



# Language Rich **Africa**

## Policy dialogue

### **The Cape Town Language and Development Conference:** Looking beyond 2015

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## **Section 4:**

Language, culture,  
identity and inclusion



# How languages get their mojo

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## UN Millennium Development Goals and potential conflict with UNESCO goals

The tenth Language and Development Conference had as its focus a review of three of the UN Millennium Development Goals. To that end, I will attempt to reframe entrenched ideas about endangered languages, mother tongues and cultural essentialism, and to catch out some of the slippery words that figure in this discourse, such as 'linguistic equality'. This I take to be shorthand for equality for *speakers* of different languages. But shorthand can be ambiguous. Languages are not speakers, and sometimes their interests differ. Ambiguity serves to plaster over cracks in what people believe and, in this area, while we all strive toward equality, there are strong disagreements over priorities: what we believe needs directly attending to versus what we assume will sort itself out.

There is a disagreement of this sort between the UN Millennium Development Goals and *Language Vitality and Endangerment*, the 2003 report of the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage Section's Ad Hoc Expert Group on Endangered Languages. Since the focus of the conference was to look beyond the 2015 date for the Millennium Development Goals, it is worth considering how they might be, if not reconciled, at least put into a genuine conversation with the UNESCO report. That report begins:

*Language diversity is essential to the human heritage. Each and every language embodies the unique cultural wisdom of a people. The loss of any language is thus a loss for all humanity. Though approximately 6,000 languages still exist, many are under threat. There is an imperative need for language documentation, new policy initiatives, and new materials to enhance the vitality of these languages. The co-operative efforts of language communities, language professionals, NGOs and governments will be indispensable in countering this threat. There is a pressing need to build support for language communities in their efforts to establish meaningful new roles for their endangered languages. (2003: 1)*

The Expert Group were all academics from northern hemisphere countries, apart from one Chilean working in a Canadian university. The first sentence is obviously an opinion, a slogan. No one would take it otherwise, but one might think the second sentence was a fact established by linguists. It is not. It may be true as a tautology, if we define 'cultural wisdom' to include grammar and vocabulary. But we want to avoid erasing the variation that exists in every language, and we certainly want to steer clear of

any equation of 'one language' with 'one people', which has been behind some of history's worst genocidal atrocities. It also suggests that speakers of different languages must think differently, a view which has been used to sustain a range of positions: that any mixture of language represents dilution of a people's cultural knowledge; or that refugees are not part of the people who give them refuge until they master their language; or, at the extreme, that since those who do not speak like us do not think like us, they are not human and must be exterminated. In short, it is not a fact, but a slogan with a dubious pedigree.

If you want to define a 'human heritage' and make 'language diversity' essential to it, well and good, unless this leads you to impose language diversity on people who, for whatever reason, do not want to participate in it. They become not simply betrayers of the human heritage, but a part of the perceived threat mentioned in paragraphs two and three. The document glosses over those people for whom language diversity is at odds with UN Millennium Development Goal one, eradicate extreme poverty and hunger – and implicitly with all the other goals too, since in one respect or another language diversity taken on its own can be an obstacle to each. Taking the 'value' of language diversity out of the picture, greater ease of communication through a smaller number of more widely spoken languages would, in at least some cases, help get the goals achieved.

But we cannot realistically take that value out of the picture. As the founder of modern linguistics, Saussure (1916) pointed out, in all languages we find both centripetal and centrifugal tendencies. The need to communicate creates the centripetal force of linguistic homogenisation, which is balanced by a centrifugal force of differentiation, driven by an impetus for local identity, by the need to exchange information without having the people from the next village or the other religious community overhear, by the desire of each new generation to mark itself off from the one before.

If all practical pressures were really poised against language diversity, it would not exist – but it does, and it is always expanding, fastest of all in a 'world' language like English. On my flight to Cape Town, the teenage English girl seated next to me asked an air hostess for a Coke. The hostess did not understand, and asked the girl to repeat. After the third repetition, the hostess looked to me for help. 'A Coke,' I said. 'Oh, a Coke,' said the woman with a look of relief. This happened again, a few hours later – same girl, different hostess. English is diversifying to the extent that someone born and bred in England cannot be understood by speakers from elsewhere whose job it is to deal with people

from all over the world. They had announced that the flight staff spoke 14 languages, but teenage English was apparently not one of them. No one is promoting this language diversity, but languages change.

What about Millennium Development Goal two, which in its full form reads: Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling? Probably children are more likely to complete primary schooling if it is in their mother tongue. But first they must start the schooling, and here again language diversity is an obstacle in the sense that the more a language is 'under threat', the less feasible it is to publish materials and train teachers in it. The UNESCO document says that such materials will in themselves 'enhance the vitality' of an endangered language, and again that is true tautologically, since any publication counts as a measure of language vitality. There is, however, the inevitable problem that the language of the textbook does not end up being exactly the 'mother tongue' of all those who call themselves users of the language in question, again because of the inevitable diversity; plus the fact that, being a textbook, it will gradually introduce words my mother never said to me, like 'whom' and 'minus' and 'truly'; words I, as a child starting school, had never heard at home. Our teachers were trying to stretch our vocabulary so we would *not* sound like our mothers, but as our mothers would have sounded if they had been 'better educated'.

For all the joy we feel upon seeing a government-mandated textbook in an 'endangered language', it should count as a sign of vitality. It is an attempt to induce vitality, in opposition to the forces of death that the UNESCO document identifies thus:

*Language endangerment may be the result of external forces such as military, economic, religious, cultural or educational subjugation, or it may be caused by internal forces, such as a community's negative attitude towards its own language ... Many indigenous peoples, associating their disadvantaged social position with their culture, have come to believe that their languages are not worth retaining. They abandon their languages and cultures in hopes of overcoming discrimination, to secure a livelihood and enhance social mobility, or to assimilate to the global marketplace. (UNESCO, Intangible Cultural Heritage Section's Ad Hoc Expert Group on Endangered Languages, 2003)*

In other words, they 'abandon their languages and cultures' in striving toward the UN Millennium Goals. Are these indigenous people's attitudes and beliefs mistaken? Must they be changed in order to protect the 'human heritage'? Much of the rhetoric of the conference suggested that such is our position. Yet the attitudes and beliefs described are not superstitions. They represent an experience-based recognition of economic and linguistic reality. And it is the reality that we would like to change – but it can seem as though the attitudes and beliefs are the problem, that they are a distortion of reality, rather than the recognition of reality. What they distort is a vision of the world as it ought to be. It is like blaming your optometrist for prescribing spectacles that clear your eyesight and let you see the world as it looks, rather than as you had hoped it would look.

### Ways of conceiving of languages that reduce the conflict

It would be nice if the findings of linguistics came clearly down on one side or the other of these debates. But modern linguistics was built upon a fault line between, on the one hand, the Enlightenment conception of a language as a system of rational signs, and on the other, the romantic conception of a language as a *Weltanschauung*, a deep, spiritual vision of the universe that embodies the essence of a particular nation or race. The Enlightenment took linguistic signs to be grounded in the senses, hence with a universal basis, but with particular signs being ultimately arbitrary. For the Romantics, language originates in the senses but they are directed by the national soul, to which it remains bound. Sériot (2014) contrasts the 'Jacobine' approach to language policy from the 18th century onward, which assumes that creating a shared language will produce a nation, versus the Romantic approach in which the shared soul that is the nation is what the language is projected out of.

It was not long after the Romantic period that the term and concept of the 'native speaker' began to crop up, and to take on a naturalised, indeed almost supernatural mythical status as the absolute embodiment of the language. My emeritus colleague Alan Davies (2013) has been waging war against the native speaker for 40 years, while others have been exploring the concept of the 'new speaker', someone whose relatively late entry into the language becomes a virtue rather than a deficit.

I have avoided ranging the UN Millennium Development Goals with the material, the UNESCO document with the spiritual – and, indeed, the UNESCO document tends to focus on materialist conceptions. Recall what it said about ‘social mobility’ and the ‘global marketplace’. The six points of the UNESCO Language Vitality assessment are again solidly materialist and functionalist in focus:

1. Intergenerational language transmission.
2. Absolute number of speakers.
3. Proportion of speakers within the total population.
4. Trends in existing language domains.
5. Response to new domains and media.
6. Materials for language education and literacy...

There is little to argue with here: the pragmatic, common-sense approach is what the people who dispense the money look for in order to assure that whatever programmes they are funding have a sound business plan. Still, a couple of things in the document do not quite ring true for all minority language speakers. They almost never ‘believe that their languages are not worth retaining’. I know what is meant, but put this way it would be hopelessly patronising to act as if these people were in a false consciousness and needed UNESCO to show them the light.

I expect that your experience is like mine: people *believe* their traditional languages are worth retaining – but in what form, at what cost, for what purposes gives rise to deep and subtle disputes within communities. The document goes on to talk about:

*... meaningful contemporary roles for minority languages ... for the requirements of modern life within the community as well as in national and international contexts. Meaningful contemporary roles include the use of these languages in everyday life, commerce, education, writing, the arts, and/or the media. Economic and political support by both local communities and national governments are needed to establish such roles.* (UNESCO, 2003: 2)

Trying to break through the surface here is *modernity*, another thorny concept since it is clearly the long suit of big majority world languages. The statement about ‘meaningful contemporary roles’ *needing* national government support to be established is a Jacobine view that bottom-up Romantics should resist, though even they might welcome the availability of government support.

There is a tendency to equate languages with species, and the discourse on endangered languages is parasitic upon the endangered species discourse. If a metaphor succeeds in what it aims to do, well and good, but I have not heard much proclaiming of formerly endangered languages being restored to health thanks to this discourse. It is worth considering another metaphor, one that treats languages not as creatures disjointed from the people who speak them, but as something that is part of them, a way of doing that is sedimented in the ‘extended cognition’ of their whole

nervous system. This metaphor would not force us to take sides when it comes to heritage and modernity, but would help us to see each as an asset, and to assess which is more and less powerful at this historical juncture.

## How languages get their mojo

*Got my mojo working, but it just won't work on you  
Got my mojo working, but it just won't work on you  
I wanna love you so bad till I don't know what to do  
I'm going down to Louisiana to get me a mojo hand  
I'm going down to Louisiana to get me a mojo hand  
I'm gonna have all you women right here at my command*  
(McKinley Morganfield, AKA Muddy Waters)

We know little about the etymology of *mojo*. As indicated in the Muddy Waters song that made it part of popular culture in the 1960s, it comes from Louisiana, and presumably has a Creole or West African source, though no one has traced it definitively. A *mojo hand* is a little bag of charms. The charms give *mojo* to their owner, but as the first verse shows, even if the *mojo* works on most people, it may not work on you. So let us think of every language as having a *mojo hand*, and consider how some languages get *mojo*, while others seem to be losing theirs.

UNESCO has six points to its language vitality assessment, and, as it happens, I have come up with six *mojos*, though I am not confident that some of them do not need to be conflated or split. They are: the identity *mojo*; the supra-material *mojo*; the heritage *mojo*; the getting-on *mojo*; the modernity *mojo*; and the resistance *mojo*.

### The identity *mojo*

UNESCO is keenly aware of the identity *mojo*. Whether conceived from a Jacobine or a Romantic perspective, a language can act for many, perhaps most, people as both an index and a performance of who they are. The modern discourse of identity stems largely from the work of Tajfel (1978), who defined ‘social identity’ as ‘that part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership’. (see further Joseph, 2004) Tajfel stressed the central importance of the *out-group* in defining who the *in-group* is, and how value is given to membership when it is withheld from those perceived as desiring it.

In the case of minority languages, there can be an economy of granting and withholding ‘(good) speaker’ identity by degrees that the accepted members of the community control. That can be a powerful *mojo* for some learners, drawing them ever further into the language, while turning others away. But even among proficient speakers, it raises the devilish issue of boundaries *within* the language: what is *proper* speaking of the language? What variants are indexed for location or for social class? This can raise extremely difficult problems in the educational context, and not just in the preparation of written materials (see Joseph, 2006).

The identity mojo can work both for and against the language from the point of view of endangerment and vitality. For any language, the out-group is always bigger than the in-group, but there will be an outer circle of out-groupers who might potentially enter the in-group – *if* the in-group recognises their claim to share their identity, which they may or may not do. Linguists, both theoretical and applied, abet the exclusion of new in-group members when we fetishise the ‘native speaker’. This is why the emerging concept of ‘new speakers’, with a positive connotation to it, is a welcome development within applied linguistics (see O’Rourke and Ramallo, 2013).

### The mystical, supra-material mojo

Mojo inhabits the realm of magic where the laws of the material world appear to be suspended. With language, the equivalent of a material law might be, for example, that its primal function is communication, imagined in the context of physical needs such as food, mating and defence from predators. But language is magical at a number of levels. It creates communities, nations. It is inextricably bound up with law, rights and contracts (including marriage). Through names, genealogies, hence identities and strong allegiances, are forged (Hourani, 1991).

Scripture brings us into direct contact with the divine. Through language, philosophy gives us dominion over our universe; it allows us to convert what is mysterious and invisible into concrete, material knowledge. Because language is not bound by the material, we are always able to conceive beyond the limits of the world as we inhabit it. The great cathedrals, my laptop, PowerPoint, all these are the product first of a linguistic imagining by engineers. So is the Africa projected at the conference: the one we imagine, strive toward, in spite of all the statistics about how things are now.

2011 marked the 400th anniversary of English getting its mojo: the King James Bible and the first important Italian–English French–English dictionaries. Both language crossings, the role of translation in mojo must not be underestimated, for both the source and target languages. 1611 also saw the first recorded performances of *Macbeth*, *Cymbeline*, *The Tempest* and *The Winter’s Tale*.

Money is magic: a piece of metal or paper is transformed into *pure value* by the stamping of language onto it. It is the perverse proof of the non-materiality of language that enormous monetary sums can *only* exist on the worthless material paper, or just digitally, but not in gold. Although the language maintenance discourse has not totally ignored the supra-material mojo, it has been marginalised; perhaps because the sort of people on whom it works do not tend to be policy wonks.

### The heritage mojo

Heritage languages possess for their speakers and partisans the ability to form a supra-material, magical connection to the past, to origins, to ancestors (real or imagined), to a mythical ‘first time’ in which things were more themselves, truth was truer. Such a time is mythical just because it has vanished. It has left the realm of the material for a purely verbal realm of memory-texts, in various forms.

The language itself is that verbal realm in its essence, but it has a lingering materiality. We certainly speak of languages as though they were things (that can be ‘acquired’, for instance), sometimes even living things (that can ‘die’). If we follow the Romantic tradition of believing that the structure of a language limits what its speakers think, or shapes it, or at least inclines it in a certain direction, we are either according it a kind of materiality or else implying a hierarchy of immaterials, such that the one controls the others.

If we take an unsentimental look around us, we are bound to admit that the heritage mojo works strongly on a minority, but weakly, or even contrarily, on the majority. In residually Gaelic-speaking areas of the Scottish Highlands and Islands, the heritage mojo casts its spell on recent incomers, who take up Gaelic and send their children to Gaelic-language schools (also under the influence of the identity mojo; they do not want their kids to be permanent outsiders). This can weaken the heritage mojo for some natives to the area, who re-index Gaelic in terms of a *social class* identity, specifically middle class, of which they want no part. But for most, hearing Asians and South Americans speak Gaelic gives it the mojo of a world language.

It is hard for us as linguists to appreciate the fragility of the heritage mojo, when we tend ourselves to be under its spell, and to have a vested interest in supporting the minority for whom the heritage mojo really works. We can fool ourselves into imagining that they are not a minority at all, or that the majority have been forced into a false consciousness by greedy corporate interests bent on wiping out all but a small number of world languages.

We should also heed the warnings of Appiah (2005) about the potential for oppressiveness of ‘heritage’. Appiah distinguishes between ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ pluralism, the former taking seriously the ethical imperative for allowing dissenters to opt out of the group culture into which they were born. The soft type instead sees the group as the most important unit where autonomy is concerned, and insists that individuals cannot have real autonomy except as part of their group belonging.

*[E]very ‘culture’ represents not only difference but the elimination of difference: the group represents a clump of relative homogeneity, and that homogeneity is perpetuated and enforced by regulative mechanisms designed to marginalise and silence dissent from its basic norms and mores. (Appiah, 2005: 152)*

We should not, he says, 'ask other people to maintain the diversity of the species at the price of their individual autonomy. We can't require others to provide us with a cultural museum to tour through'. (Appiah, 2005: 268). Well, we *can* require it, but the *mojo* it generates will be weak, and may not last long. As with the identity *mojo*, *opening up* is what brings power: the heritage should be available to all, not just those with a certain ancestry. And if this 'voluntary' dimension means that many will choose to leave, the loss of numbers should be weighed against the gain in *mojo*.

### The getting-on *mojo*

The getting-on *mojo* is the long suit of English and every other world language. English has so much of it that it is hard to persuade English speakers to learn other languages. Perceptions of the value of bilingualism set the tone: in the English-speaking world, it is valued primarily as a middle-class luxury.

Two mother tongue Gaelic speakers I have interviewed, Dolly and Anna, both in their 90s, have deep pride in their linguistic heritage yet nonetheless felt it their duty to help their children 'get on', as they put it, by using only English with them. They are now unsympathetic to the spell which the heritage *mojo* casts on their grandchildren, and unable to comprehend the younger generation's resentment at the perceived loss.

The disinclination of English speakers to learn other languages not only stems from, but also *increases*, the *mojo* of English. It makes it all the more necessary for speakers of other languages to learn it. But at that point a disadvantage kicks in: Europe is now full of multilingual young Swedes, Dutch, Poles and others who can come to Britain for education and employment, while the number who can move in the opposite direction is woefully limited. Yet even this is an addition to, rather than a subtraction from, the getting-on *mojo* of English.

Job prospects in Gaelic have improved with the expansion of Gaelic broadcasting by the BBC, the provision of Gaelic-language texts by the Scottish Government and the increase in state-funded Gaelic-language education programmes. Students of Gaelic can at least claim *some* 'getting-on' *mojo* that they could not do a decade ago; and it could snowball over the years, as with Welsh. Still, against English, even other world languages, or strong national languages like Afrikaans, do well to hold their own.

### The modernity *mojo*

The heritage *mojo* finds itself in fairly direct opposition to the modernity *mojo*. Most people no longer perceive the two as being in competition for them as individuals, but that is only because the modernity *mojo* has become the default, the superior one in the hierarchy.

There is some complementarity: heritage matters because it underpins identity, and for many of us it gives a plot, a meaning, to get us through our lives in the modern world. It is in societies where heritage is strong that modernity takes on more value, rather than being assumed as a given. In the so-called Arab Spring of 2011, a shift was detectable in the perception of Arabic and English in the Middle East and North Africa, with Arabic taking on more modernity *mojo*, and this has persisted even as the 'Spring' has turned distinctly autumnal.

Nowadays, giving a minority language the modernity *mojo* usually involves using recent technologies and media. This can go quite some way to dispelling any exclusive association of it with the past, though it depends, I would argue, on the content. It has been most effective when it is the users of the language themselves using the technology to communicate with one another. There is, however, scope for more creative uses that might develop the supra-material *mojo*: what UNESCO calls 'writing, the arts, and/or the media' supported by the government, but not in a way that, as tends to happen, sees such support go almost exclusively to output that appeals only to a narrow élite.

### The resistance *mojo*

Most powerful may be the 'resistance *mojo*'. As *political* resistance it is the only one capable of engaging a whole population, or at least a majority. It can also take the form of resistance to *modernity*, and to *getting on*, but the hard truth is that resistance to these has always been soft, or rather fragile. It requires massive and sustained investment from the community itself to insulate each new generation from the appeal of modernity and money, with all that they appear to offer in the way of individual freedom.

For the political resistance *mojo*, that is not an issue: some specific force is perceived as the obstacle to freedom, and in-group solidarity is the way to overcome it. Here the *mojo* can endure for many centuries, kept alive by the *memory* of oppression long after actual oppressive acts have ceased to be perpetrated.

Memory is primarily a verbally transmitted and maintained world, and it is surprising that the dilemma does not arise more often that speakers of endangered languages worry about their bilingualism carrying them into the mental world of the majority language, or about the fact that, in order to make and spread the case for their memory, they need to make use of the majority language. A case such as that of Ngūgĩ wa Thiong'o is notable above all for its exceptionality. No doubt there are many other writers who refuse to use English or French, but we never hear of them for that reason; Ngūgĩ wa Thiong'o is known precisely because he was recognised as an important English language writer.

## Conclusion

Languages do not generally 'lose' their *mojo*, except in relative terms, to a rival language possessing a better *mojo* hand, for now. A language with resistance *mojo* depends on the memory of what was resisted. We can find ourselves in the strange situation of being nostalgic for the very oppression that was the object of resistance. What is hard for top-down Jacobins to understand is that language policies intended to promote endangered languages can themselves readily become the focus of resistance for a majority of the heritage population.

You cannot *force* *mojo*. You cannot legislate *mojo*. *Reviving* *mojo* is risky because it tends to put heritage into conflict with the modernity and getting-on *mojos*.

To conclude: what I would like to see added to the agenda for pushing the UN Millennium Development Goals beyond 2015 is to recall that:

- Every language can be thought of as having a *mojo* hand. All *mojos* are powerful, but they vary in their power in a particular context and at a particular time.
- The language's *mojo* hand is in a give-and-take relationship with each speaker's *mojo* hand and what it can add to it. Ultimately, it is the interests of speakers, not of languages, that matter.
- *Mojo* grows with mixture, not purification; with becoming placeless, not bound to place; with becoming every speaker's equal possession, not just 'native' speakers'. The languages with the biggest *mojo* have been those whose native speakers are a minority, such as English, or even non-existent, such as Latin.

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‘Development, whether narrowly or broadly defined, cannot be achieved unless it involves the participation of all in the development process, and such participation inevitably requires that people are reached and are able to reach others in the language or languages in which they are competent.’

**Professor Ayo Bamgbose**



# Local languages and primary education in Northern Uganda: post-conflict community and local partnerships

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## Introduction

In this paper we discuss a case study of how a Ugandan NGO, Literacy and Adult Basic Education (LABE), has supported government responses to the UNESCO Education for All (EFA) and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) frameworks. In particular, the NGO has developed a carefully calibrated system of strengthening community, local and national government partnerships in language education planning while building capacity and agency among stakeholders at all levels. Early results of a four-year mother tongue education initiative (2009–13) show increased involvement of parents in the education of their children and in adult education; retention of early primary school children, especially of girls; improved achievement; development of orthographies and reading materials in local languages; and teacher education approaches developed in local contexts extended to the national level (Heugh and Mulumba, 2013).

Since the watershed UNESCO Conference on Education for All (EFA) in Jomtien in 1990, the Government of Uganda, like many others in the global south, has turned its attention to achieving the MDGs. In 1997, through the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) and the National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC), the government launched its universal primary education (UPE) initiative and began to focus on primary school enrolment and retention, literacy for all and gender equality. Achieving an entirely free education system to meet the UPE imperative has proven difficult for a government in a country afflicted with ongoing civil conflict, particularly in the northern and north-western districts. Nevertheless, the government has attempted to implement curriculum change including the re-introduction of local languages as mediums of instruction for the first three years of primary school (P1–3) from 2007

(Penny et al., 2008).<sup>1</sup> Low enrolment and retention has been associated with a mismatch between the local language(s) used in the communities and the medium of instruction (usually English) in primary schools of most African countries (Bamgbose, 2000; Ouane and Glanz, 2010).

In many African settings, initiatives in (adult) literacy and school education have taken place in isolation from one another. Partly this has occurred because poor countries can barely afford to maintain state-run formal education systems, and what resources they do have are limited to provision of formal primary school education. Scant government resources have left adult and non-formal education to the NGO sector, while opportunities for sharing of knowledge and expertise between government and NGO sectors have therefore been limited (see also Wagner, 2000). LABE, established in 1989 by a group of undergraduate students at Makerere University to promote adult literacy, was registered as a national NGO in 1995 to work in partnership with other NGOs, government departments and local communities. LABE recognised an opportunity to bridge a divide between the two with the Family Basic Education (FABE) project in 2001.

FABE was based on the view that literacy has to be useful and to offer satisfactory responses to the needs of adults as parents (see also Oxenham, 2008). Specifically FABE capitalised on parents' wish to ensure that their children have the best possible opportunities to succeed in life (see also Oxenham, 2008: 65). FABE ensured home–school (parent–child) literacy connections by including primary school curriculum in teaching literacy and parenting skills to parents. This connection supports two EFA goals simultaneously: universal primary completion and a 50 per cent increase in the rate of adult literacy by 2015 (see UNESCO, 2008).<sup>2</sup> In addition, the project has been

1 After independence in 1962, Uganda chose an English-only school system, doing away with the use of local languages as mediums of instruction for early primary during British colonial rule.

2 The process of strengthening parental support of children's educational needs appears to have a positive impact on primary school completion rates and this in turn improves children's opportunities in life. See UNESCO (2008) 'Effective Literacy Practices – Family Basic Education Uganda', [www.unesco.org/ui/litbase/?menu=4&programme=9](http://www.unesco.org/ui/litbase/?menu=4&programme=9)

based on a strong foundation of building broad stakeholder participation and capacity development.

Building on the knowledge and expertise gained in its community-based adult literacy projects, including FABE, in rural and remote areas of Uganda, LABE extended its work into early primary education in the Mother Tongue Education (MTE) Project from 2009 onwards. The new initiative was intended to support the implementation of local languages as languages of instruction in the first three years of primary school as part of national curriculum policy change implemented across the country since 2007 (Penny et al., 2008). The MTE Project assists the government to meet its MDG commitments, particularly in relation to UPE, gender equity and literacy. Working in post-conflict areas of Northern Uganda, the MTE Project illustrates the possibilities of civil society participation, collaboration and empowerment in language education planning activities (for example, Bamgbose, 1987) or 'language planning from below' (Alexander, 1992).

The Ugandan example is particularly instructive because it takes place within remote and rural settings on the borders with neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo and South Sudan, in areas of political instability and upheaval. On the Ugandan side of the borders, communities are recovering from 30 years of civil conflict in conditions of long-term post-traumatic stress and poverty.

### From adult education to primary education and strengthening communities

It took the Ugandan government some years to finalise its new school curriculum. Implementation was set for 2007, but government required external assistance and this offered an opportunity for LABE to strengthen linkages between adult and primary education.

The Thematic Curriculum for the first three years of primary (P1–3) requires the use of children's local languages as mediums of instruction. However, earlier use of local languages as mediums of instruction in early primary ceased after independence in the 1960s; thus most teachers currently in the system are unused to reading and writing in local languages, they lack instructional materials and they lack the pedagogical knowledge to use these languages in their classrooms. Owing to the status of English as discussed in many other post-colonial contexts (see various authors in Coleman, 2011), resistance, or perceived resistance, to the use of local languages by a range of stakeholders including parents and teachers has complicated matters. As has been the case in many other settings, government has not disseminated adequate knowledge of the educational implications of different language education models (see Ouane and Glanz, 2010).

Thus resistance towards the use of local languages as mediums of instruction include the notions that local languages may be antithetical to national unity, or that local languages may inhibit educational achievement and opportunities beyond primary, particularly in secondary and tertiary education (see also Coleman, 2011; Ouane and Glanz, 2011).

The MTE Project, initiated in 2009, was intended to tackle several serious issues in addition to the implementation of local languages as mediums of instruction in 240 schools in six north and north-western districts (Adjumani, Amuru, Arua, Gulu, Koboko and Yumbe). Owing to three decades of conflict, the initiative was also intended to assist in the rebuilding of communities, and to rekindle a culture of schooling after a generation of young people had experienced limited educational opportunities. Challenges of implementation included resources, professional development, management and dissemination of information. In particular, they involved the need to establish local or area language boards to develop contemporary standardised orthographies and then to develop appropriate reading and learning materials in five minority languages used in the six districts. They included capacity building of language board members, writers, teachers and school principals. They also included professional development of teacher-trainers and local education officials.

### Achievements and limitations

There is evidence of improved enrolment of P1–3 learners, from 104,502 in 2010 in the six districts to 141,733 in 2013. This is an increased enrolment of 35.63 per cent overall and with an increased enrolment of girls by 38.7 per cent. Literacy and numeracy achievement improved in 2011 and 2012 in comparison with baseline data collected in 2010. Nevertheless, it needs to be emphasised that, owing to limited government funding, most children still have insufficient learning materials and, in very many cases, insufficient access to paper, pens and pencils. This means that school children are not yet deriving full benefit of the new curriculum or the use of MTE.

Co-ordinated public awareness strategies, or 'sensitisation' towards the benefits of local languages in education, are conducted in each district, involving local radio stations and the participation of local government officials, writers, language board members and school children. The project has involved parents, grandparents and communities in school learning, parent educators chosen by village communities to liaise with schools, weekly classes in which parents and grandparents join children in school, and adult literacy classes. Of 20,722 adults registered as participating in these classes, 12,698 are women and 8,024 are men.

Two unexpected developments have emerged from the adult literacy and numeracy classes. Village communities have taken the initiative to establish 551 home learning centres, i.e. two or three attached to each of the 240 schools engaged in the MTE Project. These centres provide conveniently located spaces for adult learners as well as after-school-hours learning spaces for primary children. In several instances, they also provide an opportunity for the establishment of preschool/kindergarten early child care. In many villages, community-initiated saving schemes have been established and are used to foster micro-economic enterprises.

Capacity development, orthographic development and materials development training has occurred with five language boards, for Acholi, Aringa, Kakwa, Lugbara and Madi languages. Nevertheless, after only four years, the language boards need further support in order to become independent and fully-fledged structures with the capacity to take over the writing and translation of educational resources.

The development and printing of sets of storybooks in each of the five languages has been successful, but distribution is limited owing to meagre financial resources available to LABE. LABE's collaborative and capacity-building mechanisms for school change have been taken on board by government as evident in two joint LABE–NCDC publications, which are available nationally. The first of these is the *Implementation Strategy for Advocacy of Local Languages in Uganda* (LABE and NCDC, 2011). Prior to the LABE intervention, primary teacher education included local language education only as a subject from the fourth year of primary, not as a medium of instruction, and teacher education was intended to equip teachers 'with specific local language system awareness needed to teach their respective local languages effectively'. (MoES, 2012: 12) The jointly produced LABE–NCDC *Pedagogy Handbook for Teaching in Local Language* (LABE and NCDC, 2013) has been developed for teachers who are required to use local languages as medium in each setting of the country and will be used in teacher education from 2014 onwards.

As suggested above, this project has been in existence for only four years at the time of writing. However, implementation of significant curriculum change, particularly involving changes of medium of teaching and learning, takes a long time. Thus, what we have to say here is indicative of what appears to be successful interventions at this time. To date, insufficient reading and learning resources, particularly in local languages, are available, even in the 240 project schools and the situation is dire in many other primary schools across the country.

This is a matter for the MoES and NCDC to resolve since NGOs cannot be expected to take on resourcing responsibilities of this scale. Implementation of policy through the professional development of teachers at the national level has only recently begun and this needs to be an ongoing process, rather than a one-off exercise. The LABE experience of the needs of teachers at the chalkface requires a measured response at the system-wide level.

### Implications and lessons

This intervention offers an example in which the building of collaborative partnerships appears to contribute positively towards the implementation of policies that foreground local language-medium education in African countries (c.f. Bamgbose, 2000, and see Ouane and Glanz, 2011). As Webb (2009) notes, and as evident in this example, 'bottom-up' approaches to implementing language-in-education policy may complement 'top-down' or government initiatives. The state may respond to the needs of language development infrastructure while community-based and local stakeholder groups take ownership of the process.

An evaluation of the MTE Project shows that this collaborative process has contributed towards a reduction or dispelling of negative attitudes towards local language or mother tongue-medium education. It has, in this case, increased community-level stakeholder participation, by engaging minority language groups in corpus language planning activities, production of reading materials, and increased agency over community-based educational practices. This in turn increases ownership of the process. Teachers are included in collaborative enterprises with language board members, parents, grandparents and children in order to develop reading materials (Heugh and Mulumba, 2013).

At closer inspection, the intervention has shown the need to have in-service teacher development that is collaborative and focused on instructional improvement in the local language at classroom level. The intervention also shows that teachers need necessary guidance on how to manage mother tongue-based instruction in schools. It further demonstrates that collaboration between an NGO initiative in remote areas of the country and a national education authority, in this case the NCDC, can inform national programmes for teacher development, such as through the production of a pedagogical handbook for teachers across the country.

## Conclusion

The MTE Project is thus far more than a school-based project; it has resulted in extending home–school local language and literacy linkages to support both children and parents and has led to the establishment of village-based learning centres that now cater for early child care, after-school learning support, adult education and saving schemes. The knock-on effect, together with the public awareness strategies, has resulted in significant ‘buy-in’ and recognition of the value of local languages in practical aspects of education and income generation. Initially reported ambivalence or resistance towards MTE in the six districts appears to have dissipated (Heugh and Mulumba, 2013).

LABE staff learned through this project that for an intervention like the introduction of MTE to succeed and to be sustainable, community members and their organisations require the knowledge, skills and information on the necessity for, and advantages of, change. NGOs can initially contribute to and assist government providers to fill the knowledge and expertise gap. However, it is equally important that this knowledge and expertise is passed on to and taken up by community and local stakeholders in the interests of local sustainability. It is also important that this knowledge and expertise is shared with government education providers at the national level, also in the interests of sustainability. This is the kind of knowledge and experience that may be useful for government education providers, NGOs and development agencies working in other contexts of diversity, poverty and (post-) conflict to meet EFA and MDG goals and obligations.

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# Accepting and including learners with special educational needs: essential requirements in achieving universal primary education standards

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## Introduction

In this paper I will examine the British Council's approach to the inclusion and provision of special educational needs (SEN) based on the ideas I presented in my interactive talk at the Cape Town conference. The framework for my discussion was the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and in particular MDG 2: 'Achieve universal primary education and ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling'. However, in SEN, there is a wider perspective that goes beyond what many academics and specialists focus on (as happened at the conference), which is the importance of learning through home and vernacular languages and not through the imposition of international languages. In Sub-Saharan Africa this is often realised through the introduction of English at early stages in primary school as a medium of instruction. While good practice in learning would support such an approach, for SEN learners there is an added dimension in that, to a significant extent, the challenge for many of them is one of different ways that learners cognitively process information and how they learn. Therefore, for learners with SEN, if teachers do not teach in ways that learners learn, information transmitted will appear as if a 'foreign language' whether or not transmitted via their home language.

## What exactly are special educational needs?

SEN is a complex area. It encompasses a wide range of learning needs and a wide range of people, including those children who need extra provision because they have abilities significantly ahead of their peers. Many learners have multiple needs such as mobility or sensory disabilities. However, it is also important to understand that not all people with SEN have a disability and not all people with a disability have special educational needs.

Underlying this complexity, of course, is an unintended consequence of labelling or categorising learners as having SEN, which can lead to them (effectively) being excluded from an educational system rather than included. Some states make wide use of selective or 'special' schools to place learners with special needs. Turkey, for example, makes very little use of special schools whereas Mexico has invested heavily in them (OECD, 2007).

Across Europe there is considerable variation in the percentage of learners identified as having special educational needs, ranging from 1.5 per cent in Sweden to 24 per cent in Iceland (NESSE, 2012: 14). Even across the nations of the United Kingdom there are considerable differences in defining SEN. In England, there has been a greater focus on 'disability', 'vulnerability' and disability legislation. In Scotland, the term 'additional needs' has been used, which includes a broader range of young people (beyond those with learning difficulties and disabilities); for example, children in care, ethnic minorities and the travelling community (Williams et al., 2009).

While it is impossible to cover every learning need, a comprehensive identification of SEN covers the following:

- Cognition and learning: dyslexia, dyspraxia, dyscalculia.
- Behaviour, emotional and social development needs: working with learners with challenging behaviour.
- Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).
- Communication and interaction needs: speech, language, intellectual and communication needs.
- Autistic spectrum disorder (ASD), including Asperger Syndrome.
- Sensory and/or physical needs: visual, hearing and physical impairment.
- Gifted and talented learners and learners affected by global cultural movement and displacement.

However, for the purposes of this paper, I use the term 'special educational needs' to mean children who have a much greater difficulty in learning than the majority of children of the same age or they have a disability that stops or even hinders them from making use of the general educational facilities provided for children of the same age.

### The Millennium Development Goals, disability and special educational needs

The UN estimates that some one billion people, or 15 per cent of the world's population, live with a disability, of which some 80 per cent live in developing countries (United Nations, 2013). Such figures are extremely difficult to gather and so the scale of disabilities is often under-reported. In Sierra Leone, for example, the 2004 census reported some 3,300 cases of cognitive impairment or challenge, but a detailed national survey in the previous year had estimated that over a five-year period 25,200 would be severely mentally impaired and a further 219,300 would present mild forms of mental retardation owing to malnutrition in pregnant mothers (Aguayo et al., 2003).

The United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) presents perhaps an even starker set of statistics that illustrate the link between poverty, disability and access to education:

*An estimated 20 per cent of the world's poorest persons are those with disabilities; 98 per cent of children with disabilities in developing countries do not attend school; an estimated 30 per cent of the world's street children live with disabilities; and the literacy rate for adults with disabilities is as low as three per cent and, in some countries, down to one per cent for women with disabilities. (OHCHR, 2007: 1)*

While the MDGs represent a concerted effort to address global poverty, there is acknowledgement that people with disabilities need to be included in international goals (United Nations, 1994). This is despite the delegates of the 1994 World Conference on Special Needs Education, who represented 92 governments and 25 international organisations, committing themselves to Education for All and the Framework for Action on Special Needs Education, which is more commonly known as the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 2010). This stated that:

- Every child has a fundamental right to education, and must be given the opportunity to achieve and maintain an acceptable level of learning.
- Every child has unique characteristics, interests, abilities and learning needs.
- Education systems should be designed and educational programmes implemented to take into account the wide diversity of these characteristics and needs.
- Those with special educational needs must have access to regular schools, which should accommodate them within a child-centred pedagogy capable of meeting these needs.

The Salamanca Statement should also have been seen against the backdrop of a proposed Global Compact on Learning and a shift towards a new goal of Learning for All as opposed to Education for All. The focus in Learning for All is on 'quality' and 'equity' to ensure that all children, particularly those who are marginalised, have access to 'quality learning opportunities' (CUE, 2001).



## Social and medical model approaches in educational settings

Thus, in understanding SEN, it is important to know that it focuses on equity and quality and is founded on a social model of disability. A social model of education assumes differences are a normal part of diversity and that teaching must be adapted to the needs of each individual learner (see, for example, Carson, 2009). Successful teaching and learning celebrates all learners and promotes the contribution that all learners bring to learning. This is consistent with United Nations' MDGs and European integration agendas and is different from a medical model where the starting point is the impairment or the disability (see Table 1).

**Table 1:** Medical and social models of education

Medical model	Social model
Based on diagnosis of impairment.	Child/learner-centred approaches.
Impairment is the problem.	Focus on access to curriculum.
Support agencies – social workers, occupational therapists, educational psychologists – central to support.	Start from individual strengths.
Most likely to focus on special schools.	Integration for the benefit of the individual and all learners.
Medication used as significant solution.	Support in the appropriate environment.
Targeted specific support for SEN – often in ways not focused on inclusion.	Obligation of society on accessibility, meeting access and educational needs.

The above is a generalised description of both models, and reality is more complex. An integrated model of both specialist professional and educational support would be, of course, more appropriate for an individual. However, in many countries, funding for special educational needs is defined by a 'medical diagnosis'.

## Providing support in SEN environments

An ideal scenario for SEN provision would include the following, which draws on the UK Department for Education and Skills SEN Code of Practice (DFES, 2001):

- **A whole-school and community policy for inclusion and integration**

Inclusion does not necessarily mean all learners in the same class all the time. The main concern is how to ensure access to the curriculum in learning. This *could* be everyone in same mainstream school, provision within a special school, an appropriate combination of special and mainstream school for specific subjects or home learning and care support; crucial to this is the extent to which access to the curriculum leads to an inclusive approach.

- **The role of special educational needs co-ordinators (SENCOs)**

Every school should have a co-ordinator who is responsible for SEN and is usually known as a SENCO. However, although a SENCO is a co-ordinator who must be trained and qualified in SEN, the responsibility for implementation of policy lies with the whole school. School leadership is crucial to success.

- **Professional support and co-ordination**

There should be an integrated approach with support from professionals including educational psychologists, occupational and speech therapists as well as SEN-trained educationalists. It is *not* the role of teachers to diagnose SEN (this is for the professionals), but it is the role of teachers to notice the learning challenges and problems that may result from SEN. If everyone is working together, the conditions for providing necessary support for individuals with SEN can be created. The teacher's role is to provide the necessary interventions, based on findings through this co-ordinated approach, to develop learning opportunities.

- **Parental involvement and child-centred decision-making**

This can be difficult. Sometimes parents either do not wish to tell schools that their child has a SEN, are in denial about this themselves or hope that the school will 'cure' their child. This often happens when the SEN is largely unrecognised and may be expressed through a behavioural issue. However, effective and constructive dialogue between parents and schools is the only way to fully support a child with SEN. It also involves planning necessary home support. In as much as it is possible, the most effective support is where the child is actively involved in making their own decisions.

- **Peer and buddy support systems**

Many learners who do not achieve at school feel school to be an alien place and this is especially so for learners with SEN. Learners with SEN are most ripe for bullying. As a result, behaviour issues can arise and can lead to exclusion from the class, if not the school. Creating an effective buddy or support system of friends and peers within the school can lead to greater understanding of SEN across the school.

Of course, all the above is an idealised scenario and cannot be applied in some kind of quick fix through policy handed down from above. Everywhere, and not just in contexts that could be described as 'developing countries', the above presents a considerable challenge, the biggest of which is not funding or material resources but attitudes to change. Nevertheless, the above represents a quality standard for measuring progress in support towards an inclusive approach.

### Individual education plans (IEPs) and provision mapping

The British Council has recently launched a new SEN course<sup>3</sup> and has published a series of SEN case studies from around the world (British Council, 2012), which form the basis of this section.

Learners with SENs have a range of needs that can be divided into three broad categories:

- 1. Accessibility:** In the school, the classroom and the virtual world (which has implications for web design).
- 2. Access:** Through specific tools such as Braille, screen readers, sign language, learning support resources (both human and material).
- 3. Learning:** Being able to access the curriculum and any standards. These may be specific and unique for individuals, but also apply equally for all learners (this is an issue of 'inclusion').

Any good practice approach in meeting the needs of learners with SEN is through individual education plans (IEPs). Such IEPs can meet the learning needs and lead to promotion of inclusion. An IEP would identify areas of concern, such as concerns over a learner's literacy and numeracy skills, how this concern could be tackled and who would be responsible and by when. In such a case, this could be support in class using differentiated materials through a class teacher with guidance from a SENCO with an immediate start date and an initial review period in six weeks. This review would assess whether progress has been made as measured against previously agreed achievement criteria and whether any follow-up action may be required through additional support in class or perhaps at home.

While an IEP targets an individual's learning needs and is very important in any learner-centred approach, provision mapping involves a broader strategy, which provides a quick and clear way of showing *all* the provision that a school makes that is *additional* to and *different* from that offered through the school's curriculum. The purpose of a provision map is to describe what provision the school will make each year for pupils with SEN within the context of the *whole* school. Thus in the case of IEPs, only the needs of those learners with SEN are identified and supported through specific teachers and support groups. In contrast, in provision mapping the needs of all learners are identified with the aim of involving the whole school so that quality and standards across the school are raised. In this way, a school's educational culture and ethos can be transformed.

Provision planning, therefore, meets an important aspect of our British Council approach to SEN and inclusion. It meets the needs of learners with SEN, but also meets the learning needs of *all* learners, which is what inclusion is really all about.

### Conclusion

It can be very difficult for teachers to know what to do in terms of SEN and 'whole-school' inclusion. So, to conclude, here are ten practical strategies designed to include SEN into the mainstream of schools:

- 1.** Celebrate diversity by working with and acknowledging the strengths and positive contributions that different learners bring to the classroom.
- 2.** Ensure that the learning outcomes are clear and can be easily understood by all.
- 3.** Always link the subject matter and the learning to something that the learners already know about and understand.
- 4.** Remove clutter and confusion, which can detract from learning.
- 5.** Ensure that your planning includes support and scaffolding for any skills or sub-skills.
- 6.** Plan differentiated approaches that enable all learners to participate.
- 7.** Ensure that all accessibility and access needs have been met.
- 8.** Use assessment-for-learning approaches and not only assessment of learning.
- 9.** Ensure that there is high-interest learning using multi-sensory approaches.
- 10.** Make provision for the learner's voice and learner's experience.

<sup>3</sup> See [www.teachingenglish.org.uk/teacher-training/special-educational-needs](http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/teacher-training/special-educational-needs)

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## **Appendix:**

The Language and Development  
Conference publications



All the conference publications can be accessed at [www.langdevconferences.org](http://www.langdevconferences.org). Additionally, those published by the British Council can be accessed at [www.teachingenglish.org.uk/publications](http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/publications).

- 1993** First Language and Development Conference, Bangkok, Thailand  
 Theme: 'Issues in Language and Development'  
 Kenny, B and Savage, W (eds) (1997) *Language and Development: Teachers in a Changing World*. London: Longman.
- 1995** Second Language and Development Conference, Bali, Indonesia  
 Theme: 'Language and Communication in Development: Stakeholders' Perspectives'  
 Crooks, T and Crewes, G (eds) (1995) *Language and Development*. Denpasar: Indonesia Australia Language Foundation.  
 Crooks, T (ed) (1996) *ESP in Southeast Asia*. Denpasar: Indonesia Australia Language Foundation.
- 1997** Third Language and Development Conference, Langkawi, Malaysia  
 Theme: 'Access, Empowerment, Opportunity'  
 Abdullah, A, Crocker, T et al. (eds) (1998) *Language in Development: Access, Empowerment, Opportunity*. Kuala Lumpur: National Institute of Public Administration (INTAN).
- 1999** Fourth Language and Development Conference, Hanoi, Vietnam  
 Theme: 'Partnership and Interaction in Language and Development'  
 Shaw, J, Lubelska, D and Noullet, M (eds) (2000) *Partnership and Interaction*. Bangkok: Asian Institute of Technology.
- 2001** Fifth Language and Development Conference, Phnom Penh, Cambodia  
 Theme: 'Defining the Role of Language in Development'  
 LoBianco, J (ed) (2002) *Voices from Phnom Penh: Development and Language: Global Influences and Local Effects*. Melbourne: Language Australia.
- 2003** Sixth Language and Development Conference, Tashkent, Uzbekistan  
 Theme: 'Linguistic Challenges to National Development and International Co-operation'  
 Coleman, H, Gulyamova, J and Thomas, A (eds) (2005) *National Development, Education and Language in Central Asia and Beyond*. Tashkent: British Council Uzbekistan.
- 2005** Seventh Language and Development Conference, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia  
 Theme: 'Language and Development'  
 Coleman, H (ed) (2007) *Language and Development: Africa and Beyond*. Addis Ababa: British Council Ethiopia.
- 2009** Eighth Language and Development Conference, Dhaka, Bangladesh  
 Theme: 'Language and Development: Sociocultural Issues and Challenges'  
 Savage, W (ed) (forthcoming) *Language and Development: Sociocultural Issues and Challenges*.
- 2011** Ninth Language and Development Conference, Colombo, Sri Lanka  
 Theme: 'Language and Social Cohesion'  
 Coleman, H (ed) (forthcoming) *Language and Social Cohesion in the Developing World*.
- 2013** Tenth Language and Development Conference, Cape Town, South Africa  
 Theme: 'Opportunity, Equity and Identity Beyond 2015'  
 McIlwraith, H (ed) (2014) *The Cape Town Language and Development Conference: Looking beyond 2015*. London: British Council





**10<sup>th</sup> INTERNATIONAL**  
Language and Development  
**CONFERENCE**

The British Council hosted the tenth International Language and Development Conference in Cape Town in October 2013. The conference coincided with reviews by development professionals and policy makers worldwide of progress towards the eight 2015 UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). It was an opportunity to focus on a range of language-related issues common – but not unique to – developing countries across the African continent. This collection is drawn from papers and presentations across the four main strands of discussion: language policy; language, literacy and education; language in socio-economic development; language, culture, identity and inclusion. The writers look at African languages, varieties of English and other languages from policy level to practical application in the classroom, and in the home and wider community.

Hamish McIlwraith, editor of this publication, is founder of McIlwraith Education, an international education consultancy based in Edinburgh. He has worked as a teacher, lecturer, trainer and consultant in China, Asia, North Africa, the Middle East and Central Europe.

Each contribution in this volume was subject to the British Council's peer review process, led by the volume editor and the British Council's Commissioning Editor for Publications.

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