Language Preference among Nigerian Undergraduates and the Future of English

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What will be the future of English in Nigeria? Put more apprehensively, will the English language die in Nigeria in the near future? These questions are answered by reporting on the language preference at home of some Nigerian undergraduates in order to gauge the future of English in Nigeria. The investigation sought to determine the language(s) most preferred for communication at home among Nigerian undergraduates. From a sample drawn from students in a private Nigerian university, 66.7% identified English as the most frequently used language at home while 64.1% indicated fluency in English against other languages spoken in Nigeria including the indigenous major Nigerian languages (Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba). On order of fluency among the languages sampled, 18.5% indicated an English-only fluency, which reveals that some section of young Nigerians are moving towards a monolingual English-only proficiency. This discovery has implications for the future of English in Nigeria. Several factors may account for this emerging trend. However, the premier position occupied by English in Nigeria and the expanding use of English world-wide clearly support the continuous growth and visibility of English as the language of choice among Nigerian undergraduates at home. This is without prejudice to several declarations and policy statements in favour of Mother Tongue education and usage in Nigeria. The paper concludes that the emergence of a new generation of Nigerians who use English as a first language in a non-host second language context is sowing the seed for further nativization and entrenchment of English in Nigeria.

Keywords:
Language Preference, Language Choice, Nigerian English, English-only Fluency, Nigerian Undergraduates

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