Languages in Sub-Saharan Africa in a broader socio-political perspective

Jan Záhořík

Charles University

Abstract. This study deals with language policies in Africa with a special focus on multi-ethnic and multi-lingual states including Sudan, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Cameroon, and Democratic Republic of Congo. The study will thus examine relations between state and minorities, the status of major and marginalized languages, the roles of European languages in politics as well as theoretical frameworks. Sub-Saharan Africa has undergone a remarkable process from linguistic imperialism to linguistic pluralism and revivalism. Until the 1960s the superior position of the European languages (English, French, and Portuguese) was evident, but after the Africanization of politics and society in many African countries, a strong accent on linguistic emancipation was initiated. Nowadays, many African countries follow the principle of linguistic pluralism where several languages enjoy the same rights and space in the media, administrative, education, etc. This study will discuss some important case studies and their specific language policies.

Introduction

This study aims to depict a role which languages play in the socio-political sphere of African multi-ethnic states. We will deal with the development of language policies in theory as well as in several case studies including Cameroon, Ethiopia and West Africa. Each of these regions represents a specific historical, political and socio-cultural experience. One of the crucial questions in studying language policies is also the role of the former colonial powers in promoting their national languages (English, French, Portuguese), which in many cases overtook the functions of national and/or official languages in the postcolonial states in Africa.

In the first part of the following text, we will present a theoretical introduction to the study of language policies; we will present basic terminology and explain their use in the text. The second part deals with the problems of minority and majority languages and approaches of African states to their languages. The significance of major European languages in Africa will be presented as well, including the so called linguistic imperialism and the question of national identity. The last part is dedicated to several short case studies which illustrate the researched topic and the variability of language policies and statuses of African languages in postcolonial Africa.

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In terms of interdisciplinary research, it is obvious that such an issue can hardly be examined only through the lenses of one discipline. It is thus necessary to employ approaches from various fields of social sciences including anthropology, political science, history and linguistics. Such a study can then become a useful means for students and scholars dealing with African languages in their social, historical, and political contexts. One of aims of the study can also be answering the question as to whether African languages could play a significant role as means of communication on national or international levels comparable to that of European languages and Arabic.

Language policies

Before we analyze the statuses of African languages it would be useful to explain several terms, which one may come into contact with when dealing with the issue that we may call a language policy. In his study, van Dyken perceives languages in multilingual societies from various perspectives. While a mother tongue is a language, which a child frequently speaks in pre-school age, a community language is spoken by at least a part of population of a given region and is also used as a second language by a part of non-native population. *Lingua franca* is a language broadly used as a means of communication by speakers of various different languages. Languages of minority groups may be a confusing term since it would be first useful to explain what we consider a minor or minority language/group. The national language is an indigenous language whose status is accepted and codified by the government and is used in administrative and education. The official language is used for any formal manifestations in the country (van Dyken 1990, 40–1).

The majority of African countries are ethnically and linguistically heterogeneous while homogeneity occurs only in a small number of them. The intergovernmental conference on language policy in Africa, which took place in Harare in 1996 under the shelter of UNESCO, defined eight countries as homogeneous while the term itself means that more than 90% of inhabitants of the country speak one language. Among those countries we may find Botswana, Lesotho, Madagascar, Mauritius, Rwanda, Seychelles, Somalia, and Swaziland (Chimhundu 2002).

In the last few decades, several African countries have witnessed the development of what we may call 'a linguistic nationalism' in relation to a state-directed effort leading to linguistic homogenization (Prah 2004; Batibo 2005). Non-democratic language policies are often linked to bloody conflicts and ethnic tensions. Batibo claims that such ethnic movements are not only motivated by an effort to maintain indigenous languages in a given country but by an aim of local authorities to maintain the linguistic plurality of their country (Batibo 2005, 111). On the other hand, linguistic revivalism can be successful only in such a case when it is supported

by state institutions and through a concerted effort of its speakers to preserve it as a mother tongue.

The fact that languages are a necessary part of politics, and the question of the standardization of languages can be abused by political representation, is more than obvious. In the recent past, language and its standardization has quite often become the subject of political clashes in several African countries. During the Siyad Barré dictatorship (1969–1991) a Latin script was introduced for a Somali language despite the Osmaniya script being legalized in 1961. Moreover, Barré's secularist regime strongly took measures against Arabic and the Arabic script preferred by the Muslim authorities (Warsame 2001).

Languages were for a long time taken as an inseparable part of an ethnic identity but several recent research efforts have shown that such a claim does not have absolute validity. As an example we may point at Senegalese Serer, which has been in 1960 completely Wolofized since independence, but since then, there has been a concerted effort by the Serer elites and people to strengthen elements of Sere culture and ethnic identity. Serer considers Wolof to be inferior and the development of an ethnic identity without its own language was a means as to how to defend against the Wolof domination (Brenzinger, Heine, Sommer 1991, 36).

Some authors (e.g. Ouedraogo 2000; Bamgbose 1991) claim that the main barriers to the promotion of African languages into education were not just a result of colonialism but also the insufficient will of many African rulers to bring changes in the era shortly after independence played a factor. Ouedraogo states that African politicians were afraid of potential problems connected with the promotion of African languages in schools and at institutions and it was more comfortable to keep things as they were including language policy, inherited borders, etc. (Ouedraogo 2000, 24). It is related to the term 'collective amnesia' originally used by Prah (2003) and developed by some other scholars (Roy-Campbell 2006). This meant a disastrous result from language policies in Sub-Saharan Africa with all their negative consequences including the decrease of indigenous African wisdom and knowledge stemming from previous generations and Pre-colonial times. The theory of 'collective amnesia', in a certain sense, follows Walter Rodney's *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1972). There, the author claims that African skills, knowledge and values were substituted by European values and knowledge after the 'invasion' of Europeans.

In international and economic perspectives the abovementioned opinions, as stated by Roy-Campbell (2006, 3), mean that the disuse of African languages in education and the devaluation of knowledge incorporated into these languages accredits Africa to a position of 'a receiver' rather than 'a contributor'. African countries thus receive technology, know-how, skills, publications and other elements from foreign countries

without being perceived as contributors to a common social wealth in the era of globalization. Roy-Campbell even blames African countries that in the past, instead of developing African know-how, they only followed the development policy of Western countries by which they failed in the effort to systematically promote indigenous practices in development processes (ibid., 6). Language became an indubitable part of these processes because European languages used in education supported Western modernization as something desirable and broadly expected.

Majority and minority languages

Dominant languages exist in a majority of African countries whose position can be expressed not only demographically but also socio-economically as they were once considered prestigious. In many cases these days, they are *lingua franca*, as they are used as second languages in everyday speech. Such languages are Wolof in Senegal, Swahili in Tanzania, Amharic in Ethiopia and others. Very often these dominant languages serve as a means of inter-ethnic communication on local, regional, and national levels. They are also used together with the former colonial language as official languages. We can again point to Senegal where Wolof is used together with French as the most prestigious languages.

Batibo is divided into three types of dominant languages (2005, 21–5):

1) Languages of areal (or spatial) significance: there it includes languages which are prestigious to a certain area.
2) Languages of national significance: there the national lingua francas used in administrative, education and government levels are put.
3) Languages of regional significance: those which overcome borders of one state and are usually spoken by a large number of speakers, a typical representative can be Swahili in East Africa (spoken in Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Democratic Republic of Congo, Comoro Islands, Rwanda, Burundi, and Northern Mozambique).

While the number of major languages in Africa is relatively low, we may find huge quantities of minority languages in most African countries. The following table shows the percentage of minority languages in African countries.

In regard to the intergovernmental conference on language policies in Africa in Harare, the UNESCO commissions in Sub-Saharan countries received questionnaires called *Politiques et Pratiques linguistiques en Afrique/Linguistic Policies and Practices in Africa*, which inspired a similar *Charte de la langue français* in Canadian Québec. The questionnaire was focused on problems of majority and minority languages, their position and use at the legislative, administrative, education and media levels (Gadelii 2004, 2).

Table 1. Percents of minority languages in Africa

	Minority languages in %	States
1	0–19	Burundi, Cape Verde, Djibouti, Lesotho, Rwanda, Seychelles, Swaziland
2	20–39	Comoro Islands, Egypt, Eritrea, Mauritania, Mauritius, Niger, São Tomé e Príncipe
3	40–59	The Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Libya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Morocco, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe
4	60–79	Algeria, Angola, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Central African Republic, Equatorial Guinea, Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Mozambique, Namibia, Senegal, Somalia, Sudan, Togo
5	80 and more	Botswana, Cameroon, Chad, Congo, Dem. Rep. Congo, Ethiopia, Gabon, Nigeria, Tanzania

Source: Batibo 2005, 53.

Shortly after independence, many African leaders promoted alphabetization campaigns in order to emancipate and standardize the so far marginalized, although numerically significant, languages. These actions were developed both by socialist (Ethiopia, Somalia, Angola) and 'conservative' or pro-Western states (Democratic Republic of Congo/Zaïre during the Mobutu regime. In both cases, the wave of Africanization of public life and culture took place as it was a remarkable sign of the 1960s and 1970s. The absolute minority of states, those based on democratic nature (Namibia, Botswana) fully respect equality of all languages and minorities (Batibo 2005; Warsame 2001; Gadelii 2004; Appleyard, Orwin 2008; Zewde 2001).

Linguistic imperialism

African languages were confronted by the logic of colonialism, which the new independent states simply inherited and which was based on the dominance of a European language (English, French, Portuguese). The most important language not only in Africa is indubitably English, often regarded as a global language (Hnízdo 2007). English belongs to the most dominant languages in West Africa (Nigeria, the Gambia, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Cameroon), as well as in East Africa (Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda). Since 1795, English is one of the most widespread languages in Southern Africa where it spread within the British mandated territories and protectorates (South Africa, Botswana, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Zambia, and Malawi). English is together with Arabic and French considered the largest and the most used language of Africa, although, for instance, Bloor and Tamrat suggest that to label so many countries as simply Anglophone (or Francophone) can be misleading since besides

South Africa and Liberia (where English is widespread) English is used only by the educated elite. Nevertheless, the authors admit that the situation continues to change as English slowly becomes the most important means of communication even outside 'traditional' Anglophone areas (Bloor, Tamrat 1996, 324).

Hnízdo states that English should be considered not only as a global language but also as an African language. It cannot be perceived only through lenses of heritage of colonialism or linguistic imperialism but it is also necessary to reflect an overwhelming increase of importance of English and her role as one of the identity factors—on regional, state and international levels. From this point of view we may consider English with her vast number of regional, Creole and Pidgin variants as an African language (Hnízdo 2007, 202–3).

In non-Anglophone countries, mainly in Ethiopia and Eritrea, the importance of English has been steadily increasing at least since 1941 when the Italian East African Empire ceased to exist and Great Britain and the United States of America became the main partners of the Haile Sellassie regime. Although during the Socialist Derg regime the role of English was limited due to ideological reasons, after 1991 its widespread nature cannot be ignored as it has become a part of the school curricula and especially in urban areas, knowledge of English increases from year to year. In Ethiopia, English has become one of the two official languages (after Amharic) in which official documents including the Constitution are written. Many Ethiopian dailies and magazines are published in English as well (including independent The Reporter or pro-government The Ethiopian Herald).

Table 2. Role of English in Africa

Status	Country
National language	South Africa, Liberia
Second language	Swaziland, Lesotho, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Namibia, Malawi, the Gambia, Kenya, Uganda, Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone
Second/international	Cameroon, Ethiopia, Somalia, Tanzania, Botswana
International	Sudan, Egypt, Mozambique

Source: Batibo 2005, 27.

Both French and Portuguese maintained their statuses (see Table 3) in former colonies and especially France invests to promote French culture and language and to keeps strong relations with Francophone Africa. The role of Portugal is, on the other hand, being substituted by Brazil. In Angola, Portuguese kept its indubitable *lingua franca* status and became a national language because it united various ethnic groups into *angolanidade*. The effort leading to search for a new national (indigenous) language proved to be futile as no language reaches such a territorial spread as Portuguese.

Table 3. European languages with official statuses in Sub-Saharan Africa

Language	%	Language	%
English	46	Portuguese	11
French	41	Spanish	2

Source: Gadelii 2004, 10.

Arabic is currently probably the most developing non-African language in Africa, spoken by approximately 100 million speakers. While in Northern Africa (Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Mauritania, Sudan) Arabic has an unquestionable status of official language as well as means of everyday communication, in Sub-Saharan Africa, it can be said only in four countries, namely Chad, the Comoro Islands (besides French), Djibouti and Somalia (besides Somali). Eritrea, due to its specific international position, put Arabic into the forefront of its language policy despite only having a tiny minority of Arabs living there. Although according to the Eritrean constitution, all languages are equal, Arabic and Tigrignya are treated differently. Arabic is used for international communication with Arabs states. The most significant Arabization policy was adopted in Sudan where it became one of the crucial aspects of long-lasting civil wars between the North and South, Kordofan, and elsewhere (e.g. James 2008; Johnson 2004; Sanderson 1975, 427–41). Forced enforcement of Afrikaans in South Africa in the era of Apartheid can be considered a specific category of linguistic imperialism as well. Table 4 shows languages in Sub-Saharan countries which are used (besides official languages) in legislative.

Table 4. Sub-Saharan countries using other than official languages in legislative

State	Languages (*official languages in italics*)
Angola	*Portuguese*; Kikongo, Chokwe, Oshiwambo, Kimbundu, Umbundu
Cape Verde	*Portuguese*; Criolo
Chad	*French*; Arabic, Sara
Democratic Republic of Congo	*French*; Lingala, Swahili, Chiluba, Kikongo
Eritrea	*Tigrigna*; Afar, Arabic, Bilin, Hedareb, Kunama, Nara, Saho, Tigré
Guinea-Bissau	*Portuguese*; Criolo
Kenya	*English*; Swahili, Kikuyu and others
Madagascar	*Malagasy*; French
Mauritius	*English*, *French*; Creole
Namibia	*English*; Oshiwambo, Nama, Otjiherero, Rukwangali, Afrikaans, Silozi
Niger	*French*; Hausa, Songhay/Zarma
Nigeria	*English*; Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba
Senegal	*French*; Wolof

Source: Gadelii 2004, 14.

Ethiopia and Eritrea

The modern history of Ethiopia was characterized by a strong Amhararization of non-Amharic territories. While Emperor Menelik II brought his rule into the Southern lowlands, it was Haile Sellassie, who by his centralizing policy, contributed to unification of Ethiopia (let us leave the debate whether to talk about Amhararization or Ethiopianization). Bamgbose aptly suggested that language is a mighty symbol of society, especially when its potential is sufficiently acknowledged and exploited (Bamgbose 2000, 30). Batibo then adds that when African states gained independence in 1950s and 1960s, they realized the importance of a single unifying communication medium with potential to connect very often disunited societies inherited from the colonial era (Batibo 2005, 44). Despite this claim, only a minority of countries including Ethiopia (without colonial experience), Tanzania and Somalia developed indigenous languages into broadly accepted national languages.

The transition after 1991 took place also in the language policy in Ethiopia. The most important event was the approval of full rights to minority (not numerically) languages, which brought a certain revision of Ethiopian history based on linguistic imperialism with Amharic as the sole dominant and acknowledged language. Constitutionally based linguistic plurality promised at least the redefinition of the dominant position of Amharic and increasing role of Afaan Oromo, Somali, Sidama, Wolayta, Tigrigna and other languages. The constitution of 1955 simply stated that Amharic is an official language of the Empire without even mentioning the question of other languages. Amharic became the means of communication, the only language which could be heard and read in the media, and the sole language of education while other languages were prevented from that, and it was even forbidden to use them at schools. When the federation was abolished in 1962 and Eritrea became a part of unitary Ethiopian state, Tigrigna was forbidden in Eritrea as the official language as Amharic replaced the vacuum. The socialist constitution of 1987 proclaimed that Ethiopia was a country of linguistic pluralism although reality was much different with Amharic still being the sole language in which the vast majority of books were published. Despite the alphabetization campaign of the 1970s, Amharic only strengthened its significance.

Table 5. Main languages in Ethiopia

Language	Number of speakers
Amharic	17,372,913
Oromo	17,080,000
Tigrigna	4,424,875
Somali	3,334,113
Sidama	1,876,329
Afar	1,439,367
Gamo-Gofa-Dawro	1,236,637
Wolayta	1,231,678

Source: Appleyard, Orwin 2008, 272.

The truth is that almost immediately after the Socialist revolution of 1974, several minor languages were allowed to be broadcast by radio including Afaan

Oromo, Somali, Tigrigna, and Wolayta. In 1975, the first Oromo written magazine—Bariisaa—was published. UNESCO financially supported the alphabetization campaign which involved also other minor languages: Hadiya, Kambaata, Gurage, Gedeo, Kefa-Mocha, Saho, Afar, Tigré, and Kunama (Appleyard and Orwin 2008).

West Africa

Since the end of the 15th century, the European colonialists brought (besides political dominance and the slave trade) European languages. In the following centuries, Africans experienced English, French, Portuguese, and even Swedish, Danish and Dutch. Due to the historical consequences, only English and French remained as dominant foreign languages with a minor position for Portuguese. All these languages, due to intermingling with local African languages, became creolized, which is a typical phenomenon of West Africa.

Some native languages gained a certain prestige during colonialism as was the case of the Bamum language in Cameroon, which was standardized under the rule of Sultan Ndjoya and used in education long before the Germans came there to establish their colony. Similarly, Fulbe became, since the end of the 18th century, a part of the so-called Fulbe djihads, which took place not only in Northern Nigeria but also in other parts of West Africa (e.g. Echu 2004). Among other major West-African languages we may include Hausa, Yoruba, Wolof and other as obvious from Table 6.

Table 6. Major languages in West Africa

Language	Country	Number of speakers
Fulbe	Mauritania, Ghana, Senegal, the Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Nigeria, Togo, Cameroon	11 million
Hausa	Niger, Nigeria, Benin, Chad, Sudan, Cameroon, Ghana	34 million
Mandinka	Senegal, Mali, the Gambia, Sierra Leone, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire	2,8 million
Songhay	Mali, Niger, Benin, Nigeria	2,4 million
Wolof	Mauritania, Senegal, the Gambia	3 million
Yoruba	Nigeria, Benin, Togo	12 million
Djula	Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire	2 million
Ewe	Ghana, Togo	3,3 million

Source: Ouedraogo 2000, 39.

West Africa can be characterized as a combination of Anglophone, Francophone and Lusophone space. Despite this claim, African languages continue to gain more

and more prestige and space at schools, institutions, governments, etc. This can be proved in the following characteristics of the language situation in West Africa as presented by Ouedraogo (2000, 25):

1) Diffident use of native languages in primary education as well as the education of adults.
2) Precarious use of native languages at secondary schools in Mali, Ghana, Nigeria, Guinea.
3) Dominant use of the former colonial languages from secondary to tertiary education.
4) Widespread use of indigenous languages in informal education.

The largest country in West Africa is Nigeria. Its language policy has been, due to its specific colonial history, of a multi-ethnic and multi-lingual character and a matter of various recent research projects (e.g. Sanderson 1975; Adegbija 2004; Simpson, Oyètádé 2008). The multi-lingual character of Nigeria can be best illustrated through the number of local languages, which exceeds 450, but only three—Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo—were acknowledged as dominant and national. Even though the Nigerian politicians tended to spread these languages throughout the state at least in administrative matters, all three languages maintain their given territorial status stemming from historical, political, cultural and ethnic roots. Hausa is spoken mainly in Northern states of Kano, Katsina, Adamawa, Bauchi, Gombe, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kebbi, Niger, Sokot, Zamfara and Sabongari; Yoruba is dominant in Southwestern states of Oyo, Ogun, Osun, Ondo, Lagos, Ekiti and partly Kwara; Igbo is spoken in Southeastern states of Enugu, Anambra, Imo, Ebonyin and Abia (Adegbija 2004, 184).

Table 7. Percentage of major ethnic groups in Nigeria

Hausa-Fulani	29,5
Yoruba	20,3
Igbo	16,6
Kanuri	4,1
Ibibi	3,6
Tiv	2,5
Idjo	2
Edo	1,7
Nupe	1,2
Others	17,5

Source: Simpson, Oyètádé 2008, 175.

Nigeria, at least since 1914 when Southern and Northern territories were put into one colonial unit, tended to find a *modus vivendi* of incompatible parts of the colony in order to create a unified nation. Different social, historical and economic conditions contributed to the unwillingness of major exponents to develop a common government without threatening each other. Such hostility resulted in the Biafra secession (1967–1970). The major factors of the political struggle can be seen in the ethnicity and languages, which were abused and politicized for mass mobilization (Imobighe 2003; Falola 2004). Similar developments could be seen in many

other multi-ethnic states as in the Sudan or the Democratic Republic of Congo. Table 7 shows a percentage of major ethnic groups of Nigeria.

Cameroon

Cameroon is an illustrative example of nation-building stemming from two different incompatible colonial units, namely British Cameroons and French Cameroon. Since the very beginning of their mutual coexistence as an independent state, the internal social and political climate was influenced by a struggle for identity based on two non-African languages, English and French. For a long time, the inhabitants of Anglophone Cameroon called for equal status and refused the social marginalization delineated by the Francophone majority.

Cameroon is an ethno-linguistic melting-pot composed of almost 250 different languages. Due to the fact that no indigenous language forms a remarkable majority, the core of the identity clash lay in the French/English quarrel. Despite official bilingualism and the equality of French and English in the public sphere, reality seems to be different as a vast majority of public space was occupied by French. Biloa and Echu present that 90% of printed media and 65% of radio and television stations are in French, which can be explained by the numerical superiority in French Cameroon. While French is used in urban areas as a prestigious language, English is threatened by Pidgin English. On the other hand, Anglophone Cameroonians speak French more than French Cameroonians use English, which is visible mainly in communications with institutions (Biloa, Echu 2008, 199–205). In regard to the language policy in Cameroon, a new term—Camfranglais—has evolved, being composed of Camerounais, Français and Anglais, including Pidgin English. Moreover, it has to point at a specific reunification identity of Cameroonians originating in the complicated colonial history and politics of identity (ibid., 206–8).

South Africa

The vast majority of scholars (see Alexander 2001; Roy-Campbell 2006) usually agree on the opinion that in South Africa, the main social markers of differences including 'race', language, culture, gender, or religion played a crucial role as the determinants of group or social identities. The main component of South African politics and social life in the last century was definitely Afrikaner nationalism with its segregation context (1948–1989). In Apartheid South Africa, vast socio-cultural engineering took place and influenced all parts of society. The government forced people to accept artificially created identities. Some groups of people even lost the right to be citizens of South Africa, as these were destined to live in newly created homelands, or *bantustans*.

Post-Apartheid South Africa resolved its linguistic plurality and dominance of Afrikaans by acknowledging eleven official languages including nine native, English and Afrikaans (*The Constitution of South Africa*, Chapter 1, Section 6—Languages, Article 1, 1996). Article 3(a) of the Constitution of South Africa recognizes the right to the central government and provincial cabinets to use for official purposes a language which is locally preferred and convenes to the needs of local citizens in the given region. Furthermore, each region has to use at least two official languages (Beukes 2004; Biseth 2006). Table 8 shows all official languages with their demographic data in the period between 1980 and 2001. There, we can see a dramatic increase of speakers of isiZulu and isiXhosa.

Table 8. Number of speakers of South Africa's languages

Language	1980	1991	1996	1998	2001
isiZulu	6,064,480	8,343,587	9,200,144	10,194,787	10,677,305
isiXhosa	2,879,360	6,729,281	7,196,118	7,610,435	7,907,153
Afrikaans	4,925,760	5,685,403	5,811,547	5,945,805	5,983,426
sePedi	2,431,760	??	3,695,846	3,32,645	4,208,980
English	2,815,640	3,422,503	3,457,467	3,692,157	3,673,203
seTswana	1,444,908	3,368,544	3,301,774	3,613,925	3,677,016
seSotho	1,877,840	??	3,104,197	3,539,261	3,555,186
xiTsonga	888,140	1,439,809	1,756,105	1,776,505	1,992,207
siSwati	650,600	952,478	1,013,193	1,068,733	1,194,430
tshiVenda	169,740	673,538	876,409	1,227,824	1,021,757
isiNdebele	459,880	??	586,961	654,304	711,821
Others	292,360	640,277	228,275	157,767	217,293
Unspecified	??	??	355,538	10,868	??
Total	**26,271,060**	**31,255,420**	**40,583,574**	**43,325,017**	**44,819,778**

Source: *Statistics South Africa*, available from <http://www.salanguages.com/stats.htm> (accessed on 15 January 2009).

Conclusion

As we have seen, languages in Sub-Saharan Africa in their social, political and economic context are directly influenced by the colonial heritage since foreign (European and Arabic) languages dominate the continent while indigenous African languages struggle to gain the widely accepted status of international languages. Moreover, in multi-ethnic and multi-lingual states it is almost impossible for one language to become the national—unquestionable—language because languages as well as ethnic identity can become a part of political mobilization in very sensitive areas. It is thus, in this sense, logical that European or better to say old colonial languages play the unifying role in Anglophone, Francophone and Lusophone countries. The case of Ethiopia, on the

other hand, is a bit different due to its own colonial history within which Amharic, the only truly dominant language, is by some groups perceived as the means of colonial subjugation going centuries back. The same can be said about Afrikaans in South Africa which in recent times has lost its superior status.

In the foreseeable future, it will be important for African governments to find a certain equilibrium between the support of mass languages and minority languages in order to maintain its own cultural and social wealth, embodied in oral history, oral literature and the indigenous knowledge hidden in these languages. On the other hand, it is, in our opinion, almost impossible to give several languages—e.g. Hausa, Fulani, Swahili, Yoruba, etc.—international status on the soil of the African Union or any other institution to replace English, French or Portuguese, due to the lack of territorial significance as well as an almost non-existent international potential.

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JAN ZÁHOŘÍK, Ph.D. (nvgogol@seznam.cz), researcher at the Department of the Near East and Africa, Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Prague, and Department of Historical Studies, Faculty of Arts and Philosophy, University of West Bohemia in Pilsen, Czech Republic

✉: V Bezinkách 9, 326 00 Plzeň, Czech Republic