Cultural Diversity and African Language Education: The Role of Urbanization and Globalization

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Abstract

The African Union has been committed to the development and promotion of African languages for a long time. This is in cognizance of the fact that, language is the DNA of culture and its vehicle of expression. The Languages Plan of Action which was first adopted in 1986 and reviewed in 2006 outlines clear goals to be achieved by member states in the promotion and recognition of African languages. The Plan for all its intents and purposes has good will for the development and use of African languages in critical social domains such as education, trade, government and media. The Policy Guide on the Integration of African Languages and Cultures into the Education systems adopted in 2010 and Aspirations 3 and 5 on Agenda 2063 are clear examples of such good intentions. On the other hand, practice continues to show very little, if any, improvement in the development and use of African languages in these critical domains. Scholars have explored several reasons why African languages continue to have low socio-economic status (Bamgbose (2011), Batibo (2013), Nyati-Ramahobo (2011), Chebanne, 2010). Globalization and urbanization have been described to be among the many factors responsible for this state of affairs. This paper aims to explore these two factors to see how they contribute to language under-utilization and the inherent loss of African languages. Are globalization and urbanization by nature detrimental to language diversity resulting in language loss? The paper concludes that urbanization and globalization are facilitators of language and cultural diversity. However, it is policy frameworks operating on and in Africa which shape values and attitudes against the use of African languages. These policy frameworks are politically driven by multi-national corporations for economic exploitation of Africa.

Keywords: Diversity, language, language policy, globalization, urbanization, education, cultural diversity.

Diversity: the norm rather than the exception

Whether one believes in God as creator or not, they cannot help observe diversity of the creation in flowers, trees, people, animals, physical environments, solar systems and so on. There is diversity within the same species, human families and nations. Diversity therefore creates difference, beauty and comparison for learning. It can also create an unhealthy competition if not properly managed. Diversity is therefore, the norm rather than the exception. This means that, no matter how much human beings may try to create uniformity, diversity continues to manifest itself in one way or the other.

Cultural Diversity refers to the variety and differences that are found in a community, nation, society and the World. It is the co-existence of people from different racial, ethnic, linguistic, religious, social and economic class, sexual orientation and cultural backgrounds (African Union Concept Note, 2015). This co-existence is nurtured by respect for difference as a source of innovation and a value for diversity as a resource. In other words, when diversity is viewed as a threat, the co-existence can be challenged and competition can erode those cultures that are not favored. With regards to linguistic diversity, Papua New Guinea is reported to have most languages (840), Indonesia (742 and Nigeria (516) (CIA World Fact Book, 2013).   Nigeria is in the top three (3) of the most linguistically diverse countries of the World.   Research on cultural diversity concludes that Africa is the most diverse continent, with regards to the features described above (Goren, 2013). The cities of New York, London, Manchester, Los Angeles and Paris are the most culturally diverse in the World (Racoma, 2013). Interestingly, Africa does not feature on this list, and yet described as the most diverse.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, Lagos, Kinshasa-Brazzaville, and Mugadishu would be among the most culturally diverse cities, given their large populations of over 5million ((United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA, 2012). There seem to be some truth in the common sense notion that, the more people from different walks of life, there are in a place, the more culturally diverse it is likely to be.

By any standards, the World is culturally diverse and so is Africa. As the World becomes smaller through communication and technology, diversity becomes alive in the daily lives of the citizens of the World. Each day one sees a different person, hears a different language, sees different religious practices, either as one travels, at the work place, or when doing business. One reads about new and different experiences, different stories taking place in the world, new ideas are circulating in business, education, politics and economy. As an individual, one feels differently about themselves, other people and the ideas around them. Diversity is therefore a way of life.

On the other hand, there are other forces which seem to pull towards uniformity where diversity exists, moving towards commonality of language, culture and value systems. A new World order has emerged pulling towards more technologically advanced languages, cultures and peoples. In other words, the diversity is less valued as a resource to be nurtured but rather to be suppressed. These forces see diversity as a threat to business, trade and international communication, hence the need for one language and a common culture.

This paper aims to examine two forces which bring people from different backgroundstogether namely, globalization and urbanization and their impact on cultural diversity in Africa, in the context of the competing ideologies for and against diversity.

Globalization

Globalization is the process in which businesses or organizations expand their operations and influence beyond their borders. It also refers to the world wide movement towards economic, financial, trade and communication integration (The Levine Institute, 2015).   This process is driven by international trade and investment and it is aided by information technology. When companies and individuals begin to operate beyond their borders, the need to communicate with foreigners becomes inevitable. As different people come together, they bring along their different languages, cultures, World views, as well as value systems. Globalization therefore facilitates cultural and linguistic contact thus creating cultural diversity.

The natural expectation is co-existence of the different cultures, that is, a value for each other's culture. In situations where languages are not in competition for political or economic gains, people tend to learn each other's language and become multilingual (Hasselbring *et.al* (2001). Supporters of cultural diversity argue that it is good for business because it drives innovation to satisfy different needs (Amadeo, unknown-(http://useconomy.about.com). In reality, the influence of goods and service providers exert on the customers becomes important to the communication process. In what language and which cultural values are such products provided? Ordinarily, the customer should be the most important and the provider should be providing such services in the language and culture of the buyer.

  To the contrary, the profit driven nature of business is to reach as many customers as possible, with less expenses, hence the need to create a common communication tool. This business minded scenario, calls for the service providers not only to provide the goods and services, but create an environment that would facilitate the communication channel to sell their products. This is the basis for the birth of the 'English only movement' (De Ross, 2006). This movement is successfully backed by the historical fact that Britain colonized most of the World, making English the language of most countries. Thus the business agenda is backed by the political agenda. While most multinational corporations provide goods and services in different languages for Europe and Asia, they do not do so for Africa. While diversity is acknowledged and valued for business for other regions of the World, it is not for Africa. Africa is served through colonial languages and not African languages, and yet Africa is a large market for these corporations.

It has to be noted however, that even in regions where diversity is valued, and goods and services are provided in those languages, English continues to be a dominant language on the global scene. The European Union has twenty four (24) official languages and English is one of them. English is the official language of the Commonwealth of Nations, one of the United Nations official languages, and the International Olympic Committee. These are powerful organs with international influence on Africa. While not clearly stated, but observed in practice, the foreign language policy of Europe with regards to doing business in Africa is the use of English.

In the United States, California, which is one of the most culturally diverse states declared English as the official language in 1988 and currently, 30 of the 50 states have declared English as the official language (De Ross, 2006). The English only movement is backed by a movement called 'US English'. The declaration of English as the official language carries with it a discouragement of bilingual education and use of other languages in the work place. At best it allows only the restrictive use of other languages to early schooling and the home. There has been a tag of war between the Democrats and Republicans with regards to the implementation of Title V11 of the Bilingual Education Act of 1968 as amended from time to time. While the former would increase funding for bilingual education, the later would reduce it and tend to promote the officialization of English even for the work place (California Employees Association, 2012). Such debates taking place in a super power the United States is, are likely to have a direct impact on Africa, specifically, on its foreign language policy on trade and investment in Africa. As Gandara (2012) points out, the English only movement is not based on any positive impact on learning, or any rational thinking or research in education, but on business interests.

In recent years, as the World becomes highly interactive, globalization has been used by those who support the English only movement to justify the English hegemony (www.debate.org). It has also been used by those who believe that a globalized World implies an interaction and co-existence of several cultures and languages, creating a wealth of experiences which is good for business, especially at the workplace (De Ross, 2006; Amadeo, Kimberly (http://useconomy.about.com). Oracles has a product called Global Support which 'enables customers to develop their own multilingual applications and software products using oracle technology stack including the Globalization Development Kit' (www.oracle.com). Africa however, has not taken advantage of this opportunity to use its own languages. Supporters of diversity argue that it is a growing phenomenon as more people continue to speak different languages and express different cultural practices (Gandara, 2012; American Sociological Association, 2009).

Africa in the Global World

African leaders are under pressure to react to the global language and culture debate, if they are to access the products they need for the development of their countries. Thus while globalization creates diversity, and the natural expectation within the context of human rights and tolerance is co-existence, the power play within the political and economic domains places Africa in a vulnerable and weak position. Some African countries such as Ghana have gone 'English only in their education systems (Opoku-Amankwa, 2009); Botswana uses the national language for only one year since 2000 (Nyati- Saleshando, 2011; Jotia and Pansiri, 2013, Republic of Botswana, 1994). The restrictive use of African languages in education is the common model across the continent. Even when language policies are positive towards local languages, practice tends to favor English teaching and official use (Tebategeza (2010); Cook, 2013; Kinzler (2012).

Within the power play behind the global language policy formulated by World super powers and driven by multinational corporations, are attitudes and perceptions. The image of

Africa within the global World is a negative one (All Africa, 2008). Thus it is not surprising that linguistic and cultural diversity is not valued for Africa. Africa is perceived as good for raw materials and not production. Its 'backward' culture (Kamdaya, 2014); Zijima, 2014) is to be written about, and sold back to the continent in order to create the negative image within the African people. They can then despise themselves and aspire for a new World language and culture. At the global level, this aspiration has been achieved. The African leader is perceived as corrupt and dictatorial (Kanuma, 2011). The African people are diseased, hungry, poor and ravaged by ethnic war (Zijima, 2014; Khalil, 2005). Language policies designed at the global level, within the context of these attitudes toward Africa are less likely to be sympathetic to preservation of the diversity of African languages for business, trade, financial communication at the global level. The African continent, as a receiver and not a producer of goods and services, a situation exacerbated by her colonial past, remains a consumer of these policies, leaving African languages at the local community level, with no role to play at the national and global level. As Wolfson and Manes (1985) have noted 'a rejection of one's language and culture, is a rejection of the total individual' --- the status of a language reflects the status of its speakers. They further observed that cultural discrimination translates into economic discrimination.

Globalization creates diversity in that it brings people from different backgrounds together. This diversity can either be nurtured through policies that encourage intercultural communication and co-existence or can be destroyed through policies that seek assimilation and create competition for resources and space for doing business and trade. In other words, whether diversity is viewed to be a resource or a threat in a particular context will determine the policy and practical directions taken. African's diversity is viewed as a threat because producing goods and services in many African languages is seen to be too expensive and impossible. As a result, the imposition of English to create uniformity is good for business by these multinational corporations. The agenda for globalization is economic expansion and political influence over the most likely customers, thus the need to create a global language and culture to nurture and flourish business and trade, as well as expand political influence around the World. Globalization in its nature is not responsible for low socio-economic status of African languages it is only a tool for achieving economic hegemony around the World by multi-national companies and political institutions. It is not a causal factor, but a means to achieve a goal.

Urbanization

Urbanization is similar to globalization but more at the national or country level. It is the process through which cities grow through movement of people from less developed parts of the country to more developed parts, in search for services and jobs. In Africa, most services such as roads, hospitals, schools (especially at tertiary level) are better provided in urban areas than rural areas. Rural development agenda has not yet taken root enough to keep rural populations in their local communities (DESA, 2012). As more people come to cities and towns, the rate of service provision does not match the urban movement, hence creating new problems in cities (African Development Bank, 2012). The competition for resources continues to impact on relations and communication patterns.

Like globalization, urbanization means more people of diverse languages and cultures are brought together, creating diversity. Whether this diversity will be nurtured and promoted, and even exploited for business and trade or it will be suppressed in search of commonality, will depend on the language policy the African country has adopted. If the policy is in line with the global English movement, then the urban population will naturally tend to value what is supported by the state and the global multi-nationals.

In most African countries, the language policies stipulate or practice the use of a national language (local) and an official language (international). In most urbanized areas of Africa, people communicate in the national language and the official language. Eventually, they become bilingual in these two languages and over time loose the language of their home village. Thus the value for the national language is demonstrated by its use by politicians when they speak to the nation in their respective villages, but function in the international language when engaged in official business in the city and at international forums. These two languages are also used in government, media and business. Most of the services are provided to the populace in the international language. For instance, the national identity cards, death and birth certificates, marriage certificates, water and electricity bills and so on are written in the international language. Thus the value for the international language is instilled in subtle ways and hence less value for the national language, and complete de-value for the home language. In this process, the majority of African languages have become endangered and some eventually lost (UNESCO, 2003). The role of the African state in the endangerment of its linguistic and cultural diversity becomes vivid in this regard. Like globalization, urbanization becomes a tool used by the state to promote one local language and an international language and suppress diversity.

Thus the impact of the global language policy formulated by World powers is felt at the national level and the negative consequences are felt at the village level when children's home language is completely excluded from the learning process or restricted to three or four years. This has rendered education in Africa to be sub-standard and therefore continues to lack the human capital in critical areas (Nyati-Ramahobo, 2011). In this regard, the suppression of diversity is costly to African states. Economically, it has to buy knowledge generated from its soil at a high price economic modes of production, and produce essentially inadequate educational experiences for learner. Socially, it is expensive because it deprives Africa of development of its own cultural heritage and politically because it renders the majority of populations to be non-players in the economic field due to the use of foreign languages. While the African agenda is for the preservation of her languages, the actions described here to do not support this agenda. There is therefore need to reconcile the aspirations on paper and the actions. Should there be a stumbling block, it should be identified, and one of them is the foreign language policy of the developed World on Africa. This dislocation is detrimental to achieving the African dream of Agenda 2063.

How can Africa achieve its Dream?

The 4th, Nitobe Symposium on Language policy in the European Union emphasized the importance of preserving all the languages in Europe. I observed that a European policy

framework would have direct implications for Africa and its languages. An English Only language policy for the European Union would accelerate the disappearance of African languages and cultures Nyati-Ramahobo, 2005). It would also halt, and even reverse the current efforts by some governments and private organizations in accommodating and protecting as many languages as possible in Africa. A multilingual orientated language policy in Europe could provide an enabling environment for the development and use of African languages. All the legal, economic, educational, cultural and linguistic arguments presented in the symposium for the preservation and uses of all European languages are equally relevant and desirable for African languages. If multilingualism and multiculturalism is good for Europe it is also good for Africa and this must be reflected in the development agenda Europe has for Africa (Nyati-Ramahobo, 2005). Unfortunately, as described about, Africa's linguistic diversity is not so much valued, but rather a problem that can be resolved by the use of former colonial languages. While the European Union does support activities for cultural diversity in Africa, from a human rights perspective, its foreign language practice has been to defining Africa according to its Euro-colonial past – Anglophone Africa, Francophone, Portuguese speaking Africa and so on, and education policies and system reflect those of the former colonizers.

The African Commission shares the same aspiration as the European Commission, to create a multilingual and multicultural continent and have these values reflected in the education system. Policies and programs such as Agenda 2063 (with its seven aspirations (see African Union, 2015), the Language Plan of Action and policy guidelines for integrating African cultures into the education system, are evidence of this dream. However, the implementation seems to encounter problems. There is therefore need for the African leadership to take stalk of what they can do on the ground to project a positive picture of the use of the local languages in critical social domains, using models which do not negate the importance of these languages, beyond political campaigns.

African leaders were convinced at Independence that there cannot be development without the colonial languages and they became the most fluent speakers of these languages (Bancroft-Hinchey, 2013). They also became the agents for the promotion of these colonial languages and the demotion of their own languages (Opoko-Amankwa, 2009). However, it is worth noting that Albaugh (2009) observes a reversal of this situation in Francophone Africa – where African leaders now have opened up to support the use of African languages in education, as a consequence of the change of heart in France. While gaining political independence, but de-valuing their own languages, the African leader lost Africa's economic independence. She is now a consumer and not a producer of goods and services written in foregin languages, hence a consumer of policies unfavorable to her languages and cultures (Nyati-Ramahobo, 1997). Thus Africa remained the least developed continent on Earth, with the least developed skilled labor and human capital. Learners reflected less developed analytical skills as a result of the use of an unfamiliar language for learning (Nyati-Ramahobo, 2011). The African Commission has the opportunity to emulate other World leaders on the use of national languages in international forums, within and beyond Africa through the use of translation which has been found to create jobs.

Bold steps in the promotion of national languages at the regional level and local languages at the national level should be taken. The 4th Pan African Cultural Congress should at which his paper was presented should have been using the regional languages of Southern Africa, namely Setswana and Chichewa (ACALAN, 2007). I should have presented this paper in Setswana with translation services. Plans of the African Union Commission should be part of the curriculum in schools so that African children can know the dreams and find ways to actualize them as they become adults. African languages should be used in school through the introduction of multicultural education. This type of education is good for nation building and nurturing tolerance among citizens. This will reduce ethnic wars which are associated with African and create tolerance for diversity in line with aspirations of Agenda 20163. African media should promote African languages at national and local level, with community radio stations, private media policies that encourage local language us and using national languages in higher education. Africa needs to move from discourse of recognizing the importance of African languages in education, political economy, trade and the media, to implementation. The challenges have been described long enough, but we must seek solutions through practical actions that reflect our state of mind on the issues. It is the business of the African Union to state its case for the use of an African language at the United Nations and this language should be taught in schools in Africa. This will enhance the image of Africa at the global level and promote business and trade within Africa, with an African mindset. Efforts by Tanzania in the use of Kiswahili in higher education are steps in the right direction, as well as others in other parts of Africa (ACALAN, 2007). African leaders should develop and implement policies that encourage the use of African languages beyond four years of schooling and support local non-state actions in the development of African languages for use in education and the inclusion of African cultures in the curriculum. This could dispel the international view that African languages are only fit for the restrictive use during formative years in education. English language should be placed in its proper perspective, its importance for trade does not translate into its use as medium of instruction in early learning, rather than a subject. It is the duty of the African leader to inform its citizens about the value of learning in local languages so that parents can made informed decisions. Implementing Agenda 2063, would greatly enhance her image by removing the oppressive policies and practices, and embrace cultural diversity without discrimination. A project to review constitutions and practices which discriminate along tribal or religious, sex and other characteristics should be launched. The African Peer Review Mechanism should include cultural diversity as a substantive focus area (www.aprm-au.org).

Conclusion

While Agenda 2063 would have its opponents, if implemented, as it will change the negative image of Africa and bring economic independence to a large extent. Most importantly, it will improve the quality of education in Africa which has a great impact on the economy, labour and governance of the continent. Africa must purpose to make the African renaissance a reality in all its senses, with educational attainment as a priority. The continent must unite to achieve this noble goal through Agenda 2063. It is this agenda that will find space for Africa in the global World. Globalization and urbanization create diversity. Diversity is good

for business since one can innovate to meet different interests and clientele. Africa through Agenda 2063 has defined its policy framework, one of nurturing its diversity and valuing it as a resource. It just needs to find to pull its vast resources and implement this agenda. Much as English mono-lingualism is emerging around the World with many advantages attached to it, diversity is also growing with merit and it cannot be wished away. These two are realities which need to be managed through balanced policies which recognize the merits of each and provide environments for practical realism.

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