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RESEARCH REPORT

AN INVESTIGATION INTO LANGUAGE ATTITUDES OF SECONDARY-SCHOOL STUDENTS IN ZIMBABWE*

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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF the role that attitudes play in language education, planning and development has been noted by researchers in Africa and elsewhere. To date there have been very few documented studies on language attitudes in Zimbabwe. This present study was inspired by previous work carried out by Ngara (1982), Mparutsa (1986), and Chiwome and Thondhlana (1989). Ngara examined the attitudes to English and Shona of 60 Shona-speaking students in Form III at three different schools. Hofman (1977) writing earlier, felt able to categorize language attitudes into intrinsic and extrinsic value systems, noting the ambivalence with which the dominant language, English, was viewed by first language (L1) Shona speakers. But, as Ngara notes, the liberation war radicalized African politics and Zimbabweans became increasingly aware of language as a symbol of culture and nationalism. While English is still regarded as the language of officialdom and education, there is an increasingly positive attitude towards the use and the value of Shona (Ngara, 1982, 24–6). Mparutsa (1986), in an unpublished study of 100 Harare residents, found that, although English was seen as the language of success, a high proportion of the respondents would like to see Shona used more widely. Similarly, Chiwome and Thondhlana (1986), in their interviews with secondary-school teachers and students, reported that, while many students chose to do English at 'O' level, they often felt that they could express themselves better in Shona.

PROCEDURE AND RESULTS

This article seeks to explore some of the contradictions in the language attitudes of school children in Zimbabwe that were discovered in the data collected for a study of language attitudes among secondary-school pupils.[1] Preliminary findings of this study are based on responses to questionnaires given to 100 upper-secondary-school pupils. The questionnaire was divided into two parts: Section A dealt primarily with language use questions and

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[1] The survey and the results given in this article are intended as a pre-test for a larger-scale research project into the question of language attitudes that will be taking place over the next few years.

Section B dealt with language attitudes (see Appendix 1). The questions in Section B were taken from Ngara's study so as to enable us to examine possible shifts in attitudes from before and after Independence. The upper-secondary-school age-group was chosen for three main reasons: firstly, as these pupils had received most of their education since Independence, it was expected that they would have internalized some of the changes in the curricula; secondly, the results from this age-group could be compared with the results given by Ngara and by Chiwome and Thondhlana; and finally, we had relatively easy access to this age-group for an initial inquiry. The University of Zimbabwe Open Day (12 August 1989) was an excellent opportunity to reach students from both rural and urban schools from all parts of Zimbabwe. In addition, to round out our study, we were able to administer some 20 questionnaires to students at a nearby secondary school. Of the 100 respondents all were secondary-school students. The majority were 16–20 years of age. A more accurate figure on age distribution is not available as more than half the respondents did not fill in the answer to the question asking the respondent to give his or her age group.

In the construction of the questionnaire we embedded one attitudinal question (Question 4) in Section A which was, otherwise, mostly concerned with the language use of the respondents. It was thought that, because this question, which asked whether the respondent would favour a change from English to Shona/Ndebele as the medium of instruction in secondary schools, was surrounded by 'factual' response-based questions, it would trigger a different ideological response from that elicted by the attitudinal questions in Section B. To see if the answers to Question 4 correlated with the types of answers in Section B we divided the respondents into two groups. Group A included all those who had answered 'yes' to Question 4 (15 respondents), and Group B included all those who had answered 'no' (83 respondents). Two respondents did not reply to Question 4; this group has been been called the NR-group. For the purposes of correlating group ascription with answers to the other questions in Section A we have included the NR-group in Tables I–VII.

It was hypothesized that those respondents who favoured an increase in the use of indigenous languages in school curricula would have noticeably different responses to the attitudinal questions in Section B. As it was thought that Group A respondents would tend to value Shona or Ndebele more highly than Group B respondents, we attempted to correlate A and B groupings with the answers given in Section A and in Section B. Overall it appeared that the groupings did reflect a pattern of use (see Tables I–XII). However, when we attempted to correlate the groupings with the attitudinal questions of Section B we realized that there was no appreciable difference in the responses of Group A and Group B respondents. This in itself proved interesting. We asked ourselves why respondents would argue in Question 4 that English had to remain the dominant educational language because of its international position, yet rally to the support of the indigenous languages in their answers to questions in Section B. In particular, we were interested in the responses to Question 11 which asked whether a person who does not speak or write English can be considered not educated. Of the total 83 respondents in Group B 68 said that they would

consider unilingual indigenous-language speakers to be 'educated'. By what criteria? Not their own it would seem, nor those of the educational system which does not present unilingual indigenous-language education as an option. It was at this point that we began to look at the issue of contradictory attitudes held by secondary-school students towards the indigenous languages.

It was thought that Question 4 and Section B questions were triggering different ideological responses in the respondents. It would appear that Section B aroused a sense of duty in most respondents, encouraging them to defend the indigenous languages against probing inquiries which might be construed as hostile and which could be seen to be tied, even if antithetically, to colonial prejudices. Group A and Group B respondents seemed to rally to the defence of the indigenous languages even if their responses contradicted their answers to Question 4. In contrast, Question 4 triggered a response closer to what might be called a 'practical' ideological position, that is, eliciting an answer referring more to concerns about personal advancement.

SOME THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The following theoretical discussion is presented as an attempt to link our socio-linguistic work with the larger body of critical linguistics. Critical linguistics is a school of linguistics which has developed in Britain and Australia, at Lancaster and Deakin Universities, respectively. In particular, the theoretical considerations presented here have been influenced by the work of Coward and Ellis (1977) who developed a theoretical base for this new direction in linguistics by bringing together two of the twentieth century's most important psycho-social theories, Marxism and Freudian/Lacanian psychoanalysis. The terminology used in this section should be seen in the context of both dialectical materialism and psychoanalysis.

In both the construction of hypotheses and in the analysis of the data we necessarily had preconceptions which influenced our choice of areas upon which to focus our attention. In particular, we took as given the notion of 'contradiction' in attitude testing: when applied to language attitudes this connotes larger ideological–cultural contradictions. Contradictions should not be regarded as being irreconcilably opposed to one another, but rather as being motivated by different socio-economic interests. Their relationship is dialectical; the arena of this dialectic is psycho-sociological. That is to say a person might hold two attitudes about a language simultaneously. These two attitudes could have two different historical origins. For the individual concerned these two contradictory attitudes would have an influence on one another. Without the individual discarding either attitude they would have to be moderated in circumstances where the contradictions became explicit. The data for this study suggest that at least two primary contradictions exist in the language attitudes of the respondents: a contradiction between use and attitude, and a contradiction between attitudes towards indigenous-language development and personal advancement.

For the speaker, ideological–cultural contradictions are usually manifested unconsciously and when challenged they are described along the lines of 'common sense'. It is one of the objectives of attitude testing to bring to the surface (that is, into analytic discourse) some of the contradictions present in the speaker's mind, both conscious and unconscious. We wish to emphasize, however, that not all ideological–cultural contradictions have the same structure or historical significance. There is a sizeable body of Marxist writing on the subject of contradiction, including Mao Tse Tung [Mao Zedong]'s discussion (1965) of antagonistic and non-antagonistic contradictions, which is relevant to this discussion. From the psychoanalytic tradition we can also see that the two competing ideological positions (or attitudes) that form a contradiction may be conscious elements of a particular culture, or they may be based in the unconscious.

This theoretical approach may sound convoluted at first but it should be noted that the contradictions that we are discussing are recognized ideological issues in Zimbabwe. The liberation war put considerable emphasis on pride in indigenous culture and language. The use of the indigenous languages was a counter-ideological instrument used against the colonial ideological hegemony and its linguistic instruments, English and Chilapalapa (Fanagalo). Yet, since Independence, English has remained the *de facto* language of power and economic advancement. School curricula reflect this contradiction in a number of ways; and, possibly, teachers themselves reproduce this contradiction through their own attitudes and actions.

ZIMBABWEAN LINGUISTIC CONTRADICTIONS

From previous knowledge of the educational system and observation of attitudes, we are of the opinion that first-language Shona and Ndebele students often prefer working in their first languages rather than in English. This view has been substantiated by Chiwome and Thondhlana (1989) during their interviews with Shona-language teachers in secondary schools. Teachers reported that students often claim to be able to express themselves better in their first language. Yet when it comes to choosing subjects at 'O' and 'A' level many students choose English in preference to Shona as there is a widely held belief that a certificate in an indigenous language is not likely to help young people in the job market. English is considered by many to be the language of economic opportunity and advancement. This is true in both rural and urban schools, as well as in high- and low-density suburban schools. The degree to which this attitude prevails in these population groups is not known as yet and we hope to extend our study to look at these differences. Consequently, most first-language indigenous-language speakers find themselves in a position of preferring their first language for communicative purposes yet functioning in an educational, social and economic system that emphasizes the importance, even the dominance, of English.

From the data we observed that Group A and Group B have different use patterns which coincide with their responses to Question 4. Looking

at the answers to the questions in Section B we cannot see an appreciable difference in attitude between members of Group A and Group B. There are two ways of looking at the data. On the one hand, there is a contradiction between Group B respondents' use of the indigenous languages and their defence of these same languages. (As has been suggested already, this contradiction may be a manifestation of an ideological contradiction between the hegemonic class culture and counter-hegemonic revolutionary culture.) On the other hand, it should be noted that the respondents' support for the indigenous languages (a revolutionary-nationalist counter-ideological view) in the answers to questions in Section B is not carried through in their reported use of these languages: this suggests that students are not consciously aware of the contradiction and do not recognize their role in maintaining the dominance of English (hegemonic culture). This is particularly true of those who claim that the position of English is justified because of its international significance. The overwhelming support for this last position raised the question of how this idea entered the intellectual world of secondary-school students. It appeared that few, if any, had considered that English is the first language of only a small percentage of people and that many non-anglophone countries cope adequately using English as a second language without sacrificing their first language. This is a crucial point for African socio-linguistics owing to the usual dominance of the colonial languages in post-colonial polities. It is unlikely, for instance, that such attitudes would be found among students in Asian, South American or European countries. We were faced with the question of whether those whose answers were categorized as acceptance of the status quo had been exposed to the idea that languages are not static and that the language situation in Zimbabwe can be changed.

METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In this report we attempt to look at some aspects of theory-building as they pertain to our investigation. We are concerned with clarifying our model of society and our methodological theory so as to improve our methodology where possible. The questions we asked in this pilot study are questions which other researchers in the field have been asking, and there is a clear indication that some of these questions, especially those on attitudes, elicited mere stereotyped responses or clichés, as is evidenced by the contradictions noted above. There is a need, therefore, to design a better instrument that will enable us to obtain a more reliable answer to the question of language attitudes in Zimbabwe. It is probably necessary to realize that the problem is not that of the distinction between professed attitudes and actual behaviour. Goode and Hatt (1952) noted that verbal behaviour is one kind of behaviour which expresses certain dimensions of social reality which is as real as any other kind. Thus the fact that a group expresses an ideal is of great importance for behaviour even when there is non-conformity with that ideal.

It is essential to realize that what people say they do or believe and what they *actually* do or believe may be quite different. Thus the methodological problem is not a simple one. It should be noted, therefore,

that the penetration of stereotypes or clichés does not necessarily reveal what people really do or what they say they will do. Either what they say or what they do may be a façade. One needs to get behind external, evasive behaviour, of whatever variety, in order to find reliable answers.

Our research goal might have to be that of checking certain types of behaviour against other types of behaviour through questioning and observation. There is, perhaps, a need to replace or supplement the questionnaire method with that of the structured interview. An interview has the advantage of giving the researcher an opportunity to elicit more information by probing when the answers are vague, irrelevant or even contradictory. The interviewer gives the respondent emotional support and stimulates the expression of deeper levels of thought. A sometimes useful aid is to be found in what has been termed the 'sieve question'. This is a question that sifts out those who should not be answering the question because they do not possess the necessary knowledge or experience. The sieve question may follow or precede the important question but only answers from those who have the requisite knowledge will be counted. Alternatively, opinions of those with specialized experience, such as teachers, may be compared against those without such specialized experience, such as students.

Another set of devices for penetrating the cliché is the 'assuming' question and the 'adverse' question (often used for delicate matters like sex). These are similar in that they both convey to the respondent that the interviewer already knows the facts. The advantage of this type of beginning is obvious if one is to move beyond the facts and expressions of conformity. The respondents find the discussion of their attitudes much easier because they sense that the interviewer is not going to be shocked. They also assume that the interviewer already knows what goes on so that attempts at evasion will be useless. The common assumption behind such questions is that the respondent will deny the statement if it is false but if it is true then a basis for frank discussion has been laid.

CONCLUSION

Language attitudes have a profound effect on the life and languages of bilingual people. The goal of language attitude studies is to contribute to our understanding of which languages are positively evaluated, which are learned, which are used, and which are preferred by bilingual people, all of which have implications for language planning. The data from our study suggest that there is not necessarily a single set of language attitudes but a complex system of seemingly contradictory positions. These results, although unanticipated, seem to reflect the Zimbabwean socio-historical experience. Our pilot study has given us the impetus to embark on this research on a wider scale. The task at hand is to redesign and refine our research instruments in the light of our preliminary findings.

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APPENDIX I: QUESTIONNAIRE

Circle age group *12–18* *19–19* *20–25*

SECTION A

1 What language do you consider to be your mother tongue?

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2 Which radio station do you listen to most often?
1 2 3 4

3 How often do you read *Kwayedza*?
sometimes always never

4 English is largely the medium of instruction in secondary schools. Would you favour a change to Shona/Ndebele? Explain why.

.....

.....

5 How many books in English have you read in the last two years?
A lot A few None

6 How many books in Shona have you read in the last two years?
A lot A few None

7 Do you think we should have more public signs (e.g. at hospitals, roadsigns) written in Shona? Ndebele?
Yes No

SECTION B: DO YOU AGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS?

8 All educated Shona/Ndebele men and women should know something about Shona/Ndebele language and literature.
Yes No

9 Shona/Ndebele and English are equally important.
Yes No

10 All educated Shona/Ndebele men and women should be able to speak English.
Yes No

11 A person who does not speak and write English is not educated.
Yes No

12 Shona/Ndebele is a useless language; there is no reason why it should be taught in schools and university.
Yes No

APPENDIX 2: TABLES

Table I

WHAT LANGUAGE DO YOU CONSIDER TO BE YOUR MOTHER TONGUE?

Language	*Response* (%)
Shona	83
Ndebele	11
English	2
Other*	4
TOTAL	100

* Included in this category are speakers of Nyanja, Chewa, Lozi and Tonga.

Table II

WHICH RADIO STATION DO YOU LISTEN TO MOST OFTEN?

Station	*Response* (%)	*Group A* (*n* = 15)	*Group B* (*n* = 83)	*NR Group* (*n* = 2)
Radio 1 (English language)	1	–	1	–
Radio 2 (Shona/Ndebele language)	29	8	21	–
Radio 3 (popular music)	67	5	60	2
Radio 4 (education)	1	–	1	–
No answer	2	2	–	–

Group A is composed of those respondents who answered 'yes' to Question 4.
Group B is composed of those respondents who answered 'no' to Question 4.
The NR Group is composed of those respondents who did not answer Question 4.

Table III

HOW OFTEN DO YOU READ *KWAYEDZA**

Response	*Response* (%)	*Group A* (*n* = 15)	*Group B* (*n* = 83)	*NR Group* (*n* = 2)
Sometimes	65	6	58	1
Always	11	4	6	1
Never	23	5	18	–
No answer	1	–	1	–

* *Kwayedza* is a Shona-language newspaper with an Ndebele supplement.

Table IV

ENGLISH IS LARGELY THE MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS. WOULD YOU FAVOUR A CHANGE TO SHONA/NDEBELE? EXPLAIN WHY.

Response	*Response (%)*	*Reasons*				
		Unintelligible/ no response	*Internal communication*	*International communication*	*Pro-status quo*	*Anti-status quo*
Yes (Group A)	15	5	8 *	–	–	2 †
No (Group B)	83	17	19 ¶	36 §	11 #	–
No response (NR Group)	2	–	–	–	–	–

* These reasons included: Shona is more understandable; Shona is the mother tongue of many Zimbabweans; and Shona is an official language in Zimbabwe.

† One respondent said that there was enough English used and that the indigenous languages should be promoted, the other said 'we hate manose' (referrring to the practice of speaking nasally, a commonly ascribed characteristic of children educated at private schools in wealthy areas of the city. It is seen as a desire of some Black youths to imitate the speech patterns, and life-style, of privileged White youths).

¶ These explanations included statements that Shona and Ndebele are not sufficiently developed to take on an increased load in the school system. Certain respondents pointed out that English was well understood by all Zimbabweans. Other respondents stated that young Zimbabweans want to learn English.

§ English was seen as the language of international trade and communication by these respondents.

These respondents thought that implementing large-scale curriculum changes was too difficult, or too late. Others said that English was 'not bad', neither was it bad to speak it.

Table V

HOW MANY BOOKS IN ENGLISH HAVE YOU READ IN THE LAST TWO YEARS?

Response	*Response* (%)	*Group A* (*n* = 15)	*Group B* (*n* = 83)	*NR Group* (*n* = 2)
A lot	80	11	67	2
A few	18	3	15	–
None	2	1	1	–

Table VI

HOW MANY BOOKS IN SHONA HAVE YOU READ IN THE LAST TWO YEARS?*

Response	*Response* (%)	*Group A* (*n* = 15)	*Group B* (*n* = 83)	*NR Group* (*n* =2)
A lot	35	8	26	1
A few	33	4	28	1
None	32	3	29	–

* Note: The question should have read 'books written in Shona/Ndebele'.

Table VII

DO YOU THINK WE SHOULD HAVE MORE PUBLIC SIGNS WRITTEN IN SHONA/NDEBELE?

Response	*Response* (%)	*Group A* (*n* = 15)	*Group B* (*n* = 83)	*NR Group* (*n* = 2)
Yes	71	15	54	2
No	27	–	27 *	–
No answer	2	–	2	–

* Of these respondents 21 were mother-tongue Shona, 4 were Ndebele speakers and 2 were English speakers. It is interesting to note that 1 of the 4 speakers of other indigenous languages answered 'no' to this question.

Table VIII

SHOULD ALL EDUCATED SHONA/NDEBELE MEN AND WOMEN KNOW SOMETHING ABOUT SHONA/NDEBELE LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE?

Response	*Response (%)*	*Reasons*				
		None/unintelligible response	*Internal communication*	*International communication*	*Pro-status quo*	*Anti-status quo*
Yes						
Group A	15	5	8	–	2	–
Group B	80	17	19	34	10	–
TOTAL	95					
No						
Group A	-	–	–	–	–	–
Group B	3	–	–	2	–	1
TOTAL	3					

Note: The NR Group is not included in this table.

Table IX

ARE SHONA/NDEBELE AND ENGLISH EQUALLY IMPORTANT?

Response	*Response (%)*	*Reasons*				
		None/unintelligible response	*Internal communication*	*International communication*	*Pro-status quo*	*Anti-status quo*
Yes						
Group A	11	4	7	–	–	–
Group B	56	12	12	24	8	–
TOTAL	67					
No						
Group A	4	1	1	–	–	2
Group B	25	4	7	11	–	3
TOTAL	29					
Did not respond						
Group B	2	–	–	–	–	–
TOTAL	2					

Note: The NR Group is not included in this table.

Table X

SHOULD ALL EDUCATED SHONA/NDEBELE MEN AND WOMEN BE ABLE TO SPEAK ENGLISH?

Response	*Response (%)*	*Reasons*				
		None/unintelligible response	*Internal communication*	*International communication*	*Pro-status quo*	*Anti-status quo*
Yes						
Group A	9	2	6	–	1	–
Group B	75	16	16	33	10	–
TOTAL	84					
No						
Group A	5	3	1	–	–	1
Group B	8	1	3	3	–	1
TOTAL	13					
Did not respond						
Group A	1	–	1	–	–	–
Group B	–	–	–	–	–	–
TOTAL	1					

Note: The NR Group is not included in this table.

Table XI

IS A PERSON WHO DOES NOT SPEAK AND WRITE ENGLISH EDUCATED?

		Reasons				
Response	*Response (%)*	*None/unintelligible response*	*Internal communication*	*International communication*	*Pro-status quo*	*Anti-status quo*
Yes						
Group A	3	1	1	–	1	–
Group B	15	3	3	7	2	–
TOTAL	18					
No						
Group A	12	4	7	–	–	1
Group B	67	14	16	28	–	9
TOTAL	79					
Did not respond						
Group A	–	–	–	–	–	–
Group B	1	–	–	1	–	–
TOTAL	1					

Note: The NR Group is not included in this table.

Table XII

IS SHONA/NDEBELE A USELESS LANGUAGE THAT SHOULD NOT BE TAUGHT IN SCHOOLS AND AT UNIVERSITY?

Response	*Response* (%)	*Reasons*				
		None/unintelligible response	*Internal communication*	*International communication*	*Pro-status quo*	*Anti-status quo*
Yes						
Group A	2	2	–	–	–	–
Group B	2	–	–	1	1	–
TOTAL	4					
No						
Group A	13	3	8	–	–	2
Group B	81	17	19	35	–	10
TOTAL	94					

Note: The NR Group is not included in this table.