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A critical analysis of the historical and contemporary status of minority languages in Zimbabwe

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Although a voluminous amount of literature addresses language-in-education policy in Africa, one area in which the literature remains sparse is the role of minority languages in education. This article presents an overview of complex issues regarding the hegemony claims of different minority language groups in Zimbabwe. Given the relatively small research base dealing explicitly with controversies in the promotion of minority languages as the media of instruction, this article uses archival and historical literature to trace intricate controversies about language in education within minority African languages groups. This article argues that the interrelationships between the dynamics of the state, ethnic composition, and history vary considerably and impact the success of minority language policies.

Keywords: minority languages; group identities; standardization; orthography; heritage language; Zimbabwe; language-in-education planning

Introduction

Discussions about minority¹ languages have achieved little prominence in Zimbabwean academic discourses because Zimbabwe has been imagined largely as a Shona and Ndebele state, with the former as the dominant ethnic group. Thus, the main thrust in Zimbabwean sociolinguistics has been the dynamics of English and its relationship with Shona and Ndebele or the languages of the ‘super tribes’ (Werbner, 2003). The historical and contemporary constructions of the super tribes inversely created and marginalized ethnic minorities. The search for a new status by these minorities, therefore, runs counter to this ideological and sociological trend. The constitutional debates of the 1990s created space for minority language groups to demand linguistic recognition.

In this article, the nature of language planning and policies of ethnic minorities in Zimbabwe are analyzed. In particular, the focus is on the multiple dimensions of language planning: (a) top-down and bottom-up planning; (b) national policies and transnational language practices; (c) external support and community autonomy; and (d) use of partially non-standardized varieties of language in education. The main thrust of this article is a critical analysis of the promotion of ethnic minority languages, such as Kalanga, Sotho, Shangani, and Tonga. We also argue that promotion of these languages to indigenous

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status has, ironically, further marginalized other minority languages, such as Yao, Barwe, Hwesa, and languages of European and Asian minorities, which are spoken by groups that do not actively campaign for recognition.

Language promotion, especially of minority languages, is inherently discriminatory. Sizeable Asian and European communities in Zimbabwe live in specific residential areas, with their children attending specific schools and universities in South Africa, and have a considerable impact on the Zimbabwean economy. Yet, their languages have not been included in the minority language debate in Zimbabwe, rendering Asian and Europeans as ‘invisible minorities’. While this article does not delve deeper into the reasons for other minorities being rendered ‘invisible’, it does point out the need for studies into language planning that explore the impact, if any, of these communities on local language practices at a grassroots level.

When discussing European languages, language policy studies in Zimbabwe have often been restricted to English and its effects on indigenous African languages. Such an approach to language policy is too narrow because between 1960 and the late 1970s, there were more European non-native speakers of English who were natives of Greece and Italy and who were Jews from the former Soviet Union and Afrikaans speakers in southwestern Zimbabwe (Ranger, 2010). The wide variety of non-standard varieties of English in Zimbabwe might, in part, be due to the extensive contact between European non-native speakers of English who were also second language speakers of African languages. The effects of Afrikaans, for instance, are apparent in most indigenous Zimbabwean languages, especially at the level of lexical borrowing. In Shona, for instance, words such as *fasitera* (window) seem to have their origins in the Afrikaans *venster* (window), *kereke* (church) seems to originate from *kerk* (in Afrikaans), and *sawuti* (salt) seems to be derived from *sout* (Afrikaans for salt). Even though Afrikaans is widely spread and African languages have borrowed extensively from it, no language policy study in Zimbabwe has ever explored the colonial and post-colonial status and impact of Afrikaans on African languages since more emphasis is placed on English.

It is, therefore, not surprising that the well-documented argument with regard to language in education in most African contexts is that African parents prefer their children to be taught in English rather than in indigenous African languages. One of the reasons for the preference for English, it is argued, is that English will provide children with a global future. In this article, we contend that while this argument may be correct, another debate on language in education is often sidelined. This particular debate relates to the controversy within indigenous African languages themselves about which of the multiple varieties of minority languages are to be used as languages of instruction. In this article, we argue that, while little attention has been paid to the debate among different minority language groups, the call for mother tongue education has revived the debate regarding which of the varieties of minority languages are to be used as languages of instruction. This tension is not new but has been evident in the ‘major’ indigenous African languages that were developed through missionary education and later accorded official status after independence. The most common practice during the colonial period was to make use of European language orthography; hence, ‘for a number of African languages, there was often no fully uniform practice of representation across dialects or agreement on which of the many competing forms should be recognized as the standard form of a language’ (Simpson, 2008, p. 5). Harmonization efforts have been unsuccessful because these competing forms have become solidified and associated with ‘ethnic identities that were previously less clearly defined’ (Simpson, 2008, p. 3).

In order to explore this tension, it has been situated in different minority language groups to see how it manifests itself both historically and in contemporary Zimbabwe. The choice of certain languages as the subject for analysis is strategic. Shangani is situated in the southern part of Zimbabwe, sharing borders with South Africa. In both Zimbabwe and South Africa, Shangani is an officially recognized minority language. However, in Zimbabwe, Shangani attained official minority status after extensive lobbying by community organizations. On the other hand, Kalanga is also a recognized minority language in Zimbabwe and Botswana. Like Shangani, Kalanga attained official minority status after a protracted period of lobbying by community organizations in Zimbabwe and Botswana (Chebanne, 2002; Nyati-Ramahobo, 2000). Nda, as it will become evident, has a rather ambivalent status, depending on whether it is viewed as a language different from or as a variety of Shangani.

The fact that these minority languages have, in some instances, significant status in other states creates opportunities for transnational language policies and possibly provision of teaching materials from other states. Yet, as will be evident in this article, any attempts at transnational language planning have been fraught with varying problems, depending on the aspirations of the ethnic group in question.

Lastly, the sociolinguistic landscape of contemporary Zimbabwe has, in recent years, been complicated by the emerging role of China's political and economic engagement in Africa and its potential effects on language policy. This article, therefore, analyzes whether the introduction of Chinese language teaching in Zimbabwe is significantly different from the introduction of English in colonial Zimbabwe and whether the current interest in Chinese suggests that Mandarin Chinese will, at some point in the future, be Zimbabwe's new lingua franca. Thus, this article explores the extent to which the *modus operandi* of the Chinese is significantly different from that of the former colonial powers that introduced European languages in Africa.

This article is divided into three sections. In the first section, we provide a background in order to contextualize the issues related to minority language planning. In this section, we describe the activities of the Zimbabwean Indigenous Languages Promotion Association (ZILPA) as well as provide a brief overview of the two Education Acts in an attempt to establish the degree and extent to which minority languages have attained meaningful status in education. The rationale in this overview is to show how language policies reflect 'power, politics and status differentials' (Lo Bianco, 2009, p. 113). Different languages are accorded different statuses, thereby perpetuating systems of inequality in that some languages acquire dominant status while others are marginalized (Wickert, 2001). The question for this article is whether the 2006 Education Act accords minority languages the same status as the languages of the super tribes.

The second section focuses on the sociolinguistic contexts of a number of minority languages in Zimbabwe that are rarely written about – (a) Shangani; (b) Nda; (c) Kalanga; (d) Fengu; (e) Nambya; and (f) CiNyanja – and the different contestations in which the different groups are engaged. In this section, we comment on the status of each language, the nature of minority language promotion activities, and their role and status in the Zimbabwean educational system.

In the third section, we briefly comment on the theoretical relevance of minority language research in Zimbabwe and the challenges it poses for language planning, including: (a) standardization (orthography creation and reform); (b) the development of language teaching materials; (c) implications for top-down status planning; and (d) the opportunities and constraints of transnational language policies. Lastly, this article analyzes the gaps and silences in Zimbabwean language planning literature and proposes areas for future research.

Historical and political context

Zimbabwe's history has to be traced back to its predecessor state, Rhodesia. Rhodesia was a British colony characterized by seizure of land, marginalization, and exploitation of Africans. In 1965, during the period when most African countries were attaining their independence from Britain, the White community tried to preempt African independence by declaring their own Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) from Britain under the leadership of Ian Smith. The establishment of UDI prompted intense nationalistic wars led by Robert Mugabe and Joshua Nkomo's liberation armies, Zimbabwe African National Union and Zimbabwe People's Union, respectively. Zimbabwe attained its independence in 1980 as a result of the impact of the liberation and nationalist armies and withdrawal of South African armies from Zimbabwe.

In the 1990s, Zimbabwe's successful mineral and agriculture-based economy collapsed due to a combination of factors ranging from mismanagement of the agricultural sector and the general decline of the mineral sectors. Frequent and sustained unrest led to the formation of the Movement for Democratic Change, led by a trade unionist, Morgan Tsvangirai. The seizure of land by Robert Mugabe from the White commercial farmers and violation of human rights led to its ostracization from Western countries, which resulted in Zimbabwe becoming increasingly dependent on Chinese assistance. It is against this political background that the developments outlined in this article should be read.

In Africa, the choice of languages in education has been based mainly on the historical experience of colonialism. That each colonial power imposed its own language on the countries it colonized is a well-known fact. Colonial language-in-education policies often determined the level of entrenchment of the colonial language and the extent to which indigenous African languages were consciously promoted within the educational system. British colonies encouraged the teaching of African languages up to the end of secondary education, and Christian missionaries provided instruction in indigenous African languages to the early grades. A prominent feature of the teaching of indigenous African languages during the colonial period was the constant use of English as a reference point. Thus, the grammatical categories of English (which were derived from Latin) were applied to African languages. Grammatical categories used are important because languages are, to a large extent, abstractions, metaphors, an artifact of the analytical postulates used, and do not necessarily exist independently of the analytical templates used as entries into communicative practices (Harris, 2009; Hutton, 2010). The meta-language for African languages was an extension of the meta-language used in descriptions of English and/or Latin. Whether the categories described using this Anglicized meta-language actually existed in these languages was considered irrelevant. Similarly, translation of African languages into English was particularly widespread. In essence, the meta-language used in any instruction was English. Hence, mother tongue education was, for all intents and purposes, an extension of learning English.

The irony is that the promotion of indigenous African languages in post-colonial Africa is, inadvertently, a continuation of a colonial project. It is, therefore, not surprising that the continuation of the colonial project is often met with resistance, especially when African languages are introduced as languages of instruction in mother tongue instruction programs. Although in contemporary Zimbabwe the argument against the use of indigenous African languages appears, *prima facie*, to be one of a preference for English, the fundamental issue is, as it was in the early 1930s, that the standardized varieties that are used in classrooms are not mother tongues to anyone but, rather, foreign languages or, as Rusike (1936) neatly described them, 'whiteman's language' (*The Bantu Mirror*, Rhodesia 18 April 1936).

It is also not surprising that standardization in both colonial and post-colonial Africa has been a source of controversy because it was, and still is, perceived as radically changing indigenous languages to suit a particular worldview. The controversy surrounding the standardization of African languages is not unique to Zimbabwe. For instance, Peterson (2004), referring to Gikuyu in Kenya, argued convincingly that grammar was fixed in central Kenya because everyone reworked vernacular languages for different objectives. This statement echoes framework on the lack of regularity or absence of fixed structure in grammar, which reflects that it cannot be taken for granted that there is a natural fixed structure to language (Bybee & Hopper, 2001). Rather, speakers borrow heavily from their previous experiences of communication in similar circumstances, on comparable subjects, and with a similar audience (Peterson, 2004). From this perspective, linguistic structure is not 'a set of independent pre-given laws but rather a response to discourse needs' (Bybee & Hopper, 2001, p. 2). The structural fixity arose as a result of standardization, a reification that led to the description of African languages as subject–verb–object languages, and all the other permutations that were used in syntax became a source of consternation.

Another controversy sparked by the standardization of African languages seems to have been in-group and related to the question of which variety of the same language is to be used as a medium of instruction for the same ethnic group. In the Zimbabwean context, the most well known of these debates relates to whether Zulu or the variety of Ndebele spoken by all should be used as a medium of instruction in Matabeleland. This controversy draws heavily on the historical nature of the Ndebele society. The Ndebele society is heterogeneous and, therefore, divided along caste lines into *abezansi*, *abenhla*, and *amahole*. The aristocracy, *abezansi*, often identified itself with the Nguni clan and the Zulu language, while the commoners were a heterogeneous group that had been drawn from the Sotho and the Tswana and were often referred to as *amahole* (commoners). This act of naming other group members using derogatory names reflects the tension between Zulu aristocrats and the Ndebele commoners; the latter preferred the use of Ndebele to subvert aristocratic powers of the *abezansi*. The *abenhla* or *amahole* who had been integrated into the Ndebele advocated for the use of Ndebele to promote a much broader Ndebele identity than that predicated on Zulu as a prestige variety. From the standpoint of the Ndebele aristocrats, 'pure' Ndebele was associated with the use of the Zulu language. Learning and speaking Ndebele were then associated with the political and social history of the Ndebele. The debates between the different groups reflected different 'moral and social stand points' (Msindo, 2005, p. 79) about what it meant to be Ndebele. The conventional view in African studies attributes the invention of African ethnicities to colonialists, missionaries, and African elites (Ranger, 1989), yet the case of the Ndebele demonstrates the active role of 'commoners' in shaping the nature of their identities.

Introductory overview: role of ZILPA and the two Education Acts

The Education Acts were facilitated by a series of events, including extensive lobbying by ZILPA and Silveira House. Although Zimbabwe's minorities came together in ZILPA to claim their rights to more inclusive policies regarding language in schools and national broadcasting and to share concerns over stigmatizing stereotypes, poverty, and access to resources, sharp differences and tensions exist between them. For example, Zimbabwe minorities differ in their relationships with the ruling party. Within Matabeleland, minority groups differ in their historical relations with 'the Ndebele' and 'the Shona' and with each other. Promoting ethnic minorities and boundaries between 'self' and 'other',

including demands for cultural rights, has generated conflict with the majority ethnicities and among the minority groups themselves, thus engendering tensions between essentialized identities and dynamic constructions of ethnic identity.

The socio-cultural contexts for the production of the two Education Acts were shaped by the prevailing political contexts, such as efforts toward a wider inclusion of minorities into Zimbabwe in the 1980s and the space created by the 1990s' constitutional forum. The space for minority languages was narrowed by the President of Zimbabwe, who referred to a 1987 agreement of the super tribes as 'a charter which would bind once and for all, the two major tribes of Zimbabwe, namely the Shona and Ndebele, into one ... The Unity Accord thus forms the bedrock upon which peace, democracy, social justice and prosperity should be built' (Mugabe). Minority language groups were clearly excluded from a political and linguistic standpoint, which is evident in both Education Acts.

ZILPA's main objective (see Appendix 1) was to challenge the provisions of Section 62 of the Education Act of 1987 and propose changes to the act (see Appendix 2). Notably, the names of these languages are written using an orthography that ZILPA preferred and not the orthography commonly used in Zimbabwe. By choosing a different orthography, it seems that ZILPA was resisting what it perceived as the hegemony of the languages of the super tribes since the orthography used in post-colonial Zimbabwe is based either in Shona or in Ndebele.

In response to ZILPA's demands, the government of Zimbabwe amended the Education Act in 2006. Specifically, the category of indigenous languages was broadened to include what, in the 1987 Act, were described as minority languages. The 'new' indigenous languages were Shangani, Tonga, Venda, and Nambya, but Fengu (Xhosa) and CiNyanja were excluded from this category, indicating the ranking order of languages that often reflects a 'hierarchy of power' (Pelinka, 2007, p. 141). Both CiNyanja and Fengu speakers are treated as immigrants, even though some have been in Zimbabwe since the mid-twentieth century. Fengu speakers have been treated as non-Zimbabwean. In fact, the Fengu regard themselves as a nation outside the Zimbabwean state, prefer to be part of South Africa, and provide social justification for being part of a bigger Xhosa nation. The CiNyanja, speakers of Mozambican languages, and their descendants (even if born in Zimbabwe) have also been excluded by the ways in which the categories of indigenous are used. Even though CiNyanja speakers are dominant in some areas of Zimbabwe, such as northwestern Zimbabwe, they fall into a third space in which they are neither foreign nor indigenous.

In both the Education Act of 1987 and that of 2006 (see Appendix 3), the status of Shona, Ndebele, and English as the three main languages remains unchanged; if anything, their status has been enhanced. The expression 'main languages' is, in fact, a depoliticized manner of referring to dominant languages described in a quasi-neutral form as official languages (Williams, 1992). What is implied in this euphemism is that these three languages are the common and possibly nationally unifying languages of Zimbabwe. As a result, the other minority or indigenous languages are rendered negligible and of secondary importance. In fact, in both acts, it is mandatory for schools to teach English, Shona, and Ndebele, as captured in the use of the deontic modal 'shall', which, in a legal sense, is equivalent to 'must'. There is no room for either the school or minister to exercise any discretion, unlike in the teaching of other languages in which the minister 'may authorize [author emphasis]' their use as the media of instruction. The use of the modal auxiliary *may* indicates possibility but leaves room for the minister to propose the use of one of the main languages instead, thus underscoring the secondary importance of these languages.

Even though English, Shona, and Ndebele are the dominant languages in the two acts, there are subtle differences between the two acts in relation to the educational status of the

languages. The 1987 Act states that the three ‘main’ languages ‘shall be taught’ but not necessarily on an ‘equal-time-allocation basis’. However, the 2006 Act contains an attempt to close the gap in the time allocated to teaching the three main languages by explicitly stating that the languages shall be taught on an ‘equal basis’, which seems to be a rhetorical strategy for achieving parity of esteem. Despite the inherent status differential in the ‘main languages’, the notion of an ‘equal-time-allocation basis’ suggests peaceful coexistence in a shared physical space, despite their status differentials. The idea that the main languages may be taught on an equal basis is indicative of the government’s attempt pedagogically to establish some form of linguistic equality between the languages. Yet, the notion of an ‘equal basis’ creates a ‘fiction of language equality’ by disguising a ‘hierarchy of power’ (Pelinka, 2007, p. 141) between English, on the one hand, and Shona and Ndebele, on the other hand. It disguises the power hierarchy between the main languages and other indigenous languages and also between minority languages and excluded languages such as Yao, Chikunda, Barwe, and Asian languages. There is no explicit directive that, when the minister exercises discretion, the ‘indigenous’ or, for that matter, the minority languages may be taught on an ‘equal-time-allocation basis’ with the three main languages. This silence in the act suggests that these other languages are viewed, as has already been pointed out, as of secondary importance.

The status of English is also different between the two acts. The 2006 Act states that English is to be taught from the first grade, whereas the 1987 Act states that English is to be deferred until the fourth grade. The 1987 Act states that English is to be taught in both areas in which Shona and Ndebele are spoken, suggesting that the bilingualism expected was one between English and either Shona or Ndebele but not a multilingualism in which the pupils are proficient in Shona, Ndebele, *and* English, as is implied in the 2006 Act.

In a sense, the 2006 Act is more inclusive. For example, sign languages are mentioned as the media of instruction for the ‘deaf and hard hearing’. Unlike in the teaching of either the main languages or indigenous languages, the medium of instruction for sign language is calibrated by introducing a notion of ‘priority medium of instruction’, which leaves room for other languages to be used as the media of instruction. Although the 2006 Act is more inclusive, it excludes other minority languages such as Barwe, Yao, Chikunda, and CiNyanja. Ironically, CiNyanja was used as a medium of instruction prior to Zimbabwe’s attainment of independence in 1980. This practice was discontinued after 1980, suggesting that, as far as CiNyanja is concerned, colonial language policy was more inclusive than contemporary Zimbabwean language policy. Arguably, speakers of CiNyanja may be discriminated against more in post-independent Zimbabwe than during the colonial era. Furthermore, they do not fall under either the indigenous or ‘foreign’ language category. Thus, while the 1987 Act discriminated against most African languages, the 2006 Act discriminates against what are considered to be ‘small’ minority languages or the so-called immigrant languages such as CiNyanja and Fengu.

By and large, the formation of ZILPA as a grassroots movement that lobbied the government for the promotion and development of minority languages has been somewhat successful. The success of ZILPA is, however, ambivalent. First, by rejecting the use of the term *minority language*, the group managed, at least on an ideological level, to equate these languages with those of the super tribes. Secondly, the inclusion of languages of instruction suggests some legal gains. Yet, the promotion of indigenous languages in both Zimbabwean Education Acts has only created a rank order of languages. The ‘main languages’ are not functionally equal to the indigenous languages, just as the indigenous languages are not functionally equal to the ‘invisible’ minority languages. The mere fact that languages

such as Kalanga and Shangani are elevated from minority to indigenous language status but are not examinable subjects like the indigenous languages of the super tribes indicates that the new language-in-education act has concealed certain power relations. Since the Zimbabwean educational system is examination driven, the fact that these languages, although taught and used as the media of instruction, are not examined means that, from the government's perspective and possibly from the students' viewpoint, these languages are not that important after all. In fact, this echoes an argument by McGroarty, Beck, and Butler (1995), who, with reference to Navajo communities, stated that:

For indigenous languages, often disparaged or at least neglected by the dominant society, tests can be powerful pieces of evidence that a hitherto 'invisible' language does indeed exist in terms that an educational bureaucracy can understand and, consequently, must acknowledge. (p. 324)

In light of this comment, it is indeed possible that the Zimbabwean state is not as committed to minority languages as their inclusion in the new language-in-education act might suggest.

CiNyanja: Neither a foreign nor a minority language

Northwestern Zimbabwe is a fascinating linguistic landscape because of the number of different languages that are widely used there. These languages include: (a) CiNyanja; (b) Nambya; (c) Tonga; (d) Ndebele; (e) Shona; and (f) English, in part because of tourist ventures as well as the area's status as a mining location. Hwange, for instance, is a coal-mining town with a majority of Nambya and CiNyanja speakers, whereas the official languages in the schools have been Ndebele and English; however, in recent years, there has been an attempt to use Nambya and CiNyanja as languages of instruction in grades 1–4. Even though Nambya is the language spoken by the original inhabitants of Hwange, previously the most widely used language for official business was Ndebele, while CiNyanja was used largely for communication. It appears that CiNyanja became a dominant language because of a relatively large number of Zambians and Malawians in the mining areas. While Malawians may define themselves as Nyanja when in Zimbabwe, they may view themselves as belonging to different ethnicities, such as Ngoni or Kunda, while in Malawi. Consequently, CiNyanja is a broad linguistic category that includes a wide range of languages and ethnicities. Even though Nambya and, to some extent, CiNyanja are dominant languages in specific locales, they are not officially used in education or recognized as minority languages in Zimbabwe. Speakers of these languages are not considered citizens of Zimbabwe, despite the fact that they were born in Zimbabwe and know no other place as home.

Shangani and Ndaou: an overview

Borders have variable effects on ethnicities. For example, the label *Shangani* is much more complicated than one might initially assume because its referents and symbolic meanings vary depending on the situational context and the person using the term. The referent *Shangani* is not a stable one, rendering it difficult to determine the number of speakers, even if the problematic nature of what constitutes 'speakerhood' is resolved (Makoni, Makoni, & Nyika, 2008; Moore, Pietkainen, & Blommaert, 2010). For example, a Zimbabwean ethnic group referred to as Ndaou may be referred to as Shangani in South Africa

because when the Ndaus migrate to South Africa, they appropriate the term *Shangani* and use it to refer to themselves. They do so because of the perceived preferential treatment accorded to Shangani speakers in South African manual jobs. Because most Ndaus eventually return home, a new category of migrant Ndaus leads to yet another distinction between ex-migrants and those who never left Zimbabwe.

The South African/Zimbabwean border on the Shangani produces different Ndaus 'ethnic' groups, whereas the Zimbabwean/Mozambican border does not have the same effect. Thus, Ndaus in Mozambique, which has been strongly influenced by Portuguese, has not produced distinct Ndaus groups on either side of the border. Similarly, the Kalanga in Botswana and Zimbabwe retain a strong sense of ethnic identity despite being separated by the Zimbabwe/Botswana border. In certain cases, the converse also takes place: individuals who might have been regarded as belonging to different ethnicities in one country redefine themselves as members of the same group in a third place.

Changes in the ways people define themselves may also be the result of historical factors. For example, while contemporary Ndaus may refer to themselves as Ndaus, their ancestors would have defined themselves as both Ndaus and Zulus as they had Zulu surnames (McGonagle, 2002). Self- and group identities are, therefore, not permanently fixed in time and geographical space. The same language may evoke different associations and engender multiple and, at times, conflicting associations that are in a constant state of flux.

Shangani language in education

Shangani speakers are found in Zimbabwe, Mozambique, and South Africa. Bearing in mind that Shangani speakers found in Mozambique and in South Africa refer to themselves as Tsonga, the presence of the Zimbabwe/South Africa border has led to a fractured Shangani identity in South Africa and among their Mozambican counterparts, thereby working against efforts to synchronize language planning strategies in Mozambique, South Africa, and Zimbabwe. Even though materials for teaching Shangani in Zimbabwe are lacking, unlike in South Africa, if Shangani speakers in Zimbabwe do not subscribe to the same identity as their South African counterparts, they may not readily accept language teaching materials produced in South Africa because using such materials may make them feel inferior to their South African counterparts.

Although Shangani was a minority language in the 1987 Zimbabwe Education Act, it is categorized in the 2006 Act as an indigenous language. Even though Shangani is referred to as 'indigenous', the Shangani still find this term objectionable and prefer their language to be referred to as a 'community language'. The construct of a 'community' arguably captures the multi-layered and interconnected nature of their individual and collective histories as speakers of Shangani. However, the discourse implied by the use of the term may undermine their efforts because community languages rarely have status as formal languages that can be used in educational contexts.

Currently, Shangani is taught up to the fourth year of elementary education. Students have to switch to either Shona or Ndebele as second African languages. Pedagogically, Shangani students are heavily disadvantaged because they are treated as if Ndebele and Shona were their primary languages. Plans are underway to extend the teaching of Shangani to the end of primary education; however, the use of common Zimbabwean Shangani teaching materials is complicated by the diversity of views on what constitutes Shangani. If Shangani is viewed from the bottom up, it can be more appropriately defined as a continuum characterized by Shona, on the one end, and Ndebele, on the other end. With the

prevalence of migrant labor in Mozambique and South Africa, cross-national varieties of Shangani are found in Zimbabwe. Thus, the promotion of Shangani has to resolve a tension or take advantage of a creative tension between the state's perceptions of the development of Shangani as a discrete entity, on the one hand, and as an amalgam, on the other hand.

The use of Shangani in education, therefore, raises questions about standardization. Because Shangani is in the early stages of standardization, a wide range of competing orthographies are in use, including the following:

- (1) An orthography based on one or more of the earlier versions of Ndebele or Shona (e.g. Shangane versus Shangani).
- (2) An orthography based on Tsonga (e.g. XiTshangana).
- (3) An orthography dependent upon different denominations and religious affiliations of the congregation (e.g. Chaangan by the Dutch Reformed Church or Changana by the Anglican Church).

Efforts have been made to harmonize the diverse orthographies because orthographical variation is considered a problem in literacy acquisition. The desire to unify the orthographies is driven by a standard language ideology (Milroy, 2001) that sees variation as problematic and uniformity as a solution. Because orthographies are both linguistic and social, it is critically important to determine which orthography to use. The challenge is to find an orthography that balances technical acumen with sociological insight. As Schiefflin and Doucet (1992) pointed out, orthographies are seen as 'sites of contested identities rather than as neutral academic or linguistic arguments without political, social or educational consequences' (p. 427).

Possibilities and constraints of transnational language policies: the case of Kalanga

Kalanga speakers can be found in southwestern parts of Zimbabwe and northern parts of Botswana. Historically, the Kalanga were separated from the main Shona communities by the Ndebele, which has strongly influenced the Kalanga. The Kalanga, both in Zimbabwe and in Botswana, are multilingual. Those found in Zimbabwe speak Ndebele and Shona and, if formally educated, they speak English as well. Similarly, the Kalanga in Botswana speak Tswana and English. The Kalanga in both Botswana and Zimbabwe actively collaborate in the production of teaching materials and participate in common cultural festivals. However, because of the collapse of the Zimbabwean economy, the Kalanga in Zimbabwe are more aggressively reasserting their shared origins with the Kalanga in Botswana by claiming their membership in a larger Kalanga ethnicity that predated the formation of Botswana. In doing so, the Kalanga are, by default and possibly for purposes of economic expediency, claiming to be citizens of Botswana. Yet, when the Zimbabwean economy was still viable, the Kalanga in Botswana were emphatic that their 'roots' lie in Zimbabwe.

Demands for the recognition of Kalanga, more so than of other ethnic groups, are likely to be perceived by the Zimbabwean government as political demands because of the long historical activism of the Kalanga. They have, at times, entered into astute political alliances with the Ndebele even though they have long objected to being taught through Ndebele, which was sanctioned in 1930 by Doke (the South African University of Witwatersrand Linguist), who recommended that Kalanga should not be the medium of instruction (Msindo, 2005).

Promotion of Kalanga has always been justified on grounds of political secession. Hence, campaigns to promote Kalanga initially resulted from a deep desire to resist Ndebele political and linguistic hegemony (Msindo, 2005). Historically, the Kalanga revolted against the colonial government because they were resisting colonial encounters, and in post-colonial Zimbabwe, the Kalanga have continued their defiance, although this time it was against the Zimbabwean government. The issue revolves around the classification of Kalanga as a minority language, in which case Kalanga-speaking children are to be taught either in Ndebele or in Shona. It seems that changes in language policy in Zimbabwe have been partially influenced by a relatively long and sustained history of dissent at the grassroots level by both parents and teachers.

The discourses used in the promotion of Kalanga as well as Shangani are based on an assumption that the boundaries between these languages and their attendant ethnicities are tightly drawn. At times, the promotion of minority languages created and enhanced the boundaries, some of which did not necessarily exist in the form which they later took as a direct consequence of language promotion. The discourses of language promotion founded on notions of ethnicity and language as tightly knit together created the impression that the groups were homogeneous.

Fengu: an ethnic group with ‘static’ heritage demanding alternative citizenship

The Fengu are, historically, Xhosa-speaking communities that originated from the Eastern Cape (South Africa) and were brought to Zimbabwe by Cecil John Rhodes as domestic workers and wagon drivers (Ndhlovu, 2009). The Fengu are a close-knit community living in areas such as Mbembezi, Fort Rixon, Gwatemba, and some parts of Mashonaland and Midlands (Hachipola, 1998; Ndhlovu, 2009).

There are indications that the term *Fengu* was originally used broadly to include anyone who was destitute or a refugee, including Europeans during the colonial period. However, the meaning of the term was subsequently racialized to refer to a specific ethnic group, the Xhosa who had fled Shaka during the Mfecane in the mid-nineteenth century and those who came with Cecil John Rhodes. The Fengu, like other minority groups, are increasingly vocal in promoting their interests, although they have never argued for the promotion of their language as a language of instruction, notwithstanding that their language has never been used as a language of instruction in Zimbabwe. The government has always argued that the number of speakers is not sufficiently significant to warrant the language any status in education (Ndhlovu, 2009). Unlike other minorities, the Fengu have been motivated by a powerful sense of ethnic identity and strong allegiance to the Xhosa in South Africa and, thus, view their language-in-education needs as met by the South African national language policy since it recognizes Xhosa as 1 of the 11 official languages.

Hence, the Fengu in sharp contrast with the Kalanga adamantly argue to be relocated to their ‘mythical’ home in the Eastern Cape in South Africa. While the Kalanga recognize their Zimbabwean citizenship (while quietly aspiring to be citizens of Botswana), the Fengu feel that they are foreigners in Zimbabwe but part of a bigger Xhosa ethnicity in South Africa. They still maintain some of Xhosa cultural practices, although these appear to have been influenced by Ndebele. Despite the fact that the Fengu have lived in Zimbabwe since the late nineteenth century, they strongly believe that they speak Xhosa and are part of the South African Xhosa-speaking community. However, what the Fengu do not realize is that the language they speak is, in all probability, significantly different from the variety of Xhosa spoken in South Africa because ‘all groups that come into contact with others, over time, develop their own unique “codes”, “dialects” or “languages”’

that emerge through these interactions and shared knowledge, leading to the development of unique and collective identities' (Shohamy, 2006, p. 8).

For the Fengu, it seems, ethnicity is not fluid, boundaries are not permeable, and geography and physical space define each other. Yet, as Shohamy (2006) and Mignolo (2000) pointed out, geographical location and language are disarticulated because languages are not permanently situated or located in any space. The presence of the Fengu in Zimbabwe and their strong yet 'imagined' association with the Xhosa in South Africa raise interesting issues about language, citizenship, and transnational language policies. The Fengu sense of group identity and demands to be relocated to South Africa suggest that transnational language policies are irrelevant because they do not address their sense of not being citizens. Other ethnic groups argue that being born in Zimbabwe guarantees their citizenship as Zimbabweans, although some have been deprived of citizenship (e.g. CiNyanja speakers and all children of Malawian and Zambian immigrants born in Zimbabwe have been denied Zimbabwean citizenship). The Fengu, although born in Zimbabwe, argue that Zimbabwean citizenship is being imposed on them. As the Fengu wait to be relocated to South Africa, they consider themselves a people without national citizenship. Because of their sense of not being Zimbabwean citizens, they have not taken part in the language minority movement or in organizations addressing the problems of language minorities.

Clearly, cross-border language planning among the Xhosa in South Africa is likely to be rejected by the Fengu in Zimbabwe because they have different objectives. In addition, there may be intergenerational differences regarding language planning policies. Young Fengu speakers may not necessarily identify with the variety of Xhosa spoken in South Africa but may entertain the idea of being in South Africa for economic reasons, such as job opportunities they may not have in Zimbabwe. Similarly, young Ndaus who recast their identities as Shangani in South Africa may welcome language policies that provide opportunities for learning minority languages other than their own. Elderly Ndaus may be indifferent to the promotion of other Zimbabwean minority languages but welcome transnational cooperation that may provide them opportunities to be exposed to Zulu texts since they define themselves as both Ndaus and Zulus.

One of the recurring assumptions in the promotion of minority languages in Zimbabwe is that language users are able to identify the linguistic community to which they belong. The distinction between 'hard' and 'soft' boundaries is relevant to a key construct in minority language planning: heritage. Yet, *heritage* means different things to communities with hard boundaries as opposed to those with soft boundaries. Because the Fengu identity is firmly situated in the past, heritage is fixed and retained regardless of differences in time and geographical location. For groups with soft boundaries, such as the Shangani, Kalanga, and Ndaus, heritage is dynamic and 'reinvented' by each generation.

The dynamic nature of heritage has challenging implications for designing language teaching materials and language planning. Contemporary youth may be unable to relate to language teaching materials that overly emphasize the past, as their lives are heavily influenced by technology and popular culture. On the other hand, teaching materials that frame heritage as constantly evolving and are relevant to the youth may be regarded by the elderly as frivolous and not sufficiently educational (Pennycook, 2008).

Language planning and teaching materials: challenges for minority languages

Efforts to enhance the status and widen the spread of the teaching of minority/indigenous languages have been constrained by the reluctance of commercial publishers to develop

learning materials for use in minority language classes. Publishers view such projects as not economically viable because the market is limited due to two factors:

- (1) Minority language speakers tend to identify themselves with one of the super tribes and, therefore, will learn either Shona or Ndebele.
- (2) Most teachers are not from these minority language groups and, therefore, are not proficient enough to use minority languages for instruction.

In such contexts, social ideology is confronted with commercial realities.

These publishing constraints could be alleviated by collaborating with other minority speakers in neighboring countries on textbook production. However, collaboration between minority language groups in Zimbabwe and other countries is faced with ideological constraints due to potential tension between speakers of the same minority languages across boundaries. In Zimbabwe, most of the teaching materials for minority languages are produced in the Curriculum Development Unit at the University of Zimbabwe in Harare and translated from English into minority languages. From the state's perspective and top-down language planning, translation is a useful strategy for creating uniformity. Translation is also a strategy for improving the availability of materials in minority languages. After all, materials in other languages already exist, and there is no need to undertake research (as would be the case for the newly introduced minority languages) to develop materials in all the minority languages.

While the move to make teaching materials in minority languages readily available is welcome, it may unintentionally undermine efforts toward minority language planning. Translation of materials from 'major' languages in order to 'improve availability of materials may inadvertently contribute to the view that "real" knowledge is knowledge' not codified in minority languages but in either the languages of the super tribes or in former colonial languages (Stroud, 2001, p. 342). In this regard, translation may give the impression that minority language cultures and ways of knowing are insignificant in education. Thus, using teaching materials translated from English or from any of the major indigenous African languages may inadvertently reinforce the marginalization of minority languages, undermining the very goals the minority language activists are seeking to accomplish.

Uniform materials may still need to be adapted to local contexts in which minority languages are used. However, the fluidity of political boundaries and their transnational nature means that appropriate language teaching materials in relatively homogeneous cities may not be directly relevant to the complex heterogeneity of communities at political boundaries. Arguably, what might be required in such contexts is not so much the promotion of specific languages, which tend to be construed as formal objects, but the development of strategies for facilitating students' ability to communicate and move with relative ease 'into and out of' diverse communities (Canagarajah, 2007). This means creating language teaching materials founded on constructs such as crossing and accommodation (Rampton, 2003). Yet, materials based on such constructs may radically differ from those produced at the national level, which focus on a single national identity rather than on multiple group identities.

In addition, producing materials for languages in the early stages of standardization raises questions about which variety to use or what constitutes the correct form of spelling (Sebba, 2007). When language varieties and orthographies are distinct, they project a differentiated identity. Language varieties are then associated with 'specific and pure

identities' (Simpson, 2008, p. 10). Choosing one form of spelling over another may create undue tensions as much as will choosing one variety of the same language over another (Bird, 2001; Sebba, 2007).

In order to make the materials more suitable to local contexts of minority language speakers, it may be necessary to involve local communities in the design of the teaching materials. Although sacrificing uniformity of materials across the state, the involvement of local communities makes for locally relevant materials that might be considered 'authentic' (Stroud, 2001). Although enhancing ecological validity, this involvement may be regarded as time-consuming and difficult because of potential conflicts regarding what communities might consider desirable.

Top-down language planning and local initiatives

It is considered axiomatic that initiatives for the promotion and development of teaching materials, compilation of dictionaries, and writing of grammars should be left to the local communities, as involvement by external agencies may be interpreted as undermining their sense of agency. For this reason, Hale (1969) called for the professionalization of native speakers and informants so that they can take the lead in the design and development of their languages. His argument is based on both 'scientific and moral grounds' (Dobrin, 2008, p. 201). If local community members are trained in the necessary disciplines, engaging them is a productive way of proceeding because they would have both the expertise and the inside knowledge about how the communities function. In the case of Zimbabwe, the professionalization and extensive utilization of local expertise are feasible because of the presence of a small but active group of locally trained linguists from different ethnic minorities.

As part of these local initiatives, the Zimbabwean government has also committed itself to introducing minority languages through the end of elementary education, and universities are beginning to offer degrees in minority languages. For example, the University of Great Zimbabwe offers degrees in Shangani, whereas the University of Zimbabwe has an institute dedicated to research and development of standardized orthography for minority languages. The participation of local universities in the promotion of minority languages is critically important, but it is also a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it contributes toward the overall 'intellectualization' of African languages (Finlayson & Madiba, 2002); on the other hand, the minority languages are discursively constructed as parochial. By offering degrees in minority languages in geographical areas in which these languages are most widely spoken, universities provide credibility to the programs. The involvement of the local communities also contributes to establishing rapport between academic institutions and local initiatives. In spite of these advantages, the localization of these languages leads to assumptions that they do not have wider relevance, undercutting the success of local initiatives.

Nonetheless, in some cases, local communities may value sustained engagement by external agencies. Dobrin (2008) pointed out that:

So while the idea that outsiders should limit their involvement in local communities in an effort to respect their autonomy might seem commonsensical, it is at odds with the perspectives of ... most villagers for whom foreign sponsored projects of all kinds (economic, religious, health-centered, etc.) are valued precisely because of the exchange relationships they bring with the outsiders who promote them. This applies to language projects no less, whether their aim is vernacular schooling, community literacy, Bible translation, language documentation, etc. (p. 309)

In such situations, more involvement is a sign of commitment to partnership with communities, rather than a compromise of their sense of agency. The degree to which the active involvement of local communities is warranted for the success of minority language development can only be determined on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the tensions and conflicts within the communities that may be exacerbated by the presence of outsiders. Reception to engagement with outsider agencies might also be strongly shaped by the communities' own history of relationships with outside agencies. If such relationships have been negative, communities are not likely to respond positively.

Chinese language in Zimbabwe

More recently, the introduction of Mandarin Chinese as a foreign language in schools and universities has raised another important issue in Zimbabwean language planning. Chinese seems to be playing a prominent role in the Zimbabwean sociolinguistic landscape, one that used to be played by former colonial languages such as English. The introduction of Chinese in Zimbabwe has to be understood in the context of China's increasing economic role in Africa, as China relies heavily on the importation of oil and minerals from the continent.

Mandarin Chinese has been introduced in all political regions, cutting across Francophone, Lusophone, and Anglophone regions. Confucius Institutes have been established in a number of different countries, including Zimbabwe. These institutes are a powerful instrument in the promotion of Chinese interests and the development of its international language policy. In a standard Memorandum of Agreement with African countries through Confucius Institutes, the Chinese Language Council International commits itself to four key obligations that are attractive to Africa:

- (1) the provision of start-up funds for setting up new Confucius Institutes;
- (2) training and deployment of Chinese teachers and/or volunteers for Confucius Institutes;
- (3) payment of teachers' salaries and allowances; and
- (4) provision of language teaching materials.

Language teaching materials are developed in China and used in different African countries, with very little adaptation to local contexts. Yet, Chinese is proving to be very popular in Zimbabwe. The Confucius Institute at the University of Zimbabwe has enrolled a large number of students for non-degree short-term courses in Foundational Chinese and Chinese for Business Purposes; the latter is in great demand in the business community. Chinese has also been introduced as a foreign language in secondary schools for students who may have English as a mother tongue with restricted proficiency in an African language.

The popularity of Chinese might also be related to the fact that, similar to the employment guarantee provided by knowledge of English in the past, knowledge of Mandarin Chinese currently guarantees employment in those areas of business controlled by the Chinese as well as in some locally owned businesses. For example, some hotels in Zimbabwe require their employees to have knowledge or basic proficiency in Chinese as they serve a large number of visitors from China. In addition, Air Zimbabwe flight attendants and some National Baggage Handling Services staff are required to communicate with Chinese speakers, read Chinese documents, and provide interpreting and translation services at the airport. With the collapse of the Zimbabwean health system, use of Chinese traditional medicine has also increased, and those who sell these medicines need to be proficient in Chinese in order to read the instructions on the packaging.

However, it is not only Zimbabweans who have been interested in learning Chinese. Members of some of the Chinese communities in Zimbabwe that have been in the country since the early twentieth century are also taking advantage of the Chinese international language policy. Young children from local Chinese communities are also attending language courses in Chinese in order to negotiate their identities.

Conclusion: silences and gaps in the literature

This article has demonstrated the various ways in which ethnic groups interact with the dominant group and the impact of these interactions on language planning. Minority grievances have been used to both enhance the status of ethnic minorities and construct patronage networks by the ruling party (McGregor, 2009). In addition, although languages such as Kalanga, Shangani, and Nambya have been elevated to indigenous language status in the new language-in-education policy, there are significant differences between the functions of these languages and those of the super tribes, indicating some power differential.

This opens up a possible avenue for a comparative textual analysis of the two Education Acts in order to establish whether any status differentials are embedded in their texts. Such an analysis could utilize critical discourse analysis (CDA) as an analytic and interpretive framework. Since language policy texts are a form of social practice reflecting power differences and social and political inequalities (Tollefson, 2006), CDA renders it possible to interpret the power dynamics concealed in the language used in policy documents, illustrating how texts are connected to each other and informed by their socio-cultural contexts (Abdelhay, Makoni, & Makoni, 2010).

The Zimbabwean diaspora and technology raise new challenges for most countries including Zimbabwean language planning. The issue of diaspora language planning is urgent because one-third of the Zimbabwean population lives outside the country, with the largest numbers in South Africa and the UK diaspora language planning raises new challenges because of the tendency of Zimbabweans like other people from other countries to congregate in specific geographical areas. It is possible that much more intense interaction occurs among Zimbabweans in a relatively small area who use their 'home' languages because these, to a large extent, create a community away from home. Yet, the conundrum for diaspora language planning is that migration to another country/continent by its very nature engenders a certain degree of loss of linguistic identity; for migrants, there is 'a compelling need for new languages of communication' (Falola, Afolabi, & Adesanya, 2008, p. 13). The implications and consequences of such intense interaction in home country languages and the linguistic needs of the 'receiving' country require attention for sociolinguistic studies of language planning. Because of the connection between those in the diaspora and Zimbabwe through electronic communication (e-mail, Facebook, Twitter, etc.), the nature of diaspora language practices may have an impact on 'local' Zimbabweans who never migrated. There is, therefore, a gap in the current language planning literature as it has focused exclusively on traditional forms of language planning and maintenance.

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Note

1. In Zimbabwe, the term *minority* is racialized and refers to the White minority. However, we use the term differently from its conceptualization in Zimbabwean political discourse.

Notes on contributor

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Appendix 1: The two Education Acts

1. Zimbabwe Education Act (Chapter 25:04 part XII, 62)

62 Languages to be taught in schools:

- (1) Subject to this section, the three main languages of Zimbabwe, namely, Shona, Ndebele, and English, shall be taught in all primary schools from the first grade as follows:
 - (a) Shona and English in all areas where the mother tongue of the majority of the residents is Shona; or
 - (b) Ndebele and English in all areas where the mother tongue of the majority of the residents is Ndebele.
- (2) Prior to the fourth grade, either of the languages referred to in paragraph (a) or (b) of subsection (1) may be used as the medium of instruction, depending upon which language is more commonly spoken and better understood by the pupils.
- (3) From the fourth grade, English shall be the medium of instruction: Provided that Shona or Ndebele shall be taught as subjects on an equal-time allocation basis as the English language.
- (4) In areas where minority languages exist, the Minister may authorize the teaching of such languages in primary schools in addition to those specified in subsections (1), (2), and (3).

2. Zimbabwe Education Act of 2006 (Chapter 25: 04)

PART XII
GENERAL

62 Languages to be taught in schools:

- (1) Subject to this section, all three main languages of Zimbabwe, namely, Shona, Ndebele and English, shall be taught on an equal-time allocation basis in all schools up to form one level.
- (2) In areas where the indigenous languages other those mentioned in subsection (1) are spoken, the Minister may authorize the teaching of such languages in addition to those specified in subsection (1).
- (3) The Minister may authorize the teaching of foreign languages in schools.
- (4) Prior to Form One, any of the languages referred to in subsection (1) and (2) may be used as medium of instruction depending upon which language is more commonly spoken and better understood by the pupils.
- (5) Sign languages shall be the priority medium of instruction for the deaf and hard hearing.

Appendix 2: ZILPA proposed changes to the Zimbabwean Education Act (1987)

Zimbabwe proposed amendment to Section 62 of the Education Act of Zimbabwe 1987

Interpretation of terms

In this section:

- i) **Indigenous languages** means the following languages: Ndebele, Shona, Tonga, Sotho, Venda, Shangani and Nambya.
 - ii) **Area(s)** means district(s)
1. Subject to this Section, the indigenous languages of Zimbabwe including English and the Sign language shall be treated equally, taught and examined from first grade to university provided that, in each area or part of the area, the predominant indigenous language and English shall be taught.
 2. The medium of instruction in any area or part of the area, shall depend upon which indigenous language is more commonly spoken and understood by the majority of the peoples and shall be used in addition to the English language.
 3. All indigenous languages shall be taught as subjects on equal time allocation basis as the English language.
 4. Subjection four of the Education Act is to be deleted.

Appendix 3: Objectives of ZILPA

4. The objectives of the Association are to operate on a non-profit basis and to:

- 4.1 Promote the teaching of TjiKalanga, ChiTonga, ChiNambya, Chichangana and SeSotho in schools, colleges and universities.
- 4.2 Lobby the government of Zimbabwe to recognize and permit the use of TjiKalanga, ChiTonga, and TshiVenda, ChiNambya, ChiChangana, and SeSotho as official languages.
- 4.3 Assist and encourage the writing and production of literature in TjiKalanga, ChiTonga, TshiVenda, ChiNambya, ChiChangana and SeSetho languages for use in schools, colleges, and universities.
- 4.4 and
- 4.5 Promote the use of Tjikalanga, ChiTonga, Tshi Venda, ChiNambya, ChiChangana, and SeSotho languages on national radio and television.
- 4.6 Network with organizations with similar objectives in Africa and beyond the six languages. Solicit for and receive donations.
- 4.7 Do all things necessary to further these objectives and for the general and cultural well being of the association's beneficiary.