



11. Mother-tongue education for the Omaheke Jul'hoansi in Namibia: Between policy and practice

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Abstract This chapter explores the gap between language policy and practice for an Indigenous San language in Namibia – Jul'hoansi. The globally influenced policy, while designed to facilitate democratization and equality for all factions of the post-apartheid society, has not led to educational inclusion and social justice for the most marginalized groups in the country, such as the Jul'hoansi. In this chapter, I present the barriers to the implementation of the language policy, and the consequences of this failure.

Keywords San | Namibia | sub-Saharan Africa | language policy | mother tongue education

INTRODUCTION

Namibia is a southern African country, which after independence from South Africa in 1990 has democratized its education system and has adopted one of the most progressive education policies in the region. Among other tenets, the policy recognizes the pedagogical value of mother-tongue education, particularly in the first years of schooling. Yet, despite the state's positive attitude towards linguistic and cultural diversity and its commitment to include all citizens irrespective of their cultural, linguistic, economic, or social background, implementation of the education policy with regard to small Indigenous languages has been severely compromised. Jul'hoansi¹ is an Indigenous San language with about 10 000 speakers in Namibia and Botswana (Biesele & Hitchcock, 2011). In Namibia, the

1 Ju|'hoansi ('true, proper people') refers to the people and the language. Ju|'hoan is an adjective (as in 'a Ju|'hoan student').

Ju|'hoansi reside in the Omaheke region in east-central Namibia, and in the Nyae Nyae Conservancy in the north-eastern part of the country. In stark contrast to the progressive education policy, the inclusion of culturally relevant material in the school curriculum or the teaching in the Ju|'hoan language have been hindered by a combination of structural, economic, and sociocultural barriers (Hays, 2016; Ninkova, 2020). This has resulted in low performance and high drop-out rates for Ju|'hoan students, often in rates much higher than for students from other groups (see Dieckmann, Thiem, Dirkx, & Hays, 2014).

This chapter is concerned with the Omaheke Ju|'hoansi, with whom I have conducted ethnographic research since 2008. The Omaheke is a predominantly rural and sparsely populated region that hosts three distinct Indigenous San communities – Ju|'hoansi, !Xoon, and Naro. Ju|'hoansi is the only San language recognized as a language of instruction in Namibia. Yet, for reasons that I will describe below, in the Omaheke, it is used in one school only – Gqaina primary school, and not as a language of instruction but as a subject only. Since each school can determine its language of instruction depending on its location, the composition of its student population and availability of teachers, the language of instruction in most government schools in the Omaheke is English, Otjiherero, Khoekhoegowab, Setswana, or Afrikaans. Despite the existing language policy that aims to include all Namibian students on an equal basis regardless of their socioeconomic or cultural background, historical and ongoing power dynamics allow for the inclusion of some and the exclusion of other groups and languages from the system. Currently, Ju|'hoan children attending school in the region begin their educational careers in languages they are either not fluent in, or that are completely foreign to them. Due to the diversity of classes and the lack of resources specifically directed to support the Ju|'hoansi, many struggle with the oral and written acquisition of these languages, and some drop out before they have acquired them sufficiently enough.

Focusing on the Ju|'hoansi language education situation in the Omaheke, this chapter offers an ethnographically informed analysis of the challenges to the implementation of a national language policy on a local level. The use of ethnography in inquiries focused on education has been recognized both as a theory and a method that helps illuminate ‘messy and complex social activit[ies]’ (Hornberger, 2009, p. 355) and elucidate the social meaning behind policy and practice (Hornberger, 2015). Ethnographic inquiry is thus well suited to understanding the complex social meanings of language policy, and its implementation and contestation on a local level. Before I describe the specific barriers to the local implementation of the policy and the impact of this status-quo on Ju|'hoan learners and communities, I will trace the aspirations and discontinuities that have occurred in

language planning, policy, and practice between the different levels of policy conception and implementation – globally, nationally, and locally. Following Johnson (2013), I regard language policy not as a product but as a practice that is continuously negotiated and shaped by multiple (and not seldom) divergent social and political forces. These contestations are further impacted by the historic and ongoing political struggles and hierarchies of legitimacy, which favour certain factions of society and exclude others. Within the broad field of Indigenous education, language choice and use has served both as a means of continued oppression and exclusion (see Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000) or as a means of recognition and inclusion (see Sollid & Olsen, 2019). Decisions regarding languages in education occur at the level of policy planning and writing. The enactment of these policies, however, occurs and is contested at the local level. My purpose here is to illuminate the frictions that have occurred between the different levels and to empirically investigate how they have impacted the experiences of Indigenous Ju|'hoan students in rural east-central Namibia. Just as policies and practices normalize values and behaviours, so too do they elicit responses from those who have been excluded and stigmatized in these processes (McCarthy, 2011). In an unjust and unequal playing field, those who are structurally oppressed and 'othered' are silenced and often opt for withdrawal. For Indigenous students, as the Ju|'hoansi case highlights, this translates as mass dropping out or underperformance in the system.

The discussion of language policy implementation with regards to Indigenous learners in a postcolonial African state touches upon several themes. On the one hand, postcolonial African states have concentrated efforts in breaking away from the colonial legacy of European languages and developing national languages as languages for education, science, and research (Kamwangamalu, 2016). African states have also had to mitigate local political concerns about the status of different local languages as to ensure the equal recognition of competing groups and factions of society. Furthermore, the national education policies of many developing or recently developed nations have been conceived under the guidance and vision of overseas policy experts and advisers and the international donor community. The globalization of Western education practices, policies, and ideologies has not been unproblematic, and its logic and success has been contested, especially in (post)colonial, hyper diverse and politically unstable contexts (Grigorenko, 2007; Harvey, this volume; Moland, 2019; Ninkova, 2020). Language policies exist at these intersecting social and political fields and converge numerous ideologies, aspirations, and contestations.

As the case presented here will show, the ideal of linguistic inclusion and representation on a national policy level does not lead to social justice through inclusion and representation on a local level. In the case of severely historically marginalized

groups, unless other, special measures are considered, equality on paper does not lead to equality in practice. In what follows, I present the Ju|'hoansi people and their language, followed by an outline of the Language Policy for Schools in Namibia and its inception and interpretation on both national and local levels. Afterwards, I present some of the main barriers to the implementation of the policy with regards to Ju|'hoansi in the region, and some of the impacts brought about by the continued linguistic marginalization of Indigenous languages in the country.

BACKGROUND: THE PEOPLE AND THE LANGUAGE

'San' is a collective term that denotes all (former) hunter-gatherer groups living in the southern African region. Despite the common denominator, San groups exhibit great linguistic and cultural diversity, as well as sociohistorical development and current livelihood circumstances. The Ju|'hoansi are one of seven San groups presently residing on the territory of Namibia (Dieckmann et al., 2014). The Omaheke Ju|'hoansi number about 2000 people and constitute one of the three main San groups living in today's Omaheke region.²

Starting at the beginning of the 20th century, waves of European and Bantu settlement in the Omaheke had gradually dispossessed the Ju|'hoansi of their land. Under Apartheid during South African rule, the land suited for agriculture was divided into commercial farmland (occupied by European settlers) and communal land (set aside for the local Bantu population). As nomadic hunter-gatherers, the Ju|'hoansi were not seen to need a permanent land base for their subsistence and survival. Instead, they were incorporated as an underclass of manual farm workers on commercial and communal land (Suzman, 2000; Sylvain, 1999). After Independence, Namibia has undertaken a massive land redistribution reform. However, the situation of the Omaheke Ju|'hoansi has not changed much. The contemporary Ju|'hoansi subsist from a mixed economy based on government welfare, manual or piece labour, small-scale subsistence farming and traditional foraging. A limited number of families have gotten access to government-owned land on resettlement farms, where the government is trying to turn them into self-sufficient small-scale farmers. Many continue to provide for their families as underpaid manual farm workers – a scarce job that is both despised and sought after. Despite the dramatic historical developments that have undermined their culture and very existence, the Omaheke Ju|'hoansi have also exhibited remarkable

2 The Ju|'hoansi also reside in north-eastern Namibia and north-western and west-central Botswana. Their exact number is subject to interpretation, however, the whole Ju|'hoan population comprises about 10 000 people (Biesele & Hitchcock, 2011).

resilience, most notably through the maintenance of their kinship system, and egalitarian social organization (Ninkova, 2017).

Jul'hoansi is a click language that belongs to the Ju language family of the Khoisan languages, spoken in southern Africa. Linguists and anthropologists sometimes refer to the variety spoken in the Omaheke as †X'ao-l'aen, Kung Gobabis or Gobabis Jul'hoansi (after the administrative centre of the Omaheke region) (Biesele, 2011). The people refer to their language and themselves as Jul'hoansi (meaning 'true people'). The language is part of a language complex without clear boundaries, with varieties spoken in western Botswana, in north-eastern Namibia, and in southern Angola (Biesele, 2011; Biesele & Hitchcock, 2011; Hasselbring, 2000). Omaheke region is an ethnically heterogeneous region, with a complex and shifting linguistic ecology. The Jul'hoan language is actively spoken at home, and children acquire it as a first language. Despite its active use in the home, the language is threatened at several different levels. All Jul'hoan communities live in proximity with other ethnic groups, and many adult Jul'hoan speakers are multilingual and fluent in Afrikaans, Khoekhoegowab, Otjiherero, and/or Setswana. These languages hold a higher status than Jul'hoansi and are replacing it in contact zones. With participation in the education system, and greater exposure to popular global culture through music, films and the internet, English is becoming increasingly widespread among the younger generation. Urbanization is also increasing, and a growing number of young Jul'hoansi are seeking employment on the outskirts of urban centres. These squatter melting pots facilitate the use and spread of more dominant regional tongues.

NAMIBIAN EDUCATION POLICY AND LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT FROM A GLOBAL AND NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Namibia achieved independence in 1990 after first German and then South African colonization. Prior to independence, the country had a highly segregated education system that was designed to serve the interests of the colonial elites, and that 'was irrelevant and unsuitable to the needs and aspirations of the Namibian people' (MBESC, 2004, p. 3). In this segregated environment, provision of equal access to quality education was seen as one of the main pillars of national reconciliation and the path to democracy (Gonzales, 2000). Through a comprehensive educational reform, the country adopted one of the most progressive and inclusive education and language policies in the southern African region, with English as an official language of instruction. The adoption of English, as Brock-Utne (1997) observes, was a highly politicized decision, whose purpose was to distance the

country from the legacy of South African apartheid, and to create a sense of unity among the country's diverse population. It was also heavily influenced by overseas donors with interest in international educational development. As such, the language policy is just one example of the impact of the transplantation of global ideologies and practices without their critical examination with regard to their suitability in a particular context or in terms of the preparedness of the system to adopt them.

The Language Policy for Schools of Namibia of 1991 (and revised in 2003) recognizes that: 1) language is an important means for the transmission of identity and culture; 2) all national languages are equal regardless of their level of development and number of speakers; and 3) learning in a mother tongue, particularly in the early years of schooling, constitutes a good pedagogical practice (MEC, 1993). The pedagogical value of the inclusion of mother-tongue teaching and culturally appropriate materials in school is also recognized in the National Policy Options for Educationally Marginalized Children (MBESC, 2001) and in the more recent Sector Policy on Inclusive Education (MoE, 2013). Currently, the National Curriculum for Basic Education recognizes fourteen African and European languages as mother-tongue-level languages that can be taught from pre-primary to grade 12. Among these, Ju'hoansi is the only San language recognized as an official language of instruction for grades 1 to 3.³ The development of the language was spearheaded by a group of dedicated academics and local community activists in the Nyae Nyae Conservancy in north-eastern Namibia. The development of an orthography for the language laid the groundwork for the establishment of a curriculum committee that oversees the development of school materials in the language at the National Institute for Educational Development (Davids, 2011). The establishment of the Nyae Nyae Village Schools Project, an innovative community-based education project, in the early 1990s, also became the basis or the development and the active use of the language in a school setting (see Biesele & Hitchcock, 2011; Hays, 2016).

Despite the progressive policy framework and efforts invested in the inclusion of mother tongues as official languages of instruction, the current and future status of Indigenous languages in the system remains precarious. Namibia does not recognize the term 'Indigenous peoples,' and instead refers to its Indigenous citizens as 'marginalized communities.' San children are targeted as 'educationally marginalized children,' and on a policy level the government has committed to uphold their educational rights, and to 'allow them to keep and be proud of their

3 Kwedam and Naro are the other two San languages with standardized orthographies; however, their level of development is not deemed sufficient for adoption as mother tongues in the education system.

origin and culture' (MBESC, 2000, p. 12). This treatment, however, precludes their right to self-determination as an Indigenous people, which, among other tenets, may navigate their development, including in the sphere of education. San communities, including the Ju|'hoansi, have repeatedly requested education in their own languages, which is inclusive of their cultural values and knowledge (Dieckmann et al., 2014; Hays, 2016; Ninkova, 2017). Yet, the number of children who have access to this right is very limited (Hays, 2009). Before we investigate the specific challenges to the implementation of the school language policy with regard to Ju|'hoansi, the next section outlines the context in which Ju|'hoan children access education and the status of language teaching in the region.

THE LOCAL LANGUAGE POLICY IN THE OMAHEKE REGION

The Omaheke region is a sparsely populated region, comprising predominantly of large commercial farms and scattered settlements in the communal areas. Amidst this unevenly populated landscape, government schools are located either by major roads, in the region's administrative centre, Gobabis, or on the outskirts of small settlements. The organization of labour in the region, as well as the severe land dispossession of the Ju|'hoansi, means that for the most part, Ju|'hoan families live in remote or inaccessible parts of the region, often far away from any school facilities. As a result of this, the overwhelming majority of Ju|'hoan children attend boarding schools from the age of 7. Lack of transportation often results in weeks or months without any contact between children and parents. The harrowing impact of boarding schools on Indigenous children and whole communities has been long documented, and attempts for amendments, reconciliation, and decolonization have been spearheaded by boarding school survivors, governments and religious institutions across Scandinavia, the Americas, and Australia (Carroll, 2009; Dawson, 2011; Lind Meløy, 1980). In many parts of the African continent, as is the case in Namibia, the impact of boarding schools on Indigenous and minority students remains to be critically examined and addressed.

The quality of the physical infrastructure of the boarding schools in the Omaheke varies and depends on the commitment of the school management and the school's access to national and international donors. Most schools, however, are poorly equipped and maintained. The everyday routine of pupils is strictly regimented and controlled. The student population is heterogenous and can comprise children from as many as 6 or more ethnic groups.⁴ Teachers often come

4 Despite school desegregation, white and elite Black Namibian students do not attend government schools, and instead opt for private institutions.

from dominant groups and have little experience, knowledge, or appreciation for the Ju|'hoansi, their language or their culture. The numerous challenges that San children face and their large number in schools in the Omaheke, also means that the region is perceived as a difficult workplace for teachers, particularly those coming from other regions.

As mentioned above, only one school, Gqaina Primary School, offers instruction in the Ju|'hoan language. The school is locally known as 'the Bushman school', as it was established by local white farmers for the children of their 'Bushman' workers. In the years since, the school has transitioned into a government school that admits children regardless of their background, with the majority of its students being Ju|'hoansi. The school has only one teacher fluent in the Ju|'hoan language, although he himself is not of Ju|'hoan descent. Currently, the medium of instruction for all grades (1 to 7) is English, and Ju|'hoansi is only taught as a subject in grades 2 to 4. While the teaching of the language creates a positive environment for the Ju|'hoan children, the limited hours of teaching do not result in literacy in the language, and children reported little or non-existing written and reading comprehension of the language. The other primary schools in the region use Khoekhoegowab, Setswana, Otjiherero, English, or Afrikaans as the language of instruction in the first three years of schooling.

The Ju|'hoansi, and the San in general face many challenges in education, which have been well documented (see Dieckmann et al., 2014; Hays, 2016; LeRoux, 1999; Ninkova, 2017). As I have elaborated elsewhere, the barriers to schooling that the Ju|'hoansi face can be broadly separated into three categories: 1) barriers related to socioeconomic status; 2) barriers related to stigma and ill treatment; and 3) barriers related to cultural and linguistic alienation (see Ninkova, 2020). While the failure to implement the language policy may seem most directly linked to cultural and linguistic alienation in school, it also relates to aspects of the other two categories – poverty, geographic isolation, and stigma.

Since independence, Namibia has invested considerable efforts and resources to develop several local dominant and non-dominant languages. The question of language dominance deserves further attention, as it relates to the status of the Ju|'hoan language and its use (or lack thereof) in school. English, which is the official language of instruction, does not have any historical presence in the country. At the same time, numerically small languages that are invisible on the national linguistic map can be dominant in certain areas. The situation with Ju|'hoansi-speaking learners is such that in the areas where they reside, their language is never in a dominant position, even if they constitute the majority of learners in a school. As Benson (2013) has argued, the challenge for non-dominant language learners is that educators blame learners for their own failure, and not the system that creates

the conditions for this failure. The use of terms such as ‘language barrier’ or ‘the language problem’ that educators often employ to describe the language situation of Ju|’hoan learners, are reflective of this attitude, and highlight the unequal power relation embedded in the politics of language use in schools.

One of the starkest reminders of the status of Ju|’hoan language in the Namibian society in general, and in the education system in particular, lies in the observation that Ju|’hoan learners can receive education in any other national or local language, such as Afrikaans, English, Setswana, Otjiherero, or Khoekhoegowab, that they may or may not speak prior to schooling. When asked whether Ju|’hoansi can be taught to *all* students, for example, in schools with a majority Ju|’hoan student population, educators perceive the idea as inconceivable. Whereas other languages can be taught to all learners regardless of their background, Ju|’hoansi is seen as having no value to others and is reserved for the Ju|’hoansi only.

In the remaining empirical sections, I outline the main challenges to the implementation of the language policy with regard to Ju|’hoansi in the Omaheke, and trace some of the consequences of this failure.

BARRIERS TO IMPLEMENTATION

Lack of qualified teachers

The major obstacle to teaching Ju|’hoansi in school is the lack of Ju|’hoan or Ju|’hoansi-speaking teachers. Indigenous teachers are recognized as valuable assets in school not only due to their linguistic expertise but also due to the cultural, and symbolic value they add to the school. Many government officials, principals, and school staff have acknowledged this, and have expressed their frustration with having to grapple with the implementation of the education policy, without the necessary resources to do so. Said one principal:

You ask me about implementation of the policy, but I have to ask you this: where are the San teachers? They are not on the market. The policy is one thing, but when it comes to implementation, our hands are tied. If we have San teachers, the children and the community will have a feeling of belonging. The whole community will feel proud to see their culture [represented] in the school. Right now, they feel like they are colonized. (November 2018)

The lack of qualified Ju|’hoan teachers is a result of the government’s commitment to providing quality education and not committing to exploring alternative tracks for the training of Ju|’hoan teachers. There are provisions that allow San individuals who have only completed grade 10 to access professional training (particularly

nurse and police training). When applying for a degree in Education, however, San members must have completed grade 12. The number of Ju|'hoan individuals who have completed grade 12 in the Omaheke are in single numbers. Many of those who enrol in secondary education after grade 7 drop out in the first year. For those who remain, successfully attaining grade 10 continues to be problematic. There simply does not exist a pool of Ju|'hoan individuals who have completed grade 12 and who are interested in pursuing education or another equivalent degree. The issue is well known and discussed at different levels in the region. Well performing Ju|'hoan secondary school students have also expressed their frustration with the attention and the high expectations that come from donors and institutions invested in the field. The few individuals who have completed grade 12 simply want to pursue further studies and professions based on their interests and talents and not based on the pressure to bridge this gap.

Lack of materials and dialectal differences

As described above, Gqaina Primary School is the only school that provides Ju|'hoan classes to a limited number of its Ju|'hoan students. The Ju|'hoan teacher, however, has repeatedly reported that the school materials in Ju|'hoansi that have been developed by the Language Committee at the National Institute for Education Development (of which he himself is a part), are based on the northern (Nyae Nyae) variety of the language. The two dialects, while belonging to the same language, have some differences, due to the different historical circumstances in the two regions. The Nyae Nyae Ju|'hoansi remained relatively secluded well into the 1960s, and currently reside in a conservancy where they are the majority, and where they hold land rights. In the Omaheke, the Ju|'hoansi have lost access to traditional territories and have been in close contact with other European, Khoisan, and Bantu languages since the beginning of the 20th century. Practices, concepts, and words have been lost and replaced by loan words from other languages.

The importance of terminology

Namibian schools do not collect data on students' ethnicity but on languages. Each student's record thus contains the personal information of the student and their mother tongue. The form offers a short list of languages, including Afrikaans, English, Oshiwambo, Otjiherero, and Khoekhoegowab.⁵ Ju|'hoansi is

5 Oshiwambo and Oshierero are Bantu languages, spoken by the Owambo and Herero, respectively. Khoekhoegowab is a Khoisan language, spoken by the Khoe people, the Damara.

simply listed as 'San language'. This nomenclature is problematic on several levels. First, it lumps all San speakers in one homogenous category with one language and culture and reinforces colonial and apartheid-era stereotypes about the San and their 'culture.' Second, it obscures the variety and diversity of San languages spoken by San students. In the Omaheke region alone, in addition to Ju|'hoansi, there is a large number of !Xoon and a small number of Naro students. The lack of data on actual number of speakers of each San language, minimizes the visibility of the San languages and the need for their development as languages of instruction. The practice also obscures the dire situation with regard to Ju|'hoan teachers. Some schools with predominantly Ju|'hoan students pride themselves on having 'San teachers'; however these teachers come from other groups, do not speak Ju|'hoansi, and teach in some of the other local non-San languages. Finally, the use of the term 'San language' further exoticizes Ju|'hoansi. Many in the education system and in the government cannot pronounce the name of the language correctly, and treat it as a curiosity without much value in itself. This attitude trickles down to the classroom, and students receive the message that their language is not respected on par with the other languages taught at school.

Heterogeneity of classes

Apartheid-era education was segregated along racial and ethnic lines with each group receiving the type of education deemed necessary for their imminent development. The San groups, perceived as too small, scattered, and ill-equipped to benefit from schooling, were not considered in this scheme at all. Bantu education, on the other hand, was mostly vocational in nature and was designed to serve the economic needs of the colonial class. In independent Namibia, all citizens have access to all education institutions, at least on paper, and in the heterogenous Omaheke region, government schools are open to all children. The student population differs greatly, depending on the location of the school. Thus, some schools may have a majority of speakers of a certain language (e.g., Otjiherero in the communal Herero-dominated areas in the eastern border region with Botswana). Arguing for the need for segregated schools that serve specific groups and exclude others goes against the government's nation-building policies. All factors described above – the lack of Ju|'hoan-speaking teachers, the lack of materials and dialect differences, the lack of knowledge of San language diversity – all result in Ju|'hoan children learning in other more dominant local languages.

Mother-tongue languages beyond the primary level

In 2018, the Ju|'hoansi Language Development Committee at the National Institute for Educational Development (NIED) had been working on the development of materials for grade 4. It had been working on materials for grade 4 since at least 2013. Initially, the language was in a group with Khoekhoegowab under an Education Officer for Khoe and San Languages, Laurentius Davids. In in-person interviews in 2013 and 2015, Davids expressed concerns about the stagnation of the process, the lack of financial resources for more frequent committee meetings, and the unwillingness of publishers to work with small languages such as Ju|'hoansi. 'I do not see a future for Ju|'hoansi', were his concluding remarks in an in-person interview in July 2015. After Davids' retirement in 2017, Ju|'hoansi and Khoekhoegowab were moved in an umbrella group with RuKwangali, a better-developed Bantu language spoken in northern Namibia. In interviews with education officers and members of different curriculum committees at NIED in November 2018, interlocutors related the importance of mother-tongue teaching, and expressed concerns about the challenges they faced with publishers. Some also expressed concerns about the slow pace at which small languages, such as Ju|'hoansi, were being developed.

In comparison, the more dominant languages spoken in the Omaheke – Otjiherero, Setswana, and Khoekhoegowab – are all taught throughout the full basic education cycle of twelve years. This not only sends messages to Ju|'hoan students about their place and value in the system, but it also makes it easier for them to adopt another identity, particularly at the secondary level, as I will elaborate below.

CONSEQUENCES OF THE LACK OF MOTHER-TONGUE EDUCATION FOR THE JU|'HOANSI

Decreased capacity for learning

The cognitive and pedagogical benefits of learning in the mother tongue have long been recognized. Literacy and content learning are best facilitated in the mother tongue (Benson, 2002), and submersion or early transition to another language has shown to dramatically disrupt the learning and academic success of students (Rossell & Baker, 1996; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). The challenges related to many Ju|'hoan students' inability to speak and understand the language of instruction in the first year(s) of schooling has been widely recognized by teachers in the Omaheke. Many reported that Ju|'hoan students often needed at least a year to begin to understand what was being taught in class. Engaging on an

equal par with other students took even longer. The inability to understand the language of instruction disrupts not only the learning process of young Ju|'hoan students, but also creates a number of other social and practical problems. There exist several points during which the drop-out rate of students is particularly high – usually during the transition from the home to school (in grade 1) or during the transition from primary to secondary level (grade 8). Language plays a particularly important role during the transition of young students from their communities to boarding schools. The situation was eloquently described by a grade 1 teacher:

Look at them now. What do you see? They look at me but they don't understand what I'm saying. They just blink with their eyes, and don't understand a word. How can I teach them? If someone wants to go to the toilet, they don't know how to ask for it. That's why we lose so many of them in grade 1. They are just afraid of everything.

Continued oppression

The visibility of Indigenous languages in the education system does not only have pedagogical and cognitive significance. The symbolic significance of having Indigenous languages as languages of instruction in school is of equal importance. Language policies and practices are written and implemented in a politically and socially unequal field, where visibility, representation, and inclusion signal a group's status in the wider society and send intended or unintended messages both to students and to the society at large. On the one hand, the Namibian government's commitment to include a San language as a language of instruction is a confirmation of the country's commitment to equality and inclusion of all in the new democratic state. On the other hand, the lack of measures to successfully implement this progressive policy confirms the belief held by numerous Ju|'hoansi I have interviewed over the years – that the government's commitment to them is on paper only, and that the legacy of the apartheid-era segregation still lives on. This continued oppression, or erasure, as Olsen and Sollid (this volume) have argued, was recognized by actors in the education system as well:

[The San] get the message that their culture is not respected in school. In the colonial period, Otjiherero was not taught in schools, only Afrikaans. Now we teach Otjiherero. Nothing has changed for the San [since] independence. They still have to learn in another language, and this tells them that others are more important than [they are]. (Primary school secretary, July 2013)

Loss of confidence and loss of culture

The stigma of being a San individual in contemporary Namibia is one of the biggest obstacles that hinders San groups and individuals' participation in the larger Namibian society on an equal social, cultural, and economic footing. This stigma is a vestige of the colonial era and most broadly centres around the perception of the San as a backward people whose existence is more firmly established in the natural rather than the 'civilized' world. 'To admit to someone that you are a San, is like admitting to them that you are an animal and not a human', a young San scholar and activist from Botswana once recounted to me (personal communication, 2012). These perceptions are held by individuals in all spheres, including teachers and other fellow students.

The stigma of 'being a Bushman' is particularly strongly acted on in secondary schools. Teachers reported that when presented with the opportunity, Ju|'hoan students more often than not attempted to hide their identity by pretending to not speak and understand the language. Since in Namibian school settings, language and ethnicity are closely interlinked, language use is often associated with ethnic identity. Ju|'hoan students are well aware of this association. As some teachers and other fellow students observed, the Ju|'hoansi's multilingualism and fluency in more dominant local languages (which they have acquired in primary school) was actively used by the Ju|'hoansi to hide their identity at secondary level:

Teacher: We have more San learners in the secondary level now. But when they come, they are no longer San.

VN: How do they identify themselves?

Teacher: Maybe as Nama or Damara or Setswana.

VN: How many do that?

Teacher: Most of them. If you don't know them [from before], they would always go like that. So, when I started this [San cultural] group, I had to force them to accept that you are a San. Because others were also telling me, 'No, this one is also a San.' (secondary school teacher, 2008)

Student: You know, she's not a real San [referring to another female student].

VN: Why not?

Student: Because she was speaking Ju|'hoansi before but then she stopped and now she is Damara.

VN: So, she only speaks Damara now?

Student: Yes. And when I speak to her in Ju|'hoansi she pretends she doesn't understand.

VN: Why do you think she's doing it?

Student: She doesn't want to be a San anymore. She is a Damara now.

(Ju|'hoan secondary school student, 2008)

Given the current situation, not surprisingly, Ju|'hoansi parents expressed concerns about the well-being of their children, as well as the future of their language and culture. These concerns have been repeatedly expressed by Ju|'hoan and other San parents in the southern African region. The urgency in the words of this San woman speaks for itself:

If we have San teachers they will not neglect our language. We think our traditions and language can also be taught through books. If we just wait, some of those traditions might not be there any more by the time the books come. (San woman, Omaheke Region, Namibia, quoted in LeRoux, 1999, p. 80)

The stigma associated with being a San also means that some students, particularly those who have had some years of secondary level education, have started to perceive their home culture and their parents as inferior and 'less than' their newly acquired identities. Since the majority Ju|'hoan students would end up back in their communities, many experienced a reversed stigma – their own families and communities perceived of them as 'more than' themselves, which sometimes resulted in social exclusion or lack of sense of belonging (see Ninkova, 2017).

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have outlined the Namibian language policy and have traced its path of implementation with regard to a small Indigenous language, Ju|'hoansi, between the global, national, and local level. I have described the challenges of implementation with respect to Ju|'hoansi in the Omaheke region in east-central Namibia and the consequences it has for the learning, self-esteem, and cultural belonging of Ju|'hoan students. While the case study is based on a small Indigenous minority in southern Africa, the historical context, as well as the structural and systemic forces that continue to marginalize and endanger Indigenous languages and cultures, is of global character. On a global level, the experiences of Indigenous students in state education systems have been universally similar with regard to the extent of the harm inflicted upon individuals, communities, languages, and cultures. In similar veins, recent research has shown that the legacy of colonialism continues to inform education policies and practices in contexts as diverse as Namibia and Aotearoa (as described by Harvey, this volume). Furthermore,

even when recognized in policy, the use and status of Indigenous languages is still threatened in practice (see e.g., Belancic, this volume). In the Namibian context, as I have described above, the progressive language policy has not benefitted Ju|'hoan students in the Omaheke. On the contrary, it has allowed for the development and inclusion of other dominant local languages. In an unequal social, political, and economic environment, in which the Ju|'hoansi occupy the lowest rungs, this has meant that their language (and as a consequence of that – their identity and culture) has been further marginalized, exoticized, and endangered. Instead of creating a sense of belonging and a positive environment for learning and pride in one's culture, the current implementation of the language policy in Namibia has resulted in the reiteration of local ethnic and social hierarchies in a school setting. Instead of uplifting Indigenous students, the system has further stigmatized and excluded them.

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