

Globalising The French Language: Neo-Colonialism Or Development?

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Abstract

This paper is concerned with the attempt to globalize the French language in contemporary world politics, in view of competing value systems from other key languages of the international society. It attempts to contextualize the philosophical trajectory of globalization which sees globalization as the homogenization of ideas, images and institutions with a view to creating a ‘global culture’ of norms and values acceptable among certain regional blocks. It draws its intellectual support from the French policy of assimilation which informed their colonial method during the era of balkanization of Africa, Asia, and the rest of the Third World. It adopts a critical conversational method which involves literature review, histo-empirical analysis, critical conceptual clarification and analysis, within the purview of intellectual interrogation. Findings show that the policy of assimilation adopted by the French as a fundamental colonial policy created a tension between fragmentation and integration, which still resonates in contemporary literature on neo-colonialism, albeit its developmental paradigm. The paper recommends the dissolution of this tension and reconciliation of the pragmatics of globalization as critical panacea for greater global and regional cooperation.

Keywords: Globalization, French Language, Neo-colonialism and Development.

1. Introduction

As academic analyses of globalization increase in number, it is ever more important to examine the drivers behind this phenomenon, the factors that influence it, and the manifestations it produces in everyday life. A pertinent example of all three dynamics, the world wide advance of the French language is important to study not only in its own right, but also for its potential to deepen our understanding of globalization and of the possibilities of creating a more equitable, tolerant and ethically responsible world (Johnson, 2002:131). Simply put, the world’s linguistic and cultural diversity is endangered by the forces of globalization, which work to homogenize and standardize even as they segregate and marginalize (McCarty, 2003:147).

Surprisingly, little academic and policy attention has been directed to the rise of the French language, especially in regionally specific contexts. More importantly, whether this advancement of French language in regional contexts promotes development or neo-colonialism is yet to be adequately addressed in scholarly literature.

Furthermore, the subject matter of language advancement will be better understood if discussed within the broader context of globalization, with more attention paid to factors that have favoured particular languages at the expense of others, factors which lie in the historical trajectories of colonization (Hinz, 2006). To be sure, linguists have typically bemoaned the loss of ancestral languages and cultures especially among populations colonized by Europeans, arguing that relevant languages and cultures must be revitalized or preserved by all means (Mufwene, 2002:3). Missing from the same literature, however, are assessments of the costs and benefits that the affected populations have derived from language shift in their particular socio-economic ecology – costs and benefits that undeniably have bearing with their present political and economic conditions.

This interface in political economy and their relations with language movement can be stressed by the import of the most surprising political mobilization of the year 2003 which occurred in France, where more than 200,000 people gathered to protest against globalization (Meunier, 2004:125). From the state’s proposed pensions reform to the privatization of public enterprises, the ultra-liberalism of the World Trade organization (WTO) and the threats posed by genetically modified crops, the French population denounced the ravages of neo-liberal

globalization on the French economy and society. Beyond the unexpected high turn-out, the most surprising aspect of this mobilization was the non-political nature of the protest, despite the political nature of the issues addressed. Indeed, the growing strength and appeal of the French language and culture among the diversified class and group of 'French people' who gathered for the protest is telling enough.

In any event, the distillation of French language, especially in colonized territories have endangered other languages, or driven them to extinction, typically in settlement colonies, not in exploitation nor in trade colonies. To be sure, we cannot overlook the fact that language loss has been the most catastrophic in settlement colonies compared to other colonies. We shall return to that later, but it is also important to bear in mind that globalization is not as recent a phenomenon as may be assumed. It is in some ways as old as colonization in its population-genetics interpretation, to the extent that when a population relocates and/or dominates another, it more or less imposes a form of geographical globalization by connecting the political and economic structure of the colony to that of the homeland (Mufwene, 2002:9). The colonists may import into the new territory production techniques that are more typical of the metropole, they may make the colony part of the same industrial network, and they often adopt the same business language at least for some level of the socio-economic and political system.

Thus, it can be argued that even the use of European languages as the official varieties in some former colonies is a form of globalization, to the extent that they represent some form of uniformity or unity (as partial as it is) in the way that business is conducted in the metropole and the colony (Mufwene, 2002:10). For, it is often the case that a lingua franca is adopted as a vehicle of communication to ease the burden of learning local languages as the case may be. Indeed, today's globalization differs from its earliest ancestors, particularly in complexity and speed of communication rather than in the fact of interconnectedness and uniformity of economic systems, technology and production of goods.

In view of this background, the paper explores the dynamics of globalization of the French language within the context of neo-colonialism and development literatures. It hopes to do this by borrowing from the historical interface of colonialism and the French policy of assimilation, especially in Africa, to put within perspective the attrition, and possible extinction of local languages and cultures within contemporary forms of cultural globalization. To achieve this, the paper is divided into six sections. Following the introductory part, the basic concepts are explained. The third section interrogates the origin of the French policy of Assimilation in Africa. The fourth section extrapolates on the neo-colonial and development paradigm to determine the aftermath of the French policy of assimilation. The following section bridges the conceptual gaps by linking the above argument with the emerging cultural forms of globalization. The last section concludes the work and makes policy recommendations.

2. Conceptual Clarifications

Three concepts are central to the understanding of this paper – Globalization, Neo-colonialism and Development. Here, attempts are made to clarify these concepts to avoid misrepresentation of thought and facilitate a discussion on the major objective of the paper.

2.1 Globalization

Globalisation has attracted a harvest of literatures in contemporary social studies. It is important to mention from the outset, as many other scholars have, that there is no simple or agreed definition of what constitutes globalisation (Conversi, 2010:36; Movius, 2010:7; Omotola, 2010:106), nor indeed, any consensus about how far the process has advanced, and in which areas. What is, however, clear is that it is a major site of contestation (Clark, 1999, cited in Agbu, 2004). It assumes several interpretations covering nearly all facets of human endeavour- economy, culture, environment, politics, information transmission etc. (Fadahunsi, 2000 & Onyekpe, 2000). Globalisation is therefore, the transcendence of economic, social, cultural, political, environmental constraints across territories. In other words, it means the growing worldwide integration of goods, services and capital between countries in the international system. More specifically, making allusion to the multi-dimensional nature of globalisation, Onyekpe (2000), stated explicitly:

“Globalisation covers all areas and aspects of life. First of all, it can be in the economic areas of industrial form of production and inventions, types of goods, capital and technology; it can be in the areas of ideas, ideologies, system of values and their allocation, and economic system; it can be in the areas of defence and armament....further still, it can be in the area of social and welfare issues and the policies affecting them; it can even go beyond those divisions to include research efforts, theories of knowledge and cognition, trends and perspectives” (Onyekpe, 2000:43).

Amuwo (2001) corroborates the many-sided nature of globalisation. According to him, globalization is a complex process and phenomenon of antinomies and dialectics: integrating and fragmenting world; uniformity

and localization; increased material prosperity and deepening misery; homogenization and hegemonization. He argued that, globalization is nothing but a mixed grill. On the one hand, it has the potentiality of eroding national sovereignty of the weakest and poorest states, whilst widening the technological divide amongst states; on the other, it tends to provide an enabling environment for greater respects for human rights and gender equality.

Understood in a generic sense, Massamba, et al (2004) define globalisation as an extensive integration of production, trade, finance and information across states and societies, such that the economic, cultural and often political consequences of actions in these realms become increasingly undifferentiated and impact each other across national and regional boundaries. European Union (1997) sees globalisation as a process by which markets and production in different countries are becoming increasingly interdependent due to the dynamics of trade in goods and services and flows of capital and technology. Jervis (2007) views globalisation as involving all countries of the world and a wide range of economic transactions. He observed that a potential loss of autonomy is broader because the nature of national economies, the abilities of states to direct their individual economic and even social policies, and the stability of governments are affected by the movement toward a truly worldwide economy.

Furthermore, Agwu (2007) conceptualises globalisation as the unfolding resolution of the contradiction between ever expanding capital and its national political and social formations. He also perceives it as the shift of the main venue of capital accumulation from the national to the supranational or global level. Ouattara (1997) states that, for the developing world, globalisation, in the most basic terms, is the integration of economies throughout the world through trade, financial flows, investments, the exchange of technology and information and the movement of peoples. Thus, for the underdeveloped countries, globalisation means nothing more than a re-colonization process of the third world economies. Viewed from this perspective, globalization has been seen as a new phase of capitalist expansion and is still about exploitation, accumulation, inequality and polarization (cited in Omotola, 2010:107).

It is evident from these definitions of globalisation that it solely thrives on the compression and interdependency of the world through changes in the boundaries of economic, social, cultural and political actions, simultaneously propounding and dispersing new hegemonies and challenging and subverting settled ones. At once, local, national, regional and international institutions and practices become relevant across the world and affect, and are affected by, others across the world (Robertson, 1992, cited in Massamba et al, 2004).

According to Agbu (2004), one way of making sense out of the many and diverse definitions of globalization is not to be unduly descriptive of the phenomenon. He argued that, to appreciate the impact of globalization, it would be best to narrow it down to specific issue for discussion with a view to fuller grasp the particularistic effect on that area of interest. In line with this understanding, the focus of the paper is on cultural globalization. Hence, Movius (2010:1) argues that cultural globalization is the emergence of a specific set of values and beliefs that are largely shared around the planet. The import of this for our analysis is that globalization can be a tool for promoting global culture and global consciousness. Maduagwu (2003) summarizes out thought in this way:

“Globalization is the direct consequence of the expansion of European culture across the planet via statement, colonization and cultural mimesis. It is also bound up intrinsically with the pattern of capitalist development as it has ramified through political and cultural arenas” (cited in Oni, 2005:14).

2.2 Neo-Colonialism

To understand, neo-colonialism, we may have a brief stint on the concept of colonialism. This is important because contemporary literature now uses a contrast between early and late colonialism, or between colonialism and neo-colonialism to make a distinction between direct political domination through force of arms and domination by ‘extra-political means’. In general, this distinction is used to highlight the fact that the expansion of the capitalist system, from the earliest days of European exploration and colonization to the present day, has always implied the domination and assimilation of non-Western societies to Western ways of life. In other words, while the precise methods used to achieve these ends may have changed, the implications for non-Western peoples remain much the same (Rodney, 1972; Dudgeon, 2007).

Hence, colonization conjures up political and economic domination of one population by another. This form of control is often associated with military power, which, based on human history, is the means typically used to effect such domination. This has been made more obvious by the European colonization of the world over the past four centuries, at least until the independence of African and Asian countries in the mid-twentieth century (Mufwene, 2002:3). Often in alternation with neo-colonialism, the term has also been used to describe the economic relations of less industrialized countries (LICs) with their former colonial metropolises, in which the latter have continued to determine the terms and language of economic exchange.

According to Kwame Nkrumah:

“...the essence of neo-colonialism is that the nation which is subject to it is, in theory, independent and has all the outside trappings of international sovereignty. In reality, its economic system and thus its political policy is directed from outside”
(cited in Salami, 2009:132).

In other words, neo-colonial nations are nations, which, in spite of the apparent status of being independent, actually depend on the imperialist nation. Such nations may be seen to have mere flag independence without having the necessary economic and political independence to back it up and foster their independent development. Essentially, neo-colonialism refers to the continued domination of former colonies using extra-political or commercial means – the tactic by which the imperial powers granted formal political independence to, while maintaining real economic control of their colonies (Wilmot, 1980:130). In other words, though it is a continuation of the same process of exploitation and assimilation, it operates not through the application of military might or legislative power but through economic compulsion.

Kieh (2012) argues that neo-colonialism is anchored on an asymmetrical relationship between dominant and weak states. According to him, at the core is the disparity in national power – economic, military and political. He submits that the power asymmetry is used by the dominant power as the leverage for getting the dominated peripheral state to do its bidding. In part, this is made possible because the leaders of the neo-colonies have been mentally colonized to accept the so-called ‘superiority’ of the imperialists. In other words, the leaders of the neo-colonies lack the requisite political, sociological and philosophical education that would fully equip them to understand the machinations of neo-colonialism and to struggle against them.

Fundamentally, an element of neo-colonialism, which has bearing to this work, is that ‘it operates through a broad array of modes of interactions between the dominant and dominated states – cultural, economic, political, military-security and social’ (Kieh, 2012:167). It is within the context of this broad movement or interaction that we find explanation for the language movement that characterizes contemporary forms of globalization.

2.3 Development

Development is a key word when comparing nations. Some countries are said to be highly developed, some rapidly developing, whereas other countries are labelled underdeveloped. Even if these words are not used similar distinctions are singled out by means of other more diplomatically phrased terms. In the official statistics, the following categories are represented: low-income economies, middle-income economies and high-income economies, industrial market economies and non-market economies. In other instances, developed market economies are distinguished from developing countries and centrally planned economies (World Economic Survey, cited in Lane and Ersson, 1990).

At the same time, the notion of development is an essentially contested conception (Sen, 1988). It has been argued that the concept of development is a value-loaded notion, expressing Western preconceptions about basic values in social life. It presupposes or requires that the non-Western world adheres to a similar culture to that of the advanced economies giving priority to economic growth and its derivatives. This explains why the concept of development has been generally reduced into “an exclusive economic sense- the justification being that the type of economy is itself an index of other social features” (Rodney, 1972:64).

Indeed, the concept of development is better conceived in its multi-dimensional character. It stands for a set of properties that refer to economic, political or social aspects of life and theories about development may focus on these varying characterisations. However, in contrast to this study, the average bourgeoisie scholar conceives development as “a type of social change in which new ideas are introduced into a social system in order to produce higher per capital incomes and levels of living through a more modern production methods and improved social organisations” (Rogers, 1969). But in this study, development is conceptualised as “the coincidence of structural change and liberation of men from exploitation and oppression perpetrated by international capitalist bourgeoisie and their internal collaborators” (Offiong, 1981).

Following this definition, therefore, *real development* involves a structural transformation of the economy, society, polity and culture of the satellite that permits the self-generating and self-perpetuating use and development of the people’s potential. Development results from a people’s frontal attack on the oppression, poverty, and exploitation that are meted out to them by the dominant classes and their system. Development “implies increased skill and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material well-being, in terms of the relations of men in society” (Rodney, 1972). The point of departure of this paper is a critical delineation of development within this contextual paradigm.

3. The Origin of French Policy of Assimilation in Africa

Colonial thoughts and models have left legacies as determinate factors in African continent. Both the British and the French colonial models have influenced the continent in one way or the other. Many scholars

have studied and aired their views with respect to the impacts of colonialism on Africa as a continent; but this section of our work deals with the Origin of French Policy of Assimilation in Africa.

Among many other definitions, Assimilation can be defined as the act of assimilating or being assimilated. It is the cultural absorption of a minority group into the main cultural body; in the context of this study, Africa is seen as the minority group while France is the main cultural body. It is an instrument of social, political and cultural transformation of the lifestyle of African people and societies by the French colonial masters. French, in the sense that it was France that championed the policy of Assimilation in African continent. According to internet sources (<http://www.chegg.com/homework-help/definitions/assimilation-49>, consulted on 3rd Sep, 2013), “Assimilation is a gradual process by which a person or group belonging to one culture adopts the practices of another, thereby becoming a member of that culture”. Cultural assimilation can be defined as the process by which a person’s or a group’s language and/or culture come to resemble those of another group. The way assimilated Africans (French citizens) think and act like the French corroborates this. It is a policy of converting African natives into full-fledged French citizens.

This approach had its origin in the French Revolution of 1789 which held that equality, fraternity and freedom should apply to anyone who was French, regardless of race or colour. According to internet sources (http://www.mongabay.com/history/Mauritania/Mauritania-french_colonial_policy.html, consulted on 8th Sep 2013), this took effect “... when the Convention in 1794 declared that all people living in the colonies were French citizens and enjoyed all republican rights”. The term, “Assimilation” was an ideological basis of French colonial policy in the 19th and 20th centuries where the French subjects (not citizens) were taught that they could become Frenchmen if they adopted French language and culture as their own. The first man to adopt the “French Assimilation” concept was the philosopher Chris Talbot in 1837 and it was based on the idea of expanding French culture to the colonies outside of France in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Unlike the British administration whose colonial and integration policies relied on indirect rule of groups defined by race or ethnicity, the French policies emphasized direct rule and were highly assimilationist. That takes us to look at some of the aims and objectives of the French policy of assimilation in Africa.

3.1 Objectives of the French Policy of Assimilation in Africa

The following can be said to be some of the objectives of the French Policy of Assimilation in Africa:

- (i) To turn African natives into “Frenchmen” by educating them in French language and culture for them to become French citizens;
- (ii) To dismiss African culture, civilization and history as non-existent or of no value by replacing them with French language, culture and civilization and eliminate traditional power networks, institutions and social traditions;
- (iii) To brainwash Africans by making them to believe that they (African natives/French subjects) were “barbarians” but were capable of becoming Frenchmen by being civilized via the “mission civilisatrice” (Civilizing mission); French idea that their colonies were meant to civilize the world, idea of a civilizing mission rested upon the assumption of the superiority of French culture and perfectibility of humankind;
- (iv) To make Africans believe that French culture was superior to others and the best of all cultures.

From here, let us examine some characteristics of the French policy of assimilation.

3.2 Characteristics of the French Policy of Assimilation

Contrary to the British policy of administration that is more liberal, the French colonial administration is characterized as using “direct rule” on its African colonies. The French policy is perceived by many scholars and critics as being highly centralized, assimilationist and more exploitative and oppressive. Asiwaju (viii:2001), referring to the impacts of French colonialism in West Africa has this to say:

... it was the colonial style of authoritarian governance that set the pattern for the post-colonial states especially in Francophone Africa, where power has remained centralized and interventionist in the economy, land tenure and rural life to the detriment of traditional institutions and customs.

The same critic (2001:7) reports that: “... the French African empire concentrated heavily on Western Africa and was strictly centrally controlled”. Condemning the French administration that he sees as being oppressive, exploitative and callous, Asiwaju (2001:xvi) goes further to report the sad plight of one of the assimiles (Africans assimilated into French culture) and aspirants by name, Louis Hunkanrin:

Spending over 50 of his entire life of 77 years in various prisons and detention camps in French West Africa and France, Louis Hunkanrin was

perhaps the best known victim of colonialism as “violence” and one whose life epitomised the most celebrated opposition to human rights abuses which characterized French and other European colonial systems.

The French colonial policy is characterized as one that adopts direct rule on its colonies whereby traditional powers and authorities are ignored. It is also passionate about international prestige and cultural assimilation of indigenous populations. There are some pitfalls associated with the French policy of assimilation.

3.3 Some Problems with Assimilation

As stated earlier, the French colonial administration is exploitative and oppressive. History has it that “France has been actively involved in the exploitation of goods, services, and labour in tropical Africa since the seventeenth century” according to internet sources (<http://www.enotes.com/france-tropical-africa-reference/france-tropical-africa>, consulted on 5th Sep 2013). The administration is egoistic in nature in that the preoccupation of France is not to develop Africa but rather to make use of African human and natural resources and of course human labour by using Africans as slaves to fight wars for them, uncompensated. The natural resources in African soil were usually exported to France and used to develop French industries. In a nutshell, the so-called developmental mission is selfish-oriented. Cumming (2001:3) holds the opinion that some researches and surveys

... have examined aid within the context of French African policy and have shown how its real purpose has been to promote France’s wider politico-cultural objectives south of Sahara.

Cumming (2001:59) pinpoints the fact that:

France’s new-found concern for the welfare of her colonies stemmed from an appreciation of their important role in the Second World War, from a sense of post-war optimism, and from a growing awareness and the disparities in wealth between North and South. As a result of this heightened humanitarian concern and a resurgence of the doctrine of assimilation, French development policy in these years balanced limited concessions towards self-determination with generous economic assistance.

The same critic highlights so many shortcomings and deficiencies of French developmental programmes in Africa as surveyed by some scholars and critics such as Chipman, McNamara, Chafer, Andereggen among others who examined such aid within the context of French African policy. He goes on to report that some other critics like Hessel, Vivien, Duffaure, Michailof, Fuchs, Marchand, Tavarnier among others attack the French aid policies and structures for lack of coherence, transparency and developmental effectiveness while Brunnel attacks them for being wasteful; Marchesin and Marchal attack them for lack of democratic accountability; Boisgallais and Verchave, for the policies’ inability to alleviate poverty; some others, condemn the policies for their overconcentration on client regimes in countries like Rwanda where French support inadvertently contributed to one of the worst genocides of the 20th century. In addition, the system called the “indigénat”, ensemble des indigènes d’une région ou d’un pays, régime administratif et juridique appliqué aux indigènes à l’époque du colonialisme, notamment en Afrique du Nord (the whole indigenous population of a region or country, legal and administrative form of government applied to the native population during the colonial period, especially in north Africa) allowed administrative tyranny on the natives. Governors could define certain offences by degrees and persons could be tried summarily by local administrators.

From the above definitions of French policy of assimilation and findings, we can deduce that to be assimilated amounts to losing one’s own language, culture and background for another’s. We can therefore advance the argument that Assimilation of Africa by the French is an indirect form of neo-colonialism rather than development for the continent.

4. Assimilation: Neo-Colonialism or Development?

It is already clear that the ending of colonial rule in most countries in Africa has not resulted in a complete control of their economic or political affairs, and their cultural affairs, as the case may be. They are sovereign states only in name. In reality, many of them remain under the economic, political and cultural control of their former rulers. As is evident from the history of many African countries, the achievement of political or flag independence does not automatically translate into economic or cultural independence (Fenwick, 2009; Salami, 2009). In the undying words of Omar Bongo Ondimba’s predecessor, Leon M’ba:

“...’Independence’ has not altered the fundamental structural relations between colony and metropolis; between Gabon and France nothing has changed” (cited in Wilmot, 1980:132).

In essence, for most of Africa, there was a carryover of colonial institutions and structures into flag independence. Apart from the intellectual doctrines – which manifested themselves even during the existence of the two separate world ideologies – Africans were fundamentally oriented towards culture, popularly referred to as the total ways of life, of their colonial overlords. Though it has been argued by some scholars that, it was not a process of wholesale enculturation (Olutayo et al, 2007:103), the basis of African post-colonial philosophy was essentially outside the grasp of Africans.

To be sure, this interpretation is present in the current debate on language endangerment, in which European languages have been depicted as “killer languages” about to replace all other languages. Thus, power has usually been invoked as an important factor that has favoured the language of the powerful over those of the dominated, hence less powerful, populations. It is in this regard that the French policy of assimilation needs to be understood in its contemporary manifestation in order to avoid the danger of reductionism to mere language shift.

Contemporary form of assimilation has involved a subtle but significant change in perspective. Analytically, this has involved a shift from an overwhelming focus on persisting difference – and on the mechanisms through which such cultural maintenance occurs – to a broader focus that encompasses emerging commonalities as well. Normatively, it has involved a shift from the automatic valorization of cultural differences to a renewed concern with civic integration (Brubaker, 2001:542). This shift in analytical and normative emphasis does not presage a radical reversal. It does not amount to a return to the bad old days of arrogant assimilationism - For ‘while the term assimilation has returned, the concept has been transformed’ (Brubaker, 2001:543).

Brubaker (2001:544) further advances the six major transformations on the concept of assimilation that is driven by the forces of globalization. According to him, they include: a shift from organic understandings of assimilation, focusing on an end state of complete absorption, to abstract understandings of assimilation, focusing on a process of becoming similar (in some respect, to some reference population); a shift from transitive to intransitive understandings of assimilation; a shift from an individual-level assimilation to a population-level assimilation; a shift from thinking in terms of homogenous units to thinking in terms of heterogeneous units; a shift in the focus of normative concern informing research on assimilation from cultural to socio-economic matters; and a shift from the mono-dimensional question, ‘how much assimilation?’ to the multi-dimensional question, ‘assimilation in what respect, over what period of time, and to what reference population?’.

Reformulated in this manner, and divested of its ‘assimilationist’ connotations, the concept of assimilation – if not the term itself – seems not only useful but indispensable to understanding contemporary forms of colonization, albeit in development studies. To further demonstrate this, it would be useful to quickly examine the three forms of colonies to see the extent to which the Western European hegemony, exemplified by France was entrenched.

Mufwene (2002) distinguishes between trade, settlement and exploitation colonies. According to him, trade colonies were the first to develop. This typically happened soon after Europeans explored new territories and established trade relations with the local people on more or less egalitarian terms, although the terms of interaction changed later, at the expense of indigenous population.

In the later part of the world, the trade colonization was concurrent with settlement colonization. Europeans settled to build new homes or better Europe than what they had left behind. The nature of interactions among different populations in these new colonies often led to protracted competition and selection among the languages and dialects they brought with them, leading to shifts from some to others and to the loss of several of them, as well as to the emergence of new language varieties typically lexified by European languages (Mufwene, 2002:11). It is important to re-iterate that no significant language loss has so far been associated with trade colonization, even when trade was abused to enslave and deport some of the indigenous populations.

Especially noteworthy about settlement colonies is the fact that they gradually produced local or regional monolingualism, favouring the language of the colonizing nation but dooming to extinction the languages brought by the Africans and Europeans originating from countries other than the colonizing ones. Also, unlike trade colonies, settlement colonies everywhere gradually evolved to some form of economic (and social) integration that has endangered languages other than those of the colonizing European nation, or one adopted by it. Although both settlement and exploitation colonies developed from the trade colonies, in part as the consequence of European commercial greed in wanting to control the sources of raw materials and other products needed in Europe, very few colonizers planned or decided to build new homes in the exploitation colonies (Mufwene, 2002:13).

Indeed, as the term exploitation colony suggests, these colonies were intended to be exploited for the enrichment of the European metropole. The colonizers were generally civil servants or companies’ employees who served limited terms and had to retire back in Europe. With the help of missionaries and their schools, they generally

developed an intermediary class of indigenous bureaucrats or low-level administrators through which they communicated with the local populations or they themselves learned the most important of the local languages, but they encouraged no more than this local colonial elite to learn scholastic varieties of their languages.

It must be taken into consideration that in the evolution of languages, the balance sheets from European contact with other countries look very different in settlement colonies than in their exploitation counterparts. An important reason is that the colonial agents were less socially and psychologically invested in the exploitation colonies than were the colonists in settlement colonies. The latter considered their colonies as their homes and the patterns of their interactions with the indigenous populations gradually moved from sporadic to regular, with the involvement of the indigenous populations in the local economy growing from marginal to engaged. Also, unlike in exploitation colonies, where the European colonizers remained a small, though powerful, minority, the colonists in non-plantation settlement colonies, became the overwhelming majorities and instituted socio-economic systems that function totally in their own dominant language (Mufwene, 2002:15).

5. Bridging Conceptual Gaps

In view of the foregoing, it is evident that the goal of colonialism was universal – extract economic benefits for the colonizing government. However, France had fundamentally different approach to her colonial rule. While other European colonists, for instance, England, wanted to exploit resources and create a profitable environment for its settler communities, France espoused an additional goal of transforming the African populations within its sphere of influence into French citizens. Nowhere is this effort epitomized better than in West Africa. This approach incidentally affected the type of colonial rule and the post colonial relationship between France and these countries in an elemental way (Fenwick, 2009:2).

The French colonial policy imposed direct rule, limiting rights of the African peoples. The colonial administrations established a complimentary economy based on exporting raw goods and importing manufactured goods. They introduced European culture and taught their own history in schools. The idea of a united French Empire was mooted with the policy of assimilation. Reeling from the ideals of equality from the 1848 Revolution, the French Republic granted political rights and citizenship for Frenchified Africans. Its rule in West Africa was characterised by an unprecedented degree of political representation for Blacks (Fenwick, 2009).

French West African colonies enjoyed their close economic, political and cultural ties with the metropole. While other French colonies were fighting for independence, these states were calling for a federation with France – wanting to extend the process of assimilation in order to have the same rights as French citizens but remain united. In comparison with the English, because the latter had never attempted to assimilate Africans within its Empire; lacking this cultural aspect, it was easier for them to disengage from their former colonies. While former British colonies wanted to maintain trade and development aid with the U.K., England was not entrenched in the policies of its former colonies like the France.

In its independence negotiations, French West Africa signed Cooperation Accords, ensuring the continuation of French influence. These different approaches to colonialism affected the type of institutions erected by the colonial powers and the affability of that relationship. In turn, this affected the process of decolonization, the method and degree of influence of the former colonial powers in the early years of independence, and most importantly, has resulted in the globalization of French cultural values in the post-colonial societies (Fenwick, 2009).

It must be mentioned that, as a country with a strong assimilationist tradition, France has long favoured integration with its national culture over any particularized group identities. In particular, France's strong secular policies relegate religion into the private sphere and aim to reserve the public sphere for a singular cultural identity – the French people made up of uniquely French national values. The country-wide ban on religious symbols in public schools in 2004 represents France most prominent relegation of religion into the private sphere (Bienkowski, 2010:437). Currently, France's assimilationist policies go beyond determining how student's can symbolise their faith in schools; they have also extended into determinations of French citizenship. France requires assimilation as a precondition to obtaining citizenship.

On June 27, 2008, France's highest administrative body, *the Conseil d'Etat*, took its policy of assimilation a step further than it ever had before. Mme M., a Moroccan immigrant married to a French citizen with whom she has four French-born children, applied for French citizenship. However, Mme M.'s belief in Salafist Islam and her wearing of a niqab, precluded her attainment of French citizenship. The *Conseil d'Etat* ruled that Mme M.'s practice of her religion was incompatible with the essential values of the French community. Consequently, it found that she had not fulfilled the condition of assimilation necessarily for attainment of French citizenship (Bienkowski, 2010:438).

Since this decision, France has continued down this strong path of assimilation. Between mid-June 2009 and January of 2010, events in the French Parliament culminated in the Parliamentary Commission recommending that the full Islamic veil be outlawed in public buildings, but did not go so far as recommending a full ban on the streets, thus creating an admixture of cultural, academic and identity challenges within the French society (Vladescu, 2006:16).

We should however, not overrate the importance of European languages regarding language endangerment. The experience in former exploitation colonies has certainly not been the same as in former settlement colonies, although European colonization has undeniably spread European languages to territories where they were not spoken 400 years ago. Indeed, the balance sheet has of course involved more losses than gains, but we must always remember that the outcome of the contacts of population and of languages in settlement colonies anywhere, including French colonies, has not consisted of losses only. This is especially important in view of the French West African colonies, where, despite the adoption of French as lingua franca (official language), other local languages have survived, and indeed, prevailed for many decades after French colonial rule.

The above considerations are simply a reminder that, just as colonisation has not been uniform worldwide, the vitality of languages has not been uniformly affected everywhere, not even in former settlement colonies. In future research, it will help to examine the social structures of these former colonies in terms of which have majority European populations and which do not, whether this has some correlation with economic development, and to what extent particular patterns of interaction across language or dialect boundaries are linked to the process of language endangerment (Mufwene, 2002:12).

Conclusion

This paper has critically examined the spread of French language within contemporary literature on neo-colonialism and development. The arguments were hinged on the present world order and in the dynamics of the coexistence of languages. It is apparent that indigenous African languages are largely eliminated and marginalised from use. Instead of investing in and using their linguistic, cultural, and human potential, African governments and the elite still continue to channel away their resources and energies into learning ‘imperial’ languages that are used by a tiny minority of the populations. Against the backdrop of constraining global forces, and Africa’s internal problems (wars, repression, and general economic misery), which continually narrow their chances in the international system, the paper argues that African languages could be the most critical element for Africa’s survival, and cultural and economic development (Negash, 2005). In order for this to happen, however, Africa must invest in this sector of ‘cultural economy’ as much as it does in the ‘material economy’, since both spheres are interrelated and impact on each other in a globalising world.

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