

Language Influence and Culture: Comments on the Impact of English on Shona

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This paper describes some aspects of the mutual impact of languages in a bilingual situation where one language is dominant and the other subordinate. The influence of the two languages on each other is effected through the user, namely, the bilingual. When the bilingual is in the process of learning the second language, his mother tongue influences his mastery of the former, resulting in the process that has been variously referred to as mother tongue interference, approximation, or interlanguage. However, the influence does not take place in one direction only; in other words, it is not only a case of the mother tongue influencing the second language. If the second language is a dominant language its impact on the bilingual's first language can have far reaching implications.

Now what is a dominant language? A dominant language as defined here is a language that is given a commanding position by the state, and a subordinate language is one that is given an inferior status. In colonial situations the language of the conquering race is almost inevitably given a commanding position while that of the subject people is given a subordinate position. The dominant-subordinate relationship has a direct bearing on the way the two languages influence each other. In my study of the mutual impact of English as a dominant language and Shona as a subordinate language I have argued that the influence of the former on the latter is appropriately described in terms of penetration. As used here "penetration" refers to (1) the process by which the bilingual speaker introduces foreign words, meanings, structures, and phonemes into his native tongue, (2) the introduction of foreign words, phonemes, etc., into a local language by speakers of a for-

eign or colonial language such as English, and (3) code-switching in speech, that is, the tendency by the bilingual speaker to switch to the second language while speaking the first. It is the phenomenon of penetration and its impact on Shona culture that I wish to discuss briefly in this paper.

I should state from the outset that the influence of English on Shona is both positive and negative. If you value the authentic structure of a language, its repertoire of words, its idioms, its distinctiveness, you might feel that the influence on it of another language, especially a dominant language, is negative if the effect is to deprive the language of its distinctiveness. The influence is positive if the subordinate language is enriched by the dominant language as, for example, when new concepts are brought into the language which did not exist previously, thus enabling it to express abstract ideas and concepts that go with a modern industrialized society.

Penetration can be said to take two forms, secondary and primary. Secondary penetration refers to the process whereby features of the dominant language are introduced into the receiving language in a very modified form so that they are integrated into the phonological, syntactic, lexical, or semantic system of the latter. Primary penetration takes place when features of the dominant language are introduced into the subordinate language while remaining clearly and indisputably part of the former language.

Aspects of the Influence of English on Shona

The most obvious form of penetration is the introduction of lexical items. In this connection it can be argued that English has had its greatest impact on Shona in areas where Western civilization has brought new ideas, new concepts, and new ways of living. This is evident in such spheres as technology, government, commerce, and medicine. The following are examples of words brought into Shona in this way:

<i>English Words</i>	<i>Shona Adoptives</i>
bilharzia	<i>bharazia/bhirazia</i>
pills	<i>mapiritsi</i>
government	<i>hurumende</i>
school	<i>chikoro</i>
storekeeper	<i>kipastoro</i>

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bank	<i>bhangi</i>
cheque	<i>cheki</i>
dollar	<i>dhora</i>
minutes	<i>maminetsi</i>
hour	<i>awa</i>

The words cited above are examples of what can appropriately be called “borrowing” because the subordinate language is enriched by borrowing from the dominant language words and concepts that did not exist previous to the contact between the two languages. This is different from the process called *replacement*, that is, the displacement of existing lexical items and syntactic structures by foreign ones. Now replacement can be direct or indirect. *Direct replacement* refers to the replacement of a particular word or a group of words by a foreign one on a one-to-one basis. *Indirect replacement*, on the other hand, occurs when words of foreign origin are used where, if language contact had not taken place, a native word would certainly have been employed.

Direct replacement can be demonstrated by citing the words most commonly used to refer to time and counting. For the months of the year, for example, the majority of Shona speakers now use adoptives from English while the original Shona terms shown below are falling into disuse:

<i>Original Shona Terms</i>	<i>English</i>	<i>Adoptives</i>
<i>Ndira</i>	January	<i>Jenyuwari</i>
<i>Kukadzi</i>	February	<i>Februwayi/Febhuruwayo</i>
<i>Kurume</i>	March	<i>Machi</i>
<i>Kubvumbi</i>	April	<i>Eprei/Epurei</i>
<i>Chivabvu</i>	May	<i>Mei</i>
<i>Chikumi</i>	June	<i>Junhi</i>
<i>Chikunguru</i>	July	<i>Jurai/Julai</i>
<i>Nyamavhuvhu</i>	August	<i>Ogasti/Agasti</i>
<i>Gunyana</i>	September	<i>Sekutemba</i>
<i>Gumiguru</i>	October	<i>Okutobha</i>
<i>Mbudzi</i>	November	<i>Novemba</i>
<i>Zvita</i>	December	<i>Dhisemba</i>

The same applies to words referring to counting as indicated in the following table.

<i>Original Shona Term</i>	<i>English</i>	<i>Adoptives</i>
<i>poshi/potsi</i>	one	<i>hwani</i>
<i>piri</i>	two	<i>tuu</i>
<i>tatu</i>	three	<i>trii/tirii</i>
<i>china</i>	four	<i>fo-o</i>
<i>shanu</i>	five	<i>faifi</i>
<i>tanhatu</i>	six	<i>sikisi</i>
<i>chinomwe</i>	seven	<i>sevheni</i>
<i>ruseru</i>	eight	<i>eiti</i>
<i>pfumbamwe</i>	nine	<i>naini</i>
<i>gumi</i>	ten	<i>teni</i>
<i>zana</i>	one hundred	<i>handireti</i>

The following are examples of words belonging to different spheres which are falling into disuse and being replaced by new words derived from English:

<i>Original Shona Term</i>	<i>English</i>	<i>Adoptives</i>
<i>nzombe</i>	bull	<i>bhuru</i>
<i>chirariro</i>	supper	<i>sapa</i>
<i>chisvusvuro</i>	lunch	<i>dhinha / lanji</i>
<i>bota</i>	porridge	<i>poriji/porichi</i>
<i>rugwaro</i>	book	<i>bhuku</i>
<i>muchairi</i>	driver	<i>dhiraivoha</i>
<i>mudzidzisi</i>	teacher	<i>ticha</i>

In a colonial setup, place names are easily affected by direct replacement. In colonial Rhodesia the following indigenous names were replaced by colonial ones.

<i>Original Shona Name</i>	<i>Colonial Name</i>
Chegutu	Hartley
Harare	Salisbury
Chivhu	Enkeldoorn
Banyanyama	Norton

Another way in which penetration works is by changing the sound structure of place names so that the names reflect the phonology of the dominant language. In this way English phonology was responsible for the distortion of many place names in

Mashonaland. Because the corrupt forms were reduced to writing, this form of secondary penetration had the effect of making people forget the authentic names of places. The following are only some of the numerous places that were affected in this way in colonial Rhodesia.

<i>Authentic Name</i>	<i>Corrupt Form</i>
Chinhoyi	Sinoia
Chipuriro	Sipolilo
Shurugwe	Selukwe
Gweru	Gwelo
Kadoma	Gatooma
Marondera	Marandellas
Mberengwa	Belingwe
Uhera	Buhera

The influence of English and Western names on Shona names was very thorough indeed. It mostly took the form of indirect replacement and probably affected names of people more than place names and other names. The Christian Church no doubt played a major role here as Africans had to be given new names at baptism because the names given to people at birth were referred to as "heathen" names. Partly as a result of the Church's attitude and partly because of the prestige of the English language and everything that went with it, Shona people began to despise their names and to go for what were considered to be "beautiful" and "civilized" names from the English language and the Christian Bible. Hence names like Winnie, Michael, Joseph, Josiah, Mary, and many others replaced Shona names. What is more interesting is that Shona parents were so intent on acquiring the beauty of the English language that they could take any English word or combination of words and turn it into a name for a child. Hence you have names like Knowledge, Psychology, Talkmore, Stoodwell, Standwell, Roadwell, Admire, Ability, Doesn't Matter. This inventiveness of the Shona mind was not restricted to names of people, but influenced those of domestic animals as well. In one village there were oxen and cows with such names as Banana, Football, History, Professor, Society, Sweet, Telephone, and Verynice.

I have focused on lexical items in this paper because simple words or phrases are relatively easy to explain in a conference attended by non-Shona-speaking people, who may not be able to make much out of long Shona sentences. Nevertheless, it is impor-

tant to make the point that syntax is probably the most vulnerable feature of a subordinate language in a contact situation such as the one under discussion and is probably the most difficult to account for. As mentioned in my book*, many languages, English included, have been subjected to syntactic violation. A good example of such violation in English is the expression "Father Almighty" or God Almighty where English syntax is inverted because the expression is a direct translation of the Latin expression *Pater Omnipotent*. Shona has suffered a similar fate. Shona-speaking Catholics, for example, were extremely impolite to God, Jesus, and Mary for decades because they used to address them in the singular form as in English, instead of using the plural of respect. In the prayer "Hail Mary," for example, Catholics used to say *Kaziwa Maria uzere grasia, Mambo anewe*, "Hello Mary, you are full of grace, the lord is with you," when they should have been saying

Kaziwai VaMaria, imi muzere grasia. Mambo anemi
 "Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee."

In authentic Shona, adjectives follow nouns. A very noticeable example of the violation of this word order and one which is similar to "Father Almighty" is the formula which serves as the salutation in letter writing. This is directly translated from English as the following examples show.

<i>English</i>	<i>Shona Translation</i>	<i>Authentic Shona Equivalent</i>
Dear Uncle	<i>Wadiwa Sekuru</i>	<i>Sekuru vangu</i> or <i>Sekuru vandinoda</i>
Dear Sister	<i>Wadiwa Hanzvadzi</i>	<i>Hanzvadzi yangu</i> or <i>Hanzvadzi yandinoda</i>

A very important aspect of penetration in its primary form is interlarding or code-switching. With educated people such utterances occur very frequently and often involve the expression of concepts which, though capable of being expressed in Shona, are more easily said in English. An advance form of interlarding, called alternation, occurs where the speaker introduces so much English that it may be difficult to tell whether he is speaking English or Shona. For example, I was told of a Zimbabwean stu-

*See E.A. Ngara, *Bilingualism, Language Contact and Language Planning: Proposals for Language Use and Language Teaching in Zimbabwe* (Gweru: Mambo Press) 1982. This book includes a series of recommendations concerning the preservation of Shona.

dent mistaken for (i.e., the author of this article). The Zimbabwean student, in his native Shona, discussed the political situation in Zimbabwe with a person who spoke Zulu. The student used so much English in his Shona speech that the Zulu listener was able to follow much of the argument. This is an example of how many educated Shona-speakers are genuinely unable to sustain a conversation in Shona without switching to English every now and then. Many politicians find it difficult to give a speech in good Shona. This situation is quite different from Sotho-speaking people in Lesotho. By and large, I find Shona speakers to have a greater problem than Sotho speakers, who frequently speak their language to one another even when conducting official business, but I have noticed that even they tend to experience difficulty in sustaining a conversation in Sotho without switching to English.

Some Conclusions

Penetration does not just affect the language in question; it also has some far-reaching cultural implications in that elements which reflect the authentic culture of the speakers of the subordinate language are replaced by foreign ones from the dominant language. A society which experiences such a drastic transformation in names as Zimbabwe did during the colonial era has undergone a serious cultural change. Indigenous names may have a certain significance; a particular name may have a historical or social significance that is lost when a foreign name is imposed. Certain forms of penetration are indicative of the attitudes of the indigenous people to their own culture and language. There comes a point when a colonized people despise their own culture and language while the culture and language of the colonizers are thought to be more beautiful and civilized. Hence you have the phenomenon where African names are looked down upon and rejected in favor of names that reflect the structure and values of the colonial language. When I was growing up I noticed that some people who had been given African names by their parents at birth "baptized" themselves, as it were, by giving themselves European names. Zimbabweans had to go through the experience of a war of national liberation to realize the beauty of African names. Most educated people now give their children African names.

The problem of interlarding leads one to the conclusion that there comes a time when bilingual speakers think predominantly in the dominant language, when they tend to organize their thoughts in

terms of the structure and concepts of that language; hence they find it difficult to sustain a conversation in their own mother tongue.

These findings have implications for language planning. There is no doubt in my own mind that the development of a language which has been under the influence of a dominant language in the manner in which Shona was influenced by English should be directed. This is necessary if the subordinate language is to become an effective means of communication in a modern state and if the speakers of that language are not to lose some valuable aspects of their cultural heritage. In the case of Shona I presented a comprehensive set of recommendations in my book, and I am glad that, although no acknowledgment has been made to me, some of my proposals have been implemented. For example, Shona is now a compulsory subject for all primary and junior-high pupils in all the Shona-speaking provinces of the country, and many places have been given back their original names. However, I do not believe that we have gone far enough in raising the status of Shona and Ndebele as national languages in Zimbabwe. I notice, for instance, that at the university Shona is still taught in English and that little has been done to develop Shona and Ndebele as languages of commerce. It seems to me also that more research and thinking needs to be done about what aspects of Shona to teach, as it appears that there is too much emphasis on teaching about traditions which mean very little to most urban children. In my view, the emphasis should be on teaching children how to communicate effectively in a modern developing country. Having said that, I wish to point out that in an independent state such as Zimbabwe, the respective international language (English in this case) and the national language (Shona) should be seen as fulfilling two complementary and equally important functions in society, which means that the aim should not be to do away with the international language but to develop a balanced form of bilingualism which enables the users of the two languages to appreciate the role of each language and to adopt a positive attitude towards both languages. I have said about Shona and English that "we must establish an equilibrium in the status and mode of operation of the two languages. If that equilibrium is to be established each of the two languages involved should be given a meaningful place in the relevant spheres of the community's life." I believe this comment applies equally to any context where two languages influence each other as English and Shona have done.