No Easy Walk to Linguistic Freedom: A Critique of Language Planning During South Africa's First Decade of Democracy

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ABSTRACT

In 1994, South Africans of all races and political parties took part in the first democratic elections. The election and inauguration of Nelson Mandela as the first black president marked the beginning of a new era – an era of democracy. The new era has, among other things, witnessed reforms in language planning. The current paper is a critique of South Africa's language planning efforts during the first decade of democracy i.e. 1994–2004.

Keywords: Apartheid, democracy, human rights, language planning, language policy

"There is a lack of political will on the part of the current government to have our progressive language policy work," - Neville Alexander.

1. INTRODUCTION

The apartheid political dispensation in South Africa finally came to a halt in 1994 when Nelson Mandela of the African National Congress (ANC) became the first black president following the first multiparty and multi-racial elections. The ANC went on to win the second and third general elections that were held in 1999 and 2004 respectively. In 2004, South Africa celebrated its first decade of democracy. One of the highlights of this grand celebration was the desire to assess how South Africa had performed in various sectors during the first decade of democracy. As we look back at South Africa's first decade of democracy, it would be a serious omission not to consider language planning and language policy. Why? Language has had a central position in South Africa's socio-political history. Language has been one of the sites of political struggle(s). In fact, language policy was one of the tools for advancing the goals of apartheid. As Blommaert (1996) has observed, political ideologies and/or interests usually shape language policy and language planning. Political factors or considerations cannot, therefore, be separated from language planning. Any language planning activity, therefore, has to be understood and analysed within a particular political context. To this end, Vic Webb has described the role of language in South African politics as follows:

As an instrument of ethnocultural identity, it played a central role in defining racial groups, thus supporting apartheid. As an instrument of mobilisation, it has served to establish the political power of the white Afrikaans-speaking electorate. Finally, as an instrument for gaining access to certain rights and privileges (such as job opportunities) the former language policy favoured the so-called white communities, thus serving as an instrument of discrimination (Webb, 1996: 139).

South Africa's post-apartheid eleven official language policy has been described in various positive ways, for instance, as "a progressive language policy" (Brock-Utne, 2002: 12; see also Alexander, 2003: 23); "the new very enlightened South African policy on languages" (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 2003: 3); "South Africa's ambitious language policy" (Englund, 2004: 197); "this apparently very generous language policy" (Satyo, 1999: 150); "a revolutionary language policy for the new millennium," (Chisanga, 2002: 95); "the most democratic on the continent" (Chisanga, 2002: 101); and so on. The policy aims at healing the wounds that were created by apartheid. This policy aspires to steer South Africa towards the promotion of inter-racial unity, the promotion of respect for and tolerance towards linguistic and cultural diversity, and the entrenchment of democracy (see Langtag Report, 1996). On paper, the language policy is a remarkable compliance with the Language Plan of Action that was formulated by the then Organisation of African Unity (OAU) - to which many African governments have paid lip service.[1]

South Africa's entry into the world of democracy in 1994 gave high hopes to other African countries, and it is therefore not surprising that South Africa is regarded as a leader;[2] or "a locomotive" that can pull other African countries out of bad governance and poverty, "Africa's best ticket" out of poverty (Wohlgemuth, 2004: 30). Wolff captures these high hopes in the following way:

If South Africa arose from its apartheid past and present post-apartheid turmoil like Phoenix from the ashes, a wave of hope and optimism can be expected to roll over all of Africa. If, however, South Africa fails to come to grips with its severe and highly complex internal problems, fails to use her particular historical experience and startling resourcefulness for the benefit of all of its population, then frustration will rock the continent and damage all hope for overcoming underdevelopment in Africa for a long time to come (Wolff, 2003: 7–8).

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[1] In 1986, the OAU, at its 22nd ordinary session of heads of state and government adopted a Language Plan of Action for Africa. One of the major aspirations of the plan was to free Africa from undue reliance on the ex-colonisers' languages. For a full text of the language plan, see Bamgbose (2000: appendix) and Wolff (2003: appendix).

[2] Note, for instance, South Africa's role in brokering peace deals in the Democratic Republic of Congo and other warn-torn African countries. In addition, there are expectations in some quarters that South Africa can help in resolving the current political problems in Zimbabwe.

The expectations are indeed high. And in the area of language planning, the mood is the same. South Africa is expected to light the path. South Africa should learn from the mistakes and successes of those African countries that attained their political independence much earlier. At the same time, the other African countries too should be able to learn from South Africa.[3] This is a mutually enriching process.

In this paper, I attempt to make a critical review of the first ten years of South Africa's language planning under a democratic dispensation. I identify some of the successes South Africa has achieved. At the same time, I also highlight some worrisome trends - i.e. hurdles or setbacks to the implementability of South Africa's human rights-inspired language policy. These hurdles or setbacks are not new at all - they have been around in other African countries for some time. These setbacks include: the lukewarm approach by the political leadership towards language issues or simply the lack of political will; negative language attitudes towards African languages; the process of globalisation and the ever increasing demand for English, and so on.

The paper has been arranged as follows. In section 2, I give an overview of the language planning situation during the apartheid era. In section 3, I turn to the language planning situation during the post-apartheid era. This is where I discuss the new political dispensation's encouraging trends in language planning (section 3.2). But as section 3.3 will show, there are also some worrisome trends in the new political dispensation's language planning efforts. The paper's conclusions are made in section 4.

2. LANGUAGE PLANNING IN THE APARTHEID ERA: AN OVERVIEW

In 1652, the first Dutch-speaking settlers arrived at the Cape. This area then became a sphere of Dutch political and economic influence. To this end, Dutch became the official language of the Dutch colony of the Cape of Good Hope. When South Africa became a British colony in 1814, English became the dominant language used in the official domains (Raidt, 1999). Under the 1910 constitution of the Union of South Africa, English and Dutch became co-official languages. In 1925, Afrikaans replaced Dutch as an official language. Afrikaans was a language "derived from a Dutch vernacular of the seventeenth century, and a language that developed in Africa, shaped by colonists, Asian slaves, local Khoikhoi and coloureds" (Raidt, 1999: 163).

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[3] The then Head of the Division of Language Policy of the OAU, Professor Kahombo Mateene, told an international seminar on language in education held in Cape Town in 1996 that South Africa was the first country to put in place a language policy that was very similar to the one proposed in the OAU Language Plan of Action. He further declared that "South Africa may be the last country to join the OAU but it has given a lesson of democracy which all the others still have to take and apply" (cited in Langtag Report, 1996: 9).

When the Afrikaner National Party came to power in 1948, Afrikaans received a major political boost. From 1948 to 1994, South Africa was officially bilingual, the irony being that the two official languages, English and Afrikaans, were the languages of the minority white population. Whilst African languages were promoted in the homelands, the lion's share of government support for languages was directed towards Afrikaans and English. The Afrikaner-dominated National Party government invested tremendously in the corpus development of Afrikaans. As Raidt observes, "Afrikaans was perceived as a possession of the white Afrikaner population, who felt oppressed by the British. The language became the symbol of national identity in the struggle against English supremacy" (Raidt, 1999: 163). The political will to transform Afrikaans into a language that could effectively take a leading role in various domains led to the creation of massive resources such as terminology banks, a wide range of dictionaries, and a significant literary output.

The Bantu Education Act of 1953 placed African education under the control of the state. African schools were linguistically zoned. The mother tongue was the medium of instruction up to standard seven. Thereafter, English and Afrikaans were used equally as media of instruction (Henrard, 2001). The equal use of English and Afrikaans as media of instruction (also known as the "50/50" policy) was a serious stumbling block to effective learning because of the sudden shift from African languages to Afrikaans and English. To make matters worse, African learners had poor levels of competence in the two new media of instruction. The curriculum was poorly developed and was therefore not geared towards producing educationally well empowered Africans. There was a deliberate attempt to limit Africans' access to the languages of socio-political and economic power i.e. Afrikaans and English (see Unesco 1967).[4]

Because of its close ties with the architects of apartheid, Afrikaans was stigmatised by Africans as the language of the racist oppressors. English, on the other hand, though a colonial language, was portrayed in positive light; and was (and still is) the language most demanded by black South Africans. Some positive labels were attached to English - for example - the language of unification and liberation, the vehicle for ideologies of freedom and independence, and the symbol of liberal values and liberation. It was the liberating potential of English that drove Africans to revolt against the imposition of Afrikaans as the medium of instruction in African schools in 1976. The Soweto uprising in 1976 was not only a rejection of Afrikaans but also a rejection of the whole apartheid system.

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[4] Owing to this abuse of the language policy for racist goals, mother tongue education remains unpopular not only in South Africa but also in other African countries such as Malawi (see Kamwendo, 1997, 2003; Kishindo, 1998 for Malawi's case).

The language situation in South Africa is very complex.[5] First, South Africa, due to its former apartheid system, did not produce a national lingua franca. Each African ethnic group was encouraged to live in its own so-called homelands. Furthermore, residents of the ethnically based homelands were encouraged to promote their own ethnic languages. The acquisition of other ethnic groups' languages was discouraged, and so was free movement. The separate development scheme was part of the divide-and-rule colonial and apartheid tactic. Hostilities between the various ethnic groups led to the cultivation of negative attitudes towards other languages and their speakers. After the demise of apartheid, the new South Africa finds itself with "no single language of wider communication/lingua franca at the national level; there is no single 'neutral' language; and language was such a politicised matter that the choice of any language as official language and national language at the national level was regarded as highly controversial, even highly conflictual" (Webb, 1996: 140).

3. LANGUAGE PLANNING IN THE POST-APARTHEID ERA

3.1. AN OVERVIEW OF THE LANGUAGE PLANNING SITUATION

South Africa's new language policy is a product of the political transformation that started in the early 1990s. In 1990, the apartheid regime released Nelson Mandela and other political prisoners, unbanned the African National Congress and other political groupings, and set in motion negotiations for a political settlement. The negotiations culminated into the drafting of an interim constitution in 1993. The interim constitution governed South Africa covering the period of the first multiracial elections in 1994 up to the adoption of the 1996 constitution (Henrard, 2001). The climax of the political change came in 1994.

South Africa's new constitution, which was adopted in 1996, recognises[6] eleven official languages, nine of which are the previously marginalised African languages. The official languages then are: Sepedi,[7] Sesotho,[8] Setswana, siSwati, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, Afrikaans, English, isiNdebele, isiXhosa and isiZulu. The constitution further provides that recognising the historically

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[5] According to the 2001 population census, South Africa has roughly 45 million people. The majority 23.82 % of South Africans are isiZulu speakers, followed by isiXhosa (17.64 %), Afrikaans (13.35 %), Sepedi (9.39 %), English (8.20 %), Setswana (8.20 %), Sesotho (7.93 %), Xitsonga (4.44 %), siSwati (2.66 %), Tshivenda (2.28 %), isiNdebele (1.59 %), and other languages (0.48 %).

[6] According to Patten (2001: 695), a language is recognized in public life "when public services are offered and public business can be conducted in that language."

[7] Also known as Northern Sotho.

[8] Also known as Southern Sotho.

diminished use and status of the indigenous languages of our people, the state must take practical and positive measures to elevate the status and advance the use of these languages.

It is important at this stage to situate this language policy within Cobarrubias's (1983) framework of language planning ideologies. The framework comprises four language planning ideologies, namely: linguistic pluralism, linguistic assimilation, internationalisation, and vernacularisation. One should be careful not draw too sharp lines between the four categories since it is possible to have a polity that exhibits more than one language planning ideology. In the case of South Africa's new language policy, it is clear that that it is strongly rooted in linguistic pluralism. The direct opposite of linguistic pluralism is linguistic assimilation, whose goal is to have one dominant language that is used in official domains. The other languages are ignored and given no official recognition. Sometimes the unrecognised languages may even become targets of eradication efforts. By granting official recognition to eleven languages, and not only one or two, post-apartheid South Africa has gone a long way towards avoiding linguistic assimilation.

Internationalisation is also clearly visible in South Africa's language policy. This ideology refers to the granting of official status to an international language. This may not be the language spoken by the majority. It is a common practice in post-colonial Africa to have the ex-coloniser's language such as English, French or Portuguese serving as the official language of the state. It is argued that the adoption of such a language gives citizens the means through which to interact with the outer world because the language is a medium of wider communication. In the South African case, internationalisation is practised through the use of English as one of the official languages. Others would also argue that Afrikaans is also part of the internationalisation ideology since the language has European origin. This raises the difficult question: Is Afrikaans an African or European language? It is not my intention, in this paper, to re-open this controversial debate.

Vernacularization refers to a situation where an indigenous language is developed and made to function in domains such as education, the mass media and government services. The elevation of the nine African languages to official status is an example of vernacularization.[9] This is something that is not yet firmly established since English continues to dominate in official domains.

The South African constitution (as cited in Henrard, 2001) also spells out how the national and provincial governments should handle official languages:

> The national government and provincial governments may use any particular official languages for the purposes of government, taking into account usage, practicality, expense, regional circumstances and the balance of needs and the preferences of the population as a whole or in

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[9] Other examples of vernacularisation include Hebrew in Israel, Malay in Malaysia, Tok Pisin in Papua New Guinea, Quechua in Peru and Kiswahili in Tanzania.

the province concerned; but the national government and each provincial government must use at least two official languages.[10]

The constitution allows municipalities to take into account the language usage and preferences of their residents, and then formulate appropriate language policies. The national government and the provincial governments are required to regulate and monitor their use of official languages. The constitution further provides that all the eleven official languages must enjoy parity of esteem and must be treated equitably.

In a nutshell, the goals of this language policy are as follows:

(i)   to promote national unity within the country's linguistic and cultural diversity;

(ii)   to entrench democracy, which includes the protection of language rights;

(iii)   to promote multilingualism;

(iv)   to promote respect for and tolerance towards linguistic and cultural diversity;

(v)   to further the elaboration and modernisation of the African languages;

(vi)   to promote national economic development (Langtag Report, 1996).

3.2. SOME ENCOURAGING TRENDS

There are some encouraging trends that have come with the democratisation process in South Africa. It is to these trends that I now turn. In this section, I examine the following encouraging trends: the central position assigned to linguistic rights in the new constitution; the constitutional provision for the creation of bodies whose task is to serve as language rights watchdogs, namely the Pan South African Languages Board (PANSALB) and the Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities; the decentralisation of language planning; the culture of consultation and participatory democracy in the formulation of language policies.

To begin with, it is important to mention that the language clauses in the South African constitution have been particularly outstanding on linguistic rights. South Africa is "one of the rare nations in the world that recognise as fundamental the linguistic rights of individuals and groups" (Faingold, 2004: 12). The constitution is very explicit in terms of official languages. This is in contrast to countries such as Malawi and the USA whose constitutions do not

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[10] South Africa has nine provinces: Eastern Cape, Free State, Gauteng, Mpumalanga, KwaZulu-Natal, Northern Cape, Western Cape, North West, and Limpopo. Whilst speakers of the various languages are scattered throughout South Africa, most of them are to be found in large concentration in a particular province or provinces. For instance, the largest concentration of isiZulu speakers is found in KwaZulu-Natal.

spell out their respective official languages.[11] Whilst the South African constitution does provide for eleven official languages, it does not provide for a national language.[12] Bamgbose has observed that:

> Those wedded to the 'one language, one nation' 19th Century concept of nationhood will certainly be appalled by such a policy. But for those who have always advocated a multilingual approach to national development and integration, the policy is a perfectly logical one in the sociolinguistic and political circumstances (Bamgbose, 2000: 108).

Another welcome development in post-apartheid South Africa is that the constitution provides for the establishment of the PANSALB as a permanent watchdog over linguistic rights. PANSALB is mandated:

  (a) to promote and create conditions for the development and use of:
      i.   all the official languages;
      ii.   the Khoi, Nama and San languages; and
      iii. sign language.
  (b) to promote and ensure respect for:
      i.   all languages commonly used by communities in South Africa, including German, Greek, Gujarati, Hindi, Portuguese, Tamil, Telegu and Urdu; and
      ii.   Arabic, Hebrew, Sanskrit and other languages used for religious purposes in South Africa.

PANSALB is empowered by the constitution to investigate complaints about language rights violations from any individual, organisation or institution. At its hearings, both the complainants and respondents are supposed to be present; and depending on the findings, PANSALB may recommend steps to be taken by the appropriate party. However, some analysts (e.g. Ridge 2002: 47) regard PANSALB's mandate to be too tall an order.

As I mentioned earlier, human rights have been put at the centre of post-apartheid language planning. It is in this regard that the South African constitution provides for the creation of a Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities. The Commission is empowered to promote respect for the rights and interests of the numerous cultural, linguistic and religious communities of South Africa (Henrard, 2001). Among the powers of the Commission are:

  (i)   to monitor, investigate, research, educate, lobby, advise and report on any issue concerning the rights of cultural, religious and linguistic communities;

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[11] It is important to note that "even if a conscious choice is made not to declare any particular language 'official', as has been made in the United States, decisions still need to be made about the de facto language(s) of public communication" (Patten, 2001: 693).

[12] A national language, in this context, refers to a language that acts as a national symbol.

(ii)   to facilitate the resolution of conflicts or friction between any such community and an organ of state;

(iii)   to receive and deal with complaints and requests by cultural, religious or linguistic communities;

(iv)   to convene a yearly national conference of delegates from the various religious, cultural and linguistic communities and governmental and non-governmental role players.

The creation of the Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities entails that post-apartheid South Africa is interested in preserving linguistic diversity. This augurs well with the proponents of linguistic human rights who call for the revitalisation of minority languages in order to avoid the depletion of linguistic diversity (see Kymlicka & Patten, 2003). They, therefore, call on states to ensure that all languages are maintained. However, such a call is tantamount to ignoring the fact that some speakers of the minority languages have no wish to maintain their original tongue(s) for one reason or another. What the linguistic rights scholars and/or activists fail to notice is that economic incentives may be behind the desire of a group to replace its mother tongue with another language. While governments can formulate language policies that support the promotion and official recognition of minority languages in order to check language shift or death, the final determiners of the fate of any language are its native speakers. If speakers of a minority or marginalised language want to maintain it, it will be maintained. Governments can only complement the efforts of the speakers of the language.

The lack of consultations on language policy formulation is a widespread phenomenon in Africa (see Bamgbose, 1991). Directives, decrees and other top-to-bottom modes of language policy formulation are the order of the day.[13] Since the culture of consultations and fact-finding is absent in a number of African countries, we have policies that are not backed by research evidence or consultations. On a positive note, one notices that this no-consultation virus has not infected South Africa. In South Africa, there has been contributions from both academic and non-academic quarters such as media debates and submissions (e.g. in form of letters to the editor), deliberations and recommendations of learned societies, political party manifestos, and

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[13] A good example is when Malawi rushed to issue a directive on mother tongue instruction in 1996 before studies and consultations on the acceptability, relevance and practicality of the policy had been done (see Kamwendo, 1997, 2000; Kishindo, 1998). See also Kawale (2000) on the need to consult what he calls "the owners" of a language on issues like orthography reform and the naming of languages. Kawale (2000) has also called for the establishment in Malawi of what he calls a language commission, "an independent body which can look at the language policy and its implementation" (Kawale, 2000: 144). Kawale adds: "No one ministry should monopolize the use and policy formulation of Malawian languages. All the various interested and competent parties should be involved in the language policy formulation through the proposed Language Commission" (Kawale, 2000: 145).

contributions from specialised committees such as the Language Plan Task Group, commonly known by its acronym, LANGTAG (see Bamgbose, 2000: 109). The political negotiations that led to the first multiracial and multiparty elections of 1994 did not omit the language question. The language question was one of the key topics during the drafting of the constitution (Henrard, 2001).

LANGTAG was established in 1995 and tasked to advise the Minister of Arts, Culture, science and Technology on a national language plan for South Africa. The LANGTAG committee, chaired by Neville Alexander, prepared a blueprint for language planning and submitted it to the Minister in 1996. The LANGTAG Report (1996) is a statement of South Africa's language-related needs and priorities. Within its short life span (eight months) and a meagre budget, the LANGTAG Committee managed to come up with a document that has been hailed as "a visionary document that builds on validating all the languages of South Africa, and links language needs and strategies to the economy, education, cultural change and democratisation" (Skutnabb-Kangas, *et al.* 2001: 146).[14]

Since language planning assumes that there are some language problems that have to be solved in one way or another, the complex linguistic situation in South Africa cannot be adequately handled by centralised language planning alone. It is against this background that the constitution and the language plan provide room for decentralised language planning so that provinces can effectively handle their province-specific or province-unique language situations and/or problems. The main concern here is the degree of local initiative involved in the formulation and implementation of a national plan (Tollefson, 1981).

3.3. SOME WORRISOME TRENDS

I now turn to what is considered to be the negative side of the language planning process in post-apartheid South Africa. There are a number of worrisome trends. These trends include the drift towards unilingualism (English); the presence of escape clauses in the constitutional provisions on language; the invisibility of the language factor in high profile programmes such as the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), the African Renaissance, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and others; low funding priority given to language issues; the low esteem in which African languages are held; the low level of corpus development of African languages; and the lack of political will to turn the grand language plan into reality.

The first worrisome trend in the post-apartheid South Africa is the ever growing hegemony of English which is at odds with the new policy stipulations (see Bernsten, 2001; Brock-Utne, 2002; Kamwangamalu, 2000; Mutasa, 2000; Raidt, 1999: 162; Webb, 1996; Wright, 2002). The LANGTAG Report (1996) had also expressed concern over the steady drift towards English unilingualism

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[14] For a critique of the Langtag process and its report, see Ridge (2000).

in public services, a development that disadvantages the majority who do not speak English. Kamwangamalu (2000), for instance, has observed that contrary to the aspirations of the constitution, there is no parity of esteem and equality among the eleven official languages. He notes that a language hierarchy in which English is at the top, Afrikaans in the middle, and the African languages at the bottom, is the order of the day. He goes further to show how English dominates domains such as the mass media, education, the legislature, the judiciary, the army, and so on. Basically, it is still English and Afrikaans that are the languages of economic and political power. Thus, the majority remains disadvantaged because, to borrow Bamgbose's (2000) terminology, language excludes them from active participation in political and economic endeavours.

Satyo says he has:

sneaking suspicion that actually the policy of eleven languages in fact translates into 11=1+1=2. We are back to square one... we are presented not with eleven languages but rather with a menu of eleven languages from which to choose two formerly privileged languages (Satyo, 1999: 156).

Neville Alexander echoes Satyo's worry: "We have one of the most progressive constitutional arrangements ever in regard to the language question, yet indications are that we are about to go the way of all neo-colonial flesh also in this regard" (Alexander, 2003: 23).

It is also worrying that there are escape clauses in the constitutional clauses on language (see Bamgbose, 1991, 2000, 2003; Satyo, 1999: 156). Escape clauses give governments and other bodies excuses for not adhering to the constitutional provisions in full.

What is also worrying is that whilst there is a recognition of the critical role of language in national development, there is no meaningful attempt to incorporate the language factor into national, regional and continental socio-economic development plans. In South Africa, for example, the language question was not adequately taken on board the Reconstruction and Development Programme (see Langtag Report, 1996). Even in President Mbeki's African Renaissance, there is an "inadequate representation of the language issue and the role of African mother tongues in education and development, both of the individual and society in general" (Wolff, 2003: 2). Wolff notes that it is common to omit the language question from key development agenda or programmes such as NEPAD. On his part, Alexander (2003) argues strongly that there can be no genuine African Renaissance without taking the African indigenous languages on board.

South Africa has elements of "both the 'developed' and the 'developing' worlds" (Reagan, 2001: 52). Reagan goes on to observe that South Africa is "by far the wealthiest and the most developed of all the nations of Africa" and that the country has "an infrastructure that in many ways parallels those of Western Europe and North America" (Reagan, 2001: 52). However, South Africa has numerous problems of serious social and economic inequalities, and limited

resources that are too insufficient for the many high expectations the citizens have.

By the end of the day, everything boils down to priorities: "Language issues rank low in comparison with jobs, crime-prevention, housing and health" (Wright, 2002: 172). There is no doubt that the policy of official linguistic pluralism is not cheap. One thing that is clear is that governments are reluctant to invest in language policies on account of cost, yet "in other areas of social policy, we are, to some degree, willing to tolerate costly or time-consuming procedure to promote equality" (Patten, 2001: 702). Providing funding for language issues is not a priority. This is a common practice in Africa. In addition, not many donors have serious interest in language matters. If at all they show interest, then it is when metropolitan languages such as English, French or Portuguese are involved.[15] "Although large sums of aid money are being poured into various programmes of democratisation and 'good governance', donors' lack of interest in language-related issues betrays a narrow-minded understanding of what democracy entails in Southern Africa" (Englund, 2004: 197).

The few donors that show interest in the development of African languages are sometimes suspected of having a hidden agenda. I will give here a Malawian example in which the German technical co-operation agency, GTZ, is involved. Some people in Malawi (among them politicians and government officials) have been sceptical of GTZ's support for local language development (see Kamwendo, 2000, on the GTZ-funded mother tongue education project in Malawi). Some people have argued that at a time when the standards of English continued to go down, it was counterproductive that GTZ was supporting the development of local languages. It has been argued that in supporting the development of local languages, and not English, GTZ has no interest in seeing Africans or Malawians, for that matter, acquire the international language(s) of socio-economic and political power. To this end, references to the history of South Africa when the apartheid regime used mother tongue instruction not to empower but to disempower the majority Africans (see Unesco 1967). Others have even referred to Germany's own colonial past - its exclusionist approach that denied the colonial subjects any access to the language of power, the language of the colonial master. Ironically, it was this same policy that contributed significantly to the development of Kiswahili as an official language in the then German colony of Tanganyika (now independent Tanzania). Given that there are many misconceptions and fears surrounding the use of African languages in education, South Africa, and indeed other African countries, need to mount language awareness campaigns that can spell out clearly what each country's policy entails.

One painful reality is that African languages are held in low esteem, the result being "the continued stigmatisation of the indigenous African languages"

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[15] See Mazrui (1997) who accuses the World Bank of using double standards in its support for the use of African languages in African education, with these double standards working in favour of Western languages (see also Brock-Utne, 2002, for the case of Tanzania).

(Wolff, 2003: 9). African languages have "a very low social and political status, being seen as almost meaningless in public life" (Webb, 1996: 141). Any talk about the elevation of African languages is seen as a roadblock to the acquisition of English. For example, when Malawi issued a policy directive instituting mother tongue instruction in primary grades one to four, there was a loud outcry that the government was out to kill English - something which would lower the education standards (see Kamwendo, 1997, 2003; Kishindo, 1998). When Professor Al Mtenje of the University of Malawi presented an inaugural lecture on 26th July, 2002, on *The role of language in national development: A case for local languages,* he was accused in certain Malawian quarters of "wishing to undermine English" (Englund, 2004: 196).[16] In Tanzania, an opposition politician had declared that if elected as president, one of his first tasks would be to introduce English as a medium of instruction straight away on the first day of grade one (Brock-Utne, 2002). There is no doubt that in the situations described above, English is perceived to be synonymous with education itself. As such, it still remains a tall order to promote the use of African languages as media of instruction.

It is not enough to simply declare the previously marginalised languages as official languages. There is an urgent need to have this declaration of official recognition accompanied by appropriate corpus development. Language planning has been categorised into status planning and corpus planning. Status planning refers to the choice of official language(s). This is the process that determines what languages shall work in what domains. Corpus planning, on the other hand, is the selection and codification of norms such as in the writing of grammars, the development and standardisation of orthographies, and the compilation of dictionaries. This is the technical empowerment of a selected language or dialect. The objective of corpus planning is to enable a language or dialect to carry out effectively the functions that have been allocated to it. The case of Afrikaans can be used positively for the benefit of African languages in South Africa. There is a lot that can be learnt from how Afrikaans was developed. The case of Afrikaans has shown "how an underdeveloped colloquial language can be fully developed so as to compete with world languages in the technological era" (Raidt, 1999: 167).

As it has already been mentioned, the South African language policy has been heavily inspired by the linguistic human rights paradigm (Blommaert,

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[16] Ngugi wa Thiong'o, one of the staunchest proponents of the elevation of African languages, has also been accused of waging a war against English. Recently, Ngugi clarified his position on English as follows: "There is nothing wrong with European languages, there is nothing wrong with Portuguese, English or French. But there is something not right about people abandoning their own languages for others. You have two legs already, why talk about borrowing somebody else's legs? We are not talking of disengagement with the world but engaging with the world, but from a more confident base" (cited in Palmberg, 2004: 19). It is also worth mentioning that Ngugi wa Thiong'o did abandon English as his medium of literary and scholarly output, but the realities of working in exile in the USA forced him to reverse his decision. See Gikandi (2000) on Ngugi's return to English.

2001).[17] This is a strength, but it can also turn out to be a weakness. One weakness of the linguistic human rights paradigm is its idealism. The idealism associated with the linguistic human rights paradigm is also reflected in the naively phrased clauses of the Universal Declaration on Linguistic Rights.[18] As an example, let us consider Article 25 of the said Declaration: "All language communities are entitled to have at their disposal all the human and material resources necessary to ensure that their language is present to the extent they desire at all levels of education within their territory: properly trained teachers, appropriate teaching methods, textbooks, finance, buildings and equipment, traditional and innovative technology." It is simply unrealistic to expect all languages to be used at all levels of education.

Within the linguistic human rights paradigm, there is a general assumption that mother tongue education is an empowering process. Yet South African history gives us evidence to the effect that mother tongue education can be used for disempowering certain groups of people (see, for example, Unesco 1967). Therefore, there is nothing inherently empowering or disempowering in any language - it all depends on what one intends to achieve with the use of a language. Yet proponents of the linguistic rights paradigm often ignore this reality when they proclaim the emancipatory and empowering nature of mother tongue education.

By the end of the day, the success of South Africa's bold language plan depends on political will. Where there is a lack of political will to implement policies, one is bound to see declarations without implementation (Bamgbose, 1991). Neville Alexander (2003) has accused the South African leadership at various levels of paying lip service to the implementation of a policy of functional multilingualism. In an interview with Brock-Utne, Neville Alexander was unambiguous in voicing his frustration: "There is a lack of political will on the part of the current government to have our progressive language policy work" (Brock-Utne, 2002: 12).

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

I agree with Satyo (1999) that South Africans should not spend a lot of time congratulating themselves on having produced a multilingualism-friendly constitution. Implementation is the key issue. "The constitution cannot implement itself; it needs to be implemented" (Satyo, 1999: 158). There is a need, therefore, not only for South Africa, but for the entire sub-Saharan region, to move from words to action. In Africa, there have had many charters, plans,

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[17] See the debate between Blommaert (2001) and Skutnabb-Kangas *et al.* (2001) on the linguistic human rights paradigm.

[18] According to Skutnabb-Kangas *et al.* (2001: 146), the draft Universal Declaration of Language Rights that was handed to Unesco in 1996 was rejected by the majority of the states because it contained some "naive demands."

declarations on language planning and policy, but very little has so far been accomplished. It would appear that Africa has specialised in coming up with glossy plans that remain unimplemented. For the implementations of language plans to succeed, the main propelling power is political will. Where there is political will, as was the case with the corpus development of Afrikaans (Raidt, 1999), there is always a way. As Chisanga has put it, "it will require a great deal of political will and serious financial commitment to bring the nine African official languages to a level even remotely comparable to that of English and Afrikaans in terms of linguistic development with the accompanying written materials needed in the education system" (Chisanga, 2002: 103).

As I conclude this paper, Bamgbose's critique of the post-apartheid language policy is pertinent. Bamgbose notes that South Africa distinguishes itself by: respect for multilingualism being one of the main pillars of the language policy, a language policy that has a legal backing, the democratisation of the policy-making process, and the serious attention given to language planning. However, South Africa "shares some of the weaknesses of language planning practices in Africa, especially lack of a detailed plan of action for the implementation of proclaimed policy" (Bamgbose, 2003: 56).

Despite the fact that South Africa is travelling on a rather bumpy road towards the implementation of a language rights-oriented language policy, the country, backed by its enormous resources, still remains Africa's best model and leader in language planning. Although the gains South Africa has made in the past ten years have been remarkable, there is still more that needs to be done. It is certainly no easy walk to linguistic freedom and equality.

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