

Cultural Relations Collection

*Edited by J.P. Singh*



# Love and War: A Nigerian Pidgin Production of Shakespeare's *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, and the Role of Language in Cultural Relations

Chidi Ezegwu



Culture

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### **The British Council**

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## Foreword

I am delighted at the release and publication of the first contributions to what I hope will be an important collection on cultural relations and the mission of the British Council. Not always easy to describe and at times even more difficult to measure, when you see cultural relations in action you know what it is about: working over the long term with individuals, communities and institutions in a spirit of mutuality.

Our mission is not only about what we do but also how we engage. This is what distinguishes a cultural relations approach from other forms of public or cultural diplomacy. It is about activities and opportunities, but it is also about how relationships are formed and nourished. And in our case as the British Council it happens in over one hundred countries, working with the English language and through cultural engagement in the arts, education and skills.

This collection provides an overview and analysis of diverse examples of this distinctive cultural relations approach and how it is used to further the British Council's charitable objects, and how the approach benefits both the UK and the people with whom we work. The ways of working apply whether convening the global leaders of international higher education, or building partnerships with civil society organisations or artists within a single country. The cultural relations thread also applies across the British Council's largest programmes, including those such as English Language teaching which deliver income.

Over the past decade the British Council has been consolidating its activities in order to increase the commonality across different countries and regions. Yet a cultural relations approach will always necessitate some variety, because mutuality involves degrees of exchange, co-production and adaptation to local needs. An example in this collection shows how in 2016 within Shakespeare Lives, a global programme celebrating the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's death, and operating to consistent global production values, a small, country-based arts investment in Nigeria saw the production and touring of a locally relevant Shakespeare play performed in Nigerian Pidgin.

The collection also reflects on the long view and includes two contributions which draw on historical investigation to understand the British Council's role over many decades in Burma/Myanmar and the Soviet Union/Russia, drawing on deep scholarship of post-colonialism and the Cold War respectively. It is to be applauded that the editors and authors allow such critical reflection, avoiding the risk of self-congratulation and enabling organisational learning and growth.

Reading these contributions together as a collection reminds me that while all these different areas constitute cultural relations in their own right, together they add up to more than the sum of their parts. Hard work in one area leads to networks and builds the trust that enables the British Council to undertake activities in different areas and with diverse kinds of partners.

It is not always easy to quantify cultural relations or the impact of an individual institution like the British Council over the arc of time and geography. Today, great effort is put into evaluating both the programmatic and organisational impact of our work. Yet the methodologies to assess the effects of multiple decades of engagement are still developing. Friends made, understanding gained and trust increased are things we know to be important. Proving their worth is harder.

Historical investigation helps, but in the end, as Martin Rose says of cultural relations in his essay in this collection: "It has been said of diplomacy that its success can be measured by wars not fought.... The same might be said of the British Council, though it operates at a more human level with individuals and communities rather than nations." Seen in this way, cultural relations is as much about the absence of negatives as the presence of positives. Cultural relations delivers the calm, reflective response as well as the bustling, creative one. This collection, authored by both well-known scholars and authoritative practitioners shows both. And it does so in a way that I hope you find to be accessible, enlightening and compelling. I commend it to you with enthusiasm.

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**Sir Ciarán Devane,**  
Chief Executive, *British Council*

## Preface to the Cultural Relations Collection

The British Council is often viewed as an organisation that 'does', and it does a great deal, but it is also a 'thinking' and learning organisation and in recent years has begun to increase its investment in commissioning, using and sometimes undertaking research. It does so for three key reasons.

As an organisation that provides thought leadership in cultural relations it is important that the British Council contributes to, demonstrates and shares a thorough understanding of cultural relations, and of how this approach contributes to the United Kingdom's attraction and trusted connections in international relations. It does this, for example, through regular studies on the influence and measurement of soft power that track perceptions of the UK, particularly among young people across the world.

Second, we commission and undertake research as trusted expert practitioners in the thematic areas in which we work: in the arts, international education, English language teaching and assessment, and activities undertaken largely with young people in communities and civil society organisations, such as through the Active Citizens Programme. In each of these areas we convene informed debates based on the provision, sharing or curating of new knowledge, in many cases disseminated in well regarded publications and series.

A third reason is to increase the evidence and understanding for ourselves and others of what works to generate cultural relations impact and why. We seek to demonstrate engagement of the highest standard to supporters and partners, while also building our capacity as an organisation to benefit from using research and evidence, both our own and work by others', in order to make strategic decisions, engage global stakeholders, and exchange knowledge. Together, each of these research areas contributes useful new knowledge to further our charitable purpose through generating new insights and understanding in areas relevant to our work, in turn enhancing our ability to influence policy or to impact debates.

This cultural relations collection arose out of an early initiative when the British Council first established the small research team that would become part of the new global function led from the Research and Policy Insight Directorate. In commissioning a series of in-house and external studies it had three key aims. The first was to clarify our understanding of cultural relations as an encompassing venture that permeated all our work, whether specific to a sector or not and whether income generating or not. Here the contributions on English language and on assessment are particularly illustrative. The second aim was to provide an opportunity to country offices and regional teams, through a competitive bidding process, to commission research on initiatives that were able to illustrate a cultural relations approach in action at a local level. The fascinating contribution on Shakespeare in Nigerian Pidgin stems from this call. A third aim was to grapple with the challenges of understanding and demonstrating impact when reviewing the British Council's work in an area of activity or in a country over a long period of time. The contributions on science diplomacy and on Myanmar fit here and demonstrate the richness of reviewing cultural relations over time, alongside the challenges of making assessments across the long arc of history.

This cultural relations collection has provided an opportunity to show the work of the British Council in its rich diversity, linked by this common thread and demonstrating that as with the best partnerships, mutuality in approach often produces things that are not what were originally designed, which are often better as a result and that sometimes grow in ways over which no individual or organisation has control.

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**Dan Shah**  
Director Research and Policy Insight  
*British Council*

## Editor's Note

This contribution brings together public meanings, art and syncretism through an analysis of Shakespeare's *Two Noble Kinsmen* in Nigerian Pidgin English. The role of language in imagining a collective identity, such as that of a nation-state, is well-recognised (Gellner, 1983; Anderson, 1983). The role of these language and symbolic representations in increasing international understandings and furthering cultural relations is much less discussed. Cultural diplomacy increases understanding and humanises international interactions (Schneider, 2012). But how do we understand the cultural diplomacy impact of iconic representations such as Peter Brook's *Mahabharata* or Kurosawa's *Ran*, a rendering of *King Lear*? Do they expand the vocabulary of cosmopolitanism or restrict it through cultural imperialism? This contribution provides a conceptual and empirical overview of local contexts that translate, creolise, and even appropriate Shakespeare. In general, the findings confirm a greater degree of interest in English plays and a favourable view of the UK after watching *Love at War*. At a more nuanced and qualitative level, the play also generated debates about the status of language in post-colonial cultural relations.

## Introduction

Appreciation of the art and culture of others influences how we relate to them. Increased familiarity with and understanding of another people's cultural output can enhance inter-group and intercultural interaction. In May 2016, British Council Nigeria collaborated with Nigerian and UK theatre directors to produce *Love at War*, an adaptation of Shakespeare's *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, performed in Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE).<sup>2</sup> The production came under the umbrella of *Shakespeare Lives*, a year-long, worldwide festival coordinated by the British Council in commemoration of the 400th anniversary of the Bard's death. The British Council also commissioned a study on the staging of the play, to examine firstly whether and how language fosters shared meaning and understanding, and secondly the extent to which the rendering in Pidgin English might promote Nigerians' appreciation of the culture and literary value of the UK. This report summarises the findings of the study and situates them within the wider contexts of the work of the British Council in Nigeria, the *Shakespeare Lives* programme, and, more broadly, within the British Council's engagement in cultural relations through the arts, language and education.

*Love at War* was staged in theatres across Abuja, Calabar and Lagos, engaging a total audience of 4,316 people, with the aim of catalysing Nigerians' affection towards Shakespeare. A multitalented troupe was formed through auditioning young Nigerian performers and students of theatre arts to provide a Nigerian take on the adaptation of *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. The troupe gathered Nigerian stories and dance, improvised and performed with an imaginative versatility of styles that enlivened local theatres.

One of Shakespeare's last plays and lesser known works, *The Two Noble Kinsmen* (generally accepted as being co-authored with John Fletcher) is itself an adaptation of 'The Knight's Tale' from Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*. It is set in ancient Athens, at war with Thebes, and is the story of two friends who are rivals in love. According to Findlay (2017, p. 198) the play "prompts spectators and readers to reflect on the composition of their own national identity, and how it might be reinvented".

The choice of *Love at War* resonates very well with traditions relevant to the Nigerian environment. One of the directors of the Nigerian adaptation observes that it was a cultural production, a hybrid of cultures that was used to tell Nigerian stories. Local narratives were embedded; names of people and places in the original play were changed. In Lagos, the play was given a Yoruba title, in Calabar a South-South one, and in Abuja, various Gwari (original indigenes of Abuja) titles. Songs also bore local and traditional imprints. In each location, local songs that conveyed similar messages were used.

The idea of translating the play into Pidgin, according to one of the directors, was born out of a need "to make it accessible so that people can understand the beauty of what Shakespeare did in literature". Adapting it in this way is part of a long tradition of mediation of Shakespeare's works for every age since his own and in many countries across the globe. This diversity of complexion was reflected in the varied *Shakespeare Lives* programme, which included performances on stage and film, online collaborations, workshops and debates, reflecting the festival's aim "to engage in fresh and informal conversations around the works of William Shakespeare, sharing the wisdom, inspiration and relevance of his words, themes and stories to our present-day human encounters and the global challenges of our time" (*Shakespeare Lives*, 2016).

The British Council has a rich history of involvement with such international adaptations and performances of Shakespeare, supporting UK touring productions in other countries at important political junctures – including Sir Alec Guinness's *Hamlet* in pre-war fascist Italy and Anthony Sher's *Titus Andronicus* in Johannesburg, shortly after the election of Nelson Mandela – as well as bringing performances of Shakespeare plays in foreign languages to the UK, as in the Globe to Globe festival during the 2012 Cultural Olympiad. Productions like *Love at War* are core to contemporary British Council approaches on cultural relations.

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<sup>1</sup>Broadly speaking, a pidgin arises when speakers of two different languages with no language in common have a makeshift conversation; a pidgin has no native speakers. A creole is a language that was originally a pidgin, but has become a fully-fledged language, with a community of speakers who claim it as their first language.

## Method

The study focused on the contribution of language of delivery (here Nigerian Pidgin English) to the promotion of shared meaning and cultural understanding. It was a bid, through a single case study, to understand whether people of diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds can feel connected across geospatial and linguistic divides, if stories from one nationality are crafted and told to people of another in the language in which they have the highest level of proficiency. Ilo (2006) suggests the need to subvert foreign languages through African characteristics and the indigenisation of language. The production of *Love at War* provided an opportunity to investigate just such a mediation and the extent to which performing the play in Pidgin English might contribute to Nigerians' appreciation of the literary values of Shakespeare and the cultural values of the people of the UK.

An earlier British Council study (Ezegwu, 2013) focused on the language of delivery in basic education in Nigeria and also examined the importance of language in fostering cultural understanding. It explored whether a deconstruction of Shakespearean English and its rendering in Pidgin English could enhance understanding. A key finding of the study is that language and culture need to be treated as inseparable components, in line with a growing body of linguistic research. Pidgin English was settled upon as it is widely used in classrooms, TV and radio broadcasts, and is the main language of engagement in most Nigerian cities. Findings from earlier studies suggest that nearly half of the Nigerian population speaks Pidgin English either as a first or second language, underscoring the possibility of using Pidgin English as a tool for wider engagement of Nigerians in intercultural exchanges (Ghani, et al., 2012).

The study explored two overarching themes. The first was the extent to which Nigerians derived a better understanding of Shakespeare's plays if they were produced in Pidgin English and if this in turn gave rise to greater appreciation of the plays and an improved understanding of the cultural values of the UK. It is recognised that the notion of UK cultural values is fraught but is used here to refer to the exploration of cultural meaning and understanding towards shared human values.

The second theme was how the reproduction of Shakespeare's plays in Pidgin English might meet social expectations, whether artistic, educational, creative, imaginative or cultural.

The methodology included a desk review exploring existing literature on issues around Nigerian Pidgin English and language preference in Nigeria; intercultural relationship promotion through literary adaptations; and previous adaptations of Shakespeare's work in other cultures. Qualitative and quantitative primary data was collected in four states (Cross River, Kano, Lagos and Rivers) as well as in Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory. Qualitative data was collected from 73 respondents across seven different sets of participants through focus group discussions (FGDs) and in-depth interviews: 18 people who had seen *Love at War* in Abuja, Cross River and Lagos; one of the play's directors; six sector experts; five directors from both federal and state ministries of arts and culture; six senior secondary and tertiary education teachers; six senior secondary and undergraduate students; and 31 students who participated in five student focus group discussions.<sup>3</sup>

Quantitative data were derived from two sources: a survey of 26 people who saw the play and 2,100 students in secondary and tertiary education institutions in Rivers, Kano and Lagos. Telephone interviews were used to collect data from audience members and to identify volunteers for qualitative in-depth interviews. The students were randomly selected: 1,200 from 12 secondary schools, and 900 from eight tertiary education institutions. Other British Council studies of *Shakespeare Lives* productions and their effect on perceptions of the UK have focused primarily on stakeholders who participated in or helped deliver projects (Garcia et al., 2017). This study helps to broaden understanding somewhat by focusing on the impact on audiences.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup>It is acknowledged that a slight but unavoidable weakness in the qualitative data is that the research respondents, because of who they are, may be already positively predisposed towards the UK.

<sup>3</sup>Claims here are modest, however, due to the low sample size. This relates to difficulties in finding respondents from among people who had seen the play and the fact that none of those who saw the play in Lagos responded to the request to participate.

## Review of Literature

In the UK, Shakespeare is a cultural touchstone but also commands considerable international profile. Young people across the world identify him above anyone else with British culture, and it would be a mistake to underestimate his international popularity (British Council, 2016). When promoting the UK, Shakespeare has a positive effect on perceptions of the UK, and adaptations of his works continue to have impact because of their moral complexity, political subtlety and the range and timelessness of his themes.

### Global and Intercultural Shakespeare

Shakespeare's literary works have inspired a multiplicity of cross-cultural translations and theatrical adaptations (Paliřá, 2013). Some commentators divide intercultural Shakespearean productions along linguistic lines, such as those embedding the local within European languages and theatrical traditions, while others feature multiple languages and emphasise differences in the Shakespearean encounter (Alexander C.Y. Huang, cited in Venning, 2011, p. 151). Intercultural translations can embody cultural politics and political issues, such as a Palestinian production of Richard II, chosen because its "tale of a weak and vain king overthrown by popular uprisings spoke to the Arab Spring" (Walking, 2012 blog); the 1990 Ryuzanji *Hamlet* in Tokyo, Japan, presented an imaginary Chinese coastal town with intricate power struggles among multiracial residents; or the Iraqi Theatre Company production of Romeo and Juliet, performed as a love story across the Sunni/Shia divide.

Intercultural approaches to Shakespeare sometimes attract criticism and debate over motives, processes and impact. While some construe intercultural Shakespeare as an exploration of common humanity, others perceive it as cultural imperialism (Cocks, 2016). Venning (2011, p. 150) describes an "unequal power dynamic" in which Western culture exerts influence over non-Western culture. By contrast, in many countries Shakespeare is seen not so much as a cultural import but rather as part of the local culture, influencing traditional literary practices. In this way, it may be said that even though Shakespeare wasn't born in, say, Germany, he has nevertheless become German – in the same way as he is American, Italian or South African.

In Asia, early translations into local languages such as Hindi, Japanese, Mandarin and Marathi largely preserved Shakespeare's voice in the vernacular languages. Productions in China, Japan and Korea in the early 20th century were given glorified European settings, with actors having flowing velvet European costumes, blond wigs and large false noses (*de rigueur* for representing European bodies). However, this practice has waned in recent times. Indeed, 'nativisation' of Shakespeare has long been a practice in Asia, drawing from local vernacular traditions to such an extent that it is difficult to identify the plays as foreign at all (Trivendi, 2010).

In the Arab-speaking world, early performances of Shakespeare date from the 19th century but presentation of the plays in local languages is a relatively recent phenomenon. The Anglo-Kuwaiti director Sulayman al-Bassam played an important role in this respect. Between 2001 and 2007 he adapted a number of cross-cultural versions of *Hamlet* into modern English and Arabic. They wove Middle Eastern politics and violence into a Shakespearean template, highlighting Arab-West relations and many other dimensions of conflict in the Middle East (Holderness, 2007a, 2007b; Holderness and Loughrey, 2011a, 2011b). Some Arab intercultural productions have proved a strong tool for connecting similar occurrences in different cultural settings and showing a cultural relationship between Western and Arab worlds. An Iraqi production of Romeo and Juliet, set in a world of bomb blasts and gunshots led one audience member to remark: "That wasn't just a play. That was real. I couldn't stop thinking, this is really happening out there in the real world." (Walkings, 2012).

In Africa Shakespeare is taught widely in schools, particularly in countries with a colonial past. Cocks (2016) records recent positive audience responses to performances in East and West Africa, and at the 2012 Globe to Globe festival in London, where five of the 37 Shakespeare productions from around the world were productions adapted to indigenous African cultures. These included *Itan Oginintin*, a Yoruba adaptation of *The Winter's Tale*, which was praised for its artistic prowess but criticised because the formal style of Yoruba was not widely understood in Nigeria, generating discussion on the nature and reception of theatre in modern Nigeria (Adeyemi, 2013; Sanders, 2012).

## Nigerian Pidgin English

Pidgin English in Nigeria, often referred to as Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE) or *Naija*, has its origins in trade in the Niger Delta region in the 1400s, when local people were trading with the Portuguese (Mensah, 2011). Over the centuries, the language has undergone a series of transformations (Ativie, 2010; Ofule, 2010). The Portuguese-based pidgin may have laid some foundation for Nigerian Pidgin English but English is the most notable influence on the dominant version of the pidgin currently spoken in Nigeria. This may be attributed to colonial influence and the use of English as the mode of Western education delivery in the country. Other languages that contributed directly or indirectly to NPE include Nigerian languages, Arabic and French (Ayo, 2009; Esizimotor, 2010; Mensah, 2011).

NPE is largely confined to the south of the country, but a number of studies indicate that in the north it is widely used in urban and multi-ethnic communities such as military and police barracks, National Youth Service camps, universities and marketplaces (see Esizimotor, 2010; Adedun & Shodipe, 2011). Such multi-ethnic communities and markets abound in northern urban centres, the so-called Sabon Gari towns ('strangers' town' or 'new town' in the Hausa language) in states such as Kaduna, Niger and Kano (Falade, 1985; Falola & Genova, 2009; Okolie, 2017).

Scholars tend to agree on the creolisation of NPE, but differ in terms of degree. For example, Ofule (2010) and Balogun (2013) claim that NPE has fully developed and been creolised in many parts of Nigeria but Mensah (2011) argues that NPE has not fully creolised because most Pidgin English speakers still retain their mother tongue, though he admits that the language is widely spoken and is transforming towards a creole. NPE varies across the country's ethnic groups and from place to place. Some of the notable varieties and dialects of Nigerian Pidgin identified in the literature include Benin, Lagos, Onitsha, Port Harcourt, Sapele and Warri (Mowarin, 2010a; Mensah, 2011; Balogun, 2013; Ajepe, 2014). Then choosing which pidgin dialect to use for such productions must be tricky.

An increasing number of studies advocate that NPE be accorded official recognition in national language policies because of its sociocultural context, continued 'nativisation' and its grassroots-reach capability (Oribhabor, 2010; Balogun, 2013; Mgbemena, 2014; Marzagora, 2015). These studies suggest that the NPE can no longer be regarded as "broken English", "unruly jargon", or "vulgar" and "corrupt" forms of expression outlawed in official circles, including schools and government offices (Mensah, 2011, p. 212). Even Taiwo (2009) who describes NPE as a debased form of English, concedes that it is consciously used to bridge communication gaps in the media for advertisements, newscasts and news reporting and has become a major tool for government agencies to engage with the masses. NPE is now being used in formal settings as well and by highly educated people (Ugot, 2014). It has been referred to as the country's unofficial lingua franca with the potential to foster national unity and identity (Uguru, 2008; Osoba, 2015). Despite the fact that NPE enjoys the patronage of most people in Nigeria, it remains a predominantly oral language (Endong, 2015, p. 1). Nevertheless, NPE's simplified structure and local adaptability make it easy to use by both literate and non-literate people in Nigeria. Some claim that NPE has become established as a means of mass appeal, as it is being used more than Standard English and vernacular tongues in some sectors, such as audio-visual advertising (Adedun & Shodipe, 2011; Endong, 2015).

Opinions are divided on Nigerian language policy. While many claim that Nigeria lacks an explicit language policy (Ndimele, 2012; Ayenbi, 2014; Dada et al., 2015), others construe language policy provisions in the constitution and other legislation (Emenanjo, 2002; Mbah, 2012; Omotoyinbo, 2015; Udoye, 2016). According to Ayenbi (2014), the existence of heterogeneous linguistic groups across Nigeria contribute to the difficulties the country faces in designing its language policy. There are over 500 indigenous Nigerian languages, besides English, the official language. Although Nigerian Pidgin is considered to be a relatively neutral linguistic medium (Owolabi and Dada, 2012), it lacks official recognition, exists "without any policy statement" and has been Nigeria's most neglected language "since varying degrees of roles are assigned to both the major and minority languages but not to NP" (Igboanus, 2008, p. 69).

Nigerian policy favours English and puts pressure on the mother tongues (Ajepe, 2014). Yet Nigerian youth and students have embraced NPE and are advancing its wider usage, irrespective of the policy position. Ukwuoma (2015) examined lecturers' perspectives on the use of pidgin and creole as a medium of instruction, and observed that while the lecturers were uncomfortable (due to possible negative impact on students' English learning), postgraduate participants were more willing to receive instruction in NPE or a combination of English and NPE. The silence of official policy on NPE, despite it being one of Nigeria's main languages is questioned (Emenanjo, 2002) but there seems to be consensus among scholars that the success of the standardisation of NPE will have to depend on the individual efforts of interested users of the language (Rebecca Agheyisi, cited in Oloko (2001, p. 7). To this end there are organisations supporting NPE including the Naija Languej Akademi and Wazobia FM, a Pidgin radio station established in 2007 (Ndukwe, 2017).

There is a limited range of studies examining NPE in international cultural promotion although the British Council and the BBC are among a few organisations promoting cultural understanding through NPE. In 2016, the BBC launched its Pidgin English programme, targeting over five million users of the language (Oyewole, 2016; Uwandu, 2016). NPE is generally seen as an indigenous language that subverts the linguistic hegemony of English and responds to the need for national bonding. The literature is critical of its use in international cultural relations (e.g. Martins, 2003; Babatunde, 2005; Marzagora, 2015) and relates to on-going debates on post-colonialism. Some argue that as long as the vocabularies of postcolonial pidgins and creoles retain the structure and grammar of colonial languages, they preserve elements of historical cultural contact with former colonisers (Simon & St-Pierre, 2000). Contrary views argue that this also brings power: "power to appropriate the colonisers' culture and invest elements of it with new meanings, as well as power to subvert colonial cultural authority and cultural forms" (Tymoczko, 2003, p. 32).

## Findings

Shakespeare's plays have not often been translated into Nigerian languages despite being extensively studied in standard versions in schools and universities. The NPE production of *Love at War* was part of a raft of similar productions across the world during *Shakespeare Lives* and opened channels of investigation into the promotion of cultural relations between the UK and Nigeria, alongside the educational impact of Pidgin English. It had an impact on the cultural sector in Nigeria, as well as on developing audience diversity and reach and a social impact on those who saw it.

### Educational Impact of Pidgin English

Distinction must be drawn between language as a medium of instruction and language as a vehicle for increasing understanding of Shakespeare and learning about the UK. Data highlighted a duality of opinion among students and young Nigerians: they want literary works in Standard English because it is the language of education and it helps their learning of English grammar, but they do not always understand English works and want Pidgin to help them understand the texts and plays. Pidgin helps them comprehend cultural issues underpinning the texts and it reaches a wider, grassroots audience as well.

This dichotomy between the language of education and language of understanding resounds throughout the study. One secondary school student noted: "If everybody is speaking Pidgin English, it will affect the way we study English in school." These findings are consistent with broader research on *Shakespeare Lives*. In China, Russia and the Horn of Africa most respondents agreed that they liked Shakespeare, but were slightly less likely to agree that they 'understood' Shakespeare. Respondents reporting a higher level of engagement with *Shakespeare Lives* were more likely to state that they liked or understood Shakespeare (Garcia et al., 2017).

There is also an association between liking Shakespeare and having a positive view of the UK (British Council, 2016). Young Nigerians showed considerable interest in UK literary works that are reproduced in their preferred language. Data from the student survey show that 72.8% hold the view that a Pidgin version would increase their interest in the work, and 54.8% said that it would increase their understanding of UK cultural heritage (see Tables 1 and 2). Both audience and performers, even some who had initially been wary of a Pidgin adaptation, attested to *Love at War's* capacity to break down the language barrier that prevented a large proportion of Nigerians from accessing Shakespeare and other literary works. Audience members not only found the NPE version easier to understand but also said actors were sometimes saved from the struggles of mimicking native English speakers.

**Table 1:** Distribution of responses indicating how a Pidgin translation would increase interest in the work

Location	It will increase	It will not increase	It will somewhat increase	I do not know
Kano	75.3%	11.8%	4.8%	8.2%
Lagos	67.8%	13.2%	13.4%	5.6%
Rivers	75.5%	10.6%	8.7%	5.3%
Total	72.8%	11.9%	9.0%	6.3%

**Table 2:** Distribution of responses indicating how a Pidgin translation would increase understanding of UK's cultural heritage through Shakespeare.

Location	A great deal	Moderate extent	Little extent	Not at all
Kano	50.6%	28.1%	13.6%	7.7%
Lagos	54.7%	31.2%	11.3%	2.8%
Rivers	59.1%	27.8%	9.2%	3.9%
Total	54.8%	29.1%	11.4%	4.8%

British Council research on *Shakespeare Lives* indicated that given the origin of Shakespeare's plays as popular entertainment, it is possible that teaching them academically might not be the optimal way to introduce them to people, and that people may appreciate the works more if they watch adaptations than if they study the original (British Council, 2016). According to Rebecca Simor, director of festivals and seasons at British Council: "We are definitely not about promoting a particular type of interpretation of Shakespeare, nor do we think that Shakespeare in translation isn't Shakespeare anymore. Quite the opposite, the point of what we do is to create connections." However, "This is emphatically not to suggest that Shakespeare should not be taught in school in the original today. Such teaching can play an important part in learning the English language itself" (British Council, 2016, p. 25).

Some concerns were expressed in the current study that NPE while useful as a language of understanding, might interfere with Standard English as a language of learning. "We are really still struggling with the Standard English language including our students in the universities and I ask again, 'will it in anyway help them, if we really bring down the plays into the Pidgin English?'" noted a teacher. *Love at War* was appreciated because adaptation made it easier to understand by reducing the complexities of both the storyline and language of delivery. Industry experts interviewed said that NPE is popular in communications and a Federal Ministry director favoured NPE as a delivery medium because of audience reach.

There was some resistance to this view, largely informed by social class or standing. One lecturer noted: "I don't think I would value it because English language is the lingua franca of Nigeria and so many other countries in the world. Again, Pidgin English...to most people is viewed as associated with a low level person, an illiterate person."

There is also a north/south divide in Nigeria regarding NPE with many respondents from Kano expressing an interest in seeing Shakespeare's plays in their own language. "I prefer to see or watch Shakespeare's plays in my local language, Hausa, to understand better... I will not understand the plays better if they are written in Pidgin English or Shakespearean English... I prefer to see it in Standard English so that my grammar will improve... We don't speak Pidgin English in the north and I don't speak it," said a Kano student.

However, NPE has increasingly become accepted as a language of mass communication and entertainment and can also play an important role in cultural promotion.

### Cultural Relations between Nigeria and the UK: Promoting Culture and Sharing Understanding

Research on *Shakespeare Lives* in China and Russia showed that on the whole stakeholders had a positive view of the UK and data supported the finding in the British Council's 2012 *Trust Pays* study that there is a positive relationship between engagement in cultural relations with the UK and trust in people of the UK (Garcia et al., 2017). In addition to his artistic value, Shakespeare is an important asset for the UK's prosperity and soft power (British Council, 2016). In Nigeria, the staging of *Love at War* also contributed to closing a knowledge gap in that it brought the cultures of Nigeria and UK together and gave audiences a greater understanding of UK culture. A media industry expert who had not seen the play concurred with the vast majority of respondents in the quantitative study:

“When you are familiar with people’s culture, you tend to get closer to them and it makes you unvg of those plays by coming down to their level.”

The extent to which people understood the UK’s culture before being exposed to the Pidgin versions of Shakespeare’s work influenced the impact it had on them. The survey results in general showed that although *Love at War* inspired people who had a good knowledge of UK culture, it particularly inspired those who had little knowledge. This accords with the British Council research on *Shakespeare Lives* which found that Anglophone countries and some of those more familiar with UK culture (such as France and Germany) were less likely to agree that Shakespeare influenced their view of the UK than were people from emerging economies (British Council, 2016).

*Love at War* considerably inspired viewers to want to learn more about UK culture. Some respondents specifically mentioned that they knew little about UK culture before watching the play, but that it aroused their curiosity to learn more. Quantitative data supported this. Before seeing *Love at War*, only 10% reported they understood UK culture a great deal; after watching the play, 66.7% of males and 54.5% of female respondents developed a strong interest in UK culture (see Table 4).

**Table 3:** Previous knowledge of UK culture and inspiration to watch more English plays

Level of previous knowledge of UK culture		Inspiration by <i>Love at War</i> to watch more English plays			
		Inspired	Not inspired	Somewhat inspired	No response
A great deal	66.7%	-	33.3%		5.6%
Moderate extent	60.0%		30.0%	10.0%	5.3%
Little extent	88.9%	-	11.1%		6.3%
Not at all	33.3%	33.3%		33.3%	
All	60.7%	3.6%	17.9%	17.9%	

**Table 4:** Distribution of respondents who developed interest in UK culture after watching *Love at War*

Gender	Developed interest in UK culture	Did not develop interest in UK culture	Developed interest somewhat in UK culture	No response
Male	66.7%	6.7%	20.0%	6.7%
Female	54.5%	18.2%	9.1%	18.2%
All	57.1%	10.7%	14.3%	17.9%

Viewers' opinions were divided about whether the play projected UK culture, but many who claimed they did not see the UK in the play confirmed the human condition the play projected, an important factor in enhancing understanding and promoting cooperation. "It really added a lot to my educational value and I was pushed to browse and know more about their culture and everything. Since then I now have a different view of the UK culture," said one viewer.

Similar findings resulted from a survey of perceptions of the UK following participation in *Shakespeare Lives* in Russia, China and the Horn of Africa, indicating that stakeholders felt their knowledge of the UK and of the English language had been positively impacted by the programme. Chinese respondents said *Shakespeare Lives* had confirmed British creative identity and said the programme provided motivation not only to begin to understand British culture, but to see what the two countries had in common culturally (British Council, 2016).

Some thought that more recent and contemporary UK literary works would be more likely to reflect contemporary UK values than Shakespeare. However, as a story originally told about a distant culture, *Love at War* inspired some respondents to consider lessons Nigerians could learn from it. One of the play's directors compared circumstances in the play with situations in Nigeria, as did a number of respondents. For example, some mentioned that various ethnic groups in the country needed to come together and work to deal with Nigeria's problems as a key strategy for nation building. A Rivers teachers said: "Well, I think if a work is originally in the Western culture, and is translated or done in our mother tongue...we will also look at that work from a social perceptive. Is it possible that such incident[s] and event[s] happen in our own culture and if it does, how are we going to handle it?"

It is interesting to note that many respondents felt that the play was largely Nigerian with very little on UK culture. A prime aim of the *Shakespeare Lives* programme was to reach new audiences. The adaptation of *Love at War* both engendered interest in the play and sparked a desire to see more, both Shakespeare in particular and English plays in general

One of the directors of *Love at War* emphasised language as the architecture of culture. Adaptation of a play into a people's indigenous language can be used to share UK cultural values, but efforts need to be made to ensure that the product does not become unbranded or distorted in the repackaging processes. Nevertheless, *Love at War* shifted viewers' perceptions of the UK from negative to positive, in some cases rethinking views influenced by colonialism. One respondent noted: "What it revealed is that the UK people are like every other people...it is human...it is a human thing... having portrayed different culture in this manner shows that UK culture might not be what some people thought it was, they too are human beings... All of us have same aspiration as human beings. It increased my likeness for UK culture."

Nigerians who saw *Love at War* were also influenced by the role played by character and setting in the production. Various respondents (including those who did not see the play) said that their identification with characters in films, books and plays influenced their social imagination. A number of respondents emphasised that setting as much as language could play an important role in improving Nigerian's understanding of UK culture. A media practitioner noted: "If you set Shakespeare's play in Warri Pidgin English, the dress code and environment should also be Warri. It will enhance faster understanding but if you bring Victoria gown, England apparel of the queen into Warri, it will be alienated because there is a cultural disconnect at that point."

While such productions can be agents in shifting perceptions of the UK in a more positive direction, viewing *Love at War* as an instrument of cultural promotion requires a degree of caution as the UK cultural imprint can be lost in adaptation. Some might argue, so it should.

In addition to exploring cultural meaning and understanding, *Love at War* projects a shared humanity and human values. This was a conscious aim of the playmakers. One of the directors noted: "Firstly, there is a human culture, even though we are divided over cultures, religions and tribes. Here is a British story, told in a Nigerian context ...we face the same fear... We do not laugh in different languages and hunger does not have different language... these are things that combine us as humanities... It was performed in ways that you would not know, except if you see where it is said it is a Shakespeare's story. Most notable playwrights, when they write their plays, it is for humanity not just for a particular place, but you have to situate it somewhere. So we just changed the location that's all."

A number of respondents said that efforts should be focused on deepening (as opposed to promoting) cultural relations, because the relationship had already been established. The Rivers ministry director specifically suggested the need for the two countries periodically to co-organise artistic and cultural exhibitions in both Nigeria and the UK to crystallise cooperation and cultural exchange. Other respondents also spoke of a two-way cultural learning process between the UK and Nigeria. One viewer noted: "It will also [be good to] get the UK people to get to know our own culture because by translating Shakespeare's works, you get to understand the UK culture but on the other hand, does the UK understand Africa or Nigerian culture." As such it is clear that many respondents valued the process and ways of engaging as much as the product of the play.

Some interviewees felt culture between Nigeria and the UK could be shared more broadly, expressing a wish for more adaptations, especially at the grassroots. Quantitative data indicated that promoting intercultural relations through mediated plays might have greater impact if the adaptations and imagery connect to people's way of life, enabling them to imagine themselves in a character's role. Broadening the base of impact also received attention, with respondents mentioning the need for more effective publicity, suggesting that plays should be woven around key events and holidays in the UK but also relevant to Nigerians.

Clearly Shakespeare can be a significant asset and powerful enhancer of UK influence beyond the world of theatre and television, in education, tourism and the creative industries (British Council, 2016). These responses to *Love and War* echo research on the impact of the *Shakespeare Lives* programme in China and Russia. This highlighted the importance of cultural sharing based on understanding cultural differences and varied cultural and literary heritages, vital when wishing to explore the potential for cultural relations to build trust (Garcia et al., 2017).

### **Love at War's Impact on the Nigerian Cultural Sector**

The *Shakespeare Lives* programme covered a wide range of formats, many aimed at developing artistic skills and engaging participants in dialogue. Collaboration between UK cultural institutions and artists and those in other countries was also a feature of the year's events. Most surveyed stakeholders in China, Russia and the Horn of Africa said that involvement with *Shakespeare Lives* helped them meet new cultural partners, and reported that involvement in *Shakespeare Lives* either had a lot of impact or some impact on their skills and abilities (Garcia et al., 2017). These findings are supported by the research into the impact of *Love at War*.

Evidence indicates that *Love at War* created a variety of opportunities in Nigeria, opening spaces for diverse forms of collaboration between Nigerian and the UK artistes. It showed the way to exploring new possibilities both in performance and theatre entrepreneurship and for revitalising traditional theatre culture. The staging of the play brought people from Nigerian and UK cultures together by creating opportunity for participating artistes from both countries to learn from each other's culture, during workshops, auditions, performance and touring. One of the directors of the play said: "I worked with a man who does not know anything about my culture except what he read in a book and whose language I had to learn myself... and I had to adapt to that."

The production presented opportunities for strengthening Nigerian theatre practice in terms of creativity, artistry, imagination and improvisation. Respondents who were artistes and students of theatre arts expressed a desire to undertake similar work and said they learned new dimensions of theatre practice. The *Love at War* approach differed from traditional Nigerian theatre methods and was seen as a game-changer in Nigerian theatre industry. According to one of the play directors: "Those who know the traditional way and our style of work knew that the play was a richer production in terms of perspective. It was richer in music, richer in style and richer in interpretation. It was not just one culture but mixture of cultures."

There was a strong indication that actors played an important part in audience appreciation. Many respondents, including a Federal Ministry director, echoed the view that actors' skills were crucial in making the play acceptable to Nigerian audiences. Thus, promoting culture through a play may require engagement of actors with the requisite skills, who are capable of prompting audiences' imagination.

Interviews revealed that *Love at War* catalysed this thinking in audience members and industry professionals alike. A Federal Ministry director noted that the play would open up other areas of interest, such as collaborative writing in indigenous languages and expanding Nigerian theatre practice beyond its traditional domain. One viewer noted: "It makes you think more on things you can do with the UK...it forces you to research deeper and see to the extent you can go... once you know this is a possibility, a lot of artistes I know would be thinking towards cultural partnership and try to do collaboration with other cultures, not just the UK."

*Love at War* also helped create an infrastructure and mobilised emerging artistes in Nigeria. The play inspired desires for intercultural storytelling and arts. It also inspired the spirit of improvisation in local artistes, which some arts student respondents believe will contribute to breaking down infrastructural barriers. Respondents from government commenting on the play, recommended state involvement in promoting further collaboration between Nigerian and UK agencies.

## Conclusions

The study data strongly suggest that producing Shakespearian plays in Pidgin can promote Nigerians' appreciation and understanding of UK literary works and cultural values, and ultimately promote cultural relations between Nigeria and the UK. Seeing *Love at War* not only significantly enhanced people's appreciation and experience, it increased their preferences for English literature and inspired them to learn more about UK culture. People who saw *Love at War* were interviewed with a view to understanding their experiences, and discovering the extent to which the production met their social expectations, catalysed their appreciation of UK literature, and improved their understanding of the UK's cultural values.

The study focused on Nigerian Pidgin English as a vehicle to examine the role of the language of delivery in fostering cultural understanding. Data showed that a play that is adapted to an environment and produced in a language people understand can influence appreciation of the culture portrayed. Well-adapted and skilfully staged plays can substantially influence both opinion of and attitude towards foreign cultures. For maximum impact, plays should reflect the sociocultural realities of both the culture of origin and the destination culture. Young Nigerians were engaged by a production in a language they speak but the research showed that language preferences are divided along regional and ethnic lines. Interviews also repeatedly revealed a dual preference: Nigerians want to see plays in Standard English to develop their facility with the language ('language of education') but prefer Pidgin English to help them understand and appreciate the plays ('language of understanding'). For the larger part of southern Nigeria and among those who understand NPE in the north, adaptation into NPE is preferred because it removes language barriers and is understandable by both literate and illiterate Nigerians. It is also widely used in official and non-official functions by both public and private institutions.

Cultural and language adaptation often speaks to local and national issues and the link to UK culture can be diminished. Moreover, differences can potentially create challenges to intercultural collaboration. Poor understanding of collaborators' respective backgrounds, political ideologies and social perspectives can lead to friction. A number of challenges experienced by the *Love at War* directors and actors were related to cooperation and bonding. The UK and Nigerian directors had to understand and manage their differences to build the partnership necessary for staging the play. Professional performers in the cast at times had challenges with students enlisted to the company (who sometimes felt overwhelmed by the dimensions of new theatre activities to which they were exposed). Adapting and staging *Love at War* also revealed some pidgin-specific challenges. These relate to regional variations in NPE and the lack of a unified orthography or standard grammar. This meant, for example, that without a standard text, memorising lines was difficult in Pidgin. Engaging professionals who have track records of international collaboration and are skilled in the use of NPE in engaging wider audiences can lessen these challenges. In-depth understanding of Nigerian culture and local audience characteristics also need to be taken into consideration when engaging artistes and to ensure that the nuances of destination cultures as well as the original plays.

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