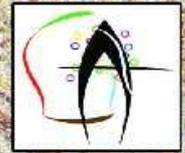# CODESRIA

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إفريقيا وتحديات القرن الواحد والعشرين

Language Policy Lapses in Africa:
The Curse of Statehood and Nationhood

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Introduction

A considerable majority of Africa's modern states exists in their current territorial shapes as the result of earlier Western colonial expansion in Africa, and the imposition of boarders on contiguous bodies of land with almost noconcern for creating homogenous or coherent populations (Simpson 2008:1).Consequently, a wide range of quite distinct ethnic groups were artificially assembled as the demographic co-constituents of European protectorates and colonies, while other groups were divided by new borders and separated into two or more Western administered territories. After independence, in the second half of the 20th Century, the inheritance of these externally and arbitrary imposed borders consequently led to the sudden emergence of a great number of states with mixed populations with little in common except a shared officially recognized territory. The leadership of Africa's independent states has been very challenging, especially issues of language and cultural integration. How to bring together the diverse ethno-linguistic groups occupying many of the continents new states and create a sense of belonging and loyalty to a collective national whole is a challenge yet to be addressed. Simpson (2008:2) captures the challenges of Africa accurately when he states that:

"*In the general attempt to build stable, integrated new states in heavily multilingual and multi-ethnic sub-Saharan Africa, language has, not surprisingly, proved to be an important and contested force intimately connected both with citizens' individual access to education, employment and political participation and with the broader growth of a shared sense of national community, and has often given rise to perceptions of multilingualism (in the sense of occurrence of many languages within a single population)as principally negative complication for national development rather than an asset to be exploited*".

Scholars and governments in Africa see language policies adopted at the end of colonial rule as the genesis of the good or bad practices observed today. For many African states, important influences on the prominence, extension and functional use of languages in post-colonial times were already established during the experience of colonial occupation, not only as the result of the creation of borders which put together various ethno-linguistic groups as members of future states, but also through specific language related policies and activities (Simpson 2008:2). For instance, in education, usually the kind of education offered to Africans was one to prepare them for blue-collar jobs, and thus the local indigenous languages were used as media of instruction.

Another common approach used by colonial administrators was to provide a minimal amount of western-language medium schooling, sufficient to train up a necessary number of junior-level civil servants with the proficiency in French and English, and to leave any education of the remaining majority of local African populations to the sporadic initiatives of the missionary groups (cf. Simpson 2008). As a consequence, the missionary involvement in education and spread of Christianity resulted in the use of indigenous African languages, and thus various languages had to be standardized and formally described. It is during this period that many dictionaries, grammars, orthographies and teaching materials on many African languages were developed and produced. The languages and varieties of languages that were selected and formally developed and promoted acquired a higher status and in many cases became *lingua francas* and these languages also emphasized ethnic identities that were previously not clearly defined.

The use of African languages in education was not always appreciated because the knowledge of a Western language always resulted in access to better jobs. Since English and French were used as the official languages of colonial bureaucracy, the use of indigenous languages rather than European ones as mediums of education created resistance, and evoked emotions that indigenous language education was a deliberate attempt by the Europeans to withhold the linguistic means of advancement for Africans. That is why, in the light of the above, it makes sense to point out that language can be a key contributing force towards the consolidation of nationhood and the realization of national development and that is why it is important for a country to formulate a national language policy. Since the various countries of Africa acquired their independence, the failure of many of these states to come out with a clear transformational language policy appears to be a major handicap in their experiences of nation-building.

Despite the fact that language is a powerful symbol of society, if its potential is fully recognised and exploited, ironically to-date European languages dominate in most African states in all the formal and technical domains, such as government, business administration, science and technology, trade commerce, international relations and education. Indigenous languages in Africa have therefore been restricted to a few domains of use and the less formal ones are relegated to less glamorous domains such as intra-community communication, interpretational roles in local courts, use by politicians in local political rallies to name a few. There are only a few countries in Africa, e.g. Tanzania, Somalia, Ethiopia, Burundi, Uganda and most Arabic

speaking countries, which opted to develop their indigenous lingua franca to serve as national languages. The former colonial languages have, therefore, continued to strengthen their positions of prestige at the expense of the indigenous languages. The use of ex-colonial languages has far reaching implications in undermining the consolidation of nationhood.

In addition, the restriction of education, in a European language, to a small population in colonies in Africa resulted in the creation of a small class of African elites in many countries. This class of people clearly understood the benefits of proficiency in a western language, and therefore knew that offering education in a western language to the entire population would lead to literacy of the masses and competition for the government jobs. Thus, it was not in their economic interest to educate the masses.

As African states approached their independence in the mid-20th century, the former colonial languages had become positioned as languages of economic success, higher education and prestige, and as mentioned above, they were known by a small percentage of the population.In contrast, the African languages were confined to informal domains of use and had less overtly recognised prestige, even when occurring as regional *lingua francas* among larger populations (Simpson 2008:3).

It appears that Africa's failure to harness the cultural and social efficaciousness of language in national construction is contrasted with the observable trend in all the world's developed countries which have well calibrated language policies. In these countries, technology is adapted and integrated within their cultural and social values, thereby providing a means of mobilization and the fomenting of national cohesiveness. Language policy can be an effective tool of political socialization and mobilization for effective participation of all citizens in nation-building. This explains why countries like the Netherlands and Denmark in Europe have preserved their languages for use in their daily social and economic activities while many others including China, Korea, Taiwan, Malaysia and Thailand, base their development strategies on the indigenous languages because this is the only way to involve the whole population in the development effort to meaningfully bring about technological advancement within the country's cultural framework.

Evidently, after independence in the late 1950s and1960s, many nations had to begin by addressing situations of high linguistic diversity and complex socio-cultural identities. Ideas inherited from the ex-colonial masters suggested that the new independent states of Africa

should identify and promote a single indigenous language to function as a national language, a linguistic means aimed at achieving national unity and a better future for all. In addition, there was the need to determine a language(s) that would be used in government, education and administration. Most African states opted for ex-colonial languages to serve these functions. It would have been practically possible to use a single language in some countries or a small set of languages to serve all these functions, but as mentioned above, the minority elite population wanted to be in charge of the development efforts in independent African states.

One wonders why very few countries in the sub-Saharan Africa have developed a national lingua franca to serve all the functions described above in the country. In most of Africa, the governments opted for a simple continuation of the basic language policy of pre-independent colonial times, with minor modifications in the form of declarations of intent to revisit issues of national language in the future, as and when opportunity and resources became available and presented them selves (Simpson 2008:4). Consequently, the ex-colonial languages, which had become entrenched in administration and known to the educated minority were accepted and recognized as the official languages for use in government business, administration and education, and little was undertaken to select and promote national languages which would have shaped the new identities of independent African states. Therefore, there was lack of commitment in development of national languages which was rationalized in terms of expenses and availability of resources in the future.

While the leaders and governments of a number of African states made affirmations in support of African languages to be national languages, there was no political will to support such a move to give these languages new status. In a number of cases the indigenous languages of a country were simply referred to as national languages treasured by citizens of a particular nation and as such it would be difficult to promote any of these languages and leave the others without any outcry in the country. Such an example is Cameroon where 250 languages were recognized as national languages in 1974, and Sudan where a similar declaration was made with regard to the 140 indigenous languages spoken there (see Simpson 2008 for details). In some countries, a number of languages were given the national status e.g. South Africa declared 11 languages to serve as national and official, and Nigeria promoted Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa, in a country where over 400 languages are spoken.

Reasons for Failure to Promote African languages in Post-Independent Africa

The language policies in multilingual societies of Africa has always been a matter of concern to educators and educational planners because of the sensitive "multi-ethnic and "multi-lingual situation". This is made more complex when the official language of a country is a language other than any of the indigenous languages. When a language other than an indigenous African one is use to serve official roles, there is always controversy over which language to use in school and which one (s) to use in other domains. The choice and preference of one or more languages to serve as official or national in African states has attracted a lot of criticism from academics, politicians, educators, traditional rulers, and the general populace.

It makes sense to argue that the absence of an effective language policy in African countries seems to be the curse of statehood, nationhood and development on the continent. It appears that development in Africa slows down because important communication relies on foreign languages of the former colonial masters and the parties involved in the process of development cannot interact effectively. A common language therefore should be seen as an integrating force, a means by which political empowerment and participation of all citizens is fully facilitated. There is need to explore how African languages, if empowered, would foster development of Africa, to begin with, by involving the entire population of a nation, and consequently spill over to other countries of the world. It makes sense to argue that the dominance of foreign and largely colonial languages has undermined not only national cohesiveness and their perceptiveness of responsibilities as citizens but also seriously undercut their development of self-confidence and sense of Africanness. As a result, many nationals are rendered unable to access government information because of bridling communication barriers.

The reasons often advanced for the acceptance of the existing pre-independent language situation and the reluctance to discard colonial languages and develop African ones are outlined below:

1. Most African states did not have a single indigenous language known to the majority of the population. This was mostly because of the colonial groupings of highly heterogeneous populations within a common set of borders, and thus there were no natural choices of a single national official language from the set of languages present in respective countries after independence. There was often no language that was known by over 50% of the population, and in cases where there were sizeable populations

whose languages would be adopted as national or official, there were fears among the ethnic minorities of being dominated by the larger groups, Nigeria is such an example (Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa are a large ethnic majority). These fears undermined the possibility of selecting combination of larger languages as official replacements of ex-colonial languages. (we will re-visit the case of Nigeria later in this paper and highlight the challenges facing the most populous state in Africato-date).The ex-colonial languages were considered neutral thus favouring no group over another and they were believed to offer a unifying force in the multilingual and multicultural setting of most African countries.

2. The other reason reinforced for favouring the retention of European languages to serve official roles was that the ex-colonial languages already had standardized orthographies and could be used right away, instead of awaiting the development of the orthographies of the indigenous languages. The indigenous languages were seen as inadequate for use in the same range domains as European ones. Only a few African languages had developed orthographies and even those that were developed there were issues of which of the many varieties should be considered standard. There were concerns as to whether the lexicon of the African languages could be expanded for use in science and technology and education in general. In some cases there were controversies on the appropriateness of differing orthographies e.g. the case of Somalia which could not be used in the official domains until 1972 when a uniform writing system was adopted.

3. Another reason advanced against mother tongue instruction in many African states is that there was simply not enough teaching materials in the numerous languages present in many countries to facilitate learning in children's acquired languages, and that mixed classes of students with different language backgrounds often made attempts to provide mother tongue education very difficult even when relevant textbooks might be available.

4. Availability of trained teachers with necessary linguistic skills to properly implement teaching through indigenous languages is also a major hindrance to mother tongue instruction

5. The delivery of education in African languages is impeded by the attitudes of the African population that there are no benefits for the formal learning of indigenous languages and preference should be accorded to European languages which enhance an individual's

employment potential. The arguments that the ex-colonial languages paves the way for African countries to be part of the international world further reinforces the continued use of English and French in education. These languages were seen as a necessity to maintain access to developing science and technology, modernization and contact to the western world. Therefore, parents would rather an education in a European language for their children which would consequently give them a better future.

The continued use of ex-colonial languages in most African states to- date has excluded a majority of citizens in the development efforts of many African states.

Policies Adopted by Selected Countries in Post-Independent Africa and the Consequences of These policies in the 21st Century

There is need to explore strategic importance of language as a tool of statecraft that can be harnessed in accelerating social and national transformation. Africa need not rely on foreign languages for its development when it has such diverse linguistic resources which are well saddled in its cultural heritage that is critical for social capital formation. If developed this capital can for a basis of uniting not only people of its various nations but also foster prospects of enhancing regional integration. Well defined language policy outlays should be formulated as a basis of re-asserting African authenticity and self-hood and providing sustainable charters of national consolidation of statehood and collective idioms as well as a national behavioural ethic. Therefore, the paper marks a departure from sterile textbook circumscribed models of explaining development and as such emphasizes the need to place fundamental value on national language policy formulation and its enforcement. That is basically why the paper seeks to show that if a common language is adopted, the transfer of skills, new knowledge and other vital information desired to effect radical and sustainable changes in 21st century African states will be both feasible and germane to the building of a true sense of Africanity.

Evidently, after independence, African states had to educate their citizens and language choice was a very crucial decision in the development of literacy programmes. The big question was which of the many languages should be used as a medium of instruction at different levels of education? The common practice in many African countries was the use of ex-colonial languages at secondary school level and use of mother-tongue at the primary school level. Nevertheless, the use of the ex-colonial languages at the primary school level is also common.

The use of unfamiliar languages such as French and English at the primary school level, for the young school going children has not been very successful, and instruction through the mother tongue in at least the formative years of education is known to be considerably more effective as a teaching strategy (cf. Simpson 2008, Kioko and Muthwii 2004).

Many African states have made attempts to provide early primary education through local languages, i.e. the mother tongue of the school children where possible or a common African lingua franca due to the growing acceptance of the importance of mother tongue in helping the child have a proper home-school transition. Such attempts have been successful in some countries and are growing steadily (e.g. Mali, Zambia and South Africa), but are faltering or are totally discontinued in other countries (e.g. Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya etc.). Even in cases where the states have made an attempt to offer a proper home-school transition through the use of mother tongue, the general attitude of the public towards language use in education (parents in particular), prefer to have their children educated in two languages – a European language (for wider communication) and an African language (to facilitate learning in general and for cultural transmission).

The common trend in the education system in many post independent African states to-date is the use of European languages and the potential for the education systems of various countries to spread knowledge of African languages as a way of strengthening national unity has not been fully realized.Therefore, it can be said that the education system in many countries is still reinforcing the presence of European languages among the school-going-age, and is not yet having a major impact on the spread of African languages in formal areas despite many promising initiatives (cf. Simpson 2008:8). For instance, in formal domains such as administration, written media, politics, and formal mechanisms of state bureaucracy ex-colonial languages are used, but in more informal domains African languages are used significantly, e.g. when politicians try to woo audiences they prefer a common lingua franca such as Kiswahili, Wolof, Bambara, Igbo, Hausa among others.

As Simpson (2008) would have us believe, in some states lesser degrees of explicit planning have combined with 'natural' undirected forces of growth to give rise to the knowledge of a particular language among sizeable populations. For example, Wolof in Senegal which is a mother tongue of 40% of Senegalese and used as a second language by another 50% of the population; Bambara in Mali, spoken as a first language by 40% and as a second language by

another 40%; Swahili in Kenya, which is spoken by two-thirds of the population as either first or second language; Akan in Ghana is spoken by over 50% of Ghanaians. In all these multilingual, multi-ethnic states, there are indigenous languages that are spoken by a sizeable population and the potential in developing these states cannot be underestimated. The big question is, why are these countries not taking advantage and develop these languages to enhance economic development and political integration?

Development is a process which involves the entire spectrum of the society, with each individual making a contribution. A communication channel is therefore imperative in order to mobilise the whole society in the process of social change. It is an essential tool in ensuring the full participation of the masses in the political, socio-economic and cultural development. Institutions, organisations and even governments cannot perform clearly and effectively to their expectations unless they can understand and be understood by every citizen of a particular nation. This argument is summarized by Simire (2004:1) as follows:

"In order to achieve rapid political, economic and sociocultural change in the country, all academic and specialized institutions and corporate organisations in the local and federal governments, should mobilise, inform and educate the old and the young, illiterate and literate, male and female, lowly and highly placed individuals across the diversified ethno-linguistic groups in their respective code"

Unfortunately, speakers of minority languages in most African countries are excluded from or marginalised in respect of national participation because of the use, by the ruling elite, of an ex-colonial language or of a dominant indigenous language, which may be used as a lingua franca but not understood by certain groups. Speakers of minority languages are therefore denied direct participation in public interaction, meaningful audiences with government authorities, contact with other groups or active contribution at public rallies (Batibo 2005:47). The exclusion of minority language speakers for these reasons is very common in Africa, as most countries either assume that all are able to follow discourse in those languages or insist that all official communication be made in them whatever the social cost. Many communities experience marginalization and there is need for critical strategies for combating African language marginalization. The immediate consequence is that nationalism, which is an economic necessity and can only be achieved by a communication that is capable of reaching all members of society in the economic process, is not achieved.

If a common language is not adopted, which in this case would be a common African language serving as a lingua franca of particular nation(s), the transfer of skills, new knowledge and other vital information desired to effect changes cannot be delivered to the target group at both the regional and national levels to mobilise the masses for the development endeavour. In the following section, an exploration is made of the historical development of educational language policies in selected African states in general, examine what necessitates the change in policy, and give recommendations on how a language policy can be an effective tool of political socialization and mobilization for effective participation of all citizens in national-building in the 21st Century.

The Failures of Many African States Originate in the Failure to Enact the Set Policies

During an Intergovernmental Conference of Ministers on Language Policy in Africa (in Harare 20-21 march 1997), Ministers and Heads of Delegations representing African states declared cognisance of the richness of the linguistic diversity in Africa and its potential as a resource for all types of development. They declared that they were convinced of the necessity and urgency for African States to adopt clear policies for the use and development of mother tongues as well as community languages, national, inter-African and international languages; and that the optimal use of African languages is a prerequisite for maximizing African creativity and resourcefulness in development activities.

In addition, they declared that they were aware that the language policies introduced since independence have generally favoured the colonial languages by setting up language structures that confer a monopoly of status to the languages of former colonial powers; and lastly they pointed that they were further aware that most of the recommendations previously made to correct this situation have not been implemented considering that only very few African states have clear and comprehensive language policies and that even fewer have enshrined the stipulations of such policies in their constitutions. They noted also that language policy decisions are actually political decisions that can only be taken by national governments.

After making the observations above, the Ministers and heads of delegations declared their total commitment to correct the anomalies outlined above but to-date very little has changed in most African countries. Thus, there is need to outline sections of language policies of selected countries with a view to understanding the consequences of failing to enact these policies. In a

paper of this nature, it is impossible to discuss the policies of all the fifty-five (including the new South Sudan) African states, but we aim to sample a few countries in the sub-Saharan Africa where the challenge of national building is faced with severe multi-ethnic and multi-lingual issues. In addition we will consider some North African states and consider how issues of language and identity are constructed in states with a restricted number of languages. In the revised edition of the National Policy on Education in Nigeria, it states that:

"Government appreciates the importance of language as a means of promoting social interaction and national cohesion; and preserving cultures. Thus every child shall learn the language of the immediate environment. Furthermore in the interest of national unity, it is expedient that every child shall be required to learn one of the three Nigerian languages, Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba" (*NPE*, 2004:5, Para. 10a).

It further reiterates that:

"For smooth interaction with our neighbours, it is desirable for every Nigerian to speak French. Accordingly French shall be the second official language in Nigeria and it shall be compulsory in Primary and Junior Secondary schools but Non-vocational elective at the Senior Secondary School" (*NPE* 2004, Para 10b).

In addition, the policy with regard to early childhood education states that *"Government shall ensure that the medium of instruction is principally the mother tongue or the language of the immediate community* (*NPE* Para. 14c. Section 55 also cf. Kawu Bala 1997 for details). Simire (2004) points out that of about 33% of the total population of Nigerians who are literate in English (the official language) only about 15% of these can really use English effectively in professional and administrative activities. Therefore, we can interpret this to mean that 85% of Nigerians do not have sufficient knowledge of the official language, a situation that is not different from other African states that use an ex-colonial language in official matters. The statistics are an indication that few Nigerians are getting the best of education because most of them acquire education through the medium of a language they do not know. Education in foreign languages has thus become education for a minority, and the majority is excluded in national development programmes. If the development of such countries were to hinge on communication using English, then we must accept that it will involve a very small minority of the population. This becomes a hindrance to economic, political and socio-cultural development because institutions

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and other corporate organisations cannot perform their developmental roles accurately unless they can understand and be understood.

A policy that advocates use of mother-tongue in education would ensure that a firm foundation of primary education is established. That is, it would effect a smooth transition from home to school; inculcate the spirit of inquiry and creativity in the child through the exploration of nature, the environment, art, music and playing in a language that a child understands best; inculcate permanent literacy and numeracy, and ability to communicate effectively; and laying a sound foundation for scientific and reflective thinking. For this policy to work, for example in Nigeria, the government of Nigeria had to develop orthography of many more Nigerian languages (Nigeria is the most populous nation in Africa and also has the largest number of languages spoken in a single country; over 400), and produce textbooks in Nigerian languages.

While it is compulsory for Nigerian children to learn French – a foreign language, the policy states that "every Nigerian shall be required to learn one of the three Nigerian languages, Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba". However, the federal government tactfully waved the learning of any of these indigenous languages at the junior secondary school level when it stated that "a language of the environment to be taught as L1 – where it has orthography and literature but where it does not have, it shall be taught with emphasis on oracy as L2" (FRN 2004:14).

  It is also essential to quote from the provisions of the 1999 Constitution. Section 55 states that: *"The business of the National Assembly shall be conducted in English and in Hausa, Ibo and Yoruba when adequate arrangements have been made therefore"*; and of interest is also section 97 which states that: *"The business of a House of Assembly shall be conducted in English, but the House may in addition to English conduct the business in one or more other languages that the house may by resolution approve."* The emphasis here is again laid on a European language unless there are prior arrangements to use other languages. Fafunwa et al (1989:7) remarks that one of the important factors that militates against the dissemination of knowledge and skills and therefore of a rapid social and economic well-being of the majority of people in developing countries is the imposed medium of communication. The parliament is a very important arm of the government and if the house business is conducted mostly in a language that a majority of thepopulation does not clearly understand begs the answer to the question of whose interest is the government business? Is it for the majority of the people or the ruling elite?

In the early 80s some states in Nigeria (Bauchi state) started implementing the provisions of the policy and they had teachers in Yoruba, Igbo and French. The decision makers in Bauchi would have ignored the calls and emphasize on their own languages, mainly: Bole, Fulfulde and Hausa. The decision to implement the teaching of Yoruba, Igbo and French is an indication that if there is a political wills the implementation of language policies can be done. In the words of Kawu (1997), "Nigeria is not far from getting the right cord at least we are not so bad without guidance and we can still go back and look at the strategies for the effective language policy since it is national development that we are talking about. This should be within the context that ought to be between the "aspiration for a knowledge driven and modern society" and the urgent need to review the impact of our native languages".

If we consider the case of Kenya, we observe that there have been serious challenges of developing African languages to be used in schools. There has been Commissions set up to empower African languages but implementation has taken decades. For instance, The Education Department's Annual Report for 1951 (Colony and Protectorate of Kenya 1952:13) called for the teaching of English from lower classes because it contended that it was pedagogically unsatisfactory to use three languages (English, Kiswahili and Mother tongues) as media of instruction in primary schools (Musau 2004:61). This started to be implemented in 1958 in what came to be known as the 'New Primary Approach (NPA)'. The approach involved using English as the medium of instruction on an experimental basis in Asian schools from the first day that a child entered school (Mbaabu 1996:115). This policy was later extended to cover African schools. This policy disadvantaged African children because they were not given a chance to adapt to the school environment. The children were forced to learn in a language they barely spoke or understood.

The Kenya Education Commission, also referred to as the Ominde Commission, which was appointed to review education matters for independent Kenya recommended the continued use of English from class one. Kiswahili, which the commission recognised as 'a tool of national integration and means of Pan-African communication' (Republic of Kenya 1964:60-61), was to be made a compulsory subject in all primary schools. As for the vernaculars, the commission recommended a daily period of storytelling! (Musau 2004:61). The recommendations of the commission were adhered to with respect to English. Kiswahili was taught, but not examined;

the result was that both teachers and pupils did not take the language seriously, teachers concentrated on examinable subjects at the expense of Kiswahili.

Regarding the possibility of making Kiswahili the language of instruction, the Commission Report claimed that this would not be possible because it would be 'a grave misuse of public funds to translate textbooks and supplementary books into Kiswahili' and that it would not be possible to use this language because 'it would require adaptation to unaccustomed scientific uses' (Mbaabu 1996:125). The negative attitudes are, therefore, rationalized in terms of 'expenses', 'non-scientific language', 'lack of neutrality', 'lack of internationality' and other similar descriptions (see Ansre 1977, cited in Musau 2004:66). Later, 1976, the 'Gachathi Report' reiterated that Kiswahili should be a compulsory and examinable subject in primary and secondary schools. This boosted the status of Kiswahili. Kiswahili is an examinable subject in primary and secondary schools to-date and it is also taught as a subject of specialisation at the University level. In addition, Kiswahili has been declared as an official language in Kenya in the new constitution.

Although there have been pronouncements and even decrees with regard to enhancing the role of Kiswahili, this has not been followed immediately by concrete measures of implementation. For example, the recommendation that Kiswahili should become a compulsory and examinable subject made in 1976 was implemented 9 years later in 1985. The recommendation made by the ruling party (Kenya African National Union), which was in power from 1963-2001, to make Kiswahili the official language in all government business made in 1970 was not implemented by 2010, when the people of Kenya voted in a new constitution. The constitution is yet to be implemented.

Failure to make Kiswahili the official language since 1970 clearly shows lack of commitment among the élite and in particular the policy makers. We now only hope that Kiswahili will indeed acquire the same status as English after being elevated to the official status.The new status of Kiswahili in Kenya now shows the decisive role of policy in the development of a language. It shows that favourable policy can boost the fortunes of a language. It should be noted, however, that no policies or plans have been put in place, either for the short term or long term, for making Kiswahili a medium of instruction for other subjects except the language itself (Musau 2004).

In the case of Arabic as a national language in countries of North Africa and the Middle East the situation is also complex. Localized forms of Arabic such as the Moroccan Arabic and Egyptian Arabic are clearly distinctive and distinguish their speakers from those of other states, but are often considered lacking in prestige to serve as national languages. Modern Standard Arabic, which is more closely linked with Classical Arabic, is a very widely shared form of Arabic in North Africa, but it does not have an obvious potential to serve as a clearly distinctive national language in multiple states, though it does enjoy high prestige (Simpson 2008:17). Some Arab countries tried to nationalize or unsuccessfully promote the localized variety of Arabic as a distinctive national language, or they denied the linking of national identity to the use of a particular language. An example, is the localized from of Arabic in Egypt where early 'territorial' nationalists tried to promote the colloquial Egyptian form of Arabic in vain. The nationalists also tried to sidestep the conclusion that use of shared forms of Arabic left Egypt without an individual national identity and simply part of a wider Arab nation (for more discussion on this see Suleiman 2008, Ennaji and Sadiqi 2008).

However, if the potential of Standard Arabic as a symbol of unification in North Africa is explored, what some scholars have referred to as pan-Arabism, this region would be a great force to reckon. Classical and Standard Arabic could be embraced as markers of a shared Arab identity. The issue of linguistic and cultural identity would thus necessitate a clear attention from nationalist leaders in states which appear to share their national and official languages with others, and may lead to different responses and interpretations, some better accepted than others. The leaders would capitalize on the shared responses as a way of regional integration.

Perhaps what should be emphasized is that the language policy failures in many African states lies in the inability to recognise the policy documents at their disposal or rather the inability of the policy makers to re-examine the policy in relation to what steers the country to economic development, social integration and growth. African leaders should therefore try to chart a common cause for the good of their countries. "It has always been felt by African educationists that the African child's major learning problem is linguistic i.e. the inability of the learner to appreciate the language of instruction". Instruction is given in a language that is not normally used in his immediate environment, a language which neither the learner nor the teacher understands and uses well enough", writes Birgit Brock-Utne in *Language-in-Education Policies*

and Practices in Africawith Special Focus on Tanzania and South Africa. In this writer's experience "Children are being branded as unintelligent when they lack knowledge of the language used in instruction, a language they often hardly hear and seldom use outside of the classroom" (see Kawu Bala 1997 for details).

Language and Nationhood in Africa

With regard to the effect of language use on national building in Africa we observe that African states, with a small number of exceptions, has not experienced language nationalism that has characterized the growth of various nations in Europe from the 19th century onwards. A common language is paramount in establishing nationhood and subsequent development of such a nation. It is a fact that no developed country has developed on the basis of a foreign language as development involves the participation of all citizens in nation-building. It is no wonder that small countries like the Netherlands and Denmark have preserved their languages, which are used in their daily social and economic activities (Batibo 2005:45). The problem of Africa cannot be captured in a better way than what Mazrui observes:

" *….no country has ascended to a first rank technological and economic power by excessive dependence on foreign languages. Japan rose to dazzling industrial heights by scientificating the Japanese language and making it the medium of its own industrialization. Can Africa ever take-off technologically if it remains so overwhelmingly dependent on European languages for discourse on advanced learning? Can Africa look to the future if it is not adequately sensitive to the cultural past? This lingo-cultural gap, then, is seen as a serious impediment to the full maturation of Africa's own scientific genius. Against this backdrop, then, the need to "scientificate" African languages cannot be over-emphasized" (*Mazrui 1999).

The fast-developing countries of Asia, such as China, Korea, Taiwan, Malaysia, Thailand, base their development strategies on the indigenous languages as this is the only way to involve the whole population in the development effort and to meaningfully bring technological advancement within the country's cultural framework. Independence movements in Africa accepted the geographical shapes and ethnic composition of the territories they in habited and commonly fought for independence from foreign rule but they did not redefine the national boundaries to mirror physical distribution of ethnic groups.

Consequently, the varied ethno-linguistic character of the majority of colonies did not allow for a single language to be fully used as a representative symbol of an emerging nation, in for

example the German and polish nationalist movements in Europe (Simpson 2008:12). There were instances in Africa where specific languages became associated with independence and post-independence nationalist movements in certain countries where a lingua franca or a common language is spoken e.g. Arabic speaking countries in North Africa and Kiswahili in East Africa (particularly Kenya and Tanzania). However, in other places language has not figured as a central driving force of nationalism except, perhaps in the case of Afrikaner nationalism which presented Afrikaans as a unique defining property of the Afrikaner nation in its struggle against the British rule (cf. Mesthrie 2008 for details).

Nation-building is a long and complex process. African countries are products of a history, a history that has changed many things; of colonialism and its relics. As Aimé Césaire said in *Culture and Colonisation*, "Wherever colonisation occurs, native culture begins to wither. And among the ruins there spring up not a culture, but a kind of subculture, a subculture that, because it is condemned to remain marginal as regards the European culture and to the province of a small group" (Cited by Kawu, 1997). African states ought to re-think their language policies to ensure full participation of its citizenry in a language that can mobilize the masses. The "perpetuation of backwardness" is no excuse. It can be reversed.

In Education, where the body of knowledge is generated and conveyed in a different language it would be difficult for a learner to grasp it easily. There are numerous countries we can cite: China, Japan, Turkey, Russia, the Middle East, Asia and Latin America which have all advanced due to their policies that knowledge should be taught in the local languages. The statistics of the examination failures in many African states are real and to achieve success in education, we need to achieve success in the language of instruction. We will then be talking of policy and practice to ensure a rethink in our approach to indigenous languages and constructing it as integral part of the economic development of the nation. Empowering African languages does not mean discarding the European languages. These languages are important in international communication and trade and they also serve and languages of wider communication in the African continent where French and English are commonly used as official languages. European languages in the whole of Africa could serve as languages of self enhancement and self-empowerment. For instance, in South Africa, English became associated with the anti-apartheid movement and it was perceived as the language of unity and freedom from Afrikaner rule among the black population of the country. Following the eventual successful uprooting of the

apartheid system, English has emerged with strong positive connotations stemming from its earlier role in an opposition function and its representation of future hopes. However, the new status of English did not stop South Africa from recognizing ten other languages to serve as official.

In other words, empowering African indigenous languages would not in any way become a threat to the European languages but Africa would be advantaged in the sense that its citizenry would be directly involved in the development endeavour. Africa has the largest concentration of languages in the world (Batibo 2000:21). About thirty-one percent of the world languages are found in Africa and this translates to an average of 50 African languages in each country. So why should Africa depend on ex-colonial languages as official languages? Are any of these languages spoken across boarders? If so, can they be developed to serve as regional *linguae francae* with several nations sharing the burden of developing and documenting these languages if they are not documented? In many countries you will find medical personnel from Egypt who studied in Arabic and most of what these experts need is only interpreters to work. Currently, there are Chinese engineers and contractors who are contracted in the construction industry by various African countries to revamp their infrastructure, our ailing railway lines, real estate and it is their languages they speak but the engineering is of standard.

If we consider what Kishe (2004) calls a Great Lakes region, one can actually explore the possibility of Kiswahili becoming a lingua franca of a number of nations. In her paper, Kishe discusses the potentiality of Kiswahili in accelerating social, political, economic and cultural integration in the Great Lakes region. The countries that are included in this cluster otherwise called Great Lakes region are: The republic of Burundi, The Democratic Republic of Congo, The Republic of Rwanda, The Republic of Kenya, The United Republic of Tanzania and The Republic of Uganda. Each of these countries has various African languages spoken by their population but Kiswahili, which is used as a lingua franca, unites them.

If Kiswahili is adopted, it will not only facilitate national building in the above states but also enable the region to establish its authenticity throughout the continent. The use of Kiswahili in official matters and day-to-day business will make regional leaders less dependent on ex-colonial languages and provide the countries in the Great Lakes Region with a debating ground for their regional affairs without the dominance or influence of foreign thought which is a times

prejudiced. With reference to the significance of Kiswahili in promoting unity and nationalism, Indakwa (1978:58) notes:

"Modern African nationalism is now conceived as the necessary framework for and propelling force behind catapulting Africa into a complex industrial world. Africa needs to build their national states into stronger entities but this work can hardly be achieved when common languages of communication are alien languages rarely spoken and understood by the majority of the people in every African country (cited in Kishe 2004: 125).

When one considers the dynamism of indigenous languages which are used by millions of speakers for communication and business, such as Wolof, in Senegal and Gambia), Bambara/Jula (in Mali, Côte-d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso), Akan-Twi (in Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire), Moore (in Burkina Faso) Fulfulde (in the entire west Africa region), Hausa (in Niger, Nigeria, Mali, Benin), Yoruba and Igbo (in Nigeria), we can argue that what is needed from policy makers is to find the best way to attend to this natural trend to use these majority languages or indigenous languages as languages of wider communication. This can be achieved by making teaching learning materials in these languages available; suggesting, without imposing, the inclusion of the languages in school curriculum as optional subjects to increase literacy, and lastly creating awareness to sensitize people on the importance of these languages as tools of their own social, economic and regional integration .

Conclusion

In conclusion, we want to say that the functions and roles assigned to languages vary and evolve over a long period of time. Therefore, developing African languages should not be seen as a threat by the ruling elite but strength geared towards development and economic growth. Typical examples of change in language status, functions and roles in history include the shift from Greek to Latin when the Romans ruled over western and Mediterranean Europe, and later on, the shift from Latin to modern European languages for administrative and educational purposes. It is also a historical fact that Arabic has been adopted or imposed in the Middle-East and North Africa following the conquest of these territories by Islamic armies (Ouedraogo 2000:27). This shows that if there is a political will in a country or a region as a whole then language policies can be decided upon and implemented. The use of English by the black South Africans against the Afrikaner rule and the use of Afrikaans by the Afrikaner nation against the

British rule illustrate the power of a common linguistic resource in unifying people towards a common course. This is the kind of a unifying force that Africa needs in the 21st century if African renaissance is to be achieved.

Finally, there have been successful politically motivated decisions in Africa to assign new roles and functions to languages thus changing the status of these languages radically. Examples of such decisions include the choice of Arabic in Mauritania, Kiswahili in Tanzania, Amharic in Ethiopia, Somali in Somalia, etc. Therefore, it is evident that if a common language, namely an indigenous one is adopted; the transfer of skills, new knowledge and other vital information desired to effect radical and sustainable changes in 21st century African states will be both feasible and germane to the building of a true sense of Africanity.

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