

Language Diversity and Globalization of Economies in the 21st Century: The Chinese and American Perspectives

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Abstract

The paper examines language diversity and globalization of economies focusing on two world economic giants, China and the USA which are used here as case studies because of their economic capacity and valency in global business. The USA is the largest economy and followed by China. Given that economic communication is facilitated through the use of language, the paper notes that it is the case that, without the understanding of the language of one's trading partner(s), it will be a little difficult to make a good economic deal. The paper uses historical and multidisciplinary methodological approach. It concludes that language diversity exists even among nations but economic/exchange relations can still function and they require nations to learn one another's language.

Keywords: globalisation, diversity, major, languages, nations

1. Introduction

It is known that of all the numerous human endowments, the ability and capacity to acquire and use language as a means of communication is the most important and very rewarding. Language is man's indispensable tool, with which his day to day activities are being carried on. Language through interaction with one another translates to communication. And communication through the use of language is one of the nuclei of development. In the words of Mac Bride as quoted in Akpan (2006)

Communication maintains life. It is also the motor and expression of social activities and civilization; it leads people and peoples from instinct to inspiration through various processes and systems of enquiry, command and centre; it creates a common pool of ideas, strengthens the feeling of togetherness through exchange of messages and translates thought in action, reflecting every emotion and need from the humblest tasks of human survival to supreme manifestations of creativity-or destruction. As the world has advanced, the tasks of communication has become ever more complex and subtle – to contribute to the liberation of mankind from want, oppression and fear and to unite it in community and communion, solidarity and understanding.

The above quotation means communication is a product of language in a different setting. Without the language and interaction, there would have been no communication. Different peoples the world over have their languages in which they use for interaction. This is the language diversity. Globalization of economics is the utilization of the products of different economies by peoples of different climes for their development and growth. Every country is

involved, there is no barrier. Every country must participate, give out something to another and take from others in return. These are facilitated through the use of language and by extension communication.

However, for the communication to really have value the different countries with their language need to be integrated. For instance large economies such as China and the United States of America and others that have a great deal to play in the global world market, their languages need to be studied and integrated for easy communication by the entrepreneurs. Some languages such as Chinese, Arabic, Japanese etc. are rather too complex, but they are leaders in production of goods and services to the global citizens, their languages become necessary to be studied and vice versa.

2. The Concept of Language and Language Diversity

Many other scholars have tried to conceptualize language from different perspectives. Robins (1985) defines language as “a symbol system based on pure or arbitrary conventions...infinitely extendable and modifiable according to the changing needs and conditions of the speakers.” According To Derbyshire (1967), “Language is undoubtedly a kind of means of communication among human beings. It consists primarily of vocal sounds. It is articulatory, systematic, symbolic and arbitrary”. This definition appears to be dealing with the characteristics of language. It is not intended to be so. Every language is unique and important to the people who use it as an important means of communication and of intellectual discourse, and for advancement of civilization. Language is an indispensable element that drives civilization, as it contributes to building and changing the socio-economic and political conditions of the people. Without language neither civilization nor socio-economic or political development would even have begun, let alone achieve the height it does today in any part of the globe (Akpan, 2013). The term “language”, and for the purpose of this paper, connotes people or group of people uses a particular language for expressing actions and inactions, intentions and demands for what they need at a given time or moment or the use of words that convey meanings to the intended expression and understood only by the users (Akpan, 2013).

3. Conceptualising Globalisation

Globalization is a buzz word that appears to have very many meanings as there are specialists in the subject. It would suffice to look at it as such, as Stiglitz (2002), sees globalization as the closer integration of the countries and peoples of the world which has been brought about by the enormous reduction of cost of transportation and communication, and the breaking down of artificial barriers to the flow of goods, services, capital, knowledge, and (to a lesser extent) people across borders. Kwanashie (1998), puts it that it is a process of integrating economic decision making such as the consumption, investment and saving process all across the world. it is also a process of creating global market place in which increasingly all nations are forced to participate. Ajegi (2005) explains globalization as a process which in all-embracing and includes human migration, trade in goods and services, movements of capital across national boundaries and integration of financial markets. It is a process that has even driven by the rapid development of communication, technological innovations as well as major changes in public policy and economic management. Globalization is a complete process developed by advanced industrial nations to frustrate the emerging economies from advancing to catch up with developed nations. It is a formula to perpetuate dependence and economic imperialism because of their advantaged position, a slow process of killing indigenous technology (Akpan, 2005).

4. Language Diversity and its Connotations within the International System

There are very many languages in the world as there are people speaking them. This is the application of language diversity. The people who use these various languages apply them in their day to day interaction either in business, or commerce, government business or for cultural entertainments etc. On other perspective, language diversity could also be seen as cultural acculturation by major dominant powers, nations mainly from Western Europe who ventured into other lands during the age of discovery and later colonization of the 18-20 centuries. These countries include Britain, France, Germany, Portugal, Spain, Denmark, Holland, Belgium etc. Today the languages from the colonial masters become the dominant languages or lingua franca in the colonized states-languages of diversity. Therefore, language diversity depends on the usage and applicability on the group. To the Americans, language diversity refers to the number of languages spoken in the United States and the number of people who speak then (Rumbaut & Massey, 2013). Perhaps this is applicable to other peoples the world over.

5. Language Diversity and Globalization of Economies

Historically, language diversity and globalization of economies are not really new phenomena as many people would want to see today. Major languages or international languages and their diversities are products of colonization. Different European powers such as Portugal, Spain, England, Holland, Denmark, France, Belgium, Italy etc. spilled over to other lands since the 15-20 centuries, initially for discovery and ultimately ended up in colonization. The colonized people had or still have their languages, but for the colonial masters to be relevant with the colonized people, they needed to force them to accept their languages. This was so because firstly, they were linked to international commerce and secondly for internal and external administration of the states colonized. The only way the colonial masters would derive the economics of scale was for them to force the indigenous people to adopt their language in education, business or commerce and for other aspects of social interactions. Thus, these become a dominant force for language diversity. Since the age of colonization till date those different colonial states adopt the language of their masters in business, education, social interaction, and behold a lingua franca for them. Although in some states indigenous languages are still being used, but in government business, the alien or colonial language is the parameter. For instance, in Nigeria it is the English language because we were colonized by the British whose language is English. Ivory Coast uses French because France colonized the Ivoirians. This is the latitude of language diversity irrespective of people and culture.

In the area of globalization of economies, historically globalization is not a new phenomenon after all. Globalization is a process of historical change rather than a specific condition. Since the discovery of West Indies by Christopher Columbus and his crew in 1492 and subsequent sailing around the world by Ferdinand Magellan before the end of the 15th century, the world was globalized. These early explorers were able to change their merchandise from Europe with the Chinese goods in the Far East merchandise from America were found in Europe and vice versa, Africa were able to exchange their ivory, gold, 'ostriched' feathers, hides and skin, and in turn accept textiles, spear, gun and gun power, and rum from Europeans across North Africa (Stride & Ifeka, O'Brien & Williams, 2011).

However, since globalization partly means to a large extent integration of world economy, it means there was integration of world economy even before the 20th century. So, what is being seen today as globalization is perhaps the second wave and facilitated with changes in

international system driven by improvement in science and technology. It is agreed historically that before the present time, there was science and technology that was the reason the early explorers were able to construct sailing ships, were able to invent compass, able to brew drinks, manufacture gun and gun power, by the time changes came since no nation is static, and man continues to improve as new knowledge also emerges or increases (Strike & Ifeka O'Brien & Williams, 2010).

Conversely, the first wave to global economic integration was possible and easy as a result of the introduction of their language by the colonial masters of the indigenous people or the subject people. Their language facilitated commerce because it was easy for the subject peoples to interact since they learnt the language of their masters. It means the language was the means of communication and communication enlarge the coast of commerce and absorption of the new culture.

It should be known that in the first wave of globalization the indigenous people who were integrated into the global market economy did not benefit much from that integration: firstly, the prices of their merchandise or goods and services were fixed by their masters; and most of their exports were primary products and the price were fixed by the same colonial masters, the finished products brought back, the prices were also fixed by them. Secondly, the subject people were literally new to the system, which is international trade and its challenges, hence were on the disadvantaged in nearly all perspectives. Of course the situation has not change much today and if there are changes they are merely cosmetic.

Towards the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century came the second wave of globalization of economies. This second wave is facilitate by the improvement in science and technology, again this improvement emerged from the colonial powers from western Europe, America and other advanced industrial economies. The phenomenon again is about economic integration. For the integration to be meaningful, globalization has to encompass many trends, such as expanded international trade, telecommunication monetary coordination, multinational corporations, technical and scientific cooperation, cultural exchanges of new types and scales, migration and refuges flows, and relations between the worlds' rich and poor nations (Goldstein Pevehouse, 2008).The central issue here is language and communication.

6. Language Diversity and Globalization of Economies in the 21st Century: The Chinese and Developing Economies Perspectives

China before the beginning of Cold War in 1945 was in a nebulous state because her economy would not support her large and increasing population. A large segment of Chinese population was poor with no Shelter and food. China was a poor country by all measures. She was being looked down by the Western nations of Europe that were ahead of her in the 1960s. However, she decided to close all 'doors' and protected herself against outsiders'. By outsiders, it meant she decided to develop her economy without heavy depended on other economies. The idea paid off and by the time she came out of the economic cocoon, things changed for her positively (O'Brien & Williams, 2010). Towards the close of the 20th century China bounced back and became a country to be reckoned with in many spheres of human development. It means Chinese economy altered and she became heavily industrialized, the subsistence she was known diminished. China became one of the World's industrial giants in car manufacture, textiles, household utensils, arms, printed materials, chemicals, building materials etc. Towards the turn

of this century her economy opened itself to the outside world especially the developing economies of Africa. For instance, Nigerian entrepreneurs flocked into China to participate in Chinese business by either buying or selling or directing the Chinese on the way out of producing goods that would suit Nigeria according to economic or spending capacity. The most important aspect of economic interaction is communication or the use of language. The business or partnership between Nigeria entrepreneurs Chinese counterparts would not grow well except they are able to relate adequately through the use of language. Perhaps, Chinese language is difficult to learn, so also is English language to many entrepreneurs. It has become necessary to learn each other's' language.

On another perspective, Chinese is an economic super power, the second largest economy next to the United States, she would not be able to benefit from the global market structure except she liberalize her economy and open her borders. That she did by joining the World Trade Organization. World Trade Organization is an international organization established in 1995 to replace General Agreement on Trade and Tariff that aimed to expand free-trade concession equally to all members; establishing freer global trade with fewer barriers; making trade more predictable through established rules etc. Chinese entry into WTO is highly advantages to them, firstly she is an enterprising economy and secondly she has a large population translating to mean large market. However, she cannot compete with other economic powers such as the USA, France, and Britain except she adopts her language. Global market today thrives through language diversification - in the process the relationship become a win-win-all.

Indeed, since China returned to the liberal economy and by being part of the World Trade Organization (WTO) much is expected from her globally. Without understanding of the menedain, it would be difficult to deal with them. In this connection, Chinese language becomes a sine qua non for her trading partners to learn and vice versa. Understanding international languages today is a plus to the development of economies, because globalization of economies means give and take, although some countries such as those in Africa and some in Caribbean have nothing to offer; this is done through language communication. Globalization by other means, means that every country must participate in the global economy. A country is either a donor through export of goods and services, human capacity through export of labour or import of goods and services or import of human capacity through labour or indeed a balancing of import and export of the components mentioned above. It is known that most of the developing countries especially African countries are only receiving those components' for their development and by extension do not really benefit from the globalization mantra. This is not to say that African nations do not export goods, but the value of their exports and gains cannot be equitably compared to those of advanced economies. Take for example, the products needed by the emerging economies range from industrial products to food, electronics of different kinds, cars spare parts, ships, railway components, arms, etc. Every home in the emerging economies relies heavily on goods from China. On the other hand, Chinese engineers and manufacturers are spilling over to other countries especially to African countries. They are engaging in the construction, establishment of small and medium scale industries. For instance CCEC construction companies are based here in some states in Nigeria, helping to fix our economy through construction. Again some Chinese companies are into food production, the producers of nodules products, a brand of food highly sort for in nearly every home in Nigeria and beyond. Therefore, it is necessary to understand the language of the producers and construction and vice

versa since much of their needs for exports and imports would be done through the use of language.

7. Chinese and World Economy: The Language Perspective

As earlier discussed, China is the second largest economy with an enterprising population made up of youths. She is next to the United States in industrial ladder. China, with her heavy industrial base, she has produced much goods and services needed globally especially from the emerging economies. Her export base to these countries (African, Latin America, Asia) is perhaps, command respect and wider acceptability than even those from the west in some instances. Since China now is a world factory, which produced all types of goods for virtually all countries of the world, thus in exporting their manufactured goods, China also takes advantage of the situation in exporting its language and culture. However, a lot have been said about China and how she is trying to dominate the world economically especially the emerging economies. They have offered loans, provision of infrastructures such as building of Ports, Airports as in Uganda etc. Whatever is the ulterior motive, there is no way anyone can learn their language without benefitting from their civilization and technology. Learning the Chinese language will in a long run facilitate interactions with China in the area of business, commerce, tourism and industry, diplomacy, entertainment etc. all revolves a sound communication through exchange of languages, and by extension language diversity.

8. Language Diversity: The American Perspective

The United States is known as the melting pot of nations or ethnicities. By extrapolation is also a melting pot of languages. There are over 350 languages spoken in America. However, our purpose here is not to look at these languages as they are but in the areas of world economy and its diversity. But in the overall, the commonest language or lingua France in the USA is English. In spite of the fact that the US government as a policy is encouraging the study of minor languages even those of the African descent, this is done particularly for the preservation of the people's culture and tradition. This is because when a people's language is lost the people are lost. Indeed, in the United States, English is regarded as the language of the mass media, language for the education of Americans, language for doing government business, language for interactional relations, language of diplomacy. In this connection, English language occupies a privilege position in America. This acquisition opens many doors for job opportunities for non-English speaking people to learn if they must be relevant in the American environment. This also extends to doing business in America and vice versa.

In the area of commerce and World economy, since the advent of China in the world economic sphere much changes have been made. The Americans especially the entrepreneurs are effervescently learning Chinese language. There is heavy competition between the Chinese and the United States in the areas of industrialization and trade. Of recent there was a trade war between the US and China under Trump's administration. These were facilitated through communication using the language in which the Chinese would understand and vice versa. The US is industrial power so also is China, but the competition would only make sense if communication would be understood by both parties. The economic competition have made it that a lot of Chinese students want to study in the United States, not necessarily for American civilization but for American language that is English so as to assist China balance economically in commerce and industry, tourism and indeed solidify their dominance. It is of note that since the entry of the Chinese in World Trade Organization, America has become a little cautious on

the Chinese relationship-vis-à-vis trade and diplomacy. Very many Americans are admitted into the Chinese Universities to read and protect American interest to counter the perceived domination of China. Again Chinese studies and indeed language is receiving much attention in highbrow Universities in North America. All these competitions are done to balance the economic power of these nations. One understands that America had been a domineering power in the world since the end of the Second World War, in 1945. That political barometer and economic latitude is what she still want to offer to the world - the opposing 'train' has come and that is China - only communication through diversity can conger it. That indeed has been established between them and the rest of the world.

9. Conclusion

Language diversity refers to the number of languages spoken in a country or domain and perhaps the number of people who speak them. There are very many languages in the world today; some are seen as major while others are regarded as minor. A major language refers to the number of people who speak a particular language say English or French or Spanish. To understand the concept of major language, one therefore must understand the root of colonization by European powers from the 19th -20th centuries.

However language diversity and globalization deal with global economy as the new trend in exchange relations predicts. That globalization is a buzz word and people interpret it the way they deem fit. It means the world becoming a global village as a result in improvement in communication caused by advancement in science and technology. Language diversity and globalization of economies is explained in terms of exchange relation and without understanding of one's language especially those of the super economic powers, one may be kilometers away from enjoying the benefits of globalization of economies. Using China and America as illustrations – these are two giant economies with diverse languages – how does the world integrate without them. Globalization implies give and take; hence countries who want to benefit need to key in and learn the languages in order to benefit from the new world trade.

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