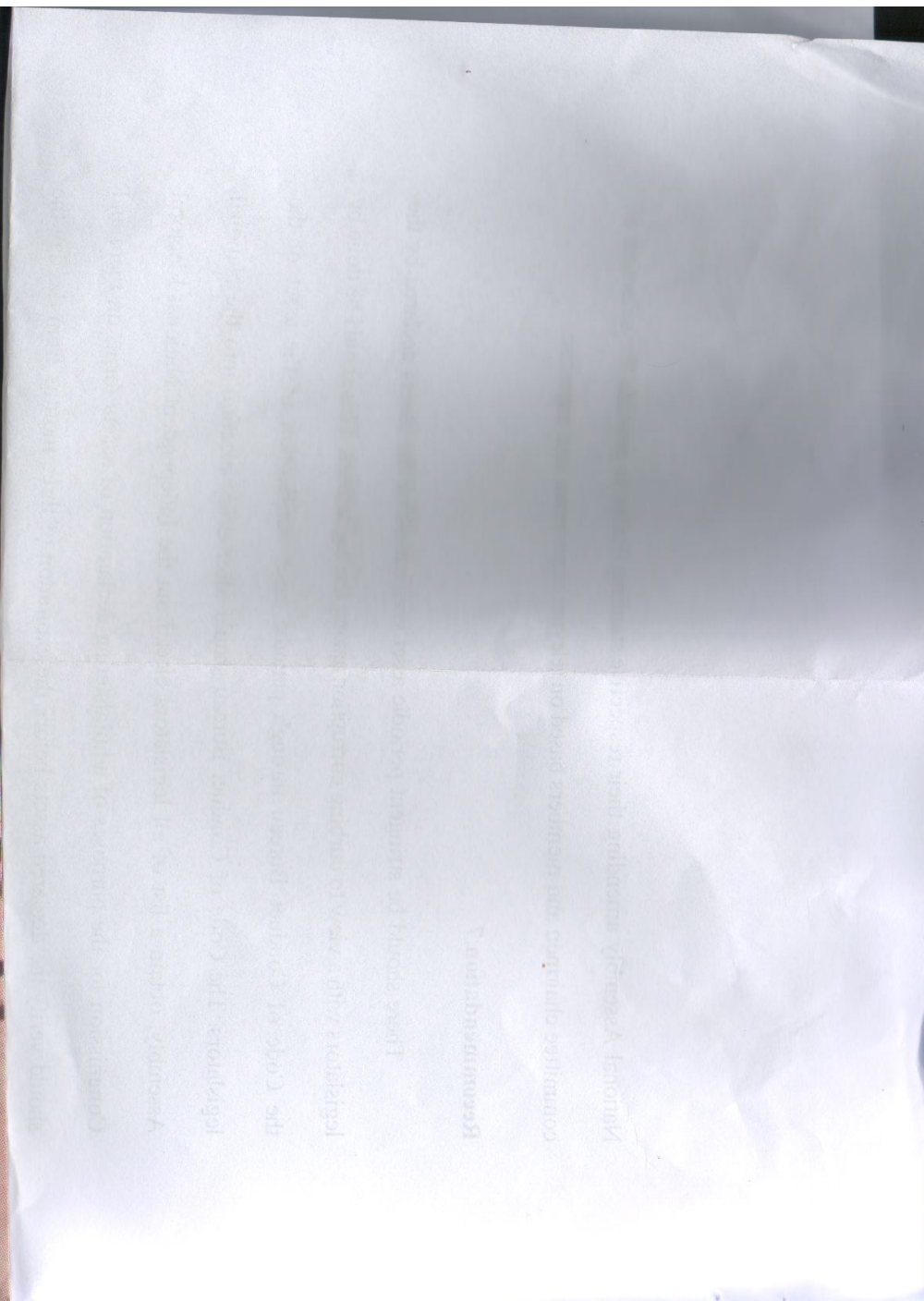


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TEN CRITICAL C'S OF PERSPECTIVISING THE HISTORICISM OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN NIGERIA

Abstract

From global irrelevance a few centuries back and virtual obscurity in the Nigerian socio-political life about a century and half ago, the English language has metamorphosed not only to the *numerouno* language in the world but also a medium upon which the survival of many countries, including Nigeria, depends (Adedimeji, 2007). The predominance of English in the Kachruan outer circle of Nigeria and its *nullisecondus* status is predicated on a number of factors such that apart from being the official language and lingua franca of the country, it is also a language that is increasingly attaining an indigenous status. This paper basically overviews the historicism of the English language in Nigeria, and enriches the literature of the subject, through the identification and discussion of ten critical c's accounting for its advent and nature in the country: Contacts, Commerce, Christianity, Codification, Colonialism, Constitutions, Certification, Commissions, Communication and Contextualisation.

Key words: Nigerian English, varieties, history.

Introduction

History is significant because the knowledge of the past facilitates the understanding of the present in order to project and determine the future. According to Fafunwa (1974:1), "history is to a people what memory is to the individual." Thus, there cannot be a sense of direction without reflecting on the past and those without history are "bound to repeat their faults and are incapable of taking corrective and right decisions to shape their future" (Ogu, 1992:63).

Though the contact between the Europeans, especially the Portuguese merchants, started earlier, it was in 1553 that the actual Nigerian contact with the English language began. Years later, the infamous Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade began and the English

dominated the trade. The white man became a symbol of fear and admiration by the oppressed and the local oppressors respectively as several Africans were forcefully rounded up and banished to the miserable journey to, and terrible life of slavery. After the slave trade ran its full course and was stopped in 1883, a few Africans were returned to Liberia, Sierra Leone and other parts of Africa. These returnees had been exposed to the Western language and culture and they subsequently served as models for Africans who were fascinated by the civilisation and development of the white man.

Adegbija (2004) believes that ten factors are critical to the advent and survival of the English language in Nigeria. These are:

- (i) European contact
- (ii) Christian missionary activities, especially studies on indigenous languages, the devising of orthographies for them;
- (iii) The 19th Century Fulani jihad, its impact on Islamic fundamentalism and on the entrenchment of Arabic, especially in the northern parts of Nigeria;
- (iv) The administrative and educational policies of different governments over the years;
- (v) The establishment of educational institutions and language related professional bodies and agencies;
- (vi) The 1966 Jacobs Report on English Language Teaching in Nigeria;
- (vii) The establishment of literacy projects;
- (viii) The making of language related legal and constitutional provisions;
- (ix) The 1960 independence;
- (x) The diachronic political fluidity

and instances of the adjustment of administrative boundaries.

It is the totality of these factors that informs the oft-repeated Bamgbose's (1971:35) comment, which summarizes the functions of the English language in Nigeria:

Of the entire heritage left behind in Nigeria by the British at the end of the colonial administration, probably none is more important than the English language. This is now the language of government, business and commerce, education, the mass media, literature and much internal as well as external communication.

While Adegbija's exhaustive discussion of some of the identified factors is considered insightful, like Awonusi's (2007) periodisation of the historicism of the English language into the tripartite "1400-1842: The Earliest Incursions", "1843-1914: The era of Missionary Adventurism" and "1915-1990: Independence and Experimentation", we opine that the nature and nurture of English in Nigeria are conditioned by the agglomeration of ten C's, which are:

1. Contacts
2. Commerce
3. Christianity
4. Codification
5. Colonialism
6. Constitutions
7. Certification
8. Commissions
9. Communication
10. Contextualisation

This paper is intended to perspectivise the advent and survival of the English language in Nigeria from the prism of these factors. It is believed that apart from presenting a fairly detailed

account, the effort would serve more pedagogical relevance as the factors can thus be easily articulated and recalled.

English in Nigeria and the Ten Critical C's

The pre-eminence of the English language, which serves Nigeria as a dominant medium of instruction, *lingua franca*, official language and language of politics, administration, business, sports, diplomacy, communication, media, education, creativity, literacy, constitution, law, nationism, nationalism and unity among others (Adedimeji, 2004), is predicated on a number of factors. These factors account for nature of the language in the country and are accountable for the nurture of the language. The ten identified factors are examined as follows:

Contacts

The earliest contact Nigerians had with Europe was in 1472, when the Portuguese merchants came to the West African coasts and interacted with natives in places like Calabar, Warri, Brass, etc. many years before the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. The Portuguese were traders and their main goal was to promote their commercial interests. This would be further advanced if they could speak the native language of their customers. It was the initial attempts to communicate with the Nigerians that gave birth to what is referred to as "Pidgin", a hybrid of Portuguese and Nigerian languages. The effort of the Portuguese to consolidate their heritage by establishing mission schools at the Oba of Benin's palace was not very successful though there was a diplomatic relationship which informed the presence of the ambassador of the Oba of Benin in Portugal between 1482 and 1495. Words like 'palaver', 'wrapper', 'Lagos' (from the Portuguese 'Lago' or Lagoon), 'bokos', 'pikin', etc. are contributed by the Portuguese to the lexicon of Nigerians (Ogu, 1992:66).

Later, a group of British sailors among whom were Thomas Windham and Nicholas Lambert arrived Benin in 1553 when the contact with English actually began. The British eventually upstaged the Portuguese intrade and ultimately

surpassed them as the net exporter of slaves from the ports of Benin, Lagos, Bonny, Calabar and Warri (Musaka, 2003:92). With the active domination exerted by the British on the infamous slave trade, English became the main coastal trade language.

It should be added within these early contacts that the freed slaves from Sierra Leone and Liberia in 1787 also contributed to the development of English in Nigeria (Adeniyi, 2006:18). These were slaves originally brought from England, Jamaica, America and Nova Scotia to the African settlements after the abolition of slave trade. The "returnees" had adopted unavoidably the English language and culture and had an air of superiority complex. They became models that Nigerians (and Africans at large) looked up to in terms of civilisation and social status. It was only the white men that were initially associated with English. The arrival of the 'Saras' or the freed slaves from Sierra Leone and their relative economic prosperity and higher standard of living motivated natives to also learn the white man's language. These initial contacts and the adventures of the adventurers like Mungo Park, Richard Lander, John Lander, etc. that sowed the seed of English usage and... prepared the ground" (Adeyanju, 2009:2) for the predominance of English in Nigeria.

Commerce

The earliest Europeans to arrive the Nigerian/ West African shores were mainly traders. Trade, both legitimate and illegitimate, had been an important landmark in bringing the English language to Nigeria and consolidating its existence. While slave trade transplanted Nigerians, who were eventually recycled as translators and interpreters/missionaries, legitimate trade in palm oil dominated by the British merchants was firmly entrenched by the middle of the 19th Century. The increasing rate of industrialisation propelled Europeans/ the English people to explore more commercial opportunities in Nigeria. According to Banjo (1996:11), "if the English language was brought to Nigeria through the agency of commerce, the grafting of the language to the Nigerian sociolinguistic scene was supervised by the Christian

religion through missionary activity.”

Christianity

With the abolition of slave trade, Nigerians who had been slaves were repatriated to Sierra-Leone. During their sojourn in the American plantation fields, they had learned English and got in contact with Christianity. These returnees were to serve a good purpose in assisting the missionaries in their evangelical activities. A prominent Nigerian ex-slave was Bishop Ajayi Crowder who, having become a Christian himself, worked with the White missionaries in proselytizing and evangelising the Africans with the resultant entrenchment of English. He, as well as his ex-slave colleagues, served as a teacher and interpreter of the English language as a way of advancing the work of God. To become a Christian then, a little knowledge of English was important since it was the language of the Bible. This situation was peculiar to Southern Nigeria where English language rapidly spread with the spread of Christianity. The 'Saras' served mainly as interpreters and teachers in this respect of evangelism and propagation of Christianity.

Besides, apart from their interest in trade, the British also had missionary interest in Nigeria. As Igboanusi (2003:100) submits, “during the course of the first half of the 19th Century, British Christian missions had become active in various parts of Southern Nigeria” and English was a powerful tool in their “civilizing” and evangelical business. Christian missionaries fervently used standard English and taught their pupils to use it. “Parents enthusiastically encouraged their children to learn and use English, the language of commerce, civilization and Christianity” (Adebija, 2004:21). Churches were established and they constituted a veritable platform through which Christianity was promoted via the medium of English language (Adeniyi, 2006:18).

Codification

As part of the guiding principles of missionary activities,

the introduction of literacy was considered highly essential. In other words, to spread the message of Christianity, the missionaries started and championed the learning and codification of the Nigerian languages. According to Dieldrin Westerman, a famous missionary linguist (cited in Omolewa, 1979):

We do not want Christianity to appear in the eyes of the natives as the religion of the white man, an opinion to prevail that the African must become a pseudo – European in order to become a Christian, but we want to implant the Gospel deep into the soil “of the African mind, so that it may grow there in its own African form, not as a gift of the white man....

Thus, the missionaries initiated and advanced foundation orthographies for languages like Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, Efik, etc. They studied the Nigerian languages and translated the Bible and prayer books to the native languages. While Rev. J. F. Schonchoso to study Hausa and Igbo, Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther studied and developed Yoruba, producing the first grammar of the language in 1843. The Yoruba orthography produced by the missionaries was revised and agreed upon at the Orthography Conference of 1875 (Adebija, 2004:23), the year Rev. J. C. Taylor, who volunteered for the Onitsha Mission, relieved Rev. J.F. Schon of the challenge the latter gave himself to do the same for Igbo.

Codifying Nigerian languages was part of the principal aspects of the missionary programme. As more people craved to read, the more they became Christianized. Rev. Bowen stated in 1857, as quoted in Ajayi (1965) thus:

Our designs and hopes in regard to Africa are not simply to bring as many individuals as possible to the knowledge of Christ. We desire to establish the Gospel in the hearts and minds and social life of the people... without the instrumentality of

without civilization. To establish the Gospel among any people, they must have Bibles and therefore must have the art to make them or the money to buy them. They must read the Bible and this implies instructions.

Colonialism

With reference to Nigeria, Igboanusi (2003:102) asserts that "the most important factor in the implantation of English in the country is colonization". While missionaries were initially interested in proselytization in whatever form efficient, especially in the indigenous languages, the object of colonial administration was the imposition of the British system of government, and by implication, the super-imposition of the English tongue. Prior to 1882, the colonial government did not show much interest in the entrenchment of the English language. It was in the year that the 1840 policy of educating the natives in their indigenous languages, so that they could be able to read the Bible and other religious materials, was reversed. The British colonialists had justifiably reasoned that without linguistic imperialism which the imposition of English would engender, the gains of the colonial/political domination might soon be eroded.

Colonial administration thus started to make conscious plans to promote the English language and culture. In 1887, the 1882 education ordinance promulgated in Gold Coast (Ghana) was made to apply in Nigeria. By 1897, one of the conditions for which schools could benefit from grants provided by the government was the "effective learning and teaching of the English Language". Indeed, "the colonial administration remained the single greatest carrier of English Language and culture" (Odumuh, 1987:10) and it was colonialism that actively masterminded the emergence of English as the Nigerian *lingua franca* and official language.

Constitutions

The English language is also influenced, historically, by

constitutional provisions that advanced its course. The Richard Constitution of 1946, for instance, made English the official language of the Southern Nigeria while it made Hausa the official language of the North by providing that "the language of government would be Hausa in the North and English in the West and East" (Akinaso, 2006). The Macpherson Constitution of 1951 confirmed this *status quo* of linguistic dichotomy (English for the South, Hausa for the North) with its obvious imbalance, but in deference to the sentiments of the North. The Littleton Constitution of 1954, on the other hand, recognised two levels of English usage in Nigeria: National and Regional levels. While nationally, English was to be used; regionally, English was to serve the South exclusively while Hausa and English were to jointly serve the North.

In other words, the 1954 constitution re-addressed the language provision of adding English as a co-official language of the North and made English, for the first time, the language of federal administration. The constitutions of 1960 and 1963 confirmed what existed as the role of English, while the 1979 Constitution did not undermine the status of English but elevated the three major languages to be "official" though, conditionally, in Nigeria. Its section 51 in FRN (1979:22) states thus:

The business of the National Assembly shall be conducted in English and in Hausa, Ibo and Yoruba when adequate arrangements have been made therefore.

The 1989 Constitution retained these provisions and that of 1999 did not also undermine them.

Certification

By certification, we mean the impact of schools that awarded one certificate or the other to pronounce an individual, educated. As an effective means of spreading the message of Christianity, the missionaries had taken up the establishment of schools. Educational institutions began to provide a fertile ground

for the development and perpetuation of English (Adegbija, 2004:27). This method was championed by the Church Missionary Society (CMS) in 1842 with the founding of a set of schools which effectively brought Western education to Nigeria. The CMS opened a station in Abeokuta in 1846 and were closely followed by the Methodist that opened theirs in 1848. In 1859, the Anglican Grammar School, Lagos, was established. The Wesleyan Methodist Church, the Baptist Church and the Roman Catholic Mission also joined afterwards. For instance, Methodist Boys High School was established in 1876 while Hope Waddel Institute was founded in Calabar in 1895. Education was perfectly in the hands of the missionaries and their major pre-occupation was to teach the "word of God" which they achieved this through the indigenous languages.

But with the 1882 Educational Ordinance (originally promulgated in Gold Coast (Ghana) but made to apply in Nigeria in 1887) mentioned earlier, the colonial administration gave the English language a boost (and indigenous languages a blow) by legislating English as the language of instruction in schools. The government made grants to schools, which it gave generally before, to be conditional. It was only the schools that spoke English very well that would deserve grants. Many new schools, like Hope Waddel Institute, Calabar, and the 1934-founded Higher College, Yaba, were established. English was the most important/emphasised subject in their curriculum. The establishment of the University College of Ibadan in 1948 was also aimed at entrenching English through training students in different disciplines with the English language.

Commissions

There were different educational commissions and ordinances that had sought to promote and advance the English language. One was the 1882 Education Ordinance and its impacts followed by another Ordinance in 1887. The Phelps Stokes Commission of 1919 recommended a policy that still impacts on the Nigerian educational policy till date. The commission recommended the

use of indigenous languages in the early primary education and English at the upper primary classes and the secondary school level. This was not radically different from the provisions of the PEP Commission of Education in British West Africa in 1922. By 1926, another ordinance was made, known as the 1926 Education Ordinance, to emphasize the need for English. It made certification in English a prerequisite for job opportunities in government offices and other firms. English then began to wear the robe of official nobility and it was planted firmly in the Nigerian educational policies.

By 1927, the British Government Advisory Committee on Education supported the recommendations of 1919 Phelps Stokes Commission. In this direction, the British Council was further founded in 1935 (chartered in 1940) in order to promote, among other things, the United Kingdom and "the English language abroad" including Nigeria (Akere, 2009:4).

As the Nigerian educational policy makers are tied to the apron strings of their colonial masters, the 1977 National Policy on Education further underscores the superiority and predominance of the English language by endorsing splitting the primary school instruction between the indigenous and English languages. The implication of this, as noted by Adegbija (1994: 149), is that "the colonial language is the one that matters" and that Nigerian languages should remain backward, unimportant and undeveloped.

The nineteenth-century Wales slogan, through the various educational commissions and ordinances, became inexorably applicable to Nigerians viz: "If you want to get ahead, get an English head" (Bamgbose, 1991:20). The foundation was firmly laid such that no candidate would be deemed to have passed his public examinations like West African School Certificate Examination (WASCE), Senior Secondary School Examination (SSCE) and National Examinations Council (NECO) examinations without having passed English.

Communications

Given the heterogenous nature of Nigeria and the need for a common linguistic basis for communication purposes, the English language is further strengthened. As a nation cannot function without a common communication meeting point, English had continued to serve the purpose of inter-ethnic communication mainly and even intra-ethnic communication. Right from the colonial period thus, through the various factors that lend further support to the promotion of English, the English language had been the important language of communicating with a critical segment of the Nigerian society, even if it was or still remains a minority.

As a means of mass communication, the first newspaper was founded a century and a half ago with the publication of *Iwe Iroyin fun Awon Ara Egba ati Yoruba* ("The Newspaper of the Egba and the Yoruba") on December 3, 1859. It was a bilingual newspaper in Yoruba and English before a separate English edition appeared in 1866. The first radio station was established in 1932. This was followed by the longest surviving Nigerian newspaper in English, the *Nigerian Tribune*, which was published first on November 16, 1949 and ten years after, the first television station in Nigeria, indeed in the whole of Africa, Western Nigeria Television (WNTV), was also launched in Ibadan precisely on October 31, 1959. According to Chief Obafemi Awolowo, the goal of the television, was to serve a "teacher, entertainer, a stimulus to all, and to transform Nigeria into a modern and prosperous nation" (*Sunday Sun*, 2009: 6).

Within the colonial period when communication bludgeoned and the English language was used as a weapon of confronting colonialism, promoting political interests and nationalism, many newspapers were established. Dr. Nnamdi Azikwe established *West African Pilot* in November 1937; the *Daily Service*, initially started in 1933 by the Nigerian Youth Movement, was resurrected in 1938 by Ernest Ikoli while the *Nigerian Citizen* was also established in 1948 by the Northern Nigerian Government. Since then, the mass media has grown

exponentially with over a hundred newspapers published daily in English across Nigeria, mainly in cities like Lagos, Ibadan, Abuja, Port-Harcourt, Kano, Kaduna, among others. The electronic media, like the print counterpart, have also developed such that in Lagos State alone, there are dozens of radio and television stations, and there are scores of such stations across the country with virtually all states of the federation having their radio and television stations.

A large percentage of broadcast time is devoted to English language, with "80% of radio and television broadcasts done in English and more than 90% of newspapers and magazines in Nigeria published in it" (Adedimeji, 2002: 5). Indeed, the English language has been "entrenched as the official language of communication" (Medubi, 1999:10) and "about 90% of the text books available to Nigerians in the world today are written in English" (Ofuya, 1996:139). The mass media has further shaped and determined the English language in Nigeria as Adegbiya (1989) identifies "the pervasive, omnipresent and indomitable influence of the media" as one of the factors responsible for its variation in the country.

Contextualisation

The nature of English is further conditioned by the pragmatics of the Nigerian context, by virtue of which the language, just as Platt, Webber and Ho (1984) writes of New English, "has been 'localized' or 'nativized' by adopting some language features of its own, such as sounds, intonation patterns, sentence, words, expressions." This process, variously called "indigenisation", "contextualisation", "domestication", "localisation", "nativisation", etc., is compelling and indeed is beyond apologetism: "the English language has to adapt itself to the Nigerian environment. In fact there is nothing anybody can do about the matter" (Banjo, 1970:51). The contextualisation of English is the process of increasing the usage of indigeneous linguistic and cultural norms in articulating ideas expressed in English language in such a way that there is an unmistakable

influence of the indigenous language on the foreign one.

As such, scholarly attention has been devoted to the characterisation, codification, identification and description of the variety of English used in Nigeria at all levels of linguistic analysis and in literature, a review of which is undertaken by Banjo (1995). General and linguistic features of Nigerian English have thus been elaborated as constrained by the contextual trappings of the Nigerian society. The contextualisation of English in Nigeria, its forms and processes, have enriched the study of English in Nigeria and Nigerian English with scholars like Ekong (1980), Bamgbose (1982), Jibril (1982, 1986) and Udofot (1997, 2003) focusing on its phonology, acceptability and intelligibility and the likes of Bamgbose (1971), Odumuh (1984), Kujore (1985), Adegbija (1989), Jowitt (1991), Alabi (2000) focusing on its lexicosemantics. Works like those of Tomori (1967), Jowitt (1991) have addressed the syntax of Nigerian English while the pragmatics of the variety has been analysed by Bamgbose (1971), Adesanoye (1973, 1979), Adetugbo (1979), Akere (1982) and Babatunde (2001a&b, 2002) while the English of the Nigerian literature has been studied by Young (1971), Achebe (1975), Osundare (1983), Johnson (1981), Adejare (1992), among several others.

Conclusion

Since 1553 when the first English men paid a brief visit to the Nigerian Coasts, especially the ports of Benin and old Calabar, before the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, the English people had set to establish their language and foist it on our psyche. With cross cultural/linguistic contact brought about by the slave trade and the succeeding Christianisation and colonisation, the English people systematically began a systematic arrangement of making the English language a linguistic force in the Nigerian context. At the end of the day, even after the political independence of 1960, linguistic colonialism still exists as their language they planted had blossomed to a formidable tree in Nigeria, the filling of which may be tantamount to the destruction of the whole country.

The article has thus traced the birth of the English oriented

language in Nigeria based on early contact, missionary activities, colonialism among others. It is obvious that the historical pre-eminence of English on Nigeria language is predicated on ten C's: Contacts, Commerce, Christianity, Codification, Colonialism, Constitutions, Certification, Commissions, Communication and Contextualisation. Of these factors, commerce, Christianity and colonialism are dominant. While commerce mainly concerns trade activities with which the first contacts and the eventual, yet infamous, slave trade were consolidated, Christianity involves missionary activities and the establishment of schools, both of which entrenched English language. Colonialism, through educational ordinances and constitution as well as political might is also a factor in shaping the destiny of English language as a dominant and domineering language, without which the nation cannot survive as one. As a result of this status of English in Nigeria and even beyond, proficiency in its use, both in speech and in writing, is desirable for every goal-oriented Nigerian.

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