
English and Spanish Languages Learning in Africa

Aria John Saleh

ABSTRACT

This review focuses on the English language and Spanish language learning in Africa. It also attempts to find out how many countries speak English and Spanish languages according to regions, Africa, Asia, Europe, Central America, North America, South America and other parts of the world. This study reveals that English and Spanish number among the language of the world and thousands of English words exist, converted into Spanish with their English meaning sustained. It also reveals that 24 of the 54 countries in African continent speak English and Equatorial Guinea as the only Spanish speaking country in the African continent. Based on the fact that majority of the countries of the world including United States of America speak Spanish language, this study recommends the inclusion of the Spanish language in the curriculum of both the secondary and tertiary levels of education as well as immersion programs for the respective levels of education in Africa. The training and retraining of teachers by the Spanish government in collaboration with UNESCO is also recommended.

Keywords: *English language, language learning, Spanish language, teaching*

INTRODUCTION

Humans possess a truly symbolic means of communication and no human society, however simple its material culture, lacks the basic human heritage of a well-developed language (Greenberg, 1971). According to Sesan (2010), the sole machinery used by man to manipulate and control his bio-cultural sphere and linguistic domains at micro and macro levels is language. Hence, according to Greenberg (1971), language is unique to man. Language functions as an instrument that brings about natural discussion of ideas to be able to affect comprehension (Faniran, 2016). It is the mechanism that enhances connection. Connections are becoming inevitable among people, nations and organizations of the world which warrants a huge need for knowing more than one foreign or international language (Ademola, 2009). But Aboyeji (2010) argues that:

Many African languages are being exterminated by their people themselves as they embrace foreign languages. It has to be recognized that we cannot express all our thoughts in another

Aria John Saleh is a Lecturer in the Department of English, Nasarawa State College of Education, P. M. B. 05, Akwanga, Nasarawa State, Nigeria. E-mail: salehwunka@gmail.com.



language. It is impossible because one cannot live in one's culture and express oneself perfectly in the language of another culture.

The definitions of language are wrought with some ideological and semantic differences because it is impossible to find a definition against which we could not raise at least one objection (Elugbe, 1991). However, languages and dialects are natural gifts to humanity irrespective of the nation, region, race or colour (Saleh and Akoshi, 2018). African countries are capable of effectively displacing foreign languages being used currently at various levels of education in Africa. There is joy and ecstasy in speaking one's dialect or language because the rules are not learnt (Saleh and Akoshi, 2018). Language's roles relate to the embodiment of culture leading to the depth of a person's reflection beyond the practical necessities of life to such aspects of searching for knowledge, education and collaboration among multi-ethnic societies (Faniran, 2016). The roles of language include a substantial amount of people's historical experience, their thought patterns, and their world view (Saleh, 2019a).

From the point of view of the Linguistic forecasters, in the 21st century, English and Spanish will number amongst the dominant languages of the world (Mosashvili, 2019). Thousands of English words exist, converted into Spanish with their English meaning (sustained) (Cobarrubias, Green and Quiroz, 1996). Both languages have vast numbers of native speakers, falling within the top five languages of the world (Mosashvili, 2019). They are both official languages of the United Nations and many other international organizations (Pountain, 1999). According to Rizzo and Villfane (1975), there are some errors in English language caused by Spanish interference. Based on the foregoing, this study aims at reviewing the English and Spanish Languages Learning in Africa.

English Speaking Africans

English belongs with German and certain other languages because of the features it has in common with them and that enable us to distinguish a West Germanic group as contrasted with the Scandinavian languages (North Germanic) and Gothic (East Germanic) (Baugh and Cable, 2002). English is the most spoken language in the world and the official language of the sky – all pilots have to speak and identify themselves in English (Klappenbach, 2019). The situation is a reflection of what is obtainable in English speaking African countries (Saleh and Akoshi 2018).

Nevertheless, African languages are among the 5687 official languages in the world (Ahukanna 1990; Olaofe 1996; Eka 1996); Saleh 2007; Ngharen, Saleh



and Mua'azu 2014). English speaking African countries number up to twenty four (24) countries out of a total of 54 countries in the continent. They are Cameroon, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Egypt, Sudan, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria and Sierra – Leone (Dada, Jibrin and Ijeoma 2006).

Spanish Speaking Africans

Spanish is one of the international languages spoken in the world. It is one of the roughly 6,500 languages spoken in the world today (Klappenbach, 2019). The alternate names and spellings of Spanish are Español, Castellano and Castilian. Spanish is one of the most widely spoken foreign languages after English, and the fourth most widely spoken language in the world.

Spanish is a member of the Indo-European languages, whose earliest ancestor was spoken approximately 5,000 years ago in the area of the Black Sea (Mosashvili, 2019). According to Accredited Language Services (2010), Africa has Equatorial Guinea, formally known as “Spanish Guinea” as the only Spanish speaking country in the continent (Klappenbach (2019). Spanish is not a homogenous language. As a result of centuries of evolution across the world, nearly every Spanish-speaking country has its own dialect. However, there are many similarities in the phonologies of English and Spanish (Binguistics, 2007).

Accredited Language Services (2010) posits that Spanish has been the official language of Panama, Uruguay, Venezuela, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru, Puerto Rico, Spain, Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Equatorial Guinea, Guatemala and Honduras; and the United States has the world's fifth-largest Spanish-speaking population. It is obvious that there are twenty three Spanish speaking countries in the world including Spain.. Europe has Spain, the native speakers of the language. Central America alone has ten countries speaking the Spanish language, the highest compared to any continent or region. In North America, however, there are two countries where the Spanish language is spoken in large proportion; they are United States of America and Mexico. Out of the fourteen countries in South America, nine of them are Spanish speakers, leaving Brazil, British Guyana, French Guyana, Falklands and Maldives Islands as speakers of the Portuguese, English, French and Dutch languages respectively.

According to Pharies (2007), many foreign languages have contributed loanwords to the lexicon of Spanish, in different quantities and in diverse semantic fields,



according to the intensity and the character of contact between its speakers and those of Spanish or the linguistic ancestors of Spanish. The task of trying to genetically classify the world's approximately six thousand languages has been ongoing for more than two centuries (Pharies, 2007). In other words, it is a language which majority of educated Africans do not speak or need at all, and which almost all uneducated Africans know nothing about (Faniran 2017). However, Klappenbach (2019) opines that twenty-two countries over four continents have Spanish as the official or one of the official languages and it is already the second most studied language in the world. It should be noted that the foreign languages that have affected the Spanish lexicon most heavily have done so, not through direct contact with Spanish speakers, but through the importation of their culture through the written word (Pharies, 2007).

Africa and Multilingualism

Africa has been categorized as a multilingual and multicultural continent with many indigenous languages. Indigenous languages are not learnt but acquired naturally (Williams, 1990). And it is good to be versatile especially in languages as no one can predict with accuracy where he or she will find himself or herself tomorrow. Many languages have thrived in travelling outside the countries of the native speakers. According to Udodiong (2019), these languages either play the official language role or foreign language role in the countries they have moved in successfully. Olaofe (1982) states that the leading international languages in Africa are among the more than a thousand languages spoken in the Africa continent. A good number of Africans are not adequately informed on the usefulness or importance of international languages. This makes English speaking Africans, multilingual communities. Multilingualism can be summarized to mean a person or people's ability to speak two, three or more languages competently, vast in the cultures of these languages whether the person or people are co-ordinate multilingual, compound multilingual or subordinate multilingual (Saleh and Akoshi 2018). But Spanish language has an unfamiliar phonology in a multilingual and diverse cultural society. It shares with English language the dissimilarity of being taught as a foreign language in the educational systems of most African countries (Faniran, 2016).

According to Mosashvili (2019), English and Spanish are very popular in students; consequently, difficulties related to the learning of these languages are very common problems between English and Spanish speakers. In order to avoid mistakes on both sides, it is necessary to defend grammatical rules and



keep the balance in order not to complicate the way we learn foreign languages.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Language education will have positive influence on African youths if additional knowledge of an international language is acquired. Language education is the teaching and learning of any language, either as a foreign or second language in a school; it is also the formal acquisition of communicative skills by an individual (Omolewa, 1978). Therefore, the teaching and learning of foreign languages would create more job opportunities for young Africans since these languages are international languages (Saleh, 2019b). Hence, the training and retraining of the teachers of the language would enhance fluency and articulation of the students in the language. Both English and Spanish use the same alphabet; however the Spanish sound system is more concise (Binguistics, 2007).

The Spanish language is one of the foreign or colonial languages introduced in Africa and other parts of the world; the language is spoken at the European Union and United Nations, Central American Union, South America Union, among others. According to Mosashvili (2019), English and Spanish are international languages with the same historical roots, which, as the factor, had an influence on the development of both languages. Since Spanish is an international language, there is need for the Spanish government to popularize it; therefore, it is imperative for the Spanish government to have it taught in more secondary schools around, Africa specifically. The language could also be introduced and included in tertiary curriculum where it could be taken as an elective course. The Spanish government should plan acculturation programs for both secondary and tertiary levels of education; this would help to popularize the Spanish language as an international language. The Spanish government in collaboration with UNESCO should train and retrain teachers in Africa to teach this language.

REFERENCES

- Aboyeji, O. S. (2010). *Global cultural crisis: Implications for African development*. In: Babatolu, J. S. and Gbade, I. (Eds). *Trends in African development* (86-94). Adeyemi College of Education.
- Accredited Language Services (2010). Translation, Interpreting, Transcription and Multimedia Services (Spanish). <http://www.alsintl.com/resources/languages/Spanish/>



- Ademola, M. (2009). French language education in Nigeria: Prospects & challenges. https://www.academia.edu/7845045/French_Language_Education_In_Nigeria_Prospects_And_Challenges_By_Ademola_Michael.
- Ahukanna, J. G. W. (1990). *Bilingualism and code-mixing in language use in Nigeria: The case of Igbo-English bilinguals*. In Emenenjo, E. N. *Multilingualism, minority languages and language policy in Nigeria* (175-185). Central Books Ltd.
- Baugh, A. C. and Cable, T. (2002). *A History of the English Language*. Routledge.
- Binguistics (2007). http://bilinguistics.com/education/abad_0707/abad_0707.pdf
- Cobarrubias R., Green N. and Quiroz S. (1996). *Science Cognates English-Spanish for K-6 Bilingual Teacher Candidates*. The University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College.
- Dada F. O. A., Jibrin G. and Ijeoma, A. (2011). *Macmillan Nigeria Social Studies Atlas*. Macmillan Publishers.
- Elugbe, B. (1995). *Nigeria Pidgin: Problems and Prospects*. Mosuro.
- Eka, D. (1996). *Multi-lingualism and National Unity*. In: Omole, K., Okwudishu, C. and Junaidu, I. (Eds) *Media, Culture and Language Teaching: Implications for Democracy and National Development* (67 -72). National Library of Nigeria Cataloguing and Publication Process.
- Faniran, K. F. (2016). The Role of French Language in Developing 21st Century Nigerian Graduates. *Journal of Literature, Languages and Linguistics*, 23, 64-69.
- Faniran A. O. (2017). French as a Second Official Language in Nigeria: Problems, Prospects and Implications for the Future of the English Language in Nigeria. *European Journal of English Language, Linguistics and Literature*, 4(1), 7-15.
- Greenberg, J. H. (1971). *Language, culture and communication*. Stanford: University Press.
- Klappenbach A. (2019). Most spoken languages in the world 2020. <https://blog.busuu.com/most-spoken-languages-in-the-world/>.
- Mosashvili G. (2019). Spanish Language Influence on English Language and Vice Versa. Western Conference on Linguistics WECOL 2019, held by California State University, Fresno At: Fresno, CA, USA on November. Projects: Latin American Studies Linguistics.
- Ngharen, Z. A. Saleh, A. J. and Mua'azu, F. (2014). *Ban M'da: The history, culture and language of a people*. Tripathite Publishers.
- Olaofe, I. A. (1996). *English for national development: A realistic approach*. In Omole, K. Okwudishu, A. & Junaidu, I. (Eds). *Language, national unity and democratization process* (77-82). National Library of Nigeria Cataloguing and



Publication Data.

- Olaofe, I. A. (1982). A Sector Analysis - Based Contrastive Study of English and Yoruba Verbal Systems with Teaching Implications. Unpublished Ph.D Dissertation, Department of Education, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria.
- Omolewa, M. (1978). The teaching of French language in Nigeria. *Cahiers d'etudes africaines*, 18(71), 379-396.
- Pharies D. A. (2007). *A Brief History of the Spanish Language*. The University of Chicago Press, Ltd).
- Pountain, J. C. (1999). *Spanish and English in the 21st Century*. Queen's College, Cambridge
- Rizzo, B. and Villafane, S. (1975). Spanish Language Influences on Written English. *Journal of Basic Writing*, pp. 62-71
- Saleh, A. J. (2019b). French Language Education in Nigeria: Significance and Status. *Journal of Research in Education and Society*, 10(1), 14-21.
- Saleh A. J. and Akoshi A. A. (2018). Multilingualism and Multiculturalism in English Speaking African Countries with their Teachings Implications. *Journal of Research in Education and Society*, 9(1), 44-54.
- Saleh A. J. (2019a). Etymology of African Languages cross-breed and the Enhancement of Global Economic Unity. *Journal of Communication and Culture*, 10(1), 25-31.
- Saleh, A. J. (2007). Phonological Interference experienced by Mada students learning English as a second language. Unpublished M.Ed Dissertation submitted to the University of Abuja, Abuja.
- Sesan, A. A. (2010). *Language and Politics: The Nigerian Experience*. In Ojelade, K. and Ezezanu, P.E. (eds.) *Language and National Development*. Pallets Concepts.
- Todo Que Necesitas Saber (Nd). Spanish Culture, Traditions, and Language Manual. <http://languagemanuals.weebly.com/uploads/4/8/5/3/4853169/spanishmanual.pdf>.
- Udoidiong I. (2019). 30 foreign countries where Nigerian languages are spoken. <https://www.pulse.ng/bi/lifestyle/30-foreign-countries-where-nigerianlanguages-are-spoken/wcqbeyt>.
- Williams, D. (1990). *English language teaching: An integrated approach*. Spectrum Books Ltd.

