VOL. III NO. XII, 2021 ISBN: 1596-3834

AL-LISĀN

JOURNAL OF THE ACADEMIC SOCIETY FOR ARABIC LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN NIGERIA (ASALLIN)

1442 A.H/ 2021

ARABIC LANGUAGE AND THE CHALLENGE OF IDENTITY IN MULTI-ETHNIC SOCIETIES: A CASE STUDY OF NIGERIA

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Introduction:

Nigeria is a linguistic, ethnic, cultural and social mosaic with more than four-hundred different indigenous, endoglossic tongues.[1] According to Brann, these languages are of divergent genetic families such as Niger-Kordofanian, Afro-Asiatic, and Nilo-Saharan. Furthermore, Niger-Kordofanian has two branches: Niger-Congo and Benue-Congo. Niger-Congo itself is of three sub-branches, namely, Kwa, West-Atlantic and Adamawa. However, Benue-Congo has two sub-branches: Cross-River and Bantoid.[2]

The Arabic language belongs to the Semitic family of languages. It is a relative of the South-West Semitic branch that entails South Arabian and Ethiopian languages.[3] The Arabic language was first introduced in to Nigeria through the Islamic faith and the Arab traders in the Northern part of the country in the ninth century A. D. when the Old Kanemi Empire was first introduced to Islam. According to Turkham as cited in Zakariya,[4] Arabic at the initial stage was circumscribed to religious sphere in Nigeria due to its great affinity with Islam. The spread of Islam and the proliferation of the Quranic knowledge, coupled with the establishment of the religious statehood in Sokoto by Fulani Jihadists made Arabic gained enormous ground by the end of the nineteenth century.

Today in Borno State, there is a sizeable ethno-linguistic minority population called Shuwa Arab whose mother tongue is Arabic. By implication, Arabic is one of the Nigerian languages. The fact that it is not given its due care in this country is regrettable.

Arabic: An Indigenous Nigerian Language

Whenever Arabic is mentioned in discussions about national language problems in Nigeria, the oft-coming questions to the minds of the Nigerian people, including the elites, are what Arabic has to do in this issue? Is Arabic an indigenous Nigerian language? Of course, these are important questions and we are of strong conviction that such questions, if propounded to many Nigerian people, their responses would virtually be in the negative either out of ignorance or under to the subterfuge of being ignorant. However, the fact remains that Arabic is an endoglossic, indigenous Nigerian language for the following reasons:[5]

Firstly, Arabic language has a long-rooted history in Nigeria. It came to the northern territory of Nigeria in the ninth century A. D. through direct bilateral trade relations between the North African Arabs and the people of West Africa. Moreover, the advent of Islam in Nigeria in the eleventh century further strengthened the position of Arabic. Ever since, it has become one of the Nigerian indigenous language after it had undergone different circumstances.[6]

Furthermore, the Arabic language was the official tongue during the reigns of both Borno (9th century A.D.) and Sokoto (1809-1903 A. D.) Empires before it was supplanted by the English language in the colonial era.[7] Despite this set back, Arabic continues to play significant roles in the life of the Nigerian people, especially the Muslims. Therefore, it is hardly in the nature of such a long existing language with continued importance and different roles in the society to remain classified as a foreign language and not to be even recognized as a second language in the country.[8]

Secondly, there is an ethnic group in Nigeria whose mother tongue is Arabic. This group is called Shuwa Arabs located in towns and villages like Dikwa, Ngala, Gajibo, Gamboru all in Borno State near the Nigerian/Chadian border.[9] It is widely believed that they are the descendants of an Arab Muslim called Abu-Yazeed, who came to Borno from Bagdad in the 8th century A.D. However, the attachment of the language to Islam, to a very large extent, is responsible for the misconception of the language as an exclusive language of the Muslims. Whatever be the case, there would be no iota of doubt on the Nigerian citizenship of this ethnic group. Therefore, it is logical to accept their language as a Nigerian language since most of the ethnic groups in Nigeria today are immigrant settlers who have become citizens and their languages are now among Nigerian languages.[10]

To further corroborate the statement above and for the sake of credence and validity, Oladosu asserted that "...Arabic cannot be defined as a foreign language within the Nigerian context where a whole indigenous tribe has been identified as using the language as a mother tongue".[11]

Thirdly, the origins of some of major Nigerian ethnic groups such as the Yoruba and the Fulani have biological relationships with some Arab countries. According to Al-Awwal, the Yoruba, which is one of the main three Nigerian ethnic groups, is reported to have their origin traceable to Mecca and their progenitor, *Oduduwa*, was the son of one of the Mecca Kings. On the other hand, others say they are from Iraq and were driven out there from by Ya'kuub bn Qahtaan, while some historians view that they are from Egypt.[12]

Research on the origin of the Fulani provoked many views the prominent of which is that their progenitor was a Tunisian Arab called 'Uqbat bn Naafi', one of the great companions of Prophet Mohammad (Peace be upon Him), thus underlying the influence of Arabic on some Nigerian languages.[13] In the same vein, Al-Ilory enumerates more than 150 Arabic loaned words in to Yoruba, a phenomenon stressing the close relationship between the two languages.[14]

Nigerians' Divergent Attitudes towards Arabic and its Experts

The continued negligence towards specialists in the Arabic language by the successive Nigerian governments has created unsuitable climate for the learning of the language in the country. This is due to the upsurge of apprehension of limited job opportunities, lack of future prospects and possible confinement of their future roles to traditional type scholars whose social status is in-coveted owing to their old days' positions in the society. In those days, according to Hamzah, Arabic scholars used to teach the language to interested Muslims without earning salaries, assuming it as a divine task for which they would be rewarded in the Hereafter. Those scholars lived on alms given to them by members of the society, a phenomenon that is analogous to beggars. The situation persisted until the emergence of the English language teaching in the country in which the English teachers were placed in high social positions. As a result, Arabic teachers were considered less valued in the society. Despite that things have turned better today for experts in Arabic, the low profile inherent in the study of Arabic and its experts is still having negative impacts on the learning of the language in Nigeria.[15]

Similarly, Ogunbiyi in Zakariya notes that interested and motivated students of Arabic in Nigeria today are the ridicule prone citizens in the society when he remarks that:

> Even Muslim children in formal schools refuse to choose Arabic as one of their subjects, and if they are persuaded (by their parents) to learn it in their first and second year, they soon drop it due to the absence of proper motivation (intrinsic motivation) and the scorn and derision of their mates who often ask them derisively: "Do you want to become Imam?".[16]

In spite of the lack of official status conferment on Arabic in the country as well as the lack of admiration of its learners, most of the Nigerian Muslims are determined to study it alongside Western education.[17] As the instrument of the Islamic faith and its being the language of the Qur'an, Arabic has been strongly propagated, upheld, relentlessly supported by several private entrepreneurs and Islamic organizations. Using individual voluntary contribution and monthly subscription as a starting point of departure for their supporting activities, several members of these bodies have been individually and collectively receiving a variety of assistance from the Arab World. Thanks to some Arab nations such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, The United Arab Emirates, Iraq, Tunisia, Morocco, Jordan, etc. there has been a continuous provision of financial aid, books, teachers and training abroad.[18] The private entrepreneurs' schools that champion the course of Arabic and Islamic knowledge in Nigeria today are of three types: (1) Non-formal Arabic Primary Schools, (2) Non-formal Advanced Arabic Schools and (3) the Western type modern Arabic schools.

1. *Non-Formal Arabic Primary School (Ile kewu Oniwala)*

This type of school is regarded as a Primary Arabic School. It operates in all nooks and crannies of the Northern and South-Western States in Nigeria. These

schools are in form of centers wherein children are taught the Arabic alphabets written on their locally made slates and then committed to their hearts. Other things to be memorized next are some portions of the Qur'anic verses said by Mallams (the instructors) and parroted by the pupils.[19] These verses are then written out on their wooden slates. Children from four to ten years of age usually attend these schools concomitantly with their education. Moreover, adults whose pangs for religious knowledge have not been satisfied attend these schools. These schools are usually set up in the mosques, under the shades of trees, in front of mallams' houses, etc. At this stage of learning, no Arabic grammar is taught to these pupils, nor are they required to learn the meanings of any Arabic words or advanced study of the Qur'an.[20]

In the same vein, describing the whole situation on ground in the northern part of the country, Khalid eloquently pictured out the scene as follows:

> The pupils sit on the mats, bare floor or ground either in a semi-circle or straight line. Each child holds his written wooden slate (allo) and recites the verses of the Holy Qur'an. The method of instruction is as follows, the teacher recites to the pupils the verse to be learnt and they repeat it after him. He does this several times until he is satisfied that they have mastered the correct pronunciation. Then the pupils are left on their own to continue repeating the verse until they have thoroughly memorized it. The verse is then linked with the previously memorized verses and in this way the pupil gradually learns by heart the whole Qur'an. At this level, hardly is any attempts made to enable the pupils understand the meaning of what they recite or write. The teacher only pays particular attention to the reading and writing skills of every pupil as well as keep tract of his attendance even though no formal registers are kept. The relationship between teacher and pupil is generally intimate and personal. The teacher is always ready to pardon a late-comer if he is convinced that his lateness was caused by some engagement at home.[21]

2. *Non-Formal Advanced Arabic Schools (Ile kewu Onituma)*

The 'ilmiyyah schools are learning places where the students are rigorously exposed to various aspects of the Islamic theology, the Arabic language, Literature, the Quran, the Hadeeth of the Prophet, Islamic jurisprudence and transactions, Rhetoric, Prosody, Poetry, Grammar and other sciences written in Arabic such as Astronomy, Mathematics, Medicine, etc. In the meanwhile, students are expected to acquire communicative competence because of the use of Arabic as a vehicle of instruction during the learning process. This heavily depends on the depth and breadth of the knowledge of the tutors.[22]

In his comprehensive account of Arabic learning in West Africa, Windwood Reade narrates that:

> I have found mosques and schools and the language of the country written in Arabic character; as English and French are written in Roman characters; and Negroes reading the Koran, the "Tradition of Mohammad", the Psalms of David and various Arabic works on law, grammar, history and logic...A man might travel across

> Africa from St. Louis in the Senegal to Cairo, or in another direction from Lagos to Tripoli, sleeping in a village every time (except in the Sahara) and in every village he would find a school. This will give the reader some idea of the population and culture of Soudan.[23]

3. *Modern Arabic Schools (Western Type Schools)*

Another giant stride taken by the *ulama* of Qur'an and Arabic education in Nigeria in order to ensure the continuity and the flourishing of Qur'an and Arabic education is the modernization of Qur'an and Arabic schools after they adopted the managerial expertise they had gained from the Colonial rulers whom were seen as their enemies and powerful opponents. Under this arrangement, tuition and admission form fees are paid by their pupils, while they provide them with text books. Modern classrooms are now being used for the study instead of assembling in their teachers' houses, mosques or under the shade of trees. Interestingly, teaching aids like chalkboard, whiteboard and other apparatus are in use in these schools. Other developments on ground in the schools are syllabus, school uniform, boarding house facility, roll call on every morning school day, record keeping of students' progress as well as organized sport equipment for recreational activities.[24]

These schools are privately owned by voluntary Muslim Organizations or individual proprietors. According to Oladosu, "Students of these schools pass through three distinctive stages of Arabic Education: The ibtidàaiyyah (primary education); the idaadiyyah stage (preparatory); and the Thaanawiyyah stage (senior secondary school level) in the Nigerian system of education."[25] These schools are regarded as the Non-formal Arabic Advanced schools. They are as numerous as that of the traditional ones. Below is the list of some of them:

No.	INSTITUTE NAME	LOCATION	AVAILABLE LEVELS
1	Az-Zumratul Adabiyyatul Kamaliyyah School for Arabic & Islamic Studies	Ilorin, Kwara State	Preparatory & Secondary
2	Markaz al-ta'limil Araby Al-Islamy	Agege, Lagos State	Preparatory & Secondary
3	Al-Azhar Arabic & Islamic Institute	Ilorin, Kwara State	Preparatory & Secondary
4	Daarul 'Uluum Arabic School	Ilorin, Kwara State	Preparatory & Secondary
5	Kamal Institute of Arabic & Islamic Studies	Ilorin, Kwara State	Preparatory & Secondary
6	Az-Zumratul Adabiyyatul Kamaliyyah	Osogbo,Osun State	Preparatory
7	Shaikh Abubakar Gumi College of Arabic & Islamic Studies	Kaduna, Kaduna State	Preparatory & Secondary

8	Manba'ul Hikmah School of Arabic & Islamic Studies	Ikirun, Osun State	Preparatory & Sec
9	Daarul Kitaab was-Sunnah for Arabic & Islamic Studies	Ilorin, Kwara State	Preparatory & Sec
10	Islamic Vocational Arabic Centre	Ibadan, Oyo State	Preparatory & Secondary
11	Shamsud-Deen College of Arabic & Islamic Studies	Ilorin, Kwara State	Preparatory & Secondary
12	Abdul Azeez Islamic School	Kaduna, Kaduna State	Preparatory
13	Arabic & Islamic Technical Centre	Ibadan, Oyo State	Preparatory & Secondary
14	Al-Falaah Al-Adaby School of Arabic & Islamic Studies	Ilorin, Kwara State	Preparatory
15	Daarus-Salaam Institute for Arabic & Islamic Studies	Ilorin, Kwara State	Preparatory & Secondary
16	Hayaatul Islam School	Kaduna, Kaduna State	Preparatory
17	Daarud-Da'awah wal-Irshaad	Isolo, Lagos State	Preparatory & Secondary
18	Muhyiddeen College of Arabic & Islamic Studies	Ilorin, Kwara State	Preparatory, Secondary & University
19	Arabic & Islamic Institute	Ibadan, Oyo State	Preparatory & Secondary
20	Ansarud-Deen Arabic & Islamic Institute	Isolo, Lagos State	Secondary & Diploma
21	Zumratus- Saliheen School of Arabic & Islamic Studies	Ilorin, Kwara State	Preparatory & Secondary
22	Al-Markaz al-ta'limi Al-Araby Al-Islamy, Agodi	Ilorin, Kwara State	Preparatory & Secondary
23	Al-Adabiyyatul Kamaliyyah School of Arabic & Islamic Studeis	Igbeti, Oyo State	Preparatory
24	Jawaahiru School of Arabic & Islamic Studies	Ilorin, Kwara State	Preparatory & Secondary
25	Manhajud-Da'awah School of Arabic & Islamic Studies	Ikirun, Osun State	Preparatory & Secondary
26	Uthman Dan Fodio Arabic School	Kaduna, Kaduna State	Diploma
27	Arabic Teachers College	Katsina, Katsina	Diploma
28	Higher Islamic Studies	Zaria, Kaduna State	Diploma
29	Al-Qur'an Kareem Institute	Funtua, Katshina State	Secondary
30	Islamic Institute	Ede, Osun State	Preparatory & Secondary
31	Ridwanullahi School of Arabic & Islamic Studies	Igbeti, Oyo State	Preparatory
32	Nurul Islam School	Kaduna, Kaduna State	Preparatory

In all the afore-named Arabic institutions, the Arabic language is used as the medium of instruction and English is taught as a subject. Fortunately, most of the students of Arabic schools are well-versed in English due to their early mastery of the language in their former schools in which English language was the medium of instruction. According to Oladosu, in many of these Arabic schools, Arab scholars sent by Al-Azhar authority in Cairo work as lecturers. In others are Arab expatriates sent by the governments of Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and others. Outstanding Nigerian Arabic scholars are not left out of this task, although majority of them lecture in government owned higher institutions.[26]

In the formal school system, the Arabic language is studied in many schools in the Northern and Western parts of the country. West African School Certificate (WASC) has been setting examinations in both Arabic and Islamic Studies since the late fifties of the 20th century and approved Arabic language syllabus designed by the West African Examination Council (WAEC) in 1974.[27]

Expatiating more on the study of Arabic up to formal certification at higher level, Oladosu further states that:

> At the end of their Senior Secondary Education, students with credit pass in Arabic, Islamic Studies, English language and two other subjects are eligible to major in Arabic at the university. The subject combination also allows candidates to major in other relevant areas of their interest, provided specific admission requirements are met.[28]

It is pertinent to note that apart from Private Arabic Schools which concern itself with the promotion of the Arabic language, there are several colleges of education, universities at both federal and state levels and Private educational institutions that run Arabic Studies or Arabic Educational Programs in Nigeria. According to Oladosu, the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Brochure reveals that out of 123 universities in Nigeria, there are 21 that offer Arabic related programs. Moreover, the number of Federal, States and Private colleges of education in Nigeria is 109 out of which 44 run Arabic related programs. All this progress can be regarded as fortunes which automatically engender wanton rivalries.[29]

As to Islamic Organizations in the country, there exist hundreds of Muslim associations and societies (Jama'at) that meticulously promote the cause of Arabic and Islamic Knowledge. These bodies voluntarily contribute to the erection of western-type schools, mosques, Islamic centers and organize a variety of religious celebrations on occasions such as Maulidu an-Nabiy (celebration of the Prophet birth) the head of the Islamic year, Laylatul Qadri (the night of power in Ramadan), Al-Israai wal Mi'iraaj (the night of ascension of Prophet Mohammad), Nisfus Sha'baan (the first half of the eight month of lunar calendar), etc. which are highly important elements of public Islamic visibility, as well as occasions for fund-raising activities. These associations have branches in the nocks and crannies of Nigeria, even some with branches outside Nigeria.[30]

Arabic: An Enigmatic and Esoteric World Language

Regarding Arabic as a symbol and expression of Islam as well as a unifying force for the Muslims all over the Islamic World, the Nigerian Muslims expend their wealth and faculties on the proliferation of the language. Within the context of the recent political and educational development in the country, Arabic language, apart from creating a link to the Islamic World, serves to secure a certain degree of cultural homogeneity among the Muslims and to provide a modernized form of a distinct Islamic socialization for their children.[31]

Within the society, the Arabic scholars, especially those who adhere to traditional modes of life, they enjoy high reputations because of an extraordinary, supernatural power associated with the Quran, the words of God, whose language is Arabic. Most of the Arabic scholars are venerated for they minister to the spiritual condition of the people in their society. In addition, they offer amulets and remedies against evil spirit, enemies, sickness and obstacles to success in life. These scholars are widely believed to possess divine power of the Quran. They know the appropriate portions from the Quarnic chapters or verses to be used in order to gain someone's love, to attain high promotions in any job, to attract customers to one's merchandising goods and to salvage ill-fated men.[32]

In this process, some Qur'anic verses may be written on paper, soaked in water, and then used by some people who come to those scholars as a special solution with which to wash themselves as protection against witches' attacks and to bring good fortune. A significant portion of the writing consists of esoteric formulae and signs (khatumi). This service is in high demand among Nigerians, both Muslims and Christians, especially in times of economic hardships and political activities. These divine charms are kept secret and specially taught to interested modern Arabic experts who incline to lead a conventional life similar to that of those scholars who know the secret meaning of the Qur'an.[33]

Arabic Language in the Nigerian Media

As far as the mass communication and the press are concerned, Akinnaso and Ogunbiyi, state that there is a very limited chance for Arabic at both the federal and state levels. At the federal level, news and some programs such as greeting requests, music interludes, etc. are broadcast in Arabic by the Federal Radio Corporation Service of Nigeria (FRCN), external service division which starts its daily transmission programs at 5.00 pm GMT. At the state level, some radio and television stations in many states in the north occasionally broadcast in Arabic for the purposes of Arabic teaching oriented programs, Fridays Jum'at services, religious activities during Ramadan and festivities associated with both 'idil-Fitr and 'idil-Adhaa Muslim big festivals.[34]

In the same vein, in its concerted efforts to fast-track the proliferation of the Arabic language, the Nigerian Association of Teachers of Arabic and Islamic Studies (NATAIS) Kwara State Chapter, in conjunction with the management of Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN), is currently sponsoring an Arabic teaching

oriented program, namely, ARABIC BY RADIO on the Harmony 103.5 FM, Idofian, Kwara State. The program is being anchored by the author of this paper and it is broadcast on Saturdays from 2.30 to 3.00 pm local time.

As to the press, there are no government-owned newspapers, periodicals or magazines published in the Arabic language. The periodicals edited in Arabic in Nigeria today are students' unions and Arabic scholar associations' sponsored publications. Although they are not exclusively in Arabic, they contain a lot of Arabic texts. Among them are *al-'ilmu* , (Journal of the Muslim Students Society of Nigeria); *Majallat al-Buhuth* (Research Bulletin); *Dirasat Arabiyyah* (Arabic Studies); Journal of Arabic and Religious Studies (JARS); Ar-Risalah (The Message) the first Commercial Arabic Magazine in Nigeria[35]; and *Saotul Haq* (The Voice of Truth), an annual Magazine of Al-Adabiyyah Nigerian Students Union in Cairo, Egypt. Interestingly, in an unprecedented giant stride, there is an Arabic language bi-monthly bulletin (Akhbar Aljami'ah) edited and published by the Arabic Unit, Kwara State University, Malete. It is the first of its kind in all Nigerian Universities. Its first edition was published in November 2012.

Arabic: An Embattled Nigerian Language

The lack of official allocation of funds for the promotion of Arabic in the country is religio-political. The growing tensions between the Muslims and Christians over the Nigerian membership in the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) as well as the demand for the establishment of Shari'a law in Nigeria have blocked the official recognition of the language in Nigeria. The Arabic language study is neither explicitly alluded to in the National Policy on Education published in 1977 (revised in 1981) nor in Government Views on the Implementation Committee's Blue Print on the Federal Republic of Nigeria National Policy on Education, although, its study in higher and tertiary institutions in the country is allowed up to certification and degree attainment.[36]

Moreover, considering one of the objectives' of the OIC, namely, the promotion of Islamic solidarity among member states, Nigerian non-Muslims and other Westernized Muslims in the country strongly objected to the Nigerian membership in the OIC. They posited that the body may adopt Arabic for its affairs. According to Kenny, one Nigerian Westernized Muslim expressed his rejection of the Nigerian participation in the OIC thus:

> How would posterity explain to the coming generation that 26 years after the country had attained independence from European imperialism, Nigeria slumped again into another domination of Arabian religious imperialism![37]

On the Christian side, several acrimonious articles were published in the Nigerian newspapers and other mass media against the proposed membership. Registering his strong objection to the Nigerian membership in the OIC, Professor Olajide Aluko of the University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University) Nigeria remarked that:

> Although the Arab states are rich in oil revenues, most of their financial resources are invested in financial institutions and real estate in North America and Western Europe to yield heavy dividends and interest, and not in Africa. In a few Muslim countries in Africa where they have given some financial help, it goes for the promotion of Arabic language and Islam, such as the building of Islamic universities in Niger and Uganda. Less than 1.05% of Arab aid has gone to Africa, not even to fellow African members of the Arab League such as Somalia and Sudan.[38]

Nonetheless, the neutrality of the Nigerian membership in the OIC was stressed and articulated by some high ranking Muslim personalities throughout the country. For example, Rilwanu Lukman, the one-time Minister of Energy and Mines, who represented Nigeria in one of the OIC sessions, explained that:

> Joining the OIC does not make Nigeria an Islamic State, as it did not make other member states like Cameroon, Benin Republic, Sierra Leone, Gabon and a host of others. He added: "If there was any international Christian organization with the same objectives, aspirations and results as the OIC, Nigeria would not hesitate to join, if we believe it in our national interest to do so.[39]

The availability of a sizeable number of non-Muslim scholars of Arabic in Nigeria would have played a positive role in settling differences between the two parties. In other words, consultations with non-Muslim Arabic experts in Nigeria would have averted the wanton uproar and verbal wars traded by the officials of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) over the membership of Nigeria in the OIC. A testimony to the veracity of the availability of eminent non-Muslim Arabic specialists in the country is in the confirmation made by Oloyede (2012) that Ogunbiyi, the first Christian Professor of Arabic in Nigeria, said that D. H. Bivar, Mervyn Hiskett and John Hunwick were the people who assisted in building a virile program for the study of Arabic language at the University of Ibadan. He further said that:

> Hunwick was said to have been responsible for the establishment of the Arabic documentation centre of the institute of African Studies of the University. The centre was set up for the purpose of collecting, preserving and collating Nigeria Arabic manuscripts".[40]

Furthermore, in his defence of the Nigerian membership in the OIC, President Ibrahim Babangida, the former Nigerian Military head of state, delivered an address on 3th February, 1986 to the bi-religious panel established to study the situation that:

> The OIC is only incidentally religious and primarily for the purpose of economic, cultural, technical and diplomatic co-operation along with the pursuit of peace and justice. Membership in the OIC is not different from membership in the UN. OAU, etc.

> Its business is strictly international co-operation and the struggle for economic development and self-reliance.[41]

The former President warned the anti-Nigerian OIC membership against making any infuriating utterances that could destabilize the country and trigger a bi-polar religious violence. Upon all the exonerations, Professor Aluko refuted the President's explanation and said that:

> It is nonsensical to say that the OIC's membership does not make Nigeria an Islamic state. First, the title of the organization made it clear that it was Islamic. Of the seven aims of the organization adopted in its charter of 1972 three specifically dealt with Islamic matters....All the specialized committees of the OIC specifically contain the word Islam. I shall give some random examples: Islamic Commission for Economic, Cultural and Social Affairs; International Commission for the Islamic Heritage; the Islamic Civil Aviation Council; Islamic Foundation for Science, Technology and Development, and the Research Centre for Islamic History, Arts and Culture etc. What can make a country more Islamic than this I don't know.[42]

Concerning the wanton uproar generated by the possibility of the incorporation of the *Shari'a* law into the Nigerian constitutions, the generality of the Nigerian Muslims under the canopy of the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs holds firmly to their belief that under no circumstances should an individual Muslim be ruled by any other laws than the *Shari'a* law alone. If justice were to be done in Nigeria, the Muslims in the country should be allowed to be governed by the *Shari'a* law which goes with their faith. This would manifest to the world the splendor of the diversity of regions in the country. The proliferation of heinous criminal acts, corruption as well as the poor standard of education culminated in the absence of the *Shari'a* law.[43]

Conversely, the Nigerian Christians, represented by the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) have strong oppositions to such a move and called for the running of a secular nation. The inclusion of the *Shari'a* law in the constitutions, according to the Association, is discriminatory against other citizens of different religious backgrounds in the country. They also expressed apprehension of the potential Islamization of Nigeria and the ensuing imposition of Arabic, which is the lingua franca of Islam on Nigeria should the *Shari'a* law be institutionalized. This would negate the true spirit of federalism, they argued.[44]

Such attitudes towards the Nigeria's membership in the OIC and the heated debates on the establishment of Shari'a law militate against any official recognition of Arabic either as an indigenous Nigerian tongue or an exogenous language worth incorporating into the Nigerian constitutions. The same reason has made it difficult for the National Policy on Education to reinforce its learning at all levels in schools and secure enviable governmental posts for its learners in Nigeria.

Moreover, equally obstructing the smooth road for the recognition of Arabic in the Nigerian constitutions is the communal confrontations between Christians and

Muslims, especially in the northern part of the country where Arabic had enjoyed a wide range of official usage before independence. Today, Arabic still has a relative stronghold in most parts of the North in which probably few a government-run Arabic medium schools can be found. The situation is aggravated by the current confrontations between Nigeria as a nation and the so called Boko-haram syndrome which is seen by some people as a religious fight between Christians and Muslims in the North.[45]

Suggestions and Recommendations

To gradually ameliorate this potentially explosive situation, this article is of the views that the Federal government of Nigeria should enlighten the general public about the benefits of Arabic language *vis-à-vis* other world languages. The government should help people to realize that Arabic is a language of great interest to both the Nigeria's political and economic balance on the African continent just as the other world languages are. Interested non-Muslim students should be sponsored by the Nigerian government to study Arabic in secular institutions in the Arab World such as the American Universities in Cairo and Beirut (AUC and AUB) or other Western universities in order to see the high rate of non-Muslim Nigerian students learning Arabic language. Interested Nigerian Christians should also be sponsored to some Nigerian Universities that offer the Arabic language as a programme of study.. Upon their graduation, the government should place them, together with their Muslim colleagues and those being trained in the Arabic language village at Ngala, Borno State in very coveted posts in order to encourage other citizens.

Furthermore, Arab nations should be awakened to the ideological and cultural revolutionary campaigns being waged by the Western world. In spite of the domination of the English language in the political, economic and social activities in the former British colonies, a substantial amount of money is earmarked annually by both the British and American governments for the promotion of the English language and culture worldwide. The British government has been financially supporting the British Council in its English language teaching mission abroad since its inception in 1934. The British government's financial backing of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) has been instrumental in its active spreading of English worldwide via its World Service and English by Radio, Television and satellite Programmes.

Before the unfortunate events of the World Trade Center in September 2001, there was very low ebb for Arabic studies in the United States of America as shown by various studies conducted at the time.[46] In the aftermath of the attacks, the demand by the Americans for Arabic rose as a result of the FBI's recruitment's offer to employ Arabic translators and interpreters. Ever since, there have been huge increases in the enrolment for Arabic.

In its own efforts to uphold the strength of English in the world, Wardhaugh notes that the USA government in the 1960s used to promote the language five powerful official channels outside the States: the US Information Agency (USIA), the

Agency for International Development (AID), the State Department, the Peace Corps and the Department of Defense. Undoubtedly, the US endeavors have been intensified especially now that the acquisition of the English language is equated to erudition and civilization. Both the British and the US governments have successfully made the English language an indispensable tool of international understanding and have gained and still gaining more grounds in every part of the world.[47]

In the same vein, the situation is similar in Francophone countries where the French government has been vigorously promoting its language and culture. Is the Arab World aware of all these? It is in 1998 of the past century during the late General Sani Abacha's regime that the French language was accorded an official recognition as a second language in Nigeria.[48] With immediate effect, the French government started alluring Nigerians by lavishing a huge sum of money through scholarship awards for Nigerian students to study French in France. The French government also embarked on the establishment of French learning centers throughout Nigeria. Where are the Arabs in all these? The Arab's endeavor in spreading their language should not be circumscribed to religious domain per se, cultural-oriented ties with Africa in general and Nigeria in particular is of paramount significance for mutual benefits. The lost historic multi-faceted relationship between Nigeria and some Arab nations could be restored if the revival process is backed by political will. If the so called Pan Africanism is to be meaningful, Nigeria and other African states must fully embrace the Africa's most living language with international reputation, i.e. Arabic.

We call on the Arab world, particularly the Arab League, the Organization of Islamic Conference and other concerned Arab organizations to further promote the cause of Arabic language in Nigeria by taking the following measures:

(a) Work together with the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs in order to further encourage the proliferation of Arabic Studies in our Private Arabic Schools, and strengthen its presence in the curricula of institutions of higher learning in the country;

(b) Fully recognize the Nigerian Association of Teachers of Arabic and Islamic Studies (NATAIS) in order to sustain and perfect its learning progression beyond the present level;

(c) Provide material and financial aid to different non-Governmental, Islamic organizations in the country;

(d) Endeavor as humanly as possible to restore the Arab and Islamic cultures in Nigeria. By so doing, hopefully the Arabic language would regain its evaporated status in the Nigerian constitutions.

Conclusion

Languages spoken in Nigeria are as many as the Nigerian different ethnic identities. Although, an official recognition has not been conferred on it, the historical background reveals that Arabic is one of the indigenous Nigerian tongues irrespective of its great affinity with the religion of Islam.

Moreover, having migrated from various destinations to the land called Nigeria, the origins of many Nigerian languages of today have been overlooked and the right of naturalization has been granted, the same right enjoyed by the Arabic language which is natively spoken by tens of hundreds of the Nigerian citizens.

In spite of the natural and artificial hindrances in the way of Arabic, the proliferation it enjoys emanates from the concerted and insidious efforts made by various organizations and bodies who are stakeholders to ensure its smooth spread to the nock and cranny of Nigeria. This effort is coupled be the official authorization allowing the language to be studied at different educational levels.

Furthermore, a full-fledged official recognition of Arabic suffered a setback when the French language was made the second official language in Nigeria, relegating Arabic to a foreign language status in the constitutions of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

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