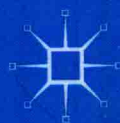


# Language Policy and Economics

The Language Question in Africa

*Nkonko M. Kamwangamalu*

Palgrave Studies in Minority Languages and Communities  
Series Editor: Gabrielle Hogan-Brun



Nkonko M. Kamwangamalu

# Language Policy and Economics: The Language Question in Africa

palgrave  
macmillan

Nkonko M. Kamwangamalu  
Department of English  
Howard University  
Washington, District of Columbia, USA

Palgrave Studies in Minority Languages and Communities  
ISBN 978-0-230-25172-4 ISBN 978-1-137-31623-3 (eBook)  
DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-31623-3

Library of Congress Control Number: 2016933998

© The Editor(s) (if applicable) and The Author(s) 2016

The author(s) has/have asserted their right(s) to be identified as the author(s) of this work in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

This work is subject to copyright. All rights are solely and exclusively licensed by the Publisher, whether the whole or part of the material is concerned, specifically the rights of translation, reprinting, reuse of illustrations, recitation, broadcasting, reproduction on microfilms or in any other physical way, and transmission or information storage and retrieval, electronic adaptation, computer software, or by similar or dissimilar methodology now known or hereafter developed.

The use of general descriptive names, registered names, trademarks, service marks, etc. in this publication does not imply, even in the absence of a specific statement, that such names are exempt from the relevant protective laws and regulations and therefore free for general use.

The publisher, the authors and the editors are safe to assume that the advice and information in this book are believed to be true and accurate at the date of publication. Neither the publisher nor the authors or the editors give a warranty, express or implied, with respect to the material contained herein or for any errors or omissions that may have been made.

Printed on acid-free paper

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by Springer Nature  
The registered company is Macmillan Publishers Ltd. London

## Palgrave Studies in Minority Languages and Communities

### **Aims of the Series**

Worldwide migration and unprecedented economic, political and social integration in Europe present serious challenges to the nature and position of language minorities. Some communities receive protective legislation and active support from states through policies that promote and sustain cultural and linguistic diversity; others succumb to global homogenisation and assimilation. At the same time, discourses on diversity and emancipation have produced greater demands for the management of difference.

This series publishes new research based on single or comparative case studies on minority languages worldwide. We focus on their use, status and prospects, and on linguistic pluralism in areas with immigrant or traditional minority communities or with shifting borders. Each volume is written in an accessible style for researchers and students in linguistics, education, anthropology, politics and other disciplines, and for practitioners interested in language minorities and diversity.

More information about this series at  
<http://www.springer.com/series/14611>

## Series Preface

Worldwide migration and unprecedented economic, political and social integration in Europe present serious challenges to the nature and position of language minorities. Some communities receive protective legislation and active support from states through policies that promote and sustain cultural and linguistic diversity; others succumb to global homogenisation and assimilation. At the same time, discourses on diversity and emancipation have produced greater demands for the management of difference.

This series publishes new research based on single or comparative case studies on minority languages worldwide. We focus on their use, status and prospects, and on linguistic pluralism in areas with immigrant or traditional minority communities or with shifting borders. Each volume is written in an accessible style for researchers and students in linguistics, education, anthropology, politics and other disciplines, and for practitioners interested in language minorities and diversity.

Gabrielle Hogan-Brun  
University of Bristol  
Bristol, UK

## Foreword

This well-researched and lucidly presented account of language planning theory and practice with particular reference to the language situation in sub-Saharan Africa is highly welcome for three reasons. First, at a time when language planning is not as popular in linguistic research as compared with topics in the core areas of syntax and phonology or even sociolinguistics, the author of this book is to be commended for reminding us of the importance of language policy and planning, particularly for development in African and other developing countries. Second, years of adopting the same well-worn colonial and postcolonial language policies have brought in their wake retrogression rather than progress. The situation, therefore, calls for a review of the failed policies and an exploration of alternative strategies and approaches. This paradigm shift is of particular importance in African countries which have suffered in no small measure from outmoded and puerile language policies. It is in this connection that the author has proposed examining language choices through the concept of *Prestige Planning* which is underpinned by the twin concepts of *language economics* and *game theory*.

By adopting this alternative approach, the author hopes to avoid the pitfalls which have so far characterized language policies and planning in Africa, thus breaking away from the stagnation of years of fruitless practice of language policies which pay lip-service to the empowerment

of African languages while, by default, strengthening the stranglehold of the dominance of imported European languages.

Third, the study is borne out of firsthand experience and field research by the author in Africa. Drawing on his earlier publications, he provides a rich background and brings together the various strands in an ordered progression that leads to the climax of the recommended concept of *Prestige Planning*. Thus, we have in this volume a rich tapestry of inter-related topics all of which are of great relevance to the language situation in Africa. As may be expected in any scholarly work, the author lays out the theoretical framework on which the study is based, but goes beyond this to provide practical application of the theory to examples of specific languages in certain African countries. Thus, we have a judicious blend of theory and practice.

The book is a welcome addition to the literature on language policy and planning in Africa and a reminder of the recurrent challenges that scholars and policymakers are facing on the African continent. For them and all those interested in the empowerment of African languages as well as the complementary role of the imported official languages, this book is a must-read.

Ayo Bamgbose  
University of Ibadan  
Ibadan, Nigeria



## Preface

*Language Policy and Economics: The Language Question in Africa*<sup>1</sup> addresses the perennial question of how to promote Africa's indigenous languages as mediums of instruction in educational systems as against the hegemony of such inherited colonial languages as French, English, Portuguese, and Spanish.

This question, which has come to be known as Africa's *language question* (Bamgbose, 2003; Mazrui, 1997), arises out of the widening socioeconomic divide between the elites, who have access to material resources and employment opportunities because they are proficient in former colonial languages, and the masses, who have no access to those opportunities because they are illiterate not only in the colonial languages but

---

<sup>1</sup> I understand the possibility of confusion in using the term "African continent," especially since the book focuses mostly on language policy and planning in sub-Saharan Africa. However, I wish to use the term throughout the book to remove any confusion and for the following reasons:

- (a) The ongoing competition between Arabic and French in North Africa is similar to the competition between French and/or English with indigenous languages in sub-Saharan Africa; the major difference between the North and the South is that the former includes Arab settlement colonies (which France subsequently colonized), while the latter (except South Africa) includes French or British exploitation colonies.
- (b) Also, Arabic has, through Islam, penetrated regions in sub-Saharan Africa (e.g., Sudan, Nigeria, Mali, and Kenya). Consequently, though the book focuses on sub-Saharan Africa, it does also delve into language planning issues in North Africa. For example, the discussion of the spread and globalization of English (e.g., Chap. 4) covers both North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa, as does Chap. 8 with respect to resistance of vernacular language education.

in their native languages as well. The language question, though couched in terms of language education, has as much to do with language as with a polity's socioeconomic development. In this regard, Bruthiaux (2000) observed that the fields of language education and development economics should form natural academic and professional bedfellows. However, this has hardly been the case in the literature on the language question in the African continent (Akinnaso, 1993; Organization of African Unity (OAU), 1986).

Traditionally, African countries have addressed the language question by giving official recognition to selected regional languages but only symbolically bringing them to equality with former colonial languages; however, those countries have hardly considered what it means for an African language (or for any language for that matter) to be recognized as an official language. Walker (1984: 161) defines an official language as one designated by government decree to be the official means of communication in government, administration, law, education, and the general public life of the given state. Eastman (1990: 71) sees an official language as one used in the business of government. A true official language, says Fasold (1984: 74), fulfills some or all of the functions listed under the following points (i)–(v), to which Fishman (1971: 288) would add those listed under points (vi) and (vii). An official language is used

- (i) as the language of communication by government officials in carrying out their duties at the national level;
- (ii) for written communication between and internal to government agencies at the national level;
- (iii) for the keeping of government records at the national level;
- (iv) for the original formulation of laws and regulations that concern the nation as a whole;
- (v) for such forms as tax forms;
- (vi) in the schools; and
- (vii) in the law courts.

Also, Kaplan, Baldauf, and Kamwangamalu (2011: 116) point out that when a language is granted official status, it is presumed that this designation enhances its prestige, extends its use into educational and

noneducational domains, and privileges its speakers. Language practices in most African countries, however, indicate that only inherited colonial languages have prestige and perform most or all of the afore-listed functions. In other words, official recognition has not equalized opportunities for African languages and their speakers but rather has provided a cover for what Pennycook (1994) called the planned reproduction of socioeconomic inequality.

I argue that this book breaks with the traditional approach to the continent's language question by focusing on one issue that has generally been overlooked or simply ignored in the discussions of language planning and policy across the African continent, namely, the linkage between African languages and economic development. The book argues that African languages are an integral part of a nation's sociopolitical and economic development (Chumbow, 1987); therefore, any language policy designed to promote these languages in such higher domains as the educational system in particular must have economic advantages if the intent is to succeed. To this end, the book proposes *Prestige Planning* (Haarmann, 1990) for African languages—an approach that has hardly been explored in the discussion of the language question in Africa—as the way forward to addressing this question. As will presently become apparent, wherever *Prestige Planning* has been considered in language planning in Africa, it has concentrated mostly on what Haarmann (1990: 105) has termed the *production of language planning*, but not on the *reception of language planning*. The former concerns legislation or official policy declaration about the status of languages in a polity, while the latter has to do with the population's attitude to the contents of the policy—that is, whether the people accept the declaration or reject it.

The proposed *Prestige Planning* model is premised on the idea that giving official recognition to the selected indigenous languages must be done in tandem with creating the demand for these languages in what Bourdieu (1991) calls the “linguistic marketplace”—that is, the context in which language is used. Creating the demand for African languages entails meeting three intertwined conditions, as outlined in Kamwangamalu (1997b) and developed further in subsequent works (Kamwangamalu, 2002, 2004).

- First, there is the need to vest the selected indigenous language with some of the privileges, prestige, power, and material gains that have been for so long associated only with former colonial languages.
- The second condition, dependent on the actualization of the first, requires that the indigenous languages be used throughout the entire educational system rather than being restricted to the first 3 years of elementary education, as is currently the practice in most African countries. In other words, the prestige associated with as well as the demand for these languages in the marketplace might constitute an incentive for their speakers and potential users to study them in the schools.
- Third, a certified (i.e., school-acquired) knowledge of the indigenous language must become one of the requirements for access to employment in the public, let alone the private, sector, as is currently the case for former colonial languages.

In an earlier study (Kamwangamalu, 2004), I have argued that meeting the identified three conditions does not mean removing former colonial languages from or diminishing their status in the educational system or in other higher domains. Rather, it simply means creating conditions under which the selected indigenous languages can compete with the former colonial languages, at least in the local linguistic marketplace. After all, for the *language consumer*—the term refers to the *receiver* of language planning (see Sect. 1.3), that is, an individual whose language or speech community is the target of planning—the most central question is not so much whether or not the selected indigenous language should be used as a medium of learning. Rather, the consumer is interested in the outcome of an education through the medium of an indigenous language—commonly referred to as *vernacular language education* or *mother tongue education*—and how this would compare materially with the outcome of an education through the medium of a former colonial language (Kamwangamalu, 2013c). For instance, would an education through the medium of an indigenous language ensure its consumers socioeconomic self-advancement? Would that education enhance the language consumer's standard of living? Would it give the language consumer a competitive edge in the employment market? Or, put differently,

what benefits would individuals actually reap, particularly on the labor market, because of their academic skills in an indigenous language? And how would these benefits compare to the benefits derived from the skills in a foreign language such as English, French, or Portuguese (Grin, 1995: 227–231)? I have observed (e.g., Kamwangamalu, 1997b: 245) that it does not take long for the language consumer to realize that an education through the medium of an African language does not ensure its recipients social mobility and a better socioeconomic life; that those who can afford it, among them policymakers themselves, send their children to schools where the medium of instruction is a former colonial language; and that when all is said and done, only education in a former colonial language opens doors of opportunity to the outside world and to high-paying jobs.

In the proposed *Prestige Planning* framework, indigenous languages are seen as potential cash cows and as a commodity to which the market assigns a value. To view language as a commodity is “to view language in instrumental, pragmatic and commercial terms, which is precisely the dominant discourse on language in many contemporary contexts” (Pennycook, 2008: xii). At the core of *Prestige Planning*, then, is “linguistic instrumentalism,” which Wee (2003: 211) describes as “a view of language that justifies its existence in a community in terms of its usefulness in achieving specific utilitarian goals, such as access to economic development or social mobility.” In this vein, I argue that for the African masses to embrace their own languages as the medium of instruction in the schools, they would want to know what such an education would do for them in terms of upward social mobility (Kamwangamalu, 2008a: 180–183); would it, for instance, accrue the benefits (access to resources and employment opportunities) that are currently associated only with an education through the medium of former colonial languages?

Two theoretical frameworks undergird the proposed *Prestige Planning* model for African languages: *language economics* (Coulmas, 1992; Vaillancourt & Grin, 2000) and *game theory* (Harsanyi, 1977; Laitin, 1993). *Language economics* is a field of study whose focus is on the theoretical and empirical analyses of the ways in which linguistic and economic variables influence one another (Dustmann, 1994; Grenier, 1984; Grin, 2001). *Game theory* is a framework that predicts and provides insight into whether a language policy will fail or succeed (Harsanyi 1977; Laitin,

1993). Ultimately, this book calls for language policies ensuring that former colonial languages are used in society along with, rather than at the expense and marginalization of, the selected indigenous African languages and consequently the majority of their speakers. The call requires that both former colonial languages and indigenous languages participate productively; that is, they each play some role in a polity's educational, political, and economic development.

The book will appeal to students of language and linguistics and of African studies, to researchers in language education and applied linguistics, and to language professionals and policymakers genuinely interested in promoting use of selected African languages in the higher domains, and in the educational system in particular.

Nkonko M. Kamwangamalu  
Washington, DC

## Acknowledgements

This book has benefited substantially from the comments and suggestions of four experts in the field of language planning and policy, including two anonymous reviewers and two internationally renowned scholars—Professor Emeritus Ayo Bamgbose of the University of Ibadan, Nigeria, and Professor Emeritus Robert Kaplan of the University of Southern California, Los Angeles, USA. I thank them all for reading earlier drafts of this book and, in doing so, helping me refine my thoughts on the language question in the African continent. Clearly, I alone am responsible for any claims made in this book and for any inaccuracies and/or omissions.

I owe a debt of gratitude to my wife Martha Nkonko and my children Lwenyi, Malu, and Detty Nkonko for their love and continued support of my work, and to my new love and granddaughter Olivia Nkonko for constantly reminding me that I needed to strike a balance between my scholarly endeavors, on the one hand, and playtime for her, on the other.

I also wish to thank Elizabeth Forrest, Rebecca Brennan, and Esme Chapman, all from Palgrave, for responding timely to all my queries and thus helping me bring this book to successful completion.

Finally, I would like to thank the publishers—Continuum, Routledge, Oxford University Press, and Wiley and Sons—for granting me permissions

to reuse my work in this book, including parts of the following copyrighted materials:

- “Language policy, vernacular education and language economics in postcolonial Africa.” In Peter W. Tan and Rani Rubdy (Eds.), *Language as commodity: global structures, local marketplaces* (pp. 171–186). London: Continuum, 2008, used by permission of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc.
- “Language planning: Approaches and Methods.” In Eli Hinkel (Ed.), *The Handbook of Research in Second Language Teaching and Learning*, Volume II (pp. 888–904). New York, NY: Routledge, 2011.
- “Language-in-education policy and planning in Africa’s monolingual kingdoms of Lesotho and Swaziland.” In: James Tollefson (Ed.), *Language Policies in Education* (pp. 156–171). New York, NY: Routledge, 2013.
- “English in language policy and ideologies in Africa: Challenges and Prospects for Vernacularization.” In Robert Bayley, Richard Cameron & Ceil Lucas (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Sociolinguistics* (pp. 545–562). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Mother tongues and language planning in Africa. *TESOL QUARTERLY*, 39(4), 734–38, Wiley & Sons, 2005.



# Introduction

This book brings together the works I have written on language planning and policy in Africa over the past 15 years (see Kamwangamalu, 2013a, 2013b and the references cited there). In brief, the book moves from the theoretical basis of the study to analyze the concepts of language policy in historical and postcolonial states, the persistence of colonial language ideology, the relatively recent reorientation of language planning in the context of a globalized world and explores successes and failures over time, showing how and why *Prestige Planning*, the proposition advanced in this study, may revise the complex language situation in Africa.

**Chapter 1** starts with a survey of the literature on language planning, including a discussion of *language economics*, *game theory*, and related theoretical frameworks, among them *critical linguistics* (Bourdieu, 1991; Fairclough, 1989, 1992; Tollefson, 1991, 2006), to provide the background against which the language question in Africa will be analyzed. **Chapters 2–4** and **6** discuss the import of the above and related theoretical frameworks in language planning in colonial and postcolonial Africa, with a focus on the ideologies that have informed language planning decision-making in the continent. In particular, together with **Chap. 5**, which addresses the medium-of-instruction conundrum in Africa, the chapters provide a detailed background leading to the climax of the proposition that is at the heart of this book: *Prestige Planning* for African languages, introduced in **Chap. 7**. **Chapter 8** offers a survey of case