

# Does English Still Have a Future in Mugabe's Zimbabwe?

by

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## Introduction

In the run-up to the June 2000 elections, the attention of the world's news media was focused on Zimbabwe more intensely than at any time in the previous 20 years of the country's independence. Perhaps the principal reason for the keen international interest was the apparent racial dimension to the election campaign, notably the vitriolic attack launched on Zimbabwe's white landowners by the country's incumbent president, Robert Mugabe. As an expression of his animosity towards the white landowners, Mr. Mugabe used a television address on the occasion of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Zimbabwean independence to describe them as "enemies of our people", accusing them of seeking to return the country to colonial rule. Amid such harsh rhetoric, Mr. Mugabe outlined a

plan to reduce significantly the role and importance of Zimbabwe's once powerful (though still relatively prosperous) white minority community. Perhaps the most highly publicized of Mr. Mugabe's many pre-election declarations was his threat to confiscate hundreds of farms from their white owners for redistribution to landless blacks. In this case, the threat was backed up by a certain degree of physical force, as hundreds of white-owned farms were occupied, often violently, by supporters of Mr. Mugabe's ruling ZANU-PF party.

During the election campaign, President Mugabe also accused the government of Britain, the former colonial power, of interference in the internal affairs of Zimbabwe. In this connection, Mr. Mugabe announced the introduction of a regulation removing rights of citizenship from British passport holders in Zimbabwe—a move seen by some as a first step towards the expulsion of the British minority, estimated at around 20,000, out of a total white minority of 60,000–70,000 (Daily Telegraph 2000). While some of Mugabe's threats were dismissed at the time as pure election rhetoric, it appears clear, following the narrow victory of his ZANU-PF party over the then newly-formed Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), that the Zimbabwean government remains set on a collision course with Zimbabwe's white economic elite, earmarking more than 2000 white-owned farms for confiscation. Mr Mugabe has been particularly angered by the strong support among white Zimbabweans for the opposition MDC. In October 2000, Mr. Mugabe threatened to prosecute white Zimbabweans for "war crimes" committed during the independence struggle of the 1960s and 1970s, a measure which, if pursued, would amount to a revocation of the policy of reconciliation extended to whites when Zimbabwe became independent (Financial Gazette 2000). The government has also brought severe pressure to bear on senior white members of Zimbabwe's judiciary.

In official pronouncements and interviews with the press, President Mugabe has expressed his desire to "Africanize" Zimbabwe's economy. But might he seek also to extend the principle of Africanization to other areas, such as the use of language in the education system and other public domains? With this question in mind, I shall attempt to determine whether, in the process of reducing the status of the country's white community (the vast majority of whom have English as their L1), the government might also seek to effect a downgrading of the role of the English language in Zimbabwean society.

However, before discussing the current and likely future status of English in Zimbabwe, I shall explain how discriminatory policies, particularly in the area of education, have led to the entrenchment of English in a country whose population is largely made up of L1-speakers of indigenous African languages. There is little doubt (as I shall explain in more detail later) that the language does play a very prominent role in Zimbabwe today, despite the fact that most Zimbabweans do not use English as a medium of communication in their daily lives. Indeed, English is the language of highest prestige and the dominant medium in much of the public and private sector. Moreover, as the linguist, Kumbirai Mkanganwi points out, few Zimbabwean whites speak any language other than English, yet they encounter no communication problems in their daily lives—meanwhile, those Zimbabweans who do not speak English do occasionally experience difficulties (Mkanganwi 1989).

## **White Minority Rule in Rhodesia**

### *Rhodes and the Origins of White Domination*

As in other parts of the African continent, British colonial rule was the vehicle for the spread of the English language in what is now known as Zimbabwe. In 1889, a wealthy English trader by the name of Cecil John Rhodes invaded the area from South Africa, accompanied by a band of would-be white settlers. Although Rhodes had come in pursuit of commercial interests, his company, the British South Africa (B.S.A.) Company, quickly became the *de facto* agent for British colonization in the area. The settlers, who were well-armed, overcame resistance from local African fighters and soon began taking over tribal lands.<sup>1</sup> These lands were to form the new colony of Rhodesia.

The chief colonizer, Cecil Rhodes, was renowned for his strong imperialist visions. He believed that the British had an inherent right to rule over others, and is known to have harboured a dream of extending British rule throughout the whole of the African continent “from the Cape to Cairo”. While Rhodes is said to have taken a strong personal interest in indigenous African culture, the regime that he helped establish was one that largely ignored the needs of the local African people and violated their human rights (Thomas 1997). Rhodes

personally had a hand in shaping Rhodesia's discriminatory education policy, acting as an advisor to the committee established to determine the structure of its 'whites-only' education system.

### *The Rhodes Legacy: Educational & Linguistic Discrimination*

Since Rhodes and the settlers were concerned solely with addressing the needs of the white community, the only language that mattered in the Rhodesian education system was English. Responsibility for educating local Africans was left to missionary schools, though, even then, such education had to be conducted on terms acceptable to the B.S.A. Company. Indeed, the only mission schools that were granted any financial assistance by the colonial authorities were those that agreed to dedicate half of their school day to non-academic (i.e. manual) work, as stipulated in policy guidelines laid out by the B.S.A. Company. Moreover, any missions considered 'anti-establishment' risked having their leases withdrawn (Zvobgo 1998: 16). Of course, even in the missionary schools, a heavy emphasis was placed upon English, since many of the educators were white, English-speaking Christians. Nevertheless, some teaching of indigenous African languages did take place—because, as Mkanganwi (1992) points out, missionaries also had “a vested evangelical interest in ensuring that as many children as possible learned to read and write their own mother tongue”.

In 1922, as the B.S.A Company's charter was due to expire, a 'whites only' referendum was held to decide whether the colony should be incorporated into the neighbouring Union of South Africa or become a separate entity within the British empire. In 1923, Southern Rhodesia (the area now known as Zimbabwe) was formally annexed to Britain as a self-governing colony,<sup>2</sup> with its own legislature, civil service, armed forces and police.

Over the next several decades, Africans were denied access to a decent education, as the colonial authorities sought to ensure that they would not be able to compete with whites in the labour market (although the authorities were keen to secure a pool of manual labourers with the requisite skills to serve the white community). Strong parallels can be drawn between this policy and the so-called system of Bantu Education, as practiced in apartheid-era South Africa (Borg 2000: 253). In 1941, the government agreed to establish the first state-run

secondary school for blacks, though even this move may not have been entirely motivated by benevolence.<sup>3</sup> A decade or so later, the governments led by Garfield Todd (1954–58) and Edgar Whitehead (1958–62) did introduce some improvements in conditions for Africans,<sup>4</sup> though ultimately they did little to rectify the fundamental evil of a society organized along racial lines.

The victory of the right-wing Rhodesia Front (RF) party in the 1962 General Election represented a retrograde step as regards conditions for blacks. On coming to power, the RF government began implementing segregationist measures akin to those that had been introduced by the architects of apartheid in neighbouring South Africa. One such measure was the introduction of a racially-based system of “Community Development”, which sought to transfer responsibility for African education from Christian missionary organizations (which, as mentioned above, had taken on the task largely neglected by successive white governments) to poorly-funded African local councils. This represented another blow for mother-tongue education, since throughout the entire period of white rule, the only bodies to have shown any interest whatever in developing the local African vernacular languages were the Christian missionary schools. Conditions for blacks worsened still further in 1965, when the hard-line prime minister, Ian Smith, announced the colony’s Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) from Britain.<sup>5</sup> In the pre-UDI educational system, some of the African languages had been taught in schools up to Standard 6, while others had been taught up to Standard 1 (i.e. the equivalent of the current Grade 3 in Zimbabwean schools). After UDI, the educational needs of the non-white community were placed at the very bottom of the list of priorities. As an illustration of the illiberal and unashamedly racist approach of the Rhodesian Front government, the Minister of Education, A.P. Smith announced to the senate in 1970 that the government’s first priority was to provide a system of education “for Europeans, Asians and Coloureds”. This approach was clearly reflected in the way government allocated financial resources: in 1970, \$234–238 was spent on the education of each European, Asian or Coloured child, compared with a mere \$24–28 per African pupil (Godwin & Hancock 1993: 34). Moreover, while Whites, Asians and Coloureds had almost 100% access to secondary education, only 12.5% of black pupils in their final year at primary school were able to enter secondary education. Given the lack of spending on the development of African education, it is hardly surprising that English remained the medium of

instruction for all subjects (except Shona and Ndebele), at all levels of school education and university.

The UDI years were turbulent ones for both whites and blacks, though ultimately they represented the final, desperate chapter in the history of white-minority rule. On March 1, 1970, the Smith government formally declared Rhodesia a republic, though it proved to be incapable of withstanding the pressure of an armed guerilla struggle and international isolation. The armed conflict was finally resolved, by diplomatic means, at the Lancaster House Conference in England in 1979, where it was also agreed that free elections would be held on the basis of universal suffrage. The country became independent in April 1980 under the name of Zimbabwe. Robert Mugabe became prime minister following a multi-party election, contested by seven parties, and he remains in power to this day.

### **Language Issues in Independent Zimbabwe**

Given the blatant injustices of white-minority rule and the acrimony of the long independence struggle, one might have expected the new black-led government to begin immediately redressing the linguistic imbalances in their country. Certainly, amid the euphoria of the immediate post-independence period in Zimbabwe, there were certain individuals, like the prominent linguist Kumbirai Mkanganwi (1983), who did argue for a promotion of African languages and a downgrading of English. However, in general, there appears to have been little interest, especially among those in power, in implementing any meaningful language policy reform. This may be taken as an indication both of the extent to which English has become entrenched in Zimbabwean society and a general acceptance of the linguistic *status quo*.

#### *The Unassailable Position of English in Zimbabwe*

According to the national constitution, Zimbabwe is a tri-lingual country: English is the designated "official language", while Shona and Ndebele (the languages spoken by the two largest ethnic groups) are classified as "national languages". It is estimated that approximately 75% of Zimbabwe's 11 million

people speak Shona as a first language and about 16% speak Ndebele (United States Central Intelligence Agency 2000). However, it is generally acknowledged—including by the government-commissioned National Language Policy Advisory Panel (1998)—that the status of Shona and Ndebele is largely theoretical. Meanwhile, despite the relatively small number of native-speakers in the country, the status of English is most certainly real. Indeed, the role of English is dominant in just about all of the key domains of public life—the law, public administration, education, the mass media, and the commercial sector. To illustrate the extent of this dominance: English is the principal medium of official communication in the Zimbabwean parliament—it is used for debates and for the drafting of legislation. English dominates both the electronic media and the press—there are daily newspapers in English, such as *The Zimbabwe Independent*, *The Zimbabwe Standard*, *The Herald*, and *The Financial Gazette*, but no daily (only weekly) newspapers in languages other than English. There are even English-language magazines (such as *Moto*, *Parade* and *Horizon*) which target a 'black', mainly middle-class readership. In terms of the broadcast media: while Shona and Ndebele radio stations are popular, there is still very little television in any language other than English. Indeed, non-English television broadcasts amount to just a couple of news bulletins a day, some light entertainment shows, and a few commercials. In 1996, television broadcasts in vernacular languages amounted to a mere 5 hours 45 minutes out of a total of 136 hours per week (National Language Policy Advisory Panel 1998: 30).

English functions as the *lingua franca* of the Zimbabwean public sector; as such, most information about public services and activities is published in English only, thereby disadvantaging non-English speakers. In the private sector, too (especially at the executive/management level), English is the principal language of day-to-day communication. Companies also routinely use English to issue directives and to disseminate information to employees.

The dominance of English is no less evident in the key area of education. Although since coming to power in 1980, the new Zimbabwean government has helped bring about a dramatic increase in access to formal education, especially at the primary school level (the 1992 Census indicated that about 96% of the population aged 18 years and below were attending school), its policies have served to entrench still further the position of English in the national education

system. And while the government can take credit for having attained a very high literacy rate among Zimbabwe's youth (96% for boys aged 15–19 years; 95% for girls, according to the 1992 Census), its record is much less praiseworthy when it comes to the promotion of indigenous languages within the education system. According to the National Language Advisory Panel (1998: 26), a government decision, taken soon after independence, to drop Shona and Ndebele from the list of examinable subjects at Grade 7 effected a downgrading of African vernacular languages within the entire education system. Even though the government has since reinstated Shona and Ndebele as required subjects, they are compulsory only for the first three school years (Government of Zimbabwe 1987). Meanwhile, English has continued to be a requirement for all forms of education and training, as well as for university entrance. And although, officially, education is English-medium only from the fourth grade, any status-conscious parent wants his or her offspring to go to a school that provides English-medium instruction from the outset. The appeal of English is bolstered further by the fact that the government has not defined an official language-in-education policy that acknowledges the value of mother tongues as media of instruction.

### *Language Attitudes in Zimbabwe*

The extremely high status accorded English during the years of white-minority rule led, as Mkanganwi (1991) points out, to a diglossic<sup>6</sup> relationship in Zimbabwe between English and the vernacular languages. And, as I explained in the previous section, two decades of black-majority rule has not changed this situation at all: the inability, or perhaps reluctance, of the government of Zimbabwe to promote African languages—whether through the education system or in other domains—has meant that English continues to enjoy unparalleled status among citizens of all ethnic backgrounds.

According to Mkanganwi (1989), this perception of English as a *sine qua non* for upward social mobility has caused many Zimbabweans to hold the language in excessively high regard. This, in turn, has led a growing section of the Zimbabwean population (most notably the elite and urban middle-class) to begin using English in domains where they formally spoke their vernacular languages. Mkanganwi even suggests that some Zimbabweans use English, because of its



status, for effect rather than for communication. As he explains, "speaking English in Zimbabwe often has little to do with the propositional content of words, phrases or sentences, or their denotative meaning, or with the referring property of utterances, but more to do with the mere fact that it is English being spoken by the individual" (Mkanganwi 1991).

Given the high status of English, it is perhaps no surprise that Zimbabwean parents of all social classes are determined to ensure that their children are exposed to the language as early as possible. While there is relatively little data available on attitudes to English among younger Zimbabweans, a survey conducted by Mparutsa, Thondhlana and Crawhall (1990) suggests that children of secondary school age share their parents regard for English (although many also appear to favour a stronger role for their mother-tongues in school education). The survey revealed that while L1-Shona-speaking students often claimed to be able to express themselves better in their mother tongue, they tended to opt to study for academic qualifications in English in preference to Shona, reflecting the widely-held belief that a certificate in an indigenous language yields limited value in the Zimbabwean labour market. Another interesting finding of the survey—and one which may help explain the lack of governmental action to alter the linguistic status quo—is that many students justified the position of English in Zimbabwean society on the basis of its international significance. As the authors of the survey explain, few respondents appeared to regard English merely as the first-language of a small percentage of (principally white) Zimbabweans (Mparutsa, Thondhlana and Crawhall 1990: 89).

### *Zimbabwean Language Policy: Maintaining the Status Quo*

In March 1997, Zimbabwe played host to a high-profile international language policy conference, the *Intergovernmental Conference on Language Policies in Africa*, organized by UNESCO and the Organization of African Unity. At this conference, whose aim was to strengthen the relationship between indigenous languages and economic development, each participating country was given the challenge of formulating a clear language policy, within which all indigenous languages could play a role before the year 2000. Speaking at the time, Dr. Herbert Chimhundu, a member of the Zimbabwean delegation (and later Chairman of the National Language Policy Advisory Panel) explained precisely why

language policy reform was so important for the development of his country:

“We are no longer merely talking about decolonization of the mind, national pride and identity. These are givens. We are now emphasizing development, empowerment and democracy. How can a country develop its human resource base to its fullest potential without the languages of its people? Can democracy be guaranteed when, for example, the law of the land is not understood in the language of the people? Can freedom and democracy be enjoyed in a foreign language?”

(Cited in Mail & Guardian 1997)

Clearly, Zimbabwe has failed to meet the challenge laid down at the Intergovernmental Conference. Mr. Chimhundu’s pleas for strong governmental backing for language policy reform appear to have fallen on deaf ears. More than 20 years after independence was declared, Zimbabwe has barely even tinkered with the language policy it inherited from the white-led government. And even though the changes in political leadership since independence have bestowed upon Shona and Ndebele some of the status that was consistently denied them under white rule, these languages still lag far behind English. Another important reason why African vernacular languages lack status in the eyes of the black population is that they have not been sufficiently developed as resources for national development, e.g. as languages of business, science and technology, literature or education. There is still a paucity of specialized printed material in indigenous languages, so Zimbabweans will almost invariably seek out an English-language alternative. The situation is even more serious for Zimbabwe’s so-called ‘minority languages’.<sup>7</sup> These languages have been almost completely neglected by the government; as a result, their use in schools has gradually declined (Hachipola 1998).

For all the government rhetoric about “Africanization” and “indigenization”, there has been no real attempt to raise the status of indigenous languages to the level enjoyed by English, whether within the education system or in society at large. Indeed, as Mkanganwi (1992) points out, apart from the constitutional language clauses and Section 55 of the 1987 Education Act, there is no evidence to suggest that any significant language policy reforms have been introduced by the government. Despite the best efforts of concerned academics to spur policy-makers into action, there has been surprisingly little debate about language policy matters—a fact acknowledged even by the authors of the only comprehensive language policy report of the post-independence era: the *Report on the*

*Formulation of a National Language Policy.* This report—issued in 1998 by the National Language Policy Advisory Panel, a six-member body made up of university academics and representatives of government ministries with a direct interest in language-related issues—contained a wide array of recommendations pertaining both to the general principles which should underlie language policy and the practicalities of implementation.

In essence, the report's authors sought to provide a blueprint for an equitable national language policy in Zimbabwe. To this end, the report began by illustrating the extent to which the country has become over-reliant on English and neglectful of its many indigenous languages. The report contained a number of concrete recommendations, e.g. it advocated the establishment of a Language Research Centre, as well as a three-tier advisory and decision-making structure (with a National Language Council at the top; National Language Committees and their National Languages Board in the middle; and Local Language Committees at the base). However, much of the report's content appeared to be aimed at establishing the basic principles which should underlie future language policy, and raising a basic awareness of Zimbabwe's language problems among authorities that have consistently failed to consider them. The authors were careful to remind the authorities that any language reform is dependent on political will, specifically the willingness to commit state funds (National Language Advisory Panel 1998).

The apparent lack of government interest in language issues contrasts starkly with the situation which prevails in neighbouring South Africa, where the post-apartheid government (which has only been in power since 1994) has at least formulated and adopted a positive language policy which is designed to redress the linguistic imbalances caused by decades of white-minority rule. The South African language policy debate has been a widely-publicised, vigorous and informed one, although there have been some major problems of implementation. In Zimbabwe, there has certainly been no shortage of debate concerning the inequities of white-minority rule, though this has tended to focus on economic matters, such as redistribution of land, resources and business assets.

It is not entirely clear why the Zimbabwean government has been so reluctant to redress the linguistic imbalances of white-minority rule. From an extreme

perspective, one might come to the conclusion that the current elite maintains the status quo for reasons of self-interest: Zimbabwe's rulers are educated and English-speaking, and the current language policy serves the interests of people like them, in the sense that the best employment and educational opportunities are, in large part, reserved for those with a good command of English. A less cynical explanation may be that policy-makers simply do not fully appreciate, or remain unconvinced of, the importance of mother-tongue education in fostering academic development in children, as many researchers (e.g. Dutcher 1994; Krashen 1996; August & Hakuta 1997) have argued. Alternatively, given the importance of English as a medium of international communication, particularly in southern Africa, Zimbabwe's political leaders may genuinely believe they are acting in the people's best interests by maintaining the status quo.

While it is clear that the Zimbabwean government has displayed a lack of political will when tackling language issues, most Zimbabweans do not appear to be overly concerned that English still plays such a prominent role in their society. Indeed, there has been no grass roots agitation among ordinary black people in support of mother-tongue education; nor has there been any Zimbabwean equivalent of the protests against the compulsory teaching of Afrikaans that occurred in the 1960s and 1970s in the black townships of South Africa. In short, aside from the writings of a few university academics, and the protests of some minority language advocates opposed to the increased marginalization of their mother-tongues in Zimbabwean society (Panafrican News Agency 1998), there has been little pressure on the government to instigate language policy reform.

### **Prospects for Language Policy Reform in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Zimbabwe**

Even if the Zimbabwean government were immediately to begin adopting a more active stance on language-related issues, it would find its efforts hamstrung by some very severe problems, the solutions to which currently lie beyond its capability. Perhaps the greatest impediment to any substantial language policy reform is the lack of financial resources available to the government. Put

simply, there is little money available for promoting languages whose development has been hindered by decades of neglect. In this connection, the authors of the *Report on the Formulation of a National Language Policy* even made a point of lamenting the lack of adequate financial support for their own research project. And since the publication of that report in 1998, the Zimbabwean economy has worsened considerably, and it appears to be deteriorating still further. To illustrate: key indicators, such as unemployment, inflation, and interest rates all remain well over 50%. Zimbabwe's involvement in a war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has drained hundreds of millions of dollars from the economy, and support from the IMF has suffered delays in part because of the country's failure to meet budgetary goals. In short, Zimbabwe is in dire economic straits.

While linguists might argue that language policy reform is an urgent priority, the Zimbabwean government has a range of other, arguably much more pressing matters to contend with, such as the problem of AIDS. Currently, Zimbabwe is estimated to have the highest rate of infection in the world (United States Central Intelligence Agency 2000). Since the acrimonious 2000 elections, Zimbabwe has also been plagued by fuel and electricity shortages, low foreign exchange reserves, and political turmoil.

Aside from the near impossibility of mustering the requisite financial resources, major language policy reform would place an extremely heavy logistical burden on the government. The extent of the upheaval that would ensue, especially within the education system, is difficult to predict. That said, the lack of educational resources in the African languages would undoubtedly represent a major obstacle to the smooth implementation of language-in-education reform. In particular, the over-emphasis on English has led to the inadequate translation of teaching materials into Zimbabwe's indigenous languages. And while the situation is particularly grave with regard to Zimbabwe's so-called 'minority languages' (Hachipola 1998), there is even a shortage of teachers with thorough knowledge and expertise in the written forms of Shona and Ndebele. In recognition of the scale of the task required, the *Report on the Formulation of a National Language Policy* advocates a gradual approach to language policy reform, with specific emphasis on the development of indigenous languages as media of instruction. Indeed, it takes care to warn against too many sudden changes and

simultaneous demands on students, teachers, curriculum developers and publishers (National Language Advisory Panel 1998: 55).

In February 1998, a Commission of Inquiry into Education and Training was established with the aim of overhauling the education and training system. The commission issued its report in August 1999, stipulating that Shona and Ndebele, in addition to English, were to be the media of instruction throughout the education and training system.

In line with the recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry into Education and Training, the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture issued a statement in late 2000 explaining that all primary schools would have to introduce Ndebele, Shona and (more surprisingly) French<sup>8</sup> as compulsory subjects from 2001. According to the same statement, responsibility for employing teachers for these subjects would be left to the School Development Association (Daily News 2000b). No rationale was provided for the introduction of French, nor was it explained how the requisite manpower would be recruited. If implemented with such speed and apparent lack of forethought, the measures would clearly run contrary to the recommendations of the National Language Advisory Panel and, consequently, almost certainly fail to achieve their intended goals. They would also encounter opposition from speakers of Zimbabwe's 'minority languages', who would then be obliged to learn English, Ndebele, Shona and French, in addition to their own mother tongue.

Although inter-ethnic relations in Zimbabwe have generally been very good, it is worth remembering that Zimbabwe's higher political leadership (including President Mugabe himself) is predominantly Shona. It is worth bearing in mind also the extent to which Matabeleland (the ethnic homeland of the Ndebele people) voted for the opposition MDC in the 2000 elections. Irrespective of current political polemics, the language policy issue is one that must always be handled with extreme care, since it touches upon tribal divisions. For instance, according to Hachipola (1998), the disproportionate number of Shona-speaking teachers and headmasters in Matabeleland schools has remained a sensitive issue. Against this background, the continued emphasis on English at a national level might be perceived as an effective way of avoiding the inter-ethnic friction that could occur in Zimbabwe if the government were to give one indigenous

language preference over another. This common (though not uncontroversial) position has long been used a rationale for maintaining the hegemony of English in former British colonies with a heterogeneous population. Indeed, back in 1966, Strevens argued that English was the only feasible language in such countries for internal political unity, inter-country collaboration and a “window on world civilisation” (Strevens 1966: 121).

To judge from the examples of myriad other countries, particularly ex-British colonies, around the world, it is likely to be the global (rather than the local) dimension that guarantees the pre-eminence of English in Zimbabwean society in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Certainly, it is hardly conceivable that future governments would set Zimbabwe's language priorities purely for the benefit of the country's small and dwindling white community (today numbering a mere 60,000–70,000; down from 280,000 in its heyday). Indeed, Zimbabwe's leaders, and a sizeable proportion of its people, have come to regard English as much more than the mother tongue of one of the country's minority ethnic groups. Today, Zimbabweans of all social backgrounds view English as the key to better educational and employment opportunities, and as the essential medium of regional and international communication. On this basis, English is almost certain to continue to play a major role in Zimbabwean society well into the new century.

Despite the anti-white farmer, anti-British, and anti-colonialist rhetoric which has come to characterize much of Zimbabwean political life, especially since the vitriolic 2000 election campaign, it is clear that downgrading the status of the English language is not considered an option. That being the case, it remains to be seen whether the government will emulate neighbouring South Africa and elevate Zimbabwe's indigenous languages (specifically, Shona and Ndebele) to the level of official languages (i.e. on a par with English) in the national constitution. In the short term, however, a far more important question is whether the government will heed the recommendations of the National Language Advisory Panel and implement a positive, properly-financed language policy which actively promotes the development of Zimbabwe's indigenous languages. To judge from the government's previous track record in the language policy area, the prospect of drastic reform seems highly unlikely.

## Notes

1. Unsurprisingly, the wholesale seizure of land by white settlers sowed the seeds of black resentment, which was to characterize the entire period of white minority rule and fuel the guerrilla struggle that ultimately led to the foundation of the Republic of Zimbabwe in 1980. Since independence, the so-called "land issue" has continued to influence Zimbabweans' perceptions of concepts like property, nationhood, community, ethnicity and citizenship (Morrison 1996). Moreover, as the violence and acrimony of the June 2000 election campaign illustrate, the issue is, as yet, far from resolved.
2. While the B.S.A. Company retained its mineral rights in the colonies of Southern Rhodesia (present-day Zimbabwe) and Northern Rhodesia (present-day Zambia), the British Government took over land, public works and buildings, and maintained the right to intervene in the colony's affairs if it deemed it to be necessary.
3. According to Zvogbo (1990), the slight liberalization in government policy was motivated by a need to curry favour with the local black population during the war years. Atkinson (1972) views the policy change merely as a ploy by the government to gain control over missionary policies on secondary education. Such 'liberalization' was opposed by many politicians, and this led to a split in the ruling party.
4. In 1953, Southern Rhodesia was brought into a federation (the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland) with Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland. Although this federation was relatively short-lived, being dissolved by the British government in 1963, it did coincide with a period of relative improvement in conditions for Africans in Southern Rhodesia. In 1964, Britain granted Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland their independence (under the names of Zambia and Malawi respectively), but Southern Rhodesia remained a colony. Britain was reluctant to allow Southern Rhodesia to become independent as long as its government showed no sign of transferring political power to the majority black African community.
5. The Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) was motivated by the refusal of successive British Governments to grant Southern Rhodesia independence on terms acceptable to Smith and his regime. The British government responded by imposing economic sanctions on the Smith regime and leading diplomatic moves to isolate it from the international community, e.g. through the United Nations Security Council. However, while the sanctions did cause considerable inconvenience to Smith's white-minority government, they also served to worsen the living conditions of the black population. This, in turn, exacerbated the decline in black-white relations and led to the start, in 1966, of an armed independence struggle by the African community. Over the next decade or so, the Smith regime continued to uphold the principle of white supremacy in the face of international political pressure, economic sanctions, and guerrilla attacks.
6. Charles Ferguson is credited with first using the term "diglossia" in his 1959 article, *Diglossia*. In simple terms, Ferguson said that diglossic speech communities have a prestigious "High" variety and a "Low" variety with no official status, which are in complementary distribution with each other—for instance, the High variety might be used in literature and the Low variety for ordinary conversation. Although Ferguson's original definition of diglossia presupposed that the High and Low varieties were closely related variants of essentially the same language, Fishman (1967) extended the concept of diglossia to cover situations where forms of two unrelated



languages represent the High and Low varieties. It is this definition of diglossia which is applicable in the Zimbabwean case.

7. In addition to English, Shona, and Ndebele, the following 'minority languages' are spoken within Zimbabwe's borders: Kalanga, Hwesa, Sotho, Shangani (Tsonga), Tonga of Mudzi District, Venda, Tonga, Chikunda, Doma, Chewa/Nyanja, Khoisan (Tshawawo), Barwe, Tswana, Fingo or Xhosa, Sena and Nambya.
8. While French plays an important role in certain parts of Africa, it is not widely spoken in the region where Zimbabwe is located. Indeed, with the exception of Mozambique, all of Zimbabwe's neighbours fall into the so-called Anglophone camp. The lack of human resources (i.e. Zimbabweans with a working knowledge of French) probably constitutes the biggest obstacle to the introduction of French as a compulsory subject at the primary school level.

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