

# Between Linguicide and Lingua-Hatred: A Provisional Linguistic Performativity Model for Africa

by

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## Abstract

African languages have suffered from a double handicap: from the colonial strike, on the one hand, and, on the other, these languages have been undermined by African people themselves. Of all the colonial myths, none seem to have been more disadvantageous to African people than that of their languages. The idea that European languages are analytical as opposed to the emotional African languages created an unnecessary hierarchy between languages. This paper aims primarily at challenging such misconceptions. It argues that the study of African languages requires proper policies and planning and that until these languages take their central place in the educational system talks about curriculum change that dominate African academic circles will remain but a dead letter.

**Key words:** African language, policy, planning, curriculum change, Africanisation, education.

## Introduction

*How can one understand the fact that some people are panic-stricken when the adoption of Wolof is proposed as the official national language? If the Senegalese people can't be helped to retrieve and develop their linguistic unity now, what use is there to talk about defending African culture? In contrast to this, the attitude of someone like Julius Nyerere is consequential. Without rhetoric or fanfare, he elevated Swahili to the status of a national and governmental language (Diop, 1987:121).*

Colonialism or slavery gave rise to many challenges which affected African languages: some of these languages, with their speakers forcefully divided, developed into different dialects while others, especially of the smaller ethnic groups, simply died. “Linguicide”, writes Skutnabb-Kanga cited by Ngugi wa Thiong’o, “implies that there are agents involved in causing the death of languages” (Ngugi, 2009:17). Ngugi adds: “this is precisely the fate of African languages in the diaspora” (17). Kikongo, Yoruba, Igbo, Twi will suffer from the weight of French, Dutch, Portuguese and English and die in North America because in slavery African languages could not be used at all. The African people were punished if they were caught “calling themselves by their names” (Ngugi, 2009:18). Language is directly correlated with memory, “the liquidation” writes Ngugi, “was clearly meant to deny [the enslaved people] their languages both as means of communication and as sites of remembrance and desire” (18).

It should be pointed out from the outset that we must not confuse this case, in which disruptive effects of imperialism, slavery caused languages to die, with the case in which the fragmentation of African languages resulted from internal causes. To consider Africa’s linguistic problems today only from external factors, no matter how true they may be, affords Africa no good if it fails to ask itself the right questions: why are there so many languages in Africa? Or, can Africa be politically and economically united in spite of the plurality of its languages?

In this paper, I would like to propose a linguistic performativity model which, despite being critical of colonial alienation, acknowledges Africa’s own internal problems. While this is not a new approach, it is imperative to review Cheikh Anta Diop’s model on linguistic unity. The model I propose aims at identifying linguistic politics of significance which goes beyond colonial linguistic assimilation.

History provides scores of examples of Western thinkers and writers denigrating African languages. Captain John Locke is reported to have stated that the West African people “have no speech, but rather a grining and chattering” (Achebe, 2000). The Khoi-San, who had visited England in the 1800s, appear in Charles Dickens’s *The Noble Savage*, as having undiscernible language: “... remember the horrid little leader of that party... his straddled legs, ... and his cry of "Qu-u-u-aaa!" (Dickens 1853: 337). Writing in the same vein of thoughts Conrad (2002) who did not understand the Congolese language referred to it as ‘noise’. The above are but a few examples of racism on linguistic grounds. To admit that African people have a human language would legitimise the hypothesis that they have a philosophy, a religion, a history and culture which language gives expression to. The Belgian Franciscan priest Placide Frans Tempels who spent more than ten years among the Luba of Katanga (Congo) and acknowledged their systems of thought in a book entitled, *Bantu Philosophy* was recalled back home for holding such views (Mudimbe, 1988:137). There is no reason why Christianity should not take the blame for destroying Africa. While the Church voted for lies, it is ironic that European secular scholars were happy to expose lies. The French Count Volney, for example, rejected Western falsification of history in his works. On seeing the faces of the ancient the Egyptian Pharaohs with typically black features, he wrote the following words which I believe linguists would well do heed to:

*Just think that this race of black men, [enslaved] and the object of our scorn, is the very race to which we owe our arts, sciences, and even the use of speech! Just imagine, finally, that it is in the midst of peoples who call themselves the greatest friends of liberty and humanity that one has proved the most barbarous slavery and questioned whether black men have the same kind of intelligence as Whites! (Diop, 1974:27-28 my extrapolation)*

Unless we subscribe to the myth that African languages are non-analytical, we must accept that Africa taught others the art of speech because their rhetoric was highly advanced. This left Chancellor Williams wondering: how and under what circumstances would African people, among the very first people to invent writing, lose this art almost completely? (Williams, 1987:19).

The colonial school is itself to blame. Following the 1855 Berlin Conference which sanctioned the partition of Africa, colonial schools were formed to serve the colonists' purposes and it is from these schools that African languages were dethroned and replaced with European languages as Earth by the Sun. This education led the African child to view English, French or Portuguese as languages of prestige and opportunities in the world. The reception of the foreign languages, however, was not without destructive results: refusal to see education in one's mother tongue as something to be happy about. Colonial children were simply taught to despise their languages and cultures. The Western weapons that killed African people were not to fear more than Western education that would make African children think that the best only comes out a foreign language and culture. This accords well with Cheikh Hamidou Kane's view of colonial school as a gun:

*On the Black continent, one began to understand that their real power resided not at all in the cannons of the first morning but in what followed the canons. Therefore behind the cannons was the new school. The new school had the nature of both the cannon and the magnet. From the cannon it took the efficiency of a fighting weapon. But better than the cannon it made the conquest permanent. The cannon forces the body and the school fascinates the soul (Kane in Ngugi, 1986: 9).*

The coloniser changed the language because he wanted to change the African culture. Like Kane, the Congolese writer, Sony Labou Tansi, in Granel's words by Palmberg, shares with his childhood memories: "primary school teachers in the colonial days hung a tin of excrement around the neck of weak pupils who made errors in French or refused to speak this language, the sign of "evolution" (Palmberg, 2001:206). Whether one is inclined to recognise this as destroying one's soul or not, it remains a fact that colonisation not only caused the death of African languages but also provided fertile ground for self-enslavement and disempowerment. Even the best among us, the Negritude writers, were caught "accept[ing] the European conceit that only Europeans can think analytically" (Bernal, 1991:404); they undermined their own analytical intelligence. In the British colonies African scholars also admitted that English was the language of unity.

Victor Webb argues that “there was among the early nationalists “an awareness of something of a debt to English, paradoxical as it may be, since the colonial language facilitated the transcendence of [ethnic] loyalties” (Webb 1995:187). This attitude towards English, writes Ali Mazrui, “was not only because of the role of English as a useful lingua franca, but also because, faced with a common racism, especially in the case of intellectuals who had been in America, Anglophone Africa developed an awareness of a common identity to a greater extent than their Francophone counterparts, who could be assimilated” (Webb 1995:187). English had imposed symbol of inferiority on its borrowers according to Mazrui. Colonisation and self-colonisation could be seen to work hand in glove. In Owen Alik Shahadah’s *500 Years Later*, one of the characters explains what it means to be enslaved. He says: “You take away their language, you take away their music, you take away their religion and you give them yours”. This means, he adds, “to crush somebody’s mental development and graft upon their mind the bestial imaginings of their own civilisation as evil” (Shahadah, 2005).

Returning to the introductory quote, in 1947 the Senegalese scholar, Anta Diop, grasped the problem of language as one of the key points from which African renaissance has to start. In his book, *Towards African Renaissance*, he addressed this point sternly. He made an appeal to regain belief in the indigenous languages which were destroyed by colonialism. What he believed was dead was the recognition of African language on the global map. On the other hand, he was convinced that the African languages were still very much alive and widely spoken among African people wherever they are contrary to the view which led most researchers astray that European languages are widely spoken. Unlike many scholars Anta Diop argued for total abandonment of European languages. He knew that African knowledge would not be produced as long as we continue to use European languages. The colonial deception would magnify the more in that African scholars will not try to combat it, on the contrary, they will glorify it. The impact of the Kenyan scholar, Ngugi wa Thiong’o, who became famous for his *Decolonising the Mind*, is that he shares in common his radical thinking with Anta Diop. The two scholars opposed colonialism with neither admiration for it, nor did they deny the need for reciprocal relations with mutual respect between free people. Yet the colonial mission was to improve the other, the African; and this acknowledged no reciprocity.

However, we cannot admit that colonisation is the only cause for a lack of faith in local languages. The African regards the European languages as superior sometimes without the Whiteman campaigning even for his language. What the West represented for the African was the European’s superiority, the attitude he was able to keep towards European languages throughout the course of history. One wonders why the African shows no admiration for his own languages. Chancellor Williams ascribes the reason for the demise of the African languages long before the coloniser arrived: “the reasons of security caused the separation from kinsmen in smaller groups.

The isolation of these groups “led”, says he, “to the developments of over two thousand different dialects and languages” (Williams, 1987:46). Williams further argues that the rise of all these tongues widened the gulf between [people of African heritage] that territorial distances had already achieved” (46). A few factual reports such as the xenophobic attacks on other African people in South Africa, in the past recent years, may offer support to this argument.

Hatred motives played a large part, no doubt, in the disunity among African people. Williams is of the opinion that “even without the aid of Western writers in emphasising the language differences and the cultural variations and attempting to show how unrelated African people were “disunity and mutual suspicion became an African way of life” (46). While such fault lines in the fabric of African society would seem to justify the hypothesis that European languages united Africa, the same hypothesis fails to show that operationally African people were united by European languages but ideologically the same people have remained cut off from each other. And while Anta Diop’s and Ngugi’s ideas could be seen as serving to protect African people against colonial (linguistic) alienation, the scholars did not do enough to show us how Africa was divided. The proposed model is encapsulated in Williams’s views. I argue that a successful study on African languages should strive to discover why there were many languages in the first place as opposed to earlier African scholars’ understanding. Those who fought against colonial alienation did well but they left internal problems unaddressed. Thus, I could say that the problem of African language is not merely historical, it is first and foremost a cultural problem in the sense that African people developed mutual hatred and maintaining this linguistic hatred also left a space open for cultural alienation when the coloniser came to colonise Africa. The work of the reconstruction of Africa needs to begin from this space.

I believe that language is a unifier of people and there is a reason for invoking a framework of linguistic unity here. With reference to Anta Diop’s model on linguistic unity, I will introduce below, I would like to highlight its relevance therefore there is a need to revisit it. Anta Diop argued for a need for each African nation to have its national languages from those languages a continental language would be selected. While I agree with Anta Diop I argue, however, that speakers of local languages will not easily subordinate to another local language being promoted to a level of a national language, and so to avoid such sensibilities of proximities, I suggest instead a language that comes from a faraway region, which will be regarded as a foreign language independent of the local people’s preferences. This language will be regarded as a regional language and will create social bond within several countries within the same region. (I shall come back to this later on).

In the sections that follow I intend to discuss the use of African languages in literature and education because whatever debate there is on language policy and planning, the ultimate goal is to bring them into education where there can be used to imagine future.

## Literature in African Languages

No African scholar has felt it worthwhile to make a full defence of owning a European language without feeling embarrassed by this position or by a challenge from the native speakers. Chinua Achebe, the Nigerian writer, had attempted to defend the use of English which he regarded as a language of unity; however, his work did not hide the truth that the writer who had yielded to the functionality of English felt the pain of his position to it as a stranger. Through Obi Okonkwo's mouth, Achebe demonstrates his embarrassment:

*Nothing gave him [Obi] greater pleasure than to find another Ibo-speaking student in a London Bus. But when he had to speak in English with a Nigerian student from another [ethnic group] he lowered his voice. It was humiliating to have to speak to one's country man in a foreign language, especially in the presence of the proud owners of that language. They would naturally assume that one had no language of one's own (Achebe, 1960:45).*

Such a statement, I believe, may account not only for the ambiguous mind set of the period in the text, but also the psychological influence this experience has had on Africa as a whole in terms of its ambiguous language policy. Elsewhere Achebe observes:

*It is right that a man should abandon his mother tongue for someone else's? It looks like a dreadful betrayal and produces a guilty feeling. But for me there is no other choice. I have been given the language and I intend to use it (Achebe in Ngugi, 1986:7)*

Since Achebe was given a language, I cannot say that he had either an option of choice or personal preference. Under such circumstances, he had to renounce his language in order to guarantee that he is listened to by others. It is therefore appropriate that the writer uses the word 'betrayal' than a victimisation by outsiders. Gurr explains how in his *Song of Lawino*, Okot's p'Bitek shows how a village wife Lawino laments the loss of her husband's manhood in the dark forest of books. The man has become the white man's obedient dog, having lost even his own identity because of the books which taught him to ape the white man's ways (Gurr, 1982:30). It is difficult to separate Africa's alienation from the use of European languages. Similarly one cannot separate academic freedom from one's use of African languages. Identifying African systems of thought through languages remain the only means by which the African people would be seen academically free or else decolonisation of the Social Sciences would be slow. Writing in a foreign language has generated a new community, one in which the individuals are related not by common heritage but by a foreign language and a possible secret desire to become whites.

This community of early writers, by duty, felt no obligation to use African languages but preferred the use of the coloniser' language. Writing African literature in English attributes its success to the Makerere conference (Uganda) in 1962 where the participants firmly defended English. The influence of these scholars is the continuation of the view that books written in African languages will not sell, a view that has never died out. African intellectuals' attachment to European languages became a survival tactic. Solarin expresses his disappointment when he writes: "it is sickening reading Chinua Achebe defending English as our *lingua franca*. I do not blame Achebe or any other Nigerian novelist, taking the same stand. Their books are, commercially speaking, necessarily written in English" (Eme & Mbagwu, 2011:122). I agree with Ridge that English became a "language of economic opportunity among Africans" (Ridge, 2001:235). One was considered important if he/she could speak a European language. Without taking any merits away from most African talented writers who have proved wrong the myth that a poetry is better only when written by a native speaker (although that is not entirely false), we all admire the great works written by Africa's own children in foreign languages both in Africa and the diaspora.

However, I would disagree that in their beauty and wisdom these works served the interests of the African people. Highly prophetic is Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah*. It is, to me, a work that deals with the question of transmission of memories. As its author acknowledges, after events have occurred, it is surely the anthill that survives the fire, the wind and the rains, so that the new grass may have the memory of the devastation the savannah went through in the previous dry season. But because these memories are in English, this makes one wonder whether the ordinary people the colonial memories are related to were able to read them. This is where the project of restoration becomes necessary: retranslating these important books into the African languages in order to do justice to the culture from which they originated.

To return to Anta Diop, "Every literary work" he argues, "necessarily belongs to the language in which it is written: works written by African people in foreign languages thus belong first and foremost to those foreign literatures" (Diop, 1996:34) regardless of it being rooted in an African experience. Diop asks his readers: who benefits from the literature written in a foreign language? The answer is: not the native! The very end result of the African writer writing in a foreign language proves itself disturbing because an African experience is used to enrich the foreign language. Obi Wali saw the sterility of this approach and he too opposed it firmly arguing that "... until these writers and their western midwives accept the fact that any true African literature must be written in African languages, they would be merely pursuing a dead end, which can only lead to sterility, uncertainty, and frustration" (in Eme & Mbagwu, 2011:118). The South African writer, Nadine Gordimer, did not shy from defending literature in African languages:

*But we writers cannot speak of taking up the challenge of a new century for African literature unless writing in African languages becomes the major component of the continent's literature. Without this, one cannot speak of an African literature. It must be the basis of the cultural cross-currents that will both buffer and stimulate that literature* (Gordimer, 1999:34).

Literature is bound to language and culture from which it originates; thus, it will seem a deviation from its orbit if literature records emotions and experiences into a language other than the local milieu that shaped them. Another issue is that “language is the medium of memory” (Ngugi, 2009:40), how do you raise buried memory from the grave when the means of raising it are themselves buried in the grave” [languages] (41). The arguments by V.Y. Mudimbe, in this context, are equally fulfilling: “[...] it seems legitimate to consider this literature in African languages as an expression of African condition” (Mudimbe, 1988:77). Mudimbe further that “this literature heavily relies on African experiences and milieu and can present another “view” different from that of colonizers and Western anthropologists” (77). “Consequently it takes a power which could ultimately be used against foreign ideologies” (77) he concludes. One could further contend that corresponding to the quotation of Kane from Ngugi and later by *500 Years Later*, the enslavement was meant to be permanent and its reverse is not an easy exercise: Anta Diop rightly points out, “African culture will not be taken seriously until their utilisation in education becomes a reality” (Diop, 1974: xv).

## **The Use of African Languages in Education**

*We have neglected to study matters at home because we were trained in books written by foreigners, and for foreign race, not for us- or for us only so far as in the general characteristics of humanity we resemble that race...Therefore, we turned our backs upon our brethren of the interior as those from whom we could learn nothing to elevate, to enlighten, or to refine...We have had history written for us, and we have endeavoured to act up to it; whereas, the true order is, that history should be first acted, then written* (Blyden in Mudimbe,1988:122)

The most neglected area in the language debate has been the use of African languages in education. And yet if we were to measure the emotional distance between two children, namely the African child and an European child in a classroom setting where they are taught in English or French, the result is likely to be blatant: education through one’s own language absorbs the child’s mind and the emotional contact established between child and discipline. Inversely, when the African child is drawn into education through a foreign language he is emotionally disconnected from his subject matter, or he is in it, at least, in a less intimate way, until he masters the new language and makes it become one with his person. On the one hand, this gap is equivalent to the degree of thinking, and, shows how learners move away from themselves or reality which is replaced with foreign reality through the medium of that language. This means, the better the child knows the language the easier it becomes for him or her to acquire the knowledge in a particular discipline. Thus, Anta Diop believed that African children should be taught everything from writing, reading to arithmetic in their languages. It is in this manner, he suggested, that the learning process would be easier for them. He gave the following practical examples:



*Let us consider the following definition: a point that moves engenders a line. For a young African to be able to understand this definition positively (and even that is not sure), he needs a minimum of six years of schooling to possess the French syntax and have enough vocabulary. Now, the same definition, for example, could have been taught in Valaf to a child of seven years the very first day he starts schooling. If one waits six years to impart this knowledge to him in French, he would be thirteen by the time he conceives the definition. Six years during which a lot of effort is put into building for him, from scratch, an instructional instrument that is by no means more appropriate than that which he has from birth (Diop, 1996: 35).*

He further argues:

*If such teaching were done in African languages, a lot of erroneous assumptions would be exposed to begin with, it would be seen that far from being incapable of logic, the African could even do without difficulty mathematical problems, and that what is actually blocking him is the mathematical symbolism taught in a foreign language of which he has no mastery. The African is forced to make double efforts: to assimilate the meaning of words and then, through a second intellectual effort, to capture the reality expressed by the words. Quite often this faulty pedagogical procedure leads to a complete break with reality and subsequent contact is only established at a very slow rate, a situation that would not have occurred if teaching were done in Valaf, because not only is there something natural and ordinary in that reality when expressed in his mother tongue that makes the African master and dominate any reality, but also the chances of his not understanding the meanings of words are negligible. The contrary is the case when expressed in an European language. Then, it appears that an impervious membrane separates this reality for the mind which now struggles with formulae and wording as if these were magical tricks that make up knowledge itself (Diop, 1996: 35-3).*

While such an observation is generalised, it nevertheless explains why one group of learners, as may be inferred from the quotes, struggles due to language barriers while the other seems to have no problem except enjoying the acquisition of new skills their language affords them possibility. It is this challenge that most African children face on daily basis in schools where they spend many years struggling with language acquisition while the acquisition of subject-related knowledge remains behindhand. A clear distinction has to be made between a child at an entry level whose native language is the language of education and the other child who uses that language both for scientific and communication purposes- that is to say, the two are exposed to processes of learning which are mutually exclusive. This reveals unfairness in a system which proposes 'Education for all' while in actual fact, 'language hierarchy' favours some children to the detriment of others.

We disregard this contradiction which favours some and disfavour others and tend to promote the belief that 'you can't do without English'. English, in this sense, becomes the centre of thought for all endeavours. Given these obvious discrepancies the scholar points out, it might seem surprising that African children's future continues to be imagined without their languages<sup>1</sup>.

Like Anta Diop, Ngugi's writings in the early 1960s were a double declaration of decolonisation: of one's mind from European alienation and of our conversion to African languages. Objection to foreign language is made even louder in his *Weep Not, Child* in which the scene of his child protagonist, Njoroge, is set before us in order to show how hard it is to learn a new language and even harder to acquire skills while still in the process of learning a new language:

'The two children tried hard to learn English. It was important for them to learn English. But it was difficult and sometimes Njoroge got confused.  
'I am standing up,' the teacher said. 'What am I doing?'  
'You are standing up,' the class replied. Lucia pointed her finger.  
'You, boy, what's your name?'  
'Njoroge.'  
'Stand up, Njoroge. Now, what are you doing?'  
Njoroge was afraid of the watching, smiling faces. epitomise  
'You are standing up,' he said.  
'No, no. What are *you* doing?'  
Njoroge answered again, 'you are standing up.' The teacher was really angry now. She told Mwihaki to stand too.  
'Mwihaki, what are you doing?'  
'I am standing up.'  
'Good. Now, Njoroge. What is she doing?'  
'I am standing up.'  
The pupils laughed quietly. But when the teacher asked them, they could not give the right answer.

Although on the surface the text is very explicit, a critical look at Njoroge's difficulty epitomises the experience of most African children in schools where they are forced to learn not only additional languages but are taught through the mediums of foreign languages. It is difficult to expect African children to be deeply immersed in Life Skills, Numeracy (Mathematics) while taught in English on the first day of school. One might admire the girl, Mwihaki, Njoroge's class mate whose sister, Lucia, is a teacher and they all speak English at home. Lucia's frustration is not less dangerous than it might first appear. Lucia thinks of children solely as objects of the acquisition of Western culture. We are also to suspect that the missionary visit is not without significance. Western civilisation came packaged in Christian religion. As such missionaries, with the exception of Presbyterians, encouraged children to align themselves not only with Christianity but also with European languages.

The above discussion of Ngugi's book encourages us to look at the colonial world critically, this would imply "to see the discrepancy between the way the characters in that world think of themselves and the way that we actually see them" (Dubbler, W & Zarin, 1967). But as soon as we realise that we are not seeing the world simply through the eyes of the characters, we must be happy with the efforts, because we have decolonised our minds. Ngugi suggests, therefore, the place where the child should be or should not be, through his art as ironic commentator on the present world's foibles and follies. If Ngugi disapproves colonial language policy, he also creates the child character as a victim of ethnocentrism. The child Njoroge becomes then a figure very central to his politics of language. Through the boy's challenges the writer introduces his reader to the world of colonial and postcolonial domination. In his *Decolonising the Mind* (1987) and *Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms* (1993), Ngugi has remained decidedly inclined to ascribe the predominance to local identity.

He helps us "to see ourselves clearly in relationship to ourselves and to other selves in the universe. Achille Mbembe summarises Ngugi's approach in his *Decolonising the Mind* (1981) as nothing more than "seeing oneself clearly" (Mbembe, 2015:15). Simon Gikandi also points out that Ngugi's literature is "a transmutation of not just a political idea but a political programme into art" (Minga, 2005:12). Gikandi shows a careful examination of his thought and language by saying that he is both "the mirror and lamp of his society" (2005:13). This suggests that as a lamp Ngugi shows Africa to illuminate the way and as the mirror he allows us to see ourselves (know who we are or how we now look). Language, in my opinion, cannot develop and maintain its standards unless its speakers wish it so or support it.

This point leads to the section in which I propose the revised model of Anta Diop. Though this model has its own shortcomings it has all the merits to make it something we can refer to for language planning.

### **The Revised Ancient Cheikh Anta Diop's Model of Linguistic Unity**

What follows is my interpretation of Anta Diop's original views from a chapter in his *Black Africa: The Economic and Cultural Basis for a Federated State* (1987) entitled, "Linguistic Unity" (pp-9-14). Anta Diop himself never called it a model. The reason why I refer to it as a model is because it is quite a reasonable framework within which we can develop a plan to work with toward concrete solutions to the problem of language in Africa. As a model it explains African unity which was the cornerstone of Anta Diop's convictions as he thought it could be achieved through a continental language. Drawing on the example of the Senegalese languages Anta Diop had studied he stated that African languages are related to one another by a deep kinship or an organic link, the importance of which, most of us were misled to think that it was the European languages that united Africa.

According to him African languages such as Wolof, Kikongo, Swahili, Tshiluba, Yoruba and Zulu could have become a national language because they had minority groupings falling under them and their speakers who are bilingual would suffer no discrimination. Despite speaking from the point of view of his native Senegal, his point was critically examined by linguists who saw Wolof as fit to be a national language as it had the potential to be easily developed by introducing concepts in the Sciences, mathematics, physics, and so on. Anta Diop argued that it was also “necessary to use some artificial but effective methods such as funding literary prizes, translating scientific works [from other languages into Wolof], creating a national commission to draw up an academic dictionary and various specialised ones for mathematics, physics, philosophy, and so on” (10). The same methods of selection would be applied at the regional level to determine a territorial language with sole level of linguistic impartiality. The purpose of all this would be to eliminate the foreign language, French in this context, slowly from government at all levels which made it difficult to hold an office without the knowledge of French.

The scholar believed that as quickly as possible “Wolof should become the language of government used in public and political documents and acts: parliamentary debate, drawing up of the constitution and legal code” (10). The model was very significant for Anta Diop, for it emphasised the effective role of African languages in African unity. He further proposes a choice of language at the continental level which not many continents have been in the position to do except for Russian which is “overlaid on the language of each Socialist Republic within the Soviet Union” (11).

Explanations of how this model can be adapted today with few changes are given below: “The language selected [at the continental level] will at first be taught in the secondary schools of all territories, just as if it were an obligatory foreign language in the curriculum” (11). This is the aspect of the model where Anta Diop realised that a social consciousness and patriotism are required to learn a language other than one’s own, but African nevertheless. He states that “Then, text books on various subjects are completed in this language and adopted in high schools and colleges, the continental language will take the place of European languages learned at secondary– school level” (11). He says: “a citizen of any given territory will be obliged to learn to speak fluently the continental language”. Perhaps it will never become in any real sense a dominant language like English, French, Spanish or Portuguese, the citizen will still be “able to get secondary and even higher education in the territorial tongue” (11). He thinks the continental language is important because the representation of African reality through this language does not conflict with the experience of the learner of the continental language unlike the European language which does not reflect the African’s experience or fails to take cognisance of the demand on the reality of the learner’s environment.

Anta Diop has shown in a decisive manner how linguistic unity based on a foreign language, however one may look at it, is a “cultural abortion” (12), which he said “would irremediably eventuate in the death of the authentic national culture, the end of our deeper intellectual and spiritual life and reduce us to perpetual copycats” (12).

His model is aimed at resisting against cultural assimilation imposed on people by the coloniser. He felt very strongly that “we must remain radically opposed to any attempts [of cultural assimilation] coming from the outside: none is possible without opening the way to the others” (12). It might be pointed out that Anta Diop was not against cultural exchange, but he had clearly foreseen the future and the danger of European languages being developed by African people at the expense of their own African culture. His study on language convinced him that “the European mother countries felt they can afford to withdraw politically from Africa without great loss as long as their (linguistic) presence remained in the economic, spiritual and cultural spheres” (13). Of a greater concern is Africa’s willingness to continue the coloniser’s work by wholeheartedly patronising his/her language. Thus, Anta Diop’s model emphasises a language policy characterised by acceptability, equity, practicability of African languages as well as their use in education and for other official purposes in order to meet the needs of the African people. The ultimate result is to end the colonial exploitation of the African people, which was sustained by the adoption of foreign languages.

This model can be reviewed and readapted today. However, if the situation of Anta Diop’s time which led him to this conceptualisation has remained unaddressed in a continent where people continue to honour the language of the former oppressors as the centre of thought and school curricula, further questions need to be asked: what is wrong with the African people? What do we do with a curriculum deep-seated in western canon? Does Africa need monolingualism, multiculturalism or simply making African languages a medium of instruction?

Before revisiting Anta Diop’s model, mention should be made of a paper by Mbembe entitled “Decolonising Knowledge and the Question of the Archive” (2015) in which he explores the new form of mental discovery by students. Mbembe’s work follows from the suspended project of Africanisation or decolonisation of the 1960s as it manifests the intention of renaming the colonial spaces. Ernst Cassirer cited by Ifversen writes “whatever has been fixed by a name, henceforth is not only real, but is Reality”. In the light of this statement, everything formed by concepts and in languages foreign to Africa suggests that the reality within which Africa operates has been invented for her. Hopefully, such a debate will give African scholars more to think about as they trace the implications of influential scholars like Fanon’s and Ngugi’s thoughts on curriculum transformation and other language issues. Fanon’s work focuses on the middle class who abused the system of Africanisation while Ngugi attributes the decolonisation of the mind mainly to writing in African languages. My contention is that if Africa wants to ensure the quality of its education system, there is a need to rethink its language policies. Ridge (2001) raises important questions in this regard. Ridge criticises the Outcomes Based Education (OBE) in South Africa whose policy statements he thinks contradict themselves: Critical outcome 3 states, for example, that *learners have to communicate effectively.....* and goes down to outcome 7: *Demonstrate an understanding of the world as a set of related systems by recognising that problem solving contexts do not exist in isolation* (Ridge, 2001:233).

However, the question is, what kind of effective communication could be achieved when children are deprived of proper mediums of communication which only their mother tongues could offer? In outcome 7 Ridge argues that “the word ‘demonstrate’ is widely used in OBE’s outcomes to describe the practical manifestation of high-level outcomes in terms of their relation or lack of relation to real life” (Ridge, 2001:233). But assuming that systems are related as indicated in the outcome students, however, may not be able to demonstrate their understanding of African systems, people of Africa’s perception of the world around them if the system and the perception are hardly taught in schools. What are we asking students to compare then? Children learn in a system that tells them to regard Africa’s belief systems as inferior and so the result we can expect of them is a flight from local reality that alienates them and upholds outdated truths. Ridge observes that: “We expect to be inspired by mediocre appeals for “excellence”, to be made literate by illiterate appeals for literacy” (Ridge, 2001:236). Such statements confirm the hypothesis behind this paper that the promotion of foreign languages by African leaders is a snare of false objectivity. If one is determined to understand Africa’s systems of thought, one will inevitably come across the issue of language behind it. Thus, it is impossible to account for African reality without taking one’s departure from this existential fact: “A flight from one’s language is the quickest short cut to cultural alienation” (Diop, 1987:121).

In agreement with level 1 of Diop’s model, territorial or provincial languages are to be accepted legally as equal and used as languages of education. In Congo, for example, these languages would be Tshiluba, Kikongo, Swahili and Lingala. In South Africa, they will be *Xhosa, Zulu, Southern Sotho, Northern Sotho, Venda, Tsonga, Swazi, and Ndebele*. African children would have their schooling in these languages. What precedes the use of these languages in schools (at this level) will be the drafting and translation of textbooks (mathematics, technology, biology, physics, and so on). As Diop argues, such activities “will show once and for all that it is indeed possible to raise an African language to the prestige of any European cultural languages” (Diop, 1987:10). Anta Diop recognised the fundamental value of “translation” which Ngugi refers to as the ‘language of languages’. Except for a few writers who wrote in African languages such as D. O. Fagunwa, who constantly wrote in Yoruba, Thomas Mofolo who wrote his novel *Shaka* in Sesotho in 1925 and would be translated into English in 1981, Enoch Guma’s novel in Xhosa, *U-Nomalizo*, published in 1918 and translated into English in 1928 and a collection of folktales under the French title *L’éléphant qui marche sur des oeufs* though originally written in Tshiluba in 1931 by a Congolose high school learner, Badibanga Thadée, most early writers thought writing in the vernacular was going to limit their audiences. Ngugi suggests, however, that the works by African writers writing in foreign languages such as Chinua Achebe, Alex Guma, Wole Soyinka, Tsitsi Dangarembga and Ferdinand Oyono, to mention but a few, should be restored into African languages, they have to return to their original base (Ngugi, 2009:126). The restoration project should also embrace works of the diaspora by W.E. B. Dubois, Tonny Morrison, Marcus Garvey which must come to Africa through translations as Booker T. Washington’s *Up from Slavery* translated into *IsiXhosa* by the poet J.J. R. Lolobe in the 1950s (Ngugi, 2009:127).

It might take a few years to see textbooks written or translated into African languages and such a process requires not only translators, but also schools of language and translation established where students will specialise in different language combinations. Joseph Ki-Zerbo rightly suggests that “it is not enough to change the syllabus. One must change the books, methodology, the teachers, the structures, the qualifications” (Ki-Zerbo, 1987: 221). It is a task which requires language specialists, politicians and policy makers to join hands together.

The translation of Arabic scientific books into European languages and back to Latin and the translation of the Bible into German by Martin Luther and English by William Tyndale are sufficient to show how happy people were feeling that God spoke to them in their languages. Translation contributed to Reformation or European Renaissance.

I find levels 1 and 2 of Anta Diop’s model very important because they African languages. However, this has been attained by some countries that take pride in the use of their languages in schools and parliamentary proceedings. Examples of these are Nigeria which uses Hausa and South Africa where some members of the parliaments use their national languages. While we appreciate these efforts, the *Asmara Declaration on African Languages and Literatures*, a ten-point document calls on African languages to take on the duty which weigh heavily upon them to speak for Africa. The African Union’s sixth session in Khartoum also underlined the importance of African languages in education and proposed an establishment of a specialised office in Bamako. Against this background, one wonders why the debate on the African languages has not “moved from paper to the ground” to use Ngugi’s (2009:94) words.

The question Ngugi seems to ask is: how do we get a thousand tongues, barely mutually comprehensible among themselves nationally, speak for a continent? (Ngugi, 2009:95). If the unity of Africa is the aim and language its anchor, regions must give up personal preferences and plunge into the new language performativity. To avoid sensibilities linked to hierarchy of languages which surface when one territorial language is given preference over others is the main objective of the model below. While attachment to our native tongues is necessary learning another African language marks the expression of one’s adhesion to a broader African family, a continental identity. To demonstrate this further, Africa South of the Sahara can be broken up into regions, namely, West Africa, Central Africa, East Africa and Southern Africa. If we take the idea of African regional organisations such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) or geographic sub-groupings of countries, it becomes possible to allow communication through a few selected languages.

West Africa can be given an already literary developed language from the South such as *Xhosa* while the East Africa could embrace *Lingala* from Central Africa and the latter will take in return *Yoruba* from West Africa. The equally developed *Swahili* originally from East Africa may receive the attention and admiration of the SADEC region.

I have already pointed out that such a linguistic performativity does not encourage complete rejection of one's mother tongue but the cultural exchange would help to put Africa on high, shape common heritage and prevent hatred among African people. This model is developed or proposed from the premise that because African people tend to appreciate what is foreign, linguistic unity could be grafted upon this need or social behaviour. The flow of people's movement such as *Xhosa* language speakers to West Africa, and the Kenyans, Ugandans and Tanzanians coming to the Southern region to enhance the learning of *Swahili* is likely to heal Africa from xenophobia. A plan such as this (see Figure 1 below) is needed. Paul Addison suggests that:

*[...] as we stumble in the future a provisional map is better than none at all. Scholarly detachment may be something to aim for in fifty years-time, but engagement is what we need now* (Randall, 1989:7 emphasis mine).

It is here that I think Anta Diop's model needs adjustment—that is replacing the national languages with three to four regional languages; which will make it easy to select a continental language. It is through this Pan-Africanism that a new energy can bring fresh air of renaissance. The African Union, I suggest, has to commit itself politically, financially and linguistically, with a plan, even if a provisional one such as the one described above. In Halliday's words, any language can be developed, as local economy can, however, the development of local languages requires huge amounts of capital (Gurr, 1982:30)<sup>2</sup>. "All this calls for a very different attitude towards our languages on the part of African governments and the African intelligentsia,...and the whole line of African intellectuals who have faith in African languages" (Ngugi, 2009:128).

## **Conclusion: Eclipsed by the Vernacular?**

Offering themselves for the approbation of their Western admirers whose languages they use profusely in speech and writing, African people have not realised that it is the lack of appreciation for their own languages which results in alienation. They defend European languages more obstinately than the Europeans themselves do. As such, they have failed to build a world which other nations feel obliged to respect. In this sense, Africa's development becomes slow; there is no development which can be isolated from language. Great Zimbabwe, Nok civilisation (Nigeria) and Kongo kingdom whose ruins still stand achieved greatness designing plans within their languages. Similarly, as Mazrui in his Key Note Address in 1996 cited by Paulin Gidjité, the Chinese, Korean and Japanese owe their progress to their languages:

No country has ascended to a first rank technological and economic power by excessive dependence on foreign languages. *Japan rose to dazzling industrial heights by the Japanese language and making it the medium of its own industrialization. Korea has approximately scientified the Korean language and made it the medium of its own technological take-off. Can Africa ever take-off technologically if it retains so overwhelmingly European languages for discourse on advanced learning?* (Gidjité, 2008:187 emphasis mine).

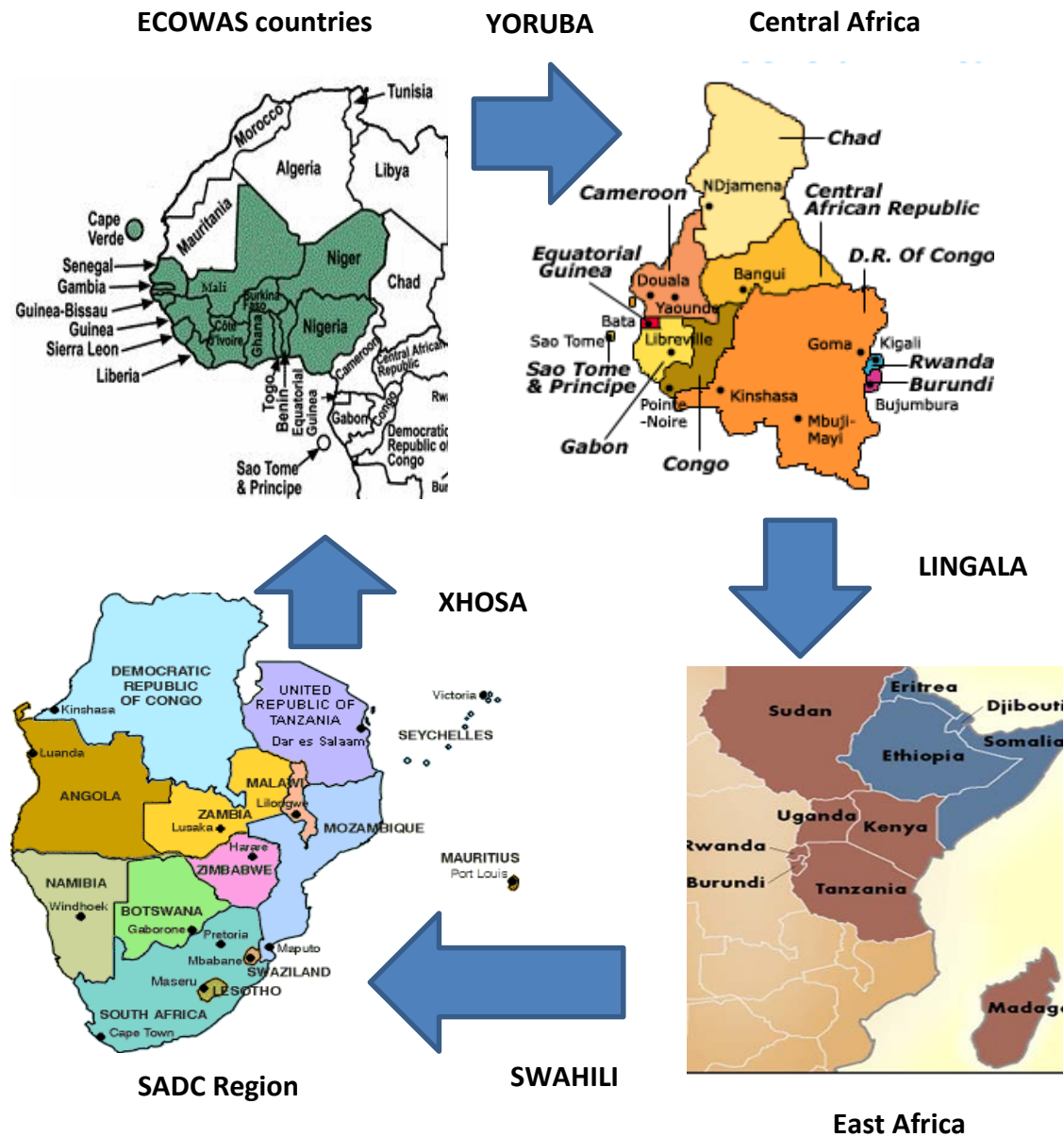


Let me end by arguing that globalisation is to us today what colonialism was to the world fifty or sixty years ago. Although the two conceptions of the world images belong to different dispensations, they have at the heart of their construction an eager proselytism to get people alienated. Although globalisation celebrates unity yet it ignores that true unity comes from diversity. Puffed up with westernism, globalisation shows the outer semblance of a world coming together politically, economically and linguistically but its true ambition is to make the rest of the world conform, not allowing others to take control of their destinies. We expect the world to develop. But how do we escape from the trap of such thoughts while making it difficult for people to use the languages within which they can participate and imagine their own future.<sup>3</sup> To use African languages is not to impoverish human experience; rather, humanity is enriched by it. To recognise the place of African languages in the world is not to undermine the African people's relations with other parts of the world, but it is merely to enable people to think freely.

Albert Gérard Barthold writes that “European language literature in Africa may eventually be eclipsed by vernacular writing, much as Latin was in Europe” (Barthold, 1983:991). This is one of the reasons why there are invitations to listen to African voices: “One out of every eight people in the world lives today in Africa. And the population of that continent is increasing faster than anywhere else on earth; triple the rise of North America, ten times faster than Europe. *That alone should be reason enough to pay attention to Africa, to listen to African voices*” (Words of Moyers introducing Achebe's interview in 2008).

In a continent still “grappling with the reality of multiple languages” (Ngugi, 2009:94), Anta Diop's ideas are applicable: Africa needs a linguistic unity (Diop, 1989). But such unity must be guided by “the great re-membering vision of Pan-Africanism” (Ngugi, 2009:88). In a recent talk at the University of the Witwatersrand on ‘Decolonising the Mind and Secure the Base’ (2017), Ngugi argues that to know European languages whilst allowing one's mother tongue die is disempowerment but knowing other languages in addition to one's mother tongue is empowerment. He further argues in this talk about the need of coming out of the metaphysical empire which outlives the physical empire. The debate on African language remains alive as long as African languages such as *Naama* in South Africa are threatened to die. Thus, using African languages is not desirable it is a must.

Fig 1 below<sup>1</sup>:



<sup>1</sup> The maps have been retrieved from these links:  
<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/int/ecowas.htm>  
<http://v1.sahistory.org.za/pages/governance-projects/organisations/sadc/sadec.htm>  
<https://www.google.co.za/search?q=east+african+countries&biw=1600&bih=754&tbm=isch>

## Acknowledgements

I am indebted to Drs Alex Asakitikpi and Dr Aretha Asakitikpi for sharing with me their thoughts regarding aspects of this model for language planning. The couple spent long hours of the night debating on whether developing regional languages should be the best option for Africa. Also, to Dr Aloysius Conduah many thanks for proofreading this paper.

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> *News 24* reported on 17<sup>th</sup> of August that Mandarin will be added to the South African school curriculum in January 2016 as an ‘additional language’, i.e. “a language of political, social and cultural entity” (Webb, 1995:67). However, in a country of 11 national languages, learners could use them interchangeably as additional or ‘permitted languages.’ Questions arose (arise): “Why is not the Asia and Europe interested in introducing *Swahili*, *Lingala*, etc. in their schools? Why shouldn’t we develop African languages, such as the Koi-Sans’ *Nama* which is dying, instead?”

<sup>2</sup> It is reported by Douglas Pickett that it took Tanzania one-third of its annual budget for a couple of years to replace English by (with) Swahili. But (if) it takes an European critic like Pickett to see in (Delete) the fight to replace English (as) a waste of time than he is impressed by the idea that a well-respected African language like *Swahili* if elevated to a continental language will be one which any foreigner (needs) to learn (in order) to communicate with African people as (the) African people do with their languages.

<sup>3</sup> There is approximately seven thousand languages in the world of which only six (French, English, Spanish, Russian, Chinese, and Arabic) are recognised as United Nations (UN) official languages. Of these, only English and French have been chosen as career languages (*langues de travail*), a choice dictated by the UN founders. African languages dried up in colonisation and African people (are) consumers of others languages and thoughts. Much the same can be said about African Union (AU) itself. That it favours foreign languages as its career languages amazes (amazing) (any reasonable mind Delete), if not alarming it. Often believed is the idea that African languages are poor in concepts (because they are) unable to capture concepts of law, politics, economics and technology which other languages do (and full stop) one wonders why the reason for developing these languages should serve as the reason for marginalising millions of people who have no other ways of expressing themselves except through their languages?