
How Has The Quest For *Itiwa Sleeti* Aided The Neglect of African Indigenous Languages?

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<https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/ujah.v24i2.2>

Abstract

Itiwa sleeti in a loose translation means “to break the slate,” is an aphorism that was used during colonial period and beyond by Igbo-Africans to denote an unbridled passion to the acquisition of western education. Due to the high cost of acquiring western education and the intellectual rigor involved, many African parents could not face this challenge at that point in time. As a result these parents later took up the remedial challenge of bequeathing their children this perceived asset which they didn’t get. Unfortunately, this unbridled pursuit has left many valuable African cultures to be neglected and subjugated on the long run. The disastrous impact of this neglect is felt in the use of African indigenous languages because many of them are currently endangered while some have gone into extinction. My aim in this essay is to show how the unbridled quest for western education has aided the neglect of African indigenous languages. Though, some external factors like multilingualism, (which is a fall out of mindless partitioning of the continent by the west), Over-reliance on foreign languages as official language of instructions by Africans and their government and underdeveloped vocabularies and concepts have necessitated this neglect. I argue that there is an internal factor that is pioneered by African parents to foist these foreign languages on their children with the “mind view” that foreign languages serve the “actual need” of the hour more than indigenous languages. I contend that since the indigenous languages help the African child to establish both emotional and intellectual closeness with their parents in communicating their feelings in their own indigenous language at home, then restoration of

African indigenous languages should begin from the home since charity they say begins from home.

KEY WORDS: *Itiwa sleeti, Africa, parents, African indigenous language, neglect.*

Introduction

Coming home during festivities like Christmas used to be a memorable one in its entire ramifications. Many activities used to spice up these events which range from the nostalgic event of seeing one's kit and kin after many months and sometimes years of absence. There used to be this feeling of communion and brotherhood among communities and families in the exchange of love and pleasantries. Another remarkable observation is the superior show off of some linguistic skills in English language from children of those who live in the metropolitan cities to impress the villagers and to intimidate their village contemporaries. These village children consciously revere and longed to be like them one day as a result of their linguistic prowess. Most times, these village children were sternly warned by the parents of their metropolitan counterparts not to dare speak indigenous languages to their children lest they be corrupted by the language.

Those who dread these linguistic intimidations are not limited to the children but grown-ups also. This is because of their inability to match their linguistic proficiencies with these city kids. A

friend's mum had her own fair share of this harassment from her grandchildren which warranted her to vow, *ɥwa m ɔzɔ, agam etiwa sleeti makana bekee bu agbara* which loosely means [in my next world, I must be an educated fellow because English is a magical language].

This 'magical' attribution to English language and some other western languages is the colonial legacy that is yet to be decolonized from the minds of many Africans even after many years of political independence. African indigenous languages, with all the promises they hold for Africa and African child have been neglected and most of them have gone into extinction because of lack of use by Africans.

The educational system in Africa that should be the custodian of African indigenous languages rights and privileges has not fared well in protecting the rights of an African child. This is why many concerned African educationists have observed that the African child's major learning problem is a linguistic problem (Paul Obanya, 1980: 88). This is because Instruction is given in a language that is not normally used in his/her immediate

environment, a language which neither the learner nor the teacher understands and uses well enough. African languages are given little validity in our educational system. As a result, the knowledge that children have of these languages is ignored. That is why it is urgent that African languages should be given greater attention in terms of being used as media of instruction. The urgency is necessary because the loss of any language by a people is the loss of their root and the loss of their identity and culture.

.... Language and ethnicity are deeply intertwined. While the language a child speaks at home is often a crucial element of personal identity and group attachment, language can be a potent source of disadvantage at school because in many countries children are taught and take tests in languages they do not speak at home. Their parents may also lack literacy skills or familiarity with official languages used in school (Unesco 2014: 198).

The lack of literacy skills and familiarity with these official languages is one of the major reasons that spur most African parents to go out of their way to make sure their children acquire them even at the expense of their indigenous languages. It is against this background that this paper inquiries into the rationale behind the excessive quest by parents for this inordinate

acquisition of foreign languages for their children to the point of denigrating their own indigenous languages.

In the first section of this paper, I will consider the concept, nature and some inherent challenges of African indigenous. In the second section, I will show that the genesis of these challenges emanates from the mindless partitioning of Africa by the western powers without considering Africa's language peculiarities and diversities. I will also anchor on the linguistic rights and UN declarations to prove how germane it is to use African indigenous languages and attempt to prove how these rights will help in the promotion of African indigenous languages. In section three, I will consider African indigenous language as the language of communication especially the language use to instruction the African child. I contend that there is a huge disconnect in communicating realities to African child because the languages used for instruction are not understood by the African child. In the final section, I will give a clarification on the concept *itiwa sleeti* and expose some of the reasons for the inordinate quest by

African parents to acquire knowledge and be instructed in foreign languages instead of their familiar African languages.

African Indigenous Languages, Linguistic Rights and the Challenge of Communication.

It is trite to begin this section by defining what we really mean by indigenous language so that it can direct our focus in this paper. When we refer to indigenous language, our scope is Africa especially sub-Saharan African languages. Indigenous language can be construed to mean a language spoken or belonging or connected with a particular place or area which one is talking about or with the place where one lives (Adedeji A, 2015). Here, Adedeji draws his own definition of indigenous language from a residential perspective. A slight departure from above sees Daura in (Oyemike Benson et al, 2017) adding longevity of residence to his definition. According to him, “Indigenous languages are the tribal, native or local language spoken. The language would be from a linguistically distinct community that has been settled in the area for many generations” (Jibir-Daura, 2014). Finally, Adeniyi and Bello (2016) drew specificity of location to their own

definition when they observe that “Indigenous language refers to the various native languages spoken in Nigeria, These are languages that are aboriginal to the people”. One point of emphasis from these definitions is the fact that indigenous language is the language which is not alien to people’s culture or background and this language has the capacity of being passed from one generation to another generation.

In contemporary Africa, it is estimated that Africa has the most complex and varied language situation in the world. Viera Vilhanova (2018) referring to UNESCO records observes that over 2,000 languages, 30 percent of the world’s languages are spoken in Africa. This multiplicity of languages seems to be a feature of everyday life in most African countries and it seems that it will remain the norm for a long time to come. Vilhanova (2018: 247) narrates the complexity of African indigenous languages thus:

Africa is the most multilingual continent in the world and there are very few countries with more than 90 percent ethnic and linguistic homogeneity of population, where one African language is spoken by the people as a mother tongue, namely

Somalia (Somali), Swaziland (Seswati), Botswana (Setswana), Burundi (Kirundi), Lesotho (Sesotho) and Rwanda (Kinyarwanda). In some other countries one African language is spoken by the vast majority of the population as a lingua franca. Kiswahili in Tanzania is a case in point. About a hundred of the languages of Africa are widely used for inter-ethnic communication. Arabic, Somali, Berber, Amharic, Oromo, Kiswahili, Hausa, Bamanan/ Manding, Fulani and Yoruba are spoken by tens of millions of people. If clusters of up to a hundred similar languages are counted together, twelve are spoken by 75 percent, and fifteen by 85 percent of Africans as a first or additional language.

The complexity of languages in Africa seems to have a two edged sword consequences. At one point, it can serve as a weapon of development and on other flip side; it can be exploited as a weapon of conflict and division among Africans. When harnessed properly, it can also be used as a medium of influence to propagate African values in our diverse cultures. An African who can communicate in four and five African indigenous languages can effectively communicate African values like honesty, diligence, brotherliness to any culture he find himself/herself within Africa without being an agent of division there. At the other extreme point of exploiting the complexity of African

indigenous languages as a tool of division and conflict, Vihanova (2018) claims that:

The national boundaries of African countries drawn arbitrarily by the colonial powers at conferences in Europe during the time of the imperial partition of the African continent paid little regard to the historical, cultural and linguistic affinity of the Africans thus creating extremely mixed populations and a very complex and varied language situation. A wide range of distinct ethnic groups became assembled in European protectorates and colonies while other ethnic groups found themselves divided by newly established artificial borders and were separated into two or more territories administered by different colonial powers (2018, 247).

The above submission shows that the language situation before the invasion of the west was seamless and more unified but the partitioning of Africa by Europeans changed a lot in the language dynamism and complexities of Africa. The mindless partitioning was done not with the interest of Africans but solely for the European countries interest. The consequences of this linguistic imperialism are mixed population and the variations of language situation currently witnessed in Africa today. This is also why

Amadi avers that “it should be mentioned that many African languages remained oral languages for very long. This situation was compounded by colonial masters who, not content with colonizing the continent, also colonized the languages found in it” (2015:733).

The above mindless division and partitioning of African languages led Ayo Bamgbose to group African indigenous languages into major, minority and endangered languages (2011, 2). The major languages are spoken by large numbers of speakers and are almost invariably associated with higher status and perhaps political and economic power. Some of the languages in this category are Swahili, Hausa, Yoruba, Zulu, etc. However, whatever status may be ascribed to major languages, they still rank lower than imported official languages.

The minority languages according to Bamgbose, lack the advantage of numbers as well as status and power being enjoyed by the major language (2011, 3). Their lower status emanates from the fact that it is uneconomical to cater for them because they require huge investment. Since speakers of minority

languages learn another language, it is assumed that not much harm is done if their language is ignored.

Endangered languages are evident when there is no attempt to take principled action to preserve these languages and as a result they are held in low esteem. Following the statistics compiled by Matthias Brenzinger et al (1991) indicate that as of 1991, there were 54 Extinct, 67 Near-Extinct and 49 Dying languages in Africa.

Bamgbose established six major characteristics of an endangered language:

1. Very few speakers remaining, most of them old
2. No longer used for any meaningful purpose in the community
3. Not being transmitted to the younger generation
4. No orthography or written materials in it
5. Language shift has taken place such that the language has been or is being replaced by another language
6. On the verge of extinction

Language endangerment is one of the prevailing consequences of negative perception towards multilingualism and this phenomenon that has become a prominent issue in sociolinguistic studies. This demonstrates that a people deprived of its language are also deprived of its culture and the fear of this deprivation has led to renewed emphasis in the world at large on preservation of endangered languages.

How has African indigenous languages fared in the midst of other acclaimed international languages? There are certain conditions to be met before a language is considered to be an international language.

1. It must have a number of speakers in many nations of the world;
2. It must enjoy a widespread use in many countries;
3. It must have a lot of literature written and diffused in it;
4. It must be amenable to scientific and technological dissemination;
5. It must facilitate international communication worldwide.

World's Top 10 Languages**(According To Number of Countries Where Spoken)**

An example of the world's top 10 languages according to number of countries where they are spoken was shown by Amadi (2016:731) in the diagram below:

Language	Number of speakers
1. English	42
2. French	30
3. Arabic	22
4. Spanish	19
5. Portuguese	7
6. German	6
7. Dutch	4
8. Swahili	3 (with 20 million speakers)
9. Malay	3 (with 19 million speakers)
10. Mandarin Chinese	2

Culled from Amadi (2015:731) in the Journal of Language Teaching and Research, Vol. 6, No. 4.

A rapid look at the languages in this Table shows that about six or seven of the present top ten languages in the world are linguistic legacies of Africa's former colonial masters (*viz* English, French, Arabic, Portuguese, German, Dutch, and Spanish). Swahili, an authentic African language, made it to number 8, over and above Mandarin Chinese which has a higher number of speakers. This is because Swahili is officially spoken in at least 3 countries of the world, thereby satisfying one of the conditions for internationalization.

Yoruba language though not on the list above can safely be categorized as an international language. This is because Yoruba language belongs to Benue-Congo, a sub-group of the Niger-Congo language family. The vast majority of speakers are found in Nigeria in the South western States of Ekiti, Lagos, Ogun, Osun, Oyo, and in some parts of Edo, Kogi and Kwara. Speakers are also found in the West Indies, Brazil, Cuba, Sierra Leone, and in some West African countries like Benin and Togo. Recent figures provided by Crystal (2003, 289) put the number of Yoruba

speakers at 25 million worldwide. The number 2 criteria above talk about widespread in many nations which it comfortably covers.

Among the list of top 40 first-language speakers provided by Crystal in Amadi (2015) , the Hausa language, an African language, features as No. 28 with 24 million speakers, while Yoruba as discussed above, is rated, the 35th position with about 20 million speakers. Swahili features as No. 8 among the list of top world languages.

These African indigenous languages when harnessed optimally will ensure maximum participation of the populace in the socio-political and economic development like in businesses, in market transactions and in other social events. This is so because indigenous languages are the languages that people use in their day-to-day interactions. It is only after establishing this line of communication and freedom that a populace can be mobilized for engagement in development.

African Indigenous Languages and Linguistic Rights

Linguistic right is the inalienable rights of everyone to choose from especially in choosing the preferred language of communication, education, religion, commerce etc. It is natural that when people's linguistic rights are acknowledged, the full participation of minority groups in all national activities such as judicial and administrative proceedings, civil service, examinations, voting and public employment is guaranteed. Linguistic human rights (LHR) are based on the notion that language rights are like human rights which are enshrined in the UN-sanctioned Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This human right to education is only made possible if linguistic human rights are respected. The linguistic human rights in education are emphasized in Section II of the United Nations' 1996 Barcelona Universal Declaration on Linguistic Human Rights (United Nations 1998, 27-28):

Article 24

All language communities have the right to decide to what extent their language is to be present, as a vehicular language and as an object of study, at all levels of education within their territory: preschool, primary, secondary, technical and vocational, university, and adult education.

Article 27

All language communities are entitled to an education, which will enable their members to acquire knowledge of any languages related to their own cultural tradition, such as literary or sacred languages, which were formerly languages of the community.

Article 29

1. Everyone is entitled to receive education in the language specific to the territory where s/he resides.
2. This right does not exclude the right to acquire oral and written knowledge of any language, which may be of use to him/her as an instrument of communication with any other language communities.

In principle, Language Human Rights are a powerful means of language empowerment, but this is only the ideal. But In practice, declarations of rights of this sought are not normally matched by action and even some of the expected outcomes are unrealistic or unattainable. Hence, LHR can only be regarded as a limited means of enhancing the status of African languages. (Bamgbose 2011, 12).

It is a welcome development that many African communities both in urban and hinterlands are gaining access to free education especially in the elemental and fundamental stages of their lives. The declaration entitles communities to acquire education in the language related to their culture and territory. The initiators of these declaration should be commended if not for anything, for at least initiating a legacy that is a significant departure from the past. Analysing the provisions made by the education and linguistic right for all, it is worrisome that the declarations did not consider what the students learn while in school since what matters for growth is not the years that students spend in school but what they learn' (World Bank 2011, 2). Encapsulating this, would have taken care of the problem where so many students, especially in sub-Saharan Africa drop out of school, while many repeat grades and majority sit year after year hardly learning anything. This simply shows the learning challenge currently witnessed in African continent. The seriousness of the learning challenge is shown by the statistics presented by world bank where "more than 30 percent of Malian youths aged 15–19 years who completed six years of schooling could not read a simple sentence; the same was true of more than 50 per-cent of Kenyan

youths” (World Bank 2011, 6–7). The summary of the above provision shows that more schooling has not resulted in more knowledge and skills necessary for job creation in sub Saharan Africa.

Birgit Brock-Utne asked himself a soul-searching question when he read the above World Bank submission thus “In whose language could the youth not read a simple sentence? He goes on to ask “In their own language or a language foreign to them or in a language that they hardly hear around them?” (2014, 6). If African children speak African languages while instruction is given in an exogenous language, how then is it possible to give quality education for all (children) in a language mastered by few?

English represent one of these exogenous languages and it is famed to represent the above irony in Wiseman Magwa’s analysis, according to him “English has not yet reached the masses of the indigenous population thus it remains a minority language in most African countries. Very few rural Africans for

example, are able to meaningfully make use of English in their deliberations” (2015, 3).

When we consider other foreign languages like French and Portuguese, Herbert observes that “10% of the people of Francophone countries of Africa speak French and that only 1% or 2% can speak it fluently and can think in it. The situation is even more pronounced in countries such as Angola and Mozambique where less than one tenth of the national population is able to make use of the national official language (Portuguese) (Herbert, 1992, 8).

Although most African education systems focus on the use of international languages, only between 10 and 15 per cent of the population in most African countries are estimated to be fluent in these languages. Nevertheless, these languages, besides their strong weight in governance, dominate the educational systems. The apparent consequence shows that there is a serious communication gap between the formal education system and its social environment. As such, Brock- Utne warning is timely “there can be no democratic governance if important papers and laws are written in a language citizens do not master well, speeches and political messages given in languages people do not

normally speak” (Brock- Utne, 2015, 9). This means that to enhance the general quality of education taught to our children while in school, there is an urgent need to look at the language they are learning in. This is because “to improve learning outcomes, therefore, a key focus must be on support to the development and use of the most appropriate language of instruction and literacy from the learner’s perspective” (Mercer 2013a, 8, 9).

We can conclude this section by establishing that the most important and least appreciated educational challenge that our government and educational system have failed to tackle is to have African children learn in the language they normally speak and know best.

African Indigenous Language and the Challenge of Communication

The language of instruction is the vehicle through which knowledge is communicated. Indigenous language and communication are inseparable tools for the development of any nation. This is why Akabogu & Mbah (2013) urged the

government to see indigenous languages as veritable and practical means of communication which could easily be harnessed for effective national integration which is a matter of paramount importance for a country still struggling to consolidate its independence.

African indigenous language is the most vibrant means of communicating the identity of the majority of African people and the construction of all language policies accordingly (Ouane & Glanz 2010, 10). By constructing genuine language policies he opines that policy makers should accept African languages as official languages and language for exams. They recommend that one of the processes of investing in education and multilingual education in Africa is the valuing and developing of African languages.

Irrespective of the above gains and potentials, there is still wilful denial of indigenous languages to be given a chance to grow and help promote African cultures and national identity, hence the need to urgently redress this anomaly. The continent is seized with the problem of linguistic imperialism which has unfortunately distanced African people from their immediate

environments and deliberately disassociated them from the language of interaction in their home and the community.

It is this lack of an adequate linguistic communication system on the national level that has significantly contributed to the economic and technological stagnation and backwardness in most African countries. Magwa (2015) citing Bodomo observe that in Ghana, as much as 51% of the total amount of annual broadcast hours is reserved for English alone, leaving the rest for all the many Ghanaian African languages. Unfortunately, these same languages are not the languages of national government and the languages of mass communication are hardly the languages of the people. This goes to buttress the fact that Indigenous languages, an important means of communication in African societies are not widely used in the national and our formal educational systems.

When we come down to our educational system, having the foreign language as the language of instruction and communication prevents the students from really grasping the subject matter the teacher wants to convey, from developing their own language and from learning the foreign language. Making

larger African languages national languages and using them for communication in our educational system and also using them as language of instruction would hasten the level of comprehension of concepts and terminologies and also contribute in the development of Africa as a continent.

In research conducted in Botswana, Ouane and Glanz (2010) citing in Brock-Utne et al observe a set of science concepts that were taught to an experimental Form I group in Setswana language and to a control group in English language. These students were tested for their understanding of these concepts. The researchers observe that the students taught in Setswana language developed a significantly better understanding of the concepts than the students taught in English language. A similar study with the same results was also carried out in Tanzania. It was observed that secondary school students taught science concepts in Kiswahili did far better than those who had been taught in English (Mwinsheikhe, 2003).

We can deduce from the above submissions that children learn better when they understand what the teacher is saying. But in Africa this seems not to be the case because most class room instructions are given in foreign languages whereas most African

children hardly comprehend these languages. An interview comprising both the lecturers and teachers reveals that learners encounter problems when English is used as the only official medium of instruction in education (Magwa 2015: 10). The interviewer noted with chagrin at Manicaland high school on one of the teachers who boldly submits thus: *“Mkwasha, rega ndikutaurire! Wana awa totowadzidzisa ngemutauro waamai kuti vanzwisise. Ukashandisa ChiRungu besi besi veshe wanofaira bvunzo.”* (My son-in-law let me tell you this. We resort to teach using the mother tongue in order for these pupils to understand concepts. If we are to use English throughout, they will all fail their examinations). It is safe to conclude this section by noting that the best way to improve the communication challenge and the learning outcomes in our schools would be to have them communicate in the language they know best and normally speak at home. It is a sad discovery that none of African government or their agencies emphasis on discusses this fundamental and least appreciated educational challenge.

The Concept of *Itiwa Sleeti*

Itiwa sleeti in a loose translation means “to break the slate” (breaking slate). It is a metaphorical concept that was used during colonial period and beyond by Igbo-Africans to denote an unbridled passion to the acquisition of western education. Slate was used during the colonial and post-colonial period as a means of writing from the kindergarten stage to early primary school stages before one graduate to using pencil and paper in African schools. This foundational stage is a destiny defining moment in the life of an African because it suggests whether one will continue with his or her educational development or whether one will discontinue and join the rest of the children in the then traditional life of farming. Those who show some promise of comprehending the western form of education are usually celebrated with mini chalk board traditionally called a slate which is usually craftily constructed by a renowned village carpenter. The announcement that one is in work schedule of the village carpenter is a feat that is celebrated by all progressive minded villagers because it is seen as an express way of escaping from poverty and from the traditional occupation of farming. It used to be dream come true for every parent because it a clear sign that great fortune awaits for the child and the family at large.

The art of *itiwa sleeti* (breaking the slate) simply denotes the time and the academic processes involved in acquiring western education. These involve perseverance, rigor, discipline, financial engagements and other sacrifices involved in attaining academic success.

Itiwa sleeti denotes also the time duration involved in attaining academic success. The duration from *nta akara* to *mahadum* (Nursery to University) spans 20-25 years. The systemic formation from Nursery, primary, secondary and University formation is a herculean time indeed. Due to the high cost of acquiring western education and the intellectual rigor involved, many African parents could not face this challenge at that point in time. As a result these parents later took up the remedial challenge of bequeathing their children this perceived asset which they didn't get. Unfortunately, this unbridled pursuit has left many valuable African cultures to be neglected and subjugated on the long run. The disastrous impact of this neglect is felt in the use of African indigenous languages because many of them are currently endangered while some have gone into extinction.

How the Quest for *Itiwa Sleeti* Aided the Neglect of African Indigenous Languages

One of the challenges confronting African languages and the African child in the 21st century is the deliberate ignorance to pass these languages to them by the custodians of these languages. By custodians, I mean those who are in position to transmit this knowledge but are reluctant to do so but are rather quick to embrace the foreign languages and use them as language of interaction and instructions. These are the government (who make the policy), parents, teachers, elders, lecturers etc. This has warranted African educationists to declare that “the African child’s major learning problem is a linguistic problem” (Letsie, 2002, 34). This is because for a very long time, African languages have received very little attention in terms of being used as media of instruction. Also these languages are given little validity in most African homes and most especially in our educational system today. Ademowo (2016, 40) citing Afolayan decries this ridiculous ignorance thus “in general, the new African elites and postcolonial educational policies were, ignorantly or deliberately, aimed (currently) at making Africans view their languages as

inferior and less competent while holding the colonial languages in high esteem. This position has been vigorously challenged; yet the new African ruling elites, today, retained their privilege position by continuing in the tradition of the colonial masters.

Elsewhere, people are positive and proud of their language but the reverse is the case in Africa. What we encounter daily is total disdain and negative attitude to African languages. This is prevalent among the elite class who prefer their children to be instructed and educated in foreign languages. It is not surprising that parents belonging to lower social group tow this line of the elites in decision making for their children. On this parental neglect, Bamgbose remarks “in some countries such as Nigeria, it is amazing to find the large number of English medium private nursery and primary schools offering education to young children. Patronage of such schools comes not only from well-to-do parents but also from many lowly paid blue-collar workers, who believe that they are making a great sacrifice for their children’s future” (2011:5). In the introduction, I remarked how one grandmother vowed that in her next life, she must be acquire western education

at all cost. This informs the title of this paper, *itiwa sleeti*. She said and I quote “*uwa m ozo, aga m etiwari sleeti*” [in my next world, I must be educated].

In this section, I enquire into the rationale behind the mad rush and crave for foreign languages over African indigenous language by some African parents in our contemporary times. At this point I collaborate with Achebe’s position that the crave for foreign languages by African parents did not begin today. The quest had been there since the colonial times (Achebe 2009: 104). Originally, it was the desire of the colonialists to teach the African child in their mother tongue rather than impose their language on them. Contrary to the narrative, it was “their patriotic parents” who revolted and resisted this move because they prefer their children to be taught in English language. In Achebe’s opinion “as early as in the 1920’s and 1930’s the Scottish missionaries desired to teach kikuyu children in their mother tongue but their peasant parents started revolting and started breaking away because they prefer English instead of their already accustomed vernacular” (Achebe 2009: 104). Achebe also cited the historic and influential Phelps-Stokes commission report in West Africa in

1922 where the report favoured the use of the native language over English language as the language of instruction in schools. Also, by 1876 in Calabar, some of the traditional African chiefs were not satisfied with the amount of English language taught their children in missionary schools; as a result, they hired private tutors for their children even at their own expense and at a whooping sum (2009:106). Achebe used the above proofs to invalidate the fact that the European imperialists forced their languages down the throats of unwilling natives but on the contrary, it was the natives who went out of their way to embrace these foreign languages and personally enforced them on their children.

They enforced the foreign language on their children because they believe that there is an entire world of knowledge, skills, jobs, power and influence, which is totally closed to their children if they only speak an indigenous language. The relegation of African languages from high status to low status resulted in people thriving to learn the colonizer's language to be able to

copy western lifestyle and also consume Western products. In a letter by a correspondent to the editor of the *Cape Time*, it reads:

The reason people like me choose English is very simple. How many books are there in Xhosa on physics, mathematics or history of art? What does a Sotho speaker do if they (sic) want to improve themselves and gain knowledge? How many encyclopedias are written in Zulu? What books are there on business skills in Pedi? The answer is obvious to anyone. If you do not have the language skills to access the huge store of information available in English, then you are in a prison. The door out of that prison is knowledge of English (Moodley 2000, 110).

Most parents believe that many puzzles of life can be demystified with the knowledge of the colonial languages because it is an important weapon in the search for employment, class and privileges. It holds the key to one's socio-economic advancement and provides opportunities for good jobs and upward social mobility. Commenting on the upward social mobility of the colonial language Kayambazinthu avers that "in nearly all the countries, English, the colonial language of 'high-culture' and the language of the elite was and is still regarded as the most prestigious language used in parliament, legislature, education,

government, science and technology and most academic writings and official correspondences. The colonial language is considered highly because of the historical processes that put it there and uphold it” (Kayambazinthu, 2000, 35).

Most parents see these foreign languages especially English language as a tool of globalization. English and French languages have become languages of world bodies. As such they fiercely argue that these languages dominate international politics and commerce and its privileged role is made strong through world bodies like the United Nations (UN), the World Trade Organization (WTO) and regional groups such as the African Union (AU), the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the European Union. The United Nations Organization through its General Assembly stipulates in the resolution of 1st February 1946 that only English and French have the status of working languages; so, all other interventions and texts will be obligatorily interpreted or translated into these two languages. There is therefore a bilingual situation in the UN a world body of which most African states are member countries. These

motivations influence the choices of these parents who overtime have admired and envied the lifestyles of these western cultures at the expense of their local languages and cultures. These parents believe that these foreign languages especially English language is an internationally recognized language, which doubles up as the gateway to success. Others argue that since most African countries are mixed society with so many languages being spoken, it is only English which can be neutral when it comes to selection of the language of instruction in education. They also insist that their children will never study and achieve their professional potential learning in African language. Magba (2015, 8) reveals this of a respondent in Masvingo province who vehemently proclaimed, “*Unofunga iwe mwana wangu angaita dhokotera kana akadzidziswa Science neChiShona kana ChiNdevere? Hazviiti!*” (Do you think my child will ever be a doctor if he/she learns Science in Shona or Ndebele? It doesn't work!).

African parents contend that English and by extension other foreign languages are universally economical and have been tested and found viable in time past and in the contemporary era. They vilify African languages as inadequate for education and

inapt for the dissemination of scientific information. African languages they say do not have enough vocabulary to express modern scientific concepts hence they rendered themselves unsuitable for use as media of instruction in education. They contend that foreign languages constitute means of communication that provides a wider audience than African languages. They are sceptical also that African languages are often underdeveloped, as far as their modern terminology and concepts is concerned. In Rettova's words "there are too many; and they mostly lack a written tradition, with only a few exceptions" (2016). Since most of the indigenous languages are poorly developed, most African parents sometimes feel embarrassed when a native language is spoken in a very official context. To those who venture to speak African languages in offices, they are always reminded accordingly, "are we now at home? This is to remind the speaker that he/she is in an official setting where it is the English language that should be used.

Aside the efforts of linguistic school of thought, contemporary African philosophers are of the opinion that philosophy can only

live up to its pragmatic role in social reconstruction in Africa if she takes cognizance of the importance of indigenous language. The major importance to be considered is the fact that African languages still remain the best medium of education that guarantees the best result in learning. Irrespective of the mad rush for foreign languages and education, Ademowo (2016, 43) is still in the dark on why “despite being certificated, many African graduates find it difficult to put their education to the service of transforming our environment through the provision of amenities capable of making life easier.” The reason is simple; it is as a result of accumulated neglect in teaching African children the cultural fundamentals in African indigenous languages like African oral tradition, customs, rituals and various skills which constitute what gives identity to people. The cultural heritages in stories, folktales, proverbs, idioms, taboos and poetry teaches valuable ideals such as dignity, hope, sense of duty, hard work, faithfulness, accountability transparency, honor and other humane qualities. If charity begins at home, then the restoration of African indigenous languages should begin from home since indigenous languages help the African child to establish both emotional and

intellectual closeness with their parents in communicating their feelings.

CONCLUSION

The point must be made that unless speakers of African indigenous languages take pride in their own languages and show a definite desire to preserve them, no amount of external engineering can ensure any status and viable roles for them. This is why the parents and other stakeholders must be intentional in this rescue mission by prioritizing African indigenous languages to take the lead role as a medium of instructing the African child and communicating African realities to him/her. Achieving this will require a serious mental decolonization in the minds of Africans especially African parents whose utilitarian quest has blinded their eyes that they could not see the privileges inherent in African languages. Africa as a continent cannot develop without the majority of its people being part of the development. No nation has ever developed with foreign language as its basic language.

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Vilhanova. V. 2018 “Multilingualism in Africa. Challenges and Solutions,” (*Institute of Oriental Studies, Slovak Academy of Sciences Klemensova*), 246-257, 19, 813 64 Bratislava, Slovakia
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