

The role of ecosystems in the endangerment and revitalization of languages of Africa

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This paper addresses the impact of the ecosystem on language endangerment and its importance in the enterprise of language revitalization especially in African countries. Language endangerment has long been explained by linguistic factors solely. But as research on this issue goes on, ecological factors seem to play an important role that needs to be well understood and described for a better handling of language revitalisation process in African languages. Africans are considered to be “primitive” by a good number of people, because of the relationship they entertain with Mother Nature, because of the constant ties they have with their immediate environment, because of their specific understanding of the cyclic evolution of nature and the climate that gives a clear picture of their activities within a span of time. Their way of life, their social practices, their cultural beliefs have contributed in a way or another to a sound preservation of the biodiversity and consequently to the linguistic diversity maintenance and sustainability.

To demonstrate this “permanent” tie and closeness between ecosystems, language endangerment and the revitalization enterprise in the African context, we will question some of the practices going on in certain linguistic communities and express the impact they have on languages lexical enlargement and refinement. It goes without saying that the disappearing of certain practices related to the preservation of the ecosystems contributes to the loss of some vocabulary items, puts an end to the indigenous knowledge of people in the original use of industrious skills of nature management, deprives the world over from an amount of knowledge and skills that could have been useful for man. We will capitalize on the findings to propose to African educational authorities, their integration in the school curriculum as quite a number of countries are introducing their native tongues in the school system. Our hope is that by so doing, not only the language material will be safe and harnessed for the teaching of indigenous languages, but also some social practices will be better understood and criticisms about them will be more enlightened and more realistic.