

Teaching Shona In English/Shona: Ideological Challenges And Implications-Whither UZ & MASU?

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates ideological challenges and implications associated with two models in the teaching and learning of Shona at university level. The UZ¹ model involves the use of English as a medium of instruction for Shona courses while MASU² pedagogy employs Shona for the same purpose. Both approaches raise fundamental pedagogical and linguistic issues conceptualized within the framework of broad diglossia, functionalist and bilingual education perspectives. Data was gathered through participant observation, interviews and questionnaires. Proponents in favour of Shona argue that it is a carrier of culture, pride, consciousness, value systems, fosters a participatory approach to development and offers a window for decolonization and total emancipation. Those in favour of English highlight its expressiveness and utility in the global context. However, it is argued that all languages are equally expressive and as such Shona can be used for pedagogical purposes at any level of education. At the moment, researchers, policy makers and other relevant stakeholders should make concerted efforts in language planning, curricular designing and policy formulation in order to empower indigenous languages and hence indigenous people, their value systems and developmental potential.

Introduction

Bilingual and multilingual contexts, a legacy of colonialism have presented multifarious challenges in terms of identifying language(s) to use for teaching and learning purposes.

In the African situation, Nigeria and Tanzania have made phenomenal strides in addressing the challenges through the use of indigenous languages in academic and professional contexts. The same though, cannot be said about many other African

¹ UZ stands for the University of Zimbabwe specifically the Departments of African Languages and Literature and that of Curriculum and Arts Education.

² MASU refers to Masvingo State University particularly the Languages and Education Departments.

countries including Zimbabwe, which are still haunted by this daunting linguistic problem characterized by ideological setbacks.

Zimbabwe's linguistic profile as enunciated by Hachipola (1998) reveals that:

- . English – official language
- . Shona and Ndebele – national languages
- . Shangani/Changani, Venda, Kalanga, Nambya and Tonga- five officially recognized indigenous languages.
- . Chichewa- the only officially recognized migrant language
- . Sotho, Chikunda, Sena, Xhosa, Tonga (Mudzi), Barwe, Hwesa and Tshwawo(Koisian)- other minority languages.

Interestingly, there is no official (government) language policy, that is, no de jure language policy. Consequently, English remains the predominant language of function in government, commerce, education and so on.

Despite the worrisome scenario befalling indigenous languages depicted above, attempts have been made to address the language situation in Zimbabwe. For instance, the National Cultural Policy of 1996 simply noted that Zimbabwe's indigenous languages constitute a rich linguistic and literary heritage for all people and should provide fertile ground for enhancing national understanding. It also spelt out that research will be carried out in indigenous languages so that dictionaries, textbooks and literary works as well as scientific and technological works are available in these languages. What emerges from all this is that the cultural policy reflects awareness on the part of policy makers and

relevant stakeholders on the fact that real development in Zimbabwe is possible only on condition that indigenous languages are given centre stage. However, this proclamation does not amount to a comprehensive language policy as it fails to define the status of all the languages in use in Zimbabwe and does not make specific provision for language use, development and use in crucial sectors such as education, law and media.

There was also the Intergovernmental Conference of Ministers on Language Policies in Africa hosted by UNESCO in Harare in 1997 which culminated in the setting up of the National Language Policy Advisory Panel (NLPAP). The conference resulted in the Harare Declaration where all participants expressed commitment to ethno-linguistic pluralism, peaceful co-existence, active participation of all citizens in all institutions, promotion and preservation of an African identity and enhancement of scientific and technological discourse in national languages. From this conference there emerged an unequivocal commitment to raising the status and usage of indigenous languages among the delegates who included researchers, academics, policy makers and politicians.

In education, English continues to be the dominant language as exemplified by the Education Act of 1987, as amended in 1990. It stipulates that,

1. ...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 sub-section (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 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 sub-section (1), (2) and (3).

The Education Act highlights the primacy of English in the education system. More significantly, it does not clearly provide for the status of indigenous languages beyond the fourth grade. Clearly, it can be argued that the glaring lack of a clear-cut language policy has created a state of confusion in the Education system with respect to which medium to use when teaching and learning indigenous languages particularly from the upper Secondary to Higher Education levels. On a related issue, Chiwome and Thondhlana (1990) observe that, generally some teachers prefer to use English in the teaching and learning of Shona, whilst, when given a choice, some students prefer to write their Shona essays in English. Some informants argue that the lack of a clear policy has seen some educationists preferring to use English when teaching grammar courses whilst Shona/Ndebele literature is taught using the respective indigenous language particularly at 'A' level.

What spurred this research is the realization that about fifteen years after the findings by Chiwome and Thondhlana (ibid), even universities have not yet reached a consensus as to which medium to use when teaching African languages. They seem to be groping in the dark. Specifically, the researchers were intrigued by the situation obtaining at the UZ where lectures in Shona courses are conducted in English while at MASU the medium of instruction for similar courses is Shona. Therefore, in this paper the researchers critically analyse the implications of the two models and, on the basis of scholarly input, advance some recommendations. It is hoped that such recommendations would be used by

relevant stakeholders to rationalize this linguistic problem bedeviling even institutions of higher learning about twenty five years after the attainment of independence.

To achieve the above, the organization of this study is as follows; firstly, there is presentation of the analytical framework which broadly revolves around Broad diglossia, Functionalist and Bilingual education perspectives. Secondly, the paper characterizes the data demonstrating fully the elicitation methods adopted. Thirdly, there is presentation of findings and discussion. Finally, the paper draws up a concise recommendations and conclusion.

Theoretical Framework

Broadly, this research falls within the sociolinguistic framework which is a perspective that views language use in relation to the socio-cultural values (Fasold, 1990).

Institutions of higher teaching and learning are a microcosm of the broad Zimbabwean community. Zimbabwe's language situation, unique in some respects, generally represents the situation in many Southern African countries. In particular, the broad diglossia notion characterizes the case of different languages existing in a speech community with each language having a definite role to play. In practical terms, English enjoys a diglossic relationship with the indigenous official national languages, that is Shona and Ndebele notwithstanding the trilingual constitutional provision that any one of these three official languages can be used anywhere in Zimbabwe. In other words, English is the H-variety whereas Shona and Ndebele occupy the L-variety slot. Therefore, the Zimbabwean language situation is somewhat confused and confusing due

to diglossia. Little wonder then that educationists at the micro-level are seemingly in a quandary viz Shona or English?

Dell Hymes, a sociolinguist of the ethnography of speaking tradition, elaborated the ‘functionalist’ model which offers a refreshing sociolinguistic perspective regarding motivation for the choices speakers make in terms of the back and forth movements across languages within bilingual contexts. The model is taxonomy of ‘hierarchically structured’ functions with referential, expressive, directive, metalinguistic, poetic and phatic paradigms. Referential function addresses issues related to **topic** where deficiencies noticeable in a particular language are covered for by the other language thus highlighting the interdependent relationship between languages. The expressive function revolves around **speaker’s** feelings, attitudes or thoughts about a given language relation to the other. In this case there is a feeling that one language is more expressive than the other to the extent of according it a status symbol instead of regarding it as a mere communication tool. Our universities could be caught up in this cobweb. The directive function foregrounds the **receiver** in the sense of being the target of commands or instructions in a communicative act. In essence, one medium of instruction is considered more ideal for this function than the other. The metalinguistic function deals with the **code** itself whereas displaying the creative capacity in a speech act falls within the realm of the poetic function. Finally, the model covers the poetic dimension which is concerned with the establishment of contact between participants in a communicative content. The language merely keeps the social wheels turning.

Bilingualism is a real phenomenon in former colonial contexts. To this extent, some scholars advocate a harmonious or peaceful co-existence between colonial and indigenous languages inculcated through the notion of bilingual education. According to Hamers and Blanc (1992:189) bilingual education describes, "...any system of school education in which at a given time and for a varying amount of time, simultaneously or consecutively, instruction is planned and given in at least two languages." The current researchers vigorously probe this liberal approach as it seeks a way forward in so far as the Zimbabwean language situation is concerned. At the moment it suffices to point out that the liberal approach advocates an anarchical pedagogical environment with respect to language use at university level of education. A deliberate policy of promoting bilingualism can rationalize the models in the institutions identified subsequently providing a panacea to the linguistic problem besetting the institutions of higher learning.

Methodology

The data gathering process spanned over a period of fifteen weeks (one semester) at the UZ in the department of African languages and Literature, and MASU's department Languages and Education. This study is both rationalist and empirical in the sense that it is a confirmation of theoretical foundations and exploratory since data was collected from informants. The two institutions have fully fledged African languages programmes which can be taken to be representative of other universities where African languages are on offer.

Data gathering was done mainly by four research assistants (two per institution) identified well before the commencement of this research. They were all undergraduate students registered for some of the African languages courses in their degree programmes. Inevitably, the basic research instrument they used was direct observation strongly recommended by Robson (1993:189) thus, “ To find out what people do in public use direct observation.” A lecture room is a microcosm of society with important communication processes encountered in day to day existence. There was a need to watch what the lecturers and students did and more significantly, what they said. Observation as a technique provides for this directness and is a natural way of collecting information. Direct observation is considered an appropriate technique for getting at real life in the real world and lacks artificiality which is common with the other techniques (Robson, *ibid*). Since research assistants from both institutions were studying some of the courses in Shona, they were also participant observers who not only assumed a physical presence but also established some role within their groups. Thus, they were in a natural environment where they did not feel intimidated and inhibited. The researchers avoided participant observation since they were mindful of the fact that an observer affects the situation under observation thus making the group do something in a different way to please or placate the important observer. In any case there was no need to duplicate assistant researcher’s effort that was also better placed.

Two sets of heterogeneous questionnaires were developed and administered to students and lecturers. There were 100 and 48 student respondents from UZ and MASU respectively. Variations in terms of sample size were determined by enrolment statistics

where the former grossly outnumbers the other institution. There were ten lecturers who responded to the questionnaires from the UZ while MASU had five respondents.

Questionnaires were complemented by interviews which were administered only to lecturers. Assistant researchers administered the structured interview while the researchers engaged in semi-structured interviews with selected professional colleagues in both institutions. A combination of the two research instruments was able to generate data on what the participants thought, felt and believed about the subject matter. The major problem though was some did not provide adequate information demanded particularly by lecturers who claimed to be overwhelmed by other commitments.

This being case study findings can be applied to appropriate contexts. In this regard, the researchers take a cue from Noam Chomsky who proposed linguistic universals on the basis on the basis of limited data on English. In any case the quantity of data needed in a representative research remains unclear.

Data analysis is mainly qualitative. The qualitative paradigm provides for conclusions drawn from recurrent patterns observed. Apart from being hypothesis-generating, it is descriptive in nature. The descriptive thrust makes it possible to generalise, thus Leedy (1997: 107) observes, “By observing the specifics of a situation qualitative researcher hope to increase their understanding of the broader phenomenon of which the situation is an instance....”

Findings and Discussion

The UZ Model

Lecturers' Perspectives

Responses from seven UZ lecturers in the Department of African Languages and Literature reveal that English is the pedagogical language used to develop course outlines conduct lectures, tutorials, setting and marking exams, giving feedback on student's assignments and consultations. However, three lecturers from the department of Curriculum and Arts Education's responses show a transitional period whereby both Shona and English are used for pedagogical purposes to both undergraduate and post-graduate students. Lecturers from these departments gave similar reasons concerning the language used for academic purposes. The reasons for using English were given as follows:

1. The reference material is in English hence it makes it difficult to use Shona.
2. Lack of literary terminology in Shona.
3. English is more expressive than Shona.
4. English has a wide vocabulary.
6. Love for English.

There are two issues that arise from point number one. Firstly, the respondents appear to reflect either lack of translation skills or a positive attitude on the same. Secondly, the respondents either seem to be unaware or indifferent to a sizable amount of resource materials written in Shona on the subject. In reality though, the statement renders itself fallacious in that there is abundant literature in Shona which can be used to teach Shona courses throughout the education system. Similarly, points 2 and 4 are not sustainable since they overlook the existence of a number of both bilingual and monolingual dictionaries in Shona. For instance, Chimhundu, H. etal. (1996) and (2001), Duramanzwi ReChiShona and Duramanwi Guru ReChiShona (Monolingual) respectively, provide a corpus that adequately addresses the quest for terminology for use in academia. There is also Mpfu's (2004), Duramanzwi Reurapi neUtano (A Dictionary of Medical Terms) which complements the terminology aspect with reference to medical issues.

Arguments in Favour of Shona

Lecturers' submissions in favor of Shona are as follows:

7. It is best to teach a language in that language for sociological and psychological reasons.
8. Existence of adequate reference materials in Shona.
9. Shona is an embodiment of culture.
10. Teaching Shona in Shona enhances preservation of the language.

Proponents of this perspective constitute an Afrocentric group that can best be treated together with the MASU model in favour of indigenous languages. In addition, these

views are analysed within the contexts of diglossia and the functionalist model together with points 2 and 4 above.

Students Perspectives

Students' respondents and interviewees from U Z maintained that English is used to write assignments and in consultations. However, some of the respondents indicated that both Shona and English are used in peer preparations for assignments, tutorials and examinations. The reasons given cascade into a three fold division of those who outrightly endorse the use of Shona in all facets of its learning and teaching and another group which prefers to use English whilst the last group advocates for a more liberal approach where both Shona and English can be used interchangeably.

Advocates for the use of Shona are adherents of the Afrocentric approach which sees merit in using African languages for instructional purposes. This approach, popularized by scholars such as Ngugi waThiongo (1981, 1987), Awoniyi (1982) and Freire (1972) generally propound that Africans in independent African states, are in constant struggle with vicissitudes of colonialism which they should persistently ward off from their midst through a systematic process of conscientisation by way of a vigorous pursuance of cultural programmes of socialization embedded in African languages. These proponents view African languages as means to empowerment and total emancipation of African people – a tool for liberation. To this extent, respondents argued that Shona is their mother tongue which is an embodiment of their culture, knowledge and value systems whose preservation partly lies in harnessing it for pedagogical purposes. Further, such

responses also indicated the general awareness among some students and teaching staff that as their mother tongue, Shona bequeaths them with an identity clearly endangered by other identities associated with a multi-cultural environment dominated by western values and sensibilities dominated by English. As noted earlier, in Zimbabwe, English is a prestigious language variety that enjoys an official language status hence the use of indigenous languages has potential to reverse the status quo.

The researchers noted that of the respondents in favour of Shona four answered the questionnaires in Shona. This is testimony of a passion for the mother tongue. However, it was noted that they were faced with serious linguistic challenges reflected in their failure to find Shona equivalents for terms like, *comments*, *lectures* and *university*. Their language was also characterized by code-switching. This failure to use fluent Shona to communicate reflects what can be perceived to be a general inability of students who learn Shona in English. It amounts to a linguistic problem created by pedagogy.

Respondents in favour of the use of English as the language of instruction in Shona courses at UZ cited its expressiveness even in the context of teaching and learning of African languages. They pointed out that Shona is handicapped for it is not in use as a medium for wider communication particularly in professional circles. At international level, they proceed to argue, English is the appropriate medium.

The respondents upholding the view which integrates the two languages might have been influenced by literature on politics of language in bilingual societies. Naturally, they

claim that both English and Shona should perform complementary roles in Higher Education. Like some of their lecturers, they noted that Shona does not have sufficient vocabulary for use in academic discourse. Areas like phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax and theories of literature, the respondents stressed, do not have standardized Shona terminology with which they can be taught. Thus, it is in such areas where the target respondents felt English can be used. However, it suffices to mention that such respondents should be exposed to the available literary sources given above. The researchers note that these were apostles of pragmatism who seem to be infatuated by the need to use anything that works irrespective of other ideological undercurrents associated with such posturing. In addition, adoption of this approach would be in line with the Language Transferability Theory propounded by Williams and Snipper (1990). The theory observes that languages have a common underlying proficiency which makes it possible to transfer concepts from one language to the other. However, this ideological posturing is fraught with numerous shortcomings notably its insensitivity to the cultural variable critical for decolonization and emancipation of individuals from the yoke of eurocentricism.

The MASU Model

Lecturers' Perspectives

Five lecturers from MASU responded to interviews and questionnaires. With the exception of one, all arguments raised were in favour of the use of Shona. Such views seemed to overlap with those raised on number 7 to 10 by their counterparts at UZ.

However, they raised the following additional points:

11. Indigenous languages facilitate communication with the grassroots on developmental issues;
12. To complement government effort in nation building through the promotion of indigenous culture;
13. It inculcates a sense of pride.

The researchers noted that two of the respondents used flawless Shona which is indicative of their passion for the language and the cultural values espoused. This demonstrates that like any other language, Shona is capable of expressing its environment. From the points raised one notes the existence of a symbiotic relationship between language and development. This argument can be sustained since in countries like Malaysia, Bahasa Malaysia, an indigenous official language, has been associated with developmental processes. The point of pride raised is critical for Zimbabwe where indigenous people need to shake off the shackles of colonialism by taking pride in their culture and languages. Scholars have argued that individuals can only reach the self actualization stage through their mother tongue. Sure and Webb (2000) observe that a person trained in his/her own mother tongue is likely to have a positive self image.

The only respondent with a different perspective posited:

“Though language is an expression of one’s identity, we are now living in a global village. There is need for us to acknowledge and accept that we are now a hybrid of different cultures. Let’s now accept the language of the international community in whatever we do for our products (students) to be marketable our university is not training students just for the local market which is as well hybrid, but for the international community as well. Let’s not be cheated into blindly following Ngugis’ and Bolekaja’s rhetoric on language issues yet these proponents of the idea of promoting local languages in universities are themselves beneficiaries of the systems they are criticizing. These proponents are living in the States.”

The respondent bemoans what s/he perceives as hypocrisy shrouding the campaign for institutionalization of the indigenous languages in academia. However, in doing so s/he reflects worrisome identity crisis typifying one transformed by a well calculated dosage of the colonial education system still in operation in university education. Thus, s/he commits a fallacy of relevance by viewing the language for global communication (English) as sacrosanct. The researchers advise that the use of Shona for instructional purposes in Shona courses at university level is by no means a handicap for purposes of communication at international fora. This is so because, apart from the communication skills course in English offered to undergraduate students in the two universities, all students who qualify for university education in Zimbabwe should have demonstrated proficiency in English. Therefore the issue of inadequacy in terms of communication in whichever context becomes a nullity.

Student's Perspectives

Students at MASU concurred that Shona is used to teach, consult, formulate assignment and examination questions, give feedback and design course outlines. They also noted that reference materials are in both Shona and English. Students proceeded to argue that they do not experience any problems in translating information from materials that are written in English noting that it is a pleasant academic experience. Whilst questionnaires were deliberately administered in English (to suit the purposes of this research in which English is used as a medium of communication), 46 respondents used English and 2 used Shona. It is however noted that the target population unanimously supported the use of Shona for instructional purposes as currently obtaining at their institution. In addition, the arguments raised by the students are similar to those offered by lecturers and students who are in favour of the use of Shona for teaching and learning purposes.

From the two models, there emerge two ideological positions wherein on one hand proponents of the use of Shona - the decolonizing crusade, seem not only to be advocating for the use of the language in academia but in all facets of socio-economic life as a substitute for English. In principle, they are clamoring for an equal functional status of languages in the context of broad diglossia. On the other divide are advocates for the use of English who strongly view it as the H- variety, the language for education, employment and international communication. The latter typify products of an education system about which Ngugi (1981:5) writes:

This had one aim: to make a child despise his language, hence the values carried by that language, and by implication despise his language, hence the values

carried by that language, and by implication despise himself and the people who spoke a language which now was the cause of his humiliation and corporal punishment.

This depicts the colonial education system as a well calculated strategy of inculcating western sensibilities to the subjugated at the expense of indigenous knowledge systems. Since the Zimbabwean system has not fundamentally changed in terms of orientation, the UZ model is a reflection of this scenario. However, the MASU model is understood in the context of education for liberation about which there is a complete individual who is not only obsessed with his/her language and culture, a source of pride, but also conscious of imperialist machinations and neocolonial forces of domination, exploitation and repression.

Respondents who had reservations about the MASU model raised concerns mainly revolving around point 3. They maintained, without providing examples, that there are certain ‘things’ which cannot be easily expressed in Shona. One of these even noted that English is clear, precise and to the point. They also noted that Shona does not have adequate lexical items. However, given the arbitrary nature of language it follows that any language is capable of expressing reality in any environment. In addition, just like English which expanded its lexicon through borrowing from languages like Latin, French, Greek and German, Shona has equal potential. To reinforce this view Finegan (1994), maintains that any language can assimilate an infinite range of vocabulary from other languages through the processes of remorphologising and rephonologising. This implies that for any language to function effectively in the context of globalization

adaption and adoption of lexical items from other languages is inevitable. Thus, the functionalist model should be viewed in the light of an interdependent relationship of languages in which all languages are endowed with the referential, expressive, directive and other functions.

The arguments above have implication for a positive direction for bilingual education at university level in Zimbabwe. This is against the backdrop of two positions given by some respondents thus:

14. Grammar related assignments are better written in English than Shona.

15. Literature courses are better written in Shona than English.

The polarization reflected in the points above can be harmonized if both lecturers and students become creative. Creativity enables them to find linguistic equivalents of English in Shona through translation. Already a lot of work on corpus development has been done by researchers at the African Languages Research Institute which can be used to teach and learn indigenous languages.

Recommendations and Conclusion

It has been demonstrated in this paper that UZ and MASU offer distinct models in the teaching of Shona. The models viewed within the framework of broad diglossia, functionalist paradigm and bilingual education; bring to the fore interesting observations relating to the following:

- a. The need to formulate a comprehensive national language policy which takes into account the use of indigenous languages in tertiary education.
- b. The need to foster participatory approach to development through a language that inculcates a positive self image and pride.
- c. The realization that there is need to bolster dynamism, creativity and innovation in the teaching and learning of indigenous languages.
- d. Educational planners in liaison with policy makers should invest in lexicography work, translation materials production and bilingual education training.

It suffices to conclude that both models reflect the centrality of a complementary approach in the use of English and indigenous languages for pedagogical purposes in university education in Zimbabwe in view of the fact that all languages have sufficient ground to deliver. This approach would facilitate effective participation of African languages graduates both at the local and global contexts.

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