

A Critical Analysis of Namibia's English-Only Language Policy

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1. Introduction

When Namibia gained its political independence in 1990, it inherited a society characterized by segregation, vast urban and rural poverty, a highly skewed distribution of wealth, unequal access to land and natural resources, and dramatic inequalities in the quality of education and health services rendered to its various ethnic groups. The country was thus left at independence with a huge skills deficit and a slew of social imbalances to be resolved. In 2004, the Namibian government launched a national development strategy called Vision 2030 to address and resolve the country's issues by the year 2030. The driving force behind the Vision was to be capacity building, aimed at operating a high quality education and training system, achieving full employment in the economy, and transforming Namibia into a knowledge-based society. Vision 2030 was further expected to reduce inequalities and create "a pervasive atmosphere of tolerance in matters relating to culture, religious practices, political preference, ethnic affiliation and differences in social background."

While this national development strategy is seemingly all-encompassing in the areas it set out to address and the issues it planned to resolve, it lacks entirely any mention of language or language policy. This absence in the plan is critical because language is not simply an area to be addressed or an issue to be resolved, but rather an issue that affects every other targeted area outlined in the plan. Namibia's current language policy will, as will be argued in this paper, significantly impede progress in each of the areas that Vision 2030 has targeted. Without addressing and revising Namibia's language policy, the government's vision for "a prosperous and industrialized Namibia, developed by her human resources, enjoying peace, harmony and political stability," cannot be realized by 2030. The purpose of this paper is therefore to make evident the crucial need for Namibia's language policy to be addressed as part of the country's development plan, first by critiquing the development of the language policy and then by analyzing the most general implications of this policy for Namibia's national development. In order to provide a context for this critique and analysis, the paper will now continue with an overview of language planning and policy in Africa, followed by a brief profile of Namibia.

2. Language Planning and Policy in Africa

Language policies have emerged throughout the African continent in much the same way. The commonality among African language policies is due in large part to the widespread Western colonial expansion that engulfed Africa as well as the resulting artificial and arbitrary borders, within which wide ranges of distinct ethnic and linguistic groups were often merged into single populations. During colonial rule, the French and Portuguese colonial administrations imposed French and Portuguese on their respective colonies as the exclusive languages of administration and education. The Belgian, British, and German colonial administrations adopted a more *laissez-faire* policy with regard to the education of their subjects by allowing churches to establish educational institutions and language policies; but eventually, like the French and Portuguese, imposed their respective languages, French, English, and German, on their respective colonies as the exclusive languages of administration. When

in the late 1950s and early 1960s the vast majority of African nations gained their independence from colonial rule, the leaderships of those states were faced with the colossal challenge of formulating new national policies, including the possibility of revising the language policies, which would peacefully unite the wide range of ethno-linguistic groups within their borders into a collective national whole.

The multilingualism that characterized the majority of those newly independent states came to be perceived negatively by governments as a significant obstacle to achieving national unity and cohesion. While the governments of a few countries opted to overcome this perceived obstacle by identifying and promoting a single indigenous language to serve as a ‘national language’ which would bring their varied ethno-linguistic groups together and unite them under one language, this indigenous national language was most often coupled with a more dominant, foreign, official language, and what ultimately happened in the majority of African countries (35/55) was a simple continuation of the language policies imposed by the former colonial rulers—a retention of the status quo (Bokamba 2007).

Accounts of language planning and policy in other Southern African countries, most of which gained independence long before Namibia, provide an important context from which to understand language planning actions taken in Namibia. In Volume 1 of *Language Planning and Policy*, edited by Richard B. Baldauf and Robert B. Kaplan (2004), language policy and planning in four Southern African countries are discussed. Here I will summarize the discussions provided in this volume and illuminate some common themes which have significant bearing on the language planning situation in Namibia.

2.1. *Malawi*

In this volume, Edrinnie Kayambazinthu characterizes language policy in Malawi, which gained its independence in 1964, by an asymmetrical coexistence of English, which is the official language, Chichewa, which is the national language, and 12 other indigenous languages and their varieties, a few of which have been introduced on the radio but otherwise have not been attributed any official status or roles. Given that Chichewa had become the dominant indigenous language during colonial rule and that English was brought to Malawi by the British colonists and became during their rule the language of higher education, parliament and law, and the elite, the language policy adopted by Malawi at independence was in essence a retention of the status quo. English indisputably continues to have more prestige than Chichewa, which in turn maintains a higher status than all of the other indigenous languages in Malawi, signaling a strong sense of linguistic stratification in the country. Language planning in Malawi has been most strongly influenced by prominent individuals, including the country’s first president (Kamuzu Banda) who reigned supreme for decades, the language situation itself, and sociopolitical issues, and is further characterized by Kayambazinthu (2004) as “ad hoc and reactive, based more on self-interest and political whim than on research,” with decisions significantly connected to the socioeconomic and political environment in which they were made.

2.2. *Botswana*

Language planning and policy in Botswana, which became independent in 1966, is in many ways very similar to language policy and planning in Malawi. The sense of stratification, however, between its official language, English, its national language, Setswana, and its other twenty-something indigenous languages, is even stronger in Botswana than in Malawi, except for the existence of Setswana as the most widely spoken language. Nyati-Ramahobo (2004) maintains that language planning in Botswana has been influenced by the orientation of language diversity being perceived as a problem, in which minority languages, cultures, and identities must be eradicated. This orientation has led to a policy of assimilation under which all citizens must assimilate to the Setswana language and culture, and all children must learn Setswana and use it as a medium of instruction. The assimilation policy in Botswana suppresses minority cultures and languages and discourages their use in public domains. While Setswana is irrefutably the dominant indigenous language of Botswana in its role as the country’s national language (estimated to be spoken by over 80% of the population), English, as the official language, permeates the social, economic and cultural lives of all educated Batswana.

English plays a much more dominant role in both public and private domains in Botswana than it does in other African countries which have English as their official language. This trend and the language policy upheld in Botswana seriously threaten the future of Setswana, and even more so the survival of the other indigenous languages of Botswana, which receive no recognition by the government. Pressured by the masses, the government has made some progressive policy decisions regarding language in Botswana, but implementation of such policy decisions has not been seen.

2.3. Mozambique

According to Lopes (2004), the language policy and planning situation in Mozambique, which gained independence from Portuguese colonial rule in 1975, is different from the language policy and planning situations in Malawi and Botswana in that no single indigenous language has been promoted or identified as a national language. Rather, Portuguese serves as Mozambique's only official language and the country's twenty indigenous Bantu languages are designated equally as national languages, without any legal implications. In this respect, Mozambique's language policy is very similar to Namibia's, as will be shown in this paper. Portuguese, brought to Mozambique by its colonists, was chosen during Mozambique's 10-year liberation struggle for Independence as a means to unite nationalist freedom fighters with different language backgrounds. At independence, Portuguese was then selected as Mozambique's official language, presumably for the reason that no indigenous majority language existed in the country, and that choosing any one of the Mozambican languages would have been an arbitrary decision with serious consequences (Lopes 2004). This decision was a political one, aimed at preserving national unity and the integrity of the territory.

As in Malawi and Botswana, post-independence language policy in Mozambique was thus also inherited from the colonial regime and maintained thereafter. In the years following independence, concerns began to be voiced about the national Mozambican languages and the role they could play in harmony with Portuguese. These concerns and the debates that ensued served as an impetus for a number of seminars, conferences, and draft papers that called for action regarding the country's language policy and particularly the status and development of the Mozambican languages (Lopes 2004). While significant attempts have been made by authorities and language planning agencies to redress linguistic imbalances and develop the Mozambican languages for their use in various domains, Lopes (2004) asserts that while corpus planning activities have developed to a considerable extent in Mozambique, the same cannot be said of status planning activities. Vocabulary expansion and orthography work have been undertaken by different planning agencies and language materials have been produced, but experiments carried out in the domains of formal education and literacy have simply remained as pilot projects. Lopes (2004) concludes that "in spite of the great value attached to the bilingual experiments, languages will only truly be recognized, promoted and have fundamental rights, if they can enjoy official status."

2.4. South Africa

South Africa, which shares with Namibia not only a border but also the experience of apartheid rule, has arguably the most liberal and progressive language policy in Africa. This language policy, adopted by South Africa at its independence in 1994 and incorporated into its 1996 Constitution, is one of official multilingualism, according 11 of its approximately 25 languages, including English and Afrikaans, official status. Despite South Africa's admirably progressive language policy, however, Kamwangamalu (2004) remarks that "if anything has changed at all in terms of language practices [in South Africa], it is that English has gained more territory and political clout than Afrikaans in virtually all of the country's institutions, including the legislature, education, the media, and the army." There is thus a mismatch between South Africa's multilingual language policy on the one hand and observed language practices on the other. While the language policy promotes additive multilingualism, the language practices in most of the public domains reflect a promotion of monolingualism in English (Kamwangamalu 2004).

In summary, these four Southern African examples show that while language policies are indisputably unique from one country to the next, there are certain issues and trends inherently common to the language policy and planning situations of these and most other Southern African states. One such trend is the inheritance and maintenance of colonial language policies, as seen in the cases of Malawi, Botswana, and Mozambique. Another common issue is linguistic stratification and inequality, as seen in Malawi and Botswana between the official language, national language, and other indigenous languages, and in Mozambique between its official language and its national languages. Even in South Africa, where 11 languages have been made official, there is still stratification both among those 11 languages and between those 11 languages and the ones that do not have official status. Thus, even in places where progressive language policies have been made, flagrant gaps between policy and practice give way to linguistic stratification and unofficial policies of monolingualism. While language policies in Southern Africa are in most cases the result of retaining the status quo, any language planning that has occurred in these states has been considerably ad-hoc, in the sense that they have been largely declared rather than proposed and debated, and strongly connected to the sociopolitical environment. There are few cases in Southern Africa of language planning decisions based on the classic model of language planning.

2.5. Namibia

As a country that gained its independence nearly thirty years after the majority of the rest of the African states, Namibia, one would think, would have forged a different, more informed path to language policy development. Due to Namibia's unique history in Africa, characterized by both colonial and apartheid rule, the development of its language policy did in fact follow a slightly different path than that of most of the other African states. The outcome, however, was essentially the same. To this day, Namibia has a language policy of official monolingualism with English serving as the sole official language. This policy can be seen as an outcome of ideological views espoused by Namibia's pre-independence government more than a decade before Namibia gained independence in 1990. These ideological views, informed by the sociopolitical situation of the country, resulted in a fervent movement to make English the official language of Namibia. As a result of this movement and the establishment of English as Namibia's sole official language, its policy became one of official monolingualism. This type of policy has had far-reaching, detrimental implications for Namibia's people and for its development. The sections that follow will provide a background to Namibia and the development of its language policy and then analyze this policy and consider its implications.

3. Country Profile

Namibia is a country situated in the southwestern part of Africa, bordered by Angola and Zambia to the north, Botswana to the east, South Africa to the south, and the Atlantic Ocean to the west. Namibia's vast territory covers approximately 318,695 square miles, with a terrain that varies from coastal desert to semi-arid mountains and plateaus. In spite of Namibia's vast territory, it has a relatively small population of just over 2 million, yielding one of the lowest population densities in the world. Though small, Namibia's population is certainly diverse, categorized in both the daily speech of Namibians and in scholarly literature into roughly nine defined ethnic groups. These include the Owambos, the Ovaherero, the Kavangos, the Caprivians, the Bushmen, the Namas, the Damaras, the Rehoboth Basters, and the Whites. For as many ethnic groups as there are in Namibia, there are at least one or more languages spoken. Due to the difficulty in distinguishing languages from dialects though, estimates for the total number of languages in Namibia have ranged from 10 to 30 (Maho 1998). These languages can be divided into roughly three language families: the Bantu languages, the Khoesaa languages, and the Indo-European languages. Thirteen languages have been recognized in Namibia as national languages, including 10 indigenous African languages spoken by 87.8% of the population and 3 Indo-European languages spoken by 11.2% of the population. The 10 indigenous languages include Oshikwanyama, Oshindonga, Rukwangali, Otjiherero, Rucgiriku, Thimbukushu, Silozi, and Setswana, all belonging to the Bantu language group, and Khoekhoegowab and Ju'hoan which belong to the Khoesaa language group. The three Indo-European languages include English, German, and

Afrikaans. Afrikaans is spoken by 9.5% of the population, German by 0.9%, and English by a mere 0.8% (Brock-Utne and Holmarsdottir 2001; Pütz 1995). Ironically, English, the first language of the smallest percentage of Namibia's population, is the official language of the country, used in all of its formal domains.

Imperative to understanding how English came to be the official language in Namibia is a brief overview of Namibia's colonial history. While in many other countries the official language is that of the country's former colonizer, in Namibia this is not the case. From 1884 to 1915, Namibia was under German colonial rule. Throughout this period German enjoyed the status of an official language, although Namibia's indigenous languages were also accepted and used in daily life and in schools (Pütz 1995). However, while the Germans may have been accepting of Namibia's native languages, they certainly maintained an oppressive and brutal rule of the natives, resulting in the deaths of thousands of Namibians (Dahlström 2002) and setting the stage for South African and apartheid rule.

After Germany was defeated in World War I, South Africa invaded Namibia on behalf of the British in 1915, and on a mandate from the League of Nations, took over administration of the territory of Namibia in 1920. After South Africa pushed Germany out of Namibia, German lost its official status and Afrikaans and English became the official languages of Namibia. Afrikaans, however, was the language predominantly employed in the administration and in education (Pütz 1995). In 1948 the Nationalist Party assumed power in South Africa and the apartheid regime began in South Africa and Namibia. As the apartheid system became increasingly more oppressive, SWAPO (South West African People's Organization), the leading organization in Namibia's liberation movement, deemed it necessary to replace Afrikaans, the "language of the oppressors," and to establish a language policy in preparation for an independent Namibia.

4. Policy Analysis

The outcome of SWAPO's language planning for an independent Namibia was a policy of official monolingualism with English serving as the single official language. However, for a clearly multilingual country with an English-speaking population of less than 1%, neither the choice of a monolingual language policy nor the selection of English as the only official language seem readily obvious. Thus, it would seem wise to first question SWAPO's decision to establish a monolingual policy and then its decision to select English as the single language for that policy. In reality though, these decisions, if the former can be called that, did not follow in such a sequence. The aim of SWAPO was not to establish a monolingual language policy and then select a language to serve that policy. Rather, the aim of SWAPO was by and large to establish English as Namibia's official language, and as a result, the policy became a monolingual one. While the monolingual aspect of Namibia's language policy has ensued as a sort of implicit byproduct of the explicit decision to establish a dominant role for English in Namibia, it is this aspect of Namibia's language policy that has had the furthest reaching implications.

In order to discern the reasoning behind and implications of Namibia's official monolingualism, it is necessary to first expound the reasoning behind SWAPO's decision to make English Namibia's official language. While Namibia's language policy was formally established in 1981, nine years prior to independence, SWAPO had begun to advocate English as the sole official language already several years earlier. In fact, the establishment of English as the official language had been a major aim of SWAPO since before its inception (Maho 1998, Pütz 1995). In a presentation of SWAPO's proposed constitution in 1975, it was stated that "Namibia should be a republic; English should be its official language." The UNIN, which was established in 1976 and operated in close collaboration with SWAPO, supported this mantra (Harlech-Jones 1995). Thus, when in 1981 SWAPO and the UNIN published the key document, *Toward a language policy for Namibia: English as the official language*, which presented 8 criteria that an official language should meet, the official language had actually already been selected. Rather than as a basis for selection then, those criteria instead served to rationalize the already established decision that English would become the official language. This decision, which was in the making long before the document was published, was based almost exclusively on ideology and only retrospectively rationalized with functional and linguistic arguments.

The decision to establish English as the sole official language in Namibia was based on an ideology informed chiefly by the sociopolitical circumstances of the country. Oppressed and divided by South Africa's apartheid regime, Namibians sought liberation and unity. English, they believed, would be the vehicle to achieve these ideals. If Afrikaans was the language of oppression, then English was the language of resistance and liberation. Imbued with this symbolism, English and its prospect as Namibia's official language gained widespread support among the masses, whose views by and large echoed those of the SWAPO government. Despite the fact that only 0.8% of the population spoke English as a first language and only another 4% as a second language, surveys show that English was the favored language among Namibians (Pütz 1995). Even in Kaokoland, where 91.7% of the population claimed to not understand English at all, English was highly preferred as the official language (Maho 1998).

English came to the fore in Namibia as a language of resistance and liberation that would serve as a tool in the country's struggle for independence. After this ideology was promoted by the SWAPO government and embraced by its people, it evolved to also incorporate the pursuit of unity, which was deemed integral for a successful independent Namibia. South Africa had long pursued a policy of ethnolinguistic fragmentation in Namibia to divide its people, so with imminent independence it became of utmost importance to unite the Namibian population into one nation. This, SWAPO believed, could only be achieved with English, a neutral and extra-ethnic language, as the official language. In the foreword to the UNIN document, director Hage Geingob (1981) stated clearly that "the aim of introducing English is to introduce an official language that will steer the people away from lingo-tribal affiliations and differences and create conditions conducive to national unity in the realm of language."

Thus, when the UNIN document *Towards a Namibian Language Policy: English as the official language* was published in 1981, English had already been decided upon as Namibia's official language, and primarily on ideological grounds. The purpose of this document was then to formalize this policy, but also to rationalize it and consider its implications. In the section of the UNIN document titled, "A Rationale for English as the Official Language for Independent Namibia," the selection of English as the official language was rationalized through demonstrating that English, and no other language, meets all of the criteria SWAPO deemed necessary for an official language. The arguments put forth to show that English and no other language meets each of the 8 criteria, however, have since been repeatedly contested. The 8 criteria against which languages were to be measured included unity, acceptability, familiarity, feasibility, science and technology, Pan-Africanism, wider communication, and United Nations. The languages examined against these criteria for their suitability as Namibia's official language were the indigenous Namibian languages, Afrikaans, German, French and English. It should be noted that the indigenous languages were clumped together into a single group, whereas the four Indo-European languages were each considered individually.

The first criterion proposed was unity, which had become the primary goal of the new nation. With regard to this criterion, the indigenous languages were deemed unsatisfactory on the grounds that choosing one local language over another could be seen as being based on tribal preference and might lead to further linguistic and ethnic divisiveness rather than unity. Without any explanation, but surely due to the sociopolitical ideology that had developed among Namibians, the document also regarded Afrikaans and German as unfit to promote national unity. French was regarded as satisfactory to satisfy the criterion of unity, but also without explanation. English too was seen fit to promote national unity, "because of its special role as the language already chosen and used by the Liberation Movement" (UNIN 1981). Once again it is evident that "language planning" in Namibia involved much more affirmation and rationalization of ideologically based decisions than it did actual planning.

Critics have conceded that as an extra-ethnic, linguistically and politically neutral language, English could be useful in facilitating trans-ethnic or national communication, which could in turn result in national following of a single leader and a sense of national unity. They maintain, however, that the success of English for this role is conditional upon the number of people and groups for whom English becomes an accessible language and useful means of communication (UNIN 1981). It has been demonstrated over the last two decades that for the rural as well as uneducated populations in Namibia, in which exposure to and opportunity to use English is minimal, English has not become a useful means of communication. English has therefore become the property of only some of Namibia's

population, and as such it is difficult to imagine how it could play a significant role in uniting the Namibian population into one nation.

The second criterion for Namibia's official language was acceptability. For a language to meet this criterion it was to have positive rather than negative associations for the people, and therefore not be associated with oppression or injustice. As such, Afrikaans, which had been considered the "language of oppression," and German, which was used to rule Namibia and therefore also associated with oppression and injustice, failed to meet this criterion. All of the other languages, on the other hand, which included the indigenous languages, French, and English, were deemed satisfactory in meeting the acceptability criterion (UNIN 1981).

The third criterion to be met by the official language was familiarity. In order to satisfy this requirement the language under consideration had to be one that Namibians both in and out of the country were familiar with and it was preferable that the language had some prior experience in the education system. The only language under consideration that did not satisfy this requirement was French. This criterion was, however, easily satisfied by the indigenous local languages as well as Afrikaans, which in addition to being a local language also served as Namibia's lingua franca. German was also considered satisfactory with regard to the familiarity criterion, though given that less than 1% of the population spoke German as a first language and it had never really spread as a second language, this is a questionable claim. Finally, English was deemed "preeminently suitable" for this criterion, on the grounds that it was already one of Namibia's official languages and that although it was not taught "for actual use of its features," it was taught as a subject in schools (UNIN 1981). Given the small population of first and second language speakers of English (0.8% and 4%) as indicated by the 1991 census, however, in addition to the fact that English was not taught in schools for actual use, the claim that English was a "familiar language" is also quite questionable (Maho 1998).

The fourth criterion, feasibility, involved a number of vital considerations regarding the implementation of the official language. Some of these considerations included the cost and effort involved in promoting a language to official status, and the availability of necessary resources for implementation, including books, learning materials, teachers, trainers, and training facilities. All of the languages except the indigenous languages were determined to satisfy this criterion. The assertion that none of the indigenous languages would be feasible as an official language was grounded in the view that it would be too costly to prepare resources and materials in those languages (UNIN 1981). This view ignores, however, the fact that the indigenous languages were already known to and used by the population, whereas while resources in English may have been more available or less costly to produce, English was largely unknown to the nation. Many critics have furthermore retorted with explanations of cost-benefit analysis that this view is short-sighted and antithetical to national development (Pütz 1995).

With regard to the fifth criterion, science and technology, the three European languages, German, French, and English, were considered suitable while the indigenous languages and Afrikaans were not. This claim was made on the basis that the African languages, including Afrikaans, were not developed with regard to scientific and technological terminology, whereas the European languages were all well developed in this regard and the languages of people who are advanced in these fields (UNIN 1981). As has been pointed out for Namibia and for other African countries many times before, the reason that the African languages are underdeveloped in scientific and technological terminology is that they have not been used in these fields. There is no linguistic evidence to suggest that these languages could not be developed to become useful in these fields (Mateene 1985, Pütz 1995, Bokamba 1995, 2007). Swahili provides an example of an African language that has been developed to incorporate scientific and technical vocabulary to be used by its speakers in the fields of science and technology.

The sixth criterion stipulates that an official language should be capable of achieving Pan-Africanism through facilitating "the growth of bonds between Namibian and other progressive communities in Africa." A language would be advantageous if it was common to many of the countries neighboring Namibia, as well as spoken widely throughout Africa. The indigenous languages, Afrikaans, and German were all found unsuitable to satisfy this criterion. French was deemed "partly" satisfactory, and English was seen as well qualified (UNIN 1981). Beck (1995) takes issue with the argument for English based on the implied claim that English is the language of many of

Namibia's neighbors. While four of the five countries neighboring Namibia have English as an official language, only Zambia and Zimbabwe have only English as their official language, which demonstrates that for Botswana and South Africa any Pan-Africanism achieved has been accomplished without an English-only policy. Furthermore, Beck notes that in Namibia's neighboring countries, only a small percentage of the populations are actually able to speak English.

The seventh and eighth criteria were proposed with a more international perspective than the previously discussed criteria. The seventh criterion, wider communication, was suggested with the view that an independent Namibia would develop a more international outlook and thus require an international language of wider communication, which would be used by Namibians as they developed sea and air communications and international trading and negotiating. Given that through its struggle for independence Namibia was already closely linked to and assisted by the United Nations, the eighth criteria stipulated that the official language of Namibia, "if other than an indigenous language, should be one of the principal languages of the United Nations." For both of these criteria, only French and English qualified (UNIN 1981). While the claim that both French and English would effectively serve as languages of wider communication and are principal languages of the United Nations is difficult to refute, the relevance of these criteria to the majority of Namibia's population should be considered, and will be done so in the sections that follow.

Despite the seemingly vast number of criticisms directed at the choice of English as Namibia's official language, English should not be seen in Namibia as an evil to be uprooted. English has in fact proved in many ways to benefit Namibia and to serve a number of important purposes. However, there are also a great number of purposes that English does not serve, or does not serve effectively. Thus, English in itself is not a problem for Namibia; English by itself is. The policy of official monolingualism that has emerged from the establishment of English as *the* official language in Namibia has had and continues to have significant implications for the country and its development.

It has been established that English does serve a number of purposes for Namibia. It serves as a lingua franca, facilitating communication across and between ethnic groups, and also as a language of instruction in tertiary institutions, where students from all linguistic backgrounds come together. English also serves Namibia as an international language of wider communication, and as a language of the United Nations. Although English is sufficient in serving all of these purposes, and in some cases even more qualified than any other language to do so, it must be taken into consideration whom these purposes serve (Beck 1995). While English has indeed replaced Afrikaans as a lingua franca in Namibia, a large proportion of the Namibian population still does not have competency in English, due to lack of exposure or education, and is thus precluded from using English for this purpose. English also serves in Namibia's university and other tertiary institutions as a common language of instruction for a multilingual population of students and faculty. Those who attend these institutions, however, represent only those Namibians who have already developed sufficient competency in English, through either quality instruction and/or high exposure to English, and thus account for a minority rather than majority of the population. English has served Namibia effectively as an international language of wider communication, however only Namibia's elite is actually involved in international communication, or with the United Nations for that matter. Therefore, while the benefits of English and the purposes it serves are undeniable, they cater to only a select population of Namibians, thereby excluding the majority from benefitting from its country's official language.

Furthermore, there exists a greater number of purposes in Namibia that are both relevant and critical to the majority of Namibia's population and its development that English cannot effectively serve. As mentioned above, since the onset of the Liberation Movement, which aimed to stomp out any dominant roles for Afrikaans, English has acted as the nation's lingua franca. While English has served certain groups sufficiently as a lingua franca, those groups who have not had the opportunity to formally acquire English as a foreign language, which includes at least two generations of Namibians in addition to all those outside the formal education system, have no language which they can use as a lingua franca and are thus barred from communication with other linguistic groups. It would therefore be much more practical for Namibia to adopt as a lingua franca a language that is more familiar to or more easily acquired by the population than English.

English alone is also insufficient for the purpose of facilitating participatory democracy in Namibia. As the country's official language, English is currently the language of the administration,

government, and national politics. As such, the same groups described above who do not have access to a lingua franca because they do not speak English also have no access to political space, and are precluded from both understanding political programs and participating knowledgeably in politics (Harlech-Jones 1995, Pütz 1995, Bokamba 1995, 2007). Furthermore, in restricting its ability to communicate directly with the people by using a language to which not everyone has access, it is likely that the state is not responding to its people's needs and that the people will not feel they have an enduring personal stake in the future of their country (UNIN 1981). Although Namibia has been striving to promote participatory democracy since its independence, as long as English is the sole language in this domain, Namibia will only be able to achieve very selective participatory democracy, excluding the vast majority of the citizens (ca. 95%). If, on the other hand, the Namibian languages were implemented for use in the political domain, all Namibians would be able to knowledgeably participate in politics, and thus a true participatory democracy would become possible.

English has also since independence served as the dominant language of the education domain. A number of studies (Brock-Utne and Holmarsdottir 2001, Cantoni 2007), however, have demonstrated English to be unsatisfactory for and even detrimental to this domain. Under the common interpretation of Namibia's language policy for education, English currently serves as the language of instruction in schools from Grade 4 onwards. For a number of reasons grounded in cognitive and language acquisition theory, English as the language of instruction has been demonstrated in Namibia and many other African countries (Bokamba 2007) to impede quality teaching and learning, contributing to extremely poor academic performance and high rates of failure, repetition, and wastage among students. These consequences are not only financially costly to the government, but also to the development of human capital for Namibia. Because students are required to learn in English at the same time they are learning English, content information often gets lost to language difficulties. As a result, students gain little knowledge in school, and they produce even less. Furthermore, as has been argued with regard to many other African states (Roy-Campbell 2001, Bokamba 2007), the use of English as the language of instruction in Namibian schools prevents transmission as well as production of indigenous knowledge, to the detriment of indigenous cultures and languages. The implementation of indigenous languages as media of instruction for Namibian schools would bring an overwhelmingly positive change for education in Namibia. Transmission and production of knowledge would increase in quantity and quality, and academic performance would improve significantly. While the cost of implementing indigenous languages as media of instruction would initially be high, these costs would with time subside, along with the costs previously incurred by the high rates of failure, repetition, and wastage (Bokamba 2007).

While the decision to make English the official language of Namibia was rationalized in part by its suitability to serve in the domain of science and technology, in the reality of the Namibian context, it is ineffective in serving this domain. It is ineffective in this regard because it discourages those who do not have high competence in English's technical vocabulary, which is most, to pursue studies or work in this field. As a result of this deficiency, very little progress has been made by Namibians in the fields of science and technology. If the Namibian indigenous languages were developed to incorporate scientific and technical terminology and put to use in these fields, Namibians would be significantly more motivated and empowered to contribute to their country's development through the pursuit of science and technology.

Finally, English alone certainly cannot promote appreciation nor facilitate the preservation of Namibia's many indigenous cultures and languages. In fact, the exclusive use of English in Namibia's important public domains serves to prevent the learning of Namibian languages, thereby leading to the erosion of these languages, as has been argued by a number of scholars with reference to other African states (Bamgbose 1991, 2001, Bokamba 1995, 2007). As indispensable "for understanding the richness of a tradition and for expanding the development of cultural expression in many forms," (UNIN 1981) the erosion of these languages also poses the threat of erosion of the cultures that they encode. Unless Namibia's indigenous languages are promoted in status and put to use in important public domains, their use will continuously decrease, and since they are "already minority languages in functional terms, [they] will probably turn into marginalized languages within one generation" (Harlech-Jones 2000). Therefore, it is imperative for the sake of ensuring appreciation and preservation of Namibia's indigenous languages that they be promoted in status and allocated roles in formal domains.

5. Conclusion

Based on the arguments presented thus far, it should be clear that a monolingual policy is not satisfactory for Namibia. Namibia is endowed with a great number of linguistic resources, which, if promoted in status and put to use in Namibia's public domains, could help to solve many of Namibia's current problems and contribute greatly to realizing Vision 2030. The country is therefore in need of a multilingual policy that allocates appropriate roles to its many languages, including English. While it was established in the UNIN document discussed above that English would be the official language of Namibia, the establishment of English as the only official language was not yet settled. As a whole, the study was intended to provide "a systematic, specific and logical set of foci for further research" and was "therefore recommended to the serious scholars and Namibian decision makers." This statement in the forward of the report together with the first word of its title, "Toward a Language Policy for Namibia," suggest that the report was intended to serve as a resource for scholars, planners, and decision makers to consider in their formulation of an official language policy for Namibia.

Especially important for their consideration is the section of the report following the "Rationale for English as the Official Language for Independent Namibia," titled "Language Strategies: Issues and Implications." The purpose of this section was to set out and discuss the major issues and implications that would arise from the selection of English as Namibia's official language. The introduction to this section correctly pointed out that:

Multilingualism rather than monolingualism seems to be an increasingly natural development in African and other societies where exposure to more than one language is common place. This supports and adds to the overall theme that [English] and local languages have complementary roles. However ... for local languages to play their full part in national life, government encouragement and promotion may be needed—status and respect do not necessarily arise naturally. (UNIN 1981)

Furthermore, in a short sub-section entitled "Multilingualism – A Possible Compromise," the merits of multilingual language policies are actually addressed, using the case of India as an example of success. The concluding paragraph of this short section on multilingualism is worth quoting:

Thus, while English as the language chosen by SWAPO for official use in Namibia will have a significant role to play in the life of the new nation, can it also play a complementary role with Namibian languages in the effort to achieve social and political solidarity? Will it not possibly be worthwhile to devise short and long term strategies which fully establish the use and roles of local languages as well as English, and take into account their values and permanence... (UNIN 1981)

The questions and suggestions posited above are exactly those that should have guided the formulation of Namibia's language policy. It is evident in Namibia's current policy of official monolingualism, however, that these critical suggestions were not heeded. In fact, after the publication of this UNIN document, no further language planning or policy formulation ever actually occurred. The already established policy that English would be Namibia's exclusive official language was at independence simply made official in Article 3 of the new country's constitution. Significantly, after stating that "the official language shall be English," this article stipulates permission to use languages other than English for legislative, administrative, and judicial purposes, as well as medium of instruction, "where such other languages are spoken by a substantial component of the government." Despite the open-endedness of this article's stipulations and the opportunity it provides for interpretation, no interpretation has been utilized as of yet to reflect or counter the implications that English alone has for Namibia in these domains. This suggests that an open-ended policy is not enough. In order for languages other than English to be used in Namibia's important public domains, they must be officially recognized and promoted in status and allocated roles in these domains in a new language policy of official multilingualism.

It seems, as was alluded to in the above overview of language planning and policy in Africa, that language policies in the continent have tended to take shape in one of two ways. The first and most common way is through inaction, or retention of the status quo (Bamgbose 1991, Bokamba 1995). The majority of African countries thus continue to operate under the language policies imposed by their former colonial rulers. In fewer African countries, Namibia included, language policies are the outcomes of ad-hoc ideological decisions connected to the sociopolitical environment of the time. In the case of Namibia, this decision was based on an ideology that was largely informed by the country's own sociopolitical history, characterized by oppression and injustice. The decision made in Namibia was to establish English as the country's official language. In doing so, a policy of official monolingualism was also established. This policy and the exclusive use of English in Namibia's important public domains have had many serious implications for the country. Despite warning of these implications and suggestions for how they could be countered appearing nearly a decade before Namibia gained independence, English as Namibia's sole official language and all of the implications it carries as such remain two decades after independence. Considering the inability of English alone to serve the overwhelming majority of Namibia's people and many of its most important purposes, as well as the way in which English as the exclusive official language has shown to greatly impede development in Namibia, it is truly time that the language policy be reconsidered and revised.

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