



OPEN ACCESS

EDITED AND REVIEWED BY
Anastassia Zabrodskaia,
Tallinn University, Estonia

*CORRESPONDENCE
Soyiso Khetoa
✉ soyiso.khetoa@wits.ac.za

RECEIVED 29 July 2024
ACCEPTED 01 August 2024
PUBLISHED 13 August 2024

CITATION
Khetoa S, Aiseng K, Theledi K and
Motinyane M (2024) Editorial: The
centralization and racialization of language
policy: implications for the 'below'.
Front. Commun. 9:1472674.
doi: 10.3389/fcomm.2024.1472674

COPYRIGHT
© 2024 Khetoa, Aiseng, Theledi and
Motinyane. This is an open-access article
distributed under the terms of the [Creative
Commons Attribution License \(CC BY\)](#). The
use, distribution or reproduction in other
forums is permitted, provided the original
author(s) and the copyright owner(s) are
credited and that the original publication in
this journal is cited, in accordance with
accepted academic practice. No use,
distribution or reproduction is permitted
which does not comply with these terms.

Editorial: The centralization and racialization of language policy: implications for the 'below'

Soyiso Khetoa^{1*}, Kealeboga Aiseng², Kgomotso Theledi¹ and
Mantoya Motinyane³

¹Department of African Languages, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa, ²Media Studies, Rhodes University, Makhanda, Eastern Cape, South Africa, ³Department of Linguistics, University of the Western Cape, Cape Town, South Africa

KEYWORDS

African languages, linguistic hegemony, marginalization, exoglossic policy, BELA Bill

Editorial on the Research Topic

[The centralization and racialization of language policy: implications for the 'below'](#)

1 Contextualization

The significance of language policies cannot be overlooked, particularly in countries where political ideologies influence perceptions about the use of various languages in various domains. Due to political influence certain languages are regarded as 'languages of the state' and others are perceived to be 'languages in the state'. Language practices during apartheid in South Africa were very influential in deciding the plight of indigenous African languages. During this period, indigenous African languages were subjected to suppression, wherein an exoglossic language policy remained intact. Meko (2020) explicates that language was used as an instrument of domination or subjugation during apartheid and colonization. Meko (2020) further indicates that in South Africa, indigenous African languages were denigrated and marginalized through legislative structures of the apartheid government. The exoglossic nature of language policies during apartheid sought to subject learners in South African schools to learn in Afrikaans. In 1976 the language politics of South Africa were reshaped by students' opposition toward the imposition of Afrikaans in the schooling system. The pre-democracy era in South Africa highlights the complex relationship between language, power, and identity.

Due to the complex linguistic tapestry of South Africa, the post-apartheid government hanged on to linguistic practices where indigenous African languages are marginalized despite having been elevated to official languages of the state. This under-usage of indigenous languages in higher domains perpetuates coloniality and colonial language ideologies where colonial languages dominate higher domain. Consequently, this linguistic practice entrenches structural linguisticism where the language(s) of the economically strong members of society dominates other languages. Recently, the Department of Basic Education sought to redress linguistic inequalities in the sector by introducing BELA Bill which prescribes that schools should develop language policies that promotes multilingualism, inclusivity and equity. The central idea with this policy is that there must be linguistic reform in the education sector. This reform seeks to challenge the legacy of apartheid's language policies which continues to have an impact in the

South African community. The legacy of Apartheid's language policies includes inequalities that exist between indigenous African languages, and English and Afrikaans, the association of African languages with subnormality.

This Research Topic examines the impact of language policies on marginalized communities. It also sheds light on an important issue that language policies are not devoid of political influence, and are essentially used to perpetuate linguistic hegemony between languages and exacerbate inequalities. Special attention is paid to how marginalized communities are impacted by language policies.

This editorial brings together a collection of contributory articles that advance our understanding of the centralization and racialization of language policy, and its implications for the 'below'. These contributory articles are rich in methodology, findings and relevance to the topic. The article '*Corrigendum: Revisiting the past to understand the present: the linguistic ecology of the Singapore deaf community and the historical evolution of Singapore Sign Language (SgSL)*' highlights the importance of understanding Singapore's socio-political history and its linguistic context of Singapore Sign Language in order to appreciate its unique features and the Deaf community's experiences (Tay and Ng). The second article titled '*English language in Saudi Arabia: vision 2030 in the historical prism of a clash between cultures*' examines the role of English in the context of Vision 2030 which seeks to diversify the country's economy (Almesaar). The study concludes that Vision 2030's emphasis on linguistic competency will have implication for Saudi Arabia's identity and culture. The third article '*Teachers' efforts to increase students' confidence in speaking Indonesian in Sarolangun through language habituation*' explores teachers' strategies in boosting students' confidence in expressing themselves in Indonesian (Nugraheni and Abroto). The study concludes that conducting language learning environments are crucial in fostering language use. The last article titled '*Linguistic dominance and translanguaging: Language Issues in Generations: The Legacy*' highlights a complex language landscape in multilingual communities (Aiseng). The article emphasizes the importance maintaining languages in the face of linguistic dominance. Together, these articles provide a comprehensive overview of linguistic practices in various parts of the world, tensions between a language of 'upward mobility' and culture, and efforts for language reclamation.

2 Centralization and racialization of language policies

Our main starting points for this Research Topic were 2-fold. On the one hand, we look at language policies as instruments that seek to advance political ideologies of a specific era and how the ideology influence redress interventions. On the other hand, language policies are valuable instruments in advancing nationalism and nationism. Bell (1976) postulate that nationalism is premised on the idea finding a national identity through socio-cultural unification. In the context of South Africa this unification is expressed by a phrase coined by the late Bishop Tutu 'rainbow nation.' Nationism on the other hand is centered on the nation's handling of its affairs through a certain language (Bells, *ibid*). The notion of 'rainbow nation' symbolizes South Africa's commitment to embracing its diverse population and promoting national

unity. Baines (1998) postulate that among the Xhosa people of South Africa, rainbow represents hope and the promise of a brighter future. Contributions to this Research Topic details diverse perspectives about language policy implications for the 'below.' This Research Topic encompasses various perspectives about the effects of language policies on people, communities, and societies in four countries, situated in the continents of Africa and Asia. Asia, much like Africa, is characterized by multiculturalism and linguistic diversity. Maliwat (2021) indicates that the state of languages, particularly in Southeast Asia, depend on how different countries approach them in terms of policy and educational support. The same is said about the indigenous languages of Africa. Desai (2001: 323) argues that 'language policy plays a pivotal role in enabling citizens of a country to participate in the political, educational, social and economic life of a country'. The use of languages in the political, educational, social and economic life of a country influences language speakers' perceptions and attitudes about certain languages, and also influences the prosperity of languages in a changing world. Therefore, in developing nations where colonial policies favored other language while marginalizing others, principles of equity must be applied to marginalized languages in order to promote inclusive participation of citizens in the affairs of a country.

3 Concluding remarks

The currency of languages is dependent on the roles that languages are afforded in a country. Again, the currency of languages can vary on the basis of economic shifts, technological advancements and political changes. Political and economic changes are a dominant feature in the determination of language policies. Language policies tend to favor the use of languages whose speakers are politically and economically influential, to the detriment of languages whose speakers are economically disadvantaged. In this Research Topic there are diverse perspectives on language policies and their applications. There are different aims to the development of language policies: redress, promotion of linguistic diversity, addressing language rights issues, and to improve education standards in a country. Language policies should reflect linguistic realities of a country.

Author contributions

SK: Conceptualization, Writing – original draft. KA: Conceptualization, Writing – original draft. KT: Writing – review & editing. MM: Writing – review & editing.

Funding

The author(s) declare that no financial support was received for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Publisher's note

All claims expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of their affiliated

organizations, or those of the publisher, the editors and the reviewers. Any product that may be evaluated in this article, or claim that may be made by its manufacturer, is not guaranteed or endorsed by the publisher.

References

- Baines, G. (1998). The rainbow nation? Identity and nation building in post-apartheid South Africa. *Motspluriels* 7, 1–12.
- Bell, R.T. (1976). *Sociolinguistics: Goals, Approaches and Problems*. London, Batsford.
- Desai, Z. (2001). Multilingualism in South Africa with particular reference to the role of African languages in education. *Int. Rev. Educ.* 47, 323–339. doi: 10.1023/A:1017957927500
- Maliwat, R. (2021). Language policy and education in Southeast Asia: a primer on Southeast Asia language policy and education. *The Diplomat*. Available at: <https://thediplomat.com/2021/12/language-policy-and-education-in-southeast-asia/> (accessed July 29, 2024).
- Mekoa, I. (2020). The politics and nuances of language in South Africa: a critical appraisal. *J. African Lang. Liter. Stud.* 1, 55–69. doi: 10.31920/2633-2116/2020/1n1a3