LANGUAGE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT IN TEACHING AND RESEARCH OF INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES: CAMPAIGNING FOR CHANGES IN LANGUAGE CURRICULAR IN ZIMBABWE

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Abstract:
Language is one of the most fundamental vehicles of human development and transformation in post-modern times that can bring both intended and unintended changes to mankind. According to Spolsky (in Cohen, McAlister, Rolstad and MacSwan, 2005), language development is consciously and deliberately contrived to influence changes to mankind through linguistic functions, structure or acquisition of the various speech communities involved. This paper seeks to highlight some of the issues that could be considered important to the teaching and research of indigenous languages, including the marginalized languages of Zimbabwe. The paper, therefore, seeks to give some pointers for consideration to growth and development of indigenous languages in Zimbabwe. It is the view of the paper that the teaching and research of indigenous languages in Zimbabwe still needs to be monitored and strengthened further in order for it to reach out to comparable linguistic standards elsewhere. The paper uses the researchers' experiences at Zimbabwean and South African Universities where the researchers attended a lot of seminars and conferences on linguistics.

Keywords: language, language growth, indigenous languages, language curricular, marginalized languages, linguistic functions

Introduction

Language speakers the world over are known to predominantly use language as a vehicle to communicate wants and needs, thereby realising their interactional life objectives (Makoni, 2012). Thus, in a general sense, the use of different languages and

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language varieties in different language contexts and situations should be understood to be an important window to realize social, political, economic, religious and even educational transformation by different speech community speakers. Most language studies in post-modern times have tended to concentrate mostly on analyses and descriptions of language in specific linguistic situations and contexts, including its applications in education. And yet, there are gaps that need to be addressed whenever we talk of the growth and development of indigenous languages teaching and research in Zimbabwe, in order to meet international trends and levels of linguistic research and teaching.

While the authors of this paper are aware that the idea of calling some languages *marginal languages* is as controversial as it is also an emotive one, they are of the view that the term is sometimes unavoidable. These marginalized languages in Zimbabwe are not exactly in the same linguistic status and corpus development. It seems English, Shona and Ndebele have, over the years, enjoyed linguistic growth and development that the other languages in Zimbabwe still lack. This puts all languages of Zimbabwe in some kind of a linguistic hierarchical order in terms of their growth and development, functions and status. There are notable gaps in research and teaching of these languages. The above three languages have been extensively used in both public and private life by many people in Zimbabwe as languages of greater communication, as examinable subjects and as medium of instruction from Grade One to Grade Three. However, the new Republic of Zimbabwe Constitution (2013) has declared former marginalized languages of Zimbabwe as languages in their own right. Thus, comparatively speaking, all indigenous in Zimbabwe, can be said to be at the same level and yet they are not necessarily equal. All the indigenous languages seem to be seriously lagging behind English in many respects, requiring a different approach to their growth and development for the benefit of research and teaching. They need different strategies research and teaching to that of English, and emphasize the creation of meaningful and appropriate materials for educational purposes.

Defining language

The concept of language is not defined in the same way by different scholars. It depends on what one is emphasizing and the ideological mooring being used. One of the most basic definitions of language is given by Hartshone (1995) (in Vuyokazi, 2014) who says,

> *"Language is the repository and means of articulation of values, beliefs, prejudices, traditions and past achievements… It is the heart of the people's culture that is related to the issues of power, identity and position."*

This is a very broad understanding of language and its benefits to its community of speakers. For marginalized languages resource writers, it may imply that they

consider so many issues and aspects of language in their intended work to cover values, beliefs, prejudices, traditions and history of the people. What is more, they need to be aware that language embodies power relations within the speech communities themselves and from a comparative point of view with other speech communities. Hameso (1997, 3) (in Vuyokazi, 2014) points out that,

> *"Language is a means of communication, expression and conceptualization which can be used to dominate or discriminate others."*

One can observe that the definition emphasizes the communicative function of language, together with the warning that people can also use language to dominate and even discriminate other people from within a speech community or from without. These observations are vital to language resource producers since they need to be aware that the different speakers of the languages they will write in and the materials they will so produce should avoid being domineering or discriminative to either first language speakers or any interested stakeholders of those languages. The said observations are different from Pattanayak's (1986) views who says,

> *"Language is a critical factor that provides or withholds access to education and human resource development. It is key to accessing knowledge, information and communication and is also a major element in elite formation and alienation, a barrier to or equalizer to social, political and economic opportunities. It plays a major role in the development and modernization of a country."*

This definition sees a lot of benefits to the use of language and its subsequent growth and development, together with the personal and national development of the people, especially when one considers the importance of using it to access to education and the right to accurate information for all. Language is critical in making all this possible. Therefore, there is little doubt that language can be a source of increased social, political and economic opportunities for ordinary people. However, in the same definition, there is also a warning that language use and practices could lead to elite group formation and the alienation and segregation of those who may not be fortunate to speak or use it well enough. We are all aware that the use of oral and written English in Zimbabwe has sometimes been known to have been used to create an elite class of citizens where those considered fortunate to speak or write English in a certain way have become an elite group of citizens who eventually look down upon the less fortunate people of our country who struggle in to use that language. Unfortunately, the same could also happen if marginalized languages are used to create some form of elite and alienated groups of citizens. In short, one can see that language is a very important tool for the general development of a speech community or country.

Another definition of language comes from Moller and Jorgensen (2009, 144) who say,

"Language is a tool with which to exchange ideas and concepts, rules, structures and forms that we share as community speakers. It must be structured and systematic in order for it to be acquired by individuals."

According to these scholars, language becomes an important carrier of ideas, concepts, rules, structures and forms of order in a speech community. These are essential elements of human survival. Above all, our study and use of language should be structured and systematic. Makoni and Pennycook (2006, 16) further add that,

"Languages are not complete and coherent without the human construct of meaning… language use changes according to many variables. This means that the system of naming and the definitions of entities are all connected to identities and power."

Of importance here is the fact that meaning of linguistic speech acts resides in people's interpretation of texts and ideas. It is a conscious and deliberate effort which changes according to how the same people want the same language entities to mean differently at different times of life. This means that language is but a very dynamic and functionalist activity, rather than just a historically given fact. At the same time, even people's identities might not be seen as the same all the time because they also change with language and human contact. One can argue that today there is no longer any pure language community in Zimbabwe to talk about because of the different forms of human contact over the years due inter-marriages, migration patterns and institutional education and religion, so that there is simply no pure Shona, Ndebele or any other language group to point at. Thus, it is important for the language resource producers to be aware of the different definitions of language that give different directions and points of emphasis to the general understanding of language.

Trends in international linguistic research

The researchers have been following research seminars on linguistics development in South Africa and Zimbabwe for the past five years and noted huge differences in the way Zimbabwean institutions are teaching and researching in language. While it is not possible to give all the indications of linguistic research internationally in this paper, it was found essential to highlight some research cases in linguistics as a way of demonstrating some gaps in the development of linguistic research in Zimbabwe. Thus, in this paper, selective examples of some views of scholars on language are given as a way of showing what language researchers are doing in other countries which is not replicated in Zimbabwe.

A number of seminar and conference papers were delivered at the universities in South Africa and these seemed to show linguistic research and teaching gaps in Zimbabwe. In his paper entitled: *"Being and speaking Portuguese: Ethnic and linguistic monitoring in a London Secondary School"*, Holmes (2014) delivered a seminar paper at the

University of the Western Cape and makes several observations about language practices on a marginalized language in a London school. Holmes (2014) notes that Portuguese is spoken within the context of a multilingual London society by a very small community of speakers and yet there have been efforts to cater for the specific linguistic needs of this small Portuguese community of speakers (Harris, 2006). In this case, Portuguese is used for identity purposes within a multilingual set-up and it is based on the concept of language as a bound, fixed, separate, homogenic entity or system for its speakers (Heller, 2007). Holmes (2014) actually believes that what eventually obtains in the London school is some kind of positivist multilingualism where ethnic labels are used as identity markers at different times and this has received national attention. However, one might note that ethnicity does not have the same meaning for different people in both colonial and post-colonial times, especially in Africa. However, what is important to note is that this kind of research thrust is not evident in in Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe has been failing to recognize linguistic groups much bigger than the London Portuguese speech community. For years, it seems Zimbabwe was satisfied to call some speech communities minority languages, a term that suggests that the country does not fully recognize and accept these languages and their community speakers as equal to English, Shona and Ndebele languages and speakers. It seems Zimbabwe has been lagging behind other countries in terms of linguistic recognition, research and teaching.

Another paper by Busch (2014) entitled: *"Life in suspense: Precarity and Exclusion lived as bodily emotional language experience"*. In a paper presented to the University of the Western Cape, Busch (2014) talks of language portraits that are drawn by foreign labourers from Austria who live in Germany to show their frustrations with the way they are treated in foreign countries as immigrants. Her conclusion is that language can be used in a crisis situation where people, in this case labour migrants, can show their aloofness to certain linguistic behaviour by using their bodily language to reveal their status of speechlessness and vulnerability in a foreign country. They end up showing their state of individuality as human beings and associate their linguistic status as punishment by the other language community speakers of Germany. In this research in Germany, the individual can be said to be portrayed as speaking without anybody listening or understanding her/him. The conclusion of this research is that sometimes people end up developing their own linguistic resources as a sign of their own community's silence in addressing their linguistic concerns. It is a case of people's resilience to their linguistic challenges.

This research shows that daily social interactions of the people can result in people directly responding to their real life concerns. In such situations, people end up looking for other colleagues who similarly affected, in this case other labour immigrants. This is evident in the social gatherings that the Austrian migrant workers went through in Germany where people used prayer and preaching sermons, speaking to plants and animals and even poetry recitation to resuscitate their social and linguistic realities while in a foreign country. Such research is not found in Zimbabwe. This is in

spite of the fact that there are so many Zimbabwean situations and contexts where languages are spoken or used that are similar to the Austrian migrant worker language situation. Instead researchers and teachers in Zimbabwe are using the dominant languages concept that may turn out to be a repressive language policy to national community speakers that do not share those languages. In this kind of language scenario, there are obvious gaps to language research and teaching in Zimbabwe. It is important for language practitioners in Zimbabwe to embark on linguistic analyses that benefit people in everyday life in Zimbabwe.

There are people who believe that linguistic users must always be informed by the context of their national language policy documents. They need to understand language policies well because language policy should always be purpose-driven. This is why language policies change with time. According to Vuyokazi's (2014) paper entitled: *"Science Teaching and learning through the medium of English and Xhosa: A comparative study of 2 primary schools in the Western Cape"*, issues of language planning and language use are critical when generating national consciousness, especially in Education. Vuyokazi's (2014) points out that language policy is, oral or written, should show the scope of operation of all programmes as a response to national language issues at any given time (Rubin, 1984; Cooper, 1989). This is not the thrust of linguistic research and teaching in Zimbabwe. The Zimbabwe Education Act (1987 (revised in 1990, 1996, 2006) was meant to respond to the need to use indigenous languages as media of instruction in the first three grades of learning at Primary School Level in Zimbabwe. It came from the realisation of the inadequacies of English as a second language in the teaching of most, if not all, subjects in Zimbabwe. But, Zimbabwe hesitated, or failed, to implement this language policy fully. To date, there are no teaching or learning materials for all the subjects that are in the medium of these languages of Zimbabwe.

The new Republic of Zimbabwe Constitution (2013) was also meant to catapult some marginalised languages into fully-fledged languages that were similar or comparable to English, Shona and Ndebele. Kalanga, Barwe, Ndau, Nambya which were previously known to be dialects of Shona were elevated to the same level as English, Shona and Ndebele. Similarly, Sotho, Shangani, Venda, Tonga, Khoisan and Sign Language were elevated to the level of national languages. However, there is no research and teaching materials of teaching these languages in those languages, let alone to use them to teach other subjects at Primary or Secondary school level. Thus, one can see that Zimbabwe has not adequately responded the critical issues of how to all the indigenous languages nationally. The present language policies in Zimbabwe are, generally speaking, not dealing with the efforts to find permanent solutions to existing language use challenges in the country. The 2013 Constitution of Zimbabwe language policy is meant to solve social, political, economic or even educational problems within the country. The truth is that it is not addressing any of the sensitive issues it is meant to solve. It seems the document is only important for political expediency. In Zimbabwe, language policy formulation is seen as a national linguistic

management tool. Such policy directions create huge gaps in linguistic research and teaching.

Vuyokazi (2014) says that language policies are the highest national level of consciousness where government enunciates key directions in terms of language status and function (Dyer, 2004; Heugh, 2003; Corson, 1990). They are a reflection of the ordinary people's views and values of their languages. However, in Zimbabwe, it seems that they are the elite people's views, values and interests (Alidou, 2004; Dyer, 2001, 3). While generally speaking, all language policies should seek to promote the full recognition and use of all languages that are spoken and/or used by the people, this is not the same context and situation we find Zimbabwean indigenous languages in. Thus, we find Zimbabwe using a colonial language as national and official languages, in spite of the fact that it is not the first language of most of the ordinary and majority people in Zimbabwe. Most people can hardly communicate meaningfully without making mistakes in it (Alidou, 2004; Heugh, 2003; Prah, 2003; Mazrui, 1990). As a result, there is a general belief that Zimbabwean language policies are not tailor-made to be used in the best way to serve their people.

Most scholars agree that language policies are known to be either exclusivist or assimilationist, and they can also be monolingualist, bilingualist or multilingualist. In this regard, one could take Zimbabwe as having a multilingual policy. Scholars also agree that there is hardly any African country that uses just one language or that is monolinguist in nature. This is why some people point out that language policies are either integrationist or marginalistic in nature. This is how some people in Zimbabwe have argued that English can be used to unify different African speech communities. This is part of colonialist and neo-colonialist mantra. As Vuyokazi (2014) adds, language policies can generally be official, meaning that they are generally recognized by government, or they can be unofficial, meaning that they are not recognized by government and are just functionally obtaining within a speech community in business, mass communication or in their daily application to foreigners.

Corson (1990; 99) talks of four aspects of language planning and language policy decisions which are *selection of the norm,* where particular language(s) is/are assigned for particular functional use, *codification of the norm,* where issues of styles of language use and context are made such as standardization or harmonisation, *implementation of functions,* where specific linguistic fields are identified for functional use, such as in education, business and media and *elaboration of function,* where research is done, such as in terminology development. Cooper (1990, 99) gives three dimensions of language planning as *status planning, corpus planning* and *acquisition planning*. It is also generally agreed that all languages should have either a high or low national status, according to how the languages function in society. In Zimbabwe there is no comprehensive language policy and hence, practitioners have relied on peace-meal language policies. There is very little coordination of research and teaching on all the major aspects of linguistics the different perspectives of *language selection of the norm, language codification of the norm, implementation of functions* and *elaboration of the functions*. There is very little

effort to approach linguistic research and teaching from the point of view of language *status planning, corpus planning* or *acquisition planning* point of view. These become huge gaps in linguistics research and teaching.

Karlander's (2014) paper entitled *"Imposing order on a turbulent present: temporalizing and authenticating Ovdalian"* has implications on linguistics research and teaching in Zimbabwe. Karlander (2014) says the Ovdalian language is probably spoken by about 3000 people in Sweden and yet the language has recently been subject of intense research as a way of reclaiming the linguistic heritage of its speakers. Karlander (2014) says that researchers in Sweden have established that while Ovdalian registers were asymmetrically distributed by government in order to make the language accessible to different people, its authentication and the ascertaining people's understanding of it was difficult because of linguistic hybridity. Thus, the registers of Ovdalian were identified through negotiated reflexive processes in social life activities (Agha, 2007; 4). He adds that this means that the Chomskian concept of linguistic competence could only be substituted by schematic or functional language practices in newly established social relevance. Language practices of Ovdalian were more inclined towards what people were now doing rather than through ideological beliefs. This is something important that Zimbabwe can learn, that there are no languages that should be defined by the number of speakers when it comes to allocation of status and functional roles of languages in Zimbabwe. The case in point is the language of the Khoisan people who are said to be just around 1000. Government should direct research in this language and all the others impartially.

Karlander (2014) says cognitivists believe that no one person can have complete mastery of a language, what is also called competence of a language. He says people can only have situational competency or relevance. He observes that Ovdalian people used to be harassed by teachers for speaking in their languages until they became proficient in the other vernacular languages of Sweden. This means that sometimes people's recognition of an official language has nothing to do with the professed, deliberate and revocable belief in that language. It could just be a practical disposition that is taken by people and is knowingly inculcated in people through a long, slow and painful process of language acquisition that is based on market needs and demands and not necessarily on overt calculation of its effect. This is also true in Zimbabwe. The fact that there are so many people who believe that English should be learnt and spoken well might not have anything to do with the belief in this language. It is also possible that, like the Swedish example, people are being forced to ignore or neglect their own mother languages in order for them to learn and use another form of language. It may not have anything to do with the decisions of the speakers of the community languages.

Blending Theoretical Linguistic Approaches in Research and Teaching in Zimbabwe

The researchers have noted that most research and teaching of language does not strongly adhere to the two main branches of Sociolinguistics and Psycholinguistics.

Thus, there is need to strengthen research and teaching in these areas of linguistics in order to prepare learners adequately to apply them in the different languages. We may need to blend current research and teaching with the two major branches. For the moment, it seems as if institutions are scratching the surface of the different approaches to language. Among some of the major theoretical approaches that are need to be strongly introduced in Zimbabwean linguistics are the following: *cognitivism, semiotic remediation/re-semiotic remediation, discourse analysis, critical discourse analysis, multimodal discourse analysis, systematic functional linguistics, colonialism, post-colonialism, Afro-centricity, structuralism/traditionalism* and *post-structuralism/post-modernism*. Using these theoretical approaches in linguistic research and teaching will do away with inherent weaknesses in the research and teaching of indigenous languages in Zimbabwe. This would bring the study of linguistics to the same level as is happening in other countries. For now, there are few language researchers and teachers in Zimbabwe who are actually using some these theoretical frameworks in linguistics, thereby creating some gap in the language research and teaching. The best way would be to introduce these theoretical approaches in formal teaching. At the same time, it is also important to point out that need to include the following: *monolingualism, bilingualism (additive and subtractive), multilingualism, languaging, translanguaging, linguistic landscaping, terminology development* and others in research and teaching if we have to bridge the gap that exists now.

Each indigenous language in Zimbabwe has its own demands for research and teaching. It is vital for each language's group of researchers to identify the level of need and inadequacies that could be addressed in research and teaching. Generally, all indigenous languages research and teaching should be approached in a systematic, thorough and consistent manner, taking note of the four major elements of linguistics: *Phonetics, Phonology, Morphology* and *Syntax*. These areas have not been adequately taught and researched in Zimbabwe. It is difficult to see how we can adequately prepare researchers and teachers of indigenous languages without adequately covering them in the taught modules in Zimbabwe. Researchers could approach their work either from a descriptive or analytical point of view.

Conclusion

This paper presentation has tried to highlight some of the issues on linguistic research and teaching gaps in Zimbabwe, especially in indigenous languages. It has argued that Zimbabwean linguistics research and teaching could be strengthened a lot by changing theoretical frameworks and borrowing from international linguistic research trends. In order to do this successfully, researchers and teachers need to be systematic, consistent and thorough. Obviously, these ideas are not complete and definitive, leaving some room to generate other ideas of how to produce acceptable research materials. It is hoped that readers will find the suggestions useful and intriguing.

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