



## The hegemony of the English language and the plight of African languages: towards linguistic revolution

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### Abstract

The elevation of African languages into official status with English and Afrikaans in South Africa was meant to redress linguistic imbalances of the past. The past linguistic imbalances negatively affected mother tongue speakers of African languages. This article highlights the gravity of this imbalance from a general linguistic perspective, demonstrating how the hegemony of English continues to downplay the efforts of developing African languages for African children's epistemic access and educational success. Among the challenges in developing African languages into the same status as English are the globalisation imperatives that are set to counter the project of decolonisation. Although there has been linguistic resistance, it has not contributed to the elevation and development of African languages. The theoretical underpinnings of the arguments in this paper are located in the critical approach. The critique is mounted not only on the hegemonic presence of the English language but on the failure of resistance to depose that hegemony and to elevate the position of African languages as viable languages of intellectual pursuit. This article therefore proposes linguistic revolution as a solution to the plight of African languages.

**Keywords:** African languages; linguistic decoloniality; epistemic access; globalisation; social language construction

### Introduction

South Africa has had her share of linguistic resistance. The 1976 student uprisings saw the dethronement of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in favour of English. After the fall of apartheid, linguistic resistance continued to call for predominantly Afrikaans schools to cater for English speaking students most of whom are Africans. In both these situations, the Africans have been in the forefront, implicitly calling for English. Whilst the downside of these resistances is apparent, in the fact that Africans were supposed to resist in favour of the elevation of African languages, Akpome (2017), for instance, reduces such calls into a neurosis. His thoughts are similar to those propagated by Foley (2015) whose pessimism dismisses the project of elevating African languages into viable media of instruction. They argue that the position of English is not to be questioned as English has successfully established itself as the global language. They see very little sense in advocating for the use of African

languages as media of instruction; as languages of science and commerce; as languages of the media and the judiciary. For them, the status of English at present is a natural phenomenon, forgetting that the expansion of the English language was facilitated by the project of colonialism and presently continues to be buttressed by the globalisation agenda. In fact, one of the reasons why insistence on the call for the utility of African languages is dubbed a neurosis, is because the beneficiaries of English believe it is not the language per se that characterises a colonised mind but the ideological lineage towards the Western thought and intellectual tradition. The paradox is that language is the vehicle through which these ideologies are propagated, understood and utilised. This means that as long as dependence is on the English language; the Anglo-Saxon pattern of thought is bound to persist. On the other hand, the utility of African languages would promote not only the linguistic repertoire of African origin but will further promote African epistemology.

Therefore, the argument that this paper raises is that the promotion of African languages cannot be addressed without acknowledging and revolting against the hegemony of the English language. It argues that the most fertile field for decolonisation is the minds of academics whose ethos has been captured by the Western ontology in the guise of English language. It further advocates that the passion and pragmatism in the promotion and utility of African languages lie in linguistic revolution. As basis of this argument, it is imperative to first locate language as a fundamental human phenomenon.

### ***Language as a Natural Phenomenon***

Every human being is endowed with the ability to learn a language naturally (Crystal, 2012). Children pick up a language from their surroundings which forms part of their interaction with their environment. Even though animals communicate differently from human beings, they also naturally develop their unique system of communication (Aitchison, 2011). This means the survival of a living creature, be it human or otherwise, is dependent on the communication system which is developed naturally. This natural development levels the playing field for every creature. In that way, there is no creature that is set at an advantage but all have their own communicative ability. Language endowment can be explained in terms of naturalness as explained in language acquisition device and social construction, of which a brief discussion follows.

### ***Language Acquisition Device***

To illustrate this equality, I shall refer to Chomsky's theory of Universal Grammar (UG) (Fromkin, Rodman & Hyams, 2014). According to this theory, every child is endowed with an innate ability to acquire a language – some kind of grammar framework that a child uses to learn a new language. Through UG, a child is able to acquire any language that exists in his or her immediate environment. In fact, the tool that allows the child to decipher the language that he or she is born into is termed Language Acquisition Device (LAD) (Crystal, 2012).

The term 'acquisition' is preferred to 'learning' because the latter presupposes the presence of a teacher (Crystal, 2012). Although the

significance of parents and significant others to provide the linguistic input that would facilitate the child's acquisition of language is acknowledged, such input is not regarded as teaching per se, which is reserved for formal situations such as school. Nonetheless, there is a very thin line between the two because when an individual uses a language, especially a second language, it cannot be seen whether such use is a product of learning or acquisition.

LAD is based on the biological endowment common to all Homo sapiens. This biological endowment refers to the parts of the brain, Broca's area and Wernicke's area, that have been identified as responsible for language acquisition (Fromkin, Rodman & Hyams, 2014). It is in these areas that the LAD is located. The emphasis on this facility in the brain of every child means that first and foremost, language exists in the brain of individuals in the same measure across Homo sapiens. This explanation has come to be known as nativist approach because it emphasises innateness (Crystal, 2012).

### ***Social Construction of Language***

However, critics of the nativist approach to language acquisition emphasise that language is a social construction. Some of this criticism can be attributed to De Saussure (De Saussure, 1959; Holdcroft, 1991) who defined language as a system of signs. These signs cannot be altered by an individual but seem to operate in some kind of agreement within the speech community. However, there remains another complexity in the signs in that they are arbitrary. According to De Saussure (1959), the linguistic sign unites the concept with the sound image. But the main question is whether the speech community has any direct responsibility in the linking of the sound image with the concept. Studies in euphemism seem to suggest that the speech community somehow controls the concepts linked to the sound image (Uzdu Yıldız, 2021). In English for instance, words of Anglo-Saxon origin that refer to sexual organs are vulgarised and replaced with those of Latin origin that are deemed more polite and civil (Fowler & Fowler, 1974). In isiZulu, the hlonipha ('respect') custom of avoiding certain words as a way of respecting either persons or objects that the word points at suggests that the

speech community has some control over the concepts linked to the sound image.

Perhaps the strong argument relating to the interference of the speech community in language construction has to do with language standardisation. In British English for instance, ‘r’ is dropped in pronouncing words such as ‘car’, ‘barn’, ‘card’ etc. but is retained in some rural dialects (Fromkin et al., 2014). On the other hand, the retaining of ‘r’ in pronouncing the same words in American Standard English is associated with prestige, which interestingly has not always been the case. In this way, the speech community does not only construct the language but by implication the people who speak it. Furthermore, the phenomena of diglossia and polyglossia therefore would be a social construction where either within the same language variety or across languages, the speech community attaches high prestige to one higher (or ‘H’) variety and low prestige to another (‘L’) variety (Oei, 2016).

### *Instructed Language Learning Versus Language Acquisition*

Diglossia and polyglossia adds another layer of complexity demonstrated by the ability of human beings to learn different languages in a formal setting. This learning however differs from the natural phenomenon of acquisition in that it immediately sets others at an advantage, i.e., those who are endowed with linguistic intelligence according to the theory of multiple intelligences (Gardner & Hatch, 1989; Gardner, 2003). Studies in bilingualism indicate that children are capable of learning and acquiring more than one language (Fromkin, Rodman & Hyams, 2014). However, this ability diminishes with age which is explained by the critical period hypothesis (Fromkin, Rodman & Hyams, 2014; Guðlaugsdóttir, 2016). According to this hypothesis, there is a critical period after which it becomes difficult to learn a new language. This period is normally reached after the onset of puberty. This also means that the period before puberty is the best for language learning. It does not mean however that people are incapable of learning new languages after puberty; the difference is that they are usually incapable of reaching native-like proficiency especially in pronunciation – they speak with an accent (Zhang, 2009). Also, those who have reached puberty

usually learn a new language in a formal setting. Some studies have sought to investigate whether the acquisition of language by an adult in a formal setting follows a similar route than that of first language acquisition (Spada & Lightbrown, 2020; Abdullaev, 2021). Adult learners have been found to make similar mistakes that children make while at a similar level of learning/ acquisition, while other research has shown that due to age and maturity differences between children and adults, the latter are prone to come up with errors that sometimes fossilise and cannot be eradicated with whatever amount of teaching (Crystal, 2012). This is especially the case where the amount of exposure to the target language is less. Unfortunately, many children especially among Black South Africans who have acquired their first language at home, suddenly find it less valuable in the education system and have to learn another language to which they have very little exposure (Ntombela, 2020a).

When children have to ‘abandon’ their first languages and replace them with learned ones, it sets them behind and so they become disadvantaged. By the time they catch up, their peers, who could continue using their first language as medium of instruction, have gone far ahead. Take the example of the South African Language Policy in Basic Education: children learn in their mother tongue up to Grade 3; at Grade 4 they switch to English medium of instruction (Ntombela, 2020a). But this is only applicable to children whose mother tongues are African (English and Afrikaans are exempted). What this means is that English and Afrikaans children are immediately placed at an advantage because they continue to interact with their environment naturally. Even if they learn other languages, those languages do not replace the mother tongue but only add to their linguistic repertoire. The double jeopardy of this arrangement is that in South Africa, the society has diglossically relegated African languages to informal use, fit only for home or street communication, while English and Afrikaans are reserved for formal interactions at school, judiciary, media, business transaction etc.

### *Plight of African Languages*

Whilst in the past, schools were racially segregated in South Africa, with White, Coloured and Indian schools more privileged; they are now stratified according to class where the economically affluent attend the privileged schools whilst the relatively poor majority attend the low or no fee schools whose resources are equally low or non-existent (Ntombela, 2016; Probyn, 2005). Pennycook (1994) observed that since English spread through trade, missionary work and education, it could be viewed as synonymous with education such that to be educated meant speaking English where fluency in English language came to be associated with intelligence (see also Kamwendo et al., 2014). This notion although slightly linked to the social construction of language is the core of colonialism. The master who brings the new language does so in order to subjugate the conquered by making every transaction only possible through the new language. This new language is also sold to the conquered at a high price which explains exorbitant fees required to learn the new language – the more affluent is the conquered, the more possible it is for them to have access to the new language. The first language of the child is made to lie dormant and is prepared for preservation in some museum (Ntombela, 2017; 2018).

Brock-Utne (2005) accurately observed that language is the main hindrance to an African child's educational success. The common arguments that are usually used against the use of African languages as media of instruction are that it is costly; there are too many African languages, and the colonial language will give better opportunities (Brock-Utne, 2005). All these arguments are fallacious and can be dispelled. For example, there are eleven official languages in South Africa which include English, Afrikaans and African languages. The nine African languages can be divided into Nguni languages (isiZulu, siSwati, isiNdebele, isiXhosa) which are all mutually intelligible. The other cluster is Sotho which has Sepedi, Setswana and Sesotho, which are also mutually intelligible. The remaining two languages are Xitsonga and Tshivenda. In essence, Nguni-language-speaking children would be better off taught in any of the Nguni languages than in English or Afrikaans; and so, would Sotho-speaking ones when taught in any of the Sotho

languages. This reduces the number of languages considerably which is also the same case in other parts of Africa (Oloruntoba-Oju, Van Pinxteren & Schmied, 2022).

Others may want to argue that children who come from minority groups will not benefit when another African language is used. This is not true because many African students who move to English medium schools are immersed in the English language and are therefore able to acquire it faster. The same situation would occur when children are immersed in another African language, only the target language differs. In fact, many African students would benefit when taught in any other African language rather than in the colonial language (Brock-Utne, 2005).

Roy-Campbell (2000) bemoans the sorry state of the African child who is condemned to psychological trauma of not being able to access knowledge in the language they know and thus fail to benefit from the education they receive, whilst at the same time unable to intellectually develop in their indigenous languages. The postmodern realities are such that people's cultures can no longer be thought as monolithic; their identities cut across languages and communities and their knowledge forms are no longer uniform or centralized (Canagarajah, 2005). Therefore, there is a need to revisit the formulation of language-in-education policy which must take into account these realities

### ***Language Coloniality and Globalisation***

Linguistic colonisation occurs when the mother tongue is replaced by a learned one. In most cases this replacement renders the mother tongue powerless, insignificant and irrelevant. The replacing language emerges as all-powerful, relevant and modern. This colonisation of the mother tongue has a psychological effect on its speakers (Nishanthi, 2020). There is most likely to be feelings of being undermined, second best, insignificant and irrelevant. On the other hand, the custodian of the replacing language maintains a superior attitude.

The replacing of the mother tongue is fronted with a myriad of justifications such as

educational advancement, media, business, technology, and judiciary. (Oloruntoba-Oju, 2022). At the same time, the mother tongue is labelled as incapable of making strides in any of these fields. In this way, the learned language colonises the mother tongue. This colonisation happens at different levels and the *modus operandi* differs. At a formal level, it happens through language planning where the learned language is explicitly promoted whilst the mother tongue is sidelined. This promotion happens at language officialisation, which directly impacts on education and every other formal operation mainly by the government and other important structures like the judiciary, media, business, science and technology. This then explains the swift move of the South African democratic government to elevate the formerly marginalised African languages into official status (Ntombela, 2016).

The most subtle level of colonisation happens in the psyche where after long periods of promoting the learned language, it becomes as though it is a natural phenomenon to have it that way (Phillipson, 2009). This further thickens the rift between those who benefit from the elevation of the learned language and those whose lineage is grounded on the mother tongue. Because the system favours the learned language as the language of access, individuals may come to despise their mother tongue as it does not afford them the same opportunities. The ultimate language is made to represent the natural custodians in which case colonisation has come full circle.

The replacement of mother tongues (or local languages) cannot be explained outside the dominance of Western thought pattern. Mbembe (2015) asks a crucial question of what it means to be westernized. He explains it as the desire to become local examples of an academic system based on Eurocentric epistemic canon (Mbembe, 2015). And by Eurocentric epistemic canon, Mbembe (2015) means the canon that attributes truth only to Western ways of knowledge production. This attribution pushes other epistemic traditions into the margins. Furthermore, this canon regards colonialism as an inescapable social relation between human beings rather than being seen as a system of exploitation and oppression (Mbembe, 2015). Western epistemic tradition

seeks to keep a distance between the known and the knower through objectification. In this tradition, the ontological *a priori* keeps mind and the world, or reason and nature apart. Thus, the subject produces knowledge objectively which is regarded as universal and devoid of context.

This, applied to language, means that the aspiration is to join the universal citizenry through English language and sacrifice the vernacular subjective orientation. But this sacrifice only applies to second and foreign users of English. Naturally, there would be no problem with the objective orientation *per se*; the only trouble is that it has become hegemonic (Mbembe, 2015). All other forms of knowing that appeal to different frames is repressed. It is therefore upon this hegemony that the decolonisation of knowledge and institutions of knowledge such as schools and universities is legitimated.

The establishment of English as a sole medium of instruction in South Africa has a historical colonial origin where the British only funded public schools on condition that English would be the sole medium of instruction (Probyn, 2005). The subsequent establishment of Afrikaans as the sole medium of instruction was a direct resistance to the British stance (Probyn, 2005). The Afrikaners went further to distort UNESCO's support for the use of mother tongue education by packaging Bantu Education with vernacular languages which were not meant for educational purposes but for segregation policies (Probyn, 2005). Hendrick Verwoed's words capture the whole ploy: "[w]hen I have control over native education, I will reform it so that natives will be taught from childhood that equality with Europeans is not for them" (Christie, 1991, p. 12).

However, the 1997 Language-in-education policy recognised the importance of mother tongue education although not throughout the schooling system (Probyn, 2005). The language-in-education policy was in fact grounded on the need to redress the imbalances of the past. Unfortunately, this has been challenged by the imperatives of globalisation which has seen the increasing dominance of English at the expense of African languages. In fact, the demand for courses in African languages has declined in universities, which is a direct result of the economic muscle of

the English language (Probyn, 2005, McKeever, 2017).

In a somewhat similar situation, the debate surrounding the shift from indigenous languages media of instruction of science and mathematics to English in Malaysia is imbued in globalisation and communication technologies (Martin, 2005). “The English only ideology and policy in education in Africa is driven by the notion that science and technology are part of the western package of modernity” (Martin, 2005, p. 92). This is what Mazrui (2002, pp. 272-3) calls “epistemological and intellectual dependency on the west”.

### ***Language and Decoloniality***

Decoloniality in the context of language brings into consciousness the onslaught of linguistic colonisation which in its worst is responsible for linguistic genocide. There is a natural decline and ultimate death of a language but there’s also a deliberate attack and obliteration as well – colonisation is responsible for the latter (Torquato, 2020; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2017). Decoloniality seeks to reverse that situation. Linguistic decolonisation is important because its ultimate goal is to bring the balance that was disturbed by colonisation (Langa, 2020). In this case, this imbalance is the relegation of the mother tongue by the learned one which creates an undue disadvantage upon those who rely on the mother tongue.

It is therefore unthinkable that decolonisation can be achieved without addressing the linguistic imbalance. The success of colonisation was largely through linguistic conquest which ensured that the imposed language becomes a shadow that must be chased by the conquered. Until those who were subjected to linguistic colonisation are freed from those clutches, they will forever lag behind.

Mbembe (2015) highlights how Fanon was critical of the middle class’s inability to champion the Africanisation agenda because they had assimilated the colonialist thought system and therefore appeared to safeguard and promote colonialism. For instance, for many countries, Africanisation meant replacing fellow Africans with the local (Ntombela, 2020b). The manner in

which this happened bordered on xenophobia. In fact, the Africanisation project turned out to be nothing but the looting of resources now by the middle class who replaced the colonial master. In the case of language, the same middle class has been responsible for promoting colonial languages at the expense of local vernaculars (Wolff, 2022).

### ***Language-in-education Policy***

It remains a paradox that the language that is deemed necessary to access job opportunities is at the same time a barrier to academic success (Probyn, 2005). The language-in-education policy recognises eleven official languages and is set to promote multilingualism (Department of Education, 1997). The rationale is that learners would use their mother tongue from the beginning and then add an additional language in order to enhance multilingualism. Indeed, all learners seem to start on equal footing, however in Grade 4 the majority of African learners have to switch to an additional language which becomes the medium of instruction. In fact, the theory of additional languages is that the home language should be used as a medium of instruction which will aid in developing additional languages (Probyn, 2005). But this is not widely understood and is therefore not considered (Probyn, 2005). In the South African context, this theory is counter intuitive because for most South Africans, English Additional Language happens to be a ‘powerful’ colonial language (Probyn, 2005). According to this theory, additional languages were not meant to be media of instruction but were meant to enhance multilingualism (Probyn, 2005).

The formulation of the language-in-education policy that is caught between redressing the imbalances of the past and responding to the globalisation imperatives is an entrapment in as far as it fails to take into account the realities that take place in schools. For the policy to work in sync with the realities on the ground, it must emanate from below and not above (Probyn, 2005).

### ***Linguistic Revolution***

Decolonisation presupposes taking back, restoration and self-asserting (Maart, 2020). It is always a violent process that seeks to replace one

species of man with another. Thus, decolonisation in the context of language would culminate in a revolution. This is because the route of negotiation which never happened with colonialism cannot be the sole ingredient of decolonisation; instead, a revolt against the continued colonial onslaught is expected.

It should be borne in mind that Eurocentrism is grounded on the utility of European languages. Therefore, it should be inconceivable that Afrocentrism would proceed without African languages. Whilst efforts have been made elsewhere to elevate African languages to the same level of utility as English, the attempts have not been met positively (Rudwick, 2018). Rudwick's (2018) criticism of the mandatory promotion of isiZulu in UKZN is based on what she calls the essentialist tendency and the narrow reference to Africanisation whilst isiZulu is only confined to KwaZulu-Natal and thus does not facilitate cross ethnic communication. This is another excuse for maintaining the status quo. This line of argument is reminiscent of a colonial mindset that only sees Africans as always ready to tear at each other's throats on account of one language over the other. This is the lie that saw the elevation of French and English as the sole official languages in Cameroon; languages that are foreign and not spoken by the people of Cameroon but adopted because politicians had bought into a European monolingual ideology of one nation one language, which cannot be achieved with so many local African languages (Dissake, 2022). The immediate solution is always provided in the form of retaining a European language which is viewed as a panacea to all educational woes.

Naidoo's et al. (2018) study, although it applauds the implementation of a compulsory isiZulu module among UKZN graduates, it contains a tinge of doubt on isiZulu's ability to promote social cohesion arguing that learners have less inclination to gain competence in the language. In other words, the module is reduced to one of the boxes that must be ticked. Kamwendo's et al. (2014) defense on the use of isiZulu as a medium of instruction in the University of KwaZulu Natal has been criticised as essentialist since he appealed to the ideal of a 'truly African' university. Kamwendo et al. (2014) are not alone in the drive to promote African languages

especially through the use of isiZulu in UKZN; Ndebele and Zulu (2014) similarly argue that UKZN has set an example in promoting a dual medium of instruction with isiZulu and English which will help forge equal education to citizens. The implementation of the use of isiZulu as a medium of instruction at the University of KwaZulu-Natal deflates the dual myth that African languages cannot rise to the level of tertiary education and that African languages are only relevant for primary school education (Kamwendo et al 2014). Thus, the attitudes of students who were schooled in the medium of English and find themselves having to switch to the medium of isiZulu with whose intellectual frame they are unfamiliar begs a question of why basic education does not promote the utility of African languages as UKZN has shown that it can work. In fact, Chetty's (2013) study concluded that students who were being taught Physics in isiZulu at UKZN wished that isiZulu had been used for science subjects at primary and secondary level; at tertiary level there was a lack of vocabulary that would have been developed earlier. Chetty (2013) further concluded that it would be advisable to retain the status quo, i.e., to teach in English and only avail isiZulu for tutorial sessions. The relegation of isiZulu to the tutorial space could also create the stigma that using an L1 other than English is seen as remedial, despite the fact that Chetty (2013) recommends the development of Physics books in isiZulu and also the development of terminology.

The study conducted by Nkosi (2014) showed that students have a positive attitude towards the use of isiZulu as a medium of instruction. Thus, the question that arises is how do we break from the entrapment of a colonial worldview? Unfortunately, the education system is prone to produce an African child who has internalised the colonial worldview rather than dismantling it. Part of this entrapment is linguistic as exemplified by cases where students and teachers (and even parents) insist on the colonial language as a medium of instruction even when they realise that it is a barrier to academic success (Brock-Utne, 2017).

For Ngugi (1986), decolonisation is not necessarily turning away from European tradition or any other tradition but is about bringing Africa back to the centre. This obviously means that

African epistemology should come to the centre. This cannot happen without bringing African languages into the centre, which means making them form part of knowledge creation. This has never been part of the colonial agenda because as Mbembe (2015) puts it, colonialism favoured monolingualism which saw the elevation of colonial languages – this has made English the single most hegemonic language in modern times. Decolonisation would therefore favour multilingualism where African languages would be used as media of instruction whilst learning other languages as subjects.

In the context of a university, Mbembe (2015) argues that decolonisation would culminate in the death of a university but would resurrect a pluriversity. The pluriversity would acknowledge the multiplicity of knowledge production open to epistemic diversity. Unfortunately, whilst decolonisation is set to resist the dominance of English, globalisation reinstates the importance of English at a global scale. This means that the English monolingual continues to access all the global amenities whilst any other monolingual or multilingual without English is relegated to second class global immigrant.

This hegemony of the English language is such that in many parts of the world, e.g., Hong Kong, parents choose English medium schools for their children even though the majority of them can hardly function in an English medium classroom (Lin & Martin, 2005). Globalisation that catalysed the imperial expansion of English has introduced paradoxical challenges where essential technical spheres such as engineering, science, and medicine are increasingly moved from being accessed in local languages (Reagan & Schreffler, 2005).

Whilst the UKZN case of promoting isiZulu as an additional medium of instruction should be applauded as a positive way forward, there are important considerations. Students who are directly affected are not brought to the centre but are made to be on the receiving end. This is caused by the top-down approach which is the *modus operandi* used to promote the 50/50 dual media of instruction of Afrikaans and English that led to the 1976 Soweto uprisings. The recent student protests on Rhodes Must Fall and Fees

Must Fall should be giving us a clue of how to proceed. In other words, the only way to accelerate the promotion of African languages is to invest in the minds of students who are able to speed up the changes. Here we are referring to students who stand to benefit from being schooled in their mother tongue. We should not wait for the situation to fester and then explode catching everyone by surprise. We already have the figures that indicate that the majority of learners who are not taught in their mother tongue are also the majority Black African students who perform worse academically at all levels of education (McKeever, 2017). The few Black African students who appear to fare better are the minority affluent ones who can afford tuition in prestigious institutions who are unfortunately used as a yardstick to mask the suffering majority. This minority belongs to the middle class which historically has benefited from leftovers of the colonial system. They are therefore not the ideal candidates to drive forward any change. The ideal ones are the students who called for decolonisation of education because they had realised that the education they were being offered did not speak to their emerging African-centredness (Fataar, 2017). The apparent exclusion of students in the decolonisation debates is testament to the top-down approach. For instance, Fataar (2017, p. vii) convincingly espouses that there is a need for “urgent conversation in policy circles, among curriculum workers, learning materials and textbook designers, and, crucially, among university lecturers and school teachers” about the inclusion of all forms of knowing as part of decolonising education.

Nevertheless, Ndlovu-Gatsheni’s call is very timely that students have to be “challenged to think outside the box” of colonialism and that they should be empowered “to fight all forms of injustice (social, economic, historical, intellectual) and inhumanity brought by colonialism” (Matope, 2018, p. 113). Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2017, p. xii) aptly propounds that “[w]hat is needed is not a reformation of higher education but a revolution.” This revolution is in sync with Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s (2016) argument ~~that~~ about returning to the base which “must mean at the very least the use of a language and languages that the people speak” such that “[a]ny further linguistic additions



should be for strengthening, deepening and widening this power of languages spoken by the people.” Revolution is a phase of the historical evolution of nations that generates a rapid change in society (Coccia, 2019). Similarly, Seehawer (2018, p. 107) argues that “[t]eachers, parents, students, elders, traditional healers, and academics cannot change the education system from the top, but they can initiate decolonisation bottom-up.”

### Conclusion

The condition of languages in South Africa can be traced back to coloniality and the current imperatives of globalisation. The language-in-education policy in its many forms as it changed over different periods continues to be at the centre of promoting certain languages whilst leaving others in the margins. However, decolonisation is set to reverse the effects of colonisation in language. There are implications in pursuing a decolonial agenda in addressing language matters.

Without doubt, it is time to appeal to revolutionary theories. Theories of revolution emanate from below. They are grassroot oriented and work toward regime change and overhauling the system. Academics can facilitate such movement although all by themselves cannot be trusted to spearhead it because of their rootedness in the education system that is underpinned by the Western ethos which recognises dominant languages of the West as the centre. In other words, academics are the primary beneficiaries of academic enterprise and may not be able to initiate a revolution without the involvement of important stakeholders, i.e., the students (and parents).

Therefore, unless we are willing to engage in epistemic, linguistic, cultural and ideological violence, an ingredient of revolution, we will perpetually opt for upholding European languages and maintain the marginalisation of African languages.

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