LANGUAGE, IMMIGRATION AND ETHNICITY: THE CHOICE OF LANGUAGE IN DRC IMMIGRANT FAMILIES

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DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own unaided work. It has not been submitted for any degree or examination in any other university.

Giasuma Kasandji Kamuangu

December 2006
ABSTRACT

In South Africa there appears to be no published work on language policy in immigrant African families. This thesis, therefore, aims to understand the language policies and language practices of four immigrant families from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) living in South Africa (SA). These four families are presented as case studies and were chosen on the basis of their different ‘family language policies’: English-only, French-only, French-Tshiluba, Multilanguage. The study explores the underlying reasons for the choice of language/s in each family.

The main research question is: What are the current language policies and practices of selected DRC immigrant families, and their implications for children’s schooling, for relations within the family and the DRC immigrant community, and for relations outside of these? This research is based on observations and recorded semi-structured interviews with the immigrant parents and children, principals, teachers, and the peers of two children from each family. A theoretical framework based on the work of Bernard Spolsky (2004) is used to understand and analyse the data in relation to: external forces such as power relations within and outside the family, the choice of language for the family, its regulation, and its identity effects.

The analysis of data indicated four main findings. First, in all the research families, gender and patriarchy, together with ethnicity and external forces, play a crucial role in the choice of languages for a family’s chosen language policy. Second, the family language policy (FLP) emerges mainly as a consequence of anxiety regarding the marginalisation of immigrant families in their struggle to fit into the host society and to acquire material resources. Third, in three families whose policies restrict which languages may be used, other languages are spoken or heard in addition to the language(s) stated in the policy; only the Multilanguage family has a policy which allows members of the family to communicate in any language within the household. Fourth, this research confirms earlier research (Peirce 1995; Krashen 1982) on the importance
of affective factors such as motivation, investment, self-confidence, and optimism, on the one hand, and fear or anxiety on the other, on learning the host society’s languages. In South Africa, ethnic enclosure and xenophobia prevent most immigrant family members (especially the mothers) from learning local African languages and English. Their exclusion (also self-imposed), together with unequal relations of power in South Africa, plays a crucial role in their interactions, thus limiting opportunities for learning local African languages. However, schooling enables immigrant children to integrate into the South African society. Regardless of the FLP, the immigrant children in the research families speak more English than the DRC languages which are showing signs of disappearing in their language repertoires.

Based on these findings, my research contributes to a deeper understanding of the experience of immigration and sheds light on foreigner identities. As well, the present study is significant in that it contributes to the emerging scholarship on language policy in immigrant African families, given the dearth of information on language choice and use among immigrants in South Africa. This research also adds to the burgeoning literature on the relationship between language and ethnicity in the diaspora.
DEDICATION

To:

My mother, SUGIS’A KILOLO, and in loving memory of my father, KAMUANGU KINGAMBO, the pioneers of my education;

My wife, Annie WA-NZAMBI KAMUANGU, for her unconditional love; and

My children, KAMUANGU, Princess SUGISA, Jemima LUPUNGU and Bénédicte MILOMBA, may this thesis be a pathfinder for their education.
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Table of Contents

Declaration ii
Abstract iii
Dedication v
Acknowledgements vi
List of Appendices xv
List of Abbreviations xvi
List of Figures xviii
List of Tables xix

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH CONTEXT 1

1.1 The concept of family language policy 1
1.2 Situating the research project 3
1.3 Identifying the problem 4
1.4 Research aims and question 6
1.5 Rationale 7
1.6 The context of research 9
1.6.1 Brief historical background to immigration to SA 9
1.6.2 Border-crossing to SA 10
1.6.3 Immigrants' social status in SA 11
1.6.4 Language competence and stereotyping on arrival 12
1.6.5 Historical background to language policy in the DRC 14
1.6.6 Aspects of post/colonial language policy in DRC education 15
1.6.7 Patterns of language practices in postcolonial DRC 18
1.7 DRC immigrants’ settlement and organization in SA 18
1.7.1 Location of DRC immigrants 18
1.7.2 Social organization: language at core 20
1.8 Immigration in SA 22
1.9 Thesis overview 23
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction 24
2.2 Language and culture 24
2.3 Language and identity 26
2.3.1 Meanings and relationship 26
2.3.2 Symbolic identity: language and other cultural elements 29
2.4 Gender relations 32
2.5 Ethnicity in immigration 33
2.5.1 Ethnic identity formation 33
2.5.2 Language and ethnic mobilization 35
2.6 Language policy and the ideology of language absorption 36
2.7 Family language policy 38
2.7.1 Family language policy: children's socialization 38
2.7.2 The value of the language in the family 40
2.8. Language maintenance, shift and loss in immigration 43
2.9 Language practices in a multilingual setting 45
2.9.1 Language interaction of multilinguals 45
2.9.2 Language and distribution of the power 48
2.10 Multilingualism and social mobility in SA 49
2.11 Identifying African immigrants 50
2.12 The politics of social space: language and ethnic group 51
2.13 Hybridity of immigrants’ identities 52
2.14 Language learning 53
2.15 Relationships and children’s identity negotiation in school 54
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction 56
3.2 Case study research 56
3.3 Research participants 58
3.3.1 The sample 58
3.3.2 Research participants 59
3.4 Data gathering methods 64
3.4.1 Methods 64
3.4.2 Observations in families and field notes 64
3.4.3 Semi-structured interviews in families and schools 67
3.5 Data description and analysis 71
3.5.1 Transcripts of recorded material 71
3.5.2 Data analysis and interpretation strategies 72
3.6 Ethical issues 74
3.7 Research design limitations 74
3.8 Reflection on the fieldwork 75

CHAPTER FOUR: ENGLISH-ONLY FAMILY

4.1 Introduction 77
4.2 Context: External forces 78
4.2.1 Life accounts, migration motives and geographic location 78
4.2.2 The ‘Other’, language and ethnic boundaries 80
4.2.3 English: power and prestige in SA 84
4.3. Power, choice, and regulation of the FLP 84
4.3.1 Family language profiles 84
4.3.2 Family language policies and practices 89
4.3.2.1 Family language policy in the DRC 90
4.3.2.2 Power, choice, and regulation of the Stated FLP in SA 92
4.3.2.3 Family language practices in SA 96
4.3.3 School language policies, and their impact on immigrant learners 107
4.3.4 Implications of the FLP for schooling 115
4.4 Identity 116
4.4.1 Identities based on language and culture 116
4.4.1.2 Symbolic identity markers and practices in SA 120
4.4.2 Ethnic and linguistic identity maintenance and hybridization in SA 122
4.5 Conclusion 126

CHAPTER FIVE: FRENCH-ONLY FAMILY 127

5.1 Introduction 127
5.2 Context: External forces 128
5.2.1 Life accounts, migration motives and geographic location 128
5.2.2 The ‘Other’, language and ethnic boundaries 131
5.2.3 Power and prestige of French in the diaspora 136
5.3 Power, choice, and regulation of the FLP 146
5.3.1 Family language profiles 146
5.3.2 Family language policies and practices 151
5.3.2.1 Family language policy in the DRC 151
5.3.2.2 Power, choice, and regulation of the Stated FLP in SA 153
5.3.2.3 Family language practices in SA 146
5.3.3 School language policies, and their impact on immigrant learners 156
5.3.4 Implications of the FLP for schooling 162
5.4 Identity 162
5.4.1 Identities based on language and culture 162
5.4.2 Symbolic identity markers and practices in SA 165
5.4.3 Ethnic and linguistic identity maintenance and hybridization in SA 166
5.5 Conclusion 169
CHAPTER SIX: FRENCH-TSHILUBA FAMILY

6.1 Introduction 171
6.2. Context: External forces 172
6.2.1 Life accounts, migration reasons and geographic location 172
6.2.2 The ‘Other’, language and ethnic boundaries 175
6.2.3 The ideology around bilingualism 180
6.3 Power, choice, and regulation of the FLP 180
6.3.1 Family language profiles 180
6.3.2 Family language policies and practices 184
6.3.2.1 Family language policy in the DRC 184
6.3.2.2 Power, choice, and regulation of the Stated FLP in SA 185
6.3.2.3 Family language practices in SA 191
6.3.3 School language policies, and their impact on immigrant learners 198
6.3.4 Implications of the FLP for schooling 201
6.4 Identity 202
6.4.1 Identities based on language and culture 202
6.4.2 Symbolic identity markers and practices in SA 205
6.4.3 Ethnic and linguistic identity maintenance and hybridization in SA 206
6.5 Conclusion 209

CHAPTER SEVEN: MULTILANGUAGE FAMILY

7.1 Introduction 210
7.2 Context: External forces 211
7.2.1 Life accounts, migration reasons and geographic location 211
7.2.2 The ‘Other’, language and ethnic boundaries 213
7.2.3 Power of multilingualism 217
7.3 Power, choice, and regulation of the FLP 217
7.3.1 Family language profiles 217
7.3.2 Family language policies and practices 221
7.3.2.1 Family language policy in the DRC 221
7.3.2.2 Power, choice, and regulation of the Stated FLP in SA 222
7.3.2.3 Family language practices in SA 227
7.3.3 School language policies, and their impact on immigrant learners 235
7.3.4 Implications of the FLP for schooling 243
7.4 Identity 243
7.4.1 Identities based on language and culture 243
7.4.2 Symbolic identity markers and practices in SA 248
7.4.3 Ethnic and linguistic identity maintenance and hybridization in SA 249
7.5 Conclusion 252

CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION 253

8.1 Introduction 253
8.2 Summary of findings 253
8.2.1 What are the DRC parents’ underlying assumptions that underpin the language policies in their homes in SA? 253
8.2.2 What are the current language practices in DRC immigrant families in SA? 254
8.2.3 What are the implications of language practices for relations within the families and the DRC community? 256
8.2.4 What are the implications of language practices for relations within the wider SA society? 257
8.2.5 What are the children’s attitudes towards their parents’ home languages and language policies? 258
8.2.6 What is the motivation for ethnic language maintenance/learning in SA? 258
8.3 Findings in relation to Spolsky’s categories 260
8.3.1 External forces/context 260
8.3.2 Power, choice, and regulation 260
List of Appendices

A. Information letter  
B. Informed consent  
C. Interview schedule  
D. Ethics clearance  
E. Observation sheet  
F. Field notes  
G. Interview data  
H. School reports  
I. Tables
xvi

List of Abbreviations

AELS:  Applied English Language Studies
Afrik:  Afrikaans
Be:     Bemba
DRC:    Democratic Republic of Congo
Fa:     Father
FLP     Family language policy
FLPs:   Family language policies
Fr:     French
Eng:    English
Gr      Grade
G1      First generation
G2      Second generation
Kik:    Kikongo
Kil:    Kiluba
Ling:   Lingala
LP      Language policy
LPs:    Language policies
L1:     First language
L2:     Second language
LoM:    LoMongo
L'shi:  Lubumbashi City
Mo:     Mother
MOL:    Medium of learning
MT:     Mother tongue
Pe:     Kipende
Port:   Portuguese
Princi: Principal
| Res:  | Researcher |
| SA:   | South Africa(n) |
| Sa:   | Sakata |
| So:   | seSotho |
| TG    | Transitional generation |
| Tshi: | Tshiluba |
| Zu:   | isiZulu |
List of Figures

Figure 1: Communication pattern in the English-only family 96
Figure 2: Communication pattern in the French-only family 146
Figure 3: Communication pattern in the French-Tshiluba family 191
Figure 4: Communication pattern in the Multilanguage family 227
**List of Tables**

| Table 0: | Research children | 63 |
| Table 1: | English-only family’s background information | 353 |
| Table 2: | French-only family’s background information | 353 |
| Table 2: | French-Tshiluba family’s background information | 353 |
| Table 4: | Multilingual family’s background information | 353 |
| Table 5: | English-only family’s language repertoires | 354 |
| Table 6: | French-only family’s language repertoires | 354 |
| Table 7: | French-Tshiluba family’s language repertoires | 355 |
| Table 8: | Multilingual family’s language repertoires | 355 |
| Table 9: | English-only family’s language proficiencies | 356 |
| Table 10: | French-only family’s language proficiencies | 356 |
| Table 11: | French-Tshiluba family’s language proficiencies | 357 |
| Table 12: | Multilingual family’s language proficiencies | 357 |