'Languages don't have bones, so you can just break them': Rethinking multilingualism in education policy and practice in Africa

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INTRODUCTION

'Languages don't have bones, so you can just break them': rethinking multilingualism in education policy and practice in Africa

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Abstract: Multilingualism is widespread amongst individuals and communities in African countries. However, language-in-education policies across the continent continue to privilege monolingual approaches to language use in the classroom. In this paper we highlight the colonial origins of these monolingual ideologies and discuss the detrimental effects which arise when learners' linguistic repertoires are not welcomed within the education system. We draw attention to major themes within education across a range of contexts: policy vagueness, teachers as policy implementers, and the creation and imposition of boundaries. We advocate for a language-in-education approach which brings the outside in, which welcomes individuals' lived multilingual realities and which values these as resources for learning. We highlight the ways in which translanguaging could represent a positive shift to the way in which multilingual language practices are talked about, and can contribute to decolonising language policy in African contexts. We conclude by calling to action those working on education and policy to ensure that learners and teachers are better supported. We call ultimately for a rethinking of multilingualism.

Keywords: multilingualism, translanguaging, access, language policy, language-supportive pedagogies, Africa.

Note on the authors: see end of article.

1. Background

The ways in which we have come to understand multilingualism have changed significantly over the last 50 years. However, we are yet to reach consensus about how to best harness multilingualism as a resource for individuals, communities and society more broadly. There is increasing evidence of the benefits of mother tongue and multilingual education (Cummins 2000; Ball 2011; UN 2015; UNESCO 2015a; UNESCO 2015b). Despite this, the use of English as a medium of instruction in education continues to grow globally (Dearden 2014). Some 40 per cent of the global population does not have access to education in a language they speak or understand (UNESCO 2016: 1). Monolingual policies which do not accurately reflect the linguistic reality of many people's lived experiences can inhibit access to health, education, political and economic systems (Bamgboṣe 2000; Djité 2008; Williams 2011; Negash 2011).

This supplementary issue of the *Journal of the British Academy* brings together those conducting research on multilingualism in Africa, with a focus on language policy and education on the continent. We are interested in the links between language policy and multilingual practices—both in formal educational contexts and outside of these spaces. In these contexts, there are interesting questions relating to the extent to which the practices used inside the classrooms mirror or reflect those outside the classroom. There are questions as to whether the current approaches and policies most appropriately support and enable effective educational and learning experiences—as will become clear over the course of this paper, you will see we argue that they do not. There are questions as to whether multilingualism itself is encouraged or permitted. Across many African countries, there is a discourse on which language should be used as the medium of instruction in education and which language should be the national or official language, as well as which speech communities should be supported or even protected. However, what is notably less present in these discourses is whether—and how—formal provisions for multilingualism itself can be established. That is, not just whether one language is more 'fit for purpose' than another language, but whether policy can in fact support multilingual language practices themselves.

2. Multilingualism and education in Africa

Individual and societal multilingualism is a key aspect of the linguistic reality of many African countries. In some ways, this multilingualism differs from that seen in much of the so-called Global North, where linguistic diversity is the result of more

recent population changes and cycles of migration.[1] Rather, there are numerous communities and regions in Africa which have been consistently characterised by what has been termed 'sustained multilingualism' (Lüpke 2016; Makalela 2016a) or 'stable multilingualism' (Nakayiza 2012). This situation has led to the observation that multilingualism is the 'lingua franca' in Africa (Batibo 2007; Fardon & Furniss 1993).

Multilingualism implies choices and freedoms for speakers to draw from their range of linguistic resources to make meaning and interact with/in the world. Language policy, on the other hand, is often concerned with managing the choice of language at the individual, community and national level. In the post-independence period of the 1960s, nationhood and national unity in Africa were commonly equated with monolingualism (Heine 1970; Bamgboṣe 2000). As a result, the majority of African countries adopted one official language, and in many African contexts, language policies exhibit an 'inheritance situation' (Bamgboṣe 1991: 69; see Batibo 2007 for discussion of post-independence language policy) in which countries continue to implement policies which reflect those of the colonial period and favour the use of colonial languages in education (Kamwangamalu 2018). In some instances, this explicitly includes the adoption of a former colonial language as the medium of instruction in some or all levels of education. In other cases, however, even when another language is chosen as the official or national language (e.g. in Tanzania, where Swahili is the official language), policies are still very much inspired by European monolingual approaches to language planning and management. As Reilly (2021) notes for Malawi, for example, language policies and discussions around policies are often embedded within a monoglossic perspective and concern themselves with when to move from one monolingual medium of instruction to another monolingual medium of instruction. There is, therefore, in many instances, an 'inherited monolingual bias' (Ndhlovu & Makalela 2021: 62), regardless of which language is chosen for which purpose.

The widespread adoption of monolingual policies and approaches has a wide range of consequences for education. The monolingualising (Heller 1995; 2007) of education systems perpetuates systems of inequity in which some language and literacy practices are valued and others are stigmatised (García 2006; Windle *et al.* 2020; McKinney & Christie 2021). It also reinforces boundaries. Boundaries between languages themselves and boundaries between the school and the home. These boundaries are created through, and reinforce, inequitable systems of power and can oppress, isolate and exclude (Windle *et al.* 2020).

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[1] We recognise that the 'North/South' dichotomy is artificial. There are 'Norths in the South' and 'Souths in the North' (cf. Pennycook & Makoni 2019; Chetty *et al.* forthcoming), and any attempt to group together vast, diverse portions of the world is reductionist. We use the term here, however, since our primarily concern is not with the terms themselves but the approach which considers it possible to divide the world and its people into (such) categories in the first place.

The artificial monolingual space often created in education leads to pressures on teachers to conform to monoglossic ways of being which contradict lived multilingual realities. Teacher training within Africa (as in other contexts) seldom equips teachers with the multilingual pedagogies which would be helpful within the classroom and rarely consider teachers' linguistic repertoires as an important tool (Erling *et al.* 2021). Teachers are then faced with the pressure of implementing monolingual policies and preparing students for monolingual exams, while having to ad hoc navigate the multilingual reality of their learners (Bagwasi & Costley 2022, this issue; Reilly *et al.* 2022, this issue). Such pressures and practices lead to a devaluing of certain language practices and identities. In many African communities, the continued dominance of a colonial or dominant national language means that some teachers and parents have ceased to value their 'ethnic' languages, arguing that their low socioeconomic standing is caused by their use of the community language (e.g. Mapunda 2013).

Educational approaches which do not make room for or value wider language practices can contribute towards increased marginalisation of languages and language communities, resulting in language endangerment and language shift (Boyer & Zsiga 2014; Bagwasi 2021). Additionally, these practices often render students' language practices as invalid, which also has negative consequences on their sense of self and identity (Chumbow 2013; Kirkpatrick 2013). When the language practices within the classroom are not familiar to students, they are not able to effectively access and engage with education or to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary for them to pass required assessments. This often means that students are unable to engage with education and drop out of school. While there are additional factors in school dropout rates in Africa, this lack of engagement and knowledge acquisition due to language is likely to be a factor (Bamgboṣe 2011; Glanz 2013; Kioko *et al.* 2014; Kiramba 2014; UNESCO 2016; Brock-Utne 2017; Clegg 2021; Clegg & Milligan 2021).

An exception to the monolingual official languages policy is found in the case of South Africa. The Constitution of South Africa recognises 11 official languages. Given the legacy of Apartheid, it is perhaps not surprising the Constitution sought to recognise many more groups than were recognised in the language policies of other countries in Africa. Although the adoption of 11 official languages has been critiqued as a symbolic rather than practical gesture (Batibo 2007), there are languages used in South Africa which do not have official recognition.[2] One of the observations that emerges from the South African context is that many of the practical challenges are similar to those in other countries which have chosen a single official language. A regional approach to what is considered—or assumed—to be learners' home languages means that children with different first languages are also marginalised or

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[2] In 2021, South Africa also announced that South African Sign Language would be designated as an official language. Work is under way to enable this as it requires an amendment to the Constitution.

overlooked by policy. In education, we still see the dominance of a single regional language followed by another language of wider communication (see also Kula & Mwansa 2022, this issue; Reilly *et al*. 2022).

The dominance of English within education systems across Africa is both a consequence of colonialism (McKinney 2020) and a symptom of neo-liberal capitalism (Piller & Cho 2013; Price 2014). In many contexts, while English is synonymous with education, so too is it synonymous with employment (Reilly *et al.* forthcoming). The emphasis on acquiring English language skills is founded on the belief that this is the language of opportunity and value which students will need in their lives after education. This ignores a reality in which (1) many students do not complete secondary school; (2) the majority of individuals are employed in the informal economy; (3) multilingualism is a natural occurrence and is a skill valuable in the labour market. The emphasis on acquiring English above all else thus has both serious consequences for education and is pursued under a belief which ignores multilingual realities which characterise vast portions of Africa.

Eurocentric, monoglossic conceptualisations of language, which were a crucial part of colonial othering and oppression (Errington 2001; Makoni & Pennycook 2005; Rosa & Flores 2017), have continued to have a major influence on how language policies are constructed in African countries. Multilingualism and linguistic diversity have long been considered problematic and associated with disunity, low social cohesion and low rates of socioeconomic development (Batibo 2007). The enumeration, naming and counting of language(s) is one of the foundations of this belief.

African languages operate from a position of historical and continued marginalisation. Early efforts to count languages and people, as well as to divide and draw lines between groups, served to further the colonial endeavour. The division of groups also served to disrupt local and historical networks, organisations and concentrations of power. It also an imposed a conceptualisation of language and identity which more closely resembled the dominant notions of language and identity in Europe, which also adopted monolingualising approaches to the creation of the European nation state. African languages were routinely viewed by colonisers as 'inferior'. The complexity of African languages as well as the complex language practices of their speakers was often deliberately overlooked or denied. In many instances, this came from explicitly racist worldviews—in order to acknowledge the complexity of African languages, it was necessary to acknowledge the complexity of African peoples, communities and ways of organising. This was in direct contravention of many of the dominant colonial discourses, which were steeped in notions of 'rescue' and 'civilisation'. Under these views, colonialism was argued to be improving the lot of African populations rather than constituting a racist imposition with extractive goals.

These monolingualising tendencies also have consequences post-, and beyond, education. A monolingual approach does not align with the lived multilingual reality

of individuals, communities or countries around the world. The dominance of a mono-lingual approach to language policy is perhaps fundamentally an approach which will never be effective as it does not consider the linguistic reality for individuals and communities, or the value of fluid language practices which challenge the boundaries between named languages (Makoni & Mashiri 2006; Erling *et al.* 2017; Ndhlovu & Makalela 2021; Reilly 2021). This is true in the African context but is also mirrored in diverse countries, regions, communities and homes around the world. The challenge here is therefore to both recognise what is unique about the multilingual practices and realities of the numerous and diverse African contexts, and to avoid presenting these linguistic practices as exceptional.

This dominance of monolingual approaches does not just concern English. There are also countries in which other languages play this role. This is the case in countries where French, Spanish or Portuguese have the role of the language of the former colonial power. However, there is also another context in much of North Africa, for example where the discourse pertains to the role of Arabic and/or French, often at the expense of other languages found in the region, such as Tamazight (see Rouabah 2022, this issue). This in some ways reflects the situation in Tanzania, where Swahili is the official language and the linguistic context has also been described as one of triglossia, with English the language of education from secondary school onwards, Swahili as the official language and the community languages representing the third category of language. In North Africa, in addition to the discussions pertaining to the role and value of different languages, there is also the differing status of Modern Standard Arabic and varieties of Arabic which are also present in a country, often resulting in a diglossic situation. This is a reminder that in many ways it is less the language choice itself that is the issue—although the choice of language does of course reflect a colonial inheritance—but the choice of a monolingual policy at the expense of multilingual realities. In this sense, Swahili or Setswana (see Bagwasi & Costley 2022) can also be languages which marginalise other (minoritised) languages in a given context. In education, this monolingual, one language at a time approach to schooling is present in all contexts discussed in this volume. In addition to the examples given above, we see that alongside English, dominant regional languages are prioritised in Ghana and a single language, Chichewa, is prioritised in Malawi (see also Reilly *et al.* 2022). An approach to language-in-education policy which is built on monolingual foundations will always necessitate the choice of which single language to choose, which inevitably results in multilingual practices being side-lined and marginalised.

In the next section, we explore a concept which we believe is central to a better understanding of multilingual language dynamics in Africa, particularly in the context of educational and language in education policy—translanguaging.

3. Translanguaging in Africa

Recent years have seen a growth in studies examining multilingual realities in educational contexts, particularly those adopting the lens of 'translanguaging' (Williams 1994; Canagarajah 2011; Lewis *et al.* 2012; García 2014; Wei 2018). Translanguaging refers to both language practices of plurilingual individuals and communities and pedagogical approaches that harness such practices (García 2014). Scholars working on translanguaging argue that imposing monolingual norms onto multilingual learners can perpetuate inequality, as well as meaning that some learners are expected to work in and through language and literacy practices that may bear little or no resemblance to their own (Canagarajah 2011; Lewis *et al.* 2012; García 2014). In adopting a translanguaging approach in educational contexts, 'bi/multilingualism is acknowledged as a resource and teachers strategically incorporate students' cultural and linguistic funds of knowledge in academic tasks' (Paulsrud *et al.* 2021: xxiii). Crucially, this is situated on the 'concept of the multilingual speaker, the whole linguistic repertoire and the social context' (Cenoz & Gorter 2020: 307).

Translanguaging as a pedagogical approach entails 'mobilising [students'] full language repertoire as a resource for learning' (Erling *et al.* 2021: 14; see also Duarte 2020; García & Kleyn, 2016; García & Sylvan 2011). Different approaches to translanguaging are currently a central topic of debate within multilingual education and applied linguistics (see, for example, Brooks 2022; Flores 2022; Cummins' 2021 discussion of unitary translanguaging theory and crosslinguistic translanguaging theory; García *et al.*'s 2021 manifesto, which outlines their decolonial approach to language and education).

Much of the research on translanguaging has focused on North America and Europe, where translanguaging has been used to challenge negative attitudes towards bilingualism and the marginalisation of certain (ethno)linguistic groups. However, explorations of the practice of translanguaging in the context of Africa are also increasing (cf. Lüpke *et al.* 2021; Madiba 2014; Childs 2016; Guzula *et al.* 2016; Bagwasi 2017; Makalela 2016a; 2016b; 2019; Erling *et al.* 2021; Makoni & Pennycook 2006; see also Bagwasi & Costley 2022; Reilly *et al.* 2022; Weidl 2022, this issue). Given the multilingual ecologies within Africa, translanguaging is particularly apt for conceptualising the language practices found on the continent (Makalela 2016a) and, as García *et al.* (2021) write, translanguaging

> is a way to understand the vast complexity and heterogeneity of language practices, avoiding their conception as problems and their evaluation in the negative terms of the colonial imaginary line that values only those socially situated as being above and making invisible those assigned to being below.

Given the ways in which African multilingualisms have been problematised, this translanguaging perspective is particularly relevant within education contexts across the continent. Translanguaging offers an opportunity to construct pedagogies through a 'decolonial lens' (Cushman 2016: 236). We agree with Ndhlovu & Makalela (2021) that translanguaging could be a powerful decolonial tool and with García (2019: 162) in thinking that translanguaging provides a chance to 'decolonize our conception of language and, especially, language education'. Ndhlovu & Makalela (2021) suggest that the adoption of translanguaging pedagogies could offer a means through which to 'decolonise multilingualism'. Decolonising multilingualism relates to fundamental epistemological questions, acknowledging that 'mainstream approaches to multilingualism and language diversity ... follow a mono-epistemic paradigm that focuses on standard countable language things' (Ndhlovu & Makalela 2021: 11), challenging how useful this perspective is within educational contexts and exploring new ways of thinking (Phipps 2019).

A translanguaging pedagogy disrupts the monolingual ideologies which are dominant within much education (Duarte 2020). As we will see throughout this *Journal of the British Academy* supplementary issue, the multilingual reality of much of Africa means that teachers and students are already engaged in complex, sophisticated translanguaging pedagogical practices (Erling *et al.* 2021). The innovative ways in which teachers are disrupting language policy and implementing multilingual pedagogies in Africa is an untapped resource for the construction of translanguaging and language supportive pedagogies globally. Inclusive, contextually appropriate multilingual education is not a panacea for ensuring quality and effective education for children worldwide, but it is a necessary element. We argue that education systems and policies that continue to be built on monoglossic ideologies, which are exclusionary and neglect to engage with, and accommodate, the multilingual realities of students' lives, will never be truly effective for all students.

4. 'Breaking the bones: rethinking multilingualism'

At a teacher meeting on language and language policy in Botswana in February 2022,[3] a teacher described the way in which they and their pupils use language as being like a body: 'Languages don't have bones, so you can just break them.' This statement provides a telling insight into how this teacher views everyday flexible, dynamic and multifaceted language practices—both inside the classroom and in the broader community. However, it also provides an excellent lens through which to explore the issues

[3] This meeting was organised as part of the Global Challenges Research Fund research project *Bringing the Outside In: Merging Local Language and Literacy Practices to Enhance Classroom Learning and Achievement*.

raised in this journal issue in that policies are the bones—the supporting skeleton—upon which classroom and wider social practices rest. The theme that unites these contributions is 'rethinking multilingualism'. We see in each of the papers that the context and countries on which the authors are drawing from or working in are multilingual. We also see in all of these instances that the policies—without exception—are monolingual in nature. Even those which might perhaps be viewed as multilingual, in that they recognise multiple languages, can still be thought of as monolingual, as the multiple languages are adopted *in sequence* rather than at the same time. We therefore have *sequential multilingualism*, which still means that a single language is chosen over another (or indeed, all others).

This supplementary issue of the *Journal of the British Academy* brings together those working on topics relating to multilingual educational practices and policies, with a focus on Africa. It seeks to provide a forum for the exploration of issues relating to languages in education, particularly in relation to enhancing equitable access to resources in the African context.

The issue foregrounds experiences and practices emanating from the Global South, as well as providing an opportunity to (re)examine current practices and contexts for North–South collaboration. We are also interested in the role of multilingual approaches and translanguaging in processes such as transformation and decolonisation, as well as innovative methodologies which may be used to inform the discussion. The articles contained here highlight a broad range of issues and adopt a number of different (methodological) approaches.

The paper by Rouabah (2022) examines education in Algeria, where recent policy shifts have attempted to promote multilingualism. This has been done through a focus on encouraging the learning of foreign languages in education and acknowledging the role of Tamazight as an official language, through inclusion in regional schools in some instances. However, despite recent changes, it is argued that there is a mismatch between the language practices inside and outside the classroom. Moreover, these language policies have implications for social justice issues and access to power.

Kula and Mwansa (2022) focus on education in Zambia. This country's language policy is ostensibly more inclusive, as it allows for the use of a 'familiar language' in the first four years of education. However, as there is no clear guidance on how individual educational districts of schools should decide what counts as 'familiar', in practice this is defined in a restrictive way, only to include one of the seven officially recognised regional languages. In their discussion of children's reading ability in selected Zambian primary schools, Kula and Mwansa highlight the ad hoc and 'haphazard' way in which individual teachers disrupt the official language policy and use learners' linguistic resources in the classroom.

Bagwasi and Costley (2022) report on the Botswanan context. In Botswana, Setswana and English are the only languages legitimised within the education system.

This context is also particularly English-dominant, with English being the main MOI from the second year of primary school onwards. Drawing on data from classroom interactions, Bagwasi and Costley problematise the rigid separation of languages within this monoglossic policy approach, highlighting that it does not reflect the rich linguistic diversity of the country or the fluid and dynamic ways in which individuals use language inside and outside of the classroom.

The article by Mapunda and Gibson (2022 this issue) focuses on Tanzania, a country with a number of parallels to Botswana in that English and one dominant national language are prioritised in policy (Swahili). The Tanzanian language policy adopts Swahili as the MOI for primary schools, with English for the remainder of education, once again providing an example which neglects the majority of languages in the country—with approximately 150 languages not recognised for use in formal contexts or for use within education. Drawing on examination results and classroom practices, the authors illustrate how MOI issues affect equality of educational outcomes as children who do not have Swahili resources in their linguistic repertoires are significantly disadvantaged.

The contribution by Reilly *et al*. (2022) provides a comparative discussion of the Malawian and Ghanaian contexts. They trace the historical changes to language policies in each country, highlighting the monoglossic ideologies on which they are based. The discrepancy between policy and practice is clearly visible within classrooms in both countries, as multilingual language practices are commonplace in contrast. In this data, we see how multilingual repertoires can be positively harnessed to engage students more effectively with education.

Weidl (2022) discusses multilingual practices in Senegal, focusing on the Casamance region. She highlights how fluid language practices are commonplace by presenting linguistic ethnographic data from two distinct contexts—family discussions and official learning environments. In doing so, she illustrates that multilingual languaging practices are the norm for individuals, and artificial monolingual systems are restrictive. Weidl also provides an important reflection on the limits of epistemologies and methodologies from the 'Global North'.

Across the papers in this journal issue, a number of key themes emerge. All the papers focus on language-in-education policies. As Spolsky (2004) highlights, language policy can take many forms—language management, language practices and language attitudes. The majority of our papers start from a point of critiquing policy as legislation, arguing that the restrictive monolingual policies found across the contexts under discussion are harming students' educational experiences and attainment. A fundamental issue here is a lack of transparency on language policy decisions and a lack of clear implementation plans for the practical roll-out of policy. What we find, across countries, is a *policy vagueness*. Often language policies are not clearly documented, are often incredibly brief, are embedded within other educational legislation

and do not appear to be treated as matters of importance. Language policies appear to serve purely ideological functions and are separated from the realities or concerns of education and ultimately their uses, the learners and teachers.

The importance of teachers as enactors of language policy therefore becomes central. What we see clearly from all contexts discussed is that teachers are under numerous and immense pressures. Responding to factors such as the demands of the curriculum; parental expectations; and the practical realities of managing classroom spaces which comprise individuals with diverse repertoires all influence how teachers implement language policy. While we see that different teachers take different stances towards embracing students' linguistic repertoires, we also see that teachers are actively engaged in language practices that disrupt the monoglossic nature of the 'official' policy and are ultimately much more responsive to the needs of learners and communities.

Boundaries are another key theme throughout the papers. Boundaries are created and reinforced but also challenged and permeated at multiple levels. We see clearly boundaries created between the school and the home, which influences attitudes towards what language practices are appropriate or valid within each space. For example, dominant, 'official' languages are accepted within the school and may have little place within the home, while the multilingual practices present within the home are not viewed as being of value past the school gates (see Bagwasi & Costley 2022; Kula & Mwansa 2022; Mapunda & Gibson 2022). We also see conceptualisations of language, and language practices, which conform to monoglossic ideologies; we see important value placed on named languages by individuals, while also seeing conceptualisations and practices which challenge these ideologies and actively disrupt boundaries between named languages.

Pennycook, Kubota and Morgan, in their preface to Ndhlovu and Makalela's *Decolonising Multilingualism in Africa* (2021), write:

> Many of the common ways of thinking about multilingualism, as exemplified in notions such as mother tongue education, bilingual education, or multilingual language policies need critical interrogation. They simply do not match the ways in which languages are used or understood in many African contexts.

Similarly, Erling *et al.* (2021: 13) write:

> the promotion of indigenous African languages in education often fails to recognise the rich multilingual repertoires of learners, simplistically putting forward one language for schooling where community members are more linguistically diverse.

This is our starting point for rethinking multilingualism. There is a disconnect between many policies, research and conversations on multilingualism which does not match the linguistic reality. Our perspective on rethinking multilingualism in education and language policy in Africa is informed by the work of scholars cited in this

introduction, by our experiences of living, working and researching in a range of educational contexts in Africa and by our frustration at the inequity and injustice of education systems across Africa in which systemic issues result in multiple children being silenced, ignored and excluded. This *Journal of the British Academy* supplementary issue represents a contribution towards rethinking multilingualism and a call to do it.

5. Steps for rethinking multilingualism

In order to rethink multilingualism, we believe:

The starting point must be to value all the linguistic resources which pupils bring to the classroom. Where languages and language practices are stigmatised, this must not simply be dismissed but must be understood, in dialogue with the people and communities of language users affected. Taka fanila tangisa ne ku tolela pezhugwi ndimi bana dza ba no zha ku ikwele be dzi ziba. A kuna ndimi idzedzi pa dzi no lingigwa pasi kene kuna sekwe ngwao dzabo kwa dzi no lingigwa pasi, ichechi cha ka fanila lingisisiwa ku lebesaniwa ne beni be ndimi kene ngwao idzedzo.[4] Re tshwanelwa ke go simolola ka go lemoga boleng ja diteme tse bana ba tlang ka tsone ko sekolong. Re seka ra itlhokomolosa mabaka a diteme dingwe le ka fa tiriso ya tsone e tlontlololwang ka teng, mme re buisanye le batho le badirisi ba diteme tseo gore re tlhaloganye mabaka a tsone.[5] He tjhwanee go simolola gka go lemoga boleng jhwa rityeme jhe batyhwana be da gkajho mo shekoleng. He shegka ha ithogkomolosha mabagka a rityeme ringwe le gkaho tyihiso ya jho e tontololwa gka ho, mbe he burisanye le batyho le barihisi ba rityeme jheriyong gore he raloganye mabagka a jho.[6] I hatula iya gwandya, i lilazima i bi gujitogwa i ndimi jose ijo abhana bhagwizaga najo u ng'widarasa. Ulu bhubhiza bhuliho bhubaguji bho ndimi na matumiji ga lulimi lungi, iti mhayo gwa gudalaha gete, i lilazima gumanyike, kubhitila gu mahoya gi hanga lyene.[7]

The current monolingual system simply does not work with regard to nurturing and supporting multilingual practices and in recognising the positive role of multilingualism in teaching and learning. An 'otherwise' is essential (Walsh 2018; García *et al.* 2021). Sera inayohusu lugha ya kufundishia ikubali na iheshimu ukweli kwamba lugha za jamii zipo, na watoto wengi maeneo ya vijijini wanafahamu kidogo sana, ama hawafahamu lugha inayoitwa rasmi.[8] Ukulesha abaana ukubomfya indimi balanda kumayanda musukulu cimo nokubeba ukuti indimi shabo tashacindama

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[4] Ikalanga.

[5] Setswana.

[6] Shekgalagari.

[7] Sukuma.

[8] Swahili.

shakubomfyafye ku ngánda. Abaana teeti baishibe nangu ukwishiba intambi.[9] Bringing the language practices and repertoires which naturally exist outside of the classroom into the education space provides one avenue for change and for an otherwise.

National-level language policies have proven themselves not fit for purpose. More localised approaches are necessary, which provide practical and flexible strategies for language-supportive learning which draw on the linguistic repertoires of the wider school and community populations. In dialogue with teachers, students, communities and governments, we need to reflect on what makes language policy useful and effective. Imisolele ya matampulo ya mitundu yimwi iya kuwomvya awantu wonsinye nanti kulolechesya pa mitundu itichi itavwilizya nkani. Cinga zipa ukulolechesya pa miwele yino inga ficilizya amasambililo ya mitundu yino isukulu inga womvya. Mu kulanzyanya na wa sambilizya, awana wama sukulu, awikalansi nu wu teko, cikulondeka ukwelenganya ama tampulo ya mitundu yino inga wvilizya.[10]

Strict impermeable boundaries between school and home are not useful. We adopt the term *living multilingual reality* to reflect the everyday languaging experiences and practices of individuals. This relates to Ndhlovu & Makalela's (2021: 159–61) call to focus on the *languages of the people* and *socially realistic multilingualism.* The lived multilingual reality of individuals and communities is something which can be harnessed for engaging with, and increasing the effectiveness of, education systems.

Change must happen across the education system. Teachers are powerful agents for language policy implementation and for disrupting monolingual approaches, but they are also only one part of a larger, multi-faceted system. For effective multilingual approaches to education, multilingualism must be considered across the whole system. We must reflect on what valuable education looks like in different contexts. Crucially, we must also reconsider assessment practices.

Monoglossic ideologies and the enumeration and naming of languages have for far too long been central to how multilingualism and linguistic diversity in Africa are discussed. We must also recognise how this affects how we conduct and represent our research. We must consider the language we use to talk about language and be pragmatic in our decisions to ensure that it is the lived multilingual reality of learners which is prioritised within education.

We need to reflect on how we do research on language and on education. We need to emphasise collaboration (Costley & Reilly 2021) and open access, to include a diversity of knowledge systems (Chetty *et al.* forthcoming) and to avoid the appropriation of knowledge. We need to reconsider what are valuable as research outputs when, in our current system, too often journal articles and edited volumes are produced in

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[9] Bemba.

[10] Namwanga.

English are dominated by 'Northern' scholars and are inaccessible to scholars who are not affiliated with university libraries with large budgets (Gibson *et al.* forthcoming).

What does it mean to rethink multilingualism in the African context? It means a genuine shift away from sequential monolingual approaches which are presented as multilingual. It means a true value and appreciation of linguistic variation and diversity, both between languages and within languages. It means truly valuing African languages and seeing them as equal to all others in terms of the role they should play in schools, communities and workplaces. It means the creation of spaces for learners and teachers to express themselves fully and to use their full linguistic repertoires. It means breaking down the boundaries between home and school, the boundaries between languages. It means viewing teachers as powerful agents of change and for the implementation of language policy. It means recognising that teachers are already disrupting monolingual approaches which are imposed on them and their teaching. It means recognising that the current systems are not fit for purpose and are not serving the learners, teachers and the broader aims of equality, access or sustainable development. It means supporting multilingual practices and realities in every stage of the education process, as well as all stages of policy creation and implementation. It means supporting teachers to use multilingual approaches in their classrooms. It means training teachers in techniques and strategies for language-supportive pedagogies. It means recognising that the monolingual expectations and impositions are legacies of colonial policies and divisive approaches and decision making. It means recognising that languages and the people who use them have the power to disrupt. It means that the policies—like the languages—need to be flexible and dynamic. It means remembering that languages do not have bones.

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