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#### **RECONCILING THE TWO WEST AFRICAS: MANAGING ETHNIC AND LINGUAL DIVERSITY FOR REGIONAL INTEGRATION**

**Summary:**

*In international politics, language is core in inter-state trust and relationship, and the West African region (or sub-region), which is multi-ethnic, culturally plural and bi- or multilingual in imported languages, may never evolve an integrated region if the diversity is not converted from source of disconnections to source of connections. At best, West Africans have regarded themselves as pre-colonial kinsmen but post-colonial strangers as a result of the factor of language barriers created in the years of colonial rule. The Yoruba, Ewe, Ashante, Mende, Temne and many more had similarities of languages and cultures and led a regular life of communal conflict and cooperation until the arrival of the French, English, Portuguese and Germans, who established sharp misunderstandings and divisions along the lines of European lingua franca. From a participation-observation experience and perspective, and having consulted literature and government records on futile integration efforts, the study, adopting a functionalist model for analysis, submits that the differences have led to alienation among West Africans since independence, and ECOWAS, despite its spirited commitment to regional integration by the protocol on free movement across the borders, has faced brick-walls from human and social forces engendered by language barriers. This paper looks beyond the artificial linguistic barriers inherent in the bilingual or multilingual character of West Africa, by exploring the richness of the linguistic diversity to advance the cause of regional integration. The paper strongly advocates that local languages spoken across most of the West African states such as Hausa, Mandingo, Peul and Yoruba be taught in primary and secondary schools, while ECOWAS leaders should agree on making English, French and Portuguese compulsory in all secondary schools and higher institutions in their respective countries. These will help demystify and dismantle the artificial linguistic barriers created by the accident of colonialism and make the formal and informal instruments, including ECOWAS towards integration, more functional.*

**Key-words:**

*Bilingualism, Multilingualism, Integration, West Africa, ECOWAS*

## Introduction

West Africa is a vast territory with about 1,500 spoken native languages of the 2,500 total number of local languages spoken in Africa, which implies that the sub-continent alone constitutes seventy-five per cent of the entire spoken languages of the continent<sup>1</sup>. A region made up of 15 countries politically and economically grouped into the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), West Africa has evolved some of the most popularly spoken languages on the continent; Hausa, Yoruba, Peul and Mandingo being four of the most commonly spoken across the borders. Other widely spoken languages include Ewe, Creole, Berber, Igbo and Ashanti. By reason of history, the peoples of West Africa were closely knit socio-culturally, economically and politically and language experts have identified language family groups that underline the significant pre-colonial ethnic and cultural ties between the peoples<sup>2</sup>, a thesis scholars have also validated by research findings that show the presence of same ethnic group in long stretches of land or territory that cut across several present-day or post-colonial territorial demarcations<sup>3</sup>.

Research has shown that three of the four major ethnic/language groupings are present in West Africa<sup>4</sup>. These include Afroasiatic (or Hamito-Semitic), Niger-Congo and Nilo-Saharan branches. The Berber and Chadic languages spoken around the Lake Chad area comprising Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon and Niger, as well as the Tuareg of Burkina Faso and Mali constitute the Afroasiatic language branch. The Atlantic or Niger-Congo languages, which include Wolof, Fula and Serer are spoken in large parts of Guinea Bissau, Guinea, Senegal and The Gambia; while the Kwa, Mende and Gur language groups, which stretch from as far as Liberia to Ghana, Togo and Southwest Nigeria, complete the Niger-Congo family in West Africa. The Nilo-Saharan language group is not as large, but it has some semblance with the Afro-asiatic language family.

The indigenous languages are not the problem, *per se*, of this study, but the imported languages from Europe, which have redefined the social, cultural, political and historical contexts of the West African sub-continent. From the brief outline above, it is clear that the language factor was more of a unifying element in West Africa before the advent of English, French and Portuguese in West Africa. It is pertinent to note that the over one thousand languages no

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<sup>1</sup> LAAF, The West African Languages, <<http://www.laaf.me/en/west-africa/the-west-african-languages.php>> (24.08.2015).

<sup>2</sup> J. Middleton, *Black Africa: Its Peoples and their Cultures Today*, London 1970.

<sup>3</sup> B. Akinbobola, *Regional Integration in West Africa: Challenge for Emergent States*, Lagos 2007.

<sup>4</sup> LAFF, *op. cit.*

longer count in the contemporary scheme of things as the global languages have since become the “currency of exchange” in Africa and international politics, and are, as such, the factor for social integration or disintegration.

Ironically, the three foreign languages, which have become the region’s *lingua franca*, should have been a unifying factor as the 1,500 ethnic groups would no longer be divided along 1,500 ethnic or linguistic lines. However, reverse is the case as the imported languages, particularly English and French have had more divisive influences on the peoples and countries of the region. The languages have come with much deeper inbuilt elements, such as ideology, philosophy and cosmology of the patrons, which have created sharply different identities among the recipients of the languages in West Africa. This is same for the entirety of the continent.

In post-colonial West Africa, the *Francophones* and *Anglophones* are two different Africans, whose allegiance is first and foremost to their metropolitan lords whose French and English have created a bond within Francophone and Anglophone blocs as well as bond between the blocs and their overlords, but disunity between the two West African blocs. This, for historians and political scientists has been the very factor in futile attempts at regional economic and political integration<sup>5</sup> at informal or formal levels, including the ECOWAS mechanism to bring about regional unity. This paper thus constitutes a study on the bilingual and indeed multilingual bottlenecks towards the attainment of integration and how these bottlenecks can be converted to solvents for West Africa.

### **Conceptual and Theoretical Frameworks**

In contemporary global politics, *integration* is a concept that has passed through stages of redefinitions. Ordinarily, integration simply refers to a process of evolving an inclusive society, at any level. The concept is often viewed from a sociological lens, which connotes cultural bond and affinity; and from a political perspective, integration would mean a unification process, or sometimes be simply defined as unity. As a result of developments in Europe and North America, integration is taking the form of economic union and growing political interdependence. It is translating to dismantling of borders and barriers to movement of people, ideas, goods and services. This has informed, among other things, an evolution of the European common market, common currency and integrated immigration laws<sup>6</sup>.

The development around the world, particularly in Europe has informed the redefinition of integration in Africa and West Africa. The ECOWAS and AU, originally formed for economic and political cooperation between states of the

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<sup>5</sup> M. Kwanashie, *Historical Perspective on the Scramble for Africa*, [in:] *New Scramble for Africa*, C.E. Osita, C.A. Anigbo (ed.), Lagos 2010.

<sup>6</sup> J. Lodge, *EC Policymaking: Institutional Dynamics*, [in:] *The European Community and the Challenge of the Future*, J. Lodge (ed.), London 1993.

sub-continent and continent respectively, have adapted the western model of economic and political integration, employing same integrative mechanisms such as visa-less and free movement protocols, common bank, currency and parliament<sup>7</sup>. But that kind of integration has been hampered by entrenched distrust and mutual suspicions between West Africans created by linguistic differences and lack of communication/understanding between them. Language is the key in international politics as it facilitates communication, establishes relationship and strengthens understanding and trust.

In terms of language, the problem of West Africa is multilingualism and bilingualism. Multilingualism refers to the presence of more than two major languages in a social space. Multilingualism in West Africa has created multiple leakages in the integration attempt, both at the formal and informal levels, namely between the social groups or nationals of countries and between governments of the region. It must however be understood that for the purpose of this paper, multilingualism does not refer to the existence of 1,500 native languages spoken in West Africa, but to the influx since the pre-colonial times from the fifteenth century, of foreign languages, such as French, English, and Portuguese.

Bilingualism is the major thrust of this paper. This is because in all of West Africa, there are two main language, cultural, ideological and political blocs-Francophone and Anglophone. Lusophone is less contentious as Portuguese is spoken only in the smaller countries of Cape Verde and Guinea Bissau, and besides, these countries align more with their Francophone counterparts. There are sixteen countries in West Africa, fifteen of which are members of ECOWAS. Five of these countries are English-speaking; nine are French-speaking while the remaining two are Portuguese-speaking states. In number, the strength of ECOWAS are the Francophone states; but in terms of resources, the ECOWAS fulcrum is the Anglophone state of Nigeria<sup>8</sup>. The two Lusophone states are like bystanders, which has made them, probably because of proximity to the Francophone countries, to have more relationship with Francophone West Africa.

Bilingualism for this paper will therefore be in the context of the dominating influence of English and French in the formal and informal life of the region. The contention is and has always been between French and English-speaking countries of West Africa, with France playing a key role in balancing of power in a sub-continent perceived to be dominated by Anglophone Nigeria<sup>9</sup>. The French colonial and post-colonial policy of assimilation is further

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<sup>7</sup> B. Akinbobola, op. cit., pp. 172-200.

<sup>8</sup> S. Folarin, *Discovering Nigeria's Power and Influence in West Africa*, "National Mirror", Lagos, July 2015.

<sup>9</sup> B.A. Akinterinwa, *French Security Arrangements with Francophone Africa: Implications for Nigeria's Relations with its Immediate Neighbours*, [in:] *Nigeria and Its Immediate Neighbours: Constraints and Prospects of Sub-Regional Security in the 1990s*, B.E. Ate, B.A. Akinterinwa (eds.), Lagos 1992.

strengthened to knit the bloc closely together and grow its bond and allegiance to France<sup>10</sup>. It is this context of bilingual forces at play in West Africa that forms the framework for discourse in the paper.

Having examined the contexts of integration and the *lingua franca* issues, it is appropriate to situate the concepts and issues in a theoretical context. The workability of integration processes is obscured by a dysfunctional society, structure and mechanism. If ECOWAS is to work and engender its major objective of regional integration, the language factor has to be considered as central in their discussions. A functional structure will more likely put together a functional mechanism. The functionality of ECOWAS is dependent on the functionality of processes, such as erasing or reducing the language barrier among West Africans.

This is why the functionalist theory becomes a framework for analysis. Indeed, functionalism has been one of the theories that have defined the integration initiative in West Africa. In the works of Asiwaju<sup>11</sup> and Le Vine<sup>12</sup>, a distinction has been made between two sub-interrelated levels of regional integration in West Africa. These are the functionalism and neo-functionalism as well as the political or constitutional type otherwise referred to as Federation, which Adetula<sup>13</sup> however perceives as inadequate in the theoretical positioning of ECOWAS, the regional body to superintend over the integration process.

The school of thought that functionalism may be inadequate to examine the totality of regional integration also holds for all the Less Developed Countries (LDCs), as it is believed that regional integration in the South is conditioned by different socio-economic and political dynamics from that of the developed countries. Flowing from this, Fayomi and Adeola<sup>14</sup> argue therefore that, regional integration in Africa must recognize the processes of economic, political and social integration and also provide for the political weapon for implementing the programmes and policies. In fact, Bulmer<sup>15</sup> even argues for a shift from such supra-nationalism/inter-governmentalism debacle to the intricate connections between the domestic and regional levels, that is, increasing people to people interaction.

One cannot agree more with the position above in a holistic study of regionalism. But when looking at the ethnic or linguistic factor in regionalism or

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<sup>10</sup> B.E. Ate, *The Presence of France in West-Central Africa as Fundamental Problem to Nigeria*, [in:] *Nigeria and Its Immediate Neighbours: Constraints and Prospects of Sub-Regional Security in the 1990s*, B.E. Ate, B.A. Akinterinwa (eds.), Lagos 1992.

<sup>11</sup> A.I. Asiwaju, *Borderlands Research: A Comparative Perspective*, El Paso 1983.

<sup>12</sup> V.T. Le Vine, *Politics in Francophone Africa*, London 2004.

<sup>13</sup> V.A. Adetula, *ECOWAS and the Challenges of Integration in Africa*, [in:] *Milestones in Regional Integration*, U.J. Ogwu, W.O. Alli (eds.), Lagos 2009.

<sup>14</sup> O. Fayomi, G.L. Adeola, *ECOWAS and Sub-Regional Integration in West Africa: An Appraisal*, "Covenant University Journal of Politics and International Affairs", Vol. 3 (1), 2015, pp. 7-13.

<sup>15</sup> S. Bulmer, *Domestic Politics and European Community Policy-Making*, "JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies" Volume 21, Issue 4, June 1983, pp. 349-364.

regional integration, it would be seen that the position would be like digging for gold in a coal mine or using a paracetamol tablet to heal a wound. Rather, functionalism identifies the fundamentals, such as lingual or such deep social infractions, and then goes beyond scratching the surface (like most other studies of regionalism do, when they discuss very serious theoretical issues) and considers issues that appear simple and unserious such as language barriers, to identify the dysfunctionality of the system. For instance, like Aja<sup>16</sup> observes, in modern integration schemes, states do not take their differences for granted any longer for the sake of mutual trust and confidence. In integrating states through institutional mechanism such as parliaments, banks, inter-ministerial committees and the likes, language is core in communication, comprehension and collaboration.

### **The West African Ethnic and Language Profile**

Moving across the West African coastline, a fascinating and eye-opening discovery is that the borders are mere artificial barriers. The ethnicity and local language between two borderline towns between two countries are the same. From Idi Iroko in Nigeria to Igolo-Porto Novo and even Cotonou in Republic of Benin is the similarity of ethnic identity, culture, names and language. Whether the dialects are different is not an issue as even ethnic groups within same territorial sovereignty have different dialects; but the common ethnic group and language is Yoruba in these areas of Nigeria and Benin. In a similar vein, the borderline towns of Benin and Togo at Ave-Condji and Ilacondji respectively are another case of artificial boundaries because the peoples of both towns and beyond are of the Ga ethnic and language group.

From Baguida through Lome metropolis to Aflao and beyond are Ewe-speaking people of Togo and Ghana. Aflao thus becomes another artificial boundary. The Mende group cuts across Liberia, Sierra Leone and parts of Ivory Coast, while as earlier highlighted, several countries in the West African region speak similar languages, albeit with some dialectical differences. The artificial boundaries are the borders created by the Europeans after the Berlin Conference of 1884-5 to demarcate their “spheres of influence” and authority.

Deeper than the borders however were the artificial “nations” that emerged and the severance of close ties between the Yoruba of Benin and Nigeria, Ewe of Togo and Ghana, and Mandingo of The Gambia and Senegal, among other groups. The common denominator is either French or English language, which underlined totality of the way of life of the West African peoples- including social identity, culture, religion and language. Artificial boundaries and nations thus gave way to something much deeper and dividing for over a hundred years. At independence, the Africans had gotten accustomed to these dichotomies and had begun to see themselves as either British or French. In any case, the Yoruba in Nigeria speak English while their kinsmen in Benin speak French

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<sup>16</sup> A.A. Aja, *Selected Themes in International Economic Relations*, Ogui-Enugu 2002.

and the propensity of forgetting their common bond, the native language is high. The Ewe in Ghana became British while the Ewe in Togo were thoroughly Frenchified. These differences gave birth to a new Africa that became more westernized and more antagonistic of itself.

Interestingly, the Europeans who applied this weapon of division were themselves allies of each other. Aside being neighbours, their relationship dated back to the Anglo-Saxon years of hostility and moved to the Middle Age collaborations and 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>c alliance against common European enemies. But back in Africa, nationalism gored them to carve out distinct African empires and the best way to maintain their stranglehold unto the empires was by building sharply contrasting principles and identity that would keep the blocs safe. The policies of association and assimilation were an example, and the language factor became a more critical instrument to permanently keeping the divides apart<sup>17</sup>.

### **ECOWAS Integration Policy**

Established at the instance of Nigeria and Togo in 1975, ECOWAS' main thrust has been economic integration. In the Chapter II, Article 3 of the Revised ECOWAS Treaty, its other objective includes the promotion of regional economic, social and cultural development through improved relations among member-states. Members of the organization are Burkina-Faso, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Benin, Senegal, Ivory Coast, Niger, and Togo, which constitute the French Zone; and Ghana, Guinea, Nigeria, Liberia, The Gambia, Sierra Leone, Cape Verde and Liberia, that are regarded as the non-French-speaking countries.

Gambari<sup>18</sup>, like other scholars have averred that ECOWAS is emblematic of Pan-Africanism, a movement that actually gained momentum in West Africa in the colonial times, ahead of other regions. It is important to state that the French-speaking countries were initially not willing to identify with ECOWAS, but soon began to embrace the idea with the pressure from Eyadema of Togo and Gowon of Nigeria. It took a lot of efforts on the part of Nigeria and Togo to change their disposition. Since its inception, ECOWAS, has been making giant strides in the area of community integrative schemes, such as liberalization of regional trade; liberalization of movement of persons, goods and services; harmonization of monetary and fiscal policies; harmonization of business law; development of transport, communications and energy networks and involve-

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<sup>17</sup> B. Omole, *Nigeria, France and the Francophone States: The Joy and Anguish of a Regional Power*. 225<sup>th</sup> Inaugural Lecture, Ile-Ife 2010.

<sup>18</sup> I.A. Gambari, *Political and Comparative Dimensions of Regional Integration: The Case of ECOWAS*, New Jersey 1991.

ment of private sectors in the regional integration process to enhance the integration of West African states<sup>19</sup>.

The ECOWAS schemes and protocols have taken into consideration relevance to the economic interests of the members and contribution to the ultimate goal of economic union<sup>20</sup>. The ECOWAS Protocol on free movement is considered quite significant to the overall objective of the ECOWAS initiative as such a factor is very critical to integration. The Protocol is cognizant of the cultural, social and emotional ties between families, groups and relations who have found themselves in different sovereign territories since colonial times, and aims at reducing the tight custom and immigration laws around the borders. It is expected that these would not only promote the cultural ties, but also galvanize regional trade and commerce, mutual cooperation and assistance, and ultimately enhance national and international development<sup>21</sup>.

The Protocol has on paper, been impressive as it drives to create Free Trade Area, Customs Union, Common Market, and so forth, which would eventually culminate in full-blown economic union. The Protocol on free movement confers on the Community citizens the right to enter and reside in the territory of any member-state, provided they possess valid travel documents and internationally acceptable health certificate. The Protocol however, also grants member-states the right to refuse admission to any Community citizens who are inadmissible under the member-state's domestic law. For instance, the four supplementary protocols adopted between 1985 and 1990 committed member-states to provide valid travel document to their citizens, grant Community citizens the right of residence for the purpose of seeking and carrying out income-earning employment, ensure appropriate treatment for persons being expelled, not to expel Community citizens *en masse*, and limit the grounds for individual expulsion to reasons of national security or public order, et cetera<sup>22</sup>.

The Protocol in reality is, however, a far cry from the principle. The border security agencies in almost all the West African frontiers have turned the borders to open fields for day-light robbery through extortions from even those

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<sup>19</sup> G. Obiozor, A. Olikoshi, C. Obi, *The Challenge of West African Regional Integration: An Introductory Overview*, [in:] G. Obiozor, A. Olikoshi, C. Obi (eds.), *West African Regional Economic Integration: Nigerian Policy Perspectives For The 1990s*, Lagos 1996; A. Opanike, A.A. Aduloju, L.O. Adenipekun, *ECOWAS Protocol on Free Movement and Trans-border Security in West Africa*, "Covenant University Journal of Politics and International Affairs", Vol. 3(1) 2015, pp. 14-18.

<sup>20</sup> G. Lansana, *Review of Africa and the War on Drugs* by N. Carrier, G. Klantschnig, <<https://sites.tufts.edu/reinventingpeace/2013/01/22/review-of-africa-and-the-war-on-drugs-by-neil-carrier-and-gernot-klantschnig/>> (25.08.2015).

<sup>21</sup> Y. Gowon, *The Economic Community of West African States: A Study in Political and Economic Integration*, PhD Thesis, University of Warwick 1984.

<sup>22</sup> B.E.Ate, B.A. Akinterinwa, *Cross-border Armed Banditry in the Northeast: Issues in National Security and Nigeria's Relations with its Immediate Neighbours*, Lagos 2011; A. Opanike, A.A. Aduloju, L.O. Adenipekun, *op. cit.*



with legitimate documents and those without any travelling documents. The border posts collect tolls and tributes from legitimate travellers, collecting un-receipted fees before entry-stamps are issued. The health officials do not care about using the temperature gadgets to detect and control Ebola and other transmittable regional diseases, but prefer to collect tolls for unavailability of health cards. The security posts officials are unduly harsh and would be more difficult with travellers from another zone- English or French<sup>23</sup>. These practices do not only hinder movement, but also puncture the objective of ECOWAS of friendliness, association and integration.

Again, regional security, peace and trans-border movement is hampered by the collaboration between custom and immigration officials with criminals, smugglers, and illegal immigrants. With specified amount of money and sign language between the officials and the miscreants, trans-border movement is made at will. Again, money laundering, arms and drug deals are common across the borders, while the illegal currencies of certain countries are legal tenders in these areas. For instance, the outlawed Biafran Pound is spent in the borders of Togo-Benin, Togo-Ghana and Ghana-Ivory Coast<sup>24</sup>. Also replete are enormous number of barriers and roadblocks, as well as unnecessary stoppages on international roads in different countries, which frustrate the ECOWAS Protocol. In 2005, it was reported that about 44 Ghanaians were killed in The Gambia by unknown assailants while moving into that part of the region<sup>25</sup>.

It is pertinent to state that while ECOWAS seems to mean well for regional free movement for integration and development, the lawlessness in the uncontrolled borders go unchecked, which makes nonsense of the regional initiative and objective. One critical area is language barrier and the emphasis on Francophone-Anglophone backgrounds at the frontiers, which ECOWAS leaders seem to pay little attention to, but which is a sore point in the futile attempts to integrate West Africa.

### **The Bilingual Infractions**

Adebayo Adedeji once said: “The general view was that setting up a sub-regional cooperation entity in West Africa that cuts across differences in language, culture and the relative size and economic strengths was an idea whose time had come. And this seal was put on the determination to end the centuries

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<sup>23</sup> S. Folarin, *The ECOWAS “Disintegration” Process*, “National Mirror”, Lagos, May 2011, p. 12.

<sup>24</sup> Idem, *Discovering Nigeria’s Power...*; Idem, *Biafran Pound as a Legal Tender in West Africa*, “National Mirror”, Lagos, August 2015.

<sup>25</sup> *Murder of 44 Ghanaians: Gambian President Ordered Killings*, “Ghanaian Times” 9.08.2007, No. 15, 188.

of division and artificial barriers imposed on the people of West Africa from outside”<sup>26</sup>.

The assertion above clearly captures the essence of ECOWAS- ending once and for all, the centuries of artificial barriers and divisions created by the Europeans. Incidentally however, the bilingual issue has remained an albatross for ECOWAS. The language barrier is not only at the non-state or informal level, in which travellers, buyers and sellers, commuters and other entities find it difficult to communicate or develop distrust for one another; but even at the governmental level, ambassadors and government officials feel like strangers in the land of another West African country. It has been argued that even in ECOWAS, relationship between leaders and senior representatives is often characterized by distrust, suspicion and hostility, as leaders speaking the same European language often feel more comfortable with each other<sup>27</sup>. This submission is validated by the formation of a Francophone parallel of the ECOWAS in West Africa.

The language factor is often explained away as the factor for hostility at the borders. From personal experience, crossing Francophone borders for someone from an English-speaking country is often tough. The customs, immigration police and gendarmeries would put up a hostile reception, stop the movement of the traveller, or delay him, subject such a person to unnecessary scrutiny and most times extort more money from him than from a co-French-speaking traveller. Obtaining vehicle document (*lassiez passé*) is determined not by the ECOWAS Protocol, but by the foreign language a traveller can speak. A French-speaking driver who drives a Nigeria-registered vehicle in Grand Popo (Benin) is treated more courteously by the security operatives at the road blocks than an English-speaking driver who drives a Benin-registered vehicle in the same area. A Nigerian who is driving a car to Togo for the first time has to pay 31,000 FCFA for *laissez passé*, while a Beninoise in the same category is billed 10,000 FCFA only<sup>28</sup>. In a similar vein, custom and immigration officers in Nigeria who flag down a vehicle and discovers that the passengers can barely communicate in English but speak French fluently, even if they have all the necessary documents, subject the occupants to undue scrutiny.

The hostility of Beninoise gendarmes towards Nigerians crossing the Seme border in Badagry, in spite of the stature and military might of the latter, is enormous and captured in several research and media literature. The hostility is however nothing compared to what an average Nigerian traveller faces at the Togo-Benin frontiers. This is explicable in the sense that the further the Nigerian moves away from the Nigerian frontiers, the harsher the reception. The less harsh reception at Seme compared to Ilacondji is as a result of the nearness between Nigeria and Benin, who, aside the French and English language prob-

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<sup>26</sup> ECOWAS *Regional Integration Processes and International Cooperation*, “Cooperacion Espanola”, Vol. 4, Madrid, June 2014.

<sup>27</sup> B. Akinbobola, *op. cit.*, pp. 95-101.

<sup>28</sup> S. Folarin, *Discovering Nigeria's Power...*

lems, also share linguistic and cultural ties locally. The Yoruba and bits of French and English both sides can speak as well as the shared cultural and historical heritages reduce the tensions. But this is not the case with Togo, a largely Ewe-speaking group, which though belongs to the same Kwa-speaking language family as the Yoruba of Nigeria, is distant by the lack of shared boundaries and more by the distinction between the English and French ways of life entrenched in both countries. However, the reception to the Nigerian in Togo is yet less harsh compared to what the Nigerian will experience in Ivory Coast, another French-speaking country that has very little or no socio-cultural affinity with Nigeria. Aside being in the same linguistic family, many from the Ewe people of Togo have lived and worked in Nigeria, while so many of them still have families or relatives living and working in the country.

Similarly, the fact that many Nigerians have established social links and businesses in Togo, some with families and wives there, they tend to be less hostile to Togolese people living in Nigeria. An average Nigerian family employs Togolese as domestic and office staff as well as patronizes their artisans because of their professionalism in their services. This kind of social affinity has reduced the hostility toward the Togolese crossing Nigerian borders or living in Nigeria.

It is instructive to note that despite all the troubles, hostilities and long distances encountered by a Ghanaian crossing the borders from Ghana to Togo, and Togo to Benin, the average Ghanaian traveller finds warm reception at the Nigerian borders of Idiroko or Seme. What simply explains this is the language and colonial bond between the two countries. A Beninoise crossing the Togolese border will pay an illegitimate fee of 200 FCFA only, while a Nigerian crossing the same border will be compelled to pay 2,000 FCFA as a first-time crosser (if he has an international passport to show) or 1,000 FCFA as an old-timer<sup>29</sup>. The issue in this case is the colonial and language factor.

### **A Pragmatic Approach to Integration: The Multilingual/Bilingual Academic Curriculum Options**

The central argument of this paper is that the sharp language differences have created artificial but enormous barriers to mutual understanding, trust, confidence, sincerity, cooperation and integration among West Africans. Language is a unifying force; it is also a divisive tool. Global events and indeed configurations of power have been formed along linguistic lines. Natural allies of powerful states are first and foremost those that can understand and communicate in similar language<sup>30</sup>. Hitler attempted to create a Greater Germany

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<sup>29</sup> Idem, *Obstacles to ECOWAS Integration*, "National Mirror", Lagos, February 2014.

<sup>30</sup> K. Rajagopalan, *The Politics of Language and the Concept of Linguistic Identity*, "CAUCE:Revista de Filología y su Didáctica", No. 24, 2001, pp. 17-28; G. Orwell, *Politics and the English Language*,

around all Germanic people, thereby bringing several other states together by force because of the same ethnicity and language. The Second World War erupted in the course of this. Hence, ethnicity (nationalism) and language could be said to have caused the Second World War.

The Europeans understood this and that was why the first thing at colonization, was to change the tongue, mind and identity of the subjects. The attachments to the master would be built around the similar identity shared. West Africa and indeed the rest of Africa have been in these dire straits for a long time. The sense of belonging has been towards Europe- the direct colonial master- and not towards fellow Africans. Of course, the allegiance and subordination go to the *ex-metropoles* as well. As such, Africa would remain in a perpetual position of subjugation as the social and political divisions would not allow for joint or collective will to ward off neo-colonialism.

The ECOWAS leaders would require more decisive measures channeled at the social climate rather than always seeking political solutions to West Africa's disintegration or lack of integration. The Protocol on free movement is a good one because it promotes people to people interaction, which is more effective for integration. But the organization has to raise a committee that will monitor the land and sea borders as well as the airports to ensure that the Protocol terms and commitments are adhered to by security personnel of each country. There should also be dedicated military patrol team by each country to see to it that best practices stipulated by the ECOWAS Protocol are observed. The free and legitimate movement of persons, goods and services will enhance more of informal international collaboration that would lead to unity, rather than the placid and uncertain government to government interactions that have characterized ECOWAS over time.

A more effective way to facilitate de-colonization of West Africa and freeing up of the minds of the peoples to relate more with one another, which would enhance integration, is the agreement among ECOWAS leaders to implement a school curriculum in which four major indigenous languages in West Africa will be taught from primary to secondary schools. The four most spoken languages are considered to be Hausa, Mandingo, Yoruba and Peul. ECOWAS can decide better what the languages should be. However, pupils in West African schools should be compelled to pick at least two of the languages. Countries where the languages are common should make it mandatory for the students not to pick their indigenous language as one of the compulsory African languages to undertake. For instance, Hausa and Yoruba, which are widely spoken in Nigeria, should not be an option for the Southwestern schools and Northern schools in Nigeria respectively. Hausa is spoken in Northern Togo, Benin and Ghana, and beyond. The language will not be an option there. This

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<[http://www.npr.org/blogs/ombudsman/Politics\\_and\\_the\\_English\\_Language-1.pdf](http://www.npr.org/blogs/ombudsman/Politics_and_the_English_Language-1.pdf)> (26.08.2015).

should be institutionalized so much that Hausa or Mandingo will become one of the official languages in ECOWAS assemblies and summits.

Also, all governments should agree that West African universities make French and English compulsory at the undergraduate level for all students from the first to the final year. Alternatively, French should be made compulsory in Anglophone countries and English made compulsory for students in Francophone countries at the undergraduate level. Portuguese or Latin can be made an option. This will make every West African automatically bilingual in foreign languages and make communication and interaction with fellow West Africans easier. Anyone would have the ability and ease of switching to any language and the “borders” would have either been reduced or dismantled. In this way, the allegiance will be towards a fellow West African, and not to a foreigner whose interest is for the self and not to any former subject. By this, ECOWAS would find it easier to implement its integration agenda in the region.

### **Conclusion**

The multilingual approach as far as local African languages is concerned and bilingualism in terms of western languages will be a mileage towards the reduction of the artificial borders in West Africa. The sub-continent has for too long been hijacked by the former colonial masters, whose colonial strategy of divide and rule, perpetuated by language barriers, has made regional cooperation and integration a herculean task.

ECOWAS leaders have the responsibility to be true to itself and set the region free from the stranglehold of neo-colonialism. It is understandable that it will be difficult to be assertive when some of these countries depend on the former colonial masters for virtually everything. But, it must be thought-out and realized too, that when there is economic and political synergy among West African states and peoples, as one indivisible group, they would pull down adversities and overcome challenges and grow into a formidable economic force.

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