

**PREFACE TO SPECIAL EDITION:
LANGUAGE POLITICS AND MULTILINGUALISM IN AFRICA**

The issue of language politics in relation to multilingualism in Africa has been a subject of considerable theoretical and empirical discussion. The main debate on this issue has focused on the role and sociolinguistic status of African indigenous languages in official domains like education, politics, business, religion and sports, among others. The main sentiment that has been raised by most scholars of language politics in Africa is that the continent cannot develop socially, culturally and economically when it relies on foreign languages for its philosophical and scientific discourses at all levels of learning and administration. By empowering indigenous languages African governments ensure maximum participation of the masses in their political, socio-cultural and economic development. The South African icon, Nelson Mandela, had the same conviction when he said ‘if you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language that goes to his heart’. Therefore, Africans must be taught and be governed in their own languages.

This was the main debate that exercised the minds of linguists and language practitioners during the African Languages Conference that was hosted by *Amabhubesi* from the 28th to the 29th of March 2014 in Johannesburg under the theme: *understanding the role played by languages in the integration and development of African countries*. Five of the eight papers that are in this Special Issue (SI) were presented at the conference. Though the other three were not presented at the conference, they are relevant because they address issues that fit into the main theme of the conference and this SI. This edition is timely as it highlights current debates and empirical studies on enhancing the status and role of African languages in political domains, in education and in discussions of multilingualism, and with regards to translation and interpreting in Africa. The authors adopt different analytical frameworks in discussing this issue. Although the sociolinguistic contexts that are covered in this edition are in South Africa, Zimbabwe and Ghana, the issues at hand are true of the majority of African countries.

The first article by **Mayaba** notes that teacher education programmes in South Africa are required to ensure that students can converse in one of the indigenous languages of the country and presents a case study which explores students’ views on learning isiXhosa in the BEd (Foundation phase) programme. Her main findings show that teacher education programmes need to recognise the value of indigenous languages in advancing the pedagogy of teaching in multilingual classrooms. She argues that an understanding of student teachers’ views on learning an indigenous language will contribute to knowledge on the purpose of learning isiXhosa and how the current isiXhosa module is capacitating them to teach in multilingual contexts.

Still on multilingualism in the context of the South African education system **Makalela** investigates the use of multiple languages in classrooms, what he refers to as translanguaging

practices, based on data collected from one higher education institution and an intermediate phase primary school. Drawing analytical insights from what he refers to as the *Ubuntu* translanguaging model, he argues that fuzziness and blurring of boundaries between languages in the translanguaging classes are necessary and relevant features of the 21st century to enhance epistemic access for speakers in complex multilingual spaces, and that they are indexical to the pre-colonial African value system of *Ubuntu*. This is an important theoretical and empirical contribution to the complex issue of the teaching of African languages in multilingual communities like South Africa.

In **Kadenge's** contribution, the focus shifts to multilingualism at institutions of higher learning, with special focus on the linguistic landscape of the University of the Witwatersrand. He presents some informative insights into the sociolinguistic situation at this institution. His main findings show that the linguistic landscape at Wits is largely monolingual and English dominated. Although Sesotho is declared as one of the official languages of the institution, its visibility is very limited. This, unfortunately, goes against the transformation spirit espoused in the *National Language Policy Framework* which compels South African universities to develop language policies that accommodate linguistic, racial and cultural diversity.

Also, on language politics in South African universities, **Mutasa** highlights the extent to which the language choices of universities and perceptions of academics and students impact on the process of implementing multilingual language policies. He is of the opinion that universities can eliminate traces of the remnants of the colonial legacy and this will result in the status elevation and development of indigenous languages subsequently impacting positively on the minds of university communities and the speakers of indigenous languages at large. In conclusion, he argues that when this is achieved, indigenous languages will be able to take their rightful place in the state and in the world and will be assured of their existence in the language ecology.

Yu and Dumisa's article draws on lessons learned from language policies implemented in other countries to shed light on indigenous language promotion in South Africa. It highlights the importance of community support as the missing link in current policy and implementation in South Africa and criticises the policy's top-down approach. The article provides a brief analysis of the activities of selected non-state actors who promote indigenous languages in the country. It proposes that greater attention needs be paid to community support as a necessary and critical step towards ensuring more positive outcomes.

The next two contributions shift the focus from South Africa to other African countries: Zimbabwe and Ghana. **Gora and Mutasa** argue that the Zimbabwean high school curriculum has remained largely irrelevant to the human resources needs of professionals who draw expertise from the African languages discipline. Sadly, they note that those who end up being absorbed in the professions that draw from African languages are not satisfied. The same can be said of other African countries that were subjected to colonialism in the past and neo-colonialism today. They advocate for the re-engineering of the Zimbabwean school core-curriculum by incorporating mandatory study of an indigenous language in a bid to preserve and promote African languages and at the same time meet human resources needs of professionals that draw from this discipline over time.

The penultimate contribution of this issue by **Ansah and Agyeman** shifts the focus from Southern Africa to West Africa and investigates the survival of two South-Guan minority dialects: Leth and Efutu in the context of the Ghana's language-in-education policy. They

note that the decision by the government of Ghana to promote 9 languages at the expense of minority languages spoken in the country is detrimental to their survival. They further argue that if language and culture are intertwined, and the culture of a people must be preserved, then language policy makers need to consider the linguistic rights of speakers of the so-called minority languages.

Lastly, **Svongoro** qualitatively examines the impact of additions in Shona-English consecutively interpreted rape trials in Zimbabwean courtrooms. The study reveals that court interpreters are aware that their primary role is to ensure mutual understanding between courtroom participants such as magistrates, witnesses, the accused and prosecutors. In trying to ensure that the speaker's intention and not only his words is available to the intended receiver, they use communicative strategies that may result in renditions riddled with additions which may impact on the propositional content and style of the source message and hence the administration of justice. He concludes by arguing that interpreted courtroom dialogues are essentially three-party face-to-face transactions involving two primary speakers and one interpreter.

It is clear from these contributions that, multilingualism, in general, and in Africa, in particular, should be viewed as a resource rather than a curse. Africa should take this as a resource for meaningful socio-economic and physical development.

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