ATINER's Conference Paper Proceedings Series
LNG2017-0054
Athens, 20 March 2018

Research on African Languages at the Era Emergence

Charles Fonkpu Banfegha

Athens Institute for Education and Research
8 Valaoritou Street, Kolonaki, 10683 Athens, Greece

Charles Fonkpu Banfegha, Senior Lecturer, University of Douala, Cameroon

Research on African Languages at the Era Emergence

ABSTRACT

Presently in Africa, many of the 54 countries (especially the French speaking ones) have of recent been involved in the political propaganda of emergence by 20 this or 20 that. Cameroon, my country, for example talks of 2035. Chad is talking of emergence by 2025 and Equatorial Guinea by 2020 just to name these. However, this quest for the so-called emergence conspicuously leaves out the key role that African languages have to play in that emergence. The political speeches vehiculating this emergence propaganda focus only on the economical and infra-structural aspects of development. Emergence is a concept that has to be considered holistically, involving all the societal aspects that lead or contribute to the development of a people. Even the two conferences on the 'Emergence of Africa' held respectively in March 2015 and 2017 respectively lost sight of the importance of the socio-economic linguistics that has to be promoted within the general framework of emergence. In other words, no mention of the promotion and use of African languages as wider developmental and communication tools was seen in the debates of the conferences (cf http:www.ferdi.fr/en/event/2nd-international-conference-emer gence-Africa). This paper sets out to stress on the importance and contribution of African languages to that emergence. Language and development cannot be dissociated from any political action that must be taken by our leaders. In other words the domain of 'socio-economic linguistics' or the 'socio-economy of linguistics' has to be promoted by the stake holders of emergence- linguists and governments of the continent.

Keywords: Research, Africa, Languages, Era and Emergence.

Africa: Its Peoples and Languages

According to Worldometers (2017), Africa is a continent whose present population stands slightly above 1.2 billion people spread over 54 countries of diverse cultures, tribes, ethnic groups, languages, traditions and customs. The continent ranks number 2 in the world, with a population density of 42 per Km^2 (106 people per mi^2). Its total land area is 29,661,70 Km^2 (11,452,443 sq. miles). 40.5% of this population is urban with the median age estimated at 19.5 years.

The thousands of ethnic groups speak more than 2000 languages that are distinct. Ethnologue (2017) puts the total number of languages at 2144: 191 institutional, 544 developing, 1025 vigorous, 250 in trouble and 134 dying.

Literature Review

I would like to note here that literature that blends these two notions, national languages and emergence, is relatively scarce. This is due to the fact that 'émergence' as a political dogma in Africa is a recent development that came to the lime light some two or three years back. However the following were laid bands on:

Ahoure A. E et al (2014) focuses on the challenges Ivory Coast has to overcome if emergence is to be attained in that country. However and unfortunately, the educational challenges made mentioned of failed to integrate national languages as indispensable official communication and instruction languages alongside French.

As earlier mentioned, the two conferences(2015, 2017) on the emergence of Africa held so far gave no attention to the indispensable role (this writer thinks) African languages have to play in the so-called emergence.

Jules A(2017) on his part stresses on the need to integrate African languages and cultures in a pre-school educational set-up. This will stir up the general awareness and the need of national language usages.

Martha Mbu N (2016) clearly concludes that national languages are yet to be confined the statues given to official languages in Cameroon and that the majority of these languages have not yet been standardized. Consequently, the integration process is still a far fetched dream.

Research Questions

Looking globally at the present and general official communication and linguistic situations in Africa, one does not fail to see or notice that only very few countries use national languages alongside foreign and European languages (just a handful from the total of close to 2000 languages the continent has.)

Considering the important role of language(s) in the development of any country, one is forced to wonder if the African countries clamouring for

emergence by this date or that date will truly and ever attain it without the integration of popular and vehicular national languages in their communication setups.

The research questions therefore that this paper poses as the guiding roadmap for this study are set as follows:

- Can African countries 'émerge' with mostly foreign languages as their official languages?
- Are national languages indispensible communication tools in the 'emergence' of the continent?

This paper therefore seeks to provide answers or solutions to the above questions within the theoretical considerations below.

Theoretical Considerations

This paper draws inspirations from the declarations and preachings of Unesco over the years and from the Socio-Economic Linguistic Theory in learning and teaching.

Multilingualism-UNESCO

Unesco has been so instrumental in the fight for mother tongue education since its creation. Multilingual education has been one of its principal goals or objectives.

Languages, Unesco argues, are the most powerful instruments of preserving and developing our tangible heritage. Borrowing from the Unesco Director's speech on the occasion of this year's mother tongue day celebration (February 21, 2017), I quote,

> 'On the occasion of this Day, I launch an appeal
> for the potential multilingual education to
> be acknowledge everywhere, in education and
> administrative systems, in cultural expressions
> and the media, cyberspace and trade' (Irina Bokova).

Sustainable development, according to Unesco, must pass through mother tongue education. Basic skills of reading, writing and numeracy are acquired best in mother tongues and minority languages than in second languages.

The Socio-Economic Linguistic Theory

The Socio-Economic linguistic Theory that I baptize here as SELT is a recent development in the domain of linguistics as pointed out by Gabriel Mba (2015).

The need to live together in a more global set-up, characterized by an acute linguistic diversity and the need to communicate within this complex diversified world led to the development of this new domain, whose five pillars are stressed in Joachim Grzega (2005:19);

(1) les notions fondamentales de langue et de linguistique
(avec les définitions de la langue, texte, mot et grammaire
qui soulignent les aspects relevant de la société);
(2) la notion de la triglossie globale (c'est-à-dire la promotion
de la compétence d'une personne en anglais global, sa langue
maternelle et une troisème langue de son choix);
(3) la communication interculturelle et la communication
interpersonnelle; (4) des compétences de codification
et de décodification; (5) la linguistique de service (avec la promotion
et le support des traducteurs de style, de journalistes académiques,

de linguistes forensiques, d'entraineurs de communication, etc., translated here below as follows:

((1) the fondamental notions of language and linguistics
(with the definitions of language, text, word and grammar
that underline the relevant aspects of society);
(2) the notion of global triglosia (in other words the promotion
of a person's competence in global English, his/her mother tongue
and a third language of his/her choice);
(3) intercultural and interpersonal communication; (4) codification and
decodification competences; (5) the linguistics of service (with the
promotion and support of style translators, academic journalists,
forensic linguists, communication coaches, etc.).

As pointed out by Gabriel Mba (ibid), the Extensive Trilingualism Model of education for Cameroon by Maurice Tadadjeu (1984) and applied in Cameroon since 1984 falls in line with SELT:

Le Camerounais des temps futurs sera celui qui aura
la capacité de communiquer en trois langues au moins donc
l'une devra être une langue camerounaise de préférence
sa langue maternelle, l'autre sa première langue officielle
(le français pour les Francophones et l'anglais pour les Anglophones).
La troisième langue devrait être pour certains une langue véhiculaire
camerounaise et pour d'autre la deuxième langue officielle (Tadadjeu, M.
1984), translated below as:
(The Cameroonian of future times will be that one who will
have the capacity to communicate in three languages at least
one being a Cameroonian language preferably his or her
mother tongue, the other his or her first official language (French

for Francophones and English for Anglophones).
The third language would be for some a Cameroonian vehicular
language and for others the second official language (Tadadjeu M. 1984))

The two approaches above seem to converge on the number of languages to be taught, learned and used in a pluri- or multi-lingual context. Thus three languages (of various degree of importance according to each individual and state) at least must mastered.
Let us look now at the state of the official language situation in the various African countries.

Countries and Official Languages

BENIN	FRENCH
BURKINA FASO	FRENCH
BURUNDI	FRENCH, KIRUNDI
CAMEROON	FRENCH, ENGLISH
CENTRAL AFRICA	FRENCH
CHAD	FRENCH
COMOROS	FRENCH, ARAB
CONGO DEMOCRATIC	FRENCH
CONGO	FRENCH
IVORY COAST	FRENCH
DJIBOUTI	FRENCH, ARAB
GUINEA	FRENCH
MADAGASCAR	FRENCH, MALGACHE
GABON	FRENCH
MALI	FRENCH
MAURITANIA	FRENCH, ARAB
MAURITIUS	FRENCH, ENGLISH
MAYOTE	FRENCH
REUNION	FRENCH
NIGER	FRENCH
RWANDA	FRENCH, ENGLISH, KINYARWANDA
SENEGAL	FRENCH, WOLOF
TOGO	FRENCH
SEYCHELLES	FRENCH, ENGLISH, CREOLE
ALGERIA	FRENCH, ARAB
MOROCCO	FRENCH, ARAB
TUNISIA	FRENCH, ARAB
BOTSWANA	ENGLISH
GAMBIA	ENGLISH
GHANA	ENGLISH
KENYA	ENGLISH, KISWAHILI
LESOTHO	ENGLISH, SESOTHO
LIBERIA	ENGLISH

MALAWI	ENGLISH, CHICHIWA
NAMIBIA	ENGLISH
NIGERIA	ENGLISH
SIERRA LEONE	ENGLISH
SWAZILAND	ENGLISH
SOUTH AFRICA	ENGLISH, AFRIKAANS, NDEBELE, SETHO, SESOTHO, SISWATI, TSONGA, TSWANA, VENDA, XHOSA, ZULU
TANZANIA	ENGLISH, KISWAHILI
UGANDA	ENGLISH, KISWAHILI, LOUGANDA, LUO
ZAMBIA	ENGLISH
ZIMBABWE	ENGLISH, SHONA, NDEBELE
ANGOLA	PORTUGUESE
CAPE VERDE	PORTUGUESE, CREOLE
GUINEA BISAU	PORTUGUESE
MOZAMBIQUE	PORTUGUESE
SAO TOME AND PRINCIPE	PORTUGUESE
ALGERIA	ARAB
EGYPT	ARAB
LYBIA	ARAB
SOMALIA	ARAB, SOMAO
NORTH SUDAN	ARAB
SOUTH SUDAN	ENGLISH
WESTERN SAHARA	ARAB
EQUATORIAL GUINEA	SPANISH, FRENCH
ETHIOPIA	AMHARIC
ERITREA	AMHARIC

Source: Ethnologue (2017) and http:// www.dack.org/languages.html. 2017

Analysis and Discussion

As earlier said, emergence should be viewed holistically and not only limited to infra-structural development as reflected in the political speeches of most African leaders.

He or she talking 'emergence' should equally be talking 'high living standards'.

A country well developed infra-structurally but with low literacy rate resulting in poor standards of living may not likely 'emerge'.

The key to getting high living standards is none other than education: formal and informal combined.

Languages being the means through which education is carried out are to be valorized and promoted by all governments in Africa. African leaders and other stake holders in the quest for emergence should come out with language policies prioritizing multilingual education

Considering Unesco's stand : ' a child is best taught in his or her mother tongue than in a second language' or knowledge is best transmitted and acquired in someone's mother tongue' and those of the proponents of extensive trilingualism and the socio-economic linguistics, African political leaders and decision holders still have a lot to offer the continent.

Looking at what obtains in the continent, we have the following statistics

FRENCH	28 COUNTRIES
ENGLISH	21 COUNTRIES
SPANISH	1 COUNTRY
PORTUGUESE	5 COUNTRIES
ARAB	12 COUNTRIES
AFRICAN LANGUAGES	14 COUNTRIES
CREOLES	2 COUNTRIES
AFRIKAANS	1 COUNTRY

14 out of 54 countries use purely African languages as official languages. This gives us 25.9%, meaning that 74.1% of African countries are still to adopt policies that integrate national languages as part of the official communication setup.

In terms of the number of languages used, the percentage is too low. Out of the 2144 languages (Ethologue 2017), only 22 are used as official languages in Africa, giving us 1.02%.

It should be noted that the number of languages used do not take in consideration the 2 Creole langages (Cape Verde, Seychelles) and the Afrikaans (South Africa) that are highly dominated by foreign language influence. Thus, for the purpose of this study, these 3 languages are not considered as purely African languages.

African leaders and linguists must work hard to raise the above percentages to at least reasonable percentages before 2050. The 40 countries not yet using African languages should therefore adopt language communication policies with focus on African languages.

Working from the premise that ' not all the 2144 African languages can be made official languages', this author thinks that at the continental level, languages that are spoken and used in more than one country (for example Kiswahili, Amharic, Ndebele and Sesotho should be considered for the African Union and some regional inter- country organizations (for East and South African countries). In the same line, Ecowas (Economic Community for West African States) and Eccas (Economic Community of Central African States) and other groupings must work to see which vehicular languages must be adopted as their working languages alongside the foreign ones.

If the end results of emergence are high living standards coming partly from high literacy rates, guaranteed by good systems of education, then national languages must be given that prime of place in the African continent.

Looking at QUORA(2017) rankings, Kenya stands out as the first African country with the highest living standards last year. This cannot be dissociated from the educational system that uses Kiswahili alongside English language.

Africlandpost.com (2017) rankings on literacy show that 50 % of the first 10 countries use national languages alongside foreign languages. E.g. Zimbabwe, South Africa, Kenya, Namibia, Lesotho.

Again, this cannot be dissociated from the high living standards such counties tend to enjoy, resulting from the knowledge obtained through education that is carried out in many languages.

Looking at the above statistics, French speaking countries, which are now chanting the emergency songs and spear-heading international conferences on the emergence of Africa, are far backwards in the officialization of African languages (4 out of 14 countries) as opposed to the high usage in the English speaking countries (8 out of 14 countries).

The present developmental rate in these French speaking countries is low especially in those countries south of the Sahara. This under-development cannot be dissociated from their respective educational systems void of multilingual approaches. This situation therefore needs to be remedied. However, a close look at the 8 English speaking countries using national languages show that the level of development is really advanced in those countries.

Thus, for counties still lacking the political will to officialized national languages, I say the time is now for them to work with the renowned linguists that Africa boast of to redress the situation.

Research Focus: Extensive Linguistic Engineering

From the previous analysis, it is clear that the marriage between languages and holistic development cannot be separated.

The stake holders of *emergence* in countries not yet using African languages should focus research on and adopt policies towards Extensive Linguistic or Language Engineering (ELE). Focus should first be on how to standardize at least two popular and/or vehicular African languages in every country of the continent and then proceed to their officialization.

Secondly, research focus should be geared on how to get African leaders integrate African languages into the vectors of socio-economic linguistics such as their usages in: administration; commerce; education; politics; tourism; technological development (e.g. cyber space, computer world), media and communication.

This will lead to a wide majority of Africans being involved in the socio-political, economic and technological life of the continent as the use of foreign languages exclude the majority of Africans from most of these domains.

Those using African languages should focus research on how to improve on thier present status:

- creation of national language centers

- creation of computerized national language
- learning applications and softwares
- creation of translation applications

In this way, a greater opportunity will be given to foreigners to learn the African languages while indirectly boosting its economy through the payment of such services.

Conclusion

A person's language is his or her cultural repertoire and his or her developmental tool. Similarly, a country's language(s) is(are) its(their) cultural repertoire(s) and its(their) developmental tool(s).

The present linguistic situation in the continent in terms of national language officialization or institutionalization is still too insignificant to guarantee the preservation the African cultures and to contribute to its development. Consequently, the majority of foreign languages being used, need to be complemented with the African languages. Any attempt to relegate African languages to the background will definitely not take Africa to real and complete emergence.

All the African countries (especially the French speaking ones) should do everything in the powers to integrate at least one or two national languages as official languages. Those setting deadlines to their 'emergences' should make sure African languages are officially used by deadlines in other the guarantee a wider involvement of their respective populations in the development of Africa.

References

Ahoure A. E et al. 2014. Analyse des Conditions de l'Emergence des Pays Africains : Études de Cas de la Côte d'Ivoire. CIRES.

Grzega, J. 2005. "Socioeconomic Linguistics (or Linguistic Socioeconomics) - a New field of European and global Research and teaching" in *Journal of eurolinguistics* X 2, pp. 19-43.

Gabriel, Mba . 2015. Le trilinguisme extensif et son apport dans la construction de la linguistique socio-économique. In Jules Assoumou, Gabriel Mba et Julia Ndibnu Messina (eds.). 2015. *Pour Une Afrique Emergente*. L'Harmattan Cameroun. pp. 137-146.

Jules, Assoumou. 2017. Orientation pour l'intégration des langues et cultures nationales dans l'éducation préscolaire au Cameroun. In La Renaissance Africaine: de la Théorie a la Matérialisation a l'Horizon 2060. Melanges Internationaux Offerts au Pr Samuel EFOUA MBOZO'O. Edition Cheik Anta Diop (Edi-CAD).

Irina Bokova (for Unesco). 2017. Speech on the Occasion of Mother Tongue Day Celebration, 21 February 2017. Unesco.

Martha Mbu N. 2016. The Place of National languages in an Émergent Country: Case-study in Cameroon. In Valentin NG NDONGO (eds.) Problématique de la

Renaissance en Afrique. Le continent noir face au défi de l'impérieuse émergence. L'Harmattan. 2016. pp 162-170.

Simons, Gary F. and Charles D. Fennig (eds.). 2017. *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*, Twentieth edition. Dallas, Texas: SIL International.

Tadadjeu, M. 1984. "Pour une politique d'intégration linguistique camerounaise: le trilinguisme extensif" dans Quelle identité culturelle pour le Cameroun et l'Afrique de demain? APEC.

Worldometers.2017. United Nations, Department of Economics and Social Affairs, Population Division.

http://www.africlandpost.com/ranking-african-countries-literacy-rate. 2017

http://www.dacb.org/laguages.html. 2017

http://www.ethnologue.com. 2017

http://www.Ferdi.fr/en/event/1st-international-conference-emergence-africa.2015

http://www.ferdi.fr/en/event/2nd-international-conference-emergence-africa.2017

http://www.quora.com/nux/follow_topic. 2017

http://www.un.org/new/en/international-mother-language-day. 2017

http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/strengthening-education-systems/ language-in-education/multilingual-education. 2017

http://www.worldometers.info/world-population/africa-population. 2017