

Chapter 2

The Effects of Colonisation on Endangered Indigenous African Languages in Africa

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ABSTRACT

The effects of colonization on indigenous African languages were profound and far-reaching. When European powers colonized Africa, they imposed their own languages on the indigenous populations and discouraged the use of native African languages. This had a number of negative consequences for African languages and their speakers: many African languages were suppressed or even banned by the colonial authorities. This led to the loss of many languages and the extinction of some of them. The colonial authorities often invested little in the development of African languages, such as creating written scripts, grammar rules, dictionaries, and educational materials. This meant that many African languages remained underdeveloped and were unable to keep pace with the modern world.

INTRODUCTION

Colonization has had damaging effects on endangered indigenous African languages, leading to linguistic homogenization, cultural erosion, and uneven language dynamics. The effects of colonization on endangered indigenous African languages have been intense and persistent, with consequences that linger till date and continue to shape linguistic landscapes across the continent of Africa. European colonial powers enforced their languages on indigenous populations, leading to the suppression, marginalization, and even extinction of many native African languages (Heugh, 2019). The effects of colonization on indigenous African languages were profound and far-reaching. Language was fundamental to colonization, the colonisers generally enforced their languages on the colonised, prohibiting the natives from communicating and interacting in their mother tongues. In some cases, they steadily outlawed native

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languages (Samarin, 1989). In countries such as South Africa, English was declared as the language of business, education and administration as the country was a British colony. The Nationalist Party wanted to introduce Afrikaans as a medium of teaching and learning in black schools. Unfortunately, its implementation was never materialized because of Soweto 1976 uprisings where slogans were “down with Afrikaans”. These foreign languages were imposed on blacks so that they can be colonized and captured under the National Party rule. It has been observed by many scholars that under colonial rule, students were downgraded and demoted, demeaned, or even beaten clobbered for expressing themselves speaking their native languages in colonial schools (Adedeji, 2015). In reaction and spiteful revenge to this harsh treatment to the systematic imposition of foreign languages, some post-colonial activists advocate supported a complete return to the use of indigenous and aboriginal languages (Shakib, 2011). In South Africa, the basic and higher education departments talk of curriculum transformation. However, the use of African languages as languages of teaching and learning in schools and institutions of higher learning is moving at the snail’s pace as the Department of Basic Education and Department of Higher Education and Training are hesitant to sanction use of these languages. Twenty nine years into the new political dispensation in South Africa, African languages remain underdeveloped and marginalised as they were never used for teaching, learning and research. Even, publishing of reading materials in African languages is also a nightmare for publishers as the languages are “considered not to be economically viable.” (Totemeyer, 2013, p.6). Consequently, there is an acute shortage of reading materials in African languages in public libraries with dire consequences specifically for black learners. This partly explains why learners in Grades 4 to 6 cannot read for meaning. It must also be noted that 81% of the Grades 4 to 6 learners performed badly in 2021 Progress of International Progress in Literacy Studies (PIRLS) in South Africa. South Africa is the last country of all countries which took part in a study (Department of Basic education, 2023).

When the European colonialist authority came to Africa, they imposed their own languages on the indigenous populations and discouraged the use of native African languages and to gain political and economic control and as an instrument to dominate and subjugate the populace (Nwanosike, Onyije and Eboh, 2011). This had a number of undesirable consequences for African languages and their speakers: loss of linguistic diversity: many African languages were suppressed or even banned by the colonial authorities (Mous, 2003). Futhermore Bromham, et al (2022), stated that modern schooling system is associated with loss of linguistic diversity, the scholar was of the opinion that without policy interventions, language loss could triple within the next forty years. With at least one language lost per month, to avoid this irreparable loss, serious investment is necessary through proper documentation of languages, encouraging multilingual education programmes and other community-based programmes. With twelve official languages in South Africa, adequate reading materials in all languages are needed so that learners can use them to read and to acquire reading culture which is currently lacking as learners are reluctant to read in foreign languages that they do not understand (Lüpke, 2019).

In the opinion of Dascomb (2019), it was argued that the role that colonisation played in language education policy call for the need for first language instruction in educational institutions because colonial languages were used to strengthen and reinforce the imperialistic goals of colonising nations and this language policy was rarely reversed after decolonisation, even in few cases where nations have instituted pilot mother tongue arrangement into school systems, but they hardly move past the rudimentary stage. It is vital to evaluate the new global forces which have been put in place to hinder the use of first language instruction or mother tongue particularly because of globalisation and westernisation of information

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