AFRICAN LANGUAGES OF REGIONAL INTERCOMMUNICATION

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Note: The views expressed are those of the author, and do not commit Unesco.
The languages of regional intercommunication in Africa correspond to linguistic areas that have often developed naturally. In certain exceptional contexts their sudden growth has resulted from a deliberate policy, but in all cases the expansion of the great vehicular languages has occurred in response to needs and to an identifiable role or function. The formation of the vehicular languages during the pre-colonial and colonial eras sheds light upon the present-day problems that arise in regard to languages of intercommunication.

CHAPTER I

Historical background to the problem

Three periods are involved:

A. The pre-colonial vehicular language and the prime importance of the function of communication

The primary function attributed to the pre-colonial vehicular language in particular for purposes of intercommunication derived from ideological and historical reasons.

Culturally and linguistically, the black African's outlook was essentially pluralistic prior to the incursion of Indo-European influences, i.e. Islamo-Arabic or Euro-Christian.

In this outlook, the educational and cultural instrument remained that of the ethnic group itself. The black African State may in this respect be contrasted with the Nation-State of Indo-European origin, for the African State organizes ethnic, socio-ideological or socio-economic groups that are self-governing in their own terms. The type of power that is generated in multi-ethnic societies, with or without a State, with or without developed caste or class systems, precludes the idea of an official language or culture of reference. Thus the great vehicular languages of the pre-Colonial era were chiefly assigned the role of an instrument of social intercommunication. They did, certainly, exercise a far from negligible function in spreading elements of the education and particularly the culture that was transmitted through them, but this function was subsidiary and was, in effect, bound up with the actual nature of the linguistic instrument.

Economic interchange and urban growth both played an essential role in the extension and development of the vehicular languages of the African continent. The great languages which were to develop - in Western Sudan with Soninke during the era of Ghana, in Mali with Mandingo during the era of the Mansa, with Hausa under the Habe States and the Emirate, with Kiswahili around the ports of the Indian Ocean, with Kanembu in the Empire of Kanen Bornu - were all instruments of communication for urban and merchant civilizations. The Wangara Soninke economically dominated the commercial cities of Kumbi Saleh in Ghana and of Sylla, capital of Tekrur between the seventh and twelfth centuries. The influence of the Mandingo language was extended far beyond the frontiers of the Mansa thanks to the dynamic activity of the Yulu traders. And as from the sixteenth century the Hausa dominated the market in the Niger-Sudan, although they had not yet formed a State commensurate with their own demographic extension.

Kiswahili, without any ethnic reference, is clearly the classic example of a vehicular language of commercial intercommunication.
The linguistic map of the great vehicular languages of the pre-colonial period matches that of the axes of the great trading routes and of the great centres and regions of urban civilization.

So it was that Soninke, Mandingo, Hausa, Kiswahili and Kanembu emerged, alongside the Arabic of the Middle Ages, between the fourth and sixteenth centuries, with the opening of the trans-Saharan and Afro-Shiraz trade-routes, as instruments more especially of socio-economic change. The fact that these languages also progressively served towards the enrichment of culture and education, or for political or religious unification, is part of the normal course of history; originally, this was neither their role nor their chief function.

Linguistic and cultural infrastructure: As a result of their very function, the (black) African vehicular languages and spoken Arabic, which served as languages of commercial and social intercommunication, developed specific features owing to the facts of language and culture.

At the linguistic level, these vehicular languages were set apart from the ethnic languages by the distinctive features of their vocabulary and the characteristics of their phonological and morphological structures. They were subject to environmental constraints and to the pressure of the socio-linguistic substrata on which they were superimposed.

The languages of intercommunication that developed from a colloquial form of the spoken language resulted in a koine or lingua franca. They did not give rise to forms of Pidgin or Creole. Thus, languages such as Kiswahili, Yoruba, Hassani, or the colloquial Arabic of Chad, Yulu, or demotic Hausa, are all perfectly structured languages with phonological systems and conceptual and lexical mechanisms which are internally coherent. Nevertheless, these koines do present local variants and variations which enable comprehension to be maintained.

The Kiswahili of the Kassai is not the Kiswahili of the Bukavu further to the east. The literary Kiswahili of the Kilwa or the scientific Kiswahili of the schools of Tanzania show considerable differences in their lexical material. Our investigations in Chad revealed that between Abeche in the centre and Sarh in the south there existed substantial variations in the Arabic dialects of the same region.

These shades of difference resulted largely from the fact that the pre-colonial black vehicular language was not intended to fulfil a unifying function at the educational, cultural, or even political level. It was not merely fortuitous, then, that academies for languages such as Yoruba, Lingala or Kiswahili should have been born along with colonialism, the resistance efforts, and the language revival movement. They are evidence, as will be seen further on, of an outlook which is still bound not only to a need for order and rationalization as imposed by the modern State, but also frequently to centralizing tendencies which generally run counter to the pluralism characteristic of indigenous traditions.

At the cultural level, the great vehicular languages are clearly not neutral instruments. Like any other language, Kiswahili, Yulu or Hausa serve for the diffusion of the ideas and outlooks specific to particular cultures, whether these ideas and outlooks are unique or not. The fact remains that the cultural and educational role of the pre-colonial African vehicular languages is slight if compared with that of languages in other civilizations.

The Yulu may have caused a language to spread through the land of Mosi Dogon Pulaar, Senufo or Somhray, but they did not cause a shift in the religious and social traditions of these peoples. The commercial and religious vocabulary of Arabic has had a considerable impact on Kiswahili, and this influence extends
even to regions where those who speak this vehicular language — in Uganda, Kenya or Zaire — have preserved the essence of their cosmogony and their ontological and sociological vision of the world. By contrast, the Roman Christian Empire of the West attempted to impose uniformity of language, culture and religion. And in order to do so, it canonized and made official the Latin language, Christianity, and even the forms of church music. This conception is foreign to the black African tradition.

The imperialist structures of Ghana, Mali, Sonhray and Kanem Bornu or the Yoruba and Ashanti confederations made practically no use of a vehicular language in order to spread a dominant culture of reference.

In this respect, we need only recall the conflict in the late fifteenth century which was to set Sonni Ali Ber against the intelligentsia of Tombukutu.

The Ulema of Sonhray, having been converted to Islam, carried their intransigence to the point of aspiring to obliterate the cultures, religions and languages of West Sudan in order to replace them with Arabic and Islam. Sonni Ali rejected outright any idea of a State language and religion. In opposition to the elite of Tombukutu, he ensured religious, cultural and linguistic liberty in the black African spirit of differing levels of authority.

The same controversy is encountered again in the nineteenth century during the era of the Jihad, who sought to convert everyone to the Islamo-Arabic tradition. Earlier echoes of these quarrels are to be found in the Kitab Al Farq of Dan Fojo, founder of the Hausa Emirate at the end of the eighteenth century. In this work, Dan Fojo expatiates at length on the cultural conflict which, as he stresses, acquired a virulent character during the era of Askia Mohammed.

At the political level: It was with the advent of Christianity and Islam that the notion of a vehicular language for political unification was introduced — unsuccessfully moreover — in Africa. As we have seen, the quarrel instigated by the use of Arabic as the language of culture and communication of the elite and of the State in Sonhray marked a stage in this dispute.

The hegemonies of the Tunka of Ghana, the Mansa of Mali, the Alafin of Oyo and the Seriki of Abe, were political; they did not result in linguistic imperialism. It is one of the characteristics of the African State that information and political decisions should be conveyed from the centre to the periphery by means of spokespersons representing the linguistic or cultural communities in a given region. Thus it is the Wolof lajto, the tekkikat, or translators and interpreters, who convey the words of a chief — Miiit — or the proceedings of an assembly – ndaale — to the listeners, for whom they interpret (tekk) the message.

The urban civilizations of West Sudan naturalized many foreigners, particularly in commercial cities. The Arab or Persian foreigners, and in East Africa the Indians, established their own quarters. Above all, they learnt the indigenous vehicular language of intercommunication. It was in this context that Kiswahili came into being.

With the development of Atlantic trade the ethnic languages gained rapid importance as a means of intercommunication between the State authorities and the indigenous merchants and their European fellow-traders. Alexis St-Is, who in the seventeenth century visited the West African coast, makes mention of the knowledge foreigners had of the African languages, which they acquired in response to their needs.

The ports of Senegal and Gambia made Wolof the required language. It was in these circumstances that Mina, a variant of the Eve spoken at El Mina, began to develop. The same was to happen with Susu in Guinea.
Thus the local authorities, but more especially the social structures in Africa, were able without resort to force, and without disruption, to impose indigenous languages of intercommunication, languages which were to have only a subsidiary role as instruments of linguistic, cultural or political integration.

This function of the languages of intercommunication appeared with the colonial conquests.

B. The colonial vehicular language and the prime importance of the function of imperial integration

Colonization had a double effect on the development of the great vehicular languages. It led to the creation of new areas of interest, thus conferring the role of an instrument of intercommunication on languages that had not formerly had this function. Wolof in Senegambia, Creole in Gambia, Casamance, Guinea-Bissau and Angola, Pidgin from Bathurst to Lagos, through Sierra Leone and Ghana, Ibo in Nigeria and Lingala in Congo-Zaïre all owe their recent growth to the intermediary role they played in support of European economy and colonial power. In addition to the diversion and disruption of the activities of the traditional cultural centres inflicted by the colonial conquest, and the resultant effect on the geographical coverage of the vehicular languages, the inter-ethnic languages acquired a new function, that of fostering political integration within the imperial framework.

The European administrations backed up their imperial integration policies by relying on languages of intercommunication that enjoyed privileged status in the machinery of State.

Thus the Federation of Nigeria had three principal poles which were politically defined on the basis of the areas corresponding more or less closely to those where Ibo, Yoruba and Hausa were spoken.

Kiswahili was promoted in the educational and administrative systems of East Africa so as to ensure a certain cohesion within the former Federation out of which Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania emerged. Lingala, which was taught in Congo-Zaïre, performed the same role under the Belgian administration. In North Africa, the colonial system accentuated the traditional pre-eminence that Arabic had held ever since the advent of Islam over the more or less unknown Berber dialects. And in South Africa, Zulu, within the Nguni and Bantu group, was promoted in similar fashion.

Thus, as European power became established, the political, educational and cultural role of the vehicular language emerged more clearly. The language of intercommunication continued to serve for purposes of traditional economic and social relations while at the same time its status was enhanced more in accordance with a European tradition of integration and homogenization. This policy, which not only favoured the vehicular languages but often acted as a damper on languages that were widely spoken, created serious social and political difficulties. In East Africa, the dismembering of the former Federation, in which Kiswahili has been the predominant language, was marked by a sudden check to the British policy of linguistic integration. Uganda, on attaining independence, restored to Ganda and in particular to the ethnic languages their place in the educational system, to the detriment of Kiswahili. The same process has been observed in Nigeria, where not only were the Edo quick to express their desire for linguistic autonomy with regard to Ibo, but also the Igala, Kaburi and smaller ethnic groups with regard to Yoruba or Hausa. In Ghana, the Ewe, Mina, Twi, Ga asserted their identity in terms similar to those of the Luo of Kenya vis-à-vis Kiswahili. The Moroccan Berbers and the Algerian Kabyles reacted in the same way towards Arabic, as did the Sara of Chad towards the Central African Shango.
What was in fact being challenged was not the unifying role of the great languages of intercommunication, but the exclusive, all-compelling function imparted to them in everyday life by a reductionist approach deriving from foreign and particularly European influences.

As a consequence of its exclusivity, the colonial language policy thus left behind a heritage of conflict which meant that the vehicular language was faced with a new set of problems in discharging its functions as a means of communication, education and culture, or of political and economic integration.

C. Contemporary problems and role of African languages of intercommunication in post-colonial States

Contemporary political and economic requirements have imposed on vehicular languages in present-day Africa a role that extends far beyond that which fell to them in pre-colonial society, that of providing a mere aid to communication.

The fact remains that the new functions pertaining to vehicular languages cannot be conceived or performed, at whatever level, without account being taken of the need for a pluralistic outlook. Colonial policy led to the deadlock and the dilemma with which post-colonial African States are confronted.

It is only a policy which takes into consideration the reality and the roles of the local or national ethnic languages and cultures that is able to define a coherent strategy for the major vehicular languages in the administrative or educational machinery of African post-colonial States. And it is only once the field of action of the vehicular language has been defined in relation to the country's other languages that a clear analysis can be made of its role in educational activities.

We shall not dwell here on the definition of language policy, which is irrelevant to our purposes. Language policy has, moreover, been made the subject of research projects, studies and publications which cannot be dealt with in this paper; nor is this the place for the kind of discussion this topic requires.

We shall, therefore, keep closely to the subject on which we are here commenting.

It should be pointed out, in this connection, that without a survey of past and present experiences, it is not possible to encompass all the problems involved. The aim of this paper, then, is to discuss primarily theoretical questions so as to suggest possible approaches, should their validity be borne out by current field surveys and subsequent experimental work.

CHAPTER II

The potential role of African languages of regional intercommunication in educational activities

A. Introduction to the discussion

The first step is to define the scope of the topic by analysis of the concepts and objectives.

The concept of African languages of intercommunication or inter-African vehicular languages has come to be accepted in preference to the disputable notions of a language of unification or of regional integration, marked as these are with the stigma of the conflicts aroused in this respect by centralizing
language policies. The concept of intercommunication leads us back to a vision more appropriate to that of black Africa, implying a readiness to limit and define the respective fields of vehicular languages, mother tongues and minority languages. And this fundamental distinction is at all times the basis for defining the criteria by virtue of which a language of regional communication acquires its status as such, for determining its role and functions with regard to training, information exchange, and unification, and for formulating the principles governing its choice.

B. The most common criteria by which a language is raised to the status of a language of regional intercommunication concern:

1. its multi-ethnic character;
2. its geographical extent;
3. its demographic weight;
4. its frequency of use, and the fields it covers (information, education, etc.);
5. the extent to which it is suited to modern conditions (progress in codification and terminological adaptation, the existence of scientific literature, etc.);
6. the prestige it enjoys and its acceptance in the sociological world over which it extends.

C. Role and functions

On account of their present status, African languages of intercommunication are competing almost everywhere with officially recognized foreign languages (French, English, Portuguese, Afrikaans, Spanish). These languages are, on the whole, assigned the role of official language as well as the function of language of education and of political, economic or civil administration. The Arab-speaking countries of the Maghreb (Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria) and of the Mashrek (Libya, Egypt, Sudan) are exceptional in that they have made Arabic the official language and use it in their educational and politico-economic systems. Mauritania has adopted a similar approach. In Ethiopia, the role of official language has been assigned to Amharic; Somalia uses Somali and Tanzania Kiswahili.

Elsewhere, language changes are still in most cases at the project stage. Even where there exists political desire for change, many countries are thwarted by obstacles which might often be easily overcome but which appear insurmountable in the immediate present, simply on account of lack of information and experience.

It is particularly in the practical introduction of the African language in education that the policy is often brought to a standstill owing to the absence of accurate information concerning the use of the available research material or the nature of the steps to be taken.

The transition to Arabic has been facilitated by the extensive efforts made in the Middle East to adapt it to modern conditions. A whole range of scientific and educational literature is available which could be adapted and used in the Arab-speaking African countries, but it is rare for the educational training services to make systematic efforts in this direction.

The work that has been carried out on Kiswahili and Zulu, Lingala, Ciluba and Shago has greatly opened up the prospects for the Bantu vehicular languages. Little
advantage is drawn from this, however, in the educational systems. Although Yoruba, Hausa, Tso and Fulfulde have now practically proved their worth as instruments of education, the material they offer is not always taken completely into consideration either in the countries where they are used or in those where they could be used. This reticence is in fact a reflection of the conflicts of interests lying at the heart of the language problem.

In order to ensure their cultural and political influence, the colonial hegemonies were opposed to the use of African languages in the educational system. And they were even more strongly opposed to extensive use of the great vehicular languages of communication, fearing that the integration of African peoples and countries, and of their elites, would begin primarily at school on the basis of an indigenous culture and linguistic medium. Today, by dint of bilateral and international co-operation, the dominant European countries still maintain their grip on African educational systems, by imposing on them—through their specialist advisers—a policy in line with that of French, British or Portuguese educational systems.

Education and training in the African languages also conflicts with the interests of the Europeanized elites in Africa, who use the exclusive status conferred on the European languages and cultures they have adopted as a means of keeping a firmer rein on people with little or no education in these languages.

There are accordingly major obstacles to be overcome at the political level if the languages of intercommunication are to perform their educational function, inasmuch as this function raises the problem of the transformation of structures, integrated development and liberation of the popular masses over vast regions of the continent.

To aim at providing education based on the languages of intercommunication represents an open challenge to present State boundaries and traditional zones of foreign influence.

This political dimension of the educational function of the great vehicular languages is an obfuscating factor, since it has so far led to the other functions being regarded only in terms of manipulation.

In general, the function that has devolved upon the great African vehicular languages, while not political, has political implications, in that they are very widely used in the oral mass media in order to condition public opinion and mobilize different sectors of the population.

Thus, the post-colonial machinery of State in Africa exploits the vehicular languages for the transmission of political messages and for socio-economic organization.

If modern African vehicular languages are to perform their role, their status and function should accordingly be redefined in all areas, particularly in educational activities. But it would be vain to imagine that the vehicular languages could fulfill their educational purpose without being granted the status necessary to render them officially acceptable and usable in everyday life, in the economic and political sphere, and for governmental and administrative purposes.

The educational function of the vehicular language will have been fully established only once it has been codified, with its vocabulary and scientific terminology clearly defined so that it can be used at all levels of the educational system.
1. ** Formal education

At primary school level, the vehicular languages should not be the principal instrument of instruction: both for educational reasons and for reasons of cultural policy, this role pertains to the mother tongue.

Kindergarten and primary school are the places where the child's balanced development should be ensured through recourse to cognitive material, which he has acquired in the family environment. It is the mother tongue that provides the medium for all this diverse material, at the level of perception, apprehension, understanding, analysis, representation and conceptualization. The only cases, therefore, in which kindergarten and primary school should be based on use of a vehicular language of intercommunication are those where this language - in fact or by nature - fulfils the role of the mother tongue. In order to serve as first language in this context, it must have been perfectly mastered from birth.

By contrast, the language of intercommunication has an important part to play as second language at the end of the primary course. Introduced at this level, it can help ease the way towards secondary education, which for reasons of scale and cost, underdeveloped countries cannot afford to maintain on too diversified a basis.

In devising language policies, however, this approach is not often adopted. The policy of unification applies in this respect the all-or-nothing approach. Generally, it is thought to be sufficient to Africanize the kindergarten or primary school by simply imposing one of the widely spoken languages - such as Kiswahili, Arabic, Yoruba or Hausa - as a means of solving the problems.

What in fact occurs is that the minorities are thereby constrained to begin their education by using a vehicular language they have not mastered, causing them difficulties which may lead to traumas reminiscent of those experienced with the use of French or English in an African environment.

The imposition of Arabic on the Berbers or the Tukuler obliges the young to make an additional effort to gain access to knowledge that is more readily grasped in the mother tongue.

A language that is not familiar results in the child's being faced needlessly, too early, and at great cost, with linguistic structures and cultural concepts to which he is unaccustomed. This difficulty becomes all the greater when the foreign language is poorly taught. On the whole, contact with the foreign idiom at this stage occurs in writing and not orally, and without the invaluable support of the natural speech context. While a young Hausa could learn Yoruba in its context within a year, like this he will have to spend many years learning it - as has been shown in practice with the learning of French or English in African primary schools. At the end of seven years the African pupil is hardly able to write, still less speak the European languages to which he has been subjected throughout his primary education, which has been dominated by the re-invention of languages analysed in an abstract fashion. He is confronted by a transcription with little bearing on the real phonology of French or English, and with visually aberrant orthographies that have to be explained by rules which are often contradictory. And he is caught up with new concepts and foreign outlooks, exposed to the full weight of a world of sounds, symbols, images and concepts with which he has no intimate link.

The gap between African languages and cultures is not as great, but this does not prevent it from causing problems. There is no kind of audio-visual training in African languages which could compensate for the sense of 'dépaysement' and
dislocation felt by the young Edo being educated in Hausa or by the young Hausa in Yoruba. One need only imagine what the tones of Yoruba or the labio-velars of Ibo must represent to a Nigerian Hall Fulani if he is to gain mastery of them through the written form, which, for reasons of expense in particular, is the only means open to him.

It is only by means of progressive discovery of the non-mother tongue that one can ease or eliminate the difficulties. This is why the — indispensable — introduction of the language of intercommunication should occur late in the primary course, preferably during the last two, or at most the last three, years of primary school. For this purpose the use of active teaching methods will be needed, but this may involve very little additional cost in so far as the environment in those regions where African languages of intercommunication are spoken makes things easier.

The vehicular language must be acquired first by oral means, then through writing; lastly the pupils will learn how the vehicular language is used as an instrument of reasoning and knowledge. As African languages are closely related in regard to their underlying structures and concepts, these different stages can be easily traversed, thanks to the pupils previously having a firm grasp of the mother tongue.

The vehicular language in secondary education. Post-primary education is the level at which the foreign or African languages of intercommunication come mainly to the fore. At least in the present conditions of under-development and material restrictions, there are not enough secondary schools for each village, district or even town. The secondary school is, therefore, a meeting-point of ethnic, cultural and linguistic differences, where pupils can be first initiated in foreign languages and cultures.

The fact that languages of intercommunication have such a leading part to play at the level of secondary education means that the efforts made to adapt them to modern needs must be directed to this level. The vehicular language should be capable of providing instruction in all the disciplines, particularly in the scientific subjects such as mathematics, physics, chemistry or architecture, and even, to a lesser extent, economics or geography.

The compulsory scientific subjects (those which figure on the "common core" syllabus) lend themselves to unified and integrated teaching. It is the role of the secondary school to operate at this level and within this perspective. The African mother tongues or languages of national and sub-regional unification can clearly be used for instruction in all subjects where this is possible (sufficiently large number of pupils, adequate material and technical resources, etc.). In this case, the vehicular language of intercommunication would play an auxiliary role. Otherwise, it ought to assume the principal, even exclusive role in formal education at this level.

The universities, the institutes and higher education in general simply provide a further extension of secondary education, and more marked specialization.

There is, however, a slight difference inasmuch as it is principally its regional coverage that makes a modern African university economic and efficient. Without the broad cultural zones in Africa and the great languages of intercommunication a truly modern African university could not exist. It is, however, already at primary and secondary school that appropriate decisions must be taken in regard to the language of instruction so as to pave the way for use of the vehicular language at the level of higher education. But at this level the prime essential is to break with the narrow and outdated nationalism inherited from the exclusively French- German- or English-speaking universities.
The modern university must be polyglot in a rational sense. The students and lecturers must be able to receive or give instruction in a wide range of African and foreign languages. This development clearly entails a new approach to the question of the relationship between the African languages themselves and between them and non-African languages.

The educational systems of the post-colonial African States do not yet reflect the viewpoint outlined above, except, perhaps, as far as intentions are concerned.

2. Languages of intercommunication, training and the spread of knowledge

It is evident that the vehicular languages have a unifying function and that it is necessary to use shared knowledge as a basis for information, training and instruction, and as an aid to communication. The vehicular language has an undeniably educative and cultural role, alongside the role it plays in the political and economic systems. It would be inconceivable to unite East and Central Africa, with their 200 million Bantu speakers, without employing Kiswahili, Lingala or Zulu for the joint machinery. The West African Economic Community (CEAO) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), as part of their project for economic and political integration in West Africa, will of necessity have to make provision for Hausa, Yoruba, Ibo and Mandingo to become genuine means of contact and interchange between the peoples of West Africa at all levels, including the elite.

This is essential, even if today the elite are still apt to use French or English for intercommunication. In the long run, this exclusiveness will have to be abandoned, even though the world at large may impose the use and knowledge of the leading foreign languages.

Training, the spread of knowledge and regional integration all require a major practical effort which, for reasons of length, we cannot enter into here.

As in other areas, preliminary surveys have to be carried out and efforts made at the theoretical and practical level to adapt to modern needs; in this way it will be possible to spell out in detail the various immediate and longer-term measures which ought to be put into effect and then take appropriate action.

CHAPTER III

Political aspects and implications of the question of languages of intercommunication and the resulting technical and resources problems

A. The philosophy behind the project

The use of African languages of intercommunication as intermediary instruments in relations between the African peoples at all levels (including the elite) is a matter of deliberate government policy. It is fortunate that OAU should have made this policy its own and that Unesco is endeavouring to put it into practice.

Colonization imposed foreign languages as the official form of intercommunication at State level. Consequently, French, English, Afrikaans and Portuguese today act as a screen between African peoples and institutions at the national and continental level.
By their fragmentation effect, the present national language policies could actually hamper unification on the basis of those indigenous African languages which have for centuries performed this unifying role.

The project for African languages of intercommunication accordingly provides a much-needed counterbalance. It envisages continental and regional integration on the basis of African languages. The political and economic communities of West Africa (CEAO, ECOWAS), Central Africa (UDEAC), the Maghreb and East and Southern Africa thus aim to establish cultural and linguistic zones, as infra-structures for political and economic union, thanks in particular to Arabic, Hausa, Mandingo, Kiswahili, Lingala and Amharic.

Policy decisions: orders of ranking and priority. In this connection the Scientific Committee for Unesco's General History undoubtedly adopted the right approach in establishing a provisional but representative list of the African languages of intercommunication at regional, continental and even intercontinental level. The languages particularly concerned are Arabic, Hausa, Kiswahili, Lingala, Zulu, Yoruba and Mandingo. The language of regional intercommunication is chosen by reference to objective criteria. The great vehicular languages included are in fact representative of the chief large civilization groupings of the continent: the Arab-Berber culture (Arabic), the Sudanic culture (Hausa, Mandingo), the Nubio-Ethiopian culture (Amharic - Somali-Galla), the Bantu culture (Kiswahili, Lingala and Zulu) and the Niger-Congo culture (Yoruba). These are living entities with their own structure and specific features. To our mind they are as irreducible as is Germanic culture in relation to Latin culture, or Chinese in relation to Indian.

Thus the policy in regard to African languages of intercommunication involves a hierarchy or ranking order which assigns to the vehicular languages of unification, by virtue of their function and the context in which they are used, a position different to that of the mother tongue or a language spoken only in one district or country. This must be taken into consideration when co-ordinating language policies.

The position of foreign languages - whether introduced or not in the wake of colonization - must be redefined in the light of this perspective. It is to be welcomed that today the general tendency is to point out the foreignness of French, English, Afrikaans or Portuguese in relation to the truly African and national languages. It is especially interesting to note how traditional hierarchies have been overturned with respect to foreign languages, with the increasing importance accorded to considerations respecting the nature of the science and technology they convey. Interest is now turning more and more towards the so-called leading languages which serve to convey modern developments. French, Spanish and Portuguese, which have lagged behind in science and technology, have had to yield their place to the languages which contribute most to extending domains that are vital for the liberation and development of African societies. It is becoming more and more evident that the language of modern African humanism can be re-invented only on the basis of the languages of the native soil. Modern civilization in Africa necessitates the use of African languages underlying the policy of African languages of intercommunication. History has now ceased to impose the colonial languages at this level in order to favour the most innovatory elements of foreign languages and cultures.

B. Practical problems: adaptation to modern conditions

The future of the African languages of intercommunication depends on their competitive strength as instruments for education, communication, and dissemination of the sciences, techniques and cultural products of the modern world. For this
purpose it is necessary to adapt them to contemporary needs; once they have acquired precise orthographies and suitable terminologies, these languages will be perfectly capable of competing in all respects with any language in the world. English and French, in order to become modern languages, had to undergo adaptation through the Greek and Latin terminology taken over at the time of the Renaissance. The same process of adaptation has occurred in Russian, German, Chinese, Tamil and Arabic, from the late 18th and throughout the 19th century. Today, a similar transformation is taking place in Vietnamese, Amharic and Kiswahili.

Nevertheless, the fact remains that there are still no scientific norms by which the method and purpose of such adaptation might be defined. Up to now, groups, academies or isolated individuals have in practice defined norms for specific languages in response to the pressure of circumstances. There is, for instance, no study of the problems involved in adaptation corresponding to what has been done in the field of translation.

At the IFAN Seminar held in Dakar as long ago as 1969, however, the basis was laid for a scientific approach to the problem of adapting African languages to modern needs. The aim of this research was to define norms applicable not only to transcription but also to the systematic naturalization and assimilation in black-African languages of neologisms and loans of a phonological, morphological or morphosemantic character. This endeavour, which is still being pursued, has not attained the scope it deserves, owing to lack of resources and facilities. For ten years, we have been content to think of adaptation chiefly in terms of the codification of graphic systems; this part of the work, now nearly concluded, is henceforth of relatively minor importance in comparison to the rest.

A scientific approach to the process of adaptation in fact involves several stages, particularly with regard to the languages of intercommunication:

1. The preliminary survey with a view to defining the profile of the language. In each case, it is necessary to determine the following: the geographical extent, the demographic weight, the status and affiliation of the language in relation to other black-African languages, its unity, the dialects, the variants and the dominant speech form or koine of reference, the literary, scientific and educational role, and the extent to which the language is already adapted to modern conditions.

2. Practical problems of adaptation:

a) Graphic transcription has been a particular preoccupation. The meeting organized on this problem by Unesco in February 1966 gave rise to ten years of fruitful research which resulted in the establishment, in Niamey, of a reference system for the transcription of African languages, along the lines mapped out at the symposium which Unesco had convened earlier the same year in Paris. This symposium, in connection with the question of transcription for the General History of Africa, had already reached agreement regarding the transcription of African names in Latin and Arabic characters. Thus, the main lines have now been established for basing the alphabets and scripts of African languages on Arabic, Latin and even traditional or modern black-African characters.

b) Lexicography and lexicology. Today, this is one of the essential issues. What is required is an inventory of the lexical content of the languages to be adapted. The lexicographical stage involves a survey among users and model speakers in order to compile a list of the concepts of the language in each field (religion, literature, science, technology, etc.).
Once this task has been completed, the work of lexicology properly speaking can begin; this will result in a comprehensive list of the concepts that must be created, naturalized or assimilated in order to endow the language with all the necessary terms and means of expression.

c) Reference material. This aspect of the question concerns the development of standard literary and scientific texts to serve as works of reference for users and teachers as well as for editors of economic, technical or philosophical texts or of educational material.

C. Ways and means or proposals concerning priorities

African States, like OAU, Unesco or any other international organization, can only make an effective contribution if it is judiciously directed towards specific inter-African projects which involve both research and experiment.

1. The scope of the projects. The sporadic, isolated sociolinguistic research studies, surveys and consultations, which often drain away the main part of the available resources without achieving any great results, must be integrated within larger projects where they play a necessary part and which are truly decisive in the process of adopting, transforming and using regional languages of intercommunication. In this respect, there are three sectors that merit attention:

a) Educational projects: these involve defining and financing the development of all necessary teaching material in the language of intercommunication, and training adequate teaching staff. In concrete terms, this means making it possible to have kindergarten, primary and secondary school and university in Mandingo, Hausa, Yoruba or Fulfulde.

b) Training and development projects: what is involved here is linking the project regarding languages of intercommunication to the establishment of societies and economies that are efficient, up-to-date, and balanced. This entails the spread of techniques and skills in clearly defined contexts: the modernization of agriculture, animal husbandry, fishing, and craft industries, the introduction of new techniques, productive work, etc.

c) Projects for promoting the language of intercommunication in the political and cultural spheres. This means arranging to use various media - publications, the press, television, theatre - to promote the language in question as a means of cultural and diplomatic exchange at inter-African and continental level.

2. Institutional infrastructure for the projects. Adequate research, teaching, and experimental facilities will need to be established. In this connection use of the traditional institutions (universities, academies, research centres) should be avoided: it has always proved difficult to obtain good results from them, and they have a tendency to swallow up available resources or misapply them.

What must be envisaged, then, is a purpose-built type of centre which will serve as infrastructure for the projects with a view to adapting and using the languages of intercommunication. This centre, which could specialize simultaneously on evolving a scientific approach to adaptation and planning how it should be put into effect, could be either an urban and/or rural "university" (in the etymological sense) or some even more original structure of a type still to be devised.