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# English Language in Sierra Leone: Its Perspective and National Language Flavour

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## ABSTRACT

This paper examines the role and status of English in Sierra Leone. It examines the evolution of the Language in English and make a case for a national language .It examines the role of the Language in the Global stage and how that can be linked to Sierra Leone national development. It is the de-jure official language in the country. The 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone, Act No. 6 which is the country's grundnorm provides for it as official language. No indigenous language in Sierra Leone can better serve the function of togetherness and unity more than English language due to Sierra Leone political Polarization. It has our glorious past as it was brought to us by our colonial masters through colonialism who equally were not original owners of the language but they made it as theirs and they are still using it at their convenience. From the time of British colonization till today, English is the language used for all purpose-politics, education, media, diplomacy et al. No language can replace English as either official language or medium of communication. We cannot have a de facto national language because there is no one language that is used by majority of the population as their mother tongue. Sierra Leone needs a de jure national language for togetherness and unity which English can better serve that role.

**Keywords:** english language, national, official, political, de-jure, de facto.

**Classification:** LCC Code: P119.32.S5

**Language:** English



Great Britain  
Journals Press

LJP Copyright ID: 573332

Print ISSN: 2515-5784

Online ISSN: 2515-5792

London Journal of Research in Humanities & Social Science

Volume 25 | Issue 4 | Compilation 1.0





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## ABSTRACT

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**Keywords:** english language, national, official, political, de-jure, de facto.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Before 1950 and even the early 1950, any notion of English as a true world language was bat and dim, shadowy, theoretical possibility, surrounded by the political uncertainties of the Cold War, and lacking any clear definition or sense of direction. Today, English appears as a world language and it has taken its political and cultural reality. It is the global language not that it is saying, then that every country in the world recognizes English as an official language neither it is saying that everyone in the world speaks English. It is global when no one country, individuals, or nobody owns it anyone. Or rather, everyone who has learned it now owns it – ‘has a share in it’ might be more accurate – and has the right to use it in the way they want.

And if English is not your mother tongue, you may still have mixed feelings about it. You may be strongly motivated to learn it because you know it will put you in touch with more people than any other language; but at the same time you know it will take a great deal of effort to master it, and you may begrudge that effort. Having made progress, you will feel pride in your achievement, and savour the communicative power you have at your disposal, but may none the less feel that mother – tongue speakers of English have an unfair advantage over you. In Sierra Leone, the survival of our local languages; Temne, Mende, Sherbro et al is threatened by the success of English and that has made us feel envious, resentful or annoyed. And we are now strongly objecting to its success. This natural feelings are common with any language that emerged as a global language.

A language can be given a special status if it can be made the official language of a country, to be used as a medium of communication in such domains as a government, the law courts, the media, and the educational system. To get on and

drive in this society, it is germane to master the official language as early in life as possible. It is described as a 'second language' because it is seen as a complement to a person's mother tongue or first language.

Secondly, it can have a special status whenever it can be made a priority in a country's foreign-language teaching, even though this language has no official status. It becomes the language which children are most likely to be taught when they arrive in school, and the one most available to adults who – 'for whatever reason-never learned it or learned it badly, in their early educational years.

Importantly, English is now the language most widely taught as a foreign language in over 100 countries – and in most of these countries it is emerging as the chief foreign language to be encountered in schools, often displacing another language in the process.

The English language evolved from a set of West Germanic dialects spoken by the Angles, Saxons, and the Jutes, who arrived from the continent in the 5<sup>th</sup> Century. Thus English is more closely related to West Frisian than to any other modern language, although less than a quarter of the vocabulary of modern English is shared with West Frisian or other West Germanic language because of extensive borrowings from Norse, Norman French, Latin and other languages.

The establishment of the first permanent English-speaking Colony in North America in 1607 was a major step towards the globalization of the language. British English was only partially standardized when the American Colonies were established. Isolated from each other by the Atlantic Ocean, the dialects in England and the Colonies began evolving independently. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the standardization of British English was more settled than it had been in the previous century, and this relatively well-established English was brought to Africa, Asia and Oceania. It developed both as the language of English-speaking settlers from Britain and Ireland and as the administrative language imposed on speakers of other languages in the various parts of the

British Empire. The first form can be seen in New Zealand English and the latter in Indian English. In Europe English received a more central role particularly since 1919, when the Treaty of Versailles was composed not only in French, the common language of diplomacy at the time, but also in English.

The English language is a bridge that connects people, countries in the global market and stage. It is the 'door and windows which opens up the vast prospect of human achievement. The more effective grasp of English in all its diversities of speech, vocabulary, structure and meaning, the more will be benefit personally and contribute to the growth of our country as a modern nation of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Dr Radhakrishnan's (1948), Chairman of the University Education Commissions (then) - on the importance of English to India (which is also vital in the Sierra Leone context) said:

'It (English) is a language which is rich in literature-humanistic, scientific and technical. If, under sentimental urges we give up English, we would cut ourselves off from the living stream of ever growing knowledge '.

English is therefore the world's widely used language. To push out English is to disconnect from the world and there is great danger for any nation that may attempt to do that. Education systems around the world give special attention to teaching of English. The main aims of teaching English are language development and library development. It enables students to understand spoken English, speak English, read English and write perfect.

English has been playing an important role in our educational system as well as in our national life. English was supreme in the Pre-independent Sierra Leone because of British Colonialism. And it still occupies a germane place and position in our system; courts, trade, commerce, industry, educational system and national life of Sierra Leone.

One of the consequences of the widespread dispersal of the English language has to do with

the various ways the language has diversified and the subsequent ways it has been described and classified. Whereas English is a native language for some, others use it as a non-native language, and still yet some others use it as a foreign language with an international dispensation, character and status. The present place of prominence that English enjoys in an already globalized world has been considered from various perspective. For Kachru, 'the universalization of English and the power of this language have come at a price; for some, the implications are agonizing, while for others they are a matter of ecstasy' (Kachru 1996:135, cited in Bangura 2015: 91).

Prasad, 2018, a person's second language is a language that is not the native language of the speaker but that is used in the locale of that person'. In other words, a second language is learned in addition to the mother-tongue of the learner for its practical utility in day to day life affairs. Therefore, the mother tongue of the learner is called as the first language or L1 and any language that is learned in addition to the mother tongue is known as second language or L2.

In Sierra Leone, English has acquired the place of the second language for its national and global importance as a language of knowledge, communication, education, business, trade, commerce, science, technology and a window on the modern world. Hence, English has been used by Sierra Leoneans for utilitarian purposes, such as for social, commercial, official and educational activities within the country and abroad for listening to the national and global broadcast for reading newspapers and books and to travel across the country or world.

English can be distinguished between the different uses of English. We have English as a first language, English as a mother tongue (MT), English as a second language (ESL) and English as a foreign language. These distinctions have far-reaching implications for the teaching and learning of English. In Sierra Leone, English is treated as second language. It is used in official communication- the language of parliament, the

language of government, the courts, church, schools and tertiary education. In Sierra Leone today, English is supreme though local languages are gaining status. The non-literate in English in Sierra Leone is at the disadvantage. Notices are still written in English and if one cannot read English one finds to survive in Sierra Leone. In Schools and Universities, English is a vital tool. All courses are taught in English and Examinations, assignments and projects are written in English. Just as Lord Denning rightly said the tool of the legal profession is English and a legal professional who struggles with the use of English struggles in his practice. Same for Journalism and other vital professions. Broughton et al (1988 )said, 'clearly a good command of English in a second language situation is the passport to social and economic advancement, and the successful user of the appropriate variety of English identifies himself as a successful, integral member of that language'.

English is no longer a country's land. It is no longer a national language for the British or the Americans. It is no longer a language for the English-speaking countries anymore. It is a language of the world. It is a global language. It has spread worldwide to all the countries in the continents. It is hardly a country or continent where English is not treated with relevance. A germane reason is economy. It is one way to cope with the communication in economy trend. The language is needed to process information, analyze, evaluate, experiment, negotiate and collaborate in economy.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Language is described by (Lamidi 2000; cited in Ajoke 2018) as the medium for relating ideas, a vocal symbol used for social interaction, the entire meaningful utterance in any society. He recognized that the numerous descriptions of language show that it is a suitable tool for societal interaction and sustenance. It is also agreed that 'a language serves in a particular social, group based on social groups interaction and interpretational norms besides the unique purpose of language for the exchange of information between and among users of a



language”.( Johntone & Marcellino, 2020; cited Ajoke 2018). The language used in teaching the English language in a bilingual classroom helps to show the progress of learning due to the interference of mother tongue which is used at times to explain further what students do not understand.

Oyeyemi (2001; cited in Ajoke 2018) confirms that the English language, apart from being the language of education, it is a subject taken at all levels of education. A man’s intellectual attainment in any field is the way he expresses himself in the English language orally or graphically.

Alabi (1994; cited in Ajoke 2018) asserted that the English language is the gate for gaining access to global advancement in science and technology. It is the language of the internet. Therefore, a success in it is a key to decent employment and admission to tertiary institutions. English will continue to function as a unifying tool and remains the National and official language as there is no any consensus on lingual- Franca backed up by the constitution of nation.

Turay (2019) said there is no indigenous language in Sierra Leone that can perform the national function in the Country. He said the two languages that constitute the bulk of the country’s population (Mende and Temne) cannot serve as a symbol of national unity. This is because their use is predominantly local and invariably limited to regions where they dominate. There is no indigenous language in Sierra Leone that can singularly associate national aspirations. The major languages can fulfil that in terms of specific region but not the whole country. He furthered that a national language is usually expected to be declared by decree or by legislation as was in the case of Kiswahili in Tanzania and Kenya. This is significantly the case in Sierra Leone and in the whole of the sub region where a language has been allowed to perform the national function.

Turay (2019) said in Sierra Leone, English performs both the national and the educational functions. Proficiency in English is therefore a requirement of a typical educated Sierra Leonean.

(Pemagbi 1989, Cited in Turay 2019) neatly sums up the importance of English in the Country when he states that:

Even though English is not native to Sierra Leone, its functions are as crucial to the Country’s survival as they are to where it is used as a mother tongue (Pemagbi 1989, Cited in Turay 2019).

Turay (2019) sates that in it suitability for the national function, English occupies a favorable position because of its neutrality. The educated Sierra Leoneans come from different regions of the Country. This is a significant advantage considering the regional divide in Sierra Leone .Besides, it is authentic as it has a rich literary tradition. It has a standard orthography and a literature. And it is the world’s most important and widely spread international language with a continued.

Turay (2019) states that English is non indigenous in Sierra Leone, it does not fulfil most of the requirements to perform the nationalist function. In the first place it was introduced to Sierra Leone by missionaries and colonialists. As a result, it cannot be a part of Sierra Leone pre-colonial history nor can sierra Leonean use it to develop the required feelings for nationalism. English cannot in effect connect Sierra Leoneans with a glorious past which can help to identify them as belonging to a nationality distinct from other nationalities. English cannot serve as a symbol of national unity for sizeable and powerful proportion of the population and connecting the people with a glorious past.

Jowitt (1994; 36, cited in Turay 2019) said while English in Nigeria is deeply entrenched in the Country’s life in most domains, the fact that it is a colonial legacy “automatically rules (it) out as a candidate for the status of national language. Turay (2019) says that the rate of illiteracy in the country is high. Besides, the few educated Sierra Leoneans use the language mainly for official purposes.

Fasold’s (1984; cited in Turay 2019) six proposed sociolinguistic attributes of a national language are; symbol of national unity, widely used for

every unofficial purposes, widely and frequently spoken, no major alternative language, symbol of authenticity and link with glorious past.

Turay (2019) says that assigning a given function to a specific language is often dictated by underlying political and social realities of the society in which the language is found. Cited Gorman (1974) and Westway (1991) he says Decision on language use in a particular society is almost invariable subordinate to or a reflection of underlying political and social values and goals. He further states that Sierra Leone is a polarized state declaring anyone of the major indigenous languages of the country would be a hazardous step, nor can declaring English as such make the situation better.

Spencer (1971: 13 cited in Bangura 2015: 39) opines that while English is the most important language for most regions of the world in the current era of globalization and information technology, English played three important roles in West Africa even before , during and after colonialism. It was and still continues to be the language of “salvation, civilization and worldly success. Spencer also notes:

It is normally through English that an individual breaks the bonds of West African Tradition life and enters into some kind of relationship with the westernized sectors of society. Through English he obtains the education which is the road to the kind of success which awaits him beyond the village or the tribe. Through English of one kind or another he communicates with fellow citizens from language groups other than his own, or with foreigners. English is the language of institutions implanted by colonialism...for the majority of adult English-using West Africans today, English is primarily the language of the westernized areas of their lives, an institutional rather than a domestic tongue (Spencer 1971: 4 cited in Bangura 2015: 39).

### III. ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN ITS GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

The English language is used by the majority of the populace in the world. While some use it as a

first language also known as Native language, as a second language, others use it as foreign language or a lingua franca. English as a Native language is restricted to English or British English (BrE) since English is the only language being spoken in the country. In the sense, English is the first and only language of the speakers. In Britain, English is the first and only language of the people. Historically, English which was part of the Germanic tribes became the national language of British as a result of Colonialism. The original language of Britons is no longer being spoken. Thus English is the only language of the people in a native sense. English as a Second Language (ESL) is another broad grouping in the use of English within the Anglo sphere. ESL is used by people who have their mother tongue but use English has their official language. This use shows that people speak other language other English but English occupies a germane position in their lives and well beings. According to Quirk et al (1979) “By foreign language we mean a language as used by someone for communication across frontiers or which people who are not his countrymen. No language is more widely studied or used as a foreign language than English. English as a Foreign Language (EFL), indicates the use of English in a non- English speaking region. And Finally, English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) explains a way of communication in English between speakers with different first languages. Crystal (2003), most ELF interactions take place among ‘non-native’ speakers of English. EFL is a ‘contact language’ between persons who share neither a common native tongue nor a common (national) culture and for whom English is the chosen foreign language of communication. When English is chosen as the means of communication among people from different first language backgrounds, across lingua – cultural boundaries, the preferred term is English as a ‘Lingua Franca’.

It is worth noting that ESL and EFL programs also differ in the variety of English which is taught. ‘English’ is a term that can refer to various dialects, including British English, American English, Sierra Leonean English, Nigerian English, Ghanaian English and many others. However, for those who do not intend to change

countries, the question arises of which sort of English to learn. If they are going abroad for a short time to study English, they need to choose which country. For those staying at home, the choice will be made for them through the country's language policy through the adoption of one model. Students studying EFL in Hong Kong, for example, are more likely to learn British English, whereas students in the Philippines are more likely to learn American English. For this reason, many teachers now emphasize teaching English as an International Language (EIL), also known as English as a Lingua Franca (ELF).

Vergheze (2007) states that: Apart from the former British Colonies, there are other countries like Japan, Korea etc. in Asia and some the European and Latin American countries where English is taught as a second or third language purely out of utilitarian considerations. That is to say, almost, the world over whether as mother tongue or as a foreign language, English is being used in one way or the other. This fact more than any other makes English merit the status of a world language.

Why has English occupied this unique position of a world language since it is a young language when compared with Chinese, Greek, Japanese or Sanskrit? The reason according to Stevens (1987) is that English was the language used for exploration, trade, conquest and dominion from the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. According to him: There is an element of historical luck about the dominance of the English language: the exploration of Captain Cook and Captain Vancouver, the establishment of the trading posts in Africa and the Orient, the colonial and penal settlements in North America and Australia, the profit-dominated grip in India, the infamous triangular slaves-for molasses-for-manufactured-goods traffic between Africa and the Caribbean, and the early stages of the Industrial Revolution.

All these happenings according to research were dominated by people who speak English. Around 1945, Stevens stated that the role and functions of English language changed from being an instrument of subservience to other, quite different ends, such as 'window on the world of

science and technology' or as the only language not rejected by one section of population or another. Since then, a number of activities, movement and subject were carried out predominantly across the world. This is because the English language practically gained strong grounds in various spheres. Stevens recorded that there was an international agreement to adopt English for air traffic control; another which began with the establishment of the United Nations was the use of English in the numerous bodies providing international aid and administration. As the telecommunications revolution developed, English became dominant in the international media, radio and television, magazines and newspapers.

International pop music industry relies on English; so too does space science and computing technology. As the English language developed globally, it became obvious that using English has nothing to do with one's nationality or with the historical facts of the spread of English-speaking colonies. Vergheze (2007), a very important reason for regarding English as a world language is that the world's knowledge is enshrined in English. It was observed that countries in Asia and Africa which were formerly under the British rule obtained their scientific knowledge and technological know-how from English books. It is undoubtedly the Knowledge that helps these countries maintain their high level of intellectual and scientific training and achievement.

English language in Africa is an official language of the African Union and an international language. It is important for the Continent and it has played critical role in entertainment and the media, in diplomacy, in commerce and tourism, in migration and in education. In fulfilling these roles, English creates development opportunities for individuals and communities in African. Coleman (2010) in discussing the functions of English in Development, he identifies four areas where English has often been given a role to play: for employability, for international mobility, for unlocking development opportunities and accessing information and as an impartial language.



The English language has become dominant in the world not out imposition but through the realization that it has certain immanent and ingrained advantages. Today, the fact that the majority of the countries of the world make the use of English compulsory is no longer political but scientific and technological. The English language, therefore is no longer the language of Great Britain only but the language required by the world for great understanding. It is, thus, the most international of languages.

Since the English language is a dominant language in the world it plays very important roles. According to Smith quoted in Stevens (1987), English is being used as an international language in diplomacy, international trade, and tourism. It is indeed a unifying language. In sports, for example, during the Olympic Games, where the majority of the countries are in attendance, English is used as a medium of Communication. Again in the Miss World Beauty Pageant, representatives of the countries where English is not a dominant language are taught some words of English that would enable them communicate effectively to the rest of the world.

In the International trade, the dominant language is the English language because the majority of the populace speak it; though some speak the debase form of the language. Besides, the English language helped most of the countries to get their freedom and self-government and thus enabled them to fight for the independence of their countries. Commenting on this, Verghese (2007) writes:

‘In the multilingual context of these countries, English became a unifying force and helped the freedom fighters propagate the ideas of nationalism and self- rule. In these countries English still remains a cementing force...’

In the educational sector, English plays a practical role. Most writers in the world pour their thoughts on paper in the English language. The literature written in these countries today according to Verghese constitute what has come to be called Commonwealth English Literature as distinguished from English literature and

American literature. Teaching and learning in most countries of the world take place in the English language. It is therefore the language of education.

The English language is the most widely used and the most germane means of communication of our times. Its relevance has been felt on all corners of the world even to the remotest villages in Asia, Africa et al. It is used in almost every undertaking of the International community and is very influential in politics, sports, trade and business, the media, air and sea travel networks. It is the language of major academic centers and the books and conferences they produce, the most widely used language in computers and the internet. English language is the dominant international language in communication, science, education, business, aviation, entertainment, radio and diplomacy. It is one of the six official languages of the United Nations. From the foregoing importance of the English language, it is germane to emphasize that it has come to be accepted as a centralized and unified language.

#### IV. ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND THE SIERRA LEONE PERSPECTIVE

There is no Sierra Leonean language that can be subjected to one third of the functions which the English language performs in our national life. It is certainly the most vibrant and vital legacy from our colonial master to Sierra Leone. It is a vital tool for internal and external communication. English is the only language in Sierra Leone that has helped to reduce the linguistic differences of the heterogeneous people that constitute the geopolitical entity in Sierra Leone. The English language is pedagogically significant as the language of instruction in virtually the entire school system, from the upper primary to the highest tertiary level.

Sierra Leone is a linguistic diversified country with 18 indigenous languages existing. Each ethnic group has its own peculiar cultural and linguistic manifestation. Four of the Sierra Leonean languages (Limba, Krio, Mende and Temne) are currently used in the educational system and as subject of study in secondary and tertiary

institutions due to and based on their regional use and dominance. Limba and Temne are widely spoken in the Northern Province, Mende in the Eastern and Southern Provinces and Krio in the Western Area (Freetown). Sierra Leone lacks a common indigenous language for national wide communication which is an assertion in line with Bokamba (1992: 125, cited in Bangura 2015). Bangura (2015) holds a different view maintaining that Krio is the linguistic melting pot of different indigenous and ethnic languages. He opines that Krio is an indigenous nationwide language of communication although it has not been declared as de jure or national co-official language. Contrary to Bangura (2015), Krio cannot be de-fact National Language in Sierra Leone as it is not the mother-tongue of majority of the Population in Sierra Leone. It cannot serve as a symbol of unity and cannot speak to our glorious past. A de-jure national Language for Sierra Leone should note the political polarization of Sierra Leone and the role that language should play for Unity. No indigenous language in Sierra Leone if used as de-fact and or de jure national language will bring Unity and together than English language.

Freetown was the first English using/speaking West African city to witness the introduction of western education and civilization through the establishment of Fourah Bay College in 1827. Freetown also witnessed the exploitation and diaspora of restructured varieties of the English language through Graville Sharp's philanthropist move to (re)settle the Black Poor in London and consequently other people like them in the Americas to Freetown two hundred and twenty-eight years ago. This was not only a salvation and civilizing mission but was also meant 'as a potential utopia frontier of the mind and soul: a new beginning, in which humanity could rectify its past sins'. This new, therefore has direct links to the existence of the English language with its divergent dialects in its new ecology in Freetown, 'the Province of Freedom'.

There are constant debates among those who use English as a native language and those who use it as a non- native language regarding the legitimacy of the latter's variety, Mufwene 2009, referring to the indigenization of English in North America,

argues that 'all English varieties spoken outside England have been indigenized' the indigenization of English is the adaptation of the language 'to the communicative habits and needs of its (new) speakers in a novel ecology.' (Mufwene 2009:353, cited in Bangura 2015:113).

One of the successes of the Freetown ecology in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries with regards to the structural adaptation of the English language in Sierra Leone is the development of not only West African English but also the other English pidgin and the creole language in the region. The early settlers in Freetown came from different places and with various restructured Englishes and were later joined by the recaptives with many African languages, Freetown paved the way to the subsequent linguistic adaptation of the restructured Englishes to what is today Krio and its sister pidgin and creole languages in West Africa and even beyond.

English language in Sierra Leone is a new type of English. The English language in Sierra Leone is mostly in official institutional settings in urban areas and in very formal contexts. 'New Englishes' have been referred to as consequences of British colonial policy from a socio-historical, cultural and political perspective. Makoni (1993; 103, cited in Bangura 2015; 136) highlights four factors responsible for the emergence of 'New Englishes': British colonial language policy, localization, the teaching force, and pedagogical implications. These four factors apart, 'New Englishes' constitute a new whole linguistic, psychological and cultural experience. Sierra Leone English, as a New English variety, demonstrates the linguistic and cultural experience of those who speak English in Sierra Leone; this variety can be observed both from a cognitive perspective coupled with the fact that it is a communicative instrument that meets certain requirement and can be used to express what is typically Sierra Leonean.

While one may not dispute the fact that English has become one of the indigenous, native or 'common' languages, through adaptation and appropriation, of those who speak this universal language, one thing is much evident: that is, the indigenization of the English language in its

different ecologies has diversified the language in its phonological, lexical and syntactic components. This can be noticed by listening to two speakers of English from two different English – speaking or English – using countries due mainly to the development of indigenous and regional varieties which most times compromises intelligibility.

English was brought to Sierra Leone by traders, the settlers and the Christian Missionaries most of whom did not speak English as a native language even before the country was officially colonized. Crucially for the evolution of English and Krio, the locals and the traders, and later the settlers, had to relate with one another and this propelled the development of what is regarded as West African English and Krio and its consequent spread through missionary activities to other West African countries and beyond. However, during the colonial period there was an unequal relationship between the locals, settlers and the representatives of the British Empire.

One of the factors for the widespread use of English language in West Africa was the exportation of Afro- Americans with their restructured English and other English-based Creole speakers from Jamaica and other plantation centers which saw the beginning of the establishment of, first, Freetown as a British colony and then the rest of Sierra Leone as a Protectorate. Sierra Leoneans played a significant role in shaping West African English as it developed in the nineteenth century. Their Krio spread as a second language not only to the nearby indigenous groups in Sierra Leone, but also throughout much of the rest of West Africa. Therefore, the impact of Sierra Leone on West Africa as a whole was perhaps more in the spread of the English language than of the Krio (Mazrui 1975:41 cited in Bangura 2015:168).

As such , the spread of English language and Krio and its consequent influence on Pidgin English in West Africa by Sierra Leoneans was due to the fact that , after Britain successfully gained control of certain areas, the British sent Sierra Leonean Krios to the other regions as administrators, missionaries, traders and teachers rather British

Citizens. In Sierra Leone, restructured English became more evident with the arrival of former slaves who fought on the side of the British in the America Revolution, namely the Black Poor, former slaves originally settled in Nova Scotia, the Jamaica Maroons and later joined by the recaptives, among others, who together formed the indigenous Krio ethno linguistic community in Sierra Leone. Taking into consideration first that the ‘English’ spoken by these settlers from the New World was not standard English and, second, that the intercepted Africans settled in Freetown brought many African languages with them hence the slave trade paved the way for the introduction of some form of restructured English in Sierra Leone especially so when we consider the fact that the Krio community had limited access to the target language, that is standard English.

## V. ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND THE NATIONAL LANGUAGE FLAVOUR IN SIERRA LEONE

English language came into Sierra Leone with colonialism in the nineteenth century and the European missionaries started setting up schools , not for the purpose of education but to train those who are going to be intermediaries between the Church and the people. It is the language of colonialism that came with settlers from England and the missionaries.

English language in present Sierra Leone is the only language that will foster the spirit of togetherness and integration. Activities conducted in our indigenous would be termed as tribal and ethnic except in cultural celebrations or entertainment purposes. It is the language of nationalism. It is the language that brings all the supposed tribes to function as one if perfectly used. And a nation is expected to have at least one national language and one official language. Sierra Leone has one de jure official language and it is expected to have a national language. The English will best serve that function for political reason and not linguistic reason contrary to the position of Turay 2019.

Linguistically, a national language is a language that has some connection de fact or de jure – with

people and territory or territories they occupy. A national language means there is a connection between a territory and a language spoken there, but a national language can be used as a communication tool between different groups within a nation. In any case, a national language is expected to reveal a sense of collective identity and that identity could be through colonial heritage which perfectly explains the Sierra Leone context. In de-fact national language situation, the language should be spoken by the majority and should be the mother tongue of the majority of the population in the community. A de fact National language does not require any legislation or statute to acquire the status of National, but the fact that it is spoken and used by the majority for communication and identity makes it a de- fact National Language.

However, a statute or legislation normally grants the status of National to a language that is not necessarily spoken by the majority; in this case we are talking about a de jure National Language. This is similarly adopted in other countries like Indian, Hindi is a national language-de-jure though it is a language spoken or even understood by people living in other parts of the Country. This situation is also the result of a language policy. It is the result of human intervention that dictates which language(s) should be granted the status of National, usually for political and not linguistic reasons. Sierra Leone is tense and politically polarized. The tribal lines are gravely wide. All tribes are linked to political and ethnic lines and any attempt to select one indigenous language as National Language will not be productive. It will not foster unity and allowing English language to assume that status will symbolize the Unity of a Sierra Leone. English language can link to our colonial past and it is not owned by anybody. It did not start in Britain neither America but elsewhere. They have grabbed it and it is helping them to their national developments. English language is today a global language owned by everyone with various 'ENGLISHES'.

Turay (2019) in his article; *Can Sierra Leone serve as a National Language of Sierra Leone?* Examined the impossibility of English being the national language of Sierra Leone. He premised

his argument mainly on Fasold's (1984) six proposed socio-linguistic attributes of a national language. Fasold's six attributes are; symbol of national identity, widely used for every unofficial purposes, widely and frequently spoken, no major alternative language, symbol of authenticity and link with the glorious past.

Among the four indigenous languages in Sierra Leone: Mende, Temne, Limba and the Krio, none of them fulfilled all the attributes required of a national language in Fasoldian terms. Fasold has unintentionally excluded one vital attribute for a national language requirement which is integration, togetherness and unity. This is probably the most vital attribute for a national language.

In Sierra Leone, there is no politically neutral indigenous language. The Temne, Limba and Krio are linked with the North – West and the Mende is linked with the South – West. Therefore, disunity will be heightened and the political survival of the Country would be in danger if any of our indigenous languages were promoted and legislated as de-jure national language. The only answer to this crisis is English language. English is neutral in Sierra Leone considering the nation's political and regional divide. It will be misplaced judgment and Afri-centric if a discussion of national language excludes English language because of colonialism. Colonialism is past gone and we should appreciate issues in Africa on merit, unity and national development rather than the mindset of colonialism.

## VI. THE STATUS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN SIERRA LEONE

Language epitomizes growth and development. Individuals need language for their growth just like society and countries. Language is a country's most valuable and indispensable characteristic. There is hardly no country without a unified language for growth, development and for unity among the different races, togetherness and growth. There must be a language acceptable to all in running the nation's affairs. Sierra Leone is a linguistic diversified nation with different races. It has a population of about 7.5 million people. It



has five regions: North East, North West, West, South and East Regions. The North East and North West is predominantly occupied by the Temnes and the Limbas, the West is the Capital City and predominantly occupied by the Krios and the South and the East is predominantly occupied by the Mendes. These differences led to the need for a unifying language to bridge the linguistic gap in the country.

English has played an essential role in bringing together the different races in Sierra Leone. This language entered Sierra Leone with colonialism, slave trade et al as the official language a status that is still in existence pursuant to the constitution. Certainly, English is the language of colonialism and it is a second language in Sierra Leone but it is vital to be standardized and made a national language despite the fact that it is a colonial heritage; it has been nurtured, conserved and guided. Therefore, there is no political neutral indigenous language and therefore adopting English as a national language would be vital to help unify the Country. There is no other major alternative language. This can be done through decree or legislation.

English language in Sierra Leone started humbly but it has today assumed a germane role and achieved a greater status for itself in the country. It has been the only prosperous language that has helped to unify the Nation. The only language if used will reduce the danger of making any of our indigenous language as a national language because Sierra Leone is politically polarized (Cited in Turay). It is the only language that is used for official functions and the language of the classroom and instructions. It performs an important role in the teaching and learning system in the country. It is the language of education. It is the language of communication, the language of science and technology, and as a passport for educational advancement. The importance of English language has been given a significant attention in Sierra Leone. It plays and continue playing a vital role in transmitting and projecting indigenous cultures and values to the outside world. It plays a unique role in the legislative arm of government. It is the language of parliament pursuant to section of the

constitution. Parliamentary acts are written in English language. Proceedings in Parliament are done in English language. Its relevance in the executive, educational sector and judiciary arms of government cannot be underestimated. It is the language of the Court pursuant to Section 78 of the Court Act of 1960. Records of the courts are written in English. It is the language of instructions from the primary school to the tertiary level.

English language is a national link language as well as international link language of the world. It is the only language which is understood by all elites and all countries of the world are using it either as a native language, official language or foreign language. Sierra Leoneans can establish social, economic, cultural and political relations with other countries and other West African states. English language is the only language which Sierra Leoneans can use as a window through which they can see the scientific, technological, agricultural and commercial developments taking place in the world. It is the only language which can ensure Sierra Leoneans essence in the field of human activity in the world.

The adoption of the English language as official language is not to reduce the local languages to the background, but rather to prevent confusion, misunderstanding, danger and conflict of interest. Sierra Leone diverse ethnic groups brought English language to bridge the communication gap that would have existed among the ethnic groups. Therefore the role of the English language in unifying and integrating the various ethnic groups is pivotal is the country's national development.

## VII. CONCLUSION

English language remains one of the most indispensable languages in the world and probably the most used languages in the International stage. It plays a unique role in the government architecture of Sierra Leone as it is the language of the Executive, parliament and the Judiciary. It is Sierra Leone De-Jure Official Language and remains the only prosperous language that has aided to unify the Country. It



can help reduce the danger of making any of our indigenous language a National language because of Sierra Leone Political Polarization.

No language is more widely studied or used as a foreign language than English. It is the language of trade, entertainment et al. It is a world language because the world's knowledge is enshrined in English. In Africa, it is an Official language of the Africa Union and an International language. It plays a crucial role for diplomacy, media, commerce, entertainment et al. Besides, it creates development opportunities for individuals and communities in Africa.

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