

Book review

Neville Alexander, editor, **Social Dynamics - special issue on 'Language and Development in Africa'**, Volume 25 Number 1, 1999, Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town, 199pp.

Ayo Bamgbose, **Language and Exclusion: The Consequences of Language Policies in Africa**. Hamburg: Lit Verlag Munster, 2000, 151pp.

Volume 25 Number 1 of the South African journal, *Social Dynamics* is based on the theme, 'Language and Development in Africa'. The guest editor is Neville Alexander, one of South Africa's veteran sociolinguists. For devoting this special issue of *Social Dynamics* to the theme of language and development in Africa, the editorial board has to be commended. This is so because often people, even those presumed to be enlightened, fail to appreciate the contribution(s) of language to development. For Kishindo (2000: 15), "language in any case is both object and instrument of development. Language serves as an important, if not the most important tool for the development of communities i.e. 'development' in the sense of offering them education in order to enable them to transform their conditions of life. Language is the conveyor belt for all political and professional communication". We can, therefore, confidently assert that without language, there can be no meaningful development of whatever kind¹. It is now widely asserted by some African and Africanist scholars that:

if Africa is to advance in a way which lifts society from the mass level and empowers mass society with knowledge, such advancement would need to be premised on the languages and cultural usages of the mass society. (*The New Manifesto* 2000: 3; cf. Kamwendo 2000; Kishindo 2000; Djite 1993).

The problem with Africa is that it is foreign languages, especially the languages of the ex-colonizers, which are used by the privileged minority as tools for development, thereby neglecting the indigenous languages which the majority of the citizens use in their daily activities. This relationship between language and development preoccupies the attention of many of the contributions to the special issue of *Social Dynamics*.

The special issue of *Social Dynamics* carries contributions from some of the heavy weights of African language scholarship, for example, Ayo Bamgbose², H. Ekkehard

Wolff, Beban Chumbow, Pai Obanya, just to mention a few. The contributions cover a wide range of topics such as language planning (Ayo Bamgbose and Irene Rabenoro) Cross-border languages (Beban Chumbow); African languages in education (Pai Obanya); literacy (Carole Bloch and Naz Rassool); language in the media (Moha Ennaji) etc. In the first article, "An African Renaissance Without African Languages?", the theme editor, Neville Alexander argues that a true African renaissance should be accompanied by the elevation of the status of African languages. Ayo Bamgbose's "African Language Development and Language Planning" analyses the common trends and problems in Africa's language planning. In conclusion, Bamgbose proposes some strategies for good language planning in Africa. Another contribution is "Multilingualism, Modernisation and Mother Tongues: Promoting Democracy Through Indigenous African Languages" by H. Ekkehard Wolff. He argues strongly for mother tongue education in the context of Africa's multilingualism and multiculturalism. Beban Chumbow's "Trans-border Languages of Africa" is concerned with how to develop cross border languages. Chumbow observes that many cross-border languages (or trans-border languages as he calls them) are in different states of development in different countries due to lack of uniform and adequate inter-state collaboration. Irene Rabenoro discusses various aspects of global multilingualism. In another contribution, Pai Obanya dismisses some of the widely circulated fallacies about the use of African languages in education. There are two contributions on literacy, the first one is by Carole Bloch and it is on early childhood literacy. She argues that folklore can aid effective acquisition of initial literacy through an African language. The second contribution on literacy is by Naz Rassool who discusses the role of literacy in relation to information technology advances such as the internet, e-mail etc. Language policy in the media, especially the electronic media in Morocco, is analysed by Moha Ennaji. He argues that the central pillar of the language policy in Morocco is the Arabization process.

Apart from these general contributions, there is a small piece by Neville Alexander, "Instead of an Obituary", in which he mourns the death of Kahombo Mateene, the man who once steered the activities of the OAU Language Bureau. In honour of the departed linguist, the editor has reproduced Mateene's contribution to the Pan African Seminar on the Use of African Languages in Education³.

In the book reviews section, Robert Phillipson reviews three books. All the three books deal with the position of English as the most dominant language of the world. The books under review are D. Crystal's *English As A Global Language*; J. W. Fishman et al (eds) *Post - Imperial English: Status Change in Former British and American*

Colonies, 1940 - 1990; and David Graddol's *The Future of English?*

The final section of the journal contains a reprint of the widely cited OAU Language Plan of Action for Africa. It is unfortunate that much of what is articulated in the plan of action has not yet been implemented. This lack of implementation is, in my view, Africa's tragic flaw. Conference after conference,⁴ beautifully phrased resolutions are made about the burning need to actively promote African languages, yet nothing tangible happens. These conferences, symposia, workshops have generated into gatherings where scholars and other participants simply recycle their old arguments (in favour of the prominence of African languages in development).

Volume 25 Number 1 of *Social Dynamics* raises a number of interesting and relevant issues from both the scholarly and non-scholarly points of view. What is worrying, however, is that the majority of the views expressed in many of the contributions are not new at all. These views have been aired by the same authors in different fora before. This aside, the special issue of the journal is worth reading and citing. This issue of the journal should not be missed by any serious scholar of African languages

The author of *Language and Exclusion*, the Nigerian sociolinguist, Ayo Bamgbose is one of Africa's most prominent language scholars. One of his memorable contributions to African sociolinguistics is his book, *Language and the Nation* which was published in 1991. The book currently under review has been carved out of a series of professorial lectures Bamgbose presented at various South African Universities in 1998. The main argument running through the book is that certain language policies and practices in Africa tend to exclude the majority of the people from active participation in socio-economic and political activities. The excluded majority are then unable to enjoy some of their basic human rights such as access to literacy and/or education. The main trigger of the exclusion is the predominant use of a foreign language (which is often the language of the former colonizer). Such a language is widely used in the key formal domains such as education, the media, justice and law, high level politics etc. This state of affairs, according to Kishindo (2000: 14) "empowers a few against the interests and the rights of many and helps to create and maintain a vicious circle of the poor majority becoming poorer and evermore marginalized and the rich few becoming even richer and self-glorifying".

The summary of the book presented above can be verified in many countries in Africa, including the reviewer's own country, Malawi. The book, therefore, address a topic which should be appealing not only to language scholars but also to politicians, human

rights activists etc. Language - propelled social exclusion is not a newly discovered problem in Africa. It has been around for sometime, prompting some of the continent's scholars and policy makers to make declarations or sign charters whose goal is to promote the active use of African languages in areas in which the majority suffer from social exclusion.

Bamgbose's book has five chapters, namely: Language Factor in Participation and Exclusion; Language as a Resource; Language, Literacy and Education; Language and Medium of Instruction; and Language Planning. The appendices comprise the OAU's Language Plan of Action for Africa; Language Provisions in South Africa's post-apartheid Constitution; and the Barcelona Universal Declaration on Linguistic Rights. The documents in the appendices highlight the relevance of language rights within the general context of human rights. These documents strongly reinforce the fact that language is one of the basic human rights.

In the first chapter, 'The Language Factor in Participation and Exclusion', Bamgbose defines the concept of exclusion and gives a number of examples. 'Language as a Resource', the second chapter, discusses the way multilingualism can be treated as a valuable resource and not as a burden. 'Language, Literacy and Education' and 'Language and Medium of Instruction' are the third and fourth chapters respectively. The dominant issue in these two chapters is the widely proclaimed relevance and importance of using local languages in the early phases of education and/or initial literacy. The current situation in Africa is that local languages are held in low esteem, and often they are not preferred as media of instruction^s. The final chapter is 'Language Planning', a subject which Bamgbose has treated in great detail in earlier works. In this chapter, Bamgbose identifies the common features and/or problems of language planning in Africa. He also presents four case studies of language policy, namely Malawi (a tiny paragraph on language policy during the Banda regime), Nigeria, South Africa (i.e. with special reference to the post-apartheid era), and Tanzania. The reviewer feels Bamgbose could have done a better job if he had presented more detailed case studies rather than the 'skeletons' he has presented. For example, Malawi's language policy has undergone some significant changes since the end of the Banda regime, an issue which Bamgbose's small paragraph on Malawi has failed to highlight.

In all the five chapters, Bamgbose clearly demonstrates how in many parts of Africa language policies have led to the social, political and economic marginalization of the majority. He, however, does not call for the radical dismissal of foreign/international languages such as French, English and Portuguese. His plea is that favourable language policies which adequately cater for both local and international languages should be put

in place. In the Anglophone African context, Bamgbose is obviously advocating what Okombo (2000: 42 – 51) calls 'a non-adversarial relationship between English and indigenous African languages'.

The major issues raised in the book have been on the author's menu for some time. It would appear that there is a repetition of 'the old song'. One, however, cannot question the validity of the arguments made in the book in favour of the promotion of African languages. That criticism aside, I would not hesitate to recommend the book to scholars of different persuasions e.g. linguists, political scientists, and even human rights activists.

Notes

1. The International Development Research Centre (IDRC) has produced a poster which states that: "no country has achieved sustainable development using someone else's language".
2. On the back cover of Bamgbose (2000), Professor H. Ekkehard Wolff describes Ayo Bamgbose as "Africa's most prolific and eloquent elder in the field of African sociolinguistics".
3. The seminar was hosted by the Project for the study of Alternative Education in South Africa (PRAESA) at the University of Cape Town, from 15th to 19th July, 1996.
4. For example, refer to the following conferences' resolutions: the Pan African Seminar on the use of African Languages in Education, Science and Technology; the 2nd Malawi National Symposium on Language in Education held in 2000 etc.
5. When the Ministry of Education in Malawi issued a directive in March 1996 that from then onwards, mother tongues or vernacular languages would work as media of instruction in the first four classes of the junior primary school, fierce resentment against the policy was voiced. Chauma et al (1997) for the arguments levelled against the new language policy.
6. This criticism is not levelled at Bamgbose alone. Of course, the reviewer realises that sometimes repetition is inevitable.

References

- Bamgbose, A. 1991. *Language and the Nation* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press).
- Bamgbose, A. 2000. *Language and Exclusion: Consequences of Language Policies in Africa* (Hamburg: Lit Verlag Munster).
- Chauma, A et al. 1997. "Problems and Prospects for the Introduction of Vernacular Languages in Primary Education: The Malawi Experience". In B. Smieja (ed.) *Proceedings of the LICCA Workshop in Dar es Salaam*, University of Duisburg
- Djite, P. 1993. "Language and Development in Africa". *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* (100/101) pp 149 - 166.
- Kamwendo, G. H. 2000. "Towards the Use of Indigenous Languages in the Development of the Nation: The Case of Malawi". In E. Chiwome et al (eds) *Indigenous Knowledge and Technology in African and Diasporan Communities: Multi-Disciplinary Approaches*. Harare: Mond Books. pp 215 - 224.
- Kishindo, P. J. 2000. "Language and Development". In *Lamp*. No. 25, September – October.
- The New Manifesto: Towards the African Century (Africa and the Challenge of the 21st Century)*. 2000 Cape Town: African Opinion Series Number II.
- Okombo, O. 2000. "Towards A Non-Adversarial Relationship Between English and the Indigenous African Languages". In J. Pfaffe (ed.) *Local Languages in Education, Science and Technology: Proceedings of the Second National Symposium on Language Policy Formulation*, held at Sun and Sand, Mingochoi, 25th to 28th October, 2000), (GTZ/University of Malawi) pp 42 - 51.

GREGORY H. KAMWENDO
CENTRE FOR LANGUAGE STUDIES
UNIVERSITY OF MALAWI
P. O. Box 108
ZOMBA
MALAWI
e-mail: gkamwendo@chirunga.sdn.org.mw