Esther Mukewa Lisanza & Leonard Muaka (Eds): *The Palgrave Handbook of Language Policies in Africa*, 2024, Palgrave Macmillan, xxviii + 752 pp., ISBN-13: 978-3031573071

Charity Owusu Ansah
University of Maryland (College Park), USA
cansah@umd.edu

The impact of colonial language policies (LPs) is illustrated by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's experience in Kenya, where children were punished for speaking mother tongue languages by wearing humiliating signs reading "I AM STUPID" or "I AM A DONKEY" (p. 11). These practices exemplify how colonial language regimes degraded and suppressed Indigenous languages. Esther Mukewa Lisanza and Leonard Muaka, editors of *The Palgrave Handbook of Language Policies in Africa*, bring together country-specific accounts that show how such histories continue to shape language policy across the continent.

The volume contains 32 country chapters covering 31 states. Tanzania is represented through separate chapters on mainland Tanzania and Zanzibar, while Somaliland and Somalia are addressed in one chapter. This organization gives the handbook a broad continental scope and makes it possible to consider recurring tensions among colonial languages, national languages, Indigenous languages, education, identity, and power. At the same time, the uneven country coverage and differences in the analytical depth of the chapters raise questions about the handbook's representativeness and comparative reach.

Part One, Language Policy in East Africa, begins with Kenya, where Oduor and Kipsang examine the interaction of English, Kiswahili, Sheng, and Indigenous languages across education, public spaces, government, business, and religious institutions. Their account shows that language use cannot be understood only through official policy because sociocultural practices continually shape how languages function. The chapter on mainland Tanzania by Maganda traces the historical and educational roles of Swahili and English and draws attention to limited institutional support for Indigenous community languages. Maalim's chapter on Zanzibar examines the continuing relationship between Kiswahili and English, including debates surrounding Kiswahili as a Medium of Instruction (MoI). Mukama's chapter on Uganda similarly highlights tensions among English, Kiswahili, and Indigenous languages, including debates surrounding Kiswahili and Luganda. Across these cases, the chapters demonstrate a

eISSN: 3042-4046

recurring gap between formal policy and language practices in everyday and educational settings.

Part Two, on Central Africa, begins with Burundi. Muaka, Nduwamahoro, and Butoyi describe a multilingual setting in which Kirundi functions as the national language and primary medium of instruction in early education, while French and English have gained prominence through historical and contemporary institutional developments. The chapter on Rwanda by Gahutu traces shifts from Kinyarwanda to French and later English, connecting language policy to political and historical change. Bokamba's discussion of the Democratic Republic of Congo examines national languages, multilingual education, and the ideological dimensions of language governance. Tsoumou's chapter on Congo-Brazzaville focuses on the dominance of French alongside Kituba and Lingala as interethnic lingua francas, while noting new visibility for ethnic languages through social media. Together, these chapters show that official language choices are closely connected to national identity, governance, and access to education.

Part Three, Language Policy in West Africa, contains the largest set of country chapters. In Cabo Verde, Portuguese remains the official language and dominates formal domains, whereas Kriolu is widely used in everyday communication but lacks equivalent legal and institutional recognition. Yuka's chapter on Cameroon addresses the challenges of governing a highly multilingual society, with more than 280 Indigenous languages alongside English, French, and Pidgin. The chapter shows how languages can have different social meanings depending on whether they are acquired through everyday interaction or formally taught and institutionalized. Seck's discussion of Senegal describes the continued dominance of French alongside national languages that have symbolic recognition but more limited institutional use. Jammeh's account of The Gambia similarly identifies a gap between policies intended to promote local languages and the continued preference for English in formal education and government.

The chapters on Côte d'Ivoire and Benin further illustrate the institutional dominance of French despite widespread multilingualism. Dodo and Yao argue for stronger support for Indigenous languages, particularly in education, while Baloubi emphasizes mother-tongue instruction so that children can begin schooling in languages they understand while acquiring French and other languages. Sow's chapter on Mali examines efforts to promote national languages such as Bambara and the challenges created by limited resources, materials, funding, and resistance. Adeniyi and Ayodele's chapter on Nigeria moves beyond formal policy to consider the beliefs

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and power relations underlying language practices. Sagayar's historical account of Niger connects language policy with Indigenous language marginalization, identity, education, and knowledge transmission. Mouzou's chapter on Togo traces shifts from assimilationist to nationalist and identity-oriented approaches and considers efforts to promote Ewe and Kabiye alongside French. Ouédraogo's discussion of Burkina Faso similarly highlights the difference between policy recognition and practical marginalization of national languages such as Moore, Dioula, and Fulani. Ofori's chapter on Ghana concludes the regional section by arguing that deliberate language planning is necessary to manage multilingualism while recognizing both local languages and the continuing functional role of English.

Part Four, on the Horn of Africa, examines Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Somaliland and Somalia. Asfaha and Kroon show how Italian, British, and Ethiopian administrations imposed different language policies in Eritrea, leaving lasting effects on its multilingual landscape. Alem's chapter on Ethiopia considers the relationship among language policy, politics, and ethnic federalism, noting differences between legal recognition of languages and their implementation in education, media, and religious practices. Ali's chapter on Somaliland and Somalia traces the development of Somali from an oral tradition into a central component of national identity and governance. These chapters reinforce the handbook's broader argument that language policy is shaped by political histories rather than linguistic considerations alone.

Part Five covers North Africa. Alalou examines the continuing effects of French colonialism in Morocco and the marginalization of Amazigh, showing how postcolonial policy remains connected to colonial linguistic structures. Hedid's chapter on Algeria places language policy within a historical and sociolinguistic context, tracing the linguistic effects of successive periods of conquest and colonization. Tchaine's chapter on Chad describes what he calls "double colonization," referring to the combined historical influence of Arab-Muslim contact and French colonialism. French became institutionalized in schools, churches, and legal administration, while many of Chad's more than 130 Indigenous languages remained concentrated in informal domains. The chapter's account demonstrates the difficulty of developing policy that reflects multilingual realities shaped by overlapping historical forces.

Part Six, on Southern Africa, includes Zimbabwe, Lesotho, Namibia, Zambia, Botswana, and South Africa. Ndlovu's chapter on Zimbabwe examines language policy at macro, meso, and micro levels and highlights tensions between official recognition and implementation. Rakolobe

eISSN: 3042-4046

discusses Lesotho's efforts to include minority languages alongside Sesotho and the implications for education and cultural diversity. Bruwer shows how language policy in Namibia has been connected to political and ideological interests. Simungala's analysis of Zambia emphasizes the fluidity of plurilingual practices and questions rigid approaches to language planning. Chebanne and Monaka challenge assumptions about Botswana's linguistic uniformity and discuss the marginalization of Indigenous languages in education. Hlengwa-Selepe's final country chapter examines South Africa's continuing struggle to translate formal commitments to linguistic equality into practice, particularly given limited resources, implementation challenges, and the continued prominence of English.

The organization of the volume makes visible an important distinction between language policy as written and language policy as practiced. Across the countries, chapters recognize national, Indigenous, or local languages, yet historically privileged languages such as English and French continue to hold authority in examinations, administration, and higher education. Implementation depends not only on legislation but on resources, teacher preparation, instructional materials, public attitudes, and status attached to languages. Distinguishing policy formulation from enactment provides an important contribution to the study of language policy in Africa. Several chapters suggest that formal recognition does not automatically produce institutional change. A language may receive constitutional or legislative recognition without gaining comparable space in schools, government offices, or public services. This distinction helps explain why policies supporting multilingualism on paper may produce limited changes in practice.

Beyond formal policy arrangements, everyday linguistic practices reveal a more complex picture of language use. Sheng in Kenya, Pidgin in Cameroon, Kriolu in Cabo Verde, Kituba and Lingala in Congo-Brazzaville, and plurilingual practices in Zambia do not always fit official classifications. Such examples challenge distinctions between "official" and "local" languages and show why everyday communication deserves attention in language policy research. For education, these practices matter because classroom interaction may extend beyond the officially designated medium of instruction. Greater comparison among these cases could have strengthened the editorial synthesis. Speakers often select linguistic resources according to audience, setting, purpose, and familiarity rather than official language boundaries. Such

eISSN: 3042-4046

practices raise questions about whether educational policies adequately reflect multilingual realities experienced by teachers and learners**.**

Extending the discussion across national contexts, readers can consider language policy across different historical and sociolinguistic settings, with education emerging as an important site of policy implementation and contestation. Mother-Tongue Instruction (MTI) and multilingual education receive attention in several contributions, revealing the difficulties involved in sustaining African languages within formal educational systems. Yet Angola, Mozambique, Madagascar, Sudan, and Egypt, among others, are absent, leaving significant linguistic and policy contexts outside the collection. Including additional countries could have expanded comparison of how colonial histories, language diversity, and political structures influence language planning.

Geographical coverage is further complicated by differences in chapter organization and analytical depth. Chad, for example, appears in the North Africa section without an explanation of the geographical or analytical rationale for the placement. Some contributors provide detailed discussion of implementation, educational consequences, and policy responses, whereas others concentrate on historical development or descriptions of contemporary language conditions. More consistent analytical categories across the chapters would have made similarities and differences easier to identify. A shared set of questions concerning language status, education, implementation, public attitudes, and community use could have provided greater continuity without limiting the distinctive histories of individual countries.

Questions of analytical depth led to another limitation concerning the relationship between individual country accounts and existing scholarship**.** Several contributions address established tensions surrounding colonial and African languages, but fewer chapters explicitly explain how particular cases extend, complicate, or challenge previous research. Stronger cross-national synthesis could have connected institutional structures, educational systems, historical circumstances, and community practices to different policy outcomes. Greater attention to concrete policy responses would have increased the value of the collection for educators and policymakers working in multilingual settings. Such discussion could include teacher preparation, curriculum development, African-language materials, assessment practices, and institutional support for multilingual education.

eISSN: 3042-4046

Moving from the individual cases to the concluding discussion, the final chapter returns to the continuing influence of colonial histories on contemporary language policy. Connections among language, education, politics, culture, identity, access, and power receive attention, providing a frame for understanding the consequences of language choices in institutional settings. The concluding discussion gives coherence to the country chapters while recognizing differences among national contexts. The chapter provides a useful point of departure for considering language policy as a process involving historical legacies, institutional priorities, and the everyday experiences of language users.

Viewed as a continental reference work, the volume offers a substantial resource for scholarship on African language policy and multilingualism. Its coverage provides material for comparative research, although geographical omissions, uneven analytical treatment, and limited synthesis leave questions for future study. Scholars and students in language policy, multilingual education, sociolinguistics, African studies, and language and identity can draw on the country-specific accounts to investigate how historical language arrangements continue to shape contemporary educational and institutional practices. For readers entering the field, the collection provides an accessible introduction to different national policy histories; for established researchers, the chapters create opportunities for further comparative investigation.

Reference

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Authors' Biography

Charity Owusu Ansah is a doctoral student in Applied Linguistics and Language Education at the University of Maryland whose research focuses on multilingualism, language policy, literacy, oral storytelling, and culturally sustaining pedagogies in Ghanaian and African immigrant educational contexts.

eISSN: 3042-4046