

TEN COMMANDMENTS FOR SETSWANA TO BE A RESOURCEFUL VEHICLE OF DEVELOPMENT IN BOTSWANA

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Abstract

When most African countries became independent in the early 1960's, they were driven by a strong nationalistic desire to be united, sovereign and developed. After realizing that many languages were spoken within their borders, they had to come up with language policies, which would meet their aspirations. Although many countries selected the demographically and socio-politically dominant indigenous languages to be national media, in most cases, the national language remained functionally symbolic. Botswana is one of the African countries which selected its dominant indigenous language, Setswana, to be the national language (Republic of Botswana, 1994).

This paper examines the position of Setswana, whose role has remained largely symbolic, as a national language (Bagwasi, 2012; Chebanne et al., 1993). However, in order to ensure maximal utilization of the national medium, as a vehicle for development and mass mobilization, Botswana needs to accord Setswana more control of the country's socio-political, economic and technological domains for sustainable development. The paper proposes ten possible measures, that it terms "commandments", which ought to be followed for Setswana to become a resourceful and effective national and primary official language.

Keywords: capacity planning, national language, norm planning, official language, status planning

1. Introduction

When most African countries gained independence in the early 1960's, they were driven by a strong sense of nationalism, which was the key to the attainment of their national independence. The aspirations of the new states included three important needs that Fishman (1971) has referred to as unification, authenticity and modernity. The new states needed unity of the many and diverse ethnic groups, which constituted semi-autonomous ethno-linguistic entities; identity of their sovereignties, as states in their own right; and development to be part of the modern world, in both socio-economic and technological spheres.

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One of the main tasks of the newly independent countries was to be able to select the most viable language or languages for each domain, and use them optimally, ensuring maximum participation of the citizens and effective communication both nationally and internationally. Thus, there was need to choose an official language, a national language as well as localised languages. The official language is the language to be used in official communication, especially in the higher domains like government, judiciary, education, media, diplomacy and international trade. The national language would be the symbol of nationhood, unity and mass mobilization, as well as national communication and integration. Localized languages would be used in the confines of their locations, such as villages, settlements, in families and cultural gatherings. According to Batibo (2013), more than 37% of the African countries chose to maintain their ex-colonial languages as both official and national languages, while about 32% of them decided to promote the demographically and socio-politically dominant language as national languages. However, in most cases, these national languages remained functionally symbolic.

2. Empowering African languages through systematic language planning

Most African countries have not instituted a systematic language planning process in order to optimize the use of their linguistic ecology and to ensure maximum development efforts. In most cases, a decree is made by the government without thorough and objective language survey (Nyati–Ramahobo, 1999). According to Rubin and Jernudd (1971), language planning should be a government authorized, long-term sustained and conscious effort to alter a language's functions in a society or country, for the purpose of solving communication problems. Thus, the African countries were expected to treat their many and diverse languages as a resource and to plan for their optimal utilization (Bamgbose, 1991; Rubin and Jernudd, 1971; Hornberger, 1988). In fact, any viable language planning should include the stages of: status planning, where a political or ideological decision is reached on the selection of language or languages to be used for specific domains; norm or corpus planning, that is the language norms in terms of the codes to be used; and capacity planning, which addresses ways in which the language would be empowered intellectually and stylistically to handle new concepts or domains (Hornberger, 1990;

Cooper, 1989). Capacity planning is associated with two other forms of planning, namely language acquisition planning for optimal or strategic language learning and teaching, and opportunity planning for maximal entrepreneurship and equal opportunity rights (Bamgbose, 1989). Unfortunately, most African countries have tended to take language for granted, as a natural commodity, and have not put much effort into systematic language planning.

Since independence in 1966, Botswana has largely maintained the *status quo* in which English, the ex-colonial language, is the official language and Setswana, the demographically and socio-politically dominant language, as the national language (Nyati–Ramahobo, 1999; Batibo et al. 2003). Although Botswana's language policy is not enshrined in the constitution, an official document published in 1984 (Republic of Botswana, 1994) highlights the country's national language policy. Botswana is therefore one of the countries in Africa in which an indigenous language is designated 'national language' without having proper national roles. In order to plan for the effective use of Setswana, as a national and even first official language, Botswana needs to fulfil certain processes.

3. The ten commandments to empower Setswana

In order for Setswana to become an effective national and first official language, a number of language planning processes need to be effected. This paper highlights ten such processes, which, in this study, will be known metaphorically as "commandments", given that they are requirements in order to empower Setswana both structurally and functionally.

Although Setswana is the most widely spoken indigenous language in the country, its role has been confined to that of serving as a lingua franca and being a symbol of national identity. English, the ex-colonial language is the official language and therefore plays all the formal functions of government and of the private sector. Because of its functional role as official language, English is the most prestigious and privileged language in the country. Its privileged position has been enhanced by the emergence of globalization, which has added more attractions to it, such as being considered the super-language of the world, the propagator of information technology and the main medium of international relations (Mufwene, 2002). The impact of English, which is now being felt all over the world, is also highly visible

in Botswana, where there has been a recent mushrooming of English-medium schools and the preference for young people to use English at the expense of Setswana. In such a linguistic ecosystem, the extended use of Setswana as a functional national language has become a big challenge.

It is important to point out that the promotion of Setswana in the country should not be seen as a demotion for English or as a situation where the two languages now compete with each other. Ideally, the two languages ought to co-exist with each other in a complementary division of domains. Setswana should cater for all national functions as the national and main official language of Botswana and should also play a significant role as a regional and cross-border language in Southern Africa; while English should be confined to all international communication needs. This is, in fact, the case in many countries, such as Denmark, Norway, Sweden and the Netherlands, where the state languages are used as national and main official languages, but English or other foreign languages are used extensively for international relations. This is also the case with the fast developing nations of Asia and Latin America, which are developing on the strength of their own national languages, with only a supportive role of the metropolitan languages (Maniasoosay, 1996).

4. The Ten Commandments

4.1 Status planning

In order for Setswana to be an effective national and main official language, it needs to be empowered both ideologically and technically. Ideologically, it requires policies to be in place which will not only give it the mandate to play the role of main official language but also establish the necessary instruments to transform it into a functional national language. This level is known as ideological or status planning. Three requirements are needed in order to empower Setswana ideologically. These requirements, known in this study as commandments because they should be mandatory, are presented and discussed in turn.

First Commandment

An effective national language ought to be given the mandate to play all the national roles, including government business, local administration, education, science and technology, judiciary, medicine, mass media, etc.

A true national language should not only be symbolic but also

functional—it should assume the functions of an official language. In this case, it will be able to play an active role in national affairs and ensure that all citizens participate in all government and other public domains. A number of African countries have managed to promote their major indigenous languages not only to national language status, but also to main official language status. These countries include Algeria, Egypt, Ethiopia, Libya, Morocco, Sudan, Tanzania and Tunisia. In such countries, participation in national affairs has permeated grassroots, thanks to the use of a widely used indigenous language.

The major task for Botswana would therefore be for the decision-makers to revise the national language policy to make Setswana the national and main official language of the country.

Second Commandment

An active and well-resourced Botswana Languages Council ought to be established, with a permanent secretariat, to deal with matters relating to language policy, planning and development.

In order to ensure that language matters in the country are accorded enough attention, there should be an authoritative body which will deal with all matters relating to language policy, planning and development. At the moment, Botswana has a language body known as the National Setswana Language Council (whose mandate was to be extended to include all the Botswana languages, under the name of Botswana Languages Council, as recommended in the *Revised National Policy on Education* document (Republic of Botswana, 1994), which not only has been dormant for many years, but also has had no authority or clear mandate of its functions. It is important that the status and structure of the National Setswana Language Council, in its current form, is revised to make it a vibrant and well-resourced body. The composition of the Council, currently made up of mainly civil servants, should be revised to involve largely members of the public, particularly representatives of the relevant Government departments, parastatal and civic organizations, language enthusiasts and specialists, cultural officers, writers as well as journalists. The Council should also have members representing each district in the country. Moreover, a permanent secretariat should be established and adequate resources should be made available to enable the Council to function continuously, as it is the case in countries where there is such a Council. In order for the body to cater for all language matters in

the country, the Council's mandate should be extended to the other languages in the country. It would therefore be more appropriate that the Council is known as the Botswana Languages Council, as it was proposed previously (Republic of Botswana, 1994).

Third Commandment

A Centre or Institute ought to be established to conduct language development research and to coordinate the activities of norm and capacity planning, and advise the Botswana Languages Council as appropriate.

According to the *Revised National Policy on Education* document published by the Republic of Botswana (1994:26), the Department of African Languages and Literature, at the University of Botswana, has been given the task of developing and promoting Setswana all over the country. But this task has not been easy for the Department as it has other duties, including teaching and conducting academic research. Moreover, the Department is supposed to deal with a wide range of African languages, as its name implies. There is therefore a need to establish an Institute or Centre consecrated to research and documentation of Setswana as its main target. The Centre would also coordinate language research activities in the country. So as to ensure a holistic research on the country's languages, the Centre could be known as Botswana Languages Research Centre (BLRC). In fact, similar Centres exist in the region, in countries such as Zimbabwe, Malawi, Mozambique and Tanzania. As an initial arrangement, the Centre could start as a unit within the Department of African Languages and Literature, but with its own budget and personnel.

4.2 Norm planning

Following the three ideologically based commandments, the process of language planning involves a technical level, where the national language policies are implemented. The technical level has two parts: Norm planning which deals with the standard or codified form of the language, and capacity planning which is concerned with the transformation of a language to make it a modern means of communication, capable of handling all forms of discourse. In the case of Setswana, there are three commandments relating to norm planning.

Fourth Commandment

An effective national language ought to be properly standardized and codified

in terms of standard grammar, dictionary, orthography and pronunciation.

Language standardization involves the choice of not only the standard form of the language, but also the forms which would be considered representative of the language. In the case of Setswana, the first form to be used was the one used by Robert Moffat in 1830. This was the Setlhaping variety, which is closely related to Serolong and some of the varieties of Setswana spoken in the southern parts of Botswana. Setlhaping does not seem to be closely related to varieties in the northern and eastern parts of the country. Although the southern varieties are regarded as largely representative of the standard form, they are now in competition with the Gaborone variety or the one used in the school system, namely *Setswana sa dibuka* (Janson and Tsonope, 1991). It is important from the onset that a pronouncement be made about the official standard form of Setswana which would then be the basis for the standard orthography, grammar, dictionary and the standard pronunciation of Setswana sounds.

At the moment, Setswana has an orthography which is based on the revised version of 1981 (National Setswana Language Council, 1989). However, it still contains many ambiguities and inconsistencies. Moreover, there is a need for current and widely accepted reference grammars and dictionaries. The grammar by Cole (1955) which has been used extensively, especially in schools, is old and mainly descriptive. The one by Mogapi (1989) is mainly pedagogical; while the two monographs produced by the Department of African Languages and Literature (1999, 2000) are very sketchy and highly technical. Furthermore, the several dictionaries, including those of Matumo (1993), Kgasa (1976), Kgasa and Tsonope (1997) and Otlogetswe (2012), have yet to be considered as authoritative or standard. The remaining task in the codification of Setswana is therefore to revise the orthography and decide on a standard reference grammar and dictionary (which would be approved by the Botswana Languages Council).

Fifth Commandment

The standardised form of the language must be disseminated as widely as possible. This will involve the sending out of the relevant documents, including the standard grammar, standard dictionary and the standardized orthography.

The Botswana Languages Council, in collaboration with the other relevant bodies, could put in place strategies to disseminate the

standardised form of Setswana, as widely as possible. These strategies would involve the distribution of the standard grammar, standard dictionary and the standardized orthography to all government departments, the media, schools and colleges, parastatal and civic organizations, editing and publishing houses and any other places, where the standard use of the language is needed. These items should be used in offices and learning places as reference materials. Such materials could also be sold at a subsidised price, so as to be affordable to as many members of the public as possible. The public could be encouraged to use these publications, as reference documents for all official interactions and correspondences.

Moreover, special programmes could be put in place on the radio and television to discuss and sensitize the public on the use of the standard form, especially in official dealings. Such programmes have been very successful in countries like Tanzania and Kenya, where members of the public ask questions to a panel of Kiswahili experts on the best practices in Kiswahili. Also, new standard terms or usage modes could be published in local newspapers or disseminated in pamphlets to the relevant departments or offices.

Sixth commandment

The people of any country ought to feel proud and loyal to their national language as the symbol of nationhood, national identity and authenticity.

Like in all other countries, the people of Botswana are generally proud of their languages and cultures. They have also accepted Setswana as their national language and a symbol of nationhood, national identity and authenticity. However, it is important that they see socio-economic value in their language, so as to have a strong attachment to it. What is even more important is that Botswana should ensure that the younger generations continue with this pride, so as to maintain the language. This is important because these younger generations are currently under pressure to be more oriented towards English and other foreign cultures.

4.3 Capacity planning

In the area of capacity planning, there is still a lot to be done in order to make Setswana a modern means of communication, capable of handling all forms of discourse. Hence we have four commandments in this area.

Seventh Commandment

An effective national language, as main official language, ought to be properly empowered and technicized to meet new usage demands, such as Government business, education, science and technology, mass media, judiciary, medicine, etc. Thus, the language must be sufficiently differentiated and refined to deal with specific types of discourse in each domain.

In the past, Setswana was mainly a cultural language, used in village affairs, family interactions and cultural discourse. It was later used as a lingua franca, catering for inter-ethnic communication in the country. However, in its new roles as national and main official language, it would have to be empowered so as to be able to function in the various domains such as education, science and technology, law, medicine, journalism and all other official functions. It would therefore be the task of the Botswana Language Research Centre and other relevant bodies to actively deal with matters relating to norm and capacity planning, including terminology development, special jargons and specific stereotyped expressions.

The language will have to be sufficiently cultivated or refined stylistically to ensure appropriateness, clarity and precision of discourse. Such refinement should involve the creation of many terms and synonyms to differentiate not only levels of formality on the vertical scale but also the various types of choices according to domains of use at the horizontal scale. Thus, thanks to this refinement, English has many synonyms which enable English people to differentiate between levels of formality, such as *domicile* (very formal), *residence* (formal), *home* (general), *abode* (literary) and *shacks* (informal), on the vertical scale; and *evidence* (law), *proof* (science), *testimony* (religion) and *manifest* (commerce), on the horizontal scale. It would therefore be the task of the Botswana Languages Research Centre and other relevant bodies to cultivate stylistic variation in Setswana.

Eighth Commandment

An effective national language ought to be enriched by the various linguistic, cultural and artistic wealth of the other language communities in the country. This should include indigenous knowledge from the various groups as well as names of objects, traditions and skills, peculiar to specific locations or ethnic groups.

In order for Setswana to be a truly national language, it must have a broad local base. This means that it has to be enriched by the various

linguistic, cultural and artistic wealth of the other indigenous language communities in the country. Presently, Botswana has 25 other indigenous languages, with approximately 13 Bantu languages and 12 Khoesan languages (Andersen and Janson, 1997; Batibo et al., 2003). All these languages have rich cultural and artistic wealth including indigenous knowledge, which could be embodied in Setswana. Such an enrichment of the national language would, in fact, give confidence to the speakers of the other groups as they would feel that their languages and cultures are contributing to the development of their national language. In fact, this has been the case in Tanzania, where many of the indigenous languages have contributed to the enrichment of Kiswahili terms, such as *Bunge* “Parliament” (from Kigogo), *Ikulu* “State House” (from Kinyamwezi), *Kitivo* “Faculty” (from Kipare), *kiganga* “granite rock” (from Kisukuma) and *sato* “tilapia fish” (from Kikerewe). The contribution of the other indigenous languages in the empowerment of Kiswahili has instilled pride in all the ethnic groups of Tanzania, as they feel that they have a stake in its development. Hence it would be important for the Botswana Languages Research Centre to also conduct research on the other Botswana languages.

Ninth Commandment

Foreign knowledge ought to be tapped and encoded in the national language through documentation and translation. Foreign technology should be acculturated and encoded in the language.

It is a known fact that no country in the world has developed on the basis of a foreign language. Equally, all developed countries, however small, have developed on their own languages. Denmark and Holland are small countries which have developed on the basis of their own languages. Also the fast developing countries, like China, South Korea, Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand are using their own languages in their developmental programmes, as recommended by Jernudd and Das Gupta (1971)’s language planning procedures. This is because foreign technology does not permeate into a country unless it is embodied into the cultural set-up and brought to the grassroots through the country’s linguistic and cultural norms. An important task for the Botswana Languages Research Centre and other interested bodies is therefore to translate foreign knowledge and ideas into Setswana and at the same time generate original ideas.

Tenth Commandment

An effective national language ought to be periodically evaluated to determine its effectiveness and efficiency in its various domains of use, the level of its social acceptance and the extent to which its standard and technicised form has been disseminated, known and used by the public.

Once Setswana is used as the main official language in the various public domains, it would be important to ensure its effectiveness and efficiency. Hence a routine of periodic evaluation must be put in place. The system of evaluation would also determine the extent to which the newly introduced standard or technical forms are accepted and used by the people. Thus it would be the task of the Botswana Languages Research Centre and the Botswana Languages Council to plan for these periodic surveys.

5. Conclusion

From the foregoing, it is concluded that the most important task that needs to be done first is the revision of the national language policy, to make Setswana the main official language of the country and to ensure that it is used in most national affairs of the country. In order to make the policy effective, the necessary instruments and resources need to be put in place, to implement the revised policy. These instruments would include the establishment of an active and well-resourced Botswana Languages Council and Botswana Languages Research Centre.

Substantial commitment on the part of the decision-makers would be required, preparedness to learn from other experiences, having resources, in both financial and human, forms, and undertaking a systematic and holistic planning (Bagwasi, 2010). The driving force in taking this move would be the caution that no country in the world has developed on the basis of a foreign language. Fast developing nations like Brazil, Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand have been very much enhanced by their supportive national language policies, which promoted their indigenous languages to effective national media, while maintaining the ex-colonial and minority languages in a complementary and supportive relationship (Maniasoosay, 1998; Paauw, 2009).

These ten 'commandments' therefore need to be observed for Setswana to become a resourceful and effective national and primary official language of Botswana and respond effectively to the language based issues in Vision 2016 (Chebanne, 2006; Government of

Botswana, 1997). This would also enhance national unity, participation and internationalization (Batibo, 2013).

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