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Globalisation, Multilingualism and Multiculturalism in Mozambique

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Abstract

The present paper discusses the issue of increasing levels of multilingualism and multiculturalism, worldwide, as consequence of ongoing globalization and look at the major challenges involved in managing linguistic and cultural diversity at societal, institutional and academic level, in particular. The paper has as its major focus the Mozambican context and drawing on current research in the country and internationally on the language question, it discusses the various existing challenges and opportunities for devising an inclusive and democratic language and language education policy.

Key words: multilingualism, multiculturalism, globalization and diversity

The adoption of Portuguese as Official Language

As a background to the present study, it is worth mentioning that switching between two or more languages is part of the daily language practices of the average Mozambican, considering that the majority speaks an L1, usually a Mozambican Bantu Language, in the home domain, an L2, the country's official language, Portuguese, used mostly as the country's *Lingua Franca* and also for all formal and public administration domains and in a few instances, a foreign language, which in most cases will likely be English.

High levels of linguistic and cultural diversity and bi/multilingualism characterize Mozambique, a country, which as a result of the colonization process, and similarly to other countries in the region, has adopted the ex-colonial language, Portuguese, as the only official language, at the time of its independence in 1975. The adoption of the former colonial languages as official languages has been common practice in many independent countries in Africa. Among the reasons that appear to be behind the choice of the ex-coloniser's languages at the expense of the local African languages is the fact that the newly-independent countries did not really have any other alternative. It should be said that, in many countries, most of the African languages either

did not have a written form or decisions had to be made concerning the language to select from amidst the mosaic of languages (Henriksen 2010).

For Ruíz (1988:7), a large part of the work in the field of language planning has, in fact, been inspired by the “preponderance of problem-oriented language planning approaches”, which seem to establish a link between language and language diversity with social problems and therefore multilingualism being perceived as ultimately leading to a lack of social cohesiveness¹; with everyone speaking their own language, political and social consensus being *impossible* (pp.10)². In fact, for Tsonope (1995), it is widely argued that promotion of various languages impairs national cohesion, increasing the risk of the emergence of conflicts between communities³.

Still in relation to the adoption of the ex-colonial language, at the expense of the Mozambican Bantu languages, Ganhão (1979) admitted that although spoken by a very small percentage of Mozambicans, at the time of independence, Portuguese was certainly a politically neutral language, which would serve well the purposes of nation building, and surely a better option than any other national language for avoiding conflicts. The view of multilingualism or language diversity as a problem was certainly present in Mozambique at the time of independence. The vision of a multilingual Mozambique was out of the political agenda; the key goal at the time was to urgently build the Mozambican nation and make it work as such. The fact that there were so many languages spoken by the various ethnic groups constituting the new Mozambican state, and the fact that none of them was spoken nation-wide as a common language or *Lingua Franca*, would probably have constituted a hindrance to the birth of the new Mozambican nation.

¹ We have to look at the equation – multilingualism means problems - with caution, as a number of examples exist throughout the world of linguistically homogeneous areas (like Northern Ireland, Rwanda or Somalia), which also lack social cohesiveness; and if we compare them with Switzerland, which is extremely heterogeneous but still cohesive, then it becomes difficult to argue in favour of the equation.

² A very interesting critical review of the suggested correlation between high linguistic diversity and level of socioeconomic development or the relationship between multilingualism and social wealth of a country is presented by Coulmas 1992, who draws on Pool (1972: 222) who argues that “linguistically highly fragmented countries are always poor”.

³ See David Laitin (2004) for an interesting discussion of the correlation between language policy and civil war and the evidence he presents “against claims that the elimination of minority grievances would be a sure fire way of lowering the incidences of civil war” (p. 178). See also François Grin (2004) for the costs of maintaining cultural diversity.

Portuguese in Mozambique: Status and Attitudes

As a result of its adoption as the only official language, and thus its connection to jobs in the formal labour market, including both the public and private sectors, and its exclusive use in the education system⁴, the Portuguese language has enjoyed a very high status and prestige. It is a language, thus, seen as the key to academic, social, professional, and economic ascendance. It is a language linked to the top of the social hierarchy, and a language highly valued by the social and political elites and equally by the masses⁵.

The Portuguese language in Mozambique is no longer seen as the ex-coloniser's language, but a Mozambican language in its own right⁶. It certainly differs from the Portuguese of Portugal or the Portuguese of Brazil in many respects, and particularly at the lexical and phonological level. It is quite common, nowadays, to hear and read about the nativisation of the Portuguese language in Mozambique, which according to Firmino (2005: 143) comprises not only a linguistic dimension, as new usages are being developed, but also a symbolic dimension, characterised by the emergence of new social attitudes and ideologies. Gonçalves (1996: 61) points out that Mozambican Portuguese is characterised by the coining of new words, as well as extensive borrowings not only from the Bantu languages, but also from English; although it still draws on the European Portuguese, new semantic values and syntactic properties have developed.

Lopes (1998: 475), on the other hand argues that the Portuguese language is no longer foreign, as it "has been evolving as a naturalised variety to serve the needs of Mozambicans". The

⁴ It should be highlighted that the *Plano Curricular do Ensino Básico* or the Curricular Plan for Basic Education (2003: 17) stipulates that the medium of instruction in the whole education system is Portuguese, regardless of the fact that the large majority of children do not speak it when they start schooling.

⁵ Firmino's (2005) study on attitudes to Portuguese in Maputo city appears to confirm that the Portuguese language is highly valued due to its pragmatic function, or in his own words, "*os sentimentos em relação ao Português é de que esta língua se tornou um importante instrumento linguístico em Maputo, em parte como resposta às exigências do Mercado linguístico e socioeconómico, mas também como resultado de uma consciência metapragmática da mudança do seu estatuto social*". Essentially what Firmino states is that feelings in relation to Portuguese indicate that this is an important linguistic tool in Maputo, partly as a response to the demands of the linguistic and socioeconomic market, but also as a result of a metapragmatic awareness to change in its social statute. In her study of Trilingualism in Guinea-Bissau, Carol Benson came up with a similar conclusion as per the attitudes of ordinary people towards the Portuguese language. She argues that "although only a small percentage of Guineans claim to speak Portuguese (9% total according to the 1991 census), there is a widespread, unquestioning belief in its value for future employment and other opportunities". (2004: 170).

⁶ Although in the official discourse and, most particularly, in the Constitution of the Republic, there is a reference to the *national languages*, meaning territorially and ethno-culturally Mozambican, and the Portuguese language (still seen as an exogenous language).

naturalisation and indigenisation processes have led to the acquisition of new features, adapting the language to the “local realities, including the journalistic and literary registers of use”. In Couto’s (1986) view, alterations to the Portuguese language go beyond the linguistic domain and reveal a different perception of the world and life. “Mozambicans are in the process of transcending their role as simply users of the Portuguese language and assuming a status in which they are co-producers of this means of expression”.

Multilingualism and Multiculturalism in Mozambique

As already mentioned above, Mozambique is a multi-ethnic, a multicultural and a multilingual country, and this heterogeneity is certainly a result of the encounter and contact, over the years, between different groups of people, among them, Islamic coastal traders, European colonizers, and the indigenous populations. Sixteen main ethnic groups, mostly of Bantu origin, are recognised in Mozambique. In addition, we also find population groups of European descent, mixed Euro-Africans, Indians and Chinese.

As a result of ongoing globalisation, the levels of multilingualism and multiculturalism have surely increased in Mozambique, due to the presence of large numbers of Chinese nationals working mainly in the construction industry, Indian and Brazilian nationals working for the mine industry, just to mention a few. Globalisation, characterised by increasing levels of population movements and migration, is just one side of the coin. The other side is certainly the partition of Africa in the 1880s, which in my view, has also contributed greatly to increasing levels of ethno-linguistic and cultural diversity in the African territories and particularly in Mozambique. As Mazrui (1998:5) indicates, the “national boundaries of most African States lack the underpinning of any national linguistic identity”; in the same token, Kashoki (2003: 186) argues that

The largely arbitrary nature of the manner in which present-day African countries came into being as sovereign nation states is directly responsible for their present highly multi-ethnic, multicultural and multilingual ‘national’ character – sometimes, as in the case of Tanzania and Nigeria, containing as many as 100 or more ‘languages’ or ‘dialects’ within their borders.

Both Mazrui and Kashoki defend the view that the current linguistic diversity of many African countries is in part an artificial outcome of the colonisation process, resulting from the manner in which their borders were conceived by the colonial powers.

The Mozambican National Languages: Status and Attitudes

Until recently,⁷ the use of the Mozambican National Languages had mostly been assigned to the home, family, and other informal domains such as shops, market places, etc. In addition, some of the Mozambican languages have also been used in radio broadcasting, particularly for news, and also for religious purposes. In regards to the status of the Mozambican National Languages, it would be quite prudent to argue that feelings and attitudes towards them have, throughout the years, been quite ambivalent; a mixture of positive and negative feelings.

Soon after independence, the use of these languages in the public sphere (particularly schools) was strongly discouraged by the FRELIMO government, the education authorities and also at the level of certain families (especially, urban and literate). In other words, there was no space, in the public sphere, for the use of the Mozambican National Languages. Among the reasons that appeared to have prevented their use in the public sphere were, the need to promote national unity by speaking a neutral language, the fact that these languages were seen as underdeveloped (particularly when it came to their readiness to be used as vehicles of instruction, issues related to their orthography or lack of it, etc.). One could perhaps attempt and say that, in fact, they seemed to be deprived of prestige, considering that during the colonial period and in the pre-independence years they were all considered dialects, with all the related connotations.⁸

Regarding the question of attitudes to indigenous African languages, Kamwangamalu (2006:730) points out that

A set of beliefs ... perpetuate the colonial myth that indigenous African languages do not have the linguistic complexity to be used in higher domains; and that these languages are good only to preserve African cultures and traditions. [Such a model, in his opinion, has] ideological implications

⁷ Most specifically, early 1990s, with the introduction of the national languages in literacy development and under the umbrella of the Mother Tongue Bilingual Education experimental project

⁸ In the popular use, the term dialect is commonly seen as a linguistic variety which is 'inferior', less prestigious, and something 'less' than a proper or a fully-fledged language

that condemn languages to perennial status as underdeveloped. Consequently, in the post-colonies in Africa the position of the indigenous African languages in education and other higher domains has remained closely linked to the inherited colonizer's model, which perpetuates the hegemony of ex-colonial languages over the indigenous African languages.

Although the use of the Mozambican National Languages has been excluded from the formal contexts, they are strongly viewed as vehicles and symbols of the Mozambican national ethno-linguistic and cultural identity and, for that reason, their vitality is quite high⁹. They are still being transmitted from parent to child, from generation to generation, particularly in the rural areas. In fact, with their introduction in the education system, it is possible to argue, without a doubt, that there is a renewed vigour and even prestige in speaking and using these languages. Recent developments in Mozambican society point to the introduction of these languages also in the public television, introduction of *major* and *minor* courses in the Mozambican Bantu languages at university level (*Universidade Pedagógica*) and increasing research on these languages.

The English language

Attitudes to the English language are very positive in Mozambique, due to the fact that it is the most spoken foreign language taught and learned in the Country, the main working language at the level of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the Commonwealth of Nations, the African Union (AU), of which Mozambique is part of and also the main *Lingua Franca* used by other international organisations, such as the United Nations (UN).

Mozambique appears, geographically, like an island surrounded by English Speaking countries, such as South Africa, Swaziland, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi, and Tanzania. Although Portuguese is spoken in countries such as Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Brazil, Portugal, and to a small extent in Macau, in order to communicate with the rest of the world, Portuguese alone would not suffice. However, the findings of the study conducted by Henriksen (2010) indicate that the English language would neither be enough. While admitting the importance of speaking English, the children in the urban school seem to look at multilingualism (including the

⁹ It is probably this strong identification with their mother tongues, as markers of ethno-cultural, linguistic and group identity that has contributed to the vitality and maintenance of these languages.

use of Portuguese and the Mozambican National Languages) as part of the answer to the challenges of globalisation.

Challenges in managing multilingualism and diversity

Managing multilingualism and diversity at society and school level raise a number of challenges that include, among others, the following:

- (1) the need to manage people's attitudes to minority and majority languages or Languages of Wider Communication (LWCs), people's perceptions on the symbolic value of languages;
- (2) the issue of the costs involved, for instance, in providing mother tongue education to everyone and the costs of defining a Language Policy that includes all languages and population groups; and
- (3) the need to eliminate ethnic and social cleavages.

In spite of the above-mentioned challenges, a number of successful examples are reported from different parts of the world. For instance, among others, we have in Europe the 'European School Model'¹⁰ in providing multilingual education, and in India, there is the case of Tribal Multilingual Education¹¹. As many have argued before me, although managing diversity is a very "arduous and expensive" endeavour¹², it is worth it. Multilingualism and language diversity should be seen as "sources of knowledge and enrichment" (Extra & Yagmur 2004), as "much more of an asset than a disadvantage" (Hélot & Young (2006), or as very appropriately put by Jo Lo Bianco (1987) as resources for the individual, the society and the economy. Linguistic Diversity enriches our world and our reality; because, "all languages are depositories of

¹⁰ See Baetens Beardsmore (1995) for details on the European School Experience, comprising provision of education in eight or nine different languages (majority European languages). Of course, I am not suggesting that this model would be easily replicated in a context such as Mozambique, because of the very favourable conditions of the European School Model, characterised by a whole wealth of resources (human, material, etc); conditions which are not easily available in Mozambique.

¹¹ See Mahendra Mishra (2004) for an account of Tribal Multilingual Education in India.

¹² On the 2nd February 2008, Jutta Limbach, President of the Goethe-Institut, stated the following, in her paper entitled *Plurilingualism and Multilingualism – Obstacles on the Route towards a European Public*: "For some, the postulate of multilingualism appears to be an annoying national relic within the mosaic of the future European culture. However, this criticism misjudges the very special nature of European integration. The EU member states and their people do not want to follow the model of the nation state when shaping the European Union. When singing the praise of multilingualism, we must not forget a particularly weighty argument – the fact that language pluralism proves to be arduous and expensive."

knowledge and some of the endangered languages constitute the only possibility of access to valuable indigenous knowledge that reaches far back into the history of human species” (Alexander, 2006: 3).

Concluding Remarks

Based on the above and informed by the best international practices, I advocate for the need to devise an inclusive and democratic language education policy for multilingual contexts such as Mozambique, in which there is room for smaller or *minority* languages and bigger or *majority* languages. This is a policy that is grounded on the discourse on Linguistic Human Rights (LHRs), it is a policy aimed at maintaining the country's linguistic diversity, while promoting its cultural and economic development, and at the same time fostering national integration, and helping the Mozambicans to keep abreast of world developments and participate actively in the so-called knowledge society.

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