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Sound language policies must be consistent with natural language evolution

Abstract: Societal multilingualism and multilectalism have been among the leading justifications for language policies, especially in the Global South, where many of these have failed. I associate the failures with poor choices of official languages and media of education, which are not consistent with the linguistic behaviors of the majority of the citizenry and the socioeconomic structures of the relevant polities. I review some cases of adequate and inadequate policies around the world and explain ecologically some reasons for either their successes or their failures. In a subset of the cases, I assess the results as mixed. My recommendation is of course not to follow the policy of a particular polity simply because it has succeeded there but to also check whether the ecology of its success is similar to that of the new polity. The relevant ecology includes the socioeconomic structure/system and the linguistic practices of the citizenry for whom the policy is intended. Among the issues to address is, for instance, whether the language adopted as the official language and medium of education is easy for the majority of the citizenry to learn successfully. Another is whether the language policy will make the economic development of the nation more inclusive and empower the majority economically and politically.

Keywords: ecology; economy; evolution; medium of education; multilingualism; official language; policy; schooling

1 Introduction

In this article, I explain ways in which knowledge of how languages evolve naturally – as a consequence of the behaviors of their speakers in specific population structures – can shed light on the success of some language policies and failures of some others. As an evolutionary linguist, I have deliberately chosen the term "evolution", instead of "change" in my discussion below because, inspired by biological evolutionary theory, this approach enables me to invoke "ecological" factors, external to language (such as socioeconomic structure), to explain changes in forms,

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structures, and functions. I focus on function (including domains of use, which influence aspects of language vitality), with which much of the literature on language policy is concerned. However, I sometimes also allude to forms and structures when I refer to stipulations of academies.[1]

I submit that language policies are more likely to succeed when they are sound, especially in taking into account the communicative practices of speakers/signers to whom they apply and the socioeconomic dynamics in which the latter operate. To be concrete, I first survey some cases of natural language evolution determined by ordinary communicative practices of people and guided by no policy. I compare them with cases of evolution triggered by institutional policies (Section 2.1). In the latter cases, I show to what extent the successes or failures of the policies can be associated with whether or not they are consistent with trends in natural language evolution (Sections 2.2 and 2.3). I assume that language practitioners are the "unwitting agents of change" (Mufwene 2001). In Section 3, I explain ways in which understanding natural language evolution can inform sound language policies.

2 Natural language evolution driven by local ecological factors, despite some universal trends

Alexander (1989) was so perceptive in stating that the present state of institutionalized language practices and attitudes in Southern Africa reflects colonial language policies, which served the interests of the rulers but ignored those of the colonized people. A case in point is that former European colonial languages continue to

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1 It appears from a comment by two reviewers that some people think that (natural) language evolution occurs independent of the behaviors of their users. This is an inaccurate interpretation of evolution, on which ecology (including language users) rolls the dice of its direction, for better or for worse. Languages are produced by their speakers or signers and influenced by the linguistic behaviors of the latter, who are themselves typically also influenced by the socioeconomic ecologies in which they operate. This human ecology determines how languages evolve regarding structures, functions, and vitality. This evolution is as natural as that of, say, animal species, as the latter respond (mal)adaptively to changes in their ecologies or ecosystems. Speakers or signers are not usually aware of how their behaviors influence the evolution of their languages. However, policy makers and language planners consciously intend to influence language evolution too, often against the current practices of the relevant populations. This kind of evolution that they (intend to) set in motion is what I consider artificial in the sense of produced by design and unnatural. It is decisions of these policy makers that I engage with in this article. May the reader also bear in mind that I'm an evolutionary linguist attempting to make my scholarship relevant to language policy, about which my knowledge may appear too narrow to (some) experts.

function as official languages and therefore as media of education past the elementary school although they remain lingua francas of a small elite class. Generally (with a handful exceptions such as in Gabon, Angola, and Mozambique [Mufwene 2022a]), the national population majorities do not speak them fluently if at all. As noted by Pinxteren (2022), most high school students do not yet have enough competence in the foreign language to be able to perform well in school.[2]

These policies can be considered as successful if one embraces Thomas Babington Macaulay's (1835) *Minutes on Indian Education*, according to which the British Empire needed to teach English, the colonizer's language, only to a small elite class of indigenous "colonial auxiliaries" (Samarin 1989) who would interface between the colonizers and the colonized. The rest of the indigenous population did not need, nor have, to know it. The same applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to other colonial languages, especially French and Portuguese. The success in this case amounts to the fact that nationals of former colonial metropoles can communicate with the national elite in the former colonies and investors from the same European and related Western nations can sign their contracts in the languages that are advantageous to them. The basic advantage lies in them not having to learn the indigenous languages, not even the major lingua francas, while the Natives must use the former metropole's language to communicate with them. We can of course not ignore that the policy disenfranchises the majority of the citizenry.

It is striking that, 60 years or so since Independence, the vast majority of Africans still do not speak (fluently) the official languages of, and dominant media of education in, their countries. Africa is still being governed through interpreters or intermediaries (Lawrence et al. 2006). This colonial legacy is a colonizers' success if one acknowledges that indigenous African languages continue to be considered less prestigious and less important economically and politically than English, French, Portuguese, and Spanish, though highly valued in the (extended) family networks. Otherwise, the policies are failures if one has expected the colonial languages to gradually spread within the former colonies and become dominant lingua francas or vernaculars.[3] The poor results attest to wasteful financial investments in the current media of education. They also illustrate the extent to which students have been short-

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2 A reviewer remarks that South Africa is perhaps an important exception from these general remarks. They are correct in pointing out that there is an increasing segment of the non-White population that speaks English. However, this doesn't deny the proposition that more students from this background would perform better in school if the media of education were languages more familiar to them and about which they have more reliable intuitions, as well articulated by, for instance, van Pinxteren (2022).
3 One can argue that Portuguese has somewhat evolved in this direction in Angola and Mozambique, serving as the primary lingua franca. This evolution is more a byproduct of their revolutionary wars than the success of Portugal's language policy.

changed against the time and money they and their parents have invested in their schooling. Both the limited competence in the official language and the inadequate quality of the academic knowledge they have acquired make them non- or less competitive in their socioeconomic structures (for the few good-paying jobs available), even less so if they want to travel to countries where their official languages are used as vernaculars and their accents and/or limited competence are stigmatized. Many of the few that have succeeded in their respective countries had relied on their social connections or bribery, even if they may be relatively more competitive than their peers.

Unlike in former European settlement colonies, a large proportion of the indigenous elite who speak the colonial languages (well) and use them to index their (relative) socioeconomic success do not even practice them as their vernaculars. As explained in Mufwene (2020), a great deal of this unimpressive evolution of the European languages within the former exploitation colonies has to do with the collapse of formal economies in the relevant African nations. I submit that the success of adequate language policies depends largely on economic development, which generates motivation within the people for whom they are intended. This position is essentially utilitarian. Accordingly, people invest in specific languages because of the social, professional, or economic benefits that they hope to accumulate from their investment in time, effort, and often money. When the white-collar sector in which the official language is intended to be used stagnates or contracts, the motivation for learning or keeping up competence in the language decreases. Things get worse if the language remains restricted primarily to a socioeconomic class that is perceived to exploit the disenfranchised in the same way as the former colonizer.

2.1 Some policy-independent cases of language evolution

For a broader perspective and more historical depth, I start with Latin as an imperial language. The Romans did not intend to share their language with all the Celtic populations in their Empire. The Romans simply Romanized and Latinized their rulers, the top indigenous class, who paid tribute to Rome. It is this elite class and the traders within the provinces who, after the collapse of the Western Empire, maintained Classical Latin as the High language and Vulgar Latin (VL) as the lingua franca of trade. While the indigenous scholars chose to use Classical Latin all the way to the 18th century in their writings, the rest of the population gradually adopted VL, the language of Roman-style economy. The more extensively this variety spread informally from the urban centers to the rural areas, the more it indigenized and vernacularized, replacing many Celtic languages in the process. All this happened

without the help of any stated policy, driven by the success of the expanding non-traditional socioeconomic system.

Long before modern France's elite developed policies for spreading Parisian French as the national language at the expense of what they identified as *patois* (see, e.g., Nadeau and Barlow 2006), the new socioeconomic structure had already been spreading the indigenized offspring of VL – several dialects of it.[4] In the process Classical Latin was ignored by the non-elite segment of the population. It is later that modern standard French has been refashioned, artificially, by grammarians too eager to pattern some of its structures on those of Classical Latin (see, e.g., Mufwene 2015 and references cited therein).

Founded by Cardinal Richelieu in 1635, the Académie Française had the mission of purging the then emergent French language of impurities accumulated over time by "poor speakers and writers," modernizing, and making it uniform. Another purpose was to help unite a linguistically diverse and expanding polity, into modern monolingual nation-state. This political goal would be buttressed by the adoption, in the 19th century, of the one-nation-one-language political ideology. On the other hand, the Académie also adopted gradually an elitist ideology that has privileged practices of a particular social elite and discouraged grassroots creations and borrowings from especially English (Kibbee 2014).

No major modern language, including English (which is now the foremost global lingua franca of science and technology, academia, and trade), has been spared from foreign influence. In this elitist orientation, the Académie has worked against natural dynamics in language evolution and worked against the success it had scored in its original mission, with the help of the school system, to be sure. Unsurprisingly, most vernacular speakers of French have ignored the stipulations of the Académie against borrowings, especially from English.

Urbanization has also helped in spreading modern French. As rural areas have been changing physically, economically, and in other cultural ways, looking less and less different from the urban environment, the *patois* associated with them have also gradually been given up, interestingly in favor of urban colloquial French rather than the élite standard variety prescribed by the Académie. Natural language evolution has redirected the trajectory of change consistent with the vernacular behaviors of ordinary speakers.

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4 The term *patois* has been used loosely in French to refer to Celtic languages and/or rural neo-Latin varieties. They both have gradually been replaced by modern French, which is very much influenced by the Parisian variety, reflecting how highly centralized the French political and administrative systems have been. The most prestigious French commercial publishers, if not most of the publishers for that matter, are also in Paris.

Ironically, it is in the former exploitation colonies, where French is acquired primarily in school and where it is not used by most of its xenolectal speakers as a vernacular, that scholastic French varieties consistent with the stipulations of the Académie have been taught and approximated. Certainly, French has also indigenized in the process, with the xenolectal varieties identified by its heritage speakers as *les français d'Afrique.* European heritage French speakers may consider them, along with those spoken in France's overseas departments and in Quebec, as deviations. However, this is how French itself emerged, from the indigenization of Latin under Celtic substrate and Frankish adstrate influences, following a natural course of evolution.

The Académie has been more successful in influencing the outcome of the competition between the multitude of neo-Latin varieties that emerged than in influencing the emergence of forms and structures produced from the competing varieties. It has also succeeded in influencing how French is taught in school, at least to non-native speakers.

The birth and spread of English in the British Isles are another interesting case of natural evolution. There was no English language spoken in Continental Europe or the British Isles when the Germanic tribes colonized England in the fifth century. By the seventh century, what is now called Old English had emerged out of the contact of the Germanic languages spoken by the Angles, the Jutes, and the Saxons, who had not yet assimilated the indigenous Celts. Based on the terms *England* and *English*, I submit that Anglian, the language of the Angles, prevailed over the other Germanic languages. Etymologically, the terms mean, respectively, 'land of the Angles' and 'way or language of the Angles'. The invaders had truly settled the colony and claimed it as their home!

One can conjecture that the superiority of the Angles' socioeconomic, political, and military structures helped their language prevail. Although England was later colonized by the Scandinavians (eighth to tenth centuries) and by the Norman French (eleventh to fourteenth centuries), these colonial regimes must have not been assimilationist. Old Norse and Norman French did, indeed, influence the evolution of English but they did not drive it to extinction. On the contrary, they vanished, despite the political power they had enjoyed. The colonizers must have not wanted to impose their languages as the new vernacular; instead, they shifted to the colonized people's Germanic language. The Celtic languages were relegated to the margins.

We can conclude that natural dynamics of interactions among colonizers and between the latter and the indigenous Celts drove the emergence and evolution of English, from Old English to Late Modern English in the British Isles, without the intervention of a particular academy. Successful colonization ventures would spread it to the rest of the British Isles, to large parts of North America and some Caribbean Islands, to parts of Africa and Asia, and to Australia and New Zealand. To be sure, the

style and timing of colonization were not the same everywhere. This variation is reflected in differences between the structures of the ensuing "colonial Englishes", including those characterized as creoles. It is also evident from the fact that English endangered both the Celtic languages of the British Isles and the indigenous languages of Anglophone North America, of Australia, and of New Zealand, but not those of the British colonies in Africa, Asia, and the Pacific Ocean. Everywhere in this linguistic empire, the indigenous languages have been considered less prestigious and economically less powerful than English.

2.2 Some successful policy-based cases of evolution

Defending themselves against the spread of English in the Canadian part of what was called *New France* during the colonial period, the Québécois resorted, in the 20th century, to a language policy grounded in an ethnolinguistically more equitable economic system. They demanded that every business and industry function in both English and French and that Francophones be paid wages equal to those of their Anglophone counterparts for the same jobs.

To put things in a historical contrastive perspective, note that the English settlers had not intended to impose their language on everybody else when they colonized parts of North America. They allowed other Europeans to settle in their colonies and form their own national and cultural enclaves in which they continued to speak German, Swedish, Italian, etc. For instance, they did not impose English on the Dutch in present-day New York State, which had been a Dutch colony until the late seventeenth century. Nor did they impose English on the French colonists after the Louisiana Purchase in 1803 and encroaching on French settlements from Maine to Nova Scotia, from where they infiltrated the rest of New France. It was the success of their economic system that drove the other European colonists to assimilate linguistically and politically.[5]

Thus, what can be characterized as extensive White American English monolingualism in the 20th century is the outcome of natural evolution, by competition and selection driven mostly by economic pressures, rather than the product of a particular language policy. As residential segregation collapsed among the Whites and their children could attend Anglo schools, especially during the first half of the 20th century, Americans from Continental Europe gradually gave up their national traditions, including their parochial schools, churches, and newspapers published in their respective languages. Anglophone schools contributed to the spread of the

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5 An important recent reference on this is Brown (ed. 2022), an informative anthology on various Continental European diasporas in the United States.

standard variety, and this is the only aspect of the spread of English in North America that may be associated with some language policy, regarding institutional and formal domains of language practice (see Part 3).

The only European settlers who stood up against this demographic and geographic spread of English in North America are the Francophone Canadians, especially in Quebec. Their advocacy for French as a co-official language has succeeded in having Canada adopt a bilingual administration and economic system, although the bilingualism is apparently only symbolic outside Quebec and New Brunswick.[6] In any case, unlike in Louisiana, where commitment to French among the Francophones is now essentially ideological (with CODOFIL[7]), the Canadian policy has helped revitalize French in Quebec and some pockets of Francophone populations in Canada. In Louisiana, the omission to involve the economy in the endeavor to revitalize French accounts for the latter's lack of success. Funding for learning and teaching French is not enough if no state-wide advantageous ecology is concurrently created to nurture the practice of the language. French remains moribund in Louisiana (Dubois 2014).

The Québécois success story is comparable to that of the Afrikaners, who in the 19th century did something similar in order to save Afrikaans from the spread of English, in relation to which this derivative of Dutch was considered inferior. To enhance its value, they not only produced literature in Afrikaans and set in place a parallel school system in which it was the medium of education; they also invested it in a parallel economic system where their vernacular functioned as the language of business. By 1925, the language had been standardized; and they got the British colonial administration to recognize it as the second official language of South Africa (Deumert 2005; Kirsten 2019; Mesthrie 2008; Roberge 2003). Their revitalization and valorization endeavors were facilitated by a segregated population structure that enabled them to maintain a culture distinct from those of the indigenous Africans and of the British colonizers (Giliomee 2003; McKenna 2011). Their success was boosted by the apartheid rule (1948–1994), when they controlled alone the politics of South Africa and made Afrikaans the primary official language of the government and formal economy, which every White person who participated in the

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6 Mougeon (2014) shows, however, that there are proportionally fewer bilingual Anglophones than bilingual Francophones in Canada's maritime provinces. The observation is consistent with Chaudenson's (2008) reservation about the success of Quebec's reversal of language shift. Anglophones who are not running businesses or different parts of the industry have less to gain from bilingualism than Francophones outside Quebec and New Brunswick. Of course, the endeavor to reverse the shift to English in these provinces would not have succeeded if the Anglophones had not cooperated to support bilingualism.

7 Conseil pour le développement du Français en Louisiane 'Council for the Development of French in Louisiana'.

socioeconomic and political system had to learn. Political, economic, and military powers provided an advantageous ecology for its growth, although the disenfranchised Black South Africans resisted it (see below).

Since 1994, Afrikaans has lost some political power, although it counts among the eleven official languages of South Africa. Some scholars think that it is now a language at risk, owing to substantial emigration of its speakers from the new, post-apartheid South Africa, the decreasing loyalty of Colored people to this vernacular they have shared with the Afrikaners since the Dutch East India Company's days, and the fact that in urban areas even Afrikaner children are learning English as a mother tongue, though not as the only one for many or most of them (Broeder et al. 2002; de Klerk and Bosch 1998; Giliomee 2003). In other words, the success of a language policy is very much at the mercy of the interests of individual speakers. In present-day South Africa, the competitiveness of Afrikaners and Colored people in the white-collar job market depends largely on how fluent their English is. The fear is whether English will be the dominant language of the children and gradually displace Afrikaans.

Coetzee-Van Rooy (2013) and Kirsten (2017) argue that the process described as the displacement of Afrikaans by English applies especially to prestigious domains that Afrikaans is losing while the Afrikaners are increasingly becoming multilingual. Multilingualism can be stable and does not necessarily result in language shift, especially among the ethnic speakers of Afrikaans in this particular case. This is certainly true and should be noted by those who jump hastily to the conclusion that a language is endangered in situation such as that discussed in this paragraph. Some claims of language endangerment are based on inaccurate perceptions or incomplete assessments of the relevant situations. And the reviewer to whom I responded in note ten is likewise correct in noting that in geographical areas where Afrikaans is dominant and still used as medium of education in primary secondary schools (some) White Anglophone parents encourage their children to learn Afrikaans too. Language evolution need not be uniform.

There are a few other successful language policies around the world, such as the spread of Mandarin in China as the common language called *Putonghua* and the promotion of Catalan against the spread of Castilian; but space constraints prevent me from discussing them here.

2.3 Some unsuccessful policy-based cases of evolution

There are also a few language policies that have not been (particularly) successful. A very good example to begin with is that of Irish. This language has been taught in Ireland's schools for over a century now; and some *Gaeltachtaí* ('regions where Irish

functions as a vernacular'[8]) have been settled in order to facilitate its revitalization. Children in these settlements are raised with it as their mother tongue. However, Irish is not spoken outside the Gaeltachtaí, certainly not as a vernacular. Other Irish children learn it in school as they would Classical Latin or Ancient Greek, without practicing it in spoken form, at least not outside the classroom.

Reasons for the failure of the Irish revitalization policy include the following: (1) Irish does not function as the language of Ireland's economy or politics, unlike French in Quebec or Afrikaans in the provinces of South Africa, such as the Northern Cape and the Western Cape, where Afrikaners constitute a little over and almost half the population, respectively, and have significant economic power. (2) The Gaeltachtaí are in economically destitute areas, in the western geographical periphery of Ireland, for that matter; this is an ecology that cannot sustain young adults who want to earn a decent living. (3) Therefore, when they become adults, the children that learned Irish as mother tongue but acquired English in school leave the Gaeltachtaí for economically more attractive areas, where the second language is the vernacular. As they will use Irish less and less, the language remains endangered. Migrations from the Gaeltachtaí clearly drain Irish of speaker resources. (4) According to Ó Giollagáin (2014), when the Irish government tried to promote the economic development of Galtachtaí, the industry operated in English; and a stream of English-speaking in-migrants from other parts of Ireland came to compete for jobs and offset the revitalization efforts. Irish was apparently not required for the jobs. The investment of the economy in revitalization endeavor is evidently not consistent with what economists such as Grin (2006) call the "linguistic environment," one in which speakers would find Irish useful, an important social capital. To put it another way, the non-Irish speakers who move to the Galtachtaí for jobs and are not interested in practicing Irish erode the Irish-speaking environment. (5) According to Crowley (2017–2018), who focuses mostly on Northern Ireland, the government has not provided sufficient incentives for the school children to practice Irish outside the classroom; and attempts to use Irish as a medium of instruction go against the philosophy of using a medium of instruction that students speak fluently. (6) Lastly, many Irish ask whether Irish is suitable for modern life and will serve their needs as well as, if not better than, English, beyond serving as a national identity marker. The ambivalence of the Irish government and the population itself about revitalizing Irish has spelled the failure of the investment in Irish for over a century now.

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8 It may not be unnecessary to clarify here that one's current vernacular may not be their mother tongue, as in the case of many immigrants in the diaspora who have formed unions with people that do not share heritage languages with and, in addition, may prefer to communicate with their children in the host country's vernacular. One can shift vernaculars in their lifetime, either ideologically or under new socioeconomic ecological pressures.

Worth discussing briefly here is also the Bantu Education Act (1953) in South Africa during the apartheid regime, along with the imposition of Afrikaans and English, as the languages of scholarship and wider communication, on Black South Africans (Alexander 1989). The idea was to educate Black South Africans in their mother tongues, i.e., their ethnic languages, in primary school with supposedly a 50-50 switch to Afrikaans and English as media of education in secondary school. Considered as inferior or not developed enough for academia and concepts of modern politics and administration, the Bantu languages have not been used in post-primary education nor in the government and in the formal economy. At the same time, learning Afrikaans and English effectively as foreign languages in poorly equipped and staffed schools, Blacks were not prepared to be competitive with their White counterparts in segregated post-primary schools, in a polity that also discriminated against their race in other ways. The Black students also preferred learning English only, not necessarily because they thought it was not associated with oppression but because, unlike Afrikaans, it is a more useful, being spoken also outside South Africa and Namibia as well as in parts of Botswana and Zimbabwe. In this context where post-primary education in a European language was preferred, the African National Congress (ANC) also promoted English as the language of liberation from apartheid.

To be sure, schooling in mother tongue was not such a bad idea, provided everything else was equal. However, as noted above, Blacks' schools were not as well equipped and staffed as Whites' schools. Nor were the Black African languages empowered economically and politically. The policy was evidently understood as aiming at further disenfranchising the Black South Africans in a country where the Afrikaners, like the British colonizers, wanted the larger and better pieces of the pie while being a demographic minority (Mamdani 1996). With Afrikaans perceived as the language of oppression, the end result was the anti-apartheid Soweto uprisings of 1976. Thus, the policy failed.

Another case of a policy that was not successful and applies especially to the colonial period in Black Africa involved the reorganization of the Natives into ethnolinguistic groups constructed for the convenience of the colonial administration.[9] As Africa's first circumstantial linguists, missionaries played a significant role in determining which language varieties count as separate languages and which ones do not (Prah 2009, see also Makoni et al. 2006 and Makoni and Mashiri 2006 regarding Zimbabwe). Driven by the expediency of their proselytizing mission and by the now well accepted assumption that a child learns better if taught in their own mother

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9 See Mamdani (1996) for a detailed account of the homeland system in South Africa during the British colonial rule, perpetuated later by the apartheid regime. A shorter, similar account is provided in McKenna (2011).

tongue than in another language, the missionaries were eager to learn the language varieties of the areas where they had founded their missions and to write their grammars and dictionaries.

Judged by practitioners of decolonial linguistics today as more useful to the missionaries than to the Natives, the materials have become targets of criticisms of European biases in the analyses of the linguistic structures. The missionaries have also been criticized for exaggerating the number of ethnolinguistic groups, as they apparently misinterpreted what are actually dialects of major languages as separate languages. They likewise developed writing conventions that differed from those of related dialects and, for that matter, those of related languages (Prah 2009; Pinxteren 2022).

Missionary societies also competed among themselves for regions they wanted to control, with each one considering the language variety of their respective region as a separate language. Thus, they also drove the relevant populations to exaggerate the significance of dialectal and sub-cultural differences among them. A consequence of this practice was a multiplication of non-traditional ethnic groups in ways that have had political and administrative implications, especially whether or not some of them can be regrouped together for fewer administrative units. From the perspective of language policy, the situation which some economists have treated as fractionalization or fragmentation (see, e.g., Alesina et al. 2003; Ginsburg and Weber 2020) have made it difficult to develop joint teaching materials at a lower cost. Limited financial resources restricted the success of the education-in-mother-tongue policies, notwithstanding the fact that the indigenous languages were and remain disempowered economically and politically disenfranchised.

The opposite of ethnolinguistic fragmentation was true too. Faced with an extensive region-based multilingualism that has also been characterized as the "African Babel," some missionaries proceeded to lump together, into new major languages, several languages that were found to be closely related genetically. Thus emerged, for instance, Nguni and Sotho in Southern Africa (Alexander 1989), Gbe in West Africa (Prah 2009), and Kikongo in the western part of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and in the Republic of Congo. Common grammars and dictionaries intended to capture what is presumably the set-theory union of the relevant languages were produced and taught in schools. The Bible was translated into these fabricated languages, which were not even the counterparts of koinés, for the purpose of proselytizing. In practice, the teachers had to translate the texts into vernaculars that learners could understand, just like other school textbooks written in European colonial languages.

The varieties did not facilitate learning; nor did they evolve into vernaculars or lingua francas, though they were intelligible to the best of those who worked hard to learn them or spoke languages that were favored by missionaries during this

enterprise. Clearly, the policies went against the linguistic habitus of the relevant indigenous populations, although they did produce some colonial auxiliaries (including schoolteachers), who served as interpreters between the colonized and the colonizers. In other words, one must ask whether the yield was worth the investment in such language policies.

Part of the problem here lies in the idealization, through "standardization" of the variety that was promoted. The criticism also applies to Lingala Makanza, "standard Lingala," which was set up by missionaries in the Equateur Province of DRC. Putatively closer to the "Bantu canon," it has a much more complicated morphosyntax than Urban Lingala, which developed naturally in the capital city, Kinshasa, is used in popular culture, and has spread throughout the country. The latter is the real lingua franca, which is much more widely used by the Congolese on both sides of the Congo River than Lingala Makanza, in which textbooks are produced and the Bible is translated. It appears that the language policy has made the proselytizing mission and schooling more challenging than need be.

2.4 Language evolution and language policy: some important observations

The evolution of any language has traditionally been the outcome of various dynamics driven by a wide range of ecological factors acting on individual speakers. The factors include the simple desire to align oneself with a particular group, colonization by another population that is more powerful economically and/or politically, or a policy imposed by a government or some other important social institution. Like any other aspect of cultural evolution, language evolution results from the convergence of the behaviors of individual practitioners, including how they accommodate each other and generate speech norms, while hoping to derive benefits from the targeted practice. The benefits may amount to such a basic thing as being included in a select group or being able to compete for some specific (kinds of) jobs. These factors fall in the category of the "invisible hand" (Smith 1776) or "emergence" (aka "self-organization") in modern days' theory of complexity.

I argued above that no language policy was implicated in the evolution of the language of the Angles into Old English. If political or military superiority played any role in its Pyrrhic victory over the languages of the Jutes and the Saxons, these factors do not explain why or how Old English survived the Danelaw, where Old Norse was the colonizers' language, or Middle English under the Norman French rule, during which Old French was the prestige language. Segregated population structure may have been a critical factor, which may also have saved the Celtic languages of Britain

from the languages of the Germanic invaders/colonists for some centuries before they became endangered or died.

In the same vein, the attractiveness of the new socioeconomic world order, produced especially by the textile industry in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, explains why English spread by natural language evolution in Ireland, with no particular language policy guiding it. The Irish just needed English to participate in the new economic system, especially during the Great/Potato Famine and didn't realize that the shift in lifestyle (involving migrations from the rural areas) undermined the vitality of their heritage language. A similar explanation accounts for the spread of English in the United States, Canada, and Australia, where the superiority or success of the Anglo political and economic new world order caused Continental European immigrants to gradually give up their heritage languages, while they were already growing into a demographic White majority (albeit a non-united one) over English settlers. To be sure, the fact that Continental Europeans spoke diverse languages and had no lingua franca of their own made them less resistant to the primarily economic assimilation pressure (Brown 2022). Still, if any policy was involved, it was not as effective as the economic factors (Mufwene 2022b).

Natural dynamics of competition and selection, of innovations and copies, and of mutual accommodation, driven by a host of social ecological factors (Mufwene 2001) drove the outcomes of these multilingual encounters, including the emergence of standard varieties (about which one may invoke the role of academies, schools, or the elite class). And we should also know that multilingualism can be stable, as in traditional African populations, especially in relation to European colonial languages. That the more indigenous languages of the Pygmy, the Khoe, and the San populations became endangered and many of them died is not counterevidence. The Bantu expansion into Central and Southern Africa was assimilationist (see, e.g., Bostoen and Gunnink 2022), just like the colonization of England by the Germanics and that of the Americas and Australia by Europeans.

In the latter cases, one can say that the earlier stages were non-assimilationist, when the Germanics did not mix with the Native Celts and, later, Europeans and the indigenous peoples of the Americas and Australia did not mix either. This kind of exclusionism (Mazrui and Mazrui 1998) also explains why Black Africa has hardly Europeanized culturally, especially in rural areas, where the majority populations still live in numerous village-size communities. In all these cases the outcomes were produced by natural dynamics in the ecologies of language evolution, a process that varies from one polity to another. If a language policy explains it, then the evolution is simply a byproduct of policies intended to exclude the Natives from the new socioeconomic world order, starting with dispossessing them of their ancestral lands (Harvey 2015), which the British also applied in Southern Africa (Mamdani 1996).

Although one can invoke colonial language policies to account for the rise of English as one of the official languages and the language of highest social prestige in the British former exploitation colonies of Africa (and Asia for that matter),[10] we cannot ignore the role of the colonial rule in which English has also been associated with political, military, and economic power. Today, English is still the language of jobs that pay the highest wages and promise some economic affluence. The primary beneficiaries of the colonial language policies remain the Anglophones in and from what Kachru (1985, 2017) identifies as the "Inner Circle," who do not have to learn the indigenous languages of their former colonies.

In these new nation-states, the other beneficiaries are the English-speaking Natives who have perpetuated and strengthened the role of "colonial auxiliaries" either in stepping in the shoes of the former colonizers or claiming all the white-collar positions. As explained by Wornyo (2015) in the case of Ghana, working-class parents believe that English is the language that promises competitiveness on the job market, and they all want their children to be taught in English, even though it is challenging for the children to be schooled in a language they do not speak at home nor use as a lingua franca (see also Pinxteren 2022). In the general context of Sub-Saharan Africa, this nonproductive situation is worsened by the fact that the formal sector of the national economy is small; there are more blue-collar than white-collar jobs (Mufwene 2022a, 2022b). Most citizens survive on the informal economy, which operates in indigenous languages (Djité 2008; Vigouroux 2013, 2018).

As observed by several scholars of language policy and planning, current language policies in former exploitation colonies serve the interests of the elite and the outside world rather than those of the majority populations. In the case of Sub-Saharan Africa, stagnating or collapsing formal economies, since Independence in the 1960s, have maintained the linguistic status quo, which is the legacy of colonialism (Alexander 1989; Mamdani 1996; Prah 2009; Sure 2020). The situation has killed any motivation among many students to invest in the former colonizer's language after graduation, because of lack of economic benefit from the investment in a school system that favors the latter (Mufwene 2016, 2017a). Among the youth, modernity is being indexed by new urban youth languages (Hurst-Harosh and Erastus 2018; Mesthrie et al. 2021), which appear to bring some social comfort, while traditional indigenous vernaculars and lingua francas have maintained their vitality in the rest of the populations.

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10 In this context, one can indeed cite Thomas Babington Macaulay's (1985) *Minute on Indian education*, which was intended to school only a small segment of Indian children in English so that they would interface between the colonial administration and the masses of the colonized people. Applied in almost all European exploitation colonies, the policy produced the class of individuals that Samarin (1989) identified as colonial auxiliaries.

An important lesson to learn from all the above is that language policies must be clear about whom they are intended to benefit, because sooner or later the truth will be known. For segments of the national populations that have been disenfranchised, such as South Africa's indigenous majority (including the Bantu), Native Americans, and Australian Aborigines, the policies must also articulate how the current disadvantageous political and/or socioeconomic ecologies will be changed. Sadly, some, if not many, of the policies were not intended to be equitable. In any case, the proof for thinking the policy through can be cited from the success of the revitalization of French in Quebec, however mitigated some may want to qualify it on the Canada-wide scale. It is also evident in the revitalization of Afrikaans since the nineteenth century, as far as the Afrikaners were concerned. However, while the apartheid policies from 1948 to 1994 benefited them, they certainly disadvantaged and disenfranchised Black South Africans in particular.

In the same vein, the success of the spread of Mandarin cannot be dissociated from the rise of China as an economic superpower and the ongoing improvement of the living conditions of many Chinese. Mandarin guarantees schooling that is competitive with its counterparts in the economically developed world, based importantly on its advances in STEM and the availability of better-paying jobs in it cum Putonghua at the national level. There are enough economic incentives for the non-disenfranchised members of the population not to oppose the promotion of Mandarin, even at the risk of giving up their heritage (aka ethnic) languages. With Mandarin, the Chinese centralizing political system aims at constructing a nation-state united by one language, one culture, and a common history. This is the same language ideology adopted by European nation-states in the 19th century. In the case of China, structural similarities among the Sinitic languages have made it easier for the Sinitic population to accept this national linguistic ideology championed by the central government. This evolution is consistent with what is promoted by Pinxteren (2022) as a financially practical language policy. His idea is to select one of the structurally-related languages in a polity to serve as the medium of formal education, because the language is easy for speakers of the other related languages to learn, which is not the case for the colonial languages now used in especially Sub-Saharan African countries.

In this context, note that in most cases where minority or minortized languages are endangered, no policy has been set in place that forbids the victims to speak their ancestral (aka heritage) languages. In the Americas, barring cases of language loss associated with genocide and population decrease owing to ills brought from the Old World, no language policy was issued that forbade Native Americans to speak their ancestral languages. In the United States, the often invoked role of boarding schools, where Native American children were expected to speak only English, amounted to produce workers for the new economic world order brought from Europe, outside

their communities (Mufwene 2017a). The endangerment of Native American languages was really a consequence of the success of the non-indigenous socioeconomic world order, which actually took a toll on competing European languages before affecting the indigenous ones. In both cases, it drained speakers away from their heritage communities. The language shifters eventually influenced language practice among those who remained behind.

To be sure, the root cause in the case Native Americans is the dispossession of their lands by the self-proclaimed Americans and their marginalization to non-sustainable reservations which made it inevitable for them to eventually shift to the invaders' socioeconomic world order. Noteworthy here is also the fact that the American government funded research on Native American languages in order to regroup them in tribes that would be convenient to the allocation of reservations (Harvey 2015). Indeed, the order of this evolution of language shifts reflects the marginalization of the Natives to the periphery of the new socioeconomic structure (Mufwene 2017a). As pointed out by Vaillancourt (2008), marginalization from the affluent population is unfortunately a factor that helps the excluded populations maintain their linguistic and cultural heritages. In the case of North America, the marginalization actually delayed the endangerment of Native American languages, excluding the cases associated with genocide and the ills brought from the Old World, in the early stages of colonization. Subsequently economic destitution and the lure of the new socioeconomic world order triggered migrations out of the reservations, which drained substantial numbers of speakers out of the Native communities. Stable multilingualism has not been a sustainable option in this case, no more than in the case of Continental European immigrants who shifted to English.

It should be evident now why Ireland's policy to revitalize Irish primarily through teaching it as a subject in school and through the settlement of Gaeltachtaí by some devotees has not succeeded. The government failed to support the policy with incentives to practice the language outside the classroom and the Gaeltachtaí, as well as with an Irish-language economy. The language of the Gaeltachtaí should have been empowered economically, so that the Irish invested in its revitalization could have a competitive edge over the in-migrants who came to compete for the same jobs. This would have reduced the out-migration of the young adult speakers of Irish to the larger Anglophone urban agglomerations in which their competence in the language is irrelevant. The support of the European Union for minority languages remains ideological, which is not enough, especially when the "battle ground" is within the political boundaries of Ireland. The same is apparently true of Breton and other "langues régionales" in France and similar cases where the advocacy for language revitalization appears to be merely symbolic. It's not enough to try to revitalize a language by simply celebrating ethnic and cultural identity rather than earning a living in it too or first.

Advocates of endangered languages should likewise develop policies that are consistent not with the interests of linguists, who worry more about losing data about patterns of typological variation among human languages. The primary concern should be the survival needs of the populations losing their languages in the new socioeconomic ecologies that are disadvantageous to the endangered languages (Mufwene 2002). The focus should be the wellbeing of the relevant populations, which should position human rights above language rights. Languages were/are made by humans to serve human needs. Based on well-documented scholarship such as Harvey (2015), language endangerment appears to be a consequence of the marginalization and endangerment of "Indigenous peoples" themselves, starting with their dispossessions from their ancestral lands. Logically, language advocates should also be arguing for redistributing land more equitably and enabling those Natives who wish to live separately from the invaders/immigrants to earn a comfortable living on their lands and in their languages. Also relevant is the need to divorce the endeavor to revitalize a language from the ideology of language purity, which often comes with the creation of academies. A language need not be maintained or revitalized in its pristine form. The most successful ones, such as English and French, bear influence from other languages they have come in contact with.

3 Conclusions: language evolution and language policies

Articulating a language policy is like prescribing a remedy to a patient. One must not only understand the condition of the patient but also know whether there are ecological factors, some of them in the patient themself, that can hinder the effectiveness of the prescription.[11] A language policy must have a clear targeted population and definite goals to reach. In some cases, it must show how its stipulations will benefit the relevant population. The benefits include the kinds of things covered by "economic development," including being able to attend adequate schools in a language they speak fluently or can learn well in a short time, having access to adequate health care in the same language, being able to interact with their nation's administration and security systems without the mediation of interpreters, and, among others, not being automatically disqualified from some jobs for which they are

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11 One relevant ecological factor that I have not discussed in this article is the cost of implementing a policy. Gazzola et al. (2020) focus especially on financial costs, which are indeed a critical factor, especially regarding the development of school systems and of the national economy (see also Mufwene 2020). There may also be political and social costs. All these considerations fall outside the scope of this article.

academically qualified for not speaking the official language or (regional) lingua franca of employment. The policy must factor in the current linguistic behaviors of the language community and what it would take for its members to accept the stipulated changes.

One should also resist the temptation of imposing on one population a policy simply because it has been successful in another polity. If the socioeconomic and political ecologies are not identical, the results will also be different. As shown above, many language policies have not worked in Africa because they were conceived during the colonial period and served the interests of the colonizers rather than those of the colonized people.

Pennycook and Makoni (2020) are quite correct in advocating that applied linguistics, which deals in part with language policy, needs decolonizing. It is definitely critical for policy makers to understand the ecological dynamics of natural language evolution. Policies that are well informed in this respect and avoid some of the pitfalls discussed above are those that I consider sound in that they are based on true or valid premises. Likewise, development in the Global South (including language policies) has too often been patterned partially or entirely after the Global North. This approach has typically ignored the local or regional socioeconomic realities in which the relevant populations evolve, setting in place policies that would generally fail. For instance, there is no reason why formal education in the Global South should privilege the Global North's model regarding curricular contents and media of education. Nor is there any reason why there should be only one official language in a nation-state and why that language should be what was imposed by the colonizers for their own convenience first. The system has promoted elite closure and marginalized the majority.

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