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## The Role of African Universities in the Intellectualisation of African Languages<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

Neo-colonial language policies deriving from decolonisation have entrenched not merely the dominance but, fatefully, the hegemony of the languages of the European colonial powers, especially that of English, which is also driven by contemporary globalisation processes. The intellectual and political leadership of the continent has succumbed, with very few exceptions, to the forces that prevail in the linguistic markets and is reaping what Bourdieu (1984) refers to as ‘the profits of distinction’. African poverty and economic inequality are to be eradicated, or even reduced, during the twenty-first century. One of the central but least discussed issues that have to be addressed is the language question which is linked to the imperatives of the democratisation of modern African states, of increasing efficiency and labour productivity for economic development, and of promoting individual and social equilibrium, including the enhancement of self-confidence and creativity. A general policy of promoting language equity in multilingual African societies and of developing (‘modernising’ or elaborating) African languages in the context of overall national development policies will have to be followed systematically over a period of at least two generations. In this paper, the author considers the historical and social dynamics of African languages in high status functions and proposes a series of steps that will facilitate the realisation for the updated and revised Language Plan of Action for Africa, formulated and adopted by the OAU almost twenty years ago. The essay gives pride of place in this process to the African Academy of Languages (ACALAN), which is fast becoming the major point of reference in the domain of language policies for the continent.

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### Résumé

Les politiques linguistiques néocoloniales découlant de la décolonisation ont enraciné non seulement la prédominance, mais, de façon fatidique, l'hégémonie des langues des puissances coloniales européennes, notamment celle de l'anglais, qui est également poussé par les processus contemporains de mondialisation. Le leadership intellectuel et politique du continent a succombé, à quelques exceptions près, aux forces qui dominent les marchés linguistiques et est en train de récolter ce que Bourdieu (1984) appelle « les avantages de la distinction ». La pauvreté et l'inégalité économique en Afrique doivent être éradiquées, ou réduites, au cours du 21<sup>e</sup> siècle. Un des problèmes fondamentaux mais les moins discutés devant être abordé est la question linguistique. Celle-ci est liée aux impératifs de démocratisation des États africains modernes, à l'accroissement de l'efficacité et de la productivité du travail pour le développement économique, ainsi qu'à la promotion de l'équilibre individuel et social, y compris le renforcement de la confiance en soi et de la créativité. Une politique générale de promotion de l'équité linguistique dans les sociétés africaines multilingues et de développement (modernisation ou perfectionnement) des langues africaines dans le contexte des politiques de développement nationales d'ensemble devra être suivie de manière systématique sur une période de deux générations au moins. Dans cette étude, l'auteur considère la dynamique historique et sociale des langues africaines dans des fonctions à statut élevé et propose une série de mesures qui faciliteront la réalisation du Plan d'Action Linguistique pour l'Afrique revu et corrigé, qui a été formulé et adopté il y a de cela presque vingt ans par l'OUA. L'étude réserve la place d'honneur, dans ce processus, à l'Académie Africaine des Langues (ACALAN), qui est en train de devenir rapidement la référence principale en matière de politiques linguistiques pour le continent.

An intellectualised language is [one] ... which can be used for educating a person in any field of knowledge from kindergarten to the university and beyond (Sibayan 1999:229).

### Why African languages of tuition? The development argument

At the outset, it is essential to raise the crucial question that is only now beginning to be discussed openly in South Africa: why bother to 'develop' African languages as media of instruction or languages of tuition at tertiary educational institutions, given that we have English (and, decreasingly, Afrikaans) as perfectly useable formal academic language(s)? For many, including specialists in African linguistics, the provision of African languages would be nothing less than a quixotic waste of money in the cause of an anachronistic and even embarrassing African nationalism. If we are unable to give a compelling answer to this question, therefore, we are unlikely to persuade anyone,

least of all those whom we expect to put money on the table in order to get things moving forward, that this is one of the central questions that have to be addressed, especially by the university, if President Mbeki's 'African century' is ever to become a meaningful notion.

Usually, what came to be the university begins in the image and likeness of a dominating political or cultural authority. Or, to put it differently, in most cases, it is the language of the imperial or colonial power that prevails as both the medium of instruction and the standard for the subsequent development and use of one or more of the languages of the emergent national states. In the European context, we can trace this pattern from the time of the Roman Empire when Latin became the *lingua franca* of the intellectual elite.<sup>2</sup> The evolution of the university in Europe shows that in virtually all cases, 'higher' education was initially conducted in the language of the relevant imperial or other dominant power. Once the elite in any given territory began to turn its back on the imperial or international interests that had sustained it and orientated itself to national interests as the result of capitalist development in the relevant territories, the question of the national language(s) invariably became politicised and the universities became hotbeds of agitation for the displacement of the imperial ('foreign') languages by the local varieties.<sup>3</sup> Whereas this process became ever faster as one moved from western towards eastern Europe during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it has been an exceptionally slow one in the overseas colonies of modern Europe, specifically in the colonies of Great Britain and France. With the exception of those territories where the native population was systematically exterminated, i.e., in much of the 'old colonial empire' (Canada, the USA, Australia, New Zealand, the Caribbean islands and parts of the Cape Colony), where English 'naturally' became the dominant and mostly the only language, the languages of the native population were never considered worthy or even capable of being used in prestigious functions such as languages of tuition in higher education.<sup>4</sup>

### The diversity argument

Put simply, the diversity argument refers to the fact that is becoming increasingly accepted among social as well as natural scientists that cultural diversity is as essential to the survival of the human species on planet earth as is biodiversity. 'Biocultural diversity' is one of the great discoveries of the late twentieth century and it is self-evident that linguistic diversity, which is one of the core elements of cultural diversity, is *ipso facto* integral to this concept. Tové Skutnabb-Kangas (2000) and other scholars have been probing the hypothesis that there is a causal, that is, more than a mere correlative, relationship between the fact of the density of species and 'languages' respectively

that one can observe along the equatorial belt. While the diversity argument does not depend on the proof of this hypothesis, it would, of course, be immensely strengthened by it. Suffice it to say that it is fast becoming common sense that the death of any language is akin to the disappearance of a species, since with the former we lose an entire library of information about large segments of the earth and perspectives on the world(s) we live in. Indeed, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization has for a long time now funded a programme dedicated to the preservation of endangered languages and, more controversially perhaps, to the restoration of extinct languages. We know that on the continent of Africa, 2000-odd languages, however defined, are subject to the same pressures that are rendering one such language extinct somewhere in the world every two weeks or so (Ministerial Committee 2004:4, citing Crystal 2000).

An important dimension of the diversity argument relates to the question of individual and social identity. Although language is neither the only, nor for many people the main, element in the formation of individual and social identities, there is no doubt at all that for most people it seems to be the defining element of their identities, that which makes them feel both unique and at home in the company of people, usually a specific group, that speak their language. This is the essential reason why language rights such as the right to mother-tongue education or the right to be tried in a language that one understands well, are now considered to be linguistic human rights, even though universal agreement on all aspects of such rights is extremely difficult to attain precisely because of the situational, or contextual, roots of the value of language for specific communities.

### **The democracy argument**

The most immediate argument for the urgent and active intellectualisation of the African languages can be dubbed the democracy argument. I use this term in order both to point in the direction of language as a human right and, more pertinently, to language as a socio-political and socio-economic resource. In the words of Coulmas, written with reference to Meiji, Japan:

It was imperative that the new knowledge and enlightenment was spread as widely as possible throughout society. This could only be achieved if Western theories and technologies could be made available for mass consumption in the native language of the land (1990:71).<sup>5</sup>

This statement goes to the heart of the matter. The elites who inherited the political kingdom from the ostensibly departing colonial overlords, with the exception only of Tanzania and Mozambique, continued to govern within the

parameters set by the *ancien régime*, largely because they had no option, and because it suited their immediate interests. The colonial state was not fundamentally altered even if the colour (religion, language, etc.) of those who now seemed to make the decisions differed from those who had passed on the baton of rule. What was true of other policy domains was equally applicable in the domain of language policy (see Alexander 2000; Bamgbose 2000; Heine 1990; Laitin 1990). A gratuitous distinction was made between ‘official’, that is, European, and ‘national’, that is, African, languages, since some concession had to be made to anti-colonial sentiment among the masses of the people. In an unintended manner, this distinction in fact captured discursively the social, economic and political distance that separated the African citizens (workers, peasants and traditional petty bourgeoisie) from the elite, outwardly-orientated middle classes. There is no need to belabour the point. Profound and incisive analyses of post-colonial sociolinguistics in Africa have been made by numerous scholars (Alexandre 1972; Bamgbose 2000; Heine 1990; Prah 1995). The hegemonic status of English and French in particular occasioned what I have called a static maintenance syndrome. Although I am not aware of any African intellectual having gone as far as some Meiji Japanese intellectuals, who wanted to replace Japanese with English, there can be no doubt that most members of the post- and neo-colonial elites, in spite of all protestations to the contrary, believed, and, sadly, continue to believe, that preference given to English would be the best option.<sup>6</sup>

This ideology, clearly, reflects the dependency relationship that shackles the African elites to their former colonial and imperial overlords. It cannot, and does not, reflect the interests of the masses of the African people, for whom English, French and Portuguese, in whatever variety they attempt to speak them, remain essentially foreign languages. The democracy argument, which is also an argument for social equity, as opposed to the deep inequalities that characterise the neo-colonial state, demands, as I have written elsewhere, that the African middle classes commit class suicide. In terms of language policy, this means that policy has to be viewed from the perspectives of the urban and the rural poor, that is, it implies a shift from the dominance of the languages of the former colonial powers to the indigenous languages of Africa. Lest there be any misunderstanding, let me state clearly that the democracy argument is based on the assumption that the political and cultural leadership of the continent are genuinely committed to the eradication of poverty, disease, ignorance and all forms of discrimination. If that is the case, then the development of the languages of the people is a precondition;<sup>7</sup> it is in fact no less than the litmus test for determining the democratic credentials of the regime or government in

question. At the moment, sadly, most African governments fail this elementary test.

### **A programme of action: Advocacy**

On the occasion of the second World Congress of African Linguistics, held in Leipzig, Germany in 1997, Mohamed Abdulaziz of the University of Nairobi stated in a nutshell what the African university has to do in respect of the promotion and development of African languages. I take the liberty of citing him in his own words at length:

[Scholars] in the linguistics of African languages have a great task in securing and preserving the linguistic heritage of Africa. Special attention needs to be focused on small-group and dying languages that have so far not been described. Equally crucial is to develop to the maximum those languages that could be used as vehicles of communication and knowledge in all spheres of modern life. These include the languages that are now functioning very well as national or official languages at the national and regional levels. For there is need to reduce and where possible eliminate the diglossia prevailing with the use of European languages as languages of education, technology and modernisation. If efforts are not directed towards achieving this goal, then African languages will remain forever underdeveloped. The present European languages could be taught well to serve as second and foreign languages since they are languages in which there is an enormous literature in all spheres of human endeavour (Abdulaziz 2000:15).

In a nutshell, we need to develop African languages to the highest possible levels in all sectors of society.

It is essential that we begin advocating in all our countries the rehabilitation of mother tongue education within the context of a bilingual educational system where the other language in most cases will be English or French. In other words, mother tongue education from the pre-school right through to the university with English or French as a supportive medium, or in some cases, certainly at university level for a long time probably, also as a formative medium. This is the fundamental conclusion that we have to come to. Every African language department at every university or college would need to propagate and support this particular demand. Everywhere in the world people use the mother tongue to teach their children. It is only in post-colonial Africa and a few other countries in south-east Asia and eastern Europe that people use a foreign language to teach their children, and as a result we have the terrible drop-out rates, repeater rates and failure rates that we know so well. This paralysing practice, more than any other, explains the fundamental mediocrity of intellectual production on the continent of Africa. We have to persuade our

communities about the potential of African languages as languages of power and languages of high status. It is our task as language activists and professionals to do this, and it is the task of the political, educational and cultural leadership of the country to do this and to be role models in this regard. We have to persuade people to understand that mother tongue education is in fact the doorway to success, not only in general terms but also the doorway to the learning of English, French, or any other language as a second language. Everybody who has studied language education knows that this is true, that the sounder your foundation in a mother tongue, the more easily you learn a foreign language or a second language.

### **Political will, leadership and vision**

The argument about lack of resources as a cover for lack of commitment can be shown very clearly in many different ways. The best example in Africa is Somalia, where a poor country, admittedly under the authoritarian government of Siad Barré, made Somali into a language of tuition and of training from the cradle to the university without resorting to English or to any other foreign language. It is still the case to a very large extent in a country like Ethiopia where Amharic used to play a similar role in some disciplines. Of course, there are other problems in Ethiopia, but that it is not necessarily the case that we must use English or, for that matter, French is very clear from these, and other, examples. Ultimately, it is a question of commitment, of the willingness to view things from the perspective of the urban and the rural poor rather than from the convenient vantage point of the middle classes.

### **Language planning strategy**

According to Sibayan, a *popularly* modernised language, used, for example, in the electronic media and tabloid papers, is not intellectualised (1999:449). In order for it to become *intellectually* modernised, such that it can be used in the 'controlling domains of language' including higher education, much work (corpus development) has to be done by the universities and colleges. Sibayan (1999) suggests that it is easier to begin with L1-medium education in the primary schools, since the young in the schools are the most receptive. Whereas adults, who in the controlling domains already use the former colonial language more or less proficiently, tend to be extremely resistant to a changeover towards the local language(s). He states:

The schools and universities play a very crucial role in the process of popular and intellectual modernization: the primary and lower secondary schools for PML development, the upper secondary schools for beginning IML develop-

ment and the colleges and universities for IML development (Sibayan 1999:456).

It ought to be obvious that some, or all, of these conditions already exist in organised and institutionalised form in some, but not all, African states. One of the main tasks of the African Academy of Languages (ACALAN) is precisely to bring about this state of affairs in all African states. In South Africa, we are very fortunate in that there are the beginnings of an adequate language infrastructure, enabling legislation, some budgetary provision for the programme of modernisation of indigenous African languages and for related purposes. Much more can and should be done in respect of the financing of indispensable programmes and of the training of the necessary language professionals who have to run the multilingual system. In so far as South Africa is seen by many, including some of the best known African linguists and applied linguists, as an evolving model in respect of language planning, language policy formulation and policy realisation, these are important starting points, even if too many of them are, as yet, of no more than symbolic import.

### **Immediate steps: ACALAN and ILPAA**

Under the joint aegis of the African Academy of Languages (ACALAN), the Association of African Universities (AAU) and CODESRIA detailed implementation plans should be drawn up. These should take as their point of departure the experience of the post-colonial attempts at language planning, especially of corpus development, in the relevant African states. In this regard, Somalia, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Tanzania and, most recently, South Africa, among others, have much by way of invaluable data. Post-graduate students in the area of Applied Language Studies could be mobilised to collate, analyse and render useable all of this information within a period of two years or shorter. In my view, the guiding document should be the updated version of the 1986 OAU Language Plan of Action for Africa, which Maurice Tadadjeu (Cameroon) and Salam Diakité (Mali) revised in late 2004 at the request of ACALAN and of the Steering Committee of its project for the Implementation of the Language Plan of Action for Africa (ILPAA).

Outside of the immediate purview of any specific university community, the five core projects of ACALAN-ILPAA need to be promoted and with the full support of the heads of state of the African Union. Taken together, these are essentially large-scale language planning projects, calculated in principle to enhance the status, expand the corpus and facilitate the acquisition of all African languages. These core projects are the Year of African Languages (2006), the Translation Programme, the closely related Terminology

Development project, the Panafrican Joint Masters and Doctoral Programme in Applied Linguistics and, last but not least, the Stories Across Africa project<sup>8</sup>. The promotion and gradual realisation of these projects will assist in creating a climate favourable to the micro-planning and implementation of specific language development projects at specific universities in given countries. The synergies and economies of scale that can be anticipated will have both an exhilarating and accelerating effect on those who have to do the actual work of translating, developing specialised registers, creating innovative literature, training language professionals, and so forth. For each of these constituencies, the meaningfulness of what they will be, and are already, doing will be amplified in ways that very few of them can at present anticipate. Panafricanism, in the context of the cultural revolutionary dimension of the African Renaissance, will assume a new significance.<sup>9</sup>

### **The importance of translation**

Scholars who have focused on the issue of intellectualisation or modernisation of local languages are agreed that one of the main mechanisms for bringing about and driving this process is translation of major works of literary and scientific creation that exist in the more 'developed' languages. With regard to Filipino, for example, Sibayan states unequivocally, 'Translation of important publications now available in English (the chief source language of intellectualisation) is the single most important way of intellectualising Filipino for a long time to come' (1999:464).

In an epigrammatic reference to this complex, Newald states that the German humanists of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were forced through the contemplation of Latin and Greek languages to reflect on the German language, and this facilitated the development of German grammar (1960:4). Most recently, Umberto Eco (2003) has written what is going to become an indispensable text of translation studies in which he shows by means of practical examples how 'translation as negotiation' impacts on the target language. Citing Friedrich Schleiermacher, Eco refers to the strong version of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, according to which one's native language determines one's perceptual and conceptual possibilities, but points out that Schleiermacher himself accepted that thinking people 'play their part in shaping their language' (2003:81), and that Wilhelm von Humboldt had been the first to remark on the fact that translations 'can augment the significance and the expressivity of the native language' (2003:81-82).

It is precisely what Eco calls 'this dynamic capacity of languages to evolve when exposed to a foreign challenge' (2003:82),<sup>10</sup> that African university

programmes in applied language studies are going to have to explore and use in innovative ways in order to initiate and sustain the rapid intellectualisation of certain—in principle, all—languages of the people by agreement in the appropriate forums and constituencies. Just how difficult this task can and will be can be inferred from the tremendous investments that the Japanese intelligentsia was called upon to make over many generations. Like the Japanese and the followers of Kemal Ata Turk in the 1920s and 1930s, we will have to find the most cost-efficient ways of increasing rapidly the corpus of great works of world literature and science in the relevant African languages. It is my view that one of the most appropriate and acceptable ways of doing this is to ask all universities to consider introducing as an elective component of post-graduate assessment of course work in each discipline, the translation into a relevant African language of a key text or part thereof. Very few exercises could vie with this practice in respect of gauging the grasp of a subject by an examination candidate.

The practical implementation of this crucial strategic move is completely manageable. We would need a few focus groups of people consisting of linguists, translators and subject specialists in each of the relevant languages to decide whether the document is an acceptable translation. However, above all, we need people who have the vision, the courage and the energy to do it. In this regard, the stated intention of ACALAN to launch a large-scale translation programme in tandem with the appropriate terminology development project(s) is of the utmost significance, since it will serve as a compass for the individual institutions and translators of texts.

### **Inferences from the South African case**

There can be no doubt that the South African authorities and a decisive component of the intelligentsia have committed themselves with varying degrees of passion to the furthest possible development of the indigenous African languages.<sup>11</sup> Let us, therefore, consider the November 2002 Language Policy for Higher Education.

To begin, all higher education institutions should participate in facilitating and promoting the goal of the National Language Policy to develop all South African languages in such a manner that they can be used in all high status functions, especially as formal academic languages at higher education level. In the same way that English and Afrikaans are used as formal academic languages at higher education institutions, every official language of this country should be developed towards that position. Secondly, in terms of this policy framework, the research and development work required in the case of each of

the marginalised official and endangered South African languages will be concentrated in centres for language development which will be located in designated higher education institutions. The basic idea<sup>12</sup> is that a university or a group of universities would be given the task of developing specific languages such as isiZulu, or isiXhosa, or Sesotho, or Setswana and, over a period of 10 to 15 years, steps would be taken to ensure that each of the languages concerned is developed in that particular manner. A step-by-step development and implementation plan should be formulated for each of the relevant languages, such that, among other things, it will be clear when they will be able to be used as languages of tuition in specific disciplines. The decision about when to begin using the languages for specific functions, however, will be the prerogative of the relevant institutional community. In other words, if we take the University of Cape Town as an example, the university authorities will retain the autonomy to decide when exactly, for example, to use isiXhosa to teach history or to teach geography in tutorials or in lectures.

Each higher education institution will need to formulate and publish its language policy so that the extent to which they are in compliance with the legislation can be determined at a glance. Of course, much subsequent sparing and gesturing in this area has been of a ritualistic character, and although this is a dampening element, the economic need of the majority of the people have rendered these inhibiting factors irrelevant. ACALAN, the AAU and CODESRIA, acting in concert, could within a short space of time get every single African university to undertake this task as a necessary precursor to everything else.

The other important task is the standardisation of orthography in all the languages so that we have the same orthographic convention for all the languages, especially for cross-border languages. We still have the situation in Sesotho, for example, where spelling in South Africa is very different from that in Lesotho itself. Very often, people are unable to read text emanating from the neighbouring country. I have been impressed with the beginnings of a very important project undertaken by Kwesi Prah of the Centre for the Advanced Study of African Societies (CASAS) at Rondebosch, Cape Town. Beyond the harmonisation of orthographies lies the controversial issue of language harmonisation itself. Whether we like it or not, this is an *African* issue, the time for which will come sooner rather than later.

The promotion of print and electronic media in African languages on a large scale, as happens in some West and East African countries, is urgently necessary. At this level of popular modernisation of the languages, the culture of reading can be effectively established and thus the basis for the intellectual

modernisation of the relevant languages. As is always the case in language planning, all these strategic moves are integrally related, and it is important that initiatives in the extra-linguistic sectors be synchronised with what the language professionals and scholars are doing for the intellectualisation process.

In South Africa, universities and other higher education institutions have begun formulating their language policies in respect of which languages are taught as subjects, which are used as languages of tuition, which of the African languages should be 'adopted' for modernisation purposes, and which languages should be encouraged among the youth because of investment and tourism considerations, and so forth. Some universities, Stellenbosch being one of the foremost, are taking these tasks very seriously and have designed hands-on mechanisms for addressing or implementing the plans that have been formulated and agreed upon by all the stakeholders. On the other hand, the Ministerial Committee understandably refers to the 'crisis' of African languages in the universities and the schools, deriving from the pressure for English (2004:4). Enrolments in both first- and second-language courses, with some exceptions, have dropped catastrophically over the past ten years. While matters can be expected to stabilise and improve, there is no doubt that concerted counter-measures have to be worked out. With reference to the threat posed by globalisation and the hegemony of English, the Ministerial Committee states:

[It is] incumbent on South Africa to do its best to ensure, in terms of our Constitution, the continued existence of all the languages that form part and parcel of its full heritage. ... The committee members would like to reiterate that, unless urgent measures are taken, South Africa's indigenous languages are under serious threat. In this regard, recent policy advances in South Africa present a historic opportunity to restore enduring legitimacy and dignity to our indigenous languages. Sustained commitment to sound policy implementation over the next two to three decades should ensure success (Ministerial Committee 2004:5).

I have no doubt at all that if this kind of spirit can become generalised among the intelligentsia of the continent, specifically among language professionals and university academics, the secular project of intellectualising the languages of Africa can be initiated successfully and, in the case of at least some of the languages, taken to its logical conclusion. Paulin Hountondji of Benin, one of the most incisive philosophers on the continent, has spoken up for the increasing number of intellectuals who realise that the present situation is untenable: 'This is the only continent or subcontinent where all the teaching and research are done in non-indigenous languages. No doubt something also has to be done here' (Hountondji 2002:34; see also Samassekou 2002).

Writing about the achievements of the Meiji generation in Japan, Coulmas states with enviable realism:

If it is kept in mind that in many parts of the world a foreign rather than a native language is used for purposes of higher communication such as commerce, administration, and higher education, the fact that the Japanese language can fulfil all functions of modern communication emerges as an essential part of this achievement. Like modernization of society, the adaptation of language could, however, not be accomplished without much effort and hardship (Coulmas 1990:70).

Viewed against this background, the initiation by ACALAN of the Panafrican Joint Masters and Doctoral Programme in Applied Linguistics (MAPAL) represents a bold attempt to begin the process of intellectualising the languages of the African continent. If we bear in mind the caveat implicit in Coulmas' words, I believe it will be possible to tap into the sources of determination and creative passion which alone can guarantee the success of such a vast project.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, let me state clearly that the choice we face is one between elitism and middle-class convenience (with the corollary of a probable state of permanent mediocrity as our destiny) and a democratic language policy which might, among other things, uncover the hidden layers of creativity and self-confidence that are the real basis of artistic, scientific and entrepreneurial achievement. We have to consider all the hype about 'modern' U.S.-style discourses and fashions from within this perspective and reflect on the fact that we are in the midst of what can be said to be a global contest between increasing homogenisation and hegemonisation on the one hand, and cultural diversity and multilingualism on the other hand. As African language scholars who are inevitably caught up in this global contest, we have very strong reasons for wanting to promote the African languages as languages of empowerment and as languages of high status. If one looks at the African continent in this global context, one realises that because of the history of our countries and of our continent, we naturally fall on the side of the multilingual perspective. Our societies are multilingual, the states that were formed as a result of colonial conquest were necessarily multilingual, and therefore we have every reason to want to promote the continuation of our own languages, not against, but alongside, English. Because of the much greater degree of self-understanding that human beings have acquired at the beginning of the twenty-first century, it would be nothing less than reactionary to want to promote and facilitate the disappearance of the languages of Africa assuming this were possible. Under

the guidance of ACALAN, the preservation, promotion and intellectualisation of the languages of the continent will keep in step with the progressive realisation of another Africa where all people will have the real chance of developing their potential to the full extent.

### Notes

1. Paper originally prepared for the conference of the South African Association for Research and Development in Higher Education, Durban, 27-29 June 2005.
2. In medieval West Africa, Arabic had a similar status, because of the expansion of Islam from the north. One of the most celebrated examples is, of course, Timbuktu (see Ki-Zerbo 1979:152-153).
3. It could be argued that the reverse process is now taking place because of globalisation, but this is a superficial view of the matter. The comprehensive integration of national and regional economies into the world capitalist system sets up counter-hegemonic forces that resist cultural and other dimensions of homogenization. The AU and the 'African Renaissance' are direct evidence of this tendency (see Castells 1997).
4. Colonial powers have ever followed the dictum: 'the natives should learn our languages, rather than we theirs' (Wilson and Thompson 1969:66).
5. He adds significantly: 'There was a great demand, in other words, for translation' (Coulmas 1990:71), a proposition to which I shall return in detail presently.
6. Coulmas refers to 'Mori Arinori's rather startling suggestion to abolish the Japanese language and adopt English instead' because he believed, among other things, that '... our meager language, which can never be of any use outside of our islands, is doomed to yield to the domination of the English tongue ... Our intelligent race, eager in the pursuit of knowledge, cannot depend upon a weak and uncertain medium of communication in its endeavor to grasp the principal truths from the precious treasury of Western science and art and religion' (1990:72).
7. Prah (1995) examines this argument in some detail from the point of view of development theory.
8. These projects are dealt with in some detail in a forthcoming publication (see also Alexander 2005).
9. For a more detailed discussion of this train of thought, see Alexander 2004.
10. Eco refers to the fact that Martin Luther used the verbs 'to translate' and 'to Germanise' as synonyms, thereby 'making evident the importance of translation as cultural assimilation', and that he answered the critics of his Bible translation by asserting that '... they are learning to speak and write German from my translation, and so in a sense stealing my language, which they hardly knew a word of before' (2003:89).

11. The most recent, and an excellent, manifestation of this statement is the Report compiled by the Ministerial Committee appointed by the Ministry of Education in September 2003.
12. Since the policy framework was published, nine Language Research and Development Centres have been set up by the Department of Arts and Culture, one in each of the provinces of the country.

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