

# THE LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL CHALLENGE IN AFRICA

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## Abstract

The African continent is multilingual and multicultural in nature. Foreign languages and cultures have come to be accepted and integrated in daily life. The existence of African languages and cultures is still very vital for the continent. This paper examines the colonial influences and a way forward in Education and literacy. My personal experience as an African and researcher are at the bases of the analysis on the context, identity, education, policies, implementation and development.

## INTRODUCTION

The linguistic scenery before colonization was made up of tangible linguistic entities. Normally, they were under traditional authorities, chiefs, Fons, emperors amongst others. Language was and is still a uniting factor. It was and still the pride of the palace, the village, the tribe, the dynasty and today, the nation. Language is the essence of a people. People lived, dreamed, cried, rejoiced and survived with it. The political, social, economic, philosophical, cultural, spiritual and educative were expressed in the language. The language was transmitted through the oral tradition; myths, legends, songs, proverbs dirges, tales, names, incantations etc. This mode of expression kept the language going on in communicative events in homes and in public. The economy worked well because communication was not a problem as the socio-cultural aspects were in order. In fact, language was a uniting factor, a means par excellence of social cohesion.

It is obvious that the first shock in the encounter with the colonial masters was a linguistic and cultural shock. The stable African scenery got in touch with foreign cultures and languages. What is evident is that there was a concerted effort by the colonial masters to handle the linguistic challenge. The languages they encountered were written. Mungaka, Bassa, and Bulu in Cameroon for instance were written and used in religious contexts till today. There was a mother-tongue presence in the educational system, be it non-formal. The African nationalist Djoumessi Mathias, the sultan of Foumban and the rest took the challenge to move forward with the mother-tongue schools in their communities. These efforts were soon frustrated as the

intention of the colonial masters was to bring in their own languages and cultures. This became easy when new administrative structures were set up not based on linguistic and cultural sceneries. Villages, tribes and kingdoms were divided. New administrations; presidents, governors, ministers, D.O directors, inspectors, delegates amongst others were set up. Even though the traditional authorities remained, their languages and cultures were no more the language of administration. What Africa received as independence was void of education, political, economic, social, linguistic and cultural independence. The new African states since independence have tried to imitate the colonial masters in all aspects of life. The essence of life has been to be like the former masters without building on our roots and norms.

### **THE WAY FOWARD**

Many African Nations recently celebrated their golden jubilee in independence. Over Fifty years ago after handling the destiny of their Nations with all the riches, the linguistic and cultural heritage is one of the domains where a lot of challenges abound.

It is interesting to note that Africa is perhaps, the only continent in the world where non-native languages have been taught and learned with the greatest anxiety and interest. After independence, African Nations found themselves with colonial languages as a window to civilization and development. Learning English; French, Spanish, German etc. became a means of empowerment. This became so serious that, you could hear names like Grammar School Molyko in Cameroon. “The school of grammar” Mastering grammar, speaking in the near accent of the colonial master became the quest of the day. The mastering of these languages definitely became the way to master the world’s knowledge. Western civilization has been scripted in these languages. They are read and absorbed in the process of acquiring their grammars. Being able to live and study in the communities where these languages of *hope* are spoken became the order of the day. The prestige of studying in Britain, France, Germany, Spain; America etc. became clearly seen in the continent. University education became the center of the study of these cultures, especially in the Letters, Arts and Humanities. Certificates and diplomas were delivered in their thousands on languages and cultures that are not African. Naturally, thousands of these degree holders are presently either in the western Nations, or trying to go there.

This is to say that even after studying the foreign languages for over ten years, the diplomatic services still do not believe that Africans master their languages and cultures enough. Quite often they place applicants under serious linguistic learning programmes to test their aptitude before giving them the opportunity to travel to their countries. Africans hence

pay double for learning western languages. They pay in their school systems and pay again to be tested if they have to travel abroad.

### **The colonial heritage**

French has been more very dominant over the African cultural heritage .It has influenced the use of national languages in the educational, administrative and all official instances. The British and the Germans were more tolerant towards national languages. That is why national languages are more prevalent even as official languages in British and German colonies, for instance Kiswahili in east African (Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, RDC).

In the French colonies, African languages are not flourishing. In Burkina Faso where we have about 60 languages, French which is the official language and spoken by 10% of the population is weighing heavily on the socio-political and economic life of the Arabians. All laws and decisions of the nation at the assembly and state are in French. In Africa, laws of the nation are in official languages generally mastered by less than 50% of the nation. The administration, T.V publicity, etc. are in the official languages.

### **A Renaissance of Education in African languages.**

While we admit that wars, terrorism and other social, economic and political crisis have been the immediate causes of recent day migrations, the remote causes or root causes could be linguistic and cultural. The school system needs to be reconsidered. The curricula, syllabuses, programmes, text books, teacher trainings, evaluations and the overall educational process needs to be reviewed. An educational paradigm shift is needed. The language and content of education will give a direction and behavior to the learner. The language and content of education in Africa has indicated the direction of the west to the learners. We now need educational enterprises where languages and contents will show the learners Africa and how to develop and transform its riches. An educational system built on its languages and cultures which exploits them to give confidence and hope to its students is imperative. Its products will be proud to be Africans and hence think Africa first, Cameroon first. This system of education requires a bold volte-face, a return to our national languages as languages of instruction, especially in the rural areas. Provision should be given for African children especially at the basic level to learn how to read and write through their mother-tongues. They should be able to discover the sciences, technologies; cultures, histories, ethics norms and every aspect of their communities through their mother tongues.

They should progressively pass through the transition to the official languages. By the time they complete secondary education, they are comfortable in their mother- tongues and the

foreign languages. At the high school and university level, they will be interpreting and analyzing possibilities both within and without. In this global village, our era, they will have something to contribute. While they are opened to the world through the foreign languages, they will be rooted in their own mother tongues and cultures. They will be able to stabilize and exploit this rich heritage for personal and external consumption. They can create jobs and reduce the migration problem.

The efforts so far put in the African languages enterprise in Cameroon are enormous. The various actors have produced researchers, translators, writers, publishers, teachers etc. in various languages. It will be necessary to start with an inventory of what has been done in each language. Above all, those who have worked on the languages and master them need to meet. It is the language committee or all who have been involved in the language work that can easily indicate the way forward.

Generally research work in African languages is not necessarily by the native speakers. It is generally by students for purposes of their academic certificates. During their scientific work they are present. They contribute to the language development. They have a say in the language even if they are not native speakers. Most of those who have developed African languages have not been the native speakers. The Senegalese former president Abdou Diouf who became a member of the French academy did so by dint of his scientific prowess. Most Africans are teaching foreign languages abroad and considered seriously in the academies of the languages. A language committee should not be necessarily made of the native speakers of the language in question. It should be made of those who have worked on the language. They should be the ones to constitute the academy and the scientific committee. They can easily evaluate what has been done so far and show what still needs to be done. The number of people so far trained by the National Association for Cameroonian Languages Committees, (NACALCO), Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL), the Cameroon Association for Bible Translation and Literacy (CABTAL) and University departments are a serious asset to mother tongue education in Africa in general and Cameroon in particular. If each language community brings these people together, they will constitute a nucleus on which scientific work can be built, and they will be selected and trained for various activities needed for the progress of the language.

## African languages and development

According to Ethnologue, 1/3 of the world languages are spoken in Africa (2199). Most of these languages are spoken by less than 10,000 and lack documentation. Todorov and Smith (2003), hold that development is focused on the economy, which is the ability to generate and provide successful gross national product of about 5%-7%. According to Mountjoy, (1973), development is “the path towards the maximization of goods and service per head.

Language and culture are very useful aspects of development “Haque et al (1977: 15) see development as an “enhancement of personality where the crucial issues are distinct identity, self-confidence, creative ability, an ability to face the world with purpose, poise and pride. The south commission 1990, in Robinson (1990:36) sees development as “*a process which enables potential, builds self-confidence and realizes lives in dignity and fulfillment*» There are four pillars to a nation’s development as indicated by Andre (1971). They include Politico-judicial, economic intellectual and educational.

The role of language in the development process is crucial. In Cameroon, Chumbow, Tadadjeu, Mba, and Nforbi amongst others have expanded on these. Elsewhere, Prah (1993), Chessa (2001), Webg (2002), have indicate the indispensable role of language in the development process in Africa. Chimhundu (2003) confirms that language is at the heart of a people’s culture and hence decisive in cultural socio-cultural development.

The correlation between the use of foreign languages as the official language and underdevelopment in Africa is highlighted by Kishes (2003). In confirming this view, Mazuri posed this question “*can any country approximate first rank economic development if it relies overwhelmingly on foreign languages for its discourse on development and transformation?*” China has emerged powerfully and its language is invading the world through the institute Confucius which is now in about 480 countries of the world.

## CONTEXT AND IDENTITY

In the African societies where idol worship abounds , stones, trees, water, mountain will not take the pronoun (which) non animate but (who) animate thus personalized according to the world view of the learners who believe that these things have life. A mud block house to the pigmies of eastern Cameroon is seen as a tomb. Learning will be more meaningful in huts built of leaves and sticks since to them this is natural. *Primitive* in this sense is relative to the world view of those involved. Similarly in the biblical question, *can a child ask for fish and*

*the father gives a snake instead of the fish to the child*” the answer will still be **yes** because a snake is a delicious meat. It is not seen as dangerous.

Literacy is a fundamental indicator of development. Reading, writing, understanding and responding is at the centre of human relations. Building the human in these perspectives requires well defined approaches and contents of linguistic and cultural perspectives. The need to read and write is a challenging necessity in the world. People are born in communities and they either grow in that community and adopt its values or by mobility, grow elsewhere and adopt the values of the new community. In some areas, depending on when the mobility takes place, individuals end up with dual or multiple cultural values depending on the number of areas they grow in.

Intermarriages are gradually breaking cultural boundaries .In some homes where the couple come from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, the cultural values available are more often the official languages. The parents end up speaking one of the official languages; English or French or pidgin like in Cameroon. The children from these homes end up without an African language as a mother –tongue.

If the parents are educated and are Anglophones for instance, the language at home would be English. The children acquire this as their language. If the parent’s variety of English is the educated variety, these children would benefit from this. If they find themselves in an Anglophone school, they will have no problems of insertion. The language of interaction is virtually the mother-tongue. They will be no language barriers. The acquisition of knowledge will be very easy and these children would end up being *more intelligent* than the others; reasons being that they understand the language of instruction while others don’t. It might not be the same with French speaking parents in an Anglophone zone in Cameroon. If the French speaking children find themselves in an Anglophone zone, their French proficiency will not be advantageous as that of the Anglophone children of the Anglophone region. The Anglophone out of their region is not very exposed to Pidgin English. If they only speak the educated variety of English with their parents and do not react with the challenge of pidgin backgrounds, they can be more efficient in English than the Francophones in the Anglophone zones who are exposed to pidgin in the society with little contact of good English in class. The home language in most mixed cultural marriages is hardly Standard English or French except where the parents are educated speakers. Otherwise, it will be Pidgin English or nonstandard French. The home in Cameroon is hence not were a majority of Cameroonian children learn educated French or English.

While there is an elitist small percentage whose homes are bases for educated English and French, a majority of Cameroonian children still acquire educated French and English in the school system. There, they acquire even Spanish, Italian, and Chinese etc. which they do not speak at home. These languages acquired in school have text books with contents that do not carry the major concerns of the nation. Even when they do, they are learnt only in schools with emphasis based on exams, profession, a job, a scholarship, or a trip to the country where the language comes from.

### **The identity crisis in language education in Africa**

When language and cultural identities are not well handled, they manifest in strange forms and manifestations which could be political, social, economic or philosophical. Whatever the case, they end up in crisis. When people focus on studying their languages especially through language committees, the following examples can be seen.

1-The society finds a reason to identify with each other, invest energy, time, and researches on development, read, understand, translate and enjoy their language and environment. If each of the 280 language communities employs just 10 people a year, we have 2800 employments which will be useful to the population. When people discover themselves and see what riches they have in their communities and start exploiting them, the following advantages are present.

1-They will not look up to national governments for jobs creation.

2-The rural urban exodus will reduce. Active youths who get involved in the language industry in their villages will soon discover the riches of the village. The rich soil and its products, the fruits, crops and the rich natural resources will be exploited. They will learn their cultures and participate in national development.

3-This will reduce the forced migrations we know in the world. If each language committee recruits the number of people proposed, then within twenty years, millions of African youths will be recruited by its communities in the language and cultural industries alone.

4-Political tensions at the national level will be reduced as many people get to focus on the local communities.

5- This will give meaning to the traditional and decentralized authorities. The functions of the traditional authorities are gradually disappearing. If traditional authorities remain the main custodians of our languages and cultures, each traditional palace is supposed to host a

language and cultural centre where the community contributes to its development. The councils already have a budget for languages in their communities. The cultural development associations and the elitist village movements are supposed to sponsor language and cultural activities in their villages.

### **The post-independence traditional Society**

In the village community in which I was born, the society was built more on the traditional authorities rule. The palace and the chief had a lot of influence. The palace orders were passed for their community to come out the following morning to arrange a road, a bridge, or to work in the chief's farm. Traditional ceremonies of life, death celebrations and marriages were the main source of entertainment; all built around the Language. In the religious spheres, the church in my part of the village was the Presbyterian Church. I did not compare it with another. The Christian tradition was passed through this church. My parents were all deeply involved and hence introduced to me the advantages of Christianity. The traditional holiday and Sundays were days of various meetings. The bars were few. We had about five bars and one church. Today it is over 10 bars and four churches in the same village. The schools have increased in a greater number. In terms of security, the village had no threats. We needed doors that could stop the domestic animals from coming in. I remember the expression; *close the door it is cold*. The door was cut in two horizontally. The lower part will be closed to allow the upper part provide light. The doors were not closed because of insecurity from fellow humans. What we were afraid of was the supernatural. We were told that ghosts exist and you could meet them out in the night. We went out in groups and avoided being out late because we could meet with a ghost. In the early part of the evening, we could dance under the moonlight.

Economically, we lived with a low income. One hundred francs CFA could serve the value of 1000frcs in terms of domestic food items. We did not need much money to live in the village. Palm oil, food vegetable, meat and the basic needs were provided locally. Palm wine was the main drink tapped from the village and distributed there at an affordable prize

### **Education**

It should be noted that in a village of about 100.000 inhabitants, there was no government secondary school. Today there are more than 10. In the North West region by 1980, there were less than 10 government secondary schools. Today, almost every quarter has at least a basic school and a secondary school. In 1980, when I left the village for the regional

capital Bamenda, The first government secondary school had just been opened three years before. This was to add to government high schools, in Bambili, wum, Fundong and mbengwi.

### **The Official Language**

While the official languages have come to stay and are useful in the globalized world, the mother-tongues of those who use them will be a didactic advantage if they serve as a bridge to the official foreign languages. Part of the failure and low grades obtained in official examinations in foreign official languages is as a result of the pedagogic insult on the mother tongues of the speakers. A major innovation in the educational system in Africa will and should be a reinforced and methodological use of African languages in education at all levels.

Countries where these experiences occur have a high level of performance in the mastery of modern technology and knowledge as opposed to those to whom language is a barrier to this same acquisition in most of their schools. This account for the low literacy rate in most African countries. When we consider that literacy is one of the determining factors of development, then, we can conclude that part of the underdevelopment problem in Africa is a language problem. The handling of language can hence be as important as opening industries and technological development in general. This is more so when we perceive that most of the highly industrialized and developed countries of the world use their own languages.

It is equally the case that some of the poorest countries are those where its citizens spend all their lives studying foreign official languages without adequately mastering them. If they do, it happens at a very advanced stage in life that it is usually an end to itself rather than a means to an end. In other words, people will end up as specialistsof English, French, German, Spanish, Italia, Portuguese, Chinese, etc. They will hardly have time to use them in agriculture, craft, art, technology, and development in general. Those who get to this applied level are few and contribute very little to the African economy

### **My childhood language experiences**

Born in a homogenous African village community with both parents from that community, I did not experience language crisis within my childhood days. The language I heard my parents speak was acquired and we communicated in that language till I met another language "*English*" in primary school.

## **My pre-school language experience**

Within the first six years of my childhood, I was mute or dumb. Even though I was in a homogenous society with a single language, I could not use it, I had a problem with my speech organ in the throat which hindered me from speaking. I could listen, understand, but unable to speak. I could communicate with signs and gestures. At the age of six, I was operated upon and the obstacle to my speech organ was removed. A few months after that operation I started speaking the Bafut language and the following academic year, I went to primary school where I met the English language.

In reality, I had listened to my mother-tongue for six years. I spoke it for a few months and started learning how to read and write English a few months after. The mother-tongue that I had heard for six years and now speak was not a medium of instruction or a subject. It was rather discouraged in the school system. The seven years primary school period were years of learning English and acquiring knowledge through that same language. I was faced with two problems at school. The first was that of understanding the English language since it was not spoken at home and the community. The second was understanding subjects like arithmetic, nature studies, general knowledge and other sciences in that same language, English.

## **Challenges encountered**

### **i. The absence of my mother-tongue in school.**

The impression that I got was that English was a superior language. When you speak it, you are important. As such people's status changed simply because they could speak this language well. I was in that quest for mastery of the new language of hope "English". Since this was a language of instruction and a subject, it was definitely mastered in every circumstance in school.

The fact that the acquisition of knowledge in other subjects was done in this language, made it difficult to master arithmetic and natural sciences, nature studies etc. A poor foundation in the sciences was laid and I could not understand the explanation of scientific terms in English which I had just encountered. I would have understood more and even the English language if the foundation of my primary education was my mother tongue, the Bafut language.

## ii. School was detached from indigenous knowledge

The main core of the curriculum was detached from indigenous knowledge. When manual work, “*handwork*” came in, it was presented as a subsidiary lesson. There was no effort to the development of the environmental experiences such as farming.

The major source of income of the community was farming. Even though aspects of agriculture came in through some subjects, there was no effort to develop indigenous knowledge. Agriculture as the main source of livelihood would have been emphasized. This will normally be in the mother-tongue. The trained agricultural extension worker would have had a role to play to teach and explain how agriculture could be improved upon. In some countries like Ghana which I visited and studied its literacy programmes, agriculture is a main subject in the school system. In my case, being in an Anglophone region did not help me to learn English at the primary school faster. The only areas of socialization in the community were the church, market, “njangi” friendly groups, etc. The language of socialization was Bafut; English language was not one of my languages as I entered primary school. I was not conscious of its existence. In fact I am sure that if I met French, Chinese, Ewondo, Yemba, shwahili or any language there would have been very little difference. The oral and written skills of English were acquired in school. That could have been the case with any other language. It should be noted that different communities have different indigenous knowledge. A pragmatic approach to education in Africa requires that this indigenous knowledge be taught and developed at childhood such as medicinal plants, weaving, pottery, iron work, fishing, gardening, animal husbandry; the oral tradition etc. Emphasis should be laid on realities of each environment. It is in this light that the competence based approach to language teaching with applications through real life situations has its meaning. A good foundation for sustainable development is laid. The move from the millennium development to the sustainable development goal also will be meaningful if indigenous knowledge is taught right at the basic level through the mother- tongues of that locality.

### **The linguistic situation in Africa**

Geographically, Africa has a surface area of 30, 212, 000 Sq.Km. It is 22.3% of the world’s countries with about 2,110 languages, making 30.5 % of the world’s languages.

According to Simons and Levis (2013), 7103 languages are spoken in the world and about 2000 are in Africa. Out of 53 African countries, 32 are francophone and French is hence

the highest used foreign language in Africa. French francophone is twice larger than the U.S.A. Other languages introduced in Africa during the colonial period are English, Spanish, Arabic, Portuguese and German. Recently Chinese with its economic power is drawing a lot of attention. Between 1992 and 2002, the number of French learners in Africa increased by 37% from 22.337 million to 34.563 million people. English language however remains the most internationally used language.

National languages refer to major spoken languages in a country (Wolof) Senegal) Hausa and Zaringo (Niger) Likongo, Kiswahili, Lingala and Cilumba (Congo-Kinshasa). The term national languages equally refer to all the local languages of a country as opposed to those received from the colonial matters.

Official language refers to the language chosen as a means of oral and written communication by the state. It can be a nations language like Kiswahili in Tanzania, or Kinyassa in Rwanda or a foreign language e.g. French in Burkina Faso.

Some countries have more than one official language. In central Africa, we have Sango and French. In Burundi we have the Kirundi and French. Few African countries have their national languages as official languages e.g. Ethiopia with Amharic and Erythrea with its two national languages as official (Arabe and Lingrinya).

The following official languages are dominant: Arabic in 7 North African countries, French in 22 countries, English in 21 countries, Portuguese in 4 countries and Spanish in 1 country. Only 6 African nations use African languages as a means of conducting the national business. African countries with less than 10 languages are Rwanda, Burundi, Botswana, Niger, Somali and the Maghreb countries. Those who are skeptical of developing African languages for fear of ethnic conflicts are not realistic. The more the ethnic groups, the more it is difficult for them to contribute to the development if each language group does not develop its own language and exploits the riches of its community through it. It is only when each community in a nation is developed that the whole nation can emerge. Some of the worst conflicts in the continent came from Rwanda, Burundi and Somali where the multilingualism is not a challenge.

Countries with moderate multilingualism (between 1 and 30 languages) include Angola, Guinea, Liberia, Senegal and South Africa etc. It should be noted that even here, Angola, Liberia and South Africa suffered from some of the disturbing conflicts in the continent. Its moderate multilingualism situation did not stop this.

Countries with high multilingual profiles with more than 80 languages include Gabon, Togo, Ivory-coast, Chad, Soudan, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Congo Kinshasa, Cameroon, Nigeria etc.

### **Trans border languages**

Most of the African languages are Trans-border languages. Hausa with its 34 million speakers is spoken in 8 countries (Nigeria, Sudan, Chad, Benin, Ghana, Burkina Faso and Mali.

Yoruba with its 12 million speakers is spoken in 3 countries (Nigeria; Togo and Benin).

Fulfulde with its 11 million speakers is spoken in 12 countries (Mauritania, Burkina Faso, Mali, Cameroon, Chad, Ghana, Senegal, Serra Leon, Guinea Bissau, Nigeria Guinea and Togo).

Even though these languages run across boundaries, they are not sufficient to be adopted in the place of the close to 2000 other languages. In reality, most people who speak vehicular languages either speak a variety of it or do so in addition to their own mother-tongue. It is in this mother-tongue that their world views are expressed. In East Africa, Swahili cuts across (Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda and the Democratic republic of Congo).

Kotoko is spoken by along the Logone Rivers and along Lake Tchad by Chadians, Cameroonians and Nigerians.

This language is sub divide in Variants, Mindage, Mida'a, and Boudouma. Mindage as other dialects Makari (impade) spoken in Ngala Nigeria

- Ngoune spoken in Sao (north Cameroon).
- Msir at the north of Kousseri in Cameroon
- Malgbo spoken in Goulfey in the extreme north of Cameroon
- Maltam spoken at the north of Cameroon.
- Afade spoken in kalamatoux and tilde in Chad.

### **Chad /Lybia**

Share Arabe-literary Arabe and Babalia Arabe as well as the Toubou language

### **Soudan/Chad**

From Nord of RCA up to the lybiybandam and Arabe Bababial and literary Arabe, Other existing languages are Frarties Are Fongoro, Maranit, Ribet, Renga, Massalita, Tama, Songor, Claju, Zaghawa,

### **Chad/RCA**

L'arabe et le français au chad, pour une éducation multi-langue

- Mida'a spoken in north Cameroon in Logona-Birni, and Mazere
- In the extreme react of Cameroons
- Ziho spoken in Chad et Houlom, Gofta, Doufoul, Anddagaya
- Boudouma, (around Lake Chad between the populations of Nigeria, Cameroon, Niger and Chad.)
- Between Chad and Niger the Toubau, Gorane and Arabic Babah'a as well as the Boudouma around Lake Chad.

Languages of wider communication are Kiswahili/kikongo, Hausa, Mandiing, and Fulfulde. These however have regional varieties with inter-comprehension,

- 1) Low multi-lingual states (less than ten languages (Rwanda, Burundi, Botswana, Niger, Somalia).
- 2) Mid. Multilingual (10-30) Angola, Guinea, Liberia, Senegal, south Africa,
- 3) Multi-lingual Gabon, Toga, Ivory Coast, Chad, Sudan

Wolof is spoken essentially in Senegal, Gambia and in the south of Mauritania. It is a most family language. It is spoken by 80% of Senegal it is language of exchange spoken in cape-Verde. It is one of the six national languages chosen amongst the 20 spoken in Senegal.

It is equally one of the national languages in Gambia and equally spoken by the Riverside population in the south of Mauritania, it has a writing system developed since 1968 with the Latin alphabet. Its vitality is built on the activities of its speaks such as the religion as its speakers.

A great number of its speakers are Muslims with a Wolof cultural believe. Groundnuts cultivation and commerce are at the center of their activities. Their spread in the region to occupy new land has created political problems in the region. Their traders who trade in woolen objects are present in Europe and the U.S.

### **Lingala**

It is a Bantu language spoken along the Congo River. It is one of the Niger-Kordofanian languages. This vehicular language has dialects. It does not have a stable orthography. The Belgian colonial masters exploited this language in communicating with the populations. It was used as African official languages in commerce, ruler ship and diffused beyond its original comity. It is used in the Central African Republic around the Dubanui Rivers and in a great part of the democratic republic of Congo. The various rulers who ruled Congo after independence from 1960 to 1997 were from this region and encourage the use of the language.

Lingala is now completing with Swahili which is gradually gaining grounds as a vehicular language in a great part of central African especially is Latamga

### **Afrikans**

It is one of the eleven official languages in South Africa. It is a western Germanic language. It originates from a South Holland dialect spoken by the Dutch colonial masters in South Africa in the middle of 17<sup>th</sup> Century. Its writing system is however distinct and influenced by its geographic location. It has adaptations from English, French, German and other African languages. These languages are equally felt in its grammatical structures.

Until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Africans were only used orally and writing was done in the Netherlands languages. Africans became progressively written after the creation of the hour's republic and especially after the creation of the south-Africa in 1910. The apartheid regimes preferred Africans so as to distinguish themselves from English. Gradually it imposed itself in the press, schools and churches. In 1925, it officially replaced the Dutch language. The first translation of the Bible in Africans appeared in 1933. In 1977, the white ruler ship imposed Africans as an obligatory language in the school system. Even though the youth revolted against it, it was violently quenched by the wild ruler ship. Within the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Africans writings evolved with the anti-apartheid resistance, Audre Brink and Bruyten first wrote in Africans before writing in English for a speaker readership.

## **THE CHALLENGE OF SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH AND POLITICS**

The colonization of Africa brought new languages and cultures to the continent which imposed themselves over indigenous languages and cultures. This cohabitation has not been without challenges. Administrative unites today, conflict with linguistic and cultural boundaries, which were not those of the Africans before colonization, creating situations of multilingualism and multiculturalism. In Cameroon, Changes in the administrative structure from 1983 to-2013 (30 years) indicate this challenge.

When in 1983 a linguistic atlas of Cameroon was published, it facilitated the study of the linguistics scenery of Cameroon. Based on the research on Cameroonian languages at the time 256 languages were identified. Recent figures (Ethnologue, 2016), indicate 282. Over the past decades, much has evolved in this scenery. The number of regions and divisions are no more the same. More research has clarified the status of languages leading to more languages than in 1983.

As far as urbanization is concerned, towns have evolved from hither to villages. As a result of rural urban exodus, a highly diversified society has evolved .The dynamism of language has

been significant. What has been the impact of these changes on language development and literacy? What are the necessary adaptations needed to march with the changing times. A review of the two atlases (1983 and 2012) will reveal some of the challenges we need to address. The grass field languages scenery will be a case study of this dynamism.

Presentation of the grass field languages in Cameroon from 1983 to 2012.

The North West region comprised seven divisions, The Mezam division, Momo, Menchum, Donga Mantung, Ngokentunja, Bui and Boyo.

The Mezam division comprises 7 languages dispersed in the division according to Atlas of 1983). CERDOTOLA (2012) classified them into 4 main groups with (10 languages)

- Ngemba languages pinyin, Mankon, Nkwen Mundankwe, Mbili, Mundum, Bafut (with two dialects and awing
- Ring languages. Banbanki and kensweinsei
- Western Momo languages: ngamambo
- Northern Menchum language: Befang

Besides these main languages, CERDOTOLA (2012) presented three other languages of little influence.

In 1983, there were no subdivisions under Momo division. 8 languages were spoken in the division. Ngwo, Atong Busam, Ngishe, Ngie, Meta, moghamo, , menka and ngamambe.

The 2012 report adds three languages to these 8 to make 11 languages

In 1983 the linguistic situation of the the Menchum division was not well known. CERDOTOLA (2013) presents the division as comprising 18 languages, which can be put into 4 groups.

In the Donga-Mantung division in 1983, the Limbum language was found at the west of Nkambe sub division and the Atlas did not mention Mbembe as a language in the division. In 2012, it classifies the languages in the division into four main groups.

- 5 languages of the northern subgroup of the Bantu grass field languages. - 4
- Beboid languages. 2 languages on the south west borders.

This Ngo Kentunja division is made up of 12 linguistic spheres divided into four main groups (2012).

- Six languages of the noun group. .
- Four Ring languages .

In the 1983 report, three languages were absent

In the Bui division, Lamso, the language of the Nso people, was the main language of the division in 1983 beside Mbui in the north and Mbih in the south from Bambili, mezam division. In 2012, languages appear on the map: Lamso, ekwo (formerly called kwo” and Noone (of bebid Bantu origin).

The Boyo division in 2012, had seven languages in the division. In 1983, many of these languages belonged in the menchum. The west region western also registered some changes as indicated below.

In The haut Nkam division, the main language remains fe’efe’e since 1983 with two main groups of dialects In (1983), fa’ stands as the reference for the division and this was not disclaimed in 2012.

In the noun division, the shupamen language was spoken in the whole division in 1983, and till today, the language remains very homogenous in the division. This is ascribed to the political power of the sultan over the area. However, the Tikari language is spoken in the plain of Magba, a language close to Mbam (division/subdivision)

The mifi division in 1993, was covered by four dialects of Ghomala (gemba, ghomala-north Ghomala center and Ghomala south. But the 2012 report classifies the dialects into two groups –ghcmala-north and Ghomala-west.

In the Nde division, the medumba language remains the division’s language. The 2012 study show that this language is close to the Bamoun’s Shupamen. The dialects are four whereas in 1983 they were three. In 2012, the “hauts-plateaux’ division was dominated by the Ghomala with three dialectal zones. In the kounkghi division, out of the four varieties of Ghomala, one is present in the division, besides, the Nda’ nda language present since 1983.

In 1983, five linguistic zones were mentioned in the Bamboutos division, all five dialects of the Ngyembon. These dialects fitted into the five chieftaincies of the division. In 2012 only four linguistic areas were recorded.

In 1983, the Menoua division was broadly covered by the Yemba language. In 2012, these varieties spread. Also, some central Bamileke languages encroach on the North West part of the division. Ngyembon in Balessing and Ghomala, in Bansoa.

## **THE LITERACY CHALLENGE**

A glance at the literacy situation in African shows that about 20 countries have a literacy rate of below 50%. These include. Sudan, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Senegal, Mauritania, Morocco, Mozambique, Niger, Liberia, Madagascar, Mali Gambia, Guinea, Guinea Bissau Ivory coast, Central Africa. Literacy is essentially a language education enterprise. It is such we will focus on the language educational policies of these countries.

African languages include Senegal Wolof spoken is first official languages by 44% of the population. In central Africa, even though French is the official language, Sango is a trade language used by 90% of the population. African languages are almost out of the national use in these countries. Other country other foreign languages like Portuguese and Spanish are spoken in two of these countries.

### **The implication of language policies on literacy rates in Africa**

In Gambia 38% speak English instead of Wolof which is spoken by 90% of the population. With a favorable language situation (20) and Wolof spear heading, English is not the favorite for literacy madika and Wolof will increase on literary rates their English.

In Guinea with its 3 languages, the trade languages: Fulbe, Mihinke, Susa, Kissi, and Toma will increase the literacy rate than French.

Ethiopia, Tanzania, kasha Congo-Kinshasa, Cameroon, Nigeria.

These languages are essentially trans-border languages.

Haussa (34 million speakers is spoken in 8 countries (Niger, Nigeria, Sudan, Thad, Benin, Ghana, Burkina Faso. Mali.

Yoruba (12 million speakers) carries 3 countries (Nigeria, Benin, and Togo

Fulfulde (11 millions) is spoken in 1 country (Mauritania, Burkina Mali, Cameron, Chad, Ghana, Senegal, Sierra Leone Guinea Nissan, Nigeria, Guinea, and Togo.

Languages of wider communication are Kiswahili/kikongo, Haussa, mandiating, Fulfulde. These however have regional varieties with the inter comprehension,

1) Low Bilingual states (less than ten languages (Rwanda, Burundi, Botswana, Niger, and Somalia.

2) Mid. Multilingual (10-30) Angola, Guinea, Liberia, Senegal, South Africa,

3) Multilingual more than 10 Gabon, toga, Ivory Coast, Chad, Sudan

National languages and official languages

African has about 20 francophone countries. National languages refer to major spoken languages in a country (Wolof) Senegal) Hausa and Zaringo (Niger) Likongo, Kiswahili, Lingala and Cilumba (Congo-Kinshasa). The term national languages equally refer to all the local languages of a country as opposed to those received from the colonial matters.

Official language refers to the language chosen as a means of oral and written communication by the state. It can be a national language like Kiswahili in Tanzania, or kinyassa and an in Rwanda or a foreign language e.g. French in Burkina Faso.

Some countries have more than one official language. In central Africa, we have Sango and French. In Burundi we have the Kirundi and French. Few African countries have their national languages as official languages e.g. Ethiopia with Amharic, Somalia with so much Eritrea with its two national languages as official (Arabe and lingrinya).

In guinea Bissau, the Portuguese Creole spoken by 60 % of the population should be privileged. . Portuguese alone cannot meet the abalones with its 42 languages. In Sierra Leone, with its 23 languages the Krioa which is a trade language spoken by 100 as first language and 90% as second language should be used for Literacy.

In Somalia even though the official language is Someh, Arabic, few speak it. When literary more from the known to the unknown, how can the Somalians be literate in a language they do not speak. They certain speak other African languages which can be used to raise their literacy rate which is one of the lowest in African. It should be noted that several years of war and instability in Somalia and Sierra Leone have affected the literary rates of these countries like in other conflict lower in the world.

Senegal with Wolof spoken by 44% of its population will benefit in literary and development of this language is well developed.

Mauritania, Morocco, Niger, and Elite the other Arabe nations need to revisit their educational policies in the Arabic schools and literary centres and seek for ways of exploiting local languages in improving their literary rates in Africa.

Mozambique has no cultural links with Portuguese which is its official language.

Ivory Coast with 15 languages has suffered from war and instability within the past years. Besides, Jula which is the trade language will offer more in library than French alone.

Central Africa with 65 languages has a formidable opportunity through Sango which is a trade language used by 90% of the population.

Burkina Faso with one of the lowest literary rates in the continent 14% has 71 languages. However, French which is the official language is spoken by only 10% of the population. Burundi with its 4 languages will benefit more with a well-developed literacy programme in Kirundi than in French alone.

Liberia has suffered from years of instability as a result of wars which have affected its literacy rate. With its 34 languages, English is still the language of instruction. In Madagascar with its 6 languages, it is easier to do literacy in all these languages than in the standard Madagascar French. Mali with its 32 languages has Bambara as a trade language which can be used alongside French.

While the ex-colonial languages have come to stay, it is necessary that they be taught and learned well in schools and literacy systems in Africa. It will however be less effective when this is done neglecting the African languages on which the norms, cultural, world views aspirations hopes and ideologies of the Africans are expressed.

Of, 14 countries with the highest literacy rate, 9 have less than 50 languages with 7 having English as the official language. One Portuguese and one French, one Arabic and one with the national language. It is followed by south-Africa, with the prevalence of Afrikaans, 82%, with the exception of Cameroon, 280 languages and RDC, 221 languages. All the other countries with high literacy rates have less than 100 languages.

### **THE CHALLENGE OF FUNCTIONALITY IN LITERACY**

The functional literacy became an expression of hope after the traditional forms of literacy could not produce economically empowered literates. Reading and writing though fundamental in literacy, need to be linked to an income generating activity. The link between the two has been very difficult to produce expected results.

Quite often it is two activities in one. The literacy activity takes place out of the income generating project. It is often a project belonging to the literary group. Since adult literacy is usually informal and short termed, the activity hinted to it suffers from substantiality.

### **FROM FUNCTIONALITY TO SUSTAINABILITY**

We have seen functional literacy activities in the Northern part of Ghana in Tamale through REFLECT. We have seen them in Meta languages in North West Region of Cameroon through the multi-strategy methods. We have been involved in starting a functional literacy group in Balinkubat in Ngoko-Tunjiah division in the North –West region. Generally, when the founding members of the group become literate, the group project ends and individuals now start theirs or more to more uncreative jobs. The challenge sustainability in functional literacy is hence evident. This problems stem from the limited vision and knowledge of sustainability.

Functionality naturally comes in through the identification of the immediate needs of the learners. These needs are generally linked. They cover the immediate environment and time. They are micro, local and generally short ‘termed. When functionality is built on local and the immediate needs, it will enable the learners to be interested in the program and hence be motivated. Generally, when they become literate; their world view changes and it’s broader. Their needs and perspectives are widening. A macro level of needs is needed at this moment.

If the needs that were linked to literary initially are not revised to meet the needs of those that are that have become literate; the initial functionality might be neglected. When people become literate, they generally want to do bigger things, earn more leave better. Generally the activity they were involved in when they were illiterate changes. We need to recognize this in the literacy process and adapt the neo-literates to these changes. As we prepare them for post-literacy activities, we can introduce them to national and international needs.

A pragmatic approach to education requires that this indigenous knowledge be taught and developed at childhood, medicinal plant, fishing, gardening, animal husbandry; the oral tradition etc. emphasis will be laid on realities of each environment. It is in this light that the competence based language teaching with applications through real life situations has its meaning. A good foundation for sustainable development is laid. The move from the millennium development go also to the sustainable development go also will be meaningful if indigenous knowledge in taught right at the basic level through the mother tongues of that locality.

At the macro level, there are needs that lead to functionality. When local needs met with the exigencies of national and international objectives, sustainability can be easily attained. Each nation has needs and realities. When learners individual needs are being meet in literacy, it is necessary at a certain stage for them to know national needs. What is the government's plan in the social, economic, technical, educational political domain? How can individual endeavors contribute to the realization of these goals?

It is important to know international objectives as well. What are the needs of the international community? What can be the contribution of personal effort to achieving national and international needs? That is why the government strategic plan for development should be part of the curriculum both in formal and informal education. It should constitute the focus of post-literate activities. The international objectives like the millennium development goals and the sustainable goals should be emphasized. It is here that we see the role of mother-tongue in the education process. When the content of education is clearly explained in the mother-tongue with the various challenges outlined, learners can look for solution in the context. They can link their effort to showing macro national and international objectives. The resources intended can hence be extended to the projects that can contribute to realizing these goals

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