

Hegemony and Language Policies in Southern Africa

Hegemony and Language Policies in Southern Africa:

*Identity, Integration,
Development*

By

Finex Ndhlovu

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Kuntombi engizalayo, okaSipukanana, uLaizah Mpopu Ndhlovu-Mhaso. Ngikwethulela izithukuthuku zami Gogo Mathintitha, ngikhumbula ukuzinikela kwakho lalapho kukude emuva laphambili, usebenza gadalala ukuze ngivuleke amehlo ngithole imfundo engiziqhenya ngayo lamuhla. Kuwe ngifunde ukuzinikela kwalowo odela konke esenzela usapho lwakhe. Kohlala kuyisikhumbuzo sami lanini.

(To my mother, okaSipukanana, uLaizah Mpopu Ndhlovu-Mhaso. This one is for you Gogo Mathintitha, in recognition of your endurance in the face of adversity and all the toil and personal sacrifices you made to ensure I received a good education. You will always be my role model for what it means to lay down your life for your children.)

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PREFACE

A few years ago I visited my aunt, *umalumekazi* (the wife of my mother's late brother). She had just lost one of her daughters, so I had gone there to extend my condolences. My aunt and I then spoke about several issues, one of which was about her other children who were not at home at the time. As I had not met them for a long time, I asked curiously about the whereabouts of all my cousins, including four boys, one of whom had been with me in primary school several years back. She told me about the whereabouts of three of her boys—two were in South Africa, and the other one was said to be in the local city of Bulawayo. The only boy she skipped mentioning was the one I went to school with. So, I reminded my aunt that she had not told me where my primary school classmate was. She looked at me with a smile and said in the Ndebele language “*Ah! Ungatshona ubuza lowo? Angithi lowo usenguPhiri!*” (Ah! Why would you bother asking about that one? Isn't he now a Mr Phiri!) I could not understand why my aunt called her son ‘Phiri’—because this was not his real name. She explained further, followed by a somewhat sarcastic laugh: “*Ukhonapha eHarare kodwa uvele kasalugxobi ekhaya. Yikho nje ngisithi usenguPhiri*” (He is right here in Harare, but he never sets his foot home anymore. This is why I said he is now a Mr Phiri!). We both laughed about it.

The surname ‘Phiri’ is common in Malawi and Zambia, and most people who migrated to Zimbabwe (then Rhodesia) in the early '90s to take on menial jobs on farms and in mines used this surname. Because they never had a rural home in Zimbabwe, most such people stayed at the mine and farm compounds and city townships, even during the festive holidays, such as Christmas, when locals often travel to their rural homes to catch up with family and friends. Although these people, who trace their roots to Malawi and Zambia, subsequently gained Zimbabwean citizenship, most never got to have rural homes in Zimbabwe. They remained in the cities and in mining and commercial farm compounds. The surname Phiri, then, became a derogatory label or identity marker, not only for people originally from these two countries, but also for local Zimbabwean people who, upon gaining employment in the cities, chose to stay there and lost ties with their rural roots. It was precisely why my aunt called her son ‘Mr Phiri’; he had stopped coming home several years ago.

This story sowed the seeds that got me thinking about the ways we talk about each other, and the cultural and political discourses we use to describe others. I thought of the role of language policies in shaping popular thinking about what it means to be a southern African in the context of the well-known pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial migration histories across national borders of this region. Notwithstanding the shared cultural, linguistic and social ties among the peoples who call southern Africa home, most are perceived as foreigners, depending on which part of the region their ancestors originally came from. The identity question, and the associated meaning of belonging, becomes even more complex when identity markers normally reserved for foreigners are now sarcastically used to describe locals who have transgressed local traditional norms and expectations about what it means to belong and behave—like an indigene and not like a foreigner.

Hegemony and Language Policies in Southern Africa uses language policy as an entry point to discuss key issues and cross-cutting themes around the evolution of discursive practices, identity narratives and vocabularies of race, culture, ethnicity and belonging. These have in recent years played a pivotal role in shaping ideas about outsiders and insiders to the southern African region. This book argues that language policy—whether formal or informal, micro or macro—has always been the centrepiece of identity imaginings, struggles for political emancipation and quests for cultural affirmation and economic advancement in the colonial and postcolonial histories of southern African nations. To this end, *Hegemony and Language Policies in Southern Africa* addresses questions on the social and political history of language policies, focusing on their significance for ethnic, immigrant and social groups, as well as for various political projects, as they have unfolded during, roughly speaking, the early twentieth century to the present. The key questions at the core of the book are as follows: What do the social and political histories of language policies tell us about current identity narratives in southern Africa? Under what circumstances are language policies deployed in the framing of identity narratives? Whose interests do language policies serve, and whose interests do they undermine in southern Africa? Are there no philosophies of language and language policy other than those inherited from the Global North? If they are indeed absent, why are we not able to develop some? Why do scholars, governments and social policy experts from the Global South always choose the easy route of adopting language ideologies and language policy frameworks originating from the Global North? In responding to these crucial questions, the book challenges the almost cultic celebration at the altar of colonial ideologies of language

(that is, that language is there to be used as weapon of cultural normalization). It argues that languages do not necessarily have to exist as ontological entities in the world, and neither do they emerge from or represent a fixed real environment. This view of language exposes the tensions, contradictions and falsehoods underpinning dominant ideologies and narratives that consider languages to be standard and enumerable ontological objects.

Coming at a time when many countries are dealing with the tenuous issues of building national identities and social cohesion in the midst of competing transnational linguistic, cultural, religious and social diversities, this book provides new insights into how progressive language policy regimes can provide a window of opportunity for recognizing and incorporating previously marginalized and small ethnic populations into national and regional identities. The book is also a timely addition to the emerging and growing body of literature on the sociolinguistics of regional economic and political integration, a current topical theme in social science research in southern Africa and beyond. It sheds new light on the experiences of various communities in southern Africa about the changing meanings of language, culture and identity in a transnational and globalising world. With its socially and culturally aware perspective on language policies, political integration and economic development, this book is a pioneering and ground-breaking study that provides a combination of strong new theorization rarely used in linguistics (the approach of hegemony theory), and empirical interventions that are relevant to both African and global contexts. The book will have very high impact among the academic and non-academic communities. Sociolinguists, political scientists, sociologists, anthropologists, geographers, historians of language and culture, and economic development specialists focusing either on the region of Africa or dealing with it in a comparative manner will also find the book of interest.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The genealogy of my academic interest in language and society studies is relatively short, spanning just over two decades. In the early days of my academic career, as an undergraduate student in the Department of African Languages and Literature at the University of Zimbabwe, I was inspired by professors who taught a unit that was vaguely titled ‘Language in Social Context’. This was an elective unit that was not very popular with most fellow students. However, I found the unit quite fascinating, as I was introduced for the very first time to the social and cultural dimensions of language—having all along been immersed in the study of theoretical aspects of African languages, mainly morphology and syntax, phonology and semantics. I still remember very well a lecture on language policy and planning by Professor Herbert Chimhundu that was to be the genesis of my long-standing interest in sociolinguistics. To Professor Chimhundu, I say thank you so much for being an inspiring university teacher, because the motivation I got from that one lecture you gave in the Llewellyn Lecture Theatre became the foundation on which I have built my academic career. In those early days, I also had the privilege of being taught introductory sociolinguistics by Professor Juliet Thondhlana. To Juliet, I also say thank you for those passionate and well-articulated lectures that still linger vividly in my memory.

In the years that followed my completion of Honors and postgraduate studies, I had the good fortune of being appointed as lecturer in the Department of African Languages and Culture at the Midlands State University (MSU). It was at MSU that my budding academic interests in language and society studies blossomed as I taught sociolinguistics units in both the BA honors and BA general degree programs. To all my former colleagues and students at MSU, I say thank you for your collegiality and the challenging questions that we debated. From 2005 to the present, being based in Australia, I have received tremendous support and mentoring from many senior academic colleagues, first while at Monash University (where I did my PhD), then at Victoria University (where I was a postdoctoral research fellow for three years), and presently at the University of New England (where I now hold a senior academic position). I am exceedingly grateful to all three institutions for their various research grant schemes and other forms of academic support that

have facilitated the flourishing of my academic work in language and society studies.

Three of the chapters in this book are greatly revised versions of my journal articles. I am, therefore, thankful to Taylor and Francis for permission to use the following chapters: Chapter Three, 'Language Policy and Politics in South Africa and Zimbabwe' (a revised version of Ndhlovu (2008)); Chapter Four, 'The Agency of Minorities to Hegemonic Language Impositions' (a revised version of Ndhlovu, 2010); and Chapter Seven 'The Language of Humanities and Social Sciences and the Idea of Southern Africa' (a revised version of Ndhlovu & Siziba, 2014). Many thanks also to Liqhwa Siziba for allowing me to reproduce in this book some of the material that we co-authored.

As ever, I am greatly indebted to the wonderful community of scholars with whom I am privileged to talk through my ideas, and from whom I learn so much. I would like to thank in particular Emeritus Professor Keith Allan, Professor Herman Batibo and Professor Gregory Kamwendo, for their comments and feedback on the book manuscript. I also extend my sincere gratitude to Professor Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni, Head of the Archie Mafeje Research Institute at the University of South Africa, and Professor Chris Stroud, Director of the Centre for Multilingualism and Diversities Research at the University of Western Cape for hosting my Special Studies Program and for providing a collegial academic environment that enriched my research and finalization of the book manuscript.

To Karl Craig, freelance editor from Brisbane, I say thank you so much for doing such an excellent and meticulous job at a reasonable cost. Last but not least, I extend my sincere gratitude to Farzad Zarringalam, my multi-skilled PhD student, for designing the cover image for this book.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ACALAN	African Academy of languages
AMU	Arab Maghreb Union
AU	African Union
ASAPA	Association for Southern African Professional Archaeologists
BALA	Bafut Language Association
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
COMESA	Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa
DACST	Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
EAEC	East African Economic Community
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
FET	Further Education and Training
KLDC	Kom Language Development Committee
LANGTAG	Language Plan Task Group
MDC	Movement for Democratic Change
NEDPP	National Economic Development Priority Program
NEPAD	National Economic Partnership for Development
NLO	Nsó Language Organization
OAU	Organization of African Unity
PAP	Pan African Parliament
PANSALB	Pan South African Language Board
RECs	Regional Economic Communities
SAAB	South African Archaeological Bulletin
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SADCC	Southern African Development Coordination Conference
SALALS	Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies
SAIRR	South African Institute of Race Relations
TOLACO	Tonga Language and Cultural Association

UNESCO	United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization
VCBLs	Vehicular Cross-border Languages
VETOKA	Venda, Tonga and Kalanga Languages Association
ZANU PF	Zimbabwe African Nationalist Union Patriotic Front
ZTV	Zimbabwe Television

PART I:
INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER ONE

THEORETICAL ISSUES: WHERE LANGUAGE POLICY MEETS POLITICS AND IDENTITY

Introduction

Southern Africa has been imagined, created and translated into reality from different angles, including political, historical, cultural, geographical, cartographical, linguistic and economic ones. Within this range of taxonomies, geographical and political imaginings have been the most dominant with states, polities and peoples considered as belonging to this region on account of their shared geographical location and shared political experiences and histories. Southern Africa is, therefore, seen as being coterminous, with the geographical region covering the fourteen Southern African Development Community (SADC) member states. Consequently, southern African identities, generally, include those of people from the following states and polities: Angola, Botswana, Democratic Republic of Congo, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Among the most pronounced elements of the past and present historical trajectory of the majority of these SADC states is the shared political experience of protracted nationalist liberation struggles that continues to be conveniently revisited to drive home political messages about the existence of a common Southern African identity.

Hegemony and Language Policies in Southern Africa seeks to extend our understanding and definitional tropes of southern Africa by focusing on the intersections of the twin processes of language policymaking and formation of political identities. Using language policy as an entry point into complex issues around trans-nationalism, regional integration and development, this book brings together a systematic body of conceptual and empirical ideas on language policy and identity politics that I have developed over close to ten years. The specific focus is on southern Africa

with examples drawn mostly from South Africa and Zimbabwe. However, discussions in some of the chapters (mainly Chapters Two, Six, Eight and Ten) extend into Africa-wide issues to demonstrate particular points about the extent to which language policies constitute a continent-wide, if not a global, problem. The book invites scholarly debates in the humanities and social sciences to adopt analytical approaches that transcend traditional disciplinary divides in our conversations on language policies and identity politics. As the title of the book suggests, this is a trans-disciplinary study that cuts across sociolinguistics, political science, historical studies, cultural studies, diaspora and migration studies, as well as development studies. The argument is that because language policy implicates several issues that are economic, political, cultural and developmental, we need to approach it in a manner that recognizes and integrates all these separate, but intricately connected, disciplinary perspectives. The book in this regard, in a sense, adds to emerging contemporary views on languages and language policies that question and challenge canonical models of language policy and planning by drawing attention to language indexicality and diversity of language practices.

The language policy enterprise in Africa, and in many other parts of the world that were historically colonial outposts, proceeded through homogenizing ideologies that invented standard versions of language. Most, if not all, such standard languages currently considered as prime markers of southern African identities are colonial impositions later embraced by postcolonial African regimes to build uniform national identities, and provide social cohesion, political control, manipulation and cultural normalization. All other types of languages, and the cultural identities associated with them, were (and continue to be) erroneously considered constituent parts of standard languages. This view on language has its roots in colonial modernity, where colonial administrators, aided by early Christian missionaries, embarked on projects of inventing particular identities for native populations that were subsequently conflated with standard African national languages (Ranger, 1985; Brutt-Griffler, 2006; Chimhundu, 1992a; & Ndhlovu, 2006a).

Regarding the dangers of embracing and imposing some kind of linguistic uniformity on culturally diverse societies, Thompson (1991) cautions that a completely homogeneous language or speech community does not exist in reality: it is an idealization of a particular set of linguistic practices that have emerged historically and have certain social conditions of existence. This idealization is the source of what Pierre Bourdieu (1991) calls 'the illusion of linguistic communism'. As Thompson further points out, by taking a particular set of linguistic practices as a normative model

of correct usage, an illusion of a common language is produced that ignores the social-historical conditions that established a particular set of linguistic practices as dominant and legitimate. “Through a complex historical process, sometimes involving extensive conflict (especially in colonial contexts), a particular language or set of linguistic practices has emerged as the dominant and legitimate language, and other languages or dialects have been eliminated or subordinated to it. This dominant and legitimate language, this victorious language, is what is commonly taken for granted” (Thompson, 1991:5). Therefore, the idealized language or speech community is an object that has been pre-constructed by a set of social-historical conditions endowing it with the status of the sole legitimate or ‘official’ language of a particular community (ibid:5).

Most introductory sociolinguistics textbooks have shied away from looking at language and language policies using these critical lenses that bring to light the pitfalls of idealized standard languages. From the pioneering work of Einar Haugen (1966), Joshua Fishman (1968), Charles Ferguson (1959), Ralph Fasold (1984, 1990), Richard Hudson (1996), Ronald Wardaugh (2002), Peter Trudgill (1983, 2000) and Bernard Spolsky (1998) to the more recent studies by Florian Coulmas (2013), Janet Holmes (2013), and Enam Al-wer (2011) one can see consistent accounts of canonical models of language policies steeped in a rather uncritical glorification of normative language standards. The dominant theme in most of these sociolinguistic textbooks is one on step-by-step explanation of typologies of language policies in different regions of the world. What is lacking, though, is a very strong and robust critique of the phenomenology of ‘language objects’, and how they are products of complex ideological processes that empower and disempower different sections of society in equal measure. While some of these pioneering and more recent studies are critical of the ways in which national language policies sometimes legitimize the social, economic and political disadvantages faced by ethno-linguistic minorities, they have, unfortunately, done so in ways that inadvertently entrench such inequalities. In particular, mainstream sociolinguistics studies have been heavily influenced by Joshua Fishman’s (1972) typological models of language policies, which are said to correspond to particular types of societies. Fishman identifies three types of language policy. First is the *modal approach*, which applies to societies that are said to have no overarching linguistic, sociocultural or political past; that is, societies with no “widely accepted and visibly implemented belief and behavior system of indigenously validated greatness” (Fishman, 1972:194). The language policy option for these society types is said to be one in which a language of widest

communication is selected as a national or official language. Second is the *unimodal approach*, which is said to apply in societies that have long-established socio-cultural unities with well-established political boundaries (Garcia and Schiffman, 2006:38). In this case, a single indigenous or indigenized language is selected as the national language. The *multimodal approach* is third. It is said to pertain to societies that have multiple conflicting or competing ‘Great Traditions’, thus making it imperative for the nations to aspire to a supra-nationalist goal by developing a language policy that accommodates all competing regional/sub-national identities. Under this model, the outcome is a multilingual language policy regime consisting of regional official languages and a language of widest communication.

All three typologies described above clearly indicate language policies are products of a “set of deliberate activities systematically designed to organize and develop the language resources of the community” (Fishman, 1973:24)—otherwise known as language planning. An important point missed by such approaches is that they take for granted the object (language) that is subjected to such planning and policy activities. While Fishman’s model is part of the established global orthodoxy in language policies, it betrays the pitfalls of standard language ideological thinking, which has become the subject of recent scholarly criticism. Fishman’s typological model seems to gloss over the theoretical and empirical questions on the distinction between ‘language as an object’ and ‘language as capacity’, or way of communication. The work of scholars—such as Roy Harris (1987, 1998, 1999, 2006); George Wolf and Nigel Love (1992); and Michael Toolan (1999)—who all argue for an integrationist theory of language and (socio)linguistics, has long demonstrated the unhelpfulness of looking at ‘language’ as an ontological object—or something that can be subjected to processes of planning and policy-making in unproblematic ways.

What this book seeks to add to these ongoing conversations on language policies and development is a strong, empirically driven theorization that brings to light those intricate linkages between language policy-making, the interests of politics, and exigencies of fashioning transnational economic linkages and regional political integration. Drawing mainly on case studies of developments in southern African nation-states, this book attempts to close knowledge gaps in understandings of the language policy and identity politics nexus. The main argument advanced here is that while language policies are generally designed with good intentions, they also have a darker side. They often result in unintended consequences, such as the social, economic and

political exclusion or marginalization of speakers of minority ethnic and recitent languages. All these issues are explained in hegemonic terms as follows.

First, language policies sometimes wrongly consign languages and their associated cultural identities into bifurcated categories of ‘superior’ and ‘inferior’, ‘useful’ and ‘less useful’, and ‘important’ and ‘unimportant’. This breeds all sorts of injustices, inequities and exclusions, as the fortunes of ethno-linguistic groups and individuals within them become indexically tied to those of their languages. In multiethnic and multilingual contexts, such as southern Africa, language policies can determine who has access to schools, who has opportunities for economic advancement, who participates in political decisions, who has access to governmental services, and who gets treated fairly by governmental agencies (Brown & Ganguly, 2003). Language policies can determine who gets ahead and who gets left behind. Language policies do, indeed, affect the prospects for ethnic success—for both ethnic groups and the individuals in these groups. Politics, economics, community development, advocacy activities and active participation in all other aspects of life will remain elusive for the majority as long as they are conducted in languages other than those spoken and easily understood by all sections of society, both local and trans-local. The prevailing conditions in all southern African countries are such that active citizenship participation and national political deliberations are mediated mainly in standard national and official languages, such as isiZulu, isiXhosa, Setswana, Tshivenda, Sesotho, isiNdebele, ChiShona, Chinyanja, Portuguese, English and Afrikaans (among others). This is exclusionary. For example, participatory democracy requires that the deliberations of legislators be conducted and communicated in languages understood by and accessible to all citizens, including those labeled as minority ethno-linguistic groups.

The second problem about language policies is that they have traditionally proceeded along the route of what has come to be known as the ‘standard language ideology’. *Language ideologies* are beliefs that we hold about what constitutes language. Our responses to the question ‘what is language?’ explicitly or implicitly betray our language ideologies. On the other hand, the related concept of *ideologies about language* refers to beliefs that we hold about what language is for, or why we need language. Our responses to the question ‘what are languages used for?’ betray our ideologies about language. Both language ideologies and ideologies about language are cultural representations—whether explicit or implicit—of the intersection of language and human beings in a social world. They both link language to identity, power, aesthetics, morality and epistemology—

and, indeed, to just about everything else we do in life. Ideologies and beliefs about language are also deeply rooted in personal biographies, and in political and educational contexts (Shohamy, 2009). Through such linkages, language ideologies and ideologies about language underpin not only linguistic form and use, but also significant social institutions and fundamental notions of person and community (Woolard & Schieffelin, 1998). Language ideologies and ideologies about language proceed from, and are shaped by, what Walter Mignolo (2000) calls ‘locus of enunciation’; that is, our point of departure in looking at the world and everything in it, including how we conceptualise things called ‘languages’.

The locus of enunciation of the ‘standard language ideology’ derives from what Makoni and Pennycook (2007:143) call the “census ideology”. Founded on the dual notion of both ‘languages’ and speakers of those languages being amenable to counting, the census ideology masks the differences in the ways the objects called ‘languages’ have been conceptualized. Makoni and Pennycook (ibid.:143) note that “it has been widely attested that there is massive disparity between the number of languages that linguists believe exist [the etic or outsider’s view] and the number of languages that people report themselves as speaking [the emic or insider’s view]”. The origins of the standard language ideology can be traced back to the emergence of Western modernity and its invention of the modern world system as we have come to know it today—the fatalistic claims about universalism and global standards of just about everything that constitutes the modern world system.

Standard language ideologies can, therefore, be explained in hegemonic terms whereby the meanings and ideas about languages and what they are meant to do are shaped by dominant modernist worldviews and their tendency toward universality and uniformity. In his critique of modernist Euro-American epistemological paradigms and their apparent totalizing approaches to the interpretation of reality, Anibal Quijano (1999:8) cautions:

It is essential that we continue to investigate and debate the implications of the epistemological paradigm of the relation between the whole and its parts as this relates to socio-historical existence. Eurocentrism has led virtually the whole world to accept the idea that within a totality, the whole has absolute determinant primacy over all of the parts, and that therefore there is one and only one logic that governs behaviour of the whole and all of the parts. The possible variants in the movement of the parts are secondary, as they do not affect the whole and are recognized as particularities within the general rule or logic of the whole to which they belong.

This quotation captures clearly the homogenizing ideology behind standard versions of language, often erroneously considered to be constituted by mutually intelligible dialects. Within current imaginings and understandings of southern African cultural identities, all other language types are and continue to be considered as constituent parts of standard languages. This is a problematic view that stems from modernist ideological thinking about languages. It misses the crucial point that there is no universal concept of language—every cultural group has its own understanding of what constitutes a language. Tariq Ramadan (2011) uses the metaphor of a mountaintop and the multiple roads leading to it to illustrate the salient point about modernist Euro-American epistemological fundamentalisms:

There remains a risk of thinking that while there are indeed many sides to the mountain, only one road actually leads to the top—that which ‘we’ are taking. Accepting the multiplicity of truth hypotheses in theory does not, in practice, prevent the risk of considering one’s certainty and truth as exclusive; nor does it automatically forestall the casting of a final judgement on those who happen to have followed another path. (Ramadan, 2011:28)

This critique clearly reveals the pitfalls of Euro-American epistemologies that have been projected as the only legitimate way of making sense of the world around us, including the ways in which we should engage with questions on language policies and their linkages with cultural identities. The metaphor of a mountaintop and the multiple roads leading to it is informative. While modernist epistemologies, such as the standard language ideology and similar postmodernist approaches do acknowledge the existence of other conceptualizations, they have clearly shied away from recognizing the legitimacy and credibility of alternative paths (read other conceptualizations of language). Convinced that they are armed with the faculty of reason common to all, these Western conceptions seem to have adopted a fatalistic position—the belief that “the values we discover or elaborate will naturally be those of everyone else” (ibid:28). Ramadan further cautions about the dangers of such generalizations and ideological impositions, noting that “the tendency to monopolize insensibly the being and/or the ways of universality is not a property of the universal per se, but rather concerns the disposition of certain minds [read, those from the Global North] that claim to envision it” (ibid:30). By stating that their own truth or perspective is the only one appropriate for everyone, these Euro-American theories exhibit the simplistic mindset that everything else that falls outside the remit of such perceived normative frames is irrelevant or inadequate. Therefore, the major problem with dominant and universalizing

theories of language policy, and language and identity, lies in their desire to speak for everyone else; yet, beneath such pretensions is the tendency to want to gate-keep and monopolize the domain of knowledge production, theory-formation and conceptualizing the universe. It is this fallacy that this book questions and challenges in relation to language policies, languages, and their associated political and cultural identities in southern Africa.

Following the rise of standard language ideological frameworks from the Global North, meta-discursive regimes have been constructed to describe languages with significant implications for both ‘language’ (as a general capacity and ‘languages’ (as entities). This means that although it is acknowledged that all humans have language, the way in which both senses of language are understood is constructed through a particular ideological lens that excludes other ways of thinking about language. These are non-linguistic imperatives that form the basis of language scientists’ analyses and evaluations of languages. In their work, Makoni and Pennycook (2007) have sought to debunk, in particular, the standard language ideology that underpins dominant understandings of languages, language policies, and the discourses that sustain them by pointing out that linguistics does not need to postulate the existence of (standard) languages as part of its theoretical apparatus. They suggest that “linguistics needs to become the study of how people communicate rather than the scientific study of language ... It becomes human linguistics rather than a linguistics of language” (Makoni and Pennycook, 2007:19). Their overall argument is that the dominant ways of talking about languages (meta-discursive regimes) are part of a process of epistemic (or epistemological) violence that was visited on the speakers of different language forms that were disregarded during the invention of standard languages. ‘Epistemic violence’ is a crucial concept that captures the ways in which the standard language ideology has been applied to the systematic obliteration of other conceptualizations of languages and their associated cultural identities through processes of language policy and planning. As this book argues, the notion of language is more complex and broader than is currently suggested by standard language ideological frameworks. Definitions of language should encompass any or all of the following: dialect continua, cultural practices and identities, discursive practices, traditions, customs, social relationships, connections to the land and nature, religion, spirituality, worldviews and philosophies, proverbial lore, and so on. In other words, the concept of language does not have to refer to a noun only; it can be an action word or even a describing word—and all these

imperatives should be taken into account when formulating language policies.

These alternative perspectives on language are germane to a robust and progressive theorization about the formation of collective political and cultural identities as they open space for what Khubchandani (1997:54) calls a “plurality of consciousness” that raises hope and likelihood for many different cultural traditions to live together. Khubchandani’s work is about unbinding language from its position as an object of study and situating it in the sociocultural complexity that surrounds real language use with specific consideration of how individual language users have “day-to-day, moment-to-moment successes that make language transactive, functional and alive” (Khubchandani, 1997:14). He goes on to suggest that individual users work through the indeterminacy of language, making synergistic and serendipitous transactions with one another toward the development of mutual understanding: what he calls the communication ethos—the ways that speech communities design speech events in everyday life. This line of argument clearly suggests that language is living and is in perpetual flux. Thus, from a methodological perspective, Khubchandani’s argument is that we should apply a transactive approach to language use; in other words, we need to shift our locus of enunciation and see language as an ongoing process of social transaction rather than as an institution. This will enable us to recognize the “synergic network of plurilingual language use as a means to inspire trust in cross-cultural settings” (ibid.:37). There is, indeed, absolutely no doubt that Khubchandani’s thesis steers the language ideology debate toward seeing language as something that is intimately linked to processes of social networking and building strong social relationships to nurture harmony and cohesion in the midst of diversity. Therefore, by looking at language from this angle, the intention is to highlight the various ways by which individuals can find richness and strength from their linguistic differences, which would ultimately see them network inter- and cross-culturally. This pluralist vigor is the most promising methodological posture in social science. However, current hegemonic language policy regimes have missed these very important points about the social transactional nature of human communication and the promises it holds for a more nuanced and progressive understanding of cultural identities.

Language policies seeking to promote additive bilingualism, for example, are founded upon a very specific view of language; a view that takes languages to be ‘entities’ which, when accessed, will then be beneficial to the speakers. In this regard, additive bilingualism and multilingualism must also be understood as particular ways of thinking

about language. In an edited volume, aptly titled *Dangerous Multilingualism*, Blommaert, Leppänen, Pahta and Räisänen (2012) capture key themes expressed by the most recent and burgeoning body of academic scholarship critical of the ‘endangering’ nature of mainstream conceptualizations of bilingualism and multilingualism. Pitting the modernist notions of ‘order’ against ‘disorder’, ‘purity’ against ‘impurity’, and ‘normality’ against ‘abnormality’, Blommaert, et al. (2012:18) argue that the older tradition of sociolinguistic theorization saw “problems with multilingualism ... as problems of (dis)order, and the solutions that emerged out of such analyses rarely brought real benefit to the multilingual subjects to whom they were addressed. The reason for this failure was that sociolinguists of that era tended to overlook the complexity of the phenomenology of multilingualism-on-the-ground”. Blommaert and colleagues advise that we need to start with our “feet on the ground from a strong awareness that the phenomenology of language in society has changed, has become more complex and less predictable than we thought was. We have the advantage over earlier generations of being able to draw on a far more sophisticated battery of sociolinguistic insights and understandings” (ibid:18). Taking a cue from these insights, I argue that, in its current iteration, the notion of multilingualism and how it is incorporated in language policy frameworks is, indeed, a very dangerous one because it hides more than it reveals. Some of the things that are hidden by seemingly progressive multilingualism discourses include: (i) that the process of enumerating multiple monolithic ‘language’ objects is underpinned by the principles of the standard ideology; and (ii) that like other similar (post)modernist notions—emancipation, multiculturalism, cosmopolitanism, universalism, and globalization—the mainstream conception of multilingualism is part of the global imperial designs constituting ideological leanings of elite researchers and those in power bent on keeping certain groups out of their areas of interaction (Makoni, 2012). In what I would consider to be the most candid critique of the misleading and disingenuous nature of ideologies that inform mainstream understandings of multilingualism, Makoni (2012:192–193) argues that

[Multilingualism] contains a powerful sense of social romanticism, creating an illusion of equality in a highly asymmetrical world, particularly in contexts characterized by a search for homogenization [...] I find it disconcerting, to say the least, to have an open celebration of diversity in societies marked by violent xenophobia, [racism, discrimination, and so on ...]

A close look at the epistemological architecture of multilingualism in applied settings (such as multilingual education, and multilingual national language policies) does reveal that this concept reinforces social class hegemony and privilege by masking endemic inequalities, narrow forms of ethno-nationalisms, and xenophobia.

Therefore, in analyzing language policies and the standard language ideological frameworks informing them, this book seeks to achieve the following four goals with both theoretical and empirical implications:

- First, the book seeks to demonstrate that the concept of language and the meta-discursive regimes used to describe languages are firmly located in Western modernist linguistic and cultural suppositions that now underpin imaginings and understandings of southern African identities. Both the dominant concepts of language and their associated meta-discursive regimes do not describe any real state of affairs in the world; that is, they are not natural kinds. Rather, they are convenient fictions only to the extent that they provide a useful way of understanding the world and shaping language users. The downside is that languages turn out to be inconvenient fictions insofar as they produce particular and limiting views on how language operates in the world.
- The second goal is to illustrate the particular point about how definitions of language and their appropriation to language policies have material consequences on people because they are always implicitly or explicitly about human beings in the world.
- Third, the book seeks to advance the important argument about the necessity to overcome hegemonic ideas about language if we are to imagine alternative ways of conceptualizing the role and status of individuals in the world, including their social, cultural and political identities. The crucial point here is that if we are to talk of a world in which plurality is preferred over singularity, we need to rethink those concepts that are founded on notions of uniformity (notions such as, for example, standard languages) over those predicated on diversity.
- Fourth, the overarching themes addressed in this book seek to demonstrate that just as languages were invented, so too were related concepts such as multilingualism, additive bilingualism, or code-switching, which are all considered to be intrinsic descriptors of southern African identities.

The chapters in this book, therefore, attempt to extend further the promises held by alternative conceptualizations of languages to push the boundaries of the discipline of linguistics. The argument is that language policy and planning research needs to focus not only on the political contexts in which it operates, but also on the nature of the concepts of language that underpin the different options—to question not only the *realpolitik*, but also the *reallinguistik* of the twentieth century, which appears to be still ensconced in twenty-first century academic debates and conversations around this topic.

On Hegemony—Lessons from Gramsci

Each time that in one way or another, the question of language comes to the fore, that signifies that a series of other problems is about to emerge, the formation and enlarging of the ruling class, the necessity to establish more “intimate” and sure relations between the ruling groups and the popular masses, that is, the reorganization of cultural hegemony. (Antonio Gramsci, 1971:16)

The overarching argument of this book is informed by Antonio Gramsci’s theory of hegemony. The origins of the term hegemony are traced back to the revolution of the Russian social-democrats against the tsarist monarchy (Heywood, 1994). During the Russian revolution, Plekhanov and Lenin in particular, first used this term to indicate the need for an alliance between the peasantry and proletariat, led by the working class, as the only viable means to overthrow tsarism to create a national path for the liberation of all oppressed social groups. This implies that when it was first devised, the term hegemony referred to the positive mobilization of the masses to overthrow a dictatorship or oppressive system; it captured the noble intentions of political movements seeking to liberate and emancipate the masses from oppressive political regimes. However, following his long incarceration in Italian prisons under the regime of Benito Mussolini, Antonio Gramsci (1971) transformed the notion of hegemony from strategy to theory. He extended the concept to include the practice of the capitalist class and its repressive and ideological state apparatus. In particular, he explored the ways in which the elite maintains its power and domination. Thus, for Gramsci, hegemony is a summary term that explains the political and ideological relationship between the elite and the masses—the kind of relationship that guarantees the political power of the elite from being questioned. An intricate combination of coercive force and the willing compliance of the masses are used to achieve this goal.

The Gramscian theory of hegemony is born out of the basic idea that government and state cannot enforce control over any particular class or structure unless other more intellectual and covert methods are entailed. Ideally, *egemonia* (hegemony) is achieved through an intricate balancing of *direzione* (consent, which is the sense of collaboration or subscription by the ruled to the leadership) and *dominio* (coercion, with implications of domination and force) (Hoffman, 1984:10–17). Gramsci drew a distinction between rule, where the exercise of power is obvious or known, and hegemony, where the exercise of power is so disguised as to involve rule with the consent of the governed (Mesthrie, Swann, Deumert & Leap, 2000). These aspects of power are manifested in such matters as language impositions, language policies, assimilation, subtle cultural oppression, symbolic violence and misrecognition. Hegemony is, therefore, a key concept in understanding the very unity existing in a concrete social formation (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985:8). A hegemonic relationship is not the result of a contractual decision, because the hegemonic link transforms the identity of the hegemonic subjects. As Tollefson (1991:12) posits, “hegemony may be achieved in two ways: first, through the ‘spontaneous consent’ of the people to the direction of social life imposed by dominant groups; and second, through the apparatus of state coercive power which enforces discipline on members who do not consent to the dominant ideology.”

In his 300-page seminal *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (1971), Gramsci states that hegemony is exercised with respect to class allies, and force or coercion with respect to enemies. He argues that hegemony theory explains the supremacy of a social group over others, which features in two essential forms: as ‘domination’ and as ‘intellectual and moral leadership’. Gramsci further contends that the way society is organized, controlled and manipulated is a direct consequence of the practice of ‘false consciousnesses’ and the creation of values and life choices that are to be followed. For Gramsci (1971:443), the system of hegemony is the “social basis of the proletarian dictatorship.” Here he was mainly concerned with determinism within the state of Italy and saw the potential of manipulation and the practice of domination growing in Mussolini’s Italy.

Gramsci’s main argument in hegemony theory is that policies and cultural institutions are made to look natural or “commonsense”, so people do not even question the assumptions made, and results in culturally induced acquiescence to the dominant class’s social agenda (Gerbner, 1978). In the words of Williams (1977:109), hegemony “saturates the whole substance of lived identities and relationships, to such a depth that the pressures and limits of what can ultimately be seen as a specific