

## The Cross-Pollination Hypothesis of English Language Variety

**Attabor, Ocheja Theophilus**

Department of English and Literary Studies, Kogi State University, Anyigba

E-mail: [attabortheophilus@yahoo.com](mailto:attabortheophilus@yahoo.com)

Phone: 08037849871

### **Abstract**

This paper looks at the English language as a language whose centre of gravity is in the British Isles. But due to some factors, the language moved to other parts of the world where it is being used either as first language or second language. Besides, whether as first or second language, it has assumed another form a little or more different from the mother language. The thrust of the paper is that the movement of English outside the British Isles is considered to be like cross-pollination in Biology and Agricultural Science while the development of variants of English is likened to products of pollination which are not identical to the parent plants.

### **Introduction**

The story of the English language is indeed a chequered one. Historical events have linguistic and political-cum-social results and the English language is no exception. 'The Empire Writes Back With A Vengeance' is the title of an article by Salman Rushdie in the *London Times* of July 3, 1982 in which he wrote extensively about the decolonizing of the English by writers like Chinua Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiong'O, Derek Walcott, etc. He stressed that former colonies of British Empire should exercise supremacy in the development of English language and literature. It was against this background that he said 'English, no longer an English language, now grows from many roots' (8). In corroboration with Salmon's statement, Walcott also said of English as:

This is my ocean, but speaking another language, since its accent  
changes around  
different islands. (48)

The implication of these comments by Rushdie and Walcott is that English, whose centre of gravity is in the British Isles, is now spoken on different soils in different colourations. It means that the geographical dispersal of the native speakers of a given language, after a lapse of time can inevitably lead to separation of local speech patterns from those of the mother tongue. That is why we can talk of Nigerian English, American English, Ghanaian English, Indian English, etc. The aim of this paper is to juxtapose the movement of English language from its cultural setting to new grounds where it is now used as an official language with the concept of pollination. In other words, the aim of the paper is to liken the concept of plant pollination to the

implantation of English language in other countries outside Britain, especially Nigeria. By implication, this paper applies the theory of pollination in Biology and Agricultural Science to account for the spread of the language beyond the British Isles.

### **Discussion**

Pollination is the transfer of pollen from the anthers of a flower to the stigma of either the same flower or another flower. When pollen grains from a plant's stamen are transferred to that same plant's stigma, it is called self-pollination but when pollen grains from a plant's stamen are transferred to a different plant's stigma, it is called cross-pollination. It is the process of transferring pollen grains from the male anthers of a flower to the female stigma. (This is found on [www.mbgnet.net/~pollination.html](http://www.mbgnet.net/~pollination.html)). Pollination is very vital in the sense that it leads to the creation of new seeds which in turn grows into new plants.

One of the objectives of every living organism is to give birth to young ones or to procreate for the sake of future or next generation. There is no doubt that language is a living organism since it is amenable to death, revival and expansion. We have heard of cases where a family died completely because there was no offspring to produce or continue the family lineage. Also, languages have been reported to have died a natural death as a result of lack of native speakers. Linguists have also warned that some languages of the world are likely to die at some point in the future as a result of its neglect for a foreign language or due to a drastic reduction in the population of its native speakers. According to Janet Holmes (58):

When all the people who speak a language die, the language dies with them. Sometimes this fact is crystal clear. Manx has now completely died out in the Isle of Man-the last native speaker, Ned Maddrell, died in 1974. Despite recent attempts to revive it, most people agree that Cornish effectively disappeared from Cornwall in the eighteenth century when Dolly Pentreath of Mousehole died in 1777. Less than half of the 250-300 Aboriginal languages spoken in Australia when the European arrived have survived. And fewer than two dozen are being actively passed on to younger generations...these are cases of language death rather than language shift. These languages are no longer spoken anywhere.

One of the ways in which plants can produce offspring is by making seeds because seeds contain the genetic information to produce a new plant. Humans for instance need the sperm and ovaries for fertilization to take place leading to the production of another kind. But a language relies on the size of the speakers, scientific development of the language and the implantation or incursion of such a language on another

language in a foreign environment through trade, exploration, penal transportation and colonization. English does not lack any of the factors mentioned above. In terms of scientific development, English is well developed. Its development started in the fifteenth century following William Caxton's inception of the printing press.

### **Some of Caxton's Efforts towards Standardizing the English Language**

He translated into the English language a famous French Romance, the Recuyell of the Historeys of Troye in 1475 in collaboration with Collard Mansion; and this is said to be Caxton's first book in the English language. Secondly, being a non-linguist, yet he possessed the linguistic prowess to **observe the need for standardization amongst the various English dialects** so much so that he started a process of standardization and that meant a jump ahead for the development of the English language. Consequently, he **homogenized regional dialects through printing**. He knew that a single dialect out of the many dialects of English needed to be chosen and developed in order to unite the people of England. He decided to select the South east Midland dialect. By choosing a dialect (Mideast land) out of the many dialects, Caxton had met the first and important requirement for standardization known by linguists as **selection**. Actually before 1476, England was a region full of dialects from which a standard was yet to emerge. Caxton's decision to choose one of these dialects is arguably one of the most important in the history of the English language. He did not pick on East Midland dialect to print in because it was the dialect on the map of England upon which his random **cursor** pointed; but for the fact that foundations had already been laid from the Anglo Saxon days for the later rise of the East Midland. Arguably, it was due to Caxton and his printing that the dialect of London became the foundation of the language used today.

Another important contribution is that, before Caxton's introduction of the printing press in England, only the monks were writing books because they were the only ones that could read and write; spellings were different from books to books. Moreover it would take ages to produce books. With Caxton's printing press, more books could be produced within a short time. One could conclude that Caxton's printing brought **increased spread of knowledge and literacy level** among the British public as more and more people had better access to reading materials. According to Abraham Lincoln, 'what I need to know is in books and my best friend is the man who introduces me to the books I have never read'. Caxton was a friend because he introduced the British community to the books they had never read through the instrumentality of printing. Conversely, his inception of the printing press provided a good opportunity for many inspired citizens to write. According to John Ogu, following Caxton's press, "literary activity was intensified" (39). This gave their works much wider circulation.

Caxton's printing **stabilized spelling and punctuation**. There were enormous scribal variations in the previous centuries and that means that there were many or various conventions of spelling and punctuation. However, Caxton's ingenuity helped him to standardize spelling rules drawing from preceding writing. David Crystal feels that the early fifteenth century was a period when words were spelt in many ways in the manner that reflected regional variations in pronunciation. Caxton, therefore, chose the "London form in his printing and that marked the beginning of stability of spelling and a sense of correctness." (79). According to Robert Burchfield,

Caxton punctuated his texts with full-length and short oblique strokes, and with stops. The stops are normally lozenge-shaped, and they can occur in a low, mid, or high position relative to base of words in the text. (25)

It has been asserted that the spelling ghost with the silent letter *h* was adopted by Caxton due to the influence of the Dutch spelling. In his preface to *Eneydos*, Caxton complained bitterly about the irregularities in spelling, etc. compared to what obtained during his time. In his words, '*what sholde a man in these dayes now wryte, 'egges' or 'eyren...?'*' (Crystal 209). As a result, he is credited for **modernising the orthography** using *g* and *th* instead of the manuscript symbols. Caxton's printing press came decades after the period known as Middle English had given way to the early modern English era. It could be said then that English spelling and orthography did not follow any particular code as there were no dictionaries. As a result, orthographical variation was more than it had been during the Old English period. Social and political conditions must have given rise to the situation. Amongst them were: the Norman Conquest, the continuation of the process of sound change as well as increased population growth. (Crystal 78-79)

#### **Application of the Theory of Pollination**

We are familiar with the cross pollination of English in countries like America, Canada, the Antipodes, India, South Africa, Nigeria, etc. Apart from Nigeria and India which use English as an official language, the other countries mentioned above use it as mother tongue. It is to be recalled that English has its linguistic and cultural force of gravity in the British Isles. However, some of the countries mentioned above have been described by (Braj Kachru 12) as belonging to the inner circle. In his Concentric Circles postulation, Kachru argues that countries which belong to the inner circle represent mother tongue countries for English. But one begins to wonder how this trans-Atlantic linguistic achievement for English as a mother tongue came about. It is at this point that the theory of cross pollination is deemed necessary.

The English language is the pollen grain while all the countries involved are the flowers. However, it is only the British Isles (flower) that possess the anthers from which the pollen grains (English) are produced; while the other countries are recipient countries with the stigma on which the pollen grains from the donor country are deposited and pollinated. In the same light, the factors which moved English away from its home base to other places represent agents of pollination. They could also be called pollinators. These agents are penal transportation (the Antipodes), exploration, colonialism, trade, etc. and they are all recorded in books of history.

The first permanent English settlement in America dates from 1607 following the arrival of an expedition in Chesapeake Bay which was later called Jamestown, named after James the first. Later, several other settlements quickly followed along the coast and nearby islands such as Bermuda and Bahamas. Still in that order, religious migration brought the first group of Puritan settlers to Cape Cod, Plymouth, and Massachusetts in 1620 and that started a process of linguistic cross pollination. (Crystal 241). By implication, exploration and the search for a land where new religious kingdoms could be built purified and sanctified from the unacceptable practices in the English church of that time were the agents (factors) which exported the pollen grain (the English language) from the stamen (Britain) to the stigma (America).

Sarojini Ramalingam says: 'cross pollination brings the male gametes and egg cells of two different plants together. Therefore, there is greater genetic variability among the offspring which tends to be healthy and well-adapted. They also produce more abundant and viable seeds.'(467).By implication, after pollination, usually, the new plant which is the product of pollination is not a hundred percent carbon copy or it is usually not identical with the donor plant. It usually adopts its own peculiarity as a plant. In view of this fact, the reason is why the American English is different in some ways from British English especially in lexis, semantics, and phonology and so on is not farfetched. At a point in history, early American lexicographers and grammarians were not comfortable with the way the Americans were using the English language. Consequently, they criticized the American usage and the Americans in turn rebutted. For instance, Thomas Jefferson is quoted as saying that:

There are so many differences between us and the England, of soil, climate, culture, productions, laws, religion and government, that we must be left far more behind the march of circumstances, were we to hold ourselves rigorously to their standard....Judicious neology can alone give strength and copiousness to language, and enable it to be the vehicle of new ideas. (McCrum et al 227)

In like manner, Noah Webster, who was the famous American linguistic separatist of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, whose diatribe in his 1789 *Dissertations on the English Language* betrayed his inner most mind once said:

Several circumstances render a future separation of the American tongue from the English necessary and unavoidable....Numerous local causes, such as a new country, new associations of people new combinations of ideas in arts and science, and some intercourse with tribes wholly unknown in Europe, will introduce new words into American tongue. These causes will produce, in a course of time a language in North America, as different from the future language of England, as the modern Dutch, Danish and Swedish are from the German, or from one another... (McCrum et al 231)

This is to confirm that the geographical dispersal of the native speakers of a given language, after a lapse of time can inevitably lead to separation of local speech patterns from those of the mother tongue. Inevitably, it becomes a little difficult to fault Walcott for saying that:

This is my ocean, but speakingS another language, since its accent changes around different islands. (48)

In the same light, the various forms of development in Nigeria and other countries of the world with regards to forms of English and the emergence of the concept 'New Englishes' are testaments to the fact that English outside the British Isle is not the same as the Anglo Saxon generated home based form. The universal spread of the English language as a linguistic phenomenon is an established fact. And evidence of this global phenomenon of language contact, variation and change can be seen through such designations as world Englishes, new Englishes, Modern Englishes, Nigerian Englishes, etc. These are attempts to dress or find suitable terms for products of pollination which are usually not the same as the parent plants.

The categorization of the various types of English in use in Nigeria can be traced back to the study by L. Brosnaham (19) which focused on southern Nigerian varieties. In Nigeria, there are standard Nigerian English, "Pidgin English" and "broken English". But Pidgin does not attempt to approximate the linguistic conventions of Standard English neither is it the product of an incompetent attempt to speak or write Standard English. It is rather the product of a historically specific socio-linguistic alchemy of Nigerian languages and English. In this paper, Pidgin is not only a contact language but a

variant of English because Nigerian languages are its major influence. According to Ben Elugbe:

By Nigerian Pidgin we specifically mean Nigerian Pidgin English (see Mafeni 1971, Elugbe and Omamor 1991). Since it is the only pidgin which has a geographic base which is national (see Elugbe 1990 for different definitions of 'national'), it is simply called Nigerian Pidgin. Nigerian Pidgin is English-based or English-related because most of its vocabulary is derived from English. Since it has Nigerian languages as its substrate or underlying influence, it can be said, and it is often said, that the vocabulary of Nigerian Pidgin is English while its grammar is Nigerian. (286)

In other words, it is the product of linguistic pollination. Nigerian Pidgin is now increasingly being creolized especially in southern Nigeria and in such cosmopolitan, multi-ethnic urban centers as Lagos and Abuja. In a single page online article by Farook Kperogi posted on 20<sup>th</sup> May, 2010, he stated that:

It was the legendary Chinua Achebe who once said, in defense of his creative semantic and lexical contortions of the English language to express uniquely Nigerian socio-cultural thoughts that have no equivalents in English, that any language that has the cheek to leave its primordial shores and encroach on the linguistic territory of other people should learn to come to terms with the inevitable reality that it would be domesticated.

In Contact Linguistics, when speakers of different languages interact closely, it is typical for their languages to influence each other. Languages normally develop by gradually accumulating dialectical differences until two dialects cease to be mutually intelligible, somewhat analogous to the species barrier in Biology. Language contact can occur at language borders between adstratum languages or as the result of migration with an intrusive language acting as either a superstratum or a substratum. In most new environments where the English language has found itself by means of any pollinator, it has always served as superstratum and that is the reason behind such nomenclatures as 'New Englishes', etc.

### Conclusion

We mentioned that the story of the English language is indeed a chequered one. Historical events have linguistic and political-cum-social results and the English language is no exception. We also considered the fact that one of the ways in which plants can produce offspring is by making seeds because seeds contain the genetic

information to produce a new plant. Humans for instance need undergo the process of fertilization for the reproduction of their kind. But a language relies on the size of the speakers, scientific development of the language and the implantation or incursion of such a language on another language in a foreign environment through trade, exploration, penal transportation and colonization to reproduce itself in other lands.

We also mentioned that after pollination, usually, the new plant which is the product of pollination is not a hundred percent carbon copy or it is usually not identical with the donor plant. It usually adopts its own peculiarity as a plant. In view of this fact, the reason, as earlier mentioned, why the American English is different in some ways from British English especially in lexis, semantics, and phonology and so on is not farfetched. The reason is not also farfetched why and how pidgin and other Nigerian regional forms of English developed. In the end, we concluded by saying that the various forms of development in Nigeria and other countries of the world with regards to forms of English and the emergence of the concept 'New Englishes' are testaments to the fact that English outside the British Isle is not the same as the Anglo Saxon generated home based form. The universal spread of the English language as a linguistic phenomenon is an established fact. An evidence of this global phenomenon of language contact, variation and change can be seen through such designations as world Englishes, new Englishes, Modern Englishes, Nigerian Englishes, etc. These are attempts to dress or find suitable terms for products of pollination which are usually not the same as the parent plants.



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