INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES AS ‘DEVELOPMENTALS’
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Abstract

Current language policies in sub-Saharan Africa are largely characterised by the domination of the ex-colonial languages as the official ones of political, economic, judicial forms of national communication. They also dominate education systems and curriculum. This has an extremely negative effect on those minority groups who cannot speak English or French because they often have no access to educational institutions or literacy programmes in which they could be taught these languages. Fluency would enable them to communicate on a wider national level and enhance their political voice and ability to exercise their rights. Current policy works to exclude them from any strategies or decisions made by a centralised government that operates in a different language. Such policies have maintained themselves since independence based on the idea that it would be foolish to promote indigenous languages in a globalising and rapidly modernising world, where languages of wider communication such as English are essential so as not to alienate oneself from the benefits of modernity. While the growing dominance of English in particular cannot be denied, that African states have done little to improve access on a larger scale for their populations to learn these languages puts such rhetoric to the sword. The irony is that in Africa it is the dominating ex-colonial languages that are in fact the ‘minority’ ones in terms of the numbers of speakers and this excludes majority populations from participating in national movements that could potentially facilitate a national development initiative. If indigenous languages were accorded more prominence, if people were given the right to speak, and use, their languages at greater levels of organisation and influence, such as in political and educational domains as well as in mass media, would not their languages grow and develop? Since marginalised groups are so often reflected by a marginalised and minimally used language, it is suggested here that according these languages more prominence would be mirrored by the empowerment and bettering of the plight’s of Africa’s poorest.
Introduction

Language and its relationship to development theory are estranged in the sea of discourse discussing the best route for Africa’s poverty amelioration. This is peculiar given that most of the continent’s countries are multilingual with countries such as Nigeria speaking some 400 languages and Cameroon 238! (Robinson 1990; 53). Almost as a quick-fix solution to this daunting diversity, most leaderships at independence decided to make the colonial language the official language of national communication, administration and medium of education from early primary school up to university level. Herman Batibo highlights the prominence of this strategy; “...the majority of countries in Africa...81.8%, have adopted an exoglossic language policy, in that they rely heavily on an ex-colonial language for their official or national communication. Only a small percentage of [nations]...use an indigenous language, either exclusively or dominantly in their formal functions” (Batibo 2006; 263). Policies such as this have dominated since independence and have created a situation where it is accepted that ex-colonial languages are those of status and superiority and African languages are restricted to the informal sectors.

At the very heart of the problem is the fact that the majority of people in these nations have no mastery of English or French because in order to learn them, one must go to school, and given the infamy of the poverty of the African education system, many have no opportunity to do so. Even a fortunate school-attendee is not guaranteed fluency however, since this will probably require a pupil to complete (at least) primary school. With the high drop out rates of African children due to economic or familial restraints, this is far from assured. This situation is conducive to the creation of an elite who have had access to, and completed, both primary and secondary schooling, as Bamgbose writes; “Since the imported official languages are spread through the educational process and education was, and still is, largely restricted to a few, the population came to be divided into an elite that could speak the official language and the masses that were illiterate” (Bamgbose 1991; 1).

Herein lies the basis of my research question - the seemingly insurmountable gulf in power between a ruling elite and the masses they ignore is seen here as one of, if not the, major impediment to African development. Does empowering minority language
speakers, precisely through their language, offer an alternative path to installing democratic principles and processes at all levels of society, most importantly, at the very grassroots? In this way, can linguistic diversity be used to aid the developmental process, not shunned as an inconvenient drain on resources and a divisive reality? Indigenous language is explored here as a tool, not a solution (and this tempering is key), to facilitating stronger, more participatory democratic cultures in African nations where people must accorded greater rights in the political processes of their nations before they will see their standard of living improved and human rights adhered to (Sen 2000). It makes little sense in a continent of such amazing linguistic diversity that language policies that shut this amazing resource out have persisted so long.

From January to July 2008 I lived in Ghana and taught at a community school in Accra, Ghana. This experience was the seed of my interest in the role language has to play in development and particularly, children's education within this. Education will necessarily be one of the major driving forces behind a strong national development strategy and so it is crucial that curricula are relevant, that materials and resources are available and that teachers are trained adequately. It is of no surprise that in many developing areas this is not the case, and the school at which I taught was no different. Indeed, it was severely under-resourced. Fifty seven to ten year olds sat in rows in what can only be described as a shed with a corrugated iron roof, baking in the midday sun, as we struggled through a,b,c's and 1,2,3's. Pencils and paper were sparse to say the least, elbow space for writing at, quite literally, a premium. The school was situated in Nima, a suburb - or 'zongo' - of Hausa speaking peoples, originating from Northern Nigeria, but having lived in this area for several generations. No classes existed in Hausa at this school. From 9am to 4pm they sat in this tiny space being taught in English. I taught them English, in English, when the majority had little or no capacity to understand English. The teachers taught them only in English, beating those who spoke 'vernacular' (i.e. Hausa) with a stick. In six months, I did see some of them improve - the pupils who perhaps has a stronger desire to learn, or who were innately more academic than others. Most, however, fell asleep, or lost interest - to the detriment of the rest of the class - and were beaten as a result. This is in Accra, a capital city, not a remote rural area.
It wasn't long before I begun to question the reasoning behind Ghana's preference for educating its children in English. I remember one day attempting to explain to a sea of blank faces what a 'leaf' was. The teacher recognised my plight and entered the classroom, explaining what my (admittedly awful) drawing was on the flaking blackboard. She did so in Hausa, and explained in quite some detail as to the nature of the leaf, leaving and returning moments later with a small plant, she continued, animatedly. The children came alive! Hands shot up in the air, discussion carried on between the children. The plant was a major topic of discussion, and, from what I could see, because it had taken place in Hausa. Suddenly, the children had been involved, been a part of the class and could offer opinions. All of which is lost in the authoritarian-style adherence to Ghanaian curriculum. This was the first, but not only, such incident which led me to question how productive my six months of teaching was, compared to what it could have been had they learned local history, geography, biology, environmental and social studies in their own language. This was not an option, I was told; 'What would be the point of this when we are preparing them for Junior Secondary School where all subjects are taught in English? They would not be able to attend JSS if we taught them in Hausa.'

The language policies of the Ghanaian government seem obstinate. This attitude characterises leaderships’ typical approach to the language question to date (Bamgbose 1991). I could not, indeed cannot, fathom why so many children are being cut off from a relevant, worthwhile, engaging education by such one-track language policies. It is detrimental to a nation itself when there are whole generations at a time being cut off from a positive educational experience in their most formative years - growing up understanding that their mother-tongue is in some way inadequate for the establishment they attend every day.

It is this strangely sad experience that led me to ask whether the promotion of indigenous languages could work as a development strategy. Could a change at an educative level slowly inform a change of attitude at higher levels of governance? In asking this, what is really being questioned is whether change is possible to language choice in the spheres of education, communication and administration. Standing by indigenous languages as development tools means seeing them as ways in which African leaders can engage, not exclude, as they currently do, their citizenry in
political, economic, social and cultural issues. Yet in the face of the sheer amount of languages spoken in sub-Saharan nations, how practical and how realistic is it for states to cater to such a vast array of needs and rights?

Governments employ current language policy based on the positive rhetoric that exoglossic language dominance enables access to the languages of globalisation and modernity, and is therefore an economically (and thus developmentally) beneficial policy. In truth, such rhetoric contrasts spectacularly with many of the continent’s nation’s economic plights. It is in the face of poverty, dubious democratic practices and a disenfranchised and expendable majority that the language question must be accorded the time, resources and materials by development think-tanks, donors, organisations and heads of state.

In search of answering the question, the method adopted is one which takes language through some of the core issues related to development theory and attaching the significance of language to these issues. After highlighting the link between development and democracy as our base, language and the hegemony of the nation state ideal that seeks the creation of a ‘one-language – one nation’ as a pre-requisite for development will be looked at. This will be in conjunction with a closer examination of the elitist control over language policy and how this has coincided with a desire to form nation-states along the Western model and a subsequent desire to homogenise language use. The tendency for development strategies to reflect Western trends and interests will also be scrutinised – and how the maintenance of ex-colonial languages serves to provide a means by which Africa is unable to break with its past and forge a new identity – remaining subservient to international financial institutions and international business interests. Tanzania at independence under Julius Nyerere forms a particularly valid case in point given his somewhat radical approach to language policy, characterised by his adoption of Swahili as the national language and his drive to see Swahili developed into expressing new concepts in educative, economical, scientific, technological and political domains. It is worth looking at the strategy in order to extract both positive and negatives of African language promotion and both sides of the Tanzanian story will be studied.
Thereafter, it will be pertinent to look at the theory of ‘Linguistic Citizenship’, attributed to Christopher Stroud. Having looked at the role of states in implementing change to language choice and use, Stroud’s work enables us to examine the other side of the coin. It is more concerned with individual and group agency at the grassroots in order to change attitudes towards and use of indigenous languages. It is explicit in its orientation of dealing with language problems as crucial to a viable development strategy and is particularly aware of the potential for grassroots empowerment through indigenous languages and in their offering of solutions. It is however, very contestable, and a critique is necessary to seek the feasibility of Stroud’s suggestions for change and development through new language outlooks.

The most contentious issue, and perhaps the most important if indigenous languages are ever to be used as development tools, is their relationship to education and if, as seen as the gateway to informing new generations about development and the world around them, is best done in the mother-tongue. Several African nations have adopted mother-tongue education at the primary school level and the success of these initiatives will be examined. The United Nation’s Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) has been prominent in advocating mother-tongue programmes at early educational stages, which would facilitate a healthier, faster, more relevant and progressive learning environment for children (Hansford 1994). Furthermore, it lays the basis for learning wider-spoken regional or foreign languages to be learnt as subjects as a child makes educational progress. In essence, organisations such as UNESCO and writers such as Hansford recognise that it needn’t be a ‘indigenous languages versus ex-colonial language’ stand-off. Rather, there is an acceptance of educational reforms and improvements as a driving force of any national development strategy and that the inclusion and use of indigenous languages in schooling have a place in good (and better) quality education. Here is the first limitation I would like to put upon this study – the focus is upon mother-tongue education at the primary school level, which is the level at which UNESCO advocate. The reason for this is largely due to space constraints, the argument for pushing indigenous languages beyond the primary education level is strong but highly contestable and I wanted to avoid slipping into the polemical for huge swaths of this essay.
This focus on primary levels of education has also forced a discussion of adult literacy in indigenous languages off the agenda. This was a decision made on the basis of wanting a refined focus to the essay. Embarking on this discussion would have distracted attention away from the central theme of change being instigated from educational reforms at the primary level. So too has a section on the relationship between the media and indigenous languages in Africa fallen by the wayside. This is because I felt it came across somewhat ad hoc to some of the core elements of this essay.

A final limitation is the heavy reliance on the work of Ayo Bamgbose, particularly in the second chapter, ‘Elitism and the Nation-state’. In this area, his work is indeed predominant, and as I stress in this paper, given development’s tendency to give the language question a wide berth, I have been forced to rely in places on just a few sources – Bamgbose in particular.

**Democratising Development**

It is crucial to establish what ‘development’ means in the context of this writing. There are multiple understandings and opinions on what exactly constitutes ‘development’; what it aims to provide and what a previously ‘underdeveloped’ community or nation would look like once ‘developed’. There are a plethora of issues which appear to rise and fall in importance depending on policies adopted or indeed the idiosyncratic tendencies of donors, governments and NGOs.

Nations with high poverty rates are not only characterised by high levels of disease, poor education and sanitation, as well as a history of civil war, they are also well known for having governments that have long remained aloof and apart from their majority populations. There is an overwhelming consensus in much development literature that the African masses have little or no say in the decisions which affect them - their lives are dominated by the decisions of a far off, centralised, elite-based government which has continually failed to represent its citizenry in the decision making process. The work of Amartya Sen (Sen 1999; 2001) has informed much of the basis of this thinking. For him, development is a process whereby greater
‘freedoms’ are sought for the majority within society, based on the understanding that the greater freedom an individual has, the more developed that society must be;

“Development has to be more concerned with enhancing the lives we lead and the freedoms we enjoy. Expanding the freedoms that we have reason to value not only makes our lives richer…but also allows us to be fuller social persons, exercising our own volitions and interacting with – and influencing – the world in which we live” (Sen 2001; 14/15).

I will work to stress that if we value and therefore strive towards greater levels of democracy, accountability, participation and transparency in developing nations, then so too should we acknowledge the role that language can play in either harming or helping our journey down this path. Thus far, the language question has only been afforded at best a minor prominence in development schools of thought, literature and project implementation of policy changes. It has, I feel, been to development's own detriment that language’s relationship to many developmental issues has been overlooked, its potential as a tool for harnessing population participation and fostering strong democratic values amongst people has gone to waste.

This is, however, changing slowly. In the last decade or so far more literature about the centrality of grassroots empowerment and participatory development as inclusive and democratic tools has necessarily brought fresh considerations of language policy to the fore. Christopher Stroud (2001), Serge Latouche (1993), Artruro Escobar (1995) and Mahjid Rahemna (1997) writings have all been vital additions to such thinking. As will be examined here, purported solutions to vast linguistic diversity do not always fall on the side of embracing these languages as a path to democratic inclusion. Some still see keeping the languages of wider communication as dominant as the only viable language policy of an underdeveloped nation, whilst others are advocating different levels of acceptance of local linguistic diversity. There is a growing consideration being accorded to the role language does (or does not) play in development's path, yet what is little credited is the inter-relationship between democracy, language and development (Bamgbose 1994, Stroud 2001).
Development is (or ought to be) the path to creating more accountable and transparent governments, whose futures rely on them listening to, and providing for, their populations. This means taking into account those most marginalised, those at the very grassroots levels of society and building better, regular and more meaningful means of communications and decision making with the bodies that have the power to affect their lives. Essentially, I argue that more fervently democratic societies would be inherently more developmental because people at the grassroots levels, currently all too often marginalised and therefore impoverished, would be able to more effectively voice their opinions and needs through democratic channels. “Developing effective mechanisms for the involvement of poor communities in policy decisions...increases the state’s administrative capabilities while at the same time advancing the democratic values of participation and local democracy” (Singh 2003; 28).

Building cultures based upon genuinely democratic values as a prerequisite for development is now advocated by strong voices within the development school of thought (e.g. Harber 1997, Hartwick & Peet 1999, Seligson & Passe-Smith 1997). Where I seek to advocate a somewhat fresher and certainly less examined side of fostering such a participatory environment is in the primacy accorded to language. It has been an oversight for the proponents of this outlook to assume that democratic societies can be built in multi-lingual nations without attempting to answer the ‘language question’ (Bamgbose 1991). Linguistic diversity has traditionally been viewed as an obstacle to democracy (Wolf & Igboanusi 2006). Yet this is unjustified, as we shall subsequently see – on the contrary, finding a way to accommodate indigenous languages within the confines of the modern nation-state structure (with which post-colonial Africa is now unquestionably forced to work within) could help foster truly democratic societies (Bamgbose 1991). Such a standpoint derives from the fact that so many are left voiceless because the language they speak holds no weight as a language of national communication. A situation currently exists where English and French dominate education of all levels as well as politics, economics and judicial matters. Essentially, they are the ‘language of governance’ and those millions failed by weak education systems for which Africa has become infamous (Singh et al 2003) have no access nor ability to effectively communicate with the government. Elitism, exclusion and thus underdevelopment are the perceived consequences and here I work
to examine ways in which indigenous language promotion could eliminate this self-
perpetuating practice, which has characterised post-independence language policies.

Indigenous languages are not argued to be development's 'saving grace', rather they
are seen as a tool with which to facilitate democratic advancement by creating not
only wider acceptance of existing diversity but also of facilitating a greater number of
social opportunities to speakers of minority languages. Accepting and appreciating the
cultural and social value of indigenous tongues, and incorporating them more
formally into political and educational sectors is a means by which “…individuals can
effectively shape their own destiny...” (Sen 2001; 11). At present, so many find
themselves subservient to a system which limits their potential through denying their
mother-tongue use outside of the informal sector.

Elitism and the Nation-State

One of the most common objections thrown against the promotion of indigenous
languages in developing countries is that their increased use would merely serve as a
means to divide people and create ethnic tensions since most nations in Africa are
multilingual. African languages have often been seen as divisive – particularly in
nations where there are some four hundred of them as in Nigeria (Batibo 2005).
Traditionally, this has been viewed as an assault on the stability of a country, and thus
its ability to develop, since differences in language are seen to facilitate feelings of
‘separateness’ and pit a multitude of ethnic identities against one another. Bamgbose
citing Schwarz writes “…differences between indigenous languages keep the people
apart, perpetuate ethnic hostilities, weaken national loyalties and increase the danger
of separatist sentiment” (Bamgbose 1991; 14). There is a general assumption that
linguistically heterogeneous states, precisely because they struggle to attain social
cohesion amongst such vast ethnic variety, remain economically underdeveloped in
comparison to linguistically homogenous ones. The following quote summarises the
preference for the one-language framework;

“…the advantages claimed for the model are that it strengthens national unity, makes
planning easier, as there will be no duplication of effort (for example, there will be
common educational facilities), there will be no communication gap between the
This quest for a homogenous nation-state reflects the economic outlook that has dominated development strategies since independence. “National development is usually described in terms of economic growth, attainment of economic targets, increase in Gross National Product, rise in per capita income…” (Bangboso 1994; 37). An established, secure nation-state with a centralised government are earmarks of modernity and thus remain by and large unquestioned tenets of development theory; “The nation state remains the bedrock of the political world order, exercising internal political and legal jurisdiction over its citizens, and claiming external rights to sovereignty and self government….it is often viewed as the apogee of modernity and progress” (May 2000; 369). The appeal of such a ‘fortified’ nation-state can thus be seen for African leaders searching for purely socio-economic development.

The modern nation state seeking increases in GDP comes hand in hand with this notion of a common national language as vital to the efficient running of the country and thus “…the remaining minority languages become associated with tradition and obsolescence” (ibid; 370). It is in answer to the questions of how best to avoid ethnic tensions and how to secure the domination of the ‘unified nation-state’ for economic growth’ that most leaderships on the continent have felt it best to adopt (or maintain, as is easily argued) the ex-colonial languages as both national and official languages. “…the problematic relationship between the state and language…is canalized around the ideal of a single, national language” (Fardon & Furniss 1994; 5). Choosing the ex-colonial language as the official language is often seen as a ‘neutral’ choice. That is, no one tribe or group of people is favoured by their own particular language having been given credence over others. Everyone is at a level playing field and leaders feel that in this way they avoid charges of ‘favouritism’.

However, given the sixty or so years since independence for the majority of the continent and the concurrent domination of ex-colonial languages, it is all too apparent that such a choice has neither rid nations of intra-ethnic fighting nor secessionist movements against the state itself – the reality remains that despite these policies African nations are still very far from being homogenous units. Bamgbose is
critical of the assumption that language is necessarily divisive. Rather, he sees language as a convenient hook upon which inequalities and sufferings deriving from other issues are hung. Inequality derives more from;

“exploitation of ethnicity by the elite in order to gain political or economic advantage, the problem of sharing scarce resources…the use of official languages, such as English and French…is not only to defeat the main aim of mass participation in development, but also to limit the advantages accruing from foreign industry and investment to the privileged urban elite” (Bamgbose 1994; 35; italics added).

While governments have employed LWCs under the rhetoric of conflict-prevention and equality of standing, very rarely has the policy been accompanied by an acknowledgement that very few of their populace actually can claim to have fluency in the language. This requires education, which will be dealt with in larger discussion later on in this paper, but suffice it to say here that the availability (and quality) of schooling leaves much to be desired and people are left disenfranchised by a system which purports to help them but in reality excludes them. With majority populations having such limited grasp of their nation’s ‘official’ language they can have no part in, or even understanding of, the economic, political, let alone educational processes which impact so surely upon their lives.

Where Bamgbose talks of the access to scarce resources as creating conflict and division in society, it would seem through a lack of will to disseminate opportunities for their populations to learn these official LWCs to an adequate level, that these languages themselves become a scarce resource. The situation across the continent is therefore one in which “indigenous languages remain widely used but unfairly reined in…large numbers…are linguistically and educationally excluded from the corridors of power” (Edwards 2006; 28).

It is with this exclusion of the majority then that we begin to realise how the use and promotion of indigenous languages in their locales could be a means of empowerment and increased democratic participation and accountability. “The point which is often ignored is that the logic of mass participation points to not less, but increased use of
the many languages available in a country in order to reach the widest possible segment of the community” (Bamgbose 1991; 47).

Bamgbose’s writing is here suggestive of the glaring oversight which has embodied post-independence language policies; that linguistic diversity is a resource for democracy building and should be used to develop values which embrace this diversity, not shun it. Adopting policies which employ LWCs unanimously is distinctly undemocratic and thus runs contrary to many African nations claim to be liberal democracies.

When leaders view the multi-lingual make-up of their countries as an obstacle, not a resource, they look to overcome it with large sweeping policies of LWC preference in political, social and economic matters. We have seen that this alienates the most disenfranchised speakers of minority languages further from the decision making process. Bamgbose sees this apparent lack of will or desire to try something new with regard to language policy, as a historical hang-up from colonial times – what he terms the ‘Inheritance Situation’. By this he means that the roles of both indigenous and colonial languages have maintained their respective statuses as subservient and dominant. Colonial languages as those of the ruling white and dominating all levels of higher education and politics, while African languages remained, if not entirely excluded, as they were in the French and Portuguese colonies, then at most as the language used at the lower echelons of society, such as initial literacy or the medium of instruction at primary schools in British territories. Ending these roles has proved difficult, if not impossible to date, in spite of the half-century since independence,

“Since colonial practice gave pride of place to the colonial language, breaking away should mean according a greater role to indigenous languages...African countries remain prisoners of the past. The established practices are so overwhelming that it becomes virtually impossible to break away from them” (Bamgbose 1991; 70).

It appears unbalanced that governments have implemented foreign tongues at all levels of society while somehow overlooking people’s inability to communicate effectively in these languages. It is contradictory that while the evils of colonialism are condemned so vehemently by many African leaders, there has been little genuine
attempt at fostering language policies in which African languages are given prominence. Such a contradictory environment is not one in which a ‘developmental’ outlook is easily planted and nurtured. Katupha writes “…the language of the former colonial power is used for official communication while social communication relies largely on African languages” (Katupha 1994; 91). Blommaert sees this contradiction as “blocking the mind of the continent…[there is] a profound incongruity in colonial languages speaking for the continent…Africa must firmly reject this incongruity and affirm a new beginning by returning to its languages and heritage” (Blommaert 2001; 132). In order to garner the national unity African governments seem to esteem so highly, it can only reach their masses through local language promotion. The ongoing domination of English and French represent a clear lack of political will to democratise language policy. It seems very few African governments have given the language question the attention it so clearly deserves and “it indicates clearly that the powers that be do not have a coherent national language plan. It also shows they do not understand, or do not care about, the relationship between language policy and economic development and between language policy and social cohesion in a multilingual society” (Alexander 2006; 246). This laissez faire attitude seems to point to the fact that it is easier for African leaders to maintain the status quo they were left with than to ‘risk’ change.

**Tanzania, Swahili and Nyerere – A Case in Point?**

That said, Julius Nyerere, the first President of Tanzania in 1961, was a staunch advocate of the promotion and employment of Swahili in all social, political, economic and cultural aspects of Tanzanian life as a vital trigger to national unity and development. He saw the dominance of English as an obstacle to national development because it stood in the way of the intellectualisation of Swahili – the language of the people.

The example of Tanzania is particularly useful to look at in exploring the possibilities of whether indigenous languages have potential for spearheading a development model for the 21st Century. Nyerere heightened the status of Swahili by making it the official language of the country, the language of Parliament and the National Assembly. Indeed, at his inauguration in 1962 as President he addressed the nation in
Swahili leaving a “lasting impression” on the nation. A language that had been shunned by the colonial powers and “been accused of being unsuitable and ill-equipped to express modern concepts was being used with a high degree of sophistication” (ibid; 379). Nyerere showed that an African language could be used as a “viable instrument of political argumentation” (ibid). Prominence in the political sphere was also matched by its introduction as the medium of instruction in primary schools and this went hand in hand with Nyerere’s principle of ‘education for self-reliance’, that is, providing an education to people that is appropriate to their local circumstances and the needs of the country. The inherently undemocratic nature of all levels of education under colonial rule was manifested in large part to its medium of instruction being English. In a country where an estimated 5% of people have a working knowledge of English, this was a decision more authoritarian than democratic (Brock-Utne 2000). Nyerere sought to end the undemocratic learning of foreign curriculums, concepts and subjects in a foreign tongue, rather “education had to be ‘Tanzanian’…and open to all citizens…completely Swahilized education was foreseen, since Kiswahili was the only medium of instruction that could guarantee a democratic distribution of knowledge and Africanisation of thought” (Blommaert 1994; 217). Today this is still reflected in the subject of ‘Siasa’ or ‘political education’ found at all levels of Tanzanian schooling and always taught in Kiswahili, even at levels where English as a medium of instruction predominates, such as secondary schools and universities.

That Siasa is today one of the only subjects taught in Kiswahili points to the Tanzanian government’s essential failure, however, to adhere to the post-independence quest to ‘decolonise’ the nation. But we must also extract a positive in this – being taught in Kiswahili means that local culture and values are informing children’s political education, the relevance and importance of political understanding and participation being brought home by the subject’s medium of discussion being the one the students are most familiar with. Brocke-Utne, during her observations of Tanzanian school life, noted the contrasting “passivity” of students during lessons of English taught subjects in comparison with the eagerness and vitality of students during Siasa or Kiswahili class (Brocke-Utne 2000; 175). This is an almost identical experience to the one which led to my interest in the relationship between language and development whilst teaching in Ghana. Why is the vitality that the children show
when being educated about relevant subjects in their mother tongue ignored? For me, and now having read Brock-Utne’s work, it appears that this feeling of language as an under-utilised resource in both awakening children’s education and subsequently fostering embedded democratic values in African nations by accepting, embracing and working with their diversity, is shared.

Certainly, Nyerere felt this too. Principles of ‘Ujamma’ or ‘brotherhood’ reflected his desire to create an egalitarian society, his firm beliefs in grass-roots empowerment and democracy at the lowest levels of society to foster national development rested on his unwavering belief in the ability for an African language, Swahili, to serve these ends. By the same token, English could never have met these criteria. His beliefs “could not have been properly addressed if these ideas had been proclaimed in a language that was not well known to the ordinary Tanzanian…Swahili fulfilled a substantial ideological function in spreading ideas amongst the population that were plausible to them” (Legere 2006; 383). Nyerere’s work is therefore a notable example of the underlying ideas behind the adoption of African languages at the political and educational level as a way to ‘democratise development’.

However, in using Tanzania as a case in point, it must be conceded that the reality of the Ujamma policy and democratic empowerment (in part) through language was not so successful in prompting national development. One of the reasons for this was that, in truth, despite the rigorous attempts to modernise the language in order that it could not be charged with criticism of being ‘backward’, it never managed to do so without recourse to English. Modernisation of the language by linguists took the form of “borrowings, phonological adaptation of internationally standardised terms and outright ‘assemblage’ on the basis of existing terminology” (Blommaert 1994; 216). Here we see one of the major issues with African languages – their long-term subservience to languages of wider communication. The fact of the matter is that in creating new terminologies in Swahili, and indeed any African language, associated with scientific and technological advancements, words must be coined from English or other LWCs since these are where such developments occur. “Thus, Kiswahili will never be equivalent to English, since English will always be the source language…It will always seem superior and the modernisation will seem never ending” (ibid; 219). This inability for African languages to ever close the gap on ‘developed’ ones is one
of the major obstacles to indigenous language promotion and in taking steps to accord them higher status across Africa. Indeed, the 1992 review ‘The Tanzanian Education System for the 21st Century’ found exactly this “[and] argued that Kiswahili is not ready to be used as a medium of instruction” (Broke-Utne 2000). English then, continues to dominate.

However, many linguists regard this attitude as an untenable and lazy stance, arguing that “there are no under-developed languages…any language is potentially gifted for any role in communication it is expected to play” (Legere 2006; 381). Rather, such attitudes are borne out of the habitual belief in the ‘poverty’ of African languages that was instilled during colonial subjugation, today’s stakeholders in language policy have maintained this attitude, at the expense of the capabilities and use of local languages. Policy makers and leaders today are those who have had an education, the intellectuals, politicians, civil servants and teachers who have made it through all tiers of the African education system and thus mastered an LWC. These influential stakeholders “are proud of their educational background [and] will continue to believe that an African language is inferior to the ex-colonial languages” (ibid; 380). Somewhat of a conundrum is emerging here. Leaders are unlikely ever to be bold enough, or desirous enough to take the step of attributing more rights to local languages and empowering their people to participate in the social, economic and political arenas. This stifles local languages because there is no influence upon them for them to grow, which in turn provides the very justification to continue denying their worth as a potential development tools. If we are to accept Legere’s position that there is no such thing as an underdeveloped language, since any language has the potential to play any role of communication required, given the credence and space to do so, then the negation of language rights has sadly reflected itself in the socio-economic position of those who speak minority languages; “language as a social phenomenon, is a mirror of society’s achievements and socio-economic progress” (ibid).

It is interesting to ask, in truth, how much the Tanzanian experience actually reflects a genuine attempt at empowerment through local language. More so since little appears to have changed at the educational level. Secondary and tertiary levels of education continue to take place overwhelmingly in English. Moreover, the original policies
remained a means by which a central government worked to homogenise a population and gear them towards economic development demanded by a leadership unable (or unwilling) to entirely reject the status quo of the Western development model. This is more explicitly shown in that Nyerere himself refused to reject the use of English completely. It remained the medium of instruction in secondary schools and he explicitly said that to the whole-hearted rejection of English would be ‘foolishness’ given its global reach and attachment to technological development. In this sense, while Nyerere’s post-independence policies reflect the theoretical justifications for local language promotion and their potential for generating national development, they were implemented half-heartedly and therefore cannot represent a fully-fledged case of minority empowerment through language – it remained very much a top-down strategy with little grassroots involvement.

That the undemocratic prevalence of English in the Tanzanian education system has continued so strongly is also due to foreign pressures, according to Brigit Brocke Utne (Brocke-Utne 2007), and these are particularly telling as to why local languages continue to be afforded little consideration in paths towards increased participation and inclusion of local values and knowledge in the development process. Despite what is now mainstream acceptance of ‘democracy’ and ‘inclusion’ as prerequisite pillars to development practice by NGOs and donors, Brocke-Utne suggests that these are undermined by the conditionality that the International Monetary Fund has placed on loans to Tanzania. Their emphasis on cutting fiscal spending has meant less money for diversifying educational materials or creating school materials for higher levels in Kiswahili. Management of the economy has now had to take priority over fostering democratic values at local levels through large, systemic changes to curriculum and language choice; “…this…change of focus…partly accounts for the increase of the symbolic value of English in the 1980s and today. It is considered imperative that economic recovery should go hand in hand with the raising of the standards of English” (Brocke-Utne 2000). This draws us back to Nyerere’s inability to fully reject the global and technological reach English continues to represent, much to the detriment of attempts to invest and nurture local language use in development initiatives.
There is one other difficulty that Tanzania has faced in pushing forward a central role for Kiswahili, particularly with regard to its school curricula. Bilateral donors, particularly the United Kingdom, have given the majority of its aid to Tanzania in the form of the English Language Teaching Support Programme. Perhaps unsurprisingly this has meant support for teaching materials in English and worked to undermine the fundamental principles which underlined Nyerere’s outlook at independence. Not only does such aid scupper any notion of attempting to highlight the positives in implementing local language use as a development tool, particular when done so within an educative format, but it also fuels a cynical streak. It is obvious that teaching in English and the subsequent need for textbooks translates into good business for publishers. When aid is given through such support networks, donors can insist that materials used be published in their country. “It has been estimated that due to...World Bank projects and linkages, over 80% of schoolbooks in Francophone Africa are now produced directly in France” (ibid; 159). Not only does this mean donors push forward exoglossic language policies it also leads to a destruction of infrastructural facilities, publishing houses and the degeneration of a sector of industry which could otherwise generate employment or see a greater dissemination of local knowledge and information in print-form. In essence, it contributes to the ongoing attachment of backwardness with indigenous languages.

The Tanzanian case illustrates many of the intricacies of the language question. We see Nyerere’s post-independence socialist principles informing his desire to ‘de-colonise’ his country but also to spread values of democracy and inclusion of the masses in the future of the nation. The crucial decisions with regards to language in education and mediums of instruction are also highlighted by the post-colonial government and they show a government keenly aware that positive language policies that embraced local knowledge and were representative of the masses were crucial to future development. In this way is the example a good one of a state prepared to take on the challenge of language, rather than sweep it under the carpet and press on with the colonial languages. Nyerere saw the relationship between democracy, language and development.

This conclusion must be tempered however, with the realisation that these intentions have not been seen through. On one level, it appears that the strength of English as a
language of wider communication has been simply too strong to ignore. Policy makers have been unwilling to make the ‘leap of faith’ away from it and implement Kiswahili at secondary and tertiary levels of education. Constant code-switching has also informed this inertia coupled with the prediction for the future of Kiswahili as playing catch-up with English (Harber 1997). On another level, we can see the irony of the World Bank’s actions. Conditionality which enforces reduction of government spending on education removes even the remotest possibility of states funding mother-tongue education programmes at any level whatsoever. This is even less likely to change given the aforementioned business this sends to Western publishing houses to a market where 90% of books are educational (Brocke-Utne 2000).

**Linguistic Citizenship**

Christopher Stroud is amongst those who have developed the idea of ‘Linguistic Citizenship’ as a model for harnessing the benefits of indigenous language promotion. In essence, linguistic citizenship holds that top-down language policies instigated at the state-level are an intrinsically management based approach and is doubtful that “tinkering with the economic nuts and bolts of programme design” will ever genuinely heighten the status of local languages and their speakers’ plight (Stroud 2001; 340). What needs to be accepted is that it is minority groups themselves who are the only people who can use, and subsequently develop, their own language. Fundamentally, this will only occur where they wish do so. A language will become a source of empowerment only when a group chose to speak and use it. A minority speaking group that itself chooses to educate successive generations through their own language, either informally or formally, represent the antithesis to the state-led ‘linguistic rights’ framework, largely the work of Tore Skutnabb-Kangas, which demands that a group be identified by, and speak a specific language.

Stroud uses the example of the Weyeyi tribe of Botswana who, for cultural reasons, installed a chief despite the government’s suppressive ‘Cheiftainship Act’ which denied them this right. Stroud notes that this constitutional challenge was crucial for fostering unity and self-esteem amongst the Wayeyi, “two factors seen as essential to a sense of identity and the development of the Shiyeyi language…the Wayeyi are linking demands for political voice and justice to socio-cultural and linguistic
representation” (ibid; 347). Stroud is extremely keen to highlight the contrast between affirmative and transformative remedies to the language question. Linguistic citizenship represents a transformative (and thus preferable) approach because such avenues are characterised by “finding solutions to redistributive injustices by trying to increase the share of ‘consumption’ of previously disadvantaged groups...[by] attempting to change or restructure the political economic structure and transform the social relations underlying production” (ibid; 344). By the same token then, linguistic rights fall into the description of an affirmative remedy because they look for change within and by the existing political economic structures which Stroud, and others, see as impossible. For a group to truly be in power of its own development it must use its own language and demand to do so.

Language can allow the poorest people to acquire the citizenship that would guarantee them participation in social, economic, cultural, judicial, political and developmental issues. In other words, greater attention to language can lead us on our path of enhancing democratic practices in developing societies. Groups who want this involvement must take it for themselves, beginning with language (Rubagumya 2007).

Linguistic Citizenship also promotes indigenous languages as way of harnessing the political development potential that is ‘waiting in the ranks’ of Africa’s diversity. It sees the site of this debate as a political struggle and it is when minority groups recognise this and take issue with their marginalisation – precisely through recourse to their language, that they begin to exercise their linguistic citizenship. To return to Stroud, he uses the example of the Southern and Northern SiNdebele regions of South Africa, to illustrate his point. Only the South’s language was given official recognition in the 1994 constitution as the North’s was deemed too similar to be worthy of official recognition. Only the people of Northern SiNdebele were at will to change this and through grassroots investment in developing orthographies and grammar for use in formal education and lobbying provincial national departments of education by providing them with evidence of their own language as capable as a medium of instruction, have the people begun to contest the original classification of their language;
“[This] case shows that marginal groups need to seize power over the discourses and representations of language that define them, that is, relocate language into their real social, geographical and emotional space and time…the idea of language as a ‘site of struggle’ is sorely under-developed in language political contexts. The concept of linguistic citizenship provides a way in which this can be done” (Stroud 2001; 349).

Here, Stroud seems to be offering up the citizenship framework as an answer to the chasm that exists in Africa between government language policies and grassroots reality where in truth, LWCs are rarely used or mastered by minority groups. It is ironic that we are discussing indigenous minority languages, yet on the continent it is the dominating, oppressive ex-colonial languages that are in fact the minority in terms of numbers of speakers (Harber 1997). Rather it is the prestige and status accorded to each that creates this gulf. Djite stresses this point, highlighting that it is not language itself which is problematic, good nor bad, but rather the harm is done through the social, cultural, political and economic values ascribed to them. “The unbalance and disempowerment lie more in the social structures that seek to entrench a linguistic hierarchy where a balanced management of multilingualism is possible and should normally prevail” (Djite 2006; 417).

Linguistic citizenship offers an alternative by attributing to language its centrality to all political and social concepts and its ability to change them if people chose to do so. By advocating this it removes the possible criticisms of promotion of indigenous languages on the basis that the state simply does not have the resources with which to entertain their own diversity. On the contrary, it is suggesting that such top-down involvement is unwanted since linguistic citizenship, and democratic participation will take place where people want it to.

Linguistic Citizenship sees it as given that language rights cannot be given by a state, but must be taken by the disenfranchised themselves. The model’s transformative emphasis places linguistic citizenship as a somewhat post-developmental idea in which the nation-state is seen as a Western-style imposition, bearing no relevance to Africa’s tapestry of cultures and ethnicities. It confirms it is run by an elite who care little for the expendable, often rural population, who in any case have no political voice with which to challenge this situation. It is explicit in its attachment of language
to the realms of politics, culture, identity and empowerment and for this reason it remains perhaps the best theorising of how promotion of indigenous languages could dramatically affect the outlook of development in Africa.

One issue to raise with the idea of improved citizenship through language is that language status is a natural phenomenon and this will always exist. Languages will always vie against one another and have different roles – these roles leading to how each is viewed against the other. Some suggest that no matter how disadvantaged groups are, such disparity will occur even at the lowest rungs of society because “the social choices of…disadvantaged groups are made on exactly the same principles used by others”, that is, what is best for them (Edwards 2006; 29). Subsequently, the poorest will always be those whose language is the most marginalised. Linguistic citizenship does not deal with this issue, but then it is impossible to do so. While this is a valid point, it does not seem to discredit the model entirely. If this is to be the case then surely estranged groups attempting to improve their status is an ongoing must, particularly if we are to accept this pessimistic criticism that seems advocating of the ‘laissez-faire’ attitude that has become idiosyncratic of the language question in sub-Saharan Africa. It is a theoretical criticism of something that has never been tried and pessimistically it predicts failure without adequate grounds to do so.

Perhaps a keener criticism is that Stroud’s argument comes across as somewhat ‘pie in the sky’. Essentially we have to ask how realistic a process of linguistic citizenship is to become on a continent-wide level. At the same time, we must temper the theory a little, since it does seem suggestive of language as the ‘be-all and end-all’ to development theory. To reiterate part of the question, language is here argued as a tool, not a solution, to ending Africa’s impoverishment. It is easy to be somewhat sceptical with the citizenship model. In reality, it will be harder for a community of disenfranchised minority language speakers to begin a process of creating orthography for their language. With what materials? Stroud here appears to be suggesting the possibility for resource-poor peoples with a history or disempowerment and a life on the fringes of social and political participation simply to ‘decide’ to end such a situation by choosing to speak their minority language remorselessly. It is perhaps not hard to see how Stroud’s theory may be dismissed as unrealistic, unhelpfully romanticising a life in poverty and rejection of the globalised
world. Further, it seems somehow naïve to believe that the language question, particularly when we talk of its relationship to democratic principles so keenly, as done here, can be answered without recourse to the nation-state, governments and attention to political processes.

**Educating in the Mother-Tongue: For Democracy and Development**

In this next section, it is possible to see how the citizenship model could, however, support a mother-tongue education policy. Linguists like Barbara Trudell (2007), Brigit Brock-Utne (2000) and Jan Blommaert (2001) stress that ‘Education For All’ development initiatives held so highly by the World Bank and other bilateral donors are meaningless unless the quality of the education received is also worked upon. More literature today maintains that any truly worthwhile educative programme or curriculum at the primary level will take place in a child’s mother-tongue; education that is relevant to a child’s environment is far better than an estranged curriculum based on foreign cultures and values taught through a foreign language. Bunyi cites the 1951 UNESCO report on language and education in support of this. The report states the psychological benefits along with sociological ones, namely that mother-tongue education will help identification among members of the community to which a child belongs. Moreover, there are educational benefits in that children are said to learn faster through a familiar linguistic medium and thus cover more topics; “It is axiomatic that the best medium for teaching a child is his mother-tongue” (Bunyi 1999: 339). A better educated population cannot be denied as a superior development tool. Viewed in this way, the ongoing dominance of the ex-colonial languages in the education system is harming children’s learning capacity. As with Nyerere and Tanzania, we can see that if children’s first experience of their own language is of one not fit to be educated by, and excluded from the school environment, it is hard to see how this will foster the democratic values and appreciation of diversity that developing nations, or donors, claim to be seeking to establish.

From an early age, children can see that since education is taking place in English or French, these are the languages of control, therefore they must be superior, and the belief in the lack of worth of their mother-tongue is born. By the same token then, education can be used as a source of empowerment where these roles are reversed.
Here the relationship with Stroud’s linguistic citizenship model can be seen; by its very nature, mother-tongue education is a bottom up strategy and is a “highly local endeavour...heavily influenced by the values and beliefs of local community members; the families of school children, teachers, community leaders…who have a stake in the outcome of formal education in the community” (Trudell 2007; 553).

The dominance of the ex-colonial languages in education is viewed as a serious assault on the status of local ones and is crippling to their potential as development tools (Batibo 2005). This dominance is largely due to the aforementioned colonial factors which disregard the ability of African mother-tongues to express scientific and technological concepts which feature on curriculums world-wide. Also because of the difficulties for an impoverished government to invest in teacher-training, orthographic development and production of school materials in a multitude of languages. Already we have noted that they currently struggle to provide these resources adequately in few languages so perhaps it is stretching the imagination to think that this would be possible in hundreds! Bamgbose acknowledges this but takes issue with the outlook leaders have, suggesting that they do not view local language promotion as an investment but rather a burdensome process with which they refuse to engage. That education in local languages in the long-term would serve to create a generation of literate people with a greater knowledge and understanding of their environment and nation, and a stronger attachment to it – potentially ameliorating the brain-drain, is overlooked. “The economic argument when used against mother-tongue education tends to ignore the important role of education in development which should be concerned with the liberation of the human potential for the welfare of the community” (Bamgbose 1991; 75). Mother tongue education holds weight as a means by which the potential of indigenous language promotion could be realised because the associations of superiority with the ex-colonial languages could be conquered and education would greater reflect the lives of those being educated.

Attaching greater local significance to educative practices may also benefit school enrolment figures. At present, in many places, it is perceived more worthwhile for parents to have children working on farms, in the family business or taking on familial roles than to send them to a school where they will learn little of relevance to their everyday lives. Current policies create a disjuncture between the home and
school that is not conducive to positive cognitive development in children (Trudell 2007). This alienation serves to maintain the creation of a tiny minority of elites who have had a formal education and thus mastery over a language of wider communication and a subsequent interest or belief in the benefits of the current system. The crux of the problem is the reality that despite government rhetoric justifying the use of English and French in education based on their greater development and ability to express modern concepts, millions of children do not receive this education. Problems of school enrolment in Africa are well known, with the second UN Millennium Development Goal (MDG) geared towards achieving universal primary education (UPE) by 2015. DATA, a statistics bank for Africa, has the number of out of school primary-aged children as 33 million in 2005 with the primary school completion rate at 63% for the same year (DATA 2008). So, while governments maintain that LWC dominance is crucial for educating a generation enabled with the skills to interact within the globalised world, it seems that this is not being matched with efforts to improve access to education for all. It is not possible to make a connection between education in a foreign tongue and improved quality education, nor is it possible to argue, given the statistics, that such a policy means more children attend school. On the contrary, a policy of mother-tongue education could ease the pressure on governments to provide resources in exogenous languages and to control curriculum. Looking at the fact that the majority of sub-Saharan states have thus far failed to provide adequate learning materials in English or French or create an education system that all citizens value or have equal access to, the notion of citizenship through language offers an alternative. At the very least, it offers a scenario by which local cultural values and knowledge could come to play a part in children’s education. At present, such knowledge is excluded from educational recognition, thereby reducing its perceived worth, both at local and national levels (Brocke-Utne 2000). If local languages were used at greater levels of education, curriculum could come to be informed by, and reflective of, the environment and people it exists to educate.

Currently such a vast knowledge, experience and history is lost with the exclusion of local languages from schools in Africa. Including them would not only be more democratic - reflecting, appreciating, and incorporating diversity into national processes but it would also narrow the gap children experience between school-life
and home-life that Trudell outlined. This was something I too experienced in Ghana – what children learnt at school during the day was a million miles away from what was regarded as important at home. They could not go home and discuss with any relevance what they had done at school. For starters, it was in a different language! In this way, the educational experience and learning process was never consolidated or backed-up outside of the classroom, something which I now highly value of my own education.

Paulin Djite also highlights the mismatch not only of the content of the education and its learners but between qualifications and job opportunities in nations whose “economies are in the doldrums…the new education system is nothing but a factory for the production of a semi-literate unemployed youth. So much so that even the peasants have stopped their children from going to school” (Djite 2006;409). The harm is done in the valuation of education as an economic tool – it is not – rather, it is a tool that can empower people by taking into account cultural and spiritual values of the very people being educated. In order for this to materialise, a return to the pre-colonial practices of indigenous language education is necessary which emphasised oration and the learning of community values through storytelling and folklore. This has some African scholars to refer to elders as ‘African libraries’ (Bunyi 1999). An appreciation, acceptance, but above, a using of such local knowledge and values is central to seeing how ‘educating for democracy’ might be possible.

However, care must be taken so as not to impose yet another foreign imposition on people living in developing nations. The fact of the matter is that we must consider more carefully what it is the people we are talking about, theorising about and recording statistics about, want.

Who are we to advocate a return to indigenous language use and mother-tongue instruction and deny, as many Africans themselves see it, an opportunity to engage with the world at large? Already at the margins of society many critiques of the mother-tongue for education policy see it as an affront on the opportunities the globalised, modern world provides. It is very interesting to look at some of the attitudes of local people themselves to education in their own tongues. Frequently, where mother-tongue programmes have been tried, parents have raised objections
because they do not see the value in their own language. Wolf and Igboanusi are keen to stress that in Nigeria, it is English that parents want their children taught in precisely because it is the language of the political and economic elite; “the belief of these parents is that early exposure to English places their children at an advantage in a highly competitive Nigerian society” (Wolf & Igboanusi 2006; 341). Dominance of LWCs has caused what Trudell refers to as a “cultural recession” in which local values, culture and language have become deeply insignificant and this informs local people’s desire to have access to foreign tongues which promise economic gains, job opportunities, status and an improved standard of living. For many African parents, there is little point in sending their child to school to learn in their mother-tongue when this will exclude them from many of the ‘best’ jobs associated with power or responsibility.

If education is to be progressive then it must, it is perceived, be done in the ex-colonial languages. That parents in African nations, in this case Nigeria, value English and French above their mother-tongues is a particular thorn in the argument for indigenous language promotion. If African’s feel that educating their children in LWCs is more worthwhile because it connects them to the modernised, globalised world of opportunity beyond their communities, who are we to impose upon them what may amount to little more than linguistic imperialism from the other side of the spectrum? If we are to speak of ‘democratising development’ we must also consider that people may choose to speak English or French and they must have the right and freedom to exercise such a choice.

Before moving on to some of the other criticisms of educating in the mother-tongue, there is one last hindrance to development that Trudell pins to LWCs dominating education in developing countries. Mastery of an LWC by members of communities has often resulted in their flight to urban centres to employ their new skills – almost like a domestic brain-drain - vastly damaging of local customs. In rural Zambia she says “success in formal schooling implies extraction of the communities’ young people from the community into a superior and external realm which is utterly foreign to the community” (Trudell 2007; 555). The suggestion is that by greater employment of local languages in education, a situation of fostering local values and a greater commitment to one’s community could occur and diminish the negative impact the
lure of urban living is having in these countries. Not least because, as quoted earlier, with most economies in the doldrums, youngsters and families arriving in cities looking for work rarely find what they are looking for and must resort to surviving through the informal sector in cities already bulging at their seams. This adds to the demand for what are already severely stretched resources in many urban areas.

Wolf, in his criticism of indigenous language use in education as prohibitive to local communities development and participation in modern life, does not deny this but rather uses it to pick holes in the theory by using urbanisation as a justification for ongoing LWC use. When urbanisation occurs, city spaces become a melting pot of all cultures and ethnicities, and, subsequently, languages. This makes it more difficult to instigate a mother-tongue programme of any kind. Indeed, impossible he suggests, in overgrown slums, zongos and ghettoes where “this situation imposes constraints on the effective use of indigenous languages in schools, and English becomes a kind of ‘emergency language’ where no other solution is possible” (Wolf & Igboanusi 2006; 342). There is a sense of inevitability in the domination of exogenous languages in Africa and it cannot be avoided. For him, the language question becomes not one of a choice between indigenous and ex-colonial, but one of how best to deal with “the prominence of English and to ensure that all students acquire a degree of competence [in it] which allows for their participation in society” (ibid).

Further, he suggests that mother-tongue programmes are insensitive in their inability to recognise local desires. In not acknowledging that local people often see more value in learning English and French, the stance is itself elitist and undemocratic. “The equation of English with elitism rests on the misconstrued understanding of the reality of English in Africa” (ibid; 344), and this formulates Wolf’s resoluteness in his drive to prove that the ex-colonial languages cannot be described as ‘foreign’. Rather, he takes the viewpoint that they have come to form their own nuances and variations, they have themselves become ‘indigenized’ and represent second, not exogenous, languages of the people. This can be seen in the development of Pidgins and he uses the widespread and popular use of Pidgin English (PE) in Nigeria as an example of this, “It is through PE that the rural and uneducated population feels connected to the domains where Nigerian Standard English dominates…Given its affinities to the indigenous languages and the local context as well as the fact that it is the mother
tongue for many speakers, it cannot be argued that PE is not an African language” (ibid; 345/6).

For Wolf the real issue is not dealt with by defenders of mother-tongue education programmes, namely, that it is not the English language itself which causes the high drop out rates, mass illiteracy and corresponding lack of participation in national affairs, thus it is not by turning to indigenous languages that we will solve this problem. Rather, the issue is an economic one, in which vast swaths of the population are too poor to deal with anything but ensuring their day to day subsistence. This diminishes the importance of education outright. The lack of adequate learning-resources, teaching-materials, government funding and the ‘outdated methodologies’ used in many schools “raises questions about the quality of education, apart from the issue of language education…pedagogically sound use of English can turn it into an instrument of social mobility” (ibid; 346/7, italics added). Wolf’s suggestion is that the prohibitive costs of developing materials in many local languages in context of the economic backwardness most African states are currently experiencing mean that the way forward must lie in enhancing the quality and availability of education in English as the simplest solution.

**Conclusion**

While Wolf and Igboanusi’s paper holds some very forthright arguments, in the context of this paper they must be viewed as a response to theory of African languages as development tools. It is in this capacity that they come to be viewed as limited in their offering of alternatives, other than that we have just seen – maintaining the status quo and working within it to improve the developmental potential of good quality education. The fallacies of this top-down framework have been examined at large and overall it seems naïve to suggest that much will change if this remains the case. This situation is what the linguistic citizenship model and the concepts that lie behind local language promotion seek to change, searching to go beyond the tried – and failed – language policies of the last 60 years. Indigenous languages as development tools are yet to be fully tested for their potential, employed as they have been solely in experiments in early schooling. Even when given a heightened status in primary education, they have seldom been given the time to show
their potential, and states such as Tanzania and Nigeria have fallen back on reliance on LWCs. Similarly, these improved measures in education have not been matched by policy change at other levels which should work to slowly incorporate and allow these languages to flourish outside of the informal or domestic sectors of society.

In essence, local language promotion precedes Wolf and Igboanusi’s critique because they suggest when chosen to be used by their speakers as a route to power, participation and progress, they provide a learning experience to children (and adults) that is more relevant to their circumstances and that can inform them about local needs. In time, this will create a situation where minorities can come to value their own language because they see it being used in an educative and progressive format. With a higher valuation of their surroundings, urbanisation and the pull of the use of an LWC in a ‘wealthier’ city where ‘jobs abound’, as the common perception often is, can be diminished and community values and attachments reinstated. The arguments promoting local languages in this sense foreshadow the charge of local preferences for the ex-colonial languages by suggesting a way in which these beliefs may be susceptible to change for the betterment of their speakers. While we must be careful not to impose post-developmental ideas such as these on minorities who would much sooner be part of the globalised, wealthier world, it is vital to acknowledge these theories as transformative in nature. They speak of change at large, a refutation of the status quo that maintains an over-riding impetus on exogenous languages.

As such, they are not fast solutions to development issues and this makes them, sadly, easily dismissible. If local language promotion is to be given the chance, it needs generations of commitment, just as commitment to the ex-colonial languages has had. Sadly, it feels as if this is one of its major disadvantages. Since the language problem is not as ‘visible’ as economic problems, the role language could play in a development strategy is overlooked. The long-term nature of changing language practices and habits is viewed as an obstacle to its potential to alleviate class differences, “indigenous languages may divide people along ethnic lines, English divides them along class lines” (Bunyi 1999; 348/9). As has been stressed, it is not languages that fight one another, the reasons for inequality lie in “extra-linguistic…reasons, to do with the sharing of power and resources” (ibid).
Given these long-term and perhaps slightly radical outlooks to the potential of indigenous language promotion, the concluding question to ask of it is, how realistic is it as a model for grass-roots empowerment given the striking lack of resources the minorities have to work with? Stroud talked of achieving citizenship through minority groups engaging with their language rights as a site of political struggle, yet for the poorest and most marginalised, realists like Ayo Bamgbose see this as a somewhat idealistic position. He accepts that for a genuine change to occur in the provision of local language use and rights, some top-down policy change will have to occur. It is now not possible to conceive of some kind of return to a pre-colonial, nation-less Africa. Bamgbose thus concludes that a multi-lingual policy “is the only viable avenue for development…Foreign ideas, concepts and technology will undoubtedly be imported in a foreign language, but such concepts must be transmitted in a language the masses can understand” (Bambgbose 1991; 51).

Bamgbose does not see the language question as being solved by an exclusive attitude towards either local or metropolitan languages. More realistic, and perhaps more healthy, is the recognition that while mother-tongue education is beneficial for the cognitive development of learners, improved literacy and the pace of learning, it does not have to be at the expense of denying communities the opportunity to become bilingual in a language of wider communication. It is possible to perceive a situation whereby a mother-tongue is the medium of instruction for all subjects, and English taught as one. “The use of an indigenous language as a medium of instruction …can be achieved without sacrificing proficiency in a LWC….In order to achieve this attitudes to both languages must be positive” (ibid; 86). For Bamgbose, the state has the ability to instigate such changes in attitude.

Hansford (1994) goes further than this in her suggestion of a three-tiered solution to language complexities. Maintaining mother-tongue instruction as the best model for initial education, she perceives that before the complexities of an exogenous language are introduced, an African regional language, such as Hausa or Swahili in West or East Africa respectively, could begin to be taught orally. In this way, the intense resource and financial implications of developing orthographies, curriculum and trained teachers in hundreds of indigenous languages could be alleviated by rendering their development for secondary education unnecessary. This regional language could
become the medium of instruction in late primary or early secondary education as at this stage “the subject matter is likely to be national in scope, e.g. national geography and history” (Hansford 1994; 82). English, at this stage, could begin to be taught as a subject, orally, and mastered more efficiently precisely because of its slow introduction, ready for use as a medium of instruction at the senior secondary school level, where subjects contain much of the language of science and technology. “Such a progression from the small world of the local environment to the global world with its emphasis on technology, would obviate the need to construct specialised vocabulary artificially in the mother tongue…Such programmes would enable everybody to participate in the national process” (ibid).

While this appears more ‘realistic’, what is perhaps more realistic is the opportunity for such policy to become mere rhetoric for African governments. Such has been the characterisation of post-independence language policies by a rhetorical respect for African languages, but a lack serious implementation and commitment to the empowerment and participation of minorities through them. This was the case in Tanzania, discussed earlier and in Bamgbose’s acknowledgment that “…African language policies are generally characterised by avoidance, arbitrariness, fluctuation and declaration without implementation” (Bamgbose 1991; 9).

Both Stroud’s transformative citizenship approach and Hansford’s tiered, tempered approach, offer a setting of greater significance being given to the neglected yet ever-more crucial language question and reflect a growing appreciation to design language policies and implement them with a view to enhancing democratic values in developing nations and decentralising power to communities of minority language speakers so readily pushed aside or ill-considered by political elites whose decisions nonetheless affect these people for better or worse.

Having researched and written about the role of language in relation to development I have come to realise how impotent the inability to speak or to have mastered the language of the elite decision making bodies renders so many in Africa. The opportunity it gives for leaderships to ignore their population’s plight. At every stage of my research I have been taken back to experience in Ghana, and not just the teaching. I remember buying pineapples, tomatoes and groundnuts and other treats at
the market from market traders regularly, or eating at the ‘chop houses’, where transactions and communications would take place in an amusing combination of English and Twi (another commonly spoken language in the capital). Having studied this issue in some depth, I often return to thinking of those people and our difficulty in communicating, and I translate this into what has here been described as the gulf between elite leaderships and the majority who make up the informal sector. I do not mean to suggest that no-one speaks good English, rather, many people speak bad English, and it is for this reason that I question development’s rhetoric of democracy-building on the current foundations – with the focus in this case on differences in access to language and the resources and means with which to learn and master them. The distribution of such resources and opportunities with regard to exoglossic languages is at present extremely undemocratic. This must change if we are to see a democratising of development come to fruition.

I do though, feel that it is necessary to temper the theory of promoting indigenous languages as a development tool somewhat, and reiterate one final time that they are not seen here as Africa’s saviour. When we talk about developing regions in the world and the issues which keep them thus, we can talk about solutions to any number of problems; urbanisation, poor education, gender imbalance, HIV/AIDS, war, political instability, poor infrastructure, language choice, irresponsible donors or overseas exploitation of their resources. The list is long, and by no means would a change in language policy see these problems fall by the wayside. Opinions differ on how development ought to take place and people argue about how to prioritise them but really this is not helpful. Each affects the other, none is more important than the other, but what is crucial is that a balance is struck between the ways we seek to solve these problems. This must start with a view to embedding democratic social and political processes in order that those people who ‘development’ claims to be working for are heard. More than being heard, so that they can take part, change and affect the way development takes place, and impact upon the ‘balance’ which must inform the way multiple development problems are tackled simultaneously. Indigenous language promotion, beginning with a greater implementation in the education system as a viable and useful medium of instruction, has the potential to not only to embed democratic values at all levels of society, but also to heighten the accountability of governments to their people. As has been stressed, greater democratic participation of
the African people in the decisions which affect them means that slowly, an end can be brought to their consideration as an expendable majority population whose human rights or living standards bear little relevance or outcome to those currently controlling development’s path.

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