Doris Löhr, Comfort Beyang Oben Ojongnkpot, Taiwo Oloruntoba-Oju, Bert van Pinxteren, Ayodele Yusuff (eds.)

Local Languages, Global Futures

Language, Learning, and Sustainability in Africa

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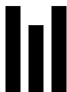

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Bert van Pinxteren (Leiden University),
Ayodele Yusuff (University of Lagos)

Local languages, global futures: Language, learning, and sustainability in Africa

Abstract

This editorial introduction tries to clarify, in summary fashion, the position taken regarding the importance of local languages for learning and sustainability in an African context.

We see language as a building block of both cognitive and affective (or emotive) intelligence. We also see learning as a multidimensional process, that involves both informal and formal language use in several ways. To help our understanding of all this, we start with the distinction that has been proposed between language as *discerned* and language as *designed*. In Africa, like elsewhere, education systems should try to reach as many children as possible. One key insight is that this can be done more effectively and more efficiently if the *designed* language that is taught and employed for this education is not too different from the *discerned* language or languages that the children already know and use efficiently. The latter is often the child's mother tongue (MT) or first language (FL). What we see around the world is that one formalized or designed language can serve the needs of speakers of several related discerned languages. It is unfortunate that this is still not the case in most parts of Africa. This is also relevant from the point of view of transmitting indigenous knowledges and cultural norms: speakers of related languages or dialects often also share a common reservoir of indigenous knowledge and similar cultural ideas and values.

Without education, long-term sustainability will be almost impossible to achieve. A decolonial position means that obstacles to learning – such as the requirement to learn in a very different language from one's own – need to be removed. Receiving education in a culturally and linguistically appropriate way is no longer a 'mere' human rights issue – it becomes imperative from the point of view of the long-term sustainability of mankind.

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In Africa, there is tremendous scope – and need – for further expansion of higher education. However, such a tremendous expansion can only be achieved if students can access higher education in a *designed* language that is close to a language they already know. A transition from the current use of former colonial languages to African languages as medium of instruction is therefore going to be needed, if education in Africa is to expand so that the potential of the continent is fully used. Africans will still learn English and other world languages – but these will be taught mainly as subjects, instead of always being the medium of instruction.

The chapters in this volume are based on papers presented at the 2023 European Conference on African Studies or at the 2024 Conference of the Association for African Studies in Germany (VAD). Seven out of the eight authors are female; five are based in African Universities.

This book challenges dominant, often Western-centric, language policies in African education systems and argues for recognizing African languages as valid and powerful tools for knowledge creation and dissemination. The reconfiguration moves beyond colonial frameworks and affirms African epistemologies and linguistic realities.

Introduction: Why local languages matter for sustainable development in Africa

This volume poses a challenge regarding the relationship between language, learning and the importance of local languages. How do these elements interact, and how do they relate to 'sustainability' within the context of Africa? Furthermore, what kind of approach is best for engaging these issues in order to contribute to knowledge and to ongoing debate in this area? This means that we need a transdisciplinary approach for this volume.

While these are complex questions and we cannot do full justice to them in this introduction, we intend to at least briefly clarify our joint understanding of the issues involved.

Language, learning, sustainability, and how they are related

Language is a building block of both cognitive and affective intelligence, and language learning is a multidimensional process. Individuals acquire, negotiate, and perform knowledge in varied contexts. This process involves language, in various ways. To understand this, scientists have focused on two different ideas of language – language as behaviour and language as innate. The behaviourist traditions (e.g., Skinner 1957), view language primarily as a learned behaviour shaped by environmental stimuli and reinforcement, while the innatists conceptualise language in universalist terms as an innate human faculty underpinned by a universal grammar (Chomsky 1965). Others focus on language as what people 'do' with language as a communicative system. For example, the pragmatic or interactionist perspective considers treating language as a form of social action (what people *do* with words in specific contexts: Austin 1962; Gumperz 1982), or as a 'social semiotic' that facilitates the exchange of meaning within a systemic functional system (Halliday 1978).

Each of these visions or ideas has its merits. Collectively, they allow us to focus on how people acquire language to communicate with one another and how this process affects situation in society, and the trajectory of development (Vygotsky 1978). Another perspective is to consider the variety within and between languages – when do we speak of a 'dialect continuum' (Trudgill 1983) of different speech forms that together still belong to the same language, when do we consider languages to be so different from one another that they should be counted separately? How do such considerations impact policy positions or the best language choices for the society? (See Ahia et al. 2024; Oloruntoba-Oju/Van Pinxteren 2022).

These questions have significant implications for education planning, and sociopolitical engineering and identity formation (Fishman 2006; Edwards 2009). They have been extensively asked in African discourses within the context of decolonisation (Wa Thiong'o 1986, and others). Decisions about which language or which linguistic variety to promote can affect social cohesion, access to resources, and the long-term health of languages and the associated speech communities.

Language is therefore a complex phenomenon, that consists of different components and stages. For individuals, language learning involves a long trajectory, that moves from the first words a one-year-old learns from caregivers or peers, to the ability to write treatises such as the contributions to this book. Nowadays, formal school education is a key ingredient of language learning, alongside the social environment, the media, the internet, etc. What is important for us (and particularly relevant as well in an African context) is that everybody should be empowered to use language, acquire and apply knowledge to the fullest extent of their capabilities. It has been established in a long line of research that the mother tongue, or languages closest to it, offers the best toolkit for the effective acquisition and use of language (see UNESCO 1953; 2008, among others). While this fact is taken for granted in largely monolingual societies, it takes on a special significance in multilingual and diglossic contexts such as Africa (see, among others, Bamgbose 2011; Oloruntoba-Oju, Van Pinxteren/Schmied 2022; Prah 1998).

What we find helpful in this context is the distinction that has been proposed between language as *discerned* and language as *designed* (Van Pinxteren 2024). This distinction points to the idea that, on the one hand, individuals employ language (spoken or signed) in a myriad of different ways. One can also say that they use different *registers* – these can be discerned, using different sets of criteria. On the other hand, in societies as a whole, more restricted (*designed*) forms of language are used – one can also talk about language as formalized or intellectualized. What is key here is that, in the course of growing up, individuals have to learn these *designed* or intellectualized forms of language (in school or elsewhere). This, in large part, is the responsibility of modern educational systems; one of their roles is to teach children and students the use of these formalized forms of language, so that they may use them both to acquire knowledge and to learn to express their thoughts more fully. It is difficult for educational systems to do this for *all* children. The aim should be to reach as many children as possible. One key insight is that this can be done more effectively and more efficiently if the *designed* language that is taught is not too different from the *discerned* language or languages the children already know. In practice, what we see around the world is that one formalized or designed language can serve the needs of speakers of several related discerned languages. It is unfortunate that this

is still not the case in most parts of Africa. This is also relevant from the point of view of transmitting indigenous knowledges and cultural norms (Mkhize/Ndimande-Hlongwa 2015). Often (but not always), speakers of related languages or dialects also share a common reservoir of indigenous knowledge and similar cultural ideas and values (Alexander 2003; 2005).

If the designed language that is used as medium of instruction is very different from what learners already know, this creates a barrier to learning: in cultural terms, but also in practical (achievement) terms. Because resources are always limited, comparatively fewer children will be able to achieve competence if a very different designed language is being taught. This will result in a waste of talent and in a situation in which people are not given the linguistic tools they need to fully express their thoughts in any of the languages that they use – a situation that has been described as semilingualism (Cummins 1979). This does not mean that children cannot and should not learn multiple languages – those who have the ability and motivation to do that should be given every opportunity. However, in order to make learning possible for as many children as possible, it should start with a *designed* language that is close to what children already know. If that is not done, it leads to waste of talent and resources. This also brings us to the next area we need to discuss, that of sustainability.

The 1987 Brundtland Commission report defines sustainable development as development that 'meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.' It is clear that, for the Earth as a whole, the current development path is not sustainable, as demonstrated for example by 'Earth Overshoot Day' – the date of the year on which the use of the Earth's resources surpasses what the planet is able to generate that year. In 2025, this date is July 24th. Every year, the resources of the planet get closer to exhaustion – this is not sustainable. In addition, the continued dependence on fossil fuels for development leads to climate change and its predicted negative consequences for the habitability of the planet. In order to change this, there is the need not only for an energy transition, but also for a different approach to how we use the world's natural resources. This poses a large challenge to mankind's ingenuity, which means that the future of mankind no longer depends on the ability to extract the planet's natural

resources, but rather in mankind's ingenuity in finding ways to use the planet's resources in such a way that we stay within its limits (Brundtland 1987). We need to think differently, and will need the full capacity of human ingenuity to bring that about.

In this light, the linkages between sustainability and (local) languages become obvious. If we accept that it will require the ingenuity of mankind as a whole to find pathways to sustainable futures, respecting planetary limits, then it becomes clear that education is a necessary (even if not a sufficient) condition to achieve that goal. Everybody needs to receive the best education that can be made available, so that their talents can be fully developed. We would not want to be overly romantic about this – an educated person is not necessarily a 'good' person or somebody who cares for the environment or for the long-term wellbeing of the planet. However, we do hold that, without education, long-term sustainability will be difficult, if not impossible, to achieve. That means that obstacles to learning – such as the requirement to learn in a very different language from one's own – need to be removed. Receiving education in a culturally and linguistically appropriate way is no longer a 'mere' human rights issue, but an imperative from the point of view of the social and technological transformations necessary for the long-term sustainability of mankind (UNESCO 2021).

Local Language and Sustainability: its relevance for Africa

It has often been pointed out that those worst affected by climate change are those who least contributed to it. This is certainly the case for Africa and its peoples. Desertification is already threatening African livelihoods in many countries. Heat waves, hurricanes, droughts, and floods seem to be on the increase on the whole continent, affecting populations least prepared for such disasters and taxing already overstretched government services beyond their limits. It bears little doubt that sustainable development is key to Africa's future.

That also means that the focus of what to develop in Africa has to change. Up to the present, Africa's role in the world economy has essentially been that of a reservoir, to be used in an extractive fashion – a

reservoir of manpower, of minerals, agricultural products and so on. In the future, the key role of Africa will change from its natural resources to its people. Africa holds tremendous human potential, primarily for the continent itself, but also for the world as a whole. One statistic may serve to illustrate this. According to UNESCO, the Gross Enrolment Ratio in Tertiary Education in High-Income Countries in 2020 was over 79 %. That means almost four out of five people in the global North receive some form of higher education. For Sub-Saharan Africa, the figure stood at under 10 %. There is no doubt that there is tremendous scope – and need – for further expansion of higher education in Africa.

However, such a tremendous expansion can only be achieved in an efficient manner (if it can be achieved at all) if students can access higher education in a *designed* language that is close to a language they already know. A transition from the current use of former colonial languages to African languages as medium of instruction is therefore going to be needed, if education in Africa is to expand so that the potential of the continent is fully used. Again: Africans will still learn English and other world languages – but these will be taught mainly as subjects, instead of being the medium of instruction. This also has the advantage of allowing for closer connections between the wider culture of societies and the educated elite and therefore for forms of development of science and education that are rooted in the problems and worldviews of the continent and are, in that sense, decolonial (see Adegbite 2003). In addition, besides higher education in the strict sense, there is also scope for an increase in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET). For such training, the use of a language close to what learners already know is even more important.

There is no way of predicting what such a massive expansion in education may yield, although it has been argued that African visions centred around concepts such as 'Ubuntu' may contribute to developing new, sustainable approaches to development (Van Norren 2022).

What this book contributes

The chapters in this volume are based on papers presented at the 2023 European Conference on African Studies or at the 2024 Conference of

the Association for African Studies in Germany (VAD). In that sense, the volume represents the latest ideas and developments in thought and research on the issues highlighted above. All chapter drafts have been reviewed by the editors, whose names are arranged alphabetically above. The papers were contributed by academics with various linguistic backgrounds.

If Africa needs to make use of its indigenous languages, also in formal domains, then it is necessary to establish that these languages are 'fit for purpose.' This issue is addressed in the contribution by Feyi Ademola-Adeoye of the University of Lagos, Nigeria. She examines the problems and advantages of using Nigerian languages for communicating scientific knowledge. She posits that, in principle, Nigerian languages are just as fit as many others for communicating knowledge. She holds that it is easier to do to this in culturally appropriate ways, using indigenous languages. Ademola-Adeoye also lists a number of challenges involved in such a project, such as the decline of Nigerian language use in favour of English, poor policy implementation, problems in language development, and the sheer linguistic diversity of a large country such as Nigeria. She acknowledges that any practical change in the language in education policy in the country will take time to achieve and will require considerable, sustained preparation and effort. It will also require a change in attitude, both of parents and other stakeholders at every level.

While this contribution is eloquent in recommending what *should* be done, a concern, which occurs in many similar studies, is the absence of a concrete strategy that would bring the implementation of the recommendations closer. This is a challenge that scholars in the field must continually grapple with.

The second contribution, by Adédoyinsọ́lá Ẹlẹ́shın, also of the University of Lagos, zooms in on a particular aspect of indigenous language use, namely the issue of terminology development, using the Yorùbá language as used in the media as an example. Her contribution is more technical in nature as she demonstrates how the use of new Yorùbá words in the media, or the changed use of already existing terms, helps to preserve the vitality of the language. She advocates the adoption of a proper terminology development model, to help this process along.

Emilisco Jones Enoachuo, of the University of Buea in Cameroon, explores a related but different element in her contribution, the area of

African medicine and the indigenous knowledge that is encapsulated in the Kenyang language of Cameroon. The study 'underscores the importance of integrating traditional ecological knowledge with modern conservation efforts, highlighting the need for a multidisciplinary approach that incorporates community engagement, ethnobotanical research, and capacity-building initiatives.'

In a different contribution from the University of Buea, Comfort Beyang Oben Ojongnkpot looks at an endangered Cameroonian language, Ejagham, and focuses on the challenges and opportunities that digital technologies present for the preservation and revival of the language. The study urges Ejagham speakers to use digital means, now or in the future. However, the problem of developing a concrete strategy for making this a reality echoes again in this contribution.

The contribution by Sarita Monjane Henriksen of the Universidade Pedagógica de Moçambique goes a step further, in identifying a number of developments that militate in favour of an increased use of Mozambican languages in various formal settings, such as the media and the arts. However, she sees those languages as essentially supplementing the use of Portuguese – rather than being, at least for the time being, an alternative.

The focus of the contribution from Tomoe Noguchi of Kyoto University in Japan is quite different: she zooms in on the role of primary education for two small, minoritized, communities of hunter-gatherers in Botswana. It clearly shows that the focus of Botswana on Tswana and English as mediums of instruction has disastrous consequences for the educational opportunities of children in these communities. However, the development of a new language policy may offer opportunities for improvements. Noguchi also sees opportunities in the development of informal education; nevertheless, the new policies fall short of giving equal rights to speakers of every language in the country.

Omusula Omuholo of the University of Oregon, USA, takes us in a different direction in her discussion of a Kenyan film, *Otis Janam*, filmed using the Luo language. She shows how this film is instrumental in fostering development and debate within the Luo society, making use of norms and language that are understood and valued by the local community.

The last chapter in the book, by Bert van Pinxteren of Leiden University, Netherlands, is of a more theoretical nature. It looks at the challenges and opportunities for multilingual education in Africa. After an examination of what educational systems in other parts of the world are able to achieve, the chapter concludes that, in future, multilingual education in Africa will have to be based on using a limited number of *designed* African languages as medium of instruction. Other languages should then be taught as subjects, as happens elsewhere in the world. For such a change to happen, however, much more research will be needed.

Overall, this volume offers an overview of prospects for the development and use of African indigenous languages for educational purposes, with chapters examining terminology development, various media, indigenous knowledge, the digital, minoritized communities, as well as the latest theoretical insights. Our hope is to bring the debate further, in the interest of developing policies that contribute to sustainable development.

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Feyi Ademola-Adeoye
(University of Lagos)

Deploying indigenous Nigerian languages for communicating scientific knowledge: Issues, challenges, and prospects

Abstract

Language is a vital component of indigenous knowledge, embodying identity and culture. Indigenous languages transmit values and beliefs across generations, and their use in education is crucial to achieving holistic national development. The mother tongue, regarded as the primary code for perceiving reality (Prah 1995; Emenanjo 1996; Skutnabb-Kangas 2000; van Pinxteren 2022), facilitates the understanding of abstract scientific concepts, enabling learners to interpret reality effectively. Research by the World Bank and UNESCO shows that learning outcomes improve significantly when instruction is delivered in the mother tongue. Countries that rank highly in mathematics and science often invest in teaching these subjects through local languages. This paper explores the challenges of using indigenous languages to communicate scientific knowledge in Nigerian schools. Findings reveal persistent obstacles such as ideologically-driven language policies, weak implementation, negative speaker attitudes, the multiplicity of indigenous languages, low proficiency, inadequate documentation, shortage of qualified teachers, poor remuneration, limited funding, and the dominance of English, which subordinates local languages. Efforts to address these issues include initiatives by the National Institute for Cultural Orientation (NICO) to promote indigenous languages and inter-agency panels advocating their use in teaching mathematics and science. However, policy implementation remains weak. For indigenous languages to function effectively in education, government must enforce policies mandating the compulsory learning of at least one indigenous language in schools.

Keywords: Education, Indigenous Nigerian languages, Mother Tongue, Scientific Knowledge

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Introduction

Before the colonial era, local languages flourished and the people's cultural values were promoted. English was first introduced into Nigeria in the 16th century by European traders. Later in the 18th century, it was adopted by the missionaries, who also taught it to their converts to facilitate the work of evangelisation. In the 19th century, when the British assumed control of Nigeria, English became the colonial language and, later in the 20th century, the official language. One of the major problems confronting Nigeria is the multiplicity of languages. Unstable language policy, the inability of Government to decide on the local language to use as the official language, failure to codify languages spoken by a minority of the population, non-delineation of roles for local language use in governance, etc., are some of the other critical factors surrounding the crisis. Although Nigeria has over 540 indigenous languages (Olatunde-Ojo et al. 2022; National Language Policy (NLP) 2022: 2), none of the languages has been considered worthy of adoption as a national language. In the 1990s, an attempt was made to popularise an artificial language (WAZOBIA), similar to Esperanto. The effort, however, failed because the language derived most of its words and vocabulary from the three major languages, namely Yoruba (WA), Hausa (ZO), and Igbo (BIA) (the verbs for "come" in these languages), to the exclusion of other languages. Consequently, the English Language has continued to assume greater importance in the country due to its indispensability, as its use cuts across different spheres of our national life. At the same time, the growth of the over 500 indigenous languages in Nigeria has been suppressed (Ajepe/Ademowo 2016).

The nexus between indigenous languages, local knowledge, and culture

From a pedagogical perspective, using local languages in education enhances children's learning within the classroom and plays a vital role in sustaining cultural and social values beyond the classroom. This duality of purpose manifests in several examples from Asia and the Pacific countries, known as two of the world's most biologically and linguis-

tically divergent regions. In Nunavut (Canada), schools use Inuktitut through early grades, integrating it into curricula (kindergarten to Grade 3 or 4) alongside English or French. This bilingual education improves comprehension, enabling students to grasp abstract and scientific concepts in their mother tongue (pedagogical benefit), while preserving Inuit language, worldview, and identity. Community elders, storytelling, and Inuit societal values are woven into teaching, helping students maintain cultural continuity beyond school (MacDonald 2023; Tulloch et al. 2009).

Similarly, Papua New Guinea, with about 840 languages and roughly 5 % of the world's biodiversity, is currently using local languages and knowledge to help boost children's language skills and biodiversity knowledge (Sudoh/Darr 2022). A number of researches (Sibayan 1968; 1978; Badejo 1989; Fafunwa et al. 1989) have shown that the use of the mother tongue, especially in early childhood education, can significantly improve the quality of learning, learning outcomes, and academic performance of learners. It also prevents knowledge gaps and increases the speed of learning and comprehension. Other benefits of multilingual mother tongue-based education include the empowerment of all learners for full participation in society, the promotion of mutual understanding and respect for one another, and the preservation of the rich deposit of cultural and traditional heritage found in all languages across the world.

Local languages are embedded with the culture and heritage of the people who speak them. Therefore, the government should protect and promote their use in teaching and learning so that the next generation can understand and develop a link with their environment and acquire the necessary biodiversity knowledge and language skills to proffer solutions to diverse environmental and climatic problems (Sudoh/Darr 2022). In his address marking International Mother Language Day on 20 February 2023, David Atchoarena, Director of the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, underscored the pivotal role of mother-tongue education in sustaining both knowledge systems and cultural heritage. He argued that education delivered in learners' first languages is not only central to the transmission of traditional knowledge and values but also to the provision of meaningful and contextually relevant learning opportunities across age groups. Importantly, Atchoarena highlighted that empirical evidence demonstrates how such provision strengthens edu-

cational outcomes while fostering learners' confidence and self-esteem (Atchoarena 2023).

According to Ademowo (2016), innovation (and technological advancement) is galvanized by the application of human knowledge acquired in the form of skills, pure theoretical knowledge, and techniques. Unfortunately, Africans find it difficult to fully comprehend the theories because the theories are rendered in foreign languages. In many African countries (including Nigeria), the languages of science and technology are still colonial, foreign languages such as English, French, and Portuguese. Indigenous languages are not prioritised in the transmission of ideas despite their proven ability to enhance cognitive understanding in learning. Japan is a good example of a country that has realised this indubitable fact. In less than fifty years, Japan, once referred to as a third-world country, is now one of the most technologically advanced countries in the world by reason of their knowledge of science and technology, a feat achieved through the development and use of techno-scientific terms in local languages.

It is believed that "Ifa" the Yoruba system of divination and philosophical knowledge centred on the deity Orunmila (Abimbola 1976; Francis/Olojo-Kosoko 2024), has existed in West Africa for thousands of years prior to the advent of Christianity, Islam, and the computer age. There is currently an abundance of literature that indicates that there are considerable commonalities between the computer and Ifa divination. While the average contemporary African might want to consider it as an antiquated memento of years gone by, foreigners are publicising it as a critical aspect of the latest technological development. If the unique numeric system of the "Odu" (the foundation of Ifa divination) which bears a striking resemblance to the binary language of computers can be expressed in foreign languages, nothing should prevent Africans (including Nigerians) from using their languages to teach Chemistry and other science subjects.

One of the implications of relegating indigenous languages to the background is that they face the threat of language extinction, language shift, or, ultimately, language death. A language that is not spoken eventually dies. Language and culture cannot be separated; therefore, the lack of use of indigenous languages by the younger generation has led to the gradual erosion of our cultures. The result of this is that the younger gen-

eration is beginning to lose the core values and virtues in their cultures. The dress culture of the younger generation is also taking after the dress culture of the people whose language they speak. The younger generation reflects the culture of the language they speak more by gradually modifying their names to be pronounceable in English: Ola written as Horllar, Femi as Phemmy, etc. (Ajepe/Ademowo 2016).

The effectiveness of the mother-tongue/indigenous languages for educational purposes

The idea that instruction in education is best given in a child's mother tongue is not new. In 1920, an American philanthropic organization set up a commission (the Phelps-Stoke Commission) to study education in Africa. In its 1922 report, the Phelps-Stoke Commission recommended, among other things, the use of the "tribal language" in the lower primary classes and "the language of the European nation in control" in the upper classes (Iwara 1981: 96–98). The idea of beginning primary education in the mother tongue further received strong support when education and language specialists met in 1951 under the sponsorship of UNESCO. Their report, published in 1953, recommended that learners should be taught at the beginning of their education in their mother tongue and that this practice should be extended to as late a stage in the education system as possible:

> It is axiomatic that the best medium for teaching a child is his mother tongue. Psychologically, it is the system of meaningful signs that, in the mind, work automatically for expression and understanding. Sociologically, it is a means of identification among the members of the community to which he belongs. Educationally, he learns more quickly through it than through an unfamiliar linguistic medium (UNESCO 1953: 11, cited in Iwara 2008: 29).

Subsequent meetings of UNESCO experts have reaffirmed this point of view. These ideas about mother-tongue language-based education became so popular that they formed the object of several experiments. One of the best-known studies, the Iloilo Experiment, yielded results that appeared to conclusively demonstrate the superiority and effectiveness of the mother tongue for educational purposes. It showed that teaching learners in the first two years of primary school in the local

language, Hiligaynon, was much more effective than teaching in English and that even when the language of instruction changed to English in the third year, the superiority of the mother language medium of instruction remained in the sense that the experimental group continued to surpass the control group in terms of academic performance (Iwara 2008: 29). Another experiment in Ghana showed that primary school children had a richer vocabulary in their mother tongue than in English. The implication was that, for those children, English would be a less efficient medium of instruction than their mother tongue (Bamgbose 1976: 12; Dakin 1968: 28).

The Six-Year Primary Project embarked upon by the Nigerian Government in collaboration with the Ford Foundation involved the use of Yoruba as the medium of instruction for the entire six years of primary education, with English taught as a subject or second language by specialist teachers. Like the Iloilo experiment, pupils who were taught with Yoruba at the primary school level performed better than their counterparts who were taught all subjects in English language. As opined by Fafunwa (1983: 395), "the child learns better in his mother tongue, and his mother tongue is as natural to him as his mother's milk."

According to Kioko (2015), early mother tongue education can aid comprehension of the curriculum content and improve pupils' attitudes towards learning. Also, when pupils receive instructions in their mother tongue or a language they already speak and understand very well, they are able to express themselves freely and confidently and participate better in the process of learning. Through this interactive learner-centered approach, suggestions are made, questions are asked, answers are provided to questions, and new knowledge is created and conveyed by the learners with excitement. Consequently, the confidence of learners is boosted, and their cultural identity is affirmed. This invariably impacts positively on learners' perception of the importance of learning to their lives. However, teaching pupils in a language that is relatively new or unknown to them results in a teacher-centered approach, which will make learners passive and quiet in classrooms.

Reading and writing skills are developed faster when learners are taught in a language that they speak or understand rather than being taught in a foreign language such as English. Learners are usually enthusiastic when they are able to comprehend written texts and can write the

names of people and things in their environment. Kioko (2015) further explains that Research in Early Grade Reading (EGRA) has shown that the ability of learners to acquire reading skills early gives them an edge in school as skills and concepts taught in the learners' native language do not have to be taught again when learners are ready to learn a second language. Learners who are proficient in reading and writing in their mother tongue acquire the ability to read and write in a new language more quickly. Using an indigenous language to teach school children also reduces the stress of the teacher as long as she can speak that language. Research has also shown that where the language of instruction is not the mother tongue of both the teacher and the learner, the teacher struggles just as much as the learners, especially at the beginning of schooling. However, the teaching-learning process is more spontaneous and more comfortable when it begins in the teachers' and learners' native language. This enables the teacher to be more imaginative and think outside the box in designing teaching/learning materials and approaches, resulting in improved learning outcomes.

Issues and challenges involved in the use of indigenous languages for communicating scientific knowledge in schools in Nigeria

Although it has been over six decades since Nigeria gained independence, the country is yet to have an implementable language policy. Over the years, Nigeria's language policy has not only gone through a cycle of adoption, rejection, and re-adoption, it has been criticized for being inconsistent, fueling series of debates on language-related policies in primary and secondary education (Brann 1980; Emenanjo 1985; Olaoye 2002).The new National Language Policy (2022) recently approved by the federal government stipulates that the Mother Tongue (MT) or the language of the immediate community (LIC) be used as the medium of instruction from Early Childhood Care and Development Education to the six years of primary education. This has raised diverse concerns including the apprehension that the language spoken by teachers may be different from that of the majority of pupils, particularly in urban areas such as Lagos; classrooms may have pupils from diverse linguistic

backgrounds, making it challenging to have a single language of instruction that caters to all. Furthermore, in terms of languages spoken, four out of the six geo-political zones (the North Central, North East, North West and South South zones) are heterogeneous (NLP 2022: 2). In other words, in many of the states in these heterogeneous zones, none of the languages widely used seems universally suitable as medium of instruction for primary education, thereby raising questions about inclusivity. Concerns have also been expressed that many of the languages specified in the new policy are not sufficiently developed for literary use, which will potentially affect the effectiveness of the language of instruction (Tsaure/ Sani 2024: 34). Nigeria is a multilingual nation with over 500 indigenous languages spoken by 250 ethnic groups. However, only about 65 have standardized orthographies, with just three languages – Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba – recognized as major indigenous languages (Gbenedio 2010; Oyinloye 2010). Musa (2010) also identifies lack of adequate vocabulary as one of the challenges associated with some indigenous languages in the country.

The linguistic diversity of the nation has hindered the development of Nigerian indigenous languages to the advantage of English, whose prominence and influence has continued to grow. According to Bamgbose (1989), multilingualism can be a resource and a problem. As a resource, it makes more languages available to the public and increases the potential for language learning. On the other hand, as a problem, it has divisive potential and, with special reference to education, leads to challenges in the area of provision of learning materials in more than one language medium. Multilingualism, which should ordinarily protect the indigenous languages and ensure diversity through the various cultures, has become a serious challenge affecting all facets of life. Today, only three languages – Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba – out of more than 500 in Nigeria are officially recognised as major languages, while the rest are classified as minority languages. This limited recognition reflects the sensitivity of language adoption in a highly multilingual nation, where elevating one language over others can easily generate political and cultural tensions. When a language is given more roles or prominence, others begin to feel envious, just as we have in Nigeria, thus making it impossible, so far, to pick an indigenous language as a lingua franca. In the words of Schwarz, cited in Bamgbose (1991a: 39), differences between indigenous

languages keep the people apart, perpetuate ethnic hostilities, weaken national loyalties, and increase the danger of separatist sentiment. Adegbija (1994: 150) also believes that deep-rooted mutual suspicions result in prejudice, stereotypes, and subtle linguistic hostility among various linguistic groups in Nigeria.

Even though the Nigerian Language Policy gives room for the use of indigenous languages, in practice, the English language is the language of governance in Nigeria. Due to the Government's perception of English as a world language or global lingua franca, most of the government business in Nigeria is conducted in English. Also, contrary to the recommendations in section 18 of the National Language Policy (2022: 17), English is the language of education in Nigeria from kindergarten to university. As a matter of fact, many schools in Nigeria prefer not to offer any indigenous languages in their curriculum. Many of such schools erroneously believe that using the English language as the language of instruction right from kindergarten gives the pupils a better foundation in the English language (Ademowo 2016).

Similarly, many Nigerian parents in urban areas speak English or one of the dominant languages to their children, hoping to create better social and economic opportunities for them. While some parents would love their children to be able to speak their indigenous languages, they are equally more concerned with the education and future of these children, which is tied to high proficiency in the English language. If, at every point in life, the criterion for measuring success and social status is the English language, then it should not come as a surprise that many parents have chosen to start promoting English language proficiency at a very early stage of their children's childhood, since it is the language with which they will be expected to function for the rest of their schooling and working lives. Educated parents who know that a child is capable of acquiring many languages before age 12 would rather have the child learn, first, the language that appears most functional in the society, which is English. Proficiency in English is widely associated with career advancement and social mobility. Since individuals function within interconnected social structures, what might otherwise be an advantage – the acquisition and application of mother tongue competence – can become a disadvantage if society does not actively support its widespread use. English proficiency is often perceived as a gateway to opportunities and as a marker

of prestige in virtually every domain where it is displayed. According to Orji and Udeze (2021: 117), the dominant attitude towards indigenous Nigerian languages, particularly among the Igbo, has frequently been one of neglect and even disdain, especially in educational settings. Many speakers express embarrassment at using their indigenous languages in public, assuming that exclusive reliance on English signifies education, sophistication, and modernity. For such individuals, English extends beyond a communicative tool to embody the perceived foundation of patriotism, employability, and long-term security for both themselves and their children.

Consequently, we now have a generation of Nigerian children who are unable to communicate with their grandparents in their mother tongue. As the youth migrate from the rural to urban centres in search of 'greener pastures,' they adopt the language of convenience in the cities. As a result, there is no local language transfer from the older generation to the youths. With time, the elders die without passing down the language to the next generation. Language is lost, and cultural values and ethical principles embedded in the language are also forgotten.

Another challenge to using indigenous languages in Nigeria is the paucity of teachers trained in using local languages. The so-called major (indigenous) languages have not significantly thrived in education beyond their geographical boundaries because of the obvious lack of teachers to teach them in schools (Udosen 2013). Similarly, minority languages have not made any appreciable impact even within their domains because of the native speakers' attitude to their language, among other things (Udosen 2002). The underdeveloped writing systems of many Nigerian languages also present a major obstacle to their effective use as mediums of instruction in education.

Another problem is the inferiority complex and mentality of the African elite, who falsely consider everything Euro-American as superior to anything African. As a result of this negative mentality, indigenous African languages are perceived as backward (Wa Mberia 2015: 53), and lacking the capacity to communicate technological and scientific concepts. The fact that there are African languages in Ethiopia and Eritrea that have a long history of writing systems that can easily be used to convey extremely technical and abstract ideas, as well as the existence of Leopold Senghor's translation of Einstein's Theory of Relativity into

Wolof, a lingua franca of Senegal, has proven this derogatory assumption to be an obvious misconception. One possible reason for many citizens' negative attitude towards the use of indigenous languages is the government's lack of success in implementing the policy of using local languages in the first three years of primary education. Most Nigerians have never observed or participated in contexts where local languages are used as a medium of teaching in schools, and when they observe their use in informal contexts, very little importance is attached to these languages. Many Nigerians will readily allow artisans who have acquired their knowledge through the use of local languages to repair their cars and automatic devices but will resist the idea of having their children taught in school in any of the indigenous languages.

Other plausible reasons advanced by Yusuff (2022) for the decline in the use of indigenous languages in Nigeria include migration to urban locations. If the parents' languages are not spoken at home, the children end up acquiring the language of popular use among multilingual speakers. In addition, when parents from different linguistic backgrounds fail to speak their individual languages or use a common indigenous one at home, a language of convenience is readily preferred. This reduces the use of indigenous languages by the couple and, by extension, the children. The fact that instruction manuals for modern gadgets like electronic media, phones, and games are mostly presented in English for wide acceptability and economic gains also discourages the use of indigenous languages. There is also the problem of displacement. As a result of war, inter-ethnic conflicts, and terrorism, the languages of the most populous members of Internally Displaced People (IDP) camps may endanger other minority languages, especially in the face of scarce and limited resources as the most popular language becomes the language of negotiation.

Efforts to promote the use of indigenous languages in Nigeria

As part of its mandate to promote indigenous languages, the Federal Government established the National Institute for Cultural Orientation (NICO) under Act 93 of 1993. A joint initiative between the Nige-

rian government and UNESCO, NICO was created during the World Decade for Cultural Development (1988–1997). Its functions include training cultural development officers, developing curricula and cultural materials, conducting public awareness campaigns, and promoting cultural research. Local language issues feature prominently in NICO's agenda: the institute recognises that language is a foundational aspect of identity, culture, and heritage, and is essential for social integration and national unity. The Nigerian Indigenous Language Programme (NILP), one of NICO's core initiatives, was launched in 2007 in response to concerns over the decline of indigenous languages. NILP is designed to raise awareness of the need to learn and use indigenous languages, foster pride and identity, and preserve those languages from extinction. The programme operates through various editions – such as one-month, weekend, and "barracks" editions – and is now implemented in NICO's Abuja headquarters and zonal/state offices across Nigeria.

To achieve its objectives, the Institute organizes an annual four-week intensive language training program every August simultaneously across the Institute's seven zonal and four state offices. A weekend version of the language training also runs throughout the year at the NICO Head Office in Abuja, and Lagos Office. Similarly, there is a Language in the Barracks version of the programme carried out in all the Institute's offices, where resource persons go into military and paramilitary barracks to teach Nigerian indigenous languages.

Much effort is already being made to promote the use of indigenous languages. This cuts across music, movies, advertising, the internet, and other media. In the music industry, many of our hip-hop artists now sing a mixture of Igbo/English, Yoruba/English, and Efik/English songs; Hausa/English is also included. This local flavour makes contemporary music appeal to both the young and the old in Nigeria. Section 14 (c)–(e) of the NLP (2022: 14) states that the Federal Government considers "all Nigerian languages are national treasures and heritage to be preserved from danger; all Nigerian languages are equal and none shall be held superior or inferior against the other; all Nigerian languages shall be assigned equitable functions and roles for communication and interaction within the socio-economic domains of the country". In the light of the foregoing declaration, it is important that other languages are also promoted. Many print and electronic media advertisements have their

equivalents in at least three major languages. Few multinational companies do this for now. More multinational companies should be encouraged to emulate those already advertising their products in local languages. There could also be a policy by the advertising regulatory board stipulating that any billboard to be placed in any community must be translated into the immediate community's language. The internet can be a veritable source of promoting indigenous languages if adequate effort is put in. While efforts are already being put in place on minimal levels, such as the ability to Google in the three major languages, and a few indigenous platforms, like "Proudly Yoruba" and "Ábiyamo," much more can still be done in Nigeria on social media like WhatsApp, Facebook, etc., to promote not only the three major Nigerian languages (Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba), but also several others recognised in national policy and scholarship. For example, the Federal Ministry of Education and the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) identify nine indigenous languages – Efik, Fulfulde, Hausa, Igbo, Kanuri, Tiv, Yoruba, Edo, and Ibibio – as priority languages for development and use in education (Bamgbose 1991b; Igboanusi/Peter 2005). Including these languages reflects a broader commitment to linguistic diversity and acknowledges the need to preserve and revitalise a wider spectrum of Nigeria's linguistic heritage, beyond the dominance of the three major tongues.

Concerned about the low interest in mathematics and science subjects, the then Minister of Science and Technology, Dr. Ogbonnaya Onu, informed the public on January 30, 2017, that plans were underway to follow in the path of countries like India and China by ensuring that primary schools in the country teach mathematics and science subjects in native languages, to encourage the application of science and technology in the country (Chiedozie 2017). On May 31, 2017, Dr. Onu announced, during the institution of an inter-agency committee set up to strengthen the capacity of local languages as a medium for the teaching of mathematics and science subjects, that the teaching of science subjects and mathematics in local languages would begin shortly in primary and secondary schools across the nation. He observed that many pupils, especially in rural areas, speak their mother tongue at home while the language of instruction in school is a non-native language. Consequently, they are faced with the challenge of understanding the non-native lan-

guage before they can even begin comprehending the subject being taught. Prior to Dr. Onu's announcement, the Minister of Education, Adamu Adamu, stated that "using mother tongue to teach science and mathematics would certainly help and ensure better understanding of the subjects" (Premium Times 2017).

On 22nd of November 2022, the federal government announced the approval of a new National Language Policy, which makes mandatory the use of the language of the immediate environment as the language of teaching and learning in public primary schools. Although the policy is supposed to be in operation already, strict adherence to the policy can only take effect when the government generates relevant teaching aids and trains an adequate number of qualified language teachers. The minister further stressed that the government was prepared to treat all indigenous languages equally, to preserve the different cultures and their peculiar idiosyncrasies, because so much had already been lost due to the extinction of some local languages. Indeed, all languages are valuable and packed with loads of information that can benefit humankind (Egbokhare 2011).

According to Owolabi (2006), efforts made to translate and lexicalise local languages to enable them to function in different areas of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM), agriculture, law, politics, and linguistics include:

i. A glossary of technical terminologies in science and mathematics for primary schools in Nigeria (GTTPSN) in nine languages (Edo, Efik, Fulfulde, Hausa, Igbo, Ijo, Kanuri, Tiv and Yoruba), sponsored by the Federal Ministry of Education.
ii. metalanguage in three languages on linguistics, literature and methodology, sponsored by National Educational and Research Development Council (NERDC)
iii. 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria translated into three languages (1st phase)
iv. a quadrilingual glossary of legislative terms (QGLT) completed in three languages, sponsored by NERDC
v. Yoruba Dictionary of Engineering physics (YDEP), produced by an engineer, Mr.
Odetayo.

The glossary of technical terminologies in science and mathematics for primary schools in nine Nigerian languages, published in 1980 by the Federal Ministry of Education is believed to be the most exhaustive attempt so far at developing the register for the sciences in indigenous Nigerian languages.

In translating mathematics and science terminologies into the nine languages (chosen based on their being used for national broadcasts at the time), effort was first made to find an indigenous equivalent before resorting to borrowing. The names for objects which exemplify the concept represented by the English term were often found useful as local equivalents. For example, the term "cone" is translated as *ikoto* in Edo language. *Ikoto* in Edo language is a conical-shaped piece of carving that children use in playing a game of the same name. Since *ikoto* has a conical shape, the adaptation of the word to mean cone is a true objectivisation of the concept of cone which is expected to help children to understand the concept more easily (Federal Ministry of Education 1980: 12). Similarly, the Yoruba word for pie-graph is *giráàfu eléèbu osàn* (Federal Ministry of Education 1980: 231). The pictorial representation of data in a circular manner in a pie graph is similar to the divisions on the surface of a sliced orange referred to as *eléèbu osàn*. It is believed that adapting the term *eléèbu osàn* to refer to a pie graph will aid pupils' understanding of the concept. While this glossary has been applauded for being the most comprehensive guide to date for the use of Edo, Efik, Fulfulde, Hausa, Igbo, Ijo, Kanuri, Tiv and Yoruba as languages of instruction in primary schools, especially in the teaching of science and mathematics, it has been criticised for some shortcomings. Commenting on the Yoruba portion of the glossary, Eleshin (2022: 47) opines that some of the terms developed "are imprecise. As such, they do not aptly convey the notion expressed in existing English terms. Two, the terms are no longer in line with the present curriculum on basic science and technology as approved by the Federal Ministry of Education." The document has also been criticised for its excessive use of the word-loaning strategy (even where there are suitable equivalents in the relevant indigenous languages) which should have been a last resort.

A good-faith effort has been made by the Nigerian government in promulgating the new National Language Policy (2022), and stating clearly in sections (27), (28), (38) and (39) that:

- Efforts shall be made to develop science and technology textual and other instructional materials in various languages;
- Registers of science and technology in the various Nigerian languages shall be developed and regularly updated to encourage the teaching and learning of STEM;
- Government at all levels shall make efforts to develop science and technology textual and other instructional materials in various Nigerian languages;
- Government at all levels shall make efforts to develop metalanguages in STEM in various Nigerian languages.

While this is laudable, the government must take this a stage further by ensuring a prompt implementation of these policies.

Recommendations

The Nigerian government needs to develop a language policy that vigorously and effectively promotes Nigerian indigenous languages in all schools, and makes the learning of at least one indigenous language compulsory in all schools rather than optional, as it is currently. Parents should be enlightened on the advantages of speaking the indigenous language/mother tongue to their children as their first language. It is a known fact that the problem of using and promoting indigenous languages is more prominent in Southern Nigeria (see Raheem 2013; Oloruntoba-Oju 2022). Perhaps other tribes should begin to take a cue from the Northern ethnic groups in Nigeria. Typical Hausa parents speak Hausa, Fulani or Kanuri to their children from birth. The Hausa people are so passionate about their language, that a foreigner who can speak their language at whatever level of proficiency is immediately regarded as a friend. Nigerians can also borrow ideas from the Ainu of Japan who have a model of learning where the young ones are taught the language by elders in the community, similar to local ethnic groups in the Philippines that run Schools of Living Tradition in order to preserve their indigenous languages, customs, and tradition (Degawan 2019).

Similarly, schools should be advised to stop punishing students for speaking "vernacular" in school. Policy implementers should ensure the use of the mother tongue or the language of the immediate environ-

ment to teach pupils at the primary school and junior secondary school levels. Indigenous languages should also be taught at the General Studies level in higher institutions. The Lagos State University of Education (LASUED) has taken a significant step toward preserving the Yoruba language by incorporating it into its General Nigeria Studies (GNS) curriculum (Punch Nigeria 2023). Under a law signed by the Lagos State Government on 8 August 2018, Yoruba must be included in the GNS programme of all Lagos State tertiary institutions, and LASUED implemented this requirement as a compulsory course for 100- and 200-level students, with passing the subject now a prerequisite for graduation. Punch Nigeria (2023) reports that after LASUED became a university, its senate approved the teaching of Yoruba in GNS in 2022, and the course commenced in the 2022–2023 session. Other tertiary institutions in the country should be encouraged to follow suit.

According to Ajepe and Ademowo (2016), the teaching of indigenous languages in Nigeria should not be limited to theoretical instruction but should also include practical components. They emphasise that language assessment ought to cover both oral and written competence in order to ensure holistic proficiency. Furthermore, they recommend the adoption of regional lingua francas, with Hausa designated for the North, Yoruba for the West, and Igbo for the East, each assigned functional roles in key domains such as education, the judiciary, and the media. While acknowledging the continued importance of English, Ajepe and Ademowo (2016) argue that it should remain the national language but not the lingua franca. Instead, they propose that English be retained as a subject taught in schools, as the medium of instruction at the senior secondary level, and as the principal language for international communication. However, they stress that English should be accorded less significance in the daily lives of Nigerian citizens.

Mother tongue-based education (which includes the teaching of STEM in local languages) is not a feat that can be achieved overnight. The government must be determined and consistent not only in formulating the relevant policies, but also in ensuring the implementation of such policies. All stakeholders (Federal/State/Local Governments and their agencies, linguists, language and cultural associations, the media, tertiary institutions, parents, every Nigerian) must play their role in promoting indigenous Nigerian languages (see Emenanjo 1996; Owolabi

2006; Oloruntoba-Oju 2022; Yusuff 2022; Bamgbose 2023, etc. for the roles these stakeholders are expected to play). A change in attitude towards indigenous languages is particularly required from Nigerian parents. The Yoruba proverb "*Ilé la tí ń k'ẹ́ṣọ̀ọ́ ròde,*" which corresponds to the English proverb "Charity begins at home," drives home the point. Parents should be enlightened on the importance of communicating with their children at home solely in their mother tongue and on the fact that speaking indigenous languages at home enhances rather than hinders a child's ability to acquire the English language in school or elsewhere.

Conclusion

This paper has dwelt on the issues, challenges, and prospects of using indigenous Nigerian Languages for communicating scientific knowledge. It explores the linguistic situation of Nigeria, examines issues and challenges in using indigenous languages to communicate scientific knowledge in Nigerian schools, and the efforts being made to increase the capacity of indigenous languages to serve as effective mediums of instruction in mathematics and science subjects. It is my considered opinion that a proper foundation should be laid out before indigenous languages become the medium of instruction for pupils in primary schools across the country, and the Federal Government should ensure that such innovation is sustainable and will not be subjected to the political caprices of successive governments. Nigeria is endowed with a vast number of native languages, with several of these languages having only a small number of speakers, which is bound to pose specific problems regarding the availability of educational materials, teachers, and even orthographies. Suppose we are to stem the tide of language death and promote mother tongue-based education, we must think of creative and innovative ways of encouraging collaboration and cooperation among federal/state/local governments, different organizations, communities, and individuals to record, describe, strengthen, and preserve all local languages (small or big). In many contexts, political, religious, economic, and other sociocultural pressures have influenced speakers of minority languages to accept, often with a degree of willingness, instruction in a dominant neighbouring language rather than in their mother

tongue. Here, *willingness* does not necessarily indicate free or enthusiastic choice; rather, it reflects a pragmatic acceptance of prevailing conditions, where individuals perceive potential social mobility, economic advantage, or wider communication as benefits of adopting the dominant language (Bamgbose 2011; Igboanusi 2017). A clear example of this situation is evident in parts of Northern Nigeria, where Hausa functions as the medium of instruction for children who are not native speakers of the language (Omoniyi 2018). Such linguistic accommodation demonstrates how power relations in multilingual societies shape language attitudes and educational practices, often subordinating minority languages in favour of those associated with broader influence and prestige. As succinctly expressed by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o in his book entitled *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*, published in 1986, development in various fields of academics, science, and technology will continue to elude Africa and Africans until we can communicate our thoughts and world view in our indigenous languages. Wa Thiong'o believes that the creation of diverse literature in indigenous African languages by African writers will unlock the potential of African languages to accommodate concepts in the fields of philosophy, science, technology, and all other areas of human creative ventures.

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Adédoyinsọ̀lá Ọmọ̀wùnmí Ẹlẹ́shın
(University of Lagos)

Terminology development: Panacea for aspects of disentanglement with African futures

Abstract

Terminology development is a veritable tool that can be harnessed for the continuous alignment of indigenous languages to meet global demands in diverse spheres. It contributes to the quality of translation and transfer of ideas in subject-related communications; it is inextricably linked to language development. This study engaged terminology development as a linguistic strategy that can be employed to fill the gaps between indigenous languages and their contribution to the development of African future praxes. The haphazard use of terms in the news media could be a serious communicative challenge for the preservation of language originality in Yorùbá language, and this poses a challenge for the future usage of the language. South Africa has since focused on terminology development for almost every field that concerns human existence. This study focused on fostering adequate communication and oral dissemination of information since the media has the responsibility of making the citizens aware of what is happening far and near. Proper and continuous use will help the future of African indigenous languages in general and Yorùbá language in particular. The study adopted a mixed research methodology; data were gathered from Yorùbá news media from two radio stations in Lagos State, Southwest Nigeria with the aim of interrogating terms used in information dissemination in the stations. The analysis of the data geared towards bringing to the fore the importance of terminology development in the preservation of African languages as they struggle to meet up with current and future communicative needs.

Keywords: Terminology development, news media, communications, indigenous language

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Introduction

It is a known fact that the world has become a global village; cultural exchange and diversity have become the order of the day. It has become expedient for African indigenous languages to embrace terminology development to foster a future that is indeed African; a future of prospect for African languages. When a new concept finds its way into the society, the language of the society must address the communicative need posed by that concept or notion. This linguistic intervention is called terminology development. It refers to a process of functionally extending, especially, the lexical semantics of a language into new domains (Antia/Lanna 2016). Although the notion of the theoretical autonomy or self-sufficiency of language exists, most African languages do not have sufficient terms especially on scientific, administrative, and contemporary disciplines. In this case, the strategy of adaptation can either be employed or a translation-oriented terminology resorted to.

According to Thelen (2015), there are two types of terminology: theory-oriented and translation-oriented. See fig. 1 below:

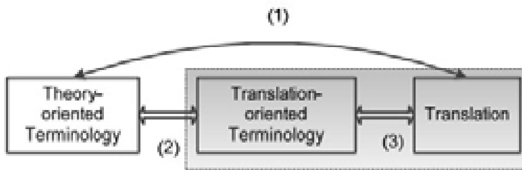

Fig. 1: The interaction between Theory-oriented Terminology, Translation-oriented Terminology and Translation (source: Thelen 2015: 352)

Theory-oriented terminology is a type of terminology often carried out by terminologists who are more “concerned with the relation between term and concept, concept formation, term formation and standardisation” in a given speech community (Thelen 2012: 132). Translation-oriented terminology on the other hand is terminological work carried out purposely to aid appropriate translation. It analyses the meaning of a term in the source language and translates same with caution to the appropriate or specific domain or field of the term. This study focuses on how to foster adequate communication and oral dissemination of

the outcome of research activities that could help the future of African indigenous languages in general and Yorùbá language in particular. Terminology study is not new to Africans, as the field has been ventured into since the 1950s in South Africa. The situation of South Africa and Nigeria can be likened to each other. Language policy gave rise to terminology development in South Africa, and Nigeria also currently has an education policy which needs terminology development for implementation. Scholars of Yorùbá language have made efforts towards providing technical terminology in different fields of study (Bamgbose 1984; Awobuluyi 1992; Odetayo 1993; Olubode-Sawe 2010; Yusuff 2010; Eleshin 2023). However, as at the time of this study, Eleshin (2023) seems to be the only terminology development model for indigenous languages in Nigeria known to this researcher. Several terminology development models have been proposed and implemented by the South African Terminology Development outlets, and these models can be adopted and used for Nigerian indigenous languages.

Some of the Terminology Development Models in South Africa

A terminology development process being driven at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (referred to as UKZN) identifies the following five stages of terminology development process:

1. *harvesting* of existing usage terms;
2. *description and translation* of terminology that has been harvested or created;
3. *consultation and verification* with end-users about terminology proposed;
4. *authentication and standardization through official national structures and*
5. *listing* on the database of institutional Terminology Development Platform.

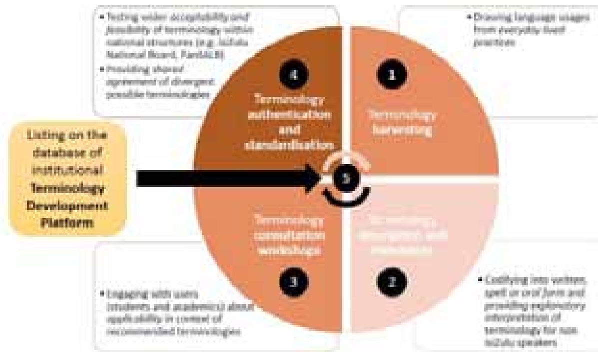

Fig. 2: UKZN Terminology Development Model (Khumalo 2016)

The UKZN model is explicit and easy to follow. However, in 2019, Ramuedzisi, Huyssteen and Mandende researched how terminology is being developed and managed in South Africa. Their aim was to propose effective models and principles for terminology development and management, and to eliminate the duplication of terminologies, sequel to the previous terminology development model already operational in South Africa. The research re-presents two models developed in South Africa; a model for collating existing terminologies (Terminology Developing Model 4), and a model for future terminology development and management (Terminology Developing Model 5). This latter model seems to me an extension of the former and they appear feasible in a situation where the concept exists in the language for which the terminology is being developed. This approach is achievable in South Africa because there are about eleven official languages recognised by the South African government and terms are developed in these languages. The case of South Africa and Nigeria is similar as Nigeria has one official language and 3 national languages i.e., Igbo, Hausa and Yorùbá. These national languages have the status of being used in their region for official purposes. In Lagos state, Yorùbá is used on the floor of the House of Assembly on Thursdays. Every Wednesday is Yorùbá day in all government-owned schools across Lagos state and Yorùbá is always used as the language of instruction on this day. Hausa is the official language of several states in

northern Nigeria. Considering the similarities that exist between South Africa and Nigeria, the UKZN and TDM 4 & 5 models can be adopted for terminology development in Nigeria. However, this study further modifies the models by introducing strategies that account for the derivation of terms. This study will dwell more on these strategies and the terms derived by the media.

Methodology

The methodological approach used in this research is qualitative, i.e., live recording, transcription, and key informant interviews. Terms were sourced and harvested from English news broadcasts and newspapers. Live broadcasts of Yorùbá news of two selected radio stations in Lagos state of the south western part of Nigeria were recorded and transcribed. The selected radio stations are Faaji 106.5FM and Bond 92.9 FM. The transcriptions were closely studied with the aim of identifying the Yorùbá terms used for the concept presented in the English language in the source data. This was helpful as it was possible to track terms developed by the media for given concepts. Media practitioners were interviewed with the aim of understanding the process(es) that they used to derive terms that were identified to have been derived by them. Some elderly native speakers of Yorùbá language were also interviewed to sample their opinions on terms appropriate for concepts that are not entirely new to the Yoruba community. The appropriate term derivation strategy employed in the derivation term was identified and appropriately indicated in the data analysis.

Analysis

This study posits that terminology development in African languages should be based on a translation-oriented terminology model. This position is based on the existing reality that almost all terms exist in the official languages, which in most cases are foreign languages used as official languages in most African countries. The terminology development model proposed by Khumalo (2016), and highlighted above, is adopted

for the study. Scholars have agreed that terminology development in African Languages is an effort beyond mere translation (Yusuff 2010; Olubode-Sawe 2010; Eleshin 2022; 2023). At the point of translation, the derivation of every term must be properly accounted for by indicating the process followed for the derivation. Eleshin (2023) refers to the process followed as strategies. Every terminology development effort must follow certain terminology development strategies. This study adopts the strategies proposed by Eleshin (2023)**:**

- Lexicon: this refers to terms already in existence in both languages.
- Morphological processes (MP): this is the use of term derivation processes like affixation (prefix, interfix), compounding, reduplication and desententialisation.
- Coinages: this is the process of putting together strings of phonemes in a natural pattern to derive new terms in a language. The position of this research is that terms derived using this method are often descriptive. Here are three sub-strategies of coinages:
- Describing Physical Features (DPF): this strategy is used to derive terms by describing the physical features of the concept or notion.
- Describing Functionality (DF): this strategy is used to derive terms by describing the function of the notion, idea, or concept.
- Describing Quality (DQ): terms are derived by describing the nature or quality of the concept.
- Semantic Extension (SEMEX): this means extending the name of an existing idea to a new idea. The two ideas are either related by feature, nature, function or meaning.
- Loan: this strategy is also referred to as borrowing. It is the process of loaning terms from a speech domain e.g., Table (English) Tébù (Yorùbá). The two words are pronounced the same way. This example was given to illustrate the concept of loaning as a term derivation strategy, since it will not be discussed in the analysis below.

It is important to note that, sometimes, these strategies can overlap. That is, more than one strategy can be used to derive a term.

In this study, focus is on terms used by the media. These terms cut across different disciplines; politics, judiciary, legislature, labour union related, and health.

S/N	Source Terms	Media Generated Terms	Glossary	Strategy
1.	Social distancing	Sún-fún-mi kí-n-sún-fún-ọ	Shift for me, I shift for you	DQ
2.	Nose Mask	Ìbòmú	Nose cover	DF
3.	Covid-19	Àrùn fófiịdì/ kofid-19	Covid disease	Loan
4.	Bandits	Ikọ̀ Jàǹdùkú adìhámọ́ra-ogun	Group of armed thugs	DQ
5.	Terrorists	Ikọ̀ Alákatakítí	Group of fanatics	DQ
6.	Subsidy	Owó ìrànwọ́	Money paid to assist	DF
7.	Head of department	Olórí ẹ̀ka	Head of a division	LEXICON
8.	Senate president	Olórí ilé-ìgbìmọ̀ aṣòfin àgbà	Head of national legislative	DQ
9.	Bill	Àbá òfin	Proposed law	DQ
10.	Correspondence	Oníròyìn/ Akóròyìjọ	Person who gathers news	LEXICON
11.	Reporter	Ajábọ̀-ìròyìn	News reporter	MP
12.	Commonwealth Nations	Àjọ àwọn orílẹ̀-èdè tó gba òmìnira lábẹ́ ìjọba ilẹ̀-Gẹ̀ẹ́sì	Group of countries that gained independence from the British government	DQ
13.	Covid protocols	Ìlànà kófíịdì	Covid related rules	DQ
14.	Autopsy	Àyẹ̀wò òkú	Corpse examination	DQ
15.	Ransom	Owó ìtúsílẹ̀	Money paid for freedom	DQ
16.	Damages	Owó ìtáràn	Money paid for damage caused	DQ
17.	Power distribution company	Ilé-iṣẹ́ tó ń pín iná mọ̀nọ̀-mọ́nọ́	Company that distributes electricity	DF

S/N	Source Terms	Media Generated Terms	Glossary	Strategy
18.	Suspected kidnapper	Afurasí ajínigbé	Suspected kidnapper	
19.	Treasury	Àpò ìsúná	Budgeting purse	DQ
20.	High Commissioner of the UK in Nigeria	Ajẹ́lẹ̀ ìjọba ilẹ̀ UK ní Nàìjíríà	Representative of the British government in Nigeria	DF
21.	Prominent Political Party	Ẹgbẹ́ òṣèlú tó gbórín jùlọ	The biggest political party	DQ
22.	Indefinite strike	Ìyanṣẹ́lódì Àìnígbèdéke	Indefinite strike	DQ
23.	Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC)	Ẹ̀ka tó ń gbógun ti ìwà ìbàjẹ́ lẹ́ka owó-nàá àti ọrọ̀-ajé	Department fighting against financial corruption	DF
24.	Refugee camp	Ibùdó ogun-lé-n-dé	Habitation for people dispersed by war	DQ
25.	Pension Trust Fund	Ọ̀ṣùwọ̀n ẹ̀dáwó àwọn òṣìṣẹ́ fẹ̀yìntì	Contributions made for retired workers	DQ
26.	All Progressive Party	Ẹgbẹ́ òṣèlú onítẹ̀síwájú	Progressive Political Party	DQ
27.	Running mate	Igbákejì olùdíje dupò	Deputy contestant	DQ
28.	Rehabilitation Centre	Ibùdó àtúnrọ ìwà ẹ̀dá	Centre for rebuilding human character	DQ
29.	Interrogate	Fọ̀rọ̀pòni-nífun-yọ̀yọ̀	Deep questioning	LEXICON
30.	Facebook	Ìkànì ìbánidọ́rẹ̀ẹ́ kọjúsími-kí-n-kọjú-sí-ẹ	Face-to-face Friendship platform	DQ

S/N	Source Terms	Media Generated Terms	Glossary	Strategy
31.	Internet	Ìkànnì ayélujára	A platform where the world interjects	DQ
32.	Twitter	Ìkànnì abẹ́yẹfò	Bird-like channel	DPF
33.	Boko Haram	Gídìgáǹpá agbébọn	Notorious gunmen	DPF
34.	Gunmen	Ikọ̀ Agbébọn	Group of armed men	DPF
35.	Chief Justice	Adájọ́ àgbà	Chief Justice	DQ
36.	Retired Justice	Adájọ́ fẹ̀yìntì	Retired justice	DQ
37.	14 days ultimatum	Gbèdéke ọjọ́ mẹ́rìnlá	14 days ultimatum	LEXICON
38.	Excise tax	Owó-orí lórí jálá nǹkan mímu	Tax on litre of drink	DQ
39.	University Alumni Association	Ẹgbẹ́ Akẹ́kọ̀ọ́ jáde Fásitì	Group of students who graduated from the same university	DQ
40.	National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA)	Àjọ tó ń dẹ́kun gbígbe egbòogi olóró àti àṣìlò rẹ̀	The agency working against the trafficking and misuse of drugs	DF
41.	Ex-convict	Tẹ̀wọ̀ndé	Prison returnee	MP
42.	Gun license	Ìwé àṣẹ àtilòbọn	Certificate for the use of gun	DQ
43.	Nigerian Medical Association (NMA)	Ẹgbẹ́ àwọn oníṣègùn òyìnbó	Group of Medical practitioners	DQ
44.	Resign	Kọ̀wé-fipò-sílẹ̀	Write to stepdown from a position	
45.	Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC)	Àjọ tó ń dènà ìtànkálẹ̀ àrùn	A commission working against the spread of diseases	DF

S/N	Source Terms	Media Generated Terms	Glossary	Strategy
46.	Correctional centre	Ọgbà àtúnṣe ìwà	Centre for behaviour correction	DF
47.	Independent Petroleum Marketers Association of Nigeria (IPMAN)	Ẹgbẹ́ Alágbàtà epo bẹntiro tó dádúró	Group of independent petroleum marketers	DQ
48.	Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC)	Ilé-iṣẹ́ tó ń rí sí ọrọ-epo rọ̀bì lórílẹ̀-èdè Nàìjíríà	National petroleum corporation of Nigeria	DF
49.	World Health Organisation (WHO)	Àjọ elétò ìlera àgbáyé	A body of medical practitioners of the world	DQ
50.	Toll gate	Ẹnu ìloro	Toll gate	SEMEX
51.	Refinery	Ẹbu ìfọpo rọ̀bì/ Oríkò ìfọpo rọ̀bì	Oil processing centre	SEMEX
52.	Camp	Bùba	A temporary place of rest	LEXICON
53.	Whip	Akójàanu	Disciplinarian	MP/ SEMEX
54.	Coup	ìdìtẹ̀gbàjọba	Conspiring to take over ruling position	MP
55.	Budget	ìsúná	Budget	LEXICON
56.	Explosion	Ìbúgbàmù	Explosion	MP
57.	Support	Ṣúgbàá	Come to aid	LEXICON
58.	Constituency	Ẹkùn ìdìbò	Voting constituent	MP
59.	Primary election	Ìdìbò abẹ́lé	Primary election	MP
60.	Bother	Kanminú	Troubled	LEXICON
61.	Arrest	Páńpẹ́	Trap	LEXICON

S/N	Source Terms	Media Generated Terms	Glossary	Strategy
62.	Representative of a foreign government	Ajẹ́lẹ̀	Government representative in a foreign land	LEXICON
63.	Tussle	Fàákája	Tussle	LEXICON
64.	Beckon	Wawọ́ sí	Call on	LEXICON
65.	Plead	Rawọ́ ẹ̀bẹ̀	Beg	LEXICON
66.	Frequent	Gbọnmọ-gbọnmọ	Constant	LEXICON
67.	Suspect	Alẹ́bọlẹ́rù	Someone who has something that can implicating	LEXICON

Major findings

It is interesting to note that sometimes, strategy overlapping can occur where a term can be accounted for by more than one term derivation strategy. This occurs on the table above in serial number (37) and (54) respectively.

The term derivation strategies discussed above can be divided under two categories. Belonging to the first category are Lexicon, MP and SEMEX and the second category are Coinages and Loan. The first category of strategies is used to derive terms for concepts that are not entirely new to Yorùbá speech community while the strategies in the second category are used to derive terms not entirely new concepts. The terms derived with the second category of strategy are concepts that are new to the Yorùbá speech community. Such concepts find their way into a speech community as a result of civilization and globalisation. since the world has become a global village.

On the table above from serial number (51) to (69), almost all the terms are derived with strategies in the second category. What this means is that concepts represented in this segment are not new to the Yorùbá speech community but, what is interesting about these terms used by the media is that they are not found on the lips of an average

Yorùbá speaker of this generation. These terms no longer enjoy robust and constant usage but the media in their quest to revitalize the Yorùbá language are engaging them to address some of the concepts presented in the English language.

Some of these terms will be analysed based on the clarifications the researcher was able to get from the elderly native speakers interviewed, and from Abraham's Dictionary (1958).

1. *Ẹnu ìloro* (SEMEX) (51)

This is the front of a house or a demarcation within a settlement as in *Ẹnu ìloro ìlú*. It is usually a place of short stoppage during transit, a place where you have to either pay before passing through or not. Making payment at *Ẹnu ìloro* is not a general rule but is subject to the authority of the land. Thus, using *Ẹnu ìloro* for 'toll gate' is not unfounded. However, the addition of *òpópónà (tarred road)* by Bond FM to derive *Ẹnu ìloro òpópónà* captures the present concept better.

2. *Ẹbu ìfọpo* (SEMEX) (52)

In the traditional Yorùbá society, *ẹbu ìfọpo* is a place where palm oil is processed; the Yorùbá Electronic Media (henceforth YEM) extended this semantically to 'refinery' where crude is processed(refined), and added *rọ̀bì* to indicate 'crude' and differentiate it from edible oil which the existing term stands for. *Ẹbu ìfọporọ̀bì* is apt and may be retained in the terminology.

3. *Bùba* (SEMEX) (53)

Tracing the origin of this word was a bit difficult as some of the persons we interviewed could not give any direct explanation. However, some old sayings like *ìpọ̀nrí ajá ò gbọ́dọ̀ bẹ́kùn ní bùba* were resourceful. An explanation given by one of the resource persons for this research is that *bùba* is the habitation of leopards. *Bùba* is often used in YEM when referring to military camp during a battle or terrorist camp. Here, military men and terrorists are compared to leopards hence the extension of the semantics of the habitation of a leopard to a military camp during a battle or war and by extension, a terrorist camp.

4. *Páńpẹ́* (LEXICON) (63)

This is originally a trap. There are expressions like *o ti kó sí páńpẹ́ mi* 'you have entered my trap,' *mo dẹ páńpẹ́ sóko* ('I set a trap in the farm') Anyone or animal that enters into a trap will be in serious pain and will need the help of people around or the person who set the trap to be freed. The semantics of this term was extended to 'arrest' and this is not out of place considering the experience of someone who has been trapped and someone who has been arrested.

5. *Akójàánu* (MP/SEMEX) (54)

This literally means someone who applies bridles. According to Abraham's dictionary, *ìjánu* is 'bridl'e: *O kó ara rẹ̀ níjàánu* ('he bridled his tongue'/'he displayed self-control.') Bridle is found on the mouth of horses; it is usually held on to by the rider and used to control the movement of the horse. The term *ìjánu* has since been extended to mean 'brakes', such that many young speakers of Yorùbá language identify it with brakes rather than bridle. The function of controlling the horse with the bridle has been extended to the brakes of automobiles like vehicles, bicycles, motorcycles and others which are used to control their movement. In the same vein, this bridle has been extended to the human tongue which needs to be controlled when talking. *Akójàánu* is therefore derived with the inclusion of the agentive prefix a- to derive the term.

i. a- kó ìjánu 'whip'
pre- control bridle

This term is often used for a senate whip who conducts orderliness and decorum on the floor of the house.

These terms are presented as indigenously used in the traditional Yorùbá society; they are not coined. The terms are either semantically extended to a new concept or the concept already exists in the language and has a term used to represent it.

6. Autopsy (DQ) (14)

This is a test often carried out on a corpse to uncover the cause of death. The term derived for autopsy is *àyẹ̀wò-òkú*.

i. *àyẹ̀wò-òkú* "corpse examination/investigation" (DQ)
examination-corpse

The derived term literally means corpse examination (or investigation). This term does not portray the meaning of the source term in its entirety because it does not show that the test is often carried out to determine the exact cause of death of the deceased. If this concern is to be captured, the terms derived would have probably been *àyẹ̀wò okùnfà-ikú*.[1]

ii. *àyẹ̀wò okùfà-ikú* 'autopsy' (DQ)
examine cause-death

This term would seem to express the notion better than the term derived by the YEM.

7. Commonwealth (DQ) (12)

According to the Encyclopaedia Britannica, 'commonwealth,' formerly called the British Commonwealth of Nations, was an association of sovereign states who acknowledged the British monarch as a symbolic head. This association has since become free as any country of the world can apply to be a member without any intersection with the British Empire, as indicated on the Commonwealth website. There are 56 sovereign states now as members of the commonwealth, including the United Kingdom. Gabon and Togo just joined in 2022. The term *àjọ àwọn okrílẹ̀-èdè tó gbòmìnira lábẹ́ ìjọba ilẹ̀ Gẹ̀ẹ́sì* was derived by the YEM for this concept.

i. *àjọ* *àwọn* *orílẹ̀-èdè tó gbòmìnira* *lábẹ́ ijọba ilẹ̀ Gẹ̀ẹ́sì*
association plural nation that gained independence from the government of Britain

[1] Editor's note: The term, *àyẹ̀wò* does already carry the meaning "investigate cause." For example, a sick person would be told: Lọ ṣe ***àyẹ̀wò*** *ni ile iwosan* ("Go for a **check-up/medical examination** in the hospital"). The term *àyẹ̀wò òkú* ("examination [of] corpse") therefore adequately conveys the needed information as a translation equivalent for "autopsy." The addition of *okùnfà* ("cause") to the term would therefore seem superfluous.

'Association of nations that gained independence from the British government.' (DQ)

If the explanation above is to be followed, the term derived will work for the British Commonwealth of Nations which was before the 1940s. Modern Commonwealth of Nations as it stands now has not only states which were formerly under the British colonial government as members therefore, the derived term can be faulted. The removal of 'British' from the name is significant and must not be overlooked as already done by the YEM. However, reading through the criteria for joining, there is a caveat that any country that wishes to join the commonwealth nations 'must acknowledge His Majesty King Charles III as the head of the commonwealth.' Now, to derive a term that will capture the concept of the commonwealth, it will require the consideration of either *modalities of joining association* or *name of the association*. If the modalities of joining the association are to be considered, the following derivation may be adopted considering the caveat earlier mentioned.

ii. *Àjọ àwọn orílẹ̀-èdè aṣòótọ́ sí ìjọba* ilẹ̀-Gẹ̀ẹ́sì (DQ)
Association plural nation faithful to government Britain
'Association of nations in allegiance to the British government'

But, if the name of the association is to be considered, a possible derivation is:

iii. *Àjọ àwọn orílẹ̀-èdè àjùmọ̀jọrọ̀* (DQ)
Association plural nation enjoying collective wealth

Either of these derivations is possible but subject to criticism

8. High Commissioner of UK in Nigeria (DF) (20)

This is the head of the British high commission in Abuja, Nigeria. The term derived by YEM is *ajẹ́lẹ̀ ìjọba ilẹ̀ UK ní Nàìjíríà. Ajẹ́lẹ̀* has since been in the Yorùbá lexicon. According to R.C Abraham's dictionary, the term *Ajẹ́lẹ̀* means the administrative officer 'of a former colonial government' in charge of an area; the term has been extended to mean representatives of foreign governments in a country like the high commissioner of Canada in Nigeria. Where *ajẹ́lẹ̀* is x because of the length of the meaning:

i. *ajẹ́lẹ̀ ìjọba ilẹ̀ UK ní Nàìjíríà*
x government land UK in Nigeria.
'Representative of British government in Nigeria'

Following the analysis above, this derivation is clear and direct.

Terms analysed above can be placed under the two categories of term derivation strategies discussed above. Terms analysed in 1–5 above are under the first category (theory-oriented), while the terms in 6–8 are under the second category (translation-oriented).

Conclusion

This study has presented two categories of terminology development strategies to demonstrate that terminology development is a panacea for aspects of disentanglement with the African future. The analysis shows the effort of the media in revitalizing the Yorùbá language in three dimensions. First, the continuous use of indigenous terms for concepts that exist in a particular speech domain; second, the extension of the meaning of an existing concept to a new concept, and third, coinage of terms for concepts that are entirely to the Yorùbá speech community, but have become a part of the community. This discovery is the crux of this study; to show that terminology development is indeed a solution to possible endangerment of African languages in the future. If a proper terminology development model is adopted, the future of African languages will be secured.

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Emilisco Jones Enoachuo
(University of Buea)

African medicine and Indigenous knowledge transmission in African languages

Abstract

This study examines the precarious state of Kenyang ethnobotanical knowledge, characterized by a decline in the linguistic and cultural transmission, thereby threatening the perpetuation of traditional medicinal practices in Cameroon. Employing a speaker-centred approach, coupled with snowball and purposive sampling methodologies, this study documents the available disease remedies through digital archiving, revealing a significant intergenerational decline in traditional knowledge, despite its pertinence to contemporary health challenges. These findings underscore the imperative for expedited documentation and preservation of Kenyang ethnobotanical knowledge to revitalize linguistic and cultural heritage, thereby promoting a holistic development.

Keywords: Indigenous knowledge systems, language endangerment, traditional medicine, ethnobotany, digital archiving

Introduction

Approximately 5400 plant species are utilized in traditional African medicine for their medicinal properties (Van Wyk 2015). Polygenetic evidence suggests that plants and herbs evolved prior to the emergence of humans, with fossil records indicating their presence on earth for millions of years (Kenrick/Crane 2017). Initially, humans and animals coexisted with these species, exploiting them for sustenance, medicinal purposes, shelter and other essential resources. As human knowledge and populations expanded, the demand for more effective and accessible health solutions led to the development of synthetic and processed foods and medicines, transforming the traditional uses of plants and herbs to

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address the growing health challenges and needs of human societies. In response to this, human focus has diverted from the natural environment, which, despite being increasingly inconsiderate, is deteriorating rapidly due to climate change, land-use expansion, and associated processes like deforestation and desertification (Intergovernmental Panel on Planet Change 2020). The preference for traditional medicine as a rapid therapeutic solution to various health conditions, owing to its established administration preservation protocols (Iwu 2013), has prompted a paradigm shift among African populations, from botanical-based remedies to conventional pharmaceuticals. However, concerns persist regarding the optimal dosage regimens, shelf life, and specific clinical indications for these traditional African medicines. This study aims to systematically document and preserve the traditional Knowledge of Kenyang medicinal plants and herbs, which are essential for promoting holistic development and revitalizing the declining Kenyang cultural heritage. Additionally, the research seeks to evaluate the economic potential of these medicinal resources and elucidate the urgent need for their conservation and sustainable use.

Related Issues

African perspectives on medicines

African perspectives on traditional plant and herbal medicines are complex and multifaceted (see Vaughan 1991). Historically, these natural resources were valued for their remedial and curative properties, However, a prevailing belief among some Africans associates traditional medicine with witchcraft and exorcism, leading to varied attitudes towards its use. In Cameroon's Manyu division, misconceptions about traditional medicine have contributed to the endangerment of medicinal plants and herbs, exacerbated by environmental degradation, deforestation, urbanization, industrialization, and climate change (Rimlinger et al. 2021). Also, the lack of comprehensive documentation and digitalization of research on African medicinal plants, particularly in Kenyang, poses a significant threat to the preservation of this knowledge (see Nji et al. 2018; Tabi et al. 2020). However, the COVID-19 pandemic has prompted a re-evaluation of traditional medicine, resulting in increased aware-

ness and demand (El Alami et al. 2020; Srivastava/Chaurasia 2020). To address the problem interdisciplinary collaboration among linguists and researchers is essential, for holistic digital documentation, (see Bodeker/Kronenberg 2002) knowledge valorisation, and conservation of these endangered resources for future generations. Medicinal plants and herbs digitization cannot be discussed in isolation of language endangerment, revitalization aspects and reasons for digitizing documentation.

Language endangerment

Language is the cornerstone of culture, identity and heritage, and its endangerment has severe consequences for minority languages, particularly in Africa (UNESCO 2019; Crystal 2000; Fishman 1991). Regrettably, its endangerment also threatens the very existence of human society (Sapir 1949). The precarious state of African languages, including in Cameroon, necessitates urgent action to document and preserve these languages (UNESCO 2019). Language documentation is crucial for rescuing endangered languages, as it helps preserve cultural norms and values embedded in language – it provides a safeguard against language shift and cultural erosion (see Diamond 2002; Whorf 1956). Thus, the decline of minority languages threatens cultural diversity, as prestigious languages diminish their use (Wardhaugh/Fuller 2015).

The endangerment of African languages is attributed to the presence of dominant exoglossic languages, which diminish the use of minority languages (see Enoachuo 2021). This has led to a decrease in language domains resulting in structural shifts or language demise (Wardhaugh/Fuller 2015). The loss of language and culture is intertwined as culture is embedded in language (Whorf 1956). The decline in minority languages threatens cultural diversity, making language preservation essential for maintaining cultural heritage (Chiatoh/Nkwain 2022).

Language endangerment in Cameroon remains a pressing concern, with the over 270 languages spoken in the country at the risk of falling out of use due to language shift and decline (Enoachuo 2019; Lewis 2009). The dominance of exoglossic languages such as English and French, as well as urbanization and modernization, have contributed to language shift and decline, leading to a reduction in language use and

transmission to younger generations (Enoachuo 2019). Also, the lack of documentation and support for indigenous languages has further exacerbated the issue, leaving many languages without a written form or educational materials, thereby hindering language maintenance and revitalization efforts. This is why many Cameroonian languages are considered endangered, with some spoken by only a few fluent speakers, again necessitating urgent documentation and preservation efforts (see Watters 2003).

The consequences of language endangerment in Cameroon are far-reaching, with potential losses in cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, and community identity (Chiatoh/Nkwain 2022; Hinton 2001). The practical consequences include limiting access to education and economic opportunities, thereby perpetuating social and economic inequalities. While efforts to document Cameroonian languages are underway, more support is needed to address the scale and complexity of the issue, including the development of language education programmes, language documentation projects and community-based language revitalization initiatives (Djomeni 2022).

Decline in the use of traditional names for plants and herbs, and counter-efforts at preservation

Decline in the use of traditional plant and herb names for both practical and communicative purposes has contributed to a significant reduction in their utilization (Krauss 2007). Rapid deforestation and climate change have also accelerated the disappearance of these plants and herbs from the healthcare landscape (Barnett 2001). As a result, the knowledge of their curative properties and cultural significance is minimal, and efforts to nurture or protect them are lacking (Mignolo 2009). However, a growing awareness and retrospective concern among linguists and stakeholders have sparked a desire to revive the existence of these plants and herbs, with many acknowledging that: “I have forgotten” or “I do not know the original name”. As the names of these plants and herbs fade, language speakers are left with limited knowledge of their values and significance to the community. There would exist greater harm, if left unaddressed, the loss of this cultural heritage will erase the rich tap-

estry of global experiences and identities, underscoring the importance of preservation and digitization efforts (see Crystal 2000).

Language is a vital tool for preserving cultural heritage and traditional knowledge, particularly in the context of medicinal plants and herbal medicine (Sapir 1949). The Kenyang language, spoken in the Equatorial Rainforest, embodies the community's understanding of their environment and the medicinal properties of surrounding plants and herbs. However, the influence of multilingualism and modernization has disrupted the transmission of this knowledge to younger generations, rendering it endangered (Krauss 1992). The Kenyang community's reliance on prestigious languages like English, French, and Pidgin English has led to a decline in the use of their indigenous language, resulting in a loss of cultural heritage (Crystal 2000). The traditional healing practices and knowledge of medicinal plants, once tied to specific families, are now attributed to sorcery and mysticism, further threatening their preservation (Berlin 1992).

The revival process necessary to address the above anomaly involves the documentation of ethno-botanical knowledge through annotation and interpretation in a digitized resource channel. This "linguistic Noah's Ark" would serve as a repository for Kenyang traditional knowledge and practices, ensuring their preservation for future generations. However, this endeavour requires the active participation and belief of Kenyang speakers in their language and cultural heritage (Fishman 2001). By communicating traditional medicines and practices in the endangered Kenyang language, community members can help safeguard their cultural legacy and contribute to the holistic welfare of their community (see Linn 2014) and the world at large.

Methodology for this research

The digital age offers a unique opportunity for preserving indigenous knowledge in minority language, such as Kenyang, through digital documentation and archiving. This study proposes the following methods for data collection.

1. Community involvement: 3 traditional healers and 5 speakers of the Kenyang language (2 youths and 3 adults) collaborated with

the researcher, who is also a native speaker, to develop and digitize a repertoire for Kenyang medicinal plants and herbs.

2. Data collection: Primary data were collected on 10 Kenyang medicinal plants (see Mahomoodally 2013) and herbs, using ethnographic methods, including participant observation, interviews, and focus groups (Hymes 1974).
3. Digitization: The collected data were digitized using audio and video recordings, as well as photographs and notes.
4. Online platform: The digitized data were uploaded to an online platform, creating a digital archive of Kenyang medicinal plants and herbs.
5. Information-oriented approach: Due to the limited and uneasy access to secondary data of Kenyang medicinal plants and herbs, an information-oriented approach was taken, focusing on primary data collection and preservation.

Data analysis

1. Ethnographic Analysis: The collected data were analysed using ethnographic methods, including content analysis and thematic analysis (see Bernard 2017).
2. Language Documentation: The digitized data were analysed to identify patterns and themes in the Kenyang language, including grammatical structures and vocabulary related to medicinal plants and herbs.

Data presentation

The 10 medicinal plants and herbs were collected and documented using video and audio. For ethical reasons, the videos have not been made public. Rather, pictures have been shared in this research.

Kenyang Plants' names and incomplete remedies

Fig. 1: ***àgbɔ̀bə̀rǎ*** – A Central African plant of South-West Region of Cameroon (Notable part of the concoction for fecundity in women)

Fig. 2: ***nəm tákɔ* (PE: king grass)** A Cameroonian medicinal herb common in the Southern parts a specie of (Amaranthus deflexus)

Specie name highly endangered or moribund (translated from Pidgin English name)

Fig. 3: ***ɛ́ráŋtákō*** – A flower-leaf of a Cameroonian Tropical forest tree commonly known as '*umbrella*' tree, Part of the concoction for the treatment of *jaundice*

Fig. 4: ***ɛ́rɛ́m nɛ̀fí*** ((*Eleusine indica(L)* – Commonly known as 'bahama grass' found around the Southern part of Cameroon. A common African Tropical Forest grass

Part of the concoction for the treatment of sprains and fractures, 100 % of the research population do not know the Kenyang name; more than 65 % of traditional doctors as well do know not the Kenyang name.

Fig. 5: ***ákákón*** – Commonly known as '*umbrella*' tree. Ghanian hiking routes 'outdoor active'

Fig. 6: ***mâmbɛ̀p*** – *Crassocephalum crepidioides* (Benth) S. Moore

Fig. 7: ***ndɛ̀rɛ́-mə̀k*** – Local appellation: 'bush groundnut', Family of *Chipilin Guatemala*

Fig. 8: ***nsók-ɲə̀n*** – Family of *Cecropia peltata-Canarius*, also in the secondary forest of Southern part of Cameroon, Africa. Used as part of concoction for difficult childbirth

Fig.9: ***βə́ŋsɔ-βáɲɛ̀p*** – Scientific name unidentified (still under investigation), Part concoction treatment for STDs

Fig. 10: ***támbáŋ-nɛ̀háyǐ*** – Commonly known as 'starleaf' tree, Adansonia digitata L (BOMBACACEAE), Part concoction for malaria fever treatment

Results

The collected plants and herbs: ***àgbɔ̀bə̀rǎ*** (fig. 1) is a common plant, but its usage is not known among the younger generation. Each of the three traditional healers, all Cameroonians and native speakers of Kenyang, identified the medicinal plant and its importance;

Each of the three traditional healers, all Cameroonians and native speakers of Kenyang, identified the medicinal plant and its importance; ***nə̀m-tákɔ̀*** (fig. 2) is a very common medicinal herb found mostly around human habitations and on farmlands; ***ɛ́ráŋ-tákō*** (fig. 3), represents a leafy tropical forest plant mostly found in the forests of Southern parts of Cameroon. ***'Erɛ́m-nɛ̀fí*** (fig. 4), unlike figure 2, is a compound herb commonly found around human habitations, though this can also be in farmlands. Figures 5, 6, 8, 9, and 10 (***ákákò***, ***mâmbɛ̀p***, ***nsók-ɲən***, ***βə́ŋsɔ-βáɲɛ̀p***, ***támbáŋ-nɛ̀háyǐ***, respectively), are typical secondary tropical forest plants and herbs of the South-West Region, that richly empower traditional medicines.

The knowledge of these traditional medicinal plants and herbs is restricted to the immediate family members that offer curation to the

community for little or no economic benefits. The 3 traditional healers (2 females and 1 male) agree up to 80 % on the Kenyang names, but diverge above 50 % on their use. They substitute the names of the medicinal plants with Pidgin English names commonly used or with the scientific names that they have researched on. However, ***ndὲrέ-mə̀k***) (‘*bush groundnut*’) (fig. 7) is a name formulated by a younger speaker due to its resemblance with groundnut leaves, not that it produces nuts.

The motivation of some of the consultants to preserve their knowledge as a legacy led to a deliberate withholding of comprehensive information regarding traditional medicine and its applications. This strategic omission aimed to stimulate further research and potentially secure economic benefits. However, this approach has resulted in a significant knowledge gap among the younger generation. Notably, only two of the five interviewees were able to provide names for the medicines which were based on common hearsay (see fig. 2, 4, and descriptive names as in fig. 7). This suggests that the traditional nomenclature of herbs and plants is no longer being transmitted effectively to the younger generation, rendering this knowledge moribund.

In contrast, the older generation exhibited a prolonged reflexive response when attempting to recall traditional names, indicating a decline in cognitive accessibility. This phenomenon highlights the pressing need for systematic documentation and preservation of the knowledge of traditional medicinal knowledge in order to prevent its loss and ensure its continued transmission to future generations. The findings of this study underscore the importance of intergenerational knowledge transfer and the need for targeted efforts to preserve traditional medicinal practices. By exploring the complexities of knowledge preservation and transmission, this research aims to contribute to the development of effective strategies for safeguarding cultural heritage and promoting the continued relevance of traditional medicine.

Conclusion

A comprehensive and systematic inventory of the array of tropical forest herbs and plants in the Manyu region, as well as throughout Cameroon, is imperative for the preservation of traditional medicinal knowledge.

This documentation research serves as a catalyst for rekindling the community's interest in their environmental heritage, cultural practices, and traditional ways of life. Moreover, this study's findings have sparked a renewed enthusiasm among the younger generation who could not identify these medicinal plants and herbs to engage in their cultural legacy, with a notable inclination towards apprenticing with and eventually succeeding the older generation as well as researchers' interest to document more of the medicinal and herbal plants in Kenyang. However, this transition necessitates targeted training and funding initiatives to ensure a seamless knowledge transfer and the perpetuation of traditional practices. Ultimately, this research underscores the importance of integrating traditional ecological knowledge with modern conservation efforts, highlighting the need for a multidisciplinary approach that incorporates community engagement, ethnobotanical research, and capacity-building initiatives. By doing so, we can ensure the long-term preservation of Cameroon's rich biodiversity and the cultural heritage associated with it.

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Comfort Beyang Oben Ojongnkpot
(University of Buea)

Bridging the digital divide of Ejagham: Challenges and opportunities

Abstract

The advent of imperialism in Africa promoted the use of European languages to the detriment of African indigenous languages. This has had a devastating impact on African traditional ways of life in various ramifications, such as the near absence of African indigenous languages in the digital space. Arguably, there is no better way for Africa to attain the 4th Industrial Revolution, than through language digitization. Hence, the African Think Tank Summit (2021) entreats African countries to adopt digitization for technological development. However, the alarm bell on the digitization of African languages is yet to receive the attention it deserves. There have been efforts in Cameroon to promote indigenous languages (Njock 1966; Tadajeu 1975; Chumbow 2013; Ojongnkpot 2015). Albeit, the future of these languages appears threatened as far as digitization is concerned; no language in Cameroon is served by ICT (social media, email). Osborn (2010) affirms that "there is still a long way to go before all world languages appear on the World Wide Web" (Osborn 2010: 29). Ejagham, though spoken in Manyu Division (Cameroon) and Cross River State (Nigeria), is moribund (Ojongnkpot 2015: 202). Indeed, bridging the digital divide of Ejagham gets the language reinvigorated, gets people well connected and engenders socio-economic development, based on its status as a Cross-border language. Moreover, given the place of Ejagham as a storehouse of knowledge, intangible resources and driver of development, we aim to explore how Ejagham could be digitized, then find out the challenges and opportunities for digitization of Ejagham, to better determine ways and means of bridging the digital divide. The study seeks to answer the following questions: 1. How can Ejagham be digitalized as a cross-border language? 2. What are the challenges /opportunities of digitalizing Ejagham as a cross-border language? The study adopts a qualitative survey research design, with N=70, aged 15–70, respondents across social strata. Data is analysed using the content analysis approach. The study has implication for language preservation, storage, retrieval, and technological exploitation.

Keywords: Ejagham, digital divide, revitalization, ICT, digitization

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Introduction

The world is grappling with the issue of the waning and disappearance of languages. Arguably, colonial legacy and linguistic imperialism have been the root cause of the continuous dismal situation of African languages. Despite the fact that African indigenous languages are imbued with intangible knowledge that can be advantageous to Africans, the vestiges of colonialism and imperialism as seen in the dominance of Eurocentric knowledge disseminated through European languages remains a cause for concern. It is the reason why Brock-Utne expresses discontent as follows:

> The forms of knowledge fostered is knowledge built on European culture and tradition and delivered in European languages. The forms of knowledge that could have empowered the underprivileged would have to be built on African culture and tradition and be delivered in African languages. A genuine concern for social justice and democracy would lead African political leaders to work for a strengthening of the African languages. Donor pressure, as well as the impact of the capital led market economy, often called globalisation, however work to retain the Euro languages (Brock-Utne 2016: 1).

The impact of colonial and post-colonial politics has been quite detrimental to indigenous languages. This situation can be traced as far back as 1884–1915, when Kamerun was ruled by Germany as a colony. When Germany was defeated in 1916, Cameroon was divided between Britain and France as mandated territories of the League of Nations between 1916 and 1945 (Ngoh 1979). That was the origin of the post-colonial political prioritization of French and English as 'official' languages, particularly in education and administration. Even at independence, Cameroon adopted two exoglossic languages as official (English and French). This led to the relegation to the background of local languages such as Ejagham. The situation has been compounded by the near absence of resources to teach/learn these languages, so as to keep them vibrant.

Cameroon is inherently a multilingual nation with four distinct language families; Afro-Asiatic, Niger-Congo, Nilo-Saharan, and Indo-European, consisting of 250 ethnic groups, with 283 languages (Ojongnkpot 2015). In tracing the evolution of language policy in Cameroon, Echu (2003) relives the trend in the evolution of language policy in Cameroon, as he demonstrates that, since independence, there have been a number of languages in Cameroon. Nevertheless, the two colo-

nial masters were determined to impose their languages in the domains of education and administration; thus, even after independence, French and English have continued to thrive as official languages, to the detriment of indigenous languages. Ejagham, like other indigenous languages, is relegated and abandoned to the private realm, in favour of colonial languages (Ojongnkpot 2015: 4).

Digital divide of Ejagham

The term 'digital divide' has evolved through the ages; during the pre-20th century era, it pertained to the dichotomy between the 'haves' and 'have nots' of telephone access. Thereafter, it moved to refer to the gap between those with internet access, on the one hand, and those without, on the other. The present study uses 'digital divide' to describe the disparity between Ejagham and European languages in terms of access to digital technology. The study holds that such access within the Ejagham language will engender digital skills among its users in various ramifications. It is for this reason that the United Nations has embarked on an awareness-raising campaign aimed at bridging the global digital divide in the form of an annual commemoration of a world information day. It is hoped therefore that bridging the digital divide of Ejagham will not only avail users of digital skills to be able to explore the world economically, socially and otherwise, but also invigorate the language.

Findings from a study by Ojongnkpot (2015) put Ejagham at 65 % endangerment, amongst languages in the Manyu Division in the South West Region of Cameroon. It has an alphabet, with publications, like the New Testament of the Bible and primers; it is used in folklore and religious music broadcasts on the South West Regional Radio station, and taught in some schools. However, owing to a language policy that promotes French and English as official languages, the future of Ejagham remains bleak. It is therefore important to examine how, through ICT, Ejagham could be revived, conserved, and promoted, especially as we are within the framework of the International Decade of Indigenous languages, which spans 2022–2032 as pronounced by UNESCO. Furthermore, the UNESCO (2003) seminal papers on "Education in a Multilingual world," as well as the African Union's revised 2006 language policy

document, dubbed "Language Plan of Action for Africa," enjoin member states to adopt language policies that take into consideration the use of African languages in education and national development with the official languages as partners. The attempt to revitalize Ejagham is, therefore, to guarantee its transmission to coming generations (intergenerational transmission), especially through digitization, such that it could be used in diverse domains. The importance of digitizing Ejagham lies in its potential for advancing cross-border socio-economic integration, given that the intangible knowledge embedded in it could better be preserved to serve in ICT, for it to be competitive on the digital world scene.

From time immemorial, Ejagham has linked people from two great countries; it is spoken in Manyu Division, South West Region of Cameroon as well as in the Cross River State of Nigeria. It is thus a cross-border language with potentials. However, in both countries, Ejagham is rendered endangered by the languages of wider communication, like English and French. Hinton therefore concludes: "A language that is not a language of government, nor a language of education, nor a language of commerce or of wider communication is a language whose very existence is threatened in the modern world" (Hinton 2011: 3). For Chumbow (2012) and Ojongnkpot (2015), such a language is better described as a Private Realm language, hence, the apprehension of the imminent disappearance of Ejagham, based on factors such as education, migration, prejudice, attitude, etc. Consequently, it is mandatory to revitalize Ejagham, through digitization such that it could not only be used in all aspects, but also passed on to the next generation.

Despite the import of digitization in supporting indigenous languages, Holton (2011) notes that "it can also be a hindrance to those efforts if not considered carefully." Lately, digital Indigenous Language Revitalization (ILR) activities "are emerging as a response to mitigating colonizing effects of exclusion, discrimination and annihilation of indigenous languages and peoples ways of life" (O'Neal 2014). Such online technology use in Indigenous Language Revitalization (ILR) initiatives had been stratified according to periods, as demonstrated by Meighan (2021).

The present study observed that irrespective of all such efforts, it is important to explore opportunities and challenges of digitizing African languages. Thus, reporting on activities marking the International Day for Maternal Languages, UNESCO notes: "In Africa, cross-border lan-

guages constitute bridges between arbitrarily fractured communities. Indeed, they are the bearers of a multi-secular e-community, the foundation of collective entities that have been built over a long period of time" (UNESCO 2020: 1).

The world of today is characterized by technology, wherein all aspects of life are digitized, for use and growth. Languages in general, and indigenous languages in particular, also need to be digitized in order to increase their functions. In fact, Meighan (2021) traces the presence of technology since the Fire Era, through the Stone Age, to today's use of cellphones characterized by social media. Consequently, there is a dire need for continuity, which in this case is the digitization of African indigenous languages, especially, if these languages have to be secured. It cannot be gainsaid that indigenous languages in general. and Ejagham in particular, constitute the intangible heritage (medium of transmission of culture and traditions inherited from ancestors) of a community, as, through them, information and knowledge are disseminated. Meighan (2021) thus groups the various stages of technology into six, as follows:

Types and stages of technology	**Examples**	**Relationship**	**Evolution**
1. Facilitation technologies	Crockery, pots, guns, agricultural machinery, and tools	Individual and group → local environment	*Facilitation*
2. Communication technologies	Writing systems (e.g., pictographs), writing implements, mass media (e.g., television), telephone, typewriter, computer	Individual, group and state → mass audience	*Communication*
3. Web 1.0 Digital and online technologies (~1990–2005)	Digital cellphone, multimedia (e.g., DVD, CD-ROM)	State and group → mass audience	*Digital Information*
4. Web 2.0 Digital and online technologies (~2005–2015)	Social media, smartphones, video games, the Cloud, broadband	State and group ↔ mass audience; Peer-to-peer (P2P)	*Digital Negotiation*

Types and stages of technology	Examples	Relationship	Evolution
5. Web 3.0 Digital and online technologies (~2015–present)	Augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR), blockchain	P2P; Peer ↔ mass audience	*Digital Creation*
6. Semantic technologies: (The future)	Internet reality, artificial intelligence (AI), 3D and 4D avatars	Technology ↔ human audience ↔ environment	*Digital Simulation*

Tab. 1: Types, stages and evolution of technology use (Source: Meighan 2021)

Irrespective of the numerous languages spoken in Africa, with the advent of a digital age, a host of African indigenous languages stands the risk of extinction, if nothing is done to ensure continuity in use. Particularly, Ejagham is a cross-border language used in certain domains like traditional folklore, music, religious songs, and local radio broadcast. However, given the fact that it is an embodiment of intangible knowledge, it could have added value through digitization, which gives it the opportunity not only for development as a cross-border language, but also preservation. Hence, Scannell postulates that "there is a general insufficient digitization of African languages, but there has been an increasing presence in local languages on the web through channels such as blogs and online publishing fora" (Scannell 2011: 14).

Digitization for revitalization

Digitization is more than just using digital platforms. Digitization concerns practical applied knowledge, skills, and networks which are continually evolving to provide arenas for language archiving and language education that have the potential for wider dissemination and flexible access. Akinde defines digitization simply as "the conversion of analogue media to digital form" (Akinde 2007: 1). He further underscores the importance of digitizing African languages because foreign concepts are often imposed on Africa such that the African heritage is overpow-

ered. On their part, Gibbon et al continue that it is pertinent to digitize endangered languages (Gibbon et al 2004: 5).

According to Note (2011), digitization encompasses the steps: "selection, assessment, preparation, digitizing, quality control, and data management to create, manage and preserve digital objects efficiently." She adds that there is a dire need for "strategic planning, project management and adherence to best practices to ensure long-term consistency and relevance of digital materials."

As for Beri (2023), digitization will "facilitate the free movement of capital, people and services, which is in line with the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)." On that score, digitization stands the advantage of harkening to African Union (AU)'s clarion call of exploring inherent challenges in "transforming the African digital space." Digitization of Ejagham will thus align with AU's agenda 2030, with regard to the free flow of goods and services, capital and people.

Going by the foregoing, this paper explores the concept of digitization of Ejagham, in order to enhance in-depth knowledge of the issue; examining opportunities and challenges, in the hope of paving the way for development, especially as it is relatively new with respect to Ejagham.

The most powerful of all digital platforms is the internet, especially with Web 2.0 technologies, which helps greatly, not only in empowering endangered languages, but also bringing new patterns of global flows for the languages. That is why Meighan (2021) postulates that "the internet offers endangered languages a chance to have a public voice in a way that would not have been possible before. Digitization is a package which includes the writing system, mass media, television and more" (Meighan 2021: 6). In today's tech-driven era, the digitization of Ejagham will offer more opportunities for the revitalization of cross-border activities like trade and culture.

Revitalization is a process aimed at safeguarding a language that has reduced function in a community by developing programs of re-establishing it in all walks of life. Going by Meighan (2021), technology has been used to reinvigorate waning indigenous languages. This, he continues, is demonstrated by the Web 1.0 Period (1990–2005), characterized by the new world wide web affordances and digital technologies such as desktop and CD-Rom. This is exemplified by the Te Wahapu (The Estuary), being the first computer-based communications system created in

1990 with focus on the revitalization of the Maori language in New Zealand. It therefore demonstrates that English may not be a monopoly of language in advanced technology.

Apart from the Maori experience, Leoki (Powerful Voice), as reported by Warschauer (1998), uses an electronic bulletin board system established in 1993, which made available culturally responsive materials and delivered entirely in the Hawaiian indigenous language, thus according online support to Hawaiian language use in the immersion schools, and the larger community.

Activities on revitalization and reclamation at the Web 1.0 era hinged on the recordings of oral and written expressions of elders in their indigenous languages, which were later recorded and produced for subsequent broadcast. Hence, the prevalence of examples such as modern-day television soap opera, the Scottish Gaelic (Cormack 1994) and the CD-ROM, referred to as ice hockey in Ojibwe (Freeborn 2024). Another example of technology to document, archive and learn indigenous languages using text, sound and video clips, is by the first nations of Canada, as explained in the First Peoples' Cultural Foundation (2003) as well as the web-based resource (First Voices) founded in Britain. It is worthy to note that these have developed such that, today, users interact on the site, which includes an archive, chat facility, games, videos, story-books and language tutors. It is the reason why Winter and Boudreau state that such revitalization efforts have been able to help "connect youth and elders to help promote intergenerational knowledge transmission, while encouraging language revitalization (Winter/Boudreau 2018: 45).

Efforts in Cameroon

The precarious situation of indigenous languages in Cameroon prompted various researchers to embark on revitalization endeavours aimed, particularly, to enhance intergenerational transmission of languages to increase use in multiple social domains. Thus, there have been models of indigenous language revitalization in Cameroon in the last three decades in the form of research methods, indigenous language revitalization inquiry and literature, such as: CABTAL (Cameroon Association for Bible Translation & Literacy), NACALCO (National Association of

Cameroon Languages Committees), led by Maurice Tadajeu (1997), a federation of over 70 language committees and NGOs, and the PROPELCA (2004) project (The Operational Research Programme for Language Teaching in Cameroon). The present study is guided by the following questions:

1. How can Ejagham as a cross-border language be digitized?
2. What are the opportunities/challenges of digitizing Ejagham as a cross-border language?

Methodology

The study embarked on a qualitative exploratory survey, as well as literature sourcing, to measure the reasons, processes, opportunities and challenges of digitizing Ejagham as a cross-border language, in order to initialize steps on the use of Ejagham in ICTs; internet, computer skills and e-commerce, so as to serve the needs of not only people along the Cameroon-Nigeria borders, but also give Ejagham the impetus to be competitive in the digital space.

Sampling

Non-probability Sampling Technique was adopted; purposive and snowball sampling were used to obtain N=70 respondents, age 24 and above, cutting across all spheres of life (Graduate students, teachers, researchers, business operators, policy-makers, etc.), of Manyu origin, living in and out of Cameroon, believed to have expertise and substantial knowledge on issues of language digitization in general, and Ejagham, in particular. The constitution of the sample, thus, aimed at representing salient characteristics and features relevant to the subject under investigation. The individuals were disposed to to providing answers to the various questions, based on a number of factors:the instructions were made clear,the topic that developed the questionnaire was relevant to members of the sample, the format of the questionnaire was straightforward and concise and the purpose of the questionnaire was made abundantly clear.

Respondents were subjected to structured interview surveys and focus-group discussions, to collect data aimed at getting a deep insight on the issue of digitizing Ejagham, following Begner et al (2009), who maintain that one with expert knowledge is the one who is able to express technical opinion on an issue in a related area of expertise. Thus, the selection of the 70 respondents was guided by an understanding of their profound knowledge of the reasons, processes, opportunities, and challenges of digitization.

Data collection

The surveys were carried out between August and January 2023 at the background of the chain referral approach of Biernacki and Waldorf (1981). The study made use of the interview protocol, while assuring respondents of anonymity. Questions were divided into parts as follows:

- Part 1 focused on demographic particulars of the respondents, which sought to find out background information and know-how in relation to the subject at hand.
- Part 2 concerned respondents' knowledge of language digitization.
- Part 3 aimed at determining the reasons, advantages, processes, and general overview of digitizing Ejagham. It also sought to understand the role of government and stakeholders in the digitization of Ejagham.
- Part 4 hinged on opportunities and challenges of digitizing Ejagham.
- Part 5 sought to know the future of Ejagham in digitization.

Nature of content analysis

Questions were asked, such that codes emerged as follows:

- Digitization – what is digitization and its role in society?
- Language revitalization – the importance of digitization on the revitalization of Ejagham.

- Economic impact of digitization – how digitization would help Ejagham as a cross-border language.
- Processes of digitization – what are the steps of digitizing Ejagham?

An analytical guide was then developed based on the research questions. The study made use of Content Analysis, whereby code lists that summarized the major concepts of the study were derived. Codes are matched with descriptions to enhance understanding of the key issues. That notwithstanding, quotations are attached to them and presented as code-quotation-grounding Tables (Tables 1–3).

Findings and Discussion

Code	Quotation
Digitization of Ejagham (40)	"Transforming Ejagham into digital technological tools" (Computer, internet, social media handles and large data).
	"Using Ejagham online"
	"Enabling Ejagham to be used in the internet"
	"Using Ejagham on the world wide web"
	"Using Ejagham on computers, cellphones and social media"
	"Using Ejagham virtually, so people can communicate with it in real-time"
Role of digitization of Ejagham in society (37)	"Ejagham will be given great opportunities with regard to technological development"
	'It will promote participation of Ejagham usesrs in handling societal issues."
	"It will enhance connectivity among Ejagham users."
	"It will enhance trade and financial inclusion."
	"Easy access to trade"
	"Will equalize people and increase their congregation across long distances"
	"Will enhance cross-border trade"

Code	Quotation
Push factors of digitization of Ejagham (27)	"When stakeholders adapt the use of new technologies" "Stakeholders need to transform Ejagham from analog to digital space." "The preparedness for Government to collaborate with the community, in order to push the digital process" "The will for business agents to transform businesses from analog to digital" "Ejagham Development and cultural associations" "Ejagham researchers"

Tab. 2: What is Digitalization of Ejagham as a Cross-border Language?

Findings in Table 2 present digitization and its role in society. The major code has to do with digitization of Ejagham, role of Ejagham as a digitized language and push factors of the digitization of Ejagham, which definitely impact the revitalization of Ejagham, as well as its promotion as a Cross-border language.

With respect to the first code in Table 2, which registered 40 voices, the quotations state that digitizing Ejagham entails transforming it into digital tools such as computers, internet, social media, and even large data, which will enable the language to be used online. With regard to the second code (Tab. 1), quotations state that as a digitized language, Ejagham will avail opportunities in various ramifications; increased participation of stakeholders in societal issues, enhancement of free trade along the borders, inclusivity and easy congregation of people.

The third code sought to find out push factors of Ejagham digitization. Going by the quotations, the willingness by stakeholders to adapt to new digital technologies, especially when analog systems are transformed to digital space, it is crucial for successful digital transformation, as it enables organizations to leverage the benefits of digital technologies, improve efficiency and enhance overall performance. For that to be enhanced, there must be collaboration between the powers that be within the larger community. Of course, the will of business and policy makers to embark on the digitization of Ejagham was quoted. Last but not the least, development and cultural associations, researchers and policy makers were noted to be important drivers of digitization of Ejagham.

Code	Quotation
Creation of social networks (35)	"Social networks among Ejagham speakers should be created."
	"Make us to come together when it comes to talking."
	"It is important to create social networks of Ejagham speakers."
	"Create social networks."
	"The creation of social networks"
Unification of efforts by Ejaghams from Nigeria and Cameroon (25)	"Concerted efforts of Ejagham in Nigeria and Cameroon"
	"Put Cameroon Ejagham and Nigeria Ejagham together."
	'Make use of both Ejaghams in Nigeria and those in Cameroon."
	"Make use of Ejaghams in Cameroon and those in Nigeria."
	"Bring the two Ejaghams together."
Bridging intergenerational gaps (5)	"Both the youth and adults must work together."
	"It is important for all generations to work together."
Including Ejagham into Data-base (5)	"Including Ejagham into search engines"
	"Planning Ejagham database entries like dictionary entries to be able to export into various formats, including Rich Text Format (RTF) that can be read in a word-processing programme such as Microsoft Word"

Tab. 3: How can Ejagham be availed of digitization?

Findings in Table 3 present data are based on how Ejagham can be digitized The major code is the creation of social networks among Ejagham speakers (35), which is backed by respondents, making use of factual arguments such as: "Social networks among Ejagham speakers should be created." The code that followed closely is Unification of efforts by Ejaghams from Nigeria and Cameroon (25), which is also backed by various view-points such as: "Concerted efforts of Ejagham Nigeria and Cameroon," "Put Cameroon Ejagham and Nigeria together," 'Make use of both Ejaghams in Nigeria and those in Cameroon", "Make use of Ejaghams in Cameroon and those in Nigeria,", "Bring the two Ejaghams together." The unification of efforts by Ejagham speakers, both from Nigeria and Cameroon, will better enhance the digitization of Ejagham as a cross-

border language. The other codes on the digitization of Ejagham focused on "bridging the intergenerational gaps and including Ejagham into the data base. As far as the former is concerned, elders and youth must be involved in the process of digitization programmes, in order to bridge the intergenerational gap. As for the latter, respondents thought that, for Eagham to be digitized, the language must be included in the database, such that school-based language teaching, like generating pedagogic contents such as poetry, and other literary content will be stored and retrieved for posterity. In that way, virtual language communities will be created, with an additional impetus of creating learning modules such that they could help to promote Ejagham as a cross-border language, where speakers could be brought together even from great distances. This is in line with Rikowski (2011)who postulates that digitization must be part of a collaborative process within the language community, this means language end-users must be included.

Codes	Quotation
Opportunities for digitalizing Ejagham	"Existence of indigenous knowledge" (45)
	"Ejagham comprises intangible knowledge."
	"Ejagham is a heritage language." (10)
	"Ejagham consists of cultural content" (15)
	"Ejagham can be used to convey traditional practices. (27)
	"Accelerate pace of socio-economic development through increased cross-border integration with Nigeria." (35)
	"Extend the reach of health services and improve the social well-being of users of the language." (29)
	"Healthcare services could be delivered in the Ejagham language, resulting in effective communication between service users and healthcare professionals." (30)
	"Preservation of traditional knowledge, particularly in the field of medicine and its use in the delivery of healthcare will improve health outcomes for the population." (40)
	"Market expansion for goods and services as product-branding, packaging and advertising will be in the language understood by potential consumers." (22)

Codes	Quotation
Opportunities for digitalizing Ejagham	"Speakers of the language, especially the youths, will deepen their knowledge of, and improve their, digital skills, which could in turn increase their access to the tools of the global economy, like phones, computers and the internet-the real benefit being equal opportunity." (27)
	"The individual and collective identity of the speakers of the language will be revived." (37)
	"The Ejagham language will be used to express complex and changing local identities, in a way that reflects the lived realities of the people." (11)

Tab. 4: Opportunities of digitizing Ejagham

Findings from Table 4 indicate a number of opportunities presented by respondents, as based on opportunities for digitizing Ejagham as a Cross-border language. There is evidence from Table 4 that the greater majority (N=45) of respondents affirmed that there is indigenous knowledge embedded in Ejagham, which is an opportunity for digitization. Closely followed is the aspect of "Preservation of traditional knowledge, particularly in the field of medicine and its use in the delivery of healthcare will improve health outcomes for the population" (40).

Another argument used to back the opportunity of digitizing Ejagham is that "The individual and collective identity of the speakers of the language will be revived" (37).

Based on the findings in Table 4, digitization of Ejagham will accord flexibility and fluidity, not only in the movement of goods and services, but also people, which will no doubt facilitate economic development. That apart, there will be the creation of jobs in the perspective of digital technologies. There will also be easy communication. In all that, there will be the preponderance of innovation in socio-politico economic activities for easy governance and inclusivity. Practically, such innovations will translate into e-banking, e-health, and new jobs in cyberspace.

The findings of this study conform to Meighan (2021) who believes that indigenous languages have a number of opportunities for digitization, given that they are not only embedded with indigenous knowledge, but also have content that could be used in several domains of life.

Codes	Quotations
Challenges of digitizing Ejagham (45)	"Technological know-how of the users, lack of knowledge, lack of access to the internet, lack of electricity" (40)
	"Unavailability of IT resources" (56)
	"Unavailability of high-speed internet" (34)
	"Lack of proficiency in Ejagham" (28)
	"The notion that only the rich can effect digitization" (11)
	"Government tends to work on behalf of indigenous people, rather than get the indigenous people at the centre of technology" (15)
	"Inadequate infrastructure, both digital, such as total absence of internet, and non-digital, such as the limited number of teachers of the language, its absence in the school curriculum etc." (44)
	"Commercial viability and cost effectiveness, as the project cannot be funded wholly by public sector (government); private sector may not agree to participate, given the market value of the Ejagham population" (16)
	"Absence of support from policy makers who rely more on exoglossic languages" (35)
	"Lack of support/interest from speakers of the Ejagham language, due partly to the effect of 'colonial mentality'; negative attitudes towards Ejagham (37)

Tab. 5: Challenges of digitizing

Findings in Table 5 are based on the second part of Research Question 2 that sought to understand the challenges involved in digitization of Ejagham as a Cross-border language.

Challenges of digitization of Ejagham are backed by viewpoints such as: "Unavailability of IT resources"(56); "Technological know-how of the users, lack of knowledge, lack of access to the internet, lack of electricity"(40); "Lack of support/interest from speakers of the Ejagham language, due partly to effect of 'colonial mentality'; negative attitudes towards Ejagham (37); and "Absence of support from policymakers who rely more on exoglossic languages"(35).

This means that the unavailability of IT infrastructure is one of those aspects that stand on the way of bridging the digital divide of Ejagham

as a cross-border language. The aspect of lack of support from speakers of Ejagham is equally a thorny one, owing to the colonial mentality that has been imbibed by speakers of indigenous languages who regard their heritage languages as primitive and backward. Inadequate infrastructure is another barrier to digitization, as this is seen in both material and human; while there is limited internet and electricity to pilot the internet, there is the scarcity of gadgets, like cellphones and computers, which are for a privileged few in the urban areas. It should be noted that most of those who are proficient in Ejagham live in the rural areas. As if that is not enough, there is also the lack of skilled language users, to champion the aspect of digitization. Lack of support from policy makers compounds the problem because of the tendency to hold tight onto colonial legacy, which puts the two official languages on the fore, to the detriment of Ejagham.

The totality of quotations from Table 5 imply that many jobs and petty businesses will face competition that could put them out of business, owing to a mismatch between the skills and resources required to compete in a rapidly changing market, and the current capabilities of these jobs and businesses. This mismatch could lead to significant disruptions and challenges for individuals and communities reliant on these industries.

Literacy in Ejagham is yet to have a solid backing, to make digitization realistic. Limited skills in digitization could be a drawback, especially to the vulnerable; those without digital skills may lag behind the rest. Digitization may introduce insecurity in data information, which may be released without confidentiality. For example, some cultural aspects, like the 'Expe' cult, that have been guarded for centuries may be exposed and thus become loose and mundane; the secrets that have held the cult supreme may be compromised.

The lack of political will and inadequate literacy skills in Ejagham as it is not properly incorporated into the school system, are among the challenges that must be abated in order for the benefits of digitization of cyberspace to be experienced.

Conclusion

Ejagham, like most indigenous languages in Cameroon is largely outside the digitization landscape, and this may likely be the case for many more years to come. Nevertheless, there have been sporadic attempts to digitize the language (for example, The Holy Bible in Ejagham), but these efforts may have been driven more by other reasons, like the desire to convert the natives to Christianity, rather than the need to valorize the language and preserve the Ejagham culture.

The population of Cameroon has been observed to grow at a rate of over 15 % per annum (Mbaku 1993; Kouega 2007; Ojongnkpot 2015; Cameroon Population Movement 2023; UNDESA 2024). Should this trend continue, the population of the speakers of Ejagham is likely to increase exponentially, thereby making the language a viable instrument for commercial transaction. Perhaps, it is at this point that a proactive interest in digitizing the Ejagham language could be perceived. Digitizing Ejagham will continue to revitalize and accord it status, increase its corpus and use, learning and teaching. Who knows, there may be an added value of change of attitude towards the language. Albeit, digitization of Ejagham is not a one-stop shop; rather, it must be an integrated activity with the larger context of community efforts and collaborative activity. If one thing is evident, it is that digitization has the potential of uniting and fostering secondary linguistic communities. New speakers of Ejagham may not be created in the digitization process, but it may contribute to the development and appreciation of the language.

It is therefore wished that members of the Ejagham community engage with digitization, which means language users become, not merely consumers of digitization, but also practicing creators of digitization. It is at this point that this study conforms to Fishman (1991) who states that "although cyber-space can be put to use for (reversing language shift) purposes, neither computer programmes, e-mail, search engines, the web as a whole, chat boxes or anything directly related to any or all of them can substitute for face-to-face interaction with real family imbedded in real community."

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Sarita Monjane Henriksen
(Universidade Pedagógica de Maputo)

Mozambican languages in the public sphere: An opportunity to be seized

Abstract

Mozambique is characterised by a considerably high ethno-linguistic diversity. In addition to the African languages of Bantu origin, the country also hosts many other languages of European and Asian origin, representing a rich tapestry of cultures and identities. However, a significant proportion of these languages do not play any role in the public sphere, facing a variety of challenges in the context of public administration, governance, and service delivery. Drawing on a review of existing literature and empirical data from the Mozambican society, this study delves into the multifaceted issues related to the use of Mozambican languages in the public sphere. The study analyses the historical, socio-political, and economic factors that have contributed to the marginalisation of these languages and their exclusion from official government functions and service delivery, and it looks at the implications of language policies, as well as the role of language, in fostering inclusive governance and sustainable development. Key themes explored in this study include the impact of language ideologies and attitudes on the question of language choice, the implications of language use on access to public services, the judicial system, and the need to promote a more positive stance to existing languages, majority and minority alike, as a way of embracing the country's linguistic diversity, and building tolerance and social cohesion. In addition, the study looks at the best practices in countries in the region, aimed at addressing the challenges faced by African languages in the public sector. The findings of this study point to the intricate relationship between language, ideology, and governance in Africa, shedding light on the experiences of Mozambican language users and their interactions with the public sector. The ultimate goal of the study is to enrich the discourse on language, ideology and governance in Mozambique, contributing to a deeper understanding of the complexities and dynamics surrounding linguistic diversity in the country, and offering insights into potential language policy interventions aimed at promoting lin-

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guistic inclusivity, language maintenance, cultural preservation and equitable public service delivery in the country.

Keywords: Language diversity, ideology, attitudes, public sphere, inclusivity, governance

Introduction

The subordinated, subaltern, and minoritised status of African languages, as well as their exclusion from most formal and high-status domains, such as governance, public administration, and education, in many post-independent and post-colonial states, has been widely debated (Mathe 2025; Jonhera/Nyoni 2023). At times, the issue has been discussed in terms of the dichotomy between majority and minority languages (Wildsmith-Cromarty et al. 2023; Pedley/Viaut 2018), and/or languages of economic progress, internationalisation, and globalisation versus languages of culture and identity (Negash 2005; Marlina 2013).

In this regard, several scholars, among them, Kamwangamalu (2004), argue that the provision of mother tongue education in African languages appears as important as any other issues, political and economic planning among them, underlining the need to look at the interface between language policy and language economics, because education plays an important role in fostering employment, creating sustainable livelihoods, fighting poverty, promoting participation, and gaining access to power. Kamwendo (2006), on the other hand, defends the need to build ownership and gather support from the grassroots to ensure the success of policies aimed at promoting and officially recognising the so-called minority languages. In other words, while top-down policies may be well-intentioned, they are more likely to succeed if they are informed by the wishes and desires of the people in the relevant communities and societies, who are the primary beneficiaries of such policies.

This study is a review of existing linguistic diversity and the multilingual situation of Mozambique, and it briefly discusses the hegemonic role that the Portuguese language has been playing as the country's exclusive official language. In addition, the study presents instances in

which Mozambican Bantu languages begin to gain terrain and become increasingly more visible. The study also revisits the language practices in a number of other countries in the Southern Africa region, with a particular focus on Zimbabwe. Finally, it highlights that it appears the time has now come to press for the use of Mozambican languages beyond the family and informal domains and bring them to the fore in a number of areas in the public sphere. The forces claiming for the expansion and/or promotion of the use of Mozambican languages in domains once exclusively reserved for the Portuguese language seem to come both from the masses (through the everyday use of such languages in conversations, in informal and family settings), but equally in the arts and cultures, religious service, in radio broadcasting, and most particularly community radio, the internet, and advertisement, just to mention a few.

Methodological considerations

The primary data for this study were mainly collected from a thorough ethnographic observation of everyday language practices in Maputo city, with a focus on the presence of Mozambican Bantu languages in the public sphere. Before moving further, a review of the concept of the public sphere appears appropriate. As such, Habermas' (1991) view of the public sphere as the area of social life where public opinion emerges seems to apply. For this study, the public sphere comprises a variety of platforms that are accessible and used by members of a polity, including in both formal and informal settings. Among them, we should highlight the school system, public administration services, streets, roads, and their respective toponomy, as well as a multiplicity of social media arenas, ranging from television channels, radio broadcasting, print media, including newspapers, and the internet. The public sphere also includes out-of-home media, such as billboards and the urban linguistic landscape.

The study also relies on a literature review of sources in the Southern African region and elsewhere, which discuss the use of African languages in formal and/or high-status domains. It should be said that African languages are often seen as minority or minoritised varieties, as compared with European languages, which are widely classified as

majority languages. In this regard, the study by Mathe and Motsaathebe (2023), on the use of Zimbabwean languages in radio broadcasting, is rather elucidating.

Linguistic diversity and multilingualism in Mozambique

Mozambique, which is geographically located in Southern Africa, is bordered by the Indian Ocean to the East, the Republic of Tanzania to the North, Malawi and Zambia to the Northwest, Zimbabwe to the West, and the Republic of South Africa and the Kingdom of Eswatini to the Southwest. The country is characterised by a high ethnolinguistic and cultural diversity, hence by the co-existence of a multiplicity of languages, most of which belong to the Bantu language family. Despite the lack of consensus regarding the number of languages spoken in the country, several scholars, among them Sitoe/Ngunga (2000) and Firmino (2000), refer to the existence of at least 20 African languages. While Chimbutane (2022) indicates that 18 languages of the Bantu language family are spoken in the country, other authors, such as Lewis (2009), refer to the existence of 43 Mozambican languages.

Henriksen (2022) argues that this discrepancy and imprecision regarding the exact number of languages spoken in the country most likely result from a lack of a major and thorough dialectological study conducted in the whole extension of the Mozambican territory. Such a study would have, primarily, allowed the mapping and identification of the language varieties spoken in the country, and informed on whether they are distinct languages, or dialects of the same language. In addition, it would have highlighted the existence of a linguistic continuum of Bantu languages, where instances of mutual intelligibility, linguistic interference and influence are noticeable, particularly in relation to those varieties which display a geographical proximity and have been in contact with each other throughout the centuries. Examples of language varieties which are mutually intelligible are the cases of XiChangana, XiRonga, Xitswa, XiChopi and Bitonga, spoken in the south of Mozambique, in the provinces of Maputo, Gaza, and Inhambane. A note should be made at this stage to highlight that in the neighbouring South Africa,

Changana is also spoken, being classified as a dialect of Tsonga, and it is a cross-border language, shared with Mozambique.

Regarding the question of the number of African languages and/or dialects spoken on the continent, it is not by chance that Makoni and Pennycook (2007) call for the need to deconstruct and reconstitute languages. The authors, in García (2007), argue that the enumerability of languages appears to be an invention, which acts as a measure to contain and control. On his turn, Extra (2008: 7) points to the importance of carrying out language surveys, claiming that they "offer valuable insights into both the distribution and vitality of languages across different population groups". Extra and Yagmur (2004), on the other hand, claim that these kinds of data are also crucial for devising comprehensive educational policies that consider the teaching of both the national majority and home minority languages.

As already indicated above, the languages spoken in Mozambique include, first and foremost, African languages, the majority of which belong to the Bantu language family. In the official discourse, and in the Constitution of the Republic (*República de Moçambique* 2004), these languages are all referred to as national languages (Boletim da República 2004), although none of them is spoken or understood by the majority of Mozambicans. As a matter of fact, there is not, in the country, a nationwide *Lingua Franca*, a common language understood or spoken by the majority of Mozambicans. However, it would certainly be possible to identify languages that could be successful candidates for the role of regional *Lingua Franca*. These are the cases of Emackwa, which is widely spoken in the northern provinces of Mozambique, by approximately 26 % of the population, CiNyanja and/or CiSena, spoken by approximately 8 % and 7 %, respectively, in the central provinces of the country, and XiChangana, spoken by around 8.6 % of the populations, in the southern part of Mozambique. In addition, other languages spoken in the country include Arabic, which is used mainly for religious purposes (Lopes 1998), as well as languages of Asian origin, such as Konkani (Maciel 2018). Dialects of Chinese, namely Mandarin and Cantonese, are also spoken in Mozambique, brought about by the new wave of Chinese immigrants into the country, resulting from Chinese investment in Mozambique (Feijó 2012).

The Portuguese language was adopted in 1975, the time of the country's independence, as the only official language, regardless of the multilingual nature of the country and the very small number of Portuguese language speakers at the time. The percentage of Portuguese first language (L1) speakers in Mozambique at independence was only 1.2 % (Chimbutane 2012). The adoption of Portuguese as the country's only official language was justified by the fact that it was seen as being neutral in the sense that it did not belong to any of the ethnic indigenous groups, and as such it was perceived as coming to serve well the role of nation building and language of national unity (Ganhão 1979; Stroud 1999).

One could contend that, following independence, the government had little choice but to designate Portuguese as the sole official language. This was largely because no Bantu language was spoken or understood by most Mozambicans (Henriksen 2010; 2023), coupled with the absence of a standardised and unified orthography across Bantu languages, and, in some instances, a complete lack of a written form. Furthermore, the scarcity of educational materials in Mozambican Bantu languages and the shortage of qualified teachers to instruct in these languages made Portuguese the most practical and preferred option for the country's exclusive official language in 1975.

There is no doubt that the post-independence language policy was inspired by an ideology of assimilation, that is, the view that everyone, regardless of their first language (L1), should communicate in the official and dominant language. It could also be argued that the language policy of the post-independence period was equally oriented by an ideology of internationalisation, that is, the adoption of a language that would allow us, Mozambicans, to communicate with the outer world. In this particular case, by adopting the Portuguese language in 1975, Mozambicans would be in a position to use a Language of Wider Communication (LWC) to communicate with Portuguese-language speakers from all the PALOP (*Países Africanos de Língua Oficial Portuguesa*, or, in English, Portuguese-speaking African countries), which include Angola, Cape Verde, Guiné Bissau and São Tomé e Príncipe. The use of Portuguese would also allow us to reach out to the CPLP (*Comunidade dos Países de Língua Oficial Portuguesa,* or, in English, the Community of Countries which have Portuguese as Official Language), which, in addition to the

four above-mentioned PALOP countries, also includes Portugal, Brazil, East Timor and Equatorial Guinea.

As already mentioned, Mozambique is considered to be one of the most linguistically heterogeneous countries in the world, as illustrated by Table 1 below. Lopes (1998: 446) claims that the country is "among the 15 most linguistically diverse countries in Africa," meaning that, in numerical terms, no language "can claim majority language status at a national level." Lopes (1998) draws on Robinson (1993: 52-55), who argues that high linguistic diversity refers to "a situation where no more than fifty percent of the population speak the same language," and that "a ranking of degree of linguistic diversity should not be based on the absolute number of languages in a country, but rather on the percentage of the population speaking any single language". Lopes also refers to Grimes (1992: 91), whose data on countries of Africa where no single language group exceeds 50 % of the population show that 25 of the total number of African countries fall into this category. Therefore, the country's high linguistic diversity or superdiversity (Blommaert and Rampton 2011), and the lack of a common language shared by at least half of the approximately 30 million Mozambicans would make it difficult to single out one Mozambican Bantu language to serve all Mozambicans.

A closer examination of the linguistic profile of Mozambique, as earlier mentioned and as shown below, indicates that the Mozambican language with the highest number of speakers is Emachuwa, with 26 % of speakers, followed by XiChangana, with 8.6 % of speakers (*Instituto Nacional de Estatística* (INE) 2022; Firmino 2000), corroborating with Lopes' argument that less than 50 % of the population speaks the same language.

No.	Languages	Speakers	%	Provinces spoken
1	EMACHUWA	5.813.083	26	Cabo Delgado, Nampula, Niassa, Zambézia, Sofala
2	PORTUGUESE	3.686.890	16	All provinces
3	XICHANGANA	1.919.217	8,6	Gaza, Maputo, Maputo City, Inhambane, Niassa
4	ELOMWE	1.574.237	7	Nampula, Niassa, Zambézia
5	CINYANJA	1.790.831	8	Niassa, Tete, Zambézia

No.	Languages	Speakers	%	Provinces spoken
6	CISENA	1.578.164	7	Manica, Sofala, Tete, Zambézia
7	ECHUWABO	1.050.696	4,7	Sofala, Zambézia
8	CINDAU	836.038	3,7	Manica, Sofala
9	XITSWA	836.644	3,7	Gaza, Inhambane, Maputo, Sofala
10	SIGN LANGUAGES	4.173	0,018	All provinces
11	OTHER MOZAMBICAN LANGUAGES	2.633.088	11,8	All provinces
12	OTHER FOREIGN LANGUAGES	112.385	0,5	All provinces
13	UNKNOWN	407.927	1,8	All provinces
Total		22.243.373	100	All provinces

Tab. 1: Languages spoken in Mozambique and percentage of L1 speakers (Source: Adapted from INE (*Quadro 22 & 24*), Census 2017)

It is important to highlight that the category *Other Mozambican languages*, under item 11 on the Table, may also include cross border languages shared with neighbouring countries in the region, such as Xichangana, spoken in both Mozambique and South Africa, Shona and Cindau shared with Zimbabwe, Cinyanja, spoken in Malawi and Shimakonde and Kiswahili, shared with Tanzania (Henriksen 2023). Furthermore, within the scope of intra-continental migrations in Africa, one should assume the existence of immigrant languages, probably categorised under items 12 and 13, respectively, brought from countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Somalia, and others, as reported by Henriksen (2023).

Adding to the already existing linguistic mosaic of the country, it is important to highlight the key role played by English, as the main foreign language taught and learned in the Mozambican school system, and widely used by academic and business sector stakeholders and politi-

cians in society at large, as the main international language. It is a language in high demand by Mozambicans due to the perceived academic, professional, and economic opportunities associated with speaking it and it is seen as an instrument of upward social mobility. After all, except Mozambique, which is a Portuguese-speaking country, all neighbouring countries have English as their main or co-official language. The French language is also present in Mozambican society, and most particularly in the school system, and is taught in public schools, from grades 8–12, as the second main foreign language. Other European languages spoken in Mozambique, although in specific settings such as language centres and/or institutes, higher education institutions and universities and other restricted sectors, are Spanish and German. The increasing demand for language courses in both Spanish and German derives from the fact that the two countries (Spain and Germany) have been offering scholarships for post-graduate studies through the Spanish Cooperation (MAEC-AECID), and the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD).

A brief note on the unassailable position of the Portuguese language

The fact that the Portuguese language is the country's only official language, and that it is linked to the job market, the public administration, and the school system, has been determinant in contributing to its power, prestige, its unrivalled position, and the perception that it is irreplaceable in Mozambique. Attitudes to Portuguese are highly positive. It is a language valued by the elites, but equally by the masses. In fact, the Portuguese language appears to have been appropriated, transformed, manipulated, and seasoned by Mozambican language users, by the contact with the Bantu languages and cultures and the English language as well. Several studies refer to an emerging variety of Mozambican Portuguese (Gonçalves 2004), mixed and influenced by the Bantu languages spoken in the country, characterised by neologisms (Machungo 2016; Ferrete 2021; 2024), malapropisms that seem to be embedded in Mozambican Portuguese, accepting borrowings from both the national languages and English, among other creative and innovative features resulting from this sociolinguistic diglossia situation of languages in contact.

It should be indicated that the number of Portuguese L1 speakers has been increasing over the years; from 1.2 % Portuguese L1 speakers in 1975 (Firmino 2000), to 10.7 % in 2018 (Timbane 2022). Abdula (2018: 83) claims that the number of speakers of the official language in the post-independence period appears to have exceeded the number of speakers in the entire colonial period (which lasted almost 500 years). According to Gonçalves (2004), this increase is explained by the post-independence educational policy and the willingness of the Mozambicans to adopt Portuguese as a language of communication to the detriment of the Bantu languages. Data from the 2007 general population census shows an increase in both mother tongue and second language Portuguese speakers. At the time, out of a population of 20 million, 10 % spoke Portuguese as their L1, an increase of 8.8 %, and the percentage of those who spoke Portuguese as L2 had risen to 55.5 %, a significant increase since it rose by 31.5 % in urban areas. Table 2, below, presents the significant change in scenario and growth in the number of Portuguese L1 and L2 speakers in the period 1980–2020.

Year	Portuguese L1 Speakers	Portuguese L2 Speakers	Portuguese L1 & L2 Speakers
1980	1,2 %	23,2 %	24,4 %
1997	6,5 %	33 %	39,5 %
2007	10,5 %	39,5 %	50,4 %
2020 (projection)	18,1 %	49,8 %	67,9 %

Tab. 2: *Percentage of Portuguese L1 and L2 speakers in Mozambique* (Source: Adapted from INE (Chimbutane 2012))

A concluding remark on the unassailable position of the Portuguese language in Mozambican society is the fact that Mozambican Portuguese is being intrinsically transformed by contact with Mozambican Bantu languages. The following session focuses briefly on the reciprocal influence between Mozambican Portuguese and the Bantu languages of Mozambique.

The two-way reciprocal influence between Mozambican Portuguese and Bantu languages

Linguistic interference, mutual influence, crossings and borrowings are often reported as obvious consequences of language contact (Jafarova 2022; Sankoff 2001; Coetser 1996; Haugen 1970). Therefore, it is not surprising that the same processes and phenomena have been observed and documented when it comes to the contact between Mozambican Portuguese and Bantu languages. Figure 1, below, presents some words that made their way into Mozambican Portuguese, coming from the Bantu languages, and are now widely used by young people and adults, and rural and urban citizens alike.

Fig. 1: Bantu words in Mozambican Portuguese and Portuguese words in Bantu languages (Source: Mozambican Portuguese in Kaleidoscope (Exhibition))

This figure, extracted from Ferrete (2024: 146), presents several examples of the two-way, reciprocal influence between Mozambican Portuguese and Bantu languages, showing how Mozambican Portuguese has adopted and incorporated words from the Bantu languages and how the Bantu languages have incorporated words from Portuguese. In other words, Mozambican Portuguese and the Bantu languages, which are indeed languages that co-exist with each other daily, influence and transform each other, giving rise to new words that enrich both Portuguese and the Bantu languages. The centre of the picture, highlighted by the dark blue background, shows that Mozambican Portuguese incorporates quite many words that originate from the Bantu languages. Such words include, for instance, *molwene* (borrowed from XiRhonga, a Bantu language from the South), which means street boy, or *mucunha* (borrowed from Emakhuwa, a Bantu language from the South), which means both white man and boss, and *matequenha* (borrowed from Yao, a Bantu language from the North), meaning a flea that penetrates areas of the body (mainly between the toes). The figure also presents a considerable number of words borrowed from Portuguese and incorporated in the Bantu languages, such as *gereja* (Ndau, a Bantu language from the North), from the Portuguese word *Igreja* (church), and *simenti* (Nyungwe, a Bantu language also from the North), from the Portuguese word *semente* (cement), or *butawu*, from the Portuguese word *butão* (button) (in Sena, a Bantu language from the Sena). A close observation of the linguistic practices of Mozambicans reveals numerous instances of translanguaging (Rafi 2025; MacSwan 2017), code-mixing and code-switching (Ahmad et al. 2025; Baixane 2023).

Studies have also reported the influence of address terms in Bantu languages on Portuguese, considering that Portuguese has the informal form (*tu*), and the more formal form (*você*), and +formal (*senhor/senhora*), which, according to Lemos (2017), is not the case in most Bantu languages. This leads many Portuguese speakers in Mozambique to mix the "two forms" when addressing the same person. Mozambican Portuguese also witnesses the introduction of new semantic nuances replacing existing lexical elements, such as the words *papá* (father) and *mamã* (mother), and *tio* (uncle) and *tia* (aunt), used to refer, not only to the biological father, mother, uncle or aunt but also to any adult man or woman, as a symbol of respect.

Firmino (1995: 39) presents quite a number of examples of the endogenization of the Portuguese language in Mozambique, including, among others, the elimination of the *tu/vous* distinction, as indicated by Lemos (2017), lexical innovations and transformations, just to mention a few. As argued by Firmino (1995), the symbolic meaning of Portuguese has indeed been redefined. Both in the official and public discourse, it has largely lost its colonial connotations. The Portuguese language has been ideologically constructed as a national liaison language, at the same time that it is developing new discursive patterns, thus calling for a review of the current language policy of the country.

Having briefly reviewed the mutual and reciprocal influence between Mozambican Portuguese and Bantu languages, what follows is a discussion of the marginalisation that Mozambican Bantu languages have endured, their exclusion from mainstream domains of society, the question of attitudes, and the increasing opportunities that seem to be emerging to change the *status quo*.

National Mozambican languages: subalternity and marginalisation

As already indicated elsewhere in this study, the national languages of Mozambique have historically and systematically been excluded from playing an important and pivotal role in the more formal domains of Mozambican society, such as education, the judiciary, and public administration at large; their role has been, at least up until recently, seen as being solely reserved to the informal and family domains. Attitudes to these languages, both in the colonial and post-independence periods, were often quite negative, as they were all considered dialects, with all the related connotations; that is, inferior, subaltern, and unimportant. At times, though, over the years, attitudes have also been somewhat ambivalent, a mixture of negative and positive.

From an initial prohibition of the use of Mozambican Bantu languages in schools and other official and formal domains in the period immediately after independence, due to the perception that they would hinder national unity and cohesion, the Mozambican Bantu languages have also been seen as symbols of the Mozambican cultures and identity. As a mat-

ter of fact, this is what is enshrined in Article 9 of the Constitution of the Republic of Mozambique, which stipulates that the national languages should be valued and promoted as symbols of culture and identity. In essence, this is how it reads on page 3:

> O Estado valoriza as línguas nacionais como património cultural e educacional e promove o seu desenvolvimento e utilização crescente como línguas veiculares da nossa identidade.

Or, in English,

> The State values national languages as cultural and educational heritage and promotes their development and increasing use as languages that convey our identity.

For a critical discussion of the rather vague nature of the above statement, as there is no reference to how such promotion should be done, as well as for a thorough review of the question of attitudes to the national languages of Mozambique, see Henriksen (2010).

The map shows that, while the Portuguese language is a common denominator, that is, it is present and spoken in all provinces, and particularly in capital cities, the same cannot be said of the national languages. In other words, not all Mozambican languages are present in all provinces of the country. However, a closer look at the map shows that a few Mozambican Bantu languages are spoken beyond the borders of a single province. For example, if we look at the north region, it is visible that Emakhuwua is spoken in the three northern provinces. The same happens to Cisena, which is widely spoken in the centre of the country, and finally XiChangana, which crosses the borders of the three southern provinces. This constitutes evidence that it would be possible to identify one *Lingua Franca* for each of the three main regions of the country, corroborating Firmino's (1995) arguments that because the indigenous languages have transcended their traditional roles, and have adapted to the contemporary social conditions in which they are used, and while they are still indexing ethnic and /or regional identities, they have also acquired the capacity to invoke national realities, hence the need to review the current language policy. Thus, although being aware of the existence of relevant success stories and best practices from other geographies in the world, when it comes to the management of linguistic diversity vis-à-vis national cohesion (Extra 2008), in what follows, the

study looks at possible lessons that could be learnt from neighbouring countries, in Southern Africa, in relation to language policy interventions aimed at bringing African languages to the fore.

Fig. 2: Map of the most spoken Mozambican Bantu languages by province (Source: Chimbutane 2012)

African languages in the public space in Southern Africa: lessons to be learnt

The Southern African region presents useful examples of the use of African languages in the public sphere (Alexander 2000; Kamwangamalu 2001; 2004; Massombuka 2018; Beukes 2004; Kamwendo 2006), which could be a learning experience for Mozambique. One of the most far-

reaching lessons is undoubtedly the South African case, where the South African Language Bill has been passed, not only awarding an official language status to twelve (12) languages, so far, including the South Africa Sign Language, but also with the main goals of seeking "to promote equitable use of the official languages of South Africa and taking practical and positive measures to regulate and monitor the use of official languages". In addition, the Bill aims to "promote parity of esteem and equitable treatment of official languages, facilitate equitable access to services and information and promote good language management by national departments, national public entities and national public enterprises to meet the needs of the public; and seek to provide for the adoption of language policies" (Republic of South Africa 2011: 7).

Additional lessons could be extracted from the Zimbabwean and Malawian cases as well (Jongore 2020; Sibanda 2019; Hungwe 2007; Kamwendo 2005), whereby, despite the obvious and manifest dominance of English, and the visible preference for it at the expense of the indigenous Zimbabwean languages, the latter have always been used in formal domains such as education. For instance, while Hungwe (2007: 146) indicates that both Shona and Ndebele have undergone a process of orthography development, and that literature and dictionaries are published in both languages, there is, however, an indication that "curriculum policy in Zimbabwe has progressively served to provide avenues for engaging and locking into networks of opportunity that are mostly located outside national borders, which is a manifestation of a global dynamic" (Hungwe 2007: 147). This is seconded by Jongore (2020), who concludes that replacing English as the medium of instruction and paralleling it with indigenous languages will require addressing the issue directly.

Discussing language policy in Malawi, Kamwendo (2005: 65) highlights the revival of linguistic and cultural identity-seeking behaviour as well as the politics of recognition in this multilingual and multiethnic country, characterised by the demand for official language status for languages that had been marginalised. The language practices and approaches used in these countries, to claim official language recognition, would certainly be a takeaway for Mozambique.

Having briefly argued that Mozambique has a lot to learn from the neighbouring countries' language policies, the following session turns

to the opportunities that appear to emerge for the Mozambican national languages.

Is there a space and opportunities for Mozambican National languages? – Concluding remarks

Following from Firmino's (1995: 40) claim that "a language policy for Mozambique must create the conditions conducive to a more widespread use of Portuguese, and also the possibility of using Mozambican national languages in institutional contexts, such as formal education, courts, the administrative apparatus or mass communication", this study contends that a close observation of the language practices of individuals and groups in Mozambican society, in the private and public domains, already point to an increasing presence and visibility of Mozambican Bantu languages in the public sphere.

An attentive observation of language practices in Mozambican society certainly indicates a widespread use of the Portuguese language, but equally the use of Mozambican languages in different contexts, as presented below:

1. by state institutions, such as the National Meteorologic Institute (INAM) or the National Institute for Disaster Management (INGD), in events of dissemination of early warning and disaster alert messages, targeting a variety of speech communities in the rural areas, in the face of the occurrence of emergencies;
2. on community radio, which has a countrywide coverage. According to CAICC (2023) , a total of twenty (20) national languages are used by community radio stations to disseminate content to their target audience;
3. in popular music, by older and younger generations of Mozambican musicians alike;
4. during electoral campaigns, not by the presidential candidates themselves, even though they are native speakers of such languages, but by resorting to interpretation;
5. in formal schooling, through the mother tongue-based bilingual education programme, so far involving 16 Mozambican languages and Portuguese.

The above instances of the use of Mozambican languages certainly signify an awareness of the existing linguistic diversity in the country and offer insights into the directions of potential language policy interventions aimed at promoting linguistic inclusivity, cultural preservation, and equitable public service delivery in the country. These developments indicate the opportunity for a change in the language policy of Mozambique, corroborating with Mathe and Motsaathebe (2023: 1) who argue that "the African multilingual public sphere should reflect participation by all ethnolinguistic groups in their indigenous languages, in which both majority language speakers and minority language speakers should be accommodated in the public sphere and multilingualism should occur without switching to the language of the majority".

Acknowledging and valuing diversity is indeed a mechanism for implementing linguistic human rights. By respecting and promoting all the languages spoken in Mozambique, and bringing them to the public sphere, we will be recognising the dignity and rights of all our fellow citizens, regardless of their ethnic or linguistic origin. This mutual respect is essential for building an inclusive and harmonious society.

It is important to exercise caution, however, as managing linguistic diversity and formulating multilingual language policies for both society and the education sector may present significant challenges. Notably, there are substantial financial implications associated with producing educational and reading materials in over 20 languages for use in schools, as well as complexities related to the training of teachers (Henriksen 2010). Furthermore, in a nation already marked by political divisions stemming from the arbitrary partitioning of Africa in the nineteenth century, it is crucial to ensure that the needs of all ethnolinguistic groups are addressed. Failing to do so could risk deepening existing divisions and jeopardising national unity.

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Tomoe Noguchi
(Kyoto University)

Role of mother-tongue in primary education: focusing on the experiences of contemporary hunter-gatherers in Botswana

Abstract

This chapter examines the experiences of indigenous communities in primary education, with a particular focus on language use in schools in Botswana. The G|ui and G‖ana, two linguistic minorities categorized as Khoisan and recognized as post-hunter-gatherer communities, have faced significant challenges due to the Tswana-centric linguistic and cultural orientation of the education system. Since 2023, the draft language policy for education in Botswana has recognized thirty-one additional languages. These languages are introduced not as subjects but as mediums of instruction, intended to facilitate learners understanding by using languages more familiar to them (Republic of Botswana 2022). However, community members have expressed concerns that mother-tongues are treated merely as tools for adapting to the dominant languages. Additionally, debates persist regarding which orthographies should be standardized within these communities. Similar disputes emerged in the 19th century, when missionaries sought to standardize Setswana; literate Batswana criticized European assumptions of Tswana unity and the imposition of varying orthographic systems.
This chapter provides a chronological overview of the G|ui/G‖ana communitys experiences with language and educational policy, and analyzes non-formal education as a recent educational framework within the community. Drawing on this context, the chapter explores how to effectively advocate for mother-tongue education that supports socialization, knowledge transmission, and decision-making within the G|ui/G‖ana community. The discussion further addresses the ideal educational framework for navigating Botswanas multilingual reality.

Keywords: Botswana, G|ui and G‖ana, Language policy, Mother-tongue education, Orthography standardization

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Introduction

This chapter explores the historical evolution of school education in Botswana and the experiences of indigenous communities within this context. The G|ui and G‖ana[1] are two of linguistic groups commonly referred to as Khoisan, also known as post-hunter-gatherer communities. G|ui and G‖ana languages belong to the Southwestern Kalahari Khoe branch of the Khoe-Kwadi family (Vossen 2013), and the number of speakers is estimated to be over 1,000 in the Ghanzi District of Botswana.

Since gaining independence, the government of Botswana has approved only Setswana and English as the mediums of instruction in primary schools. Children begin their early primary education in Setswana, with English introduced progressively in the upper levels. This policy disadvantages many children whose ethnic language is not Setswana, as it limits their access to education and adversely affects their academic performance (Republic of Botswana 2022). G|ui and G‖ana children, in particular, have faced difficulties in their schooling experiences due to an educational system that is linguistically and culturally centered on Tswana norms.

In response to these challenges, the former administration drafted the Botswana Languages Policy in Education in 2022. Following the policy's development, interest in mother-tongue education has increased among community members.

This chapter will first outline the historical development of education in Botswana, followed by a chronological description of the schooling experiences of the G|ui and G‖ana communities. It will also examine practices in non-formal education. Based on these accounts, the author will discuss the characteristics of an appropriate educational system for contemporary hunter-gatherer societies in the future.

For the purpose of this chapter, the following distinctions are made regarding educational settings: the Department of Basic Education under the Ministry of Basic Education in Botswana oversees both formal

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[1] The Khoisan languages employ a number of click-sounds. Five clicks represented by special signs have been known below, /ʘ/ (Bilabial), /!/ ((post)alveolar), /‖/ (Alveolar lateral), /ǂ/ (Palatoalveolar), /|/ (Dental). In particular, the G|ui/G||ana languages characterized in 4 clicks; (post)alveolar, Alveolar lateral, Palatoalveolar, and Dental.

and non-formal education. "Formal education" refers to school-based education. In contrast, "non-formal education" refers to out-of-school educational initiatives for children who have dropped out of the formal school system. Additionally, "informal socialization" describes activities to promote socialization within the local community.

School education in Botswana

Botswana is a landlocked country in southern Africa, known for experiencing one of the fastest-growing economies in the region. Its development has historically been anchored in prudent macroeconomic policies and robust economic institutions. Since gaining independence in 1966, the government has prioritized education and training, allocating an average of 25 % of its annual budget to the education sector alone (Republic of Botswana 2017).

Botswanas first National Policy on Education, introduced in 1977, was grounded in the philosophy of *Kagisano*,[2] which emphasized the principles of democracy, development, self-reliance, and unity. The Revised National Policy on Education (RNPE) (Republic of Botswana 1994), placed significant emphasis on the education and training of children, youth, and adults. Since 2015, the Education and Training Sector Strategic Plan (ETSSP), administered by the Ministry of Education and Skills Development, has aimed to improve learning outcomes by addressing issues related to quality, relevance, access, equity, and accountability across the entire education system, from preschool to tertiary education. This sustained investment has yielded visible improvements in key educational indicators. For example, the net enrolment rate in primary schools, which was below 40 % at independence, has increased to approximately 90 %, with the transition rate from primary to junior secondary school reaching 98 % (Republic of Botswana 2017).

Despite these achievements in expanding access to education, Botswana continues to face challenges related to child schooling. Approximately 10 % of children have not attended primary school. This group

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[2] When Botswana gained independence on 30 September 1966, the new nation adopted *Kagisano*, meaning social harmony, as its philosophy of survival.

includes children from socio-cultural backgrounds that are not conducive to modern education, as well as those from economically disadvantaged families (Republic of Botswana 2017). These challenges are particularly pronounced in remote rural areas (Republic of Botswana 2015). Previous research has identified multiple reasons for school dropout in these areas, including language barriers, limited access to schools, and various economic and social factors. Language differences between children from minority communities and their teachers often result in miscommunication due to the exclusive use of Setswana and English as the mediums of instruction in formal schools (Kiema 2010; Mokibelo 2014).

These challenges faced by socio-cultural minorities are closely tied to the trajectory of Botswanas nation-building. Botswana has maintained plurality politics and this has enabled its peaceful and democratic transition since independence. On the other hand, in regard to the national policy, it has reflected the intention of the Tswana as majority in the country in spite of its multilingual and multicultural status. Le Roux (1999) argued that the government has adopted a policy of promoting one official language and one official "tribe" – Setswana and the Tswana ethnic group – regarded as the national majority. In alignment with this policy, the RNPE approved only Setswana and English as mediums of instruction in formal education, despite the existence of at least 26 language groups in the country (Chebanne 2016). Consequently, many minority groups have expressed opposition to the lack of official recognition of their linguistic identities and the resulting limitations in access to quality education.

The fact that the neglect of their languages is often aired simultaneously with their complaints about the lack of land and political representation of minorities has given the issue of mother-tongue education in Botswana a politically sensitive slant. Therefore, the recommendation to the Ministry of Education by the Task Force for establishment of the Botswana Languages Council in 1997, that the mother-tongue education be allowed in schools in Botswana, had been shelved by parliament until recently. While in theory the principle has been given the green light, in practice the implementation is still problematic due to lack of government programmes to develop materials in languages other than Setswana (Le Roux 1999: 34–35).

Nation-building in Botswana has proceeded under the slogan that the country belongs to *Batswana* – that is, the Tswana people, who are perceived to constitute the majority. This has reinforced the notion that all indigenous populations within Botswana speak Setswana as their mother-tongue (Chebanne/Kewagamang 2020). Although national language and education policies have contributed to a cohesive sense of national identity, they have also engendered significant issues related to the educational and political participation of non-Setswana-speaking communities.

Education for the G|ui/G‖ana

The G|ui and G‖ana are two Khoisan-speaking groups traditionally residing in areas overlapping with the Central Kalahari Game Reserve (CKGR). These groups have been the subject of multidisciplinary research since the mid-20th century (e.g., Silberbauer 1961; Tanaka 1980; Takada 2016). Known for their hunter-gatherer subsistence strategies, they maintained a nomadic lifestyle until the 1980s. In the 1970s, as part of the Remote Area Development Programme – an initiative aimed at managing, educating, and training marginalized populations – they were resettled in a locality called !ʔúì!ùm̀ (administratively known as Xade). Following this relocation, a number of G|ui/G‖ana children were enrolled in the local government primary school (Akiyama 2013).

At this government school, most teachers were native Setswana speakers, whereas the majority of students spoke G|ui or G‖ana as their first language. Language posed a significant barrier for many children, and some were reportedly punished for using their mother-tongues in school [Informal communication with MT, a primary school teacher, 2024]. As a result, many children discontinued their education, often citing corporal punishment as a primary factor (Akiyama 2013). The school environment was described by Kiema (2010), a G|ui speaker, as particularly harsh:

> Those who did well were called *Bongwanake* (my children), but lower achievers were referred to as *Mosarwana ke lona* (worthless Basarwa), if their teachers were angry. It lowered being called Basarwa. The name had negative connotations. It lowered the dig-

> nity and pride we had held before the arrival of formal education. We had never been subjected to such discrimination in Tcamnqoo[3] before. We were slowly forced into accepting that we had "naturally" lower ethnic status. (Kiema 2010: 39)

This testimony highlights the early experience of the G|ui/G‖ana with formal schooling as one shaped by discrimination – not only against their language, but also against their social identity and dignity at the hands of non-G|ui/G‖ana-speaking teachers.

In 1997, the community was once again relocated outside the CKGR to a settlement called Qχ'úĩ̀sà-kínī (administratively referred to as New Xade), now the largest G|ui/G‖ana village. Here, people were compelled to adopt a sedentary lifestyle under government "welfare" provisions, including food rations and pensions. Simultaneously, access to traditional subsistence practices such as hunting and gathering was severely restricted.

The physical environment of the school in Qχ'úĩ̀sà-kínī was significantly improved relative to the earlier period in !ʔúì!ùm̀. The school's capacity expanded, and school hostel was introduced to accommodate students from outside the village. This hostel-style lodging system is common in government schools across Botswana. However, despite these infrastructural developments, key challenges persisted. According to community members, corporal punishment using canes was still reportedly inflicted on students who could not speak Setswana properly [Personal communication with !XX, community member, 2025]. Moreover, instances of bullying by children from other communities – both in classrooms and hostel – contributed to further school dropouts.

Although the educational infrastructure for the G|ui/G‖ana community improved in Qχ'úĩ̀sà-kínī, the cultural and linguistic climate remained largely unchanged from the !ʔúì!ùm̀ period. In fact, it became more complex due to increased enrollment from both local and nonlocal communities. These continued challenges highlight the enduring barriers to equitable education for the G|ui/G‖ana people, shaped by linguistic discrimination, social marginalization, and structural inequalities embedded in the national education system.

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[3] The vernacular term for the area otherwise known as the Central Kalahari Game Reserve (Kiema 2010). In the IPA system, the spelling is *ǂam-ŋ!úű*.

Recent situation in G|ui/G‖ana children's schooling

The author began field research in 2022, focusing on child socialization and education within the contemporary G|ui/G‖ana community. By comparing informal socialization practices within households and formal, school-based education, the author has reported conflicts arising from the contrasting nature of these environments. In response, the study has also examined the role of non-formal education in resolving such conflicts (Noguchi/Takada 2024). The fieldwork was conducted in collaboration with a G|ui-speaking research assistant residing in Qχ'úȉ̃sà-kínī, who is also proficient in G‖ana, Nharo,[4] Setswana, and English. Interviews with community members were conducted in G|ui/G‖ana, whereas interviews with schoolteachers were carried out in English and facilitated by the assistant, using Setswana.

According to official records, over 500 children were registered at the primary school in Qχ'úȉ̃sà-kínī as of 2025. The majority of these children are Khoisan language speakers, primarily G|ui/G‖ana. Children speaking Nharo and ǂqχ'áú-‖ʔàȉ̃ were also identified. In contrast, nearly all teachers were non-local and spoke Setswana or neighboring Bantu languages as their mother-tongues. Only one G‖ana-speaking teacher had been permanently employed, and a few assistant staff were recruited through the Tirelo Sechaba Programme to support classroom activities. Tirelo Sechaba (hereinafter referred to as TS) Programme is the National Service Programme which is responsible for the creation of opportunities for unemployed young people to gain skills and experiences across various industries (Government of Botswana 2022). The medium of instruction was Setswana in Standard 1 and English from Standard 2 onwards.

A Setswana-speaking teacher described the current linguistic challenges as follows:

> Every time the children and I face a language barrier. Even if I tell them something funny, their faces remain serious. Once the assistant staff translate it, they start smiling. We need someone who speaks the children's mother-tongue.

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[4] The largest linguistic group among the Central San. Most Nharo speakers live in and around the town of Ghanzi, and the great majority of those working on the farms run by the whites in Ghanzi belong to this group (Tanaka 1980).

In 2025, three Standard 1 classes were in operation. Setswana-speaking teachers led most classes and could not speak G|ui/G‖ana. The G‖ana-speaking teacher taught a single class, and TS assistants rotated weekly across classrooms. During lessons, teachers instructed in Setswana or English. When students or teachers encountered communication difficulties, the G‖ana-speaking teacher or TS assistants provided translation support. Such situations were frequently observed during Term 1, in which many children experienced their first exposure to Setswana.

Even those who had completed pre-primary education – known as "reception" and targeted at 5-year-olds in the village – often did not fully understand classroom instructions. Teachers frequently repeated simple commands, but some children were unable to respond appropriately. In some cases, teachers resorted to shouting or corporal punishment. Ultimately, when teachers were unsuccessful, they provided individual instruction after school. However, given that each teacher was responsible for more than 30 students, devoting sufficient time to individual support was not feasible.

The author observed that communication breakdowns were especially common among novice teachers, who sometimes expressed frustration over their inability to communicate effectively with students. A few experienced teachers attempted to use simple phrases in G|ui/G‖ana, even though it was not their native language. Despite varied pedagogical strategies, teachers continued to face persistent challenges in classroom communication.

Community members also shared their views on the current educational environment. One G|ui-speaking participant, MS, commented:

> When children are still at a low level, the language barrier destroys them. […] Because they speak *kúā* [G|ui/G‖ana] at home. When they enter school, they hear only Setswana and English, and they can't understand. […] Teachers become tired of the children. Because *kúā* children don't understand what the teachers are saying. They get tired of speaking and end up teaching in a useless way.

MS further added:

> You see that the number of children in Standard 1 is 90. But 6 years later, in Standard 7, how many children graduate? When they move to junior level, they fail and come back to the village. They don't progress to senior level because the requirements are too strict. Only a few children succeed. They are always surrounded by speakers of unfamiliar lan-

> guages and cannot understand the content. Even if the teacher motivates the child, the child realizes that the teacher is talking about things unrelated to the community.

Another community member, |XN, commented on how language use by both children and teachers affects educational outcomes:

> Children go to school every day, but no one is teaching them in their language. I see children fail to understand too much. Even when the teacher gives children homework and they come back home, the child didn't understand because the child didn't understand Setswana properly. […] Teachers face many challenges because teachers speak with children, and the child doesn't properly understand what the teacher is saying. So, the teachers performance goes down. [|XN, a G‖ana speaker]

|XN further elaborated on her own experience with her child's schooling:

> I helped my son [with his homework]. I read the assignment, then I explained it in *kúā*. The son understood, and he said, Ehe! This one means this one and enters here. Do like this, do like this. Then I saw that the child understood.

Community members repeatedly expressed concerns about the consequences of miscommunication between children and teachers. They voiced their frustration with the current school system, noting that children were unable to succeed academically due to fundamental language barriers – despite the fact that success is possible when children receive appropriate support. Miscommunication between teachers and students led to misunderstandings, incomplete homework, and poor performance on exams for progression to junior and senior secondary levels. However, the narratives also reveal that, with adequate explanation in their mother-tongue, children are capable of understanding and engaging with the content.

These testimonies highlight the importance of translating instructional materials into the G|ui/G‖ana languages and incorporating culturally familiar concepts into the curriculum. Community members acknowledged the difficulties teachers face and recognized that, despite utilizing various pedagogical strategies, these often remain ineffective for G|ui/G‖ana-speaking children without adequate linguistic support.

Moreover, some parents expressed empathy and appreciation for the teachers' efforts. They noted that although challenges persist – particularly those arising from language use – the overt discrimination against G|ui/G‖ana children and communities reported during the !ʔúì!ùm̀ period appears to have diminished. Nevertheless, the issue of language

mismatch in classroom instruction continues to hinder effective teaching and learning.

Community perceptions of the draft of the former governments mother-tongue education policy

In response to ongoing educational challenges, the previous administration introduced a draft of a new language policy in 2022. This policy recognized a total of thirty-one minor languages, including G|ui/G‖ana, which was included in Phase 2 due to the development of its orthography. The policy proposed the initial use of these languages as medium of instruction rather than as separate subjects (Republic of Botswana 2022).

However, in 2024, a significant political shift occurred. Although the Botswana Democratic Party had governed the country since independence, the opposition coalition, the Umbrella for Democratic Change, achieved a historic victory in the general elections. This change in leadership was largely driven by public dissatisfaction with the country's economic situation – particularly the downturn in the diamond market, which had severely affected GDP growth and youth employment (Savage 2024). Following this transition, the future implementation of the Botswana Language Policy in Education became uncertain. Despite the uncertainty, community members expressed strong support for the mother-tongue education initiative.

> One G|ui speaker, TN, emphasized the practical benefits of such a policy:
>
> If it [the language policy] is there, students can ask for help from you when the student doesn't understand. He asks you, and if it's done, children can never go and return and just sit. [TN, a G|ui speaker]

Another community member, MS, elaborated on the immediate advantages of instruction in the mother-tongue:

> If you teach him [a child] in *kúā*, he understands immediately. When you teach a child about the field [agriculture], you say that "you first put a seed in the sand; if it rains, that seed germinates." If you teach him this in English, he could say, you are teaching me things that don't exist." But if you teach him in the San language, he immediately thinks and understands, "wow, like this." He immediately understands. You say "seed" in English and he's confused, but when you say *|χúrī* ["seed" in G|ui/G‖ana], he understands immediately.

TN also spoke to the broader implications for the children's future development:

> Because, if the child goes from here [village] without speaking [Setswana/English] properly and stays quiet, they go to junior school and form exclusive groups among the G|ui and G‖ana. They don't get along with other children. They don't feel comfortable [talking to them], and after graduating [from junior secondary school], they return and stay [in the village] and don't apply [for jobs]. It is difficult to speak to them in proper Setswana. Nowadays, school only prepares them for drought labor.

Community members thus recognized that mother-tongue education is crucial not only for helping children understand classroom content but also for enhancing their future employability. As MS pointed out, although children possess rich knowledge from their village lives, this knowledge often fails to align with concepts taught in school through Setswana or English. For children socialized in Qχ'úĩ̀sà-kíní̄, many textbook concepts are unfamiliar. This disconnect has also been described by Kiema: "One strategy many of us attempted was to memorize the whole sentence, but without internalizing the concept" (Kiema 2010: 39).

Introducing mother-tongue instruction could help bridge the gap between community-based knowledge and formal education. It could also improve the social climate among youth in Qχ'úĩ̀sà-kíní̄, many of whom currently face chronic unemployment and are only temporarily hired for government drought relief projects. As TNs narrative suggests, mother-tongue instruction in the early grades may positively influence long-term self-reliance and social integration. Therefore, community members hoped that the implementation of mother-tongue education would not only enhance early childhood learning but also contribute to the adolescents' future career development.

Importance of community members writing in the mother-tongue

During the interviews, participants frequently referred to the orthography that should be adopted for mother-tongue education. Currently, two orthographies exist. One was introduced by Hiroshi Nakagawa (a Japanese linguist), and is based on the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). The other was developed at KURU in D'kar, Ghanzi District, as

part of the activities of the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) and the Christian Reformed Churches in the Netherlands. Linguists Hessel and Coby Visser have been involved in the development of the Nharo dictionary and the publication of various materials to promote literacy (Bolaane 2014; Kuru Family of Organisations 2016; Wynne 2014).

The G|ui/G‖ana languages have the largest phoneme inventory (90 consonants and 10 vowels) among the Khoe-Kwadi languages, and they are tonal (Nakagawa 2024). Hiroshi Nakagawa has worked with the G|ui/G‖ana communities since 1992 (Nakagawa 1996; Nakagawa et al. in compilation). His work has provided a detailed phonological description of the G|ui language and has resulted in a practical orthography for both native speakers and researchers. This orthography is referred to by community members as "Nakagawa's (writing)" (*nàkʰágàwà m̀ ɟì sì*), and it accurately represents the phonological system of G|ui/G‖ana.

The other orthography, called "Nharo people's (writing)" (*nàrō-kò χà ǹ ɟì sì*), is based entirely on the Latin alphabet and includes click sounds: the dental click is written as *c*, the alveolar click as *q*, the palatal click as *tc*, and the lateral click as *x*. This orthography is also used for official documents, such as citizen identification cards for individuals with names in Khoisan languages. Although easier to use due to its reliance on the Latin alphabet, this system often fails to fully represent the original sounds, leading to a loss of phonological distinction through the merging of different sounds into single letters.

During the former administration, a community meeting was held to decide which orthography would be adopted for mother-tongue education in the primary school at Qχ'úȉsà-kínī. At that time, four teacher aides were selected to participate in translation work for early primary education. One of them was |XN, whose testimony highlights the community's perception regarding orthography in schools:

> They [community members] said that we will write using Nharo people's writing. [Then former] government agreed with Nharo writing, not with Nakagawa's. They came and asked us which orthography we wanted. However, people didn't understand Nakagawa's method in detail. So, they responded that they wanted to use the Nharo orthography because it is simple. People will use Nharo writing. We [teacher aides] also learned its writing. We will attend the workshop and learn how to translate in Nharo.
>
> If I can speak, teach, and write [in Nharo], children will do that. So, I will be taught with Nharo clicks, not the clicks of my language – not taught like in G|ui and G‖ana. I feel too

> much pain. I want to learn my language with my language. […] It is not proper. […] All my clicks will stay behind. But if I enter, clicks remain behind – G|ui and G‖ana." – |XN

MT, a G‖ana-speaking teacher who has worked in the primary school since 2014, emphasized the importance of simplicity in writing based on her experience:

> Teacher aides will use Nharo's one. They voted for Nharo (orthography), and it will be used. Nharo language and G|ui/G‖ana language are a little bit different. But they meet somewhere. Nharo orthography is easy. It is good. But I see that it [Nakagawa's orthography] is difficult for us. – MT

People expressed differing perspectives on orthography, particularly concerning the balance between phonological accuracy and writing simplicity. Some G|ui/G‖ana words have already been exposed to Nharo orthography through use in birth certificates and citizen cards. Therefore, it could be familiar and easy to access Nharo writing for significant G|ui/G‖ana-speaking populations. On the other hand, |XN voiced her frustration regarding the use of the Nharo orthography, which, in her view, compromises the phonetic integrity of her language. Specifically, she emphasized that the unique click consonants – defining features of G‖ana and other Khoisan languages – are either lost or misrepresented in the Nharo system. She noted that teaching using Nharo clicks would not align with the actual phonemic structure of her language, and that the distinctiveness of the G‖ana and G|ui clicks would be neglected.

In contrast, MT highlighted the importance of simplicity in writing, especially within the context of classroom instruction, where teachers are responsible for educating many children simultaneously. From a practical standpoint, she argued that it is reasonable to prioritize an orthography that is easier to teach and learn, even if it sacrifices some phonological accuracy. Additionally, she noted that acquiring proficiency in orthography is generally challenging for teacher aides, further justifying the appeal of a simplified writing system. Although MT was aware that the Nharo orthography could not fully indicate the accurate phonemic distinctions of her language, she acknowledged it as a pragmatic compromise.

These differing viewpoints highlight a broader tension between linguistic identity and functional accessibility in the implementation of mother-tongue education. Introducing orthography to speakers of a

non-literate language is not a straightforward process. It involves navigating deeply held cultural values and concerns about the preservation of linguistic heritage.

Comparable issues were observed in the historical development of the Setswana orthography. Today, Setswana is widely used in both personal and public communication in Botswana, but its orthographic system originated during the colonial period and was largely shaped by early Christian missionaries. These missionaries developed orthographies to facilitate the dissemination of Christian texts and teachings. Settling in various local regions, they produced hymnbooks, catechisms, and newspapers in the vernaculars they encountered. By the 19th century, efforts to standardize the Tswana language had gained momentum. A central debate emerged around whether the local languages were mutually intelligible dialects of a single language that could be unified under one orthography. Although a standardized orthography was eventually adopted, it attracted criticism from literate Batswana. Many were discontented with European assumptions of linguistic homogeneity and the imposition of externally developed orthographic systems (Volz 2003).

The history of Setswana orthographic standardization illustrates the frustrations experienced by local communities. It involved ascribing new value to spoken language through the written form, often at the expense of local dialectal diversity. Although the process enabled the development of a standardized language, it also resulted in the marginalization of many vernaculars. Given that even minute differences of languages can be a fundamental component of individual thought and identity, decisions regarding orthographic appropriateness are rarely simple or universally accepted.

Similar challenges have emerged in other contexts, particularly with the implementation of mother-tongue education. In Namibia – a neighboring country to Botswana – mother-tongue education has been promoted since independence, reflecting a broader rethinking of educational philosophy (Sguazzin/Graan 1999). For instance, in the Nyae Nyae village primary school, Ju|'hoan language curricula are taught by Ju|'hoan teachers during the first three years of schooling. In Grade 4, however, students have to transit to government-run schools in Tsumkwe. Notably, children who received three years of mother-tongue instruction in village schools were less likely to continue their education after this tran-

sition, compared with those who began their schooling in government schools from Grade 1. The difficulties appeared to stem from challenges associated with the medium of instruction in mainstream education, as well as from discrimination by peers (Hays 2016).

Prospects for non-formal education

Thus far, the discussion has highlighted how the transition to formal school education has impacted the G|ui/G‖ana community, particularly with regard to mother-tongue use. Language functions not only as a medium of communication but also as a repository of daily practices, cultural knowledge, and collective history. As the G|ui/G‖ana have been increasingly compelled to use dominant languages in school settings, they have experienced a disconnection from their traditional body of knowledge and cultural heritage, which are intrinsically linked to their language. Consequently, although mother-tongue education is important to promote educational participation among these communities, adapting teaching to reflect local knowledge and needs involves far more than merely translating textbooks from Tswana or English into local languages.

With this perspective in mind, this section examines the interaction between children and facilitators within non-formal education programmes in Qχ'úĩ̀sà-kínī. By describing practices in non-formal education, this analysis seeks to identify potential strategies to overcome the challenges faced by formal school education today and to propose pathways for advancement in future mother-tongue education.

Non-formal education takes on diverse forms and serves various purposes, including general education, agricultural training, and vocational preparation. It is typically learner-centered and offers flexible programming tailored to specific local needs (Coombs 1973). In Botswana, the government has implemented a non-formal education initiative targeting the illiterate population, known as Out-of-School Education and Training. This program comprises the Adult Basic Education Programme, the Skills Development and Training Programme, and Out-of-School Education for Children (OSEC) (Republic of Botswana 2018). OSEC was introduced as a practical alternative, to ensure that Botswana fulfills its

commitment to universal education, especially catering to children from socio-cultural backgrounds less suited to modern formal schooling or those from economically disadvantaged families (Republic of Botswana 2017).

In 2007, the Yiaghuisi Community Learning Centre, part of the OSEC programme, was established in Qχ'úȉsà-kínī. The name Yiaghuisi (jíà gùī sì) translates as "help to climb up" in G|ui/G‖ana, and was chosen by community members (Noguchi/Takada 2024). Most learners at Yiaghuisi have either never attended formal school or have dropped out; some are over-aged for primary school enrollment. Facilitators develop monthly teaching plans, but children can participate voluntarily, choosing whether to attend activities. In 2024, eleven learners from Qχ'úȉsà-kínī were registered at Yiaghuisi. Enrollment tended to be influenced by kinship ties, given that children are more likely to attend if their relatives do.

Three facilitators, all speakers of G‖ana or Nharo, have been employed at Yiaghuisi. Each holds a Form 3 certificate, awarded upon completion of junior secondary education. These facilitators are proficient in English, Setswana, G|ui/G‖ana, and neighboring languages. Their responsibilities include daily lesson planning and teaching Setswana, English, Mathematics, and General Studies. Notably, facilitators and children maintain close relationships that extend beyond the classroom into village life.

Classroom activities at Yiaghuisi are organized for children of varying ages and learning levels. Facilitators do not constrain children's interests or behaviors to rigid classroom expectations. Communication among children, and between children and facilitators, primarily occurs in G|ui/G‖ana. When a child struggles to respond, peers often provide guidance, or facilitators reformulate questions using concepts familiar to the learners. In situations where children are accustomed to completing assignments independently, facilitators sometimes use Setswana or English. This approach characterizes the Yiaghuisi learning environment as responsive to immediate face-to-face interaction, contrasting with the more institutionalized and predetermined methodologies typical of formal education. This environment fosters inclusive participation and actively promotes children's learning by incorporating their familiar linguistic and conceptual frameworks.

Several children who completed courses at Yiaghuisi subsequently returned to primary school and continued their formal education. Thus, the interactive and flexible learning environment of Yiaghuisi not only provides alternative educational pathways, but also offers critical insights into how to promote active learning among G|ui/G‖ana children within mother-tongue education frameworks.

Conclusions

All pedagogic action entails the imposition of a cultural arbitrary, by a power structure, whether it aims to reproduce the cultural norms of the dominant or the dominated classes. As the inculcation of a cultural arbitrary, pedagogic action operates within a communicative relationship that produces a specifically pedagogic effect precisely because the arbitrariness of the content being taught is never fully acknowledged. Consequently, this process constitutes a form of symbolic violence.[5] Furthermore, groups or classes subjected to pedagogic action that inculcates a dominated cultural arbitrary often internalize the devaluation of their own cultural achievements. Such groups come to accept the dominant culture as the legitimate culture, harboring a tacit awareness of the supposed inferiority of their own cultural heritage (Bourdieu/Passeron 1977).

The formal education system, often conceived as a vehicle for nation-building and universal education, has historically operated under dominant norms, including national ideals and global development discourses. Although it primarily serves to reproduce a particular habitus,[6]

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[5] A power which manages to impose meanings and to impose them as legitimate by concealing the power relations which are the basis of its force (Bourdieu/Passeron 1977: 4).

[6] Habitus refers to the collective entity by which and into which dominant social and cultural conditions are established and reproduced. Habitus could be considered a subjective but not individual system of internalized structures, schemes of perception, conception, and action common to all members of a group or class. These internalized structures and schemes of perception structure subjects' (shared) world-view and their apperception of the world in which they expect to exist (Bourdieu/Passeron 1977: 86).

the arbitrariness of this reproduction is obscured behind claims of "universality" and is transmitted through pedagogic action. Minority hunter-gatherer communities, with distinct languages and socialization patterns, have faced significant challenges within formal schooling systems. When individuals fail to "adapt" to the dominant habitus, they are excluded from the mainstream social reproduction process and are compelled to develop alternative means to preserve and reproduce their socio-cultural identities.

This raises an important question: how can Botswana's draft language policy for primary education address these international educational challenges faced by contemporary hunter-gatherer communities? Since independence, Botswana's educational policy has largely overlooked the socialization needs of minority children, despite the country's rich linguistic and cultural diversity. The attempt to assimilate non-Tswana groups such as the G|ui/G‖ana through formal education has paradoxically heightened their ethnic consciousness rather than reinforcing a unified national identity (Noguchi/Takada 2024). A shift toward mother-tongue education, therefore, holds the potential to foster national sensitivity to cultural and linguistic diversity, facilitate mutual understanding between teachers and learners, and enhance the educational participation of the G|ui/G‖ana. Beyond schooling, this approach could strengthen children's capacities for future opportunities, including employment.

Botswana's increasing embrace of multiculturalism suggests a growing recognition of its minority populations; however, it also risks reinforcing hierarchies among languages, identities, and cultures.

Implementing mother-tongue education presents particular challenges, notably regarding orthographic standardization. Within the G|ui/G‖ana community, divergent opinions exist about which orthography to adopt. One practical option is to modify the existing Nharo orthography, which has been developed and used by the Nharo population for a considerable time. However, this involves not only phonological but also socio-cultural conflicts. In contrast to the G|ui/G‖ana, most Nharo speakers have historically lived in urban areas and accessed resources both inside and outside Botswana, including the Nharo orthography project. This has created power dynamics between the Nharo and G|ui/G‖ana communities, based on differing levels of social and international

engagement. Some community members have expressed a desire to preserve a more "accurate" G|ui/G‖ana orthography, advocating the adoption of the IPA-based framework developed by Nakagawa. This tension reflects a broader conflict between inherited cultural values and those introduced through contemporary experiences. In other words, this can be understood as a form of resistance to "Nharo-centrism," which carries its own complex history as a written language among Khoisan languages.

The draft language policy in Botswana emphasizes improving school attendance by acknowledging learners' diverse cultural backgrounds; however, it does not explicitly aim to build a multilingual society through comprehensive mother-tongue education. Minor languages are introduced primarily as mediums of instruction rather than as subjects in their own right (Republic of Botswana 2022). Consequently, linguistic minorities remain primarily subject to assimilation into the "mainstream" education system. Each mother-tongue mainly functions as a steppingstone toward Setswana and English, which continue to dominate formal education and national reproduction. Thus, although the policy recognizes linguistic and cultural minorities, it may inadvertently reinforce existing cultural-linguistic hierarchies.

Education broadly encompasses any process intended to bring about changes in attitudes and behaviors (Hamadache 1991). It is a fundamental system through which individuals develop skills within their sociocultural contexts – contexts that are co-constructed through direct, face-to-face interactions. Therefore, education should be understood as a process of negotiation among individuals sharing a particular context, rather than an imposition of a singular, arbitrary purpose. Learning processes are diverse, reflecting differences in methods and social partners. Recognizing this diversity should be part of the vision for universal education. Schools can no longer claim exclusivity over education or its societal role (Hamadache 1991). Instead, alternative educational approaches that advocate for minorities must be embraced.

A core question emerges: how can the attitudes of communities be reconciled with the political rationale underpinning mother-tongue education? This chapter's final section examines non-formal education practices in Qχ'úĩ̀sà-kínī, offering a fresh perspective on promoting education within the G|ui/G‖ana community's current system. Analysis of Yiaghuisi's practices reveals educational methods aligned with informal

socialization patterns among G|ui/G‖ana children (Takada 2020). This approach prioritizes teaching and learning as responses to immediate, situational needs, contrasting with formal education's institutionally prescribed teaching methodologies. Local language-speaking facilitators play a vital role in organizing such educational environments, although challenges remain – such as funding constraints, limited educational materials, and facilitator training (Siegrühn/Grant 2021).

In Botswana, non-formal education aims to provide alternatives for children whose socio-cultural backgrounds are incompatible with school-based education or whose families face economic hardship (Republic of Botswana 2017). Historically, it has served marginalized and vulnerable individuals within the nation-building process. Rather than merely integrating these individuals into mainstream education, non-formal education has fostered their capacity to advocate for multiple learning modalities. In Qχ'úĩ̀sà-kínī, non-formal education is thus characterized not only by mother-tongue instruction led by local facilitators, but also by the adaptation of formal education to incorporate interactive elements from the G|ui/G‖ana's informal socialization practices. Documenting the organization of classroom activities across non-formal settings nationwide can deepen understanding of diverse learning processes and social interactions, offering valuable insights for formal education. In this way, minorities can actively participate in national reproduction, potentially facilitating an alternative nation-building process that respects and reflects their cultural identities.

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Omusula W. Omuholo
(University of Oregon)

Towards a language reconceptualization of education in Africa: A review of the film *Otis Janam*

Abstract

In this era of cultural renaissance, communities increasingly employ innovative approaches to educate themselves while preserving their cultural identities. Indigenous language films, such as *Otis Janam*, are powerful tools for revitalizing cultural heritage and asserting identity amidst the pressures of global development discourses. This chapter examines how *Otis Janam* functions as an educational medium that facilitates participatory learning, cultural awareness, and local adaptation to transformation. Through qualitative content analysis, the study reveals how the film engages community audiences in understanding global influences' socio-economic, political, and cultural implications. While traditional media formats are often critiqued for their limitations, this chapter argues that narrative films still possess immense potential as localized educational resources. The paper concludes that *Otis Janam* exemplifies how culturally rooted media can promote critical reflection and community-led learning through participatory storytelling.

Keywords: Film, community, education, culture, globalization, Homa Bay

Introduction

'Otis, I want to fly high above the skies.'
(Api, in *Otis Janam*)

The above quote from the film *Otis Janam* signifies the determination and quest for cultural change that Dr. Zippy Okoth's film aims to contribute to Kenya's Luo-speaking Homa Bay society. This chapter analyses the film to demonstrate its relevance as traditional local language

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media for educating and empowering communities to appreciate and harness the benefits of cultural transformations. In this context, education and empowerment enable communities to co-learn, become aware of, own, and control the processes of cultural and social change for their development. For development to meet the needs of people within their contexts, the debate around it crucially centres on what opportunities exist for communities to engage with and contribute to development processes. According to Adéníyi & Béllò (2006), development involves material abundance and encompasses concepts such as education, social, cultural, and indigenous linguistic maturity. This implies that, as a powerful tool in the local development agenda, indigenous-language media can educate people and influence their mental development and social relations. Thus, it is essential to consider how the media operates to advance or hinder these development dimensions (Adéníyi/Béllò 2006). Mass media undoubtedly plays an important role in all societies, in reconstructing their cultures (Chikaipa 2023), and in the circulation of ideas (Bonvillain 2000: 1, cited in Adedeji 2015). Thus, media such as films, documentaries, television, social media, and print are important spaces for communities to engage with and to shape their development trajectories.

However, the benefits of media for community development are immensely enhanced when these media are participatory (Adedeji 2015; Salawu 2006). Mobilization of community people is imperative for participation in development. For its broad reach, media stands as one of the most effective tools for social mobilization and enhancement of the capacities of communities to engage and challenge development discourse and processes (Chikaipa 2023). Besides, indigenous-language media also sustains people's cultures, a means of the vitality of any society. Bringing media and language together, filmmakers have explored innovative communication methods, such as storytelling in indigenous languages. Film as media has become a means of communication and an effective medium for transmitting cultural values and their transformations (Ogbe et al. 2020). Some stories, like *Otis Janam*, with their participatory settings and local language, only make sense as participatory media for charting a development path for communities.

Meanwhile, Nyabuto (2023) highlights advances in new media technologies and interactive web-based applications like social media, which

have been identified as promoting inclusivity and interactive communication. Its instructiveness also offers opportunities for social groups, such as women's participation in societal decision-making (Ongo Nkoa et al. 2023; Tawangar et al. 2025). However, in many communities, weak regulation of social media platforms means that the necessary constraints are often absent, which ultimately compromises the proper and credible access and use of information required to meet the communities' communication needs (Guerola-Navarro et al. 2023). Moreover, social media can effectively promote political participation and empowerment in Africa, especially when elemental energy and information communication technologies are accessible to the majority (Ongo Nkoa et al. 2023). In these circumstances of new media, this paper reviews the inclusivity, content, and language used in *Otis Janam*, produced in the Luo language by Dr. Zippy Okoth. Language, in this context of indigenous languages, stands out as a core element of the cultural substance of a people, essential for imagining their futures (Greene/Gupta 2022). In this respect, there is an almost insatiable appetite for authentic local language use in African media, where participation in development discourse is limited. Therefore, using the indigenous language – or the mother tongue – enables people to respond enthusiastically to their cultural transformations and development.

This chapter seeks to demonstrate that, although traditional media is considered less interactive, one-off, and unidirectional, without involving much feedback from audiences, as discussed in Boeren (1992), *Otis Janam* offers a participatory and revolutionary way of creating awareness and encouraging learning among the people about their cultural milieu. This is relevant for communities participating in and refining their development processes. In this participatory approach to setting the various scenes in the film, Dr. Zippy Okoth identifies the problem of patriarchal control over women and sets a tone for collective solutions together with the people. The film departs from the dominant agenda-setting framing of the media, McCombs & Shaw (1972), understood as the hegemony of the media in unilaterally creating events and, with it, specific sets of meanings. Instead, *Otis Janam* incorporates various groups in the Homa Bay society and is in the local Luo language. Thus, the film offers an opportunity for the people of Homa Bay to collectively trigger an active discussion and awareness about the transformation of their cultures and

their outcomes (Boeren 1992). This participatory response justifies the review and discussion of the film in this work.

Drawing on the framework of media education for social change communication, combining Morris (2009), who expounds on social justice and communication, and Dutta (2018), who adequately captures how to centre social change communication culturally, this work contributes to a new way of seeing films as a crucial participatory medium for communicating and triggering transformation for empowering communities. Also, drawing from Brown & Collins (2007), participatory media involves the community whose story is being told in the development and execution of the story, for a more nuanced representation of the cultures of that society. For example, in an interview with Lodeki on the Cinema & Theatre Break Show (CTB),[1] Dr. Zippy Okoth shares that shooting the film *Otis Janam* involved getting the input of the fishermen, boat racers, and the older adults in the village who are custodians of the culture that the community ascribes to. In the boat racing scene, the people cheering are members of the community and not people cast from a different place who may not fully grasp the essence of boat racing within this community.

Such participatory media enables communities to reconstruct and redefine their cultures and social relations, which Pettit et al. (2009) refer to as structural, social, and political changes to address social exclusion. While globalization transmits norms, ideas, values, and practices to local societies that transform these societies, these changes and their underlying ideologies and benefits or effects may be poorly understood by societies. This partly results from a lack of participatory media, which has limited societal learning, appreciation, and awareness. Moreover, Diang'a (2017) highlights that many films about Kenya's society are produced in English, denying local people opportunities to learn and engage in development processes. *Otis Janam*, however, provides an indigenous-language-based participatory pathway to media education and learning that revitalizes local cultures and enables people to participate in and adapt to ideas and practices of empowerment. This way, *Otis Janam* is an empowering media tool for communities to imagine and act on cultural

[1] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ttPa_k1dN_E

transformations that promote equitable social relations. As Milan (2009) notes, community media is symbolic.

> … as a means of empowerment: giving people the possibility to take initiative on the local scale, they show that change is possible. They represent a way to exercise and express the imagination and to translate this imagination into practice by voicing it. (Milan 2009: 601).

In Kenya, many of these films represent events in other societies. Besides short TV series episodes, it is uncommon to find participatory films about traditional societies in their local languages. While this may not hold for other societies like Nigeria, Ghana, and South Africa, where the film industry is relatively large and films about traditional societies are numerous, Igili (2017) notes, the film industry in Kenya has not performed at par to showcase traditional values and social change (Diang'a 2017). Moreover, the media in Kenya has been weak due to constraints on press freedom and the media's inability or unwillingness to hold governments accountable for not promoting democratic development processes that reach the communities (Nyabuga 2017).

These media challenges in Kenya have constrained the participation of communities in their development. While the 2010 Constitution progressively promotes women's participation in political, social, and economic life, fundamentally providing for upholding women's rights and gender equality, *Otis Janam* shows that deep cultural constraints still affect women. Despite these constraints, society acknowledges women's contributions to community livelihood and reproduction. Thus, there are calls for supporting women's integral inclusion in forms of media that enhance their participation in communication for development (Mlama 1991; Musubika 2008). In the context of this work, *Otis Janam* contributes to meeting this call. It is a participatory means for men and women to discuss cultural constraints on women's lives.

A framework of media localization for education and development

The intersection of indigenous language media with sectors of the African economy has become central to discussions around media and

development (Tshabangu/Salawu 2022). Community-based platforms such as print, radio, and podcasts serve as tools for participatory communication and foster social transformation from within communities (Milan 2009). This paper responds to growing scholarly concerns over the dominance of foreign language media in Africa and its adverse effects on local participation. The overwhelming presence of foreign language media undermines the effectiveness of indigenous media in promoting participatory development rooted in local sociocultural contexts. Bucholtz (2011) notes that foreign media often impose external ideologies and belief systems, restricting community agencies. This form of cultural imperialism contributes to the decline of indigenous languages (Godsgift/Obukoadata 2008) and favours foreign over local modes of expression (Usua 2018).

In this context, *Otis Janam* serves as a counter-narrative that affirms the vitality of indigenous languages and promotes community-based development. As supported by Chikeka (1982), Villeneuve and Battiste (2001), and others, language is not merely a communication tool but a vessel for cultural meaning, symbols, and knowledge systems. When indigenous languages are marginalized, stereotypes are perpetuated, and authentic development is hindered (Onyenankeya et al. 2021; Guiberson/Vining 2023). It is important to recognize that the influence of globalization on development should not be mistaken for genuine progress. As Ademowo (2016) warns, externally imposed models often ignore the lived realities of African communities. Therefore, this chapter argues for systems that centre indigenous languages as a strategy to ground education and development within culturally relevant frameworks (Srinivasan 2013; Meighan 2021; Chew et al. 2022).

Media localization for education

In education, localization involves the linguistic and cultural adaptation of educational content, such as texts, visuals, audio, and interactive elements, for a specific target audience. Pym (2004) further indicates that localization supersedes mere translation, as it goes beyond making content understandable to ensuring that it is culturally relevant and appealing to its subjects. Under this explanation, media localization for

education is framed to help understand how local media, such as films produced in local languages, support community members in participating in their development on their own terms. While *Otis Janam* is not strictly a community-based medium, it serves as a regional educational tool due to its use of local language and incorporation of the people's livelihoods and communal social structures in Homa Bay County.

It therefore follows that this analysis provides an overview of the film's background. It briefly presents the people of Suba in Homa Bay County as a communal fish-producing community in Kenya. According to Mhando (2008), the Suba migrated from Uganda to settle in Rusinga, Mfangano, Gembe, Kaksingiri, and Gwasi in Homabay County. Mhando further highlights that the original name of the Suba is Abakunta, but the Luo people, with whom the Suba intermarried, gave them the name, Suba. This description explains the cultural mannerisms and the Luo language that the Suba have borrowed from long periods of living alongside the Luo. The section This first section of this discussion explains boat racing, co-wife norm, cattle wealth, and other essential contexts, making the film a participatory and locally contextualized experience. Accordingly, the subsequent section presents an extended summary of the film, reconstructed through detailed transcription and repeated viewings by the researcher. The reproduction of the summary transcript aims to present the film's nearly complete narrative to readers, enhancing their understanding of its participatory approach as an educational tool.

The following section analyses how *Otis Janam* supports participatory learning, awareness and adaptation among community members to their culture. This section explains that the cultural transformation of Luo patriarchal culture is not intended to annihilate its values, but rather to enhance them, particularly for the empowerment of women empowerment, and the benefit of the family, community, and society. The penultimate section situates *Otis Janam* within the context of globalization, noting how the film's narrative draws on the global flow of feminist ideas in the 1990s (Schaffer/Song 2017). The paper concludes by reassessing the film's role as a community educational tool. The conclusion re-emphasizes the unique participatory approach of *Otis Janam* in this regard, adopting the people and their existing language, livelihoods, and communal values in its narrative and production.

Background of *Otis Janam*

Dr. Zippy Okoth's *Otis Janam* film is an educational piece cast in the Luo language of Kenya. Key characters around whom the film revolves around are Api, the daughter of Jaduong' Okoth, the wealthiest man in the village, and Otis, who started life as a lazy drunkard unable to find a wife until the chance came to take Api as his wife. The story takes place on Rusinga Island, Homa Bay, Kenya. According to Obonyo (2012), Rusinga Island is home to the *Abasuba*, a group of Suba people who are said to have originated from the Baganda or Basoga in Uganda, thus forming a heterogeneous group of non-Luo people in South Nyanza. During this migration, most of the Suba people intermarried and adopted many aspects of the Luo culture, including their language. Homa Bay is a rural community on the western shores of Lake Victoria. Its people are crop farmers and fishers. Men, as a mainstay, catch fish from the Lake, while the women sell the fish and crop harvest on the local market. To further highlight this, Abuso (1980) and Obonyo (2012) explain that, in addition to this gendered division of labour, social life in Homa Bay is guided by local customs and norms that celebrate gendered social reproduction roles, the chastity of women, hard work, and family unity. Cultural values also acknowledge the man as head of the family, respect for the woman as a supportive wife, and a mutually beneficial communal living that connects everyone and minimizes individualism and exploitative liberal competition (Obonyo 2012; Abuso 1980). Culturally, the Abasuba are patrilineal and patriarchal, where men control resources and make significant decisions at home. The cultural background of the Suba helps to understand the film's characters and how gender justice is portrayed.

The film is a means to help the community better understand the benefits of cultural transformation. It seeks to communicate the tension between the values of gender equity and empowerment in social relations, on the one hand, and the traditional norms of patriarchy, on the other. Globally, most societies have enhanced women's civil, reproductive, economic, and political rights (Adawo et al. 2011). Understanding the film within the context of contemporary globalization explains why a boat race welcomed women's participation and why Otis initially did not stop his wife, Api, from working at her shop. Socio-culturally, Adawo et al. (2011) and hooks (1984) further note, this wave of femi-

nism globally equally raised concerns about cultural and social equality for women and campaigned heavily against the social and cultural stereotyping of women as "only capable of becoming housewives" and nothing more. However, *Otis Janam* shows that women can inherit their families, engage in productive labour to support their families, and earn social respect. The film, however, does not wholly adopt global feminist notions in opposition to Luo cultural values. For example, respect for the elderly's approval of marriage, women living as co-wives, social sanction and rewards for behaviour, communal social security and support, among others, still strongly prevail in the film. The film demonstrates a discursive flow in promoting gender equity and justice, emphasizing the worth of women to inherit their fathers' property just as men do, and teaching consensus building around justice in gendered relations as a valid Luo cultural norm regulating family life. This approach enhances social cohesion and promotes development in general. This way, the film avoids a more profound, broader clash between globalization and indigenous cultural values.

An abridged transcript of *Otis Janam*[2]

The following discussion highlights the film *Otis Janam*, scene by scene, to create the context for discussing the role of the film as participatory media for education. It also provides a detailed overview for the audience that may not be able to access the film beyond the trailer, enabling them to understand its relevance in the discourse on the media's role in education. The film starts with a scene somewhere along the shores of Homa Bay in 1991. Api is finishing serving a client in her tailoring shop (Tumaini Tailoring Centre). Her father, driving a not-too-old car, pulls up in front of the shop and honks for Api to close it so they can drive home together.

Jarieko's compound – day (scene 2): Otis and his friend Jarieko are seated on Jarieko's compound, drinking a local brew. They discuss life in general as they recall their school days together. Jarieko's family comes

[2] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lsuthDOiaxQ

over to greet Otis. After chit-chatting, Otis seeks to leave, but Jarieko requests he stay longer. Otis obliges, and Jarieko's wife serves them the local meal of gruel *(ugali),* fried tilapia fish, and sauce. They eat as Jarieko talks about and praises his wife, saying she is beautiful and prepares excellent meals. It should be noted that Otis is unmarried and is looking for a wife.

This scene is followed by an early morning as dawn breaks at the lake shore, and men and children empty their nets and boats after a full catch of fish. Women load their pans with fresh fish.

Jaduong' Okoth house – morning (scene 3): Api is taking care of her father at home. She serves her father, Jaduong' Okoth, bread, tea, and fruits for breakfast. Jaduong' Okoth starts eating, then calls Api over to tell her something. He begins reminding Api how good he has been as a boat racer. He explains to Api that someone must inherit his boat racing skills, but he does not have a son. Api tries to encourage her father that, though there is no son, the community will remember him. However, Jaduong' Okoth is not satisfied with Api's response. '*So, what do you want, Papa?*' Api asks. He continues, '*You are yet to get married…*'. Her father tells her. '*I want you to marry the best boat racer in the village so that my legacy will continue, even through my son-in-law.*' After some hesitation, Api agrees. They continue their conversation over food, medication, and rest. Api helps her father to take the necessary medicines, and she clears the table.

To introduce the next scene, we see Jarieko helps his wife to carry a basket load of fish from the water to the shore. After a brief, friendly chat about the catch, they discuss Otis's current state as a bachelor and his drinking habits. Jarieko's wife convinces him to do something to help Otis out of drinking and find something to do with his life. Jarieko agrees to pass by Otis' home to check on him.

Otis' compound – mid morning (scene 4): Otis has just woken from sleep in his one-room home. He drinks water from the earthen pot, takes a small quantity of uncooked potatoes, and dislikes them. Otis lights the firewood to boil local tea (*chai*), which he drinks with leftover *ugali.* As he eats, he descends into deep thoughts about the possibility of marrying. Two women chit-chatting near his home capture his attention with

their voices. He engages them from a distance and invites one of them, Achieng'e, to get closer to him. Otis engages Achieng'e in discussing his marriage to her, and she scorns him, walking away with her friend.

A few minutes later Jarieko visits Otis at his home, talks about his laziness, and laughs at his failed attempt at wooing Achieng'e. Otis laments that he has not refused to marry, but the women in the village deny him. He walks out on Jarieko in anger.

The local Brewer's compound – mid day (scene 5): Otis joins his friends at the local brew. Otis, though in debt, orders more drinks for his friends at the displeasure of the seller, who insists Otis must settle his earlier debts first. Just as they drink, one of the men tells them about the impending boat race Jaduong' Okoth, Api's father, the wealthiest man in the village, is organizing. For this race, the winner takes Jaduong's daughter, Api, a wonderful and educated lady, as a wife. Otis' friends encourage him to take part in the race and give him some money to register.

After speaking with his friends Otis heads to the Boat race registration centre near the shores of the Lake where he finds a large crowd and a queue of interested contestants registering for the race. He meets a friend there who dissuades him from registering because he cannot defeat the reigning champion. Otis, however, insists on being the one who will win this race. He and his friend argue, and they fight at the registration grounds. When they are separated, Otis runs away from the registration grounds.

Api meets Otis – afternoon (scene 6): Api, while walking along a path, finds Otis in the bush, sleeping and hurting from the bruises he sustained from the fight with his friend at the boat race registration centre. Apis dresses Otis' wounds and helps him to his feet. She sits beside him and engages him about who he is and what has happened to him. Api tells him that perhaps she has seen something good in him. Otis, however, dismisses that, insisting that he is of no value as everyone in the village despises him. Api leaves Otis in the bush.

Later in the scene we see Api in the bush with the same man Otis fought with at the boat race registration centre. He is showing Api a note in the bush about how much he loves her, to be his second wife. Api

rejects him and walks away. It is revealed in this scene that they are past lovers. This scene transcends a later incident in which Api goes back to the same man to help her defeat Otis, her husband.

The boat race – next day (scene 7): It is the day of the boat race and the day the winner gets to marry Api. The crowd cheers the competitors on as the first set of boats row out and about, warming up. Excitement is visible on the faces of the crowd as the boats row back and forth, warming up. Among the boat racers is Otis. Eventually, as the boat racers row out away on the lake, each determined to win, Otis's thoughts go back in time about his childhood days with his father preparing fishing nets, rowing, and fishing out on the lake in the dark, with his father instructing him on how to steer and row a boat successfully. With the scene back on the shore from Otis' childhood, Otis wins the race, with Api and his father cheering him on the dais.

The following scenes show Otis and Api get married and receive blessings from Jaduong' Okoth. As they are blessed, Otis proclaims, '*Api, I love you; you are mine*'. They go on honeymoon, taking strolls along the shores of the lake and have dinner.

These scenes are followed by their transition into marriage. Otis returns home with fish for his new wife. Api, to make dinner for the family. Otis replicates Jaduong' Okoth's routine with Api, picking her up from the tailoring shop so they can head home together at the end of a busy day. Next, we see a heavily pregnant Api receiving Otis from work and he offers to cook the fish, insisting that his pregnant wife cannot do heavy chores.

A dark cloud looms – Otis and Api's home – day (scene 8): The scene starts off five years later when Otis and Api have two children, a boy and a girl. Otis returns home in his car and finds Api sitting on the veranda, preparing their children for school. He plays with the children, and the scene fades off. In the following scene we still see a close knit family as Otis, smiling, picks Api up in his car in the evening from her shop.

Later that evening, Otis and Api lie in bed, awake in the middle of the night. Their house lights up in the dark. Api begins a conversation about how her tailoring customers are increasing, taking a toll on her

and affecting her duties as a wife at home. They continue the discussion, and Api suggests that Otis take a second wife. Otis scrambles and sits up on the bed, surprised at Api. He replies that he is happy with Api and their children alone and does not need a second wife. Api insists he does, explaining that a second woman will help with chores at home, allowing her to find time for her work. She also claims she is bored at home and needs another woman to keep her company. She assures her husband that everything will be fine between them; with a second wife, their marriage will be spiced up. Otis asks where he would find a second wife if he were to accept her suggestion. Api assures him she has already found one for him, Katoto, a beautiful, hardworking, and respectful woman in the village, she claims. Api further reassures her husband that she will pay for the dowry with some of her father's cattle.

While Otis is still hesitant about this suggestion, Api convinces him, and he gives in.

Jaduong' Okoth's house – day (scene 9): Otis and his family visit Jaduong' Okoth, Api's father, who is now very old and lies in bed, relatively weak. He calls Otis to advise him on living a good life and caring for his daughter, Api, and grandchildren. Otis promises to do just that. Jaduong' Okoth tells Otis he supports Api's idea of a second wife. Jaduong' Okoth also bequeaths half of his wealth to Otis and Api, requesting Otis not to refuse Api anything she needs. As Otis and his children leave Jaduong' Okoth to join Api in the kitchen preparing tea, Jaduong' Okoth slumps and passes on in his bed. Api, who was bringing her father tea, finds him gone.

This scene is followed by a funeral ceremony for Jaduong' Okoth.

In another brief scene Women in a neighbouring household winnow beans and gossip about Otis's plans to take a second wife, just when Jaduong's Okoth died. They also gossip about how Otis has become very wealthy. They gossip about Otis for a while. The scene is followed by a quick scene of a happy Otis and Api having an evening meal at home while talking about their children. Perhaps a sign that their marriage is still intact. At this time Otis has taken in a second wife, following his Api's advice and Jadoung' Okoth's last request to him before his death.

Achienge's father's house – day (scene 10): Preceding the two women (Achieng'e and her mother) who were gossiping about chances of Otis taking in a second wife, two elderly men pay Achieng'e's father a visit. They talk about the possibility of Achieng'e (who had initially scorned Otis) getting married to Otis as a third wife. The two older men convince Achienge's father that she is Otis's rightful first wife since Otis professed his love for her when he was single. Later when the visitors are gone, Achienge's father attempts to convince Achienge's mother that their daughter is fit for Otis as a third wife.

Storm over paradise – Otis' homestead – mid day (scene 11): This is a year later, Otis sits in his compound and is served supper, *consisting of ugali and fish*, by Katoto, his second wife. Just then, Api appears with a meal and is ready to serve Otis. However, he refuses Api's meal, rebuking her sharply for being sluggish. He tells Api to learn how to prepare a better meal like Katoto does. In a kind tone, Otis calls back Katoto from the house to help Api take back her meal. Api, still standing with her meal, dejected and confused, refuses Katoto's help and sits as Otis walks away. Api sits for a while, lamenting and confused about the rejection she had just experienced from Otis.

Later that day Otis is visited by his long-time friend Jarieko. As they engage, Jarieko strongly warns Otis that he disapproves of his marrying Achienge' as a third wife, insisting that Achienge' and her family are only interested in his wealth. However, Otis reminds Jarieko of his advice some time ago: that men should earn respect for marrying more women. Jarieko insists his friend is making a mistake in marrying a third wife, moreover, disrespecting Api, who has supported him all the while. After arguing with Jarieko for a while, while insisting on marrying Achienge' as a third wife, Otis leaves his friend in a rage.

The local market – day time – (scene 12): Api is at the local market to buy something and meets Jarieko's wife. They exchange pleasantries and step back from everyone to discuss an issue. It is about Api's business and the developments in her home. She reports to Jarieko's wife that Otis refuses her food and has used her business capital to sell her sewing machine to feed the family. Api then sells Jarieko's wife a scarf that she has stitched by hand for 100 Kenyan shillings. Jarieko's wife

appreciates and acknowledges how much Api's business has declined, to the point where she can now sew with her hands. Just then, a boy runs by and tells his nearby friends that someone is organizing a new boat race with a 100,000 Kenyan shilling prize for the winners. Stopping the boy in his tracks, Api and Jarieko's wife get interested in the race and decide to give it a try themselves. They encouraged each other, knowing that although women had never registered as competitors in a boat race, they were determined to register and try their luck for the prize money.

The local brewer's compound – daytime (scene 13): Otis and his old friends, with whom he drinks, sit and enjoy local drinks at the seller's homestead. Again, they inform Otis of another boat race organized by a company shooting documentaries about boat races, which has permitted women to compete. One of them goes on to tell Otis, to his surprise, that women are registering for the race. However, he also gets interested and jokingly replies to the admiration of his friends that he is going to race as a reigning champion and use the money to marry Achienge.

A meeting in the dark – evening (scene 14): In the late evening, Api secretly meets her friend, the man Otis fought with during the registration for the earlier boat race, which Otis won. While being careful not to be seen or heard together with this man at night in the bush, Api requests that he teach her how to row a boat. Api tells her friend, to his disbelief, that women are permitted to compete in the boat race this time. After a while, cajoling him, Api's friend agrees to teach her to row a boat successfully, enabling her to compete. That same night, Api learns how to row the boat. She informs her friend, who is teaching her to row, that she does not have permission from her husband, Otis, to compete in the race but believes she has the right to compete just as he does. They are both in the boat, rowing, and the scene fades off.

Hell breaks loose – Otis's homestead – daytime (scene 15): Otis's home second wife, Katoto, prepares to start a meal while gossiping with Achienge', the third wife-to-be. Otis arrives back home in his car. In a rage, he paces up and down the compound, looking for Api and yelling her name. Katoto and Achienge' try to calm him down. Still in a rage, he informs the two women how '*… that woman [Api] left here to register for*

the boat race…' against the cultural norm of the village and without his permission. Just then, Api returns home, singing to herself. Otis confronts her angrily, calling her a '*foolish woman*'. Otis angrily confronts Api about her registration for the boat race. She replies '… *My husband, if I win, haven't we all won?*'. However, Otis is more furious that she did not deny it. He warns Api to remove her name from the registration list the next morning. Api stands dejected and confused. Having warned his first wife, Otis leaves in his car with his third wife-to-be, Achienge'. Katoto goes over to console Api.

Otis' house – night (scene 16): Api is doing her clothes stitches in the living room when Otis suddenly storms into the room in a rage. He snatches the cloth from Api, tears it, and confronts her about not removing her name from the boat race register as he instructed her earlier. A fight ensues between them, and Api finally laments to Otis about him using up her sewing capital. Thus, she must compete in the race to win the money and revamp her business for the sake of her family. However, Otis warns Api that this is not her father's home, which infuriates Api, and she reminds him that he is the lazy one and not her. Api refuses to remove her name from the race. Otis laments in fury '… *What do you think the whole village will say when they see me competing with you?*' Api reminds Otis how she has worked hard and served him as a diligent, dutiful wife, and of his promise to her father, Jaduong' Okoth, on his deathbed that he would take good care of Api. Otis, still angry, attempts to convince Api to de-register for the race. However, Api responds '… *Otis, I want to fly high above the skies*'. Hell breaks loose, and Otis pounces on Api with rage. Katoto rushes in and tries to hold Otis off. Api manages to escape into the dark.

In the followings scene Api runs for safety to her friend's house. While Jarieko's wife massages her husband in their home late at night, they are startled by hard, persistent knocking. Jarieko opens, and Api rushes in, crying. She reports to the couple that Otis had beaten her up and warned her not to return to the house if she does not remove her name from the boat race. The couple admits Api to spend the night with them. Jarieko's wife assures her that she is also in the race and that there is nothing wrong with Api competing.

The boat race II – the shores of the lake – daytime (scene 17): At the shore. Competitors are preparing to start the boat race. A large crowd has formed. The Master of Ceremonies cheers the crowd on, chanting, '*My people, this never happened… For the first time, a person is racing against their spouse…*' The microphone is handed to Otis to speak before the race begins. He promises that if he wins, he will fetch all the young men in the village and buy them alcohol. When it is Api's turn to speak, she promises that if she wins the race, the money will revamp her tailoring business, and this will not only help her but also enable all women in the village to learn tailoring for their livelihood. She exclaims to cheers from the crowd, '*If I win, I want my father to know that I can also carry on his legacy*'. The race begins with Api leading an all-women's team in one of the boats. Eventually, she wins the race with her team, to loud cheers! While the crowd rejoices with Api, Otis remains glued to his boat, utterly disgusted and disappointed, watching the whole scene of his wife winning the race unfold before him.

Homa Bay village fades off from the shore, and the film ends.

Otis Janam as participatory media for education

In the context of the film sparking conversations among people about transformations in their culture, the film serves as a tool for participatory and collaborative learning, awareness, adaptation, and communication opportunities for community members. It enables them to better understand and appreciate transformations to their cultural norms. Studies identify traditional mass media as a means of transferring information and knowledge to people without their active participation (Boeren 1992). However, though the categorization places the film within traditional mass media, *Otis Janam* employs a participatory approach. For example, the market, the boat race registration centre, the boat race with the cheering crowd, and even the various gossip points where men or women introduce new gossip, all show numerous groups of people. It uses many community people who appear in most scenes as core participants and in collaborative scenes. In this participatory scene, community people actively discuss changes confronting their culture. In the scenes where the men are drinking at their local joint, they share the latest news

about changes to the boat race, where women are either key attractions or key participants. At the community market, Api and Jarieko's wife find time to share the latest developments in their respective families and the community. During one of their usual gossip sessions, Api and Jarieko's wife get news about women participating in the boat race. Moreover, the boat race always attracts crowds to the shore, indicating that the community people were essentially part of the film. As they cheer their compatriots on to victory, the crowd on the beach collectively shares the joys and pains affecting their community and families.

Dr. Zippy Okoth's film utilized boat racing, a skill, tradition, and livelihood that people already practice and are familiar with, to stimulate participation. The village boat race, in a sense, symbolizes a long tradition of entertainment, livelihood, and community cohesion. However, the race also presents a gendered smothering of women's capacities and the quest for self-development disguised in patriarchy. Until the 1980s, boat racing was a male-dominated sport. Zippy Okoth attempts to demystify this in the film by introducing women into boat racing. Through a competition, Zippy Okoth also teaches that Api's desire to participate, win the race, and use the prize to support her business, family, and community does not necessarily undermine the communal value in social relations in Luo culture. Instead, it aims to demonstrate the potential for the community to adapt to and benefit from cultural transformation.

Participatory media development communication is crucial. Salawu (2023) demonstrates how indigenous media communication has been utilized across Africa, the Americas, and Asia over the decades, enabling societies to adapt to or contest social change. The film features different generations of people in different scenes. This further demonstrates participation. Both adults and younger people participated in the movie. We see how a young boy introduced the second boat racing competition to Api and Jarieko's wife. Again, at the boat race, young people, the aged, and middle-aged people cluster together to cheer their competitors.

The film thus promotes intergenerational learning and social cohesion among community people. Older people often possess a deeper understanding of the symbolic meanings inherent in their culture. Therefore, by including young people in the film, Zippy Okoth contributes to community participation, passing down valuable wisdom, and developing new values, attitudes, and skills of engagement and social harmony in

communities. Although simple, the film effectively teaches the importance of social cohesion. It seeks to demonstrate women's worth in society as equal partners to men. For example, in the film, Api, despite being educated and having the choice to leave the marriage when Otis mismanages their finances, enters the boat race so that she can revive her business and continue to support her family. Social cohesion is also evident in how Jarieko and his wife intervene in Otis and Api's situation when Api runs to them after the fight with Otis.

In another scene, Jarieko and his wife can be seen working together by the lake. However, the film highlights the struggle to attain this recognition of women's worth, particularly in the family in contemporary Homa Bay. While the Luo society is patriarchal, it does not necessarily trample on women's self-development and expression. The film presents Api, a learned woman, who still adores traditions, as she listens to her father's will to marry the best boat racer. Jarieko's wife, on the other hand, encourages Api to join the boat race, citing that she and her husband, Jarieko, are also participating in the event. When Otis begins to disrespect Api, Jarieko visits him to try to talk to him about his behaviour change. All these scenes reflect the Luo society, which holds women in high esteem despite its patriarchal nature.

The *Otis Janam* film presents a profound dilemma in Luo society through its use of the indigenous Luo language, bringing education and learning about this struggle surrounding cultural transformations and the need for people to adapt. Dr. Zippy Okoth, through the film, teaches that in the Luo culture, patriarchy does not mean women cannot make meaning and decide how they want to develop themselves. It instead points out that women can inherit their families just as men do. To this end, the film is a valuable educational piece that showcases the ways local people can learn and revitalize their cultures to promote development on their terms. Zippy Okoth seeks to convey, through her film, that patriarchy in Luo culture is not solely about gender injustice. The film also emphasizes that cultural practices frowned upon in other societies are practiced daily in Africa and are effective. For example, the Abasuba predominantly practice polygamy because they measure a man's social standing by such things as the number of wives, size of livestock herd, number of children, number and size of houses, granaries in the homestead, and land size, among others (Obonyo 2012).

Otis Janam on media education in globalization

As globalization continues to pressure traditional societal values, as noted by Hornberger & McCarty (2012), and Smith (2021), it is essential to acknowledge the vital role that indigenous-language media plays in preserving culture and local education. Films like *Otis Janam* are an example of the relevance of indigenous-language media for local education and learning as globalization takes a toll on the cultural values of the society. Films as agents of media education in globalization demonstrate the cultural relevance of the media in terms of sustaining cultural identity. Local people, including those without formal education in Homa Bay and across Kenya, can see, appreciate, learn from, and respect their indigenous cultural values, to contest dominant development discourses.

Gender roles may shift due to globalization (Sassen 1998), and communal and other cultural values are breaking down in the fast urbanizing and globalizing world (Berger 1997; Bergeron 2001; Buhmann 2015). In globalization, family violence and chaos in society partly occur through the infiltration of indigenous cultures and a misreading of their values. Even though globalization threatens the cultural values and linguistic diversities of indigenous societies in its quest for homogeneity (Hornberger/McCarty 2012), films like *Otis Janam* show that indigenous-language media education can confront the influences of globalization and revitalize cultural values (Ginsburg 2008).

Through the production and dissemination of content in their native languages, many communities utilize these media platforms to preserve their culture, facilitate intergenerational transmission, and promote cultural resurgence. *Otis Janam* thus supports education and consensus-building around these issues. It teaches the diverse people of Homa Bay about the progressive attributes of their cultures, on which to understand, engage with, and contest development discourses to meet their sociocultural and material needs. The film demonstrates consensus and unity around development debates regarding cultural values such as gender equity. The boat race, though competitive and might appear an individualistic endeavour, is a public event that fosters consensus about women's worth in society as partners of men. *Otis Janam* shows how the elderly, women, youth, men, farmers, fish farmers, and sellers, among others, debate and react to various notions and events, such as specific

skills – boat racing – being a male only domain, and also the notion of only men inheriting their families (Jaduong' Okoth directing his wealth to Otis because he had no son of his own); of formal education being a barrier to adhering to local values (Api's humility), or women being objects of men (Otis' notion). Thus, the film demonstrates the value of communalism as a crucial social support system.

Conclusion

Particularly insightful about *Otis Janam* is the participatory approach in developing the film. Zippy Okoth utilizes the community's people, in their language and traditional livelihoods, to promote inclusivity and participation in learning and awareness about cultural transformations. Even though critics criticize traditional media such as film for being non-interactive and a one-way communication, it is methodologies like participatory videos, encouraging community involvement in the process of making films, highlighting their languages and cultural living, that showcase the power of media in advancing participatory communication (Ginsburg 2008; Brown/Collins 2007).

This chapter's key contribution to academic discourse on media localization for education is to practically highlight, through films like *Otis Janam*, that these filmmaking approaches, which invite community people into films and use their languages and livelihoods, can promote participatory communication and trigger responses to an issue. Without such local content3 in community development communication media, the danger exists that local media may merely exclude community members from their development processes and perpetuate globalizing influences on local people.

This paper thus presents *Otis Janam* as a useful indigenous-language participatory and inclusive local media (film) through which local people debate, evaluate their cultural values, and build consensus to learn and develop themselves on their terms. As an indigenous language medium,

[3] https://www.businesslive.co.za/bd/business-and-economy/2023-02-21-native-multichoices-str ong-investment-in-local-content-is-shaping-african-entertainment/

Otis Janam emphasizes the non-competitive, communal values of Luo society, which are also prevalent in other African cultures. Thus, the film is not a call to reject tradition, culture, globalization, or any values that may appear new to local people. Instead, it provides a local participatory space for education, learning, awareness, and consensus-building around cultural transformations and the necessity of adapting to a better society.

Further study

Since *Otis Janam* is a one-off representation of cultural transformation in Homa Bay, it is essential to follow up in any form of research, be it interviews, small theatres, or social media interactions, among others, to identify how far such revolutionary ideas by Dr. Zippy Okoth have been sustained or are affecting the community.

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Bert van Pinxteren
(Leiden University Centre for Linguistics)

Future trajectories for multilingual education in Africa: longer-term policy options

Abstract

According to UNESCO (2003: 18), multilingual education can make mother tongue instruction possible while providing at the same time the acquisition of languages used in larger areas of the country and the world. In the African context, advocating for multilingual education means using at least one African language as the initial medium of instruction, preparing for a switch to another language later on. Here, I will ask the question how sustainable such a strategy will prove to be for the longer term, as enrolment levels in secondary and higher education increase on the continent. I argue that the current multilingual models, which involve a switch from an African language as medium of instruction to a former colonial language will become increasingly problematic. The argument is supported by an examination of educational systems in other parts of the world. This leads to the conclusion that there is need for a model for multilingual education that is based on African languages as medium of instruction at all levels of education; other languages will in future be taught as subjects. However, which African languages should be chosen as medium of instruction, using which rationale? I argue that rational and practical choices are possible. For the longer term, a transition from the current models will be needed; implementing this will require more research, leading to an increased role for linguists in this area.

Keywords: Multilingual education, intellectualized languages, African languages, higher education

Introduction

At independence, the leaders of Africa were faced with a difficult situation: the countries that the colonising powers had carved out rarely

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corresponded to logical conglomerations of ethnically or linguistically related groups. Many ethnic groups were divided over different countries (Asiwaju 1985). Under these circumstances, in almost all countries the choice was made to keep the former colonial language as the official language and the medium of instruction after the first few years of primary education (Skattum 2018). This situation, where one language has a much higher status than other languages, has been referred to as (one of) diglossia (Fishman 1967). In some countries, the situation was different. Thus, Ethiopia was never colonized; it originally used Amharic as its official language; later, though, English was chosen as the medium of instruction in higher education (Appleyard/Orwin 2008: 278). In Somalia, Somali is widely used at all levels. In Tanzania, Swahili was chosen as the official language, even though English remains the medium of instruction in secondary and higher education. In North Africa (Algeria, Morocco), Modern Standard Arabic is in some cases used as a medium of instruction alongside other languages (see for example Jaafari 2019). Overall, though, the practical use of African languages as official languages and as medium of instruction in secondary and higher education remain exceptions. Even in countries that are monolingual or close to monolingual (Burundi, Madagascar, Rwanda), the former colonial language was maintained as medium of instruction. Rwanda even traded one foreign language (French) for another (English).

The diglossic situations referred to above mean that children are forced, from early on in their education, to study in a language other than their own. To deal with the problems this brings, teachers and children can employ several strategies. Thus, in class, teachers and students can and often do use whatever speech registers are available to them. This may include using dialectal variants, code-switching, translanguaging, in-class translation, and so on. Sometimes this is done in violation of official policies, but sometimes policies encourage the use of these strategies. However, teachers and students have only a limited degree of freedom here: the teaching materials and exams are usually in some form of standardized or intellectualized language. Furthermore, at the primary level, more freedom in how to speak and how to test is generally allowed as compared to secondary and tertiary education.

The consensus in scientific circles, as already voiced in a UNESCO report of 1953, is that such learning is inefficient: education in the

mother tongue leads to better results at lower cost. Even the early exit models that are currently in place in many countries, where a change to a former colonial language as the medium of instruction takes place after the first few years of primary education, are inefficient (Heugh 1999; Skattum 2018). Ouane and Glanz (2010) have given an overview of what this leads to, summarizing the works of many educationists and linguists over the past decades; it boils down to the fact that many children do not get the education that would profit them (and their countries) most.

Several authors – both African and from outside of the continent – have, over the years, argued in favour of a shift towards the use of African languages as a medium of instruction. A key visionary arguing for change is Kwesi Kwaa Prah. As early as in 1991, he argued: "If African languages are developed, to carry modern science and technology, transformation of the African earth would be rapidly advanced" (Prah 1991: 61). Another well-known proponent of this line of thinking is certainly Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. In his opinion, it is 'only through the use of African languages shall we be able to break with European memory' (Wa Thiong'o 2005: 164). Recently, Ndlovu-Gatsheni has added his voice to the debate, building on the work of Wa Thiong'o. Thus, he has attacked:

> the process of deliberate 'stupidification' of African children, youth, and even academics through consistent disciplining into abandonment of their mother tongues so as to use imperial and colonial languages of domination in their research, teaching, learning and even everyday conversations and communication. (Ndlovu-Gatsheni/Msila 2021: 38)

Many non-African authors have followed the same line of reasoning, stressing various elements of the debate. These include (for example) Skuttnab-Kangas (2013) and Wolff (2016). Skuttnab-Kangas especially has been vocal in defining the right to use one's mother tongue in all domains as a human right. Wolff (2016), in exasperation, remarks that "stakeholders, African and expatriate alike, just won't listen to experts." Many other authors have presented similar arguments for their respective countries. Among the best-known are Bamgbose (2000) for Nigeria, Chumbow (2005) for Cameroon, and Alexander (1998) for South Africa. As Kaschula and Nkomo (2019: 619) have put it: the "language question is […] the 'elephant in the room' when it comes to development in Africa."

Nevertheless, to this day, some of the poorest countries in the world spend scarce resources on educational systems that are inherently wasting both money and talent. Why is that the case?

Clayton (1998) has given a useful overview and analysis of the reasons given in the literature for Africa's continued use of former colonial languages as medium of instruction – the debate does not seem to have moved on significantly after that. In his summary, there are two types of explanations. The first type consists of explanations linked to the world economic system and the role local elites play in that system. These explanations point to the role of the former colonial powers, who want to keep their influence. In this group, Clayton also lists explanations that point to the role language plays in maintaining the privileged position of local elites (elite closure – Myers-Scotton 1993). The second type is made up of explanations related to the functions languages have for national development and integration: these hold that using former colonial languages is more affordable, is advantageous for international communication, and helps build national unity (or prevents national disintegration).

Together, the explanations summarized by Clayton (1988) show that Africa carries with it a legacy from colonial times that seems difficult to overcome, despite the spirited pleas put forward by a great many authors. Is there scope for agency? Can multilingual education provide a solution? What would that involve, and what are its possibilities and limitations? To explore some answers to that question, section two below first tries to clarify, based on the literature, what is meant by multilingual education and some related terms. Section three takes a look at the limits to the current multilingual education models, in part by examining educational systems in different parts of the world. It leads to the conclusion that current models may offer a short-term solution, but may not work in the longer term; instead, more use will have to be made of African languages. Section four then examines the practical problem of which language(s) to choose as medium of instruction. It suggests that the distinction between language as discerned and language as designed or intellectualized may offer the beginnings of a solution. This then leads to a discussion of some future policy options for African countries in section five and some concluding remarks on possible directions for future research in section six.

Multilingual education in the African context

UNESCO (2003: 17) states: 'Bilingual and multilingual education refer (sic) to the use of two or more languages as mediums of instruction'. According to UNESCO: 'In regions where the language of the learner is not the official or national language of the country, bilingual and multilingual education can make mother tongue instruction possible while providing at the same time the acquisition of languages used in larger areas of the country and the world.' In the UNESCO definition, then, multilingual education will include education in what it calls the 'mother tongue', as well as the use of another language as medium of instruction.

There are several ways of providing bilingual or multilingual education, some leading to better results than others. Ouane and Glanz (2010), writing for UNESCO, recommend what is called the late-exit method. In this method, the mother tongue is used as medium of instruction for as long as possible (at least the entire primary school period). The official or national language is taught as a subject during that period. There is then either a complete or a partial switch to this official language for secondary and higher education. This model is also advocated by many other authors, such as Heugh (1999).

However, despite this, the late-exit method is the exception, rather than the rule in most countries in Africa (Skattum 2018). In most countries, there is at best an inefficient early exit model, with a complete switch to the official language as medium of instruction after the first three years of primary education.

What this can lead to is illustrated by what the famous Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie had to say, when asked why her books were not written or available in her native language, Igbo. She responds:

> I'm not sure my writing in English is a choice. […] Although I took Igbo until the end of secondary school […], it was not at all the norm. Most of all, it was not enough. I write Igbo fairly well but a lot of my intellectual thinking cannot be expressed sufficiently in Igbo. Of course, this would be different if I had been educated in both English and Igbo. Or if my learning of Igbo had an approach that was more holistic.

> The interesting thing, of course, is that if I did write in Igbo […], many Igbo people would not be able to read it. Many educated Igbo people I know can barely read Igbo and they mostly write it atrociously.[1]

This quote illustrates the problems associated with inefficient education. It also points to the difference between bilingual or multilingual education as an educational system and multilingualism at the level of individuals. In many countries around the world, one language is used as a medium of instruction, but one or more other languages are taught as subjects. This means that monolingual education can still lead to multilingual people.[2] Therefore, the UNESCO definition as given above is perhaps too narrow. I would propose to extend the definition, to read that bilingual and multilingual education refers to an education that leads to people who are able to make functional use of two or more languages in their professional lives.

When is a person multilingual? Authors give different definitions, ranging from complete competence in several languages to the ability to use several languages in limited ways. A consequence of this lack of clarity is that when it comes to multilingualism, there is often no or little discussion of the level of proficiency. Thus, a person may be able to order a coffee and a sandwich in a given language, but unable to follow secondary-school level instruction in that language, let alone being able to write a paper in that language. For Africa, the issue of proficiency is key, as will be discussed in section three.

Policies leading to the implementation of multilingual education in Africa as advocated by UNESCO can be seen as a positive step to take. However, when thinking about the future, two complicating questions may help to explain why, if the recommendation is so clear, it has not already been universally adopted in Africa. The first of these is the question of the mother tongue – what is considered a language, what is a

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[1] https://nollyculture.blogspot.com/2018/02/0-false-18-pt-18-pt-0-0-false-false.html accessed 6 April 2023.

[2] Of course, people can also learn a language outside of the formal schooling system, for example through interactions with people with other language backgrounds, via the media, or through travel. Many also manage to mix expressions from different languages in one or more of their speech registers in day-to-day communications.

dialect, and what does that mean for the use of African languages as medium of instruction?

The second question is related to thinking through what UN Sustainable Development Goal Four (SDG 4) (United Nations 2015) of Education for All means for the feasibility of multilingual education. Making a switch from one language to another as medium of instruction places certain demands on educational systems. Under what conditions will educational systems be able to meet those demands? If such conditions cannot or can no longer be met, what would that mean for policy options?

These questions will be examined in the next two sections, in reverse order.

What can multilingual education achieve in practice?

SDG 4 aims to 'Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all'. This is a break from colonial education, where education was never aimed at 'all'. But it means, for example, that all those who are capable of taking higher education should be able to do that and should therefore have the required language skills. Is that currently the case, and what will the future bring?

In general terms, it is clear that, currently, only a minority of Africans are proficient in a former colonial language. Albaugh (2014: 221) gives estimates of the portion of the population in sub-Saharan Africa who speak a former colonial language. Her figures for the 'francophone' nations are the most comparable because for those countries she can use data collected by the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie (OIF). The average figure she gives for Africans able to speak their former colonial language is 18 %. This creates a potential problem for African educational systems because learners first have to gain proficiency in the medium of instruction before being able to get full profit from such instruction.

One example is that of Botswana. Botswana is the country with the highest enrolment ratio in tertiary education in sub-Saharan Africa,

standing at around 25 %.[3] The medium of instruction in tertiary education in Botswana is English. That means that at least 25 % of youngsters in the country should have sufficient competency in English at the end of their secondary school. Is that the case? Chebanne and Van Pinxteren (2021) have tried to answer that question. They have estimated the level of English proficiency of Botswana's youth by multiplying the completion rate for senior secondary education by the percentage of students that obtain a grade of C or higher in English in the BGCSE[4] examinations. They concluded that currently, Botswana's education system can educate slightly more than 13 % of its young people to this level of proficiency in English – far short of the required level of 25 %. This must lead to problems in Botswana's higher education, although evidence of this is hard to find. An illustrative example can be found in the study by Moumakwa (2002), who found 'that more than fifty percent of students in senior secondary schools in Botswana couldn't deal effectively with texts containing difficult vocabulary'.

In other African countries, enrolment ratios are lower and therefore it could well be that the strains experienced by the Botswana educational system are not felt as acutely in other countries. It could also be that more efficient teaching and added resources would lead to better results, also in Botswana.

However, for the future, the aim should be to increase enrolment levels in Africa, so that SDG 4 comes within reach. This ultimately means aiming for enrolment levels that are comparable to those already found in the global North. For high-income countries, the enrolment ratio in tertiary education currently stands at nearly 80 %, compared to nearly 25 % for Botswana today. It means that in the long term, enrolment in tertiary education in Botswana could more than triple. For other African countries, the growth potential is even higher. This also means that African educational systems should, in future, be able to give nearly 80 % of their youngsters sufficient competency to take tertiary education in a

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[3] The statistic used here is the Gross Enrolment Ratio in tertiary education. Data in this chapter on completion rates and enrolment ratios are all taken from UNESCO, http://sdg4-data.uis.unesco.org/

[4] The Botswana General Certificate of Secondary Education is the Certificate that can be obtained after completing senior secondary education in the country.

language that is quite different from the mother tongue. Is that a realistic goal? Are there any educational systems in the world able to do this?

Yes – there is precisely one educational system that is characterised by a high enrolment ratio in tertiary education, even though it uses a medium of instruction that is not related to the mother tongue of most students. This is the educational system of Singapore. Singapores tertiary education enrolment ratio stands at well over 80 %. The medium of instruction is English, even though the mother tongue of most Singaporeans is Cantonese, with large minorities speaking Malay or Tamil. However, the Singaporean educational system is not multilingual in the sense described above: the medium of instruction is English right from the start. There is no early or late exit from Cantonese, Tamil, or Malay to English. These languages are studied as subjects and not used as medium of instruction. Singapore can do this in part because it is an immigrant society and parents try to raise their children bilingually. There is also a very comprehensive preschool system, where children start to learn English before they enter primary school (Hairon 2022).

Are there perhaps any educational systems that combine a switch at some point from instruction in the mother tongue to instruction in a very different language (multilingual education as defined by UNESCO), with high enrolment ratios? The short answer is no. However, some educational systems could be considered partially multilingual, in the sense that higher education is provided in two or more languages, one of them being close to the mother tongue of students. A case in point is Hong Kong, which has a similar tertiary enrolment ratio as Singapore: there, higher education is provided in Mandarin as well as in English, even though the mother tongue of most students is Cantonese. Then, there are several former Soviet Union countries (such as Armenia and Georgia), where higher education is provided in the local language as well as in Russian.[5]

Lastly, in the Maghreb countries (which have tertiary enrolment ratios ranging from 35 to 55 %), the mediums of instruction are Modern Stand-

[5] Information on medium of instruction in higher education is taken from the World Higher Education database, https://www.whed.net/home.php

ard Arabic[6] and French. (For a more extensive discussion of this, see Van Pinxteren 2023.)

There are educational systems that do better than the Botswana system in giving many of their youngsters a level of competency in English that would be sufficient for taking tertiary education in that language. Data on this is available for many EU countries: in 2011, the European Commission commissioned an assessment of second-language proficiency of secondary school students in the last year before their final exams (European Commission 2012).[7] Thus, the Estonian education system can educate almost 34 % of its youngsters to a sufficient proficiency level in English for tertiary education, a proportion that is more than twice as high as that of Botswana. However, the medium of instruction in higher education in Estonia is Estonian – not English. This stands to reason because the tertiary enrolment ratio in Estonia as reported by UNESCO is over 70 %.

In theory, given unlimited resources, it might be possible to educate every child to any desired level of competence in a language other than its mother tongue, no matter how different that language may be. However, in practice, resources are never unlimited. What this short discussion has shown is that under exceptional circumstances (such as those of Singapore, which is probably unique), it is possible to reach a high proportion – a proportion that is so high that all those who have the ability to take up higher education can do that in the designated official language, a language different from the mother tongue. Under less exceptional circumstances, educational systems do not manage this. This means that in almost all countries that have a high enrolment ratio in higher education, the medium of instruction is in the mother tongue of the students or a language close to it, or that such a language is at least one of the mediums of instruction. The children that take such education can still have some level of competence in more than one language. In that sense, they are multilingual – even though in the strict sense of the

[6] Note that the *Ethnologue* considers Modern Standard Arabic <arb> a different language from Moroccan Arabic <ary> or Darija, as well as from Algerian Arabic <arq> and Tunisian Arabic <aeb>.

[7] The survey material is still available online via http://www.surveylang.org/, accessed 23 April 2025. The survey has not been repeated.

UNESCO definition given above, the education system in those countries may not be multilingual.

What do these considerations mean for the future of multilingual education in Africa? Before we can turn to that, it is important to first consider the issue of language choice.

Africa and its 2,000 mother tongues

The question of what can be considered a 'language' and then of how many languages are spoken in Africa has many answers – it is impossible to do it justice within the framework of this chapter. For a discussion, see for example Prah (2012). To make matters more complicated, some question the very idea of seeing languages as 'countable objects' (Ndhlovu 2015). One way out may be to talk about speech registers instead of languages. However, this does not solve the problem, because, in theory, there are at least as many speech registers as there are individuals. If the speech register of the teacher is not too different from the speech registers of the pupils, children will generally understand what they are being taught. But when are speech registers so different that there is no longer any meaningful mutual intelligibility between them? How many and which speech registers would have to be employed to teach all children in a speech register close to their own? It is the same problem but restated.

For this chapter, we will follow the assessment of two of the most commonly cited sources, the *Ethnologue*[8] and the *Glottolog*[9] databases. Both try to count and classify all languages spoken in the world using specific sets of criteria, and both assert that there are over 2,000 languages spoken on the continent (of which over 500 are in Nigeria alone). Does this then mean that policy advocates should ask for 2,000 mediums of instruction to cater to the entire continent? That would be a difficult task to achieve.

To deal with this problem, Prah (2012) has argued that the number of languages is overstated and that far fewer languages would be required. Van Pinxteren (2022) proposes a slightly different approach, point-

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[8] https://www.ethnologue.com

[9] https://glottolog.org/

ing out that all over the world, speakers of several related (cognate or partially cognate) discerned languages are served by education in one related designed or intellectualized, or formalized language.[10] Thus, in the UK, Scots[11] speakers receive their instruction in English. In a country like the Netherlands, the *Ethnologue* discerns 11 closely related languages; speakers of all these languages receive their education in Dutch. This does not mean that speakers of these different discerned languages do not have to make an effort to learn the related designed language – however, because the languages are related, the effort is considerably less than trying to learn in a completely unrelated language (as would be the case, for example, if Scots speakers would be required to learn in Mandarin Chinese, rather than in English). In addition, many speakers of minority languages grow up being bilingual from a very early age, thus reducing the effort that is required to learn the standard language.

It is conceivable that in a country like Madagascar, where the *Ethnologue* discerns 11 different Malagasy-like languages, the initial medium of instruction could be one of these.[12] Writing on Nigeria, Oloruntoba-Oju and Van Pinxteren (2023) show that for that country, somewhere between 12 and 24 languages would be sufficient. This would still be difficult to implement – but it is not beyond what can realistically be imagined. This point has also been made by Chumbow (2005:177):

> It has been argued that learning a zonal language for one who speaks a different mother tongue from the zonal language amounts to learning a foreign language (such as English). This is not entirely true if the zonal language chosen is closely related to the child's mother tongue. For example, because of 'deep' intrinsic relations between Bantu languages of the same sub-group such as Bakweri and Duala (Cameroon), it would be much

[10] These terms – language as designed, intellectualized, or formalized all have slightly different connotations, a discussion of which falls outside the scope of this chapter. For practical purposes, they can be used interchangeably. For a more detailed discussion, see Van Pinxteren (2024).

[11] The Ethnologue and Glottolog both consider Scots, ISO 639 code <sco> a language that is different from although related to English, not to be confused with Scottish Gaelic, code <gla>, which is a Celtic language that is quite different from English.

[12] This language could be Merina Malagasy, ISO 639 code <plt>, an official language in Madagascar. In practice, the history of Malagasy as medium of instruction in the country is long and complicated; for an overview, see Howe (2022).

easier for a Bakweri to use Duala as medium in the school system (and vice versa) than English or French.

The comparative ease or difficulty of teaching (and learning) a more related language, as compared to teaching (and learning) a more distant language has not received much attention in the literature. However, there is some US experience. The US Government has published a list of language pairs, giving for each pair the number of weeks of full-time formal instruction needed for a talented native English speaker to reach the IRL 3 proficiency[13] level in a given other language.[14] Level 3 is roughly equivalent to the CEFR C1 level.[15] The most difficult language pairs require more than eight times as much instruction as the easiest language pairs. It may not be possible to generalize this level of difference between easy and difficult language pairs to people around the world – it could be that people who are already multilingual require less effort, for example. On the other hand, it could be that for people who are less talented or less motivated the difference between related and unrelated language learning and teaching is even greater. In all, this data does illustrate the basic point made by Chumbow: teaching (and learning) a related, but different language takes considerably less effort than teaching (and learning) a completely unrelated language.

Prah and others have pointed out that, in many parts of Africa, children grow up from an early age using more than one language. Many children employ speech registers that take elements from several discerned languages and can thus be said to be bi- or multilingual from birth. This means that in some areas of Africa, it will be possible to use

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[13] IRL is a US-based way of measuring language proficiency. It stands for the Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) and has five broad levels. https://www.govtilr.org/ accessed 22 May 2024.

[14] https://2009-2017.state.gov/documents/organization/247092.pdf accessed 22 May 2024.

[15] https://blogs.transparent.com/language-news/2014/10/22/the-starting-line-how-to-determine-your-language-level/ accessed 22 May 2024. CEFR is the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages/table-1-cefr-3.3-common-reference-levels-global-scale

a designed language that is in use as a *lingua franca* in that area–something that Mufwene (2023) has recently pointed out.

Designed language choices should be based as much as possible on considerations of fairness to the speakers of all the discerned languages that are involved. Van Pinxteren (2022: 213) has proposed five principles that could guide such choices:

1. Choose a limited number of designed languages for education.
2. Choose these languages in such a way that they are easy to learn for as many speakers of related discerned languages as possible.
3. Choose designed languages in such a way that all have to exert a relatively low but relatively equal effort to learn them.
4. Make use of existing bilingualism as a resource.
5. Build incentives for linguistic collaboration, especially for related linguistic communities.

This short discussion shows that a practical way to make a start with multilingual education is to use fewer than all 2,000 languages currently discerned in Africa and to aim for a late-exit model. For the short to medium-term future, such a policy is likely to be to the benefit of Africa. For the longer term, enrolment levels in Africa are likely to approach those of the North. When that happens, multilingual education may have to evolve into a system that does not switch from an indigenous language to a former colonial language, but rather to one in which indigenous languages are used as medium of instruction throughout. In such a system, students acquire competence in foreign languages through being taught those languages as subjects, as is already common practice outside of Africa.

Future policy options for multilingual education in Africa

For decades, UNESCO has been advocating mother-tongue-based education all over the world (UNESCO 1953). In Africa, that ideal has proved to be elusive indeed. In such a context, where former colonial languages dominate, introducing bilingual or multilingual education will be a step forward, both for cultural and efficiency reasons. It will be

important to use the most efficient way of doing this – in practice, that means employing a late-exit model, in contrast to the early-exit models that are currently common on the continent. The discussion above on the use of designed languages to serve speakers of several related (cognate or partially cognate) languages – as is common outside of Africa – shows that introducing education using local languages as medium of instruction is a practical possibility, making use of existing multilingualism and of the fact that many languages currently discerned in Africa are closely related.

However, as the experience in other parts of the world shows, multilingual education as narrowly defined by UNESCO can only be an intermediate solution for Africa. African education systems will be unable to expand indefinitely using former colonial languages as medium of instruction. If the SDG 4 goal of education for all is to be taken seriously, Africa has to prepare itself for a continued expansion of higher education, to approach the levels commonly found in the global North. If and when that happens, Africa will be faced with the same constraints faced by educational systems elsewhere: resources will always be limited. Therefore, African countries will be forced to look for efficiency. Perhaps some countries will be able to follow the path taken by Singapore, although currently none of the countries in Africa seem to share the characteristics of that country. Most countries will have to follow the path taken by countries elsewhere. That path is to choose a limited number of designed languages as medium of instruction, languages that are related to the languages discerned in those countries. Other languages will be taught as subjects. For higher education, there is then more freedom to offer curricula in local languages, possibly in addition to other languages. This will lead to an education that is still multilingual, though not in the narrow sense of an education that switches from one medium of instruction to another one at some point. It will be multilingual education in a broader sense, in that, through the teaching of foreign languages as subjects it will give students the ability to make functional use of two or more languages in their professional lives.

Apart from the theoretical long-term perspective that results from a consideration of the need for a drastic expansion of higher education in Africa to meet the goals of SDG 4, there is also a more practical reason why multilingual education in the narrow sense should be seen as an

intermediate step only. This has to do with the perspective that is offered to parents and students.

If parents and students see that knowledge of a former colonial language is a passport to a better life, they will go to any length to ensure that this knowledge is acquired (De Swaan 2001). Children will be sent to expensive private schools that advertise that they only use the former colonial language as medium of instruction. Parents will only speak the former colonial language to their children, even if they are themselves not very proficient in that language. Speaking local languages will be looked down upon. Attempts to introduce local languages as medium of instruction will be resisted. In short: no effort will be spared to teach and to learn the former colonial language, as long as it is seen as key to success in life. For that reason, it is important to change the perspective, and this is something that has to be done in a top-down manner, as also pointed out by Mufwene (2023). Parents and children have to be given the perspective that a future is possible for them by using local languages. This can mean, for example, that some academic careers (perhaps only a few at first) should be opened using local languages as medium of instruction. It may also mean that a certain level of proficiency in a local language is a prerequisite for getting certain jobs in the public and/or private sectors. It may also mean stimulating a media landscape in which local languages have some prominence.

Conclusions – way forward for research

It seems almost absurd that a discussion with this level of abstraction is still needed. Given the magnitude of the tasks ahead, much more will be needed, in much greater detail. It is necessary to examine in a more practical way what policy options are available, especially with specific languages and linguistic zones. Thus, Chebanne and Van Pinxeren (2021) have started to analyse the linguistic landscape and the options for choosing a set of designed languages for Botswana; Oloruntoba-Oju and Van Pinxteren (2023) have done this for Nigeria; and Kamdem, Ojongnkpot and Van Pinxteren (2025) have analysed the situation for Cameroon. However, all these studies have shied away from giving precise recommendations on which languages to use, although they have

identified the relevant language families in the respective countries. More analysis would be needed there, and similar analyses would have to be carried out for all the other countries on the continent. Any transition would require careful preparation and planning and a sustained commitment by successive governments. That would probably have to be based on a broad societal dialogue, to create sufficient understanding of and support for any transition. How could such a dialogue be established in specific country contexts? What would have to be put in place in terms of materials development and teacher training for a transition to be effective? What would a transition mean for corpus planning, and how could that be implemented? These and more questions come to the fore when embarking on a line of thinking as advocated in this chapter.

Specialist linguistic knowledge can provide crucial inputs for making science-based, informed, and equitable choices, both for which designed languages to choose and for how they should be further developed to fulfil the social and scientific functions required of them. This also places new demands on the training of linguists: they should be able to think in policy terms and to work with others in multidisciplinary teams, aimed at changing how things are currently done, more than just at documenting what seems to be rapidly disappearing.

Moving from legacy educational systems in which a minority of the population received education in a former colonial language to education for all based on indigenous mediums of instruction will become necessary in most if not all, African countries as enrolment levels in tertiary education continue to rise. The transition will be difficult but not impossible; it is likely to bring tremendous benefits to the continent. Multilingual education as narrowly defined can play a role in this transition, although at best as an intermediate step only. The whole process will require a long-term shift in thinking and much more research and debate. In this, linguists and other social scientists have an important role to play. The perspective is that they can help shape practical, efficient, rational, and inclusive African language-based policies on the whole continent.

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Author and editor biographies

Dr Feyi Ademola-Adeoye (author)

Feyi Ademola-Adeoye is a Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of African and Diaspora Studies, University of Lagos. She holds a PhD in Linguistics from the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, South Africa (2011). She has served in several academic and administrative roles at the University of Lagos, including Course Adviser and Foundation Programme Coordinator in the Department of English, Deputy Director of the Institute of Continuing Education, Sub-Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Deputy Director and Postgraduate Coordinator at the Institute of African and Diaspora Studies, and Member of Senate. She is currently the Early Career Coordinator at the University of Lagos African Cluster Centre. With more than three decades of academic experience, Dr Ademola-Adeoye has taught and researched widely in syntax, phonetics, phonology, digital humanities, cultural and anthropological linguistics, and gender studies. A fellow of the Bayreuth Academy of Advanced African Studies and the Moi University African Cluster Centre, she is also a Principal Investigator at the University of Lagos African Cluster Centre, part of the Africa Multiple Cluster of Excellence, University of Bayreuth.

Dr Adédoyinsọ̀lá Ẹlẹ́shın (author)

Adedoyinsola Eleshin is a lecturer in the Department of Linguistics, African and African and Asian Studies of the prestigious University of Lagos, Nigeria. She is a researcher and language enthusiast. Her research focuses on terminology development in African languages, with special interest in the Yorùbá language. Adedoyinsola is also a seasoned translator who has taken part in a number of translation projects, including the translation of the National Data Protection Act, 2023 into the Yorùbá language. She is highly interested in exceptional and interdisciplinary research.

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Dr Emilisco Jones Enoachuo (author)

Emilisco Jones Enoachuo is a lecturer and researcher of Applied Linguistics in Cameroon, exploring the complex relationship between language, society, and the environment through a sociolinguistic lens. Dr Enoachuo's chapter in *Local Languages, Global Futures: Language, Learning, and Sustainability in Africa* highlights the vital role of local languages as engines of sustainable development across the continent, rather than obstacles to progress. With a passion for preserving linguistic diversity, examining language, and sustainability in Africa, using frameworks of Pragmatics, Ecolinguistics, and endangered language documentation, her research focuses on Cameroon's national languages, particularly the Nyang language group and Mokpe (Bakweri), seeking innovative approaches to language development that respect local ecologies and cultural heritage. She champions sustainable language practices for a thriving future as well as addressing pressing issues of language sustainability in Africa.

Dr Doris Löhr (editor)

Doris Löhr holds a PhD in African Linguistics from Goethe-University Frankfurt and a Master's degree in African Languages and Cultures, Social Anthropology, and Education Sciences from Johannes Gutenberg-University Mainz. She currently holds a position at the Africa Multiple Cluster of Excellence at the University of Bayreuth. Her research interests span linguistic description, language contact, and the role of African languages in education within multilingual contexts. Within the frame of the Collaborative Research Centre SFB 268 'History of Culture and Language in the Natural Environment of the West African Savannah' she conducted extensive fieldwork in North-Eastern Nigeria and published the first grammatical description of the endangered Chadic Malgwa language. She subsequently held research and teaching positions in Mainz, Frankfurt, Leipzig, and Hamburg, including work on Kanuri-Kanembu dialects around Lake Chad. Beyond research, she has experience in academic coordination and international collaboration and has managed interdisciplinary projects such as Future Africa – Visions in Time (2012–2019), has co-edited volumes including *Kanuri, Borno and Beyond* and *African Studies Centres Around the World* and is also active in profes-

sional associations, serving on boards in African and transregional studies, e.g. the Executive Management Council of the African Institute in Indigenous Knowledge Systems consortium.

Dr Sarita Monjane-Henriksen (author)

Fullbright Scholar-In-Residence, Rutgers University, New Jersey, USA (2025–2026). Post-doctorate in Human Rights, Social Rights and Diffuse Rights, with a focus on Linguistic Human Rights, University of Salamanca, Spain. PhD in Language Education Planning and Policy, University of Roskilde, Denmark. MA in Linguistics in Education, University of Surrey, St. Mary's University College, United Kingdom, and BA in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL), Universidade Pedagógica (UP-Maputo), Mozambique. Associate Professor in Language Education, teaching a variety of disciplines, including Sociolinguistics, Language and Cultural Diversity, Translation Studies, and Introduction to Consecutive Interpreting. Director of Cooperation at UP-Maputo. DAAD Visiting Professor, Justus Liebig of Giessen, Germany (2022–2023); and Guest Professor at ISCTE-IUL, Portugal (2021–2023), the *Universidade Federal do Paraíba*, João Pessoa, Brazil, and University of Southern Denmark. Former Dean of the Faculty of Language Sciences, Communication and Arts, at UP-Maputo (2012–2017). Most recent publications include *English in Mozambique, The Wiley Blackwell Encyclopaedia of World Englishes* (March 2025), *Moçambique e Finlândia – Perspectivas Educacionais Comparadas* (Mozambique & Finland – Comparative Education Perspectives) (2024). Maputo, Gala-gala Edições, and *Language and Education in Mozambique: Subsidies for a language policy oriented towards global citizenship*, Collection *Nossa gente, nossas línguas* (Our people, our languages), Gala-Gala Editions (2023).

Tomoe Noguchi (author)

Tomoe Noguchi is Ph. D candidate in the Division of African Area Studies, Graduate School of Asian and African Area Studies at Kyoto University, Japan. Her research is targeting groups of the San, also known as the (post-)hunter gatherer communities of Southern Africa. Since 2022, she has conducted her field research with the San people in Botswana called the G|ui and G||ana. Her current research theme is "Reorganizing educa-

tion in the contemporary G|ui/G‖ana community: Focusing on children's interactions." She is a member of the Research and Advocacy Group of Hunter Gatherer Education and engaged in community empowerment. She has published several papers, including 'Help to climb up: impacts of modern education among the G|ui and G‖ana' and 'Diversity and transition of stepfamilies among the G|ui and G‖ana' (both articles are published on *Hunter Gatherer Research* in 2024). Her research career with the community has just started, but she is growing with the G|ui/G‖ana children!

Dr Comfort Beyang Oben Ojongnkpot (author, editor)

Comfort Beyang Oben Ojongnkpot is Associate Professor of English Language and Linguistics at the University of Buea, Cameroon. She is Head of Department for the Department of English and Cultural Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Buea. Sponsored (2019) by the Alexander von Humbodlt Foundation as Post-Doctoral Researcher at the Technological University of Chemnitz, Germany. Comfort is credited with over 35 publications in reputable journals and edited books. She is Travel Award grantee to a number of international conferences, workshops and symposia. Has attended a number of Summer Schools in Africa, Europe, the Americas and Asia. She is member of scientific associations across the world as well as coordinator of a number of them. Comfort has over 28 years of experience in Language Teaching and Linguistic Research. Irrespective of her professional commitment, Comfort has a knack for socio-politico-cultural concerns; since 2002, she has been Councillor for the Buea municipality; from 2013–2019; she was 4th Deputy Mayor for the same Municipality. Since 2016, she has been at the helm of a network of Manyu Women, scattered all over the world, popularly known by the name, MOHWA Global. Comfort is a mother of three biological and many adoptive children.

Prof Dr Taiwo Oloruntoba-Oju (editor)

Taiwo Oloruntoba-Oju is a professor of English and Applied Linguistics at the University of Ilorin, Nigeria. His teaching and research foci include Language and Society (Polity, Gender, Youth and Urbanity); Communication Skills and Language Development; African Indigenous Lan-

guages, and Language in Drama and Theatre. He has published widely in these areas. He is co-founder and Steering Committee member of the Edinburgh Circle for the Promotion of African Languages, and a founding Editor of the *Journal of Language Policy in Africa*. Oloruntoba-Oju has been a fellow of the British Council, the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation in Germany, Cambridge Writers Seminar, Nordic Africa Institute in Sweden, Edinburgh University in the UK, and a Language Evaluator, LINGUA, Switzerland, among other honours. Oloruntoba-Oju is also a published playwright and poet.

Omusula Omuholo (author)

Omusula W. Omuholo is a PhD student in Communication Studies at the University of Oregon, United States. She has an MA degree in Communication Studies from the University of Ghana, Ghana and a BA degree in Communication and Media Studies with IT from Maseno University, Kenya. She centres her research around cultural foundations of communication, cross-cultural communication, media and indigenous language localization, and cultural representations in African popular media. Her current research focus is on the decolonization of identity and cultural representation in African popular media, particularly films in indigenous African languages. Omusula is also a poet, documenting her work in her blog https://nandirimusings.blogspot.com/ as well as sharing her cultural experiences and film reviews through her YouTube channel http://www.youtube.com/@theculturetrailbyomusula2049 and blog https://theculturetrail.blogspot.com/

Dr Bert van Pinxteren (author, editor)

Bert van Pinxteren is a guest researcher at the Leiden University Centre of Linguistics. He has an MA in adult education and community organization from the University of Amsterdam (1981), a Research Master in African studies from Leiden University (2018) and a PhD in Applied African linguistics also from Leiden University (2021). Bert has worked in a number of international NGOs, notably on environment and development issues, including with Friends of the Earth International and ActionAid Netherlands. His book, *Language and Education in Africa* (2022) was published by the Leiden African Studies Centre. Bert is sec-

retary to the Edinburgh Circle on the Promotion of African Languages and one of the editors of the journal, *Language Policy in Africa*. He has published in a number of journals and is the author of several chapters in edited volumes. He has presented papers at numerous international conferences and organized several international workshops.

Prof Dr Ayo Yusuff (editor)

Ayo Yusuff is a Research Professor in and currently Director of the Institute of African and Diaspora Studies, University of Lagos, Nigeria. He studied Linguistics and Yoruba Language at the University of Lagos and University of Ibadan, Nigeria. In 2007, he was a member of the team of linguists that produced the Yoruba version of Local Language Program for Microsoft Corporation. In 2011, he participated in the production of a unified standard orthography for the Yoruba language cluster adopted for the writing of Yoruba in Nigeria, Republic of Benin and the Republic of Togo. In 2017, he was in the team that developed the English-Yoruba Glossary of HIV, AIDS and Ebola Related Terms, which was published with him as Lead Editor. He specializes in Morpho-syntax and Language Engineering. He has over 40 publications in reputable journals and books. His doctoral thesis, titled "Lexical Morphology in Yoruba Language Engineering," presented to the School of Postgraduate Studies, University of Lagos in 2008, has been published by VDM Germany in 2010. Ayo YUSUFF is the Academic Coordinator of University of Lagos African Cluster Centre, Africa Multiple Cluster of Excellence in African Studies, University of Bayreuth, Germany.