

## MULTILINGUALISM ACROSS BORDERS: NIGERIA- REPUBLIC OF BENIN AS CASE STUDY

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### Abstract

This paper examines the incidence of multilingualism as a factor of language contact in the West Africa sub-region with particular reference to the interdependence between Nigeria and Benin Republic. By this symbiotic cohabitation, we hold that historically, culturally, socially and linguistically there had been an appreciable contact between the Yorubas, the Eguns of South-western Nigeria on one side and the Yorubas, the Gouns , the Fons of the Republic of Benin on the other side, before, during and after the colonial period. Bearing in mind that Nigeria was colonized by the British while Benin was colonized by the French. Thus, multilingualism as a sociolinguistics phenomenon must reflect some changes: functions, benefits and have some implications on the culture and life of the inhabitants of the region in focus. Consequently, this paper discusses the import of multilingualism across the Nigeria-Benin borders and how the socio-cultural and economic contacts had resulted in the over-all development of these communities under review.

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**Keywords:** Multilingualism, colonialism, language contact, borders, interdependence, culture, Nigeria, Benin, Yorubas, Eguns

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### Résumé

Le présent document examine l'incidence du multilinguisme comme un facteur de contact de langues en Afrique de l' Ouest sous-région avec une référence particulière à l'interdépendance entre le Nigéria et la République du Bénin . Par cette cohabitation symbiotique, nous estimons que historiquement, culturellement, socialement et linguistiquement, il y avait eu un contact sensible entre les Yorubas , les Eguns du Sud- ouest du Nigéria d'un côté et les Yorubas , les Gouns , les Fons de la République du Bénin de l'autre côté, avant, pendant et après la période coloniale . Gardant à l'esprit que le Nigeria a été colonisé par les britanniques tandis que le Bénin a été colonisé par les français. Ainsi, le multilinguisme comme un phénomène sociolinguistique doit refléter certains changements : les fonctions, les avantages et ont des implications sur la culture et la vie des habitants de la région en revue . Par conséquent , le présent communication traite l' importance du multilinguisme à travers les frontières Nigeria- Bénin et la façon dont les contacts socio - culturels et économiques ont abouti à la mise au point d'ensemble de ces communautés à l'étude .

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**Mots clés:** Multilinguisme, colonialisme, contact de langue, frontières, interdépendance, culture, Nigéria, Bénin, Yoroubas, Gouns

### Introduction

*“A society changes when one or more of its institutions are altered. These institutional changes may be positive (beneficial) or negative (harmful)*

*depending on how they affect the members. Changes may be brought about by forces within the society (internal changes) or by influences outside the society (external changes). An example of changes in the political institution is for a country to pass from colonialism to independence".(Encyclopedia Americana, International Edition, Danbury, 1988, p.532).*

From the above citation, one could make reference to the socio-political situation in Nigeria and Benin as countries where one or more of their institutions had been altered and there had been institutional changes in these countries because they had passed from the colonial administration to politically independent communities in the West African sub-region. It is also worthy of note that Nigeria was colonized by the British and hence an Anglophone country, while Benin was colonized by the French thus becoming a Francophone country. Benin had her independence on the 1<sup>st</sup> of August, 1960 while Nigeria also became independent on the 1<sup>st</sup> of October, 1960. It is also a fact that Nigeria and Benin are members of the Economic Community of West African States, ECOWAS( La Communauté Économique des États de L'Afrique de l'Ouest , CEDEAO in French) an international body that was created on the 28<sup>th</sup> May, 1975 by the Lagos Treaty to promote economic, industrial and border cooperation among the member states. In other words, ECOWAS was put in place in order to promote and develop inter-regional exchanges in the following domains: agriculture, energy, telecommunication, transport and commerce, financial and cultural affairs. The ECOWAS headquarters is located at Abuja, in Nigeria.

Geographically, the Republic of Benin is located beside the South-western region of Nigeria. Indeed, there exist some forms of homogeneous social, cultural and linguistic elements that are common to these two regions. Linguistically, English is the official language of Nigeria, while that of Benin is French. Although, Nigeria is made up of heterogeneous population comprising of many ethnic groups among which are the following: Efik, Ijaw, Ibibio, Edo, Jukun, Nupe, Igala and a host of other tribes to mention a few. Out of these traditional communities, the three main ethnic groups are Hausa(majority), Yoruba and Igbo(minority). The Republic of Benin as well is composed of heterogeneous population namely: Bariba, Dendi, Djerma, Groussi, Haoussa, Mossi, Paragouma and Peul in the north, while in the South we have the Fon (Adja or Aja), Ewe, Gen, Mina, Gouns (Egun) and Yorouba (Yoruba or Anago or Nago). Indeed, the three main ethnic groups are: Bariba in the North, Yorouba and Adja-Ewe in the South. It is quite interesting to remark that from all the main ethnic groups mentioned above, the Hausa, Yoruba, Egun and Bariba are common to the two countries under study. Hence, these communities have been the domineering communities across the Nigeria –Benin borders and yonder. This is an indication that there had been some socio-politico-cultural ties between Nigeria and Benin in the pre-colonial era. Let us now examine the extent to which Yoruba community had spread both far and near all over the world:

*"The Yoruba people (Yorùbá in Yoruba orthography) are one of the largest ethnic groups in West Africa. The majority of the Yoruba speak the Yoruba language (Yoruba: èdè Yorùbá; èdè). The Yoruba constitute between 30 and 50 million individuals throughout West Africa and are found predominantly in Nigeria and make up around 21% of its population.*

*The Yoruba share borders with the Borgu (variously called "Baruba" and "Borgawa") in the northwest; the Nupe (whom they often call "Tapa") and Ebira in the north; and the Edo, the Èsan, and the Afemai to the southeast. The Igala and other related groups are found in the northeast, and the Egun, Fon, and others in the southwest. The Itsekiri who live in the north-west Niger delta, are closely related to the Yoruba but maintain a distinct cultural identity. While the majority of the Yoruba live in western Nigeria, there are also substantial*

*indigenous Yoruba communities in the Republic of Benin and Togo, plus large groups of Yoruba migrants living in the United States and the United Kingdom. The Yoruba population was also involved in slavery and were taken to the Americas, where they form a large diaspora.” (Wikipedia (2012): Yoruba people).*

From the above affirmation, it is evident that Yoruba language is one of the domineering languages spoken across Nigeria-Benin borders even as far as Togo, Ghana, Liberia, Sierra-Leon and Côte d’Ivoire. Closely followed by this is Hausa language which is widely spoken in many countries in the North, West and Central African. One discovers that in these two countries, English and French languages are used intermittently with other local languages. As a matter of fact, these main groups in Nigeria and Benin speak their languages everywhere across their borders in their everyday life. Thus, these languages are considered as living languages because they are widely spoken by the two communities as well as making use of English and French as their administrative languages. Hence, this present situation of these communities implies languages in contact as well as multilingualism which are phenomenon in sociolinguistics.

According to the New Standard Encyclopedia, “Living languages are not fixed or static, but are constantly changing in grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation and spelling. Changes usually begin in the spoken languages, then, often after a gap of years occur in the written.”(New Standard Encyclopedia, Vol. 8: (1987). Considering the languages in contact across Nigeria-Benin borders,(English, French, Yoruba, Egun, Hausa,Ibo, etc.), one would agree that they have had changes constantly in their structures over the years. They have also reflected changes in the culture and life of their speakers in order to keep pace linguistically with the different developments of modern life: social, religious, commerce and industry, science and technology etc. At this juncture, it is pertinent to state that this paper will firstly examine what sociolinguistics is all about and how it is related to language contact, multilingualism and linguistic borrowing or interference. Secondly, it would define multilingualism and then discuss some factors that are responsible for multilingualism in the world with particular reference to Nigeria and Benin. Thirdly, we shall examine the importance of multilingualism in countries such as Nigeria and the Republic of Benin pointing out its benefits and implications. Finally, we have the conclusion where we express our personal view on the issue of multilingualism.

### **Sociolinguistics in relation to language contact, multilingualism and linguistic borrowing**

First and foremost we need to define what sociolinguistics is all about? According to the Encyclopedia Americana, “sociolinguistics is concerned with the interrelation of socio and linguistic phenomenon, of social classes and social dialects.”(Op.cit.p.532). Furthermore, sociolinguistics is an integral part of linguistics that covers the society. That is, the usage of language by the individual or group of people in the society as well as its relations with regards to this language in a given society. Fishman (1978:25) considered sociolinguistics as follows:

*«La sociolinguistique est l’étude des caractéristiques de variétés de langue, des caractéristiques de leurs fonctions aussi bien que celles des locuteurs ou des utilisateurs».*

“Sociolinguistics is the study of the characteristics of varieties of language, the characteristics of their functions as well as that of the speakers or the users of the language.” (Our translation).

It is evident from the above definitions that sociolinguistics covers three main fields of research: linguistic variety, the functions of the varieties and the characteristics of the

users. Thus, sociolinguistics studies contacts between languages. Kwofie, E.N.(1987) said that, language contact may be through political domination(e.g. colonialism), trade, education or it may be the result of geographical proximity among other situations. He also indicated that the most important linguistic effect of such contact is linguistic borrowing or interference which may take place at any linguistic level. Lehmann W.P.(1972) in his discussion of semantic change observes as follows:

*“By far the most important effect on the semantic component of language is brought about by the influence of other languages or dialects, a process referred to as linguistic borrowing. Borrowing may be viewed as cultural diffusion. In accounting for its effects, we must attempt to determine the conditions under which borrowing takes place.”*

We can see that borrowing or interference is not confined to a particular linguistic community; it seems to be a universal linguistic phenomenon observed among fairly homogeneous communities as well as among linguistic communities. Subsequently, language contact implies contact between people that brings about multilingualism, linguistic borrowing or linguistic interference. Such is the situation of Nigeria and Benin at present because there had been cultural, social and linguistic diffusion among the two countries since the epoch of the Old Oyo Empire. The Oyo Empire was a Yoruba empire of what is today western and northern Nigeria. Established in the 14th century, the Oyo Empire grew to become one of the largest West African states encountered by pre-colonial explorers. It rose through the outstanding organisational skills of the Yoruba wealth gained from trade and its powerful cavalry. The Oyo Empire was the most politically important state in the region from the mid-17th to the late 18th century, holding sway not only over most of the other kingdoms in Yorubaland, but also over nearby African states, notably the Fon Kingdom of Dahomey in the contemporary Republic of Benin to the west.

### **What is multilingualism?**

*“To have another language is to possess a second soul.”*

*(Charlemagne (742 – 814), King of the Franks).*

*“Multilingualism is the natural potential available to every normal human being rather than an unusual exception: “Given the appropriate environment, two languages are as normal as two lungs” (Cook 2002:23).*

It does not even require the ability to speak two unrelated languages; a user of e.g. the ‘literary’ and a vernacular/dialectal variety of a language is already multicompetent. At the same time, multicompetence does not require perfect fluency in all the languages at one’s command; thus, setting the boundary would probably be a mission impossible.

Hence, multilingualism can equally be defined as the act of using, or promoting the use of, multiple languages, either by an individual speaker or by a community of speakers. A basic distinction when discussing bilingualism and multilingualism is between the individual and societal level. At the individual level, bilingualism and multilingualism refer to the speaker’s competence to use two or more languages. At the societal level the terms bilingualism and multilingualism refer to the use of two or more languages in a speech community and it does not necessarily imply that all the speakers in that community are competent in more than one. Furthermore, a multilingual person, in a broad definition, is one who can communicate in more than one language, be it actively (through speaking, writing, or signing) or passively (through listening, reading, or perceiving). More specifically, the terms *bilingual* and *trilingual* are used to describe comparable situations in which two or three languages are involved. A multilingual person is generally referred to as a polyglot. *Poly* (Greek: πολύς) means "many", *glot* (Greek: γλώττα) means "language".

In addition, multilingualism could be rigidly defined as being *native-like* in two or more languages. It could also be loosely defined as being *less than native-like* but still able to communicate in two or more languages. Indeed, multilingual speakers have acquired and maintained at least one language during childhood, the so-called first language(L1). The first language (sometimes also referred to as the mother tongue) is acquired without formal education, by mechanisms heavily disputed. Children acquiring two languages in this way are called simultaneous bilinguals. Even in the case of simultaneous bilinguals one language usually dominates over the other. This kind of bilingualism is most likely to occur when a child is raised by bilingual parents in a predominantly monolingual environment. It can also occur when the parents are monolingual but have raised their child or children in two different countries.

Moreover, the widespread of multilingualism is one form of language contact. Multilingualism was more common in the past than is usually supposed: in early times, when most people were members of small language communities, it was necessary to know two or more languages for trade or any other dealings outside one's own town or village, and this holds good today in places of high linguistic diversity such as Sub-Saharan Africa and India. Linguist Ekkehard Wolff estimates that 50% of the population of Africa is multilingual.

Whenever two people meet, negotiations take place. If they want to express solidarity and sympathy, they tend to seek common features in their behaviour. If speakers wish to express distance towards or even dislike of the person they are speaking to, the reverse is true, and differences are sought. This mechanism also extends to language, as it has been described by Howard Giles' Accommodation Theory:

*“Various, but not nearly all, multilinguals tend to use code-switching, a term that describes the process of 'swapping' between languages. In many cases, code-switching is motivated by the wish to express loyalty to more than one cultural group, as it holds for many immigrant communities in the New World. Code-switching may also function as a strategy where proficiency is lacking. Such strategies are common if the vocabulary of one of the languages is not very elaborated for certain fields, or if the speakers have not developed proficiency in certain lexical domains, as in the case of immigrant languages”.*  
(<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/multilingualism>).

Potential multilinguals are believed to be mostly residents in boarder areas between two countries with different languages, where each language is seen as of equal prestige: efforts may be made by both language communities to acquire an L2. Yet, in areas where one language is more prestigious than the other, speakers of the less prestigious language may acquire the dominant language as an L2. However, with time, the different language communities may reduce to one, as one language becomes extinct in that area. Other potential multilingual speakers include:

- People with a strong interest in a foreign language.
- People who find it necessary to acquire a second language for practical purposes such as business, information gathering (Internet, mainly English) or entertainment (foreign language films, books or computer games).
- Language immersion children.
- Immigrants and their descendants. Although the heritage language may be lost after one or two generations, particularly if the replacing language has greater prestige.
- Children of expatriates. However, language loss of the L1 or L2 in younger children may be rapid when removed from a language community.
- Children whose parents each speak a different language, in multilingual communities. In monolingual communities, when parents maintain a different-parent/different-language household, younger children may appear to be multilingual; however

entering school will overwhelm the child with pressure to conform to the dominant community language. Younger siblings in these households will almost always be monolingual. On the other hand, in monolingual communities, where parents have different L1s, multilingualism in the child may be achieved when both parents maintain a one-language (not the community language) household.

- Children in language-rich communities where neither language is seen as more prestigious than the other and where interaction between people occurs in different languages on a frequent basis.
- Children who have one or more parents who have learned a second language, either formally (in classes) or by living in the country. The parent chooses to speak only this second language to the child. One study suggests that during the teaching process, the parent also boosts his or her own language skills, learning to use the second language in new contexts as the child grows and develops linguistically.

Considering the fact that Nigeria and the Republic of Benin are culturally, historically and linguistically homogeneous, it is of the believe that the phenomenon of multilingualism would have effected a lot of positive changes in the social, political, economic and cultural life of the two communities under review. Nowadays, in the contemporary world, multilingualism usually implies English, French and other local or heritage languages. But English has also been considered a threat for linguistic diversity (Philipson, 1992). The spread of English has been visualised in terms of three circles representing the historical and sociolinguistic profile of English in different parts of the world (Kachru,1985). The inner circle includes the countries that are traditionally considered the bases of English, where English is the first language for the majority of the populations: UK, USA, Ireland, Canada, New Zealand, Australia. Nevertheless, English is not the only language spoken in these countries because it is in contact with heritage languages or languages that are spoken as the result of immigration. The outer circle includes those countries where English is not the first language of the majority of the population but English is a second language that is used at the institutional level as the result of colonisation. The expanding circle includes those countries where English has no official status and is taught as a foreign language like in France, Belgium and Germany to mention a few. At this juncture, we would examine the factors responsible for the spread of multilingualism across Nigeria-Bénin boarder.

### **Factors for spread of multilingualism**

In order to understand the concept of multilingualism, it is necessary to consider briefly some of the underlying factors for the spread of multilingualism around the world. As a matter of fact, multilingualism can be the result of different factors. Some of them are the following:

- Historical or political movements such as imperialism or colonialism. Since Benin was formerly part and parcel of the Old Oyo Empire and it was due to colonial intervention that created an artificial boundary for these countries, it is a fact that multilingualism is a product of historical and political movements. Hence, the spread of some languages, such as English and French, which results in the coexistence of different languages such as Yoruba(Nago), Egun(Goun), Hausa(Haoussa), Bariba and Adja-Ewe in these two countries.

- Economic movements in the case of migration. The weak economics of some areas and countries results in movement of the population to other countries and to the development of multilingual and multicultural communities in the host countries. There had been mass immigration and emigration of Nigerians and Beninois across the frontiers in search of greener pastures and better living conditions. For instance, there are many Beninois working in Nigeria as teachers of French language, staffers of multinational companies, craftsmen, house-helps and security guards. Equally, we have many Nigerians living in the

Republic of Benin working as administrators, teachers of English, traders, businessmen and women across the borders. The unique position of the English or French as well as the official language, as well as the main languages of trade, commerce and communication. Or contact with non-Yoruba speaking people both inside and outside the two countries under study.

- Increasing communications among different parts of the world and the need to be competent in languages of wider communication. This is the case with the development of new technologies and also with science. English and French are the main languages of widercommunication but it is used by millions of people in both communities who use other languages as well.

- Social and cultural identity and the interest for maintenance and revival of minority languages. This interest creates situations in which two or more languages co-exist and are necessary in everyday communication. One discovers that, French, English, Yoruba, and Egun languages are mostly used in the socio-economic activities across the Nigeria-Benin borders.

- The spread of education fashioned to a large extent along the British /French pattern and conducted, understandably, solely in English/French from as early as the first year in the primary school. Moreover, second and foreign languages are part of the curriculum in many countries. For example, in Benin, English language is a core subject in all primary and secondary schools' curriculum. There are also Universities, Language Institutes and Centres where Anglophone students could improve their proficiency in French in the Republic of Benin. We have IESSAF-UNIVERSITE, Porto-Novo and CEBELAE, Cotonou as concrete examples. In the same vein, French language is one of the core courses in the present day JSS curriculum in Nigeria. French courses are offered in Colleges of Education, Polytechnics, Universities and in Alliances Françaises everywhere in Nigeria. All these educational institutions also contribute immensely to the spread of multilingualism across Nigeria-Benin borders.

- Religious movements that result in people moving to a new country. In both Nigeria and Bénin, we have so many religious sects; orthodox and traditional, that is common. For example, we have the Catholic Church, the Apostolic Church, the Celestial Church and Islam that cut across the two borders. There are some other traditional religions like: Vaudou, Ogun(Gu), Sango(Chango ou Xebioso), Oya and many others divinities being worshipped by the communities in question. In their mode of worship many languages come into contact.

Finally, the existence of two or more languages in contact will make possible the occurrence of 'code switching' described as 'the sprinkling of English words(or French words) and phrases in Yoruba sentences.'(Afolayan A: 1968, cited by Adebisi Salawu: 1982, p.123).

### **Functions, benefits and implications of multilingualism across borders**

The Italian film director Federico Fellini once said:

*“A different language is a different vision of life”. A person's world can stretch out in front of them for miles and miles or it can be a box around them depending on who they can communicate with”.*(Communicaid Group Ltd, 2010).

It is obvious that learning or speaking another language can open up new worlds, broaden your horizons and bring you into contact with many new cultures. The language you speak can mould your world view and by association your experience of life. Opening up to new cultures can enrich your life and give you new opportunities. Taking part in a *cross cultural training program* or in a *language training course* can help someone to broaden both one's mind and one's world view, increasing peoples' cross cultural competence and peoples' ability to communicate across cultures and across borders everywhere in the world.

Economically, businesses have greatly benefited from building the cultural and linguistic skills across the Nigeria-Benin borders since the early 60s. Thus, speaking many languages had opened new markets up to businessmen and women, traders and multinational companies both in Nigeria and the Republic of Benin that were previously closed. One of the businesses that is very popular is the automobile business. Automobile traders from Nigeria always travel to Cotonou port to buy and import used-vehicles, known as “Tokunbo vehicles” into Nigeria because the market values of these vehicles are by far better than that of Nigerian automobile market. And above all, if a Nigerian trader is able to communicate in French with the automobile merchants at the Cotonou port automobile market he would be able to negotiate easily and better than a trader who cannot communicate in French. Because English predominates as the ‘global language’ of trade and commerce, people often forget that the ability to conduct business with a non-English speaker in their own language, and with knowledge of their cultural values and norms, can build lasting bridges and forge links with that individual or company for many years to come.

From time in memorial, there had been trade links between Nigeria and the Benin Republic. The trans-border trade between Nigeria and Benin has been greatly influenced by the fact that many of the inhabitants of the two communities are able to speak two or more languages. I know of one “demarcheur”(hawker) at the Cotonou Automobile market who is a polyglot. He is popularly called, “Papa Sakete”. He speaks 5 languages: French, English, Yoruba, Hausa and Egun fluently but the irony of it all is that he is not literate in any of these languages he speaks. Nonetheless, he has got so many clients from Nigeria who would not negotiate with the merchants unless this “demarcheur” is around to mediate between them. At present there are a lot of Nigerian traders and businessmen and women benefiting immensely from the trans-frontier trade activities between the Nigerian borders with the Republic of Benin. The official border posts that link the two countries in the western side of Nigeria are: Badagry/Seme in Lagos State, Idi-Iroko/Igholo, Imeko/Ilara in Ogun State and Ejio/Save in Oyo State. It is worthy of note that the inhabitants of these border areas are all involved in one economic activity or the other. In fact ‘smuggling’ of goods across the borders is the order of the day from Nigerian side to Beninois side and vice versa. The goods include: petroleum products, electronics, spare parts of vehicles, beer, soft drinks etc from Nigeria; textile materials, motor vehicles, assorted liquors and drinks, jewelries, food items like rice, vegetable oil and spices from Benin.

There are so many advantages that multilingualism exhibits over monolinguals because these advantages are not restricted to linguistic knowledge only, but extend outside the area of language. The substantial long-lived cognitive, social, personal, academic, and professional benefits of multilingualism are enumerated below. Thus, multilingual persons have been demonstrated to:

- have a keener awareness and sharper perception of language. A proficiency in foreign and local languages “enhances people’s understanding of how language itself works and their ability to manipulate language in the service of thinking and problem solving” (Cummins 1981); In the cross border dealings, the multilinguals are able to manipulate the everyday use of the languages to facilitate their relationship and transactions without much problems.
- be more capable of separating meaning from form;
- learn more rapidly in their native language (L1), e.g. to read, as well as display improved performance in other basic L1 skills, regardless of race, gender, or academic level;
- be more efficient communicators in the L1;
- be consistently better able to deal with distractions, which may help offset age-related declines in mental dexterity;

- develop a markedly better language proficiency in, sensitivity to, and understanding of their mother tongue;
- develop a greater vocabulary size over age, including that in their L1;
- have a better ear for listening and sharper memories;
- be better language learners in institutionalized learning contexts because of more developed language-learning capacities owing to the more complex linguistic knowledge and higher language awareness;
- have increased ability to apply more reading strategies effectively due to their greater experience in language learning and reading in two—or more—different languages;
- develop not only better verbal, but also spatial abilities;
- parcel up and categorize meanings in different ways;
- display generally greater cognitive flexibility, better problem solving and higher-order thinking skills;
- “have a stereoscopic vision of the world from two or more perspectives, enabling them to be more flexible in their thinking, learn reading more easily. Multilinguals, therefore, are not restricted to a single world-view, but also have a better understanding that other outlooks are possible. Indeed, this has always been seen as one of the main educational advantages of language teaching” (Cook 2001);
- expand their personal horizons and being simultaneously insiders and outsiders, see their own culture from a new perspective not available to monoglots, enabling the comparison, contrast, and understanding of cultural concepts;
- be better problem-solvers gaining multiple perspectives on issues at hand;
- have improved critical thinking abilities;
- better understand and appreciate people of other countries, thereby lessening racism, xenophobia, and intolerance, as the learning of a new language usually brings with it a revelation of a new culture;
- learn further languages more quickly and efficiently than their hitherto monolingual peers;
- say nothing of the social and employment advantages of being multilingual – offering the ability to communicate with people from diverse nationalities and increasing job opportunities in many careers. Jobs that involve a lot of traveling are always on the look-out for people that can speak more than one language. Companies that have multinational presence will benefit a lot by employing people who are multilingual.

Thus, just like Latin once used to be taught as an academic exercise, mental gymnastics with the aim of cognitive training, it has been demonstrated that people who know more than one language usually think more flexibly than monolinguals. Many celebrated bilingual writers such as John Milton, Vladimir Nabokov, Samuel Barclay Beckett, or Losif Brodsky, attest that knowing a second language enhances the use of the first.

Furthermore, multilingualism can be regarded as an economic good and as well as a cultural good to the communities involved. However, given the peculiar nature of a language with respect to other economic goods, its valuation presents some specific characteristics, and therefore requires specific tools. First of all, a language presents an interesting feature that is often determined by institutional changes. The usage of a language is related to the “status” of the language and the level of social cohesion of the community the language refers to. Thus, the more a language is spoken, the better it is for the people who are using it.

To this extent, an immediate comparison with other intangible cultural goods, such as music, rites, traditions, etc., can be made. Some of these peculiarities highlight the nature of a language as a *public* good, and sometimes as a *common* good. A language is a crucial part of the heritage of a specific community, shapes and builds its identity in the same way as its

physical heritage does. Therefore its existence needs to be valued and preserved as we do with the cultural and environmental heritage of a region. In other terms, many of the considerations that one can make for cultural heritage goods seem to hold for languages. In particular, the benefits brought by the existence or the use of many languages, are always relevant to the betterment of the economic, social and cultural values of such communities.

It is also important to stress that, an implication of language contact is linguistic borrowing which permits the appropriation of a reality in another language. For example, in English language, the word ‘bread’ exists while in Yoruba it is modified as ‘búrédi’. In French, the word ‘chauffeur’ exists and it is modified as ‘shoffe’. From these examples, one would see that the language contact between the British and the Yoruba on one hand and between the French and the Yoruba on the other hand results into borrowing of words from English into Yoruba and from French into Yoruba and other local languages. These linguistic borrowings were due to colonization and language contact and such is the case in all African countries that had passed through colonization.

It is evident that the Yoruba language has employed borrowing of words from other languages to develop her linguistic evolution. Notable among the languages from which Yoruba has borrowed words are Arabic, French, Russian, Hausa and English. Consequently, the contact with the British and the French in both countries has affected the social, cultural and commercial life of the Yorubas and the other ethnic groups in the two countries, so much that the English and French languages had had a considerable influence on Yoruba language spoken in these communities. If a Beninois speaks Yoruba, his accent will be a little bit different from the Yoruba being spoken by a Nigerian. This, however, is a general linguistic trend not peculiar to Yoruba alone for E Sapir (1921: 192) has pointed out:

*“Language like cultures is rarely sufficient unto themselves. The necessity of intercourse brings the speakers of one language into direct or indirect contact with those of neighbouring or culturally dominant languages. The intercourse may be friendly or hostile. It may move on the humdrum plane of business and trade relations or it may consist of borrowing or interchange of spiritual goods—art, sciences, religion...The simplest kind of influence that one language may exert on another is borrowing of words. When there is cultural, there is always the likely hood that the associated word may be borrowed too.”(cited by Adebisi Salami:1982).*

Fortunately, the ‘intercourse’ between the British/French and the Yoruba, the Egun and the Fon can wisely be regarded as a ‘friendly’ one, moving on the ‘humdrum plane of business and trade relations’ and consisting of ‘interchange of spiritual goods as well as the trade relationship between the British/French and the Yoruba and other local languages has resulted in the borrowing of words from these European languages to Yoruba as indicated in the two examples giving above. The Yoruba people are fond of using these loan words where occasion calls for their usage. For instance, to describe new things, new ideals, that occurs through religion, politics, science and business; such words that have no equivalents in Yoruba or any other words that are very difficult to express in the local languages. Some of the loan words exhibits some striking and interesting features. They are as follow:

- **English** → **Yoruba**
  - commissioner → *komisona*
  - minister → *minisita*
  - rebel → *rebu*
  - engineer → *enjinnia*
- **French** → **Yoruba**
  - bagette → *bagetti*(bread in French)
  - des balais → *igbale*(broom in French)

- ecole → *ekolu*(school in French)
- librairie → *libreri* (bookshop in French)etc.

The above examples are manifestations that linguistic borrowing is no doubt developing in our everyday life in these two countries. Crowther S.A. (1852), recorded in his grammar book twenty loan words from English to Yoruba. Hence, the tempo of borrowing seems however to have increased by an almost geometrical progression in the last fifty years in Nigeria and Benin. Thus, multilingualism also plays an important role in the creation of more vocabulary to develop the linguistic proficiency and the language ability (*la capacité langagière*) of the users of these languages in contact.

Another important aspect of multilingual or bilingual person is the essence of linguistic borrowing. A large number of native Yoruba speakers are now bilingual. That is, they speak Yoruba which is their native language and are fluent to some varying degrees in English and/or French depending on different academic attainments of the individuals in Yoruba communities.

On the other hand there might also be possible **disadvantages** that should not be ignored at this point. A potential disadvantage is the temporary mixing of languages. Multilingual children and adults might mix up different words from different languages into one sentence. This will definitely be a risk on the part of children starting to **mix the languages** they can speak. Thus, the family will have to **invest more time** in the child's education if they want him to be able to read fluently and write legibly in all languages. But putting in the extra effort will add valuable skills to children and help them in various ways for the rest of their lives.

## Conclusion

Having considered the incidence of multilingualism as a factor of language contact in the West Africa sub-region while making particular reference to the proximity between Nigeria and the Republic of Benin, it has been discovered that the symbiotic cohabitation of the citizens of these two communities had long been cemented and had become two inseparable elements.

It is also very obvious from this paper that multilingualism is a product of languages in contact and that these two elements are sociolinguistics phenomenon that are brought about by changes in the society. The human society is not static but moving. The world as a whole is changing from time to time. By this, we mean that the human world is always witnessing tremendous social, cultural, economic, educational and above all linguistic developments every day. In fact, multilingualism is a gift for children generally. It is a gift for life. Probably one of the best gifts one can give to one's children. It will stay with them for the rest of their life and will be of great use.

It is very remarkable that multilingualism across the frontiers of Nigeria and Benin had made some important positive changes on the culture and life of the inhabitants of these regions. Thus, the socio-cultural and economic contacts between the people living in the two countries had resulted in the over-all development of these communities. It is observed that the language contact between the British/the Yoruba/the Egun in Nigeria and the French/the Yoruba/the Adja-Ewe in Benin, had made Yoruba language to belong to the latter group of languages. Scientific and technological ideas, items of clothing and jewelry, cultural and ideological concepts and their names impinge on Yoruba daily from English, French, Arabic, Hausa and Egun. The Yoruba people want to know these new concepts and people, they want to become a part of the larger world that shares a common language in certain disciplines and so they decide to learn the names of these things. And so, a good many new words in the language are adopted in order to fulfill certain needs.

Multilingualism is connected with prestige because knowledge is synonymous with prestige. Hence, there are many occasions for a multilingual person to show himself to monolinguals that he has the ability to communicate in many languages. Even though, linguistic and cultural borrowing forms part of normal life of multilingual persons in commercial and administrative headquarters, educational centres, international ports, especially sea ports and border posts one can conclude that bilingual or multilingual people in these places and elsewhere in Yorubaland is a potential linguistic borrower, directly or indirectly.

Conclusively, we believe that multilingualism across the borders of Nigeria with all her neighbours (Benin, Niger, Tchad, and Cameroun) has come to stay because its merits are more than its demerits. And if the inhabitants of these countries could still exhibit certain characteristics and common features by forging ahead to become multilingual communities, peace and unity would prevail in the West Africa sub-region in particular and in the whole world in general. This is what ECOWAS / CEDEAO, African Union/ *Union Africaine* and United Nations/*Nations Unies* stand for in promoting cultural, economic, social, educational and industrial harmony in the entire human universe.

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