Postcolonial Language Imperialism in Africa: The Latter-day Saints Missionary Program

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Abstract

This paper aims to explore the neocolonial implications of mission language planning, particularly how The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' (LDS Church) mission program relates to postcolonial African language policies. Beginning with a conceptual overview of English language hegemony engrained in African language planning, the investigation covers a detailed inquiry into the LDS Church's mission operations through contemporary missionary language training and practices. Analysis of the languages of instruction reveals a Eurocentric bias in the selection of languages within the LDS Church's Missionary Training Centers, emphasizing the need for a more inclusive and contextually relevant approach to language planning and assignment. Interviews conducted with members of the Church, having served missions on the African continent, further support this conclusion. The implications of conducting mission operations in Africa from an Anglocentric perspective relate to postcolonial discourse on power and exclusion in multilingual ecologies. Considerations for future studies include further documentation of the perspectives of speakers of African languages engaged in mission-related practices within the LDS Church.

Keywords: *African languages, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, English language hegemony, language policy and planning, missionary linguistics*

1 Introduction

Contemporary mission work functions in successive conjunction with its history of colonial subjugation. This incidental form of neocolonialism thrives on Eurocentric language policies influencing contemporary African language ecologies. An American denomination of Christianity known as The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS Church; colloquially Mormon Church) facilitates proselytization work which relies on these policies to delineate the language of instruction for a given area of missionary service. This paper aims to examine active LDS Church growth operations in Africa and the relationship between mission language planning and national language planning. The implications of conducting these programs through linguistic hegemony will be considered in the context of postcolonial discourse.

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Christian evangelical work and colonial linguistics have a long, intertwined history on the African continent, often facilitated through Western standards of literacy and the indexical link between European languages and Christianity (Pennycook & Makoni, 2005). In diachronic studies on imperialism, and on the standard language policies that have followed, missionary work reappears throughout as a powerful socializing institution while acting as an extension of the colonial regime. First as descriptive linguists and later as volunteer preachers, Western missionaries shaped linguistic identities in multilingual ecologies by categorizing languages according to "European cultures of standardization," which could then be "projected onto potential converts" (Errington, 2008, pp. 108-109). Described by Pennycook and Makoni (2005, p. 141) as "the bait for the missionary hook," the English language has also served historical and contemporary proselytization efforts through ESL education. Missionaries have served a critical role in establishing an exclusive connection between those who are allowed to associate as church members and those competent in the language of institutional power.

It is imperative to first examine the role of the English language in postcolonial African language policy, analyzed through the relevant literature, before interpreting its pertinence to the LDS Church's missionary program. This will preface an assessment of how a legacy of colonialism influences language policy and planning, identifying factors that impede the decolonization process. The Latter-day Saints and the workings of the mission process will then be examined through a concise overview of their features. In addition, an inquiry into how mission language assignments are utilized and regarded by members of the Church in the field will be contextualized through participant interviews with returned missionaries. These topics will combine to provide insights into the relationship between language policies and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' chosen languages of instruction.

2 Institutionalized Anglocentrism in Postcolonial Africa

The English language has been recognized as having reached globalized status through preserved power from its enduring history as an instrument of imperialism. In an official status, the English language occupies a majority of formal domains, maintaining an implicit association with the elite and often doing so alone (Costley et al., 2022; Githiora, 2018; Mensah, 2012; Nakayiza, 2016; Opoku-Amankwa, 2009). This imported prestige is typically accompanied by a

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subordination of indigenous languages and persists fixed in language policies that reflect an earlier colonial era (Bamgbose, 1999). The question of national language policy in Africa is often met with interethnic tensions and structures of inequality driven by the Western ideological link between a standard language system and national unity. The initial problem of selecting a language for Christian missionary training is intertwined with these complexities of language standardization. As posited by Irvine and Gal (2009, p. 423), "ideas that were forged in [a colonial] context have remained deeply embedded in our analytical frameworks," and thus serve as important points of consideration in their postcolonial contexts.

Costley et al. (2022, p. 3) contextualizes contemporary English as serving "'a symbolic function […]' to index modernity." Errington (2008) interprets the Eurocentric perspective on language difference through its application in creating linguistic hierarchies which marginalize and assimilate languages not standardized to imperialist ideology. These "cultures of standardization" foster a perception of nonstandard speech patterns as "marks of personal deficiency" (p. 108). In colonial processes, these cultures are imposed through English language hegemony to create "an Anglophone elite which would be '[indigenous] in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect'" (p. 128). As a result, colonial languages secure positions of power which, in turn, affects the positions of existing languages in the social structure and the ease of mobility for their speakers. Over the course of successful repetition of this operation through many facets, the former colonial language shifts in perception from oppressor to modernizer, bringing a linguistic element of internal colonialism to social discourse.

2.1 Language Planning

In administrative language planning, African languages and languages in Africa are divided among both separate and overlapping domains. While English, as a propositioned global lingua franca, is implemented across formal domains, indigenous African languages are often sorted as high or low and extended across a variety of domains (Bamgbose, 1999; Nakayiza, 2016). Relying on historical context, languages are distributed across three key categories: official, national, and local. Official languages are typically utilized to conduct formal government procedure and legislation, international business, and higher education. Oftentimes, public policy is articulated almost exclusively in English, such as in the Anglophone African context (Errington, 2008; Githiora, 2018; Mensah, 2012). The national category commonly hosts the

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languages of local media, news, and advertising. National languages share the education domain but maintain less relevance in comparison to the official medium of instruction and are often not extended in use past secondary education (Opoku-Amankwa, 2009). The majority of indigenous languages in a multilingual community are designated as local languages, which are used in widespread everyday social interaction and lower-level commerce (Githiora, 2018). This system recycles itself through restricted access to administrative authority, maintaining power centralization among English speakers.

The monistic ideology that drives English language imperialism is a derivation of the Western perspective on language use (Irvine & Gal, 2009; Wolff, 2016). In this view, one language represents a united community or nation while multilingual ecologies are consequently divided. The exchange of power between African languages and European languages in Africa has aided in marginalizing distinct indigenous languages in this way by allowing them to be categorized as accents or dialects of a single dominant language (Bamgbose, 1999; Errington, 2008). As a consequence of this structure, speakers are assigned sociocultural attributes which affect their attitudes and beliefs regarding themselves and speakers of other languages or dialects. These associations can also be used to exclude groups of people from participating in certain domains, such as government, based on proficiency in the language of the corresponding domain. In Zambia, for example, English is one of several official languages, but is only spoken by 1.7% of the population (African Studies Center, 2023). Of equal significance, “The constitution [of Zambia] […] states that in order to be elected to parliament, candidates have to be over 18 years old and proficient in English” (Costley et al., 2022, p. 5). These proceedings instill an ideology of English language dominance across institutions of power and socialization but have simultaneously inspired waves of attempts at challenging such assimilationist policies.

2.2 Decolonization of Language Policy

Increasingly, efforts to decolonize national language policies have been met with four barriers: symbolic dominance, indices of development, the Anglocentric standard, and internal opposition. On an administrative level, a local language may be declared national or official in a hollow display of progress and never receive the appropriate role enhancement (Bamgbose, 1999; Nakayiza, 2016). This fault becomes especially consequential in consideration of what is demanded of a language to further its development within a speech community. Bamgbose

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(1999) notes the four indices of development being a standard orthography, a set lexicon, a span of literature, and an existence across various domains in local discourse. Essentially, the criteria that are required for formal development of a language cultivate from its use in formal domains. Additionally, this model demands that, in order for more African languages to be implemented to the official tier, they must be made equal in significance to English. This process of standardization for national language planning codifies local languages through the Western perspective, promoting a language that is no longer an accurate reflection of its speech community.

Beyond judgements on language planning by government administrations, propositions to replace English-only policies with local languages as the medium of instruction have faced repeated opposition from within public discourse. The mother-tongue education movement in Africa has been argued to be a veiled effort to subordinate the African population on a global scale by denying access to languages associated with global opportunity like English (Bamgbose, 1999; Nakayiza, 2016; Opoku-Amankwa, 2009). This preference of English monolingualism for upward social mobility is especially detrimental to preserving a multilingual ecology because of its cultivation through the will of the population rather than being exclusive to the ruling elite. These obstructions to the decolonization process assist in maintaining a Eurocentric system which directs opinions on language policy and planning, ultimately determining the future of postcolonial Africa's linguistic landscape. In the following section, these considerations will be contextualized through the methods and languages by which the LDS Church conducts missionary programs, initially through the perspective of the Church administration itself and subsequently through a critical analysis of the data collected.

3 The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Although discordantly recognized by other Christian faiths, Latter-day Saints administration defines the Church as "a restoration of New Testament Christianity" (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints [LDS Church], 2022a). According to Church doctrine, the Latter-day Saints represent a branch of Christianity which accepts the fundamental principles of the Bible, the role of apostles and prophets, and the timeline of Jesus Christ on earth and up to his resurrection. In addition to these structural beliefs, the Church claims a unique doctrine in which God (known to

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the Latter-day Saints as *Heavenly Father*) and Jesus Christ appeared to a man known as Joseph Smith in the United States, ca. 1820. Joseph Smith claimed that God called upon him to serve as a prophet who would reestablish the Church for the present-day. In 1823, he recorded to have witnessed another apparition, the angel Moroni, who revealed to him a set of golden plates inscribed with the history of a civilization on the American continent from 2200 B.C.E. to 421 C.E. These accounts are said to have been translated by Joseph Smith into English and sequentially published in 1830 as the first Mormon Church scripture – The Book of Mormon (2022a).

As of December 2022, the LDS Church has 115 official translations of The Book of Mormon. The translation process requires an official review "by Church leaders with a strong gospel background" to the intention "that translations reflect as closely as possible the spirit and meaning of the English version" (LDS Church, 2022a). The Church strives to communicate an assurance that any individual may have an opportunity to be literate in the relevant scripture. However, the intention of literacy is antithetical to the inequitable access to oral education of the gospel.

3.1 Missionary Training Centers

> For it shall come to pass in that day, that every man shall hear the fulness of the gospel in his own tongue, and in his own language, through those who are ordained unto this power, by the administration of the Comforter, shed forth upon them for the revelation of Jesus Christ. (Doctrine and Covenants 90:11)

The traditional timeline that leads Latter-day Saints to missionary service begins with church participation in early youth, as a minimum to include completion of a four-year seminary. At the age of eighteen for boys and nineteen for girls, young church members become eligible to receive their mission call to 1 of over 400 location assignments around the world. According to the LDS Church (2022a), missionaries "are sent only to countries where governments allow the Church to operate" and are unable to demonstrate preference towards a destination or language. Following receipt of their assignment, new missionaries are sent to a Missionary Training Center to be equipped with the tools necessary to proselytize in their appointed area, most significantly including an education in their mission language.

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There are 10 Missionary Training Centers in operation worldwide which instruct among a selection of 60 total languages. At the time of this paper's publication, the Church had just begun announcing the construction of an 11th MTC in the Democratic Republic of the Congo as a French language training center, yet without details regarding the area of service (LDS Church, 2024). The flagship MTC is Provo (Utah, United States), with those subsequently established being Mexico City (Mexico), Preston (England), Manila (Philippines), Auckland (New Zealand), São Paolo (Brazil), Lima (Peru), Bangkok (Thailand), Accra (Ghana), and Johannesburg (South Africa) (LDS Church, 2022a). At their assigned training site, new missionaries are issued a strict regimen to prepare for conversations of conversion through an approach to language education constructed for specific contexts. According to data collected in an interview conducted by NPR Staff (2014) with a Provo MTC instructor, the maxim of the MTC is "speak your language." Missionaries are coached to learn vocabulary through speaking, enacting exchanges they are likely to encounter with locals of their area assignment, with a peer playing the role of "potential convert" (2014). Preparation in the assigned language spans most commonly over three weeks and, at a maximum, twelve, including those tasked to learn an unfamiliar orthography. The largest and most numerous in languages of instruction is the Provo MTC which educates on 55 languages, encompassing all of those administered by the LDS Church, excluding Urdu, Greek, Kiswahili, Amharic, and Q'eqchi' (see Table 2 for a complete list of the 60 languages of instruction). For the context of the present discussion, focusing on area assignments on the African continent, only 5 languages are offered: English (including ESL), French, Kiswahili, Amharic, and Malagasy (LDS Church, 2022a).

3.2 Language Assignment

Missionaries sent to serve in any permitted region of Africa attend either the Ghana (West Africa, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Madagascar), South Africa (Southeast Africa, Madagascar), or Provo (worldwide) MTC (Call, 2013; LDS Church, 2022a). The Ghana MTC instructs on English, French, Kiswahili, and Amharic. Even though Kiswahili is a lingua franca of East Africa and Amharic is spoken rarely outside of Ethiopia, they are both exclusively offered at the West African-serving MTC. Amharic (Afroasiatic) and Kiswahili (Niger-Congo) are also the only 2 indigenous African languages out of the 60 total selected by Church administration for instruction. As for the South Africa MTC, the only language other than

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English taught is Malagasy, an Austronesian language principally spoken in Madagascar. By organizing the data collected into their respective linguistic families – incorporating all 10 MTCs – and calculating the relative frequency of each family, additional patterns emerge which demonstrate a Eurocentric approach to mission language selection and assignment. Table 1 consists of the complete details of the MTCs, areas served, and languages of instruction with durations.

MTC Location	**Area Served**	**Languages of Instruction**
Brazil	Mozambique, Cape Verde, Angola, South and Central America, Mexico, Japan, Portugal	Portuguese (3-6 weeks), Spanish (3-4 weeks), Japanese (9 weeks)
Thailand	Southeast Asia	English, Thai, Russian (3 weeks[1])
England	Europe	German (3-6 weeks), English, Spanish, French, Russian (3 weeks), ESL (6 weeks), Greek (9 weeks)
Ghana	West Africa, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Madagascar	English (3 weeks), French (3-6 weeks), ESL, Kiswahili, Amharic (6 weeks)
Mexico	Mexico, other countries of North, Central and South America, Dominican Republic, Haiti	Spanish (3-6 weeks), Haitian Creole (3 weeks), Q'eqchi' (9 weeks)
New Zealand	Australia, Fiji, Samoa, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Tahiti, Tonga	English, French (native speakers only), Samoan (native speakers only), Tongan (3 weeks), ESL (6-9 weeks)
Peru	Central and South America	Spanish (3-6 weeks)
Philippines	Asia	Tagalog (3-6 weeks), Cambodian, Cebuano, English, Hiligaynon, Indonesian, Japanese, Korean, Mandarin, Mongolian, Urdu, Vietnamese (3 weeks) (all

[1] The Thailand MTC was the last to open in January 2024. The duration of these three language programs is unconfirmed as of this study's publication.

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		languages except Tagalog, native speakers only), ESL (6 weeks)
South Africa	Southeast Africa, Madagascar	English, Portuguese (3-6 weeks), Malagasy (6 weeks)
United States	Worldwide	55 different languages

Table 1: Languages of instruction and areas served of the Missionary Training Centers

Of the 60 total languages for training, 48% (N = 29) of them can be classified as Indo-European. There is currently at least one European language taught in each MTC and for every area served, primarily English, French, or Spanish. The remaining families are Austronesian (20%), Sino-Tibetan (5%), Uralic (5%), Austroasiatic (3%), and one language as the sole representative of its language family (18%), such as Thai (see Table 2 for language families). Additionally, regarding any training center or assignment to which a missionary could be sent, there is a 19% probability that the mission language would be English, factoring for English speakers as well as those learning English as a foreign language across all of the 10 MTC's languages of instruction. However, this Anglocentric approach to mission language planning is not distributed evenly, evident by contrast of the 12 Austronesian languages taught to Asia-serving missionaries and the 2 African languages for Africa-serving missions. Deconstructing the 60 languages of instruction by service area and classification reveals a disregard towards educating missionaries in indigenous African languages.

1	Albanian (Indo-European)	29	Thai (Kra-Dai)
2	Armenian (Indo-European)	30	Turkish (Turkic)
3	Bulgarian (Indo-European)	31	Ukrainian (Indo-European)
4	Burmese (Sino-Tibetan)	32	Vietnamese (Austroasiatic)
5	Cambodian (Austroasiatic)	33	ASL (Indo-European)
6	Cantonese (Sino-Tibetan)	34	Cebuano (Austronesian)
7	Croatian (Indo-European)	35	Danish (Indo-European)
8	Czech (Indo-European)	36	Dutch (Indo-European)
9	ESL (Indo-European)	37	Fijian (Austronesian)
10	English (Indo-European)	38	French (Indo-European)
11	Estonian (Uralic)	39	German (Indo-European)

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12	Finnish (Uralic)	40	Haitian Creole (French Creole)[2]
13	Georgian (Kartvelian)	41	Hiligaynon (Austronesian)
14	Hmong (Hmong-Mien)	42	Indonesian (Austronesian)
15	Hungarian (Uralic)	43	Italian (Indo-European)
16	Icelandic (Indo-European)	44	Kiribati (Austronesian)
17	Japanese (Japonic)	45	Malagasy (Austronesian)
18	Korean (Koreanic)	46	Malay (Austronesian)
19	Latvian (Indo-European)	47	Marshallese (Austronesian)
20	Lithuanian (Indo-European)	48	Norwegian (Indo-European)
21	Mandarin (Sino-Tibetan)	49	Portuguese (Indo-European)
22	Mongolian (Mongolic)	50	Romanian (Indo-European)
23	Persian (Indo-European)	51	Samoan (Austronesian)
24	Polish (Indo-European)	52	Spanish (Indo-European)
25	Russian (Indo-European)	53	Swedish (Indo-European)
26	Slovak (Indo-European)	54	Tagalog (Austronesian)
27	Slovene (Indo-European)	55	Tongan (Austronesian)
28	Tahitian (Austronesian)	+[3]	

Table 2: List of the 55 languages taught at the Provo Missionary Training Center

3.3 Field Guide

> We teach missionaries to speak foreign languages so we can take the gospel to the whole world. But missionary work would be a lot easier if everyone spoke the same language! Well, Zephaniah prophesied that someday we will: "For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the Lord, to serve him with one consent' (Zephaniah 3:9)." What is this "pure language," and how will everyone learn it? We don't know all the details. But in the meantime, with the help of the Holy Ghost and the gift of tongues, we keep working to bridge language barriers. Heavenly Father understands all of His children—and someday we will all understand each other too. (LDS Church, 2022b)

[2] Haitian Creole is coded here as a French Creole, in accordance with MTC instructional methods, despite the fact that the author disposes the concept of Creole Exceptionalism.
[3] Q'eqchi' (Mayan), Kiswahili (Niger-Congo), Greek (Indo-European), Urdu (Indo-European), and Amharic (Afro-Asiatic) are not Provo MTC languages of instruction.

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The infamous language education methodology of the LDS Church is further detailed through their self-published training handbook, *Preach My Gospel*: *A Guide to Missionary Service*. The book's seventh chapter – *How Can I Better Learn My Mission Language?* – introduces missionaries to standard advice on personal study of a foreign language, including how to document new vocabulary and grammar, improve pronunciation, and prepare materials to communicate the message in the mission language (Bennett & Fu, 2014; LDS Church, 2004). Moreover, the guide acknowledges that missionaries may be ill-equipped to encounter cultural or linguistic differences in their area of service. The preliminary suggestion to introduce the section on learning local culture and language is to "Strive to understand the culture of the people so that you can communicate the unique aspects of the message of the Restoration in a way that will be clear to them" (LDS Church, 2004, p. 132). However, the proposed timeline duration for mission language acquisition via the MTCs, at maximum being 12 weeks, does not adequately reflect this goal.

The purpose of the significantly short missionary language training of the MTCs is not to impart proficiency, but to introduce basics and instill a learn-while-you-go (i.e., "speak your language") framework from the start of the service period. New missionaries begin their (3 to 12-week) program by learning basic syntax and phonology through standard phrases such as, "'What did Jesus Christ do when he was on Earth'" (NPR Staff, 2014). This method speaks to the efficacy of a context-based approach to language acquisition but remains misaligned with realistic training durations necessary for acquiring a working proficiency (24 to 88 weeks for native speakers of English), even with program durations timed congruently with L1-L2 similarity (Foreign Service Institute, n.d.). Additionally, research on language acquisition suggests that the onset for missionary training surpasses the critical period for second language acquisition in adolescence, making the LDS Church training timelines insufficient and ineffective (Hartshorne et al., 2018). It is also worth noting that the pragmatic bilingualism promoted by Christian mission practices is defined as "between indigenous languages and a metropolitan language," represented by the predominance of ESL as the language of instruction in the LDS Church's MTCs (Pennycook & Makoni, 2005, p. 144). In mission praxis, these methods prove less practical in the face of real cross-cultural experiences.

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3.4 Accounts from Returned Missionaries

While the larger religious institution is the present subject of study, it is integral that the individual perspectives of missionaries are recorded and acknowledged when studying their collective influence to avoid the creation of oppositions in research. In attempt to do so, three independent interviews were conducted with returned LDS Church missionaries to gather evaluations of the efficacy of the mission language assignments. Each of the interviewees were assigned service areas in Africa by the Church and, most notably, English-speaking missions. Questions presented related to mission assignment, including the area served, the MTC attended, the language of instruction, and if any other languages were studied while serving. Each interviewee reported studying their assigned language at an MTC with no prior experience. Any additional necessary training was completed informally while serving the duration of the mission. The interviews were conducted informally via phone calls and text messages where responses could be recorded in the form of direct quotations and interviewees were provided sufficient time for reflection. Finally, participants were asked to consider how they felt overall about their mission assignments and their impressions on any resultant accomplishments.

The first individual interviewed was appointed to a mission in Cape Town, South Africa, and attended the Provo MTC. Although their language of instruction was English, they reported learning Afrikaans and isiXhosa during their service period. The second and third missionaries served in Accra, Ghana and Freetown, Sierra Leone, respectively, but both received their training at the Ghana MTC. While also assigned to English-speaking missions, the second and third interviewees similarly studied languages indigenous to their areas of service. The missionary in Accra, Ghana described their decision to learn to speak Twi as necessary to their perceived success, but insufficient for the multilingual community. They observed a wide variety of local languages and dialectical differences that led to the impression that their mission to proselytize was limited to the bounds of their linguistic repertoire. While serving in Freetown, Sierra Leone, the third missionary expressed dissatisfaction with their language assignment. Furthermore, they cited a discussion with Church officials in which they were informed that obtaining proficiency in a local language (Krio) would be essential as it was not taught at the MTC. Continuing to reflect on the relative success of their mission, they described figurative distance between themselves and members of the population due to their status as a monolingual English speaker. The use of Krio and Mende allowed them to not only proceed with their missionary work, but to

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also communicate respect effectively. Each missionary reported a revelation of unpreparedness despite following each measure guided by their administration. However, in considering their positionality as English speakers in Africa, they opted for practicing cultural relativism to achieve mutual understanding. The emergent patterns from these accounts help to illustrate the omissions of an Anglocentric approach to language assignment amidst a multilingual Africa.

The LDS Church's service guide emphasizes that if a missionary does not already know English, learning the language would allow them "to help build the Lord's kingdom in additional ways" (LDS Church, 2004, p. 128). In an environment where the colonial language maintains dominant status, adopting the language into one's repertoire provides opportunity for gaining an advantage, and furthermore, native speakers of the language hold the advantage inherently. By approaching mission language assignments observing this correlation, the Church is able to delegate missionaries who already align with existing positions of power. The LDS Church's missionary language program proves even less adequate when considered in conjunction with the Church's history with African-based proselytization efforts.

3.5 The Latter-day Saints in Africa

There is a history of doctrine and circumscription which details vital information for the backdrop of the LDS Church's developments in West Africa. Sanneh (1989, p. 40) notes that mission activity is facilitated and diffused through two impulses: "the obligation to spread the message with every available facility and opportunity" and "the need to regulate the emerging community of believers;" the first signifying the purpose of the mission while the second serving to address the intractable plurality that is produced through a successful mission. In standardizing the administration of the gospel, the Church can conduct successful missions which diversify the Church while homogenizing the congregation to a particular standard beyond what is demanded by the doctrine.

As of March 2025, there are a total of 849,568 LDS Church members in Africa, and 31 African countries which host missions for the Church. Nigeria holds 27% (232,654) of all African Latter-day Saints at approximately 0.1% of the total population (African Studies Center, 2023; LDS Church, 2025). In correspondence to the impact the Church has had on the religious landscape of Africa, Hurlbut (2018) describes that contemporary doctrine of the LDS Church was critically shaped by the early events of the Church's operations in Nigeria. Prior to the 1978

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Priesthood Revelation, in which the honor of priesthood, admission to Church temples, and equal Church membership was extended to black Latter-day Saints, the prevailing doctrine of the Church was "'that the Negroes are not entitled to the full blessings of the Gospel'" (p. 2). Following the 1978 declaration, the Church still struggled to establish itself officially in Nigeria by failing to provide translations of religious texts into local languages. In the late 20th century, imported Church leaders were still uneducated in languages such as Igbo, Efik, and Hausa, and members of local congregations were unable to understand English. In a series of letters exchanged between LDS Church missionaries in Nigeria, the lack of action on translation efforts was cited to derive from the government's discomfort with the decision to diminish resources intended for a multilingual ecology to a select few languages. This concern suggested that "'showing favoritism toward one tribal language over another […] could lead to resentment among other ethnic groups,'" reflecting similar concerns in government language policy and planning. However, this argument was accompanied by one by missionaries in which Efik was described as a "'relatively minor language,' despite the fact that the majority of Nigerian Mormons lived in the Efik-speaking region" (p. 15). The consequences of attempts to proselytize without local languages as a resource, and furthermore demonstrating a preference towards English-only oral education, have been demonstrated as inherited and sustained by contemporary LDS Church mission practices.

4 Discussion and Conclusion

The Christian mission in Africa contributes to ongoing English language hegemony as an ecclesiastical subdivision of the process. Prior research on related Christian church practices reveals a relatively straightforward, yet socially and politically biased, objective toward mutual understanding often swept up by macro-level-imposed language marginalization (Pennycook & Makoni, 2005; Schneider, 2022). Makoni and Makoni (2009) conclude that the impact of Anglocentric missionary practices on English language hegemony in Africa is relatively minor compared to those institutionally imposed forces and pro-Global English public opinions. However, the LDS Church's selection and distribution of languages of instruction reflects Africa's language policies and planning which directly contribute to the marginalization of local languages in favor of languages of former colonial powers. Resultant English-only language

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policies have since been shown to create space for sociolinguistic binary opposition structures rooted in Anglocentrism.

The LDS Church's primarily English-oriented African mission language assignments were presented through a descriptive analysis of their 60 languages of instruction. This subject was further explored through the Church's administrative history rooted in a discriminatory system to keep Africans from becoming full-fledged members of the Church. In context, the list of languages of instruction for the LDS Church's Missionary Training Centers is a cumulative product of the history of the Church in Africa and the effects of a globalized and neutralized English language. While English has been demonstrated to maintain this position in language policy and planning of multilingual ecologies, the perception of English in Africa as a simple answer to a multifaceted question is irresponsive to the actual sociolinguistic situation presented through modern missionary accounts. The interviews conducted with returned missionaries revealed individual perspectives on the shortcomings of mission training and language assignments. These assignments were further contextualized through the Anglocentric ideologies that influence the spread of English as an official language and lingua franca in postcolonial societies. For an LDS Church missionary in Africa, participation in the sociolinguistic situation of the area served is left to the discretion of the individual. However, the perceived success of missionary service has been demonstrated to be more dependent on micro rather than macro language ecologies, as discourse necessary for building the preacher-convert relationship with the wider population is communicated through the local languages within the community, not through the official languages of the elite. Should international organizations, such as the LDS Church, maintain English as a primary means of global communication, it is recommended that a pluricentric or transnational approach is adopted in training programs to encourage critical reflection and help facilitate effective cross-cultural communication (see Baker & Ishikawa, 2021 for transcultural recommendations on English language teaching).

Questions that pertain to the LDS Church incorporating more African languages into missionary education are similar to those of ongoing discourse regarding the accommodation of multilingualism in national language planning. How could the present selection process for mission languages of instruction be improved to better reflect the sociolinguistic situation of a given area? How effective are representative language selections in comparison to those that represent power structures in effect? Given that African Latter-day Saints are subject to the same

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conditions when it comes to mission language assignments, subsequent research is encouraged to explore these considerations further through the perspectives of speakers of African languages. Such missionaries, with the whole of their linguistic repertoires, could presumably still be assigned English or French-speaking missions in Africa.

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