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Introduction

Political cohesion seems to require a standard language. As historical state-builders monopolized violence, collected regular taxes, expanded bureaucratic reach, constructed centralizing roads, and mapped territory and population, they viewed language rationalization as a critical component of their interventions. Moving from ruling indirectly through intermediaries to interfacing directly with citizens required the ability to communicate with this population. Mass conscription and universal compulsory education aided greatly in this endeavor, and while it took until the early twentieth century before linguistic reality began to approximate visions of uniformity in Europe, the two centuries prior demonstrated vigorous and conscious efforts by rulers toward this goal of language standardization.

These hard-fought efforts at linguistic unity reached their apex just as African states were achieving independence, and most new leaders adopted the nation-building goals of language standardization. Recently, however, many states appear to be ignoring these historical models, and across Africa, governments are endorsing the use of more local languages as media of instruction in primary schools. Whereas less than 40 percent of states used African languages in education at independence, nearly 80 percent do presently. Rather than a deliberate movement toward monolingualism, perpetual multilingualism appears to be their vision and not just an inconvenient reality. Especially on a continent where high ethnolinguistic diversity is a standard explanation for poor growth, weak governance, and conflict, why are governments highlighting, rather than attempting to diminish, their linguistic diversity?

Democracy promotion has replaced nation-building as the appropriate goal for African states, but even in the latter, a common language is central to providing the communicative resources that allow citizens to participate and to hold their rulers accountable. Hobsbawm notes that a national language only became important when ordinary citizens became a significant component of the state: "The original case for a standard language was entirely democratic, not

cultural. How could citizens understand, let alone take part in, the government of their country if it was conducted in an incomprehensible language?" (1996, 1067). Green argues that a cohesive civic nation is the best guarantor of democracy, and drawing on the traditions of Durkheim[1] lauds a centralized education that helps individuals forge broader loyalties and construct participatory skills that can sustain democracy (Green 1997, 170, 186). Particularly after the spectacular dissolution of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, states that strayed furthest from the homogenizing model to institutionalize nationhood on a subnational level (Brubaker 1996, 29), the dangers to states of institutionalizing difference seem acute. Brubaker notes that unlike European nationalisms that conceived states as belonging to a particular group, African nationalism purposely was framed in a supraethnic rather than ethnonational idiom (Brubaker 1996, 64, fn13). The importance of a common, neutral language in holding together such a polity is self-evident. It is even more puzzling, then, that this supraethnic façade should be deliberately pulled away with a focus on subnational language units.

This book explains the increasing recognition of language in education as a combination of material and ideational opportunities, along with electoral incentives for current rulers. The environment that produces this policy choice is vastly different from that faced by state-builders in Europe, an important acknowledgment that opens the possibility for differing trajectories of state development. While the majority of the book explains the causes, the final chapter begins to explore the consequences of multilingual education for national cohesion and political mobilization, which are much more benign than the previous paragraph implies.

This introductory chapter is divided into three parts. The first lays a framework to explain the empirical increase in mother tongue education across the African continent, juxtaposing my own theory about the causes of these policy choices with alternative explanations. The second discusses the policy of mother tongue education generally – its rationale and current scholarly debates. The third part of the introduction describes more fully the differences in contexts faced by historical European state-builders – from whence we derive our monolingual model – and contemporary African states – where we see the multilingual option taking precedence. The chapter ends with a plan of the book.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In explaining the causes of multilingual education policy, three alternative accounts could compete with my own: norm-based, rational choice, and sociostructural. First, it may be simply part of the rise of identity politics that began in

[1] "Society can survive only if there exists among its members a sufficient degree of homogeneity; education perpetuates and reinforces this homogeneity by fixing in the child, from the beginning, the essential similarities that collective life demands" (Durkheim 1922/1956, 70).

the 1960s and 1970s, and the norm of multiculturalism and linguistic rights has finally penetrated across the globe. As international human rights activists have persuaded governments to acknowledge the rights of minority language groups within their borders, widespread multilingual education thus may simply reflect a growing international norm that favors protecting minority languages. Second, multilingual policies could reflect leaders aiming to prevent potential conflict by granting concessions to groups that demand special or equal treatment. This would be a rationalist bargaining explanation that assumes governments respond to language group pressures led by elites. The spread of democracy gives more voice to organized groups, which is why we see more policies promoting their particular interests. Third, adding nuance to the bargaining explanation with a sociostructural perspective, it might be that more cohesive, hierarchical groups would demonstrate a greater ability to hold on to their cultural identities than dispersed, "stateless" groups. Where stronger, hierarchical subunits exist, one may expect to see more attention to their languages. While I draw elements from each of these explanations, none can by itself explain the outcomes we see.

The increase in the use of local languages indeed results from both internal and external pressures, but they are different from those commonly assumed. I argue that African governments enacting mother tongue education policies are responding to two different forces – one a "push" and the other a "pull." The push comes not from language groups or their representatives demanding rights to use their languages in education – indeed, many speakers explicitly do not want this right – but from an alliance of indigenous linguists and foreign non-governmental organizations (NGOs), who use a recent accumulation of written languages and evidence of their success as media of instruction to offer an alternative to African governments facing failing education systems. Their pressure, however, has been building for a long time, and it might not have been accepted officially if another factor had not provided a moment of opportunity.

This opportunity, the pull, is provided by the new discourse of a former colonizer, France. Rather than a vague call by the entire international community to promote languages in support of diversity, a specific, new message began to emanate from France in the 1990s. Reversing its long-standing preference for French-only as the medium of instruction in African primary schools, France began to communicate its support for initial schooling in local languages. This was not because France had suddenly decided to care about local languages, but because its foreign policy leadership had been convinced by a group of strategic scholars that learning initially in a local language helps a child to learn French.

These forces meet to influence a person – a policy maker. Why would such a policy maker see the benefit of multilingualism? Current African leaders can be compared with historical state-builders as we assess their preferences, along with those of other social actors. I argue that their preferences are different from those of past rulers. They emerge as a result of the opportunities described previously, but their preferences also evolve as leaders adapt new strategies for maintaining

power. As they survey their states, I suggest that the context they face – the need
to consolidate their power within electoral institutions – is different from the
context faced by historical state-builders prior to the late twentieth century.

Why should we compare African trajectories to historical state-building
episodes? The comparison is useful because political leaders, no matter what
the historical period, aim to stay in power by extending their control over
opposition, and all must adapt to material and institutional constraints.
African states are notoriously weak – as measured by governments' abilities to
control violence, spur economic growth, invest in infrastructure, and care for
populations[2] – and the harm that their citizens have endured spurs questioning
of causes. The recognition of Africa's weakness prompted many studies to probe
reasons for it. One obvious candidate is the continent's tremendous ethnolin-
guistic fragmentation.[3]

Language is the strongest marker of ethnic identity. Usually a familial given, it
is also changeable, susceptible to individual choice and social planning. No
wonder, then, that it has been an object of tremendous scholarly interest and
political intervention. But African state leaders have not shown as much concern
for linguistic cohesiveness as we might expect. This is because of a unique
context.

Jeffrey Herbst (2000) has highlighted ably many differences between contem-
porary Africa and the Europe where "war made states" (Tilly 1990). Protected
by the Organization of African Unity (OAU) agreement on sacrosanct borders
and sustained by foreign aid and taxes on primary commodities, African leaders
have not needed to build up bureaucracies for internal taxation as did prior
state-builders. And geographic barriers made this penetration even more daunt-
ing (Herbst 2000, chapter 5). While stable borders had momentous impact by
creating permanent citizens and foreigners, Herbst observes the relatively weak
effect of African citizenship laws in establishing a strong national bond between
state and citizen. But like other theorists, he assumes that leaders *want* to
establish a common national identity.[4] That states want to control the allocation
of citizenship is not disputed. That they care about deepening national identi-
fication is what I contest.

First, without the demands of war, mass conscription is not necessary. This
reduces the value of large populations. Second, income taxation is rendered

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[2] African states make up 22 of the 29 slots in the bottom quintile in the *Index of State Weakness in
the Developing World*. None but island states of Mauritius, Seychelles, and Cape Verde are in the
top quintile (Rice and Patrick 2008, 39–42).

[3] Easterly and Levine 1997; Alesina Baqir, Easterly 1999; Collier and Gunning 1999; Rodrik 1999;
Keefer and Knack 2002. Even studies using more nuanced fractionalization measures concur that
linguistic fractionalization (Alesina et al 2003: 167) and politicized ethnic diversity (Posner 2004)
harm growth.

[4] He argues that states requiring a more demanding citizenship based on descent, rather than place of
birth, "may actually make the job of establishing a common identity more difficult" (Herbst 2000,
243) – implying that establishing a common identity is a goal.

relatively unnecessary by reliance on trade taxes, commodity sales, and foreign aid. This reduces the value of productive populations. Both of these factors dilute the need of African leaders to induce compliance and productivity by protecting citizenship rights. A recent development paradoxically has weakened incentives for rulers to connect with their citizens even more: pressure toward electoral institutions. Whereas the Cold War era African leaders grew progressively weaker in an environment that lacked external war and muted internal competition, current leaders have similar protected borders, but they are facing potential competition through the ballot box.

Thus, three periods of state-building can be compared: First, the classic European state-building era of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries provided a context of interstate war, where leaders invested in national unity to augment their power. This was in order to quell rebellion and to raise funds and fighting men. Second, during the Cold War era in Africa, without the threats of war, leaders invested less in unity. Because African leaders did not have to make societal bargains to borrow for war making, they could retain their authoritarian rule, appeasing potential rivals more selectively through patronage. Third, in contemporary Africa, without the threats of war, but with shrinking resources and demands of democratization, current leaders may find *dis*unity an attractive strategy.

What did this have to do with language? Seeking to bypass the mediating role of local elites, centralizing European rulers sought national unity through a standard language. African independence leaders, in contrast, did not require conscripts or rely on direct taxation, so they demonstrated ambivalence regarding national unity through language. Believing such policies irrelevant to their goals of maintaining power, they retained whatever language policies they inherited from their colonial predecessor. But as electoral competition is added to the context, the push and pull forces described earlier encourage leaders to rethink their strategies. Striving always to enhance their internal authority, leaders agree to multilingual policies because they begin to see in them long-term possibilities for entrenching their power. Table 1.1 shows these three periods and linguistic outcomes.

State-building in Europe eventually led to forms of democracy, but it was not a smooth transition. Forced to offer rights and protection to the wealthy and landed citizens from whom they borrowed, autocrats found their authority restrained. Landlords wanted military positions, capital holders required property rights, merchants wanted infrastructure. Later, the raising of national armies also created claims on the state for welfare and benefits. Through this process, governments began intervening more in food distribution, health, and education of workers to improve productivity. Tilly shows that state expenditure in Norway grew from 3 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) in 1875 to 24 percent in 1975, and that social service provision as a percentage of GDP in Denmark grew from 1 percent in 1900 to 25 percent in 1975 (Tilly 1992, 121). Restraint, constitutionalism, and provision of welfare were part and parcel of

TABLE 1.1. *Language Policy in Three Periods*

Ruler Environment	External Context	Political Context	Language Policy
18th/19th-century European	Threat of war	Restrained autocracy	*Proactive monolingual*
Cold War African	No threat of war	Patronage autocracy	*Language ambivalence*
Post–Cold War African	No threat of war	Electoral autocracy	*Proactive multilingual*

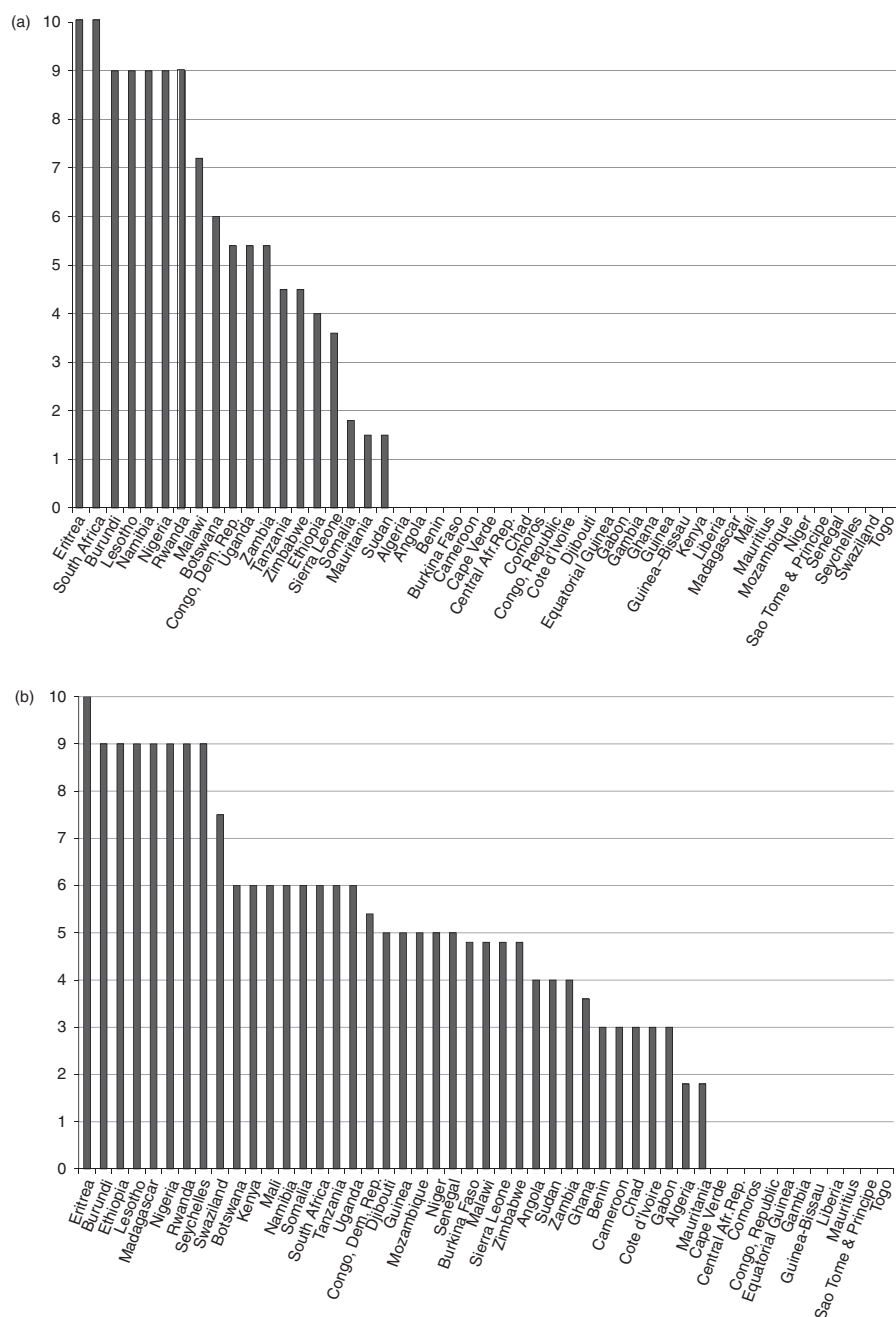militarization. The elements of value to citizens – democracy and services – came with a high price.

Scholars have mined the successful European experience for clues about what produces a deep democracy. National cohesion and dense networks of trust top the list. Both would seem compromised by linguistic fragmentation, which is the motivation for this study. The bulk of the book is dedicated to explaining the causes of the shift from monolingual to multilingual state-building, and the final chapter begins to look at its effects on these valued outcomes.

To observe these trends empirically, I created an original database of language policies in all African states, using a composite measure called "Intensity of Local Language Use in Education" or ILLED. This measure refines my previous coding (Albaugh 2005, 2009) to capture both depth and extent of language use in each country. I first assign a number from 0 to 5 to show the proportion of local languages that are used in each country, and then multiply that number by 1, 1.2, 1.5, 1.8, or 2 to show how extensively the languages are used across the primary curriculum.[5] This yields a composite score between 0 and 10, 0 indicating exclusive use of a European language and 10 indicating exclusive use of African languages through the entire primary cycle.

This way of coding enables one to compare small, homogeneous countries with large, multilingual countries, looking not at the raw number of languages used but at the proportion of possible languages used overall. Appendix A provides narrative information supporting the coding and lists the languages used in education and their proportions within each country.

Figure 1.1 compares the intensity of local language use in education at independence with the intensity in 2010. Whereas at the time of independence,

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[5] ILLED = (Proportion of Languages) × (Extent of Use). **Proportion of Languages**: 0 = None (European Only); 1 = Classical Arabic; 2 = Single Minority Language (<50%); 3 = Few Languages/One Major Language (50–70%); 4 = Several Languages/One Dominant Language (70–85%); 5 = All Languages/One Overwhelmingly Dominant (>85%). **Extent of Use**: 1 = Experimental; 1.2 = Moderate; 1.5 = Extensive; 1.8 = Generalized; 2 = Exclusive.

Theoretical Framework

FIGURE 1.1. Intensity of Local Language Use in Education (a) at Independence or in 1960 and (b) in 2010. Note that I coded states that were not colonized (Liberia, Ethiopia) or that were independent much earlier (South Africa) in 1960.

only nineteen out of forty-nine African states (39 percent) were using local languages in primary education, the number has doubled to thirty-eight states (78 percent) doing so currently.

Clearly, the use of local languages in education has increased over time. Scholars familiar with African colonial history quickly will note that virtually all of those countries using local languages at independence were former British colonies. It is customary to point out the differences in ruling practices between France and Britain in Africa. While scholars have challenged the neat dichotomy in recent years, a stark distinction does hold true in the two colonizers' approaches to education. British colonial educational policy favored initial teaching in the medium of the vernacular and then a switch to English-only in the later primary grades. French administrators insisted on the French language as medium from the outset of schooling. As one would expect, this practice carried over to independence, with Anglophone countries maintaining their inherited method of mother tongue education and Francophone countries preferring French-medium education.

Though a few Francophone African countries experimented briefly with local languages in the interim, the medium of instruction policies three decades after independence were remarkably stable. In its landmark 1988 report, *Education in Sub-Saharan Africa*, the World Bank devoted a few pages to assessing language medium in education in African countries. The bank observed that of the fifteen former British colonies in their sample, thirteen of them (87 percent) were using one or more African languages in education (World Bank 1988, 44, 154–156). Of the fifteen former French colonies surveyed, only four were using one or more African languages in their primary education. The weight of historical precedent continued to prevail until about 1990.

At this date, most Anglophone countries were using local languages, and only a few Francophone countries were experimenting with local languages. The dramatic changes occurred after 1990, when fourteen out of eighteen former French territories began or expanded local language use in their schools, compared with only one country doing so at independence.

Such a trend could point to a convergence toward high levels of local language use across the continent, which would be consistent with the competing explanation that international norms of minority rights are stimulating mother tongue education everywhere. But when we look at the direction of changes from 1990 to the present, as we will in Chapter 4, it becomes clear that the overwhelming upward trend is concentrated in Francophone Africa. In contrast, Anglophone Africa is making policy changes in both directions. And if we examine international norms on this issue, they are actually not consistent.

THE POLICY OF MOTHER TONGUE EDUCATION

Unlike scholars who urge government support of languages to stall their unprecedented death rate, this study is concerned with the factors beyond a fear of

language extinction that motivate states to alter their policies. While I believe that the choice of mother tongue education is more political than pedagogical, one such motivation could be the educational benefits such a policy purports to provide. Therefore, we should look first at the scholarly history around mother tongue education.

Works that discuss medium of instruction policy in developing countries usually refer to a 1953 UNESCO document as the landmark statement supporting such a method.[6] The benefits of local language use were only a theoretical assumption at that point, however, rather than an assertion backed with research. Dakin et al. (1968, 27), summarizing an edited volume that assessed the use of the mother tongue in developing countries, wrote:

The evidence about the difficulties of a foreign medium at the school stage thus seems inconclusive. The superiority of the mother tongue has not been everywhere demonstrated.... The practical arguments for the mother tongue in schools seem to rest more on the attitudes to language of the pupils, and the deficiencies of the teachers, than on any positive benefits of such instruction.

The most important early experiment in Africa, and the one cited most frequently, was the Ife Six-Year Primary Project undertaken in Nigeria from 1970 to 1976.[7] It is widely upheld as the most conclusive evidence for the vigorous use of the mother tongue in education, though later assessments have cautioned that several nonlanguage factors – preparation of the teachers, new materials, additional attention – in fact may have accounted for the success of the students (Akinnaso 1993, 274). Another Nigerian experiment was the River Readers Project, which also began in 1970 (Williamson 1980). This project produced inexpensive primers in all twenty-eight of the state's languages, which were used in the first year of primary school. The River Readers Project did not have the same level of evaluation as the Ife Project, but it clearly showed the feasibility of using several small languages, rather than only a large regional language, in the first years of education.

Other analyses have been mixed. Experts evaluating mother tongue teaching in Kenya were unconvinced about the superiority of mother tongue classrooms over English-only (Cleghorn et al. 1989). As with the Ife Project, the major problem with the comparisons is that mother tongue experimental classrooms have many other factors that contribute to their success. Nonetheless, there is widespread agreement among international educators that, in principle, teaching in the mother tongue is the best method.

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[6] It recommended mother tongue education for its psychological, sociological, and educational benefits (1953, 11).
[7] Description by Afolayan (1976); positive assessment by Fafunwa, Macauley, and Sokoya, eds. (1989); cautionary assessment by Akinnaso (1993).

General language rights and specific rights to education in local languages have been a theme of UNESCO declarations and major international conferences for decades. The organization has sponsored several conferences on the theme of promoting African languages (Yaounde 1983, Lagos 1989, Accra 1994). Many believe that UNESCO is behind the recent wave of mother tongue experimentation in Africa:

The effect of UNESCO's relentless advocacy is that member states of the Organization have been under pressure to re-examine their policies. Those already engaged in the practice of mother tongue education have felt justified, and those that have not had such a policy have made statements supporting it or have actually embarked on experiments and pilot projects. In effect, conducting initial literacy or lower primary education in an imported official language is no longer fashionable. (Bamgbose 2004, 7)

A *norm-based* explanation would attribute such a change to the diffusion of human rights norms: "After 1985, we can say that the world began a process of genuine international 'norms cascade,' as the influence of international human rights norms spread rapidly" (Risse, Ropp and Sikkink 1999, 21).

One can indeed observe such an international norm of preserving minority cultures has been gaining strength for the past fifty years, with the last two decades being the most significant. The modern principle can be traced most concretely to the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the beginning of a consensus on the necessity to protect minorities. But protection does not necessarily equal promotion. The 1990 Convention on the Rights of the Child guaranteed children the right to use their language and the right to education, but it did not connect the two rights. Only recently has the 1992 UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic Religious and Linguistic Minorities explicitly promoted mother tongues in education. The principle of nondiscrimination has grown to active *promotion* of minority identities. The declaration "unambiguously requires the State to allow private language use in private, public and collective action" (König 1999, 404).

Several events at the international level demonstrate accelerated attention to minority rights in recent years. The UN created a High Commissioner for Human Rights in 1993, and a UN Working Group on Minorities was set up in 1995 (Wright 2004, 192). A Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights (UDLR) was proclaimed on June 6, 1996, at the University of Barcelona. The Council of Europe adopted a Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities 1998 – a "legally binding multilateral instrument for the protection of national minorities in Europe" – and in the same year the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages promoted the "use of regional or minority languages in education and the media and urged their use in judicial and administrative settings, economic and social life and cultural activities" (Wright 2004, 192–193).