

Christina Thornell and Karsten Legère (eds). 2011. North-South contributions to African languages. Cologne: Rüdiger Köppe.

Linguistic policy challenges in Madagascar

Øyvind Dahl

School of Mission and Theology, Stavanger

Abstract

According to the country's constitution, Madagascar has one national language, Malagasy. Modern schools and the present-day written language were introduced by British missionaries at the beginning of the 19th century. French as a language of instruction and as a subject were introduced by the French colonists, holding the power from 1896 to 1960. After independence in 1960, French continued to be the language of instruction until 1972. From then until 1991, Malagasy was introduced as the medium of instruction at all levels in primary and secondary education. From about 1992, the pendulum swung back, French was reintroduced as the language of instruction during the first five years of schooling. In 2008 the government introduced a new educational reform. Malagasy is now used as the language of instruction during the first seven years and is gradually substituted by French. The shifting policies and its consequences are the subject of study in this article.

“If you want to become perfect in knowledge
then learn all languages
without ever forgetting your own”¹

1. Introduction

Madagascar is situated in the south-western part of the Indian Ocean and is the fourth largest island in the world with a population of about 20 million. The birth rate is high, around 2.5 percent per year. This means the arrival of about 500,000 new citizens every year. About 42 percent of the population is below the age of 15. This fact represents an enormous challenge for the education system and the government makes great efforts to give adequate education to the growing population. The linguistic policy to be chosen to meet this challenge is the topic of this paper.

Unlike most African countries, the island of Madagascar has an enormous advantage: a sole national language, i.e. Malagasy.² The former coloniser's language, French, is usu-

¹ Quoted from the Norwegian mediaeval royal publication *Konungs skuggsjá* about AD 1200, *The King's Mirror* (Brøgger 2000).

² Malagasy is part of the family of Austronesian languages (earlier often called Malayo-Polynesian). It has borrowings from Sanskrit, Bantu languages such as Swahili, English and

ally not used as a common vehicle of communication for people originating from different regions. The different varieties of the Malagasy language are understood across the island even when special words, suffixes, and syntax may vary. The written Malagasy language is called *Malagasy ofisialy* and is, for historical reasons, based on the spoken language in the environs of the capital in the middle of the highlands – Antananarivo. In recent times, the *Malagasy ofisialy* has also picked up some words from other varieties.³ Usually people don't even ask a question about interregional understanding, and the *Malagasy ofisialy* is often listened to on the radio.⁴ Having said this, one should not underestimate the importance of regional differences. Some recent research has revealed evidence that some groups have difficulties in understanding the official Malagasy, which is almost the only written language, and the one that appears in the textbooks at school (2004:9; Bouwer 2005).⁵

The advantage of having a national language is obviously an asset for the country compared to the multitude of languages in most other African countries (Lewis 2009).⁶ However, Madagascar has not taken advantage of this unique linguistic situation. The country was a French colony from 1896 to 1960, a period when the language of instruction was mainly French, thus alienating the population from its own cultural roots. After independence in 1960 the ruling elite of the capital and other urban centres has continuously used French as the language of administration and some, albeit a minority, have even adopted French as their everyday family language. The *Haut Conseil de la Francophonie* estimated in 2003 that 0.57 percent of the Malagasy use French exclusively, 15.82 percent use French sometimes, while 83.61 percent use only Malagasy (Randriamasitiana 2004:175). French has been the dominating academic language and the language of power. The political elite in the cities have constantly sent their children to French-speaking schools to ensure future jobs. French language has been the first factor of social mobility, and in the cities poor families also aspiring for a better future for their young ones work hard to enrol their children at *ecoles d'expression française* where they have to pay school fees.

This practice is in stark contrast to the possibilities of the rural and coastal population, which represents about 80 percent of the inhabitants. The everyday language is a variety of Malagasy and there is no natural opportunity for hearing or practising anything else. Some areas are sparsely populated, schools are scattered, and there are few opportunities for social mobility. Children participate in securing the economic outcome of the family taking part in rural activities.

The linguistic situation in Madagascar, with emphasis on French as the language of power, thus functions as a stabilising factor for the elite in power and excludes the

French. The languages that are most similar to Malagasy are found in the Barito basin, Borneo, Indonesia (Dahl 1951, 1977a).

³ For example *tale* 'director', *finday* 'cell phone', etc.

⁴ The Antandroy people from southern Madagascar often migrate to other areas of Madagascar for work. They can settle and understand the different spoken varieties from Tolagnaro in the south to Antsiranana in the north. The integration of the different varieties of Malagasy is discussed in a paper by Rabenilaina (1993).

⁵ Leoni Bouwer argues that significant linguistic diversity exists in southern Madagascar and that southern Malagasy speakers are not adequately served by the official language due to language variation, ethnolinguistic vitality, insufficient intelligibility, poor proficiency in official Malagasy, and language attitudes (Bouwer 2004). See also Lewis (2009) where ten groups of Malagasy varieties are listed. Mahafaly-Tandroy has, according to Lewis, only 62 percent lexical similarity with the dialect of the Merina, the largest ethnical group of the island.

⁶ In Cameroon, in Western Africa, which has about the same population as Madagascar, it is claimed that there are about 250 different languages belonging to 24 major African language groups (Lewis 2009).

majority of the population. With the introduction of a new school reform in 2008 there is a chance for a more democratic participation in the development of the nation by the majority of the population. However, what are the chances for the reform to succeed? Which are the necessary steps to be taken in order to transform the country into a nation where all men and women can benefit from equal and democratic rights?

These questions will be discussed in this paper using studies of documents and literature about linguistic policy in Madagascar and internationally. The risk of a new collapse of the education system due to a change of linguistics policy is great. The background for the current linguistic challenge, especially related to the educational reform, will be studied. We shall give a short history of shifting linguistic policy in section 2. After a summary of the results of international experiences and research in section 3, we shall focus on the consequences for Malagasy linguistic policy in section 4. Language mixing is discussed in section 5. Finally, we shall wrap up by discussing the challenges and drawing conclusions in section 6.

2. The shifting linguistic policy through history

The Malagasy language is part of the Austronesian family of languages due to the migration from Indonesia to Madagascar about 400–700 AD (Beaujard 2003; Dahl 1951, 1991; Dahl 1977b; Dahl 2008). Since the proto-Malagasy were sailors and arrived by boat they have had much contact with Bantu-people of the African continent and there are some loanwords from Bantu and maybe even a Bantu-substratum in the Malagasy language (Dahl 1988). There has been Arabic and Islamic influence from around the 12th century which to a great extent has been absorbed by the local religion (Dahl 1984). The first manuscripts written in Malagasy were magic formulas written by scholars on the East Coast who had learned the Arab alphabet (Dahl 1983). Some manuscripts still exist among the Antaimoro-group around Vohipeno, and some are in Paris and Oslo (Dez and Vire 1984; Munthe 1982).

2.1 The foundation of modern Malagasy

The first texts of a certain length written in Malagasy using Latin characters go back to a catechism published in 1657 by Catholic missionaries in Tolagnaro, Fort Dauphin (*Madagascar et le christianisme* 1993:183). However, the British missionaries who arrived in Madagascar in 1818 introduced the modern writing of Malagasy with Latin characters under the rule of the Merina king Radama I. The king had engaged Antaimoro-scribes who used the Arab script for ritual and magic purposes at the court. He already knew some French, and decided that in order to make the writing accessible to all subjects the Latin alphabet should be adopted. He decided that there should only be one letter for each sound and also that the French vowels and English consonants should be chosen (Dahl 1966). The goal of the missionaries was to translate the Bible and start ordinary schools for reading and writing (Raison-Jourde 1991).⁷ In the missionary schools, Malagasy was the natural language of instruction and textbooks were published using Malagasy (the Merina variety) and loan words from European languages, mainly English.

⁷ The Bible was translated and printed in 1835 before the missionaries had to leave the island because of persecution of the Christians under queen Ravalona I. The number of pupils in the schools increased from 3 in December 1820 to 2,000 in 1824, 4,000 in 1828 when Radama I died, and between 10,000 and 15,000 in 1835 before the missionaries left (Raison-Jourde 1991:119).

The administration of the kingdom was naturally conducted in Malagasy and documents were written in Malagasy with Latin characters. Norwegian missionaries arrived in 1866 and participated in the educational work started by the British. They established a Pastoral Seminary, a Teachers Training College and together with the British missionaries, even a Medical Missionary Academy (1886) where Malagasy doctors were trained. All textbooks were in Malagasy (Munthe 1985). In 1863 the Protestant primary schools had 5,000 pupils, twenty years later, the number was increased to more than 30,000 (Birkeli, Birkeli and Nakkestad 1949:150).⁸ The Merina Royal Family urged the people to enrol their children in the new schools and all education was conducted in Malagasy. Also textbooks were all written in Malagasy.

From about 1830 a great number of textbooks were written for primary schools and from about 1870 until the colonisation in 1896 a considerable number of textbooks were written for secondary and even for superior level – all in Malagasy.⁹ This corresponded with the programme of British and Norwegian Protestant missionaries to extend education to a superior level for the elite. The colonisation put an end to this intention (Gueunier 2004; Munthe 1985).

This ambitious programme, which could be called encyclopaedic, entailed also the construction of a technical vocabulary. The choice of the authors of this first malgachisation period of the 19th century was very different from the choice of the second malgachisation period of the years 1975–1985.¹⁰ Generally they transferred directly the international scientific terminology, taken from Greek, Latin or English:

14. Ny *sirkola* dia *figora* hodidin'ny tsipika anankiray, izay atao hoe *sirkomferansa*, ary ny tsipika mahitsy rehetra, izay atao avy amy ny *pointa* anankiray ao afovoan'ny *figora* ho amy ny *sirkonferensa* dia mitovy avokoa.

15. Io *pointa* io dia atao hoe *sentran'*ny *sirkola*.

16. Ny *diametran'*ny *sirkola* dia ny tsipika mahitsy mamaky ny *sentra*, ary tapitra ao amin'ny *sirkonferensa* ny laniny roa.

We recognise the words: circle, figure, circumference, point, centre, and diameter, adapted to Malagasy spelling and grammar (Gueunier 2004).

2.2 The colonial period

Madagascar was a French colony from 1896 to 1960. The colonial power met a well established school system build up by the missionaries, and a national language, well established both orally and in written form more than half a century before colonisation (Dina 2006).¹¹ When the French authorities took over the leadership of the schools they

⁸ In 1896, when Madagascar was made a French colony, the number of pupils in missionary schools was estimated at 126,000 (Chapus 1930:8).

⁹ A complete translation of Euclid's elements (Eoklida n.d. referred to in Guenier [2004]), a textbook on logic (Cousins and Toy 1878), textbooks in geography (Toy 1875; Richardson 1877), astronomy (Toy 1877), botany, geology (Baron 1888, 1896), physics, (Fisiksa 1892), chemistry, and also for medical disciplines, a pharmacopoeia (Davidson 1871, 1876), general anatomy and physiology (Fox 1887; Borchrevink 1898), surgery in 3 vols (Thesen 1891, 1894, 1895) etc. (Gueunier 2004; Munthe 1985).

¹⁰ In the second malgachisation period 1975–1985 the foreign words were translated into neologisms: *kajy* 'mathematics', *faribolana* 'circle', *teboka* 'point'. This practice made the transition to French at the university level more difficult.

¹¹ The director of education E. Gauthier appointed by the colonial power quoted general Galliéni about the school system:

C'est un viel édifice que nous avons trouvé là-bas et que nous avons utilisé sans le démolir: on l'a agrandi, on en a changé l'aménagement intérieur; et tout compte fait, la plus importante des transformations qu'il ait subie, mais elle est capitale,

first tried to reduce the number of “foreign” teachers.¹² French was introduced both as a subject and as language of instruction in the schools by the governor general Galliéni (1896–1905).¹³ This caused lots of troubles for the confessional schools where Malagasy had been the language of instruction. The Catholic mission¹⁴ had a great advantage because most of the missionaries came from France and easily introduced French both as a language of instruction and for the teaching of the French language. The Norwegian and British mission had a problem. They had to learn and teach French and appealed to French Protestant missionaries for assistance. The Calvinist *Mission Protéstante Française* (MPF) sent missionary teachers already in 1897 to assist the missionaries from The London Missionary Society (LMS) and the Lutheran Churches in France sent teachers to assist the Norwegian Missionary Society (NMS). During the three first years of colonisation the colonial power established public schools often called *écoles officielles* to mark their political and administrative importance (Chapus 1930).

The period of Augagneur (1905–1910) was particularly difficult for the missions. It was an anticlerical period and many confessional schools had to close without being replaced by lay schools, thus reducing the places offered for the Malagasy students.¹⁵ The different colonial authorities were not unanimous on the position of Malagasy. Some wanted all education to be conducted in French while others reserved a place for Malagasy. Malagasy as a subject was totally excluded from the official school programmes only during the period between 1916 and 1929 (Gueunier 1994). However, in other periods the teaching of Malagasy was maintained also in the official schools. The reading books from this period were often bilingual or parallel texts were offered.¹⁶ Geography was often dominated by the importance of *la mère patrie* – France.¹⁷ The children had to learn about cities and rivers in France while neglecting the geography of their own country. The teaching of history was ambivalent. The history of France with the revolutionary slogan *liberté, égalité, fraternité* was not appropriate for the colonised. During a certain period, history was not on the programme of the “indigenous” pupils. However, in some schools for the privileged, they followed the metropolitan programmes and read the famous history book “*Nos ancêtres – les Gaulois*” (Our ancestors, the Gauls). During the last days of the colonisation the metropolitan school

c'est qu'elle ait changé de maître (Gautier, E.: *L'oeuvre scolaire de Galliéni à Madagascar*, p. 42. Quoted from Dina [2006:6]).

¹² “Foreign” meant “not French” during the first days of colonisation, especially English and Norwegian.

¹³ The circular from general Galliéni from 1896 stated clearly: “*Madagascar est devenue aujourd'hui une terre française. La langue française doit donc devenir la base de l'enseignement dans toutes les écoles de l'île [...]*” (Chapus 1930:25). Half of the hours spent at schools should be used for the studying of French (Chapus 1930:29).

¹⁴ Established gradually from the 1860s the first Catholic mass was celebrated in Antananarivo in 1855 by Father Marc Finaz. During the French-Malagasy war the French Catholics were expelled from the country, but after the defeat of the Merina kingdom, and the French assumption of power, they came back to great advantage.

¹⁵ The main reason was that no church buildings were allowed for educational purposes. Among NMS' 900 schools only 30-40 were conducted in separate buildings and the period of transition was so short that it was not possible to build new schools (Birkeli, Birkeli and Nakkestad 1949).

¹⁶ A reading book from 1902, “*Joues et travaux de l'Île heureuse*”, was used in the primary schools until independence in 1960. It existed in two volumes, one French version, and one Malagasy version. In the Archives and the Library of the Norwegian Mission Society in Stavanger, Norway there are Malagasy textbooks from the colonial period, several are bilingual. See <http://www.mhs.no/arkiv/index.shtml>.

¹⁷ The colonial power was called *renitany* ‘motherland’ and the colony *zanatany* ‘childland’ indicating a parent-child relationship.

was closer to the “indigenous” school, and this famous book was then on the reading lists of all young Malagasy (Gueunier 2004).

The confessional schools kept teaching Malagasy throughout the whole colonial period, and the mother tongue was maintained in all religious instruction. The Bible served as a reference for correct Malagasy spelling and grammar. The Christian converts in different regions practising different varieties of Malagasy became familiar with the language of the Bible.¹⁸ The importance of this practice for preserving the national language during the colonial period cannot be underestimated.

The colonial power could not ignore the solid base of the Malagasy language and contributed through the educational system to the propagation of both oral and written language, which was, in almost every case, the Merina language of the capital. In this way the school authorities contributed to the standardisation of one national language for all Malagasy, which later developed into the so-called *Malagasy ofisialy*. The best students, who were recruited to serve the colonial administration, had to master both the French and Malagasy language (Dina 2006).

2.3 Linguistic policy after independence and the malgachisation period

Independence was declared on 26th of June 1960. School teacher Philibert Tsiranana was the first president of the new Malagasy Republic. In the new constitution which was proclaimed on 14th October 1958, the Malagasy authorities declared both Malagasy and French as official languages of the new nation.¹⁹

The First Republic under President Philibert Tsiranana (1960–1972) continued the linguistic policy of the colonial power with emphasis on French as the language of instruction. All the classes from the sixth grade upward were instructed in French. However, the Malagasy realities such as national history and geography were topics studied at school. See for instance the textbooks by Bastian (1967) and Labatut and Raharinarivonirina (1969).

During the socialist revolt in May 1972 orchestrated by the students at the universities, the three main claims were *malgachisation*, *democratisation*, *decentralisation de l'enseignement*. The students revolted against the school called *sekoly miangatra* ‘partial school’ and *ny teny fanandevozana* ‘the slave language’ (Rabenilaina 2004). One of the main issues was rehabilitation of the Malagasy culture and language. The transitional government instituted following the revolt, decided to introduce Malagasy as the language of instruction also in higher classes up to the student *Baccalauréat* examination. However, the students could choose to write their tests and home work either in French or Malagasy.²⁰ The goal of the students was to construct the *Malagasy iombonana* ‘the common Malagasy’.

The transitional government was replaced by the Second Republic led by the new socialist President Didier Ratsiraka (1975–1991) and the new constitution in 1975.²¹ The government gave priority to the creation of textbooks in Malagasy for the primary level. During the period from 1976–1989 about 20 books were written and printed in 10,000-

¹⁸ Some Norwegian missionaries on the west coast also made religious pamphlets and wrote hymns in the local Vevo – Sakalava dialect. In the Archives of Stavanger, there are also hymn books, Kolondoy, written in this vernacular.

¹⁹ In Randriamasitiana (2003) there is a synoptic table showing the different laws regulating the status of the French and Malagasy languages since the colonisation until 1991.

²⁰ The decision was confirmed by the “Loi 78-040” of 7 July 1978, article 10, which defined malgachisation as “*l'adaptation aux besoins et objectifs nationaux des programmes et des methods pédagogiques [...] elle implique également l'utilisation de la langue nationale comme langue d'enseignement*” (Seng 1997:52).

²¹ Didier Ratsiraka made a comeback under the Third Republic from 1997. Zafy Albert was president under the Third Republic from 1993 until he was impeached in 1996.

60,000 copies financed by WWF or UNICEF (Seng 1997:47). These books often never reached the remoter schools because of distribution problems. For the secondary schools the government was not able to produce the necessary textbooks in Malagasy for the students. The textbooks were replaced by *ouvrages didactiques* written in Malagasy for the teachers. Parts of these were written on the blackboard by the teachers and copied by the pupils and learnt by heart. This *pedagogie du perroquet* ‘parrot’s pedagogy’ created clever copiers and good memories, but did not enhance the creativity and imagination required by problem solvers.

The obvious benefit from this period of *malgachisation* was a better comprehension of the courses by the pupils. The teachers expressed themselves practising a language they spoke fluently. The pupils and students did not have linguistic problems related to understanding and expressing themselves. This advantageous situation at the pedagogical level should not be underestimated. The learners and the teachers were at ease with the language practised in the classrooms.²² Concerns about making errors in speaking, as was the case during the French education, disappeared. Another advantage was the teaching of foreign languages, such as English, directly from Malagasy without passing through French. The *malgachisation* period also favoured the adoption of new words from the different Malagasy varieties. The *Malagasy ofisialy* was enriched by adopting new words from the dialects and therefore contributed to the dream of national unity.²³ The parents who could read could also benefit from the reading of their children’s textbooks and could utilise their own competence.

However, some worries did appear. It was generally admitted that the generation of students educated during this period of *malgachisation* had a weak mastery of written Malagasy. Some studies that were carried out during 1986 and 1987 on the educational system revealed alarming facts (Seng 1997:52).

- The repetition rate was 50 percent after first year of primary school
- Drop-out rate was 11 percent in the primary school
- Only 30 percent of the learners finished the school cycles
- Success rate at CEPE (primary exam) was 29,9 percent
- Success rate at BEPC (junior secondary) was 30,2 percent

It is important to note that this setback cannot be ascribed only to the language policy but also to the educational policy in general. The ambition to meet the claim of democratisation and decentralisation of the student revolt of 1972 was to create one primary school in each *Fokontany* ‘basic community’, one CEG (*Collège d’Enseignement Général*) ‘junior secondary school’ in each *Firaisana* or *Sous-préfecture*, and one *Lycée* ‘senior secondary school’ in each *Fivondronana* or *Préfecture*, and one university in each of the six *Faritany* ‘provinces’. This quantitative ambition reduced the qualitative achievements of the Ministry of Education.

To sum up, the *malgachisation* was not achieved under favourable conditions. The textbooks were missing, and if they existed, the quality was not good. The teachers were insufficiently trained, the school administration did not function appropriately, and the pedagogical training suffered due to a lack of funding and adequate personnel. The list

²² This fact deserves particular attention, because during the period that followed with the return to French the majority of the teachers of CEG (junior secondary) and primary schools have poor mastering of French and learners have difficulties in following them. The solution is that they often resort to Malagasy to explain the lessons.

²³ Different commissions were convened to forge new words for mathematics, chemistry, physics, etc. The commissions often picked words from the dialects and created lists of *Voambolana*, new words to be used in the different educational subjects. Neologisms were created such as *kajy* ‘mathematics’, *ivo* ‘centre’, *savaivo* ‘diameter’, *faribolana* ‘circumference’, *tsilo* ‘vector’, *mira* ‘equal to’, etc.

of deficiencies could be continued. It is generally accepted today that the defeat of the language policy during this period is due to the bad preparation of the reform of 1973 (Rabenilaina 2004). The result was catastrophic: the learners did master neither Malagasy nor French. The reason is not because of the *malgachisation* but because of an inadequate education of these languages. The colonial power seems to have had a better comprehension of the necessity to master the mother tongue both orally and written than the Malagasy themselves (Dina 2006).

The effect of this failing education policy was catastrophic at the beginning of the 1990s. In 1993, 19 percent of primary schools were closed. The rate of enrolment fell from 73.5 percent in 1978 to 62 percent in 1994. In certain zones the reduction was 35 percent in the primary school. The repetition rate was 36 percent at primary level and 20 percent in the secondary. Under these circumstances the number of illiterate people increased and it was estimated that 40 percent of the population could not read or write at the end of the period (Seng 1997:44). This *malgachisation* period is often characterised as a total defeat, and a customary saying among people who have not acquired a proper job to day is “I am victim of the *malagachisation*”.

2.4 Return to French

The Third Republic was established by the new Constitution of 1992. In article 4, Malagasy was said to be national language (Constitution 2007). The Constitution and the law regulating the education were silent about other languages such as French. However, French was not only used in administration but also in education concurrently with Malagasy.

During the first years of the Third Republic under President Zafy Albert, until the educational reform of President Marc Ravalomanana in 2008, the public trend was a return to French – not only as the language of instruction but also the structure of the education.²⁴ The defeat of the *malgachisation* period was obvious. The return to French in 1992 was an answer to the claim of the *petite-bourgeoisie* in the cities. They expected that a return to French would give them equal opportunities with the ruling elite who had never sent their children to the *malgachisation* schools (Dumont 2004; Rambelo 1995).

The return to the French reform dictated that in the public schools Malagasy was used as a language of instruction only during the first two years. French was introduced first orally and then gradually as a written language. From third grade, Malagasy was used for social subjects such as civil education, aesthetics, morals and history, while French was used for scientific subjects such as calculus, geography and general knowledge. French was also an important subject and gradually took over as the language of instruction. At junior secondary and upper secondary level, French was the only language of instruction and Malagasy was taught as a subject.

The return to French was not unproblematic. A lot of teachers had received their training during the twenty year period of *malgachisation* and did not have a good command of French. After the return to French from 1990 in colleges and from 1992 in the whole education system, the most common practice among the teachers was to explain the lessons in Malagasy and give summaries in French. Many teachers practised both lan-

²⁴ The primary schools which had Malagasy names such as *Sekoly ambaratonga fototra* ‘School of basic level’ during the Second Republic were renamed *Ecole primaire publique*. The five year primary education *Education Fondamentale 1* reintroduced the French enumeration beginning with *11ème*, CP1 (*Cours préparatoire 1*), followed by *10ème*, (CP2), *9ème*, CE (*Cours élémentaire*), *8ème*, CM1 (*Cours moyen 1*), *7ème* (CM2). The former *Sekoly ambaratonga faharoa* ‘School of second level’ was renamed *Collège d’Enseignement Général* (CEG) *Education Fondamentale 2* with classes from *6ème* to *3ème*. The 10th, 11th and 12th year were renamed *Lycée* with *2nd*, *1ère* and *Classe Terminale*.

guages, Malagasy orally and French for the written assignments (Rabenoro 2006). The immediate problem was that the students had to learn French without having a social environment where they could practice the language. The teachers had promised the parents to make small francophone adepts of their children in order to give them a new chance of social mobility. The French ethnologist, Noël Gueunier observed the following sentence on the blackboard in a school: “*Parle français ou tais-toi!*” ‘Speak French or keep silent!’ (Dumont 2004). The pedagogic approach was learning by rote under strict constraints.

Another reason for the return to French was the shortage of financial resources to produce Malagasy textbooks. From French donors such as *Alliance Française* French textbooks were available, and France also supported the Ministry of Education with professional assistance and training programmes for teachers.

A programme for qualitative improvement was funded by external donors from 1989.²⁵ Probably the most important contributor was the World Bank through the programme CRESED (*Crédit de Renforcement du Secteur Éducatif*). Up to 1996 CRESED financed five titles of textbooks in Malagasy and two titles of mathematics in Malagasy for primary schools.

The return to French soon developed into a new catastrophe. In 2005 tests of the knowledge of French and Malagasy were carried out.²⁶ These revealed that only 18.25 per cent of the teachers in primary school had sufficient knowledge of French to be able to use French as the language of instruction. One can easily imagine what impact this weakness had on the learners (Rabenoro 2006). The results of education are closely linked to the teachers’ competence level of the language of instruction and then the knowledge of the apprentices. Rabenoro states that an adequate knowledge of the language of instruction is necessary in order to start studies, acquire knowledge and for learning second languages (*ibid.*). With such a low proportion of teachers who are able to use French as the medium of instruction it is not surprising that many people often say “Being a good student means that one is good at French” (Clignet and Ernst 1995: 100).

One of the strongest critics of the educational system came from the French professor of sociology Belloncle who taught at the *Institut Catholique*. In his book “Seven priorities for the development of Madagascar” (2004), he contends that the first priority is to stop the demographic explosion and the second is to stop “the massacre” in the public primary schools.²⁷ He points out that the detailed level of French constructions and grammar, which is required in the textbook “*A toi de parler*”, is inaccessible to learners who have not acquired a basic construction of their mother tongue. A pupil must acquire the French construction without having any support from his knowledge of Malagasy and without any support from the environment. French is spoken neither in the rural areas nor in the cities. However, a pupil who enters third grade is asked to read this text, which refers to an environment completely alien to the pupil:

Maintenant la mère de François range le linge dans les armoires. Elle met les vestes, les robes, les manteaux sur les porte-manteaux. François pose ses livres sur les étagères. Julie a fini de ranger ses jouets dans un grand panier. Elle commence à balayer le plancher de sa chambre. Leur père arran-

²⁵ The principal donors were the World Bank, UNICEF, UNESCO, France, Germany, Great Britain, USA, WWF.

²⁶ The test programme was called PASEC (*Programme d’analyse du système éducatif de la CONFEMEN (Conférence des ministres de l’éducation des pays ayant le français en partage)*). It contained tests about the knowledge of French and Malagasy in the primary school among both teachers and pupils (Nicot-Guillourel 2009).

²⁷ “*Arrêter le massacre dans les écoles primaires publiques*” (Belloncle 2004:27).

ge une lampe cassée. Et Mistigris que fait-il? Il dort sous le lit. VROUT [...] voilà tout à coup une ombre grise qui sauté sur le balai [...] c'est Mistigris (Belloncle 2004:33).

A simple test consists of letting the pupil (who just entered third grade) read the text. The teacher makes the pupils repeat it several times. Finally, the brightest pupils manage to repeat what is written. However, he/she does not understand a single word of what he/she reads. Belloncle asserts: "You may say: However, at the end of second grade he could read [...]. Sorry, he did not read, he had learned it by heart" (*ibid.*). The pictures that illustrate the text are taken from a French environment, completely unknown to the Malagasy children.

This alienation applies to other subjects such as geography, general knowledge, etc. The lessons are learned by heart without understanding. As for the teaching of Malagasy as a subject, there is no emphasis placed on learning the grammar and reading with intonation. After two years, French is used as the language of instruction, and Malagasy is taught as a foreign language before the pupil has understood how the Malagasy sentences are read and how they are constructed!

The result is that after five years of primary school the majority of the pupils (9 of 10) are not able to speak or write French, and even if they speak Malagasy, they neither know how to read it nor how to write it (Belloncle 2004:34).

A study carried out by Gouleta in 2001 (2006) made clear that there were 2 million children who were enrolled in public school 1st grade. One fifth was inscribed in private schools (400,000 pupils). After five years the situation is: In the private schools 53 of 100 pupils enrolled in first grade finish the fifth grade. In the public school only 33 of 100 pupils end the fifth grade. In rural areas only 20 of 100 reach the fifth grade (and 50 percent after one or two repetitions of class). Only 160,000 enter junior secondary school. This means that 1,440,000 Malagasy children do not continue education. Worse, they have not passed the "threshold of an irreversible ability to read and write". After a few years they have only scraps of French and the learning of Malagasy has never been acquired.

The result of the return to French was that neither "education for all" nor education for social development was achieved, which was the aspiration of the parents.

Solo Raharinjanahary, who is professor of linguistics and dean of the *Faculté de Lettres* at the University of Antananarivo, stated: "The return to French as undertaken in 1990–91 was not only criminal but also illusory" (Raharinjanahary 2004:165). He added that one has to wait for the "inevitable defeat of the politics of everything in French".

Belloncle's conclusion is that the primary education is not only useless, it is also harmful: "The defeat is today evident, and it is criminal to sacrifice new millions of Malagasy children. It is time to stop the massacre" (Belloncle 2004:50).

2.5 The education reform of 2008

The new president, Marc Ravalomanana came into power in the spring of 2002 and was re-elected for a second term in December 2006.²⁸ Just before the re-election he presented a new five-year plan for the development of Madagascar, called Madagascar Action Plan (MAP) for the years 2007–2012. This document replaced the former Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) from 2003.²⁹ The PRSP document was criticised by Michel Rambelo for having forgotten the dimension of language as a tool for democratisation. The administration used French which was not accessible for the majority of the population. "The linguistic policy of the country since the colonisation up until now has

²⁸ President Marc Ravalomanana resigned after a *coup d'état* on 17th of March 2009.

²⁹ In French: "*Document de stratégie de réduction de la pauvreté*" (DSRP).

excluded the major part of the population from the process of development” (Rambelo 2002:6).³⁰

Can one speak about good governance and democracy when the rate of illiteracy of the population reaches 49 percent, with a rate of school attendance in primary school of 72 percent for the whole country, and when the use of French still dominates the administration? The democracy is at the same time a prerequisite to put into action the economic and social changes for the profit of the population, and a result of development. It supposes information, free exchange of ideas, access to knowledge, and to obtain this, it is linked to the language policy (Rambelo 2002:11).³¹

The five-year plan (MAP) consists of eight commitments, each with defined challenges and goals. In contrast to the PRSP-document the new MAP document mentions the situation of language. In Commitment 3, which focuses on the educational transformation, an educational reform is announced. The education system shall be of international standards with respect to quality and efficiency, and shall stimulate creativity and meet the challenges of globalisation. In Challenge 2 a school reform is announced that will extend the primary cycle from five to seven years. Goal 8 reads “Produce and equip schools with more textbooks in Malagasy with French and English being secondary languages”. From 2003 Madagascar is committed to the international programme “Education for All”.³² And in April 2007 an amendment of the constitution of the Third Republic was approved by 75 percent of the voters. The amended constitution, article 4, defines Malagasy as the national language and both French and English are defined as official languages (Constitution 2007). However, besides being a national language Malagasy is also an official language. Building on the MAP and the amended constitution the new education reform has the following objectives:

- Extend primary education from 5 to 7 years
- Restructure junior secondary from 4 to 3 years
- Restructure senior secondary from 3 to 2 years
- Decrease drop-outs
- Reduce the repetition of class
- Reduce the number of pupils in the class
- Increase the quality of education
- New and more textbooks in Malagasy language
- Use Malagasy as language of instruction
- Teach French and English as foreign languages
- Gradually introduce French as language of instruction to be used in junior secondary school

³⁰ Michel Rambelo criticised the PRSP (DSRP) for having forgotten the dimension of language as a tool for democratisation. “[...] *les politiques linguistiques que le pays a connues depuis la colonisation jusqu’à maintenant ont exclu la majeure partie de la population du processus de développement*” (Rambelo 2002: 6).

³¹ *Mais peut-on parler de bonne gouvernance et de démocratie lorsque le taux d’analphabétisme de la population atteint les 49 pourcent, avec un taux de scolarisation du primaire qui est de 72 pourcent pour l’ensemble du pays, et que l’usage du français domine encore dans l’Administration? Or la démocratie est en même temps un préalable pour mettre en œuvre les changements économiques et sociaux au bénéfice des populations, et un aboutissement, un résultat du développement. Elle suppose l’information, la libre circulation des idées, l’accès à la connaissance, et à ce titre elle est liée à la politique linguistique* (Rambelo 2002:11).

³² The plan *Education pour tous* has been revised in 2005 and in 2007 by the Ministry of Education (MEN) and obtained support from the World Bank, UNICEF, ILO and other donors such as France, EU, Norway, Japan, USAID (MEN 2007).

Beginning in 2008 the National Ministry of Education has started the implementation of the reform in about 20 school regions (*Circonscriptions Scolaires*) (MEN 2008b, 2008c). Malagasy will now serve as the language of instruction during the first five grades. Gradually it will be replaced by French. After the seven year cycle of primary education, French will serve as language of instruction in the junior secondary, in the senior secondary school, and in the universities.

French and English will be taught as foreign languages. This means that French and English can be taught going directly from Malagasy and not via French as was the case when French was the only accepted language of instruction. French will also be used as a language of instruction for certain subjects such as mathematics and science beginning in 6th and 7th grade. The assignments can be written in French or Malagasy.

One goal of the reform is to make it possible for all children to attend school, regardless of the economic situation of the parents. The government has already introduced a *kit scolaire* to all pupils – a small rucksack with the essential pens, notebooks etc. Also school uniforms will be given to the pupils to make it possible for everyone to attend regardless of his or her economic situation. Another goal is to reduce the number of drop-outs in making the school programmes relevant to the children not only in towns but also in the villages. One wants to make school accessible in building new classrooms not too far from where the children live. Finally, one goal is to reduce the repetition rate in making the curricula more relevant and the introduction of Malagasy is expected to enhance understanding and creativity.³³

A great challenge of the reform is to recruit enough trained teachers. Before 2015 the Ministry of National Education (MEN) must recruit 42,400 primary and 6,000 junior secondary teachers (MEN 2007). The majority will be recruited by the Parents' Associations (FRAM).³⁴ The teachers recruited by the FRAM are locally recruited from the villages, and they are often paid by the parents, often called "barefoot teachers". Gradually the MEN will give these community-based teachers pedagogical training that will qualify them as government employed teachers and take over the burden of their wages. The teachers will have in-service teacher training at the regional teacher training institutions (CRINFP).³⁵ Often they are recruited two by two, and when one is teaching in the village, the other will have pedagogical training at the nearest CRINFP after which they alternate.

There are also lots of private or confessional actors in education in Madagascar.³⁶ According to the Madagascar 2007 EFA plan 19 percent of the pupils in grade 1 to 5 and

³³ Since 2003 one has introduced the so-called *Approche par les competences* (APC). The objective is to accentuate what the pupil should master by the end of the school year, and for what purpose. He or she should be able to use the knowledge in practical situations in the everyday life. The curriculum of the school should be adapted to be felt more relevant both for the student and for the parents. Also *Approche par la situation* (APS) has been introduced. The objective is to start from the situation of the pupil linguistically (the vernacular) and economically (rural condition, urban condition).

³⁴ FRAM is an abbreviation for *Fikambanan'ny Ray aman-dReny* meaning 'Parent's Association'.

³⁵ CRINFP stands for *Centre régional de l'institut national de formation pédagogique*. The 22 CRINFPs, one in each of the 22 regions, are administered by the central *Institut national de formation pédagogique* (INFP) in Antananarivo.

³⁶ In Fianarantsoa there is a private Institute called Malagasy Mahomby that offers all education in Malagasy at senior secondary level. In Fandriana, the Malagasy Lutheran Church has a teacher Training College called *Sekoly Fanomanana Mpampianatra* that gives substantial programmes in Malagasy and administers a programme for the Lutheran schools called *Sekoly Maitso* 'Green Schools'. The *Direction de l'Enseignement Catholique* also gives pedagogical training and teacher refresher courses for the teachers in the Catholic Schools. Recently, a private Catholic university has been established. A project called *Appui au bilinguis-*

34 percent of pupils in grade 6 to 7 are enrolled in private education (MEN 2008a:16). International partners and donors are also a great resource.³⁷

3. International experience and research

Already in 1953 UNESCO published the study “The Use of Vernacular Language in Education” in which the advantage of using the national language in education was clearly stated (UNESCO 1953). Since then several studies have been carried out. These research results indicate that if children are taught in a foreign language and have not acquired a full mastery of their own language psychological problems may occur (Brock-Utne 2000:151). The results of international research are unambiguous: Basic education should be conducted in the first language (mother tongue) of the children. Teaching the first language implies great advantages for the development of children’s cognitive achievements and also with respect to their cultural identity and self understanding. If the language of instruction is different from the children’s first language it will result in both cognitive and pedagogical difficulties and cultural alienation.³⁸

3.1 Language and power

Paulo Freire (1985) defined the practice of imposing a foreign language upon the learner for studying another subject as a violation of the structure of thinking. Yet this is the situation most African children find themselves in today. The language is of primordial importance for the social, cultural, political and economic development of a society. The South African professor of the Centre for Advanced Studies of African Society (CASAS) Kwesi Kwaa Prah argues that if the language of instruction is different from the spoken language of the people, it will in most cases have negative consequences for the building of a democratic and homogeneous society, and for the dynamics of the development process. The language of instruction is also the language of hegemony and power (Prah 2002).

In societies that do not have a colonial past, knowledge transfer naturally takes place in the mother tongue of the people. This is the language in which the citizens are most creative and innovative. Prah contends that where the language of instruction is different from the languages of mass society, those who work in the language of instruction, foreign from the languages of the masses, become culturally removed and alienated from the masses. Indeed, where the language of instruction is different from the mother tongue of the people there is almost always a history and persistence of patterns of dominance, over-lordship or colonialism (Prah 2002).

me à Madagascar (ABM) has created local centres for the teaching of French, so-called: *Centres locaux d’échanges francophones* (CLEF). By the help of media and cultural activities they try to give students in the area access to a French-speaking environment. *Alliance Française* is also active in promoting French culture and language.

³⁷ Main donors for the educational sector are the World Bank, UNICEF, UNESCO, ILO, France, USA, Norway, and Japan. Professional partners in the educational sector are African Academy of Languages based in Mali (ACALAN), Association for the Development of Education in Africa based in Tunis (ADEA), The Centre for Advanced Studies of African Society based in South Africa (CASAS).

³⁸ Cf. ADEA Newsletters 8:4 (ADEA 1996) and 17:2 (ADEA 2005) with several references to literature and research on this theme. ADEA is the Association for the Development of Education in Africa based in Tunis at the African Development Bank (AfDB) since August 1st, 2008. See also ADEA, Language of Instruction and Language Policies. A Synthesis of Research, www.adeanet.org about pilot projects in Africa.

The question of language is obviously a question of power. In many countries the patterns of over-lordship continue since the power of definition belongs to the ruling class. As long as the ruling class do not support the national educational system, but send their children to private schools where the language of instruction is that of the former colonial power, the pattern of dominance will continue. This is the case in Madagascar.

There are cases where societies with colonial pasts have been able to break with the use of colonial languages as the media for education and instruction. It seems that they are able to make progress and development not only in the educational field, but also in other areas of social life.³⁹

3.2 Acquisition of reading skills

Researcher Santosh Mehrotra has compared the acquirement of reading skills in a situation of poverty and the reading ability in those countries that have achieved a high percentage of the population having basic education:

In a situation where the parents are illiterate [...], if the medium of instruction in school is a language that is not spoken at home the problems of learning in an environment characterized by poverty are compounded, and the chances of drop-out increase correspondingly. In this context, the experience of the high-achievers has been unequivocal: the mother tongue was used as the medium of instruction at the primary level in all cases [...] There is much research which shows that students learn to read more quickly when taught in their mother tongue. Second, students who have learned to read in their mother tongue learn to read in a second language more quickly than do those who are first taught to read in the second language. Third, in terms of academic learning skills as well, students taught to read in their mother tongue acquire such skills more quickly (Mehrotra 1998:479).⁴⁰

3.3 Acquisition of foreign languages

Reading and writing the mother tongue enhances also appropriation of foreign languages.⁴¹ Virtually all international research shows that children who have good mastery of their mother tongue can master a second language more easily because they can transfer skills and knowledge from their first language (mother tongue) to the second (Interdependence Hypothesis). However, if children are instructed in the second language before they have had the opportunity to develop a strong command of their first language orally and written, they are not able (or at least retarded) to develop well any

³⁹ One such case is Vietnam where children learn Vietnamese and their mother tongue. The colonial language French has been eliminated as the medium of instruction. Special emphasis has been given on teacher training and bilingual materials.

⁴⁰ The University of Stavanger in Norway with its National Centre for Reading Education and Research (Reading Centre) has started a programme which aims at producing modern reading material in Malagasy for children in school age. These books are not textbooks, but locally produced books that can promote the “joy of reading” engaging Malagasy writers and illustrators. The National Ministry of Education will use these books to give supplementary reading material for children. Hopefully these books will also promote the acceptance of Malagasy language as a vehicle of knowledge, learning and joy!

⁴¹ Skutnabb-Kangas (2002) refers to a comparative study of Zambia and Malawi by Eddie Williams (1998). Children from Malawi had slightly better results in English than children from Zambia, even though English was language of instruction from grade 1 in Zambia and only taught as a subject in Malawi where local languages were language of instruction. Furthermore, a large number of Zambian pupils were claimed to have weak or zero reading competence in two languages while the Malawian pupils learned to read and write even though the learning infrastructure had serious weaknesses, e.g. lack of classrooms and teachers.

one of the two languages (the first and the second) and their cognitive development is at risk (Threshold Hypothesis).

Children who learn a second language as an extra bonus for enrichment and advancement while their first language is highly valued and respected experience additive bilingualism. Additive bilingualism has been proved successful in all societies. Children who learn a second language because their first language is considered to be inferior experience subtractive bilingualism (Gouleta 2006; Skattum 1997).

The linguist Jim Cummins has reinforced his hypothesis of interdependence between first and second language: The competency acquired in the first language and the second language are not independent of each other, but are rooted in a total linguistic competency (Cummins 1979).

There are different models related to language learning and various types of bilingual programmes (Skattum 1997). The most known are: (1) mainstream education (the majority language is used as the language of instruction in all subjects also for the acquisition of foreign languages). This is the most common type in Scandinavia. (2) Two-way bilingual education (instruction in two languages, one of which is the mother tongue),⁴² (3) immersion programmes (instruction in the second language with or without mother tongue support), and (4) transitional bilingual education (begin with instruction in mother tongue and move to instruction in the second language).

Transitional bilingual programmes are of two types: the early-exit and the late-exit. The early-exit transitional programmes follow the principles of bilingual education which state that it takes only 1-2 years to develop basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) in a second language. The late-exit transitional programmes state that it takes 5-7 years to develop cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) (Cummins 1979). CALP is necessary for school achievement. Late-exit transitional programmes in societies where the second language is spoken widely in the community and is a language that children can practice in the classroom and in the playground have proven successful.

3.4 Language and acquisition of science

The Sri Lankan researcher and former director of education at the Curriculum Development Center, Ministry of Education, A. Mahinda Ranaweera, writes about the great advantages to the population of Sri Lanka of the introduction of Sinhala and Tamil as the languages of instruction to replace English, especially for the teaching of science and technology:

The transition from English to the national languages as the medium of instruction in science helped to destroy the great barrier that existed between the privileged English educated classes; between the science educated elite and the non-science educated masses; between science itself and the people. It gave confidence to the common man that science is within his reach and to the teachers and pupils that knowledge of English need not necessarily be a prerequisite for learning science (Ranaweera 1976:423).

Brock-Utne (2000:153) comments the case:

Ranaweera relates that the change of medium of instruction in science and mathematics always lagged behind the other subjects because of special difficulties, like the absence of scientific and technical terms, textbooks, and

⁴² This is often applied in Canada where English and French are acquired simultaneously and support additive bilingualism.

proficient teachers. Yet he found the greatest need to switch over to the national languages in the science subjects. He gives two reasons for this claim: First, science education was considered the main instrument through which national development goals and improvements in the quality of life of the masses could be achieved. Thus, there was a need to expand science education. He tells that the English medium was a great constraint which hindered the expansion of science education. Secondly, he notes that in order to achieve the wider objectives of science education, such as inculcation of the methods and attitudes of science, the didactic teaching approach had to be replaced by an activity- and inquiry-based approach which requires greater dialogue, discussion, and interaction between the pupil and the teacher and among pupils themselves. As Ranaweera notes: “Such an approach makes a heavy demand on the language ability of the pupils and will be more successful if the medium of instruction is also the first language of the pupils” (Ranaweera 1976:417).

4. International research applied to the case of Madagascar

A study based on international research related to Madagascar was initiated by the World Bank in 2006. In the unpublished draft report several challenges are mentioned related to the policy of language on the island. The report states clearly that educational theory based on international research on how children learn should guide the decisions on the educational reform. The report also resumes the effect of different language policies in other countries from which valuable conclusions can be drawn (Gouleta 2006).

4.1 Teaching methods

Teaching a first and a second language while relying solely on behavioural approaches (such as the *Audiolingual Approach*) which emphasize imitation, rote memorization, and repetition, cannot be successful. Instead, more natural approaches to learning should be followed involving teaching language as an integrated system. [...] *Cognitive and Constructivist approaches* suggest that children must be actively engaged and “involved” in the learning process and must learn language within a meaningful context. This means that the teacher must create authentic situations for learning and teach in ways that knowledge can be transferred from classroom to the real world (Gouleta 2006:1).

Malagasy children are mainly instructed through the Audiolingual Method memorizing what the teacher says and writes without comprehension. Rote memorization of French is often meaningless to children because this is a language which is spoken neither at home nor in the community. The teachers do not provide comprehensible input (information that the children can understand) because the children are instructed in French, a language they do not understand and often by teachers who do not speak it. French and English are Indo-European languages while Malagasy is an Austronesian language as has been mentioned earlier. Their construction, morphology, syntax and vocabulary have no linkage.⁴³ Furthermore, contextual learning suggests that all subjects of the cur-

⁴³ For a European learning another European language, there are most often connections and associations that are helpful. This linkage does not exist between Malagasy and European lan-

riculum should be related to the real world, and not to an artificial world only known from the textbooks. Also, the curriculum is often related to the former colonial power.

4.2 Malagasy children experience subtractive bilingualism

The World Bank initiated study quoted above concludes with a strong appeal to value the mother tongue:

When children come to school at the age of six, all they are and all they know are their mother tongue and their family practices and traditions. When they are told that what they know and who they are is of no worth and value, that it is inappropriate for school, that school uses a language and ways that are more worthy and superior than their home language and practices, and that the ways of the school are the ones which should be observed, followed, and respected, the children's entire world starts falling apart [...] and it is hard to start building on the "ruins" (Gouleta 2006:10).

Subtractive bilingualism has been associated with school failure, grade repetition, and school drop-out worldwide (Gouleta 2006). In the case of Madagascar, the World Bank initiated draft report concludes:

Malagasy children experience *subtractive bilingualism*. Their native language is considered inferior comparing to the French language which is considered more worthy to be used in scientific matters and in higher education. As a result, the Malagasy educational system is based on *subtractive bilingualism* and has high repetition and drop-out rates; there is only a small minority of students who are able to make it to higher education (Gouleta 2006:2).

Some Malagasy, and especially the parents, seem to think that the first language is a handicap when it comes to the development of linguistic competencies in other languages. Therefore those who can afford it enrol their children in kindergartens and so-called *écoles d'expression française* as early as possible to benefit from an immersion in the second language, French.⁴⁴

However, one knows from international research that an *immersion* of the pupil into a programme that does not take into consideration the first language of the children will lead to subtractive bilingualism (Gouleta 2006). The consequence of subtractive bilingualism is diminishing or even a loss of competency of the first language of the child. This is what happens to many children of the present generation in Madagascar. Addi-

guages except for loanwords from these languages. The European languages represent an exoglossie – they are not maternal language for any Malagasy (Skattum 1997).

⁴⁴ To gain access to a second language via the first language may appear highly inefficient at first glance. As Crawford puts it: "Trying to convince a critic that bilingual education is the best route to full English proficiency is like trying to persuade someone that the best way to go west is to go east first" (Crawford 1989:439). Many commonsense notions regarding language are incorrect, but they contribute to public doubts about the usefulness of mastering one's own tongue. As Crawford writes:

Bilingual education still runs into the following powerful myths:

- That young children pick up new languages quickly and effortlessly.
- That prolonged reliance on the native tongue reduces students' incentives to learn English.
- That bilingualism confuses the mind and retards school achievement (Crawford 1989: 86-87). (See also [GTZ 2003])

tive bilingualism is conceived when the second language adds subjects to the child's linguistic and conceptual baggage at the same time as their knowledge of their mother tongue is developed. Learning a new language can be an enriching experience provided that the experience does not teach you to look down on your own mother tongue. You will also get insight into a new culture, which can be an enriching experience (GTZ 2003).

4.3 Early-exit versus late-exit transitional programmes

In the Malagasy school programme, before the reform of 2008, the early-exit transitional programmes have been applied. Only two years of Malagasy instruction are given before they switch into French as language of instruction. Before children develop a strong command of their native language and without having cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) in either their first or second language they switch to French. Therefore, they are not able to understand academic concepts in the content areas such as mathematics and science and are set for school failure, grade repetition, and drop-out, exactly as seen in the Malagasy school.⁴⁵

As a result of the education reform of 2008, French will be taught as a foreign language already from the first year of education, and English from the fourth year, or at the latest, from the sixth year. It is hoped that the children will have acquired CALP in Malagasy before switching to French as the language of instruction. The transition will take place during 6th and 7th grade. In other words, the 2008 education reform will replace the early-exit transitional programme with a late-exit transitional programme. In light of international research (see section 3) it can be questioned whether this late-exit transitional programme will be successful since French is not widely spoken in the community. Lessons learned from Tunisia can illustrate this option.

In Tunisia, Arabic is used as the medium of instruction in basic education and French is taught as a subject. Arabic remains the medium of instruction for the arts and humanities while French becomes the medium of instruction for scientific subjects. Although the system in Tunisia emphasizes the importance of Arabic and promotes late-exit transitional bilingual education, children score very low in science tests in secondary school and have difficulty mastering both languages well. The example from Tunisia is very important for Madagascar. It clearly shows that even if there is emphasis on the native language and late-exit bilingual programs are in place, when the second language is not spoken widely in the community, children face serious academic risks (Gouleta 2006).

After the transition in grade 6 and 7, so-called scientific subjects will be taught in French (mathematics, sciences of life and soil, technology) in the new reform. The other subjects (geography and history) will be taught in Malagasy. The reason for this is the claim often heard that "we need French as the language of technological development". Yet the claim seems unfounded if one considers the experiences from Sri Lanka quoted above in section 3.3. If this were true "it should be demonstrated that countries such as Finland, Norway, China or Japan, which do not teach their children through the medium of an international language, are isolated and have lost track of technological developments beyond their borders," as stated by Rugemalira and colleagues in Brock-Utne (2000:153).

⁴⁵ Most modern researchers are critical of early-exit transitional models. In recent research late-exit models or two-way bilingual models are favoured.

5. The problem of language-mixing

Most people in the countryside use only Malagasy. Even in the capital, the spoken language is everyday Malagasy but often mixed up with French words. The 0.57 percent of the Malagasy who practise only French, as mentioned in the introduction to this paper, consider French to be the high-status language, and Malagasy is disdained as a low-status language. Some members of this group, often the elite of power, have poor proficiency in Malagasy. They speak French at home and send their children to French schools and universities.

French language serves for commercial and official uses. English is used mostly in interaction with tourists and in international organisations and NGOs. In addition to this there are lots of dialects or varieties of Malagasy which may differ considerably from one region to another. In her study of the life of young people around Mahajanga, Leslie Sharp observed that several had problems in understanding the *Malagasy ofisialy* (2002). The same observation was made by Leoni Bouwer who studied the south-west languages (2004).

During my own observations in the Malagasy classrooms in the primary schools through many years, I often observed that at least three languages were practised: first, the local variety which is spoken; second, *Malagasy ofisialy* which is written; and third: French, both spoken and written (Dahl 1990, 1999, 2005).⁴⁶ Many teachers do not master *Malagasy ofisialy* and have not learned to analyse its grammar and structure. They take for granted that everybody speaks Malagasy and feel no need to study it further. Parents also claim that their children know their mother tongue, what they need to learn in school is French and English, which can give their children an opportunity for social promotion.

5.1 The “rice with vegetables” language

If being bilingual means that the bilingual person regularly uses two languages in everyday life, it should imply that the two languages, French and Malagasy, were mastered equally well and used simultaneously without intermingling (Grosjean 1982). However, this is not the case.

When the evaluation team (of which I was a member in 2005) visited the primary schools, the teachers usually asserted that the education was bilingual. In practice this claim often meant that the two languages were mixed, and what the children learnt was what the Malagasy themselves often denote as *vary amin-anana* ‘rice with vegetables’. For instance, in the courses of mathematics we heard expressions like these: *Mifandray ve ny droite A sy ny droite B?* ‘Does the line A meet the line B?’ *Atao inona ny équerre?* ‘What’s the use of the angle?’, or in grammar courses of French: *Tadiavo ny sujet. Inona avy moa ny pronomns personnels sujets?* ‘Find the subject. Which are the subject personal pronouns?’ (Dahl 2005). Spoken Malagasy uses French crutches because the corresponding Malagasy words are not acquired – and more disastrously – probably will never be acquired. However, the *malgachisation period* demonstrated that it is quite possible to find Malagasy alternatives in special subjects such as mathematics and grammar even if some of the technical words are neologisms and others are loanwords.

⁴⁶ When we, the evaluation team, observed education in English it struck us that it was taught from a French basis and not directly from Malagasy. The teachers said that this was done “so that they do not lose the French vocabulary”. Even the teaching of English relies on a knowledge of French. The children like learning English very much, and in the tourist places many youngsters know fragments of English, enough to sell their products.

The *vary amin'anana* 'language mix' is used not only in schools but also in many academic institutions such as the University (Raharinjanahary 1990). Sometimes it is called *Frangache*. The nestor of Malagasy linguistics, Professor Siméon Rajaona, observes that if the creation of neologisms is not at pace with the technological, social and commercial development, the language will experience a creolization. A creole language is a language with mixed vocabulary and structure, which has become the mother tongue of the people who use it. In Madagascar, creolization will attain both the everyday language and the scientific language (Raharinjanahary 2004:168). Rajaona shares this statement with a sigh on behalf of the Malagasy language:

And what is serious in Madagascar, among us, is that the introduction of French vocabulary in the everyday language is not only concerned with new objects and concepts; it also invades, and even more and more, the old objects and concepts. One lets it happen, one surrenders, naturally, spontaneously, without problems, without shame, not even false shame, we can even say with pleasure, by snobbism or by searching the expressive or by the pleasure of the forbidden fruit... Our language is going to rack and ruin, our language, which is one of our most essential institutions, because it defines the essence of our cultural identity, the most fundamental, because it is on the language that our other values are founded, because according to Humboldt, as we will see in the continuation, "the spirit of a people, it is her language, and the language is her spirit" (Rajaona 1990:8).⁴⁷

He also comments on the scientific and technical language. Science requires a precise language, and "I cannot see how a language with a Malagasy syntax and a *Frangache* vocabulary can be a well made language, a language that can be used for research, creation and the transmission of knowledge" (*ibid.*:9). Rajaona admits that modernisation is necessary, and even the abandonment of some values that are incompatible with modernisation, but "the impoverishment of the spirit of a people, is an impoverishment of her cultural substance" (*ibid.*). Rajaona sees a hope for revitalising the policy of language in the national literature, because "in the vitality of the literature, the citizens of the country feel an aspiration for autonomy or rather a linguistic auto-sufficiency, which is repugnance, natural and irresistible, towards a massive entrance of foreign terms in the language" (*ibid.*:14).

5.2 Neologisms or loanwords?

The debate among Malagasy scholars about the use of *Frangache* has not yet been resolved. Purists want to create neologisms (Rajaona 1990; Ranjivason and Razafindandy 1990). In the Malagasy language, several neologisms seem to have been accepted by the population, e.g. *atrikasa* 'workshop', *traikefa* 'experience', *paikady* 'strategy', *finday* 'cell phone', *tetikady* 'politics', *mailaka* 'e-mail'. Other researchers are more open to the adaptation of loanwords into a Malagasy morphology such as was the case during the first *malgachisation* period when the British and Norwegian missionaries wrote textbooks in the last part of the 19th century. Suzette Ratiaray gives examples from mathematics. Should one adapt the French word *ensemble* to Malagasy and call it *ensembla*? Or should one use the neologism *vondrona*, as was used during the second *malgachisation* period? According to her, the tendency today is to adopt and adapt more loanwords because they make the transition to French easier (Ratiaray 2008).

French verbs are easily adopted into Malagasy by the help of the prefixes *mi-* or *man-* in the active voice as in this sentence: *miaplike ny formula ianao* 'tu appliques la formule'

⁴⁷ The author's translation.

and the suffix *-ina* or *-ana* for the passive voice as in: *aplikena ny formula 'la formule est appliquée'*. “It is this rapidity of borrowing which is characteristic of the current oral language and new elements come and go in the Malagasy language” (Ratiaray 2008:13). Tourism, globalisation, and cyberspace are new challenges for the modernisation of the Malagasy language. Code-switching between Malagasy and foreign languages is probably more and more necessary. One may ask if the time has come to exhume some of the results of the work of the *malgachisation period* and test out the words to see what will be accepted by oral and written discourse and possibly modernise the findings. Rambelo (2002) says that modern development is not possible without the contribution of the national language. Probably integration of French and English terms has to follow both paths, creating neologisms and accept borrowing adapted to the Malagasy structure of language.

6. Discussion and conclusion

The introduction of a new linguistic policy for Madagascar meets at least three major challenges: First: to convince parents about the necessity of learning Malagasy, second: to establish an adequate educational sector, and third: to conquer the public sector.

6.1 The challenge of convincing parents

The parents of today regard themselves as victims of the *malgachisation period*. The authorities are facing a great challenge convincing these parents that the children who are instructed in their own language will perform better in all subjects, and especially in the foreign languages French and English – the gateway to social promotion (Rabenoro 2004). Sensitisation campaigns both among rural and urban population will be necessary.

Fifty years after the independence of the country, the French language is still the principal instrument of social mobility. Almost every job description contains the statement: “Good command of written and oral French is necessary”. Parents aspiring for a better future for their offspring therefore want their children to acquire French fluently. They have seen that the well-off people have sent their children to French-speaking schools. The children of the elite have succeeded continuing their education at universities in France and in other countries abroad. The parents who are not well-to-do hope for equal opportunities for their children. This was the greatest push for the return to French in 1992.

However, the disastrous results of this policy are now being seen. The children who have been trained after 1992 master neither French nor Malagasy in an appropriate way. The way to the French-speaking universities seem to be still longer than before. Therefore the climate for change is more appropriate than it has been. However, several actors are still sceptical. The Catholic Church, which is one of the great providers of education, has decided to postpone the introduction of the education reform until it has shown better results than the present French-based system.

Many parents tend to think that the knowledge of French necessarily implies a high academic level. This assumption is of course very superficial and obviously wrong. It seems that these parents confuse linguistic knowledge and language of instruction.

Parents must be convinced that learning the mother tongue implies great advantages for the development of children’s achievements and also respect for their cultural identity and self understanding. The advantage of having one national language which can be written as *Malagasy ofisialy* is an asset for the households and for the country. The lessons learned from history are clear: If the language of instruction is different from the

children's first language it will result in both cognitive and pedagogical difficulties and cultural alienation.

6.2 The challenge of the educational sector

The current Ministry of Education has run a successful programme for increasing school attendance. The enrolment rate has doubled from 1.7 million pupils in 1997–98 to 3.7 million in 2005–06 (Madagascar Action Plan 2007:53). However, quality is often very low, and non-completion is widespread. The new educational reform aims at improving the quality of the education, not only the quantity.

The Malagasy president Marc Ravalomanana is eager to implement the reform as soon as possible. Evaluated from a professional linguistic angle the new reform seems to be a step in the right direction. However, with the defeat of the *malgachisation period* in mind one can only worry that the implementation of the new is forced too quickly. The curricula must be adapted, textbooks must be written, teachers need recycling courses, technical terminology of the Malagasy language needs to be invented and practised for the different subjects. One needs a modernisation of the national language.

The new policy to use Malagasy as the language of instruction for the first five years of primary education reflects a compromise between those who want to introduce foreign languages as early as possible (such as many parents deceived by the *malgachisation period*) and the well-researched findings that the use of the mother-tongue as language of instruction is beneficial to language competencies in the first language, achievement in other subject areas, and second language learning (UNESCO 2003).

The policy to retain French at higher grades, and in certain subjects, and to introduce English language-learning, represents a great challenge to the National Ministry of Education (MEN). It has great implications for curriculum and instructional materials, teacher training and learning outcomes. It will be important to ensure that all teachers understand the importance of the reform and have access to resources that will allow them to develop appropriate language skills in all three languages. It will be critical that semi-specialist teachers have adequate training for teaching a second language, considering the impact of the linguistic policy on learning outcomes at the important transition years (grade 6 and 7). According to the last Education for All Plan (MEN 2007) some 42,000 new primary and junior secondary teachers are planned recruited, trained and placed by 2020. It is a striking aspect of the Plan that most teachers for grades 1-5 will be supplied by recruiting community-based personnel.

The central National Teacher Training Institute (INFP) and its 22 regional branches (CRINFP) will meet a great challenge in following up the reform in training new teachers and in giving pre-service, in-service and continuing education for the newly recruited teachers. Furthermore, new research centres must be set up for pedagogical research.⁴⁸ Today no such centre exists. The work of curriculum development and planning is done by the *Direction de Développement des Curricula* (DDC) at INFP.

Also the Universities which offer language courses in Malagasy, French and other foreign languages have a formidable task. The task of modernising the Malagasy language has already been mentioned. The National Academy for Art, Humanities and Science has involved itself in producing specialised dictionaries.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Earlier, in the 1970s, the Government ran a centre for pedagogical research named *Unité d'étude et de recherche pédagogique* (UERP). This centre was closed down several years ago, and has not been replaced.

⁴⁹ *Académie nationale des arts, des lettres et des sciences de Madagascar*, former *Académie Malgache*.

6.3 The challenge of the public sector

Giving a new value to the mother tongue must also be carried out through current mass-media: the press, radio and television. Radio is probably the media that has the greatest impact on the majority of the population as it can reach almost everyone. The Government should also use Malagasy in official forms and information material. If Malagasy is used not only for traditional and religious ceremonies but also for modern purposes in urban and rural environments, the status and prestige of the language will increase. Newspapers, poems, novels, scientific papers and other modern literature should be written in Malagasy. More literature for children and young people should be produced.

Professor Siméon Rajaona places his hope in revitalising Malagasy literature. My impression is that the promoters of the use of Malagasy in writing novels and poems are a group of rather old men. Unless the younger generation is interested in the promotion of their mother tongue, literature will be mostly focused on traditional history, customs and culture. The challenge is the modernisation of the Malagasy language in a way that will make it natural to treat also modern trends, politics, technology and inputs from the globalized world in the unique national language.

6.4 Conclusion

There are lessons to be learned from history and from other countries. The constant shift from one extreme to another has not been favourable for developing the national language. Madagascar has come to a stage where it should make advantage of its unique linguistic situation. Having one national language enriched by different varieties is an asset that can be envied by many other African countries.

The status of Malagasy must be elevated. The MAP states in the last commitment 8 that Malagasy culture, traditions, history and local dialects should be preserved (Challenge 1). The diversity of groups should be regarded as an asset (Challenge 3). The Malagasy people should be proud of being Malagasy!

My late father, who was a well-known linguist and an expert on the Malagasy language, Otto Chr. Dahl, gave me this message when I was going to attend a conference celebrating the 30 years of Malagasy language at the University of Antananarivo in 1990: “*Omeo toerana avara-patana ny teny Malagasy!*” ‘Give the Malagasy language its honorary place north of the hearth!’.

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