

The Path to Decoloniality: A Proposal for Educational System Transformation

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Abstract: *It was observed that in all circles of discussion, Africans talk about decolonisation and turning away from systems that favour the West in disfavour of Africans. Thinkers like Molefi K. Asante, Chukwunyere, and others have approached this matter of decolonisation at an angle of Afrocentrism. They intend to present African views from an undiluted African perspective. However, within that struggle, it is quite noticeable that the African basic education system has not done sufficient work to decolonise the presentation of African thoughts. There is a noticeable overrating of foreign languages like English and Afrikaans in terms of subjects or modules taught in South African schools and tertiary institutions. As it is, Sciences national papers are delivered to schools written in two languages, which are not aboriginal in Africa, i.e., English and Afrikaans, regardless of the province where they are delivered to. Within that backdrop, it becomes questionable whether African language practitioners are*

incapable of producing tools to Africanize the language of learning or the colonial languages refuse to forsake the African educational system. This conceptual study is set forth to explore decoloniality in the education sector and argue for the use of African languages as a mode of instruction in learning and promoting them to be at the same level of honour as those overvalued western languages. In this study, analytic critical theory is used to apply criticality and rationality, which guided the researchers to be more inclined towards reason than emotionality over this dire issue.

Keywords: Decolonisation, Afrocentrism, Africanization, Educational system, Decoloniality.

1. Introduction

In a troubled state of the human mind and the existence of humankind at large, humans never stopped seeking to preserve their identity. From that sense, although destructive times come, but humankind has always reorganised, grouped, and reverted to its origin. The state of origin, in this case, refers to the state of undisturbed grouping that was before distortion took place, for instance, Africans in their Africa, and Europeans in their Europe, as well as Asians in their Asia and so on. This form of origin got disturbed at some age due to human greed. According to Browning and Joenniemi (2016), there came a time in an age whereby some nations developed a belief that they are better than others. That belief became so true in their minds to such an extent that it gave them license to deem themselves worthy of dominating the whole world and its content (Nyangena, 2003). Before that greedy idea, the whole existence was in its state of form and order; there was no disturbance of any nation by any other nation. Greed in this paper refers to the idea of wanting to benefit oneself at a disregard or even disadvantaging the other. It is this idea that brought many destructive developments and violent systems into the world. Colonisation, slavery, and imperialism are just a few of those horrors brought by greed upon humanity. According to Davies (1994) colonisation is the process whereby one nation views itself better than another nation to a level where they (former nation) deems it necessary to invade and dominate the latter. Davies' explanation here is taken to be differing from imperialism because imperialism, when spoken about, usually focuses on the economy and sometimes culture, but colonisation is a total take-over. The words 'invade' and 'dominate' here are used with a special aim; they depict a forceful entry into a country with new rules of hostility against any form of order existing in that particular state.

Military of the colonising nation gets fully deployed to enforce dehumanising rules and foreign laws in the colonised state. Force during the process of colonising becomes necessary because the whole process would not succeed if not forcefully done (Blakemore,

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2019). According to McQuade (2019), all nations see themselves as worthy of living on earth and enjoying their state of originality. The only difference is that some have more greed than others. In the higher education sector, the impact of colonialism to date is alarming. For example, evidence recorded by le Grange (2016) shows that 60 per cent of African students enrolled for first-year entry at higher education institutions face enormous challenges where only 15 per cent is said to have the capacity to survive and manage to complete their studies. The focal point of this paper is the transformation of the education system in South Africa. That is, we focus on the basic education system because once there is transformation there, it will then be easier to effect it in higher education. The core idea here is that what was once colonised by foreigners or Europeans can again be disrupted by decolonisation as means of drawing back what it was (Omodan, 2020).

1.1 Theoretical framework

This study is situated within the analytical school of thought. Analytical philosophy is characterised by an emphasis on clarity and argument, often achieved through logical and linguistic analysis (McGinn, 2002). Gottlob Frege (1906) is considered the father of analytical philosophy, a tradition that emphasises clarity of argument through the logical use of language in presenting thoughts. Within this framework, Bertrand Russell argued for logicism and logical atomism (Soames, 2003). Logicism and logical atomism refer to breaking the argument into basic propositions to understand its coherence as a whole (Soames, 2003). Similarly, Barry Hallen and John O Sodipo (1997) argue for the analytical breakdown of issues to simpler and logical thoughts through the use of logic in a simple ordinary language. Philosophical problems arise from a misunderstanding of language. All necessary truths are a priori, analytic and true in virtue if meaning of words depend upon how the world is (Soames, 2003). The analytic approach helps produce a philosophy that is not ideologically motivated but thought that is analytic and reflective (Hallen, 2005). Inspired by Wittgenstein (1961), Rudolf Carnap (1937) sought to embed his analysis in logical positivism to develop this tradition. Logical positivism claims that there are no specific philosophical truths and that the object of philosophy is the logical clarification of thoughts (Soames, 2003). Carnap and other scholars contributed to this tradition by rejecting their predecessors' dogmas of constructing artificial language to resolve philosophical problems. They argue that the Vienna Circle was erroneous because the "quest for systemic theories of language worked as a misleading intrusion of scientific methods into philosophy" (Glock, 2008 p. 44).

Although this theoretical framework is from the West, we saw it usable for this study. Ndrie Assie Lumumba (2005) correctly argued that there must not be an overdoing of this good act in Africans' zeal to decolonise and Africanise themselves. She argues that the error that can be done within the process of decolonisation and Africanisation is to reject everything that came from the West. That rejection of everything from other parts of the world would be irrational because Africa is still part of the world for which the West still is. So, the argument here is not that Africa is better than the West or should be isolated from all other parts of the world, but decolonisation calls for knowledge fusion. By knowledge fusion, we mean that Africa must borrow from other nations, including the West, and use what is helpful from any part of the world. According to Mangena (2015), Africanisation must not be a call for isolating Africa and Africans from the world, but Africa as the part of the world must be able to acquire from the world what it needs for its advantage. Therefore, this paper's usage of this Western theoretical framework must not be viewed as a mistake or a deviation from the subject matter of decolonisation.

The use of analytic framework in this research work helps us acquire a deeper understanding of the research problem before putting our views. Since it is the framework that guides us in the methodology, it also critically applies analysis that is not biased in any way but pure as it is. With this framework, we have been able to be reflective and, at the same time, be within guards of rationality while being critical of our thoughts. With the guide of logical positivism, we have been able to deal with nuances and ideological speculations around the issue of academic use of indigenous languages while operating

as a neutral being in the battle between parties against and parties for radical transformation and moderate transformation. As Soames (2003) argued, logical positivism holds that there are no absolute philosophical truths, but the object of philosophy is to clarify thoughts. This has helped us simplify our thoughts. In this paper, the usage of ordinary language helps in producing our critical thoughts while at the same time analysing the common thoughts that currently exist in South African literature. '*Ordinary language*' language here means the simple language that the reader can easily understand, other than the '*artificial/ superficial language*' that is made with sophistry that is meant to be only understood by the elite. The analytic framework is adequately relevant when dealing with sensitive issues like decolonisation and Africanisation because some people emotionally talk about these issues and not rationalise them.

2. Decolonisation and the face of South African schools

Decolonisation is understood and interpreted by many authors in different literature sources. For instance, Wa Ngugi (2018) understands decolonisation as a deconstruction in which a colonised country disentangles itself from the colonial system. In his writings, Blaser (2013) understands decolonisation as a government system that seeks to restore the nation to its root government system besides the one that was imposed by colonial settlers. In addition, in his corroborative writings, Mangcu (2014) gives his understanding of decolonisation as a recoiling of a nation from any forceful and evasive systems imposed by any other nation in a search for self-affirmation. The main idea of this paper is to focus on the education part of the decolonial transformation. In the context of this study, decoloniality means acknowledging that indigenous languages can be used as methods of instructions within the education system. Education, in this case, is viewed beyond a mere process of teaching and learning or impartation of knowledge from a teacher to the students but as a broader discourse. The broadening of it comes into effect when we investigate the quality of that which the teacher imparts to her students. The Colonial system of education has a destructive tendency to uprooting students from all they originally are, thus structuring them into some form of foreign beings (Wa Thiong'o, 1986). A brutal and cruel foreignness in this sense because it is the kind of foreignness that humiliates the original or natural self. This happens at different levels; (a) at a political level, indigenous government systems get reduced to backwardness and mockery, (b) at an economic level, the traditional systems get ridiculed with the imposition of colonial currency which has its rules and value, (c) at a social level, a successful person is the one who has learned well the colonial ways of life at the expense of her original nation's ways (Alexander and Bloch, 2004). In the education field, these dimensions play a crucial role, resulting in a serious impact on students' minds. Perhaps this is the reason why Omodan (2020) recommended decolonisation of the minds in universities.

The impact it has on students' minds can be identified when critically looking at the curriculum, syllabus, and content subject delivery in the schools. At this point, it is worth mentioning that there are learning subjects that are hardly learnt in South African languages, except in only two imported languages, which are English and Afrikaans. That *prima facie* tells the mind of a South African student that those two languages have somewhat more valuable than their indigenous African languages. Besides the fact that languages are accorded different ratings, schools themselves are given different ratings within the same country. Within the same country, there seem to be different levels of the educational system; there is a general/public one, and at the same time, there is a specific/private one. According to Prinsloo (2016), in all the curriculum developments that have taken place in South Africa's new democracy, there is none that came with the teaching of Biology, Physical science, and mathematics in any indigenous languages. But, it has always been happening that matric examinations of those subjects come printed in only English and Afrikaans in all nine provinces. The only occasion where curriculum and assessment are delivered in African indigenous languages is in the foundation phase band Grade R-3. This intervention came at a small scale since it does not have a positive effect on the academic future of South African learners as soon as they transit to the intermediate

phase where their very same indigenous languages are now taught as a subject and lose the status of being treated as a language of teaching and learning. This is what is referred to as “the gap that exists between school and our lived community experiences” (Makalela, 2018, p. 825).

Recent research by Hanemann and McKay (2019) shows that approximately 2.3 billion, which is equal to 40 per cent of the world population, do not have access to education in the language they speak or understand, and those that are being taught in their home languages still the curriculum is a borrowed one from other languages which do not reflect their own languages. The borrowing and loaning of words and curriculum that are westernised is a call for concern from de Vos (2018) that the teaching of Bantu languages is not theoretically informed from their linguistic characteristics and dialects' role in order to understand the nature African languages literacy. According to Lulu (2009) that tells a tragic story about the colonial past/present of South Africa. It tells that South Africa has not fully disentangled itself from its colonial state as Mohoto (2015) says that “South Africa has not yet fully recovered from the colonial plague that many thought of as development”. Nevertheless, the question we face is; *Does it not trouble South African indigenous language practitioners to see South Africa in this state? Or do not they have any interest in re-Africanising the Westernized minds? 'Re-Africanising'* here is used as the word that describes the renaissance of the African value and quality worldview or African perspectives. By division of schools, we refer to the fact that there are those city schools commonly known as private schools while there are village schools known as public schools (Pillay, 2015). The observation is that private schools are for children who will be special victims of coloniality than those in public schools. By definition, ‘coloniality’ here refers to the state of existence whereby being colonised has become a normal thing that has reached a higher level of acceptance than the natural indigenous self. This is due to the fact that it is in private schools where learners are strictly commanded to use these import languages, English and Afrikaans, as far as to the mockery of their own languages. These learners are used to reproduce the existing colonial system that favours English and Afrikaans at the expense of African languages. At least those who go to village schools learn in their home languages and talk freely in their home languages within school premises.

2.1 Linguists’ challenges and way forward

There are students in the linguistics department in universities, and some of them obtain degrees in African languages. Still, they contribute no visible efforts in this outcry of linguistic decolonisation in academia. When I spoke with one teacher of isiXhosa in Bizana town of Eastern Cape asking why mathematics is only taught in English and Afrikaans to Xhosa learners, she told me that it is the way they learned it. According to Collini (2012), no one can give what she/he never had, so those teachers who were taught in colonial pedagogies lack decoloniality, and it seems that they do not have much to offer in the project of decolonisation. This is to say that schools and universities are built on the South African land and known as the South African schools and universities only because they occupy South African space. As opposed to ‘coloniality’, ‘decoloniality’ is the state of existence after the process of decolonisation whereby every facet of life has become free from the shackles of colonial manifestations. It is possible that we (South Africans) mistakenly attribute *Africanness* to institutions that do not deserve that honour or reference. Rumelili (2015) rightly argued that some people confuse being an African with the mere fact of being situated within the borders of Africa, which is a grave mistake. It is not clear why our South African linguists from different universities fail to develop and love our indigenous languages to the level of advertising them as Westerners advertise their languages. It would neither be fair nor truthful to believe that our indigenous languages lack expressions or concepts. But there seems to be a sense in which South African language practitioners lack interest in decolonising the curriculum. Bloch (2016) argues that there seem to be colonial traces that are still remnant in our day-to-day life spaces. We also hold the same view with him in the sense that when African children go

to school in Western universities, they come back Westernised, but we have not heard of any Western child who came to these African universities and went back home Africanized.

2.2 Overvaluing of import languages

Presenting some individual opinions from an ethnographic account, the researchers interacted with some indigenous community members and here are the shared experiences encountered.

In one of our visits to Mtata town, we felt touched by the lamentation of one Xhosa student. She saw a situation whereby a parent visited the school and enjoyed the conversations with Afrikaans' principal in Afrikaans with absolute fluency. Then when the parent left, the teachers were so proud of complementing the child to have such a brilliant parent. But it remained an unreachable possibility that the principal would visit that parent in her house and converse with her in isiXhosa as she did visit the school. The shocking part is that no person viewed the principal as less brilliant, given that she could not go visit that parent and hold conversations with her in isiXhosa.

That is exactly what we mean when we talk about overvaluing the colonial import language over the indigenous one. In this scenario, it becomes clear that in some people's mind, those import languages are even a measure of intelligence than being mere means of communication. It is upon noticing that truth that Rossdale (2015) asks a question of "is it Africans that fail to Africanize other nations or is it the case that it is an impossible mission to Africanize others?" South Africans can successfully Africanize anyone if they start by Africanising themselves and upgrade their strength to the level of Afrocentricity. In this sense, we use Africanisation after talking about decolonisation because decolonisation will always remain incomplete if Africanization is not done. Stoltze and Norskov (1985) argued that nature resists vacuum. Decolonisation only refers to the removal of the colonial factors in our spaces, everyone can talk about it in many ways, but after decolonising, there must be something done to close the gap or eliminating that vacuum. For Africans, there is surely a need to Africanize after decolonising. In fact, for the process of decolonising to be rightly guided, the idea of Africanizing must be paramount above all. Motsa (2017) and Boloka (2020) argue that it is possible to Africanise other nations if Africans take that seriously because other nations never stop coming to Africa.

3. The possibilities of indigenous languages as methods of instructions

We believe that even our South African languages are not impoverished as many people think of them. There is an argument that foreign anthropologists and linguists deliberately omitted literacy practices and literacy traditions of Bantu language people history to promote the misconceptions that Africans do not have the capacity to develop education which can produce written records of their ways of knowing and important activities (Raum, 1993). Rwantabagu (2011) refers to this as a deliberate act of colonialism to systematically undermine with the aim of erasing African contributions. Observing some occurrences within African academic institutions, Tisani (2004) and LeGrange (2014) argued that it is another error that Westerners come to Africa and study all other things except *Africanness* and Afrocentricity. From such arguments, we tend to think that we are not the only ones who consider the spirit of Afrocentrism as a need for its urgency to be addressed feels insatiable. Language is not only a tool to talk and be heard, but it is a societal emblem that has a heritage with the people who use it (Blaser, 2013).

According to Mkhize and Ndimande-Hlongwa (2014); Lockett (2016), education is a foundational aspect that defines the development of the people and their tradition. That means if people learn other traditions' languages, and cultures without being serious about theirs, they get removed from their own identity. Hence, we dare say that a nation that feels ashamed to learn and teach in their indigenous language remains an unfree nation. In that spirit, we think South African linguists should do some work in making

sure that South African languages are learned and used within academic institutions. If South African linguists need help, they must seek it until they get it. The paper takes solace in the arguments of Kaschula (2017) that there was never a person who eagerly sought help and never got it. In isiXhosa they say “Umzingisi akanashwa”, if there needs to be a miracle, South African linguists must pray and strive until it happens. It is understandable that someone may argue that there are lot of concepts that are might not be translated into indigenous languages. But we argue that languages can be developed to be more usable and be means of delivering any learning subject. Chikwa and Schafer (2016) took the argument further to say in isiXhosa “unxantathu” means a triangle, but there is no word for ‘equilateral triangle, isosceles triangle, obtuse triangle, and so on. That is similar to Sepeng’s (2014) argument that in isiPedi same thing is the case “khutlotharo” means a three-sided figure, but there are no words to explain what kind of a triangle. While in Xitsonga most of the concepts used are loaned or borrowed from English and Afrikaans, for instance, to mention a few “rhikithengula” meaning rectangle, hegizagono meaning hexagon, ovhali meaning oval, and rhoko meaning rok in Afrikaans. It is for those reasons that Hadebe (2020) if South African languages get used and honourably valued, the African renaissance will be real and vigorously make sense.

Desperate as it seems there, we still argue that English itself has derivatives from other languages. The same can be done in African indigenous languages. For instance, a teacher can teach in isiXhosa and try to Xhosa-lize her mathematics to a higher level as possible using English derivatives but sticking to subject delivery in isiXhosa. Zarakol (2016) argues that any language develops and evolves as long as it is loved and used by its people. Collaborating with Zarakol (2016), Wa Ngugi (2018) strongly argues that there is no language that has all the tools/terms it needs. However, every language has derivatives that are borrowed from other languages. Within that view, we argue for the use of South African languages in academia without the worry that there might be concepts that will need to be derived from other languages. The clear thing to say here is that we do not argue for the non-use of import languages, we are only against the overvaluing of colonial languages over the indigenous languages of South Africa. In other words, we argue that when South African children learn in their indigenous languages, they will see value in those languages and be proud of their cultural heritage. Tisani (2004) and Mizumura (2015) deepen the argument by arguing that even colonial thoughts will lose strength in the South Africans mind when Africanization becomes more effective in academia. That idea is true because that energy that students use to be creative in the colonial language will be channelled towards producing liberating thoughts that will quicken the existence of decoloniality state of mind. Within the educational system as it is now, there seems to be a significant deal of participating in some kind of neocolonialism. The more you take a child to a privileged school, the more you de-Africanize that child, although that school is within this same South Africa. Due to such contradictions, Motsa (2017) argues that many scholars say they are decolonising, but much is still colonial and Western.

4. Discussion and findings

Education is not just a mere process of teaching and learning but as a broader discourse. The first finding under colonial system is that the colonial system of education tends to uprooting students from all what they originally are, thus structuring them into some form of foreign beings (Wa Thiong’o, 1986). The authors employed the Analytical school of thought as we explored the path to decoloniality in the education system. This conceptual study's corroborative findings are that curriculum, syllabus, and content subject are still delivered in most of our South African schools in English and Afrikaans. In South Africa, the only context where curriculum and assessment delivery is delivered in African indigenous languages is Basic Education, Foundation Phase Band Grade R-4. However, as soon as they transit to Grade four, the indigenous African language lose its status, and it is taught as a subject and no longer a language of teaching and learning.

These initiative does not have a positive effect on the academic future of South African learners.

On the linguistic challenges and way forward, the findings reveal that there is a minimal contribution to linguistic decolonisation in academia. Even though some scholars graduated as linguistic specialists and some students conferred degrees in African languages, but they contribute to invisible efforts. Another finding from the overvaluing of import languages is that colonial languages still hold a superior status as compared to African indigenous languages. Colonial languages have graduated from being languages of teaching and learning to communicate as it is associated with intelligence. The possibilities of indigenous languages to be used as languages of teaching and learning across the education system lies in the hope that African indigenous languages are not impoverished as they have been projected by some scholars and how they have been treated. There is a need for the development of indigenous African languages' formal registration to be more usable and be used as a means of delivering any learning /teachable subject or course.

Drawing from the Analytical framework of logical reasoning, the authors hold a strong argument that we cannot reject everything that comes from the western world as a rejection of everything would be an irrational act because Africa is still part of the world for which the West is. The paper holds on the promise that since English has derivatives, so do African indigenous languages. We can teach African indigenous languages using English derivatives but sticking to subjects/courses delivery in the indigenous African language. Any language develops and evolves as long as it is loved and used by its people (Zarakol 2016; Ngugi 2018). In addition, Zarakol (2016) and Wa Ngugi (2018) argue that no language has all the tools/terms it needs. However, every language has derivatives that are borrowed from other languages. We propose the use of South African languages in academia without the worry/concern that there might be concepts that will need to be derived from other languages.

5. Conclusion

Decolonising the curriculum in South African basic education and higher education sector as a whole should not only be placing the local indigenous languages in the forefront based on curriculum content by removing the taste of Eurocentric experiences that are currently dominating. We are of the view that decolonisation should be in the form of the curriculum content of courses/ subjects delivered in the local African indigenous languages from Basic education to the higher education sector. We argue that the South African educational system must not just be South African because it is applied in South Africa but should also be Afrocentric. It being *Afrocentric* in this case means that it should embrace African worldviews much more than any other views that came from elsewhere. Academic institutions must be like baptism rivers where people go and get baptized with Afrocentrism so that those who have to go back to their homes after acquiring that education arrive there with an Afrocentric taste. Being 'baptized with Afrocentrism' here means a state whereby even a European who has come to study in South African institutions graduates with a zeal to establish African orientated system. Concerning the setting of matric exam papers, we would suggest that the national examination paper linguistically be set according to provinces. An exam paper must be written in two languages to be written in English (national language) and be written in a provincial dominant language. For example, Physical science exam paper to Eastern Cape would be written in English and isiXhosa, KZN paper would be written in English and isiZulu, Limpopo papers in English and Xitsonga, English and Sepedi, English and Venda - instead of printing a national paper in only two imported languages at the ignorance of all our indigenous languages. In conclusion, we argue for the possibility of realising this important long-postponed call of decolonisation of education in the education sector.

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