

Grassroots participation and agency in bilingual education processes in Mozambique¹

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INTRODUCTION

The intention of this introduction to this special issue is to give the context within which the three articles in the issue were born and foreground the main themes emerging from the discussions offered in each of them.

This special issue calls attention to the need and importance of community participation and agency in the conception, interpretation and implementation of mother-tongue based bilingual education (MTBBE) programmes. While approaching the same topic from different angles, one of the common arguments underlining the three articles is that community participation and agency is not only a necessary condition for success of bilingual education based on minoritized languages but also a powerful manifestation of community pride, empowerment and emancipation. This is particularly relevant in post-colonial contexts such as Mozambique whereby local knowledges, languages and their speakers have been marginalized under the Western and North Atlantic colonial narratives of modernity and progress. Although the critical reflections offered in this special issue take into account

language policy and planning activities located in a specific Mozambican setting, that of Maputo province, they are also relevant to other similar post-colonial settings.

The three articles we have brought together in this special issue are part of the outputs of the project “Voicing participation: Linguistic citizenship beyond educational policy”. The project targeted 5 rural primary schools and respective communities in Matutuine and Manhiça, two districts of Maputo province, Mozambique, between 2017 and 2019. Participants comprised primary school teachers, school managers, pupils, parents and caregivers, language specialists, teacher trainers and government policy makers. All teachers had received pre-service training as primary school teachers. However, they only got acquitted to bilingual teaching through in-service training initiatives which often took 2 to 3 weeks. That is why teaching in the bilingual programme was a challenge to most of them. Parents were mainly peasants and illiterate. Only a few could speak Portuguese. That is why interaction with this group of participants was always in local languages – Xichangana and Xirhonga. Data was mainly gathered through individual interviews, focus

group discussions, personal narratives of stakeholders and observations of classroom practices.

Assuming that the interpretative frame often generates layers of (potential) meanings that may be outside of the awareness of the participant, the project team engaged with the participants subsequent to transcription and preliminary interpretation in order to faithfully represent a diversity of voice (including contradiction) in the analyses. This was done through debriefings with relevant participants and brainstorming workshops after preliminary transcription and thematic analysis of narrative data. This procedure helped the research team to gain new insights from the participants as well as gauge and ensure their representativeness in the study.

Relevant to the focus of this special issue, the project aimed at understanding and explaining how local stakeholders in Mozambique insert their understandings of language into (local) socio-political and economic framings and how different actors situated at different levels of the social structure collaborate in creation, interpretation and implementation of bilingual education policy. Special attention was devoted to community engagement and participation, the focus of this special issue.

This project is, in part, a response to the current calls within the academy and across the world for a process of decolonization of views and practices on knowledge production, validation and transmission. Building on the poststructuralist assumption that all thinking is located and positioned, this project underscored the view that the production and transmission of knowledge in the Global South follows its own circuits (Medina, 2014), hence the need to interrogate to what extent

bilingual education in Mozambique has been a site for production, legitimation and transmission of specific forms of knowledge and how local actors have been engaged and participate in these processes. The project also drew on the poststructuralist view of language (and also multilingualism) as social practice (Heller, 2007), which, among other things, entails that rather than neutral and autonomous code, language is one of the means that speakers of any society use to regulate and reproduce that society, to order and control it and transmit it to future generations. This explains the project interest in unveiling how communities understand and respond to the relationship between language/language policies and socio-political and economic processes.

Theoretically, the project sought to engage with and expand the notion of linguistic citizenship, a decolonial concept that interrogates alternative ways of engaging with the 'state' through creating audibility of other voices (e.g., Stroud, 2001, 2015). This notion helps to unveil language related social injustices and seeks to "...promote a *diversity of voice* and contribute to a *mutuality and reciprocity* of engagement across difference" (Stroud, 2015: 20, italics in original). Within this framework, community participation and agency in bilingual education processes is understood as an instance of linguistic citizenship.

The three authors of the articles in this special issue were assistant researchers in the "Voicing participation project", which also had a capacity building component as one of its purposes. Considering this purpose, these articles can be taken as part of the outcomes of the project.

APPROACHES TO LANGUAGE POLICY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN IMPLEMENTATION OF BILINGUAL EDUCATION

Multi-layered approaches to language policy and planning and grassroots agency

When language planning was constituted as a research field in the early 1960s and until the late 1980s, it focused on the study of state language activities aiming at regulating the use of language(s) in a given society. The emergence of the field occurred in the context of nation-state building processes following the end of colonialism, when linguistic homogeneity was perceived as a *sine qua non* condition for the formation of harmonious, modern and progressist states (e.g., Ricento, 2000; Liddicoat & Baldauf, 2008). Following positivistic, technicist approaches, language policy and planning was “meant to influence, if not change, ways of speaking or literacy practices within a society” (Baldauf, 2008:18).

However, since the 1990s, language policy and planning scholarship has taken more critical and multi-layered approaches. Researchers following these approaches assume that language policy and planning are ideologically motivated processes (Ricento, 2000; Blommaert, 2013) which occur at different layers, levels or scales of social and institutional life (Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997; Ricento & Hornberger, 1996; Hornberger & Johnson, 2007; Blommaert, 2007).

Another characteristic that distinguishes critical, poststructuralist approaches to language policy and planning from earlier positivistic approaches is the importance accorded to

human agency (e.g., Ricento & Hornberger, 1996; Ricento, 2000). Accordingly, there is special consideration for the role that individuals and collectivities play in language use, in shaping attitudes and in policy making and implementation (Ó Laoire et al., 2011), thus highlighting the importance of bottom-up or grassroots language policy and planning activities (e.g., Alexander, 1992; Ricento & Hornberger, 1996; Baldauf, 2008). In line with these approaches, local actors are perceived as agents that contribute to responding to local linguistic demands, thus playing a transformative role in language policy and planning. These approaches presuppose that, contrary to the traditional top-down view of language planning, agency does not solely reside at the state level, but at different levels of planning process, and that agentive work at one level can influence language policy and planning at other levels.

It is within this analytical framework that the three authors in this special issue seek to linking language policy creation, interpretation and appropriation² with social, cultural, political and economic forces operating at different layers of social and institutional life. This is the spirit of critical, interpretative approaches to bi/multilingualism and bi/multilingual education (e.g., Heller, 2007; Martin-Jones, 2007).

Community participation and success of MTBBE

In a SIDA funded desk-top evaluation of factors influencing successful MTBBE in the Global South, Stroud (2002) found that successful programs exhibited a number of core characteristics, all involving a mosaic of interlinked, active community participation, agency and ownership at all levels of the planning and implementation process (see also

Stroud, 2012). Based on these findings, Stroud (2002) suggests twelve principles that can serve as inputs to mould the form and context of empowering bi/multilingual education and ensure successful implementation.

Three of such principles are particularly relevant to the focus of this special issue: “Community *control or ownership* of bilingual education programmes, and local inputs into, and *community management* of, the bilingual programme should be maximized” (Principle 1, italics in original, p.53); “Language cultivation should be conducted from grassroots perspective and be a central strategy of political empowerment for the community” (Principle 4, p.57); and “Production of materials should be decentralized to the language communities as much as possible” (Principle 4, p.65).

These and other principles suggested in Stroud (2002) underscore the view that bilingual education based on local languages contributes or should contribute to both a representation of community identity on community terms, as well as linking language issues to issues of economy and material redistribution and political participation, as highlighted through the notion of linguistic citizenship (cf. Stroud 2001, 2018).

These principles are in tune with the view that decolonial education should involve “...opening up the possibilities of teaching and learning subaltern knowledges positioned on the margins or borders of modernity” (Mignolo, 2007: 455). This leads to cross-fertilisation between local and pluriversal knowledges and contributes to empower vulnerable and marginalized communities. This view brings us to the concept of funds of knowledge, a concept regarding parents’ and communities’ role in educational

change and school improvement (Moll, 1992; Moll et al., 1992). Funds of knowledge refers to “...historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being” (Moll et al., 1992: 133). This concept is based on the assumption that the “student’s community represents a resource of enormous importance for educational change and improvement” (Moll, 1992: 21).

The authors in this special issue use the principles and concepts discussed in this section as lens to understanding and explaining community participation and agency in bilingual education policy creation, interpretation and appropriation.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO THIS SPECIAL ISSUE

The sole use of former colonial languages as the languages of education in post-colonial contexts has been regarded as the main factor of students’ failure and school-community gap (e.g., Bamgbose, 2000). This is because in most post-colonial countries such as Mozambique, the majority of the population do not speak or hardly speak these languages, which represent a barrier to communication in formal settings, including in education. In contexts like these, the adoption of MTBBE has been viewed as the way to reverse this constraining scenario. However, research and practice has shown that, although necessary, the adoption of minoritized languages as media of education is not enough to counteract communication and pedagogical constraints posed by the use of former colonial languages (Bamgbose, 2000; Stroud, 2002; Chimbutane, 2011; Ouane & Glanz, 2011). There is also a

need to change colonial mentalities and practices, including the authoritative nature of educational practices, and the tendency to marginalize local languages, knowledges and their speakers.

The three articles in this special issue illustrate quite well the observation that the use of local languages in education is not a sufficient condition to enhance students' learning and community participation and agency in education. As a matter of fact, the three authors show that, despite some progress made when compared to the period before the 1990's in Mozambique, education stakeholders, including teachers and parents, are still questioning the effectiveness and value of a form of bilingual education based on historically minoritized African languages and still regard Western, North Atlantic knowledge, but not local forms of knowledge, as the legitimate knowledge to be imparted to new generations through formal education.

Silvestre Cumbane uses the concepts of linguistic citizenship and funds of knowledge to discuss communities' participating in the planning and provision of bilingual education. Cumbane found that communities have little participation and agency in the teaching and learning processes but considerable participation in building and maintenance of school infrastructures. Related to this finding, Cumbane argues that the school and its knowledge continue to be overvalued to the detriment of the communities and their knowledge. Silvestre Cumbane concludes that in the sites studied bilingual education is still not substantially contributing to empower local communities, given that as in the colonial times they continue to be on the borders of teaching and learning processes. However, drawing on other studies, Cumbane

acknowledges that there are indications that bilingual education is a platform for (re)distribution of power between schools and communities. As illustrative examples of signs that can lead to (re) distribution of power, he points to the mutual understanding that communities have valid knowledge that can be shared with schools and the acknowledgement by schools that the use of local languages contributes to mind the gap between them and the communities.

Domingos Machalele draws on Vygotsky's social constructivism (e.g. Vygotsky, 1978) and on the concept of funds of knowledge to explore pedagogical and communicative practices in bilingual education classrooms. Departing from the analysis of the principle that the school is more "an agent of transformation, than (...) a means of transmitting knowledge" (INDE /MINED, 2003:9), as stated in the bilingual education guidelines in Mozambique, Machalele investigates to what extent bilingual education classrooms are sites for negotiation and co-construction of knowledge and exploration of funds of knowledge. Machalele found that there are mainly two types of teachers in the sites investigated: those who use and promote socio-constructivist approaches to teaching and learning, for example acting as facilitators of students' self-learning, and promote the exploration of funds of knowledge, allowing the link between home/community and school knowledge; and those who only seldom use these dialogic and student-centred methodologies. Domingos Machalele concludes that the use of the students' mother tongues enhances the application of socio-constructivist pedagogies in bilingual education. However, he also states that despite the progress made, bilingual education teachers are still not maximizing the advantages of using students' mother tongues as media

of learning and teaching. Machalele suggests that the school must adopt policies that allow students to construct their own knowledge, negotiating what they learn and relating school contents to their socio-cultural contexts.

Vasco Magona draws on decolonial constructs, including the notion of linguistic citizenship, to discuss community participation and adequacy of models, procedures and practices adopted by ADPP-Mozambique³ in the production of the textbooks in African languages. Magona found that despite differences in terms of models, procedures and practices adopted by ADPP-Mozambique and by the Ministry of Education and Human Development (MINEDH), in both cases there is a lack of community participation in the production of textbooks. Magona argues that this discriminatory approach does not allow the representation of communities' voices and identities in the textbooks, important conditions for their empowerment (Stroud, 2002). Based on his analysis, Vasco Magona suggests that developers of teaching and learning materials in African languages should allow the participation of local communities in the different production stages, including conception, terminology development, selection of relevant local knowledges and edition of the materials produced.

As summarised above, the articles in this special issue show that despite some positive signs observed in the sites studied, community participation and agency is still very limited and classroom communicative and pedagogical practices still represent some continuity of practices adopted in monolingual classrooms in Portuguese. These findings led the authors to conclude that the bilingual education programme is yet to maximize the advantages of using local languages

in education, the languages that the communities know best.

The weak forms of community participation and agency observed in these studies contrast with the strong involvement reported in other studies in relation to other provinces of Mozambique, in particular Cabo Delgado and Niassa (Veloso, 2012) and Gaza (Chimbutane, 2011; 2018a, b). Community engagement in these provinces was facilitated by the philosophies adopted by two national NGOs that led the implementation of the programme in these regions – *Associação Progresso* [Association Progresso] and *Unidade de Desenvolvimento da Educação Básica – Laboratório* [Basic Education Development Unit - Laboratory] (UDEBA-LAB).

Progresso was involved in the implementation of bilingual education in the provinces of Cabo Delgado and Niassa from 2002 to 2012 and UDEBA-LAB was the implementer of bilingual education in selected schools in Gaza province from 2006 to 2011. These NGOs not only contributed to capacity building and corpus planning activities but also pushed the official bilingual education agenda forward. One of the remarkable characteristics of these two NGOs was that they engaged communities in the production of teaching and learning materials, in particular in the development of terminology in local languages.

The open environment created, at least in part, by these implementors may explain why in the concerned regions there were relevant examples of linguistic citizenship, with communities influencing decision-making on language education matters. Veloso (2012) shows how Mwani and Makonde communities in Cabo Delgado contested aspects

of the standardized orthographies of their languages used in local bilingual education schools. The disputes were eventually resolved through negotiations involving local communities, local education authorities, linguists and Progresso. Chimbutane (2011) also reports on community actions to replace a variety of Xichangana that was used in schools in Gaza, assumed to be a South African variety. Also in this case, community intervention led education authorities to abandon the rejected variety and adopt one that the locals identified themselves with. Chimbutane (2018a) analysed these and other actions as examples of exercise of linguistic citizenship.

The research results reported in relation to Maputo province, on one hand, and Cabo Delgado, Niassa and Gaza provinces, on the other, seem to indicate that community engagement in bilingual education in Mozambique has different manifestations depending on the philosophies that NGOs or Aid agencies implementing the programme adopt in a given locale. Progresso and UDEBA-LAB were more oriented to community engagement in their activities, whereas ADPP-Mozambique was not. In fact, while Progresso and UDEBA-LAB were committed to the implementation of bilingual education in its broad sense, ADPP-Mozambique was more interested in the development of early grade literacy in local languages. In fact, the intervention of ADPP-Mozambique (2017-2019) in the implementation of bilingual education was just a small component of a larger programme called “Food for Knowledge”, which not only targeted bilingual education schools but also monolingual schools in Portuguese. This analysis suggests that different agendas may prompt or constrain the engagement of local communities in

bilingual education policy creation, interpretation and appropriation.

The findings and analysis offered in the three articles in this special issue suggest a call of more dialogic and multivocal environment in bilingual education in Mozambique, a dialogue that should enhance negotiation of knowledge in classrooms and help to mind the gap between schools and communities. In this ever hybrid, pluriversal environment that characterizes the world, the suggested dialogue should lead to the transformation of bilingual education schools into settings where the so-called ‘universal’ and local knowledges meet and cross-fertilise and where students learn to (re)appreciate and (re)value their heritage languages and cultures. In fact, the results on community participation and agency reported in the three articles on Maputo province and in those on Cabo Delgado, Niassa and Gaza, as mentioned above, indicate that there is some evidence of linguistic citizenship in Mozambique. However, the structures available for engagement with institutions and their actors are not yet sufficiently attuned to the emergent voices and agencies. This suggests that, in addition to the current ‘enabling’ legislation and policies in Mozambique, there is a need to transform the current institutional structures in order to nurture linguistic citizenship and decolonial multilingualisms. In this regard, transformations within bilingual education have the potential to trigger transformations in other societal domains.

It is within this dialogic and multivocal ethos that one of the purposes of the “Voicing participation project” was to build a network of scholars in the geopolitical North and South around alternative practices and policies to the import of Northern models and

expertise for mother-tongue based multilingual education. This network has been established and the dialogue is underway. Drawing on the results of this project, a new project involving local and international stakeholders, including teachers, school managers, parents and researchers, is now exploring ways to promote a crosscutting community engagement in bilingual education in Mozambique, assumed to be one of the conditions for successful bilingual education provision (e.g., Stroud, 2002). The hope, then, is that networks, studies and action research initiatives such as the ones referred to in this introduction should contribute to open up a new perspective on language education as emanating out of 'spaces of dialogue and collaboration' (Walsh, 2012).

(ENDNOTE)

1. This project was generously supported by the Swedish Research Council, proj no.2016-05776, 'Voicing Participation:Linguistic Citizenship beyond Educational Policy'
2. Following Johnson (2009), we assume that the term 'appropriation' covers a range of possibilities, not just compliance or acceptance but also adaptation and recasting of language policies.
3. ADPP stands for *Ajuda de Desenvolvimento de Povo para Povo*/Development Aid from People to People. ADPP-Mozambique is a Mozambican NGO of Danish origin. In partnership with central and local education authorities, ADDP-Mozambique was involved in the implementation of bilingual education in selected schools from Maputo Province between 2017 and 2019.

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