

LANGUAGE MUTATION AND LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY

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Introduction:

The main two sources of history, id. est Science and the Bible, agree and tell us about a common cradle of mankind and the unity of the human race whereas the present apparent reality attests the “opposite” through a diversity of colours among the humans, their communities and cultures, their languages.

This paper tends to work for the removal of these apparent contradictions, on the basis of three facts.

One is that the oldest remnants attesting of the presence of man on the earth have been discovered in Africa, Toumaï in Chad reported to have lived 7 million years ago, and Homo Naledi on a rich archeologic site named “the Human Cradle” registered at the UNESCO World Heritage (Wikipedia).

The second is that languages change following a number of socio-historical events (em/im-migrations, scientific progress, fashion...) but remain traceable as to the linguistic family tree of each of them (family tree).

Thirdly, “unity and diversity/variety” are a rule of nature, no one living species was made to stand as an exception to this rule: this is confirmed by Genetics, Genomics, phenotypic and linguistic studies.

We note, for example, that one of the main factors to diversification appears to be population migrations through continental drifts, climatic differences, regime, socio-scientific progress.

Abstract : Les deux principales sources de l’histoire, à savoir la science et la Bible, s’accordent pour affirmer l’existence d’un berceau commun de l’humanité ainsi que l’unité du genre humain. Pourtant, la réalité apparente actuelle semble démontrer le contraire, à travers la diversité des couleurs de peau, des communautés humaines, des cultures et des langues.

Le présent travail vise à lever ces contradictions apparentes en s’appuyant sur trois faits principaux.

Le premier est que les plus anciens vestiges attestant de la présence de l’homme sur Terre ont été découverts en Afrique. Il s’agit notamment de Toumaï, découvert au Tchad et dont l’existence remonterait à environ sept millions d’années, ainsi que de Homo naledi, mis au jour sur un important site archéologique appelé le « Berceau de l’humanité », inscrit au patrimoine mondial de l’UNESCO (Wikipedia).

Le deuxième fait est que les langues évoluent au fil de nombreux événements sociohistoriques (émigrations, immigrations, progrès scientifiques, modes, etc.), tout en demeurant traçables grâce à leur arbre généalogique linguistique (famille linguistique).

Le troisième fait est que l’« unité dans la diversité » constitue une règle fondamentale de la nature. Aucune espèce vivante ne fait exception à cette règle, comme le confirment les études en génétique, en génomique, sur les caractères phénotypiques et en linguistique.

On constate, par exemple, que l’un des principaux facteurs de diversification est lié aux migrations des populations, influencées par les dérives continentales, les différences climatiques, les régimes alimentaires ainsi que les progrès sociaux et scientifiques.

I. COMMON CHARACTERISTICS AND THE UNITY OF LANGUAGES

01. Languages are Equal in that they are meant to express the mind and fill in the communication need for their particular speakers or communities. « All dialects are natural, useful and linguistically equal. They have all grown naturally in response to the needs of their user's » (Charleton Laird, Language and the Dictionary, in Webster's, op.cit., P.XV).
02. Anyone who speaks one language, can pedagogically, learn and speak any other one, which implies the exigence of common reference marks between all the languages and between their different sytems (grammars).
03. All languages can be written in the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA).
04. Language is Dynamic, Illimited in time, Creative, Innovative, Prolific with « Centrifugal forces omnipresent and inevitable » (Charleton Laird, op.cit.).
05. Nobody can control a language in its evolution. All attempts to do so are doomed to failure. Let us refer to the French Academy at its creation with its objectives. « Languages are at once centrifugal and centripetal ». (Charleton Laird, id., P. XIX).
06. Languages are autonomous systems based on rules (Grammar, syntax, morphology, phonology) in order to maintain mutual understanding among their respective users.
07. A language is spoken, written, symbolic, gestural, graphic, sound or mute.
08. Whatever its evolution is, language has been instituted and oriented by the human mind, society and their vocal capacity (Webster's, op.cit., P. XVII) ; it is the verbal expression of the human thought is (Webster's, id.). we say, reversely, that the human thought is the silent expression of the verb/mind.
09. There is no human community without a language and no language outside a community. Language seems to be universal among human communities, but not to exist outside the human tradition (Webster's, ibid. P.XIV).
10. Languages change and progress with societies. Cities are ideal gatherings where a language evolution or change takes place as the urban life sets the fashion and popularize a language by sensitizing it to new influences (Houis N., Anthropologie linguistique de l'Afrique Noire, P.U.F, collection Sup, Paris, 1971, p.158).
11. Languages confer identity to communities and lands whereas nations are identified from territories, which appears to be a fairly recent reality, historically speaking.
E.G. :
 - British (nation vs. Scots, English, Welsh)
 - American vs. Indo-European
 - Congolese vs. Kongo, Luba, Tetela.
12. Languages are diverse ; this is related to language change and the different various social contexts.
13. The International Phonetic Alphabet sets the limits of the human capacity to produce sounds in the mouth cavity.
14. Despite the fact that they change, languages remain traceable with regard to the family tree of each of them or stock languages. A great deal of their basic and common elements can and do survive such as attested by their inner system (grammar, phonology, semiotics) : translatability, learnability, traceability.
15. Some languages are tonic, i.e, they use tones to mark semantic differences ; e.g Bantu languages. That means one word may bear different meanings by the use of the tonic accent or the stress. Let us quote the famous example of the lingala word moto.

- Môto (human being)
 - Mótó (the head)
 - Motó : motorcycle
 - Mótó : fire
16. A few Bantu languages are « clicklanguages ». clicks are sounds produced by drawing the breath into the mouth explosively with drawing the tongue from the roof of the mouth. E.G. : Zulu (South Africa).
17. The vocalic system of many languages goes beyond the five basic vowels (a,e,i,o,u) by the use of accents/stress, the movement of lips (rounding, opening, lengthening) ; let us take one example for illustration :

➤ The basic vowel (a) is produced in 3 ways in Yansi :

- a. [a] as in nsa (nsa) (nice) and man (man) (wine)
- b. [æ] as in nkay (nkæi) (leaves) and ntay (ntæi) (snake)
- c. [a:] as in nkaa (nka:) (pangolin)

➤ The basic vowel (u) is pronounced as :

- a. [u] as in mun [mun] mouth and dzum [dzum] belly
- b. [uu/u:] as in muur [mu:r] human and tuu [tu:] put down
- c. [ü] as in mutue [mutüə] head and nsüü [nsü] hair
- d. [ü:/üü] as in Ketjüü [Ketjüü] cousin and muhüü [muhü:/ muhüü] wind.

N.B : the verb fūla (to return) looks so close to the German fürher.

Finally we note that it is within the limits of the human speech organs that all the languages operate, without losing their unity. Diversification appears in the only way each of them, in its own context and environment, combine the sounds to create words and express ideas.

II. LANGUAGE CHANGE AND LANGUAGE DIVERSITY

Whereas Aitchison in his book (Language Change, Progress or Decay, Fontana Paperbacks, 1981) wonders about whether linguistic change brings progress or decay, our response is the first one, in spite of a few losses of words.

Language change is an answer to the natural internal dynamics proper to language which tends to regenerate and adapt (itself) to time and social progress.

The different languages grouped in language families (Indo-European, Bantu, Sudanese...) evolved each from one ancient proto-language called proto-Bantu, proto or common Indo-European etc.

Every current language divides into varieties or dialects ; e.g Kintandu, Manianga, Yombe...for the Kongo group.

Every current dialect may develop in an autonomous way and give way, with time, to its own varieties or dialects, in fine.

A Language does not die except in a few situations : through the extermination of its speakers by war or their total assimilation by conquests.

The Language changes because man changes. The human being is not static : he thinks, is inventive, creates, takes his mind higher and transforms his environment just like history, scientific progress and technology teach it to us. From which it follows that language cannot stay behind since it is tied up to the human mind, goes with and adapts itself to it in order to serve his communication need in each of his new socio-cultural contexts and all levels throughout generations.

To conclude on this point, we reassert that language change is intimately tied to man's mind and human progress (6.4).

Language Change Factors

The human being is active : he is inventive and innovator. He likes changes and new ways of doing things, new expressions.

But he is lazy as well and applies the « line of least Resistance » principle in any of his actions.

He dislikes physical constraints. All his attributes : human, social, moral ; his « liberties », needs, aspirations and achievements exert some impact on his speech and language.

How does language change happen therefore ?

The factors of language change are innumerable, unpredictable, of diverse sources, permanently at work, most of time imperceptible to the current generation of speakers.

They involve all the human everyday activity :

- Historical episodes (political regimes) ;
- Cultural productions and sport events ;
- Social movements (Human rights, philosophical trends) ;
- Scientific research and discoveries (medicine, biology, physics, space exploration, technology)
- Industry, Business, Finance
- Communication (transportation, media, press).

For more specification, we may summarize the main factors that cause a language to change as follows :

1. Loss of contact

A. Through Distance/Separation

Chronologically and geographically, the absence of contact between the Speakers damages the unity of their language. Glotto chronology based on the average rate of language mutation states : « when two languages go apart at a given time, they undergo 20% loss of their vocabulary every one thousand years (Darricarière, les langues Indo-Européennes (fin) in Revue Internationale des Etudes Basque »).

B. Through Population Migrations

In both directions : when migrations take populations apart or when immigrations bring them together, each of these causes changes in their own way : assimilation, adaptation, enrichment...

C. Through Forced Contacts

E.g :

- The colonization of populations or peoples coming together by force/occupation from different parts of the world creates new contexts : socio-political and cultural : pidgins and creoles, slangs, minorisation of autochtone languages, official languages, national languages. We can observe this in Africa and Latin America as the outcomings of colonization.
- A good illustration is the historical way in which terms like pork, beef, mutton came into the English language under the reign of William the Great of France who occupied England around 1066. In order to make a difference between the animals in the hands of the English Peasants and the meat served at table for the Noble French, pig left room to pork, sheep to mutton ; cow to beef...

D. From the Internal Dynamic Energy of a Language Itself and of its speakers

This includes all social dynamics field :

- Sports
- Music
- Economy
- Gastronomy
- Arts
- Science and culture

(i) Cities have a big share in language change in terms of

- Innovation (fashion, music)
- Borrowings
- Jargons

(ii) The principle of the line of least resistance commands for :

- Simplifications
- Abbreviations

E.G : Telephone → phone

Demonstration → demo

Manifestation → manif (French)

Hebdomadaire → hebdo ; publicité → pub (French)

(iii) Fashion, Art, Technology : creation of new words and phrases especially with scientific discoveries by resorting to old etymology (Greek, Latin). Let us mention once more the linguistic revolution lead by Lavoisier et al. in 1787. When scientists in Europe found themselves in the centre of an absence/shortness of a scientific terminology and faced a great number and important cultural and scientific trends in the field of research ; which forced them to develop a vast and specialized lexicology in different research domains : medical science, architecture, mathematics, social sciences and letters. The French Academy

decided to resort to Ancient Greek and Latin to build up a scientific terminology. Lavoisier, Bethoven, Fourcroix, Morveau and others brought about a dictionary named « Dictionnaire pour la Nouvelle Nomenclature Chimique » (1787).

(iv) – Age and Social class :

The need for a difference from others :

- Youngsters vs. seniors (li/makambo → ma'ambu)
- Received Pronunciation (R.P) vs. Queen's English (U.K)
- Pig meat → pork
- Cow meat → beef

(v) Necessity, Snobishness, attraction for borrowings :

Safari (Sw) → safari in western languages

Matata : idem

Lingala facile, Indoubil.

(vi) Requirements for decorum :

Avoidance of some words for others :

Toilet → water closet, loo, bathroom, restroom

kosumba → nzongo enene/ike, kobaluka na sima ya ndako (Li)

(vii) The existence of more than one word to express the same concept often forces some of them into obsolescence among the least used ones :

Ouïr (Fr) has been put aside in favour of entendre around 1130 (Larousse, Dictionnaire Etymologique et Historique du Français, 2011).

Telephone (verb and noun) tends to leave the floor to phone, call, ring, give a call/ a ring.

(viii) Affixation : prefixation, infixation, suffixation, help produce new words to express quality, absence of quality, exaggeration, number, localization...

- Umuntu → abantu → bumuntu (Bantu)
- Beatable → unbeatable ; powerful → powerless (English)
- Inside → outside → beside (i.d.)
- Globalization (ibid.)
- Bicentenaire, Polyglotte, hypersensible (French)

E. Phonetic Rules at work

As a continuum of sounds (Gimson, 1912) spoken language puts words in connection. Thus, when the sounds clash together, they give way to some word alterations which, in turn, may become incrustated in current language ; such alterations are known as :

- a) Assimilations : in the structures and in words
 E.g :
 - How do you do ? [ha:dʒəjədu:] (Engl)
 - Ndi ndia [ndjindja] (Luba)
- b) Ellisions and Contractions
 One contraction may cause another in a phrase/sentence.
 E.g :
 - I am going to [aim ɡɔnə] (Eng)
 - nadjali koya → nadji'koya → nayi koya → nâ koya (Li)
 - nayali koya → nayi koya/nazo ya → nâ koya → nâ ya (id.)
 - literature → li/rə/tritʃə (Am/British)
- c) Stops : but → bə' [bʌt]
- d) Internal isolating alterations (Aitchinson, op.cit., 68) : expansions, reductions
- e) Word lengthening/shrinking by the addition of a/in : pre/su-fix
- f) Mono or multi syllabisation consequent to sound drop devocalization/vocalization
- Dada (Mba) → daa (Mba)
 - Tar (Ya) → taa
 - Tatu/mamu (Luba) → ta', ma' wanyi
 -
- g) Displacement/ substitution of sounds : metatheses and Vocalic Harmony
- Student → stu : dənt (Am)/ [stju : dənt] (British)
 - Duty → du : ri (A) dju : ti (Bri)
 - kokenda → kokende (Lingala)
- h) displacement of emphasis/stress (object, preposition, adverb... in the structure.
 These occasion some other phenomena such as :
- (i) Vowel de/nasalization
 e.g. : tempus (La) → temps (Fre)
- (ii) Vowel mutation : hora (La) → heure (Fr)
- (iii) Vowel rounding/opening
- (iv) Consonant de – vocalisation : veritas (La) → veriad (Sp)
- (v) Consonant shifts : pauper (La) → pauvre (Fre)
 This is often observed among the voiced and voiceless labials (fricative, dentals) ; palatals, nasals :
 Savon (Fre) → sabon (Po), Sabuni (Ko, Li)
 Wasser (Ger) → water (Eng)
 Loss of consonants : Petrus → Pierre
 Consonant slide is generally observed → P.36'
- (vi) Aspiration/loss of aspiration of the consonant : Julius (La) → Julio (Sp) [ulio]

- (vii) Insertion of semi- vowels between the vowels :
- Pascal (La) → Pascual (Spa)
 - Homo (La) → Uomo (It) → Ume (Bantu)
 - Kokal (Ya) → Kokual (Ya)
- (viii) Insertion of consonants between consonants and vowels in words, generally semi-vowels :
- Homo (La) → Hombre (Sp)
- Muur (Ya) → Mbur (Ya)
- Muu' → Mut (Mbuun & Song)
- Pacal → French/Latin → Pascual (Spanish) ; porta (Latin) → puerto (Spanish)
- The impact of the above enumerated phenomena with regard to our study is the REDUCTION/SIMPLIFICATION of the roots of the words which may shrink up to what Webser (op.cit.) calls Base, to mean the common root ; e.g. : gê for the verb to go in Indo-European and Bantu.
- (ix) Some changes reveal a sort of forward/backward movement historically ; i.e a sort of return of same forms of words in time.
- If we are attentive enough, we can notice, for example, that young people in Kinshasa nowadays tend to say ma'ambu for
- Likambo – makambo (Li)
 - Diambu – mambu (Ko)
 - Jambo – mambo (Sw)

Which takes us back to the former plural of the word and a loss of its singular form.

West Indians ['di:ə] for day [dei] reminds us of the Latin dies ['di:es]

- (x) Speakers' linguistic habits
- They certainly count among the factors of change in terms of distortion of words (phonology, phonetic, structure) especially when they are engaged in a process of adaptation to a new language. They may be confronted to consonant clusters, individual consonants and vowels.
- A friend of ours from studies in an American University reported such distortion as [eskɔt] for Scot [skɔt] among some black adults, exactly like [eskɔl] for Skol beer, [esta:d] for stade ; or [estastɔ] for station among some members of our community.
- The English & French vowels [ə], [ʌ], the french nasals (on, un, em, im, am, om), the English consonants [ʃ], [θ] are uttered by ordinary African speakers as [fada] for [fa:ʃə], ['brɔda] for [brʌʃə], [tɪŋk] for [θɪŋk], [lɛr] for [lɛr] l'heure.

Synthesis : observations :

Referring to our list of factors contributing to language change, it would be interesting to examine if we have justified even a few of these throughout our cognate Database, especially among those related to phonetic and phonologic rules.

We note once more the inconstant behavior of vowels compared to consonants which we think behave like bricks in the building of a wall. They are strong, indeed, and steady, predictable in their movements inside their groupments, thanks to their opposition between voiced and unvoiced or voiceless whereas vowels are simply voiced.

A consonant shift is generally observed among those produced at the same point of articulation of the mouth organs and in opposition or not, those belonging to the same groupments.

Consonant groupments are :

- (i) Labials and Bi-labials : b, p, l, bv, pf, z, m,n, f, q

Illustration : tripalium (La)

> trabairu (portuguese)

> travail (French)

> trabajo (Spanish)

- (ii) Dentals and Labio-dentals : t, d, q, ɔ, ʃ, n, f, v

Illustration :

- Tata (Ko)
- Dada (Mba)
- Dad (En)
- Daddy
- Pater (La)
- Father (En)

- (iii) Palatals : j, c, ʒ, dz, ts, dʒ

Illustration :

- dʒana (Sw) >> jana
- dʒambo (id) >> jambo
- januari (La) >> dʒaen/uəri (En)
- Cada (La) >> chaque (Fre), each (En)

- (iv) Velars and Labio-velars : k, g, v, ʁ, x, ŋ, kg, mn, kp, gb

Illustration :

- Vova/goga (Ntandu)
- Vova (Ndi) vs goga (NT)
- Vonda (Ndibu)
- Gonda (NT)

- (v) Alveolars : l, dz, ts, z, s, r, q

Illustration : lactus (La) > leche (Spa)

- (vi) Retroflexes : t, d, n

- (vii) Laringals : p, h

- (viii) Gutturals : k, ŋ
Illustration : Kerd (I-E root) > heart, Cœur (Fre)

- (ix) Nasals : m, n, ŋ
Illustration :
- ngön (Ya)
- ñôndo (Lu)

Additionally, we may easily observe a shift of consonants in these circumstances :

- (i) To avoid or to ease a consonant cluster :
e.g. :
1. Slave (En) < sclave (M-E)
 - Slavus (M-L) > esclave (Fre)
 - Estravid (Port)
 - Sclabos (Gre)
 2. Stupide (Fre)
 - Estupidos (Spa)
 3. Rire (Fre)
 - Risa (Spa)
 4. Subir (Fre)
 - Sufrir (Spa)
 5. Pluvia (Spa)
 - Mbula (Li)
 - Mvula (Ko)
 - Mvula (Sw & Zulu)
 - Mbul (Ya)
 - Station (Fre & En)
 - Estacion (Spa)
 - Estasio (Li, Ko)
- (ii) Insertion of vowels, semi-vowels and consonants
Illustration :
- Mors, mortis (La)
 - Muerte (Spa)
 - Fable (Fre)
 - Fabula (Spa)
 - Kokal (Ya)
 - Kokwal (Ya)
 - Water (En)
 - Wasser (Ger)
 - Masa (Ko)

- Madza (Ya)
- Plaza (La)
- Piazza (Spa)
- Place (Fre)
- Kulomba (Ko)
- Kolwon (Ya)
- Homo (La)
- Hombre (Spa)

- (iii) Shortening / Lengthening of words by lengthening, replacement or suppression of vowels :

Illustration

French : Rivière

Spanish : Rio

Latin : Pater > Père (French)

> Padre (Spanish)

Yansi : Tuul, nsoo, ketân

Mbala : Dulula, sogu, tunda

- (iv) Language change is also concerned with the accent. By accent, just like previously, we mean the general melody of a language or the way it sounds in general.

We gave, for example, the difference of accent between the American speech and the English tongue, pronunciation and consonance, between Italian and French, more generally between Germanic and Roman languages, or Teke and Kongo groups among the Bantu.

- The trend to change appears to be the same in all the language families and individually. It affects the pronunciation and accents and occasions vowel (mute/voiced) and consonant (voiced/voiceless) shift, lengthening/shortening, voicing and devoicing, modification or simple loss.
- The alterations can also occur by addition of pre/in/su – fixes in all the languages, to express opposition, similarity, distance or position, location, time, tenses, moods, creation of neologism to adapt to new contexts, borrowings.

Now we summarize our conclusions/observations like this :

- (v) On languages :

We note the existence of :

- Common characteristics ;
- Common change factors ;

- Similar composition of the linguistic system

This is :

- (i) Grammar or the system is made of a lexicology, structures or syntax ;
- (ii) Morphology presents a common mode of production and representation : phonology, alphabets, the international phonetic alphabet.
- (iii) The content of languages exhibits :
 - Translatability,
 - Interpretability,
 - Learnability.
- (iv) The language family tree :
It provides for traceability and cognation
- (vi) On history and mankind
Biology proves that diversity and unity are the trends
- (vii) Bantu versus Indo-European

The elements of differences if we agree that these language families developed out of a common source at the beginning, which we have been trying to demonstrate so far in our reflexion, then we should as well be able, beside our general theory of language change, to bring out the elements of differences and sameness.

In so doing we must refer to the historical evolution of the two populations from the time when they separated or emigrated so long as we can go back into the past on the basis of as much knowledge as our memory can provide us with.

The differences mentioned here reflect the marks or the results of five moments in history :

- The new environment occasions mutations in various directions : unity and diversity go together.
- The development of writing in Europe : writing helps develop and fixe a language.
- The emergence of large national entities with durable government institutions calls for linguistic unity : one nation, one language. Compared to the situation in some nations in the making like D.R. Congo with 400 ‘‘ethnic ‘‘ dialects.
- The expansion of cultural, philosophic and scientific research in Europe opened the way to discoveries in different domains and the creation of technologies.
- The advent of the industrial revolution in the ‘‘old continent’’ as a result of discoveries and technologies, synonym for welfare, richness, goods and freedom from material worries and constraints.

Finally is it possible to draw any rules as to how some of these change factors operate ?

This is difficult although a number of situations show some regularities on the phonetic level.

- (i) For an American speaker the consonant $\underline{t}$ is voiced in front of a vowel : $t+v \rightarrow$ letter [lerər]
- (ii) Ellisions of vowels or contractions of words when one of these occurs twice, in succession. This is what happens in French when the word following the definite article begins with a vowel :
 La urgence $\rightarrow$ l'urgence (emergency)
 Le élève $\rightarrow$ l'élève (school boy / girl)
 Le argent $\rightarrow$ l'argent (money)
 In Bantu languages :

- Mwana ami (Mb) $\rightarrow$ mun'ami
- Madza a mpie $\rightarrow$ madza'ampie (Yansi) fresh water
- You are (En) $\rightarrow$ you're ; he is not $\rightarrow$ He's not/He isn't

Generally, the following are predictable in some situations or contexts in all languages :

- Assimilations : I wənə gəu (I want to go)
- Ellisions : cfr. Supra
- Contractions : we aren't (we are not)
- Stops : that we aren't (we are not)
- Stops : that [fæt] $\rightarrow$ tha [fæ]
- Affixations : possible – impossible
- Abbreviations : Demo (Demonstration)
- Nasalization/denasalisation : vowel + nasal (sing)
- Liaisons : c+v : les enfants (Fr), Bob and Jack (Eng).

Conclusion

We reassert that L. change is intimately bound to the nature of man's mind as asserted at the end of our introduction on language change and human progress.

Unfortunately, it generates not only gains but also losses to the common terminology inherited from the proto-language as a number of words fall into disuse or become obsolete and disappear from history.

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