

African French Speaking Countries and the Challenge of Globalization

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Introduction

From the social and cultural retirement marked by the distrust between human societies, to the division of the world into blocks in the 20th century, a division which was reinforced with the two world wars, mankind is now experiencing a third strategy that consecrates the burst of established frontiers between blocks. This burst of frontiers and by the same token, the burst of frontiers between societies, is sounder, at the beginning of the 21st century. As we can see, from smaller groups we now assist to the formation of larger groups within which are forged, somehow, logics of community retirements which may condemn such groups to community inaction. And yet, in the new strategy known as globalization, identities are obliged willy-nilly to coexist, reproducing in networks, constrained bonds of cohabitation. In fact, quoting Gildas Simon, Munoz L., (2008:1) defines globalization as an increasing interconnection of individuals, economic, cultural and social systems, and of different spaces (...).

In this globalization which also integrates economical aspects, Munoz L., (2008:26) in lines with Hagège C., will see it as the diffusion and prevailing of American products which threatens the productions of quality of other countries. However, beyond the domination and prevalence of the economical aspects of a given society, one should sight the domination and prevalence of its culture, and by the same token, that of its language. Therefore, in the globalization, the survival of specific cultures, and by the same token that of specific languages is said to depend on some logics of assimilation bound to an acculturation leading to risks, such as domination, submission and monopolization thanks to the supposed supremacy of a model (Gardere E. and Gino Grammatica, 2003:7)¹. Hence our topic: “African French speaking countries and the challenge of globalization”.

¹ Gardere E. and Gino Grammatica, 2003:Coexister dans les Mondes Organisationnels, Communication des Organisation, l’Harmattan.



Talking about French in Africa calls in one's mind the idea of bilingualism or multilingualism in which there is always a problem of language status with its by-cultural conflicts. This problem becomes more complex when comes into play the challenge of globalization, source of multiple hybridities which tend to homogenize various cultures within which, English poses as the dominant language. In that respect, the issue of the relevance of language planning policies in French speaking countries is addressed. Therefore, the present articles will revolve around questions such as: what linguistic map for the French speaking African countries in a world in which their cultural reference (French) is threatened by an English dominion? In other terms, what language should they possess for a better interaction in the globalization? Should they abandon their present national language policies for a better promotion of English? Should they decide on a multilingualism that integrates, at the same time, English and their local languages? To these questions are added others questions on the why and the how of the "Francophonie," as well as the new perspectives of this group.

For a better analysis of this work, we will, in the first part, overview the linguistic policies in French speaking African countries. In the second part, we will assess the viability of these policies with the advent of globalization. And in the third and last part we will suggest in what way the term globalization should be understood.

I- Linguistic Policies in French Speaking Countries in Africa.

1.1- Constraints on Language Planning Policies in French Speaking Countries

Language planning policies based on local languages is rather more recent in Africa French speaking countries compare to English speaking countries. This may be explained by the fact that two different rules were applied to govern the two blocks in the colonial period: the indirect rules for the English colonies and the direct rules for the French colonies. In the indirect rules, indigenous people were governed by their equals and they were left the possibility to devise language policies on the basis of local languages, whereas in the direct rule, French colonists were themselves in charge of the management of colonies. Moreover, it is worth mentioning that the difference between the British and the French colonial administration is that the British colonialists encouraged the use of national languages but the French were very hostile to these languages. As a result, language planning policies in English speaking countries are more advanced not only in terms of their starting period, but also in terms of their development.

French colonies in Africa were insidiously linguistically assimilated. And even, after independence, this linguistic assimilation has continued as, since colonization, stereotypes have been created with regards to our African languages. In fact, “the single story” told but in different version about African languages is that they are “poor languages, they are incomplete, barbaric, and not suitable for science”; they belongs to people that are “*beasts who have no houses, people without head having mouths and their eyes in their breast*” (John Locke 1561)². In the same trend, African languages are languages that belong to people that are, I the words of the poet Rudyard kipling “*half devil half child*”³. The power of words has definitely depicted African languages as unsuitable, therefore not good for their own education. The strategy used by colonists to subdue African and their culture and by the same token their languages, is what Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009), referred to as “the danger of the single story” *which shows a people as one thing as only one thing, over and over again. (...) It makes one story becomes the only story with the consequence of robbing people’s dignity*”.

As a result this strategy would transform people’s perception about a people. Moreover, individuals of the concerned people would look down at their own selves. Should we say with Philippe Masson (2001) that this strategy help to the “*fabrication des Héritiers*” according to whom intellectuals define their frontiers with reference to a double model: a negative model to which they want to oppose, and a positive model which is the model to follow. Therefore, presenting French as the language that would better help for the international interaction; that is diplomacy and commercial relationships, the former rulers who could help for the recognition of national languages rather resorted to French as the only language for administration, but also as the language for education. The first consequence to this has been the neglect of local languages and, by the same token, their consideration as indigenous, minority and incomplete languages. Such terminologies could only make of these languages disregarded even by their own native speakers. The second aspect which is also worth mentioning is the strategy used by tenets of the dominant culture to make of the dominated peoples become co-actors of their own cultural domination with the advent of the “Francophonie.” In fact, in this organization, there is no open intention to dominate, but it is rather veiled and shown no domination-oriented, even if the relationship between French and other cultures inside the “Francophonie” is paradoxically domination-oriented. This intended

²Quoted by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009)

³ idem

domination has not met the expectation of advocators since the French language has known a diversification with the birth of various French varieties in various countries.

1.2- Advent of Language Planning Policies in French Speaking African Countries

Some decades after their independence, Africa French speaking countries still lag behind with regards to socio-economical development, despite the use of French as the language of instruction, despite the abundance of raw materials and despite the various economical readjustments. In other terms, the rapid development which was thought to be reached thanks to the adoption of French as the language for education, did not meet its promises. With the help of the UNESCO declaration (1953), which stresses mother tongues as the best languages for children education, decision-makers of the said countries should understand that development is a social factor which could not be given nor imported, but it should rather be based on local resources.

Actually, Natural resources are very important in development, but their transformation depends on the quality of the human resources. Therefore development which defines as the transformation and improvement of living conditions of societies should, in the first step, aims at the superstructures which contain the axiological values of civilization of these societies (Diabaté, 2001: 4). In this view, development should favor both natural and human resources, with a special focus on the quality of human resources which could only be achieved thanks to a transmission of knowledge and development of skills through education. In fact, education awakens the intellectual development of individuals and this is only possible through language as subject and vehicle of communication.

An appropriate education is the one that will make effective, communication between learners and their teacher, with a special focus on the socio-cultural values of learners. This role should be devoted to local languages that will not only easier communication between teachers and learners but they will also allow a rapid acquisition of knowledge. This view is reinforced by other researches such as those of Halliday (1975, 1980, 1981; Oldenburg, 1987; Painter, 1984, 1989, 1991) and psychologists (Bates et al, 1979; Trevarthen et Hubley, 1978) which emphasize the importance of mother tongue in the psycholinguistic development of children. In fact, all these researches focus on the relevance of mother tongues in the intellectual development of children, for they constitute their first socio-cultural orientations. Therefore, resorting to local languages as means through which education is made will help

not only to solving the discrepancy between school and its environment, but, it will also boost the rapid and large scale intervention of the society. In that perspective, most Africa French speaking countries will undertake a language planning policy which will particularly intends to valuing and promoting local languages. However, language planning policies have known different development in African French speaking countries.

According to the “Rapport Afrique Ouest (2006: 7), along with their language planning policies, French speaking countries in Africa can be clustered into three major groups: whereas some countries have actually known a progress in their language planning policies, with the use of local languages in the educational systems (Mali, Senegal...), some others are still at an experimental level (Côte d’Ivoire with its PEI⁴), whereas a third group still lacks an actual beginning of a language planning policy (Togo). However, despite the remarkable importance of these policies to the actual development which shall be based on local resources, despite the decision in countries to resort to these policies, there is still no real change in the strategies governing linguistic policies in the said countries. In fact most of Africa French speaking countries are still officially unilingual despite their multilingual situation. The constitutional dispositions still define French as the only official language, and in practice, the strategy still favors French to remain the dominant language. It is in this bound of the quest for an actual language policy for a true development that African French speaking countries will face the advent of globalization.

II- Globalization as a Quadratic Equation

At the advent of globalization, African French speaking countries, in general, face an already complex situation in their language planning policies. With regards to language planning policies, most of these countries are still hesitating in actually resorting to their local languages as subject and vehicles in education. But if we admit with GNAMBA (1981:235-40) that development in any country goes together with its languages, we can easily say and observe that Africa French speaking countries are still looking for their ways. They are still looking at French as their cultural and linguistic reference to conduct their development. This attitude is reinforced through Africans active participation in the “*francophonie*” which they have helped create.

⁴ Since 2001, Côte d’Ivoire has undertaken to experiment the use ten of (10) local languages (Baulé, Yacouba, Diula, Bete, Abidji, senufo, Abey...etc, a project called “Projet Ecole Intégrée”.



According to ANU P. (2009:33), with the help of colonization and the French policy, the *francophonie* is a bloc founded by African presidents such as Senghor (Senegal), Bourguiba (Tunisie) and Diori (Niger). It is made of countries that speak or favor the use of the French language. The aim of this group is to preserving the presence and influence of French, and by the same token, preserving the world's cultural and linguistic diversity through the promotion of linguistic pluralism (Brèves, 5, 1996)⁵. But the set of actions⁶ undertaken in the view of supporting this idea rather reveals another side of the coin: the threat of the English socio-cultural and linguistic domination. According to Ager (1999:165) the objectives set by the "Francophonie" reveal an aspect of insecurity. For him through the "Francophonie," France is afraid of the English predominance and is trying to preserve goods relations with its allies so that they have a good image of France. In the same perspective, the attempt to foster the French image worldwide is a response to the English hegemony (Milhaud 2006, Judge 2002: 80-81).

All this indicate an increase in the problems faced by African French speaking countries relatively to their language planning policies. In fact, their first difficulty was to solving the issue of their respective languages dominated by French since the colonial period. Next to this, the language and culture to which they look on as reference, is dominated, in its turn, by English, either culturally and linguistically. As such, globalization poses as a quadratic equation to the Africa French speaking countries. Therefore, they face a double problem to which a genuine solution need be found. Should these countries (Africa French speaking countries) abandon their first respective language policies to constitute a resistance altogether with and around French to fight back the hegemonic expansion of English, but how? Should they reconsider orientations of their actual language policies by acknowledging and taking into account the worldly new order; that is the worldwide predominance of English? However, what are the constraints in globalization?

⁵ In ANU P. (2009:33).

⁶ Various organizations were created to sustain the cultural and linguistic promotion of French. Amongst them we have the: Haut conseil de la Francophonie, Conseil Supérieur de la Langue Française, Délégation générale à la langue française, Agence pour l'Enseignement Français à l'Étranger, Alliance française, association pour la Diffusion de la Pensée Française, Direction Régionale des Relations Culturelles, Scientifiques et Techniques, and the Direction du Développement du Ministère Délégué à la Coopération du Champ des pays Francophones.

III- Constraints in Globalization.

3.1- Defining Globalization.

Contrarily to the former strategies; first the withdrawal and then the division of the world into blocs, that governed former societies, globalization is a system in which different cultures coexist. It is a multicultural setting in which, contrarily to what might constitute the feeling of the cultural homogenization, each culture is given the opportunity to share with others by valuing and offering its specificities. Therefore, globalization becomes as a system made of three specific values such as “*Emotion-Sharing-Universality*”⁷. In fact, all in globalization is more a matter of a quest for an added-value in a set of decided and measured elements rather than an attempt of homogenization and therefore domination in a complex system. Along with this view, globalization can be defined as a tissue waded with different cultures, a combination of pluralities of contributions for the advancement of mankind. Therefore, in globalization, it is all about solidarity.

Referring to the sociolinguistic definition of the term, solidarity expresses warmth. Solidarity is a platform of sharing characterized by the feeling of membership and partnership. In the globalization system, what is at stake is not actually the hegemonic slight inclination of cultures but rather their complementarity. Globalization is just like a system, a competition in which different cultures represent participants, and each of them (cultures) shall hold its position to avoid being silenced. Therefore, to reach this point, should we admit with Hotier H., (2003:61) that absence creates latency and predisposes to excess. Constraint generates the need for autonomy; hyperrationality makes the room for gurus⁸. From this point, one needs understand that globalization is just like an international competition in which each culture should appear not just like a spectator but an active participant. For, in a game or a competition, only participants but not spectators are granted rewards⁹.

Moreover, one can see in the globalization, an opportunity given to cultures to be valued. A culture is worth by what it acquires and gives in the exchange. So, it will not consist in just sharing without contributing. Therefore Africans countries in general and those referred to as the Africa French speaking countries, in particular, should learn to export their culture.

⁷ These three values were those used by the organization committee of the 1998 world cup in France which organized a competition for the most beautiful poster.

⁸ My translation.

⁹ In our context, the reward represents the valuing and recognition by others.

However, an authentic exportation will only be possible on the basis of authentically African data.

The development and the valuing of African cultures and by the same token the development and valuing of African languages, surety of African philosophy, on which leans the African culture, is the key for any Africa real entrance and participation in the globalization. The development of African languages is only possible if, within African nations, actual language planning policies that constitute an inception to authentic cultural exportation are devised and conducted. But what should be the orientations in these linguistic policies?

3.2- New Linguistic Maps in French Speaking African Countries

Resorting to a language planning policy in Africa responds to many problems amongst which we have the inadequacy between education and its environment. In fact the rupture between school and its setting represents the visible aspect of the difficulties that undermine the quick and easy understanding of learners in the educational system. In fact, amongst the four principles suggested by the psycholinguist Shirly Brice-Heath (1983) for a better education, we will focus on the dichotomy acquisition and learning. According to him, education should first be concerned with acquisition and not learning.

Acquisition is the reinforcement of capacities and knowledge about things that we meet in our natural *milieu*. One acquires his mother tongue, the first cultural inheritance he receives from his community. Therefore, this step should first be respected to easier the individual linguistic and cultural development before learning, which is, the transmission of knowledge to a relatively passive learner. Moreover, an easy accessibility to language that serves as means of education stimulates a rather great motivation to learn, and best of it, education is psychologically more adequate as learners are familiar to the concepts of the language in use (UNESCO, 1974:23-24).

Contrarily, starting education in a foreign language, as it is done in Africa French speaking countries, is to inverting the normal order of things. In this trend, education is no more a help for children's cultural and linguistic development, but rather it becomes a complex environment which poses as a constraint for children, and by the same token, it foreshadows difficulties in the sense the country's development. Should we recall that the development of a country goes along with the development of its resources and mainly its human resources? In fact, a good conception of the notion of development places the human resource as the base from which any development, even economical, is boosted. Therefore, education should not be perceived as a simple acquisition of the way to read, write and

calculate, but a contribution to the liberation of man and his entire development (Bataille 1972:74).

The paragraphs above clearly indicate that it would sound curious and vain to devising a serious program of development putting aside local languages, but, all the same, it would appear illusory to categorically reject European languages, pretending some African authenticity (Chaudenson, 1989: 6-7). Therefore, an ideal language policy would consist in devising a language planning policy based on Afro-European bilingualism. This afro-European bilingualism should not only take into account local African languages as an absolute step to development, but it must pose them as the first steps of the ladder to development. As for the European languages, they will serve as means for the international communication with a new special focus on English, a language which prevails in the planetary village.

Conclusion

Along with the analysis above, one can easily states that the issue of language planning policy in Africa always goes along with the issue of language in education. In fact, it is difficult to speak about a language planning policy without referring to the languages to use in the educational system. But the present challenge in African nations, and mainly in those which have French as their colonial linguistic inheritance, globalization presents a double challenge; the relevance of their local languages policy, in the one hand, and in the second hand, the strategy to adopt face to English as the dominant language in this planetary village. However, part of the answer to this equation is to be found in what one should understand through globalization. In fact, if globalization is to be understood not as a homogenizing and cultural standardization, it should therefore be looked on as a platform where all cultures should meet without destroying each other. Therefore, promotion of African languages in the considered nations, and by the same token, promotion of their development in the new socio-political and economic perspective known under the denomination of globalization should lean on two main pillars: at the same time, they should have their feet rooted in the past and turn their eyes towards the future. In other terms, it consists in saving African cultural identity and orienting educational systems towards development based on scientific and technological knowledge; no worth adding that knowledge is power without which the African future generations will not be competitive in globalization. So the new linguistic map, with regards to language planning policies in African French speaking countries, will no more

consist in a unilingual system in which French is the unique language for education. It would rather be made of an Afro-European bilingualism (OUEDRAOGO R.M., 2000) in which, next to French, African local languages and English should be integrated and promoted to solve the problems that undermine these countries with regards to their cultural and economic development.

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