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On the parameters of the power of English in Nigeria: A bottom-up approach towards revitalizing Nigerian languages

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Abstract: This study explores the power of English in Nigeria following Kachruvian six parameters of the power of English. The paper indicates that the range and depth of English in Nigeria could be seen in the government, education, mass media, commerce, and religion. The positive attitudes towards English have negatively impacted mother-tongue education and have endangered many of Nigeria's indigenous languages. The desire to learn English has also given rise to the pluri-centric power of English, which has seen English “nativised” in Nigeria. Advocacies for the revitalisation and development of indigenous languages have followed the top-down perspective. However, I propose a bottom-up approach for developing indigenous languages in Nigeria. The study argues for the reawakening of the linguistic consciousness of Nigerians towards their languages.

Subjects: Bilingualism & Multilingualism; Language & Power; Language Policy & Planning

Keywords: Nigerian English; nativisation; mother tongue; social mobility; language attitudes; multilingualism; indigenous languages

1. Introduction

The aftermath of the British overseas trade and exploration saw the spread of English to other parts of the world, especially in Africa, in what has been described as “Eurocentric [Anglocentric] diffusionism” (Blaut, 1993) and “European [English] exceptionalism” (Wolff, 2017). In recent times, the English language has developed into a global language because of its speakers’ economic and political power (Crystal, 2003). It has become functional outside the “Inner Circle” (Kachru, 2017) and equally nativised in British (non)colonies (Schneider, 2007). With the emergence of English as a world language, its power has exponentially increased in different domains and “sites of power” (Sadiqi, 2003), such as religion, law, commerce, politics, and literacy. Kachru (1986a) argues that the power of English in these domains allows it to manipulate individuals and nations linguistically, psychologically, and socio-politically.

In the “Outer Circle” where English was implanted through colonialism, English has continued to dominate sub-Saharan Africa (Adegbija, 2000) and is challenged in North Africa through the Arabisation policy. With Nigeria in focus, previous studies have explored and described the varieties of English in Nigeria (Bamgbose, 1998; Dadzie & Awonusi, 2004; Jowitt, 1991, 2019; Kperogi, 2019).
2015; Salami, 1968; Walsh, 1967), issues about its standardisation (Bamgbose, 1982; Banjo, 1971) and arguments to support the existence of Nigerian English (Adetugbo, 1977; Akere, 1982; Jibril, 1982), the role and functions of English (Bamgbose, 1971; Bamiro, 1991; Omoniyi, 2006; Ubahakwe, 1979), Nigeria’s experience of English (Banjo, 1996; Schmied, 1991; Schneider, 2007), history of English in Nigeria (Banjo, 1970; Ogu, 1992) and the issue of English ownership (Ugwuanyi, 2021).

Concerning linguistic description, Nigerian English has been explored from the perspectives of phonetics and phonology (Ekong, 1980; Igboanusi, 2006; Jowitt, 2000, 2019; Melefa, 2021; Ooniyi & Ekerete, 2013; Omachonu, 2011; Udofot, 2003; Ugorji, 2010), morphosyntax (Alo & Mesthrie, 2008; Jibril, 1991; Jowitt, 2002, 2019; Werner & Fuchs, 2017). Studies on Nigerian English’s phonetic and phonological description have established that consonants (especially the dental fricatives) are pronounced as alveolar plosives. The mispronunciation of vowels such as the NURSE, STRUT and GOAT, among others, are some of the features that characterise Nigerian English. Attempts have also been made to describe further the differences among the Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba sub-varieties of Nigerian English (Igboanusi, 2006; Omoniyi & Ekerete, 2013). Including prepositions where they should be absent, as in “discuss about” and wrong use of words, “bogus” to mean “big”, characterise Nigerian English. Scholars in support of the existence of Nigerian English have argued that these non-Standard usages should not just be dismissed as errors but should be seen as variants (Jowitt, 2019). With the continuous recognition of the existence of Nigerian English, which has led to the compilation of A Dictionary of Nigerian English Usage (Igboanusi, 2002), issues concerning its standardisation have been raised. Following Brosnahan’s (1958) four levels of Nigerian English and Banjo’s (1971) identification of four varieties of Nigerian English, Bamgbose (1982, p. 102) argues, “When the two other variables of acceptability and international intelligibility are considered, Variety 3 or Educated Nigerian English stands out as the only plausible candidate for a standard Nigerian English” because it is similar to “Standard British English both in syntax and in semantics; similar in phonology, but different in phonetic features as well as about certain lexical peculiarities. Socially acceptable and internationally intelligible. Spoken by less than 10 percent of the population” (Banjo, 1971, p. 170).

Notwithstanding many studies on Nigerian English, one of the areas that appear to be understudied is a synthesis of the Kachruvian parameters of the power of English in Nigeria. Examining these parameters is the primary objective of this study. In addition, in the bid to promote mother tongue education and advocacy for the growth and promotion of Nigerian languages, previous studies have recommended a top-down approach where the call for a language policy and the government’s implementation of the language-in-education policy has been made. This top-down approach seems to be insufficient in dealing with the issue of negative evaluative reactions towards indigenous languages. As such, this study proposes a bottom-up approach towards the revitalization of Nigeria’s indigenous languages.

In addressing the objectives of this study, I refer to Kachru’s (2017) six parameters of the power of English. Drawing on Foucault’s view of power, Kachru (2017) proposed six parameters to account for the power of English in the world without situating it in detail in any particular country or speech community. While Kachru’s parameters are open-ended in their account of the power of English in the world, this study seeks to systematize it by situating them within the Nigerian sociolinguistic contexts by drawing on research available in the literature and the author’s knowledge about Nigeria’s sociolinguistic situation. The second section reviews the parameters of the power of English in Nigeria while the third section presents the bottom-up approach to the development of Nigerian indigenous languages. The conclusion is captured in the fourth section.

2. The parameters of the power of English in Nigeria
There are many languages globally, but some languages are more powerful than others because of their value in the linguistic marketplace. English, as one of the languages that wield great power, manifests its linguistic power by “adding a code to the linguistic repertoire of a speech
community [through] persuasion, regulation, inducement, and force, [which has resulted in] the suppression of a particular language variety and the elevation of another variety” (Kachru, 2017, p. 87). In Southern Africa, the tale of English, which has led to the agitation of indigenous language education, is fundamentally that of:

attempted genocides (physical extermination of indigenous people), epistemicides (killing of knowledges of the colonised), linguicides (decimation of languages of indigenous people), inventions (mutilating, orthography and naming of indigenous languages) and standardisation (re-defining, re-ordering, re-classification, re-codification, disciplining and re-making of indigenous languages to accord with Eurocentric linguistic standards for instrumental purposes; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018, p. vii).

Kachru (2017) identifies six parameters of English globally, namely: demographic and numerical, functional, attitudinal, accessibility, pluricentricity, and material. The six parameters as they are related to the Nigerian sociolinguistic situation are discussed in the following subsections.

### 2.1. Demographic and numerical power of English

The spread of English globally has given rise to terms such as Inner Circle, Outer Circle, and Expanding Circle (Kachru, 2017). These circles cut across different continents of the world. It would be fair to say that a word of English is spoken on all the world’s continents. The power of English, together with French and Portuguese, has resulted in the classification of African countries into Anglophone, Francophone, and Lusophone (Mazrui, 2004). The division of Cameroon into Anglophone and Francophone is one of the causes of crises in the country (Agwanda et al., 2020). Nigeria, which belongs to the Outer Circle because of its colonial history, first came in contact with English through trans-Atlantic trade in Benin in 1553 (Banjo, 1970) and started developing through Christian missionaries who arrived Nigeria in 1842 and went ahead to establish schools (Jowitt, 1991). Even though the Portuguese language first came to Nigerian soil, English became popular through its unprecedented spread.

Banjo (1970) argues that English was not initially planned to be a lingua franca in Nigeria but an official language in government, the media, and the teaching of the Christian doctrines, especially in the southern part of Nigeria. However, the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorates by Lord Frederick Lugard in 1914 intensified the contact between the North and the South. Since the North has Hausa as a lingua franca and there is a multiplicity of languages in the South, English or Pidgin became necessary for intercultural communication (Jowitt, 1991). During pre-colonial and colonial times, English was seen as an elitist language. Its elitism has been questioned in recent times because it has become a language spoken by elites and non-elites. Then, the respect given to those who could speak English was also a driving force that motivated people to learn how to speak English because they “sought to establish close relations with the white man” (Igboanusi, 2002, p. 9). This positive evaluation of English made the first set of Nigerian District Officers “speak English even to those with whom they shared a Nigerian language” (Bamgbose, 1998, p. 357).

Expectedly, then, in Nigeria today, one might say that English is spoken in every state in Nigeria. It has been noted that whereas schools have long been established in the southern part of Nigeria, it was not until 1900 that Lugard saw the importance of establishing schools in the North. Such an establishment saw the increment in the enrollment of children in primary schools rise from 66,000 in 1947 to 205,769 in 1957 (Fafunwa, 1991). At that time, Hausa still served as a lingua franca and medium of instruction in the North. According to the Annual report of 1934, “In the North […] the language of instruction is Hausa for the most part, and where some other language is used in the initial stages, Hausa is nearly everywhere introduced as a subject and before the end of the school year becomes the medium of instruction” (Banjo, 1970, p. 65). This practice affected the number of English speakers in the North then and even now. Personal communications with current Nigerian graduates posted under the auspices of the Nigerian Youth Service Corps to the
northern part of Nigeria indicate poor usage of English by students of Hausa descent. They often report that the students tell them *ba turenchi*, which means “I don't understand English”.

Over the years, the number of English speakers in Nigeria has increased. Previous estimates of English speakers in Nigeria placed them about 20% (Ermenanjio, 1990; Igboanusi, 2002) and not more than 30% (Jibril, 1982). For Bamgbose (1971), English speakers in Nigeria do not exceed 10% based on the number of primary-school leavers. Recent reports estimated that 53% of Nigerians could speak an intermediate level of English (Pinon & Hayden, 2010). On the other hand, Sawe (2018) reports that about 79 million Nigerians speak English. If compared with 2018 Nigeria's population of 195,874,683 as reported by macrotrends.net, then the percentage of English speakers in Nigeria as of 2018 is 40%. This lack of exactness in the number of English speakers in Nigeria points to the lack of solid data analytics in Nigeria and the need to include linguistic demographic information when conducting censuses in Nigeria. However, one thing that can be observed is an increase in the number of English speakers in Nigeria in the 21st century. One unknown thing is how many Nigerians speak Banjo’s (1971) variety 4 of English, which is identical to Standard British English in phonology, syntax, and semantics. A basic assumption would be that the number of Nigerians who speak Standard British English (SBE) will be smaller than those that speak what has been described as Nigerian English because, as Schneider (2007) argues, Nigeria was a settler-free society, with only very few native English speakers from the British Isles. He categorises Nigeria as a former “exploitation colony”, which partly explains why few people speak variety 4.

The increase of the urban population to 53.5% in 2022 (Central Intelligence Agency, 2022) shows the numerical increase in the number of English speakers in Nigeria. Since most of these urban areas accommodate individuals from different cultural and linguistic groups, English—whether Nigerian English or Pidgin—is the language that unifies these people. Udofot (2010) revealed that even though a more significant percentage of people living in Uyo, the capital of Akwa Ibom State, South-South Nigeria, understand Ibibio, 76.7% preferred to use English as a medium of business interaction. This practice is common, especially in the south, where individuals who speak a common Nigerian indigenous language would use English in their interpersonal interactions in motor parks, markets, churches, and recreational centres. This positive evaluation of English has resulted in individuals opting for English to be adopted as Nigeria’s official and national language over their mother tongue (Adegbiija, 1994). Akinjobi (2004), in his study involving 100 educated respondents, observed that whereas 75% of his respondents indicated that one of the three major Nigerian languages should be adopted as the country’s national language, 94% of Igbo speakers, 86%, and 70% of Yoruba and speakers of minorities languages respectively indicated that English should perform the function of Nigeria’s national language. The possible explanation for the Hausa speakers’ favourable disposition to Nigerian languages is that Hausa is the indigenous language most likely to be used as a national language due to the number of its speakers and political support. Some Igbo-Hausa bilinguals could comfortably speak Hausa with little or no code-switching with English, but they could barely speak Igbo frequently without mixing it with English. This practice has to do with the earlier exposure of the South to English. Such a practice accentuates that Hausa “oppresses the oppressed” minority languages in Nigeria (Igboanusi & Peter, 2004).

The power of English in Nigeria has stimulated Nigerians to aspire to learn and speak it. The beliefs that English is a “necessary evil” (Unegbu, 2015) and that the knowledge of English is the knowledge of everything (Slabbert, 1994) have made English, in Nigeria, flourish “on the graveyard of other people’s languages” (Ngugi, 1993, p. 35). Even though many people claim to speak indigenous languages, many persons are not fluent in them. Lately, an observable phenomenon in Nigeria is that parents who only attained a primary or secondary education and had a poor command of English would prefer to speak English to their children instead of their mother tongue (Adegbiija, 2000). More so, due to the poor support of the government towards education, students’ competence in English continues to deteriorate. A developing practice among some educationists is correcting students’ essays written in Nigerian languages with English.
In Nigeria today, students are expected to credit English in their West African Examination Certificate (WAEC) before being considered for admission into tertiary institutions. On the other hand, the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) made Nigerian indigenous languages optional, resulting in the decline of students’ interest towards these languages. Nevertheless, under the general studies unit, English is still a compulsory subject at Nigerian tertiary institutions. Notwithstanding that Nigeria is regarded as an English-speaking country where the medium of instruction in secondary and university education is in English, due to economic gains, many Western universities require Nigerians to write the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) or International English Language System (IELTS) before they can be considered for graduate studies. The reason for the insistence on writing this test, notes Kachru (2017, p. 102), is “to sell a particular model of English, to make a market for teachers (or “experts”) from one’s own country, to seek foreign students from particular regions of the world for the study of English, and so on.” This “open linguicism” (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1989) increases Nigeria’s number of English speakers.

Therefore, the unprecedented spread of English across the different states in Nigeria and the increase in its number of speakers pose a severe threat to Nigeria’s indigenous languages. An example of this is the Ohaneze Ndigbo, a group comprising Igbo people serving as the voice of the Igbo people. Despite that all the members can speak and understand Igbo, the group conducts its meetings in English. The continuous spread of English in Nigeria makes it be described in messianic terms as a language that liberates. In contrast, Nigerian languages are historically constructed as languages that had served their purposes in the past and may be helpful in the future “when the work of intellectualization had been completed” (Stroud & Guisemo, 2017, p. 43).

### 2.2. Functional power of English

Out of the over 500 indigenous languages and the three major exoglossic languages (English, French, and Arabic) in Nigeria, English is the language that performs the most function because it “provides access to most important scientific, technological, and cross-cultural domains of knowledge and interaction” (Kachru, 2017, p. 97). In addition, English plays a crucial role in religion (especially Christianity), politics, law, and literacy, which Sadiqi (2003) refers to as “sites of power”. This exoglossic monolingual practice in these sites of power has resulted in the functional inertness of Nigerian languages since the dominant linguistic ideologies are in favour of English. Many Nigerians seem to (un)consciously detest everything that concerns indigenous languages in favour of English. This attitude confirms Blommaert’s (1999, pp. 10–11) position, “the more a linguistic ideology is taken up in any setting, the more likely it is to undergo normalization, a hegemonic pattern in which the ideological claims are perceived as normal ways of thinking and acting.” These ideological claims determine the “choice, evaluation, and use of language forms and functions” (McGroarty, 2008, p. 98).

Jowitt (2019, pp. 16–17) identifies six domains in Nigeria where English is used: official, education, mass media, religious observance, informal interpersonal relations, and creative writing. English is the language used in official pronouncements and correspondence, at the courts, and in different arms of government. Jowitt (2019) declares that there is no official document in Nigeria with an explicit declaration of English as an official language. He adds that the only place the role of English seems to have been officially endorsed in the 1999 Constitution is where it was stated that “the business of the National Assembly shall be conducted in English”. The Constitution also allows the state houses of assembly to use indigenous languages to conduct their activities. Unfortunately, the state houses of assembly activities are conducted in English. This practice is due to their uneasiness to speak for a long time in their indigenous language in a setting where they are to use legislative and legal registers, which they do not know how to say in their native language (Jowitt, 2019). The “unofficial” declaration of English as an official language and its dominance in Nigeria’s official settings demonstrates how much power English wields. English does not need to force itself into Nigeria’s official domains; instead, its functions and the ideology of its superiority position it as a linguistic sine qua non. Nevertheless, many Nigerians have
accepted the official status of English. The acceptance of the official status of English explains why many Nigerians criticised President Muhammadu Buhari for addressing Nigerians during the 2017 Eid-al-Fitr in Hausa instead of English.

In education, English continues to play a significant role. The language-in-education policy stipulates that a child’s mother tongue or the language of the immediate environment should be used to teach a child at the lower primary education while English will serve as a medium of instruction at the upper primary, secondary and tertiary education. The choice of mother tongue education at the lower primary level is inspired by research findings that indicate that mother tongue education is crucial in a child’s cognitive development. One of such studies is Fafunwa et al.’s (1989) Ife Six-Year Primary Project, which showed that pupils taught in their mother tongue performed better in academics and in other aspects of their lives than the control group which was taught with English as a medium of instruction. Heugh’s (2009) study in Ethiopia also confirms Fafunwa et al.’s findings. Heugh found that students taught in their mother tongue for about six to eight years plus English language as a subject performed better than students who transited earlier to English after fewer years of mother tongue education.

Despite the support for mother tongue (MT) education in Nigeria (Agbedo, 2019), Igboanusi and Peter (2016), in their study involving 1000 respondents comprising 500 teachers in public and private schools, and 500 parents and officials of the State Ministry of Education in Benin, Ibadan, Kano, Owerri and Lafia, found that apart from Kano where Hausa is predominantly spoken, other areas have jettisoned MT education. This asymmetry between policy and practice confirms Kamwongamalu’s (2003) 2 + 9 = 1 formula in the South African context where English and Afrikaans (2) and nine South African languages are officially seen as official languages, but in practice, only English dominates. Despite the policy that supports MT-education within the Nigerian context, English appears to be the only language that dominates Nigeria’s educational system (except Hausa at the lower primary level in the core northern states). This practice is what Schiffman (1996) construes as a false front where pluralism is constitutionally promoted, but in practice, only an exoglossic language prevails in education.

Igboanusi and Peter (2016) further indicated that Igbo used to serve as a medium of instruction in primaries 1–3, but parents and stakeholders complained that their children could not communicate in English when they migrated to urban areas. As a result, parents started withdrawing their children from MT-based instruction schools to private schools where English is a medium of instruction. Yielding to such pressures, teachers resorted to English as a medium of instruction in lower primary education. Igboanusi and Peter (2016) observed that 24.1%, 24.3%, 25.8%, and 25.8% of ministry officials, parents, teachers in private and public schools respectively do not want children to be taught in their MT. Describing the unexpected dominance of English in Africa, Ager (2005, p. 1048) opines:

the thought never entered anyone’s head that the higher public domains could use anything other than English, that education could use any language other than English, or that training in English as the language of the elite should not receive the highest prestige.

Due to this decline in mother tongue education and economic gains, publishers prefer to publish books in English. However, because of the solid positive attitudes of the Hausa towards their language and the belief of the Muslims among them that English is a Western hegemonic tool, Hausa still serves as a medium of instruction in schools in core northern states (Igboanusi & Peter, 2016). The reasons behind the non-achievement of MT-based education in Nigeria as well as in other sub-Saharan African countries/regions, notes Kamwongamalu (2016, p. 60), are:

[First] the myth that language diversity or multilingualism is a problem. [Second] Africa’s economic dependency on the West. [Third] elite closure, that is, a type of social mobilization strategy by which those persons in power establish or maintain their powers and privileges
via linguistic choice [and lastly] the low linguistic instrumentalism of African languages, that is, the fact that there is no demand for these languages in the formal labor market.

In addition, mother tongue education appears implausible in multi-ethnic urban areas in Nigeria because of the social tensions separating urban learners based on their MT may cause. These reasons continue to reinforce the power of English in education. In some schools in Nigeria, English is used to teach the indigenous languages. Since everyone aspires to speak English, individuals who do not have access to education are excluded from “prestige” jobs.

In radio and television, published books, newspapers, video films, advertisements, and social media, the power of English manifests. Most radio and television programmes are in English because the radio stations and television channels seek to remain relevant and reach an audience within and outside the locality where they are situated. Some programmes and news broadcasts are also conducted in various mother tongues to reach those in rural areas who do not understand English. This use of both English and indigenous is aimed at constructing a glocalised corporate identity (Poppi, 2011). There are no statistics about the number of radio and television programmes conducted in indigenous languages and English. It is believed that the number of programmes and news broadcast in English exceeds those in indigenous languages. Concerning newspaper publications, virtually all the newspapers published in print form are published in the English language. Of the major Nigerian newspapers (such as The Telegraph, The Sun, The Punch, The Guardian, Vanguard, and Premium Times) published online, only Premium Times publishes in Hausa. The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) publishes Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba news content. The poor reading culture in Nigeria has made “most Nigerian newspapers belong to a dying breed” (Garba, 2016). The Nigerian video film industry known as Nollywood is also known for using English in its films. Inasmuch as there are films produced in major Nigerian languages, the number of films in English is higher. In some of these films in English, some expressions in either Hausa, Igbo, or Yoruba are inserted to express the cultural aspects showcased in them. In her interview with BBC Igbo on 19 February 2022, a veteran Nollywood actress, Chioma Akpotha, remarked that the reason for the low rate of films in Igbo is because it is not as profitable as films in English. As a result, producers are demotivated from producing films in Igbo since the audience is limited compared to films in English.

English also plays a role in interpersonal communication. It is often used among individuals who do not speak a common Nigerian language, especially in inter-ethnic marriages (Offiong & Mensah, 2012). The power of English is seen in its usage as a medium of communication among individuals who can speak the same indigenous language. In his study involving 245 Yoruba-English bilingual students within the age range of 13–19 in southwest Nigeria, Owolabi (2014) found that 60% of the respondents indicated that their first exposure to English was in the home while 29% stated that they were first exposed to English in school. The results further showed that 96.33% of the respondents were exposed to English within 3–6 years of age, while 81.63% expressed that they were exposed to Yoruba within the same age period. Even though the respondents are simultaneous bilinguals, Owolabi (2014) found that Yoruba influences the respondents’ English at the phonological and syntactic levels. Despite this early exposure to the Yoruba language, 77.96% of the respondents indicated that they now prefer English to Yoruba. This shift and preference for English show how much value people attach to English. Based on this importance, Owolabi (2014) discovered that even though the respondents and their siblings are competent in the Yoruba language, 73.47% of them admit that they use English frequently with their siblings. Among the Igbo, there are pieces of evidence that there is a high rate of language shift towards English in homes, schools, markets, and in electronic-mediated communication (Okoro, 2018; Onwudiwe, 2016). Igboanusi and Peter (2004) argue that whereas speakers of other Nigerian languages are shifting towards English, the loyalty of the Hausa towards their language is strong. As such, instead of English being a threat to the Hausa language, Hausa joins with English to threaten minority languages in Nigeria. Out of the 200 persons that speak 50 minority languages in the
northern part of Nigeria used in their study, 17.2% indicated that they use Hausa for oral communication. In contrast, 74.2% admitted that they use English (Igboanusi & Peter, 2004).

With about 45.9% of Nigerians being Christians (Central Intelligence Agency, 2022), and since English is associated with Christianity, English wields its power in the religious domain (see, Ndiribe & Aboh, 2020 for a discussion of religion and linguistic marginalisation in Nigeria). In some Pentecostal churches, the practice is for the preacher to speak in English while an interpreter interprets in an indigenous language. Many Pentecostal churches use English in their preaching and correspondences. Orthodox churches such as Anglican, Catholic, and Methodist have services or Masses conducted in indigenous languages. Unfortunately, some of these orthodox churches in the urban areas mix the so-called indigenous language services or Masses with English, thereby linguistically excluding monolingual congregations (Onumajuru, 2017). Apart from the Catholic church bulletins that contain Bible readings in Nigerian languages and some Pentecostal churches like the Redeemed Christian Church that translate some of their evangelical documents into indigenous languages, a more significant number of the documents used in churches are in English. Taiwo (2009) claims that most Nigerian Christian youths prefer to go to churches that conduct services in English. As a result, most orthodox churches that conducted their services in the indigenous languages have established youth services and churches where services are conducted in English in order not to lose their young members. Despite 53.5% Muslims in Nigeria, 7.6% more than Christians, English still holds sway in Nigeria more than Arabic because of colonialism. Ayuba (2012) argues that the Arabic language is marginalised in Nigeria because of its association with Islam. Some Christians in Nigeria have expressed discomfort in using Arabic on the 1,000 naira note seeing it as a subtle move in the plan to Islamise Nigeria.

As indicated earlier, English is crucial in creative writing in Nigeria. Many award-winning literary works in Nigeria such as Chinua Achebe’s Things Fall Apart, which won him the Man Booker International Prize, and Chimamanda Adichie’s Half of a Yellow Sun, which earned her the Orange Prize for Fiction were written in English. Soyinka’s ability to win the Nobel Prize for Literature was because of his works in English. The call by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o to decolonise African literature has not been heeded. Ngugi’s recognition in the literary world is not a result of the works he translated in his mother tongue, the Kikuyu language, but because of the literary texts he published in English. Achebe (1975) argues that he decided to write in English because English was given to him and that his interest is to adapt the language to suit the philosophy of his people. Achebe’s work, an anthology of plays titled Aka Weta, published in his native language Igbo, was not accepted among Igbo literary scholars because it was written mainly in Ogidi and Ohaafia dialects of Igbo. While responding to why she does not write in Igbo, Chimamanda Adichie remarked that few people have reading skills in Igbo. In a personal communication with the director of one of the publishing companies in Igboland Nigeria, the director stated that he prefers publishing manuscripts written in English to those written in indigenous languages. For him, texts in English have more economic value than texts in Nigerian languages. Following this determinist line of reason, English wields power in creative writing in Nigeria.

In the Nigerian linguistic landscape, English also dominates. The six figures of linguistic landscape in Ibadan, Nigeria, presented by Adetunji (2015), have more English expressions. The same can be said of every state in Nigeria. In religious signposts, there is a “prominent use of English in the Christian-related signage [which is] a reflection of sophistication and globalization” (Inya, 2019, p. 1157). With these functions of English, one might say that English has permeated virtually every domain in Nigeria because of its prestige. English continues to perform these functions because of the ideology that Nigeria’s multilingual nature is a problem and the need to “meet the models provided by Western civilization” (Wolff, 2017, p. 2). The Nigerian situation supports Kamwamagalu’s (2016, p. 47) claim, “The long-term impact of colonialism on the sociopolitical, economic, and cultural bases of colonized polities […] has led to the construction of a colonial discourse that legitimizes the idea of the inherent superiority of colonial languages over indigenous languages.”
2.3. Attitudinal power of English

At the interlanguage level, there are evaluative reactions towards English and other languages in Nigeria. At the intralanguage level, attitudes towards different varieties and accents of English in Nigeria exist. The power of English in Nigeria with respect to attitudes in this study is best captured at two levels: governmental and individual. The power of English in Nigeria has made the federal government evaluate English positively. This positive evaluation is seen in the continuous recognition of English as a compulsory subject in schools and a prerequisite for gaining admission into tertiary institutions. In contrast, indigenous languages are made optional, including the major ones. This policy has increased the rate at which students want to improve their English language skills, on the one hand, and reduced their desire to be competent in their mother tongue, on the other hand. The negative attitudes of stakeholders in the Nigerian educational sector stem from the hegemonic nature of English, where it is seen as a language of progressivism and neutralisation of linguistic diversity in Nigeria. Ager (2001) opines that the prestige of a language influences stakeholders’ attitudes towards it, especially in the educational system. Ironically, with all the institutional support given to English, some of these stakeholders bemoan the endangerment of Nigeria’s indigenous linguistic system. In line with this thought, Kachru (2017, p. 98) notes:

We find evidence of this attitude (and use of language power) of the new emerging elite in the Outer Circle. They are generally English educated; they exploit the power and symbols that such education bestows upon them and they see to it that their children go to the best English medium schools and seek admission to Western universities. And then, they proclaim – both in English and in local languages – the ills of English, and the evils of its power, and they protest against the continued domination of the language.

The inclusion of indigenous languages in education and the recognition of the functions of Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba in official domains such as in the National Assembly are accompanied by “escape clauses” such as if possible or modal auxiliary verbs (Kamwangamalu, 2016) or “when adequate arrangements have been made, therefore” as in the Nigerian case. These escape clauses and negative attitudes towards indigenous languages sustain “the effects of the colonial construction of the cultural images of superior Self and inferior Other on theories, beliefs, and practices in language education” (Shin & Kubota, 2010, p. 210). As Kamwangamalu (2016, p. 51) puts it:

The implementation of the nation-state ideology [centralism] in the then Western colonies in Africa has left a destructive legacy in the continent, including the following: [1] Negative attitudes toward the indigenous languages as equal mediums of learning in the educational system in postcolonial Africa. [2] The marginalization of the indigenous languages and their speakers away from mainstream society. [3] Their exclusion from participation in the social, political, and economic development of the continent.

Upon reflection, then, Nigeria’s political actors endorse the hegemony of English in Nigeria, but during electoral campaigns, when they go to their speech community or areas where their mother tongue is spoken, they use the native language to communicate with the people as a strategy of showing that they share the same social identity with the people; hence, the need for them to be voted into power. A similar situation is observed in Mozambique where politicians use African languages for political campaigns as a way of building “populist image” but “in the urban public speech, the use of African languages was seen as an indication of tribalism or regionalism, or even conservatism” (Firmino, 2002, p. 107 as cited in Stroud & Guissemo, 2017).

Individuals who have access to quality education and got exposed to English at an early stage of their lives discriminate against those who have no access to a good education because of the way they make use of English. English is used by many to measure intelligence, success, and status. In other words, English is a tool for othering. Igboanusi (2006) reports that individuals from different ethnic groups in Nigeria negatively evaluate other ethnic groups’ use of English. For instance, some individuals of Igbo origin are discriminated against because of their alternation between /l/ and /r/. They pronounce “raw” when they mean “law” and use “law” when they mean “raw”. Other ethnic
groups ridicule mesolectal and some acrolectal Yoruba speakers of English because of the phonological problem of /h/ dropping and insertion. These speakers pronounce “hear” when they mean “ear” and “ear” when they mean “hear”. Basilectal and mesolectal (even some acrolectal) Hausa speakers of English are negatively evaluated because they substitute /p/ with /f/ and /f/ with /z/. Words such as “people” and “other” are pronounced as “fiful” and “oza”, respectively. Other ethnic groups also discriminate against Ibibio and Efik English speakers because of their replacing /f/ in “champion” with /j/, which makes them pronounce “yampion” instead. Individuals who exhibit these phonological interferences are tagged local and uneducated.

Nigerians expect individuals who have attained a particular stage in their career to speak correct English. In cases where such individuals fail to use English correctly, their credibility and personality are questioned. One of such cases is Sabo Bake Zuwo, a former Senator representing Kano Central and Executive Governor of Kano State Nigeria in 1979 and 1983, respectively. Zuwo had no formal Western education, although he claimed to have attended Mallam Aminu Kano Political School, Sudawa, Kano. Zuwo’s poor usage of English as a governor made his political associates like Dr Junaid Mohammed remark that he is “incapable of any decent argument in English or any other language”. One of Zuwo’s statements that made him be negatively evaluated was his response (when he was still a gubernatorial aspirant) to a question asked by a journalist inquiring about the natural solid minerals in Kano state. Zuwo was reported to have replied: “In my state, we get am for panta, we get am for milinda, we get am for danta cola, sina cola, we get am for coke” (In my state, we have Fanta, we have Mirinda, we have Coca-Cola). While being expected to answer along the lines of coal, crude oil, natural gas, iron, or copper, Zuwo responded with examples of soft drinks, known as minerals in Nigerian English. This response by Bakin Zuwo made him a source of jokes in Nigeria to a point where Zuwo became a name for anyone (even till today) who exhibits daftness or cluelessness.

In recent times, another individual who has been otherted because of her improper use of English is Patience Jonathan, the wife of the immediate past President of Nigeria. Unlike Bakin Zuwo, who had little or no education, Patience Jonathan has a National Certificate in Education from the Rivers State College of Arts and Science and a Bachelor of Education in Biology and Psychology from the University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria. It is expected that with her level of education and position as the First Lady of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, she should have a mastery of the English language. Some of the expressions with which she is being ridiculed include: “On behalf of 2million, I donate my family”, “I would rather kill myself instead of committing suicide”, and “My fellow widows”. Nigerians did not consider it a slip of the tongue when Patience Jonathan reversed the words in the first example, which should have read, “On behalf of my family, I donate 2 million” because of her previous blunders such as using “My fellow widows”, a statement she made when referring to widows as if her husband is dead and her misinterpretation of the word suicide in the second example (Agbedo & Krisagbeda, 2014). These two cases confirm that individuals who have attained a certain high position in society are expected to speak English, befitting their status. Scammers in Nigeria understand this societal expectation, and that is why they align the identities they construct with their language use. It would be a case of identity-language asymmetry when a scammer identifies as a banker but speaks like a petty trader with little or no formal education. Chiluwa and Chiluwa (2020, p. 1) studied 5 Ponzi schemes with international outlooks that operated in Nigeria between 2016 and 2019 and discovered that these Ponzi schemes aligned themselves with the linguistic expectations in Nigeria by “adopt[ing] discourses that match the social and cultural contexts in order to appeal to the Nigerian social and contexts”.

There is a consistent finding in the literature on language attitudes that women aspire to speak more pleasant English than men (Garrett, 2010; Ladegaard, 2000). This situation is because women are early receptors of language change (Labov, 2010) and, in so doing, determine language use (Valentine, 2006). Within the Indian context, Valentine (2006, p. 572) argues: “Although the women consider themselves “linguistically limited,” they understand the economic advantage,
the professional importance, and the social significance of being multilingual in English, Hindi, or Kannada.” In Nigeria, women are probably more mindful of how they speak English than men. Women are most likely to consciously reduce their accent because they believe that the way they speak influences the kind of men they attract. As a result, they are often turned off by men who speak accented English. Most of these men are labelled “Igbotic”. In addition, women are regularly recruited to serve as customer care representatives, human resource personnel, news broadcasters, amongst others. Many men ignore their English accent because of the dominant ideology that not knowing how to speak the Received Pronunciation is not a problem. Instead, what is problematic is not having money.

A central point that has also shown the attitudinal power of English is onomastic anglicisation and indigenous name dropping. It is common, especially among youths, to anglicise their native names. As exemplified in Eze et al. (2020), many Yoruba youths have changed their names from Adébísì to “Hardebisì” and Femi to “Fehmhí”. Among the Igbo, names such as Ijeoma and Kelechi are changed to “Aijay” and “Kayceee”, respectively. Some individuals, especially Efik and Ibibio, do not include any indigenous name. Possible reasons for these practices are the ideologies that indigenous names are local and do not meet with globalisation and the intention of de-ethnicising their identity.

2.4. Accessibility power of English
Following the amalgamation of the southern and northern protectorates in 1914 and the emergence of a new country known as Nigeria, the need for a link language became expedient since there are more than 400 languages in the newly formed country. As a result of this new development, English which was domiciled in the Christian religious teachings became a crucial part of Nigeria’s education. Today, (Nigerian Pidgin) English is a unifying language for individuals who do not share the same mother tongue (Schneider, 2007). English’s accessibility power as an ethnic neutraliser can be seen in inter-ethnic marriages where English is used to bridge the linguistic gap between couples. In most inter-ethnic marriages, the home language is English, and the children’s first language is predominantly English. In rare cases, the children may later learn either or both of their parents’ mother tongues. In most cases, the children only know how to speak English. These pose threats to the vitality of couples’ indigenous languages (Ochonogor & Ikems, 2019) because the indigenous languages are in constant competition with English which can provide access to science and technology, which Nigerian indigenous languages appear to have failed to do (Spencer, 1985). Offiong and Mensah (2012) studied three inter-ethnic marriage families comprising Efik-Ibibio, Igbo-Efik and Lokao-Efik. They discovered that the children from these marriages speak English with their parents at home and speak English in schools. English provides individuals from different ethnic groups access to start a family in this situation.

In addition, English provides access for individuals to trade. The international markets in Nigeria, such as Alaba International Market, Lagos, and Ariaria International Market, Aba, are international because of buyers’ and sellers’ cultural and linguistic diversity. Without the English language, the Igbo people have no business selling or buying in markets located in Kano, where Hausa is the language of the community. This intranational accessibility English provides in Nigeria expands its power and hegemony, which has made many Nigerians to learn it. Individuals who could not speak Standard English settle for Pidgin English, which satisfies their communication needs. As Chew (1999, p. 37) puts it:

the relentless demand for English needs to be understood in terms of the empowering role of English, which is evident in the employment opportunities the language can bestow on its users […] and the access it provides both to knowledge and markets.

English also provides access to positions in the government. When individuals get to a higher status in Nigeria and cannot still speak good English, the question many Nigerians ask is: “How did s/he get here?” This question reflects that it is expected that for them to have got to that high
position, s/he must have been competent in the job and their use of the English language. On 6 March 2013, Channels television, a Lagos-based private television, interviewed the then Commandant of the Lagos State Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) Obafaiye Shem on the recurrent defrauding of job seekers by people who claimed to work for the organisation and asked him to state the correct website of the NSCDC. Obafaiye committed an interlingual error by saying that the website will be provided by his “Oga at the top” (boss). When the interviewer prodded further that what he meant was the official website of NSCDC, he replied, “The website of NSCDC is www.nscdc.” without including the domain name such as “com, ng, org, or gov”. This interlingual error, which resulted in accidental humour, exposed his pragmatic incompetence in English (Agbedo & Krisagbede, 2014). The failure to provide the correct website of an organisation he represents stimulated concerns bordering on his competence in the job and technology literacy. As such, he was reportedly redeployed to another state.

Aside from providing intranational accessibility in Nigeria, English also links Nigeria with other countries in Africa and the world. With many Nigerians migrating to different parts of Africa and the world, English allows them to interact with people from different countries. The call to make Swahili or Hausa Africa’s lingua franca was not generally accepted because of the argument that English already serves as a link language; hence, the promotion of an African language to perform the functions English is already doing is a waste of time, resources and a means to force another language on all Africans (Adegbija, 1994). Similarly, Kachru (2017, p. 104) remarks that the legacy of English in the Outer Circle serves as a tool of “national identity and political awakening, a window onto the world”.

2.5. Pluricentricity power of English

The different varieties of English in the world have given rise to terms such as “New Englishes” and “World Englishes”. Today, terms such as Nigerian English, Indian English, Canadian English, Namibian English, and Scottish English, among others, show English’s linguistic peculiarities in different speech communities. These linguistic peculiarities, which have been nativised, are signs of the pluricentric power of English. English has assimilated across cultures (Kachru, 2017). Valentine (2006, p. 569) makes a similar point:

An extension to the world Englishes paradigm is its potential for pluricentricity. Rather than a monocentric model, the pluricentric approach challenges the idealized notion of the native English speaker and the monolingual, monocultural Anglocentric identity. It views the English language as several interacting centers, with each center interacting and interacting with the others.

The pluricentric nature of English is achieved through nativisation. In his dynamic model of postcolonial English, Schneider (2007, p. 212) argues that Nigeria is experiencing the third phase—nativisation—and is not far from entering the fourth stage, which is endonormative stabilisation. For him, what is delaying Nigeria from entering the fourth stage is “the stabilisation of a more homogeneous concept of a Standard Nigerian English, i.e. an explicit codification” and the lack of formalised role of Nigerian Pidgin. Fifteen years after Schneider’s book, one might argue that Nigeria is yet to enter the phase of endonormative stabilisation because of the debate between the “accepters” and “rejecters” of Nigerian English (Jowitt, 2019) and the perceived low status of Nigerian Pidgin English due to lack of institutional support.

Nativisation, according to Schneider (2007, p. 40), is the “central phase of both cultural and linguistic transformation [when] combining the old and the new (language structures) is in full swing”. Linguistic transformation, notes Schneider, results from the distance between the colonisers and the colonised after the latter’s independence. Kachru (1986b) states: “the legacy of colonial Englishes has resulted in the existence of several transplanted varieties of English having distinct linguistic ecologies—their contexts of function and usage.” Within the Nigerian literary space, Achebe supports the use of a nativised variety of English as reflected in his
literary works. Achebe (1975) argues that English can be Africanised in producing literature that conveys African experience.

In Nigeria’s case, the nativisation of English was facilitated by three factors. First is the multilingual and multicultural nature of Nigeria. The numerous languages in Nigeria provided a linguistic pool from which Standard English needs to draw. During acculturation, the different phonological, lexical, and semantic features of Nigeria’s indigenous languages were transferred to English. Second is the English language teaching in many unassisted schools (not sponsored by government grants), especially in southern Nigeria, by teachers who are not native speakers (Fafunwa, 1991). Since language is a behavioural process and “the learner will acquire the language only to the extent that he acculturates” (Schumann, 1978, p. 29), students imitate the non-standard variety of English, and when they turn to teachers, they perpetuate the non-standard form. Recently, a nativised variety of English has been transferred by mothers who are not competent in the English language to their children. The complaint tradition in Nigeria has predominantly centred on the poor performance of students in the English language in examinations. In Schneider’s (2007) view, the third factor is the absence of a significant settlers’ speech community (STL) strand that could act as a target.

There is a growing body of literature on Nigerian (Pidgin) English. These studies have accounted for the phonological features of Nigerian English (Bamgbose, 1982; Gut, 2005; Jowitt, 2019), its lexical and syntactic features (Igboanusi, 2002; Kperogi, 2015; Schneider, 2007), and discursive features (Jowitt, 2019). These studies establish the existence of a nativised version of English that demonstrates the pluricentric power of English. As such, many Nigerians do not bother if they speak Standard English or not. Their concern is to speak English that can fulfil their communicative goals. Scholars have also established sub-varieties of Nigerian English, which can be observed among L1 speakers of the three major Nigerian languages and some other major-minor languages, especially in phonology (Igboanusi, 2006; Olaniyi & Ekerete, 2013). This distinction suggests that even though Nigeria’s southern and northern protectorates were geographically coalesced and English was promoted to serve as a unifying language, such merging does not include “koinéization” (Trudgill, 2004). The subvarieties of Nigerian English have “contributed to the expansion of the range of English [and] have acquired important roles that motivate a variety shift among the users of English” (Kachru, 2017, p. 97).

2.6. Material power of English
A famous remark by many Igbo people, È jì Ègbó èjé èbèè? “which status can one attain with Igbo?” presents a picture of how they see English as a tool to achieve social mobility, economic gains, and social status. This statement is rooted in an ideology that one cannot be successful by knowing how to speak Igbo or studying Igbo as a course in the university. Indeed, there is a correlation between the socioeconomic value of a language and positive attitudes towards it as a medium of instruction in school (Kamwanganamalu & Tovares, 2016) and as one worthy of being competent in. In a personal communication with one of the professors of Igbo literature, he remarked how people derided him for deciding to study Igbo in the university. He further stated that the question some persons asked him, “If students studying English in the university complete it in 4 years, will you also complete yours in 4 years since you are studying what everyone else speaks”. Similarly, Stell (2016) observed that there is a positive attitude towards English in Namibia. With respect to Zulu in South Africa, Rudwick and Parmegiani (2013, p. 102) observed a similar situation from the responses of some of the respondents:

Where would I be employed with my Zulu degree in the world? Maybe in the government, but I don’t know of a single department where I can only speak isiZulu. […] Zulu is as important as all other languages, but then, with English being the language that you need to succeed as a person, it’s better to learn in English.
The above excerpt corroborates Kachru’s (2017, p. 97) claim, “the viability of a language [is] what one thinks the language (in this case, English) will do for a person, and what others think of a person when he or she uses the language (again, in this case, English)”. Against this backdrop, English in Nigeria and other parts of sub-Saharan Africa is seen as a tool for achieving socio-economic development. In contrast, indigenous languages are seen as a hindrance to growth. In other words, English continues to wield power in Nigeria because Nigerians believe that English will alleviate their troubles and open a pathway for financial stability. In colonial times, individuals were motivated to learn English because of the social status of the few elites who worked with the government. This scenario is demonstrated in Achebe’s (1964, p. 78) Arrow of God when Ezeulu explained to his son, Oduche, why he needs to be educated:

I have sent you to be my eyes there. Do not listen to what people say – people who do not know their right from their left. No man speaks a lie to his son; I have told you that before. If anyone asks you why you should be sent to learn these new things tell him that a man must dance the dance prevalent in his time.

While Ezeulu was restricted in his position as the spiritual head of his community, which does not permit him to openly embrace the British culture at the expense of his culture and language, pragmatic needs inspired him to send one of his sons to learn English so that the good thing the language brings will not pass by his family. Ezeulu’s action is in sync with that of many parents and the government in Nigeria who serve as supporters of English. It is undoubtedly true then that “the motivation that individuals and communities demonstrate for English is based on economic and pragmatic opportunities” (Ager, 2001, p. 9). Conspiracy theorists (Davies, 2003; Phillipson, 1992) argue that the material power of English has resulted in the endangerment and death of many languages. Adherents of the conspiracy theory have used terms such as killer English, linguistic imperialism, linguicism, and inequality to describe the adverse effects on other languages. Following this line of reasoning, Nigerian languages are seen as embodied glory of the past, valueless in the present and optimistically valuable for the future. What appears to be overlooked is that the present was once a future.

On the contrary, in line with grassroots theory (Fishman et al., 1996), Kachru (2017) believes that English does not give itself power; instead, its range and depth of power is a product of the support it receives from its promoters and users. In other words, many Nigerian indigenous languages do not self-lose their material power; their speakers strip them of their power and functions. The vitality enjoyed by the Hausa language is a result of the positive attitude of its speakers who do not believe that they need to abandon their language for an alternative—in this case, English. Based on observation, one might argue that instead of the Hausas to socially discriminate against a member of their ethnolinguistic group who does not know how to speak English, they are wont of ridiculing a Hausa person who does not know how to speak Hausa. Mchombo (2014, p. 33) admits that English serves as “the gatekeeper for access to the realms of power and economic advantages” but suggests that the linguistic power of English should not lead to the relegation of African languages.

3. A bottom-up approach to the development of Nigerian languages
The populist view is that English in Nigeria and sub-Saharan Africa has caused disloyalty towards indigenous languages, resulting in language endangerment. In the bid to revitalise these indigenous languages, scholars have advocated linguistic trilingualism (Bodomo, 1996; Ndiribe & Aboh, 2020) and prestige planning (Kamwangamalu, 2016) which involve the use of these languages in official settings. However, as seen in the South African case, even though the government recognise nine indigenous languages as official, English appears to be the main language that performs official functions, with Afrikaans performing official functions in the west. As rightly observed by Reagan and Schreffler (2005, p. 115), language planning and policies in Africa have been debated on whether the use of “English as the medium of instruction and, in so doing, succumb to linguistic imperialism; or to use a local language and, in this process, cut off students from the international scholarly community.” The support for indigenous languages has been anchored on macro-language policies or the top-down approach (Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997), where
the government of a country is expected to dictate the functions of languages in a country, and the citizens are expected to obide by those functions. In other words, if the government supports a language (in theory and practice), the higher the value of that language in the linguistic marketplace. The top-down approach has characterised the Nigerian and African sociolinguistic situation over the years.

In theory, the top-down policy involving the governments and the African Union has recognised the importance of English in Africa and the need to promote indigenous languages. Hence, the now inoperative Organisation of African Unity, which is recently known as the African Union, in 1986 formulated a “Language Plan of Action for Africa” aimed at minimizing the overdependence on exoglossic policies to incorporate exo-endoglossic policies where African languages and colonial languages can function as official languages and medium of instructions in schools. Similarly, in 2006, the African Union established the African Academy of Languages (ACALAN) with the objectives of empowering vehicular languages in Africa to serve as working languages in the African Union, to promote vernacular language education, to elevate the status of indigenous languages in official domains and information dissemination. In the Nigerian situation, the government on paper recognised mother tongue education and the use of major Nigerian languages in the National Assembly, but the poor institutional support received by these languages has constantly fuelled English’s power. As Fosold (1997, p. 268) puts it, macro-policies have not yielded the desired dividends because of the “hypocritical attitude of the policymaker who sends [their] children to English-medium private schools, whilst extolling the virtues of vernacular literacy which is to be found only in the public school.” The positive attitudes of the government towards English have made many Nigerians see English as the only language they need to use even though, as Wolff (2017) points out, one may not survive with only one language in Africa.

As impressive as these plans are, the goals of the macro-policies have not been significantly achieved. Thus, the need of rethinking possible ways of developing Nigerian languages. Following Lin and Martin’s (2005) call to provide language policy and practice alternatives, I argue for a bottom-up approach to the development of Nigerian indigenous languages. The bottom-up approach advocated in this paper is different from the micro-policies or bottom-up planning proposed by Kaplan and Baldauf (1997) and Omoniyi (2007). Whereas the former emphasised specific aspects of language to broader language planning, the bottom-up approach proposed in this paper argues for the involvement of non-governmental organisations and the reawakening of linguistic consciousness in Nigerians to understand that even though Nigeria’s indigenous languages appear to possess little socioeconomic values, it will be a case of linguistic disenfranchisement to abandon their language and not encourage their children to learn it. It is worthy to note here that the bottom-up approach does not advocate the discontinuation of English language learning or the stripping of the official functions of English in Nigeria.

The main argument here is for Nigerian languages to be developed and for Nigerians to aspire to learn their mother tongues and the language of their immediate environment. The change does not necessarily need to begin with the governments’ proclamation or institutional support; it can start with the value individuals attach to their mother tongue. This practice, in turn, may spur the government to prioritise these languages. For instance, Hausa speakers have a positive attitude towards the language. In present times, Hausa has become a vehicular language. It is emerging as the de facto language of the Nigerian military.

The bottom-up approach borrows from Ruiz’s (1988) “language as a right” and “language as a resource” concepts to advocate the need for Nigerians, especially women and mothers, to see that their children have the right to acquire their mother tongue. One of the observable reasons that make many Nigerians have negative attitudes towards their mother tongue is the ideology that their MT is a problem, which can interfere in their quest for upward social mobility. Therefore, parents are wont of enrolling their children in English-medium schools where no Nigerian language is taught as a subject. Some of them defended this practice by
stating that it would be a case of cognitive overload on their child to learn two languages simultaneously. This is where non-governmental organisations and Nigerian languages linguists need to sensitize Nigerians and bring to the fore the findings available in the psycholinguistic literature that a child can acquire up to five languages. These sensitizations need to prioritise women and mothers as the primary audience since they are the concierges of language and the champions of language change (Labov, 2010). The importance of viewing language as a resource is that it can have a “direct impact on enhancing the language status of subordinate languages; it can help to ease tensions between majority and minority communities; [...] and could help to reshape attitudes about language and language groups” (Ruiz, 1988, pp. 25–26). To create a balance, children can learn English from school, their mother tongue at home, and the immediate environment’s language (if it is different from their mother tongue) by exposing them to the linguistic environment.

The sociopolitical situation in Nigeria shows that governments are more likely to make a decision based on Nigerians’ reactions. Nigerians’ criticisms against the Twitter ban made the government lift the ban. On 5 June 2021, the Federal Government of Nigeria banned Twitter because the company deleted president Buhari’s tweet on treating the youths in southeast Nigeria in the language they understand. Twitter flagged it as offensive and deleted the tweet. Consequently, the Nigerian government banned Twitter. A ban that was criticised by many Nigerians especially the Nigerian Bar Association citing it as an impediment to freedom of speech. If there were a solid loyalty to Nigerian languages, the exclusion of Nigerian languages as compulsory subjects in the West African Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (WASSCE) would have been challenged. However, parents are responsible for the continuous use of English in schools. They withdraw their children from schools where Nigerian languages are used as the medium of instruction, especially in the south and urban areas (see Igboanusi & Peter, 2016). This practice has led to the increase of private-owned schools. These schools charge exorbitant school fees and pay their teachers a paltry sum as salary. Because of their unwillingness to pay their teachers, some hire unqualified and untrained teachers who impact little on their students. This situation explains the high rate of patronage of miracle centres (where malpractices are allowed) during WASSCE and Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME). Some schools even go to the extent of tasking their graduating students to pay money that they will use to bribe the invigilators to be allowed to indulge in exam malpractices.

Previous sensitisation by non-governmental organisations such as Otu Sowakwa Igbo, a group charged with informing the Igbo people on the importance of safeguarding the Igbo language, has led to the introduction of the Igbo language as one of the compulsory general courses at the Nnamdi Azikiwe University. This policy enacted by the then Vice-Chancellor of the University, Professor Pita Ejiofor, has yielded positive dividends as students whose parents disenfranchised linguistically are provided with the opportunity to learn their mother tongue. Such initiatives and calls for the need for everyone to learn their native language have made some Igbo parents who trained up their children in Lagos, a Yoruba land, send their children to universities in Igboland where they can learn the Igbo language and culture. Following the success of Ejiofor’s initiative, the government of Anambra state has declared every Friday as an indigenous day where primary school pupils and secondary school students are to wear a traditional attire as their school uniform and are allowed to speak their mother tongue freely. In addition, the Lagos state House of Assembly also claims to conduct its sessions in Yoruba on Thursdays. These practices show that Nigerians are beginning to understand the importance of promoting their languages.

On the part of linguists, Nigerian scholars have also intensified their study of the so-called minority languages. For instance, the Department of Linguistics at the University of Uyo hosts a Nigerian Languages Project to describe and document endangered languages in Nigeria. The Department of Linguistics of African Languages, University of Ibadan, is also known for its
efforts to ensure that Nigerian languages meet the demands of the computerised world. Professors such as BM Mbah of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka and Nwokoye of the Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, have taken forward the message of the need to learn Nigerian languages as a way of identity formation and cultural preservation by delivering their inaugural lectures in a Nigerian language, Igbo. Such display or performance unconsciously communicates that one can become a professor by studying indigenous languages.

Different organisations have sprung up in the diaspora to help Nigerians born and bred in North American and European countries learn their mother tongue. For instance, through Fulbright Scholarship, the US Embassy has a “Foreign Language Teaching Assistant Program (FLTA)” where they teach the Hausa and Yoruba languages. In February 2022, the Igbo language was also introduced as a course at Oxford University, UK. A US-based private-owned organisation known as Igbo Podcast also teaches Igbo people in the diaspora the Igbo language. The BBC has also established BBC Hausa, BBC Igbo, and BBC Yoruba to promote the language and culture of Nigeria’s three major ethnic groups. Also, African Magic has stations that air movies in three major Nigerian languages. Individuals and organisations have also converted Bibles in major Nigerian languages into audio and included the orthography of these languages in Swiftkey and multilingual keyboard. Such bottom-up practices can increase the values of Nigerian languages to the point where Nigerians will have a rethink and value their language. When this stage is reached, it becomes possible for Nigerian languages to have socioeconomic value and prestige.

The bottom-up approach proposed in this study involves four stages:

1. sensitisation of the conscious effort to speak indigenous languages,
2. understanding that language does not inhibit social mobility,
3. attachment and gaining of socioeconomic importance,
4. the attraction of the government’s interest to lend practical institutional support towards the languages.

As noted earlier, attempts have been made to sensitisise Nigerians on the importance of knowing and speaking their native languages. However, the first stage of bottom-up language planning is for individuals, groups, religious leaders, and non-governmental organisations to intensify their efforts to sensitisise Nigerians on their mother tongue’s importance. The rise of Nigerian languages depends on their speakers’ attitudes and the “perception of both parents and learners that the indigenous languages lack value in important social and economic markets” (Turner & Wildsmith-Cromarty, 2014, p. 299). Likewise, Ager (2005) remarks that a community’s prestige to its language determines how the community views itself. The sensitisation is not advocacy for constructing a discourse of resistance towards English, but that of acceptance that English has come to stay and its stay should not displace the importance of indigenous languages. It is fair to say that English in Nigeria has reached a point where little or no European human agents are pushing or clamouring for its spread. Instead, it spreads effortlessly because of the institutional structures that demand its spread, recognition, and importance.

Present in the linguistic repertoire of Nigerians is the saying that charity begins at home. The Igbo conceptualises it as A na-esi n’ulo mara mma puwa ama, which means goodness proceeds from home to outside. On the other hand, the Yoruba views it as Ilé latì n kò ìṣò r’òde “House is where we bring virtue to outside”. Hausa philosophy renders it as Tarbiyya daga gida aka somawa “Morals are being taught and learnt from home”. With respect to the Nigerian languages, the above sayings indicate the importance of learning one’s language before learning another person’s language. These sayings connote that the desire to learn indigenous languages should precede that of learning foreign languages. In the quest to embrace English, Nigerians need to understand that they should not do so at the expense of their native
language because every language is “as important as the cosmos of ideas, metaphors, miracles and metaphysics that comprise the totality of human experience, as is the concept of biodiversity to the health and abundance of the ecologies we share with other living things” (Hume, 2008, p. 1 as cited in Kamwangamalu, 2016).

When sensitisation has yielded significant results, the next stage is the understanding that the knowledge of indigenous languages does not inhibit social mobility; instead, it facilitates it. For example, the Nigerian music industry is recognised globally not because the songs are rendered only in English. In 2021, two Nigerian musicians, Burna Boy and Wizkid, won Grammy Awards. The award is in recognition of their songs, in which they infuse Yoruba words and Pidgin English. Lionheart, a warmly received movie in Nigeria, was disqualified from the 2020 Oscars award because, according to the Oscar Academy, “the film does not meet the language requirement necessary for inclusion in the category since it was filmed mostly in English. Despite the film having some Igbo parts, an Academy rule—which states that films must have ‘a predominantly non-English dialogue track’ to be considered for the category—makes it ineligible” (The New York Times, 2019). It suggests that Nigerian indigenous languages are not inherently socioeconomically insufficient, but the attitudes of Nigerians towards them make them appear valueless. In addition, Nigerians need to avoid ridiculing those learning their mother tongue whenever they mispronounce some words. Making jest of language learners discourages them from learning the language.

The third stage involves attaching socioeconomic importance to Nigerian indigenous languages. The socioeconomic value of these languages can be consciously or unconsciously done. The economy of Nigeria may not be fully actualised since a “true development of a political, economic, or social nature cannot take place, however, unless there is also development of a linguistic nature” (Nettle & Romaine, 2000, p. 172). Tollefson (1991) argues that language is essential in societal formation because it impacts people's lives beyond expectations. The English language in Nigeria, as noted earlier, was not first introduced to serve as the country’s lingua franca but as a means of conducting missionary activities. The amalgamation of the northern and southern protectorates allowed English to thrive in Nigeria. The high linguistic consciousness among Nigerians will spur them into embarking on adventures that will see the rise of the power of their languages. It is expected that the positive attitudes of Nigerians towards their languages will lead to the fourth stage where the top, that is, the government, will become serious with language planning and policy in Nigeria and consolidate the prestige planning of Nigerian languages.

4. Conclusion
In this study, I have synthesised the power of English in Nigeria following the Kachruvian model of the parameters of the power of English. It is observed that the powers of English in Nigeria manifest in six key dimensions. The power of English was seen in its increasing number of speakers in Nigeria and the different communities and states where these speakers can be found. This numerical increase results from the functional power of English in government, education, religion, mass media, and literature. Because of these functions English performs, the study shows that many Nigerians positively evaluate English on the one hand and negatively evaluate Nigerian indigenous languages on the other hand. In addition, those who could speak English correctly discriminate against those who cannot. Furthermore, the need to speak English has given rise to different varieties in Nigeria. It is found that there appears to be a consensus that there exists a peculiar variety of English spoken in Nigeria, known as Nigerian English, which can be identified based on its distinctive phonological, lexical, syntactic and discursive features. Finally, English wields power in Nigeria because many Nigerians conceive it as the language for social mobility and economic development.

In an attempt to extend the work of previous scholars on language planning in Nigeria and Africa, the study proposed a bottom-up approach to the development of Nigerian languages. This proposed approach emphasises the need for individuals, indigenous groups and non-
governmental organisations to sensitize Nigerians and the need for Nigerians to understand that knowing how to speak their mother tongue, the language of the immediate environment (if it is different from the mother tongue), and English does not stop them from achieving social mobility. In conclusion, therefore, English has come to stay in Nigeria, but Nigerians should ensure that its stay is not thriving on the graveyards of Nigerian indigenous languages.

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