

The Language Question. The Struggle between English and the other Official and Unofficial Languages (South Africa)

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Chapter Contributed to: At the End of the Rainbow? Welfare State and Integration in the new South Africa. (Editors) Gorm Gunnarsen, Patrick Mac Manus, Morten Nielsen, and Hans Erik Stolten.

Introduction

It is often forgotten that historically the tensions between language groups in South Africa have prominently featured the struggles between Afrikaans and English. This was culturally a significant strand in the conflict, which led to the war between Boer and Brit, the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902). Indeed, this is what the white Afrikaners have called the *taal-stryd*. The struggle to assert the usage of Afrikaans in the face of English hegemony continued in the years following the Anglo-Boer War. In 1906, the English Cape Town newspaper *The Cape Times* could condescendingly write that; “Afrikaans is the confused utterance of half-articulated patois.” Afrikaans was often denigratingly described as a *kombuis taal* (a kitchen language), referring to the fact that it was a language used in the kitchen by servants and slaves. Sensitivities against the social power of English was strikingly registered in 1913 when the Boer leader Steyn cabled the *Kaapsch Taalfeest* the following words; “... the language of the conqueror in the mouth of the conquered is the language of the slaves.” Afrikaans was accepted as a school subject in 1914, recognized by the church in 1916-19, at university level in 1918, and completely by both chambers of parliament at a joint sitting in 1925. Possibly, no single personality in the early 20th century served the object of elevating Afrikaans to equality with English as C.J. Langenhoven.

Thus when the Afrikaner elite came into power in 1948, they brought with them a historical baggage and a collective memory of cultural rivalry against the English. They

proceeded rapidly in all areas of social life to catch up with the social, economic and cultural gap between English-speaking white South Africa and Afrikaans-speaking white South Africa. This process was carried out on the backs of the non-white population. The process of achieving cultural and linguistic supremacy, more or less, continued uninterrupted until 1976, when African school children in Soweto decisively rejected and revolted against the use of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in schools. This protest against Afrikaans as Language of Instruction (LOI) under Apartheid marked a watershed in the history of Apartheid fascism in South Africa. It announced to the world the coming termination of Apartheid.

Forced removals and “grand apartheid” from the beginning of the 1960s made the non-white population to various degrees “invisible”. They were geographically and physically kept away from specified areas during certain hours of the day. However, this policy of enforced physical invisibility was matched by an equally pernicious policy of selective cultural invisibility. Cultural visibility was only tolerated in the Bantustans/Homelands. It was on the basis of these Homelands, as territorial units in which specific African languages were spoken that the concept of quasi-independence was developed. By the late 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s the Homelands and the picture of the languages spoken in them was as follows:

- Transkei (Xhosa) – declared independent on 26 October 1976
- Ciskei (also Xhosa) – declared independent on 4 December 1981
- Bophuthatswana (Tswana) – declared independent on 6 December 1977
- Venda (Venda) – declared independent 13 September 1979
- KwaZulu (Zulu)
- KwaNdebele (Ndebele)
- KaNgwane (Swazi)
- Gazankulu (Tsonga/Shangaan)
- QwaQwa (Southern Sotho)
- Lebowa (Northern Sotho/Pedi)

The idea was to treat each Bantustan as a separate “nation” so that practically the principle of an African majority was obviated. In effect, although, African language speaking citizens form three-quarters of the South African population their languages and cultures were practically treated as those of insignificant minorities.

The Soweto Uprising and After

English was in South African society too powerful to be superseded by Afrikaans. The sociology of language in South Africa after 1976 offers important lessons for the observer. English after the Soweto uprising received a boost. Whereas African

schoolchildren had rejected Afrikaans as LOI, this rejection had not been made on the grounds that they preferred the use of their languages as LOI. Indeed, part of the strategy of apartheid had been to foist on Africans the use of their languages but without resources and encouragement to develop these languages into languages of science and technology. Africans had therefore internalized the attitude that working in African languages was part of the apartheid strategy of keeping Africans as “hewers of wood and drawers of water.” African schoolchildren and their parents had developed the impression that English was the language of advancement and therefore whereas they rejected Afrikaans this was done in favour of English and not the indigenous languages. Afrikaans had by the mid-seventies developed into a fully-fledged language of science and technology. One can say that from the time in the mid-sixties when the Afrikaans-speaking and Afrikaans-educated Dr. Chris Barnard accomplished his epoch-making heart transplants the significance of Afrikaans as a language of science and technology equal to any other in the world was established for all to see.

Thus under apartheid, the two languages of the white minority, namely, Afrikaans and English, held sway over and above the indigenous African languages. While English retained the preeminence it had historically acquired in the public domain through service as the language of British colonial power, Afrikaans was systematically developed with enormous state resources and blessing into a second official language. Its social role covered the entire range of functions, which any official language in a developed first world society would have. Afrikaans had in fifty years become a language of modernity.

Partial public usages of the indigenous African languages in formal and informal capacities were restricted to usage in the “Bantustans”. African languages were thus officially tolerated in the, more or less, 13 percent of the country where after being denied their citizenship within the Republic, black South Africans were supposedly allowed to exercise their political rights. However, even in these Bantustans, English, and frequently Afrikaans, functioned as official languages alongside the local African language. Africans in the rest of the country, the so-called white South Africa, where Africans formed a clear majority were treated as foreigners. In the parlance of the Apartheid state they were “resident aliens”, who were in addition to their own languages required to learn and be educated through the medium of both English and Afrikaans.

The Apartheid state thus created nine languages located in the Bantustans. With time the Bantustan elites developed interests in the cultural and linguistic representations of the Bantustans. This linguistic differentiation, nomenclature and dispensation were largely carried into the post-Apartheid era.

The post-apartheid years have seen the limited but principled dismantling of the administrative structure of apartheid-based education and the adoption of a new education system, which reflects better, at least on paper, the cultural and linguistic interests of African language-speakers. The dramatic development of Afrikaans in fifty years and the prosperity and enlightenment it has brought Afrikaners should bring to our understanding the relevance of language to social transformation in South Africa. It also implicitly points to the fact that continuing and future transformation in the country will have to pay full attention to the language question. A democratically based language policy is crucial for the development of a democratic culture. Without a policy, which culturally empowers mass society, development in South Africa will in the long run stagnate.

Languages and the New Constitution

In South Africa's new 1994 *Bill of Rights*, it is stated that; "Everyone has the right to use the language and to participate in the cultural life of their choice, but no one exercising these rights may do so in a manner inconsistent with any provision of the Bill of Rights." In addition the point is made that; "Persons belonging to a cultural, religious or linguistic community may not be denied the right, with other members of that community (a) to enjoy their culture, practice their religion and use their language; and (b) to form, join and maintain cultural, religious and linguistic associations and other organs of civil society". It is further stated that these rights "may not be exercised in a manner inconsistent with any provision of the Bill of Rights". These definitions of rights had practically been in force from the late 1920s for the white minority (both Afrikaans and English speaking), but until 1994 been denied Africans.

In the new constitution, which came into force in 1994, the nine African languages that had previously enjoyed official status in the Bantustans were granted formal equality with Afrikaans and English at the national level. The language of Section 6 of the *Founding Provisions* reads as follows: "The official languages of the Republic are Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, siSwati, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, Afrikaans, English, isiNdebele, isiXhosa and isiZulu. Recognizing the historically diminished use and status of the indigenous languages of our people, the state must take practical and positive measures to elevate the status and advance the use of these languages." The letter and spirit of these words is that all are equal as inherited from the old regime. Furthermore, the state is enjoined to correctively take the necessary steps to elevate to equality the formerly depressed languages. It is with this latter view in mind that other provisions were made that; "A *Pan South African Language Board (PANSALB)* established by national legislation must promote, and create conditions for, the development and use of, all official languages; the Khoe Khoe and San languages; and South African Sign language; and promote and ensure respect for all languages commonly used by communities in South Africa,

including German, Greek, Gujarati, Hindi, Portuguese, Tamil, Telegu and Urdu; and Arabic, Hebrew, Sanskrit and other languages used for religious purposes in South Africa”. This body was effectively established but its track record has in many respects fallen far short of expectations. In practice the African languages for which it was primarily meant to cater have not made much developmental headway. The constitution missed no chance to register the swift desirability of linguistic equality in the country. Exhortatively, it demanded that; “The national government and provincial governments, by legislative and other measures, must regulate and monitor their use of official languages. all official languages must enjoy parity of esteem and must be treated equitably”.

All in all, these constitutional provisions were a compromise between the conflicting positions and demands of the various parties involved in the transitional negotiations. The African National Congress (ANC), representing the majority of black South Africans, favoured a *laissez faire* approach, which many suggested would result over time in the emergence of a national language, probably English. The Democratic Party (DP), which largely represented the majority of English-speaking whites, favoured English as the sole official language. In contrast, the National Party (NP), representing the white Afrikaans-speaking community, was particularly concerned that Afrikaans should retain its official status alongside English. Inkhata, based in KwaZulu Natal, in theory supported the more widespread usage of African languages, but in practice was diffident. Other parties, like the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) and the Azanian People’s Organization (AZAPO) were strongly in favour of the enhanced usage and development of the African languages.

The eleven-language policy was an attempt to satisfy this wide range of clashing interests, and to avoid possible future conflicts around this potentially explosive issue. This is why the constitution made a cautionary provision that; “The national government and provincial governments may use any particular official languages for the purposes of government, taking into account usage, practicality, expense, regional circumstances and the balance of the needs and preferences of the population as a whole or in the province concerned; but the national government and each provincial government must use at least two official languages. Municipalities must take into account the language usage and preferences of their residents.” Basically, it was decided that any language, which had previously enjoyed official status in any part of the country would be recognized nationally. But in pursuit of this objective, extenuating, discretionary and mitigating circumstances were thus clearly spelt out. It may be argued that in attempting to satisfy all constituencies, the government failed to chart a truly new route forward, which fundamentally met the needs of the teeming African language-speaking majorities.

In December 1995, Minister Ngubane, the then Minister for Arts, Culture, Science and Technology announced the establishment of a Language Plan Task Group, to be known as LANGTAG. It was appointed to advise the Minister who was responsible for language matters on how to urgently devise a coherent National Language Plan for South Africa. The Minister pointed out that Langtag was to be a policy advisory group to his Ministry and should in no way be confused with the Pan South African Language Board (Pansalb). Pansalb would remain to be an independent statutory body appointed by the Senate in the new year (1996) in terms of the Pan South African Language Board Act (Act No. 59 of 1995) and will be expected to monitor the observance of the Constitutional provisions and principles relating to the use of languages, as well as the content and observance of any existing and new legislation, practice and policy dealing with language matters. The immediate rationale for this body was that during the preceding months following the end of Apartheid, it had become clear that although multilingualism was indeed a sociolinguistic reality of South Africa there was a clear tendency towards unilingualism in the country. Multilingualism was invisible in the public service, in most public discourse and in the major mass media. Emerging wisdom was that the Government had failed to secure a significant position for language matters within the national development plan. Consequently, despite the fact that the Constitution provided for the cultivation of multilingualism, there was still an urgent need for the Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology to devise a coherent National Language Plan which not only directly addressed these issues, but also drew on the framework of the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) and maximized the utilization of the country's multilingual human resources. Furthermore, it was the view of the ministry that, the need for such a Task Group was essential in the light of (a) the lack of tolerance of language diversity and the resultant "multilingualism is a costly problem" ideology evident in some sectors of South African society weighed against the fundamental importance of language empowerment in a democratic society; and (b) the growing criticism from language stakeholders of the tendency to unilingualism in South Africa.

Minister Ngubane emphasized that a National Language Plan would have to be a statement of South Africa's language-related needs and priorities and that it should therefore set out to achieve at least the following objectives: Firstly, all South Africans should have access to all spheres of South African society by developing and maintaining a level of spoken and written language which is appropriate for a range of contexts in the official language(s) of their choice. Secondly, all citizens of the country should have access to the learning of languages other than their mother-tongue. Thirdly, the African languages, which were marginalized by the hegemonic policies of the past should be maintained and developed. Fourthly, equitable and widespread language facilitation services should be established. With the benefit of hindsight we can today not say that the establishment of this body has made much positive difference to the situation, which was

so clearly diagnosed within a few months of the ushering in of post-Apartheid South Africa. The desirability of all South Africans learning an African language has been frequently aired but implementationally little progress has been made in this direction.

Post-apartheid South Africa had inherited a lop-sided linguistic scenario and proceeded volubly through these constitutional provisions and other government initiatives to dismantle the structure of the racist and unsavoury inheritance. African languages were officially elevated to the status of national languages, but a decade and more after the end of the apartheid regime, the equality of the nine African languages with English and Afrikaans remains more on paper than in reality. As Professor Sizwe Satyo of the University of Cape Town made the point “one plus one equals eleven”.

It is worth pointing out that, across the continent, African language policies, which have emerged in the post-colonial era, bear uncanny formal and substantial resemblances. Everywhere, African post-colonial regimes have on paper elevated the status of the indigenous African languages but nothing beyond this has invariably been achieved. They have from one country to the next, by evidence of the record, been particularly ineffectual in serving as a viable basis for the expansion of democratic and popular cultures or societal development. Most observers who have looked at the issue of language policy in Africa are agreed about the fact that there is a big gap between intended policy (planned or espoused policy) and action or implementation. One important reason for the vacillation is that elite interests have become very entrenched in the *status quo* and the use of colonial languages. Indeed, in a cultural sense it is arguable that African elites owe their positions of privilege and influence to the use of the colonial languages. They are languages of power. Therefore, whereas frequently many can see the logic in the argument for the unstinted use of African languages, the ruling groups and elites are unable to, as it were, cut off the branch on which they are sitting.

It is estimated that 76 percent of the population of South Africa speak at least one language from one of the following two groups, namely, Nguni, Sotho as home language. 63 percent of first-language speakers within the Nguni and Sotho groups also know a language in the other group as a second or even third language. Afrikaans language-speakers form about 12 percent and English mother-tongue speakers about 8 percent of the population. The smaller and non-cognate languages are spoken by about 4 percent of the population. South Africa also recognizes other non-official languages, these being; Fanagalo, Lobedu, Northern Ndebele, Phuthi, South African Sign Language, Khoe Khoe and San. These non-official languages may be used in certain official circumstances in limited areas where it has been determined that these languages are prevalent.

In the decade after Apartheid, what has in fact happened is that the public dominance of English, one of the smallest languages in the country, spoken as a home language by only about 8% of the population, has been strengthened at the expense of all the other languages. Afrikaans, spoken by about 12% of the population, has compared to English lost its stature. The African languages, including languages like isiZulu and isiXhosa, the two largest languages in the country, and which are almost fully mutually intelligible, continue to be almost completely neglected. In fact, the nine African languages are probably in a weaker position today than they were before the 1990s. More than three-quarters of the population speaks these languages. Serious English proficiency among African language mother-tongue speakers does not count more than 12 percent. In this respect, the language scene in South Africa is not much different from the rest of sub-Saharan Africa, where less than 10% of Africans are proficient in the official languages of their country, usually a colonial language like English, French or Portuguese. What has been happening is that the supremacy of English, above all else, is becoming patently clear.

The state of affairs described above has evoked considerable resistance from some quarters. The white Afrikaans-speaking community has been particularly vehement and often vociferous in their protest. The “coloured” population who constitute the majority of Afrikaans-speakers does not show much public concern for the diminishment of the social power of Afrikaans. Indeed, many of the “coloured” population, particularly at the younger age levels in urban areas are drifting into the camp of English speakers. Another remarkable fact worth noting is that in the post-Apartheid period some Afrikaner public intellectuals and linguists have started openly associating the defense of Afrikaans with the general defense of African languages against the hegemonic position of English.

Debates about the positions of English, Afrikaans and African languages in South African society appear regularly in the newspapers. In a letter which appeared in April 2002 in *The Star* (Johannesburg), the author, Bob Broom, in reaction to Dan Roodt’s earlier letter (*Government suppresses Afrikaans in favour of English*, April 8th, 2002) suggested that: “Far from oppressing Afrikaans in favour of English, our government has realized that English is a universal language, spoken and understood by the majority of our trading partners and is the chosen language of instruction of most faculties of learning. This government that is “hell-bent” on promoting English above all others, does so despite the inconvenience to many of its own people, as English is not their first language. Yet they also see the indisputable sense of it. Pity the Afrikaners could not/would not acknowledge the same”. The battle between Afrikaans and English in South Africa continues, above the interests of the majorities, who speak African languages. In a sharp reaction to Roodt, Ettiene van Zyl in another letter; (*Don’t perpetuate Afrikaner imperialism*), pointed out that: “Apart from the gross

misrepresentation involved, Roodt presents us with the aggravating spectacle of someone claiming his right to self-assertion while bemoaning the use of that same right by the majority of South Africans. What Roodt fails to see is that the use of the right to self-assertion in the language of their choice by the majority of South Africans will of necessity involve a rather drastic scaling down of the use of Afrikaans in the public domain". Some may argue that no language should be down scaled, rather all languages should be elevated to the same level by providing the necessary resources to enable and permit this.

One hardly notices much reaction from the African language-speakers in South Africa against the increasing predominance of English, but occasionally we hear and read strident African language-speaking voices. They are however, generally few and far between. In a sharply worded *cri de coeur* written by an African language-speaking reader, which appeared in *The Star* (K.C. Motshabi. *Africans opt for English as the Language of 'Brainy People'* 9.6.2006), the writer trenchantly observed that: "It is disheartening to see people actively shunning their languages. African languages are relegated to second best, compared to English, despite the fact that the constitution advocates for equality with respect to languages. What is more disturbing is that Africans are assisting in the marginalization of their mother-tongues. The country is currently busy producing African youth who can hardly read, let alone write a text in their mother-tongue. These youths fail to even pronounce African names correctly, let alone spell them. In some extreme cases, some African children can hardly construct a sentence in their parents' mother-tongue. The poor kid's identity is lost because they are supposed, for example, to be Tswana and yet they know nothing about the Tswana culture and language. These children look down upon African culture just like most Caucasians do. They look down upon African religious practices as backward superstition. They are alienating themselves, with the help of their parents, from their own cultures. It is unfortunate that most parents still believe that speaking eloquent English necessarily means you are intelligent. The fallacy of this observation is the suggestion that the English in England are all intelligent because they speak English. The interesting thing is that when parents enroll their children in township schools they insist that their children attend schools that offer their mother-tongue. When these kids move to schools in town, mother-tongue preference is shelved for English and Afrikaans. Granted, the school may not be offering any African language at that stage even though it has African pupils in the majority. African parents resign themselves to the status quo more often than not. Our children should learn other languages in addition to their mother-tongue. Imagine if White, Coloured and Indian children were to learn African languages as their second language at school that would add some impetus to nation-building."

The writer's perceptions of the issues around the LOI debates in South Africa were equally perceptive and forthright. Going to the heart of the excuses, which are often made to justify the hegemony of English and to a lesser extent Afrikaans he reiterated that; "Some argue that as English is an international language, it must receive priority and that African languages are restricted to Africa and therefore there are no opportunities arising from mother-tongue proficiency. Others argue that African languages have limited vocabularies, hence there are no sufficient academic textbooks written in African languages. As a start we need to vigorously promote the teaching of African languages while simultaneously developing academic books in African languages. The Christian bible, for instance, has been translated into all African languages so that the less Anglicized can access the teachings of Christianity. It is important that we decolonize our minds and avoid giving in to the *status quo*. By the way, one does not need to be conversant in English for one to be an electrician or mechanic, for example. This can be achieved if we could develop material in African languages for our children to study. The Afrikaans, French and Russians, to mention but a few, are all living examples of excellence through mother-tongue teaching." In one letter, this writer summarized the issues as seen from the viewpoint of a sensitive and socially conscious African language-speaker.

Language Policy for Transformation in South Africa

The point that must be forcefully made is that multilingualism not bilingualism or unilingualism needs to be cultivated if all voices in South African languages are to be heard. If and when this new spirit and policy based on multilingualism becomes operative, a new impetus to a more democratic and majoritarian approach to languages use in South Africa could move into gear. As things currently stand, the overwhelming majorities of South African society are culturally relatively-deprived and linguistically silenced. Another way of making this point is to say that they are culturally dominated. So that "apartheid may be dead, but long live apartheid".

Obviously, given its rich cultural mix, which should be a source of economic social and cultural strength, South Africa, like all the other former colonial countries of the continent is still yoked with the burden of language and cultural colonialism. Sagacious multiculturalism will permit the celebration of all South Africa's languages and cultures and should allow cross-fertilization and inter-penetration of individuals and groups across cultural and linguistic boundaries. But even then, democracy requires the pre-eminence of the cultures and languages of the majorities. Development in South Africa cannot be sustained in conditions where the majorities are by purpose or omission culturally and linguistically disempowered.

When this has been said, the point also needs to be made that; empowerment through eleven languages is neither economically feasible nor technically justifiable. Of the nine African languages currently officially acknowledged in law, all except two can be grouped under either Nguni or Sotho-Tswana. Venda stands a bit out of this clustering. Tsonga/Shangaan also stands on its own. Zulu, Xhosa, Ndebele, enjoy a degree of mutual intelligibility to allow written forms accessible to them all. Sotho-Tswana, likewise, will include a mutually intelligible cluster of Pedi, Sotho, and Tswana. As Washington Kwetana has passionately and with cynicism made the case; “History has unwisely created isiXhosa, isiZulu, siSwati and isiNdebele into separate languages, which divided the biological grand-grand-children of the Nguni House, and, in later generations, history again mischievously gave the impression that the speakers of these languages are different nations, not even tribes. The same goes for the Sesotho groups, who are biologically linked amongst themselves, first, and to the Nguni, too”.

In each instance, varieties of these two clusters are spoken in seven countries in the Southern African region. There is certainly more sense in producing a book for 10 million people instead of 1 million people. For this the development of new orthographic and spelling forms need to be undertaken, with an eye on the economies of scale. It is important and necessary that the relevant departments in the South African state co-operate with neighbouring countries, which have mutually intelligible languages. This can be done in the framework of the Southern Africa Development Conference (SADC). All of this will require firstly, systematic planning and secondly, adequate resources, especially at the initially stages of implementation.

Language and the National Question in South Africa

For reasons of the history of centuries-long white dominance of South African society, which is the most thorough and intense of such cases on the African continent, it is often forgotten that South Africa is indeed, an African country like all others on the African continent. At least three-quarters of its population are made up of African language-speaking people whose histories and cultures are coterminous with those of all the neighbouring countries. White dominance and repression has submerged this African character of the society, and through the operation of an economic system which involves all, but in which again Africans are kept at the bottom of the heap. Thus, the cultural and linguistic oppression of Africans in South Africa, which affects Africans more profoundly than any other group in the country, is paralleled by an economic structure of subordination. The national question in South Africa refers to the anomalies arising out of this situation and how these can be corrected as processes for the emancipation of the structurally suppressed majorities of South African society. Another way of making the point is that, how do we ensure that the African character of South Africa is fully and democratically represented in the economic, cultural, linguistic, political and social life of

the people? How do we ensure that the culture of the majority, the African languages-speaking three-quarters of the population, is given primacy and centre-stage in the development and future of the country? A judicious policy of Africa-centeredness is necessary.

For those to whom an Africa-centred approach is like a red flag to a bull, the prospect of the above raises the ire and frightens others. But this does not need to be so. The elevation of African languages and cultures in South Africa to equality and the demographic centrality they deserve is only an exercise in democracy. The situation in South Africa is such that African language-speakers are the overwhelming majorities with cultures languages and histories, which have been ruthlessly suppressed under colonialism, and the legacy of this inherited into the neo-colonial or post-colonial era. Here, Africans must as of necessity, if the emancipation process of mass society is to continue, reclaim centre-stage. This is no different from what obtains in all free societies.

All European countries have minorities from the four corners of the world. If we take Britain as an example, there are Turks, Kosovars, Chinese, Indians, Pakistanis, and Africans etc. Indeed, these minorities in any European country are almost as sizeable as non-African minorities in South Africa. But the existence of these minorities does not obliterate the cultural and national character of these countries. They are all European countries in which above all else European culture is celebrated.

In South Africa, the idea of the “rainbow nation” has rightfully been extolled as a desirable end; a South African world in which all it’s distinct cultures and people find accommodative cultural space and acknowledgement. But, sometimes the “rainbow nation” idea has also tended to be interpreted as meaning that South Africa has no pre-eminent national character; that its national character is amorphous and nondescript; that the present situation is the ideal manifestation of “rainbowism”. This argument implicitly denies the fact that in the present situation, the cultures and languages of the majorities are suppressed and silenced in favour of a dominant Eurocentric high culture, which everybody is willy nilly obliged by force of circumstance to emulate. Democratic pluralism is thus usurped in favour of undemocratic pluralism.

I have elsewhere argued that, the technological culture of South Africa is constructed on the cultures of its white minority. Knowledge, its production and reproduction, is negotiated and built in the languages and cultures of this culturally European minority. An Africa-centred approach in South Africa implies that if development is to take place which provides the masses of South African society cultural and linguistic access into the process, this will have to be done in the cultures and languages of the masses, unless we

want to suggest that the African languages and cultures of the masses are inherently inferior and can provide no basis for social and cultural advancement.

In education, knowledge production and reproduction is carried out exclusively in either English or Afrikaans. The African languages do not feature in this area. By and large, we can say that the process of transformation in South Africa at the cultural and linguistic levels point to a steady integration of the emergent African elites into the cultures of the white minorities, principally the English. For as long as this trend continues it is difficult to see how the cultures of mass society, the African language-speaking majorities can move into modernity with their linguistic and cultural belongings. The dominant trend is to integrate the majorities into the languages and cultures of the minorities.

Thus while an Africa-centred approach would be misplaced if it was suggested as a developmental paradigm for contemporary Britain, Ireland, Germany, France, or Sweden, where Africans are minorities, in Africa it is only natural that the African cultural and historical belongings of the people should be provided relevant space. When this is resisted, the development of South Africa is restricted.

The Balance Sheet

As earlier indicated, the growing supremacy of English above all South African languages is not peculiar to South Africa. A similar situation prevails in the whole of post-colonial Africa. Right across the continent the languages of colonial dominance have managed to maintain the hegemony and indeed increased in their power and influence as African elites continue to wholeheartedly embrace the usage of these languages.

In the South African media the dominance of English remains unchallenged. Today, Afrikaans newspapers manage to hold their own. In this latter instance capital and other resources help to maintain the solidity of the Afrikaans presence in the media. In the media, both print and electronic, the subordination of the interests of African language-speakers continues to be very marked. At the national level all daily and weekly newspapers are either Afrikaans or English. The implicit presumption is that only those citizens who are either literate in English or Afrikaans need to know what is going on the country. The silent majorities who speak African languages are thus kept in the dark. Accept in the cases of isiZulu, where in KwaZulu-Natal there are two regional papers published in the language and one isiXhosa paper.

When in South Africa, as is currently the case, one comes frequently across the view, mainly among African language-speakers, that most of the newspapers, including relatively prestigious ones like, *The Argus*, *The Independent*, *The Mail and Guardian* or *Business Day* pander to the white minority, its interests, and politico-philosophical

liberalism, it is often forgotten that the narrowness of the social base of the audiences of these papers is not exclusively defined or dictated solely on account of the views articulated in these papers. Even more importantly, what is at stake here is that, the language of discussion is the language of a small minority. By the very fact of the use of English, the nature and character of the audience is defined. Is this shocking? No, indeed, this is to be expected. The simple truth is that the language defines the audience.

Radio requires a low resource threshold for effective usage in any language. However, even in this area, in South Africa, the approach to the usage of the medium is weak and unsystematic. In television and cinema African languages are hardly featured. In the case of television, over the past few years some scope has been provided for African language broadcasts on the public broadcaster.

The South African parliamentarian, Duma Nkosi who in the past consistently chose to address parliament in South Africa in isiZulu, in an interview, informed me that he is convinced that many politicians are unsuccessful and unable to express their views properly and correctly to the masses they address because they speak in English, a language in which their proficiency is limited. This compounds further the problem that, they invariably address also audiences for whom the use of the English language is totally foreign. Indeed, Nkosi remarked that a few years ago, at the height of the conflict and bloodshed in the Gauteng area of South Africa, in the months preceding the 1994 elections, some of the conflicts between different parties in his view were exacerbated by poor communication in English and misunderstandings arising thereof.

Conclusion

In South Africa as indeed the rest of Africa, language policies need to move from being pious articles of faith enshrined in constitutions and policy documents by inconsequent ruling elites. If Africa and Africans are to make progress in social, economic, political and cultural development they will need to pursue these policies at the level of active practice.

Arguably, the continued social and political inferiority of African languages in South Africa is a component and reflection of the general status of Africans in contemporary South Africa. For how long can these conditions of African language and cultural inferiority continue? One cannot tell. What one can say with certainty however is that; it cannot go on forever. Ultimately, the power, strength and voices of the democratic majorities must and will prevail.