Regimes of Multilingualism and the Language of Literacy in The Gambia

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“Utterance as such is wholly a product of social interaction . . . as determined by the circumstances of the discourse, and . . . as determined by the whole aggregate of conditions under which any given community of speakers operates.” (Vološinov 1986 [1929]: 93)

Overview

1) photo Ba-Abdoulie’s letter [slide 5 - 11]
in Saateeba, rural Gambia
> ethnography of SPEAKING, question: Why are letters written in English?

2) survey of multilingualism [slide 15 - 24]
two communities: Saateeba (village), Bundung Six Junction (urban neighbourhood)
> quantitative analysis, descriptive sociolinguistics (with Ellen Vanantwerpen)
How multilingual is The Gambia and how is The Gambia multilingual?

3) English writing contest [slide 27 - 36]
in Saateending L.B.S., school in the village next to Saateeba (rural Gambia)
> new literacy studies, the language of instruction debate, linguistic imperialism & voice

4) signboard literacies [slide 37 - 40]
in Sayerr Jobe Avenue, Serrekunda (urban Gambia), at walking distance or a D5 taxi ride from Bundung Six Junction.
> new literacy studies: literacy as multimodality (Kress & Van Leeuwen 1996; Kress 2003): the future of literacy?
Regimes of multilingualism

Whenever and wherever multiple languages co-occur, they do so in functionally and socially unequal ways. Regime of multilingualism is a term inspired by (or frankly borrowed from) the work in linguistic anthropology on language ideologies: e.g., Schieffelin et al. (1998) and Kroskity (2000). Especially the title of Kroskity’s book, *Regimes of Language*, and the title of his introductory chapter, *Regimenting languages*, are important.

I use the term in a more practical or descriptive manner, as a framework to describe the visible and audible sociolinguistic landscape of a particular place and to lay bare some of the inequalities and social relations between speakers of different languages. The metaphor of a military regime (exertion of power & control) is interesting in explaining why people do this and not that with language A, and this and not that with language B. Such a regime can be more or less stringent, and regulate almost everything or only minor aspects of one’s linguistic life.

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**Sociolinguistic landscape of The Gambia**

- **English**: official language + tourism
- **Arabic**: religious language (Islam)
- **Mandinka**: 41%+ LF in the provinces
- **Wolof**: 13%+ LF in urban Kombo
- **Fula (Peul)**: 10%
- **Jola (Diola)**: 8%
- **Serahule (Soninke)**: 7%
  - Mandjago
  - Serer
  - Aku
  - Bambara

No 1-to-1 relation language-ethnicity
Social and individual multilingualism rule

(introduced above, introduced above)

(from Juffermans 2006: 34)
Regime of language at Saateending L.B.S.

languages of reward

social upward mobility

languages of punishment

shame, backwardness

languages of purposive teaching

written +

officially supported languages

secondary language of teaching

Mandinga

(extra oral explanation)

spoken only

practically inevitable language

English

official MOI

blackboard, textbooks, exercise books...

Arabic

language of Islamic educ.

Mandinga approx. 35% + lingua franca

Jola (Dolo) approx. 40%

Fula (Peul) approx. 15%

Mandjago approx. 10%

(from Juffermans 2006: 39)

References


