Nilo-Saharan Languages: Resources for Language Policy and Planning

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Abstract:

In the 36 years since Richard Ruiz (Ruíz, 1984) published his seminal work describing three orientations to language planning, his categories of language-as-right, language-as-resource and language-as-problem have enabled "professional language planners" (Lo Bianco, 2010, p. 144) to discuss how people at micro-, meso- and macro-levels (Davis, 2014; Hult & Hornberger, 2016) develop, interpret and implement language policies.

Without supportive language policies and sensitive language planning, Nilo-Saharan languages will be relegated to the realm of "problems", rather than of "resources", and they will suffer from a lack of research and development. This paper will first look at definitions of Language Policy and Planning (LPP), and then outline the salient factors in applying LPP issues to language in education policy and practice, focusing on countries such as Ethiopia, Kenya and South Sudan, and Uganda where many of the Nilo-Saharan languages are found.

The paper will seek to address the question of who has voice and agency in the process of LPP, from the level of government down to "grassroots" of parents and teachers, and outline the considerations that each level takes into account as they see language-as-right, language-as-resource or language-as-problem. These considerations range from colonial histories (Batibo, 2005), politics ((Muzoora et al., 2014; Tollefson & Tsui, 2014; Trudell, 2016), language attitudes (Chimhenga & Chivhanga, 2013;Trudell & Piper, 2014) and availability of resources in Nilo-Saharan languages (Jones & Barkhuizen, 2011; Laguarda & Woodward, 2013).

The paper will conclude with some suggestions for how we, as a community of language planners and users, can advocate for viewing languages-as-resources to increase the use of Nilo-Saharan languages at all levels.

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