



**HAL**  
open science

## C-r de Rethinking bilingual education in postcolonial contexts, de F Chimbutane, 2011

Michel Lafon

► **To cite this version:**

Michel Lafon. C-r de Rethinking bilingual education in postcolonial contexts, de F Chimbutane, 2011. Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies, 2013, 31 (2), pp.271-279. 10.2989/16073614.2013.815984 . halshs-00877084

**HAL Id: halshs-00877084**

**<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-00877084>**

Submitted on 25 Apr 2014

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

This article was downloaded by: [michel lafon]

On: 24 September 2013, At: 11:17

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954

Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



## Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rall20>

### Rethinking bilingual education in postcolonial contexts

Michel Lafon Research Fellow<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Center for Research in the Politics of Language, University of Pretoria, South Africa

Published online: 23 Sep 2013.

**To cite this article:** Michel Lafon Research Fellow (2013) Rethinking bilingual education in postcolonial contexts, Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies, 31:2, 271-279, DOI: [10.2989/16073614.2013.815984](https://doi.org/10.2989/16073614.2013.815984)

**To link to this article:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.2989/16073614.2013.815984>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

## Book Review

### Rethinking bilingual education in postcolonial contexts

Feliciano Chimbutane

2011, Bristol, Buffalo, Toronto: *Multilingual Matters*

ISBN 9781847693631

183 pages

Since 2003 a bilingual education programme has been offered in selected rural schools of Mozambique.<sup>1</sup> As part of an early-exit transitional model, the local language is used as medium of instruction (Mol) during the first three years and maintained henceforward as a subject whereas Portuguese is introduced orally from the first year with its share of time as subject and role as Mol gradually increasing before taking over from Grade 4. The issues raised in the book revolve essentially around language practices in schools. Chimbutane undertakes to inform about, review and assess the experiment in which he has been involved, both as an academic and as an NGO consultant. Indeed, some of his advice, directed, presumably, at stakeholders – education authorities, local practitioners and consultants – gives the relevant chapters the trappings of a consultant's report but this is appropriate given the fact that swords are still hanging over the programme. Moreover, Chimbutane, himself a speaker of Shangani, writes from an insider's perspective, obviating any need for a translator. He can – and does – easily communicate with the participants in his study, ensuring a degree of empathy with them. This is particularly appropriate here. It is congruent with a classroom situation where pupils are more at ease with a teacher from their own ranks who understands their social mores (see p 25, apropos American-Indian teachers in Canada). Chimbutane's privileged position underlines the drastic changes undergone in anthropology since the mid-1950s, when Malinowski saw fit to recommend cultural immersion (see Kuper, 2000: 88), at a time when most if not all researchers were alien to the communities investigated.

This publication is all the more relevant because Mozambique is one of the very few examples, and by all means a stand alone in Southern Africa, where such educational policy has proven so popular that some rural communities outside the planned scope of the experiment have requested, from its very inception, to be included (see Lafon, 2011, 2012). Indeed, the experiment has embraced 16 or 17 languages instead of the 7 initially considered and consequently about twice as many classrooms and pupils. Moreover, the effects of the programme have been felt in society at large, far beyond the educational field. Whereas African languages and culture had little space in Mozambican public discourse, to say the least (see Lafon, 2013), they are now part and parcel of an entirely revamped concept of Mozambicanhood, where modernity blends with what Stroud (2007: 42, quoted here p 126) aptly calls a 'retraditionalisation' of society to paraphrase an extract of the author's conclusion (p 161). It is one of Chimbutane's insights that, in the situation of Mozambique, both aspects are intrinsically linked. The popular endorsement the programme received, its 'emancipatory force' in Chimbutane's own words (p 167), led the political leadership to drastically alter its ideological stance, thereby entrenching the recognition of the country's linguistic diversity and its cultural and human value.

The book draws its argument from fieldwork in two schools located in rural expanses of the southern Gaza province, where Portuguese is hardly present. Chimbutane very clearly sets the scene, emphasising the triple difficulty pupils who first encounter the Mol at school school are faced with: 'acquisition of the language, of classroom genres and of legitimated forms of knowledge' (p 27), not discounting the limited knowledge of the official language displayed by the teachers themselves (see for an example p 90 et seq.). These features are not limited to Mozambique and

apply broadly in educational settings wherever the Mol is not widely spoken. The research thus offers potential lessons for similar situations worldwide.

I shall look here at issues related to language before turning to cultural dimensions.<sup>2</sup>

### **The limits of medium of instruction immersion and language teaching**

Apropos Grade 5 Portuguese classes, where Portuguese is supposed to be *both* the medium of instruction *and* a subject, Chimbutane very clearly debunks the myth that Portuguese, in rural Mozambique at least, is a second language (L2) as opposed to a foreign language (p 87 et seq.). In rural Mozambique children hardly ever hear Portuguese outside school.<sup>3</sup> Chimbutane acknowledges this as he shifts to calling Portuguese (once) L2/FL (foreign language) (p 92). The point has, at long last, been taken: local education NGO Progresso is preparing a manual to teach Portuguese as a foreign language (E Sequiera, Progresso, pers. com. Maputo, October 2011), even though the requirement for the textbook to be valid across the country may reduce or even hinder recourse to specific first languages. In such circumstances, Chimbutane cautiously proposes (p 100) that the first language (L1) be used as a Mol, possibly jointly with the target language. This is rational. Linguistic immersion may work, *provided there is immersion*. When the school language is hardly used outside school, as is the case here (p 72), there is no immersion to speak of. Mere language classes, or even school attendance at large, cannot be substitutes. After all, in a school situation, nobody would claim to teach Arabic or Chinese or German to, say, French or Portuguese or Hindi monolingual learners (that is, with no foreknowledge of a target language not in common use in the area) without recourse to a language already known to them. This would apply even if the teachers were native speakers of the language (which, it needs be recalled, is far from the case in rural Mozambique).

The point must be emphasised as its negative impact on learning is often underestimated due to a misunderstanding about language teaching. The shortcut to meaning which is used in such instances to avoid translation, by showing, designating, body language, etc., goes for things and objects that can be shown ((some) body parts, pencil, table, etc.); for basic actions (walking, seating, standing up, talking, etc.); or for simple messages ('How are you today?') – but the domains covered are per nature limited. This strategy becomes problematic when more subtle notions are introduced, including reference to events outside the classroom, both physically and temporarily, that is, implying past or future or potential, concepts, social relations, etc., all of which are central to any extensive language learning. Resorting to the L1 inadvertently or, worse, ashamedly, through spontaneous, unprepared code-switching when the teacher realises that communication with the pupils is amiss, while it remains an obvious resource in the classroom, is of dubious value for ensuring lasting and meaningful comprehension. This calls for the reasoned use of a medium familiar to the children, preferably the L1, at least a language shared by pupils and teachers. Translation is not a sinful activity that should be avoided at all cost. On the contrary, it is a rich exercise that creates awareness of the linguistic and cultural similarities and contrasts between the languages at stake, and it is a powerful tool for meaning making. This is now well accepted in schools acknowledging fully language diversity. A confirmation of the superiority of this strategy can be found in a case study in the Philippines where Tupas and Ruanni (2010: 114) observe that 'primary pupils taught English through the mother-tongue performed better...than those who were taught English through English'.

Still, Chimbutane is careful not to depict learners' participation permitted by the use of the L1 as a means to ensuring effective learning: there may be participation without learning and learning without participation (p 98). This is a precious reminder of the complex reality of teaching.

### **The first language as subject**

It is when we turn to L1 subject classes, that is, classes where the African language mother tongue is the subject, that recourse to Portuguese appears the most inescapable (p 101 and below). This is not paradoxical: grammar, which, reassuringly enough, has not been banned from the Mozambican curriculum altogether, is the one scientific subject taught during the limited period when the local language functions as the official Mol. Obviously the African languages have not yet developed grammatical terminology of their own. The same would happen should other technical subjects be

taught in the L1. However the book falls in the symmetry trap. A parallel is drawn between the use of the L1 in Portuguese classes and that of Portuguese in L1 classes, which are presented in the same light. Tempting as the symmetry may be, the two situations are in fact opposite: in L1 classes, the language is already known in its basis at least – the exercise is aiming to enrich vocabulary, make some grammatical structures explicit, etc., and the L2 is called upon as a source of technical terms which are then presumably inserted in otherwise L1 sentences as borrowings or loans; in L2 classes, the language taught is unfamiliar if not unknown and, as happens in all other subjects, the L1 may be resorted to as a teaching help through various strategies that, much beyond the mere borrowings of words, go from code-mixing to code-switching, now elegantly subsumed under the new catchword of ‘translanguaging’ (Pluddemann, 2011). The two situations must therefore be clearly demarcated, as there is a world of difference between them. Suggesting that they are symmetrical can only lead to a confusion of the issues.

### Language attitude – the temptation of purism

The two research areas, one mainly Chope-speaking, the other, Changana-speaking (Tsonga), are appropriately chosen. Chope ranks among the small languages in Mozambique. It is restricted to that country where it is spoken by circa 4% of the population (that is, 750 000 persons), whereas Changana is ascribed in Mozambique to circa 12% or 1 700 000 people – that is, three times more – and counts significant minorities in neighbouring South Africa and Zimbabwe (see [www.ethnologue.com](http://www.ethnologue.com)). The two areas further broadly share the same socio-economic circumstances of impoverished subsistence agriculture and subsequent importance of emigration and trade to support local livelihoods. Moreover, Chope and Changana, like all Bantu languages, share an array of linguistic features derived from their common ancestry, reinforced by their geographical proximity. There seems to be no apparent memory of conflict between the two groups. However, the emergence of writing and the setting of linguistic borders have triggered significant sociolinguistic differences. Changana, along with its close cognate Ronga, was reduced to writing in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century by the Swiss Mission which used it extensively in its schools; this triggered its use in writing which blossomed in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century as it was taken up by the small educated *assimilado* elite that played an important political role at the time (see Rocha, 2006: 115, and Lafon, 2013, in print). The practice, pursued by the Swiss Mission and the Methodist Church, capsized under pressure from the colonial government in the 1930s. Shangani literary production was revived after Independence by Bento Siteo, who, besides linguistic works of note, published novels – among others *Zabela* in 1983 (translated into English in 1996 by Matusse), followed by *Musongi* (1985).<sup>4</sup> These unique circumstances made Shangani arguably the most developed language in Mozambique and significantly facilitated its extended use in the programme. Shangani, together with Ronga, enjoys unequalled prestige in the country. No such circumstances occurred for Chope, which was hardly written prior to the programme inception and remains at the bottom end of the scale. Even if several have proven their vitality in recent times Mozambican African languages may share a diglossic position vis-à-vis Portuguese but this does not entail that they are all on the same level, ‘some are more peripheral’ (p 75).

These converse settings, combined with demographic imbalance, trigger significantly different linguistic attitudes. Chope speakers are the ones at stake. In the highly sensitive area of terminology, when the sudden extension of the domains of use of their own idiom confronts them with what they may see as its deficiencies, they appear reluctant to condone borrowings and wish for ‘pure’ Chope words and forms, to ‘retain the language’ (p 101, p 109). The purist attitude plays itself in two directions, vis-à-vis Portuguese on the one hand, as expected, but also vis-à-vis the sister African language on the other. As sociolinguistics has long established, languages have always influenced each other in complex ways and there is, at least in our age, no ‘pure’ language, so we are dealing here with perceptions rather than truth. Understandable though this attitude may be, one must tread very carefully here. If, in Mozambique, claims for ‘pure’ language were too vocal, they would probably threaten the maintenance of the programme as they could easily be painted as proxies for ethnic division. For the sake of the programme, therefore, and of the languages themselves, any linguistic jingoism must strongly be discouraged.

It is probably easier to thwart purism in relation to Portuguese. Chimbutane tries to bring some reason to the discussion, explaining that, given the socio-political context, borrowings from Portuguese are inevitable. He could have added that, in neighbouring South Africa, endless and fruitless debates on borrowings versus internal coinages for school terminology have shown that borrowings cannot be avoided if African languages are to be used in the modern world (see for instance Taljaard, 2008). This has recently been illustrated in a newly released Setswana dictionary that fully acknowledges today's language (Otlogetswe, 2012).

The issue of the relation between 'sister' African languages, on which Chimbutane does not really position himself, is somewhat subtler. Most Choep speakers would be fluent in Changana, as illustrated by their smooth shift to Changana to accommodate the author's limited (by his own admission) command of Choep, another instance of the efficient linguistic skills developed by ordinary people when circumstances demand. However they appear to resent the influence the bigger sister has had, and has, on their own idiom. But African languages need not be in competition among themselves. There is no need for Portuguese to remain the only source for technical terms. African languages could easily serve, as Chimbutane appropriately suggests, as lexical and terminological resources for each other, with all languages, whether minor or major, contributing their share, thus strengthening their internal ties and building bridges between them. This would go a long way towards pre-empting the potential negative effects of focusing on the particular. Post-apartheid South Africa offers a valuable example of what can be achieved in that regard. In reaction to the past when ethnic separation was promoted by seeking different terms in each and every official language for newly introduced concepts,<sup>5</sup> languages belonging to either one of the two main families (Nguni and Sotho) are now tentatively brought closer by sharing linguistic innovations, as happens in Parliament for the translation of official documents (Moses Biyela, former Parliamentary translator (Zulu), pers. com. 2008). Such a strategy would imply that languages in Mozambique should be developed in a co-ordinated and centralised fashion, through an ad hoc agency – a language academy of sorts that Dias (2002) advocated for, still to be set up. For the time being, language development is piloted on a piecemeal basis by linguists, the majority of whom hail from University Eduardo Mondlane in Maputo, who may or may not speak the language at stake, and hence may be more or less sensitive to its speakers' feelings.

That schools in such situations may have a positive impact on language development is borne out by an anecdote. As linguistic innovation (terminology and spelling essentially) is introduced, it is children who become its bearers; it is through them that parents get acquainted with the change (p 116 et seq.). This is a far cry from a more common situation where children would bring home the ex-colonial or school language and the parents in turn would try, with varying success, to emulate them. This is potentially far-reaching, and provides some hope for the future of minority languages.

### **The core issues of contents and the role of local knowledge**

In debates about language in education in postcolonial countries, there is all too often a tendency to focus on language and disregard contents, not to mention pedagogy, as Tupas and Ruanni (2010) observe in respect to the Philippines. These aspects however cannot be fully divorced. Former colonial languages on the one hand and languages of the periphery on the other, including African languages,<sup>6</sup> express profoundly differing cultures and worldviews. That the issue is cultural rather than purely linguistic is shown by creole societies. The genetic affiliation of creole languages to a European source does not lessen the cultural (and ethnic) gap between the respective speakers. Think of Haitians as opposed to metropolitan French. Those discrepancies make literal translation of schools manuals conceived and written in Portuguese into African languages such as the two Bantu ones considered herein largely inappropriate, on cultural grounds as much as linguistic ones. The same would obviously apply to translation from French and/or English into Wolof, Swahili or Zulu, to take but a few examples. I do not purport here to 'essentialise' languages and cultures. I acknowledge, as postcolonial theory has underscored, that modern circumstances have by necessity triggered a measure of fluidity between linguistic systems as well as cultural viewpoints in individuals from non-Western horizons (much less so though in natives of mainstream Western countries even when confronted on a regular basis by non-Western otherness). But this

argument cannot be used to surreptitiously expand Western models of thought without giving due to non-Western ones. Here, education must not be presented as coterminous with Western formal education, notwithstanding the Education for All Framework and Millenium Development Goals. Shoko Yamada (2010) for instance has shown the fallacy of the notion of a 'universal' and atemporal validity of such 'greater goods', which she shows are historically constructed, while Brock-Utne (2000) reminds us of the Western bias against this think-good concept which largely disregards local circumstances, particularly in respect of feasibility and societal impact. There exists or at least existed in Mozambique, as elsewhere, indigenous forms of education, not only forms of knowledge (alluded to p 133) but also of knowledge transmission. And one aim of bilingual education is, or should be, 'to transform a standardizing system into a diversifying one' as Horneberger explicates (quoted in Benson, 2003: 56). Still, as observed by Ramoupi (2011) in respect of South Africa, 'The shift from a Eurocentric to an African character of education has not occurred'. This is demonstrated here in the way language and culture are tackled by the programme. This shortcoming is insufficiently raised in the book.

Language-wise, that is, when the L1 itself is the topic of the class, the transformation doesn't necessarily imply a full paradigm change but at the very least build the curriculum from an analysis of the language. An example will clarify things. An L1 lesson observed deals with degrees of comparison in adjectives (p 78 et seq.). This involves two grammatical items, a word category and a concept or operation.

Chimbutane, a linguist himself, is well aware that adjectives are rather uncommon in Bantu languages and are certainly not a central feature of the grammar; he does note in passing without extrapolating further, that 'qualifiers' would be a better term. Still it is highly questionable whether adjectives deserve a lesson at an early stage of teaching the language. Moreover, comparison in Bantu languages is expressed in ways that have nothing to do with any alteration of the adjectives (or qualifiers) that could even loosely be termed 'degrees' along a grammatical tradition inherited from Latin. Still the lesson presupposes it. As a consequence the whole exercise is somewhat out of tune with the intended aim of a rigorous grammatical lesson, as would have been (hopefully) the case in Portuguese. In any case the lesson on adjectives is hijacked by a discussion on the proper form of the word (a verb) meaning 'being in good health' (pp 80–81).

This example illustrates that, far from being limited to occasional features, the influence of European languages on the manual informs the whole grammatical frame. Thus, the noun class system and the alliteration process so characteristic of Bantu languages are not mentioned, when they should be its guiding thread.

More specifically in relation to the expression of quality in African languages, the important category of ideophones comes to mind. Ideophones often serve to intensify various qualifiers. But ideophones are a frequent casualty in school manuals on African languages, as is the case here, because European languages lack the category. This is baffling, because ideophones offer such intriguing and exciting features for children to play with that one would think they are a blessing for language pedagogy, much like the occasional rhymes or alliteration in English or French.

In respect of grammar, therefore, Chimbutane, well informed and aware of the facts, could have been more incisive by underlining some inadequacies of the set textbooks and suggest directions, if only with a view to their improvement.

The case of the Chope counting system (p 120) reveals another feature of the cultural gap, mentioned but not explicitly raised. Chope, as with other African languages in the region, has an original base-5 counting system (6 is 5+1, etc.). The education authorities are depicted as making an attempt to replace the composed numbers (5+1) by wholesome imports, presumably to align the language with the dominant decimal system used in Portuguese (and elsewhere). Happily, we learn that the Chope community, not at ease with the proposed change, managed to force the institution to back down and accept their own genuine numbering. It is not clarified though whether the logic of the base-5 numbering will influence (as it should) the school numeracy component (the way of explaining and decomposing operations), so that it can reconcile with mental calculus.<sup>7</sup>

And then we come to inherent cultural aspects. Inescapable in the school context are body and health (as already transpired apropos 'adjectives'). The lack of one-to-one correspondence between

the two school languages (L1 and Portuguese) appears in a lesson on proper nutrition, which leads to introducing the term 'diabetes'. Using its Changana equivalent *nyongwa*, which also (and probably primarily) means 'bile' (Siteo *et al.*'s Ronga dictionary, which does not mention diabetes), the teacher influenced by her mother tongue refers back to the disease as 'bile' in Portuguese (p 89–90). Besides showing her limited knowledge of Portuguese, this example illustrates differing conceptions of body, health and disease. This same issue probably also underlies the lack of understanding by the pupils of the three-part division of the body proposed in a Portuguese lesson (p 85–86). The purely materialistic conception of the body instanced here is presumably at odds with local beliefs, and children (and teacher) might have had difficulty in conceptualising the body as a mere physical object isolated from all surroundings, physical and otherwise.

In his comments to explain the lack of response from pupils in those instances the author limits himself to the issue of language (pp 121–123). That is obviously a problem, and one regrets that he does not tackle the conceptual issues behind it, or that come along with it. He comes closer to a more comprehensive view when acknowledging the cognitive gain derived from the programme's acceptance of 'local funds of knowledge', allowing for a measure of agency from the pupils. Thus, when explicit reference is made to a local reality, 'bringing the outside in' as Lytra *et al.* (2011) call it, the piece of cork used as a 'tooth-brush' (Changana *n'ala*) in lieu of the latter, or in another instance ash to substitute soap, pupils relate more easily to the lesson's topics (hygiene, as it were). Commendable though this may be, it does not depart from a very limited instrumentalisation of local knowledge, where local categories of knowledge are referred to but never questioned within the local logical paradigm, as Lewandowski (2012: 101) noted for bilingual schools in Burkina Faso. Still, what is at stake contents-wise goes beyond the mere inclusion of local terms in an otherwise Western framed lesson; rather, it is, or should be, about incorporating community knowledge as a resource for the lesson, using possibly a bi-'ontics' approach.<sup>8</sup> This will ensure a link with the past. In precolonial times, education, understood broadly as the way to prepare the youth for taking on their social responsibilities, was given as a matter of course through the medium spoken by the community (Alidou, 2004: 197). Community knowledge may be smoothly brought in by the use of the local language, especially through lore (see Lafon F, 1982 for an early acknowledgment, and Haire & Matjila, 2008 for a South African illustration). A well-balanced example of what can be achieved is illustrated in a recent bilingual (French-Fulfulde) school manual edited by Tourneux *et al.* (2011), targeting schools in northern Cameroon. Even though the overall framework reflects Western scientific conception, local knowledge about each topic is considered and presented, invited and supported as it is by the inclusion of genuine Fulfulde texts, further translated as a way to facilitate their use for those teachers not versed in either language. This, it seems, 'provides the children with opportunity to...reflect on how traditional African society approached the subject' (Osaki, 1994: 64) while avoiding presenting this 'traditional' view as unique and final, which would obviously be problematic.

### Language and accessibility

Consistent with discussing language choice in the classroom, it is fitting to examine the book in this regard, as it is not exempted from a similar decision, as well as the more general issue of accessibility.

The overall language of Chimbutane's text is English, a choice which betrays its origin in a PhD completed at Birmingham in Great Britain and the audience targeted, composed of policy makers in Mozambique as well as local and international education consultants, for whom English is the common working language. Incidentally, this serves as an illustration of the spread of English among the country's elite, which makes it so urgent to entrench African languages.

Most excerpts of class observations are given in their English translation, significant exceptions being the transcript of a song in Chope and a handful of instances in Portuguese or either African language, usually the inception of a dialogue, words in the lessons or cultural expressions, including insults. All non-English excerpts are then duly translated into English. This choice calls for two comments, one dealing with language, the other with the audience.

One can only regret that the original Chope and Changana texts are not given in their entirety, especially as it is not always clear in which language (African or Portuguese) the exchange has been conducted (pp 80–122). I do not underestimate space constraints but, due to the very nature

of the issue discussed, a more 'literal' representation of the exchanges would make full sense, even if cumbersome, by giving a better sense of what is happening in the classrooms language-wise.

In relation to the targeted audience, one can only agree with Chimbutane that his book would be beneficial to teachers in rural areas involved (or not) in the programme (p 2). But the language chosen makes this unrealistic. Few rural teachers in Mozambique would have sufficient command of English to read the book, or else they would probably not remain rural primary teachers. In that line, a collective book in Portuguese dedicated to the programme, co-edited by Chimbutane and Stroud, was launched in Maputo in May 2013, after many delays. Were it not for the good intention expressed above this might in part answer the point as Chimbutane summarises his findings in a chapter therein.

An issue linked to the language choice is that of availability and of price. By October 2011 Chimbutane's book had not yet reached Maputo's bookshops. The author, whose concern must be commended, had come to an understanding with the publishers to make the book available in the country at a discounted price (pers. com. Oct 2011, Maputo). Still, most rural primary teachers in Mozambique are unlikely to divert some of their meagre earnings towards purchasing intellectual aliments, however much these may be relevant to them (supposing of course language is not a problem). The dire economic situation of education in the country is obviously not the author's fault. The hope here is that the discounted price will encourage education NGOs to make the book widely available in school libraries, most of which, as a matter of fact, exist at best in name only.

All in all, Chimbutane's is an important, 'though-provoking' (Derbel, 2012: 270) book to read as, besides providing information on a country whose education innovations have not been extensively covered, it brings to the fore new understanding of 'bilingual education in post-colonial contexts'. The laudatory responses it triggered are testimony to this (David, 2012; Derbel, 2012). In its first two years since its release, I have encountered at least two other reviews. A must-read, therefore, for those interested either in the country's social and political development or the dynamics of language in postcolonial classrooms.

On a lighter note, an explicit indication on the cover page that the book's case studies are located in Mozambique might have been helpful. To infer such from the reproduction of a board presumably nailed on a school door with a notice in Portuguese *Património do Estado* (Property of the State) requires familiarity with the recent history of the country. This illustration is in fact a bit disconcerting as the focus of the book is clearly not on history. Obviously, by not mentioning Mozambique in the title, the implication is that the lessons drawn here are valid in other postcolonial situations. Still, on this account it might also escape some researchers with an interest in the country rather than in education, and that would be unfortunate.

I cannot conclude without an allusion to gender. If it is acceptable to use a generic 'she' for teachers as it can be safely assumed that most are female, as does extensively Skutnabb-Kangas (2000), it is not so for learners. And the statistics given show a balanced distribution. However the use of the feminine in a passage relating to the psychological benefits of the use of the mother tongue in early schooling (p 76) seems to restrict them to girls. Common wisdom has it that these benefits are valid for both male *and* female pupils. It may be a lapsus calami unless of course the author is making a subtle point here about a finding that use of mother tongue allows postcolonial girls to stay longer in schools (see Hovens, 2002), and/or gender roles in culture transmission, but either contention would need in any case further elaboration. A few typos: p 17, 'fallowed' instead of followed; p 20, the French should read 'Les écoles de la pédagogie convergente' (not 'pédagogie convergent'); 'at any moment' should rather be 'at no moment' (p 80).

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> For a concise overview of the programme, see Benson (2010).
- <sup>2</sup> I deal with political and historical issues in another piece (Lafon, 2013).
- <sup>3</sup> In fact in the south of Mozambique, due to emigration, English may well be more present.
- <sup>4</sup> I am grateful to Bento for this information.
- <sup>5</sup> If English and Afrikaans were the sole official languages at the national level, a number of African languages were used in the Bantu education system; the same were also (co-)official languages in the respective homelands.

- <sup>6</sup> One would like identify them as *former* peripheral or subaltern languages for the sake of symmetry, but for most at least, that would be mere lip service to political correctness.
- <sup>7</sup> Thanks to Ian Draisma who awakened me to this problematic issue.
- <sup>8</sup> Postma and Postma (2011) contrast ontology to 'ontics', which they project as a dynamic interaction with reality rather than just depicting it as inaccessible.

## References

- Alidou H.** 2004. Medium of instruction in post-colonial Africa. In: Tollefson JW & Tsui AB (eds), *Medium of instruction policies: Which agenda? Whose agenda?* Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. pp 195–213.
- Benson C.** 2003. Bilingual schooling in Mozambique and Bolivia: From experimentation to implementation. *Language Policy* 3: 47–66.
- Benson C.** 2010. How multilingual African contexts are pushing educational research and practice in new directions. *Language and Education* 24(4): 323–336.
- Brock-Utne B.** 2000. *Whose education for all? Recolonization of the African mind.* New York: Falmer Press.
- Chimbutane F & Stroud C (ed.).** 2013. *Educação bilingue em Moçambique: Reflectindo criticamente sobre políticas e práticas.* Maputo: Texto Editores.
- David Khemlani M.** 2012. Book Review, Feliciano Chimbutane: Rethinking bilingual education in postcolonial contexts. *Language Policy* 12(2): 197–199.
- Derbel F.** 2012. Book Review, Feliciano Chimbutane: Rethinking bilingual education in postcolonial contexts. *Language and Education* 26(3): 267–270.
- Dias Norberto H.** 2002. *As desigualdades sociolinguísticas e o fracasso escolar: Em direcção a uma prática linguístico-escolar libertadora.* Maputo: Promedia. p 306.
- Haire K & Matjila DS.** 2008. Teaching for cultural relevance and restoration in the multi-lingual South African setting: The pedagogical potential of bi-lingual Setswana-English stories. *Alternation: Journal of the Centre for the Study of Southern African Literature and Languages* 15(2): 158–180.
- Hovens M.** 2002. Bilingual education in West Africa: Does it work? *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* 5(5): 249–266.
- Kuper A.** 2000. *L'anthropologie britannique au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (transl. Gaillard G). Paris: Karthala.
- Lafon F.** 1982. Rôle des langues (maternelles, véhiculaires, nationales) dans le transfert et l'échange des connaissances. Paris: Unesco, Division for the Study of Development.
- Lafon M.** 2011. L'Envers du décor. Les politiques coloniales relatives à l'usages des langues Africaines à l'école continuent de commander les attitudes. Contrastes entre Afrique du Sud et Mozambique. *Plurilinguisme, politique linguistique et éducation. Quels éclairages pour Mayotte?* Presses Universitaires Rouen Le Havre. p 431–448.
- Lafon M.** 2012. L'Introduction des langues Africaines dans le système éducatif au Mozambique signale-t-elle le dépassement de l'assimilation? 12<sup>th</sup> International Conference of the International Academy of Linguistic Law, Bloemfontein, 2010.
- Lafon M.** 2013. Book Review, Feliciano Chimbutane: Rethinking bilingual education in postcolonial contexts. *Multilingual Education* 3(2): 1–6. Available at <http://www.multilingual-education.com/content/3/1/2> [accessed 15 July 2013].
- Lewandowski S.** 2012. Les savoirs locaux face aux écoles burkinabè. *L'Homme* 201: 85–106.
- Lytra V & Spindler Moller J.** 2011. Editorial, Bringing the outside in: Negotiating knowledge and agency in multilingual learning contexts. *Linguistics and Education* 22: 1–9.
- Osaki KM.** 1994. Indigenous African knowledge: Understanding, use or misuse? *Educational Innovation in Post-Colonial Africa.* PRAESA, University of Cape Town.
- Otlogetswe T.** 2012. *Tlhalosi ya Medi Ya Setswana.* Medi Publishing. Available at <http://www.mmegi.bw/index.php?sid=7&aid=1756&dir=2012/July/Thursday19> [accessed 15 July 2013].
- Pluddemann P.** 2011. Crossing new frontiers with the translanguaging wagon. *LEAP News* 29(March): 10–11.

- Postma M & Potsma D.** 2011. Who is laughing last in the South African classroom? A critical reflexion on language in education. *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies* 29(1): 43–54.
- Ramoupi Lekgotla laga N.** 2011, 16–22 September. I don't speak and learn what I like. *Mail & Guardian*. p 64.
- Rocha A.** 2006. Associativismo e nativismo em Moçambique - Contribuição para o estudo das origens do nacionalismo Moçambicano Maputo: Texto Editores.
- Siteo B.** 1985. *Musongi*. Maputo: Associação dos Escritores Moçambicanos.
- Siteo B.** 1996 (1983). *Zabela: My wasted life* (transl. Matusse R). Harare: Baobab Books.
- Siteo B, Narcisso M, & Langa P.** 2008. Dicionário Ronga-Portugês. Maputo: NELIMO.
- Skutnabb-Kangas T.** 2000. *Linguistic genocide in education – or worldwide diversity and human rights?* Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Stroud C.** 2007. Bilingualism: Colonialism and postcolonialism. In: Heller M (ed.), *Bilingualism: A social approach*. London: Palgrave. pp 25–49.
- Taljaard E.** 2008. Issues in scientific terminology in African languages. In: Lafon M & Webb V (eds), *Standardisation of African languages in South Africa*. Johannesburg: IFAS Working Paper Series 11: 88–91.
- Tourneux H, Boubakari A, & Hadidja K.** 2011. *La transmission des savoirs en Afrique. Savoirs locaux et langues locales pour l'enseignement*. Paris: Karthala.
- Tupas T & Ruanni F.** 2010 The new challenge of the mother tongues: The future of Philippine postcolonial language politics. *Kritika Kultura* 16: 108–121. Available at <http://KritikaKultura.ateneo.net> [accessed 15 July 2013].
- Yamada S.** 2010. The discourse of the first Commission on Education for Sub-Saharan Africa: Does history repeat itself? NORRAG: 3. Available at <http://www.norrag.org/en/publications/norrag-news/online-version/a-world-of-reports-a-critical-review-of-global-development-reports-with-an-angle-on-education-and-training.html> [accessed 17 July 2013].

---

Michel Lafon

Research Fellow, Center for Research in the Politics of Language, University of Pretoria, South Africa  
 e-mail: [michel.lafon@up.ac.za](mailto:michel.lafon@up.ac.za) and [lafon@vjf.cnrs.fr](mailto:lafon@vjf.cnrs.fr)

---