

Training Seminar on the problems of language planning in
a bi- or multilingual context
(Lomé, Togo, 2-11 September 1980)

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

I. CONTEXT

In accordance with the decisions reached (Resolution 1/5.4/1) at the twentieth session of the General Conference of Unesco, the Division of Structures, Contents, Methods and Techniques of Education is organizing a Regional Seminar, calling upon eighteen specialists in the field of language sciences, linguists, educators, scholars and planners invited by the Director General, in their personal capacity, to examine jointly the problems relating to the programming of language teaching in a national context characterized by the presence of several languages in contact.

The organization of this seminar answers the need felt by international and national authorities, at the decision making, execution and research levels, for improved knowledge, with a view to drawing conclusions for future action, of the various aspects of an approach likely to strengthen the methodology used in programming formal and informal language education, with special emphasis laid on African language teaching.

In fact, Unesco has for a long time been working on the promotion of such languages in its fight against one of the main aspects of discrimination, based on language, referred to in the first article, point 1 of the Convention creating the Organization. This important element of educational systems, mass communication media and public life has already been the topic of a large number of international and regional conferences, seminars, meetings, courses, and symposia, studies and publications with a view to clarifying the main aspects of the complex problem raised by the role of language in teaching and literacy for a well-balanced development and the democratization of society, for the reinforcement of traditional culture and for the full development of the personality.

Fully aware, thus, of the importance, in this context, of African languages, national languages and home languages in particular, Unesco, at the seventeenth session of the General Conference, adopted the ten-year plan for the study of African oral traditions and the promotion of African languages. All the efforts made since then, in the framework of this plan, both by Unesco and by the

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Governments of the Member States in the region, in order to encourage the use of national and home languages as medium and subject of instruction in Africa and, thereby, the revival of the cultures of the continent as well as of an African socio-cultural identity, fully correspond to the wishes of all those in charge of education policies, educators, youth, parents and all those engaged in the economic life of African countries.

For several years, Unesco has participated in these efforts and the first type of activities undertaken by the Secretariat in this respect related to the organization, at the regional and world levels, of a series of meetings of which the most recent ones are the following :

- meeting of experts on the diversification of methods and techniques for teaching a second language (Paris, September 1975) ;
- meeting on national languages and teacher training in Africa (Kaduna, January 1976) ;
- symposium on the problems of mother tongue teaching in a sub-region of Africa (Dakar, June 1976) ;
- meeting on the methodology of curriculum reform (Paris, December 1976) ;
- meeting of experts on language teaching in a bi- or plurilingual and multicultural context (Paris, December 1977) ;
- symposium on the co-ordination of linguistic research with a view to its application to teaching involving African languages of regional intercommunication (Ouagadougou, September 1978) ;
- training seminar on school programmes for French and Portuguese-speaking African countries (Dakar, October/November 1978) ;
- meeting of experts on the use of the regional or subregional African languages as media of culture and communication within the continent (Bamako, June 1979) ;
- seminar on national languages and teacher training in Africa (Dar-es-Salaam, November 1979).

In addition to the final reports of these meetings, a series of documents have been published by Unesco in the last few years on the problems relating to African languages and their use in education. These are the most recent ones :

- Language Planning in Tanzania (by G. Mhina, Paris 1976).
- The Mother Tongue as a Means of Promoting Equal Access to Education in Nigeria (By C.O. Taiwo, Paris 1976, not yet translated into English).
- Procedures for Enrichening Vocabulary in a Group of Central African Languages (By Mudimbe & al., Paris 1977, not yet translated into English).

- Review of the Ethno-Linguistic Situation in Mali (by Diarra, Paris 1977, not yet translated into English).
- Languages and Language Policies in Black Africa (by A. Sow, Paris 1977).
- Critical Analysis of Forms of Autonomous Learning in the field of Foreign Language Learning (by Chaix-O'Neil, Paris 1978).
- Inventory of African Language Research in Sub-Saharan Africa (by International African Institute, Paris 1978).
- African Languages of Regional Intercommunication (by P. Diagne, Paris 1978).
- A Model for Functional Trilingual Education Planning in Africa (by M. Tadadjeu, Paris 1980).
- The Language Situation in Upper Volta (By N. Nikiema, Paris 1980).
- Guinean Languages and Education (by G. Doualamou, Paris 1980, not yet translated into English).
- Education in a Multilingual and Multicultural Context (Educational Documentation and Information, n° 204, Paris 1977).
- ALSED Newsletter (Anthropology and Language Science in Educational Development, Paris 1975-1980, programme launched by Unesco, some years ago, to promote an interdisciplinary approach to the solution of language problems, in cooperation with specialists in sociolinguistics, educational anthropology, sociology and related sciences).

It should be pointed out that the awareness of the importance of African national languages and home languages in particular has facilitated the discussion, on a new basis, of a whole range of related problems such as the maintenance of a national identity, the safeguard of cultural patrimony and the transmission of knowledge from earlier generations, the impact of education on the overall socio-economic development, the participation of all socio-cultural groups in educational activities, the cooperation of the individual in building the national community and in developing educational, cultural, social and economic activities, the respect for students' cultural identity, the yield of the educational system, the interaction of formal and informal education, and literacy in particular. It is obvious, on the other hand, that the promotion of plurilingualism in the education system leads to the double advantage offered by the use of mother tongues as a medium of instruction and the mastery of a second more widely spoken language facilitating the access to traditional culture, on one hand, and to regional and international exchanges on the other.

It would seem desirable, at this point, to look into the problems related, in a plurilingual situation and in the light of national language policy, to the programming of all languages selected as media and subjects of instruction.

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II. OBJECTIVES

In this perspective, the seminar calls upon specialists from several regions in Africa, invited by the Director General of Unesco, to give their personal contribution, based on a variety of individual experiences, to the review of the problems related to the methodology of planning language education in a context characterized by the existence of several languages in contact. The first aim of the seminar will therefore be to exchange views and information in this area. The participants will analyse the needs to be met by this planning and examine the various types of actions likely to create its efficiency. They will be expected to specify the different aspects of each stage in the process of programming language education and to suggest guidelines for the preparation and application of a programming system and for the choice of specific methodological approaches for the construction of language curricula in the multilingual African environment.

That is why the proceedings of this seminar will be expected to result in the formulation of a conceptual framework for and the main characteristics of the set of practical measures to be taken for the programming of language instruction, in the perspective of national policy for economic development in general and for educational development in particular and in such a way as to be in harmony with the genuine aspirations and interests of the population and to contribute to bringing national communities together in a spirit of justice and collective security.

The participants in this seminar will also be expected to draft specific recommendations for the Director General of Unesco, non-governmental organizations, scholars, educators or linguists and for the national authorities of the Member States in the region, on orientations likely to promote research and its application for the solution of the problems facing language education planners as well as on measures stimulating regional and international co-operation and exchanges in this particular field.

The overall objective of the seminar is to improve language education methods and programmes in a bi- and multilingual context in Africa.

The immediate objectives of the seminar will be to give the eighteen invited specialists the opportunity :

- to systematize and extend their theoretical and practical notions of programming in general and language education programming in particular as well as of the factors implied in this process at the political, economical, sociological, geographical, sociolinguistical, psychological and pedagogical levels ;

- 2- to review the successive programming stages and to focus on the development of a few selected elements, from their appearance at the finality stage to their formulation and presentation in terms of a study programme ;
- 3- to suggest a practical approach to programming and a format of presentation and to use this suggested approach in the construction of a programming model ;
- 4- to be informed of the linguistic and educational situation in Sub-saharan African countries and especially in the participants' countries of origin ; to supply the seminar with such information relating to their own country ;
- 5- to receive information on proceedings and conclusions on earlier international meetings, seminars and symposia on the problems of teaching the various categories of languages ;
- 6- to discuss the problems presented and the solutions proposed for the programming of language and more particularly national language education ; to draft recommendations in this respect, based on the information received and the practical experience acquired.

The expected result of this seminar is that the participants, after eight and a half days of information, discussion and practical application, should have :

- 1- formulated, for Unesco and the governments concerned, a set of practical recommendations on all the aspects discussed of language -and more particularly national language - education programming in the African multilingual context ;
- 2- worked out a practical approach for language education programming in a multilingual context ;
- 3- been acquainted with the linguistic and educational situation by means of case studies, in the countries of origin of the participants, and by means of the documents supplied, in the other Subsaharan African countries, so as to bring back to their own countries suggested new solutions to the problems arising there ;
- 4- become aware of the close links existing between all levels of the programming process, from the declaration of intentions by the decision-makers to the student-teacher interaction in the class room;

- 5- become aware of the fact that evaluation begins at the same time as programming and is integrated into it at all its stages.

III. OVERALL ORGANIZATION

In order to draw maximum benefit from the presence of participants from so many parts of Africa, it is proposed that most meetings should be plenary and concerned with the pooling of practical experience and with mutual co-operation in moving towards common- or at least compatible-national policies and practices in the field of bilingual and multilingual education. It is suggested that the identification of actual options in this field, with the prediction of the most likely outcome of these options, will be more valuable than only a further series of resolutions.

The programme will consist of the following six main parts :

1. an introductory survey, at the pan-African level ;
2. an examination of the typology and dynamics of multilingualism in Africa;
3. a review of actual policy and practice in the field of language teaching in selected African states;
4. a review of the technical problems of language development;
5. a consideration of curriculum design principles and practice including the objectives, organization and methodology of language education in a bi/multilingual context ;
6. a review of the current options available in individual African states, and at the level of inter-African collaboration.

The timetable should obviously be flexible, but it is suggested that the consideration of the above six topics should be organized provisionally as shown in Annex 1.

An important element of the seminar is the papers which, in their letter of invitation, the participants were asked to prepare. These papers will be reproduced and distributed so as to allow all invitees to become acquainted with them before the sessions in which they are to be discussed.

The rapporteur of each working session will hand over the minutes to the seminar secretariat for translation, reproduction and distribution to all participants.

The presence at the seminar of a number of different nationalities offers an excellent opportunity to complete the information already obtained by collecting more detailed information on the linguistic and educational situation in their countries of origin. A questionnaire has been prepared to this effect. Its result will be complementary to the information contained in the "Provisional Survey of Major Languages and

"Language Use in Independent States of Sub-Saharan Africa" produced by the International African Institute. The result of the questionnaire could either be integrated later into this survey or be analysed and published separately by Unesco, preferably with the addition of further information acquired, by the same means, from those countries concerned not represented at the seminar.

Two opinion polls will be organized during the seminar, one, on the first day, aiming at sensitizing participants to certain aspects of the topics to be discussed, the other, on the last day, intended to evaluate, through the personal reactions of the invitees, the immediate impact of the seminar on them.

The documents listed in Annex 2 will be made available to the participants, some mailed to them previously, others handed over to them on arrival.

IV. TOPICS

1. Introductory Survey

The survey will be introduced in the form of a linguistic profile of Africa, based on a presentation of the Language Map of Africa and of a summary of the major linguistic features of the continent. Attention will be drawn to the fact that Africa presents a greater degree of overall linguistic complexity, and hence a higher overall degree of bi/multilingualism, than any other continent.

The linguistic features of Africa will be summarised under

- A. Language relationships.
- B. Home languages in Africa.
- C. African languages of wider communication.
- D. Official languages in Africa (see Annex 3)

2. Typology and Dynamics of Bi/Multilingualism in Africa

Following the above linguistic and educational review, the Seminar will consider the major types of bi/multilingualism at present found in Africa

- a) in terms of the use of African languages in rural areas,
- b) in terms of the use of African languages in major urban centres,
- c) in terms of the relationship between the use of African and European languages at national and regional levels.

Attention will be paid to the parallel or overlapping domains of individual languages within the same community or state, in relation to the home, the market, formal and informal education, cultural life, politics, administration and law, the mass media, religion, etc.

Discussion will then proceed to the dynamics of bi/multilingualism, in terms of the actual, potential or desired expansion of individual languages, and of the processes favouring the unification of closely related languages. Current attitudes to individual languages (both African and European) will need to be discussed, with special reference to their actual or potential role in terms of educational, vocational and social advancement. Of particular importance will be discussion of the need to liberate African languages from their continuing 'colonial' status beneath the cultural shadow of major European languages, and of the psychological, educational and political objectives which must be secured if this vital stage of African liberation is to be achieved (see Annex 4).

3. Review of Policy and Practice in Language Education, in Selected African States.

The Provisional Survey of Major Languages and Language Use in the Independent State of Sub-Saharan Africa has been prepared to serve as basic reference material for the discussions of the Seminar, and to provide a link between the broad linguistic profile of Africa and the linguistic and educational context of each African state.

A number of the participants at the Seminar will be invited to present a review of the factors which have determined actual policy and practice in the field of language education within their own country, and to comment on current results and prospects. The states selected for this review will need, as far as possible, to represent different bi/multilingual situations and different historical, geographical and social circumstances. It would thus be valuable if at least one state could be considered in detail from each of the following educational 'regions' of sub-Saharan Africa: 'anglophone' West Africa, 'francophone' West Africa, 'anglophone' East Africa, 'francophone' Central Africa, 'lusitanophone' Africa, 'anglophone' Southern Africa, and the Horn of Africa.

This review will be accompanied by a preliminary discussion of objectives and options in the field of language development and language education in Africa, in preparation for the subsequent work of the Seminar. The opportunity will be provided for considering previous statements of principle concerning the role of the mother-tongue in education, as well as for debating the constraints and conflicts posed by bi/multilingual situations. (See, inter alia, papers of the IAI Seminar on Language and Education in Africa, Kinshasa 1976, and of the UNESCO Meeting on Language Teaching in a Bi/Plurilingual and Multicultural Environment, Paris 1977).

4. Review of the Technical Problems of Language Development.

The Seminar will be expected to examine the three major technical areas involved in the written development of individual African languages, namely standardization of dialects within each language, orthography, and modernisation of vocabulary.

5. Consideration of Curriculum Design Principles and Practice including the Objectives, Organization and Methodology of Education in a Bi/Multilingual Context.

The participants will review the successive stages of language education programming, i.e. the identification of finalities, observable results, behavioural objectives, contents, methods, techniques and material. They will be called upon to analyse existing sets of programming objectives and language teaching schemes and to undertake a programme construction exercise.

There are inevitable conflicts - not only in education - in reconciling the priorities of the individual, of the ethnic group, of the nation state, and of the international community. Africa is no exception, and no purpose would be served if the existence of such conflicts were to be denied, or ignored, in our discussion of bi/multilingual education. It is proposed, therefore, that the discussion in this central part of the programme should be structured to begin with the educational interests of the individual (child or adult) and to progress to a consideration of the contribution of language education to the survival and development of African cultures and languages, to the promotion of national unity and development, to the encouragement of regional and African unity, and to the role of African states in the world community".

Since no educational system can include more than a certain number of languages, and since language education cannot occupy more than a certain proportion of any curriculum, the conflicting linguistic needs of Africa must involve the establishment of certain principles and priorities. These will be governed also by their economic implications, including manpower requirements, teacher training and the preparation and provision of materials and by the popular and political will existing within each nation state. Alongside the discussion outlined in the previous paragraph, therefore, attention will need to be paid to the objectives, organisation and methodology of bi/multilingual education in the following formal and informal areas :

- primary education,
- secondary education,
- tertiary (university) education,
- teacher training,
- vocational training,
- adult education, including functional literacy.

These areas must be considered as integral parts of each national educational system, co-ordinated according to the same national priorities, and relating to the following areas of national economic commitment :

- professional manpower requirement,
- language development (standardisation, orthography and modernisation),
- provision of reference materials (including research leading to dictionaries and grammars),
- provision of teaching materials (preparation, printing and distribution),
- provision of reading materials (including the encouragement of creative writing),
- development of the mass-media (press, radio, television)

It is proposed that a substantial part of the programme be devoted to this problem, and that the discussion be organised around a series of papers prepared by individual participants according to their areas of professional and personal interest and expertise. Key topics which could be handled in this way include the following examples :

A. Mother tongue as medium of instruction

1. Psychological and educational importance of the mother tongue to the individual child in early years of formal education.
2. Use of African languages as a medium of instruction in the teaching of mathematics, science, history and geography.
3. Problems encountered in the shift from one language of instruction to another at a certain point in the educational system.
4. Interstate communication and exchange of experience in the teaching of African languages.
5. Participation of rural school students and teachers in the study and recording of local languages.
6. Mother tongue teaching as a means of vocational advancement.

B. Role of African languages in education/culture interaction

7. Contribution of African culture to school curriculum.
8. Contribution of the education system to the promotion of African culture.
9. Encouragement of creative writing in African languages (e.g. by means of national and inter-African literary rewards).
10. Role of literacy in the maintenance and development of African social and cultural values.
11. Participation of schools in the exploration and recording of oral literatures.
12. Interaction of European languages with African languages and cultures.

C. African Languages in teacher-training

13. Place of basic linguistic training in teacher training colleges (e.g. all trainees made literate in at least one national language)
14. Role of teacher training institutions in the development of African language education programmes and methods.
15. Language of instruction in teacher training institutions.

D. African languages in higher education and research

16. Development, in national institutions of higher learning, of research in African linguistics.
17. Regional exchange of African language research experiences.
18. Post-graduate training in African language studies at the international level.
19. African language study programmes in national institutions of higher learning.
20. Contribution of African linguists to the development of language education programming.

E. African languages teaching aids

21. Preparation of cheaply produced teaching materials in languages restricted to small communities.
22. Use of African languages in radio and television programmes as medium and subject of instruction.
23. Development of African language newspapers and periodicals including serialized literature.
24. Use of cassette tape-recorders in the teaching of African languages.
25. Principles of materials development for the teaching of African languages.

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6. Review of the Current Options available in planning Language Education in Individual African States and at the level of inter-African Collaboration.

This final stage of the Seminar will provide an opportunity to consider the gap which sometimes exists between theoretical declarations on the development of African language education and what is practically, economically or politically possible. What options do individual states actually have in determining and implementing specific policies and priorities in language education and its planning, and what are likely to be the alternative results of these options ? What possibilities are there for inter-African concertation in the development of reformed systems of education to meet, as fully as possible, the needs and objectives of this highly multilingual continent ?

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TIME-TABLE

Tue. 2nd	AM	Formal opening and discussion of programme.
	PM	Linguistic profile of Africa.
Wed. 3rd	AM	Typology and dynamics of bi/multilingualism.
	PM	Review of policy and practice in selected African countries and preliminary discussion of objectives and options in language development and language education.
Thu. 4th	AM	Continued.
	PM	Continued.
Fri. 5th	AM	Review of technical problems of language development.
	PM	Continued.
Sat. 6th	AM	Recapitulation and allocation of topics for 2nd week.
	PM	(Free)
Sun. 7th		(Individual preparation of topics)
Mon. 8th	AM	Review of curriculum design principles: theoretical basis and identification of objectives.
	PM	Review of curriculum design principles: decision-making process and model application.
Tue. 9th	AM	Curriculum design practice: analysis of existing sets of curriculum objectives and existing language teaching schemes.
	PM	Curriculum design practice: programme construction exercise in a simulated multilingual country setting.
Wed. 10th	AM	Review of curriculum evaluation practice.
	PM	Review of objectives and technical solutions problems of adapted materials production.
Thu. 11th	AM	Review of options in planning language education.
	PM	Final statement and formal closing.

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WORKING DOCUMENTS

A. Previously sent:

(Available in)

1. Remarks on the Problems of Language Planning (ED-78/WS/113, October 30, 1978, prepared for the Regional Seminar on Curriculum Development for French and Portuguese speaking African Countries, held in Dakar, from November 2 to 11, 1978) French
2. Final Report (ED-77/CONF.613/COL.8, September 25, 1978, of the Meeting of Experts on Language Teaching in a Bi- or Pluri-lingual and Multicultural Environment, held in Paris, from December 19 to 23 1977) French/English
3. International African Institute: Provisional Survey of Major Languages and Language Use in the Independent States of Sub-Saharan Africa, July 1980 French/English
4. Doualamou: Guinean Languages and Education, July 1980 French
5. Final Report (ED-78/WS/129, January 12, 1979, of the Symposium on the Co-ordination of Linguistic Research with a View to Its Application to Teaching Involving African Languages of Regional Intercommunication, held in Ouagadougou from September 11 to 15, 1978) French/English
6. Nikiema : Language Situation in Upper Volta : Research Applied to African Languages (ED-80/WS/22) French/English
7. Draft Final Report (BREDA/79/SEM/NLTT/15, April 1980, of the Seminar of National Languages and Teacher Training in Africa, held in Dar-es-Salam, from November 12 to 16, 1979) English
8. Tadadjeu : A Model for Functional Trilingual Education Planning in Africa (ED-80/WS/72, June 1980) English

B. Handed over on arrival :

9. Zierer : Teaching Second Language in Multilingual/
Multicultural Contexts
(ED-77/CONF.613/5, September 1977, prepared for the
Meeting of Experts on Language Teaching in a Bi- or
Plurilingual and Multicultural Environment, held in
Paris from December 19 to 23, 1977) French/English
10. Titone : Teaching Second Language in Multilingual/
Multicultural Contexts
(ED-77/CONF. 613/6, August 1977, prepared for the
Meeting of Experts on Language Teaching in a Bi- or
Plurilingual and Multicultural Environment, held in
Paris from December 19 to 23, 1977) French/English
11. Houis and Bole Rochard : Integration of African
Languages in an Educational Policy (June 1977,
Unesco/ACCT) French

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THE LINGUISTIC PROFILE OF AFRICA may be summarised as follows:

A Language relationships in Africa

- * Notwithstanding its relatively low population, Africa displays a greater degree of overall linguistic complexity than any other continent.
There are to-day between 1,250 and 2,100 languages in Africa (depending on the criteria used to distinguish individual languages.)
- * The languages of Africa may be grouped into approx. 120 sets and over 200 sub-sets of closely related (but by no means necessarily interintelligible) languages.
85% of all African language sets are located within the Fragmentation Belt, a zone of extreme linguistic complexity extending from Senegal to Ethiopia and Northern Tanzania.
- * In spite of their diversity, over three quarters of the languages of Africa (taken either individually or in sets) may be assigned to one of two vast 'language families' or 'areas of wider affinity'.
The Southern Area of Wider Affinity ('Niger-Congo') comprises half of all language sets and two thirds of all individual languages in Africa.
This Southern Area covers much of the Fragmentation Belt (Senegal to Northern Zaire and Southern Sudan) and includes also over 400 languages in the extensive Bantu set of Central, Eastern and Southern Africa.
- * The Northern Area of Wider Affinity ('Hamito-Semitic') includes Arabic and the other Semitic languages of Ethiopia and the Near East, but the majority of its constituent languages are spoken within the Central Fragmentation Belt in Nigeria, Cameroon and Tchad.

B Home Languages in Africa

- * In 8 states of Northern Africa, Arabic is the majority home-language ('first language' or 'mother-tongue'), ranging from nearly 100% of the population in Libya to approx. 50% in Sudan.
- * In the majority of the remaining states in continental Africa (28 out of 39), every home-language is spoken by less than 50% of the total population.
- * The 11 sub-Saharan states in which there is a majority home-language include the 4 countries in the 'Pyramid' (Burkina, Benin, Togo and Ivory Coast) with a total population of 120 million people.

Without exception, the majority home-language in each of these states (or a language interintelligible with it) is also an important language in one or more adjacent states.

Demographically the most important state in Africa with a majority home-language is Zimbabwe (Shona being spoken by nearly 70% of a population approaching 7 million).

C African languages of wider communication

* Only 50 languages in continental Africa (excluding those of European origin) are each spoken by more than one million first and second language speakers.

47 of these 50 languages are each spoken in two or more African states.

These 50 languages represent only 4% of the total number of distinct languages spoken in the continent.

* Only 3 languages in continental Africa (excluding those of European origin) are each spoken by more than 30 million first and second language speakers : Hausa (over 30 million), Swahili (over 40 million) and Arabic (over 70 million).

Each of these three languages has a sub-continental distribution ; Hausa from Ghana to Sudan, Swahili from Somalia to Zaire and Mozambique, and Arabic from Mauritania to Somalia.

D Official languages in Africa

* Excluding the states of Northern Africa in which Arabic has official status, French is used as the official language or joint official language in 17 states of continental Africa, English in 15 and Portuguese in 3. Nowhere do the boundaries between so called 'francophone', 'anglophone' and 'lusophone' states coincide with the boundaries between major African languages.

* Excluding the states in which Arabic is the majority home-language, only one state in Africa (Somalia) has adopted its majority home-language as its sole official language.

2 further states in Africa have adopted their majority home-language as joint official language with English (Lesotho and Botswana), and 2 as joint official language with French (Rwanda and Burundi).

* 3 states in Africa have adopted an official African language which is not the most important home-language in the state concerned: Amharic in Ethiopia and Swahili in Tanzania, both as sole official languages, and Swahili in Kenya, as joint official language with English.

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THE LIBERATION OF AFRICAN LANGUAGES

There is increasing unity of purpose in the desire of African states, and of international organisations like UNESCO, OAU and IAI, to liberate African languages from their continuing 'colonial' status beneath the cultural shadow of major European languages. To achieve this aim, three major tasks must be accomplished.

The first goal is psychological. Many otherwise well-informed people, both African and non-African, believe that African languages are unable to compete with European languages in the discussion of modern and technological affairs. They need to be reminded of the universal capacity of all languages to expand and adapt to cover any new subject of discourse required. One need only quote the case of Somali, which - by the will of the government and people of Somalia - developed within five years from the largely unwritten language of a nomadic people into the major educational and administrative language of a modern state. Language is basic to all human activity and creativity, and is a key to both personal and corporate identity. A nation which does not accord respect and status to its own languages can never be independent in spirit or unified in purpose.

The second goal is educational. All individuals have equal rights, including equal rights to education, and all individuals have the right to begin their education in their own mother tongue. If young children are faced with a foreign language immediately they enter school, then many will fail at an early stage for purely linguistic reasons, many will lose respect for the cultural heritage of their parents, and many will feel themselves to be 'second-class' speakers of a 'second-class' language. One may cite here the case of Yoruba, which - in a successful educational experiment at Ife - has been used as the medium of instruction in all subjects throughout certain primary schools. The children involved have fared better educationally and psychologically - including the acquisition of English as a second language - than their counterparts in primary schools where English has been the medium of instruction, and it has been possible for the subjects of their schooling to be discussed by parents, in their own language, with both their children and their children's teachers. Against such important advantages, the cost of developing African languages as educational media should not be counted and need in any case not be great. Let us take the example of a small language spoken by, say, only 5,000 people. - the price of a lavatory,

it is possible to give basic training to two or three local teachers in how to write the language, to encourage them and their subsequent pupils to produce written texts and exercises, and to have these materials cheaply duplicated. This small investment would not only make an important contribution to the early primary education of up to 200 children a year, but would also open up potential literacy to the whole adult population, and would provide a means for recording and preserving the wisdom and oral literature entrusted to them by past generations.

The third goal is political. The vast number of languages in Africa was said to be a barrier to political unity, and has enabled Africa to be more readily divided and dominated from outside. The fragmented map of African languages has been carved up further among the major languages of Western Europe, and the influence of these languages in Africa - as of the Western economic system - has in no way been diminished by the ending of former colonial power. The solution lies in the will of African states to designate the most important languages of Africa as languages of African unity. In terms of numbers of speakers, and in terms of their existing spread across many African states, the three strongest candidates for such a role are Arabic, Hausa and Swahili. Arabic is the major language of Northern Africa and the language of Islam. Hausa is the most widely spoken language in Nigeria and has spread west and east as far as Ghana and Sudan. Swahili is the national language of Tanzania, spoken from Somalia to Mozambique, and from Zaire to the Comoro Islands. No other indigenous languages in Africa can approach these three in terms of their total number of speakers, including both mother-tongue and second language speakers. The three languages not only represent complementary regions of the continent but are each members of one of the two major language families to which the vast majority of all other African languages also belong.

English and French must of course retain an important place in African educational systems, in terms both of worldwide communication and of the exchange of technical expertise. This need in no way prejudice the progressive development of selected African languages as means of international communication within Africa or as vehicles for the expression of African cultures. The degree to which individual African languages are developed, as means of education and written communication, will depend inevitably on their relative numbers of speakers. Languages with small populations can be utilised, without great cost, for primary and adult education at local levels. Hausa and Swahili, because of the populations involved, can likewise be developed economically

to take their place alongside Arabic as continental languages. Between these two extremes, however, are up to fifty African languages with potential national or even regional roles, the speakers of each of which number more than one million. Among these no less than twelve languages have total numbers of speakers in excess of ten million each, all but two of them spoken in more than one African country. The intermediate development of these languages, to a more extensive degree than that of more localised languages, will depend on the language policies of the countries in which they are spoken and on the will of the peoples who speak them.

The tasks involved in the liberation of African languages cannot be minimised, but there is a concerted desire throughout Africa that they should play a more central role ⁱⁿ ~~the~~ future development of independent African states and in the achievement of African unity. The successful achievement of this liberation depends on the translation of this desire into concerted action and development in the fields of education, administration and the mass media.

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