

Michael M. Kretzer and Russell H. Kaschula (eds.). 2022. *Handbook of Language Policy and Education in Countries of the Southern African Development Community (SADC)* (“Handbooks of Language Policies in Africa,” Volume 3/1). Leiden: Brill. xvi+368 pages. Hardback: EUR 179.14. ISBN: 978-90-04-50805-7. E-book: EUR 175.76. ISBN: 978-90-04-51672-4.

This volume is part of the new Brill series “Handbooks of Language Policies in Africa.” It discusses the language and educational policies of the sixteen African countries that make up the “South African Development Community” (SADC). As its name implies, SADC is an *economic* community based on geographic closeness (although to which extent the Democratic Republic of Congo and Tanzania are *southern* African countries escapes me: the magic of politics!). It is no wonder that not much else unites these countries: they are home to a great number of African languages actually belonging to all four Greenbergian phyla (but with a great predominance of Bantu, and therefore Niger-Congo, languages); they are Anglophone, Francophone and Lusophone in their colonial linguistic heritage (and official languages); very diverse are their language policies, too: one goes from the plethora of languages mentioned and recognized in the constitutions of South Africa and Zimbabwe to the strict monolingual policy of Angola and Mozambique.

Given this amount of diversity, one would expect some principled organization according to geographic or linguistic criteria or, still, on the basis of language policy. The editors have opted instead for the alphabetical order. We have therefore sixteen nation-states, from Angola to Zimbabwe, discussed by different authors—most of them working in the countries under analysis.

Each chapter (and country) is introduced by a (rather unuseful) b&w map showing nothing else than the borders of the country and the neighboring states, and a summary list of data on the country. Each chapter is approximately 20 pages-long, references included.

Beyond this general format, the chapters differ greatly, both in quality and contents: from overviews of the language and educational policy of a country (the great majority of the chapters) to rather detailed sociolinguistic accounts of specific languages and language situations.

Confronted with a volume of 368 pages, 17 chapters and a total of 21 authors, this reviewer cannot do much else than offer the reader a succinct overview and a few general remarks.

After a short Foreword and an Introduction (: 1-10), the editors offer the reader a comparative analysis in Chapter 1 (: 11-40). This is followed by Nicolau Nkiawete Manuel’s ‘Language Education Policy and Portuguese Dominant Ideology in Angola: Historical Processes, Discourses and Impacts’ (: 41-58). The weight of the Portuguese heritage and the persistent official monolingualism are duly stressed, together with some, timid and contradictory, steps toward toward the inclusion of the (major)

African languages in the educational sphere. The article is plagued by some bizarre wording, as when the languages of Angola are described as ‘mainly Bantu and non-Bantu’ (: 43), or trivial (and repeated) statements like ‘In order to guarantee parental acceptance of African languages as an efficient medium of instruction equal to Portuguese, an improvement in their status is crucial’ (: 54), and many others. Most of all, an insufficient proofreading has resulted in many awkward passages and downright errors.

Andy Monthusi Chebanne discusses Botswana in ‘Language and Education Policy in Botswana: Some Critical Issues’ (: 59-78). The chapter has several language issues, but is on the whole very informative of the language policy and educational system of an African country where a single ethnic (the Tswana) and linguistic (Setswana) group dominates, relegating minor languages (both Bantu and “Khoisan”) and communities to the periphery.

Rich, informative and detailed is Mohamed Ahmed Chamanga’s contribution: ‘ShiKomori, the Bantu Language of the Comoros: Status and Perspective’ (: 79-98). The language situation here is much simpler: ShiKomori is the only real African language of the archipelago and is set against two official languages (of very different social status)—French and Arabic. Still, it is refreshing that, rather than just constitutions, laws and decrees, the attention is paid here to a real language, its dialect variation, its standardization, etc. The article is also enriched by detailed maps and (sadly, b&w) reproductions of posters.

Both linguistic and sociolinguistic is also Helena Lopez Palma’s ‘Native Languages of the Democratic Republic of Congo’ (: 99-116): maybe too ambitious and certainly too short, the article is overall a missed opportunity. The author laudably extols the linguistic richness of the country, a wealth going well beyond its national languages—i.e. the “big four:” Lingala, Swahili, Cilubà (or Luba-Kasai) and Kongo (or Kituba). But in reality, cursory notes are given only on the Central Sudanic languages (‘Nilo-Saharan’ becomes here ‘Nilo-Sahara’—possibly after the mold of ‘Niger-Congo?’), Mongo, Nzadi and Cilubà (itself one of the “big four”). Here even more than elsewhere maps would have been necessary. The author has a penchant for the potential of indigenous languages in ‘developing cutting-edge Artificial Intelligence technology’ (: 100), a belief often repeated but which I still fail to properly understand. Equally unsubstantiated are many other bold statements, such as ‘Language variety evidences the genetic force of the human faculty for creating linguistic systems’ (: 112), or about the necessity of poets and story and song writers in order to change ‘the actual unstable and weak state of native languages into rich, artistic, and robust natural languages’ (: 110).

Owen G. Mordaunt and Paul A. Williams’ ‘Language Policy in Eswatini: Challenges in a Globalised World’ (: 117-134) is an interesting discussion of an officially bilingual but basically monolingual country—Eswatini (formerly Swaziland). Sadly, the chapter, itself not very long, is weighed down by a

longish section ‘Language Policy’ (: 120-123) that looks more like a sophomore literature review on general issues and whose relevance for Eswatini becomes (weakly) evident in the second part of page 123 only. Still the article has much to commend it: first, different from much current literature (other articles in the volume included), the authors abstain from denouncing the negative impact of the former colonial language (English) and stress the on-going necessity of English in economic and technological matters. Second, the Eswatini language policy and the rise of siSwati at the expense of isiZulu are very well described. All in all, the article is low on rethoric and very high on actual and clear data presentation.

‘Language as a Kennel and Husk of the African Philosophy: The Case of Lesotho’ (: 135-155) by Mosisili Sebotsa and Khahliso Mahula is a completely different article: rather than dealing with the language policy of the Kingdom of Lesotho, the authors make the case for the importance of African languages in understanding and properly evaluating African philosophy on such topics as humanity, democracy and gender. The present author remains highly skeptical on the subject of the African roots of the ancient Greek democracy and on the origin of the Basotho from... Egypt (: 147-148).

‘Language and Education in Madagascar: Ideological Conflicts and Implementation Challenges’ (: 156-181) by Penelope Howe is an accurate rendition of the legal history of education in Madagascar, well summarized in the long Table 8.1 (: 158-160). As usual, the story is that of an unresolved conflict between a largely monolingual country (speaking Malagasy or varieties thereof) and the former colonial language (French). An additional twist is provided by the non-standard varieties of Malagasy, maybe more than linguistic dialects but still under the thumb of the Merina dialects of the capital (and formerly the “royal” dialect).

‘The Prevailing Sociolinguistic and Socio-Political Realities in Malawi and Their Implications on Language Policy’ (182-198) is signed by Joshua Isaac Kumwenda and the volume co-editor Michael M. Kretzer and stands out for a very nice color map (: 185) of the languages of the country (why hasn’t the same been done for all the countries?). Again, a dominant language (but less so than in the case of Botswana and Madagascar), ChiChewa has for a long time been promoted at the expenses of all the other languages and ethnic groups. Alas, the authors display an overt, strict adherence to the ideological tenets of a centralized nation-state, as shown by such remarks as ‘a very strong federal system would mean less inter-tribal and inter-regional interactions that would eventually threaten the national cohesion’ and the very last sentence, that advocates a language policy ‘that is responsive to the needs and aspirations of all the people and also one that safeguards the continued existence of the nation-state as an entity’ (: 196).

In Nita Rughoonundun-Chellapermal's 'Pluralism without Inclusion: The Case of Mauritius, a Linguistically Diverse Diasporic Small Island Developing State (SIDS)' (: 199-221) describes the very complex language situation of Mauritius, but with an exclusive focus, again, on language-in-education. Such a complexity is the result of the presence of two colonial languages, English (in a dominant position) and French, a number of 'Asian Ancestral Languages' (mainly learnt for cultural reasons), and a French-based creole that is the first language of a vast majority but whose role in the school system is still tentative and limited.

The same tentative use in education of the languages of the vast majority is seen in Eliseu Mabasso's 'Shifting from "Uncivilised" People's Languages to Ordinary People's Languages: An Overview of Past and Current Practices in Mozambique's Language-in-Education Policy' (: 222-241). We witness in Mozambique the same timid steps toward bilingualism in education seen in Angola, to which the author adds the language use of the national TV system—a topic sadly missing from many other contributions.

'Multilingual Education Policy for Namibia: A Case for Endangered Indigenous Languages' (: 242-258) by Sarala Krishnamurthy is very clear but definitely too short for the topic at hand. As many as four pages (251-254) are devoted to a project by the author and a colleague of hers on three endangered language groups. The relevance of this in a chapter on the educational policy of the country is not very clear.

Marie Flora Ben David and co-editor Michael M. Kretzer's 'Using "Kreol Seselwa", the Seychellois Creole Language to Strengthen Connections between the Government, Public Entities, Educational Institutions and Beyond' (: 259-279) stresses the peculiarities of the Seychelles, where a creole (Kreol Seselwa) is fully integrated in the education system alongside English and French, and this, according to the author, is one of the reasons for the high literacy and educational level of the country. Notwithstanding a certain rosy and optimistic view of the Seychellois language policy and the status of the Creole, the persistent biases and dominance of English in both the educational and economic sectors are well pointed out.

The volume editors co-author Chapter 14 'Legal Regulations, Obstacles and Current Developments in the Language Policy of the Republic of South Africa' (: 280-298). Apart from a few downright errors (I wonder what the "click tones" (: 283) are), the article is very informative and clear. It clearly shows the neglect of language policy in post-apartheid times (: 287) and has the added value of revealing all the bombast and little substance in the politicians' speech on language rights and minority groups. Remembering that this is a country boasting as many as 11 official languages in its Constitution and pledging to protect even Sanskrit, this is no small achievement.

‘The Ambivalent Language-in-Education Policy of Tanzania with Specific Reference to Kiswahili’ (: 299-326) by Birgit Brock-Utne and Mwajuma Vuzo tells us about a country that any practitioner of language policy is sure he or she knows well. This is why the insistence on the ambivalence in the promotion of Swahili vs. the colonial language (but surely to the detriment of the countless other languages of Tanzania—utterly forgotten in the article) is welcome. The article develops as a detailed account of the—so far failed—shift from English to Swahili as a language of secondary and tertiary education. Pressions from international donors, the former colonial power, the publishing industry and the elites certainly played the big role the authors expose. At the same time, they acknowledge that parents are at the very least ambivalent on the issue and would often prefer their children to be educated in English. The authors sternly denounce this attitude and rightly point out that a foreign language must not necessarily be a language of instruction. Still, I cannot forget the collapse of Somali education that I personally witnessed in the eighties of the last century after the Somali language had been made the only language of instruction; I realize now how caution is of the utmost importance in these matters.

Sande Ngalande and Bandana Sinha Kumar co-author ‘No English but English: The Case of Language Policy and Planning in Zambia’ (: 327-343). This is a country whose language policy is the lack of an overtly stated language policy. The language-in-education, language-in-religion and language-in-media policies are basically unwritten. In a world dominated by more and more intricate and detailed language regulations, this could sound refreshingly new, but, as the authors note, ‘the status quo meant inadvertently choosing the colonial master’s language’ (: 331). Also the role played by different Christian denominations in the development of separate sectarian writing systems is noticed by the authors.

The last chapter is ‘Ergonyms as Material Complementing Language Policy for Education outside the Classroom in Zimbabwe’ (: 344-362) by Liketso Dube. One must remember that, quite to the opposite of Zambia, this a country with 16 official languages (probably a world record). It is therefore only apt that the author mostly skips the policy from above and chooses to focus on the use of an unrecognized minority language (TjiKalanga) in a (minority of) commercial signs of a single town. This case of self-empowerment represented by the promotion of a language through its visibility is probably rare in the African landscape: its presence at the end of this volume is all the more welcome.

A common problem throughout the book is the very poor editing, with many typos, awkward wordings, and at times even incomprehensible sentences. It looks at times like proofs were not checked or corrections not implemented. One can further question a few editorial choices (starting with the

alphabetical order in which the countries are discussed) and a deep-seated ideological penchant for top-down policies and state-control (one would like to know more about bottom-up initiatives, language in private education and the linguistic landscape in general). Still, notwithstanding all its numerous shortcomings, this volume gives the reader a wealth of data and much food for thought. Not enough is known yet about the language situation of the African countries at large. This volume—a volume to read, consult, ponder—will not be the final word; but it is certainly a big step in the right direction.

Mauro Tosco

University of Turin

mauro.tosco@unito.it