The Palgrave Handbook of Language Policies in Africa

Edited by
Esther Mukewa Lisanza · Leonard Muaka

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We dedicate this volume to the custodians of African indigenous languages and the young generation in whose hands lies the future of African indigenous languages.

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Introduction

Esther Mukewa Lisanza and Leonard Muaka

Africa is a multilingual society with some of the countries having more than 400 languages. This language scenario was further complicated in 1884–1885 when Africa was divided among European powers at the Berlin Conference. This division marked the beginning of colonization and imposition of colonial languages in Africa. This also marked the beginning of the marginalization and devaluation of African languages in Africa. Hence, almost all language policies which existed during colonial times favored the use of colonial languages (English, French, German, etc.) as official languages. Consequently, anyone who was fluent and literate in only African languages was not accorded any official place in the colonial state. However, whoever was fluent and literate in a colonial language held great status in the society. This is because for anyone to get a better job and education, one had to be a speaker and a writer of a colonial language. Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1986) in his famous book, *Decolonising the Mind*, articulates this scenario so well during colonial Kenya and especially in schools in the following quote:

> In Kenya, English became more than a language: it was *the* language, and all the others had to bow before it in deference. Thus, one of the most humiliating experiences was to be caught speaking Gikuyu in the vicinity of the school. The culprit was given corporal punishment or was made to carry a metal plate around the neck with inscriptions such as I AM STUPID or I AM A DONKEY. (p. 11)

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Therefore, an African child who was growing up and schooling in a colonial school was made to devalue his/her language. Not only to devalue but there was also the likelihood that the child would hate her/his language for associating it with corporal punishment. This was a lot for a young mind. Young minds are prone to internalize anything they are fed with at that tender age.

As a matter of fact, English was also associated with intelligence during colonial times (Lisanza, 2011). Once more Ngugi wa Thiong'o gives us a deposition of this during his primary schooling.

> Nobody could pass the exam who failed the English language paper no matter how brilliant he had done in the other subjects. I remember one boy in my class of 1954 who had distinctions in all subjects except English, which he had failed. He was made to fail the entire exam. (p. 12)

A colonial student to go up the ladder of education had to pass the English test. Hence, education and a colonial language were synonymous. Unfortunately, as the chapters show in this volume, things have not changed that much since colonial times. Still in most contemporary Africa, the ex-colonial languages are still the official languages or co-official languages. The African languages are still devalued in official domains such as schools, court rooms, and parliaments. However, in unofficial domains such as markets and stores they are thriving. These are spaces where pragmatism dictates which language will be used. Hence, African countries must look for better ways of enabling and empowering these indigenous languages not only in informal setting but formal as well. By taking bold steps in enabling indigenous languages, African countries will be decolonizing the African spaces and their people.

In this handbook we report on the language policy of 31 of the states in Africa. The volume is divided into six parts. Part I explores language policies in East Africa. East African countries have a similar history given that they share borders; the same cross-border language, Swahili; and a common colonial history. This region was colonized by the British even though the Germans preceded the British in Tanzania. This part will discuss language policies in Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda.

Part II discusses language policies in Central Africa. The focused countries are Burundi, Rwanda, Congo Brazzaville, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. These countries, just like their East African counterparts have a lot in common. For example, they share borders, and they were colonized by

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French-speaking countries. An interesting scenario is Rwanda where English occupies a special place in language policy matters.

Part III discusses language policies in West Africa. The countries discussed are Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Cameroon, Gambia, Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast), Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, and Togo. The selected countries in this region seem to be very diverse unlike the other regions although they also have similarities. In terms of similarities, some share common borders like Nigeria and Benin, and Senegal and Gambia. However, they also have major differences, for example, some were colonized by English-speaking colonizers, some by French-speaking colonizers, and others by Portuguese-speaking countries.

Part IV explores language policies in the Horn of Africa. The countries examined are Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Somalia. These countries seem to be very diverse yet similar. In terms of similarities, they share common borders. In terms of differences, on one hand, Ethiopia is one of the countries in Africa which was not colonized. On the other hand, Somalia was colonized by the British and Italians. And Eritrea was once part of Ethiopia.

Part V examines language policies in North Africa. The studied countries are Algeria, Chad, and Morocco. These countries share a common history in that they share a common language: Arabic. However, it is a unique region which has experienced two major forms of domination from the outside world. First, they were conquered by the Arab nations from the Middle East and then conquered by the European nations from the West.

Part IV discusses language policies in Southern Africa. The countries discussed are Botswana, Lesotho, Zambia, Zimbabwe, South Africa, and Namibia. These countries share a lot in common, for example, they share borders. Most of them were colonized by the British. Also, even though these countries are in Southern Africa, they are very diverse. For instance, South Africa was the last African country in 1994 to gain independence from a European colonizer. Additionally, unlike the other five countries in this region, Namibia was colonized by the Germans.

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Part I

Language Policies in East Africa

2

A Historical Perspective of the Language Policy in Kenya

Jane Akinyi Ngala Oduor and Shadrack Kipsang

Introduction

Kenya, a country in the Global South, was colonized by the British. The origin of English in Kenya dates to this colonial period. The country became independent in 1963 and a republic in 1964. It is one of the oldest members of the East African Community (EAC). It is a multi-ethnic, multicultural, and multilingual country. The indigenous languages in Kenya belong mainly to three linguistic families, namely, the Bantu, Nilotic, and Cushitic families. Among the three, the Bantu group has the largest number of speakers. Kiswahili is the most widely spoken among the Bantu languages because it is used as both first and second languages. The country at the moment is inhabited by different nationalities who use their first languages, for example, the Indians and many Europeans of British origin, among others. Naturally, the most appropriate language policy which is adopted by Kenya is a multilingual language policy.

Document analysis was used to obtain information for this chapter. Pre- and post-independence language policy documents, reports, and monographs were analyzed to establish the language practices in Kenya before and after independence. The challenges in the implementation and execution of language policies in different domains are also discussed. In addition,

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