

## **The Impact of Globalization on Nigerian Culture and Language: A Study of Ekid Language**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This article hinge on promoting Ekid language of the Eket people of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Against the background of the Ekid language facing possible threat of extinction, the language needs to be retained and maintain in all the interactive and communication stages of globalization. Western culture and ideas are easily injected into local culture with uncontrollable effect. This effect includes, loss of individualism and group identity, homogenous set of values and beliefs. Technology is one area that has assisted the spread of westernization. The advancement of technology has opened the Nigerian culture to a new level. This paper was undertaken to highlight the impact of globalization on Nigerian culture and language, using "Ekid language" of Eket people as a case study because of the small number of it speakers. Recommendations were made to protect the language which is considered an endangered language.*

**Keywords:** Ekid Language, Globalization, Eket People and Culture

### **INTRODUCTION**

Globalization is a process of interaction and integration among people, companies, organizations and government world-wide. The term globalization first appeared in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and had been known in developed countries where the people had early contact with the internet and other information and communication technology facilities. Though the term globalization became popular in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when unprecedented international connectivity of the post-cold war became high in all ramifications (James and Steger, 2014).

Globalization has both positive and negative impact on developing or poor countries where the developed countries have dominance on international relations and economy. According to Abraham (2020) due to globalization, global interdependence has increased rapidly. Though the positive aspect of globalization is that communication is easier with people from different countries. For instance, a Nigerian can sell his products to someone in China. Besides the economic aspect of globalization there is much importance to properly understand the cultural aspect which is the basis of this article on how globalization is gradually dwindling the "Ekid Language" of the Eket people of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. This would definitely resort to loss of identity and historical background if left unchecked. The Black Americans may not have lost their historical background, but they have completely lost their identity as they cannot represent their ethnic nationalities in Motherland (Africa).

Globalization has brought about a lot of changes around the world in terms of culture, education, communication, language, etc. Due to Globalization, the world has become a global market and this has led to the spread of western culture into Nigeria. A lot of Nigerian cultures are western culture infused, while some cultures have gone into extinction. Globalization has many definitions and approaches. It can be viewed from different angles, either, culture, dressing, food,

language, etc. Several definitions have been given to this concept yet it has continued to be debatable and controversial among academics and other related professionals.

According to Negus and Roman-Velazquez (2000), it refers to the process and practices that are clearly crossing geographical borders and to indicate a growing interconnected across the planet. This implies that cultural, political, environmental and economic events in one part of the world become significant to people in other parts of the world. Not leaving out the proliferation of organizations and institutions that has ensure global flow and growth. With Globalization birthing technology, we get to know the culture, languages, food, etc. of other countries of the world without visiting those countries. The world is getting smaller and smaller due to Globalization and technology. Globalization has created new frontiers and markets, encourage the growth of old ones, break down barriers and distance. It is a known fact that Globalization birthed technology and it has led to advancement in communication, information, etc. According to Imhonopi and Urim (2004) give their own definition thus; Globalization is the process of the diminishing of barriers to effective international trade supported by increased economic, socio cultural and technological interaction and integration between and among countries, which is facilitated by the increase in and access to communications technology and movement of supranational institutions and global corporations who determine the shape, character and outcome of the process.

Globalization as the establishment of social organizations that span or spread over nations irrespective of geographical, linguistic, political and cultural differences and boundaries (Ekeanyanwu,2005). Many authors see this concept as a western ploy to continue dominating the international scene and making Third World nations continually dependent. Developing countries are left with little or no option but to accept the challenges of a contemporary world by maximizing the opportunities provided by globalization. Globalization brought about behavioral changes through technology, consumer products, new thoughts, visions of others and lifestyle. This means that human activity in one part of the world in turn constantly changes human activity in another part of the world. As the world gets interconnected and distances are bridged, many changes are taking place in our culture, languages, economic sector, political system, etc. In this sense, globalization is a social and cultural process in which individuals of different cultural backgrounds interact with each other in all spheres of life more intensively than before (Smith, 2000).

Eket people have had an early interaction with the White and this has increasingly exposed them to different ways of thinking and cultural values. Today, with the emergence of modern technologies and the flocking in of the Whites because of the natural resources like crude oil in the land, Eket's cultural heritage is shifting. For proper understanding of this paper, a brief origin of Eket people will be given.

## **BRIEF ORIGIN OF EKET**

Eket is located in Akwa Ibom state of Nigeria. It occupies the south-central portion of the state territorial expanses stretching to the Northward between latitude 4033° and 4045° and Eastwards between longitude 7052° and 5002°. Eket is bordered by Nsit Ubium local government area on the North and Esit Eket local government area on the East. On the west by Onne local government area and on the south by Ibeno local government area (Noah,1988).

It is believed that the people of Eket migrated from Cameroon during the great movement of the Bantu stock of Africa. This movement brought the people of Eket to the location around the mouth of Cross River State, which was their first settlement. It is believed that Eket people had early contact with the outside world long before the slave trade era. European stores like UAC, PZ and GB Ollivant were established in Eket in 1859. French and German stores were also established. It is noted that Rev Samuel Alexander Bill landed at Ukpene Kong by sea in 1887. He established Qua Iboe church of Nigeria and converted Eket people to Christianity. Even with the introduction of

Christianity in Eket, early traditional religious practices are still prevalent and some people still believe and worship it.

Eket is popularly referred to as "Idong Mfianwe", which means "a white man's village". This name stemmed from two major reasons. First, it is observed that there is a town in Switzerland called "Eket". This corroborated the fact that the first person to write in Eket was a Swiss national. Second, Eket was the hub of economic and political activities like Lagos and this brought in White colonial administrators and businessmen into Eket (Noah, 1988). Presently, there is a land inhabited by the Whites, which is still referred to as "Abod Okokoro" or "Abod Afianwe", located at Ikot Ibiok. Due to this long interaction with the White men, the people of Eket always look neat and knowledgeable and this attracted the name "Ndito Mfianwe" meaning "white men's children".

Eket local government area is a branch of Qua Iboe district of 1885 which was supervised by white consul white House. The Qua Iboe district included today most part of Akwa Ibom State like Esit Eket, Onna, Ibeno, Nsit Ubium, etc. British Administration started in Eket in 1885 by the white consul white House, although a treaty was signed with Eket people in 1884. In 1898, Eket became a consular post and a District consul was appointed in 1898. When the then Head of State, Col. Yakubu Gowon created 12 states in 1967, Eket had been existing as an administrative headquarter for more than 100 years. But with the creation of the 12 states by col. Gowon, Eket became one of the 10 divisions in the then South Eastern state.

The language of the Eket people is called "Ekid" and it conveys a unique cultural identity to the people. Eket has quite a number of cultural displays such as Mbok, Ekong, Eka-Ekong, Akata, Obon, Ekpe-obon, Nnabo, Ndito unaidi, etc. They also have many cultural practices and ceremonies prevalent. They include, burial ceremony, marriage ceremony, coronation, status initiation, etc. Eket people have a special cultural attire worn by maidens during traditional marriages but due to globalization and westernization, there is a drastic reduction in its usage. The people of Eket believe in a myth that if a wife cheats on her husband and refused to confess, she will die.

**DRESSING:** The people of Eket dress in a very colourful way with the Ogbongbon which is usually worn with a white tailored traditional shirt and a wrapper. The wrapper is a large fabric wrapped around the waist with a black cap. The Ogbongbon could be made from the same wrapper tied around the waist. Also, a piece of cloth usually in form of a handkerchief is tied around the neck. This piece of cloth could be white or coloured depending on the choice of the user. It is always difficult to differentiate an Eket man from other ethnic groups in Akwa Ibom in terms of culture and attire. The women also have their own attire, a blouse with puff hand, two wrappers tied around the waist. One wrapper must be longer than the other. A big head tie and accessories to match, which is usually beads.

Nobody can deny the positive impacts of globalization in Eket, but still, there are numerous negative impacts in some areas like language and cultural heritage. Akande (2002) gave us a proper emphasis of this negative impact when he said that western adventure made effort to destroy the cultural heritage of various people around the world through colonization, imperialism and now globalization. He added that cultural imperialism left the colonised countries in a state of cultural disorientation which is vulnerable to cultural invasion. This properly explains what is happening in Eket. The coming of the white men and their western culture into Eket spread westernization among the people of Eket and beyond. This led to the displacement of the cultural heritage of the people. The most extreme effect of cultural globalization is the commercialization of culture. It is sad to discover that the production, distribution and consumption of Eket people's cultural goods and services have become commodities along with the essentials of life. Most of the fashions, arts, clothes, food, etc are now imported and exported. The attires used during traditional marriages are imported, even the foods served in traditional marriages are foreign delicacies. On many occasions,

fried rice, jollof rice, and sometimes salad and cake have been served in traditional marriages. These foods are not our traditional delicacies but foreign but they have become more popular than our traditional delicacies. Even the drinks presented during traditional festivities are foreign. This commercialization of culture has a very negative impact on the Eket people because their cultural way of life has become a product rather than becoming a rare quality that was made to suit their specific needs and situations. Every day, new clothes, new values, new images surfaced in Nigerian markets and the disadvantage of this, is that the old and familiar way of life and norms are been discarded because they are not valued by international markets. The weakening of the existing values and culture of Nigerian due to globalization has a harmful impact on who Nigerians are, what they want and what they respect.

Technology is one area that has assisted the spread of westernization. The advancement of technology has opened the Nigerian culture to a new level. This has aided the adoption of western culture and ideologies through many computers mediated technology. Western culture and ideas are easily injected into our culture with uncontrollable effect. This effect includes, loss of individualism and group identity, homogenous set of values and beliefs. Through technology, western culture and products dominate our local market making Nigerians to abandon and disregard their culture because they think that Western culture is superior. This attitude has led to the destruction of cultural identities.

Nigeria is blessed with lovely cultural attires that makes her stand out among other countries, but this, is losing its significance gradually due to globalization. The olden days' marriage ceremony was incomplete, if couples fail to grace the occasion in their cultural attire but that idea is fading away because now couples are allowed to wear anything on their D-day. Globalization has westernized Nigeria in that nine out of ten people you meet on the road are on blue jeans and T-shirt. Soon, everyone in Eket and Nigeria as a whole will come to wear jeans and T-shirt. Globalization has made everything from clothing, shoes, hairstyles, etc. conform to the trends of the western culture. It is no surprise to see women walk almost naked on the street and call it fashion. In the olden days, Nigerians and even Africans as a whole respected their bodies and a woman who does otherwise, probably have no elderly person at home to caution her. Today, even the elderly are the ones disrespecting their bodies.

Globalization has exploited our cultural attires through exhibitions and tourism attraction, with the excuse that it is for cultural promotion, but in most cases, it is only for the entertainment of tourists. This has led to undermining the significance of attire. Although some foreign tourists may be interested in cultural attires, they always see the attire as inferior and their fashion superior.

Language enables us to communicate effectively. It is an essential medium for communication. The ability to speak one or several languages helps us to think globally and understand new horizon. Language is the main ingredient of globalization, without it, there would be no globalization and there would be no world language. Fishman (1989) attested that "Cross-Cultural contact, therefore, is often viewed as a potential source of unmanageable, or at least undesirable, culture change and of language shift, given that power differentials are to be expected between ethnic groups in interaction. The spread of English seems a positive thing, in terms of employment, education, modernity and technology. But some people see it as inauspicious.

According to Cunningham (2001), "the biggest current threat to linguistic wealth globally is English. The current undesirable status of English posed a challenge to us. Where English is a first language, learning another is less important". Globalization actually place the native speaker at an advantage because he or she will die thinking that he/she is in a strong position. The reason for this is that globalization is English's center of gravity to revolve and thus making it difficult for the younger generation to relate in their native dialect because they see it as "old school" to speak their language. English is perceived as ultimate and superior, even the present educational system reflects

western ideologies and philosophy. Although, multilingual setting defines people in many ways, it has the tendency to create identity conflict from the coexistence of traditional and western way of life (Oloruntoba,1992). Crystal (1999) in Okwudishu (2003) describes multilingualism as an alternative fundamental principle to the concept of "shared global language". Christians believe that multilingualism was brought about by the creator during the dispersion of tongues at the tower of Babel. English, today has become an official language in Nigeria but there is still high rate of illiteracy in the rural part of Eket. The use of English has limited our local language and it is no surprise that many Eket elite families would prefer their children to learn English language better than their local language. That is why Nigerians in general, read books written in English language faster and more fluently than in their local language. Globalization has even affected the movie industry because majority of the movies produced are in English language.

We cannot deny that the impact of globalization on language has affected the culture of the language in many ways, both positive and negative. With globalization spreading and dominating on a global scale, many languages and culture have gone into extinction. This is bad because language contributes to the structure of culture, helps people to know the ethnic groups they belong and the heritage they share. Cultural identity would be lost without language. With globalization sweeping across Nigeria and Africa at large, most local languages in Nigeria, especially "Eکید" language is endangered.

What does it mean for a language to be endangered? An endangered language is a language that is at risk of extinction. Saying the same thing in a different way, Hale (1992) observes that when a language is being endangered it means that a culture is being denied of its various languages due to the emergence of a dominant language and culture. A dominant language is a language that is frequently used in communication and other activities in a community. Fishman (194) pointed out that two factors contribute to language endangerment and they are: lack of informal communication from one generation to another generation and lack of informal daily life support, not because they are not taught in school or have no official status. This means that whether you teach a language in school or makes it an official language is not enough to safeguard it from dying.

Apart from the appearance of a new and dominant language, other factors add to the endangerment of a language. Fishman (88-109) describes 8 levels of language loss. Starting in a descending order, "Level 8 is where only a few elders in the community speak the language while 7 shows only adults beyond childbearing age speak the Language. The next descending level 6 display some intergenerational use of language, meanwhile level 5 is when the language is still very much alive and used in community. Moving forward, we have Level 4, here the language is required in Elementary schools and Level 3 shows how the language is used in business places by employers in less specialised areas. The Second Level has a wider usage of the language by local government and in mass media by minority community. Finally in Level 1 there is wider usage. The language is used by higher levels of government and in government, limited only to African languages".

According to Adegbija (2001), the factors that endanger languages are; the presence and favouritism of ex-colonial language, the inferiority mindset of the colonised when it has to do with African languages, the official and functional recognition of indigenous major languages in the country which has made smaller languages like "Eکید language" to look insignificant. This means that when these factors are found in any particular language, its status is threatened and the usage slowly becomes restricted and limited, later displaced and replaced by another language in its cultural sphere.

## **ROADMAP IN PRESERVING ENDANGERED LANGUAGES**

It is imperative to save indigenous languages because of the small number of their speakers and their socioeconomic status. According to the United Nations, "the world's indigenous languages are under threat of disappearing with one language dying every two weeks and many more at risk". It is crucial to save and protect these languages for the dignity of their speakers and their traditional heritage.

The French Government for instance has given us one perfect example of safeguarding indigenous languages. The French Academy has declared unwelcome for foreign words like, "talk show", "walk man", "chewing gum", "prime time", etc. In Quebec, a French speaking province of Canada, there is a law stating that any English sign posted by a business must also have the same text in French in a bigger font size than the English text. The Chinese government is not left out in the fight to protect the integrity of its language, by removing foreign words from dictionaries. According to United Nations, an estimation of 6500 languages is spoken in the world today, but a lot of these languages are disappearing fast. If something is not done fast, many linguists estimate that by the end of this century, over half of those languages will disappear.

What can be done to preserve the endangered language of Eket people. They are as follows:

- Creation of a library of audio and video material documenting their oral traditions and preserving the dying language of Eket people for future generations. That is to say, local tales, songs, rituals and histories of the people should be recorded with voice recorders and video cameras.
- A ministry should be created to encourage and receive DVDs from people wanting to tell their stories and share their language. These materials should not only be kept for posterity, rather, they should be used as teaching aids in schools. This will give local children learning materials they have never been opportune to see.
- Creation of Apps specifically designed for the indigenous speakers of the language. The Apps should be free and accessible to anyone with an internet connection. This can help in keeping indigenous "Eki" language alive. It is true that technology is one of the contributing factors to endangered languages but it can also be used as a tool to preserve the language. The author believes that internet and technology are a powerful and easily available tools to chart this course and it can be used to understand cultural richness of language.
- Finally, private individuals and nongovernmental Organizations should venture into this area. Documentation of languages is very expensive and funds are needed for training of linguists. Just as steps are taken to preserve diversity of species and human lives, it's also important to take steps to preserve linguistic diversity.

## **CONCLUSION**

Globalization has many definitions and approaches. It can be viewed from different angles, either, culture, dressing, food, etc. The coming of the white men and their western culture into Eket spread westernization among the people of Eket and beyond. This led to the displacement of the cultural heritage of the people. With globalization sweeping across Nigeria and Africa at large, most local languages in Nigeria, especially "Eki" language is endangered. An endangered language is a language that is at risk of being extinct. What can be done to preserve the endangered language of Eket people?

## **Recommendations**

The study makes the following recommendations:

- i. Creation of audio and visual library. Creation of ministry to be in-charge of facilities. Creation of Apps specifically designed for the indigenous sparked of the language and involvement of private individuals and nongovernmental organizations.
- ii. The Nigerian government has huge role to play through the ministry of Art and Culture. The ministry should help retain and promote the Ekid Language in all business deals and interaction that involves the Ekid people. This would give the people a sense of global belonging.
- iii. Musical artists and other cultural entertainers from Eket should place Ekid language first in their music. A track can be dedicated to Ekid language, Musical artists of Yoruba extraction have shut down vast arenas in America and Europe performing in Yoruba language. This will help to promote and retain the language.

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