LANGUAGE AND AFRICAN CULTURAL IDENTITY: A REFLECTION

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ABSTRACT

Due to the historical factor of colonialism (coupled with arbitrary partitions and integrations) many countries across the world, have adopted European languages as their official languages. This is particularly so concerning in virtually all Sub-Saharan African countries. Among some African cultural groups, some European languages are not only official or second languages but have also gradually become their first languages both at home and in their places of work. The consequence of the failure of African countries to develop their languages as lingua franca and for scholarly works is that sooner or later those languages would become extinct. The question then arises: if African languages go extinct, would that also mean the loss of their cultural identity, as some believe? This is the issue that this paper sets out to address. The paper argues that though language and culture are closely related, they are separable, and consequently even if African languages should go extinct sometime in the future their cultural identities would still endure. This work is essentially a philosophical reflection based on library and Internet sources. In conclusion, the paper recommends that African people should continue to speak, learn and promote their languages, but not with the hope that they would ever replace European languages for scientific or scholarly works, but mostly for emotional satisfaction or historical purposes.

Keywords: culture, de-colonization, globalisation, identity, language.

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INTRODUCTION

There is no denial of the fact that the whole world has been long integrated into the Western technological, economic, political, and even cultural systems. Thus, Western values, languages, political and economic systems, as well as scientific and technological achievements have permeated into the remotest corners of the world and have become part of the collective experience of humankind. In recent times, the term "globalisation" has become the vogue. And, this is why many African scholars believe that globalisation is merely another name for the continued Western domination of the world (Maduagwu & Onu, 2003).

Africans, as a case in point, confronted with this reality, especially due to the enforced relationship with Europe through colonialism, have reacted and are still reacting in different ways to the situation. Already, during colonial times some African scholars had started to protest against the cultural domination of the West. The Negritude Movement, which long ago was founded and promoted by such notable African scholars as L.S. Senghor, Aime Cesaire, and Leon Damas, was one of the first popular responses. Beginning in the late 1930s in Paris, the Negritude Movement sought to re-establish African identity, which was being threatened by Euro-American cultural influence. Negritude sought to fight not only the false images about Africa and the black people being propagated by the colonialists but also the mental slavery of the African people which was causing them the loss of self-respect. There were, however, some criticisms of the Movement. Soyinka (1977) summed up his criticism of the Negritude Movement with the often-quoted statement: "A tiger does not proclaim his tigritude, he pounces". Be that as it may, it is believed that the Movement did score a measure of success in its mission of restoring the dignity of black people. Even the subsequent cultural re-awakening in Africa owes its inspiration in part to the movement.

Following the attainment of political independence by most African countries in the 1960s, many educated Africans began to vigorously propagate the idea of the de-colonization of African cultures. This demand was particularly so in the areas of literature and philosophy (Chinweizu, et al. 1975; Wiredu 1998). Even today, the

debate on the de-colonization of African cultures still goes on in several dimensions (Ndlov-Gatsheni, 2011; 2015; Belfi & Sandiford, 2021). In most of these calls for decolonization the use of European languages is often at the centre of discussion (Maillu, 2014; Bhatia, 2018). It is claimed in some quarters, for example, that modern African thinkers lack originality since they have to communicate their ideas in foreign languages.

The central concern of this paper is to discuss whether culture is inexorably tied to language or whether any culture could be propagated and preserved in other languages other than the language of the original cultural group. The paper argues in favour of the latter proposition. Before delving into this critical discussion, it is necessary to say a word or two about the concepts of language and culture.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

Language*:*

Scholars have postulated that all languages share a common origin and are therefore descendants of a single language, known as "proto-language," spoken at a certain time in the past (Okwudishu, 2018). Language may refer either to the specifically human capacity for acquiring and using complex systems of communication or to a specific instance of such a system of complex communication. In other words, language could be understood as a generic term or as referring to particular languages, such as English, French, Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba, Zulu, Xhosa Shona, and Swahili, among others. The scientific study of language in any of its senses is called linguistics. The particular languages mentioned here constitute natural languages. But other languages are based on visual rather than audio stimuli; for example, sign languages.

The human language faculty is believed to be fundamentally different from and of much higher complexity than those of other species. Research shows that all social animals communicate with each other, from bees and ants to whales and apes, but only humans have developed a language that is more than a set of signals (HistoryWorld, n.d.). Human language is highly complex in that it is based on a set of

rules relating symbols to their meanings, thereby forming an infinite number of possible utterances from a finite number of elements.

Culture*:*

The usual common definition of culture is that it is the way of life of a people. This definition is only one among hundreds of such definitions. As far back as 1952, Krober and Kluckhohn were said to have compiled 700 definitions of culture (Singer 1968; Ekeh 1989). On their own, they summarized the various definitions thus:

> Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behaviour acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinguished achievements of human groups, including their embodiment in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e. historically derived and *selected ideas and especially their attached values*; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other as conditioning elements of further action (quoted in Singer 1968, p. 528, emphasis added).

Singer (1968) states that this definition has led to two rival anthropological theories of culture – the theory of "culture patterns", best represented by Kroeber, and the theory of "social structure" best represented by Radcliffe-Brown. However, Singer sees the two schools as both parallel and complementary. Each provides a separate frame of theory for understanding the entire culture of a people – law, politics, economy, technology, kinship, social organizations, art, literature, language, religion, philosophy, science, and so on (Singer 1968: 532). For Ekeh (1989), the apparent controversy among rival schools of anthropology on the correct definition of culture is unnecessary. According to him, the distinction between *culture* and *social structure* is irrelevant (Ekeh, 1989, p.1). Although sociologists study the social structures of society while anthropologists study its culture "both social structure and culture refer to the same elements of society: its institutions, values, norms, ideas, ethos, and science and

technology … and the attitudes and behaviours of its individuals" (Ekeh 1989, pp. 1-2).

An interesting long list of beliefs and practices said to constitute the Ghanaian indigenous culture has been provided by the well-known Ghanaian philosopher, Kwasi Wiredu (1980). Some of the items in that list that Wiredu has highlighted the need to be mentioned here because such beliefs are common in other African countries. These include:

> reverence to ancestors and other departed relatives who are believed to be able to affect the living; elaborate rituals of mourning, the belief in the existence and influence of lesser gods as agents of the one Supreme God; and witchcraft and a variety of spirits; fetishes and powers, both good and evil; the notion that human beings are born into the world with an unalterable destiny bestowed in advance by God, the institution of polygamy and high esteem for large families; the influence of myths, totemism, and taboos in thought and action, etc. (Wiredu 1980, pp. 7-10).

From the foregoing, it could be seen that culture is indeed all-embracing. It is not just music and dancing as is often portrayed in Africa during festivals or for the entertainment of tourists. In summary, culture is better understood as a common patrimony of a people, generally accepted beliefs and practices, and their values and worldviews. The culture of a people is transmitted all through the ages through language and arts, literature, monuments, and several other means.

ORIGIN AND EVOLUTION OF LANGUAGES

In a generic sense, scholars are yet to establish when precisely human language evolved. On the other hand, the origin of individual languages has been the subject of intensive study over the past two centuries (HistoryWorld, n.d.). It is claimed that some Indo-European languages spoken today have descended from the language tribe of

nomads roaming the plains of eastern Europe around modern Ukraine, about 3000 BC (HistoryWorld, n.d.). It is estimated that there are today between 5000 and 7000 languages that are spoken by human beings across the world (Okwudishu, 2018, p. 15). (See Table 1 below for the distribution of languages across the Continents).

Table 1: Distribution of Languages by Continent

S/N	CONTINENT	ESTIMATED NUMBER OF LANGUAGES	PERCENTAGE
1.	AFRICA	2,143	30
2.	AMERICAS	1,060	15
3.	ASIA	2,300	32
4.	EUROPE	239	4
5.	PACIFIC	1,306	19
TOTAL		7,097	100.0

Source: Simons and Fennig, 2018 (as reproduced by Okwudishu, 2018, p. 15)

Language is thought to have originated when the early human species first started cooperating to accomplish specific tasks. Gradually they were able to understand the intentions of one another. This development is thought to have coincided with an increase in brain volume. Human beings acquire language through social interaction in early childhood, and children generally speak fairly fluently when they are around three years old. The use of language has become deeply entrenched in human culture and, apart from being used to communicate and share information, it also has social and cultural uses, such as signifying group identity and social entertainment.

Languages evolve and diversify over time, and the history of their evolution can be reconstructed by comparing modern languages to determine which traits their ancestral languages must have had for the later stages to have occurred. A group of languages that descend from a common ancestor is known as a language family. (See Table 2 below).

Table 2: Six of the Major Language Families of the World

S/N	Language Family	No. of Living Languages	% of Global Living Languages	Number of Speakers	% of the Global Population	Location of Language Speakers
1.	Afro-Asiatic	366	5.16%	496.551,004	7.3	Africa & Asia
2.	Austronesia	1,224	17.2%	324,208,082	4.9%	Asia & Oceania
3.	Indo-European	444	6.2	3,089,785 971	46%	Asia; Europe
4.	Niger-Congo	1,527	21.5%	511,419,801	7.5%	Africa
5.	Sino-Tibetan	453	6.3%	1,370,523,175	7.3%	Asia
6.	Trans-New Guinea	480	6.7%	3,555,525	0.05%	

Source: Ethnologue SIL International, 2018 (as reproduced by Okwudishu, 2018, p. 8).

LANGUAGE AND THE CALL FOR DECOLONISATION OF AFRICAN CULTURE

In his Opening Address to the Colloquium of the Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC) held in Lagos in 1977 (45 years ago), the Nigerian Head of State at that time, General Olusegun Obasanjo, lamented:

> For most people who assert the Africanness (sic) of themselves or things, there is a standing tragedy. The psycho-physiology of knowledge would confirm a built-in handicap for any human group who cannot work in

> their indigenous language form. The standing tragedy of all Blacks and Africans wherever they may be is that their tongues have been pulled out and they must speak in strange tongues (Obasanjo 1980, p.103).

It is particularly in the fields of literature and philosophy that the demand for de-colonization or de-Europeanization of African culture has been widely and consistently maintained. Starting from the Negritude era, many a critic of African literature (sometimes even by Europeans) have lamented the dominance of European influence on the works of African writers – the novels, dramas, and poetry of black African authors (Killam 1975; Chnweizu et. al. 1975). There are many aspects of Europeanism in African literature that the critics have identified. In general, critics accuse many African writers of being merely blind imitators of their erstwhile colonial masters by writing in European languages; directing their writing to European audiences; borrowing motifs and cultural elements from foreign lands, among others (Chinweizu et al. 1975).

By far, the most challenging dilemma facing African writers concerns the language of their literary works (Bhatia, 2018; Mailu, 2020). Even when African writers can avoid borrowing motifs from alien cultures and are also able to direct their works to an African reading audience, how practicable, to say nothing of profitable, would it be for African writers to write in African indigenous languages? Indeed, the issue of the language of communication has remained a serious dilemma for African scholars not only in the field of literature but also in all other fields of study and engagements.

Thus, the main issue being addressed in this contribution is to what extent the use of foreign languages affects African cultural identity, especially as expressed in their thoughts and ideas. One of the criteria for the decolonization of African literature, for example, according to some African scholars, is that African writers should write in their mother tongues. One could be tempted to dismiss the African advocates of this approach of decolonization of African literature with a wave of the hand, as not being serious, since, in any case, they are

making the demand in foreign languages, not in their mother tongues. If they were really serious in their demand, they should have started by making their criticism in their indigenous African languages.

In any case, the issue of the use of European languages by Africans is, at least psychologically, very serious and therefore should be discussed. The question is: given the African historical and present-day realities (colonialism, with its forced integration of several ethnic groups into the various countries of Africa; the imposition and later adoption of European languages as media of communication and education), is it possible or even necessary, to insist on reverting to African languages as a condition for safeguarding African cultural identity? Obasanjo (1977) on the same occasion earlier referred to believed that it is a tragedy that Africans have to be writing and speaking in foreign languages. Thus, he charged African scholars: Give attention to the question of the medium in which their thought process is encapsulated. Have we lost our tongues forever? Must we think and work in the languages of Europe forever? (Obasanjo 1980, p. 105).

Regarding philosophy, it should be noted that African philosophy, naturally, also derives from African culture. About twenty years after Obasanjo's lamentation, Kwasi Wiredu, the well-known Ghanaian philosopher, joined the fray in demanding the decolonization of African philosophy (Wiredu 1998). Naturally, he had to grapple with the consequences of the use of European languages by African philosophers. According to him if one learns philosophy in a given language, that would be the language in which one would naturally philosophize, "not just during the learning period but also, all things being equal, for life" (Wiredu 1998). Wiredu goes on to argue that language is not conceptually neutral and that syntax and vocabulary are apt to suggest definite modes of conceptualization. Consequently, according to him, the problem is that the African who has learned philosophy in English, for example, would most likely become conceptually westernized to a large extent not by choice but by the force of historical circumstances and, therefore, he might have become de-Africanized. Wiredu goes on to opine that:

> It does not matter if the philosophy [the African student] learned was African philosophy. If that philosophy was academically formulated in English and articulated therein, the message was already substantially westernized, unless there was a conscious effort toward cross-cultural filtration. Of course, in colonial times such concerns were not the order of the day, to say the least, nor have they, even now in post-colonial times, acquired that status (Wiredu, 1998).

Wiredu has suggested various ways of decolonizing African philosophy, including a comparative approach by which he means that African philosophers should always "bring their African conceptual resources to bear on their treatments of issues" (Wiredu 1998). Furthermore, "whether it be in logic, or epistemology, or ethics, or metaphysics, or whatever, they must introduce African inputs wherever feasible." Again, "exorcising of the colonial mentality in African philosophy is going to involve conceptually critical studies of African traditional philosophies" (Wiredu 1998).

So far, it could be said that there is no problem with this approach to decolonizing African philosophy being suggested by Wiredu, so long as it entails a comparative approach or the attempt to bring the African perspective, where possible, to bear on the issue of discourse. The problem arises with the role that language is supposed to play in the decolonization enterprise. According to Wiredu, "decolonization is a highly conceptual process" and for that reason:

> there will have to be intensive studies of those elements of culture that play significant roles in the constitution of meanings in the various African worldviews. Of these, language stands pre-eminent. One cannot hope to disentangle the conceptual impositions that have historically been made upon African thought formations without a close understanding of the indigenous languages concerned. … [This] stipulates that emphasis should be given to detailed, in-depth, studies of the

> traditional philosophies of specific African peoples *by researchers who know the languages involved well* (Wiredu 1998; emphasis added).

With this prescription, Wiredu goes on to demonstrate how an African indigenous language could be used in assessing the claims made of African philosophy. He used his *Akan* language to analyse one major claim made by Tempels in his *Bantu Philosophy.* Temple claimed that in Western philosophy, the concept of "being" is static while in African philosophy "being" is dynamic. Thus, for Africans, "Being is force and force is being". To ascertain the validity of such a claim, Wiredu sought to translate the concept of "being" into the *Akan* language and discovered that "there is no such thing as the existential verb 'to be' in that language. According to him, the late Alexis Kagame, a Bantu philosopher, and scientific linguist, had also argued that the existential verb "to be" does not occur in the *Bantu* group of languages. The implication of the linguistic analysis of the concept of being, at least in the context of the two African languages, is that

> whatever it was that Tempels noticed about Bantu thought was radically mis-stated by the use of an inapplicable Western category of thought, namely, the concept of being as existentially construed. It is a concept that was deeply ingrained in Tempel's manner of thinking, and he very well may have thought it universal to all human thinking (Wiredu, 1998).

Thus, according to Wiredu (1998), Tempels' claim about African thought in his *Bantu Philosophy* is misleading and a clear case of "conceptual superimpositions" and "any Africans who go about disseminating Tempels' claim without confronting the conceptual issue are simply advertising their colonial mentality for all who have eyes to see" (Wiredu, 1998). It should be noted that before Wiredu another African philosopher had criticised or even dismissed Tempels' claims about Bantu philosophy as a misrepresentation of African philosophy, but not necessarily from the language point of view (Okere, 1983).

Wiredu's proposition raises a critical question about the place of language in African thought. Is it practicable or even necessary, in the present-day circumstances, to demand that a researcher into any particular philosophy (or history or sociology or politics or literature or science or whatever, for that matter) of any African cultural group must *know their languages* to be able to correctly re-present the philosophy (or any other subject) of such cultural groups? Put differently, the question is whether African scholars must speak or write in their languages (or the languages of any other cultural groups) as a condition for correctly communicating or disseminating any aspects of their culture. Or, again, is language inseparable from culture?

These questions raise some issues usually addressed in the philosophy of language including the *origin, nature, and purpose of language*; *language and thought*; and *the problem of translation*. To these should also be added the present-day concern about the *consequences of globalization for languages*. This is not the place to go into the philosophical discourse of these issues. However, because of its currency and especially because of its implications for languages, particularly African languages, it will be pertinent to address, no matter how briefly, the problem of globalization as it concerns languages.

LANGUAGE AND GLOBALIZATION

Today, more than ever before, the world is facing a situation in which several thousands of languages would sooner or later become extinct. On the consequences of globalization for languages, the views of the contributors to the question, "What Will Globalization Do to Languages" in a Freakonomics Quorum (Dubner, 2008) is worth noting. One of the contributors, Henry Hitchings (as reported in Dubner, 2008), has graphically painted the future of world languages in light of the onslaught of globalization. Of the 7000 different natural languages currently being spoken in the world, 11 of them account for the speech of more than half the world's population. These are English, Mandarin Chinese, Spanish, Hindi, French, Bengali, Portuguese, Russian, German, Japanese, and Arabic. Of all these, English is rapidly becoming the most important world language, not only in universities but also in

the areas of computing, diplomacy, medicine, shipping, and entertainment. At the time of the discourse (2008) Hitchings claims that there were about 2 billion people actively learning English across the world. Today, however, it is reported that there are about 1.5 billion people worldwide who speak English either natively or as a second language (Statistica Research Department, 2022). This is a little more than the 1.1 billion Mandarin Chinese speakers at the time of the survey. Hindi (with 602 million) and Spanish (548 million) accounted for the third and fourth positions (Statistica Research Department, 2022). According to Hitchings, given its outreach and domestication around the world, "nobody owns English anymore" (Dubner 2008). This point has also been noted by Obafemi (2008, pp. 27-28), although he was quick to add that "variety or not, it is still English, regardless of whether we employ the capital letter ***E*** or the lower-case ***e*** to mark the standard from the variants" (Obafemi 2008: 8). Concluding his contribution, Hitchings makes this prognosis about the future of world languages:

> Realistically, fifty years from now the world's big languages may be as few as three: Mandarin Chinese, Spanish, and English. Hindi, Bengalis, Urdu, and Punjabi will also be pretty big – but chiefly because of the massive population growth on their home turf. Arabic, too, will have grown – for religious reasons at least as much as economic ones. … At the other end of the scale, many languages will have disappeared, irrecoverably, and with them will have *disappeared their cultures* (Dubner, 2008, emphasis added).

The author of the above statement may appear as a prophet of doom for world languages. However, only a doubting Thomas would insist on seeing before believing it. Here in Nigeria, for example, many languages are moving fast to their graves or at least to the archives, like the Latin language. This is so, not only for the so-called minority languages but also for the big ones. Indeed, how many Africans can discuss, in speech or writing, serious issues in their mother tongues? What is the mother tongue of many African children today? Obafemi

(2008, p. 31) noted the prediction of Alli Mazrui in 1975 that "*by the year 2000 there will probably be more black people in the world who speak English as their native tongue, mainly in Africa where the language would have become indigenous"* For his part, Leopold Sedar Senghor, poet and former President of Senegal, as far back as 1963, had eulogized the French language as the potential universal language (Obafemi 2008, p. 31). Table 3 below gives an idea of the parameters or conditions for the survival of languages, with no.1 indicating that the language would endure for a very long time while no.8 has the least chance of survival.

Table 3: Fishman's Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS) (Language Survival Indicators)

STAGES	DESCRIPTION
1.	The language is used in education, work, mass media, and government at the nationwide level.
2.	The language is used for local and regional mass media and governmental services.
3.	The language is used for local and regional work by both insiders and outsiders
4.	Literacy in the language is transmitted through education
5.	The language is used orally by all generations and is effectively used in written form throughout the community
6.	The language is used orally by all generations and is being learned by children as their first language.
7.	The child-bearing generation knows the language well enough to use it with their elders but is not transmitting it to their children.
8.	The only remaining speakers of the language are members of the gr. Are it and parental generation

Source: Obier, 2010, p.204 (as reproduced by Okwudishu, 2018, p. 39)

Now, what is to be done? Okwudishu (2018) has advocated that no language should be left behind. How that will be done realistically remains a big question. It should be recalled that many African scholars

have grappled with the dilemma of using foreign languages in their work. Some, like Chinua Achebe and Gabriel Okara, resigned to using English, even if that would be in a "re-invented version" or through "subjecting the mother tongue to … process of transformation" into English language (Obafemi 2008, p. 31). Others would prefer that African countries adopt a continental language, Swahili, as lingua franca, as once advocated by Wole Soyinka, or in their indigenous African languages, as advocated by Ngugi wa Thiong'O. Ngugi tried to put his proposition into practice and did write several works in his native Kikuyu language of Kenya, but such works were little known until they were translated into English (Obafemi 2008, p. 31). It took Ngugi, now based in the United States, two decades to write another major novel still in Kikuyu, whose English translation by himself with the title *Wizard of the Crow* was published by Random House in 2006. As for adopting an African language as a lingua franca for African countries, that has remained a mirage, as no one since the 1977 FESTAC in Nigeria seems to be interested in the proposition.

For the rest of this paper, Nigeria would be used mainly as the reference point. It is estimated that the country has over 400 languages. In the case of adopting or promoting any or some of the Nigerian languages as the national language(s), the policy has largely remained on paper. However, Obafemi (2008, p. 29) has noted the effort being made in several States in Nigeria to promote indigenous languages through the development of scientific registers for them. He commends the effort, saying it is a correct step in the right direction. For Obafemi, the various Nigerian languages should be allowed to freely develop rather than through enforcement of any on the people. He hopes that in the final analysis, "an official, national language may emerge (Obafemi, 2008, p. 29).

This is, of course, a mere dream. Similar to Obafemi's suggestion, Okwudishu (2018), as already noted, has advocated that no language should be left behind. Her position is similar to the position of Obafemi, although in her case, she does not express the hope that any of the languages would eventually emerge as the Nigerian lingua franca.

Some institutions or associations are promoting Nigerian languages. One such is the "Association for Promoting Nigerian Languages and Culture" founded in Imo State University in 1999 by Professor Ichie Ezikeojiaku, Professor Ikechukwu Okonkwo, and others, which publishes biennially the *Journal of Nigerian Languages and Culture*. The irony is that the language of business of this association is English and none of the contributions in the issues of the journal available to this writer are in any of the Nigerian languages; all are in English!

There is no intention to belittle the efforts at promoting Nigerian or other African indigenous languages here. But it is important to understand the ultimate objective and also what is possible in that enterprise, and more importantly, the relationship between language and culture. First of all, it is submitted here that it is almost impossible and even unnecessary to hope that any of the African indigenous languages would ever be so developed to the level that they could be used as languages of instruction beyond primary schools (if at all) but also to be used for secondary schools and universities.

It would be recalled that during the Babangida regime, the Education Minister, Babs Fafunwa, one of the foremost educationists in Nigeria, campaigned vigorously for the use of the mother tongue for the education of children at least at the primary school level. In the wake of that campaign, the Babangida government approved as many as 27 indigenous languages to be used in primary schools. These were: Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba, Edo, Igala, Efik, Tiv, Ibibio, Igbira, Ishekiri, Nupe, Berom, Idoma, Gwari, Zuru, Angash, Kalabari, Kanuri, Ijaws, Anang, Ikwere, Urhobo, Isan, Ukware, Badda, Ekiti, and Fulani (*The Guardian*, 1991). However, it was reported that, at that time, orthography had only been developed for nine of those languages. In the end, nothing seems to have come out of that initiative. Nigeria had also attempted the policy of encouraging Nigerian children in primary and secondary schools to learn one of the so-called three major Nigerian languages other than their mother tongue. That also has not worked.

The realistic proposition here is that the most one could achieve or hope for is to keep as many of the African languages alive for as long

as possible by ensuring that African children of today and many generations to come can speak if not write in their languages. That way, they could maintain a sense of belonging to their roots. One sure way of preserving the cultural roots of African peoples is by naming their children in their languages.

But beyond such emotional or psychological fulfillment, one cannot see any other tangible purpose for investing so much in the promotion of African languages. The second proposition is that although the language is the main vehicle for the preservation or propagation of culture, it is separable from culture. In other words, it is argued that any language could be used to preserve or propagate any culture. Karl Popper (1972) suggested that language is fundamentally only a tool, very much like the carpenter's tool, invented by human beings for the solution of their existential problems. Therefore, the identities of African cultures or African values or ideas would still be maintained even if they are being communicated in foreign languages. This point is indirectly supported by one recent analyst of the Nigerian home videos, with particular reference to Igbo culture when, even though most of the videos he selected were in the English language, he still opines that those videos constitute "an embodiment of the language, culture, and justice system" of the Igbo people (Amadi, 2009, p. 111).

Therefore, while it is possible that sometime in the distant future, many world languages, including African languages, would disappear or be confined only to the archives, it does not necessarily follow that those African cultures would also disappear with them. If educated Africans continue to articulate various aspects of their cultures in literature, history, sociology, and philosophy, for example, those cultures will continue to live and be recognized as distinct, even when they are being espoused in European or other languages. There is also a school of thought, championed by the likes of Karl Popper that individual languages are translatable into other languages. This is what Popper means by "meta language" (Popper, 1972). There is also the understanding of language as a universal means of communication. The implication is that the present-day or future African scholars, even

when they do not know their languages well, would still be able to research their culture by reading the ideas of their people, written in foreign languages, especially by their people in whatever field of study (anthropology, sociology, history, literature, philosophy, etc.) and in that way continue to preserve the various cultural identities of their African people.

It is apposite here to recall the scientific findings that all languages of the world might have descended from a common source known as proto-language. The same also applies to language families. Consider the case of many of the Nigerian indigenous languages. According to some studies, linguistic evidence would suggest that the speakers of the Benue-Congo (a branch of Niger-Congo) languages migrated into Nigeria from an earlier homeland upstream of the Niger to the North-West of Nigeria, settled and linguistically predominated over the speakers of the proto-languages of the Borgu, the Chamba, the Mumuye, the Waja, and Lunguda. It is further claimed that the Benue-Congo languages are the proto-languages of most of the present-day Nigerian languages from the Middle Belt down to Southern Nigeria. Some scholars also include Fulfulde in this group (Williamson, 1987). On the other hand, there are also Nilo-Saharan and Afroasiatic language families. The NiloNo-Saharan languages are said to occupy much of Central and East Africa; Kanuri in Borno State and Zarma in Sokoto State are said to represent different branches of the family. The Afroasiatic family is said to occupy most of North Africa and part of East Africa. It has Arabic and Chadic branches and Hausa is said to be the largest member of the Chadic branch in West Africa. In light of the linguistic findings on the origin of many of the Nigerian languages, one wonders why all the conflicts among Nigerians are based on ethnic differences, which are differences in languages.

CONCLUSION

This paper has critically examined the issue of the relationship between language and culture in Africa, although using Nigeria as a reference point in several instances. It is argued that though the language is closely related to culture the former is not inexorably tied

to the latter. Both are separable. It is acknowledged that due to historical circumstances (particularly colonialism), modern educated Africans must of necessity use European languages for their intellectual works. Despite this, the paper disagrees with the proposition that certain world cultures would disappear with the disappearance of their associated languages. Rather, the paper agrees with the school of thought that believes that language is basically like a tool invented by human beings for the solution of their existential problems. In light of the present predicaments facing African languages, namely, that some years in the future, these languages would go extinct, the question arises as to what is the ultimate goal of the development and preservation of the African languages.

The position of the paper is that although efforts should be made to continue to develop and preserve the African languages, the realistic goal would be because of their psychological or historical values and not necessarily because they would in future replace the borrowed foreign languages, especially for academic, scientific or literary purposes. It is therefore not necessary for Africans to continue to bemoan the historical circumstances that have necessitated their adoption of foreign languages for their communication. The discussion on the possibility of the eventual extinction of several world languages, as one of the consequences of globalization, provides food for thought for those African scholars who still lament their inability to work in their mother tongues. Finally, it is the opinion of the writer that it does not matter in which language an African culture is being propagated. The identity of that culture would still be recognized. For example, many African communities have unique ways of performing traditional marriages. Those unique traditional ceremonies would not lose their identities even if they are performed in foreign languages. The demand that Africans must write in African languages whether in literature or philosophy or any other field, as a condition for safeguarding African cultural identity is not only unrealistic but also untenable.

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