

ABSTRACT

A Critical Evaluation of the Development of Rumanyo as a National Language in Namibia

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Among others, the current study had been conceived due to the fact that, although Namibia is endowed with multiple languages, their development throughout the long colonial history, had been unequal. That is, some languages received more attention than others and some were hardly developed at all. After independence, Namibians had legitimate expectations that all their (different) languages would be developed equitably throughout all the regions, and among all ethnic groups or speech communities. In the post-apartheid era, however, Namibians have been subjected to a limited and unequal language and literacy development which encouraged me to conduct a study to critically evaluate the development of Rumanyo or lack of thereof.

The focus of the current study is on understanding the disparities in language and literacy development in Namibia with particular emphasis on ethno-regional disparities and what precipitates these inequalities. The reason for the emphasis on region and ethnicity in researching language and literacy development was due to Namibia's multi-ethnicity and the over-lapping of regions and ethnic groups. The study was directed by the following objectives:

1. To investigate the patterns of language use of selected 'Rumanyo-speakers' and key stakeholders;
2. To determine the applicability of the notion of 'mother tongue', given the history of Rumanyo and the effects of socio-economic mobility due to globalisation;
3. To examine the status of Rumanyo in the face of English hegemony and other ('well-established') Namibian languages in education as well as other spheres of interaction;

4. To determine the extent to which the two speech communities, that is, the Vagciriku and Vashambyu, participate in the development and promotion of Rumanyo;
5. To critique the dominant paradigms in vogue, including the linguistic human rights paradigm, which seek to promote indigenous African languages as autonomous systems;
6. To investigate the attitudes and the language ideologies of selected 'Rumanyo-speakers' and key stakeholders;
7. To establish the prospects and challenges for the development of Rumanyo or lack of it, and recommend viable ways of promoting indigenous African languages in Africa.

Drawing on language practices, orthographic conventions in place and language policies in southern Africa, the current study looks at the challenges and possibilities of orthographic harmonisation and reforms allowing for translinguistic mobility across ethnicity, regional and national borders. This calls for a different theorisation around language policy, and for orthographies that will account for current language practices, and translocations and diasporic nature of late modern life styles. Due to socio-economic mobility and massive migration of people across regional, national and ethnolinguistic boundaries, orthographic reforms and language planning and policies premised on autonomous and bounded language systems, and on the rural monoglot speaker, are bound to be irrelevant and inadequate to account for plurilingual experiences and practices of late modern Africans (Banda, 2016).

Following recent conceptualisation of language as a social practice, in which languages are not seen as countable and autonomous systems (Heller, 2007; Makoni & Pennycook, 2007; Pennycook, 2010), and particularly translanguaging as pedagogic discourse (García, 2009, 2014; García & Wei, 2014; Williams, 1994), the study critiques the notion of 'mother tongue' considering recent studies that champion multilingualism rather than singular mother tongues.

I conducted this study using the qualitative research methodology and a triangulation process in order to take advantage of the multiple systems of data collection. Employing documentary analysis, group discussions, questionnaires as well as structured and unstructured interviews with various stakeholders, the study presents an account of the state of the development of Rumanyo in particular, and other African languages in Namibia and Africa generally. Furthermore, the document analysis involved the Namibian Constitution, Language Policy and National Curriculum for Basic Education. I analysed these documents to establish

to what extent they supported or hindered the development of Rumanyo. An analysis of the language policy, the national curriculum and other relevant documents provided information on the efficacy of the language planning process in Namibia. Using questionnaires, I also explored the attitudes towards the development of Rumanyo among end-users of Rumanyo, to be precise, high school learners, and teachers who were by then based in the Kavango Region.

Purposive sampling was used to delineate the main population, viz. members of the two speech communities (Vagciriku and Vashambyu). The teachers' sample was obtained using judgemental sampling, while the learners' sample came from stratified sampling. Samples were identified for interviews and questionnaires. The main focus areas are highlighted within the study. Topical reflections on each of these areas are integrated with relevant national and international literature on language policy and planning, language and literacy development and the role of government and different speech communities in language policy formulation. Data were analysed using qualitative data analysis techniques looking for naturally occurring units and reducing them to natural meaning to check for regular patterns of events and themes.

Furthermore, the research site for the current study was the Kavango (East) Region where most Rumanyo 'speakers' are located. Due to language planning which strongly informs language development in Namibia, especially in the sphere of education, a decision had been made that the two closely related 'languages', namely Rugciriku and Rushambyu should be blended together to form a 'unified language', in this case Rumanyo. This study has therefore been particularly designed to explore the development of Rumanyo or lack thereof, in the face of English hegemony, and the preference given to other ('well-established') Namibian languages.

After examining data from various sources, it became clear that language and literacy development in Namibia generally occurs through the use of a singular language be it through the use of English or 'mother tongue', which is tantamount to multiple monolingualisms. The study therefore consolidates the recent sociolinguistic theoretical position that advocates the use of at least two or even three languages as media of instruction, which is tantamount to multiple multilingualisms. In this manner, the current study adds to recent sociolinguistic theorising calling for a paradigm shift concerning language and literacy development in Africa.

Due to the continuing dominance of essentialising assumptions and ideologies, which inform language and literacy development in Africa, the current study proposes new African contextually-based paradigms for the development of African languages in Africa generally, and Namibia in particular. Primarily focusing on language and literacy development, the study offers specific proposals for addressing issues of language policy and planning throughout Africa, and Namibia in particular. Using the situation of Rumanyo as a case study, the study suggests a new model of language development – a model, which I believe, will enable Africa generally, and Namibia in particular, to harness its multilingual resources for accelerated and sustainable socio-cultural, economic and technological development in the 21st century.

The study therefore recommends language planning and policy in the Namibian context which focuses on the revitalisation of neglected and marginalised languages in Namibia, such as Ju/'hoansi, Rumanyo, Thimbukushu, and so on. This is unlike the current language planning and policy which have created a social structuring in which the more socio-economically empowered Namibian languages such as Afrikaans, English, German, Oshikwanyama, Oshindonga, Otjiherero, Rukwangali, Silozi, and so forth, receive preferential treatment.

Moreover, this study suggests the modification of the syllabuses and curricula to account for multilingual practices of the learners. In terms of classroom practice, there is a need to move it away from English monolingual discourse practices to bring it into closer alignment with the multilingual discourse practices in which Namibian learners are allowed to use their linguistic repertoires, through translanguaging (García, 2009), in their discursive practices.

The findings of this study contributes to language education and policy scholarship in Namibia, and Africa generally by seeing language not as an autonomous system but rather as a social practice (Pennycook, 2007; Heller, 2007, 2010; Makoni & Pennycook, 2007; García, 2009). The current study also contributes to our understanding of identity as a performative act which is actively negotiated and renegotiated as people interact in various social contexts. Last but not least, the study calls for reconsideration of our conceptualisation of language and bi-/multilingualism in view of late modern (linguistic) practices (Banda, 2009b, Mambwe, 2014).