

**Vehicular cross-border languages and endangerment of minority languages:
mediating a symbiotic functional relationship**

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Much has been said and written about the nefarious role of English and other languages of the colonial legacy (French, Portuguese, Spanish etc.) as agents of the endangerment of African languages, but relatively little on the killer instincts and effective devastating negative impact of African mega-languages on minority languages. The recent re-enforcement of the acquired sociolinguistic status and power of these mega-languages by the African Union's Language Action Plan for Africa (AU2006a), which postulates the development and use of vehicular cross-border languages as languages of regional development, integration and cooperation in the five regions of the continent, makes the issue of linguistic insecurity (real or potential) of Africa's minority languages quite challenging and daunting. The power imbalance between Africa's dominant languages and minority languages deserves a critical re-appraisal as a language planning issue geared towards ensuring the survival of minority languages in a coherent relationship with dominant languages of the nation.

In this paper, a detailed analysis of the precarious antagonistic dominance relationship which pits minority languages against major vehicular cross-border languages such as Kiswahili in Tanzania, Hausa in Nigeria and Fulfulde in Cameroon leads to proposals for a planned cultivation of a symbiotic, tension diffusing, functional relationship between all categories of languages. The proposed measures seek to stem the tides of the erosive process of endangerment that ineluctably could lead to attrition, language shift and eventually, language death. In this respect, in addition to the traditional initiatives, innovative measures proposed here include adoption and implementation of a functional complementarities principle which requires the sharing of functions and domains so that minority languages can assume some of the prestige conferring and economically valorizing functions and penetrate new domains such as education, local (municipal) government, agriculture (food and animal production), health care delivery, rural development, public administration etc.) hitherto monopolized, by a few dominant languages. The innovative measures also involve undertaking the implementation of a principle of attitude engineering, a process whose finality is to ensure that negative attitudes are polarised into positive attitudes in favour of African languages as instruments for development. These proposals are in consonance with the ideological perception of national development as the construction of a nation-state characterised by ethno-linguistic pluralism predicated on universal principles of linguistic diversity, multilingualism and multiculturalism (UNESCO 2003a and 2003b).