LANGUAGE STUDY

Language for Education and National Development: The Case of Ex-colonial Languages vis-à-vis Indigenous African Languages

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Abstract

The use of indigenous African languages in official circles has largely been determined by Africa's contact with the west. In particular this has been the usage of English, French and Portuguese in most of Africa's colonial world. This has attracted the use of such terms as Anglophone, francophone and Lusophone, respectively, even after African governments have attained independence from their colonial masters. To a large extent, the influence of English has been determined by colonial governments' and natives desire for their academic pursuits and not necessarily by the wider use of indigenous African languages. For sociolinguistic purposes English, French and Portuguese, largely, have been conveniently used for communicative purposes. It is also notable that Christian missions have had a significant role in the establishment of these ex-colonial languages. As a result these languages have had much influential institutional forces, where they have emerged as languages of power and prestige over indigenous African languages. In this article reasons for learning and development using ex-colonial languages are amply given and the reader is given the responsibility to assess the powerful position of English and other ex-colonial languages in education and social practice and in the over all national development of institutional forces, such as new governments that have emerged, societies and communities at large.

The neglect to address the effective use of indigenous African languages has been the prime factor in the lack of using these indigenous African languages as media of instruction and in their use in national development,

science and technology for the majority. Language is the normal medium that a given group knows best, which provides the necessary skills for human to become effective and efficient for there to be overall national development. The central argument, therefore, is that the language used by the majority is important for human resources training and vital for overall national development.

The notion of development

Initially the term 'development' was contrasted between industrialised countries in Europe and North America, which were classified as 'developed' and Africa as 'underdeveloped.' There is a belief that this 'development gap' could be bridged or considerably reduced (Chumbou, 2005:165). The argument has been for the adoption of 'developing nations' to replace 'underdeveloped' nations in Africa and Asia, largely. This categorisation of economic and political nations into 'developed' and 'underdeveloped' (or Third world: a term that has referred to Africa and Asia, has been seen to be pejorative or derogatory). This has been implied by this appellation, which has grouped these countries into 'first', 'second' and 'third' world countries. The last has referred to Africa and part of Asia largely. Joseph Desire Mobutu, who later renamed himself Mobutu Sese Seko, was a vigorous proponent of the eradication of such a term. He forcefully argued that the so-called developed countries have actually not stopped developing and therefore also qualify as 'developing' countries. He thus viewed such a term as a misnomer.

In our conceptualisation of the term 'development' the central issue is that all countries of the globe seek development, which should be an acceptable reference of the term 'development.' The first thing to note is that development is not synonymous with growth as there would still be growth without development. A good example here would be in a case where there is an explosion in population without economic growth or a rapid increase in the indicators of human development without a commensurate reduction of poverty (Chumbou, 2005:167). The term development is essentially 'redemptive' in character and refers to the general uplift in terms of the standard of living. This includes health, shelter, food, security, life expectancy, education, work, etc. Generally, this term refers to the economic indication of a given country or the gross national product (GNP), but does not capture the redemptive character. In Africa the gap between the 'haves' and 'have-nots' could be determined by the masses acquisition of the ex-colonial languages for the 'haves' and the non-acquisition of the ex-colonial languages has given this group limited access to scientific, technological and cultural knowledge and thus the self-actualisation and the full participation of this group and its effort towards national development (Chumbou, 2008).

Economic development in a country can only succeed if there is equal language development and use, thereby giving equal income opportunities for

all the citizenry through the use of their community languages (Moyo, 2003:133). The absence of an appropriate political will leads to lack of any development, be it academic, economic, social or political.

Alexander (2000:17) has noted that many political leaders fail to see mother tongue instruction and use as 'a well-nigh, universal principle in the modern world.' It is only tactful and pedagogically sensible that learners' mother tongues be used as media of instruction in early education. Second and additional languages would follow for social-economic and possible education, where possible. This would tend to disfigure or delimit consequence of the colonial apartheid legacy in Southern Africa (Alexander 2000:17).

Mkanganwi (1992) notes that the language policy in South Africa clearly denied the majority access to communicate effectively in the languages widely used and known to them, particularly where the mother tongues members of the majority were different. The purpose of this was to discourage national unity and promote Bantustan states that were created and where English and Afrikaans played a pivotal role in shaping the supremacy of these two ex-colonial languages. This also fostered linguistic barriers, which further undermined communication among the Black majority.

What we observe is that in Southern Africa particularly ex-colonial languages have become official languages of the new African states and these are also used as languages of learning, particularly in higher education. Languages have, therefore, become a symbol of identity and 'a weapon used to protect this identity' (Mkanganwi, 1992:07). In Mozambique, for example, Portuguese was used to motivate the thinking and belief that Portuguese would be entrenched at as the language of the metropolis as well as the rural people, for political and cultural identity through its colonial policy of assimilation. Similarly, in French colonial Africa, albeit now. Nothing was to appear in print except in the colonial master's language. What we observe is that the natives have perhaps pragmatically looked at the economic realities and noted that they needed to acquire English, French or Portuguese for economic survival. Emergent African states have prudently made ex-colonial languages as central media for instruction and passively endorsed the acquisition of mother tongues in early education and perhaps in the home. Generally then politicians' views have seen that ex-colonial languages would not only be used in higher education but also as viable and neutral media for communication and this seems to remain the case for the foreseeable future. For them what is pragmatic is what matters and not necessarily forging language politics based on the social needs at the base of their societies. A meaningful change in this direction is unlikely to happen practically.

Ex-colonial Languages versus African Languages Perspectives.

In colonial Africa Christian mission generally tended to incorporate the use of local languages for communication and education, while ultimately they promoted the acquisition of their languages. This was in line with the colonial divide and rule mandate policy. Chimhundu (1992) has reported that in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), Karanga was associated with the Dutch Reformed Church, while chiManyika was associated with the Anglican church and Zezuru, a version of Shona, was associated with the Catholic church. In the missionaries' use of these local languages instead of the wholesale use of the colonial master's home languages for their proselytisation and evangelization missions; they created opportunities to be understood in these local languages. This is because religious concepts were embedded in African languages (Makoni and Trudell in forthcoming). In Nyasaland (now Malawi), missionaries appropriated northern Ngoni traditional and war songs, which were largely used as hymnals and these, were published by the Hetherwick Press, which the Church of Scotland established in Blantyre. The result was that such effects attracted more converts to the Presbyterian Scottish missions.

It is interesting to note that in the long run the colonised natives or Africans clamoured for education and acquisition of English. They strongly opposed the use and adoption of their vernaculars as media for instruction. They felt that 'the door for opportunity was slammed in the face of their children' (Smith, 1926:68). This is because they wanted their children to get the best paying jobs in the established colonial administration. In a way then indigenous mother tongues were viewed as second-class languages where English became the prestigious language of power and modernization (Campbell-Makini, 2000).

Current African States Language Policies versus Ex-colonial Languages or Mother Tongues?

Besides the views of emergent politicians, who are decision-makers, the views of parents and concerned stakeholders, it seems clear that ex-colonial languages are prestigiously deemed, if not for pragmatic reasons.

In addition to this the use of English, French or Portuguese readily received the support of dominant publishing houses in the respective education systems of countries. These publishing houses have given their full support by donating textbooks, teaching materials and the training of language teachers in English, French or Portuguese of local teachers. In addition to this Bamgbose (1991) notes that they have also provided expatriate teachers in ex-colonial languages. In such a situation an indigenous African language can only be viewed as building blocks of transition towards English (Makoni and Trudell, forthcoming). In this way a hierarchy exists, where the use of ex-colonial languages clearly has a higher status than the use of indigenous

African languages. The view adopted by politicians, parents and concerned stakeholders seems to be based on the highly pragmatic realities and awareness of globalisation and the dominant position of English, in particular, for the type of academic education in Africa. There are these powerful forces with states, international agencies and parental needs for their children and communities within education systems today.

Language, Education and National Development through African Languages

If there is to be improvement in the material condition of all citizens, the available human resources should be transformed into knowledgeable, specialised and skilled human power through an educational training process. This is in order for that given group to be useful in the national development equation. For this education and knowledge to take place appropriately in the language that people know best is the normal medium of effective communication in all the educational system. In this way education becomes a necessary prerequisite or the necessary formation of human capital development via an effective language that the masses are fully conversant with, where the necessary skills and values can be imparted for there to be change in national development.

Clearly what we note is that since education and human resources training are crucial elements to national development and an appropriate language medium is central to the acquisition of an education and training the language of the masses is a cardinal element in this process. While Christian missions, for example, allowed the British colonial system of divide and rule and adopted local languages in their system of rule, what this translated into is that there was a streamlining process, where only a selected few natives could go through to be absorbed in the education system that was set. This was because the ruled also desired to acquire the language of the rulers, which ultimately promised them better paying jobs.

The use of Indigenous Languages and National Development

From the colonial era to the present we interestingly note that formal education has been affected through the language of the colonial master. Obviously these have been exoglossic languages, English, French and Portuguese, largely in colonial Africa. Arabic and Afrikaans have also been dominant in North Africa and in South Africa, respectively.

There is undoubted agreement among psychologists, linguists, anthropologists and all educators that the learners' mother tongue is the most significant and advantageous medium of instruction in the school system over the use of exoglossic or foreign languages. In UNESCO's words mother tongue means 'the language, which a person has acquired in early years and which normally, has become his natural instrument of thought and

communication' (UNESCO, 1953:46). Usually this is the language of the environment in which the child grows up, even if he/she may be of 'mixed' parents in terms of their mother tongues. The conclusive evidence that UNESCO experts, who have been linguists, is that vernaculars or indigenous languages are conveniently more effective as media of instruction in the educational system of each state or geo-political entity.

The promotion of mother tongues (MTs) is, therefore, necessary so that they function alongside ex-colonial languages as viable media for equal access in education and for political participation in the civil service and in other forms of economic enterprises and for upward social mobility for the citizenry. This imbalance ought to be corrected if local languages are indeed to achieve any value in the linguistic market place as linguistic products (see Bourdieu, 1991). This is what Kamwangamalu (2005:737) has termed as *mother tongue education cleansing,* a process whereby indigenous African languages 'are invested with some of the advantages and prerequisites that are currently associated only with English or Afrikaans' in the South African situation.

A language policy, therefore, that only emphasises ex-colonial languages in education and national development represents a serious threat to the existence of local languages. Ex-colonial languages and local languages need to co-exist, not at the expense of the latter, but in addition to the former, in order for there to be productive and meaningful co-existence among these languages. This would be an 'enabling rather than a disenabling, empowering rather than disempowering situation' (Kamwangamalu, 2005: 378).

From the above statement it is axiomatic to deduce that any child will learn better, conceptually, cognitively and intellectually if he/she is taught through the mother tongue continuously, for at least five years in early education system than when taught in a foreign or exoglossic language. It follows then that this maximises the child's or learner's intellectual potential, if the mother tongue is employed than an alien medium.

The findings of expert opinion are that the use of African local languages is crucially instrumental, which generally outweigh the use of foreign languages in the long term. However, this does not mean that a child learning in a foreign language may retard academic achievement. It generally follows, however, that the use of African local languages has to be capitalised as media for instruction in the child's early schooling. In the Southern African context the idea that is promoted by the Centre for Advanced Studies in African Societies (CASAS) in Cape Town on the harmonisation of African languages as the case is in Nguni languages: isiXhosa, isiZulu, siSwati and isiNdebele and Sotho language: seSotho, seSotho sa Leboa, Tshwana and isiLozi along with ciNyanya that is commonly spoken in Malawi, Zambia, Mozambique and particularly in Harare, Zimbabwe, is essentially towards the standardisation of common dialects in these cognate languages. These languages are widely used, accessible and user-friendly to learners, which are essentially spoken

using different dialects, but could clearly choose a common dialect for learning purposes.

It is also to be noted that in South Africa ground work in the publication of scientific vocabulary in the official eleven languages has been achieved by the Department of Arts and Culture at primary school level in this regard. What is further required is the development of pedagogical grammar, dictionaries, primers, appropriate levels of tenders, literary material and textbooks in all the eleven official languages other than the ones that are predominant in the ex-colonial languages, Afrikaans and English. If this is achieved the use of Afrikaans and English in Afrikaans, will in the long run, no longer be a major obstacle in national development, as indigenous African languages will have come to see the light of day as instructional languages in early education.

As discussed above, knowledge, particularly, scientific and technological know-how, has to be imparted in indigenous African languages as media of instruction. This is important as there appears to be considerable difference in the language acquisition or language levels between learners in urban areas, which have more learning facilities in published material than learners in rural areas. A vigorous promotion and use of indigenous African languages in early education, therefore, requires deliberate linguistic democratisation of access to equal knowledge for all. As the situation stands currently, the sum total knowledge skills and techniques that are need in the work place for national development are imparted in exoglossic languages alone. It is worth noting that only 9% of South Africa's population of 42 million people speak and understand English. A majority of this population is black. They are not conversant with this dominant language that is widely used in schools, higher education and government.

Among others, this point has been demonstrated by Bamgbose (1970), UNESCO (1953) and Ansre (1979). The use of English of monolingual education in English, which is a foreign language for the majority of learners, however internationally used it might be, fails to make and achieve national development as in this sense it has hardly taken off. It is a much sought after requirement (Chumbou, 2005:172).

Empirical evidence for the above is provided by two experiments, one in Nigeria and the other from Cameroon. The findings of these studies have shown that where students have received classroom instruction in indigenous African languages as opposed to instruction in English and French respectively, as second languages, these learners have performed significantly better than control groups taught in English and French (cf Afoloyan, 1976 Tadadjeu, 1990). What this implies is that there is need for sound educational programme where languages that learners know best in terms of efficiency are used. This obviously becomes knowledge that is acquired via mother tongues that becomes more comprehensible to learners. Besides, mother tongue instruction psycho-linguistically facilitates the notion of transfer when a

second language such as English becomes the subsequent medium of instruction.

Additional Reasons for the Use of African Languages as Media for Instruction in Early Education.

In addition to the arguments given above, there are also fairly compelling psychological reasons for the use of mother tongues as instructional languages. The psychological and educational merits for the use of African languages are further complemented by cultural and ideological reasons. Advantages for the use of African languages include the following:

- African languages normally lead the learner to cope easily with the use of the language that the learner knows best. This is in his/her expression of thought processes in disciplines like science and technology.
- This further leads to the learner's greater participation in national life, since with knowledge that is acquired in the learner's best known language of the learner becomes more capable of being allocated functions on the dissemination of information and subsequently in national development.
- Adult education is further enhanced since there would be more people who would be able to read and write in their own language than in a foreign language. In the long run, this would reduce illiteracy levels and thus accelerate the rate of national development. It is interesting to note that under Mwalimu Nyerere's *Ujamah* policy, Tanzania had the highest literacy rate in Africa. This is because many adults were able to read and write in Kiswahili than in English.
- As a corollary from the above such an enterprise would serve as a means of transmitting and preserving cultural values, apart from science and technology. In this way, this would subsequently complement oral traditional preservation and enhance cultural independence and foster linguistic identity. This would naturally start from the individual mother tongue to national identity, but would initially start from the learner's identity and pride in the learner's mother tongue.
- The learner would be motivated and stimulated to learn more, which would lead to greater and higher level of education and the home language would lead to greater interaction among the various ethnic groups and thus promote a higher degree of national awareness and thus greater level of national integration and unification which would hopefully foster national unity in diversity.

- From a psychological perspective, there would be a sense of initiative, which tends to develop intellectual potential among learners and reduce the dropout rate from school, since mother tongue has a tendency to build up more confidence. Besides, during the formative years the child would minimise learning hardship, as the child would maximise the endowed intellectual potential. In the long run this would have a tendency to build up more confidence. Besides, during the formative years the child would minimise learning hardships, as the child would maximise the endowed intellectual potential. In the long run this would have a tendency to produce a better quality of human resources for national development.
- In addition this would lead to the free and equal use of the available national languages, which would be a celebration of linguistic and cultural plurality. The intellectualisation of free usage of African languages would furthermore lead to a democratisation of access to scientific and technological knowledge for the benefit of all nationals in urban and rural areas.

Rationalisation for Maintaining Exoglossic Languages

Some scholars and politicians have argued against the use of indigenous or local African languages. Such reasons would not be considered as sound because they are based on wrong assumptions and are, therefore, logically fallacious.

There are scholars and politicians who have argued and continue to argue that indigenous African languages do not have grammar. This is obviously fallacious since universal grammar tells as that all languages have grammars, but may have different constructions. The linguistic claim for language universal is that certain principles for the human mind are, to a degree biologically determined and specialised for language. These abstract and linguistically significant principles underlie all natural languages and comprise the essential faculty for languages which all individuals are in general uniformly and equally endowed) (McLaughlin, 1986:91).

Politicians and some scholars also argue that indigenous African languages would impede the acquisition of knowledge through, for example, English, French and Portuguese, the languages of power. There is a considerable body of research which indicates that the child's conceptual and cognitive development in the mother tongue, along with literacy in the same facilitates acquisition of a second language, where the learner would normally have a better command of the second language if he/she has received initial tuition in the mother tongue (Cf Afoloyan, 1976, Tadadjeu, 1990, Lambert and Tucker, 1972, Engels, 1975, Krashen, 1971). Besides, Saville-Troike (1971) and Krashen have shown that the basic skills in language learning,

particularly those to do with reading are readily transferable from one language to another.

Furthermore, Krashen (2001) has shown that children with knowledge of two languages demonstrate more divergent thinking than one who is monolingual. There are politicians particularly who have argued that the use of the child's indigenous African language would impede the learning of English where the latter is largely deemed as the neutral language and that this has tendency to polarise linguistic communities against each other. To some extent this could be true, but then the notion of linguistic and cultural awareness has to be promoted towards national identity. Linguistic and cultural liberation would lead to the disappearance of tribal or ethnic traits, particularly if we consider Bantustan states that were created in South Africa to provide ethnic division essentially.

Multilingualism would now be promoted towards the development and understanding of a sense for respect for individuality (Ansre, 1979). Unity in diversity can only be attained if all national resources and interests such as all languages are used freely in education and in national development (UNESCO, 1953). In any case, most countries in the world are pluralistic in nature.

The arguments given above largely by politicians and some scholars are a baseless and the rationalisation that is attempted is only to maintain a 'class' status quo to the detriment of indigenous African languages (Ansre, 1979). It is, furthermore, fallacious to contend that indigenous African languages suffer from inadequacy in scientific and technological vocabulary for them to play an effective role in learner comprehension of intricacies of expressing science and technology. All languages can express all forms as knowledge purveyors. What is required is to increase and make rapid development in terms of language engineering techniques. This might include borrowing, such a loan adaptation where necessary word coinage and other forms such as lexical reanaly. This is in order for African languages to assume any academic function (Chumbou, 2005:176).

What is required is the political will (since politicians decide which language(s) should be empowered) and the funding for developing the selected language(s). In any case one would argue that the initial languages of learning were Greek and Latin, which were languages of civilisation par excellence. English and French were then considered as 'languages of barbarians' and therefore felt to be unfit for knowledge acquisition and communication. African languages need to be fully recognised by policy makes in education, government and for information dissemination.

Cost and Resources

One other obstacle that has to be surmounted is the potential obstacle of cost. This refers to the learners' cognition, where language and the mind become inextricably linked. Learners would first need to think through mother

tongues and express their thought processes via the same, where knowledge, skills and techniques are all initially expressed in their mother tongues and subsequently transferred into language of power such as English. There is, therefore, a need by emergent state nations to end the Bantustan and colonial ideologies, which has largely been negative and counter-productive for the majority and in terms of national development at large (Chumbou, 2005:184). Bridges of co-operation between mother tongues and languages of power, such as English should be encouraged.

What are the Prospects for a New Linguistic Order?

It is to be noted with much concern that Africa's education economic development could only fully come about if local languages are employed as instructional languages and used as effective languages in social, economic and development of respective countries. Not to do so would be tantamount to a false start in Africa (Cf: *L'Afrique noire est mal partie* by Dumont). We have to commend presidents Mbeki, Obasanjo and Wade for their views on the revival and development of linguistic and cultural renaissance in Africa. This is regarding their input into the New Economic Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). In all, the integration of language development proposals in the development plans for national development of respective African states is essential for academic and intellectual purposes.

Concluding Remarks

In this discussion we have demonstrated that while there could be growth in various forms in African states, it cannot be claimed that this is equated to national development. This is because of the peripheral role of local languages, which are cardinal as agents of change in respective national enterprises.

Many learners and masses remain marginalised as they do not understand scientific and technological knowledge in exoglossic languages and are, therefore, excluded from maximising the available human resources. This is in spite of the massive evidence before policy makers to employ mother tongues widely. There is need for appropriate strategies and measures to overcome and solve these relevant problems.

The central issue eventually is that only mother tongue education has psychological and educational advantages. Therefore pedagogical needs for the child and national development need to be sacrificed first, rather than economic and political experiences for the few elite. While it could be economically and politically expedient to use exoglossic languages for the few elite and national development in the short run, in the long run, however, such policies remain hollow and have adverse effects to the masses, as such children will make no contribution to knowledge and development of their respective countries. Equal access, therefore, has to be given to education, economic resources for all the citizens as well as political and social

participation for all. There is need, therefore, for the applied linguist to promote rather than undermine MT education and national development. This would also ensure the vibrant survival of local languages and cultures in this era of globalisation, where we need to develop paradigms that accommodate MT rather than exclude them in current language policies.

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