



Language, Education, and Society in Mozambique: Assimilation, Homogenisation, and Gestures towards Unity in Diversity

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ABSTRACT

In this article, I analyse the dynamic ways in which linguistic ideologies, policies, and practices interact in education and society in Mozambique, with a focus on the postcolonial period. Taking as a reference theoretical-empirical studies on ideologies, linguistic policies, and practical experiences of other postcolonial countries, I discuss how the linguistic policies and practices adopted in the colonial and postcolonial periods in Mozambique have been ideologically motivated, being, for example, intimately linked to the type of citizen and society that was desired and actively pursued in different historical periods. Thus, if in the colonial period linguistic policies and practices were anchored in the Eurocentric ideology of civilisation and assimilation, in the period immediately after independence the ideology of national uniformity dominated, in the context of the formation of the nation state. This orientation would be relaxed from the beginning of the 1990s, when the ideology and discourse of unity in diversity began to dominate. This analysis leads to the conclusion that, despite progress in terms of discourse and legislation, declarations in favour of pluralism remain essentially sterile in the face of monolingual colonial constructs and practices that prevail in Mozambican society.

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As happens in many other postcolonial contexts, the linguistic ideologies, policies, and practices that predominated in the colonial period in Mozambique did not change substantially after national independence was achieved in 1975. This situation legitimises the observation made by Bamgbose (2000) that colonial linguistic policies continue to influence and, in some cases, to determine the policies adopted in postcolonial Africa. Portuguese continues to be the only official language in Mozambique and the Bantu¹ languages, those that most citizens speak most in their daily life, are still subalternised, essentially being restricted to informal contexts and symbolically associated with ethnic identity and traditional cultural heritage.

In this article, I analyse the dynamics of the linguistic ideologies, policies, and practices in education and society in Mozambique, with an emphasis on the postcolonial period. The Mozambican situation is seen, above all, in the light of theoretical and empirical studies of linguistic ideologies and policies and practical experiences in other postcolonial countries, with reference to countries in sub-Saharan Africa (e.g. Bamgbose, 1994, 2000; Campbell-Makini, 2000; Heugh, 2008, 2009). As well as written sources, the analysis put forward in this article is also based on information gathered throughout my ethnographic research in the field of education, in particular bilingual education.

The analysis is rooted in the theoretical perspective that linguistic ideologies, policies, and practices are not watertight or compartmentalised, but are contingent and closely related to social, political, and economic factors that leave their mark on societies at different points in history (Tollefson, 2002). Following this theoretical-methodological approach, I discuss how the linguistic policies and practices adopted in the colonial and postcolonial periods in Mozambique have been ideologically motivated, being, for example, closely linked to the type of citizen and society sought in different historical periods.

I therefore illustrate how, in the colonial period, the linguistic policies and practices adopted were anchored in the colonial ideology of civilisation and assimilation, hence the use of schools and churches to disseminate the Portuguese language and western cultural values and to inculcate in the “natives” a sense of belonging and loyalty to the Portuguese empire. Following this same homogenisation approach, in the period immediately following national independence, the discourse of the constitution of a monocentric nation state, united around the Portuguese language, ideologically labelled as the “language of national unity”, predominated. This perspective was relaxed from the early 1990s when, in the spirit of “unity in diversity” (Young, 1990, 1993), Mozambique began to accept the formation of a polycentric nation state in which multilingualism and multiculturalism, for example, were no longer seen as problems, but as important resources for forming a “strong, cohesive nation” (Conselho de Ministros, 2020, p. 49). The introduction of bilingual education in primary schools and the passing of legislation endorsing the use of Mozambican languages in public administration and local government are some of the consequences of this opening up of ideological and discursive spaces to plurality.

However, despite progress at the levels of discourse and legislation, the declarations in favour of pluralism remain essentially ineffectual in the face of the monolingual colonial constructs and practices that prevail in Mozambican society. In reality, Portuguese is still the prestige language that guarantees socio-economic mobility in the country, to the detriment of Mozambican languages. Based on the relative success of bilingual education, I end this article by suggesting that different actors continue to exploit the ideological and legislative opening up occurring in Mozambique to influence the establishment of multilingual policies and practices that promote social interaction and coexistence, as advocated via the notion of “linguistic citizenship” (Stroud, 2001, 2007; Williams & Stroud, 2013).

THE LINGUISTIC SITUATION IN MOZAMBIQUE

As is the case in the majority of countries in sub-Saharan Africa, Mozambique is a multilingual and multicultural country where, in addition to Portuguese, the official language, over twenty Mozambican languages of Bantu origin are spoken as well as some foreign languages,

1 The Bantu languages spoken in Mozambique have been officially designated “Mozambican languages” or “national languages”, even though none of them are spoken at the national level. For this article, I will alternately use the terms “Mozambican languages” and “local languages” to designate these languages.

including English, Arabic, Hindi, Gujarati, and Urdu. As a consequence of the large-scale migratory movements of recent times, other African languages have been introduced from countries such as Burundi, Nigeria, Somalia, Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Rwanda, although there have yet to be studies to systematically identify and quantify their prevalence.

English is spoken by an increasing number of Mozambicans, with some parents, especially those belonging to the middle and upper classes, preferring to educate their children primarily in that language. The motivations for investing in the English language include the prestige and educational and professional opportunities associated with it, as well as the aim to participate in economic, social, and political exchange programmes that are being established between Mozambique and neighbouring countries, where English is the dominant language (Firmino, 2002; Rosário, 2015). Arabic, which long served essentially religious functions, has also become a language of daily communication in the last few years within certain immigrant communities. Hindi, Gujarati, and Urdu, community languages rooted in Mozambique for hundreds of years, are in most cases used by Indian and Pakistani immigrants and their descendants (Lopes, 1998).

Notwithstanding the importance of foreign languages in the linguistic landscape of Mozambique, Portuguese and the Bantu languages are the most widely spoken, although they exist in a context of diglossia. Portuguese is the official language and used in formal contexts, whereas the Bantu languages, the heritage languages of most Mozambicans, remain confined essentially to informal settings, as was the case in the colonial period.

As illustrated below, linguistic ideologies and policies favourable to the Portuguese language, particularly in the post-independence period, are among the main factors that have contributed to the growth of the proportion of speakers of this language in Mozambique, including as their first language (L1). In contrast, the proportion of speakers of Bantu languages has decreased, especially as first languages. In fact, if we compare the results of the Population Censuses of 1980, 1997, 2007, and 2017, it can be noted that the proportion of Mozambicans with a Bantu language as L1 is tending to decline (cf. Figure 1). At the same time, the proportion of Portuguese speakers, including as L1, is on the increase (cf. Figure 2).

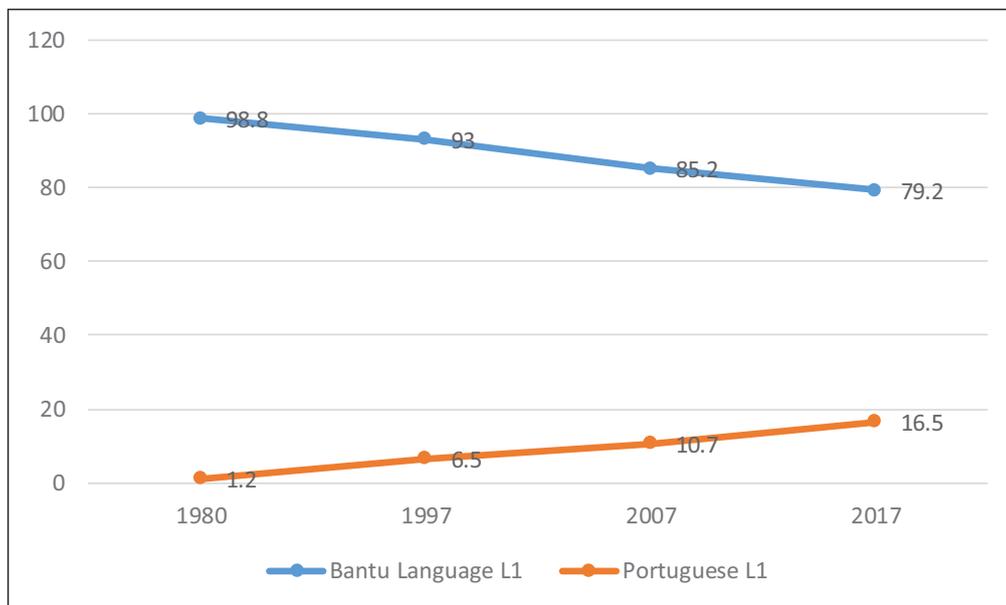


Figure 1 Evolution of the percentage of speakers of Bantu languages and of Portuguese as L1 in Mozambique (sources: Chimbutane, 2012; INE, 2019).

As shown in Figure 1, between 1980 and 2017 the proportion of speakers of Bantu languages as L1 fell by around 19.6 percentage points. In contrast, in the same period the proportion of speakers of Portuguese as L1 grew by around 15.3 percentage points. Similarly, and as can be seen in Figure 2, although in 1980, five years after independence, only 24.4 per cent of the population spoke Portuguese as L1 or as a second language (L2), this proportion rose to 58.1 per cent by 2017. In other words, in thirty-seven years the proportion of speakers of Portuguese in Mozambique increased by about 33.7 percentage points.

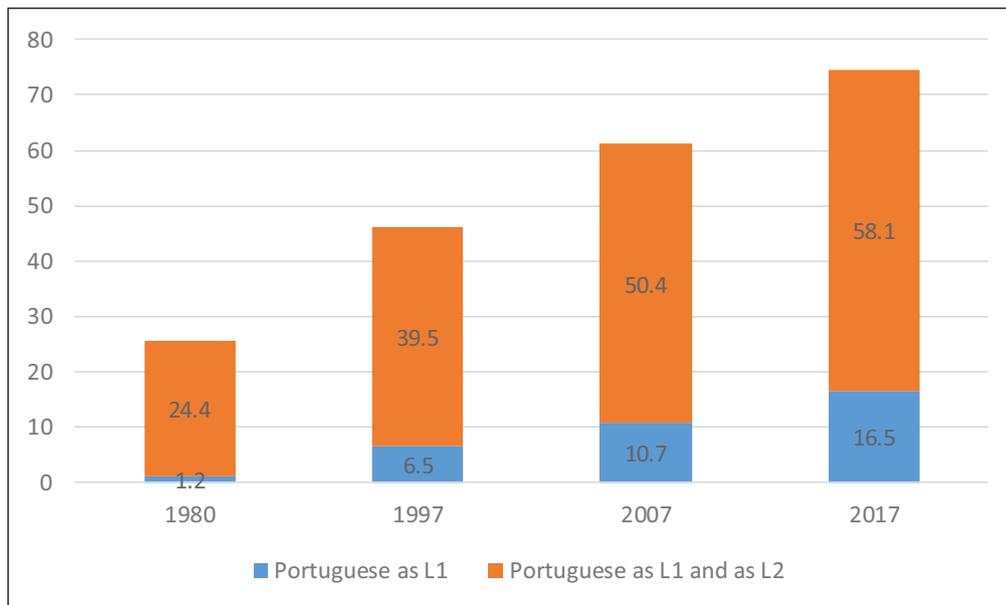


Figure 2 Evolution of the percentage of speakers of Portuguese as L1 and as L2 in Mozambique (sources: Chimbutane, 2012; INE, 2019).

The growth in the number of speakers of Portuguese in Mozambique is basically due to the increased access to formal education, conducted primarily in that language, and to the widening of the domains in which Portuguese is used. In reality, in addition to public and formal domains, Portuguese is also increasingly used in informal domains (cf. Firmino, 2002).

One of the most striking features of the data presented in this section is the expansion of the Portuguese language in Mozambique in terms of both the number of speakers and the contexts in which it is used. Conversely, the data show a considerable decline in the proportion of speakers of Bantu languages as L1. These trends in opposite directions may indicate the start of a process of language shift, from Bantu languages to Portuguese (Gonçalves, 2017), which may result in a gradual loss of heritage languages and associated cultures. As previously stated, and as will become more apparent in the following sections, this expansion of Portuguese is, to a large extent, the corollary of the diglossic practices, ideologies, and policies adopted in the country, particularly following independence.

LANGUAGE, EDUCATION, AND SOCIETY

The linguistic ideologies, policies, and practices currently adopted in many sub-Saharan African countries, which privilege former colonial languages and contribute to the marginalisation of African languages, are also a reflection of the colonial legacy (Bamgbose, 2000). Consequently, an in-depth understanding of the current linguistic ecology of these countries requires a critical revision of the linguistic ideologies, policies, and practices adopted in colonial times, particularly in the field of education, a privileged space for disseminating and legitimising these linguistic-ideological policies. Therefore, before analysing the linguistic ideologies, policies, and practices in education and society in the postcolonial period in Mozambique, I will briefly outline the nature of the situation in the colonial period.

THE COLONIAL PERIOD: CIVILISATION, ASSIMILATION, AND NATIONALISATION

Colonial discourse played a key role in the construction of European hegemony in Africa. Via this discourse Europeans constructed the myth that the African continent was primitive prior to their arrival. They used this myth to justify their alleged civilising mission (e.g. Mondlane, 1975; Rassool, 2007).

In the first phases of colonisation, between the fifteenth century and 1930 (cf. Belchior, 1965), the Portuguese assumed that their mission in Mozambique was to “civilise” the native population, chiefly through spreading European cultural values, including the Portuguese language and the Christian faith. In this initial phase, the education of the natives was entrusted to missionaries, especially Catholic missionaries. The objectives of colonial education in this period included the so-called “nationalisation” of the natives, part of the assimilationist colonial ideology that

consisted of “Portuguesing” the natives, in particular via language, education, and Christianity (Cruz e Silva, 2001). The ultimate objective was that the native population see themselves as *Portuguese citizens*. It is in this context that the evaluation of individuals as “civilised” or “assimilated”, enabling them to be deemed as “citizens”, was based on the analysis of their degree of success in acquiring the Portuguese language and western rationality, resulting in a rupture with the native language(s), then seen as “savage” or “backward”.

This ideology of assimilation and nationalisation was opposed by the Protestant missionaries who, conversely, sought to “denationalise” or “de-Portuguese” the native population, particularly by promoting the valorisation of the local languages and cultures (cf. Buendía Gómez 1999, p. 56). In the context of this ideological position, the Protestant mission passed to the younger generations a sense of pride and belonging in relation to African society, which would prove to be essential for the emergence of Mozambican nationalism (cf. Cruz e Silva, 2001). This “deviation” from the political-ideological line of the Portuguese state led to hostility towards the Protestant mission on the part of the colonial power and the Portuguese ecclesiastical authorities, which culminated, in 1919, with the introduction of legal measures aimed at policing the activities of these missions (cf. Belchior, 1965).

Colonial education in the true sense of the term only began in the 1930s, with the establishment of the “New State” and the start of legal collaboration between the Portuguese state and the Catholic Church in the areas of education and ideology (Belchior, 1965). At that time, a discriminatory education system was established that fell into two camps: *official education*, designed for the children of colonisers and the assimilated (so-called *assimilados*), managed directly by the state; and *rudimentary education*, for the native population and provided under the aegis of Catholic missionaries (e.g. Belchior, 1965; Buendía Gómez, 1999). *Official education* aimed to prepare an educated elite that could serve the interests of the Portuguese state, especially as concerned the administration of the colony. In contrast, *rudimentary education* aimed to equip the local populations with Portuguese values and *rudimentary* knowledge; in other words, its ultimate aim was to “civilise” and “nationalise” the natives through the learning of the Portuguese language, the eradication of “primitive customs”, and the assimilation of European culture.

Consistent with this civilising and assimilationist ideology, Portuguese was defined as the language of education, whether in *official schools* or *rudimentary schools*. In contrast, local languages could only be used in religious instruction (Belchior, 1965; Buendía Gómez, 1999). However, in line with their ideology of “denationalisation”, from 1919 the Protestant missions were authorised to offer education in Portuguese and in local languages (Belchior, 1965), thus contributing not only to the valorisation of the associated cultures and populations, but also to the development of these languages, including via the creation of orthographic systems and the production of written materials, especially of a religious and anthropological nature. To this end, Stroud (2007) points out, the Protestant missions in Mozambique helped to endow the local languages with social and symbolic value as vehicles for participation in political life.

This section shows how the Portuguese state, via schools and Catholic Church, sought to ideologically underpin the colonisation of Mozambicans. This ideology was founded on the idea of Mozambican populations and cultures as primitive and the consequent legitimisation of civilisation and nationalisation. This should be achieved, so it was thought, above all by means of the dissemination and assimilation of Portuguese cultural values, including the Portuguese language and the Catholic faith. Despite the counterbalance provided by the Protestant missions, and given the hegemony of official state schooling, it was the assimilationist ideology that took root most strongly and won over most souls. The continuation of the hegemony of the Portuguese language in the postcolonial period in Mozambique and the continued marginalisation of local languages and cultures, including in formal education, must be understood in this broader socio-historical context.

THE POSTCOLONIAL PERIOD: NATIONAL HOMOGENISATION AND GESTURES TOWARDS PLURALITY

In Mozambique, there is still no specific document that defines the country’s language policy. Though there have been concrete proposals for advanced language policies in different stages of the nation’s history, they have never been approved or made public. Nonetheless, it can

be said that, even if not formally expressed, Mozambique has always had, in principle and in practice, a certain kind of language policy (Lopes, 1997). Although the role of the Portuguese language has always been clearly expressed, via political declarations and legal mechanisms, the same cannot be said for Mozambican languages. In reality, the first declaration with legal ties to Mozambican languages was only included in the 1990 Constitution of the Republic (República de Moçambique, 1990).

As we can see, the linguistic ideologies, policies, and practices adopted in the colonial period continue to influence the ideologies and policies pursued in Mozambique after independence. In fact, forty-five years after independence, Portuguese, formerly the colonial language, is still the country's only official language and the only one deemed legitimate for teaching and learning at all levels of formal education. In contrast, Mozambican languages continue to be relegated to informal settings and used as languages of teaching and learning only at the elementary levels of primary education in a few chosen schools. However, compared with the clear monoglossic framework in the first post-independence years, some changes have occurred since the early 1990s, when linguistic ideologies, discourses, and policies started to be guided towards some form of multilingualism. The shifts in approach to the language question have been influenced by changes that are affecting national and international sociopolitical contexts.

The Portuguese Language and Homogenisation in the Context of the Formation of the Nation State

Mozambique gained its independence at a time when the sociopolitical ideology that supported the constitution of modern monocentric states dominated the world. More specifically, and relevant to this article, in light of this nationalist ideology, linguistic and cultural homogeneity is conceived as a *sine qua non* for political and territorial integrity (e.g. Gal, 2006).

It is in this context that, immediately after independence and with a view to building the nation state, Portuguese was declared the country's only official language. In contrast, no official status was given to Mozambican languages, which remained essentially associated with informal domains and seen as symbols of ethnolinguistic identity and repositories of traditional heritage.

As in other African countries, the choice of the former colonial language as the country's only official language stemmed, on the one hand, from the assumption that it was a politically neutral language, as it was not the language of any of the local ethnic groups, and, on the other hand, from the view that this was the only language that could ensure modernisation and international integration. Therefore, as in other postcolonial African countries, this was seen as a pragmatic and politically correct solution (Bamgbose, 2000; Alidou, 2004).

From a political point of view, the choice of the Portuguese language as the only official language was ideologically supported through its construction as the *language of national unity*. From this standpoint, it was assumed that the Portuguese language was the guarantor of the preservation of national unity and the integrity of the territory (Ganhão, 1979). Firmino (2004, p. 350) argues that this decision marked the beginning of the appropriation of the Portuguese language by Mozambicans and the "consequent purging of its colonial connotations". The idea was constructed, therefore, that Portuguese, the language of the former "enemy", should be used "in the service of social transformation" (Ricento, 2006, p. 4)

Consistent with this monolingual trend around the Portuguese language, multilingualism was conceptualised as a focus of tribalism and regionalism. Thus, it was argued that to build the nation it was necessary to eliminate tribal, regional, and cultural differences, in other words, homogenise the nation. This ideology explains why, until the early 1990s, the use of Mozambican languages for formal contexts and purposes, including educational ones, was not tolerated. The justification for banning Mozambican languages from the educational context was that the use of these languages hindered the learning of Portuguese language and fostered tribalism and regionalism in schools and society, "evils" that conflicted with the project to shape the *new citizen* pursued at the time. The latter was defined as being an individual "free from obscurantism, superstition, and the bourgeois and colonial mentality, a citizen who assumes the values of socialist society" (República de Moçambique, 1983, p. 14).

However, it must be recognised that, despite this general tendency to marginalise the Bantu languages spoken in Mozambique, there were also voices within the different Frelimo governments that expressed favourable attitudes towards these languages. Some declared, for example, that their use for official purposes would contribute to the integration of most citizens into the national system (cf. [Stroud, 2007](#); [Honwana, 2015](#)). In fact, since the proclamation of independence, the Mozambican languages (and not Portuguese) have been the main vehicles for mass political, economic, and social participation and mobilisation at the grassroots level. This enables us to see how official statements or omissions in relation to Mozambican languages were not (have not been) in line with the daily linguistic practices of the majority of the Mozambican population, who continued and continue to conduct their lives primarily in these downgraded languages.

The following section illustrates how the monolingual policies and ideologies adopted in Mozambique until the end of the 1980s strengthened the project to construct a united nation state in which a society united around a single language, a single culture, and a single centre of power was imagined.

The Portuguese Language and Other Minority Languages: The Discourse of Plurality

The creation of nation states supported by monocentric ideologies began to be questioned across the world, especially from the 1980s. As an alternative, a model of pluralist states is currently proposed, where diversity is seen as an important element for the unity and development of nations (cf. [Young, 1993](#)). From a linguistic and cultural point of view, this new ideological alternative revolves around the conceptualisation of multilingualism and multiculturalism not as problems but as resources that countries should use for their constitution or consolidation as states ([Ruiz, 1984](#)).

This ideological shift is, in part, a response to the limitations and oppressive character of monocentric ideologies. The limitations of these ideologies are illustrated by international examples that show that sharing a language and a culture is not a sufficient condition for the establishment of a harmonious society ([Young, 1990](#)). For example, from a political point of view, the African experience shows that, despite being linguistically and culturally homogeneous countries, Burundi, Rwanda, and Somalia have witnessed the most devastating and bloody internal wars of the modern era (cf. [Campbell-Makini, 2000](#); [Küper, 2003](#)). From an educational point of view, analysts point out that monolingual education centred on former colonial languages has not been able to empower most Africans or boost the development of sub-Saharan Africa, despite having been in place for centuries (cf. [Bamgbose, 1994, 2000](#); [Küper, 2003](#); [Djité, 2008](#)). On the contrary, in the view of these analysts, this ideology has a direct relationship with the underdevelopment of this region, above all by contributing to the reproduction of an educated and socio-economically privileged minority, while limiting schooling for most of the population, thus enlarging the army of socio-economically marginalised Africans.

The political and ideological changes that have occurred in Mozambique since the 1990s situate the country within this global and regional ideological and discursive context of unity in diversity. Specifically, in the case of Mozambique, these changes were influenced by internal and external factors that characterised the late 1980s and early 1990s. External factors included the end of the Cold War, marked by the fall of the Berlin Wall (1989) and the break-up of the Soviet Union, with the consequent fall or reconversion of socialist regimes across the world, including the Mozambican one, as well as the end of the Apartheid regime in South Africa (1990–1994), the most important sponsor of opposition forces in Mozambique. These events helped bring about the end of Mozambique's sixteen-year civil war (1976–1992). This combination of forces led to the introduction of a new Constitution ([República de Moçambique, 1990](#)), already foreseeing the new sociopolitical scenario that would open up after the General Peace Agreement (1992). Among the most significant changes introduced by this Constitution, the establishment of a multiparty political system and the option for a market-oriented economic model stand out.

As previously mentioned, it was in the 1990 Constitution that it was declared for the first time that the state promotes the development and use of Mozambican languages in public life, including in education. This declaration was expressed as follows in the Constitution:

The State values national languages and promotes their development and growing use as vehicular languages and in the education of citizens. ([República de Moçambique, 1990, Article 5, No. 2, p. 268](#))

In line with this constitutional development, the use of Mozambican languages in education was supported through Article 4 of Decree 6/92 of the National Education System, which established that:

The National Education System must, within the framework of the principles defined in this law, value and develop national languages, promoting their progressive introduction in the education of citizens. ([República de Moçambique, 1992, p. 104](#))

This legislative development allowed citizens to speak more openly about linguistic issues and legitimised the initial experimental bilingual education introduced for children and adults from the mid-1990s, involving the use of Portuguese and Mozambican languages.

The discourse and ideology of valuing diversity as a condition for building a strong nation have also been reflected in strategic political documents, such as the government of Mozambique's Five-Year Programme for 2020–2024. By defining the strengthening of democracy and preservation of national unity as one of the pillars of the main national priorities, this document establishes that:

National Unity is the starting point for the construction and consolidation of national ideals for the promotion and defence of a Mozambican sense of identity and for the cultivation and maintenance of the values of self-esteem, patriotic spirit [...] and the *continuous appreciation of cultural and ideological diversity as a basis for the consolidation of the construction of an increasingly stronger and more cohesive Mozambican nation*. ([Conselho de Ministros, 2020, p. 49](#); my emphasis)

As can be seen, this declaration represents a turning point in relation to the homogenising approach to culture and ideology adopted until the late 1980s. In fact, taking into account the historical trajectory described in this section, it can be said that, in legislative and discursive terms at least, the current ideological context in Mozambique favours the promotion and valorisation of local languages and cultures. As Chimbutane (2015) argues, the introduction of bilingual education based on Mozambican languages is a consequence of this opening up of ideological spaces and the implementation of policies favourable to languages of lower social status.

It is this same ideological shift that legitimises the unprecedented openness to the use of Mozambican languages in some formal contexts, as an alternative to Portuguese (cf. [Chimbutane, 2018](#)). The national parliament and the municipal assemblies are examples of such spaces. In the regulations of these bodies, Portuguese is defined as the official working language, but their respective members may express themselves in Mozambican languages, provided that they provide the appropriate interpretation or interpretation services into Portuguese. However, the fact that the provision of interpretation services is the responsibility of the members of these bodies may partly explain why they never choose to use their primary languages in these forums, even when they have difficulty expressing themselves in Portuguese ([Chimbutane, 2018](#)). Barriers like these mean that seemingly multilingual policies are not effectively implemented, leading to a mismatch between legislation/discourse and practice.

BILINGUAL EDUCATION: POSSIBILITIES AND CHALLENGES IN A CONTEXT OF PERSISTENT COLONIALITY

The introduction of bilingual education in primary education in 2003 marked the beginning of a new era in the process of local language development in Mozambique and triggered a shift in attitudes towards these languages and associated cultures. These languages, downgraded and marginalised for centuries, are beginning to expand into formal roles and domains, once exclusively reserved for the Portuguese language, and their speakers are beginning to reappraise their value, not only as symbols of identity and cultural heritage, but also as valid instruments for the production and transmission of knowledge, including in the classroom (cf. [Chimbutane, 2011](#)). However, the implementation of this educational model has also faced

many challenges, in particular arising from the persistence of the colonial narrative about languages, education, and citizenship. To discuss the possibilities and challenges inherent in a bilingual education based on Mozambican languages, I will consider the pedagogical, sociocultural, and socio-economic dimensions.

PEDAGOGICAL DIMENSION

Studies of bilingual education in Africa have demonstrated the pedagogical and academic advantages of using African languages in education (e.g. Bamgbose, 2000; Heugh, 2008, 2009). However, these studies highlight that, in order to maximise these advantages, it is necessary to ensure, among other conditions, that bilingual educational programmes are properly planned and implemented. This includes the use of African languages as teaching and learning languages for eight years or more, the provision of effective teaching of European languages as L2, the provision of quality teaching and learning materials, in particular in African languages, and the employment of properly trained teachers to teach using appropriate bilingual education techniques.

In the case of Mozambique, from a pedagogical point of view, the use of Mozambican languages, the languages that most Mozambican children speak best, is providing an environment that facilitates learning in the early school years, particularly in rural areas, where children have little or no access to the Portuguese language. In fact, in contrast to situations where Portuguese is the language of teaching and learning, when Mozambican languages are used for this role, teacher-student and student-student communication flows more easily. Students feel so at ease in class that they sometimes even question the teacher's academic authority, and can co-construct their own knowledge, including by capitalising on the link between classroom knowledge and local knowledge, an integral part of their world view (cf. Chimbutane, 2011; Chambo, 2018).

However, despite evidence of these transformative practices, studies have shown that, overall, the pedagogical advantages of using local languages in teaching are still not being fully exploited in Mozambique (e.g. Chimbutane, 2011; Patel, 2014; Chambo, 2018). According to these studies, this situation results, in part, from constraints such as the inadequacy and poor quality of teaching and learning materials available in Mozambican languages and weaknesses in the training of teachers for bilingual education. Among other consequences, these weaknesses have led teachers to use inappropriate techniques for this type of teaching, including those that reproduce monolingual Portuguese teaching practices, such as recourse to whole-class teacher-led classroom discourse and safe-talk strategies, which are manifested through repetition/chorus responses, elicitation of yes/no responses, and filling in gaps in statements produced by teachers (cf. Chimbutane, 2011, 2013a; Chambo, 2018). This situation illustrates that language planning in Africa is restricted to the declaration of language policies ("policy planning"), but does not progress to include other components that would ensure the effective implementation of these policies (Bamgbose, 2000), such as corpus planning and language-in-education planning.

In addition to limitations in terms of financial and human resources, constraints on the implementation of bilingual education also result from the persistence of colonial logics in the representation of local languages and cultures *vis-à-vis* Portuguese and associated symbolism and materiality. Within these logics, Africans were made to perceive their own heritage languages as useless in educational, economic, and sociopolitical terms, hence the "appetite" for European languages, perceived as languages of legitimate citizenship, modernity, and progress.

SOCIOCULTURAL DIMENSION

From a sociocultural point of view, the use of Mozambican languages in education has three types of impact: the development or intellectualisation of Mozambican languages, the integration of local knowledge and local communities within school, and the valorisation and legitimisation of languages/cultures and speakers that have been the victims of long-standing marginalisation (Chimbutane, 2011).

Indeed, the use of Mozambican languages in schools has been encouraging education actors to adapt them to the requirements of formal education, a process that, in some cases, is being

carried out in collaboration with the beneficiary communities. Driven by bilingual education, the interest in and number of descriptive studies on Mozambican languages has grown, leading to the availability of more dictionaries, grammars, and reading materials in these languages. Furthermore, given the concern to increasingly improve the writing rules of Mozambican languages and facilitate the teaching and learning of reading of and writing in these languages, efforts have been made since 1989 to standardise and harmonise their orthography. These measures show that, rather than expecting local languages to be “developed” for use in education, as some parties argue, the strategy adopted is to promote the intellectualisation of these languages through their effective use in education. This option legitimises Bamgbose’s (1999) observation that a language can only develop if it is used in several domains and for different purposes.

One of the main characteristics of monolingual teaching in Portuguese in Mozambique is that knowledge tends to be passed on in a unidirectional and unquestionable way from the top to the lower levels of the educational structure. In this traditional model, knowledge is transferred, for example, from teacher trainer to trainee or from teacher to student. Furthermore, particularly in rural areas, schools and teachers are viewed as the only repositories of legitimate knowledge, with little or nothing to learn from students or local communities. With the advent of bilingual education, however, this state of affairs is being undermined, creating a new order in which knowledge flows in two directions: teacher-student and school-community. In this new context, teachers tend not to be the undisputed bearers of knowledge, but rather co-actors who can also learn from their students and local communities (Chimbutane, 2011, 2013b).

As an example, given the need to coin technical terms in Mozambican languages, teachers and other education actors have resorted to collecting terms from members of the community that they then adapt to teaching purposes. Likewise, communities are also learning, from teachers and students receiving bilingual education, new terms, genres, and formal linguistic registers in their own heritage languages (Chimbutane, 2011, 2013b). In this context, teachers are beginning to engage with parents as valid intellectual partners in education, which is not common in rural schools where the language of instruction is Portuguese, and the content taught does not reflect the sociocultural reality of the local communities.

In addition to cooperating in transferring local knowledge to schools, communities also tend to oversee and influence the way in which local languages and curriculum content are delivered to children. In this regard, Chimbutane (2011) and Veloso (2012), for example, have shown how communities in the provinces of Gaza and Cabo Delgado have negotiated with the education authorities to change the language variants and/or spelling rules used in bilingual schools, in favour of those with which they most identified. This is an example of an exercise in “linguistic citizenship”, a concept that defines the situation in which speakers have control over their languages, deciding what languages are and what they mean, and where linguistic issues (especially in educational contexts) are discursively linked to social issues (cf. Stroud, 2001).

Participating in the supervision of knowledge and linguistic variants passed on to students and in the development of terminology and metalanguage in Mozambican languages has contributed to the empowerment of local communities. In fact, the introduction of Mozambican languages into the education system allows communities to use them in the formal space of the school with total legitimacy and to negotiate with the education authorities how their languages and local knowledge will be approached in this space. More than teachers, linguists, or other actors in the education field, communities as a whole are the most adept users of Mozambican languages and are aware of the sociocultural reality conveyed through them, which enhances and enables their participation and agency within education. These processes show how bilingual education has the potential to contribute to the democratisation of schools.

Bilingual education is also helping to change perceptions and create positive attitudes in society towards Mozambican languages and cultures. In addition to their traditional role as symbols of identity and cultural heritage, Mozambican languages now tend also to be seen as valid resources to be used in formal domains, including education (Chimbutane, 2011, 2013b). Although since colonial times Mozambicans have been taught that their languages are not valid vehicles for formal education, allegedly due to being out of step with progress and modernity, their current use in bilingual education means that communities are being led to revisit and question this narrative and to develop other narratives based on an appreciation

of the new role assigned to their languages. This revaluation may explain the fact that many citizens, including “assimilated” individuals, are reappraising their own native languages or even expressing regret for educating their children exclusively in Portuguese. In this context, bilingual education can be seen as a result of, but also as a catalyst for, sociocultural change in Mozambique, a kind of return to roots, although this does not necessarily mean giving up the Portuguese language and the culture associated with it.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC DIMENSION

In addition to sociocultural gains, studies have been producing evidence on the importance of African languages in generating socio-economic gains for marginalised groups in Africa, especially in the context of informal markets (e.g. [Djité, 2008](#); [Stroud & Heugh, 2004](#)). However, as these studies show, actors themselves are often not aware of or do not give importance to their multilingual skills in wealth generation. This mentality stems, to a large extent, from colonial ideological structures that dictated that local languages were used in informal markets and outside the domains considered legitimate, such as formal markets and formal education conducted in former colonial languages.

It is within this ideological and perceptual framework that [Chimbutane \(2013b\)](#) has questioned whether sociocultural gains would be sufficient to sustain bilingual education programmes in postcolonial countries like Mozambique. This issue stems from the fact that the sociocultural dimension seems to be, at least to date, the most significant in the introduction of bilingual education in Mozambique, when compared to the pedagogical and socio-economic dimensions. I am not questioning the value or relevance of sociocultural gains here, especially when it comes to preserving local languages and cultures and raising the self-esteem of speakers of these languages. Indeed, as [Chimbutane \(2011, 2013b\)](#) has argued elsewhere, the use of Mozambican languages in education is perceived by communities not only as a sign of official recognition of their existence as distinct ethnolinguistic groups, but also as a step towards the revitalisation of their languages and cultures, downgraded and marginalised since colonial times.

However, considering the results of studies about Mozambique and other postcolonial contexts, it is clear that sociocultural gains will not be sufficient to sustain and ensure the success of bilingual education if the programme fails to produce substantial academic results, including command of the Portuguese language and the acquisition of related cultural and symbolic resources, as well as increasing the possibilities of participation and socio-economic mobility. Indeed, as I have shown ([Chimbutane, 2011, 2013b](#)), important segments of Mozambican society, including members of local communities, consider that education based on local languages does not create opportunities for socio-economic benefits, in particular regarding formal language markets. This conviction stems from the observation that the Portuguese language and its associated cultural and symbolic capital are, in fact, the prerequisites for socio-economic participation and mobility in Mozambique.

The discussion presented in this section seems to indicate that, to guarantee the sustainability and success of bilingual education programmes in postcolonial contexts such as Mozambique, it is necessary to ensure that, in addition to the sociocultural gains associated with the revitalisation of heritage languages and cultures, these programmes also contribute to the provision of linguistic and non-linguistic resources that allow citizens to participate competitively in all spheres of social life, including the political and socio-economic spheres.

CLOSING REMARKS

In this article I have explored the relationships between language, education, and society. I have shown how the linguistic ideologies and policies adopted in Mozambique in colonial times and immediately after independence contributed (and continue to contribute) to the marginalisation of local languages and cultures, to the benefit of the Portuguese language and associated cultural and symbolic resources. During these periods, Portuguese was considered the only language that could mediate the development of a harmonious and united society. However, with the introduction of legislation and ideological discourse promoting unity in diversity, mainly from the late 1980s onwards, spaces were opened for the promotion of

Mozambican languages and cultures. This was, in part, put into practice through initiatives such as the use of these languages in formal contexts, particularly bilingual education, and local administration and government.

The analysis of the implementation of bilingual education in Mozambique allows us to reaffirm that, although necessary, the introduction of local languages in education is not sufficient to improve the quality of teaching and learning. In addition to inadequate financial and human resources, colonial mentalities and practices continue to hamper the development of education based on local languages, still generally perceived as backward and lacking in cultural and symbolic capital considered legitimate in the context of the colonial narrative of modernity and progress.

Thus, despite the arguments about its pedagogical, cognitive, and sociocultural advantages, bilingual education will only be sustainable and succeed if, among other things, it also leads to the appropriation of linguistic and non-linguistic resources associated with socio-economic mobility in postcolonial contexts, or at least if it can contribute to the reconstruction of heritage languages as valid forms of capital in the main formal markets as well. If these transformations do not take place in the short term, parents may (continue to) waive the right to education in their children's first language. This reaction is particularly prevalent among parents from the middle and upper classes, who tend to give more weight to the impact of education on their children's socio-economic mobility than the maintenance of their linguistic and sociocultural heritage. Indeed, as I have argued in my research, in postcolonial multilingual contexts, speakers feel empowered when they can use former colonial, national, and local languages to function effectively in any formal or informal domain, without the limitations imposed by diglossic linguistic policies and practices. This must be the essence of truly multilingual societies.

The discussion presented in this article allows us to conclude that, despite the changes witnessed in terms of discourse and legislation, declarations in favour of pluralism remain essentially redundant in the face of the monolingual colonial constructs and practices that prevail in Mozambican society. The hope is that different actors will continue to take advantage of the ideological and legislative opportunities that have opened up in Mozambique to influence the establishment of multilingual policies and practices that will lead to coexistence and social interaction—in other words, to the full exercise of linguistic citizenship. The signs highlighted in this article suggest that effective bilingual education may prove to be one of the levers of this transformation.

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