No to everything British but their language: Re-thinking English language and politics in Zimbabwe (2000 – 2008)

Finex Ndhlovu

University of Fort Hare, East London Campus

Abstract

Drawing on postcolonial theories and discourses, this paper provides another look at where the English language meets with politics, political propaganda and ZANU PF struggles for legitimacy in 21st century Zimbabwe. The paper is conceived against the well known anti-British and anti-west stance of the ZANU PF political elite, which reached its crescendo from 2000 onwards. While denouncing everything else British, President Robert Mugabe and those around him have continued to hold onto the English language (a legacy of British colonial rule in Zimbabwe) to the extent of retaining it as the country's sole official language, perfecting it and probably being more fluent in it than the native speakers. Whereas the hypocrisy of the ZANU PF anti-British and anti-west rhetoric has been analysed in the context of their appetite for western style dress codes and shopping sprees in western fashion capitals, their love for the British language has so far not been subjected to any systematic academic scrutiny. The following questions have not been addressed: Why has the English language remained insulated from the anti-British political discourse in Zimbabwe? Does this mean English has been appropriated, nativised/indigenized and therefore, no longer seen as part of the colonial legacy? What purpose does the English language serve in the anti-British and anti-west propaganda in Zimbabwe? What does the Zimbabwe case study tell us about the pragmatic and symbolic functions of English in postcolonial Africa?

Key words: *language and politics, language and propaganda, postcolonial discourses, World Englishes, English in postcolonial Africa, language and symbolic power*

Introduction

> Anti-European diatribes, conducted in European languages, are in danger of merely reinscribing the Euroamerican cultural dominance (Huggan, 1996, p.20).

This article considers the intersection of English language and Zimbabwean politics from 2000 to 2008. During this period, the Zimbabwe government of Robert Mugabe repeatedly proclaimed its rejection of everything western following strained political relations with the western world, particularly Britain, the entire European Union and the United States of America. Consequently, the Look East policy was embraced, resulting in a significant increase in Zimbabwe's trade relations with Asian countries mainly China, Malaysia and India. The one element of the British colonial legacy that has been spared the populist political posturing about denunciation of all things western is the English language. Although Zimbabwe has close to twenty local indigenous languages, English remains the country's sole official language, albeit in a context where the ruling political elite proclaim outright rejection of all vestiges of British colonialism. The question is, how then do we explain what appears to be a glaring contradiction of some sort?

This article, therefore, aims to provide a detailed analysis of the issues surrounding the clearly indispensable nature of English in Zimbabwe. It argues that the desire to effectively communicate ZANU PF political propaganda has meant that although it is a British colonial legacy, the English language remains an asset rather than a liability. The article seeks to extend into new directions the debate on the social capital of the English language by focusing on the unique political economy of Zimbabwe and how it has given rise to context-specific factors that account for the preference for English in the midst of unprecedented ZANU PF political vitriol against the English-speaking western world.

The article is divided into five sections as follows. In the next section a critique of the tensions, contradictions and ambiguities of postcoloniality and postcolonial discourses is undertaken. This is followed by a brief overview of the commonly cited reasons for the entrenched position of English in postcolonial Africa and globally. In the fourth section the article turns to the Zimbabwe case study, with a focus on the more specific socio-economic and political conditions that sustain the unchallenged position of English in a country where the governing authorities have unequivocally pronounced their rejection of all things British or western. The fifth section engages issues to do with the symbolic meanings of English in postcolonial Africa, addressing the question on whether English is still considered a vestige of British colonial legacy or it has been transmogrified and is now part of the African language ecology. The article concludes with a section that distils ideas discussed in all sections connecting them to the politics of English in Zimbabwe and comparable multilingual African countries.

Ambiguities and Contradictions of Postcoloniality and Postcolonial Discourses

Postcoloniality and postcolonial discourses have developed into a robust social-theoretical framework following the pioneering work of Gayatri Spivak (1988), Homi K. Bhabha (1985 & 1994), Achille Mbembe (2001), Edward Said (1994), Michel Foucault (1972) and Akhil Gupta (1998), among others. More recently, postcoloniality has come to be associated with the ideas of Frantz Fanon distilled in his two books *The Wretched of the Earth* and *Black Skin White Masks*. The field of postcolonial studies is conceived as having a focus on forms of resistance, an assertion that seeks to confront the legacy of European, and sometimes American direct global domination and the residual political, socio-economic and psychological effects of colonial history. The intention of postcolonial discourses is to examine and problematize the manner in which ex-colonial societies grapple with the challenges of self-determination and how they incorporate or reject remnants of western political-cum-cultural norms and conventions that are still ensconced in ex-colonial societies long after the cessation of direct colonial administration. Postcolonial discourses have also extended their focus to include critique of the effects of contemporary phenomena such as globalisation and quests for the valuing and development of indigenous solutions to local needs. Therefore, at the heart of postcoloniality and postcolonial discourses are issues to do with resistance and affirmation that operate "on many levels and in many different sites [such as] the battlefield, the law court, the government office, the university classroom" (Huggan, 1996, p.22).

A significant aspect of postcoloniality is one given by Akhil Gupta in his critique of the notions of development and underdevelopment. According to Gupta, who people think they are, how they got that way, and what they can do to change their lives have been profoundly shaped by the institutions, ideologies and practices of development. Underdevelopment or backwardness then is not merely a structural location in the global economy but is also an identity; something that informs a people's sense of self. Gupta's proposition resonates with Michel Foucault's (1972) ideas on issues of domination, power relations, the exercise of power and identity formation processes. For Michel Foucault power is at a level that is beyond repressive, materialist and institutional terms. He says power is (i) productive of identities and subjectivities; (ii) intimately linked to knowledge in terms of the production of truth and rationality; and (iii) power is always in the service of the powerful. For Foucault then, the problematization of any particular aspect of human life is historically contingent and dependent upon power relations. The powerful will always seek to construct power discourses that entrench their positions and/or sources of power. In this context, postcoloniality and postcolonial discourses can be seen as constituting critique of power and power relations.

Postcoloniality and postcolonial discourses have, however, been heavily criticized from a number of angles for being too romantic about breaking with the colonial legacy and about their critique of the same. For instance, Sara Mills (1995) has pointed out that "rather than the postcolonial being considered a period or condition which is marked off from the colonial, certain discursive structures begin to decline or disappear only when they are challenged sufficiently by other discourses" (p. 76). In other words, while the 'post' in postcolonialism is generally understood to signify the end of colonialism and imperialism as direct domination, there seems to be a "premature celebration of the pastness of colonialism [which] runs the risk of obscuring the continuities and discontinuities of colonial and imperial power" (McClintock, cited in Mills, 1995, p.77). Therefore, the usage of the 'post' in postcolonial scholarship should sidestep the language of beginnings and ends in order to capture the continuities and

complexities of any historical period, and in order to attempt to transcend strict chronological and di-chotomous thinking where history is clearly delineated and the social world neatly categorized into boxes (Abrahamsen, 2003). To this effect, Graham Huggan (1996) argues that the totalizing approaches of postcolonial discourses suffer from both temporal and spatial indeterminacy insofar as they fail to adequately respond to the following questions: When does the postcolonial period begin and when, if ever, will it end? Which parts of the world are affected, or not, by enduring colonial legacies? Where are the latest colonial Empires, the latest centers, and their latest peripheries? What is suggested here is that the oppositional force of postcolonial discourses, mediated in former colonial languages has, in fact, to be seen as an indication of continuity.

The love of and preference for the English language (a colonial legacy) in postcolonial countries such as Zimbabwe betrays some of these potential continuities and contradictions in postcolonial discourses, reflecting elements of Mikhail Bakhtin's (1981) notion of double-voiced discourse, which is a discourse that contains or inserts "a new semantic intention into a discourse which already has, and which retains, an intention of its own". Such insertion of new discursive meanings could either be a deliberate or an unintentional slippage. This is evident in the case of Zimbabwe's political elite whose anti-west and anti-colonial diatribe is delivered in the medium of the English language, a vestige of the same colonial past being attacked. As Huggan (1996) has cautioned, "anti-European diatribes, conducted in European languages, are in danger of merely reinscribing the Euroamerican cultural dominance" (p. 20), reflecting apparent discrepancy between oppositional discourse and emancipator politics. In that context, accepting English as the medium of asserting sovereignty and freedom from the shackles of colonialism "means simultaneously…accepting a particular interpretation of the world, and at that one which is located in the context of colonialism and apartheid" (de Kadt, 1991, p.8). This observation on the seemingly contradictory approach to the use of English in postcolonial discourses was elaborated on by Ndebele (1987) in the South African context:

> The problems of society will also be the problems of the predominant language of that society, since it is carrier of a range of social perceptions, attitudes and goals. Through it, the speakers absorb entrenched attitudes. In this regard, the guilt of English must be recognized and appreciated before its continued use can be advocated. (p. 11)

The argument that typifies English as a 'killer language' is true only to a certain degree. Ex-colonial languages, among them English, French and Portuguese, have proved to be useful languages of self-affirmation and quests for freedom in Africa. The history of African national liberation struggles against colonial rule vindicates the usefulness of these languages. In apartheid South Africa and colonial Southern Rhodesia (present day Zimbabwe) for instance, English played a highly effective symbolic function as the vehicular language for ideologies of freedom and independence (Heugh, 1987, p.206). In that context, labelling English as a language stained with guilt misses the crucial point about language ideologies. As Tove Skutnabb-Kangas strongly argues in one of her seminal lectures on linguistic imperialism and linguistic rights in education (2008 audio lecture, www.linguistic-rights.org) the concern should not so much be about whether the language in question is indigenous or foreign. "Being a killer language is not a characteristic of any language; it is a question of how a language functions in relation to other languages. Any language can become a killer language in relation to some other language. And besides, languages do not kill each other; it is the power relations between the speakers of the languages that are the decisive factors..." (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2008). We return to the debate on language ideologies in the final section of this article.
In the next section the discussion focuses on common reasons for the widespread use of English and how they reflect tendencies of postcoloniality and postcolonial discourses discussed above.

Popular Reasons for the Widespread Use of English

In order to fully explain the position of English in the Zimbabwe language economy, we need to put the debate in the broader African and international contexts. Although Africa is among the most linguistically diverse regions of the world with multiple local/indigenous languages accounting for almost one third of the world's living languages (Batibo, 2005), it remains the continent in which ex-colonial languages are the declared official languages. English, French and Portuguese are the most widely used languages at national, regional and continental levels of administration. There are many factors that sustain the popularity of these languages, even in countries that have declared their unwillingness to continue embracing anything to do with their former colonial masters. As the focus of this article is on

English language and politics in Zimbabwe, the ensuing discussion will dwell on factors pertaining to the enduring legacy of this particular language. Some of the commonly cited reasons for the dominance of English include the legacy of British imperial expansionist policies of the eighteenth century to the early twentieth century, the communicative currency of English, the media and advertising industry, the technology of the cinema industry and popular culture, international travel, safety and accommodation, the utility of English in the creation and dissemination of knowledge through research and education systems, economic forces of international trade, forces of globalization, as well as the advent of computer-mediated communication systems. Please refer to Davies (1991), Graddol (2006) and Crystal (2006) for detailed discussions on factors promoting the global spread of English. Following from the above, four popular schools of thought on the global spread of English have emerged:

Those depicting English as an 'imperialist', 'predatory' or 'killer' language that threatens linguistic diversity.
1. Those that see the spread of English as a great benefit and gift to the world enabling citizens to communicate freely with one another.
2. Those that believe English holds out the potential of true cosmopolitanism eradicating the 'linguistic barriers' and the curse of Babel.
3. Those that consider the spread of English as a sign of the coming of monocultural domination. (Ives, 2006, p.121-122)

Two explanatory paradigms emerge from these perspectives about the spread of English. First, English is considered to be a language that belongs somewhere and is spreading (as a uniform language) to other parts of the world. Second, the global spread of English is seen as both good news (2 and 3) and bad news (1 and 4) for the world. The usefulness of English in cross-cultural international communication has undoubtedly contributed to these generic conclusions and it is in the context of them that English has become indispensible in most postcolonial African countries that are indisputably trapped in the web of globalisation. However, it is important to point out that for a country such as Zimbabwe whose relations with the Western world has been at low ebb over the last ten years; the continued preference for English cannot be sufficiently explained by the above factors alone. It is argued here that the desire to effectively communicate ZANU PF political propaganda has meant that although it is a British colonial legacy, the English language remains an asset rather than a liability.

Why English Remains Untouched in ZANU PF Anti-west Tirade[1]

Among several reasons for the continued foothold of English in postcolonial Zimbabwe is its usefulness in the effective communication of propaganda about the resilience and strength of ZANU PF in the face of perceived adversaries from within and from outside the country's borders. One of the basic principles of effective communication entails using a medium that is easily accessible to and understood by the target audience. As the ZANU PF propaganda vitriol has always been aimed at the British, the Americans and their allies in other parts of the English-speaking world, English naturally becomes the preferred and ideal medium of communication. It is arguably for these pragmatic political and diplomatic considerations that English continues to receive active promotion and propagation by the Zimbabwe government. From 2000 onwards, the English language became a potent tool used by ZANU PF politicians in discrediting, vilifying and outmaneuvering their perceived political opponents. This was very much evident during and after the launch of the Fast Track Land Reform Programme (*Third Chimurenga*) in 2000 and the urban slums clearance exercise (*Operation Murambatsvina*) in 2005. Applied propaganda techniques in the form of discourse control, semantic twists, popular appeal, word approval, semantic forgery and semantic shifts were all deployed in the medium of English in a bid to justify the nobility of unpopular government programmes that continue to be condemned both locally and internationally. Litanies of new socio-economic and political challenges that coincided with the dawn of the new millennium forced the ZANU PF government of Zimbabwe to embrace unorthodox means of political survival. The strategy of applied propaganda in which traditional meanings and values of words have been altered and new terms serving ZANU PF ideology introduced, has

---

[1] Some of the material in this section appears in Ndhlovu (2006).

been prevalent in Zimbabwe since year 2000. State controlled electronic and print media have become awash with ZANU PF image building terminology. This insidious and potentially deadly process has been achieved through the use of some or all of the applied propaganda techniques discussed in this article. In the famous Nazi treatise, *Mein Kampf*, Adolf Hitler summarized the workings of the art of propaganda in the following terms:

> Its [propaganda's] effect for the most part must be aimed at the emotions and only to a very limited degree at the so-called intellect…All effective propaganda must be limited to a very few points and must harp on these slogans until the last member of the public understands what you want him to understand by your slogan (Pratkanis and Aronson, 1991, pp.32 – 39).

In addition to the above, emotional language, creation of associations and connotations, repetition and simplification of reality constitute a set of other key elements of propaganda (Mesthrie, et al, 2000). In the case of 21st century Zimbabwe, the Fast Track Land Reform Program and the controversial urban slum clearance exercise turned out to be fertile ground for the propaganda sloganeering that was manifested in the form of term creation, semantic shifts, dysphemism, euphemism, mystification, lexical hardening, word disapproval, repetition, censorship, popular appeal as well as semantic broadening. Ordinary everyday English language expressions were arm-twisted to assume new meanings depending on the intentions of the ZANU PF political elite. Old men and women who have been practicing subsistence agriculture for decades have suddenly turned into "new farmers." The term "settler", which for over a hundred years used to pejoratively refer to white colonial intruders, suddenly ameliorated. It now refers to the "legitimate and rightful" owners of the land. People who hold alternative views that are not in consonance with the political thinking of the ruling elite regarding the unpopular policies of the ZANU PF government are variously described as "sell-outs", "enemies of the people" and "unpatriotic traitors." These and related expressions were repeated several times in the printed and electronic media, in speeches at national events such as Independence and Heroes Day celebrations as well as at ZANU PF political rallies.

The subsequent parts of this section provide a detailed analysis of four propaganda techniques that were packaged and mediated in English by the ZANU PF administration, making the language indispensable in the fight against perceived enemies.

Word approval - This is a process whereby certain words and phrases are deliberately given special prominence and respectability by their frequent usage in influential circles and the mass media. Word approval also often results in certain profanities that are traditionally unacceptable suddenly becoming commonplace in the mass media and in everyday social discourse. For instance, all people perceived to be against the disorganized *Third Chimurenga* and *Operation Murambatsvina*, were given all sorts of labels that are traditionally unacceptable. Officialdom in the form of the presidium, cabinet ministers and other ZANU PF officials gave themselves the leeway to use the public media as a platform of hurling insults at members of the main opposition party, the MDC and their supporters. Some of the unpalatable terms that were frequently used mainly by the ruling party's then minister of Information and Publicity, Jonathan Moyo, include the following: 'sellouts', 'enemies of the people', 'neocols', 'puppets of western imperialists', 'terrorists', 'saboteurs', 'anti-government lobbyists', 'running dogs of imperialist forces', 'violent cronies of the MDC', 'political dissidents' aimed at 'undermining national interest', among others.

This kind of discourse is always used to discredit the MDC and civic organizations aligned to it – both local and international. The United Nations Special envoy, Anna Kajumulo Tibaijuka, was not spared this name-calling barrage for compiling a 'damning' report on the conduct and after effects of the urban slums clearance in Zimbabwe. She was described as a 'misguided puppet of Tony Blair' and her report labeled as 'value-laden', 'typical of neocolonial conspiracy', 'part of the Anti-Zimbabwe Global Campaign' and full of 'diplomatic naivety' (*The Chronicle Online*, 19 September 2005 and *The Herald* Online, 17 August 2005).

At that time (and it appears it is still the same even now) anyone who held an opinion perceived to be contrary to ZANU PF political ideology automatically fell into the fold of the country's 'hostile detractors'. Such labels often got naturalized over time so much that they ended up being viewed as real and commonsense. From a critical discourse analysis perspective,

> Naturalization is the royal road to commonsense. Ideologies come to be ideological com-
> monsense to the extent that the discourse types which embody them become naturalized.
> This depends on the power of the social groupings whose ideologies and whose discourse
> types are at issue. In this sense, commonsense in its ideological dimension is itself an effect
> of power. What comes to be commonsense is thus in large measure determined by who exer-
> cises power and domination in a society or a social institution (Fairclough, 1992, p.8).

Therefore, in a typical hegemonic fashion, the ZANU PF elite stepped up the ante by adding covet
strategies of ideological domination onto overt mechanisms of physical repression, which they are in-
famously known for.

Word disapproval - Under this strategy, certain words or phrases that expose the user to disagreea-
ble social reactions like personal abuse and other forms of victimization are deliberately disapproved
by officialdom. In the process of trying to recover ZANU PF's glory of the yesteryears for instance,
government officials, politicians as well as the state media employed this propaganda technique to
vilify perceived enemies. The ruling political elite disapproved a wide array of terms popularly used by
opposition parties and those who do not share the same sentiments with the Mugabe regime. Official-
dom disapproved the use of the term "farm invasions" when describing the manner in which liberation
war veterans and other ZANU PF sympathizers violently seized commercial farms from erstwhile 'de-
scendants of former colonial masters'. Cabinet ministers and all other ZANU PF politicians preferred to
use the term "demonstrations" instead. The situation that prevailed in Zimbabwe during the *Third Chi-
murenga* is akin to what Horace Campbell (2003) calls executive lawlessness. In the words of Camp-
bell, "executive lawlessness is an appropriate way to characterize the use of state violence against the
political opposition, especially against farm workers." (Campbell, 2003, p.78 – 81)

In line with Campbell's observation, it has been noted that executive lawlessness exists when the poli-
tics of law and order is mainly rhetorical, given the widespread disregard for the law by those who are
empowered to uphold it. Biko further argues: "the major democratic crisis in Africa is the crisis of he-
gemony or a situation where the ruling classes have failed consistently to win the ideological struggle
on the continent." Indeed, the Mugabe regime resorted to these unorthodox tactics of survival follow-
ing the exhaustion and bankruptcy of nationalism as an ideology of the new millennium. The quest for
entrenching ZANU PF political hegemony and regime security saw the unfortunate executive lawless-
ness being given the respectable name 'fast track land reform' by the end of year 2000.

The government of Zimbabwe worked in collusion with the veterans of the 1970s liberation war to per-
petrate all forms of executive lawlessness under the guise of 'legal demonstrations.' Under the direc-
tion of Ignatius Chombo, the minister of local government, war veterans and other ZANU PF sympa-
thizers operated like a storm trooper force that was a law unto itself and could not be touched by the
police or army. They literally attacked both farm workers and farm owners with impunity, under the
guise of 'reclaiming land' yet their express purpose was the liquidation of all opposition elements
ahead of the 2000 parliamentary and 2002 presidential elections. During this period the Mugabe re-
gime can best be described as having been commandist, militarist and lawless (Campbell, 2003).

The other litany of terms whose meanings were twisted in favor of ZANU PF political ideology include
the following: 'good governance', 'democratic principles', 'dictatorship', 'regime change', 'rule of law',
'violation of international law', 'human rights', 'subversion of democratic process', 'stolen election', et
cetera. The ruling political elite created the impression that both the *Third Chimurenga* and *Operation
Murambatsvina* were carried out in a progressive way by ensuring that the foregoing unpalatable ter-
minology is not frequently used in the public media. By disapproving the authenticity of labeling the
actions of the ZANU PF government as being in violation of democratic principles, individual human
rights, international law, as well as good governance in the conduct of the *Third Chimurenga*, the rul-
ing elite sought to entrench its political future threatened by the emergence of a new political contend-
er, the MDC, which commanded an overwhelming support from the country's working class, civic or-
ganizations and the generality of the Zimbabwean populace, both in the rural and urban areas.

Repetition and Euphemism - In this case, a selection of words, phrases and other forms of discourse
are deliberately given prominence through repetition. This propaganda technique entails disguising
whatever is intrinsically ugly, repulsive, immoral or otherwise unacceptable behind more attractive,
less offensive or neutral labels (Pratkanis and Aronson, 1991). At the hands of ZANU PF politicians
and their social engineers, euphemism became a sinister device used to deceive and indoctrinate the

public into accepting things, which are otherwise intrinsically repugnant – all in the name of regime security. The violation of property rights through violent seizures of land and the indiscriminate destruction of houses was euphemistically referred to as 'repossessing our cultural heritage', 'redressing colonial injustices', 'cleaning the cities', 'stopping economic crimes' 'countering economic sabotage', 'reorganizing small-to-medium enterprises', 'reducing the high crime rate', 'arresting such social ills as prostitution', 'stopping the hoarding of consumer commodities', stemming disorderly or chaotic urbanization', 'minimizing the dangers of disease outbreaks' and 'reversing environmental damage' (*The Herald*, 17 August 2005 and *The Financial Gazette Online*, 22 September 2005). The seemingly good intentions of the *Third Chimurenga* and *Operation Murambatsvina* that were marketed in this grandiloquent terminology turned out to be mere political sloganeering as the people affected by the two programs are now even worse off – they now have no food, no shelter and no sources of income (United Nations, 2005).

The hooligan behavior of former liberation war veterans who went about beating people and invading properties (Horace Campbell, 2003) was repeatedly and euphemistically acknowledged as the activities of 'loyal', 'patriotic', 'truly Zimbabwean nationals' who were seeking to 'empower' the landless rural people. However, as it later turned out, the so-called martyrs and champions of black economic empowerment were in fact driven by the populist, hegemonic and militaristic interests of an embattled regime whose political future was taking a nose-dive. The majority of the rural folks in whose names the farms were invaded are still crowded in the poor and unproductive pieces of land that they have been occupying for decades. This goes a long way to demonstrate that discourse manipulation by the Mugabe regime as well as the activities of the war veterans were no more than cheap politicking aimed at propping up grassroots support for the ruling party.

Popular appeal - Popular appeal involves a situation in which the propagandist's message is packaged or presented in a way likely to disarm criticism. The ZANU PF government used this technique to justify the violent farm invasions that started in year 2000. Popular appeal is an artful compound of bogus philanthropy, cloying sentimentality, euphemism and superficiality, all designed to help the medicine go down all those gullible throats (Gerbner, 1978).

In a bid to try and convince the people of Zimbabwe and the international community about the nobility of the *Third Chimurenga* and *Operation Murambatsvina* the ruling party's propaganda machinery popularized the use of selected words and phrases that appealed to the sentimentality of ordinary men and women. The endless list of such terminology included the following: 'patriotism', 'sovereignty', 'self determination', 'nationalism', 'territorial integrity', 'national interest', 'mature democracy', 'the will of the people', 'heroic sons and daughters of Zimbabwe', et cetera. The net effect of all this manipulated jargon was the legitimization of violating the rights and freedoms of those sections of the Zimbabwean society perceived to be against the status quo. An impression was created through the process of discourse control that in Zimbabwe there is a unique notion of village-based palaver human rights and democratic dispensation underpinned by an in-built tendency towards consensus. This unfortunately turns out to be no more than fictitious wishful thinking, for, as Gero Erdmann (2000, p.32) points out, human rights and democracy are not culturally relative. Authoritarianism, for instance, be it European or African, is underpinned by one common denominator: the subjugation of the individual into a Theocratic or Natural Order of Things.

The foregoing behavior of the ZANU PF government of Zimbabwe is comparable to the political propaganda of Nazi Germany (1933 – 1945). After attaining political power in 1933, the Nazi Party of Hitler embarked on a policy of literally "putting everyone in the same gear" (Ehlich, 1989). This propaganda policy, set up under the Ministry of Information and Propaganda, was spearheaded by Joseph Goebbels. All the mass media in German was controlled by this ministry which manipulated and arm-twisted ordinary everyday expressions into vehicles for Nazi dictatorship ideology. Ordinary terms such as the word 'worker', were subjected to the process of lexical hardening through endless repetition in the media. In Nazi Germany, the word 'worker' came to be associated with contexts of 'honesty', 'war', 'honor', 'religion' and 'national loyalty' (Mesthrie, et al, 2000). A similar kind of situation has been prevailing in Zimbabwe since year 2000. The word 'new farmer' for example, has been repeatedly used in the media with the associated meanings of 'patriotism', 'loyalty', 'progressive', 'anti-imperialist', 'economic empowerment', among others.

On the Pragmatic and Symbolic Functions of English in Postcolonial Africa

English remains entrenched as the official language and the political elite's preferred medium of widest communication in many postcolonial African countries. In Southern Africa for instance, English is the language of government administration, international business transaction, international communication and education in at least eight countries that include Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe (Chisanga and Kamwangamalu, 1997). Furthermore, in some of these countries English now has a significant number of first language speakers particularly among the coloured and Indian communities in South Africa, Namibia and Zimbabwe. Consequently, previous studies in this area have long suggested that English has indeed been transmogrified and nativised in many parts of postcolonial Africa where it thrives side by side with local indigenous languages[2]. However, much of the focus in previous research on African indigenization of English is on linguistic processes such as semantic extensions, and lexical and syntactic transfers from local languages into English. Therefore, in this section the article seeks to build on and extend into new directions the discussion on ownership and appropriation of English in Africa by focusing on two sociolinguistic aspects: the pragmatic and symbolic dimensions of English. These two explanatory paradigms are pertinent to understandings of how the social capital value of English is often strategically deployed in communicating ideas about freedom, independence, cultural affirmation and discourses on the possibilities for change in postcolonial Africa.

First is the symbolic dimension of language, which has been widely discussed by pioneering social theorists such as Pierre Bourdieu (1991); Norman Fairclough (1989); Braj Kachru (1986) and Ruth Wodak (1989). In his seminal book on *Language and Symbolic Power* (1991) Bourdieu defines symbolic power as power which exists because the person who submits to it believes that it exists. In the context of the discussion of the symbolic functions of English in postcolonial Africa, the realisation that power and language are interlinked is indicative of the need for us to transcend purely formal language studies by looking more "critically at the ways in which language is implicated in societal power relations [because language] is never neutral; it empowers and disempowers" (de Kadt, 1991, p.1). The Zimbabwe case study on the deployment of English in communicating ZANU propaganda exemplifies the widespread strategic appropriation of the symbolic power that is resident and firmly located in the English language. As Galbraith noted almost half a century ago, " the supreme and most insidious exercise of power lies in shaping people's perceptions, cognitions and preferences in such a way that they accept their role in existing order of things" (cited in de Kadt, 1991, p.2).

Therefore, instead of seeing a remnant of colonial legacy, most postcolonial African elites see in English an effective tool for putting across their case and for being heard because the English language carries the symbolic power that African indigenous languages do not have. So far, people like Robert Mugabe and his close allies in ZANU PF have received a barrage of criticism from western capitals over their extravagance and for having extraordinary appetite for everything western at the expense of poor ordinary citizens. Such criticisms have been backed up by practical action in the form of 'targeted' or 'smart' sanctions aimed at curtailing ZANU PF politicians' access to first world lifestyles. However, none of the European and North American countries imposing these sanctions has raised the question of access to the English language as an issue, which is an inadvertent admission that the English language now belongs to everybody, including African leaders who have denounced everything western. What is most interesting also is that over the ten years of strained relations with Harare, the English-speaking western world has never argued against what appears to be ZANU PF double standards when it comes to their denunciation of everything western. Similarly, ZANU PF has never rejected English as a vestige of colonialism the same way they have denounced all other things. Herein lies the argument of this article about the ownership and symbolic functions of English. Both the English-speaking world and the ZANU PF regime are subject to the "ideological nature of [the English] language, which wields all the more power in that it generally remains unperceived" (Connolly, 1983, p.225).

Another dimension to the symbolic functions of English in Africa relates to its role as a marker of social class and multilingual identities. In this connection, English sustains and perpetuates power relations

---

[2] See for example the work of de Kadt (1991); Heugh (2000); Pierce (1990) and Kamwangamalu & Chisanga (1996)

in the sense that it is the educated users of English who are recognized as elites in many African societies. Perceptions and ideas about being educated are indexed in English language proficiency because "command of English is seen generally as an indication of education" (de Kadt, 1991, p.8) and this confers high social status and prestige. Furthermore, many African people who profess to have multilingual identities, whether on the African continent or in the diaspora identify English as one of the languages linked to their sense of who they are[3]. For Kachru (1992), the increased use and nativisation of English by non-native speakers is symbolic of the creation of non-western multicultural identities. This does indeed suggest that English has been appropriated and added onto the nested hierarchy of languages that define and shape multilingual African identities. As Chinua Achebe argued way back in the 1970s, non-native speakers of English now own and control this language (Achebe, 1975), which has become part of their linguistic repertoire. The Zimbabwe case study discussed in the entire body of this article shows that during the diplomatic and political standoff between Harare and the western world, members of the ZANU PF regime made up of non-native speakers of English managed to appropriate the language, to turn it to their advantage and to assert themselves through it (Chisanga and Kamwangamalu, 1997). This is connected to the explanatory paradigm focusing on the pragmatic functions of English.

The pragmatic function of English is based on the communicative dimension of the language whereby in many postcolonial countries English performs important sociolinguistic roles of elucidation and neutralisation (Chisanga and Kamwangamalu, 1997). This means the English language is used by non-native speakers to articulate their arguments and/or points of view with greater clarity (elucidation). In addition to this, the English language has become part of discursive techniques and strategies of neutralisation whereby "euphemistic labelling is used to disguise the severity of actions; and 'advantageous comparison' in which benefits and drawbacks are contrasted in a way to makes reprehensible acts righteous." The discursive technique of neutralisation is precisely aimed at that – to neutralise and/or dilute – the effect of a patently reprehensible action. Sykes and Matza (1957, cited in Enticott, 2010) suggest that neutralisation techniques allow offenders to simultaneously accept societal norms whilst acting contrary to them. Similarly, Mooney (2007, p.161) has argued that 'techniques of neutralisation allow the passage from one core system to another'. Drawing on the work of Sykes and Matza, Enticott (2010, p.6) identifies five underpinning elements of neutralisation techniques, namely 'denial of the victim' (premised on the belief that whoever is harmed by an action deserved its consequences); 'denial of responsibility' (whereby offenders argue that their actions were caused by forces beyond their control); 'denial of injury' (based on the belief that no-one suffered as a result of a morally unacceptable action); 'appeal to higher loyalties' (in which offenders cite the importance of small group loyalty in preference to society at large); and 'condemnation of the condemners' (which refers to statements that suggest disapprovers are hypocrites who have caused more harm).

Returning to the Zimbabwe case study, all the above motifs of the discursive strategy of neutralisation were consistently evident in ZANU PF narrative scripts about how they were victims of the Euro-American regime change agenda motivated by the desire to protect the interests of white commercial farmers who lost their land to the Third Chimurenga. The forcible and often violent acquisition of land from white farmers that started in year 2000 (itself a reprehensible and morally unacceptable action) was justified by recourse to neutralisation strategies of denial of responsibility, denial of injury and appeal to higher loyalties. The centrality of the English language in this entire political discourse lies in that it proved to be an effective medium of communicating a seemingly positive story about Zimbabwe by the ZANU PF government throughout their ten years of diplomatic standoff with the western world. The English language was successfully deployed to the ZANU PF political propaganda of "condemning the condemners" in a manner that no other language could have done. The communicative currency and social capital of English as the language of empowerment and access to the world were all strategically deployed in reminding the British and the Americans about their heinous colonial past – the message being that they too had lots of skeletons in their cupboards and, therefore, had no moral authority to condemn what the ZANU PF regime was doing in Zimbabwe. President Robert Mugabe's eloquent English-medium speeches read at different United Nations summits as well as at home, particularly at Independence and Heroes Day celebrations attest to the pragmatic functions of English at this point in the history of postcolonial Zimbabwe[4].

---

[3] See for example findings of a study on intersection of language and African identities by Ndhlovu (2010)

[4] See for example texts of the following speeches by Robert Mugabe: Address to the 62nd Session of the United Nations General Assembly, New York, 26 September, 2007; Address to the 60th Anniversary of the UN's Food and Agriculture Or-

Conclusion

Although postcoloniality and postcolonial discourses castigating vestiges of western colonialism are clearly fraught with tensions and contradictions, the Zimbabwe case study demonstrates a productive and strategic deployment of the English language by the ZANU PF government. Cognizant of the need to effectively communicate its ideological position to the rest of the western world, the ZANU PF government of Zimbabwe found a more potent weapon in English than in any one of the country's national languages. This is certainly not a contradiction but rather a cunning political strategy that can be easily explained by the fact that ownership of the English language is no longer the preserve of the British or the so-called 'Centre'. If anything, English is now a language of all who speak it, including the so-called 'Periphery' – whether second, third or fourth language speakers. It is open to appropriation by all who speak it. ZANU PF's English-medium applied propaganda techniques in the period from 2000 to 2008 proved beyond any reasonable doubt the benefits of English language nativisation and its subsequent deployment to the achievement of desired symbolic and pragmatic goals. Therefore, while nativisation of English has traditionally been seen as deficiency and not difference, the arguments proffered in this paper have demonstrated that postcolonial African political elites have successfully appropriated the English language in their struggle for legitimacy, in political debates with their western adversaries as well as in asserting their ideological standpoints.

References

Abrahamsen, R. (2003). African studies and the postcolonial challenge. Royal African Society: London.

Achebe, C. (1975). The African writer and the English language. In *Morning Yet on Creation Day*. London: Heinemann

Bakhtin, M. (1981). Discourse in the novel. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. In M. Holquist. T. C. Emerson, &Michael Holquist. University of Texas Press Slavic Studies 1, (pp. 259-422). Austin: University of Texas Press.

Batibo, H. M. (2005). *Language Decline and Death in Africa: Causes, Consequences and Challenges*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The Location of Culture.* New York and London: Routledge.

Bourdieu, P. (1991). *Language and Symbolic Power*. Oxford: Polity Press.

Campbell, H. (2003). *Reclaiming Zimbabwe: The Exhaustion of Patriarchal Model of Liberation*. Asmara: Africa World Press.

Chisanga, T. And Kamwangamalu, N. M. (1997). Owning the other tongue: The English language in Southern Africa. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development, 18*(2), 89-99.

Connolly, W. E. (1983). The politics of discourse. In M. Shapiro (ed.) *Language and Politics.* (pp. 139-167). Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Crystal, D. (2006). English world-wide. In R. Hogg and D. Denison (eds.) *A History of the English Language*, (pp. 422-445). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Davies, A. (1991). *The Native Speaker in Applied Linguistics*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

De Kadt, E. (1991). Language, power and emancipation: A South African perspective. *Theoria, October 1991*, 1-15.

Enticott, G. (2010). Techniques of neutralising wildlife crime in rural England and Wales. *Working Paper Series No. 61.* Centre for Business Relationships, Accountability, Sustainability & Society, Cardiff University.

Ehlich, K. (ed.) (1989). *Sprache in Faschismus*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp.

---

ganisation (FAO), Rome, 17 October 2005; Speech delivered at the United Nations Climate Change Summit in Copenhagen, Denmark, 16 December 2009; and Speech delivered at the World Summit on the Information Society, Geneva, Switzerland, 10 December 2003.

Fairclough, N. (1992). *Language and Power.* London and New York: Longman.

Fairclough, N. (1995). *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language.* London: Longman.

Gerbner, G. (1978). The dynamics of cultural resistance. In G. Tuchman, A.K.Daniels, and J. Benet (eds). *Hearth and home: images of women in mass media.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Gero, E. (2000). *Democracy, Culture and Tradition.* Harare: Konrad Adenauer Foundation.

Graddol, D. (2006). *English Next.* London: The British Council.

Gupta, A. (1998). *Postcolonial Developments: Agriculture in the Making of Modern India.* Durham:Duke University Press.

Heugh, K. (1987). Trends in language-medium policy for a post-apartheid South Africa. In D. Young (ed.) *Bridging the Gap.* Cape Town, (pp. 206-220). Maskew Miller and Longman.

Heugh, K. (2000). The case against bilingual and multilingual education in South Africa. PRAESA Occasional Paper: Cape Town.

Huggan, G. (1996). The neocolonialism of postcolonialism: A cautionary note. *Links & Letters, 4*, 19-24.

Ives, P. (2006). Global English: Linguistic imperialism or practical lingua franca? *Studies in Language and Capitalism, 1*, 121-141.

Kachru, B. (1986). The power and politics of English. *World Englishes, 5*, 121-140.

Kachru, B. (1992). The second diaspora English. In T. W. Machan and C. T. Scott (eds.) *English in its Social Context.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Kamwangamalu, N. M., & Chisanga, T. (1996). English in Swaziland: Form and function. In V. De Klerk (ed.) *English around the World: Focus on South Africa* (pp. 285-300).

Mbembe, A. (2001). On the Postcolony. Berley, Los Angeles & London: California University Press.

Mesthrie, R, et al. (2000). *Introducing Sociolinguistics.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Mills, S. (1995). Discontinuity and postcolonial discourse. *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature, 26*(3), 73-88.

Mooney, J. (2007). Shadow values, shadow figures: real violence. *Critical Criminology, 15*, 159–170

Ndebele, N. (1987). The English language and social change in South Africa. *English Academy Review , 4*, 1-6.

Ndhlovu, F. (2006). Rethinking the language of politics in 21st century Zimbabwe: A critical discourse analysis perspective. *Lwati Journal of Contemporary Research*, 3, 222 – 234.

Ndhlovu, F. (2010). Belonging and attitudes towards ethnic languages among African migrants in Australia. *Australian Journal of Linguistics, 30*(2), 283-305.

Pierce, B. N. (1990). 'People's English in South Africa'. *Language Projects Review, 5*(1), 7-8.

Pratkanis, A. and Aronson, E. (1991). What is news? In *Age of Propaganda: The Everyday Use and Abuse of Persuasion, (pp.* 32 – 39)*.* New York: W. H. Freeman.

Skutnabb-Kangas, T. (2008). Language, education and (violations of) human rights. Symposium on linguistic human rights. UN. Geneva, 24 April 2008. Retrieved March 2011 from www.linguistic-rights.org

Spivak, G. C. (1988). Can the subaltern speak?. In Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (eds) *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture, (pp.* 271-313). Urbana, IL, University of Illinois Press.

Sykes, G. and Matza, D. (1957). Techniques of neutralization: A theory of delinquency. *American Sociological Review. 22*(6), 664-670.

United Nations. (2005). *Report of the Fact-finding Mission to Zimbabwe to Assess the Scope and Impact of Operation Murambatsvina.* New York: UN.

Wodak, R. (1989). *Language, Power and Ideology: Studies in Political Discourse*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.