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Book Review

**La Gestion de la Diversité Linguistique dans les Villes
Africaines/Management of Linguistic Diversity in African Urban
Cities, Gabriel Mba & Etienne Sadembouo (Eds.). (2012),
L'Harmattan, ISBN 978-2-296-99091-3**

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1. Introduction

African urban centres are viewed as “laboratories of multilingualism” or “lieu de brassage des langues” (Calvet, 1994, p. 99-103). This is the result of a permanent and massive rural exodus of the youth to urban areas. Furthermore, the context of conflicts in some countries today is continuously rendering this situation more complex because of migratory movements from conflict zones to safer urban areas.

In fact, when people from many different linguistic backgrounds meet in an environment where they are compelled to live together, to interact and to share their daily linguistic values, there is either linguistic conflict or harmony depending on how the plurality is managed both by the participants and the local authorities. Yet, so far, linguistic pluralism in African urban centres has never been an open source of conflict.

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This book published by L'Harmattan (2012), which contains some chapters in English and others in French, is the output of the most selective presentations from the second International Linguapax Africa conference which took place in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in 2008 and whose theme was "Gestion de la diversité linguistique dans les villes africaines/ Management of Linguistic Diversity in African Urban Cities". The conference came up as the follow up of the first International Linguapax Africa conference, which took place in Yaoundé in 2008, and whose aim was to celebrate African linguistic diversity. It must be acknowledged that for Africa to deepen democratic values among citizens, it must be able to make use of their languages in all domains. The book is giving the real urban linguistic landscape or pluralism in Africa. It portrays African urban cities as loft of multilingualism and dynamism (Mba, 2008). The contributions in this book are also in accordance with Fishman (1997) who compared languages in New York City to an elephant at the zoo. Furthermore, some findings go in line with Kraus (2011, p. 25) in whose opinion, "linguistic diversity [shall become] an increasingly salient issue on the agenda of urban politics and policies".

The book is organized into three sections, namely education, language policies and management of multilingual contexts, intergenerational transmission and revitalisation and finally language numbering, development and practices in multilingualism. Each section is made up of four chapters. In total, the book has twelve chapters. Each chapter has an introductory note and a concluding remark. Where the original language of some chapters is the French language as their title can indicate, we have provided for each of the titles an English translation. This addendum is not observed for chapters whose original language is English.

2. Section I: Education, Language Policies and Management of Multilingual Contexts

This section contains the first four (4) chapters of the book.

2.1. Chapter 1: Language Policies and Cohabitation between African Languages and Foreign Languages

In the very first chapter of this book, Emmanuel Sagara examines the statuses and cohabitation of languages present on the African continent. In his opinion, Africa is a continent of paradox whose countries are often viewed and called English-Speaking, French-Speaking, Portuguese-Speaking, and Spanish-Speaking countries. He argues that, it is high time African countries are termed 'Africanophones' or African-Speaking countries. As the representative of ACALAN (African Academy of Languages), he also acknowledges that African counties must get rid of colonially-based linguistic policies to adopt purely African language policies, which must take into account African languages and values as the first medium of instruction.

2.2. Chapter 2: The Challenges of the Official Management of Cameroonian Languages

In this chapter, Maurice Tadadjeu discusses the Cameroonian experience of linguistic policy termed 'extensive trilingualism' or rather functional trilingualism. According to this policy, whether languages are foreign or local, they are treated holistically through successive stages in the school curricula. This policy applied in Cameroon can be generalized throughout Africa with special focus on local African languages. Tadadjeu argues that, the policy is already in application in Cameroon and the Ministry of Secondary Education and the Ministry of Basic Education are examining its application procedures. He prescribes the creation of a central coordinating structure to address the current language policy situation of Cameroon because there are many Ministries involved in its implementation. This coordinating organ will serve as a catalyst that will help to avoid any cacophony that might arise. He regrets that the cacophony is unfortunately being observed from the ongoing attitude of the stakeholders.

2.3. Chapter 3: The Rise and Management of Linguistic Diversity in Nigeria's Urban Areas

Ben Elugbe, professor of linguistics at the University of Ibadan examines in this chapter how Nigerian urban cities are shaped today. Though urban conflicts are frequent in Nigeria, he points out that linguistic diversity has never been pinpointed as their causes. Yet,

these conflicts have favoured a difficult management of this diversity. In his opinion, the approach adopted by the government to address the problem is deemed irrelevant and unfruitful because they do not draw inspiration from the good practices of multilingualism in linguistic diversity contexts. It is a regret that the government only intervenes when the conflicts have already arisen. Therefore, he prescribes some preventive measures to be taken by the government to avoid such conflicts.

2.4. Chapter 4: Promoting Linguistic Diversity: The Place of Multilingual Education Pressure Groups

Kitetu tries to show in this chapter the place of pressure groups in multilingual education. Addressing the promotion of linguistic diversity in Kenya, she argues that the role of pressure groups in raising awareness for multilingual communication is very important. She also pleads for the implementation of political decisions regarding the management of linguistic diversity. Such working groups shall be spread throughout Kenya in order to meet the agenda on diversity. Doing so, the model could be promoted and adopted on the whole African soil.

3. Section II: Intergenerational Transmission and Revitalisation of Languages

This section is a discussion of four experiences of African countries in their effort for language revitalisation and in their commitment to ensure intergenerational transmission of minority languages. This intergenerational transmission is viewed as the panacea to language attrition. From Cameroon to Sudan and Senegal to Botswana, some practical measures are taken to care about revitalisation either by language groups' experts or through planned urban literacy activities.

3.1. Chapter 5: The Socio-Ethnic Land Allocation System in Botswana as a Mechanism of Enhancing Linguistic Diversity in Urban Centres

The first chapter of the section explores the way land allocation in Botswana influences linguistic diversity in urban centres. Herman

Batibo relies on the policy governing population settling down in rural areas in Botswana to show the relationship between the languages spoken by such populations in such areas. As instrument for discrimination, the policies favour in his opinion the preservation of ethno-linguistic diversity and consolidate interethnic communication, interaction among linguistic groups and intergenerational transmission of minority languages in urban contexts.

3.2. Chapter 6: Languages of Lesser Diffusion and Intergenerational Transmission in Multilingual Urban Contexts: A Case Study of the City of Yaoundé in Cameroon

Gabriel Mba focuses in this chapter on the languages of lesser diffusion and their intergenerational transmission in multilingual urban areas. His research is a case study of the town of Yaoundé in Cameroon. He looks at planned oral and written practices of language transmission and the factors conducive to the practices. He then examines the conditions of a successful urban literacy in the languages of lesser diffusion, as means for transmission and revitalisation of those languages. He points out that among other conditions, community ownership, networking and partnership, marketing and institutional capacity buildings of agencies in charge of standardisation and other stakeholders shall be nurtured for successful urban literacy programmes.

3.3. Chapter 7: Revitalisation of Minority Languages and Intergenerational Transmission: The Case of Mënik in Senegal

Here, Adjaratou Sall, following a research carried out in the Bedik community shows that intergenerational transmission of minority languages is most effective and even more efficient in villages than in towns. She examines some factors contributing to the blocking of successful intergenerational transmission of minority languages and those conducive to this end in multilingual urban cities.

3.4. Chapter 8: Language Use Attitudes in Sudanese Urban Centers

The last chapter of this section by Rahim Muggadam scrutinizes the language use attitude in Sudanese urban centres. He

examines the situation in three Sudanese cities namely Khartoum, Dilling and Nyala in the Darfour Region. He shows that in these cities, the younger generation live in a kind of social transitory bilingualism with their mother tongue being gradually influenced by Arabic. The consequence of this strong influence of Arabic is the progressive abandoning of the mother tongues of the speakers. These mother tongues are also gradually losing vitality in such a way that in a shorter run, if nothing is done by the local government to ensure a mother tongue/Arabic bilingual, they will end up dying out completely.

4. Section III: Language Numbering, Development and Practices of Multilingualism

In general, this section explores theoretical questions regarding the numbering of languages in a context challenged by a recent and ongoing development of the writing systems of minority languages. How many languages are there or are spoken in your country, county, region or city? This is the recurrent question to which linguists often have to answer. The answer to this question is often complex depending on the criteria established by the specialists.

4.1. Chapter 9: Transborder Languages of Benin

Da Cruz speaks of the current hesitation and the different denominations given to languages as the consequences of lack of accuracy in the numbering criteria for African languages. He further mentions that the situation even renders more complex the implementation of a global policy, planning the management of the languages. The case study of Benin portrays a situation common to African countries. In order for African languages to be numbered adequately, colonial frontiers must be broken down. In fact, some African languages are cross-border and most often, from one country to another it is observed that a language can have up to three distinct writing systems with the same language having different denominations. Their isolated development by states is not a fruitful and prescribed approach for their efficient and dynamic development, he demonstrates.

4.2. Chapter 10: Language and Identity in Multilingual Context and the Problem of Numbering Languages: The Case of Cameroon

On the basis of research works carried out in Cameroon and by other African scholars, Etienne Sadembouo vividly criticises the approximation in the numbering of African languages, which is often the result of the divergent viewpoints from speakers depending on the identity they want to establish through their particular variant. He argues that though language standardisation helps in grouping mutual intelligible variants around a common written standard form, the native speakers' viewpoints and their general sentiments must be taken into consideration prior to any such activity undertaken either by a researcher or by a language development agency.

4.3. Chapter 11: Developing Pan-African Children's Anthologies

The development of a literate environment in literature in African languages and especially for the youths is a very important channel for intergenerational transmission of languages or cultures and a strong means for establishing the writing system of the languages and by implication their numbering. This is what Ambatchew stipulates in this chapter. He prescribes the development of anthologies for children throughout Africa. He views these anthologies as channels for promoting the use of the written form of African languages and models for bilingual education based on African languages. It is also a means for stimulating book industry in African languages and for African languages and creating possibilities for generalizing the reading practice and the use of the writing system of the languages. This can only be possible throughout Africa if capacity building sessions are organized to reinforce stakeholders' capabilities. He makes use of the current Ethiopian experience built on the South African experience to illustrate the point.

4.4. Chapter 12: Development and Practice of Multilingualism

The final chapter of the book is an account of the SIL (Summer Institute of Linguistics) practices of multilingualism on development and numbering of languages. Aswigs and

Ahlberg, discuss the different research activities carried out by SIL international in Ethiopia on the numbering of Ethiopian languages, the description and the development of a written form for those languages. As members of the NGO (non-governmental organization), they argue that SIL efforts on revitalising and promoting minority languages are laudable and they go in line with the concern of African experts on the management of multilingualism and linguistic diversity in African urban cities. As a non-governmental answer to the problem, their approach shall be followed by other African NGOs who shall work for the promotion and use of African local languages in all domains.

5. Concluding Remarks

In general, the book is a collection of very informative scholarly works in multilingualism, notably on the management of multilingualism in African urban centres. It familiarises the reader with the complex multilingual contexts that prevail in African cities. The different chapters, which each address the case of at least an African language are showcases which help the reader to have in a very brief scope of time a clear picture of the very complex, yet attractive linguistic diversity in/of African cities and the major problems faced in numbering African languages.

The twelve chapters are quite well structured, presented and discussed. The presence of an introduction and a conclusion in each chapter is strength for this book. The reader of this

book will be stunned by the illuminating ideas discussed by the authors based on real fieldwork experiences. Another advantage of the book is that it is mostly made up of contributions from African scholars living on the African continent and could give a picture of the situation through an analysis from within.

In conclusion, this book is an accurate reading material for anyone who wishes to learn about the amazing multilingualism of African cities and the scholarly reflections thereto related in one volume.

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