AFRICAN LANGUAGES IN EDUCATION
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NB - This document is solely intended as a basis for suggestions for discussions

THE MOTHER TONGUE AS MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION

1. Developing multilingual states are faced with the fundamental problem of involving every citizen in the process of economic and social development, and of promoting the revival of local culture and traditions, whilst at the same time breaking down the linguistic and ethnic barriers that hinder the building of a united nation. How does multilingualism affect nation-building? Which factors favour the introduction or retention of a foreign language of wider communication in developing multilingual states? How to reconcile the claims of the various languages with the requirements of nation-building?

2. Should developing multilingual states recognize the right of every citizen to demand inclusion of his or her language, written or not, in the national language policy scheme? Should this linguistic right bind governments to provide all the required facilities for the full development and use at all levels of each language within the state?

3. Governments in those states are loath to cope with scores of local languages as written media of national development; instead, local languages tend to be confined to oral communication at home and in the local community, whereas an international language is used as the formal instrument of education and of government. The end of nation-building may be better served by a single linguistic medium. But does such a pragmatic policy rest on solid educational and cultural grounds?

4. Are there needs of communication for which local languages, especially unwritten ones, are unsuitable tools?

5. Can a European language be a suitable instrument of communication in an African home or village community?

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6. How is a young African child intellectually and emotionally affected by the use of a European language as a medium of education?

7. How does bilingual education through a language of wider communication affect a local mother tongue?

8. It is sometimes asked whether local African languages possess the required linguistic capacity to enable them to function as oral and written media of instruction, information and culture: do you think that question rests on sound linguistic information?

9. Is linguistic diversity, as one can observe it in Africa, an insuperable obstacle to the promotion of local languages as oral and written media of national development?

10. Which use should be made of the mother tongue as a medium of education in developing multilingual states?

11. Shouldn't the mother tongue in all cases be studied as a subject, even when it cannot be used as a medium?

12. The choice of a medium of instruction is intimately involved with economic and social development. In those countries where a foreign language is used as a medium from the early grades, a high percentage of primary school children are reported to drop out and very quickly to lose most of the education they received in a language which is not used in their community; moreover, they tend to become socially maladjusted. In developing multilingual countries, where large sectors of the population have to be rapidly educated so as to function better in the national economy, widespread inability to function in the language used as a medium of instruction results in wastage of human and economic resources. There may be situations where the use of a second language is found necessary for purposes of secondary or higher education. But in these situations, shouldn't the language of the community be used at least for the first years of schooling, as well as for adult literacy? Until what age or grade would you deem it indispensable that children should pursue the schooling in the mother tongue?

13. Is it still necessary today to plead the cause of the local languages? Is it not more urgent now to gather the data, and to prepare the materials and other instruments that will enable local languages to be used as media as soon as the political decision to do so is taken?

14. Should the medium of instruction be the same at all stages in the education process, even for adult literacy, in the elementary school, in the secondary school or at the university?

15. Should the use of a language of wider communication automatically lead to simple elimination of the mother tongue, as either a medium of instruction or as a subject? Should the promotion of the mother tongue as medium of instruction automatically lead to the simple elimination of the language of wider communication?
1. What should, in your opinion, be the various stages in the adoption of a national language policy scheme? Which research operations are necessary at the various stages?

2. What kind of language survey should be carried out for language policy planning? What kind of sociolinguistic data should be gathered before taking a decision involving choices to be made from among various languages or dialects?

3. What motivations are there in a multilingual state for language maintenance or language change? Is there striving towards a linguistic model conferring upward social mobility? Is it possible to move from one's social class to another by changing one's linguistic norm? Does a "good education" with the privileges it confers, entail a change of language? How does striving for language maintenance or language change vary with age, ethnic group or social class?

4. Has there been developed a sociolinguistic profile of the nation, covering the numerical importance, status, levels of acceptability, levels of literacy, levels of literary development, dialectical variations and spread of the various languages in contact, as well as the attitudes to language and the correlation between language and social situation?

5. Who is to decide which languages are to be included in the national language policy scheme? Which individuals, communities, institutions, corporate bodies, should be involved in the decision-making process? Should the sanction for such decisions come from the people through a process of democratic consultation? Should language policy issues be made part of the curriculum of schools?

6. How would you break down the sequence of steps involved in a programme designed to promote a hitherto unwritten language to be used as a medium of instruction?

7. Once it has been decided to use a local language as a medium, other decisions remain to be taken, e.g., concerning acceptable dialectical variations, grammatical norms, the extension of the vocabulary, the orthography, etc.; who should take such decisions? What kind of research is needed here?

8. What components should be included in a programme designed to evaluate the results of a national language policy scheme?

9. The use of second language as media has been made the subject of much controversy, but of little scientific research. It is often held that education through a second language is paid for by deficits in content of subjects and in mother tongue skills. Do you think that children instructed through a second language achieve the same level of content mastery as mono-lingually instructed children would? Can children educated through a second language acquire proper mastery of both the native and...
the target language? Do they tend to become anemic? What components should be included in a programme designed to evaluate the linguistic, cognitive and other consequences of teaching through a second language?

10. Research at the policy planning level is essential to the elaboration of a linguistic policy, for the choice of teaching materials and for evaluation. What initial structures seem necessary to you within the framework of a national linguistic policy making use of the promotion of local languages, to implement the research and its results so that they may be fruitfully applied.

THE PRODUCTION OF LANGUAGE TEACHING MATERIALS

1. What research has to be carried out before any unwritten local language can be taught as a subject?

2. What materials have to be produced to enable a local language to be taught as a subject?

3. Many African languages still lack suitable teaching materials, or even are yet to be scientifically described. Faced with the urgency of the task, or the paucity of resources, educators may be tempted to "go fast" to produce "practical results" at the least possible cost. But is it acceptable that, when a writing system is to be devised, or a grammar, a dictionary, or a teaching manual to be prepared, scientific accuracy should be dispensed with? Can local languages do with less scientific accuracy than languages of wider communication? The teaching materials will set a norm and start a grammatical tradition. How can inaccurate teaching materials affect the development of a local language or its use as a medium?

4. What research has to be carried out before a local mother tongue can be used as a medium in replacement of a second language? What materials have to be produced to teach content subjects via the new medium?

5. What kinds of research would be necessary before a European language could be usefully taught in Africa in order to serve as a medium of instruction and of wider communication?

6. Is the production of the materials left to the initiative of authors or producers? Are the materials produced in the country?

THE EVALUATION OF LANGUAGE TEACHING MATERIALS

1. Are the mother tongue teaching materials based on a scientific description of the language? Does the grammar of this or that African language refer to categories that are more characteristic of some European languages? Is there general agreement on the orthography used in textbooks?

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2. Are the content or the structure of the language materials in accordance with the principles of modern language didactics?

3. Has there been genuine research to adapt the content of second language materials to national needs and conditions? Or to the cultural background of the children?

4. Have the materials been tested before being used? Are teachers invited to express their views as to the suitability of teaching materials? Has any special procedure been established to that effect? Has there been comparative evaluation of the achievement of the pupils according to the materials used?

5. Is there in the Education sector a special unit in charge of the production of language teaching materials? Is there a distinct unit in charge of the objective evaluation of the materials?

6. How should a teachers' training college contribute:
   
a) to the production of the materials;

b) to the objective evaluation of the materials?

LINGUISTICS AND LANGUAGE DIDACTICS

1. For many years now language educators have been urged to apply the "results" or "teachings" of "modern linguistics". Yet, after many years of sermonizing, language teachers tend to go on as before, and even to question the usefulness of linguistics as a worthwhile tool in the classroom. Which factors contribute to this sort of scepticism concerning the practical usefulness of linguistics? Is the language used by linguists too technical for the classroom teacher?

2. Since a language has to be properly described before it can be properly taught, language education cannot dispense with linguistics. In the case of a newly-promoted medium, linguistics may also be needed for language modernization, or to devise a suitable vocabulary; it is indispensable for the preparation of teaching materials, of tests and for the training of teachers. Would you agree, then, that the role of linguistics is especially crucial in multilingual areas where local languages are to be promoted?

3. For years contrastive linguistics has been held out as a source of inspiration to second language teachers. According to the classical model of contrastive analysis, the difficulties facing a second language learner may be predicted by matching the structure of his mother tongue with that of the target language. Has this classical model of contrastive linguistics resulted in a marked improvement in the second language teaching situation? Are there enough trained linguists able to contrast the structure of the mother tongue with that of the target language? Do you believe that all second language teaching errors are due to interference from the mother tongue? 

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4. Error-analysis is a more empirical approach based on a study of the learner's performance in the target language; do you believe it to be a more fruitful procedure than contrastive analysis?

5. So much emphasis has been laid on the applications of linguistics to language education that "applied linguistics" and "language teaching" are sometimes assumed to be synonymous expressions. Do you think that the field of applied linguistics coincides with that of language teaching? Do you believe that improvement in language education is merely or mainly a matter of applied linguistics?

6. The science of linguistics has applications in the various fields of language policy: the planning, formulation, implementation and evaluation of language policy, language description, the creation or reform of writing system; language modernization, teaching and testing, adult literacy; the production and evaluation of materials. Which of the other human or social sciences are also relevant in these fields?

7. Language didactics is being developed as an independent discipline: which of the human or social sciences, apart from linguistics, contribute to the development of language didactics?

TESTING

The implementation of a national language policy demands that satisfactory answers be found to questions such as these:

1. Has there been research to develop tests suited to the linguistic and cultural background of the children?

2. Have the tests been validated and normalized with reference to a representative sample of the children who are to use them?

3. Are there suitable tests designed to:
   a) Measure the degree of linguistic proficiency required for specific communication needs, e.g. at the entrance to secondary school, to university, or to a career?)?
   b) Compare the achievement in mother tongue and second language skills of children educated through the mother tongue with that of children educated through a second language?
   c) Compare achievement in content subjects, or general intellectual development according to whether the children are educated via the mother tongue or via a second language?

4. Can the required tests be produced in the country?

5. Is there in the education sector a specialized unit entrusted with the development, validation and standardization of language tests?

6. How could Teachers' Training Colleges contribute to the development of scientific testing?
TRAINING

1. The success of a national language policy will largely depend on training. Specialists are necessary for basic, operational and applied research in linguistics, sociolinguistics and language didactics. Teachers are to be trained to teach the new media (and to teach through them) to apply in the classroom the results of research, and even to assist in the collection and interpretation of data both for preliminary research and for evaluation. Teacher Training Colleges have thus an essential role to play; what sort of training should they provide in linguistics, sociolinguistics and language didactics?

2. Does your Teacher Training College provide specific training in the principles and applications of modern language didactics. Do in-service courses make due provision for training in language didactics?

3. The traditional approach to the training of second language teachers stresses ability in literature and in translation skills. Do you think that approach still answers present-day needs in the second language field?

4. Are second language teachers trained in the procedures of error-analysis and in remedial procedures?

5. If language materials are to be based on an accurate description of the language, and if they are to embody the principles of modern language didactics, the authors of language materials should be adequately trained. What kind of training should Teacher Training Colleges provide concerning:
   a) the production of language teaching materials?
   b) the evaluation of language teaching materials?

6. How could coordination, or collaboration, be enhanced between universities, Teacher Training Colleges and other institutions or organizations concerned with training for basic operational or applied research in the field of language education?

INFORMATION

1. Research on the language problems of multilingual countries, and on language education, is developing fast and the body of literature increasing steadily. Yet information remains scattered and, for the most part, accessible only to specialists. Even specialists may not have easy access to information concerning national language policy. The fruits of research trickle but slowly down to the teachers and administrators who would most need to know and use them. Even when keen administrators or teachers eagerly engage in the pursuit of innovation, they may little know what goes on elsewhere. Inadequate information, with the
consequent duplication of endeavour, and of error, are noteworthy characteristics of our field. Do you think that, in a meeting such as ours, it would be fit to put new and urgent emphasis on the oft-stressed need for more co-ordination of effort, and more generally, for "better circulation of information on basis operational and applied research both in language policy and language didactics?"

2. What obstacles hinder the circulation of information on language policy and language didactics?

3. For the last twenty years or so, a great number of recommendations or proposals have been put forward by the many meetings that have been held, for the most part under the aegis of Unesco, on the question of language problems in Africa and of the promotion of African languages. Would it not be desirable to evaluate the results and impact of these meetings, and to try to determine what has become of their proposals or recommendations?

STRATEGY FOR INNOVATION

An action programme at teacher-training level for experiment and innovation in the use of linguistic medium or in language teaching may well result in isolated improvement in terms of methodology or achievement. One may, however, ask whether the teachers' training college is the most efficient point for the introduction of innovation in our field. For education officers and supervisors may remain uninvolved, or even become suspicious of a programme started without their official sanction. Innovation injected in this way may never get the chance to spread through the educational system. Shouldn't an innovation programme focus first on administrators and supervisors at all levels so that they can be properly informed and get involved in the planning and supervision? Shouldn't a programme that does not result from the initiative of established authorities, first be institutionalized by their official sanction and support?

PROPOSALS

What is the situation prevailing in the country in which you are serving as regards the various questions referred to in the present document? Please state your own proposals for action, concerning especially:

a) language policy planning and implementation
b) applied sociolinguistic research
c) the description of local languages
d) the use of the mother tongue as a medium
e) the production and evaluation of teaching materials
f) training in language didactics.