Chapter 36
Digital Communication in Indigenous Languages
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ABSTRACT
This chapter looks at how the demands of modern day discourse behavior may impact upon and/or transform the use of indigenous African languages, as their speakers try to cope with and/or utilize computer-based communication gadgets and access/publish information on the information superhighway. It also presents a critique of one such effort at translating information on one brand of cell phone into major Nigerian languages. Drawing from the Yorùbá option, the authors show that new terminology has been created using the strategies of Terminologization, composition and translingual borrowing, but there are problems of inaccurate translation, use of non-standard orthography and non-indigenization of loan words. The chapter therefore proposes further refinement in subsequent terminology projects, especially the possibility of producing one-key symbols to represent the distinctive graphological symbols of indigenous African languages.

INTRODUCTION
Digital communication is the process of sharing ideas, information, and messages with others in a particular time and place with the aid of digital devices, devices that store and manipulate numbers, translate words and pictures into numbers for a computer to process and then translate the numbers back into pictures or words. The most important ones from an African perspective are cell phones, computers and the internet.

Communication in general is today supported by ICTs, and the lack of terminology in African languages establishes and entrenches the digital divide, making it well-nigh impossible for them to compete (UNESCO, 2005). Websites in African languages tend to be lean and most people literate enough to be able to browse in African languages may find it more economical to do so in a European language (read English).
This is a question of economics: ‘the medium and language most likely to be used are those that are most efficient for the work at hand’ (Christopher, 2006, p.191). Information on the internet is more available in English than in any other language. The same author reports that in 1996, there were 9600 host computers using English. The next closest language used was German with 452 hosts. Adegbola (2006, p. 8) terms this ‘the information asymmetry’ that makes an African society vulnerable to foreign values. This vulnerability is what Mazrui (2005) describes as disglobalization, a creeping irrelevance to global concerns. This chapter now discusses the nascent efforts at redressing this anomaly and bringing African languages back into the global village market square.

GLOBALIZATION AND THE POLITICS OF LANGUAGE PLANNING

Globalization is the new euphemistic shorthand for the encroachment of the Industrialized Economies into aspects of the cultural space occupied by the non-industrialized countries especially traditional knowledge systems, spiritual and material culture and language, in much the same fashion that the slave trade and colonization robbed Africa of vital human and natural resources. It has been defined in various ways since the appearance of the term in the 1960s, and these definitions have been grouped into five overlapping classifications, with the different emphases betraying ideological biases. Scholte (2000) names the five classifications or “interpretations” of globalization as internationalization, liberalization, universalization, deterritorialization and westernization.

Mazrui (2005, p.1) provides a synthesis of these definitions:

In its broadest meaning globalization consists of all the forces that are leading the world toward becoming a global village. Globalization is thus the villagization of the world. In its narrower meaning globalization is the maturation of global capitalism and its interdependencies, alongside a new network of the information superhighway.

This information superhighway, popularly known as the internet, offers entertainment and information to people around the world, but the materials are ‘available only in the most common languages. Therefore, globalization has had the negative effect of reducing the worth of African languages if considered in purely economic utilitarian terms.

However, language is not only an instrument for getting what one wants but also a definition of who one is. People have a right to have their language maintained and made technologically sophisticated enough to provide their users with access to the modern world. There is a need for increased and sustained institutional support for indigenous language products and services, increased L1 literacy, recording and preservation of traditional knowledge in the original tongues, and development of ICT products and services in Nigerian languages. One means of making African languages technology-ready is terminology development.

TERMINOLOGY DEVELOPMENT TO THE RESCUE

Most African countries are multilingual societies and explicit choices have to be made among alternative language varieties about which language variety fulfils which role. This role differentiation involves language planning which may be defined as the deliberate steps taken, by governments and their agencies, by language groups or even individuals, to influence the behaviour of others with respect to the acquisition, structure, or functional allocation of their language codes (Cooper 1989, cited in UNESCO, 2005, p.5). Some of the most important objectives of language planning, accord-
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