Language and Decolonisation in 21st Century Africa

BOOK OF ABSTRACTS
10TH MAY 2019, UNIVERSITY OF PORTSMOUTH
Keynote Speaker

**Language, Power and Decolonization: Un ménage à trois?**

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In much of the postcolonial discourse on decolonization, we find references to the coloniality of power, the coloniality of knowledge and the coloniality of being. Removing colonial powers following independence has not necessarily removed colonial influences, particularly in relation to language and educational policies. The coloniality of knowledge as manifested in the imposition of Eurocentric curricula in African countries continues to deny epistemic access to students who come to university under-prepared for the demands of the western-based curriculum and the academic discourses and literacies that accompany the various scientific disciplines. The coloniality of being has ensured a continuation of oppressed subjectivities and lack of voice and agency. This has resulted in epistemic and institutional alienation of indigenous students, as well as increased the class divide. What is the role of language in all of this? In many of the more recent discourses on decolonization, language is mentioned in passing but is not a point of focus. It was certainly not the main focus in the #fallist discourse of the student protests that took place between 2015 and 2017. This presentation argues that if decolonization of education in Africa is to be systemic and relevant, and not mere ‘Africanization’ through the addition of African perspectives, the centrality of language needs to be recognized and engaged with. Examples will be drawn from interventions that have placed language at the centre of the knowledge construction process with the expressed intention of constructing new subjectivities and creating agency.
Between the late 19th century and early 20th century, almost all African was being controlled by European states. However, by 1977, 54 African countries had seceded from European colonial rulers. The causes are both external and internal. There are 2,000 distinct languages in Africa along with the indigenous dialects. Language has been used by western colonial powers to divide territories and create new identities. Nigeria was once a colony and protectorate of Nigeria and British Cameroons. During the colonial era, English was the medium of instruction in schools and grants-in-aid was paid to schools based on examination conducted in English Language. After independence, policy evolved, through the National Policy on Education that the indigenous language should be used as the medium of instruction at the pre-primary and lower levels of primary education in all subjects, except English. However, there are issues and challenges facing the use of the indigenous language (Yoruba in this case) in Nigerian schools today. Factors responsible for the effective implementation of this policy are traceable to the government, parents, teachers, schools and the society. This paper is set to examine these issues and challenges. This paper examines these factors and offers recommendations on how to promote the use of the indigenous language (Yoruba) in Nigerian schools.
Is The Gambia decolonising its language education policy?

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In post-colonial multilingual contexts, deciding which languages to use as medium of instruction and which languages to teach as ‘foreign’ or ‘additional’ languages has received a lot of attention. Such decisions play a crucial role in the issue of giving all children equal opportunities to become literate. It is now widely acknowledged that children learn best when they can fully engage with the learning activities taking place, and that to develop strong language and literacy skills children must first learn in a language they know well or speak at home. However, in many cases postcolonial countries continue to find it hard to identify adequate language education policies. The Gambia, where English is the official language, is an illustrative example of a post-colonial low resource educational context which has struggled with its language education policy. Until recently, most its state schools were EMI schools with no space for its seven indigenous languages. Although since 2015 The Gambia has officially moved towards a multilingual education system, its imperial language remains the focal language in education with literacy classes in the indigenous languages being introduced only as a means to facilitate literacy acquisition in English. While acknowledging that language plays an important role in children’s acquisition of literacy skills and learning in general, I also contend that integrating indigenous languages in education in The Gambia raises a wealth of issues (e.g. local language ideologies showing evidence of linguistic self-hatred, parental attitudes towards language education). Drawing on a review of education policy documents from The Gambia and a series of interviews with relevant stakeholders, I will provide preliminary insights into some of the challenges currently facing those attempting to decolonise The Gambia’s language education policy.
How urban Wolof rose to prominence in the decolonisation period in Senegal

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The object of this presentation is to look at how urban Wolof developed as a vehicular “language” in the decolonisation period. There are two factors that confer to Senegal its uniqueness as far as its relationship with the French language is concerned. The first being that Senegal came into contact with the French colonisers earlier than most other African countries. The second is the prominent state that the Wolof language gained in the immediate aftermath of Senegal’s independence in 1960. The Wolof language rose to prominence in the decolonisation period and hoisted itself as a vehicular language. This is unlike most other parts of francophone Africa where French became the de facto national language. In this context of decolonisation, it could be argued that the adoption of Wolof as a lingua franca was a form of resistance to the coloniser. But it is well to emphasize that this prominent state of Wolof was also due to the special relationship the Wolof ethnic group had with the French settlers in the islands of Gorée and Saint-Louis, where early forms of bilingual languaging were observed as early as the early to mid-19th century. Such translanguaging practices were the apanage of a generation of Afro-French, mixed-race population on the Islands. Out of this centuries-long coexistence a new form of languaging was originated. We shall call this entity urban Wolof. This form of languaging is, to date, the lingua franca of almost all the Senegalese, including those in the diaspora.
Challenges in the adoption of African languages in education in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

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In the DRC, the ACCELERE project, backed by USAID, DFID, and the Congolese Ministry of Education, seeks to improve educational outcomes among primary school children. As part of this, support is given to the use of one of the ‘national languages’ as medium of instruction in the first two years of primary school. This paper reports on the results of research carried out as part of this project evaluating the appropriateness of the languages and varieties used. We present a summary of results from different provinces, including:

- the use of Ciluba in Kasai Orientale, which faces very few sociolinguistic challenges
- the challenges of using Swahili in Lualaba and Haut-Katanga, where most children speak a widely divergent variety of Swahili
- the use of Lingala in rural Equateur, where it is understood, but is not the children’s strongest language
- the use of Lingala in rural Sud Ubangi, where it is not understood by most first-year children
- the challenges to using Ngbaka in rural Sud Ubangi, which are primarily political.

We conclude that the challenges facing the adoption of African languages in education are various, reflecting very different sociolinguistic situations within the same polity, and as such, careful sociolinguistic analysis is an essential part of the formulation of educational policy.
English as a decolonial language: academic frames, popular discourses and language practices

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English has historically been 'absent' from many former French colonies such as Algeria, but policy-makers and academics have suggested that there is an exponential growth in interest in the language, from increased demand for English tuition and bilateral agreements (e.g. Algeria) to changes in the education system (e.g. Cameroon, Madagascar) and a linguistic shift from French to English in the public sphere (e.g. Rwanda). These processes are described as driven in part by a rhetoric of rebelling against the legacies of French linguistic and cultural (neo)colonialism, and moving towards a language which has been 'de-colonised', or whose imperialism seems more 'benevolent' in the midst of North Africa's 'language wars'. This paper argues that, as academics, we must be wary of reproducing this discourse as a straightforward frame of analysis. It explores how the colonial lens is used by popular and academic accounts to structure understanding of contemporary language practices and conceptions of belonging. Based on eleven months of fieldwork, I demonstrate that the legacies of colonisation include not only language practices and the social hierarchies derived from them, but also the explanatory frameworks used to explain language change and the place of English, even when practices do not follow these straightforward categories.
Colonial linguistic heritage and its impact on African education: Re-assessing linguistic imperialism and unfinished decolonisation in Cameroon

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Cameroon is a highly multilingual country with 280+ indigenous languages; plus French and English as official languages ‘inherited’ from colonial times; and Arabic used in the predominantly Muslim grand North; while Kamtok, an English-based pidgin and creole variety of WAPEs, is used as a language of wider communication (LWC) in the grand South. CamFranglaiss, an urban/youth sociolect is also emerging as an LWC.

But the history of languages-in-education in Cameroon is marked by the very absence of Cameroonian languages in the education system. After the Independence from colonial masters Britain and France in 1960 and the plebiscite of 1961 which saw the British Southern Cameroons join the nascent republic, Cameroon as a nation embarked on an ‘official’ bilingualism in education based on French as medium of instruction and English as a subject in the eight Francophone provinces, and vice versa in the two Anglophone provinces. But in the Francophone provinces there is a further twist to this language-in-education policy: German and Spanish are compulsory subjects in the Secondary education, bringing the total of languages-in-education there to four, without any of them being a Cameroonian language.

After presenting critically some of the challenges faced by the education system in Cameroon in terms of languages-in-education policies, the paper will argue that the overwhelming dominance of European languages in the Cameroonian education system more than fifty years after the Independence epitomizes an un-finished decolonisation in a post-colonial Cameroon still struggling with a ‘problematic’ colonial linguistic heritage and its deep impact in the education system.
Challenges of grass-roots research and the implementation of mother-tongue teaching

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This study looks at the various challenges of grass-roots research regarding mother-tongue pilot projects in rural sub-Saharan Africa. The work of the field linguist will most likely bring a number of surprises along the way. The researcher working in schools may find setting up test groups and control groups a challenge, as things can change quickly: for example, a teacher may unexpectedly disappear to help with an NGO working in the area, or the mud hut meant to be used as a classroom may have simply vanished during the rainy season, just before the new school year starts. The researcher has to develop an ability to predict - what can possibly go wrong? - and then try to eliminate any circumstance that could threaten the experiment. In order to gain scientific data, class sizes could be reduced and extra compensation could be given to the underpaid voluntary teachers to make sure that they will come, but would that be a fair and a sustainable option, and would the results reflect a real-life situation? Giving thought to these sometimes very complex issues will also help to understand the challenges in implementing mother-tongue education in these areas. This study also investigates ways to create some flexible and practical solutions in both research and implementation of mother-tongue teaching in sub-Saharan Africa. The study is based on experience gained during a mother-tongue pilot project amongst four primary schools in Cameroon in 2011-2014.
Towards truly decolonising the linguistic milieu through a re-engineered language policy and practice in Africa

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The twin-idea of colonialism and globalisation has narrowed the extent to which indigenous languages can be used in the social and educational space in Africa and has implicitly promoted the dominance of English and French over indigenous languages. The implication of which is that while Africans have political independence, they are linguistically and educationally colonised. Over a hundred years ago, Fajana, 1982, p.54) quoted Sunter to have remarked that ‘English was the language of commerce and the only education worth a moment’s consideration… and that our languages are never likely to become of any practical use to civilisation’ while (Olagoke, 1979, p. 16) remarked that since ‘English is the language of science and technology, and a passport to educational development and prestigious employment, language of commerce, trade and administration, a means of national and international communication, it is most important that English should be learnt in our schools, at the expense of our indigenous languages. Today, the language of education, political mobilisation/participation, administration, justice and entertainment is either English, French or Arabic – languages that are alien to African. African cannot develop in the real sense (Bodomo, 1999, p. 9; Kolawole, 2016, 30) if it does not promote and use its vast linguistic resources in education, political participation, administration, justice and entertainment. It is, therefore, expedient to advocate for, develop a policy framework actively use and integrate well-developed African languages into the field of modern education, political participation and the socio-economic activities of Africans. This paper presents what needs to be done to achieve the paradigm shift being proposed to achieve a total decolonisation of Africa linguistic space.
Decolonisation and Internationalisation: English as a Medium of Instruction in the Postcolonial Francophone Context of Algeria

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English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) has emerged as a powerful tool for the recruitment of international students, internationalisation of education and economic growth (Dearden & Akincioglu, 2016; Macaro, 2018). However, EMI education has been widely criticised for hindering the process of learning, creating unequal opportunities within societies, and marginalising local and indigenous languages. While the debate continues over the implementation of EMI in the world, little attention has been given to the expansion of EMI in African countries. This paper explores the attitudes of stakeholders (students and teachers) towards the adoption of EMI in Algerian universities, in comparison to their attitudes towards the former colonial, national and local languages (French, Standard Arabic, Amazigh and Darija). The discussion in this paper is based on the findings of a research undertaken in different central and peripheral universities in Algeria, such as the University of Annaba, the University of Batna and the University of Oum El Bouaghi. Data collected at these universities were obtained using classroom observations, focus groups, questionnaires and interviews with students, teachers and policymakers. The key findings show that French language is crumbling under the pressures of stakeholders’ positive attitudes towards EMI, as opposed to the old generation francophone mindset. English is viewed as a decolonising language from French and its colonial legacies. This language competition between French and English takes place in a multilingual context that has been reduced to a monolingual (French –only) policy.
Botswana has a diversified culture. To be actively involved in the different societies in Botswana, social workers need to understand the culture of the particular community they are serving. In order for social workers to assist or identify the problems and needs of the communities they are serving, they need to understand the values, norms and social relationships of the people of Botswana in their different tribes. The research method for this study combines two major research tools in qualitative inquiry which are text analysis and interviews in order to investigate the context in which the texts are produced. 6 professional Social workers and 12 students were consulted and gave their consent for the study. 26 case reports were collected from the department of Social work at the University of Botswana. The findings revealed that there are challenges such as the use of language, where they have to conduct interviews or conduct oral communications in Setswana but write official documents in English. The interviews also showed that the writers are faced with challenges of translating from Setswana to English. Grammar and direct translation from Setswana to English poses a big challenge to the writers. There is need for writing workshops for the writers to be developed.
Language Policy in Namibian schools

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Though English was never extensively used in Namibia, it was made the official language when Namibia became independent in 1990, and consequently, medium of instruction in basic education (Tötemeyer 2010). The arguments held in favour of English were mainly that it was an international language and a neutral choice against Afrikaans which was used as a lingua franca but was associated with oppression (UNIN 1981).

The current model is a so-called early exit transition model (Erling, Adinolfi & Hultgren 2017). The medium of instruction in grades 1 to 3 of the 12 year basic education is one of the ten officially recognized local languages (Ju’hoansi, Khoekhoegowab, Oshikwanyama, Oshindonga, Otjiherero, Rukwangali, Rumanyo, Setswana, Silozi and Thimbukushu), Afrikaans, German or English. Grade 4 is a transitional year. English is the only medium of instruction from grade 5 upward.

Recent reports (Unesco 2014; Education Commission 2016) show that though access to education has increased globally, there is a learning crisis. One of the issues is the language of instruction (Unesco 2016). Research shows that Namibian learners are confused by language problems (Cantoni 2007, Tötemeyer 2010, Harris 2011).

The objectives of this paper are 1) to carry out a critical language policy analysis and 2) to discuss the issues in the chosen language policy to find new approaches to multilingual education. The data for this study consist of the normative documents from the period of independence (MoEC 1993, MoBESC 2003, The National Curriculum for Basic Education 2010, The National Curriculum for Basic Education 2016).
Language Practice in the Broadcast Media of a Multilingual Context: a Case Study of Kogi State, Nigeria.

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Studies on language practice in Nigeria have mostly focused on education while the broadcast media has received very little attention. Yet the Nigerian broadcast media has a complex task of deciding which languages to use for communicating information to a vast multilingual audience. This study which is part of a broader study on language policy and planning in Kogi State broadcast media addresses this gap in the literature by investigating the language practice of two public broadcast stations consisting of one television station and one radio station. Kogi State which has a population of over three million is linguistically diverse and offers an interesting platform for language practice studies. Relevant staff members who have a range of different functions at these broadcast stations were interviewed. Data was also collected from official documents and programming records. My iterative process of data analysis informed by Grounded Theory Method produced interesting findings. The data suggests among other things, the hegemony of English over the indigenous languages. Although the stations have a multilingual framework by using some indigenous languages in their broadcast, this study reveals that these languages are under-utilised and there is generally very little will to increase their use.
North African cinema: The French connection

Is France liberating Moroccan women? Exploring language power relations in three Moroccan films

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1999 was a turning point for Moroccan cinema: state funding increased, exiled directors resumed filming, and state censorship lessened after years of political oppression. Since 1999, over thirty films were made each year in different languages: darija (colloquial Arabic), Berber languages and French; yet these films were not met with equal success or reception in Morocco and abroad. There is a dichotomy between on the one hand, Moroccan film production in darija and Berber, only screened in Morocco, and on the other hand, films in French, which seem to appeal more to Morocco’s elite who speak French, and international audiences. Some Moroccan journalists and English-speaking or French scholars even argue that using French in Moroccan films allows to overcome taboo subjects in ways that darija does not. I aim at investigating this claim by contrasting and comparing three films that explore female sexuality: Marock (Dir. Leila Marrakchi, 2007), which takes the upper class as its primary subject and narrates, in French, a love story between a young Muslim girl and a Jewish boy, Amours Voilées (Dir. Aziz Salmy, 2008) which combines French and darija and presents a woman who has drifted from religion and has a relationship outside marriage, and Les Jardins de Samira (Dir. Latif Lahlou, 2007), entirely in darija, which draws on the sexual frustration of a young woman married to an older man. To compare and contrast these films, I will briefly contextualise the power relationship between French and darija in Moroccan society, I will then explore whether the use of French was born out of production constraints or was an authorial choice and will do so by examining the directors’ background and the films’ funding. Finally, I will discuss the films’ reception in Morocco and abroad and ask whether French overcomes taboos or perpetuate pre-conceived ideas about female sexuality in Morocco.
North African cinema: The French connection

Algerian cinema between commercial and political pressures: The double distortion

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Although ‘transnational’ cinema is now a widely-used category in the literature, to understand what ‘transnational’ means we need also to be able to conceptualise the ‘national’. This article argues that ‘Algerian cinema’ no longer exists. Instead, in both subject matter and academic analyses, it is subject to a double distortion – refracted through both a ‘French’ prism and a ‘Franco-Algerian’ prism. As such, ‘Algerian cinema’ often deals with social issues which are in fact French issues which are anachronistically transposed into an Algerian context. This article demonstrates how this situation has arisen by examining the funding of films ‘about’ Algeria via the French Centre national de la cinématographie (CNC), the language quotas which these bodies impose and how these funding mechanisms give films a linguistic identity which is often at odds with the socio-cultural context of the scenario. It then turns to explore the academic reception of these films and the way in which these films are often used as documentary snapshots into contemporary Algeria, with little attention paid to the ways in which they are products of a particular funding context. Finally, it considers how the Algerian state interacts with these ‘Algerian films’ and the political factors at play in the state’s selective instrumentalisation of them. The paper will refer to the works of filmmakers including Merzak Allouache, Nadir Moknèche and Djamila Sahraoui.
French is powerful, but English is liberating

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The status of foreign languages (French and English) in Algeria is as conflicting as the national ones (Arabic and Tamazight). Benrabah (2013) suggests that the more French is replaced by Modern Standard Arabic, the more English is needed. Despite many top-down interventions to decrease the use of French in formal settings, through the process of Arabization, its place is still powerfully present in the workplace as a linguistic capital. Many observers consider Algeria as the second-largest Francophone country after France itself (Saadi, 2002; Asselah-Rahal et al. 2007). English, on the other hand, presents a strong mediator for the petroleum industry and scientific research (Benrabah, 2013). Its neutral position in the history of the country is strongly recognised and valued. However, the ‘rivalry’ relation between these languages, as described by Zaboot (2007:161), continues to enlarge with the younger generation under forces of globalisation. While French continues to decline for its ‘colonial’ past, English is gaining a large audience as a language of future ‘liberation’. To support the claim, I report on my ethnographic observations of linguistic practices and interviews I conducted during a fieldwork in 2017-2018 in a Berber region in East Algeria. This paper attempts at exploring the possibilities of English spread in response to socio-economic reforms and educational policies, but also presents the challenges it introduces for the current linguistic hierarchy.
Centring the peripheral: The role of acceptability and ownership studies

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Even with the democratisation of English initiated by world Englishes (WE) studies, a great deal of WE perceptions, pedagogy and research still tend to assign centrality to the Inner Circle Englishes (ICEs) (Tupas & Rubdy, 2015). This notion is itself implied in Kachru’s characterisation of the ICEs as norm-providing (Kachru, 1982 & 1986). WE has also been critiqued for ironically helping to maintain the same normative, exclusionary linguistic framework by comparing the grammatical structures of the non-inner circle Englishes with those of ICEs, thus reinforcing centrist views of English. To effectively actualise its decolonial and democratic ethos, WE research should take an inventory of its theoretical and methodological approaches and develop new ways of ‘unhierarchising’ the various circles of English. It is against this background that this paper argues that studying acceptability and ownership positionalities might offer new ways of understanding the attitudes of speakers of non-inner circle Englishes towards the norms of their own varieties of English. Using Higgins’ (2003) Acceptability Judgement Task (AJT) to investigate the acceptability and ownership of Nigerian English among 40 speakers of Nigerian English, this paper offers fresh theoretical and methodological insights into the debates about the equality of Englishes around the world. The results obtained from the task indicate that by taking ownership of the variety of English they speak, speakers of Nigerian English tend to acknowledge that Nigerian English is no longer peripheral, but indeed is a centre in its own right.
In search of the United States of Africa: A linguistics approach

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After centuries of colonization, the African continent saw most of its present nation-states emerge from colonization and achieve independence in the 1960s. Sixty years later, in this 21st century of humanity, various obstacles, both exogenous and endogenous, have hampered its development. One such obstacle is linguistic. The linguistic component of any projected African federation must be accorded its due importance in contributing to a successful outcome overall. The present study seeks to outline the salient issues involved and to analyze potential linguistic approaches that might play a role in real decolonization, as a necessary component in the promotion of a new politico-cultural structure characterizing the continent. Clearly, African languages must be promoted, but European languages need not be abandoned. What is crucial is that the overall configuration must not be imposed as a haphazard relic of colonization, but rather it must be an outgrowth of a real African-inspired development that promotes unity. Although the idea of the United States of Africa is not new and has been discussed by the fathers of African independence over many decades, the originality of this study resides in the consideration of the unity of Africans from the perspective of a linguistic federation. A linguistic Union of Africans is a complex and formidable undertaking, however a carefully planned first steps in that direction must be taken to facilitate a successful cultural decolonization of Africa. Therefore, this study aims to discuss the role of language planning in the layout of a potential Union of Africans.
Postcolonial Borders and the Infrapolitics of native languages in contemporary Africa

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Lamenting the gradual erasure of African languages following colonisation, the relevant Africanist scholarship has consistently maintained its critical cursor on languages introduced to Africa via the colonial process, such as French, English or Spanish. This linguistic tension between the colonial and the local has structured much of the thinking on language policy, linguistic agency and decolonisation. However, very little attention seems to have been paid to the diversity of the colonial infrastructure affecting local languages both in the past and present. In the postcolonial era, the debate is often still phrased in terms of tension between colonial languages and local languages, exclusively.

Moving away from traditional concerns about the smothering effect of European languages on extinctive African languages, the paper goes further to include an analysis of African languages through another enduring colonial symbol, i.e. the postcolonial border. It suggests that by examining African languages across borders and focusing on their multifaced socio-political engagement by border communities, contemporary use of African languages can help trace a wider colonial impact as well as provide insight into the power of these languages in contemporary issues.

Drawing from empirical data collected at the border between Cameroon, Gabon and Equatorial Guinea, and looking at the role played by the N’toumou language in cross-border interactions, land disputes, identity and code-switching, the article examines the language both as influenced by the colonial process and as a political tool in the hands of ordinary citizens. It will conclude that the scholarship on African languages will gain more by studying them outside of the contrastive tension with European languages, considering other colonial processes and looking at the internal dynamics of African languages in the contemporary era.