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A case study of civil society organisations' initiatives for the development and promotion of linguistic human rights in Zimbabwe (1980-2004)

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ABSTRACT

This thesis considers the initiatives of civil society organizations involved in efforts to revitalize the endoglossic minority languages in Zimbabwe in the period following the attainment of political independence in 1980. The study sought to understand how particular organs of civil society in Zimbabwe, such as the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe, Silveira House, Save the Children Fund (United Kingdom), and the African Languages Research Institute, have contributed to the development and promotion of linguistic human rights in Zimbabwe. These civil society organizations have worked with grassroots organizations formed by speakers of the endoglossic minority languages, such as the Tonga Language and Cultural Organization and the Zimbabwe Indigenous Languages Promotion Association. This thesis traces the initiatives undertaken by these organs of civil society through the formation of collaborative networks involving the various actors who collectively mobilized for the linguistic human rights of minority language groups in Zimbabwe.

A qualitative approach to research was adopted for this study. Data was collected through qualitative interviews with key informants as well as through documentary materials that were collected from the identified organizations involved in the minority language revitalization project in Zimbabwe. Drawing on analytic frameworks of language revitalization efforts advanced by Fishman (1991, 2001), Crystal (2000), Skutnabb-Kangas (2000) and Adegbija (1997), I argue that the minority language revitalization efforts in Zimbabwe targeted two main domains of language use; education and the media. I further identify three main strategies that were adopted in advocating for an increased presence of the minority languages in these domains.

The first strategy involved what Fishman calls the search for “ideological consensus” and “prior value consensus”. This strategy involved efforts by the language activists to mobilize the grassroots members of the minority language-speaking community to assume an ideological orientation whereby the minority languages were viewed as a

resource and a right, and to actively participate in developing and promoting their languages. The second strategy arose from the focus on the state's language ideology as constituting the basis on which the marginalization of their languages was legitimated. This second strategy, identified as an ideological or politically-oriented language revitalization strategy, involved instituting measures that challenged the state's language policy as the manifestation of an exclusionary and linguicist state language ideology. The third strategy, identified as a language-based and technically-oriented language revitalization strategy involved initiatives geared towards corpus development of the minority endoglossic languages.

This thesis concludes that these language revitalization initiatives were successful because as a result of these initiatives, the Government of Zimbabwe made concessions that gave the minority language groups a bigger stake in their targeted domains: the Ministry of Information and Publicity set up a radio station broadcasting exclusively in the minority languages, and the Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture put in place new provisions on the learning and teaching of minority languages which allowed for the teaching of minority languages up to Grade 7 by 2005, with room for annual progression to secondary school level.

Key Words

Linguistic Human Rights, Minority Languages, Exoglossic Languages, Endoglossic Languages, Language Revitalization, Language Policy, Language Planning, Zimbabwe, Shona, Ndebele