

# LINGUISTIC HEGEMONY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN NIGERIA

HEGEMONÍA LINGÜÍSTICA DE LA LENGUA INGLESA EN NIGERIA

HÉGÉMONIE LINGUISTIQUE DE L'ANGLAIS AU NIGERIA

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## ABSTRACT

The subject of linguistic hegemony and language dominance has been taken up in many studies since the wake of the twentieth century. The common denominator among these studies appears to be the linguistic hegemony of the English language as a global language and the survival of the other languages of the world. This paper critically reviews the trend that has been reported in Nigeria and re-assesses some of the proposed resistance mechanisms in literature. The aim is to proffer solutions to the reported domination of English and its effect on Nigeria's local languages. The author believes that some views about the linguistic hegemony of English might have been exaggerated thereby influencing some suggested resistance mechanisms. Thus, this paper proposes a context-sensitive and pragmatic resistant mechanism that might place the hegemony of English in the right perspective and thus conserve local languages in multilingual societies, especially in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Hegemony, English, global, dominance, resistance, Nigerian languages

## RESUMEN

El asunto de la hegemonía y predominancia lingüística se ha discutido en muchos estudios desde los inicios del siglo XX. El común denominador entre tales estudios parece ser la hegemonía lingüística del inglés como idioma global y la supervivencia de los otros idiomas del mundo. Este artículo revisa de manera crítica la tendencia que se ha reportado en Nigeria y reevalúa algunos de los mecanismos de resistencia propuestos en la literatura. El propósito es ofrecer soluciones al mencionado dominio del inglés y sus efectos en los idiomas locales de Nigeria. El autor considera que algunas miradas, a propósito de la hegemonía del inglés, pueden haberse exagerado, influenciando así algunos mecanismos de resistencia sugeridos. Así, este artículo propone un mecanismo de resistencia pragmático y ajustado al contexto que podría poner la hegemonía del inglés en la perspectiva adecuada y por lo tanto, preservar los idiomas locales en las sociedades multilingües, especialmente en Nigeria.

**Palabras clave:** hegemonía, global, inglés, dominio, resistencia, lenguas nigerianas.

## RÉSUMÉ

La problématique de l'hégémonie linguistique et la dominance linguistique ont fait l'objet de beaucoup d'études depuis l'éveil du vingtième siècle. Ces études semblent s'accorder sur l'hégémonie linguistique de l'anglais en tant que langue globale et sur la survie des autres langues. Cet article propose de reprendre de façon critique les tendances produites au Nigéria et reformule certaines propositions de mécanismes de résistance en littérature. Son but est de proposer des solutions aux arguments sur la dominance de l'anglais dans ce pays et ses conséquences sur la survie des langues locales nigériennes. L'auteur croit que certains points de vue sur l'hégémonie linguistique de l'anglais en ont quelque peu exagéré les effets et par là, influencé des moyens de résistances. Il propose des mécanismes de résistance contextualisés et pragmatiques qui seraient susceptibles de réinterpréter l'hégémonie de l'anglais et ainsi, préserver les langues locales des sociétés multilingues comme celle du Nigéria.

**Mots-clés:** hégémonie, anglais global, dominance, résistance, langues nigériennes.

## Introduction

This paper examines the dominance of the English language and the reported endangerment of the other local languages of the world. It reviews some of the debates on the subject and argues for the adoption of the “paradox of linguistic hegemony,” which appears to be a promising resistance mechanism particularly in Nigeria where the local languages are threatened as a result of the English language dominance.

The paper is divided into two major sections – (i) the hegemony of the English language in local and international contexts, and (ii) proposed resistance mechanism. The thesis is that any proposed resistance mechanism must be context-sensitive and pragmatic in order to meet the present and remote needs of the speech communities concerned.

## Language Hegemony

The word ‘hegemony’ might be traced to its root meaning in Greek, ‘to lead’. Some scholars have thrown light on the concept of hegemony. For example, Suarez’s (2002) philosophical framework of hegemony explores the power relations between dominant and minority groups, particularly the means by which the dominant group or the leading group secures its position (p. 513). Using the Gramscian concept of hegemony, Suarez (2002) argues that whether moral or intellectual leadership, hegemony is established through consent and persuasion via the processes of leadership without force, leadership through legitimatization and leadership through consensual rule, which are the fundamental processes of hegemony (Gramsci, 1971).

On the same concept, Fontana (1993) argues that the total system of hegemony requires that the leading group secures its position via the willingness and consent of the minority group and that this consent is secured through the manufacturing of mass consent, a mass belief of the naturalness and correctness of this

social order. The manufacturing of this consent relies predominantly on systematic, consistent persuasion through media, and through institutions; and this persuasion will infiltrate ideas and beliefs of normalcy in daily life, so that they permeate and guide human interactions. According to Tietze & Dick (2012), hegemony means the rule of one social group over another that is achieved when the dominant group successfully projects its own particular ways of seeing the world, human and social relationships, such that those who are actually subordinated by these views, come to accept them as being “common sense” or natural; the dominated group internalizes the norms and ideology of the dominant group, even though this is not necessarily in their interests, (p. 2).

These frameworks reveal how dominant languages assume their place and thrive in many parts of the world. Also they provide insights on how current dominant languages operate not only worldwide but in local communities of nations and regions. The frameworks suggest that one of the main ways of doing this is by self-projection of certain cultural values of a nation or people to the detriment of the others. This is often executed in systematic way with the intention to subdue the other nation/people to a state of subordination and inferiority. An understanding of these models of hegemony and how hegemony operates would be explored further in this paper.

## Linguistic Hegemony and the English Language

Linguistic hegemony has been identified and defined as what is achieved when dominant groups create a consensus by convincing others to accept their language norms and usage as standard or paradigmatic. According to Wiley (2000), linguistic hegemony is also said to be ensured when some people or their agents can convince those who fail to meet those standards to view their failure as being the result of the inadequacy of their own language (p. 113). Thus, an extremely linguistic hegemony

is proposed by Suarez (2002) in a situation where “linguistic minorities will believe in and participate in the subjugation of the minority language to the dominant, to the point where just the dominant language remains” (p. 514).

Linguistic hegemony literature reveals the process of this subjugation. Amongst them are international scientific collaboration (Kaplan, 1993), presentation of the dominant language as an instrument/tool (Suarez, 2002), globalization/internationalization, naturalisation (taken for granted), and dissemination of knowledge among others. Suarez (2002) notes that daily forms of linguistic hegemony include the use of the media, institutions and social relationships that associate linguistic minorities with inferiority, lower self-esteem, and belittlement (p. 514). Suarez’s quotation of Phillipson (1999) elaborates how linguistic hegemony exerts itself:

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The top language benefits through the image-making of the ads of transnational corporations and the connotations of English with success and hedonism. These symbols are reinforced by an ideology that glorifies the dominant language and serves to stigmatize others, this hierarchy being rationalised and internalized as normal and natural, rather than as expression of hegemonic values and interests (p. 4).

Similarly, Awonusi (2004) observes:

Hegemony with relation to language connotes a fairly complex interplay of a number of variables such as power (socioeconomic power of its users), control (how the powerful users of a particular language use it as a weapon of linguistic domination of communities especially those that are multilingual or multicultural), legitimacy (the dependence on a language as the basis of social and political acceptance) and influence (the exercise of power – oftentimes in its coercive form and, sometimes, diplomacy such that the influence of a language is enhanced either from policies such as those of expansionism on the one hand or those of socio-political co-operation on the other hand (p. 4).

These observations of how linguistic hegemony asserts itself are insightful and useful for investigating the hegemony of the English language in any community of the world where it

is used as a second language, a foreign language, an international language or among English language learners. In what follows, we shall examine the hegemony of the English language in some parts of the world with particular reference to Nigeria.

The linguistic hegemony of the English language as a global language has generated heated debates in literature. Phillipson (1992) postulated linguistic imperialism with a particular focus on the spread and use of English on the bases of historicity and politics through the British Council and specialists in the language. Capturing the English linguistic imperialism, he said: “The dominance of English is asserted and maintained by the establishment and continuous reconstitution of structural and cultural inequalities between English and other languages” (p. 47). Many have argued that the English language is the first and foremost formative basis of hegemonic practices. This argument is based on the widespread agreement in various disciplines and the spread of English as the uncontested global lingua franca (Crystal, 2003) cited in Tietze & Dicki (2012). It is the global language, the international lingua franca (p. 2). Tsuda says that English is the *de facto* international language of international communication.

Talking about the dominant status of English as today’s most prevalent language, Ammon (1992) admits that English commands the largest number of speakers around the world (1.5 billion), and the only language with official status in over 60 nations of the world. Ammon also says that English is the dominant language in scientific communication -with 70-80% academic publications in the language-, the *de facto* official and working language in most international organizations, and the most taught second/foreign language across the world (pp. 78-81). English as an international language (EIL) has also been introduced as bachelor’s and master’s degree programmes in some universities (Matsuda, 2012). These observations corroborate the reported place of English in international politics, relations,

education, intercultural communication, and consequently, endorsing its dominance and global influence.

Thus, the English language that was, once confined to some limited tribes in the British Isles but narrowly escaped extinction under the influence of the French language, has emerged today to become second to only one language in the world, that is the Chinese (in terms of speakers-population). In terms of geographical coverage, English might be considered a global language that is second to none. It has not only resisted the influence of some world powers' languages such as Latin, Greek, and French but it has also acquired a high status among national languages of former British colonies where the local people shed off British colonial powers but maintained former lords' language. Today, statistics show the following about the English language amongst its users as native speakers (ENL) in the United Kingdom, the United States of America, New Zealand, Australia, Trinidad and Tobago, parts of Canada. The statistics also show second language speakers of English (ESL) in Nigeria, Ghana, the Gambia, Zimbabwe, Tanzania, India, Pakistan, Singapore, Hong Kong; foreign language users (EFL) in Germany, France, Sweden, China; and English language learners (ELL). These classifications are sometimes helpful in distinguishing users of English. First, the native speakers (England, The United States of America, and the others); second, former British colonies such as India, Pakistan, Nigeria, Ghana, Hong Kong who are today in "possession of English in the postcolonial era" and have 'domesticated' English to suit their socio-cultural environment as second language users; and third, foreign language users where British rule has never been experience but the use of English is being encouraged. The second group's varieties of English are native to their users because "they possess legitimate endonormative varieties when they use English in a number of domains." Thus, they are part of the 'global Englishes' and their varieties are norm-evolving unlike foreign language users of English

who are norm-dependent and rely on British and American English for their norm (for more discussion on these classifications, see Quirk, 1990; Kachru, 1991; Mollin, 2007; Sabec, 2003.)

**Table 1:** Recent estimates of World English Speakers as first, second, foreign language users

<b>Some Recent Estimates of World English Speakers as a First, Second and Foreign Language</b>				
<b>(In millions)</b>				
Source	First	Second	Foreign	Total
Quirk, 1962:6	250	100		350
1970s [cf McArthur, 1992:335]	300	300	100	700
Kachru, 1985:212	300	300-400		600-700
Ethnologue, 1988	403	397	800	
[Time, 1986 estimate]				
Quirk & Stein, 1990:60	350			
Bright, 1992: II.74	403	397		800
Columbia Encyclopedia 1993	450	400		850
Crystal, 1997/2003	337-77	235-350	100-1,000	1200
[Based on population]				
Graddol, 1998:8	372			
Ethnologue, 1992	450	350		
[World Almanac, 1991 estimate]				
Crystal [current]	400	400	600-700	1400-1500

(Source: Crystal, 2006, 420)

Table 1 shows the rapid and steady increase in the number of speakers of English whether as first language speakers, second language and foreign language speakers. It is interesting to note that the increase is rapid among foreign users that have been described as the expanding circle group.

Accordingly, it has been noted that people's beliefs that English is the international lingua franca

sometimes override reality and give even more power to English in the global context. According to Matsuda (2012), the status of English as the default international language - both actual and imagined - makes it popular in foreign language programmes around the world (pp. 2-3). However, Crystal (2003) postulates “A language achieves a genuinely global status when its special role is recognized not only in the countries where it is spoken by a large number of people as their mother tongue, but also beyond” (p. 3). English satisfies this criterion. Ortiz (2011) says that in the global market of linguistic goods, English becomes the language of global modernity. Based on this status, some scholars have justified the hegemony of English.

For example, Ortiz (2011) noted that in spite of the obstacles, the dominance of English in the social sciences continues. She asserts:

There is a consolidation of certain scientific styles, global in scale, that favour the English language. This is the case, for example, in the use of databases whose production is conditioned by various factors, such as technical factors, costs, and market distribution. Between 1980 and 1996 in the Social science citation index database, English language publications count for between 85% and 96% of all articles (p. 34).

Counting the positive roles that English plays internationally, Kubota (2012) observes that in expanding circle countries, people who can afford to travel and study abroad or enjoy border-crossing experiences tend to be socioeconomically privileged individuals. Where English is not used for everyday communication, acquiring English proficiency tends to be an elitist accomplishment. By outer circle, we refer to Kachru (1985) classification of speakers of English into three – native speakers of English as inner circle, second language users of English as out circle, and expanding circle for those speakers who use English as a foreign language. In addition, English as an international language indeed functions to make

border-crossing communication active, critical and reflective engagement in communication across diverse ethnic, racial, linguistic and socio-economic difference possible. English no doubts plays an important role as a lingua franca in various communicative contexts (pp. 62-63). Seidlhofer (2005) writes that “English as a lingua franca’ (ELF) has emerged as a way of referring to communication in English between speakers with different first languages” (p. 339). Thus, De Swaan (2001) explains: “English ... allows us to reach everyone who counts in the field of natural sciences, advanced technology, mass entertainment and corporate affairs. English has come to serve a number of linking functions, in fact, in almost all of them and almost everywhere” (p. 79).

Considering its international coverage that no other living language has been able to rival for many decades, there is no doubt that the English language has established its hegemony although the history of some previous world languages should caution any writer to be modest in applauding the success of English and predicting its future. However, the process through which the English language exerts itself as the dominant language or global language is a subject of debate. If we group the nations of the world into two, nations that were former British colonies and nations that never came under its imperialism or colonisation, it might help account for the dominance of English in some countries. In this paper, we are concerned with the nations that were once under the rule of the British Empire, and in particular Nigeria is given attention.

Before accounting for English domination, the writer cautions the way in which scholars might want to view the impact of English throughout the world. The author believes that it might be unfair to ignore the positive impact and the roles that the language has played and is playing in Nigeria and perhaps in the world at large, although studies on the hegemony of English have reported its negative impacts on other languages.

The literature on hegemony of the English language among users of English as a second language is very robust (Adegbite, 2003; Adeyemi, 2008; Awonusi, 2004; Babalola, 2002; Bamgbose, 1998; Guo & Beckett, 2007; Ngugi wa, 1981; Nwachukwu, 2003; Nwajeh, 2003; Okwudishu, 2006; Pennycook, 1994; Salawu, 2006; Suarez, 2002; Shumann, 2012; Tietze & Dick, 2012; Tsuda, 1992 among others). However, the common denominator among these studies appears to be the linguistic hegemony of English and its negative effect on many other world languages.

Thus, in spite of the important place it occupies, the hegemony of the English language has come under sharp criticism and resistance. For example, Awonusi (2004) observes that the hegemony of English has been criticized for going beyond the supposedly neutral function as *lingua franca* that brings speakers of different indigenous languages together (pp. 13-14). Stutnabb-Kangas (2000) argued that globalisation results in Englishisation, which plays a divisive role in the world that those cheerleaders of globalisation fail to acknowledge and analyse. Awonusi (2004) notes that this ideological position of English presents the language as a capitalist tool, i.e., a market-driven construct within a linguistic English language industry, which becomes an expansionist language that threatens the continued development and vitality of other languages. This is not an isolated voice. Recently in education, Shumann (2012) wrote in late 2011, President Hu Jin-tao of China published a controversial essay in which he highlighted what he saw as a culture of war between China and the West - primarily with the English-speaking world. He identified the United States - like the United Kingdom before it - as a force that "exploits its strength to export cultural products throughout the world." He likened these cultural products to opium.

At the local level, e.g., in Africa, scholars have commented on the negative impact of the dominance of the English language. For example, Adeyemi (2008) noted that in the wake of the hegemonic influence of foreign languages like

English and French, African languages in these modern times are being marginalised in terms of acquisition, learning, and use (p. 14). Other scholars have reported similar position in their works. For example, it has been observed that the neglect of indigenous languages in Nigeria could be attributed to the fatal effects of interventions like the slave trade, colonialism, and advent of foreign religions. Bamgbose (1999) noted that the subordinate status of African languages in relation to the imported European languages is one phenomenon that exists in almost every country in Sub-Saharan Africa (p. 13).

Unfortunately, efforts to revitalize African local languages, as some scholars have reported, have recorded little or no success. In fact, Adeyemi (2008) holds that achieving this goal in Africa has turned out to be a wishful fantasy in view of the apparent disuse of African local languages in our development processes (p. 17). This scenario is repeated in Sonaiya's (2007) observation that "... what continues to be of great concern to many in Africa is the fact that even after independence not only are European languages still being maintained within the educational system, but very little is being done to develop African languages which had suffered over a century of neglect" (p. 18).

However, the other school of thought that tends to cheer the dominance of English opines that there are factors that justify its hegemonic status. Thus, the general claim in literature is that going by the rapid development, acceptance and use of English in Nigeria, the local languages are not only being endangered but also there is a widespread language shift that might lead to language loss if practical steps are not taken in time.

To address the reported endangered African languages and propose any resistance mechanisms, it might be necessary to assess the process of the linguistic hegemony of English in Nigeria first. Although it might be difficult to objectively account for the process of linguistic hegemony of the English language in Nigeria using Grimsian

concept of hegemony, however, it might offer some insights. The Gramscian concept claims that hegemony exerts itself through the process of “consent and persuasion via the processes of leadership without force, leadership through legitimation and leadership through consensual rule” (for the history of English in Nigeria, see Spencer, 1971; Bamgbose, 1996; Banjo, 1996). Bamgbose (1999) observed that the root of the subordinate status of African languages in relation to the imported European languages can be traced mainly to colonial language policies that spelt total proscription of use, benign neglect, grudging acceptance, and tolerance of African languages (p. 13).

However, post-colonial era events and the adoption of the English language as the official language and de facto lingua franca across the multi-ethnolinguistic community after Nigeria gained independence from its former lords might be argued to have followed the Gramscian concept. From whichever historical account of the introduction of English in Nigeria, the current dominance of the language on the indigenous languages in Nigeria in terms of status and functions might be less controversial. Thus, some scholars have justified the hegemony of the English language in Nigeria on of its widespread usage and acceptability.

There is no doubt that English enjoys an unparalleled status and usage among the educated class and in the nation as a whole. English is the *dominant* official language, the language of the media, the court, the legislature, language of instruction, and of politics. In spite of this prestige and these functions, an empirical enquiry into the statistics of the educated (literate in English) and uneducated users in Nigeria might question the validity of the reported widespread usage and acceptance in the country. In other words, if the population of those who are literate in English is compared with the illiterate population, the differences may not support the claim that the English language enjoys widespread usage and acceptability.

Similarly, the language attitude of the people must be surveyed in order to arrive at its acceptability in the country. Otherwise, we might be providing an exaggerated picture that faintly reflects what obtains in urban centres where you find a (lesser population compared with rural dwellers). For example, according to Euromonitor International (2010) as of 2009, 53% of Nigeria’s population speak English: “the vast majority of these 53% speak Nigerian Pidgin - an English-based Pidgin or Creole.” Perhaps, Nigerian Pidgin can be more widely accepted and in use than any other language in Nigeria (Osakwe, 2005).

However, it cannot be denied that like other languages of the world, Nigerian languages (aside from Nigerian English) are negatively impacted by the dominance of English as the “hegemonic and neocolonialist language”. Certain consequences of the dominance of English have been indicated in the literature. Amongst them are linguistic and communicative inequality - a great disadvantage of the speakers of languages other than English; discrimination against the non-English speaking people and those who are not proficient in English; colonization of the consciousness of the non-English speakers, causing them to develop linguistic, cultural, and psychological dependence upon, and identification with, the English language, its culture and people (Tsuda, 2012).

Thus, in literature, some suggestions have been made on how to curb or resist the linguistic hegemony of the English language because of its negative impacts, which among others are “inequality, discrimination, colonization of the mind as well as Americanization, transnationalization, and commercialization of our contemporary life,” as well as language endangerment, language shift and language loss.

However, consideration should be given to a germane question that Suarez (2002, p. 515) raises: “Within the context of heritage language use in a democratic society, to what extent will individuals maintain their heritage language when there are incentives and opportunities to shift, as presented through hegemonic ideologies in a



given community?” Our response to this question guides our proposed resistance mechanism.

### Resisting the Dominance of the English Language

Resisting the hegemony of English has been suggested in literature in many ways. For example, Tsuda (1994) describes the ecology of language as a counter-strategy to the hegemony of English:

Tsuda’s paradigm serves as a theory or perspective for promoting a more equal language and communication policy of the world which is based on the theoretical positions of human rights, equality in communication, multilingualism, maintenance of languages and cultures, protection of national sovereignties, promotion of foreign language education (pp. 58-59).

She calls on scholars in international and intercultural communication to subject the hegemony of English to academic enquiry. The call is also extended to professionals in English language teaching to incorporate the ecology of language paradigm into the contents and methods of teaching as well as teacher education and to speakers of English (native and non-native) to educate themselves on the philosophy of the ecology of language in order to become sensitive to the ethical aspects of international communication.

Perhaps as a response to this call, Suarez (2002) suggests individual’s awareness of, and resistance towards, linguistic hegemony, and heritage language maintenance (language use motivated by antihegemonic ideologies). While at first it may seem that to resist linguistic hegemony is to resist the dominant language; this would not be a successful resistance. In fact, successful resistance may lie in the usefulness of the dominant language. As Eriksen (1992) states, “perhaps paradoxically, cultural minorities may have to assimilate culturally in important respects in order to present their case effectively and thereby retain their minority identity” (p. 313). Eriksen (1992) continues:

Any opposition against the use of dominant language is inherently paradoxical. With no knowledge of these languages, one remains parochial and powerless. The

paradox, then, of linguistic hegemony is that one must buy into it, or acquiesce on some level in order to resist it. Resistance is not through monolingualism in the minority language, but rather through bilingualism. Proficiency in both languages is the successful strategy of resistance (p. 319).

However, Kaplan (1993) observes that to some extent, the hegemony of English seems to militate against bilingualism even though ultimately it probably does not. In Nigeria, “English holds on to this power via hegemonic means: English as the language of usefulness is unquestioned. Incentives and rewards for learning English are offered” (p. 151).

An appropriate application of Suarez’s (2002) paradox to Nigeria’s situation may lie in a blend of heritage language maintenance and English-language learning. Suarez’s (2002) paradoxical strategy of linguistic hegemony resistance recommends that in order to be successful, resistance necessitates acquiescence to this hegemony on a certain level, namely proficiency in the dominant language that at the same time fuels the conviction towards heritage language maintenance. Suarez (2002) argues that the effectiveness of linguistic hegemony notwithstanding, linguistic minority groups can and maintain minority languages over time (p. 514). Other factors that might aid maintenance of heritage languages that have been identified in the literature include ethnolinguistic vitality of the language group (Yagmur et al., 1999), language as a symbol of a stigmatised ethnic group (Brankston & Henry, 1998), modernization, and occupational and education mobility (Priestly, 1994), establishment of ethnic identity (Koenig, 1980), political and social attitudes (Frank, 1993), network-situated strategies of social reproduction (O Riagain, 1994), and native language use as a resistance to linguistic hegemony (Shannon, 1995).

Focusing on her resistance mechanism, Suarez (2002) adopts Van Deusen-Scholl’s (2000) working definition of heritage language, which says that a heritage language speaker is one who has been exposed to a language other than the dominant language in the home, often a minority language

within a nation-state. In this case, while English as a global language should be duly acknowledged and utilized for maximized benefits such as administrative convenience and economy, international politics and diplomacy, inter-tribal communication, technology and education, families and other institutions in the country should promote the learning and use of local languages vigorously. This pragmatic approach is illustrated by one of the two groups that constitute Suarez's (2002) study of family portraits of family language choice. Suarez's (2002) describes the two family groups:

...they (*both family groups*) wish for themselves and for their children a chance of a better life, a chance for better educational, economic, and social opportunities. However, families who are shifting to English seem to view the simultaneous maintenance of Spanish as potentially blocking the achievement of these goals. On the other hand, the families who have decided to maintain Spanish seem to challenge the legitimation of English by challenging the very notion that English needs to supplant Spanish. They counter this legitimation of English by emphasising that Spanish is just as important for achieving the promises of a better life. These families seem to understand that opportunity, and their children's opportunity, is in learning English and in maintaining Spanish. Their opportunity is in accessing English and in retaining their ethnicity. The families who are maintaining Spanish at home suggest an awareness of the paradox of linguistic hegemony that the promises of 'English-only can actually only be yielded by bilingualism, by becoming fluent in the dominant language and by maintaining the heritage language and culture (p. 528).

It appears that the language practice among many educated Nigerians tends to shift towards English-only because of their belief that maintenance of local languages might block the achievement of a better life. However, to stem the tide of language shift towards English in Nigeria, the paradox of linguistic hegemony which fosters bilingualism might be promising although the kind of bilingualism that we recommend here appears to be the opposite of what Jubril's (2007) describes as "... a transitional stage towards language shift or language loss" (p. 285).

Therefore, we suggest the use of "resistance" in a special sense to call for concerted efforts that will

help remove all kinds of self-imposed negative attitudes towards indigenous and local languages, and promote their use in their domain. Thus, while endorsing Suarez's paradox of linguistic hegemony as an effective way of resisting the linguistic hegemony of the English language especially in Nigeria where the dominance of the English language on the indigenous languages might have been exaggerated, we call for the promotion of bilingualism or plurilingualism of English and local languages. This would involve accepting, popularizing, and institutionalizing of the latter.

### Promotion of Local Languages

We have stressed a need to promote Nigeria's local languages within the purview of Suarez's paradox of linguistic hegemony described earlier in section 5. This approach maintains a middle course between radical pro-English activists (who do not see any good in promoting local languages) and pro-local language activists who would rather see the fall of English not only in their region but in the world at large barring its native homes. However, there are other evidences that support a need to promote local languages.

Evidence of language shift and eventual language loss in Nigeria are sociolinguistic realities that are very threatening. In a multilingual society where features of polyglossia (division of language function), high language(s) and low language(s) are in place, the survival low language(s) are not only threatened but are also suppressed to the background and may suffer extinction, there is a need to promote local languages. This is the situation in Nigeria where its over 400 languages might be difficult to maintain if these linguistic phenomena (language endangerment and language shift) are not curtailed.

Another linguistic phenomenon in a multilingual setting is language conflict. This is a natural occurrence among languages and/or language speakers that compete for dominance and/or survival. According to Kembo-Sure & Webb (2000), conflict linguistics deal with situations in which two

or more languages or varieties of languages that are in contact with each other and (used in the same communities) are also in a state of competition, that is, in a relationship of tension. Such tension may lead to one language dominating or threatening the existence of the other languages (p. 110). Studies on the language situation in Nigeria also report that there is competition among the local languages especially between the languages of the majority ethnic groups and the languages of the minority ethnic groups on the one hand. On the other hand, there is a relative low competition between Nigerian Pidgin and the English language, although traditionally it is held that English occupies such a very prestigious position in the language choice of the people that no other language can be said to be in competition with it.

However, one unavoidable effect of language competition is tension among speakers of the different languages because speakers of dominant languages would feel marginalized. Obododimma (2004) captures the tension thus: “the languages of the majorities in Nigeria have often featured as the coveted languages of power, particularly because their native speakers often dominate and exercise control at social, political and professional levels” (p. 286).

Another factor that has empirical backing is connected with some of the gains of promoting local languages. Empirical studies in and outside Nigeria show that contrary to the general belief that first language competence impedes the learning of second language, the opposite is the case. In other words, promoting the learning of English only at the expense of the local languages will not improve the performance of second language learners of English or their overall educational performance. For example, Kembo-Sure and Webb (2000) noted that research has shown that maximum education benefits from bilingualism are possible only when children are trained to a level where they are bilinguals, i.e. where competence in the first language is comparable to that in the second language (p. 129). This position is upheld in other studies (Cummins, 1984; Mustapha, 2012) that refer to this submission as the threshold level for L2 users and learners.

The implication of these studies is that if competence in the first language is inadequate, there will be no advantage when the second language is introduced. In fact, there will be difficulty in mastering second language skills, thereby leading to educational failure. By extension, if competence in the first language becomes weaker than competence in the second language as a result of neglect in education, the chances are that it will be further weakened by the switch to the second language.

The importance of threshold factor stressed in the preceding paragraph is associated with another factor which stresses the importance of strengthening mother tongue education in order to provide a solid literacy base for later education in European languages (Kembo-Sure & Webb, 2000). Kembo (2000) argues that cognitive and affective development occurs more effectively when learners know language very well (p. 289), which is usually the first language. By extension, learning, in general, but including second language and foreign language learning occurs more effectively if the required cognitive development has already occurred through the use of a first language as a language of learning. Thus, Cummins (1984) showed that (i) optimal first language education provides a rich cognitive preparation for the acquisition of a second language and (ii) the literacy skills already acquired in the first language (and, of course, the cognitive skills) provide easy transition to the second language medium education.

It must be noted that these reasons are not intended to take a position that suggests that the adopted European language(s) should be disregarded. In fact, going by any objective assessments of communication importance, it is nearly impossible to relegate the English language without paying the price. It has been stressed in literature that the use of European languages has brought them enormous advantages, such as access to the knowledge, creativity, and entertainment of the entire Western world, as well as participation in global trade and commerce. In fact, European languages have become an integral part of the lives

of the African people, (in this case Nigerians) and are indeed resources to be nurtured and developed.

However, these advantages should not be overstretched to undermine the use of local languages and the peoples' cultural identities and heritages. A similar position is taken by Okorie (2008) that language and vis-à-vis the indigenous language of a people, is a fundamental aspect of their identity, with which they are not only known but can express themselves or communicate with one another (p. 123). Thus local languages must be promoted among their speakers. To stem the tide of our local language endangerment and avert language shift, language loss and the attendant consequence of loss of identity, we argue that our local languages ought to be promoted.

Finally, those in favour of promoting Nigerian languages have argued that the greater use of African languages will lead to the growth of more balanced citizens, both culturally and educationally since those trained in their mother tongues seem to have a more positive self-image and greater respect for other languages and their speakers. Kembo-Sure & Webb, (2000) reported that bilinguals have also been shown to be more culturally flexible, as they are socially more balanced and accommodating than monolinguals. Kembo-Sure & Webb (2000) have argued that there are fewer chances of political and cultural polarity if people are exposed to more languages than if there are barriers against certain languages. Thus, African communities have more to gain by being bilingual, especially as they have been accurately described as culturally and linguistically pluralistic, which stresses the importance of bilingual education and the teaching of indigenous languages in schools. Kembo-Sure & Webb (2000) advocate harnessing linguistic resources as a move towards cultural and political harmony and economic development in Africa. Kembo states the following (2000):

If people of Africa want to give themselves a realistic opportunity to develop to their full potential educationally, economically, and politically, and to contribute to the resolution of their many problems,

the issue of language in education must be addressed (p. 286).

However, in this paper, the stance of the author is that practical steps must be taken to promote our local languages although there is a need to maximally explore the offers of European languages - (in this case, English), to foster our status economically, politically, socially and culturally among the comity of nations. A similar position is taken by Kembo-Sure & Webb (2000, p. 122):

The standardization or popularization of the local varieties of European languages should not mean that indigenous language are once more relegated to inferior positions. On the contrary, the acceptance and recognition of European varieties require a parallel recognition and popularization of the local languages, so that they too can gain respectability. They must be assigned more important roles in the public institutions, including the mass media schools, and churches. They must also be used in the provision of government services. This way, people will develop more positive attitudes to them, and their vitality can be enhanced (p. 122).

In the light of our discussion thus far, and the recommendations of others on the need to promote Nigeria's local languages, we suggest the following steps:

1. The integration of local languages in the curriculum for our primary, secondary, and tertiary education – as a school subject;
2. Required communicative competence in local languages for employees in state, national, and international offices (including political assignments and /posts) in Nigeria and Nigerian diplomatic offices abroad similar to English requirement for employees in the United Kingdom;
3. The use of local languages for announcements in local and international airports -on board to and from Nigeria-; airlines owned by Nigerians should adopt the use of local languages before translating to other world languages;
4. Local language centres (including websites) should be set up in foreign countries where

Nigerians are domiciled (The Nigerian Council) to enable their children to learn local languages;

5. Universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education in Nigeria and bodies involved in the promotion of local languages should offer scholarships and research grants for courses and research in the local languages across the nation. While there are research centres outside of the country that give research grants and scholarships for studies in our local languages, the author of this paper is not aware of such institutions in Nigeria.

The author of this paper believes that implementing these steps would help popularize and institutionalize our local languages not only on paper but also in practical terms, thereby according them functional prestige and status. In some countries where some of these measures are in place such as (South Africa and Tanzania), many of the local languages are thriving. In addition, the suggested measures, in this paper, stress the acceptance of local languages, which implies an obligation to popularize them through the mass media, the educational system, publishing houses, and government administration. It also means producing dictionaries and style manuals for the languages, and printing textbooks that promote the languages.

## Conclusion

In light of the hegemony of the English language and its effects on other world languages especially local languages in Nigeria, this paper calls for institutional support of Nigeria's local languages similar to Kiswahili in Tanzania and in Kenya. Such support will accord our local languages an enhanced status and more respect nationally and perhaps give the less-educated what Kebb & Kembo-Sure (2000) call 'a sense of worth'. Local languages must be given greater functional status in Nigeria's educational systems, the civil service, and the media and national life of the citizenry. It has been stressed that when our local languages are promoted among their native speakers, well-balanced citizens that are educationally,

culturally and socially well-grounded, flexible, and accommodating enough to narrow political, ethnic, and cultural polarity in the multi-ethnic society would be the end-product.

In conclusion, this paper calls for what has been referred to as language revalorization programme (Webb, 1994), which is aimed at raising the functional usefulness, the prestige, and the social status of our local languages as a resistance mechanism patterned after the - "paradox of linguistic hegemony" framework. In addition, since English plays a very important role in our modern world (both nationally and internationally), its learning and use must be maintained. Similarly, indigenous languages play a role in national integration, and are important element of socio-cultural identity. Thus, they must be accorded commensurate recognition in use among their speakers.

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