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Sociolinguistic perspectives on the internationalization of higher education in Africa

*Higher Education, Mobility and Migration
in and out of Africa (HEMMA)
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Internationalization...

has taken place “unproblematically and, as self-evidently, produces only positive effects to everybody concerned”?

improves individual's language skills and position in the labor market

increases understanding

promotes diversity in the society

competitiveness & innovativeness

....

POWER ELITE'S POINTS

challenge in terms of quality and inclusion

reputation is linked to language policy

mis-matches of teaching and learning expectations

capitalisation of Anglophone Tradition ...

Internationalization is a dynamic process, and ultimately it is individual stakeholders who determine what goals, strategies and resources are appropriate. (Söderlundh - 2012)

Linguistic aspects on Higher Education systems

policies on and practical uses of languages in higher education have remained un-problematized (Nokkala 2007)

„instrumentalist view“ of languages (Saarinen 2012)

market adjustment: global language boosts student numbers

“one program – one language”- ideology

speaking English is a new universal relevant skill

“modern” scientific societies are English speaking societies

“Anglophone asymmetry“

(Hughes 2008)

English= the most influential medium of instruction

Far reaching consequences for **curriculum development**, teaching and learning **expectations**, and **access** policies

quality of provision of adequate language preparation?

conflicting expectations among different academic communities


commoditisation of teaching: disengaged from academic communities

barriers to choice of receiving institution /parity of access?

dominating partner institution in the north (curriculum, teaching staff,..)

problems of social exclusion as the university “elite”

Sociolinguistic recommendations...

- attention towards the communicative needs of the various groups of actors in the field
- search for the best way to deal with international norms, standards, and best practices
- language policy should help to strengthen the ability to communicate in a linguistically heterogeneous working life
- attention to the role, significance, and hidden potential of the “foreign language” ( lifeworld based approach)

Language policies in higher education systems in Africa

- “internationalization” after independence
- consistency of language policy in education systems? teaching in ex-colonial languages (Brock-Utne 2012)
- formal schooling: plurilingual resources are not considered officially - **target language** is still the „international language“
- language(s) in question: research vs. education
- English is „**the**“ language of science and technology (2nd internationalization)

Language Scene in Burkinaabè

Higher Education

tuition language of HE institutions was and is mostly French

„language of the educated classes“– but never contested as a tool for social exclusion

national languages: barely gained formal status as written languages (too much effort/ costs and development)

unofficial use of languages widely spoken by the students such as Moore, Jula etc

distant to individual's learning contexts

University of Ouagadougou: Internationalization strategy

- high ranked francophone Universities within the African context - attractive target
University for students coming from abroad
- students coming from countries with higher education systems based on **French**
- strategies to foster mobility of students and teachers
- introduction of BA/MA/Phd-system

SOMÉ 2009: Rapport sur l'Université de Ouagadougou (UO) (p.6)

*“L'enjeu de l'UO est de pouvoir être au coeur des stratégies et politiques de développement du Burkina Faso par la recherche de **synergie entre chercheurs et décideurs**. Pour cela, ses besoins en renforcement des capacités doivent être liés à ce souci d'ouverture sur son environnement en prêtant **attention aux besoins de la société**; en alliant recherche fondamentale et appliquée ; en faisant en sorte que l'Université devienne le socle du développement, le lieu de diffusion des idées **nouvelles** ; en renforçant le lien entre l'Université et le CNRST pour exploiter des synergies et complémentarités; **en envisageant l'utilisation des langues nationales à l'Université.**”*

Language policy in Burkinaabè H.E.S

- to foster interuniversitarian cooperation regionally - French is the main language of international cooperation
- insure classes on national and international languages for the public (currently only French and English) C.L.U.O.
- bridging language programs for natural sciences
- plurlingual resources are not considered – no innovative concepts
- English-only policy: MA programs are offered in the foreign language only

Language choice, language hierarchy & language ideologies

- Methodological framework: ethnography, discourse analysis and conversational analysis
- observations of a transnational research cooperation in the field of applied ecology and sociology between Burkina Faso and Austria, supplemented by audio recordings

Sustainable Management of Water and Fish Resources in Burkina Faso

(SUSFISH) www.susfish.boku.ac.at

Université de Ouagadougou

Laboratory of Animal Ecology and Biology (LAEB)

Université Polytechnique de Bobo-Dioulasso

Institut Supérieur des Sciences de la Santé & Institut du développement rural (IDR) Institut Supérieur des Sciences de la Santé

Ministère de l'Agriculture, de l'Hydraulique et des Ressources Halieutiques, Burkina Faso **Direction Générale des Ressources Halieutiques**

IUCN - International Union for Conservation of Nature/West and Central Africa

IIASA - International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis

BOKU - University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna

Department of Water, Atmosphere and Environment

Institute of Hydrobiology and Aquatic Ecosystem Management

CDR - Centre for Development Research

University of Vienna

Department of African Studies

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Austrian
 Development Cooperation



SUSFISH approach

- develop a diverse set of methodological and technical resources
- integrate bio-physical and sociological data - holistic analysis
- adaptive management & social ecology
- involvement of local experts
- trans-disciplinary (including sociolinguistics)
- training: scenario development

Sociolinguistics & transnational research cooperation

- focus on languages as communicative resources
- languages as part of a larger social and cultural context
- notion of linguistic repertoires
- knowledge about that context is important in understanding language use

(Blommaert 2012; Creese 2008; Rampton 2007)

speaker centered approach: perspective, positioning and orientation of the participants

(Busch 2012)

Speakers & language resources

French – English dichotomy (African – European)

- Language barriers: translation, interpretation, complicated communication, misunderstandings...

Deficit?

Other communicative resources?

„Nobody is unilingual“ (Busch 2012)

How do we communicate with students, practitioners, administration officers, NGOs,...?

Conclusions

- “one language – one nation ideology” leads to a parallel rather than a shared plurilingualism
- understanding is a process of negotiation
- forum for debate – **nothing uncontested**
- individual plurilingualism becomes a resource for the participants in an international cooperation.
- language policy - distant education system:
understanding as medium of instruction