Revitalizing Mother Languages: Culture, Globalization and Technology

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Abstract

Globalization has paved the way for trade, culture sharing, research, development, communication, innovation, and the spread of technology. But while these and other benefits of globalization are often analyzed, little attention is paid to its impact on mother languages. The UN estimates that more than 50 percent of the languages spoken across the globe will disappear by 2100. Africa, in particular, is in danger of losing 250 languages out of the 600 currently in decline on the continent. Globalization is responsible for much of this language endangerment as it creates economic, political, and social conditions that promote the dominance of Western languages like English and French over local languages. This paper investigates the nature and extent of globalization's impact on mother languages in Africa and forwards conditions that must be met to revive and preserve these languages. Using Memmi's Theory of Colonization, Freire's Theory of Pedagogy of the Oppressed, and Fisherman's Model for Language Revival, I argue that language endangerment is a product of previous colonizing policies that disenfranchised indigenous languages and cultures and that continues today as globalization. I posit that this endangerment poses a direct threat to the national and cultural identities of indigenous peoples. I ask and attempt tp answer three key questions: How does globalization facilitate language loss in Africa? How does this loss impact the social, cultural, and political structures of African peoples? And what steps can the continent take to revive its mother languages? In analyzing past works, I acknowledge that many language revitalization campaigns rely on technology to preserve and disseminate 'sleeping' languages. I, however, advance that a multifaceted approach involving new educational policies, decolonization, locally-driven research, and collaborative learning could produce better results. I therefore recommend that technology-focused revitalization efforts be combined with community engagement and policy changes to revitalize the languages, identities, and cultures of African people more effectively.

Key Words: *Globalization, Mother Languages, Technology, Revitalization*

Introduction

Nsibami (2011) sees globalization as the increased interaction of countries, communities, and peoples driven by new technology, communication, and culture sharing while Kwame (2007) affirms that globalization connects nations and regions through communication and the free flow of information. Scholars and analysts investigating the impacts of globalization differ in their views. While they agree that global interaction and the influx of ideas impact peoples and nations culturally, economically, and politically (Kwame, 2007), there is no consensus on the nature and extent of these impacts. Some analysts believe globalization is an all-positive force that "increases cultural interconnectedness" (Steger & James, 2017). Meanwhile, others like Aborishade (2002) see globalization as "Western colonialism, particularly American imperialism that seeks to impose its hegemony on other subjugated and exploited nations."

Regardless, experts warn that the homogenizing effect of linking cultures and experiences poses a threat to global linguistic diversity (UN, 2023). There are currently about 7,000 active languages in the world. However, over 97 percent of the world's population speaks only 4 percent of said languages. The 4 percent include, among other languages, English, Mandarin, German, and Spanish. The UN estimates that more than 50 percent of the world's languages spoken today, in whatever frequency, will disappear by 2100 (UN, 2018) and that a language goes extinct approximately every two weeks. Many of these languages are unrecorded and experiencing a steady decline as speaking populations grow older and die without passing on crucial knowledge to the next generation. Things are even worse in Africa, where centuries of colonization and the lingering effects of imperialism

have disenfranchised local languages and pushed them out of formal, political, and educational spheres. Tarugarira (2009) notes that Kenya will likely lose 16 languages, significantly more than Uganda and Tanzania, with 6 and 8 endangered languages, respectively.

But as alarming as these numbers are, why should we care about language endangerment, especially given the positive impacts of globalization on music, the economy, cultural tolerance, medicine, innovation, and other fields? What does it matter if one language enjoys dominance over another, even if the language at the bottom of the hierarchy is a mother language? Pragmatically, people who speak different languages produce a multiplicity of perspectives. Their languages, which communicate their cultures and inform their identities, help them produce different experiences, which, when brought together, enrich dialogue, foster more productive problem-solving, and promote tolerance. The UN, in fact, affirms that multilingualism and linguistic diversity are crucial for the sustainable development of different communities and the planet (UN, 2023). Sentimentally, mother languages are a vital part of a people's identity. A mother language is often a child's first introduction to the world and the lens through which they see and learn about everything else. It is also how communities create, preserve, and disseminate their beliefs and histories. Mother languages are a conduit for traditions like the oral literatures of Africa and tell us just as much about the people who created sayings, folk tales, and dirges as the content of these creations. Anthony Aristar, renowned linguist and professor, says language goes beyond its compositional qualities. "It is a web of history that binds all people who once spoke the language, all the things they did together, all the knowledge they imparted to their descendants" (UNews Archive, 2011). Aristar equates the death of a language to the death of a species (Dongyu, 2012).

Beyond pragmatics and sentiment, however, we preserve mother languages to dismantle language hierarchy. Linguists are keenly aware of the dangers ranking some languages over others poses to research and preservation efforts. However, language hierarchy also promotes cultural erasure, colonization, and human rights violations. If we believe that English is more worthy of research, preservation, and use than African languages, then we implicitly accept that Western cultures are better than other indigenous cultures. That Western imperialism and capitalism are better than other economic structures, and so on. Fortunately, Aristar believes it is possible to revive and preserve languages while they are still alive, even when they are declining. The question thus becomes: How do we revitalize mother languages?

The UN believes education is the key to revitalizing mother languages (UN, 2018). In 2018, it announced a commitment to ensuring children access education in their mother languages, at least at the elementary level. The idea is that multilingual education, if and when made available, will raise the status of indigenous languages and cultures and help preserve linguistic diversity. Historians and linguists have also zeroed in on technology as the solution to language endangerment in previous and ongoing revitalization efforts. However, so far, only about 250 of the world's 7,000 languages have been digitized or incorporated into the digital landscape in some way, shape, or form. This paper suggests a more nuanced look at factors affecting language revitalization efforts.

The systems that promote language hierarchy and inadvertently cause language death go beyond multilingual education. People are not speaking their mother languages; one because the languages are not being taught in school but also because said languages are absent from political and social spheres. Languages are dying because of multiple reasons, including lingering colonizing policies, attitudinal problems towards native languages, social caste systems, a lack of interest from the youth, and more. So, it remains that our approach to language revitalization must include not one but multiple solutions. In this paper, I rethingk various conditions that must be met to successfully revitalize mother languages on the African continent.

Language, Culture and Identity
Also known as a native language, native tongue, or first language, a mother language is the initial language a person is exposed to at and from birth throughout the critical period (Bloomfield, 2023). Mother languages can be defined based on internal or external identification as the language a person identifies or is identified with; based on origin as the language a person learned first or that offers the most durable verbal contacts; based on function as the language a person uses the most; or based on

competence as the language a person understands and speaks the best. Because this paper focuses mainly on African languages, I define a mother language as the language of a person's ethnic group regardless of their proficiency and use. Countries like Kenya ascribe mother languages like Gikuyu, Dholuo, and Gusii to people based on where they come from rather than whether they speak these languages. A person is Gikuyu because their parents are Gikuyu, even if they only speak Swahili. In African countries, also, a person's mother language may not be their first language. This is because many Africans, especially those raised in urban settings, are exposed to English and other foreign languages before they are exposed to their native tongue.

It is also crucial that we distinguish language preservation from language revitalization. Linguist Dr. Salikoko Mufwene, in an interview with the Harvard Political Review, defines preserving a language as recording and archiving it so that it is accessible for research (Dongyu, 2012). Dr. Mufwene characterizes language preservation as an easy task involving no policy change. He contrasts it to revitalization, which may include steps as elaborate as restoring a community's economic autonomy – the Maasai people of Kenya, for instance, are more likely to preserve the Maa language if they can use it viably economically. Therefore, in this paper, I defer to Tsunoda's (2005) definition of language revitalization as a deliberate attempt to stop or reverse the decline of a language. Revitalization efforts will often vary in their goals. However, the ultimate objective is usually to protect a language from death by increasing or maintaining its current level of use, rate of dissemination, and number of speakers.

Many scholars have investigated the relationship between globalization and the decline and extinction of mother languages. Mufwene (2012) notes that several books and publications have amplified research on the matter over the past several decades, such as Nettle and Romaine (2000), Crystal (2000), Hagège (2000), Reyhner et al. (1999), Grenoble and Whaley (1998), and Dixon (1998). Many of these works decry the planet's rapid loss of linguistic diversity, with some extending their analysis to how this language loss impacts indigenous cultures. Getahun (2019) believes that globalization, in emphasizing Western cultures and beliefs over Africans, has eroded aspects of Ethiopian culture, including the language, dress, food, religion, and history. Per Getahun's assessment, every time cultures interact, there occurs culture sharing. However, as he worriedly notes, sometimes, one culture dominates another.

Getahun (2019), in fact, equates globalization to the rise of a homogenizing global culture. The author sees increased global interactions as intended to spread Western belief systems, particularly in Ethiopia, where said systems have altered the" acceptable way of behavior." He points to the cultural atrophy in the country born of diluting the Ethiopian language and history with Western culture. And while Getahun is more worried about how globalization impacts culture, he does not ignore the role language endangerment plays in culture loss. Getahun is convinced that as documented and undocumented Ethiopian languages go extinct, local communities will lose the "ancestral knowledge" contained within these languages and the languages themselves. I agree with Getahun that unchecked globalization does have a homogenizing effect on indigenous peoples and their cultures. This impact often stifles aspects of the indigenous community's culture, history, national identity, and language. This paper will focus on the latter and how language disenfranchisement is a gateway to culture and identity loss.

Seemingly agreeing with Getahun, Maikanti, Chukwu and Valentina (2021) advance globalization as one of the leading causes of language decline and extinction in Nigeria. Rather than focus on culture, however, they study how this language loss affects the economic and socio-cultural stability of Nigerian communities. Maikanti et al. (2021) believe colonization displaced the dominant multilingual and multicultural systems in Africa and replaced them with a "global language," in this case, English. They assert that, left unchecked, this continued "replacement" of local languages will wipe away Nigeria's multilingual culture and further disenfranchise indigenous communities.

I concur with Maikanti et al. that African communities are often multicultural and multilingual. And that even as English becomes the more dominant language in Kenya, communities retain Swahili and their mother languages at their disposal. However, under this guise of multi-linguicism lies a more sinister truth – English is not vying for an equal seat at the table. It is rapidly edging out local languages by economically and culturally disenfranchising communities that do not speak the "global

language." I believe that embracing multi-linguicism, especially in a format that places a colonizing language at the helm of language hierarchy, might not offer the answers Africa needs. We find, instead, that reversing the tide so that mother languages are economically and socially empowered will increase the motivation of indigenous communities to protect, revitalize, and use mother languages.

I also concur with Maikanti, et al. (2021) that the best way to revitalize indigenous languages is to expand their utility and make them viable outside informal local interactions. These authors understand that this effort must begin with an altitudinal change that elevates the status of mother languages within society. They also note the need for governments to get involved, specifically by creating policies that allow mother languages to be used more in schools, the judicial system, the workplace, and the government. In agreeing with this assessment, I aver that language revitalization efforts are only complete once society adopts the use of mother languages from the lowest tiers of society to the highest ranks of government. While the efforts must begin at the community level, a policy and attitudinal shift must occur across the board, with different parties working together to raise the status and economic viability of mother languages.

Beyond culture, however, globalization and the resultant disenfranchisement of mother languages impact national identities. While studying the decline of Arabic as a dominating language in Egypt, Hassan (2012) sees language and national identity as intertwined and globalization posing a significant risk to both. Per Hassan, the increased dominance of English in Egypt has affected not only the viability but also the compositional structure of Arabic, resulting in variations in terminology and language hybridization. He also notes that English has replaced Arabic as the language of instruction in the country, threatening the national identity. Hassan believes that the linguistic identity of a people directly informs their national identity and that it thus becomes the linguist's job to address language loss and its impacts on society.

Bunyi (1999) brings the focus closer to home, studying how colonial and post-colonial systems in Kenya have devalued and delegitimized the status of mother languages in education. Through ethnographic research, Bunyi illustrates that the preference for English as a means of instruction has created inequalities and "differential treatments" in education and society. I am in agreement with Bunyi's assessment that one of the impacts of language disenfranchisement on society is societal inequalities, elitism, and social castes. By designating English as the language of commerce, education, and governance, local systems, inadvertently or by design, shut out members of society who cannot access formal education and thus do not speak English. By extension, this means that children and adults who only speak their mother languages are relegated to the periphery of society, where they cannot run for public office or conduct formal business. The result is a system that continuously creates and reinforces social castes and unequal treatment, keeping indigenous language speakers out of work, out of money, and unable to access education for their children, who then inherit the same problem; and thus the cycle continues. In some instances, these social inequalities have escalated to human rights violations.

Bunyi believes that the political, social, and economic problems of Kenya and Africa will benefit from a contribution from the education systems. She asserts that educational policies that elevate indigenous languages can ignite social change, producing a generation of leaders more suited to solving Africa's problems. Consider this. If Africa has problems, they are African problems. African problems require African solutions from African minds. However, how can we get African solutions when the education systems are designed to churn out English-speaking, West-leaning graduates with a wounded cultural and national identity and a degraded view of Africa who believe success looks like the white man? For solutions to language endangerment, therefore, the continent must look within. In recent years, indigenous communities across the globe have turned to technology for language loss solutions. Herrera (2022) underscores the role technology has played in helping local communities revive their languages, pointing to the many linguists and researchers who have incorporated technology into their research designs to revitalize dying languages, particularly Soria (2016), Galla (2018) and Elliot (2021).

Ebadi (2018), however, is hesitant to endorse technology as the only solution to revitalization efforts; a perspective I am inclined to agree with. As Ebadi notes, even as technologies like AI

promote language revival through language learning, dissemination, and preservation, the problems mother languages face are multifaceted. It is not simply that languages are not being recorded or taught; it is also that the people who should teach and learn these languages have no reason to. If the Maasai cannot use the Maa language to transact business in Kenya or Tanzania, and if it has no economic or social status, why would they want to learn it? Ebadi also notes that, like many products of globalization, the spread of technology is plagued by discrimination and bias and favours dominant languages and cultures. Currently, only a handful of the world's languages have made their way onto the digital landscape, 250 to be precise, with very few African languages even making the cut. Ebadi points to the preference researchers and tech teams afford the world's most popular languages, which she argues raises rather than lowers the risk of indigenous language death.

Ebadi believes that the problem extends beyond bias, however. Because many African languages are rooted in oral traditions that require tonal change, facial expressions, costumes, and location for delivery, it becomes challenging to onboard them onto English-dominant systems successfully. I acknowledge the challenges Ebadi raises and propose a multifaceted approach to mother language revitalization. If Africa's language problems are multifaceted, so should the solutions. Essentially, the only way to save mother languages from extinction is to address the attitudinal problems that prevent young people from learning mother languages, the barriers that keep older generations from teaching these languages, the systems that bar mother languages from schools, and the policies that economically disenfranchise native speakers.

Methodological and Theoretical Grounding

This study was conducted in various steps based on the framework of ethnomethodology as informed by Sangasubana (2011). The initial step involved a preliminary review of existing literature, during which three research questions were developed to match emerging themes and the author's interests. Secondly, a methodology that best helped answer these questions was selected. After that, the author thoroughly reviewed existing literature, focusing on African and other indigenous languages and cultures. The author reviewed reports, government documents, policy literature, and other materials, including online newspapers and websites, to create a conceptual framework for this paper. The fourth step involved synthesizing themes from the gathered information and using said themes. This information was then verified and analyzed to draw conclusions about the subject matter.

The research herein is informed by and built upon various theoretical anchors. First is Memmi's Theory of Colonization. Here, the argument is that the colonization of indigenous peoples created political, social, and economic conditions that disenfranchised and stifled indigenous identities, histories, and cultures. In 1991, Memmi forwarded a theory that if the goal of colonization were assimilation, then colonial systems would ultimately fail because they could not create democratic systems through which indigenous people could participate fully in political processes and retain their identities. Memmi averred that the ultimate result of such undemocratic conditions would be a revolt. Indigenous languages on the African continent were relegated to low and even criminal status during colonial rule. In Kenya, children were punished for speaking their mother languages and forced to learn English – the language of the colonizer – to not only thrive but survive (Whitley, 1974). Public figures were often jailed for singing or writing in their native tongue, and native publications were criminalized and banned outright (Iraki, 2009). Renowned Kenyan author Ngugi wa Thiong'o, who was arrested and jailed for writing in his native Gikuyu, described English at this time as "the language other languages had to bow before in deference" (Hirsch, 2020).

True to Memmi's theory, this language disenfranchisement robbed the Kenyan people of their identity and prevented them from participating in their own governance. Also true to Memmi's theory, many revolts in Kenya, both social and political, involved the reclamation and use of mother languages to reconstruct and reestablish lost identities. The *Mau Mau*, for instance, organized themselves by speech communties and revolted to reclaim their land and culture. *Mau Mau* soldiers used ethnic languages, primarily Gikuyu, to identify each other, administer oaths, organize, and skirt British detection (Phylon,1940-1956). In line with this, I view language revitalization going beyond maintaining linguistic diversity and crucial to the identity and freedom of a language's speaker(s). To

this end, reviving declining languages is as much a political act as a social or economic one and government policies and decolonizing efforts should be included in revitalization projects.

The second grounding is Freire's Theory of Pedagogy of the Oppressed. In his 1990 *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paul Freire identified barriers an oppressor imposes on the oppressed to dehumanize them, which he called "limited situations." The enforced imposition of the English language on Kenyans and the fact that it remains an official language associated with the elite and a gateway to professional and economic opportunities today can be considered a limited situation. This is because it continues the oppression of mother languages and their speakers. It creates a language hierarchy where a student fluent in Aembu is considered less intelligent and less employable than one who speaks English. This system also disenfranchises people with limited access to formal education, pushing them to the periphery or political and economic circles. Like Memmi, Freire believes that the oppressed must first become aware of a limited situation to initiate a revolt to free themselves from oppression. However, he notes that an oppressor-oppressed system is usually set up so that the oppressed internalizes his oppression. Freire explains that over long periods of dehumanization and objectification, the oppressed adopts "the image and guidelines" of his oppressor and comes to fear liberation because his oppression is now part of his identity.

Africans suffer this very malaise, where the youth today associate borrowed first languages and mannerisms, including accents, with esteem, class, intelligence, and status. They conceive their mother languages as inferior and not worth learning, which is why a Kenyan who speaks multiple native languages will rarely tout themselves as multilingual. Yet speaking a foreign language like French is considered a significant source of pride and professional advantage. Freire advances that reviving and preserving one's identity is the only form of liberation that can sever the oppressor-oppressed relationship. He believes that liberation requires that the oppressed participate totally and reflectively in the education process. Notably, he suggests creating new roles – 'teacher-students' and 'student-teachers' – wherein all members of an oppressed community accept to learn from each other and consider each other's views when formulating curricula.

Drawing from this, I suggest that educational policies designed to revitalize African languages should: Be driven locally through community research and member participation; Involve collaborative learning, where older generations pass on language knowledge and younger generations make technology more palatable to their teachers; and, reflect on the social, political, and economic realities of the youth (students) and formulate educational policies that elevate mother languages without compromising the viability of the youth in political, social, and economic spaces.

Finally, this paper draws on Joshua Fisherman's Model for Language Revitalization to forward conditions that could help make mother languages more viable. Fisherman (1991) suggests that revitalization efforts should involve eight key steps: (1) Language acquisition by adults who then become teachers of the language - this is a viable option where many of the remaining speakers of a language are elderly and isolated; (2) Consolidation of active speakers into socially integrated populations, with an initial focus on the spoken language, not the written language; (3) Promotion of the informal use of language where efforts should be made to encourage communities that already speak the language to some degree to use it more regularly in their daily lives, including at home or in social situations with friends and family; (4) Encouraging language literacy where literacy efforts must be independent of state educational systems; (5) Promoting language use in state education where efforts are made to pass policies and provide resources for the compulsory use of mother languages in formal education; (6) Encouraging language use in the workplace to restore the economic and professional viability of mother languages; (7) Encouraging language use in mass media and local government services; and (8) Encouraging language use in government, higher education, and other state institutions. Basing my analysis on this model, I call for a community-first approach to language revitalization, elevating the position of the elderly as mother language disseminators. I argue that attitudinal changes must begin at the lowest tier of the community – the family – and make their way up the local community, elementary schools, and ultimately to universities, government, and mass media.

Language Revitalization: Shifting (New) Gears?

A language has been revitalized when the current generation of speakers actively uses it and transmits it to the next generation for posterity (Fishman, 2007; Hinton, 2011). We can revitalize the declining and extinct mother languages of Africa through the following steps:

Adopting Widespread and Unbiased Use of Technology

Despite its limitations, one would be remiss to discount technology's success in preserving indigenous languages. In January 2013, the BBC ran a story about the lost Pama-Nyungan language of Kaurna, which had been revived after years of extinction. Kaurna was initially spoken by the Aboriginal population of Australia's Adelaide Plains and was wiped out when colonizing powers replaced it with English (Mercer, 2013). The language's last native speaker died in 1929, essentially rendering Kaurna extinct. Decades later, researchers discovered "a definitive vocabulary of about 2,000 Kaurna words, around 200 translated sentences and key elements of grammar" curated by a team of German researchers in the 1800s (Mercer, 2013). The collection was sent to Adelaide, where close descendants of the original Kaurna speakers re-learned the language and now use it for ceremonial purposes like double naming and community events, with growing applications.

Garcia (2020) reasons that if an extinct language like Kaurna can be revived after decades of non-use and using documents from the 1800s, it should be much easier to revitalize declining mother languages using modern technology. Instead of a text-only collection of vocabulary, researchers and linguists could create complete repositories with audio files, pictures, video recordings, digital dictionaries, and more. Bird (2020) believes such a repository would make a welcome "point of access for learners." Galla (2009), in turn, suggests three access levels for digital language repositories. The first level, he says, should be uni-sensory and low technology so that learners can see or hear indigenous language input (p. 173). This can be achieved through audio files, printed materials like books, and on-screen texts like subtitles, blogs, and other digital documents. The second tier should be bisensory or mid-technology. It should allow the learner to see or hear indigenous language input and create input, such as through a mouse or keyboard (p.174). Examples of forms in this category include puzzle games in indigenous languages and native language keyboards. The final tier, Galla recommends, is multi-sensory and high technology, where the learner and the repository enjoy full interactivity (p. 175). This format could prove invaluable to researchers even centuries later.

These efforts could be effective in revitalizing Africa's mother languages. However, they fail to account for the bias rampant in the digital space that sees online language apps and repositories dominated by dominant languages like French, English, German, and Mandarin. This is why technology-centric efforts are only the first condition necessary for language revitalization.

Motivating the Youth to Learn Mother Languages

If technology has any chance of revitalizing declining mother languages, it needs to be accepted into and understood by African communities. This means not only the youth, who already display an affinity for technology and digital devices, but every member of society. Coronel-Molina (2019) affirms that a project is more likely to succeed if it involves a wide variety of participants, specifically members of the community for which the project is conceived. Therefore, provided there are technological means to preserve and disseminate mother languages, the next condition for revitalization is that there needs to be willing learners (Ray, 2014).

Because language is about people, a language is only alive when it is present in everyday culture, spoken by many, and passed on to the next generation. The reality, however, is that more and more youth in Africa today are not learning their mother languages. This is due to many reasons, and every case is different. It could be that they witnessed their parents or grandparents get punished for speaking their languages or that their mother language has been relegated to antiquity, only used in cultural ceremonies. It could also be a strategy to fit in with other young people across different ethnicities or a feeling that their mother language is economically worthless.

Galla (2018) believes that young speakers can become hesitant to learn and use their native languages in a tech-driven world where their language does not seem to hold value or status. This hesitance is usually caused by a loss of pride in a language that appears low-brow or useless in the modern world. In this case, using the very technology that incites these feelings to teach mother

languages is a good strategy. Onboarding mother languages onto online platforms can generate a sense of prestige in young speakers who get to see their language as relevant on familiar platforms (Soria, 2016; Karstens-Smith, 2018; Galla, 2018; Patton, 2018; Pine & Turin, 2017).

Yet this strategy alone assumes that a lack of online visibility is the only reason the youth today are not learning their mother languages. In reality, the situation is more complex. This is why measures should be taken to motivate and incentivize young people to learn their languages. In Japan, the concept of protest and resistance motivated the Ainu people to revive their language following the government's systemic devaluation of the language (Teeter et al., 2011). In Kenya, policies can be introduced to create new contexts where mother languages are relevant and viable. For instance, power players can introduce jobs and public positions requiring mother language proficiency.

Conducting Locally-Driven In-House Research

But even with the means to disseminate a dying language and willing learners, there needs to be a willing teacher to ensure the intergenerational transfer of mother languages. This requires us to delve into why parents and grandparents have stopped using and teaching their children their native languages. Like the youth, older generations may associate their native languages with shame, social inequality, and disenfranchisement. McHenry (2002) notes that it would be bizarre to expect a grandfather who was punished, even jailed, for speaking or writing in his language just a few decades ago to teach it to his grandchildren willingly or even want to preserve it.

Previously, outsider researchers and linguists have addressed this problem of reluctance on the part of indigenous communities to revive their own languages by running revitalization efforts themselves. Foreign researchers discovered The Kaurna language repository in Germany and repatriated it to Australia for revival. Yet Villa (2002) believes that this approach is faulty. Just as indigenous people may be reluctant to associate with a language that carries memories of shame and pain, they may be unwelcoming and even hostile to outsider researchers. The sentiment also exists that these researchers will leave once their research is done without offering any solutions to the community's problems.

This is why Villa (2002) suggests a more promising approach – bringing language revitalization and research efforts in-house. Villa believes that researchers should only provide the tools for revitalization and actively encourage older generations of speakers to take on the role of "teacher." The goal would not be to revive a language themselves but to empower community elders to find pride in their mother languages and pass it to newer generations to preserve centuries-old traditions and histories. The UN underscores this sentiment in Article 13 of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which says in part, "Indigenous peoples shall have the right to revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literatures" (UN, 2023).

Establishing Collaborative and Reciprocal Learning

With willing teachers, willing students, and a means to disseminate mother languages in tow, a successful revitalization project must ensure meaningful, positive, and ongoing interactions among the three. For the reasons already discussed herein, the youth are often hesitant to learn mother languages, and older generations may not possess the same affinity for technology as their children.

In African cultures, where social hierarchy places the parent ahead of the child, and in the modern context, where the youth feel a need to prove their independence, these shortcomings may cause a rift, with neither party wanting to show ignorance. This is where collaborative and reciprocal learning comes in. Researchers and linguists should create an environment of collaborative learning where the youth teach the elders to use technology as the elders pass on the language of the community.

This brings us back to Freire's Theory of Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1990) and his recommendation that the education landscape adopt new roles – student-teachers and teacher-students. These roles open the community to new points of view, where time spent together benefits all parties. In this case, the reciprocal relationship between the youth and the elders of a community would translate into an improved understanding of both technology and the native language. Thus, the technology we mentioned earlier will have achieved a critical condition for success – it will have involved a wide variety of participants from the subject community.

Implementing New Education Policies: Language Internationalization and Localization

Fisherman (1991) suggests that initial efforts to improve community language literacy should not be independent of state education and resources. However, once collaborative learning is established, revitalization efforts can be directed toward formal education. Colonization and globalization-driven imperialism have made education the preserve of dominating languages. The teaching of mother languages, where they exist, is often limited by factors such as inadequate proficient or trained teachers, a lack of textbooks, or teaching materials that depict indigenous cultures and languages stereotypically from the Western point of view (Galla, 2009). The problem is that many African countries lack comprehensive and well-articulated education policies that center indigenous languages. Indeed, many current policies are carry-overs from the colonial period and continue to emphasize Western languages (Spio-Garbrar, 2000).

Dirar (2000) recommends a solution where African governments pass policies that safeguard and promote the use of mother languages in education, writing, and publishing. Taiwan has led the charge on this by implementing policies for multilingual education. Lin (2021) assesses the efficacy of the new education model, which adopts an internationalization-localization format (Beaser, 2006; Sandel, 2003). Instructors internationalize English and teach it as a foreign language rather than the primary language of instruction. At the same time, they rework the curriculum so that it emphasizes the local language and history (Lin, 2021). The idea is to decenter foreign languages without abandoning them entirely because they maintain economic viability.

Igniting Political Revolution and Decolonization

Nevertheless, before any government can initiate new education policies, it must extricate itself from the systems and structures left over by colonizing powers. Leonard (2017) believes reviving a language is a "political act of decolonization." It is a means through which a people reclaim their national and cultural identity and affirm their right to self-determination.

Although many policies that endanger mother languages today are carried over from colonization, they continue to operate in the post-colonization era because political leaders and governments have failed to decolonize their ruling systems. Some changes have been made and even written into constitutions, yet Africa's languages continue to wither because there is zero implementation. In South Africa, for instance, linguistic rights designed to protect native languages and their speakers are enshrined in the South African Constitution (Act 108 of 1996). They, however, remain unenforced, and indigenous languages are undeveloped and endangered (Ngulube, 2012). Meanwhile, Afrikaans retains a dominating position in the language hierarchy of the country primarily due to policies put in place by the Afrikaner government that linger today.

MacSwan (2017) warns of the dangers of language hierarchy within a nation, explaining that when the government favors one language, it can be used to afford privilege to its speakers and stigmatize non-speakers economically, politically, and socially. Webb (2002) points to the problem as being rooted in a "lack of political will." Because while researchers, linguists, and community members may initiate and drive language revitalization efforts at the community level, the government has the most say on how mother languages are esteemed in the country. The government's lifting of the status of a language opens it up to writing, publishing, education, use in employment, and much more.

Adopting Mother Languages in Writing and Publishing

Finally, if the revitalization of mother languages is to succeed, the literary world must adopt mother languages as their primary mode of communication. This means journalists, newspaper publishers, media houses, radio hosts, and most importantly, writers and publishers. In the national and global knowledge chain, writers and publishers play the role of producing and distributing ideas. Ngulube (2012) believes this position makes them the most qualified to enact and support language revitalization efforts. In his view, the language that writers and publishers choose for their works is the language that remains alive in society.

The input of local writers in language education is invaluable. In Nunatsiavut, the Inuk people who are currently working to revitalize their language point to writers and publishers as the source of their current success. Children learning the language for the first time say they enjoy the process because the stories they read are "told and written by people they know or are even related to" (Dunbar et al.,

2009). Yet many writers and publishers shy away from using their mother languages. Makokha (2021) postulates that this might be due to the perception that rural populations are not interested in literature and that, even if they are, they can barely afford it. Also, that indigenous works are a niche market.

Much of this can be addressed through government policies that raise the prestige of mother languages and overturn the disenfranchisement of native speakers. Within the literary world, however, the answer may lie in what Ngugi wa Thiong'o refers to as "decolonizing the mind". There is an argument that literary efforts should serve a cultural purpose before an economic one. But even if we take into account that writing and publishing are economic endeavors, there is no reason writers cannot earn from indigenous works. The late Ngugi wa Thiong'o, who had a career spanning over six decades, is a world-renowned author and professor who has written solely in his native Gikuyu since 1967. Ngugi, widely regarded as East Africa's leading novelist, has produced world bestsellers like "*The Perfect Nine*," "*Wizard of the Crow*," and "*Petals of Blood*," which have been translated into over 100 languages (Kilolo, 2020; Jalada, 2016).

The solution lies first in intellectual stubbornness. Non-French-speaking readers had no business reading Victor Hugo's *Les Miserables* and would probably never have read it if someone had not translated it. Ngugi's books continue to be translated, with many of his titles available across the globe, even though he writes in a language that was considered inferior to British English not so long ago. Ngugi refuses to conform to the demands of globalization that expect him only to express himself in the "colonizers tongue."

Yet stubbornness counts for naught if Africa's mother languages are not esteemed the same as French and other dominant languages. This is why the change, in this case as well, must begin at the local level. The writer must decide that his native tongue is a rich and powerful tool through which he can express his ideas. He must then convince the local reader that said language has a place in literature. As the writer's audience grows within and beyond his community, so will the status of the language he uses.

Conclusion

Africa is one of the most linguistically diverse and complex landscapes in the world (Spencer, 1985). Home to thousands of languages, including 400 in Nigeria, 206 in Zaire, 92 in Ethiopia, 113 in Tanzania, and 21 in Sudan (Bamgbose, 1991), it is also the continent most at risk for language death. The impacts of globalization on the continent have combined with the far-reaching and lingering effects of decades of colonization to devalue and disenfranchise Africa's mother languages. And, as the dialects of our ancestors die away, so do our national and cultural identities, cultures, and histories.

The only strategy to reestablish Africa's linguistic wealth is mother language revitalization. But not just revitalization, but multifaceted community-first revitalization that centers indigenous peoples, their experiences, their futures, and their cultures. Rather than accept technology as a blanket solution to language death, the African continent must dissect all the factors that allow language death to continue and even accelerate decades after the fall of colonizing powers. Governments must root out lingering policies that shut out native speakers and native languages from governance, schools, and the workplace.

Meanwhile, culture experts must reignite within the community a motivation to learn, preserve, and use mother languages. They must help older generations shed the shame and trauma that once came with speaking mother languages and direct younger generations towards a place of pride in the African identity. Educators must then bridge the gap through collaborative learning and empower the youth to deliver technology to the elderly and the elderly to transmit language knowledge to the youth. All of these efforts must be conducted with the understanding that culture sharing, as made possible by globalization, should never mean the dominance of one culture or language over another. And that, in Ngugi wa Thiongo's words, "no language is superior to another."

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