African indigenous languages debate: Is the emotional, practical and political tension resolvable?

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Social science that makes a difference

Outline

- Success and failure stories in language promotion;
- Factors contributing to success or failure;
- Africa and SA (isiZulu as case study);
- Way forward

Success and failure stories

- Failures (many)
  - Hong Kong
    - Free to choose MoI under colonial rule
    - 1997 mother tongue policy
    - Pupils and parents strongest opposition
    - 2009 policy reversal
  - Malaysia
    - Bahasa Melayu used in all government functions and MoI for all school levels (1957)
    - Corpus planning ongoing but increasing pressure
    - Private sector; private university
    - 2002 policy reversal: English as MoI (all levels)

Success and failure stories

- Successes (Few)

  - Native language revival (Hawiian, Maori, etc):
    - Strong will important;
    - Community/school-based language immersion initiatives;
    - Develop language and culture simultaneously

  - Limitations of the successes
    - Oral/written
    - Transitional/permanent

  - Hebrew
    - Champion important (Ben-Yehuda), but largely bottom up;
    - Will important, but also as common language among Jews
    - Importance of immigrants (private language for youngsters);
    - Not spoken as native language, but held prestige
    - Time of revival

Contributing factors

- Top down vs bottom up
- Critical role of community—interest and commitment
  - "language shift is determined primarily by internal changes within language communities themselves…cannot be reversed by outsiders" (Crawford, 1995); Importance of intergenerational language transmission (Fishman, 1991)
  - Power and prestige (colonial and beyond):
    – Language or language speaker? (Prinsloo, 2011)
    – Working class/middle class
    – Urban identity
- School vs community--limit of instituionalisation
  - Schools often seen as outside institution (whose control?); school can only do so much even with effective local control (Crawford, 1995);

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Africa and South Africa

- Observations:
  - Policy generally top down (PanSalb, parliament, gov dept, public entities)
  - Lack of community support
  - English proficiency and income earning; interest from private sector
  - Schools as main venue for promotion
  - Dichotomy:
    - home (local language, local culture, tradition, literary);
    - school (English, European ways, modernity, literacy);
  - Lack of role model--elites
    - sincerity of policy statement? "parity of esteem"
  - Multiplicity of indigenous languages

The case of Zulu

- Community
  - Zulu pride (Zulu monarchy)
  - Newspapers
  - But international value?

- School
  - Only 1/3 choose to be taught in isiZulu (Snyman 2012)
    » Schools' offering;
    » isiZulu taught less time; Afrikaans test perceived to be easier (Turner 2012);
    » Senior school/HE do not offer isiZulu;

- UKZN

Way forward

- Possibilities:
    - Simultaneous and in same domain
    - Simultaneous but for in different domain
    - One replace another (probability of shift sharply increases once active speakers drop below 67%, O Giollagain et al, 2007/2010)

Way forward

- Fishman's inter-generational disruption scale for threatened language (1991)

Language Status	Interventions to Strengthen Language
Spoken by a few elders	fluent elders are teamed one-on-one with young adults
Old adults only	fluent adults provide pre-school immerse programme
By some inter-generational user	Encourage, protect, use language Exclusively in certain community activities
Alive and used in community	Improve prestige and use of the language; give recognition to special local efforts;
Compulsory in primary schools	Teach reading and writing
Used in business or less specialized work areas	Develop vocabulary so workers in an office could do their day to-day work using their indigenous language
Used by local government/mass media	Promote all written form of the language
Used by high level government/HE	Teach subject in the language; Develop oral and written literature

Proposal

- Through written media: yes
  - Dictionary; Literature, stories; Newspaper, magazine, cyber; government documents, newsletters, business dealings/records, signs;

- Through other public spaces: more
  - Create preference and interest (**relevance, prestige, usefulness**) through government speeches; Government functions; social services; Entertainment; radio, TV;
  - Make supportive research evidence more widely known

- Community and schools work together

- Role of business

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- Thank you!

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