1 THE SOCIOLINGUISTIC AND LANGUAGE EDUCATION LANDSCAPES OF AFRICAN COMMONWEALTH COUNTRIES[1]

Nkonko M. Kamwangamalu (Howard University, USA)

INTRODUCTION

Commenting on the relationship between colonial powers and their former colonies, Fishman (1996, 5) says that 'although the lowering of one flag and the raising of another may indicate the end of colonial status, these acts do not necessarily indicate the end of imperialist privilege in neo-colonial disguise'. There is perhaps no better evidence of this than the privileged status and role of English vis-à-vis African languages in the educational systems of African Commonwealth countries. Although British colonial rule in Africa ended over 50 years ago, African Commonwealth countries continue to put the former colonial language, English, on a pedestal, especially in education. This chapter discusses the dominance of English in education against the linguistic diversity that is characteristic of African Commonwealth countries. First, it describes the sociolinguistic and language education landscapes of these countries. Then it contrasts the position of English in education in African Commonwealth countries with its position in the educational systems of European countries. Drawing on the literature, it shows that European countries use language ecology or the 'English-Plus' model particularly in secondary education (Seidlhofer, Breiteneder and Pitzl 2006). Unlike those in Europe, African Commonwealth countries practice a monolingual model, which posits an early exit of African languages from the education system in favour of English. In the subsequent section, the chapter discusses the ideologies that underpin language-in-education practices in African Commonwealth countries, with a focus on the ideology of the nation-state and the ideology of socio-economic development. I argue that these ideologies, though arguably dated

in Europe, continue to inform language practices in the educational systems of Commonwealth countries. In the next and final section, the chapter suggests ways in which English and African languages can co-exist productively in education. In particular, it calls for *Prestige Planning* (Haarmann 1990) for African languages not only to promote linguistic diversity in education but also, and more importantly, to ensure that African languages become, like English, a viable medium of instruction and an instrument of upward social mobility.

The call for *Prestige Planning* for African languages is made against the background of theoretical developments in *language economics* (Grin 1996; Vaillancourt and Grin 2000). This is a field of study whose focus is on the interplay between linguistic and economic variables. Understanding this interplay, remark Grin, Sfreddo and Vaillaincourt (2010, 140) in the context of language practices in the corporate sector, 'is relevant to language policy, since this understanding sheds light on why multinational firms, for instance, require foreign language skills'. In the context of African Commonwealth countries, understanding this relationship between linguistic and economic variables can help us explain why there is such a high demand for English language skills but virtually none for African languages on Africa's labour market.

There is, therefore, arguably no field of study that is better equipped than language economics to explain the dominance of English in the educational systems of African Commonwealth countries. Within the framework of language economics, linguistic products such as language, language varieties, utterances and accents are seen not only as goods or commodities to which the market assigns a value, but as signs of wealth or capital, which receive their value only in relation to a market characterised by a particular law of price formation (Bourdieu 1991, 66–7). The market value of a linguistic capital such as language is determined in relation to other linguistic products in the planetary economy (Coulmas 1992, 77–85). It is, as Gideon Strauss (1996, 9) notes, an index of the functional appreciation of the language by the relevant community. I argue that until African languages are associated with a market value, English will continue to dominate the educational systems of African Commonwealth countries, much as it did in the colonial era. But how can African languages be assigned a market value to make them instrumentally competitive with English at least on the local labour market? I will address this question in the last section of this chapter, where I propose *Prestige Planning* for African languages. But first, let us look at linguistic diversity in African Commonwealth countries to provide the background against which the proposal of *Prestige Planning* for African languages will be made.

LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY AND THE LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPES OF AFRICAN COMMONWEALTH COUNTRIES

There are 16 former British colonies in Africa. In addition, three African countries with no colonial ties to Britain, namely Namibia (1990), Mozambique (1995) and most recently Rwanda (2009), have become members of the association of Commonwealth countries. One original member state, Zimbabwe, left the association in 2003 due to land-related policy differences with Britain. Aside from Rwanda, Lesotho and Swaziland, all African Commonwealth countries are multilingual. In other words, linguistic diversity is a given in these countries, much as it is in the rest of Africa and elsewhere in the world. This diversity, however, is not reflected in the educational systems of African Commonwealth countries, let alone the educational systems in the African continent as a whole.

Table 1: The linguistic landscape of African Commonwealth countries[2]

S/N	Names	Population (2011)	Number of languages spoken	Official languages
1	Botswana	2 031 000	29	Setswana, English
2	Cameroon	20 030 000	280	French, English
3	Ghana	24 966 000	81	English
4	Kenya	41 610 000	67	Kiswahili, English
5	Lesotho	2 194 000	5	Sesotho, English
6	Malawi	15 381 000	16	English and Chicewa[3]
7	Mauritius	1 307 000	7	English
8	Mozambique	23 930 000	43	Portuguese
9	Namibia	2 324 000	30	English
10	Nigeria	162 471 000	522	English
11	Rwanda	10 943 000	3	Kinyarwanda, English
12	Seychelles	87 000	3	Creole, English, French
13	Sierra Leone	5 997 000	25	English
14	South Africa	50 460 000	28	Afrikaans, English, Zulu, Xhosa, Swati, Sotho, Tsonga, Tswana, Venda, Northern Sotho, Southern Ndebele
15	Swaziland	1 203 000	5	siSwati, English
16	Tanzania	46 218 000	126	Kiswahili, English
17	Uganda	34 509 000	41	English, Kiswahili
18	Zambia	13 475 000	46	English

On the contrary, and despite the post-independence euphoria to promote linguistic diversity in education, English-medium education remains the norm in African Commonwealth countries. This is because African Commonwealth countries perceive linguistic diversity as a curse, or what Davies (1996), following the biblical story of the Tower of Babel, describes as the *fatality of Babel*. According to this story, the descendants of Noah tried to build a tower leading to heaven, but their attempt ended in chaos when God confused the common language that enabled them to communicate and punished them by making them speak many different languages. As Muhlhausler (1996) observes, this story portraying linguistic diversity as divine punishment has dominated western thinking for centuries; with many people, including policymakers in former European colonies in Africa, believing that a multiplicity of languages is a problem. To address this problem, the African elite to whom power passed when colonialism ended have retained the former colonial language, English, as the sole medium of instruction in their respective countries' educational systems. It is explained that English was retained because of what Blommaert (1996, 21) calls the 'the efficiency argument'. In essence, the *efficiency argument* posits multilingualism as a problem that must be avoided at all costs to ensure the smooth running of the business of the state and promote national integration and economic development.

The *efficiency argument* can perhaps be entertained for multilingual African Commonwealth countries such as Nigeria, Cameroon and Tanzania, for instance, which have over a hundred languages spoken within their borders. However, the argument does not hold for monolingual African Commonwealth countries such as Swaziland, Lesotho and Rwanda, whose population is linguistically homogeneous. In Swaziland, Lesotho and Rwanda, everyone speaks only one Indigenous language, namely Siswati, Sesotho and Kinyarwanda, respectively. Therefore, drawing on Fardon and Furniss (1994), Blommaert argues convincingly that the *efficiency argument* is flawed. In particular, Blommaert quotes Fardon and Furniss (1994, 4), who say that

> whereas the former colonial powers strongly advocated efficiency among their former colonies, they now struggle hard to keep the European Union as multilingual as can be. Multilingualism in Europe is cherished as part of the unique European heritage, while it is depicted in Africa as one of the causes of underdevelopment and chaos.

In the next section, I will contrast the position of English in the educational systems of European countries with its position in the educational systems of

African Commonwealth countries. The literature shows that European countries value and promote linguistic diversity by using additive bilingualism consisting of a national language and English. Hoffmann (2000) notes that in Germany, for instance, from the 1980s onwards, a growing number of schools use a form of bilingual education with German and English, referred to as *Bilinguale Züge*, where the children receive part of their lessons in English to meet the demands of economic globalisation. Unlike European countries, African Commonwealth countries practice subtractive bilingualism by using African languages as the medium of instruction only for the first three years of primary education, after which English takes over as the sole instructional medium.

LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY IN AFRICAN COMMONWEALTH COUNTRIES AND EUROPE

As a result of the British colonial legacy, English dominates the educational systems of virtually all African Commonwealth countries. Bamgbose (2000) refers to this as a *recurring decimal*; that is, English turns up everywhere and dominates all the high-status domains, and certainly none more so than education. English is a recurring decimal not only in the educational systems of African Commonwealth countries but also in education in Europe. In their discussion of the spread of English in Europe, Seidlhofer, Breiteneder and Pitzl (2006, 3) remark that 'English is everywhere, and we cannot avoid it. Whether chosen or mandatory, English is unquestionably the dominant language in secondary education.' English dominates in Europe, much as it does in virtually all African Commonwealth countries, because of the instrumental value with which it is associated in the labour market, both local and global. The difference between the position of English in Europe and Africa is that, unlike African Commonwealth countries, in their educational systems the member states of the European Union use English in addition to rather than at the expense of their national languages. Indeed, one is not oblivious of the point that Hoffman (2000, 20) has made, namely that 'in order to partake in Europe, i.e. both contribute to and benefit from the European Union politically, economically and socially, it is now highly desirable to have English'. In this regard, Seidlhofer, Breiteneder and Pitzl (2006) describe language practices in the European Union as an irresolvable dilemma. In particular, they remark that 'in order to have a sense of community, a common language is needed, but having a common language is seen as a threat to European multilingualism. How can one promote a common language for

the community while supporting equal rights for all community languages at the same time?' (Seidlhofer, Breiteneder and Pitzl 2006, 24).

In spite of this apparent dilemma, it must be said that the European Union, the most influential institution in Europe, has taken many policy decisions since its creation on November 1, 1993 to ensure that no European language is discriminated against in the working of the Union. Phillipson (2003) lists a number of policies adopted by the European Union to promote linguistic diversity within its borders. These include, among others, the June 1995 European Council conclusions on Linguistic diversity and multilingualism in the European Union; the November 2001 Draft Council Resolution on the promotion of linguistic diversity and language-learning in the framework of the implementation of the objectives of the European Year of Languages; The January 2000 Declaration of Oegstgeest (the Netherlands) entitled 'Moving away from a monolingual habitus' and the June 2001 Vienna Manifesto on European Language Policies entitled 'The cost of monolingualism'. In the 1995 European Council conclusions, for instance, the Council affirms the importance for the European Union of its linguistic diversity, which it says is an essential aspect of the European dimension and identity, and of the common cultural heritage. Also, it describes linguistic diversity as a source of employment, an asset for the Union's influence in the outside world, and a resource that must be preserved and promoted in the Union (Phillipson 2003, 193).

There are other indicators that Europe has made every effort to accommodate its linguistic diversity. More recently, in 2010, the *Linguist List* (vol. 21, no. 736) announced the launch of MERIDIUM – Multilingualism in Europe as a Resource for Immigration Dialogue Initiative among the Universities of the Mediterranean. This was an international three-year project based at the University for Foreigners in Perugia, Italy, the aim of which was to study multilingualism in Mediterranean Europe and to raise an awareness of multilingualism and linguistic diversity.

The world has also taken notice of the fact that linguistic diversity is a feature of almost every country. Robinson and Varley (1998) list a number of conferences held in various parts of the world to promote linguistic diversity. Some of these include the 1996 Barcelona conference on Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights; the June 1996 Hong Kong conference on language rights; and the 1995 Cameroon national conference on education, which sought to establish the principle that mother tongue of pupils should have a place in the educational system, to name a few. African Commonwealth countries are yet to come to terms with and promote linguistic diversity, especially in their

educational systems. I argue that failure to do so has its roots in the language ideologies the countries inherited from the former colonial power, Britain. In the next section, I will discuss two of these ideologies, namely the ideology of the nation-state and the ideology of socio-economic development.

COLONIAL IDEOLOGIES, LANGUAGE-IN-EDUCATION PRACTICES AND LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY

The ideology of the nation-state

Schmidt (1998) has proposed a set of language policies including one, which he calls *centralist policy*, that might help us understand language-in-education practices in African Commonwealth countries both in the colonial as well as post-colonial era. A centralist policy has its roots in the *ideology of the nation-state*, which was popular in Europe at the time European powers conquered and divided up the African continent among themselves at the Berlin Conference of 1884–5 (Kamwangamalu 2013a, 546).

Inspired by the ideology of the nation-state, which by definition requires unitary symbols, among them 'one nation', 'one language', 'one culture', 'one belief system', 'one religion' and so on, the colonial authorities designed language policies that embraced monolingualism in a European language as the norm, treated the diversity of African languages as a problem and a threat to social order, and considered the African languages themselves as inadequate for advanced learning and socio-economic development (Whitehead 1995). This is evident from the following quote by Sir Stanley River-Smith, who was Director of Education in the former British territory of Tanganyika, now Tanzania:

> The vast majority of African dialects . . . must be looked upon as educational cul de sacs [sic] . . . From a purely educational standpoint the decent internment of the vast majority of African dialects is to be desired, as they can never give the tribal unit access to any but a very limited literature (Whitehead 1995, 7). 'To limit a native to a knowledge of his tribal dialects is to burden him with an economic handicap under which he will always be at a disadvantage when compared with others who, on account of geographical distribution or by means of education, are able to hold intercourse with Europeans or Asiatics' (Whitehead 1995, 8).

Ager (2005) says that British authorities had contempt for linguistic diversity both at home and in their colonies overseas. With regard to the colonies, Ager says that British authorities held the view that no African was good

enough to become English; however, unlike the Germans, who believed that no African was good enough to learn German; or the French, who believed that no African was civilised unless they gave up their languages and assimilated the French language, the British thought that there was some virtue in Africans being minimally anglicised (Mazrui 2013, 140). Accordingly, British authorities chose to train an elite in English who would provide a link between the rulers and the ruled (Bamgbose 2000). Also, they committed resources to the codification and promotion of Swahili in East Africa. As a result, Kiswahili and English in Kenya, for instance, played a complementary role in official institutions of the state, with English dominating the higher levels of colonial administration and Kiswahili the lower administrative levels (Mazrui 2013). However, as Ager (2005, 1047) notes, 'the thought never entered anyone's head that the higher public domains could use anything other than English, that education could use any language other than English, or that training in English as the language of the elite should not receive the highest prestige.'

The ideology of the nation-state, though arguably dated in Europe, continues to inform national language-in-education policies in African Commonwealth countries, much as does the related ideology, that of socio-economic development, to which I now turn.

The ideology of socio-economic development

The ideology of socio-economic development is the belief that development in all its forms (social, political, economic) is possible only through the medium of a former colonial language, in this case English. The ideology of development, based as it is on the rationalist model since it uses the nation-state as its quintessential goal, was transplanted into the territories that Britain colonised in Africa and elsewhere. It continues to inform language policy decision-making in postcolonial societies, and in Africa in particular, as is evident from language practices in education in African Commonwealth countries. Here, English dominates. In most of these countries, English is used as instructional medium from nursery school throughout the remainder of the educational system, including primary, secondary and tertiary education. In this regard, the Ugandan linguist Kwesiga (1994) remarks sarcastically that African mothers who have knowledge of this much-sought-after language start teaching their children English before they are born.

Drawing on the colonial ideals about language and development, African elites have perpetuated the colonial myth that development is possible only through the medium of an international language, in this case English; and

that African languages are good only for preserving African cultures and traditions. Thus, as Woolard and Schieffelin (1994, 63) observe, 'the model of development is pervasive in post-colonial language planning, with paradoxical ideological implications that condemn languages, like societies, to perennial status as underdeveloped'. Contrary to the colonial ideals about language and development and the ideology of the nation-state with which they are associated, linguistic scholarship has shown conclusively that the notion that some languages inhibit intellectual or economic development is a myth. Tollefson (1991), for example, argues that although the languages of the colonised people are typically described as subordinate and traditional, and lacking higher literary forms, these assessments of value must be understood as reflections of relationships of power and domination rather than objective linguistic or historical facts.

On this view, Robinson and Varley (1998, 191) make the important point that language planners and policy-makers are typically motivated by efforts to secure or maintain their own interests. In other words, language policies and their outcomes are designed by vested interests and ultimately benefit those who are in power. Along these lines, Nekvapil and Nekula (2006, 311) point out that the interests of different participants and social groups in language planning situations are not identical and that the distribution of power among them is uneven. As Fishman (1994, 92) puts it, 'language planning is . . . often disguised in the garb of ethno-national ideals and related to the righting of past wrongs, but these appeals are often mere 'cover ups' for the fact that those who advocate, conduct and implement language planning themselves have class, ethnic, political or religious interests which stand to benefit from the success of the language planning undertaken . . .' Against this background, I raise the question: how can African Commonwealth countries break away from current hegemonic language practices in education, which marginalise African languages and favour English as the sole medium of instruction in the schools? In the following and final section, I argue that research into this question needs a paradigm shift, one that goes beyond critiquing the wrongs of colonialism and inherited colonial policies, for the criticism alone does not change the power relationship between African languages and English. Instead, I will propose *Prestige Planning* for African languages if these languages are to become, like English, an instrument of upward social mobility for their speakers and potential users.

THE CASE FOR PRESTIGE PLANNING FOR AFRICAN LANGUAGES

Traditionally, efforts to address language problems in Africa have concentrated on either *status planning* or *corpus planning*. Status planning has to do with regulating the power relationship between languages and their respective speakers in what Bourdieu (1991) has termed 'the linguistic market place'; that is, the social context in which language is used. *Corpus planning* involves attempts to define or reform the standard language by changing or introducing forms of spelling, pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar (Fishman 1983). Haarmann (1990) argues that in addition to the status planning/corpus planning distinction, a separate category of language planning, which he calls *prestige planning*, must be distinguished. This is because, in Haarmann's view, prestige planning does not depend on activities in the ranges of corpus or status planning. He says that prestige planning is concerned with raising the status of a language vis-à-vis other languages in society so that members of the targeted speech community have a positive attitude towards it. Haarmann (1990, 105) distinguishes between prestige as associated with the *production* of language planning and prestige as related to the *reception* of language planning. He goes on to say that prestige planning, whether corpus- or status-related, has to attract positive values to guarantee a favourable engagement on the part of the planners – *producers of language planning* – and, moreover, on the part of those who are supposed to use the planned language – the *receivers of language planning* (1990, 104). Ager (2005) links prestige with image planning and argues that the prestige allocated by a community to a language forms part of the image the community has of itself – part of its attitudinal structure. Since both prestige and image are psychological attitudes, Ager says that attitudes need to be changed if planning is to be successful. He does not, however, explain how attitudes can be changed for planning to succeed.

In this chapter, I argue that the stakeholders' negative attitudes towards African languages may change if these languages are associated with an economic value in the linguistic marketplace. On this view, Canagarajah and Ashraf (2013, 268) note pointedly that when local languages do not have importance for tertiary education or, it must be said, for education in general, 'this reduces the motivation among students and families to learn languages other than English'. They comment further that 'if parents and students see little or no functionality for less privileged languages, they will gradually veer toward the languages with more capital' (Canagarajah and Ashraf 2013, 269). Along these lines, Coupland (2013) argues, rightly, that the decisions that