CHAPTER ONE

Introduction: Issues in the teaching of languages as a prop to a development-oriented literacy

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As a way of introducing this paper and the present volume, we wish to point out that the title of the volume, "Building capacity: using TEFL and African languages as development-oriented literacy tools" is the unifying theme that runs throughout the different papers that have been selected to make it up. Two papers are on TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) and the other papers expose the vision of using African languages as a literacy tool. This paper seeks to make explicit the types of actions we wish the various participants in the language teaching profession to undertake as a consequence of reading this book. The paper is organized as follows. ȸ1 dwells on the place of English as well as other international languages and African languages in the education system; ȸ2 elaborates on the insights from TEFL to help African languages reach their development-oriented literacy goals; ȸ3 exposes the necessity of molding TEFL and other international languages into a development-oriented literacy package; ȸ 4 introduces further papers that expose a wider vision of a development-oriented literacy such as the necessity of promoting a culture of peace among Africans, and also samples of papers that can be directly used in classrooms as reading materials but also that can be readily translated in various mother tongues as they would prove useful to the local populations.

The place of English (and other international languages) and African languages in the education system

As is well-known, most teaching systems in Africa are a perpetuation of the education system inherited from colonial powers. This can be seen for example in the types of courses taught in schools. Language classes typically refer to the languages of the "civilized" world, that is, English, French, German, and Spanish, which are the languages of the former colonial masters. When someone is referred to as an intellectual, this often means that he got his formal education in such a language, and most probably, it may mean that he can handle one or two of such languages very well. Conspicuously lacking from this picture of languages taught as school subjects are African languages. Swahili is one of the rare languages that feature in the curriculum of certain schools, mostly of those in Eastern Africa. However, recently, more and more voices are calling for a re-valorization of our African languages. A conference was for example held in South Africa calling for the use of African languages as a tool of instruction just like English or French (Szanton 2005). The question now is: would most governments adhere to the idea of spending money to initiate programs of imparting knowledge through African languages in addition to the official languages that are used for that purpose? Most importantly, would parents who have adopted the international languages such as English and French as their

own accept that their children be imparted their education in languages that they cannot use outside their territories?

Whatever opinion we might have about this topic, it is a fact that, as Africans, we cannot function without the use of international languages such as English or French. It is also a fact that our African languages are part of our inheritance. We cannot deny them. We do not want to feel uprooted by forgetting them or assigning them a permanent secondary role in our daily activities. These languages have their special places in our lives, in our daily interactions, mostly outside the schools and offices. In rural areas, they still predominate as the main means of communication between people.

One ineluctable conclusion that looks the most plausible in handling this dichotomy between international languages and African languages as school subjects in our education system is the adoption of what Professor Maurice Tadadjeu calls "a trilingual identity," that is, as Africans, we are called upon to learn our African language as well as two more languages, one of which is necessarily an international language such as English or French.

Another compelling conclusion is that African languages do not have to be taught for their own sake. They do not have to replace the international languages. It is crucial that the teaching of those languages be motivated by a loftier purpose, notably in helping the majority of Africans boost their economic as well as their cultural development as has been echoed for example in the 23rd WALS conference held in Buea, Cameroon, in August 2002. The use of African languages for a development-oriented purpose is best known in the concept of literacy. Put differently, whereas international languages will continue to play their role in the various domains where they are used, African languages can play their best role as a development-oriented tool in literacy. As is proposed by a farmer in a paper by Maurice Tadadjeu in this volume, it is imperative that useful flyers that teach how to increase the agricultural yield of certain products be available in both French (and English) and the local African language that the peasants use in their daily activities.

The various papers that have been selected to make up this collection essentially stress the above two conclusions. The papers on TEFL (Teaching English as a foreign language), that is, "Practical Suggestions for teaching English as a foreign language" and "revival of classroom activities through exercises" basically suggest ways to better teach English as a school subject. Their inclusion in this volume has been impelled by two reasons. First, it was our aim to invite teachers of African languages to read these papers to be aware of the strategies used for teaching English as a foreign language that have succeeded to make English such a prestigious international language. As is stressed for every type of lesson, there are aims that have to be clearly stated and there are various techniques that are employed to reach these aims. Teaching African languages in the light of clearly specified aims will certainly help teachers of African languages better reach their goal within the frame of a development-oriented literacy curriculum. Secondly, it was our aim to invite the various teachers of English to improve their techniques of teaching English as we believe that language teachers occupy a precious position in society to potentially influence the mentality of people through the types of texts that they study or discuss in their language

classes. We will further elaborate on these two reasons in the third section of this paper.[1]

Insights from TEFL to help African languages reach their development-oriented literacy goals
Before dealing with the means of reaching the development literacy goals that could be assigned as a function of the African languages, the definition of the term "development" we have in mind is in order here.

When we talk about "development," we usually think about economic development. This is due to the fact that, as an aftermath of western colonialism and the phenomenon of globalization, money has become the most visible value to determine, sometimes wrongly, whether an individual or a group of individuals are developed or not. Development in this sense is dependent on the GNP (Gross National Product) of a country. People will feel more developed if they have the impression that they are earning more money and that they can fulfill more and more of their economic needs like buying iron sheets for their houses, a bicycle, a car, etc. Any literacy program must therefore necessarily take the economic development of the population into account. But we know that economic development is only one side of a multifaceted coin. The following are a few of other sorts of development needs this book will take into account: (a) cultural development, that is, for the individual or a group of individuals to become aware of the cultural richness of their own community and actively participate in its maintenance and growth; (b) social development in the sense that an individual or a group of individuals are able to react as "civilized" people, not giving way to their "primitive" urges for example by fighting physically when provoked by their neighbors; (c) health-awareness development needs, for example, being aware of the necessity of fighting the spread of AIDS, knowing first-aid treatment in case of an accident, learning traditional treatment of one's cultural community for certain diseases, etc. In what follows, these various types of development form the background of a literacy program for which needs or literacy goals can be identified and implemented.

Most probably, the first reaction of an African language teacher would be whether the TEFL suggestions proposed in the following two papers would be applicable to adult education or not. Our wish is that any African language teachers be able to skim through these papers as we hope that they will give them ideas on the way they could improve their own lessons, whether they deal with adults or children. Most probably, they will realize that they already use some of the strategies suggested, and that there are new strategies that they might want to add to the batteries of their own strategies they use for teaching the African languages. What we would like to suggest now is a number of specific proposals that could help the teachers integrate more development-oriented goals into their language lessons.

Our first proposal concerns the use of texts. As a teacher, one might be obliged by the school authorities to use a specific manual that contains texts that he is obliged to teach. As will be read in "Practical suggestions for teaching English as a foreign Language," there is a step in the way to teach a reading

passage that is identified as: Further development. In this step, this is what is suggested:

- The teacher can ask the pupils to imagine a different ending to the story.
- Facts in the text can also be changed and the pupils imagine how the story evolves. As we see, the chosen themes resemble those of the lesson so as to allow a re-utilization of the notions already learned. The themes chosen later differ from those of the beginning. They must present a direct interest for the pupils.

This is a powerful suggestion which, if put in practice, can be revolutionizing our ways of teaching languages. This gives the opportunity to the teacher to introduce new ideas that are not necessarily in the current official texts but which are very useful for the mental development of his students. The question is: what best ideas could then the teacher introduce?

Our own suggestion is that the teacher who is aware of the current problems that his students face will be able to suggest ideas that are related to these problems. One point in case is for example the problem of AIDS. There is this book, "Wish I had known" edited by Mutaka and Bolima (2004) and that contains several suggestions as to the way to fight the spread of AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa. If the teacher is convinced that he and his students should contribute to this fight against the spread of AIDS, he will certainly find ways to make students talk about it by suggesting ideas related to that theme and that are already in the book. The language teacher occupies a privileged position in influencing his students because he can make them think, talk, and write about his development-oriented concerns such as the prevention of AIDS. He is and should be a key element to prove the veracity of this observation:

Education is a proven means to prevent HIV/AIDS. It has been proved to provide protection against HIV infection... It can equip children and youth to make healthy decisions concerning their own lives, bring about long-term healthy behaviors, and give people the opportunity for economic independence and hope. It is among the most powerful tools for reducing girls' vulnerability. Girls' education can go far in slowing and reversing the spread of HIV by contributing to female economic independence, delayed marriage, family planning, and work outside home(World Bank 2002:xvii).

Notice also another suggestion from "Practical suggestions for teaching English as a foreign language" that talks about the teaching of a novel. The passage is the following:

- As for the novel, some passages will be sufficient.
- The teacher may also use J. Lutoslawska's following experiment:
    1. Give books geared to the pupils' level.
    2. Tell them to jot down the difficult words. They look them up in a dictionary or ask the teacher.
    3. The teacher asks pupils to explain random passages from the book (say, after a month). Eventually, he asks general questions about the book (Lutoslawska 1975: 196)

Again, this is a strategy that offers some leeway for the teacher to include books that are not necessarily in the official program but which are useful for the students. My own proposal is that the teacher could ask students to read some novels or texts he knows will interest them and will help them tune their mentality to the present times. Students do not have to read the whole book. They can be asked to read a single chapter from the book. Take the case of this book entitled "The Fruit of Love" that the author wrote in a bid to fight successfully against AIDS. But it is a book about love in which the taboo topic concerning sexual relations is thoroughly discussed. We are fully aware that prudishness would prevent a teacher from discussing the contents of such a novel in a classroom precisely because sex is a taboo topic. But the teacher can ask students to read only the first chapter entitled "sex and self-esteem." This is a chapter that explores two basic ideas: the necessity of re-discovering one's partner as a gift from God and the necessity of promoting the self-esteem of one's partner. It is a chapter that essentially teaches how to be better husband and wife and promote a stable loving relationship between couples. Most probably students will surely read the rest of the book because it is very interesting and will thus be better sensitized about the necessity of taking precautions to protect oneself against AIDS. The teacher's action will have been to encourage students to educate themselves in a topic that serves their own interests.

Much more generally, students should be given the opportunity of developing their reading skills, be made to enjoy reading as a hobby, or looking for specific information in various types of pieces of writing. In fact, one might wonder whether the language teachers are not the primary culprits for the accusation that "Blacks do not read" as is stated in a paper published by the African Publishing Review (2002:13). The exact title of the paper is "Blacks do not read" and it is a paper which underscores the fact that reading is not a cultural feature of the African people. The observation is unfortunately true: few people read books. One might argue that Africans do not read because they do not find interesting material to read about. It is therefore a challenge for language teachers to find or create material that the students will be genuinely interested to read. If the reader knows that he or she can benefit from it, he will read it. To corroborate this, we just want to report two observations Mutaka received from two friends of his about the reading of *the Fruit of love* by Philip Mutaka. One of them said that, in their 15 years of marriage, it is the only book that he ever saw his wife very much interested in reading, as she would sleep late while reading it. The other one, a married woman, said that her eyes had become red because, as she first got it, she felt unable to put it aside. She just enjoyed reading it until late at night.

Another suggestion from "Practical suggestions for teaching English as a foreign language" is the practice of dialogues. Of particular interest for language teachers would be the third step and some of the points suggested for that step. Here is a quotation from the paper:

> The third step, i.e., using the dialogue as a departure point for free expression, is very important. The pupils should be able to use the new structures and the new words in a much more personal way to prove

that they have mastered them. This phase can be exploited in the following way:

1. The pupils begin to alter the dialogue to make it conform to the reality around
2. The teacher can ask the pupils to add some more exchanges that would be a logical continuation of the dialogue.
3. The students may paraphrase the lines of the dialogue.
4. The teacher can outline a situation similar to the one of the dialogue and have pupils write it as a dialogue.
5. The dialogue can be used to stimulate free conversation among pupils.
6. The pupils can be asked to summarize it in prose.

One way of exploiting this use of dialogues is for the teacher to bring realistic situations in the classroom and have students perform them. This gives him a further opportunity of letting his pupils role-play situations that reflect their genuine concerns and that could be chosen from topics he believes to be development-oriented needs. More elaborate suggestions about the use of role-plays, problem-solving activities, and lecturettes can be found in "revival of classroom activities through exercises" that we strongly recommend to language teachers.

As for the writing skills, the following proposal from "Practical suggestions for teaching English as a foreign language" may be used to further promote topics that are development-oriented.

- Programmed composition:
  1. Pupils and teacher prepare the ideas in the classroom.
  2. Pupils do the homework at home. The teacher should tell the pupils to limit the number of words they will use and thus train them to write as many ideas as possible in a short text.
- The pupils write a free composition. After ending it, the teacher asks them to keep it. After they have seen a number of new structures in the classroom, the teacher tells the pupils to re-read their homework and correct it. After five or six such corrections, the pupils hand it back preferably with the corrected home works.

One complaint that an African language teacher will probably have is the lack of appropriate material. Programmed composition and free composition suggested in the above quotation give the opportunity to the teacher to prepare his own material that would be adapted to his pupils' level. For the programmed composition, the teacher can thus choose a topic that will be discussed in class and then ask students to write on it as a homework. One would be amazed about the pieces of writing that students can produce if they are genuinely interested. We wish to give the examples of the several squibs in sociolinguistics that have been published in Mutaka & Chumbow (2001) or the interesting texts on AIDS prevention by Yebga Suzy, Adam Mahamat, Nga Eliane, Djoupee Bertille, Patrick Yemene, Peh Jeanne, and Esamba Michèle that are published in "Wish I had known" by Mutaka and Bolima, eds. (2004). These were homeworks the

ideas of which were briefly discussed in the sociolinguistics class and the instructor encouraged the students to write them up.

This is an opportunity to remind language teachers that they have to develop in students the skill of writing, not just writing to please the teacher or for obtaining marks, but writing for a purpose. Students will take pride in what they are writing about if they know that they will benefit from it or that society will benefit from it. It should be an opportunity for them to do research, contact the representatives of the community who might have the correct information, and for those who have access to internet, to use it for any relevant information. In so developing the writing skills in students, hopefully some of them will pursue their work and produce publishable material or the kind of needed material that can be used in a development-oriented type of literacy program. Besides, language teachers should also act as researchers in that, as they keep collecting useful data that is produced by their own students, they should endeavor to organize it, eventually write it up, or at least put it in a form that other researchers could have access to.

Molding TEFL and other international languages into a development-oriented literacy package

Notice that every suggestion that has been proposed above also applies not only to the specific teachers of English as a foreign language, but also to any language teacher working in the African continent, and this includes the teachers of French, Portuguese, Spanish, and Arabic. Something that we should certainly bear in mind as language teachers is that, when we teach a foreign language to Africans, our aim is not to bring our students to start acting, in every way, like the speakers of the language we are teaching them. In teaching these foreign languages, we simply also want to expose the students to different cultures as a way of opening up their horizons in understanding people who might be different from them.

Since we all know that language is the vehicle of culture, the question now is: what specific culture are we called upon to convey through the teaching of languages? Another way of putting this question: why do we have to teach foreign languages to Africans, since, by so doing, we will be teaching them a foreign culture? We believe one plausible answer is that, learning a foreign language helps people better communicate with the speakers of such a language and, most importantly, it helps people avail themselves of a supplementary tool to enhance its own development. As language teachers, it behooves us to teach material that can really enhance the development goals of our students.

It is true that, for a long time, we have been given a program to cover in order to reach the aims set by the school authorities or the national programmes. It is also true that we have been given specific manuals, when they exist, that we must use for teaching these languages. The question now is: have these manuals always helped our students attain the types of development-oriented goals we would really wish them to reach? Don't we find it odd that, as Africans, people be treated pejoratively as "ces anglos-là" by the francophones when referring to speakers of English or as "frogs" by the anglophone speakers when referring to francophones in a country like Cameroon? And yet, we are all Africans, maybe

with the same common ancestors, with the same economic and social problems. What we would expect from learning foreign languages is not a means to divide us, but to help us solve our numerous problems, including conflicts that often arise out of misunderstanding between people through the use of languages.

As said in the previous section, the reading of "Practical suggestions for teaching English as a foreign language" gives us the opportunity of introducing material that is not necessarily in the official programs but which is fully acceptable as meeting the aims of our various programs, notably, the idea of giving different endings to stories, changing the characters or certain facts in a story to make it conform to our realities, developing writing skills in students by having them write on something that would be useful to them, using dialogues as a departure point for free expression.

Because language teachers are in a privileged position to make students speak and write about themselves to exercise their language skills, they have a golden opportunity of making their students re-discover their traditional lore that they can now be using in their language classes. We think particularly of the so-called oral literature in their native languages that includes legends, myths, proverbs, catchy sayings, lullabies that they could help collect and translate into the foreign languages as a way of developing their writing skills. We also think about inciting students to write about the cultural events of other cultures, not only of the culture of the foreign language that they are learning, but of the cultures of their neighbors or any other interesting culture they might come across and which is likely to help them understand better other cultures as a way of sowing the seeds of mutual understanding between people and a way of avoiding conflicts that often arise from a misunderstanding among different cultures.

An outline we have in mind and which is inspired by the BASAL (Basic Standardization of All African Languages) project of Maurice Tadadjeu (2000) would be the one proposed by Mutaka and Chia (2001); it is the following.

We believe language teachers could think about their language classes as literacy classes. When referring particularly to the adults, one is indeed dealing with students who want to learn a new language but who do have a rich background in their own languages. Whereas the traditional literacy class teacher teaches his students to read and write in his own African language, the foreign language teacher teaches his students to hear, speak, read, and write most of the things he already knows but in a foreign language. In other words, for both the literacy class teacher and the foreign language teacher, the initial data out of which they develop the various respective language skills is the same, that is, the knowledge that the student already possesses. The additional material that the language classes bring in the teaching context is the choice and the organization of that material. The innovation that this paper and this whole book is trying to bring in the language classes is the fact that this material should henceforth be development-oriented where this development encompasses economic, cultural, social development as well as health-awareness development as has been specified earlier in this paper.

This book is thus an appeal to language teachers of any language working in the African continent to do the homeworks proposed in Mutaka and

Chia (2001:272) in a bid to help Africa take the right course to its own development. As they write,

People should be provided with literature in their languages that would allow them to better take care of themselves, in terms of food production, health improvement, etc. This would be achieved by encouraging the translation or summary of special literature on such topics as:

- Bee farming
- Tree planting as a social activity in the X area
- Cattle rearing in the communities of northern Cameroon
- Egg production: how to improve it
- Fighting AIDS and venereal diseases as in Mutaka (2000)
- Environmental studies dealing with subjects such as: how to maintain forest, how to obtain clean water, environmental disruption.
- Fertilizers
- Diarrhea treatment
- Disease names in language X.

Similar themes for a literacy program that language teachers could help emulate in their students are the following:

- Food variation to fight against Kwashiorkor
- Necessity of cooperatives in organizing local farmers for selling their products
- Useful tales, proverbs, lullabies
- Useful advice for the use of contraceptives and fight against the spread of AIDS
- How to fight tooth decay, epilepsy and other diseases with traditional medicine
- Possibility of attracting tourists through the organization of festivals. (Mutaka 2002:76)

We would like to end this section by pointing out two observations by Tadadjeu (2003, this volume) and Tadadjeu & Chiatoh (2002) about the use of African languages in local development and in satellite communications.

First, in the paper entitled "Enhancing the role of African languages in local development projects", the author makes the following observation:

Although S.J. could now read Yémba, he did not seem enthusiastic with the idea that he would have to face beekeeping lessons in written Yémba. [...] In fact, the idea of teaching them in Yémba was to make sure that the French language did not obstruct the acquisition of beekeeping know-how, since most Yémba adults either have a poor control of French, or have no knowledge of it. S.J. was very pleased to hear this. The ideal thing, he said, would be for Albert to eventually produce a bilingual (Yémba-French) beekeeping manual, just like the school primer he had read.

This is a real strong message to language teachers as well as to literacy class teachers. The point it underscores is that language learners will find it more

useful if we can use both foreign languages and our African languages to produce development-oriented materials such as this manual on beekeeping.

The second observation is about the use of satellite communication as a tool that can be used to hasten the socio-economic development of Africa as argued in Tadadjeu and Chiatoh (2002). One proposal is that radio community stations will be used to collect and process information both from the local community and from satellite installations, and translate this information into appropriate mediums in order to re-transmit it. This is certainly a great idea if it can be implemented. Because local communities would be solicited to collect the information, this would constitute a golden opportunity for language teachers to propose the best results of their work dealing with development-oriented topics to these community radio stations and it would be a further incentive for the students to produce high quality work related to development issues such as health, education, the environment, food security, and conflict resolution as also pointed out in this paper.

Implementing a development-oriented literacy vision

Recently, there has been much talk about the need to fight poverty in sub-Saharan Africa. A number of developing countries have now access to a special fund, the HIPC (Highly indebted poor countries) funds that the World Bank has created to alleviate the impact of poverty among the populations of these countries. It is true that, from an economic point of view, a country needs heavy financial investments for its development. What is equally true is that, to really develop, the people have to acquire some sort of mental development. That is, they must be educated in order to use judicially the new material wealth that is put at their disposal. They must be able to continue finding ways to improve their economy, and not squander the money they obtain on irrelevant products. In fact, lack of education would push people for example who do not need luxurious cars to buy them just because they want to feel rich. One actual example that illustrates what lack of education may lead to is provided by what once happened in Butembo, a city in eastern DRC. There was a time that peasants in the area of Butembo came into money because of high prices of coffee. Most of them spent it on drinks, and some were even seen washing their hands with drinks just to show they had a lot of money.

In order to combat poverty, it is crucial that people be therefore educated, preferably in their own languages. That is why a multisectoral program aiming at fighting poverty in a region has to go hand in hand with a development-oriented literacy program. Our selection of the papers that are published in this volume has been motivated by the need to give a jump-start to current educational programs that seek to ameliorate the living conditions of local populations.

Thus, the papers by Mutaka on TEFL are meant to (a) stimulate language teachers to improve their teaching and also to tune it much more to the needs of their students as regards their genuine holistic development, (b) to encourage teachers of African languages to draw inspiration from the teaching of English as a foreign language in order to improve the teaching of these languages, (c) to sensitize language teachers on the importance of their job in

that, through the topics they teach in class, they can better influence their students into making them better development agents. Maurice Tadadjeu's paper elaborates on the importance of using African languages for enhancing local development. Cathy Davison's paper entitled "Literacy in Cultures of Oral Tradition" looks at the influences of a primarily oral society on literacy learning and teaching, the range of opinion surrounding the literacy-orality debate, and the effects that such considerations could bring to bear on the literacy classroom. The two papers on the revitalization of endangered languages discuss general strategies for revitalizing African languages with exemplifications on Vute-Banyo and Nyemnyem, two Cameroonian endangered languages. Assoumou and Mutaka's paper entitled " Vers une production du matériel destiné à l'enseignement des langues maternelles : extraits de Jules Assoumou (2005)" primarily suggests guidelines for the production of materials destined for the teaching of African languages. Mutaka's paper entitled "Overpowering the anti-African values ghost in us: Reflections on the introduction of African languages in the school system" provides useful suggestions such as the necessity of emphasizing the oral skills in the teaching of African languages as they are being introduced in the school system. The paper on growing a culture of peace by Mutaka and Attia addresses the problem of perpetual conflicts in the African continent and it underscores the necessity of growing seeds of peace in order to create the ideal context of the development of people in this continent.

In the appendix, we have included texts that can be exploited in different ways: these are texts that can be translated in African languages and that students can be encouraged to discuss with people in their area. Our hope is that, if the peasants can interact with their own children who take formal classes and who can discuss such topics with them, they are more likely to become genuinely interested and be motivated to get involved in literacy classes. These texts are meant to be a bridge between formal texts taught in classrooms and literacy texts that can raise the genuine interests of the local populations in that they address their immediate needs. We also hope that students will be able to identify other topics that are of interest to these local populations, that they will write on them and eventually publish the resulting articles in their local newspapers if there are any, or use them in their local community radios for the purpose of enhancing the development of these populations. Among the possible topics, we wish students to address those concerning economic development, but also such issues as health, education, the environment, food security, and conflict resolution.

Using both the official languages such as English and French at school and translating the material in local languages in order to use it in literacy classes would be a way of implementing a development-oriented literacy vision encapsulated in Maurice Tadadjeu's statement that "it is high time to show to the world that it is now possible to use 2000 African languages as means of instruction, as is being implemented by the BASAL (Basic Standardization of All African Languages) project" (Tadadjeu, personal communication).

Notes:

[1] These goals have been described as "development needs" in Mutaka 2002. This paragraph is actually an excerpt from that paper

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