

## ENGLISH LANGUAGE IDENTITY AND DIASPORIC NEGOTIATIONS: VOICES IN TRANSITION

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### Abstract

Diasporic experiences have become pivotal in recent studies across the globe. Diaspora and migration are historically embedded in the evolution of the English language. The experiences in its migration, mixing and mingling with other languages of the world, which gave rise to the concept of Englishes, reflect similar diasporic experiences such as displacement, diaspora, hybridity, loss of cultural identity and alienation. Hence, this study tends to argue for the triumph of English over the breadth of these challenges as a didactic experience. The study adopted a qualitative approach that integrates interpretive thematic analysis of the metaphor of English as a migrant, with Kachru's Three Circles Model of analysis. It drew from secondary sources to illustrate the experiences of English language in diaspora. The theoretical model of varieties of English by Braj Kachru was used to explain the stages of displacement of English. The findings of the study show that English language encountered the challenges of duality, hybridity, loss of cultural identity, displacement and alienation but with a focus on its ideological agenda which was to conquer other languages, it traversed these challenges; triumphing as "World English". It accomplished this through its malleable nature. The study recommends that migrants have an agenda and focus more on their agenda. In addition, it recommends malleability to migrants as a tool to transcend diasporic hiccups.

**Keywords:** diachronic study, synchronic study, Englishes, diaspora, hybridity, identity, alienation.

### Introduction

The English language is said to be a Germanic language brought to Britain by two out of the three Germanic tribes that settled in British Isles (the Angles and Saxons) around 5th – 1050 CE. Denham and Lobeck (2010) attest to the fact that the Anglo-Saxon warriors, two Germanic tribes, invaded the Celts, the original owners of the land and their language- Celtic. This period in history was noted as Old English. The Norman Conquest brought about the Middle English period (1100-1500CE). By the Middle English period, the Old English underwent several changes in all its linguistic forms as a result of the influence of French language which was the language of the ruling class. Zembiri (2022) explored the influence of the Norman Conquest on English language during the period of 1100- 1150 century and observed that the Norman Conquest made

significant linguistic changes in English language as a result of the contact between the two languages. The renaissance period (14<sup>th</sup>- 17<sup>th</sup> century) had a profound impact on English language in the areas of vocabulary, grammar and style. According to Docsity. (n.d.) Renaissance transformed English through classical learning, expanding of vocabulary by borrowings, stylistic innovations and cultural shifts which redefined literary expression and linguistic norms. The Modern English periods continues to cause changes in the language. Hence, English language has undergone significant changes linguistically, culturally and socially due to influences from its migration experiences. Bizzoni et al (2020) analysed the linguistic variation and change in 250 years of English scientific writing, using computational model to reveal different aspects of diachronic changes, including consolidation in

linguistic usage and lexical innovation. These highlight the dynamic nature of English, shaped by sociopolitical and historical forces.

A notable feature of the English language from the periods of Old English and Middle English was treated as a common man's language while Latin and French were used as the language of the ruling class. Zimmerli noted that the Norman Conquest led to the restriction of English language as the language of the lower class while French became the language of the ruling class, nobility, and law courts. In other words, it was a second-class language to the ruling languages such as Latin and French. But by the end of the one hundred years of Cold War between French and English, English triumphed, regained its power and started to move to conquer the world languages. Its migration and colonial expansion led to incorporation of foreign words and expressions into the language. The steps taken by English language to conquer the world languages were migration and colonization. The spread of English is classified under two diasporas. The first diaspora is called English to the "New Worlds". The countries where English migrated to and became their vernacular language, also known as a native language, include: the UK, USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and Ireland. As a vernacular language, English provided opportunity for preservation of cultural heritage, traditions, history, a sense of community and belonging for the speakers. The second diaspora deals with the spread of English through colonization and this is referred to as English to Africa and Asia, involving countries like: India, Nigeria, the Philippines, Malaysia, Kenya, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, (at the outer circle), and Russia, China, Japan, Korea, Indonesia, and Korea (at the expanding circle). In these contexts, English is referred to as a vehicular language. As a vehicular language also known as a bridge language, English is used for communication in contexts where it is not a native language.

The reason for these Diasporas spread of English can be likened to the present-day human diaspora spread in the sense that the factors that led to the spread of English are the same as why people decide to move out of their original lands to new

lands. Some of these factors include: migration, trade, education, economic opportunities, politics, socio-cultural concerns, geopolitical dominance, science and technology, diplomacy and the likes. Thus, the interaction of English language in these contexts has left it with a complex, diverse and dynamic nature called Englishes. Hence, the study aims to examine these diasporic experiences of English language in a way to proffer a nuanced understanding of the complex relationship embedded in migration as it relates to: identity, culture, hybridity, and displacement.

There are different views on the global spread of the English language. Some views attribute it to colonial legacies and the forces of globalization, while others commonly view it as a reactive process, driven by economic necessity or political instability. However, scholarly research shows that diasporic movements, particularly those involving English-speaking populations, are shaped by historical planning and global policy. The *World Migration Report 2020* by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) states that "migration is not simply a spontaneous act of individuals but often a result of structured global policies and historical legacies that shape who moves, where, and with what linguistic resources". A closer examination of diasporic movements reveals that English language migration is not merely incidental, it is the result of deliberate planning, policy frameworks, and strategic choices. Stressing further on the intentionality behind migration, Burge, (2020), argues that "literary narratives reveal how diasporic movements are embedded in ideological frameworks and historical planning, challenging the notion of migration as merely reactive". From the foregoing, it is evident that there exist two schools of thought on the concept of migration, and these views will also impact the experiences of the migrants. The study, in line with Taylor's view above, seeks to explore English language experiences and strategies, as thematic mobility for migrant's adaptation in order to actualize migration goals. The study will explore issues of cultural-identity retention, hybridity, and alienation in the diasporic movement of English language.

English, like a migrant, traverses borders, adapts to new environments, and often struggles with acceptance in the same way migrants do as buttressed in literatures. Arcimaviciene and Baglama (2018) argue that migration metaphors in media and discourse reflect ideological tensions, portraying migrants as “commodities” or “natural phenomena” that disrupt societal norms. Similarly, English is often treated as a foreign intruder in non-native contexts, leading to linguistic alienation. Taylor (2023) shows how metaphors such as “liquid,” “invader,” and “guest” have historically framed both migrants and English in ways that emphasize estrangement and otherness. In essence, there are connected knots between the English language experience and the migrants’ experiences, and a deliberate attempt at exploring these knots will offer adaptive strategies for migrants.

#### **Framework/ Methodology**

This paper adopts a qualitative approach that integrates interpretive thematic analysis of the metaphor of English as a migrant with Kachru’s Three Circles Model of analysis. Data will be drawn from secondary sources. The thematic analysis is a methodological approach that involves identifying, coding and analyzing of themes to understand underlying meanings and patterns in texts conceptual framing that reflects the language’s global movement and its complex role in diasporic identity formation. By integrating interpretive thematic analysis with Kachru’s Three Circles Model analysis, the study engages in: a theoretical analysis of diasporic experiences of English language as a migrant, and a comparative thematic analysis, to foreground the metaphor of English as a migrant, highlighting how English, as an entity navigated and negotiated these diasporic experiences to achieve its goal.

#### **English language Interaction with the Diasporic Concepts**

Diaspora entails a movement away from one’s place, culture, customs and values to an entirely new one. The term was originally used in connection with forced movement of people from their homelands as a result of war, captivity or slavery. Presently, diasporic studies have included

the experiences of voluntary migrants who chose to leave their homelands for new worlds as a result of education, job opportunities, crisis-ridden societies, political unrest, blurry economic fortunes and more.

According to Cohen (1997)

the word diaspora can be traced back still earlier, to a Greek word used to describe the “sowing of seeds” and then applied to Greek colonization in the Mediterranean. The Biblical use of the word was one of scattering, what the Lord would do as punishment for not obeying the divine laws. The Hebrew equivalent was “galuth” or “galut”, which meant “captivity” or “exile” and the term initially, referred to the scattering of Jews outside Palestine after the Babylonian exile and has assumed a more general connotation of people settling away from their ancestral homelands. In the contemporary period, the word diaspora has lost its original meaning and encompasses variety of connotations given the incessant movement of peoples from one country, to region, or continent to another for variety of reasons: economic, political, social and cultural.

Raina (2017) posits that the term, ‘diaspora’ refers to “the displacement of an individual, community or groups of people from their original homeland to an alien territory”. He goes further to assert that diaspora has dual application: the first is related to voluntary migrations of a group of people for better lands while the second involves the description of a group of people in mass migration either as a consequence of conflict riddled homelands or migration from the third world countries to a supposed promised land in alien countries. No matter the nature it takes, migration involves “a cultural transition from pure roots to mixed customs in the adopted land”, according to him. In other words, migration involves a shift from cultural homogeneity to hybridity. The merging of the different cultures or customs is a dilemma the migrants have to embrace, resulting in a state of cross-culturalism, an emergence of “a new being”. If migrants reject or resist this “new being” status, they become subjected to continuous

experience of trauma since they cannot maintain their original cultural identity in the new land. Thus, their inability to cope with the cross-cultural context, keep them in a state of trauma, continuously experiencing alienation, nostalgia and longing for homeland.

English language can be said to have passed through these experiences as is evident in the Englishes spoken in different parts of the world. The idea of displacement, cultural transition, and even mixed customs are linguistically evident when one considers the different phonological, semantic, morphological, grammatical and syntactic colorations that characterise the different Englishes that have emerged over time. The concepts- alienation, nostalgia and longing can be illustrated using the insistence and resistance to change, of the prescriptive grammarians on the use of English language. Their insistence on the notion of standard, correct, grammatical and intelligible use of the British English in a foreign land, was a way to maintain and sustain the culture and identity of the English language. Every English usage that did not meet their prescriptions was termed- non-standard, incorrect, ungrammatical and unintelligible. The prescriptive grammarians' efforts were met with criticisms and controversies based on the grounds of their rigid speculations that failed to account for the dynamic nature of language. The descriptive grammarians on the other hand, denied the carrying-over of English language culture and identity to new lands in terms of the practice. They posit that because the English language has moved away from its place, culture, customs and values to entire new ones, what people do with it in its new environment should be a matter of study.

Thus, the descriptive grammarians view, aligned with Bates (1976) view of language which states that, "language is a tool, we use it to do things". In this respect, English migration and movement to colonize for different reasons, led to its culture and identity being altered to the point that the present-day Englishes have their unique cultures, identities, customs and values away from the original culture, identity, custom and values of the English language.

The implication of the above to migrants is that they can never have their linguistic and cultural identity untampered. Their new environment with its new cultures, customs, traditions, values and language will definitely create a hybrid personality in them, different from who they used to be and who the people in their new environment are. So their efforts to remain who they are or retain what they used to be, becomes elusive as in the case of the prescriptive grammarian's efforts to maintain the standard of the British English across the globe.

### **Hybridity**

Hybridity means a mixing of different cultures; a fact of different cultures coming into contact. In other words, hybridity can be said to mean an intersection of different cultures of the different cultures in contact situation, which may give rise to a different face of culture away from the faces of the two cultures in contact. English language experienced hybridity in all the linguistic forms, especially, in its culture. Thus, the notions of nativisation, naturalisation and indigenisation, are processes that resulted in hybridization of English language. The simplest and most commonly used definition of culture is that, it is the way of life of a people. The next commonly used expression in conjunction with culture is that, language is an embodiment of culture and culture is expressed through language. From the axioms above, it becomes very evident that a migrant, for example, from Nigeria with her culture and language will definitely find herself in a bizarre situation in terms of what she believes and knows and what her new environment offers her. This implies that her linguistic and cultural processes of communication will experience some level of resistance in the new environment.

Going further on this, Kamwangamalu (2019) in discussing hybridity in South African English uses the term "naturalization" to describe the experience of English which entails that English has been made to bear the burden of the speaker's cultural experience and as well, has become a link language. He opines that this naturalization process can be made more profound where:

- indigenous words and symbolism are borrowed into English,
- local notions of kinship are expressed through English, where this would not previously have been possible, by creating new terms to express such notions,
- idioms and expressions get carried over into English,
- existing English words get special, new meanings
- specific, African turns of phrase are entrenched in the language.

Josiah (2014) posits in his paper on the hybridity of English language in Nigeria that:

English in a non-native environment is basically an admixture of unpredictable, sociolinguistic progeny which manifests in several forms: pidginization, creolization, diaglossia, attrition, word-borrowing, word-coinage, transliterated forms, code-mixing, codeswitching, language shift, birth of a new language, and even linguicide (death of part or whole of an existing language). ...the ultimate result is various shades of endonormative form and, of course, a departure from the conventional exonormative models.

Going by the above, the process of naturalization, indigenization, and nativisation of English language offers a vivid and authentic understanding of hybrid experience. The naturalization and nativization process imposes significant changes on the English language which it has to bear. It also goes through some puncturing process with the indigenous words and symbolism, local notions, acquiring new meanings away from its original meanings, and the likes. Furthermore, English acquires by its mixing, an unpredictable sociolinguistic offspring that departs from the conventional standards of the language. The implication of this to the migrants is that there would surely be a high level of departure or puncturing in their experiences in both culture, identity and language norms in their new environment. As a result of the new environment, English was subjected to experiencing and expressing different worldviews, belief systems, traditions, values and cultures, which are foreign

to it. In the same vein, migrants, whether forced or voluntary have this hybrid space to go through.

### **Cultural Identity**

Cultural identity refers to identifying with, or sense of belonging to a particular group based on various cultural categories, including nationality, ethnicity, race, gender, and religion. Hall (1993), in his book, *Questions of Cultural Identity*, outlines why the question of cultural identity is so compelling and yet so problematic. He opines that, identification is constructed on the back of recognition of some common origin or shared characteristics with another person or group, or with an ideal and natural closure of solidarity and allegiance established on this foundation. He believes that: "Identity is a construction, a process never completed- always in process, it is not determined in the sense that it can always be won or lost, sustained or abandoned". In this way, identity can be constructed and reconstructed, and the process can retain certain elements whereas some can be discarded. Thus, identity construction process involves association or disassociation of certain elements or traits in one context and, continuity or discontinuity of certain elements or traits in another context. Derrida's (2004) *Deconstructive of identity* posits that, "identification is a process of articulation, a suturing on over determination and not a subsumption"

From the experiences of the English language in new places, its cultural identity to some extent was lost and new identities emerged; a reality that built up into the concept of Englishes. English in new lands experienced reconstruction in all of its linguistic forms, hence, the insertion of entirely new concepts, disassociation of its original identity and the putting on of the identity of its speakers, all over the globe. The impact of language in the construction of identity can as well be viewed from the perspective of Sapir-Whorfian Hypothesis of linguistic relativity and linguistic determinism. Here, what people think and experience, is likely to be influenced by the categories and patterns of the language they speak. Linguistic relativism expresses the notion that one's language shapes one's view of reality while linguistic determinism embodies the notion that



what is said has only some effect on how concepts are recognized by the mind (Badhesha, 2002). Looking at these assertions, the migrant's cry for loss of self-identity or cultural identity is as a result of the mind construct, they embody in their original space before migration. That culture is not static but transformational, is a reality that migrants must come to terms with in their new environment as was the case with English language.

In addition, whatever identity a migrant carry to the new place is a construct that is formative and transformative in nature and it is sutured or inherited from experiences of the original space which cannot match the experiences of the new environment. Additionally, Raina's (2017) postulation that, "identity is a cultural construct which one carries from womb, and through surrounding culture, with its own beliefs and values, and continues adaptation and assimilation until the tomb or death," re-echoes the fact the culture is not static. The emphasis on "continuous adaptation and assimilation until the tomb" is very expressive to the fact that mourning cultural loss in a new environment may reflect a disconnect from the evolving nature of culture. Recognizing this reality and working around it to have a different mind-construct that can aid the achievement of the reason for the migration should be of utmost importance to the migrants.

Furthermore, Dewey's (2010) assertion that different cultures interpret the same world differently which impact on how people think and construct meaning in life, highlights an important aspect of study which migrants need to undertake. Cross-cultural understanding of major issues of life that confront the migrants will go a long way to diffuse some of these challenges and refocus them on the need that resulted to the migration. English language has been used in ways that reveal identities based on the thinking processes of the users and these constructs can be seen in the different models of classifying the emerging Englishes. In other words, migrants' experiences are realities of emerging cultures and identities to be explored for their strength towards the accomplishment of the migration goal. Since identity is a cultural construct which one carries

from the womb, and through surrounding culture, with its own beliefs and values, and continues adaptation and assimilation until the tomb or death, identity is never fixed or lost. Raina (2017)

### **Alienation**

The word "alienation" is derived from the Latin term, 'alienatio', meaning to detach, estrange, remove, disconnect, separate, lack of social support or meaningful social connection. Ultimate Lexicon (2024) posits it as: "to make another's" or "to estrange", which captures the essence of alienation as a process of disconnection. Initially used in legal and property contexts, the term evolved to describe mental and emotional states, including insanity and social isolation. English Studies (2024) asserts that in modern discourse, alienation encompasses a range of experiences: powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, cultural estrangement, and self-estrangement (. These facets reflect the term's expansion from a legal abstraction to a multidimensional human condition. Ultimate Lexicon (2024) expands the scope from literature to permeate, psychology, sociology, and political theory. In nonliterary contexts, it is often linked to capitalist structures, where individuals feel disconnected from their labor, communities, and identities. In literary theory, English Studies, (2024), alienation serves as a lens to explore characters' estrangement from society, culture, or self. Social alienation manifests in characters who struggle to find belonging; self-alienation appears in those grappling with identity crises; and cultural alienation emerges in narratives of diaspora and hybridity.

Saleem (2021) notes that "alienation emerges as a natural consequence of existential predicament both in intrinsic and extrinsic terms," and that "the alienated protagonist is a recurrent figure in much of the twentieth-century American and European fiction". Some of the causes of alienation are tied to breakdown of social bonds and lack of shared values, overstimulation, and elusiveness, much focus on monetary exchange rather than human connection, mass culture, technology, government, dispiritedness, regulations, and false sense of satisfaction, among others. These concerns depict more of internal

struggles the migrants allow to impede a meaningful existence in the new space they found themselves.

### **The Braj Kachru Model of Varieties of English**

English language alienation experiences can be illustrated using Kachru's three models of varieties of English. We will explore the import of this theory for an insightful analysis in connection with the issues that characterise alienation as listed above. The phenomenal occurrences in language contact situations and their implications are the same as in the case of contact between human beings from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Language is a tool that dissects human and its cultural space.

Kachru (1997) model of varieties of English exemplifies the concept of alienation using the three categories of Englishes in circles. These circles are: - the Inner circle, Outer circle and Expanding circle; used to explain the complex and multidimensional nature of English language alienation experiences. The Inner Circle represents the traditional and historical native English-speaking countries that fall under the first diaspora spread of English where English is a native language, a mother tongue and a first language. Here, English wears the attributes of the original, native, or first language; original culture and identity. It functions as a norm-setting variety for standardization of other varieties, wears the linguistic and cultural norms that shapes how English is used globally; and often associated with imperialism, economic power and cultural prestige. Speakers from the Outer and Expanding Circles often experience alienation due to the dominance of Inner Circle norms. Berns (2021) notes that "alienation arises when speakers in the Outer and Expanding Circles are judged by Inner Circle norms, reinforcing linguistic hierarchies and marginalization. Hence, English can be likened to the migrant in his original, native land and culture. At the Outer Circle, the alienation experience sets in as English is subjected in colonized countries to a second language position.

Canagarajah (2022) argues that "Kachru's circles help us see how English is not one language but many, and how this multiplicity can both empower and alienate depending on context." At

this circle, it has no native speaker influence, and is saddled with the responsibility of expressing the speakers' sociocultural experiences which are alien to it through the processes of nativisation, naturalisation and indigenisation. Through these processes, English Language, in order to suit the local sensibilities or contexts of the new environment, has to bend to the local, indigenous languages and cultures of the new soil. It co-exists with the local languages and cultures of the new environment to produce distinct features that are not original to it nor original to the language of the new environment. In some cases, it is institutionalised for its pragmatic utility in the new land. It wears the local cultures, identities, experiences, idioms and vocabularies of the new land which goes to challenge its traditional notions of ownership. The level of alienation at this point is somewhat mitigated as English is said to have an undeniable historical and political significance in these countries. In other words, it being institutionalised gives it some level of prestige in the new land.

The Expanding Circle comprises countries where English has neither historical, political, nor governmental background but is used as a foreign language. The Expanding Circle presents perhaps the most acute form of alienation, where English is learned primarily for international communication but lacks cultural grounding. Proshina and Nelson (2020) observe that "the statuses of Englishes in the Kachruvian Expanding Circle... function mainly as lingua franca in international communication... one of the most controversial issues in sociolinguistics." Here, English has no attachment or internal relevance with speakers; rather, it is used for external purposes such as: a tool for access to global economies and a means of global communication and cooperation. This illustrates the use of the word 'foreign' as it is called, "English as a Foreign Language" in this context. The inundated experience of English in the course of its migration within this circle relates well with most of the concerns in literature, whether from the sociological, psychological, economic or philosophical context. It portrays how removed English is from its original soil, identity, power and position. This experience should be of

significant importance to migrants in their feelings of alienation.

### Discussion

English language did not just start moving from its original space unplanned. The *World Migration Report 2020* by the International Organization for Migration, and Burge (2020), argue that diasporic movements are embedded in structured global policies and historical legacies ideological frameworks, thereby challenging the notion of migration as merely reactive or spontaneous. In other words, English had a mission and a purpose for leaving its land. Secondly, it suffered alienation at the levels of linguistic, cultural, power and identity contexts. Kamwangamalu (2019) posits that English was naturalized and made to bear the burden of the speaker's cultural experiences borrowing from Kachru's (1997) classification, English was removed from its original position as a first language to a second language position, which literally means a subordinate position, where it experienced sociolinguistic and sociocultural puncturing Josiah (2014) asserts that English language underwent naturalization, indigenization, and nativisation which resulted into various shades of endonormative form and, of course, a departure from the conventional exonormative models. At the expanding circle, English experienced no attachment with its users, rather, came to be regarded as 'foreign', highlighting the extent of its disconnection from its original context. The reason for its movement away from home sustained it through every cause it had to go through till it became triumphant as the world language. Arcimaviciene and Baglama (2018) argue that English is often treated as a foreign intruder in non-native contexts, leading to linguistic alienation.

English language today is referred to as a 'world language'. At its inception, it was tagged a 'common man's language', subordinated and had no prestige in comparison with the ruling languages of then. It struggled through time to regain its place and reposition itself. This led to its migration at first, and later colonisation activities. Its mission was to become a world language which it finally achieved; every diasporic change

notwithstanding. Its mission was to place itself as a key tool for economic development, a means of international communication, a means to access better educational and career opportunities, as well as the marginalization of other languages. By this write up, English language stands to be guide to every migrant on how and what of migration.

The implication of relating the above experiences of English revolves around the need for the migrants to develop the ability to adjust to the reality of being bent linguistically and culturally, which invariably, can subject them to a subordinate position or create a sense of being that is 'foreign' to themselves, as well as being foreign to the environment they find themselves in. English displayed this through its malleable nature. English had the ability of adaptability and flexibility as is evident in its dynamic evolution that incorporated variations encountered in new environment leading to language creativity that changed its status from English to Englishes.

### Conclusion

This paper concludes that the English language migration experiences are not different from the present-day migrants' experiences. Its migration was not spontaneous nor reactionary but structured and planned with ideological framings. Even with this, English encountered challenges of diaspora, hybridity, loss of cultural identity, displacement and alienation, just as could be found in the migrant discourses of contemporary literary and nonliterary texts. But with a focus on its ideological agenda which is to conquer other languages, lead in the international economic development, and dominate international communication, English language traversed these challenges to a point of triumph; thus, becoming the "World English". It accomplished these through focus, and in addition to its malleable nature. In the same vein, migrants of the contemporary period can transcend these diasporic challenges by having an agenda before embarking on any trip away to an alien world. The need to focus on the agenda for the movement will help create a sense of attachment and accomplishment to meaningfulness of life out there. Additionally, borrowing from English malleable nature will help them see strength in areas where they perceive



powerlessness. The study recommends malleability to migrants as a tool to transcend diasporic hiccups. In addition, the study

recommends that migrants have an agenda and focus on their agenda more.

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