

LANGUAGE, *AFRIKOLOGY* AND THE TREMOR OF THE POLITICAL MOMENT: ENGLISH AS A MAIN LANGUAGE OF DISCOURSE IN AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

English plays a pivotal role as a language of discourse in Africa. Recently, the relentless pressure to embrace the much-heralded African Renaissance has prompted many African countries to promote indigenous languages and elevate their status to that of official languages, alongside English which enjoys first place due to its development and popularity across Africa. Through the theoretical lenses of hegemonic theory and Afrikology, this article explores the use of English as a dominant language in Africa. It is posited in this article that language is the embodiment of culture and that over reliance on foreign languages often leads to unintentional consequences, which include serving as a hegemonic device to promote foreign cultures at the expense of African culture. The article is informed, in part, by the author's personal experience while living in a native English-speaking country (United Kingdom); his experience while teaching English in a non-English speaking country (Japan) and his experience in his native multilingual country (South Africa). The article concludes that while the merits of using English as a main language of discourse in Africa are clear, the need to challenge such a situation is even more compelling, and proposes that at least one African language should equally be endorsed.

Keywords: English, hegemony, Afrikology, African Renaissance, indigenous languages, Fanakalo.

INTRODUCTION

Mapping Africa in the English-speaking world has to begin with an acknowledgement of her peculiar situation in the world today. At the moment Africa is probably the only continent with no single country primarily using its indigenous languages in leading discourse. It is the only continent in the world where the majority of indigenous languages remained underused, underdeveloped and unappreciated. As Serote (1999) reminds us, "Africa is the only continent where knowledge is imparted through languages, which are not indigenous." Incredibly enough, Africans are increasingly becoming fluent in foreign languages, yet some cannot speak their mother tongue. This has made Africans ambivalent citizens of both Africa and the world, further exacerbating the continent's already marginal and dependent position. However, there have been efforts, of late, to rebrand and reposition Africa within the globalising world. As a result the 21st century has been declared the African century with indigenous languages and knowledge system now being acknowledged as being critical if Africa is to claim its rightful place in the global community and halt its perpetual dependency and marginalisation.

In the heat of the relentless pressure to embrace the African Renaissance, many African countries have made notable efforts to promote indigenous languages and elevate their status to that of official languages, alongside English. In countries such as South Africa, the government has responded by introducing eleven official languages. Despite this move, English has remained the dominant language of business, politics and education amongst many South Africans. Incredibly enough, more South Africans, especially amongst the young generations, continue to be fluent in English but less so in their mother tongues. In evaluating the merits and demerits of English as a dominant discourse in Africa, the present article takes its inspiration from Afrikoology. Questions of identity and challenges facing speakers of other languages in assimilating English are also examined. Through the theoretical lens of the theory of Hegemony it will be posited that language is the embodiment of culture and that the use of English often leads to unintentional consequences, which include serving as a hegemonic device to promote foreign cultures at the expense of African culture. Finally, the article makes a case for a common language coined in Africa by Africans, in the true character of Afrikoology.

AFRIKOLOGY DEFINED

Afrikoology is “the study of traditional and indigenous Afrika by Black Afrikans. It touches on the history, philosophy, art, law, medicine, engineering, science and technology of ancient Afrika from an Afrikan perspective.” (Accessed on: 20 November 2009). Thus Afrikoology may be understood as a study of Africa by Africans and from an African perspective. According to Dani Wadada (2006: 20) “Afrikoology must proceed from the proposition that it is a true philosophy of knowledge and wisdom based on African cosmogonies because it is Afri- in that it is inspired by the ideas originally produced from the cradle of humankind located in Africa.” Indeed, history is replete with examples of falsification of accounts by people writing about Africa in order to undermine Africans and their culture, which they labelled backward, barbaric and uncivilised, while at the same time promoting foreign cultures. As a result much of the discourse about Africa and its people today remain out-of-sync with the true history. The preceding resonates strongly with the expression: “until lions learn to tell their own stories, their stories will continue to be told by the hunters.” Afrikoology suggests that African people themselves can best address such an injustice. Such a move seems useful when examining the issues of languages and culture, since Africa has experienced both language and cultural imperialism, which continue to be reproduced and reinforced through various discourses long after colonialism. Thus Africans will continue to be given a raw deal until they make it their own business to tell their stories and articulate their aspirations in their own ways. The call for the African Renaissance is in part intended to address such imperatives as Nabudere (2006: 8) aptly puts it: “The process of re-awakening and recovery has to be one of a historical deconstruction, and consciousness raising.” In that sense, the African Renaissance can be seen as a project operating within the Afrikoology framework.

Afrikology is therefore part of theoretical constructions that attempt to interrogate the current racist discourse with a view to accurately extract a true African story, realities, challenges, needs and aspirations. In this way, the discussion in this article feeds into the theme of the African Renaissance. The renaissance of Africa is essentially a project in the search of identity which had been displaced by the onslaught of foreign culture, languages and other hegemonic devices deliberately designed to subjugate Africans and socialise them in the culture, language and customs of the colonial masters. As Nabudere (2006: 13) puts it:

“The call for an African Renaissance is a call for a continued African resistance to western domination and exploitation of Africans in the process of Africa restating its original message and its own way that was at the same time universal.”

Now that Africans have regained their independence, with the 21st century being widely hailed as the African century by many African intellectuals and politicians, it is imperative, in the context the above line of thinking that Africans go all out to disentangle themselves from dependency on colonial masters. Certainly if the African renaissance is about Africans reclaiming their own identity, culture and ways of knowing, then its success is largely dependent on Africans being able to assert themselves and communicate with each other in their own languages. Yet, Africa is a huge multi-lingual continent and the possibility of utilizing any of the African languages emblematic to a particular language group, is likely to do more harm than good. For this reason, it is suggested that a common language such as Fanakalo could potentially be developed, studied, and used as a common language across the continent.

A BRIEF HISTORICAL CONTEXT

It is an open secret that colonialism exploited Africa and its people and enriched the colonisers by monopolising power and economic production. In many countries, colonisers grabbed the land, which had for centuries been the key asset for Africans (Mazrui, 1999). The discovery of minerals and other means of production bolstered colonial control and supremacy, and exacerbated the exploitation of Africans who worked as cheap labourers and slaves in some instances. The colonisers also introduced their culture and languages and ruthlessly uprooted and diluted indigenous culture which they saw as barbaric, backward and uncivilised. The history of Africa was falsified and Africans were projected as insignificant, dull and lazy creatures, which were then disempowered, debased and exploited in all ways possible. Within that formulation Africa was seen as ‘the dark continent’ or a jungle where anybody except Africans can come and do as they please. At the end of colonialism Africans had to deal with the unsurpassed levels of poverty, underdevelopment which derailed the normal stability of the African communities.

Unfortunately, when the colonialists left after looting the continent, they left behind their legacies, notably their languages which still continue to serve as their hegemonic apparatus. They also renamed much of the African landscapes,

buildings, roads and other public institutions with symbolic names to ensure that their authority lives on, even in their absence.

In the case of South Africa which experienced a double tragedy of both colonialism and apartheid, the miseries perplexed until 1994 when the country attained freedom with Mandela becoming president. The discovery of gold and diamonds in South Africa led to further exploitation of Africans. During apartheid, exploitation of cheap labour was the name of the game. Capital production in South Africa, led to the migrant labour system that saw a huge influx of Africans from other African countries such as Mozambique, Tanzania, Botswana, Swaziland, Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe descending on the mines as cheap labourers. Since these people could not speak English, a common language was coined, and that was Fanakalo. But this language was only spoken in the mines.

Of course the influences of other cultures that have dominated Africa over the years should also be accounted for in the envisaged language that this article proposes. Africa has been at the most “a stage” to put it in Shakespearian terms, if we consider the type of role players who have come and gone, leaving behind legacies that have now potentially replaced what was the African heritage. The argument in this article is that these cultures must, at the most, be assimilated in the African experience instead of just inheriting them. This argument is further illustrated by mass communication scholar Abiodun Salawu:

While we cannot wish away the fact of history, as represented by colonialism, which has made English and French languages (especially) to be global and connecting linguistic modes, yet we as people of the less-dominant cultures, cannot afford to lose the whole essence of our being, that is, our languages. (Salawu, 2006: 3)

Of course colonialism happened, and cannot be wished away. What it means is that Africans must preserve their languages, but I would go further to suggest that they coin a common language using a variety of the many African languages so that they can, for the first time, communicate using a language they invented themselves. This seems awkward but indeed as Ali Mazrui (2003: 4) notes, “there has been less African resentment of the paramountacy of European languages that there has been of the supremacy of European political sovereignty.”

ENGLISH AS A DOMINANT LANGUAGE IN AFRICA

On the one hand, due to its predominance, English plays a pivotal role as a language of discourse in Africa. Most Africans in the cities use English for interaction. Also, when Africans gather from different countries they converse in English. From a functionalist perspective, English has thus played a major role in facilitating communication amongst Africans themselves and the international community. Indeed a common language is crucial for communication and in many ways English has magnificently filled that gap. As a language, English has been around for centuries and is well developed to be used effectively in commerce, science, education and politics. It has evolved from its initial use in the Anglo-Saxon world to become an ‘international language.’ Although the thesis that English is an

international language cannot really be sustained when we consider countries such as Japan, Cuba, France and Russia to name but a few that do not use English as a dominant language of discourse.

As mentioned, English makes international interactions and forums such as this one possible where we can indulge and exchange ideas. It enables global interactions and foreigners are able to come and work here and vice versa, and thus English has contributed into making the Global village a reality. However there are a number of other roles that I see as 'unintentional consequences' resulting from the use of English, which are devastating to efforts currently underway to reverse the colonial hegemony and eradicate the problems besetting much of the African continent.

ENGLISH AS HEGEMONIC DEVISE IN AFRICA

On the other hand, English can also be seen as transporting Western and European values to the international world and Africa in particular. In this sense the usage of indigenous languages can be seen as defending African values, culture and knowledge systems which have for a long time been penetrated by the west through the proliferation of mass media, literature and other hegemonic projects. As mentioned, it is no secret that the colonial project was aimed at promoting western culture and discrediting the African culture (Vambe, Chikonzo and Khan, 2007). This view is corroborated by Musa (2009: 37) who observes "the colonial social order was abhorrent to the majority of Africans, because of the imposition of a hegemonic social relation and the denial of the right to self-determination for Africans." As such, the perpetuation of English as a media of instruction and dominant language covertly and overtly served this purpose.

In explaining that hegemonic is imperative, this article gains inspiration from the theory of hegemony. Hegemony can be understood as a means to sustain and perpetuate dominance of the ruling class. According to Joseph (2000: 183), in order to become hegemonic a group must "have behind it the economic, political and cultural conditions that allow it to put itself forward as leading." Following this line of thought, then, it must be noted that colonial governments had all these resources at their disposal having looted the continent of its resources and subjugated its citizens. Today colonialism has ended, yet the usage of English continues to serve as a hegemonic device to promote the foreign culture at the expense of the African culture. For Joseph (2000: 184) hegemony can be seen in the context of efforts by political forces to conserve certain social structures in order to promote their own interests." An even more plausible exposition is offered by Jay Michelle (2003: 7) who find that hegemony also "manifests itself in the political, economic, social and cultural terrains of society as a dynamic process of negotiation between the dominant and subordinate." In this regard, the so-called Bantu education and the imposition of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in South African schools (a move which led to the infamous 1976 Soweto Uprisings) were some of the examples of the hegemonic tools instituted by the apartheid government to assert its dominance in South Africa. And it's a clear example of how English, which is widely used in many African countries since the days of

colonialism, sustains the hegemony of former colonial masters. Of course a major means for winning the consent of subordinate groups “involves the universalising of the dominant groups interests as the interests of the society as a whole,” (Jay, 2003: 7) such as the use of English as a medium of instructions and the main language of discourse at work. As mentioned, hegemony sustains and perpetuates dominance; as such some aspects of the controlling power can be expected to continue even when the power that instituted such has long ceased to exist, and the use of English is a case in point.

AMBIVALENCE AND IDENTITY

The influence of foreign English, French and Portuguese that dominate official discourse in Africa is considerable. A cursory examination will reveal that African children know more about Queen Elizabeth, Shakespeare, Milton, Chaucer, Vasco da Gama and Napoleon than they do about Achebe, Soyinka, Shaka, Diop or Plaatje. For instance, in South Africa, when a parent says my children attend the best schools, they are referring to exclusively English schools, where African pupils do not speak their mother tongues, even during breaks. In this configuration, the use of foreign languages is then eroding indigenous knowledge, history and culture. Thus although English caters for the communication needs of the African continent, its usage serves to further alienate Africans, divide them, and ostracize them from their own culture and distract them from understanding who they really are – a move which makes them ambivalent citizens for the world. It is thus corroding efforts towards “the reconstruction of our understanding ourselves as Africans and how relationships with the rest of humanity have led us to where we are in the context of a global historical process” (Nabudere, 2006: 8). Indeed, by continuing to use, in dialogue with a fellow African, the same languages that were used to oppress and unsettle him even long after the end of colonialism, an African has become, “a pariah in the land of his birth,” as Plaatje (1913: ?) put it.

CHALLENGES FACING SPEAKERS OF OTHER LANGUAGES

A learner whose mother tongue is not English is at an immediate disadvantage. This has accounted for poor grade 12 results in countries such as South Africa as research has proven that pupils learn better in their mother tongues. According to Linguist, Khethiwe Mboweni of the South African Language Board, excellent performance from countries whose schools use mother tongue education shows that our learners are not poor performers.” A Japanese learner, for instance can learn science or any subject till doctorate level in Japanese. The opportunity for learners to receive education in their mother tongues has contributed in ensuring that that country becomes one of the major economic powers in the world. As Alamin Mazrui (2009: 2) correctly points out, “part of the problem is the prevailing attitude that one can pursue knowledge on Africa in languages other than African – lies, of course, on the degree of Africa’s linguistic dependence on the West.”

In order to halt such linguistic dependency Prah (1999: 60) suggests that, “African languages need to be rehabilitated and developed to carry science and

technology in their most advanced forms.” Wally Serote (1999) supports this call, adding that Africa is the only continent where knowledge is imparted through languages, which are not indigenous. In echoing this view, Habte and Wagaw (2003: 696) adds that foreign languages “are alien in that they are not rooted in African soil and do not draw their continued vitality from the material and cultural essence of Africans.” Clearly the issue of languages is an important one. African institutions of learning such as schools and universities can best serve their communities if they strive to function as embodiments rather than eroding forces of indigenous knowledge, history and culture. They are usually their own enemy agents in disguise, as they do not promote African cultures and languages.

ISSUES STEMMING FROM DIFFERENCES

Differences have potential to divide people. This has been exploited by the colonisers to make their rule acceptable and the oppressed manageable. At the centre of such difference is a lingering issue of Xenophobia. This is one issue that continues to threaten the normal fabric of the African people, which is characterised by noble values such as Ubuntu. Xenophobia is an unexplained apprehension about other people on the basis of their ethnicity. A common language will address many of the ills underlying much of Africa today, due to the widening communication gap amongst African communities. Differences that have the potential to divided people will potentially be eradicated, such as prejudices bordering on xenophobia, such as people being referred to by imposed disparaging labels such as *kwerekwere* (derogatory word often used in South Africa to refer to non-South Africans of African origin). When people speak a common language, they inevitably understand each other and this breaks the differences that have the potential to divide and put them on a collision course. A proper universal language will enable us to function effectively first and foremost, as African citizens whose culture, experience and knowledge does not only reflect our unique identity as Africans in the globalised world.

The importance of a common African language goes well beyond linguistic parallels. It is also about the resuscitation of the traditional values of Africans. A common language could go a long way in solidifying our culture and our common identity as Africans. The dependency on foreign languages has alienated Africans from each and other and made them forget an essential Afro-humanistic principle such as ubuntu which our ancestors practised for centuries. Ubuntu may be understood as an inherent mechanism of Afro-humanistic principle which put people first irrespective of their standing, creed or colour. This principle was in fact the first casualty during inhumane practices such as the slavery trade, which perhaps remains the most inhumane form of human cruelty in history.

ENGLISH EXCLUDES ORDINARY CITIZENS FROM BASIC SERVICES

It is an oddity that colonial languages now have to be used for survival, and those who can't use them perish. In modern day Africa, those who cannot speak English are given a raw deal. Inevitably, people who can't use English tend to be poor Africans and therefore they are excluded from services and benefits that might be

available to them. Thus the poor are excluded and remained marginalized and condemned to suffer since much of the information is in the dominant language which is spoken by the elite few who continue to marginalize those who can't speak it as they see them as uncivilised. According to Adv Tshediso Thipanyane, of the South African Human Rights Commission, the use of English denies the majority of indigenous language speakers the rights to basic health, freedom of expression, justice and contributes to loss of heritage. In a programme on one of the TV channels, it revealed how cases were dropped because the people who wrote the statements were not proficient in English, or because the court interpreters were not proficient in either the indigenous language or in English which is the language of the courts in many African countries, including South Africa.

LOSS OF HERITAGE

Under utilizing our indigenous language means that we are losing a wealth of knowledge and heritage, especially from elders who can't speak the modern languages that we speak. The heritage is under threat. Most of the school going children in many African countries especially in urban areas cannot speak their mother tongue. As I mentioned, often when parents say their children go to the 'best schools,' they invariably refer to exclusively English schools, where African pupils do not speak their mother tongues. In most instances these are the people who grow up not speaking their mother tongue and end up knowing little or nothing about their cultures and eventually despise anything seen as African or Un-English. As Mazrui (2003) observed that one of the disturbing fallacies in the African experience, in fact has been the association of European languages and the Western cultural legacy at large with modernity. The preceding is echoed by Ajuok (2009: 7) in his observation, "The concept of modernity, in the past, had seen African youth reject their own cultures in favour of other identities."

Another way of looking at the devastating impact of English is through looking at the status of indigenous language publishing. Incredibly enough, most publishers end up abandoning publishing in Indigenous languages because of lack of readership since most people who can read now find it more pleasurable and gratifying to read in English than in their indigenous languages. This has not only drastically affected indigenous publishing, but has also impacted on the number of books published from Africa. "At this point less than 2% of all the books published all over the world is from Africa". (Lanre Biobaku, 8/22/2009)

Indigenous languages, life lessons and wisdom had over the years been transmitted orally from generation to generation. Face to face interaction was very important; this is hardly possible today because the custodians of culture and indigenous knowledge do not speak English. Moreover we do not encourage that mode of communication because we are 'educated' and as Habte *et al.*, (2003: 679) found, "the educated elite were beginning to know less about and show little appreciation for African history, religion, ideas, clothes, cuisine, art, music and life-styles generally." The more educated Africans become the more disgusting their culture becomes, because we are being socialised into other cultures, in this

case the European and Western culture embodied in the English language. Listening to folklores has become a thing of the past. In an age where the continent is being ravaged by diseases such as HIV/Aids largely due to ignorance and the naivety of the youth whose inexperience lands them in trouble and destroys their lives, the need to go back to basics and embrace our culture and the normal practices that held the African communities together for centuries become important.

One may ask, why can't Africans just get on with it – use English as a universal language and even go further and adopt English as their mother tongue and forget about all these languages that they hardly use even in their own countries? As Mazrui puts it, Africa's struggle is also about linguistic survival. The cultural capital of Africa is under threat and Africa will continue to be seen and interpreted through a Western/European prism. It is an anomaly that Africans do not acquire knowledge in their mother tongues and according to Serote it is the only continent in the world where this is the case. As a result indigenous book publishing is inevitably affected due to the shrinking readership. At the moment, of all the books published worldwide, only a small percentage comes from Africa.

Many Africans who cannot use these languages continue to be excluded. They cannot pursue science at an advanced level because the education is in the languages they cannot speak. It is discrimination. As a result it makes sense to suggest that Africans be resolute in taking their future in their own hands as the African renaissance project advises. Moreover, given our historic past, it will be suicidal to appease the same system that we so tirelessly fought against, by allowing ourselves to be defined by, and subsumed under the umbrella of other nations of the world as if we were not just as self-sufficient. How do we know? Our chequered history is our strongest defence. It is clear from the benefit of a historical hindsight that if Africans don't act, they will forever remain dependent on others, and will forever remain beggars and third citizens of the world. Linked to this, languages such as Kiswahili which is spoken in countries such as Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique; Shona which is spoken predominantly in Zimbabwe and some parts of the Democratic Republic of Congo; and Zulu spoken widely in South Africa can be explored. The problem with these languages however is that they are ethnic specific and given the troubled past of ethnic wars a language which is made of other languages appears to be the right way to go about it.

THE CASE OF FANAKALO AS AN EXAMPLE OF AN IDEAL COMMON AFRICAN LANGUAGE

It is important to note that Fanakalo is used in this article merely as an example to illustrate the argument that it is possible to have a universal African language that is emblematic to Africa. Indeed it is crucial to explore the use of a common language as a viable strategy to break away from foreign hegemony and dependency. Africans that have been sidelined and subjected to discrimination and languages of their former colonisers were used as a tool to subjugate them and further the hegemony of the colonisers. One of Nepad's goals is to address the continued marginalisation of Africa. The African renaissance project is about

Africans rediscovering themselves and taking their future in their own hands – it's about cultural, scientific and economic renewal. The widespread use of English language at the expense of indigenous languages becomes a key obstacle towards realising this objective. The use of a common language with cultural characteristics of the African continent and seen from the African worldview is likely to have a desired effect such as unifying Africans in Africa and those in the Diaspora. An African language will promote values that are inherently African. In this way it is posited that a central language such as Fanakalo will go a long way in helping Africans to claim their lost identity and their right place in the globalising world. Swahili is another common language that can be investigated for this purpose, however given the recent history of ethnic wars in Africa; mixed languages such as Fanakalo are more desirable as they are not necessarily specific to any indigenous language group but a blend of an array of languages.

FANAKALO DEFINED

Fanakalo (also spelt Fanagalo) is a pidgin language previously used as the language of instruction in the mines in South Africa. What is exceptional about Fanakalo is that it is based on several languages including Zulu, Xhosa, English, Sotho and Afrikaans. It is therefore inclusive. This accounted for the relative ease with which speakers were able to acquire the language. A person will go to the mines and in a space of one month they will be able to converse in Fanakalo.

The essential feature that characterises Fanakalo is that it does incorporate English, but it is a domesticated version which resonates with African culture and worldview. Although Fanakalo was designed as a language to be spoken in the mines as a common language to enable communication among people from across the continent, it was fast making inroads into many African communities. As we know the mining industry in South Africa attracted people across the borders from countries such as Malawi, Swaziland, Botswana, Lesotho and Tanzania. It therefore had the potential of becoming a common language for speakers from these countries and other countries in Africa. If it can be used at that level, in business, for communication it has the potential to become the language of business just like English is today.

The easiness and the wide-ranging of this language can be adduced in the following quote taken from *Rammone wa Kgalagadi* – a popular Setswana novel by M.O.M. Seboni.

Tress, mina hayikhona sekhathi ka wena! Wake apo pikinini, its day breke –
Line up, there is no time! Wake up boys, its daybreak. (Seboni, 1949: 18)

Another way of assessing the popularity of Fanakalo at the time, was the way it was utilised by many artists especially novelists and playwrights. Even English novels used the language, a clear example is K.S. Bongela's *The Silent People*.

Wena fikile la mgodi a Bloe-Foetsek. Laha-hayi knona gqoka lo mpahla kawena. Ndoda iyajuluka lapha ishaya ifosholo ilele negcala, hayi khona ro-

bala. Wena tshetha sebenza. Uyangizwa? Dela lo nice time kawena usebenzele izingane zakho.

Now you come to Bloem-Foetsak mine. Here you do not wear your clothes. A man sweats as he strikes the spade lying on one side, not sleeping and snoring. You work quickly. Do you hear me? No time for nice time, work for your children." (Bongela, 1983: 28)

It could be argued that English imposes foreign culture on Africans and erodes African culture and ways of knowing. Therefore Africa needs to disentangle herself from this dependency syndrome. Due to its hegemonic influence, English has become associated with prestige, and this is enough motivation for people to learn and speak it. Linguists will concur that motivation plays a key role in the successful acquisition of a language. Foreign culture as seen on the media – for example the American pop culture – is glamourised and therefore youth emulate what they see on the media. Even the accent is modelled on these filmic images.

Using Fanagolo will potentially contribute to a “hermeneutical problem of self-understanding in which we have to position ourselves as authentic human beings who have made a contribution to human civilisation, and justifiably so since Africa is the homeland of the World Cradle of Humankind.” (Nabudere 2006: 8) The proliferation of English has also widened the gap between city dwellers and the majority of Africans living in rural areas. Politicians know little about the fundamental needs of the majority of people in rural areas – they cannot speak their languages and they know little about rural life although they originate there, but the more educated they become, the more they retreat to the cities, as Habte correctly observed.

The use of a homebrewed language such as Fanakalo as a lingua franca is critical for the realisation of the objective of the African Renaissance and NEPAD. The African Renaissance is essentially a project in the search for identity – our identity has been displaced, the normal fabric of African people destroyed by colonialism and its hegemonic institutions. The creation of a common African language is therefore a crucial step in the right direction – it is an African renaissance exercise. As Nambure (2006: 13) correctly explains, “The call for an African renaissance is a call for a continued African resistance to Western domination.”

Another advantage of Fanakalo is that it has been tried and tested in a production driven environment with resounding success. Secondly, it is not tribal specific such as, for example, KiSwahili or IsiZulu which might unintentionally elevate one group over the other. Fanakalo is easy to learn. One only needs to see the miners who would go to the mines and grasp the language within a very short period. It is argued in this paper that such a language can meaningfully help Africa extricate itself from the dependency syndrome. If humanity evolved in Africa, then it should in fact be people from other parts of the world trying to map their continents in the African-speaking world, not the other way round.

CONCLUSION

To synthesise, the discussions in this article have acknowledged the pivotal role that English plays as a common language of major discourse in Africa. We have pointed to the covert and overt consequences it often has on the African people and its effect on attempts at indigenisation and renaissance of Africa. We have further attempted to make a case for a universal African language as a viable strategy to extricate Africa from language dependency. We have cited Fanakalo as an exemplar of such a language. It is almost a certainty that at some point in history, the language question will come up, and as such it must be viewed in a serious light, since language is not only a means of communication but also a medium of power. The article concludes that Africa can only be saved by a radical change in attitude – a desire to reinvent itself and extricate itself from any form of dependency, as Mbeki (1998) crudely puts it, “The time has come that we say enough and no more, and by acting to banish the shame, remake ourselves as the midwives of the African Renaissance” (Mbeki, 1998). Until then, the African Renaissance might just remain a project existing in people’s minds.

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