

RESILIENCE OF CONGOLESE NATIONAL LANGUAGES IN HIGHER AND UNIVERSITY EDUCATION IN THE DRC: SOCIOLINGUISTIC SURVEY CONDUCTED IN PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS IN THE CITY OF KISANGANI

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ABSTRACT

This article attempts to analyze how Congolese national languages and foreign languages manage to compete for certain functions in teaching-learning and in exchanges or interactions in the university environment. This testifies to the resilience of national languages, a guarantee of remarkable vitality. Consequently, no courageous reform has been undertaken so far to establish quality basic education in national languages. In addition, higher education and university disciplines have difficulty imposing competitive knowledge of national languages on the international scene. Indeed, despite the dominance of French, national languages retain an important place. This testifies to a local appropriation of academic spaces. This is the guarantee of linguistic duality in educational practices. Thus, foreign languages are invested with all social functions, including French, but they are not accessible to everyone. Indeed, foreign languages remain the languages of major events. In other words, they are legally dominant languages, but dominated by national languages in social practices.

Keywords: Resilience, vitality, Congolese national languages, Higher and University Education, DRC.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The DRC's language policy as established imposes a diglossic relationship between foreign languages (French and English) and national languages. Raising these two foreign languages to the rank of language of teaching-learning, administration and prestige, while national languages are reduced to those that ensure the communication of daily experience. Thus, this vision obliges foreign languages to increase their irrevocable dominance in this scholarly environment.

It must be admitted, following GAUTHIER, P-L. (2011), that "the postcolonial era has left, in the former colonies of Africa, a strong mark on the education systems: the main, if not exclusive, use of the language of the former colonizer as the language of instruction. From English to French, via Portuguese, several million Africans are educated mainly in these foreign languages from primary school onwards. At the secondary and higher levels, they are totally imposed, marking the culture of the dominant African classes".

Indeed, when several languages coexist in the same space, their relations are most likely conditioned by "power relations" (BOLEKIA, BOLEKA, JUSTO, 2001), associated with

"differences of status" (MUFWENE, SALIKOKO S., 2020), of "recognition and prestige" (SCHLUMPF, SANDRA, 2024). In particular, linguistic asymmetries materialize when official languages are opposed to non-official languages, and between colonial European languages and indigenous languages. However, the position, uses and functions of each language vary according to the specific circumstances of communication.

As a result, at the level of higher education and university, foreign languages are almost the only ones to be imposed. However, it is clear that, for more than a decade, Congolese national languages and foreign languages have been able to compete for certain functions in teaching-learning and in exchanges or interactions. However, this university environment, which is supposed to be essentially or of great effect Francophone and/or Anglophone, is dominated by a linguistic use of national preference. This confrontation limits and calls into question national linguistic planning. This emphasizes the local space and the speakers as agents of their own communication activity, and also reflects planning at the sub-state level.

It is in this sense that we will focus our reflection on the following questions:

- Why do national and foreign languages compete for functions or roles in educational settings in Kisangani?
- What kind of relationship do national and foreign languages have in educational environments in Kisangani?
- In terms of the anticipated responses, we say that:
- The competition between national and foreign languages would reflect the tensions between historical heritage, socio-economic aspirations and cultural identities;
- National and foreign languages, in educational settings, would maintain the relationship of the asymmetrical type.

Through this research, the objectives are as follows:

- Identify the issues underlying the competition between national and foreign languages in educational settings in Kisangani;
- Describe the relationship between national and foreign languages in educational settings in Kisangani.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

In sociolinguistics, as in all other scientific disciplines, the importance of the methodological framework is posed from the beginning of the research. Because the results of any investigation depend on it. To carry out this work, and in order to ensure the reliability of its results, we have resorted to the sociolinguistic survey method.

CHRISTINE D. (quoted by CALVET, J-L., 1999) points out that "when we seek to know the uses and functions of different languages present in a bilingual community, we ask, or generally ask ourselves, the following questions: What is the language used at university? In the family? In administrations? etc." This survey aims to identify the use of two or more languages in different social contexts. The sociolinguistic survey method, in the university environment of Kisangani, allowed us to understand how the languages present coexist and assume the different functions as well as why language choices vary according to the setting, the audience

and the objectives of communication between the educational partners. The purpose of this sociolinguistic survey is to identify the use of national and foreign languages in the different contexts of teaching-learning in the university context.

As for the techniques and tools for collecting data related to qualitative and quantitative methods. In order to collect the data necessary for the development of this work, we used the interview guide. The interview guide is a technique that aims to organize a verbal communication relationship between two people, including the respondent and the interviewer, in order to allow the latter to collect certain information from the survey concerning a specific subject.

MELISSA BARKAT and MARION SANDRE (2024) emphasize, in their Module of the Survey Methodology in Sociolinguistics, that "studies focused on real language practices and representations must use the interview technique". For the simple reason, you must do a survey in which you yourself are present.

We thought, beforehand, to organize the survey based on an interview guide interviews with students in higher education and university in order to have an overview of their experiences. The interview, which is based on the qualitative method, is a verbal interaction between the researcher and the respondents. We opted for the individual interview which allowed us to find ourselves in a face-to-face situation with each of our respondents. It was conducted with the help of an interview guide in order to collect the personal feelings, opinions and experiences of the subjects to be investigated on the theme under study. It was designed according to the themes that we wanted to address.

In the context of the present research, the interviews were semi-structured, structured with open-ended questions leaving the interviewee free to formulate his or her answer. It should be remembered that the data were collected from the Kobocollete digital application, designed on Kobotoolbox. Our data processing was done using data analysis software called SPSS from an Excel database.

3.0 NATIONAL LANGUAGES AND TRAINING COURSES IN HIGHER AND UNIVERSITY EDUCATION IN DR CONGO

Having language skills in national languages, among future executives in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), seems crucial for their integration into the labor market and their interaction in society.

Admittedly, some courses at the University of Kisangani include Congolese languages in their curriculum as a learning subject, such as sociology and anthropology, the Ecole Supérieure d'Hôtellerie et Tourisme, Information and Communication Sciences, etc. The shared intuition is that the legislator was aiming for interregional mobility. With regard to sociologists, who are considered to be the doctors of society, the legislator has provided courses related to the Congolese national languages to facilitate their integration into a society that does not only need to use foreign languages in various communicative situations.

As far as Hospitality and Tourism is concerned, it is true that in the exercise of their profession, students who have been trained in this field will face a linguistic variety depending on the

origins of the speakers, national or foreign. In this case, mastery of both foreign and national languages are the issues and challenges in daily interactions.

However, it is clear that other training courses do not benefit from the learning of Congolese national languages, such as technical courses, so their use is essential in daily exchanges in local society. Indeed, Congolese national languages facilitate by playing a preponderant role in the execution and coordination of the various tasks. However, throughout their university studies, engineers, for example, only take courses related to the learning of foreign languages.

As far as students in applied pedagogy are concerned, only those in language courses benefit from the teaching and learning of Congolese national languages in addition to the foreign languages that are sufficiently addressed. Considering this reality, these students will teach or teach Congolese students who have a large advance competence in local languages. To do this, these future teachers undergo rigorous training, also taking into account the Congolese national languages. Thus, both French and English learned will be taught to Congolese learners.

In the tax and banking sector, some people are unaware that the taxpayers and clients are made up of nationals and foreigners. And the nationals of the Faculty of Economics and Management of the university, of Taxation and Accounting of the Higher Institutes use national languages in the practice of their profession. However, never have they been beneficiaries of teaching-learning in Congolese national languages in their training.

To this end, this problem is felt, in a global way, in other courses whose graduates are required to assume various functions directly related to the social life of the population. For example, the magistrate who has the mandate to settle disputes between individuals within this so-called multilingual society, has never followed, throughout his training, from the linguistic point of view, one or more courses in Congolese national languages that could grant him, even if only a certain plurilingual competence around the key languages of his professional environment.

Unfortunately, this sad reality is observed for all civil servants in this country. Having the vocation to work everywhere throughout the national territory and forgetting that the dynamics of languages and linguistic realities diversify from one region to another; this could constitute enormous challenges for the exercise of one's profession. However, the use of foreign languages alone presents various constraints that are difficult to overcome.

The ideal also pursued, through this research, consists in proceeding, on the basis of convincing analyses, to the development of the Congolese education system as a whole, in favour of the Congolese national languages as a compulsory subject and medium or languages of the plenaries, like foreign languages. In short, bi-literacy is advocated at all levels of the education system in the country.

It is in this context that the Seminar on The National Language and Globalization: Issues and Challenges for French, held in Quebec City from October 25 to 27, 1994, emphasizes that "the right to create and work in one's own language is one of the attributes of popular sovereignty." Indeed, for this to be given more consideration, it will be necessary, upstream, that it be done within an official and regulatory framework. Hence the need to introduce national languages in all courses of higher and university education as subjects to be taught and languages of instruction.

In addition, it is important to mention a few facts that are unknown or unknown to the majority: which European countries are taught or administered in Lingala, Mandarin or Arabic? In international studies programs, which are interdisciplinary in essence, one must know at least one foreign and local and/or national language of the region chosen for field research. Candidate researchers in African studies must know another language. This is a requirement and not a choice.

Academics often speak several national languages, which enriches their profile. The linguistic diversity in the DRC implies that academics also develop intercultural skills, allowing them to navigate between different cultures and language practices. Some universities offer additional courses in national languages to strengthen these skills in students, thus promoting better communication in multicultural contexts.

These language skills are not only important for academic success, but they also play a crucial role in graduates' employability and community engagement.

4.0 RESULTS FROM THE STATISTICAL TEST APPLICATION (X2)

The Chi-square (x2) test is a powerful statistical tool used to analyze qualitative (or categorical) data. It is used to check whether an observed relationship or difference between variables is statistically significant or simply due to chance.

The conditions of application are as follows:

- The data must be categorical (non-numerical, continuous);
- The expected number of students must be ≥ 5 in at least 80% of the boxes;
- Observations must be independent (no duplicates).

For this statistical test, we used the SPSS and R software.

Cross-tabulation LEVEL OF STUDY and speaking academic affairs, in an educational environment, what language do you use?

		When talking about academic affairs, in an educational environment, what language do you use?			Total
		English	Lingala	Swahili	
LEVEL OF STUDY	Graduate	24	8	0	32
	Undergraduate	25	13	1	39
Total		49	21	1	71

➤ Observations descriptives

- French largely dominates as the language used for academic affairs (69% of respondents);
- Lingala is used by 30% of respondents, especially at the undergraduate level;
- Swahili is marginal (only 1 respondent, at the undergraduate level).

➤ Both levels of study have a similar preference for French:

- Second cycle: 75% use French;
- Undergraduate studies: 64% use French.

Chi-square Tests

	Value	DDL	Asymptotic (bilateral) significance
Pearson's Chi-square	1,536a	2	,464
Plausibility ratio	1,917	2	,383
Number of valid observations	71		

a. 2 cells (33.3%) have a theoretical number of less than 5. The minimum theoretical number is .45.

➤ Test Results

- Pearson's Chi-square = 1.536
- Degrees of Freedom = 2
- p-value = 0.464

➤ Statistical interpretation

No significant association between level of study and language used for academic affairs:

- The p-value (0.464) is much higher than 0.05;
- We cannot reject the null hypothesis of independence;
- The differences observed between the levels of education are probably due to chance.

➤ Observed trends

• Clear dominance of French

- 69% of respondents use French for academic affairs;
- This dominance can be observed in both cycles of study;
- French is the language of reference in the academic context.

• Minor (non-significant) differences

- Second cycle: Slightly more French-speaking (75% vs. 64%);
- First cycle: Slightly more use of Lingala (33% vs. 25%);
- Swahili is almost absent from academic discourse.

- Striking contrast with previous results
 - Comparison with political discourse
 - Academic affairs: Dominant French (69%);
 - Political discourse: Marginal French (2.8%);
 - Family language: Minority French (14.1%).
- Contextual Diglossia
 - Academic sphere: Domain reserved for French;
 - Political/family sphere: Local languages domain;
 - Clear compartmentalization of linguistic uses.
- Key findings
 - No significant difference between levels of education;
 - Overwhelming dominance of French in the academic context;
 - Lingala maintains a significant presence ($\approx 30\%$);
 - Swahili is excluded from academic affairs.
- Sociolinguistic interpretation
 - French as a language of knowledge
 - French retains its status as a language of education and transmission of knowledge;
 - Its massive use in academic affairs confirms its institutional role;
 - Persistence of linguistic colonialism in the education system.
- Resilience of national languages
 - Despite the domination of the Frenchman, Lingala retains an important place;
 - This testifies to a local appropriation of academic spaces;
 - Linguistic duality in educational practices.

And when talking about politics, in an educational environment, what language do you use?						
Workforce						
		When talking about politics, in an educational environment, what language do you use more?				Total
			Other	English	Lingala	
LEVEL OF STUDY	Graduate	1	1	16	14	32
	Undergraduate	0	1	17	21	39
Total		1	2	33	35	71

- Key Observations

- Swahili is used slightly more often (35 respondents) than Lingala (33 respondents) to talk about politics in educational settings;
 - French is very little used (2 respondents), as are the languages classified as "Other" (1 respondent);
- The two levels of study have similar linguistic profiles:
- Lingala and Swahili dominate in both groups;
 - French is marginal, even among graduate students.

Chi-square Tests			
	Value	DDL	Asymptotic (bilateral) significance
Pearson's Chi-square	1,757a	3	,624
Plausibility ratio	2,135	3	,545
Number of valid observations	71		
a. 4 cells (50.0%) have a theoretical size of less than 5. The minimum theoretical size is .45.			

➤ Chi-square Test

- Pearson's Chi-square = 1.757
- Degrees of Freedom = 3
- p-value = 0.624.

➤ Statistical interpretation

No significant association between education level and language used to speak politics:

- The p-value (0.624) is well above 0.05;
- We cannot reject the null hypothesis of independence;
- The differences observed between the levels of education are probably due to chance.

➤ Sociolinguistic interpretation

• Linguistic democratization

- National languages dominate political discourse, regardless of the level of education;
- The Frenchman remains confined to a very marginal role;
- This could indicate local ownership of political debates.

➤ Linguistic pluralism

- Coexistence of Lingala and Swahili as political languages;

- Lack of a clear hierarchy between these two languages;
- Linguistic repertoire adapted to the conversational context.

Thus, we say that Swahili and Lingala dominate political exchanges in educational settings, regardless of level of education. French, although important in academic settings, is not the preferred language for informal political or pedagogical discussions. No significant relationship is detected between level of education and language used, according to the Chi-square test.

GENDER / In terms of language proficiency, which language do you master better compared to others?

	In terms of language proficiency, which language do you master better compared to others?					Total
	Other	English	Kikongo	Lingala	Swahili	
GENDE Female	1	5	0	11	7	24
R Male	3	10	1	26	7	47
Total	4	15	1	37	14	71

➤ Cross-tabulation analysis: Gender and Language Proficiency

• Sample Allocation

- Total: 71 respondents
- Women: 24 (33.8%)
- Male: 47 (66.2%)

➤ Distribution of languages mastered

• All persons combined

- Lingala: 37 people (52.1%) → Majority language
- French: 15 people (21.1%)
- Swahili: 14 people (19.7%)
- Other: 4 people (5.6%)
- Kikongo: 1 person (1.4%)

• WOMEN (n=24)

- Lingala: 11 (45.8%)
- Swahili: 7 (29.2%)
- French: 5 (20.8%)
- Other: 1 (4.2%)
- Kikongo: 0 (0%)

• MEN (n=47)

- Lingala: 26 (55.3%)
- French: 10 (21.3%)
- Swahili: 7 (14.9%)
- Other: 3 (6.4%)
- Kikongo: 1 (2.1%)

Chi-square Tests

	Value	DDL	Asymptotic (bilateral) significance
Pearson's Chi-square	2,566a	4	,633
Plausibility ratio	2,805	4	,591
Number of valid observations	71		

a. 5 cells (50.0%) have a theoretical size of less than 5. The minimum theoretical number is .34.

➤ Test Results

- Pearson's chi-square = 2.566
- Degrees of Freedom = 4
- p-value = 0.633

➤ Statistical interpretation

No significant association between gender and language proficiency:

- The p-value (0.633) is well above 0.05
- We cannot reject the null hypothesis of independence
- The differences observed between men and women are probably due to chance.

➤ Observed trends

• Gender commonalities

- Lingala clearly dominates in both groups
- Same order of preference: Lingala > French > Swahili > Other > Kikongo
- Similar proportion for French (≈21%)

➤ Minor differences

- Women seem to be slightly more oriented towards Swahili (29.2% vs. 14.9%);
- Men have a slight preference for Lingala (55.3% vs. 45.8%).

➤ Key findings

- No significant difference between men and women in language proficiency;

- Lingala is the language best mastered in both groups;
- The Kikongo is marginal in this study population;
- The Frenchman remains important (2nd position among both sexes).

5.0 LEVEL OF EDUCATION COMBINED WITH THE DOMINANT LANGUAGE IN THE FAMILY

Cross-tabulation LEVEL OF EDUCATION and What is the dominant language spoken in the family?						
Workforce						
		What is the dominant language spoken in the family?				Total
		Other	English	Lingala	Swahili	
LEVEL OF STUDY	Graduate	1	3	19	9	32
	Undergraduate	3	7	21	8	39
Total		4	10	40	17	71

➤ Key Observations

- Lingala is the most spoken language in families (56% of respondents), followed by Swahili (24%), then French (14%) and other languages (6%).
- The level of education does not seem to be strongly correlated with the dominant language:
 - The proportions of Lingala and Swahili speakers are relatively similar between the two levels;
 - French is slightly more represented among undergraduate respondents (7 versus 3).

Chi-square Tests			
	Value	DDL	Asymptotic (bilateral) significance
Pearson's Chi-square	2,089a	3	,554
Plausibility ratio	2,160	3	,540
Number of valid observations	71		
a. 3 cells (37.5%) have a theoretical number of less than 5. The minimum theoretical number is 1.80.			

➤ Statistical significance

- $p\text{-value} > 0.05 \rightarrow$ We do not reject the null hypothesis;
- This means that there is no statistically significant link between the level of education and the dominant language spoken in the family in this sample;
- In other words, the choice of family language does not vary significantly by level of education.

➤ Minor (non-significant) differences

- Upper year students use Swahili slightly more in their families;
- Undergraduate students use French a little more;
- The "Other" category is more represented at the undergraduate level.

Thus, the dominant language spoken in the family is mainly Lingala, regardless of the level of education. No significant relationship is detected between these two variables according to the Chi-square test. To refine the analysis, it would be useful to enlarge the sample or to cross-reference it with other variables (geographical area, parents' profession, etc.).

6.0 DISCUSSIONS

The results mentioned in the previous point give rise to reflections, the main ones of which are set out in the following lines:

➤ Competition between national and foreign languages in educational settings

In the university environment, bilingualism is a real fact, because among the subjects surveyed, there are those who speak more than two languages. And competence varies from one language to another between Congolese and foreign national languages with a solid foundation in Congolese languages. These are also the languages commonly used within families.

Across the various domains of academic life, interactions are held in more than one language, marked by the dominance of each of the languages present. In terms of illustration, Lingala is more prominent in political exchanges, while French is gaining ground in academic affairs and love.

➤ Relationship between national and foreign languages in educational settings

In the university context, points of view are shared by the fact that French is still the official language of school and university education as well as of the administration in the DR Congo. The dominant general tendency is to question the said policy, and by extension, in an ameliorative impulse. This also testifies to the various problems raised by the lack of mastery of French by the majority of the population.

All these languages offer various advantages that constitute an added value that situates the individual in several dimensions. At present, the usefulness of each language is determined within a very specific framework that is sometimes nuanced. This attests to the tension that starts from historical heritage to socio-economic aspirations and cultural identities.

In addition, it has been noted that Congolese and foreign national languages are involved in all circumstances of academic activities, both formal and informal. This also implies the conveyance of these languages in presence, which are almost indispensable and perform various functions.

Thus, students' alternate languages in exchanges between friends belonging to the same ethnic group. As elsewhere, the phenomenon of code-switching (mixed speaking) is regularly

observed through the students' speeches. It is an essential aspect presenting enormous challenges and a guarantee of social multilingualism.

➤ Proposing solutions to challenges

The ambition to make the Congolese national languages languages of instruction at the University is felt with great intensity. All this with a view to facilitating the understanding of the subjects taught.

Admittedly, these students have a relative performance in each of the languages, although they are based, in large part, on the Congolese national languages, mainly in Lingala and Swahili. This means that the students do not feel aggrieved in expressing themselves in the Congolese national languages of the environment.

In addition, students have a polarized representation around the languages present; each of them emerges, at the same time, an image that is both positive and negative. Thus, it is clear that these clichés or portraits are influenced by language policy and planning throughout the education system as a whole.

Thus, we have come to the conclusion that the academic sphere is the domain reserved for French while the political and family sphere is the national languages. This leads to the clear compartmentalization of linguistic uses. Although the overwhelming dominance of French in the academic context, Lingala maintains a significant presence, on the other hand, Swahili is excluded from academic affairs.

In addition, French retains its status as a language of education and transmission of knowledge, which leads to its massive use in academic affairs, confirming its institutional role. Thus, there is a persistence of linguistic colonialism in the Congolese education system.

7.0 CONCLUSION

Our analyses follow on from many other reflections on the issue of national (local) languages and educational environments in DR Congo. This article attempts to analyze how Congolese national languages and foreign languages manage to compete for certain functions in teaching-learning and in exchanges or interactions. This testifies to the resilience of national languages, a guarantee of remarkable vitality. Indeed, despite the dominance of French, national languages retain an important place. This testifies to a local appropriation of academic spaces. This is the guarantee of linguistic duality in educational practices. Congolese national languages dominate political discourse, regardless of the level of study. This pushes French to remain confined to a very marginal role. Swahili and Lingala dominate political exchanges in educational settings, regardless of level of study. French, although important in academic circles, is not the preferred language for informal political or pedagogical discussions. There is no clear hierarchy between these two languages. However, the linguistic repertoire is adapted to the conversational context. Kikongo is marginal in this study population.

Consequently, no courageous reform has been undertaken so far to establish quality basic education in national languages. In addition, higher education and university disciplines are struggling to impose competitive knowledge in national languages on the international scene.

The present study is a rallying point for everyone to join hands to respond to the inequalities in the education system that often see students speaking the Congolese national languages at home being left to their own devices. As a result, learners partially benefit from the subjects learned and society benefits in half. Thus, foreign languages are invested with all social functions, including French, but they are not accessible to everyone. Indeed, foreign languages remain the languages of major events. In other words, they are legally dominant languages, but dominated by national languages in social practices.

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