idioroko, and the Niger axis in the North. Most of the Immigration, Customs, NDLEA, Police, and even Airways officials etc at

our Airports, know next to nothing of French and so sometimes constitute some form of embarrassment to the nation when dealing with foreigners on our behalf. Even at the highest level of governance, one notices that interpreters and translators are still hired for senior officers such as Ministers, Chairmen and Directors of some sensitive organisations. Mr. President may not equally be too far away from needing such assistance in his numerous engagements within and outside the country. This lack of knowledge, had robbed Nigeria of the very coveted Secretaryship position of the UN, as we also continue to lose at other fronts where the language is a key player (Dickson, 2002:6).

For the francophone, it would appear, again from practical experience, that more serious efforts have been made to get men and women attached to international services especially at the borders, to speak and write English well enough to be at ease with English speaking travellers and customers they come across. In the main however, not much has been achieved by both sides in the area of communication at common levels as Cookey (1990:20) advocates, let alone forming closer economic ties to get the Sub-region out of the woods that underdevelopment, economic backwardness, crime and so on have become for it today.

What this shows is that French Language as taught to date, does not really impact on the society and our economy as it should and that given the fast changing world where our economy as a country and that of the Sub-region must measure up to others, tactics must change. French Departments need to produce graduates that must respond adequately to areas of need in the economy; mainly in Hotel and Tourism, Law, Business, Medicine, Information Technology etc. Programmes must now be developed towards addressing such areas of need. It is no longer enough to speak ‘‘impeccable French’’. It is now more important to speak it, willy-nilly, to a specific, targeted objective or goal; just the way the Asians, the Indians and the rest do, to help our economy and that of the Sub-region grow. For as Porcher (1995) opined:

> le français fonctionne différemment dans ses règles comme dans ses usages, dans ses instruments comme dans ses formes, selon le secteur de spécialité (42).

In the same vein, Simire (2002)a recognizes that since about nine (9) out of the fifteen member states of ECOWAS speak French, and that Nigeria, the ‘‘Giant of Africa’’ is surrounded by French-speaking countries, it would be wise for French Language teaching to be pursued vigorously so that Nigeria can play a leading role in the affairs of the Sub-region, especially in her economy. Besides, the paper argues:

> S’intéresser au français, de surcroit au français de spécialité, c’est élargir les perspectives d’avenir de nos apprenants dans la mesure où il dit libre circulation des biens, des personnes et des capitaux dit promotion des échanges inter-états et ceci à tous les niveaux. Rien d’étonnant car le Benin arbrite par exemple des milliers de Nigérians. Cela permettra aussi de dissiper les craintes et les suspicions. Les pays membres de la CEE (Communauté Economique Européenne) ont compris l’importance des langues dans le processus d’intégration et ont pour la plupart mis l’emphase sur l’apprentissage des langues étrangères dans les écoles (147-148).

In the light of the above then, West African integration has its success or failure seriously tied to the extent to which individual member states that make up the Sub-region (Anglophone and Francophone) are able to put their citizens through specific training programmes where French Language or English serves useful purpose. General Sani Abacha seemed mindful of the importance of French Language for interregional integration when he declared it the second official language for Nigeria in May, 1996. Other governments after him are equally maintaining the same posture today. For according to Cookey (1990:20), ‘‘it is important to acquire the knowledge of Foreign Languages mainly because nations have to interact across national linguistic barriers...’’. For Nwokoye (1981:247),

> Trade within the (West African) Sub-region will be greatly facilitated not only by breaking down tariff barrier but also by improving infrastructures...and communications.

The Nigerian who wishes to practise medicine in Bénin or Togo, as of necessity, learns French language as it applies to such profession. So also the Francophone who wishes to be employed in Nigeria

or Ghana in similar job situations. Security across the sub-region could be better managed if men and women of the Customs, Immigration, Army, Police etc from the different member states can use English and French as these relate to their jobs such that trans-border crime-bursting, peace keeping operations, business and so on can record better successes than are witnessed presently. Mbanefo (2006) tells us that French is now taught to non French students in the University as a GST course but the effect is still minimal.

Let us quickly add that what is needed under this arrangement is not to pursue elaborate degree programmes in French in these areas. It is rather to design Certificate and Diploma Programmes that can enhance the performance of practising graduates in the various fields concerned: Medical Doctors, Engineers, Lawyers, Nurses, Hotel Managers, Tour guides and Tourism officials who must have attained good level of education in their fields. French graduates may also need to retrain in areas such as journalism, bilingual secretaryship, translation and interpreting, tour guiding etc. to enhance their marketability. The ‘‘Village Français du Nigéria’’ at Badagry, Lagos state, is already taking the lead here but needs to do more by co-ordinating action at either Universities and other French Language Centres (Olayiwola, 2010:181).

Recommendations for Effective Integration

The discussions here would be meaningless if attempts are not made to provide possible solutions to some of the obstacles militating against effective integration in the Sub-region. We would therefore like to submit as follows:

- For any effective integration to take place within the Sub-region, we must all (Anglophones and Francophones) begin to realistically discourage the kingsmen rulership style in or countries (Obinaju and Frank, 1996:11-12). In its stead, the American style, where everyone who has

genuine intentions and ideas to contribute to the growth of the nation is welcome, should be adopted. This will surely pave way for such men to provide leadership role in the Sub-region be they from Nigeria, Ghana, Benin, Togo, Senegal, Liberia, Niger, Burkina Faso etc.

- Manpower should freely move across our borders and member states must agree to employ such manpower as they come their way, so that optimal performance of our sub-regional economy would be guaranteed. This will ensure that we achieve effective economic co-operation amongst us, to checkmate the adverse effects of globalization as conceived under our second definition, before opening up, as suggested by definition four, to the influences of the West and other such powers.
- To actualize (2) above, member states should borrow from the Nigerian experience and form TAC (Technical Aid Corps) units in specific areas of manpower in their states. Information on such units should be freely shared so that states may know where to source for experts to help in developing projects they conceive but for which manpower is lacking amongst its populace.
- Efforts must be made to allay the fears and suspicions of smaller states vis-à-vis high-jack and dominance by stronger and more populous states, especially Nigeria. This could be ensured by making sure that such states are adequately represented in the decision-making bodies of the Sub-region.
- Opportunities must be created for investors to move across the states and invest in viable businesses the states identify and such states must guarantee freedom from molestation for the investors. Adequate provision must also be made for repatriation of funds to some acceptable level that would make investment be worth the while and ensure reasonable profits for the host states.

- French and English Departments in our Universities across the Sub-region must get back to the drawing board and work out programmes that can help enhance the performance of existing manpower in the field now roaming the streets for lack of relevance. Graduates of French and English as this applies to the states, must back up their certificates with short programmes, (Certificate and Diploma) in areas such as Law, Journalism, Information Technology, Bilingual Secretaryship, Translation and Interpreting etc, while graduates in other fields must take advantage of French and English as international languages, to become more marketable even beyond their home states and the Sub-region.
- French and British Governments, through their embassies, should also encourage efforts by Anglophones and francophones to break even through the special overhaul proposed here for French and English, by supplying equipment, books and personnel necessary for this new project. This move will help them to further anchor these languages in fresh territories, as is the case for French in Nigeria today.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have tried, very modestly, to look at the issues involved in getting the West African Sub-region to forge a common front in its approach to development; economically, politically, socially etc. While doing this, we observed that much would depend on the dissemination of the two languages officially in use –English and French- among the wider populace, so that goods and services can move and promote the Sub-region's integration and economy. We also noted obstacles that must be surmounted which border on suspicion, fear, insincerity, lack of seriousness and unwillingness to work together as one such that the region becomes a ''global village'', where all can live and work without molestation or discrimination.

It is now up to the governments of the states involved here, to promote this cause by supporting the teaching of these two languages –English and French- towards achieving specific objectives within the set goals of the region. One cannot seriously talk about integration where the partners cannot communicate and understand themselves enough to be able to work together as a team. French and English Departments and Language Centres in the member states, must therefore rise to the challenge by designing programmes that have direct relevance or bearing on the economy of the states and the sub-region.

We must recognize now more than ever before, that we are in a fast changing and globalizing world and the region cannot afford to be left behind. Now is the time to act and fast too, to avoid being marginalized and sidelined for lack of relevance to the new and emerging world order.

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