




4-22-2016

Senegal's Language Problem: A Discourse of Disparity

Monica Naida

Western Michigan University, monica.g.naida@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarworks.wmich.edu/honors_theses

 Part of the [African Languages and Societies Commons](#), [Bilingual, Multilingual, and Multicultural Education Commons](#), [Educational Assessment, Evaluation, and Research Commons](#), [Educational Methods Commons](#), and the [French and Francophone Language and Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Naida, Monica, "Senegal's Language Problem: A Discourse of Disparity" (2016). *Honors Theses*. Paper 2714.

This Honors Thesis-Open Access is brought to you for free and open access by the Lee Honors College at ScholarWorks at WMU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact maira.bundza@wmich.edu.



Senegal's Language Problem: A Discourse of Disparity

By: Monica Naida

April 22, 2016 at Western Michigan University

Under the guidance of: Dr. Laura Hastings, Dr. Sarah Summy, and Dr. Virginia David

Abstract

The purpose of this research is to assess the deficiencies of the Senegalese education system and to evaluate improvements to the system so that it works for the Senegalese, instead of against them. My research is mostly concerned with the process in which the French language is taught in schools. I explain these deficiencies in the education system through elucidation of the discourse used by the French colonizer, politicians, non-governmental organizations, teachers, and parents. My approach to this research includes an extensive literature review as well as my own personal observations during a faculty-led research trip to Dakar, Senegal during the summer of 2015 through Western Michigan University.

In this report, I rely on a history of colonialism to give a background of the Senegalese education system, which is modeled after the French education system. I also utilize many studies by groups, which in large part includes non-governmental organizations, which perform tests in the classroom using an alternate method of language education. This method teaches European languages by using African languages as a medium of instruction and is often referred to as the “mother tongue” program or “transitional bilingual education.” The results from these studies are positive in that they showed that primary school students that were first educated in their indigenous language and then switched over to the French language after two years showed better progress and success in school than children who began their education with French as the medium of instruction. This system has been successful in many African countries but Senegal has not yet adopted this method as its official system. This leads to three research questions that will attempt to explain the conservation of this inefficient education system.

1. How does the French language education system affect Senegal, a country with many languages?

2. What is an alternative to using French education and what are the various reactions of the Senegalese?
3. Why has this system not been indoctrinated as the primary method of education?

My conclusion is that discourse does have an effect on the decisions made in education and these decisions affect the literacy level in Senegal. In addition, I recommend that Senegal make the change to this alternate form of education as quickly as possible in order to help increase literacy in indigenous languages and in the French language as well as to help unite the country linguistically and culturally.

French Colonialism: A Legacy of Imperialist Rule

Colonialism in Africa begins in the 15th century when the Portuguese started exploration of the continent. Portugal's success was imminent and it was not long until the rest of Europe was able to imagine the possibility of the wealth and power they could gain by occupying the African continent. In West Africa, off the coast of Senegal, from the years 1588-1677, the Dutch established a trading post for goods, which they eventually turned into a trading post for slaves. The Island of Gorée, off the coast of Senegal, was the largest slave trading port off of the African coast. The French and English competed for control of this island from the years 1677-1815 and the French eventually won the territory in 1815 because of the Treaties of Paris and Vienna. These treaties also banned the slave trade (OXFAM, 1994).

The true geographic "scramble for Africa" begins in earnest with the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885. This conference consisted of Europeans deciding how Africa would be carved into territories. Although there were no Africans present at this conference, it was decided that West Africa went to the French, most of East and South Africa went to Great Britain, and other large areas went to Belgium, Netherlands, Portugal, and Spain. This conference ensured that European

powers would not wage war with each other over boundaries and instead focus their efforts on colonization and imperialism of Africa.

This slow takeover of Africa took many forms. One of the proliferations of this takeover is the formation of Senegal's borders in 1904 (OXFAM, 1994). Before 1904, Senegal was merely a part of the large continent of Africa, with different tribes scattered throughout the land. After 1904, Senegal is sequestered within its own boundaries, boundaries that were made by Europeans who disregarded the cultural, political, and ethnic history that shaped the entire African continent. This disregard has caused conflicts between ethnic groups, and these conflicts often take the form of violence. For example, the Casamance, which is separated from the rest of Senegal by the Gambia, has made attempts since 1982 to become a sovereign territory. The problem is, the French ruled this specific territory separately from Senegal from 1854-1939 and combined the two areas during the last twenty years of colonialism. The ethnic group Diola (who speak the Diola language) practices animism and comprises about 60% of the population of Casamance (Fall, 2010). They desire to be independent from a country in which the majority of the population speaks Wolof (90%) and practices Islam (95%) (Fall, 2010). If France had evaluated their territories and accounted for these differences, these two areas would be separate and the Diola people, along with the other ethnic groups of Casamance, would be able to function as a sovereign territory, with the ability to form their laws and government around their own beliefs and culture.

At its very base, colonialism functions for the purposes of increased world power and wealth so in addition to the aftereffects of border manipulation, colonialism also gravely affects political systems, religious systems, language and culture, trade, and the land. In the case of Senegal, France found it advantageous to their goals of cultural imperialism to model the political system after the French system and to push the French language and culture agenda, especially in schools where the

French teachers could easily influence children that the French way was the best way. Part of this push for French culture came in the form of Catholic missionaries and although most in Senegal now identify as Muslim, 5% of the population claims to be Catholic (USAID, 2015). The land was exploited for obtainment of natural resources such as rubber, palm oil, gold, and ivory and much of the trade of these natural resources in West Africa was facilitated off the coast of Senegal, on the Island of Gorée.

I visited the Island of Gorée while in Senegal. It is now a UNESCO heritage site and functions as a tourist attraction. The colorful colonial homes have been either kept intact or rebuilt and there is a museum outlining the triangular trade route that transported slaves and goods. The island was at once a delight and a cruel trick, where Westerners come to learn about the brutality of their own ancestors while palm trees sway in the breeze and the pink and yellow houses seemed to be anything but cheerful. Colonialism partially finds its roots in this island and the history of colonialism is now preserved there, possibly for the simple reminder to never let it happen again.

French Colonial Discourse in Education and the Rise of Senegalese Schools

This section demonstrates the French attempts to control the Senegalese population through the education system. This takes the form of attempted linguistic and cultural assimilation through the indoctrination of the French education system as the official education system during colonial rule. This meant that French teachers taught the French language, culture, and all subject matters with French textbooks. According to Diallo, “the primary purpose was to alienate Africans, in order to assimilate them into the French culture and values” (Diallo, 2011). This alienation mostly occurred because this forced students into having ethnic identity struggles. They were Senegalese at home but were expected to behave like French children at school. This repelled parents and

prompted a movement of schools built and paid for by Senegalese communities so that their children would not be indelibly shaped by assimilation policies.

This French education system influenced the Senegalese with physical actions such as forming a system of governance and setting up an education system, and with verbal actions, which I will refer to as discourse, which aided the French greatly in creating a state of imperialistic control in Senegal. Discourse can be defined as “the totality which includes within itself the linguistic and the non-linguistic; a system of meaningful relations established by social constructions” (Laclau, Mouffe, 1987). Discourse shapes attitudes towards entities such as policies or systems by offering an explanation for their existence in order to sway public opinion in favor of them.

The discourse present during colonial times was instrumental in changing Senegalese mindset to become less African and more French, to convince the Senegalese that their way of life was far inferior to the French way of life and in this way, the Senegalese identity was tarnished. The establishment of the physical systems such as the government and education systems changed the way that Senegal functioned but the discourse enacted by the French changed the way the Senegalese identified individually and with each other. In the case of education in Senegal, I argue that the discourse present in the French education system hindered the development and efficiency of the country because it emphasizes the French way of life while degrading the Senegalese way of life, forcing the people into an identity struggle. This discourse is present in many different areas of life but has a significant effect in education, where it is enacted on the most vulnerable of the population, the children, who are easily impressionable.

Rodney speaks of the French colonial empire of the 19th through the 20th century in West Africa and how the French used “development for underdevelopment” (Rodney, 241) to create a system of education that would “train Africans to help man the local administration at the lowest

ranks and to staff the private capitalist firms owned by Europeans” (Rodney, 240). The education system only taught some Africans the French language, usually handpicked by the French administration. These Africans would then gain low-ranking positions in the government or with business firms while the French ruled these systems. The French actions during colonialism created and perpetuated a public education system that benefited the colonial empire.

Senegal officially became part of French West Africa in 1895 during the age of the European scramble for Africa and French influence lasted until Senegalese independence in 1960. France first introduced the education system in 1817 and after the system was put into place, inequalities based on French dominance escalated quickly (Diallo, 2011; Rodney, 1981). This system was based on “politico-financial” (Rodney, 241) decisions, which means that decisions were based upon French politics of dominance and inequality rather than the actual amount of money available to the colonies (Rodney, 1981). Considering it was advantageous to French rule for the Senegalese to be mostly uneducated, the French spent so little money on West Africa from the 1920s to the 1950s that money was allocated for a mere 77,000 students out of 15 million to be educated (Rodney, 1981). The French did not want Africans to be educated and they showed it. This discourse is a silent and slithery one, one that excludes and impoverishes while wearing a smug smile and spouting the blasphemy that “there just isn’t enough money.” Rodney states, “most of Africa’s surplus was exported; and, out of the small portion which remained behind as government revenue, the percentage channeled into education was tiny” (241).

The next form of discourse the French employed in their colonial agenda of Senegal is the culturally inappropriate education the children received. Those lucky enough to attend school were taught about the European climate and culture, which Rodney calls “the creation of mental confusion” (241). During the control of schools by the French colonial administration (about 1920-

1960, officially), West African children learned that there are four seasons when in reality, there are only two in West Africa (Rodney, 1981). They would learn about the flowers and plants of Europe, but not of their own plants, a facet of life that is of extreme significance in West Africa (Rodney, 1981). Rodney states darkly, “they would learn that ‘the Gauls, our ancestors, had blue eyes’” (247). This sort of discourse is a powerful one in favor of the French. In taking charge of the public education system, they were able to influence the youngest and most impressionable minds to become as close to European as they possibly could be, while still withholding most students from secondary and higher education. This manipulation set a powerful precedent for the Senegalese, because even if they knew better, it was an asset to their futures in colonized Africa to be educated in this way because acceptance of European culture usually meant becoming an *assimilée*, or “one who could be assimilated or incorporated into the superior French culture” (Rodney, 247). The paradox is that these children had a fierce ambition to be successful and in French West Africa, that meant rejecting one’s own African identity for the French European identity.

While the first sort of discourse discussed is much more discreet than the latter, both played a significant role in ruining a West African child’s chance at self-identity, cultural identity, and in many cases, even depriving them of basic education. Rodney goes on to say that this discourse caused “the dehumanizing principle of alienation from self” (Rodney, 254). By polarizing so greatly the home life and school life, the majority of Senegalese children had to act differently at home and at school. At home, the children could be African. They spoke their native language, wore African attire, and performed African cultural customs in their homes with their families. This is the way they were raised. In school, however, the children had to be European. They had to speak French, practice European classroom customs, and pretend that they had blue eyes and that roses grew in their backyards. This “alienation from self” of which Rodney speaks is the collision of these two worlds, and the children are the ones disadvantaged by this identity struggle.

In addition to the slow ruin of Senegalese culture and identity by this education system, the French language education system was not effective in teaching children subject matter because it did not effectively teach the French language, in which all subjects were taught. Jean Dard, a French schoolteacher, pinpointed this problem in 1817, when he alone started the first “Western-style” school in Senegal (Diallo, 209). He understood at the outset of this education system that it would not be effective in teaching because “he realized the challenge to teach young Africans in a language that was completely alien to them” (Diallo, 209). Dard wanted to change this because he knew that this would only serve to discourage the children, “and often the first month of education will be enough to discourage him forever” (Dard as quoted by Diallo, 209). Dard then learned Wolof and Bambara so that he could educate in these languages and teach French through the use of these languages as a medium. We now call this transitional bilingual education. Dard utilized the mother tongue education system two hundred years ago because he knew that “black people must be educated in their own language; without this there won’t be any sustainable schools, any civilization” (Dard as quoted by Diallo, 209).

Dard was completely revolutionary for this time of colonialism and was sent back to France shortly after his aims for education became apparent to the French administration. The colonial system then drafted by-laws that banned local languages from education and that made it clear that there was no room for Senegalese languages or culture, only the French language and culture (Diallo, 2011). The beginning of the mother tongue education system was stopped in its tracks at Dard’s exit and as a result, the Senegalese grew to despise the new French education system. In addition to the lack of money in education, Senegalese parents did not want their children in schools that were “a symbol of political and cultural domination” (Diallo, 210).

Fortunately, the West African people certainly did not take the lack of quality education submissively. According to Rodney, “the secondary school opportunities would have been narrower, and the ideological content would have been more negative, if the activities of the African masses were not in constant contradiction” (Rodney, 262). From 1930 to 1960, West Africans that were able opened schools so that a greater majority of children and young adults could acquire an education in hopes of becoming part of a “Frenchman” population, the highest position a West African could aspire to in the days of colonialism. While these schools were not explicitly private, this attempted control over the youth education was the closest thing to a private school education most would receive.

Others who desired private education and were part of the majority Muslim population attended Koranic schools. Koranic schools helped immensely with literacy because students learned Arabic script and were able to apply the Arabic alphabet to their own native languages (Gellar, 2005). Gellar states, “in the rural areas, far more Senegalese were literate in Arabic than in French” (129). These private schools were instrumental in educating many Senegalese, especially in the rural areas, but also in the cities, where public colonial education was more accessible but just as undesirable.

This persistence by the Senegalese community for an increase in education, especially at the secondary level, “establish[ed] an order of priorities different from that of the colonialists” (Rodney, 266). This discourse, although desperate in some ways and subtle in others, helped to push the African continent, including Senegal, towards independence and out of the European chokehold. Taking back control of the education of their own children meant a strengthening in ideology for Africans and a loss of confidence in the French system, which resulted in a slow loss of French colonial power. This is a significant example in the African fight between preserving their culture

and tradition and the ever-invasive colonial agenda. It seems that in this case, the culture and traditions of Senegal still had a noteworthy presence against Westernization and this shifted the power slightly away from the French administration and towards their own informal system of education. This movement, which occurred intermittently from about 1930 until 1960, educated many more children than would have been educated under the French system and in this way, the Senegalese slowly started to take back their power over their homeland.

Senghorian Negritude and the French Language

The uncertain thrill of independence accompanies a new era for the Senegalese people in 1960, a landmark year for so many African countries in gaining independence from their colonizers. As France was formulating its exit strategy, a young Senegalese was climbing his way to the top, with big ideas that seemed as if they would change things for the better. Leopold Sedar Senghor was elected as the first president of Senegal. He was a man with the black skin of an African but with the brain of a man with multiple identities, trying to find a way to marry the both in his new Senegal. He presented the Senegalese with a philosophy called Negritude, his own cry for a Civilization of the Universal, which called for blacks and whites living and working in harmony with one another. However, many critics argue that the way in which Senghor used his ideas of Negritude was actually detrimental to the recovery of black Africa after colonization. Article 1 of the Senegalese Constitution drafted in 1960 instituted French as the official language of the newly established Republic of Senegal. When Senghor passed this law in 1960, a mere 11% of Senegalese people were able to write French correctly in addition to an extremely low school enrollment rate, 36% for boys and 0% for girls (Diallo, 2011). This decision by Senghor kept the country divided socioeconomically, socially, and educationally by preserving the French language. In passing this law, Senghor preserved the language of the elite, white, wealthy, and powerful, as the official medium of instruction in all government-run schools.

Senghor defended this decision through spoken and written discourse. Discourse is an almost invisible force that affects a population's opinions and perceptions of their own systems and the situations in which they find themselves. This discourse was mostly channeled through his ideas of Negritude that were powerful and pervasive for the Senegalese, because these ideas came in a time of political change on a grand scale, from a politician they trusted.

I argue that Senghor's discourse operated on an antithesis of itself and that it served only to disillusion and confuse the Senegalese, putting them at a disadvantage to understand how dire a problem the language division would become. Senghor's discourse, whether written or spoken, had a significant effect on the newly independent Senegal of 1960-1980 just as his legacy has continued to influence politics into the present day.

Senghor was born in 1906 into fortune to a father who flitted seamlessly from the old and new worlds of Africa. Senghor was Catholic and not part of the majority Muslim population because his father was "a friend of the Europeans and practiced their religion, Catholicism" (Rabaka, 197). Senghor's father became a primary influence in his professional life, his father a staunch supporter of French influence while still supporting Senegalese culture and beliefs. Beginning in 1928, Senghor attended high school and university in Paris, France and earned his PhD equivalent in French grammar and literature in 1935 (Mabana, 2012). Senghor matured in France and effectively became a Frenchman in a Senegalese body: he was assimilated into the French way of life from his youth, he spoke French impeccably, he was Catholic, the religion of Europe, and most importantly, he supported French influence in Africa, which is evidenced through his set of beliefs, called Negritude, which he developed while in school in Paris.

Senghor defined his Negritude as "the entire values of the civilization of the black world as they are expressed in the life and the works of Blacks" (Mabana, 4-5) and he expressed these ideas

mostly through poetry. One of the key facets in Senghor's poetry was his insistence that the black and white world are inextricably connected, that one needs the other for either to function efficiently. In testament to this, Mabana states, "Africa and Europe being linked by the navel, it is up to the Black to ensure rhythm and sensitivity to balance the geometrical world of the White" (5). An example of this is present in his poem "Prière aux masques", which contains three important verses in understanding Senghor's opinion on the African role in the new world of post-colonialism:

That we be present at the Renaissance of the World
Like the leaven is necessary to the white flour
For who would teach rhythm to the dead world of machines and canons?
(Written by Senghor, translated by Mabana, 6)

Mabana argues that Senghor reduces Africans to "soul instead of intelligence, intuition instead of knowledge" (7). In Senghor's poems, Black Africans are portrayed as the soul and rhythm needed to liven the capitalist machine that is Europe, a role that is both complementary and inferior. He expects little out of his African brothers and sisters, depreciating them to the role of the unneeded third leg. His poetry does not hold the belief in a future for Africans that is independent from Europe. He only believes a future in which the Senegalese are neither free nor independent from Europe. A world in which the colonial system drags on – but with Europe at a distance this time, a physical distance that makes all the difference for discourse because Senghor seemed uninfluenced by France, ready to form Senegal into a country that benefits the Senegalese. This distance aids Senghor in convincing the Senegalese that conditions will improve, and that by keeping European policies, the country will flourish like other European countries, but with an added African spirit and "rhythm", ignoring that Senegal is not France, that Africa is not Europe. In testament to this, Rabaka states "Senghorian Negritude has a tendency to acquiesce to colonial assimilation even as it purports to defend 'African cultural values'" (211).

Another example of discourse put forth by Senghor came in the form of a 1974 speech to the Indian Academy of Ministers in which he stated:

“Negritude, to-day, consists in grounding ourselves deeply in the values of the black peoples, but, at the same time, also in opening ourselves to other civilizations: to the European civilization for sure, which, though furthest away from us, marked us a lot, historically...” (Senghor, 272).

It was in this way of crafting discourse to the world outside of Senegal that Senghor was able to preserve the economic and political policies started by the Europeans. He justified this course of action by using discourse that was acquiescent to the venerable power of Europe and that was accepting of a fate that allowed Senegal and France to continue on inexorably intertwined. In this excerpt, he mentions all civilizations and then quickly states that Europe is the most important civilization for Senegal to be open to, alerting the world that his country will be preserving relations with France while portraying this relationship as beneficial for Senegal. He says all of this directly after stating that his main platform of belief, the face he has shown to the world as a politician, is first and foremost concerned with “the values of the black peoples”, not of the values of Europeans.

In this excerpt, Senghor’s “but” is the word that shows he thinks of Senegal as a country without the ability to be sovereign from Europe. He shows that although he talks the talk of independence, he fears a Senegal without the French influence in which he feels the most comfortable. He shows that he does not have enough faith in his country to recover from the time of colonialism so he takes a tone of discourse that portrays a team effort mentality, as if Senegal suddenly gained first-world country status and could do just as much for France as France could do for Senegal.

The success of France as a country may have made it difficult for Senghor to reconcile with changing Senegal’s system and risking failure rather than sticking with a system that has shown success, though in a different country. He wanted to follow an established system, not only of

economics and politics, but also of language. The first article of the Senegalese Constitution, written in 1960, directly after independence, established the official language of Senegal to be French. However, “the fact that less than one-fifth of the Senegalese population was literate in French or spoke French fluently at independence made it highly unlikely that the people would be active participants in the government” (Gellar, 130).

This one article of the constitution would prove to be polarizing and tragic for the Senegalese, although Senghor “argued that Senegal’s indigenous languages and Arabic lacked the logic and rationality needed to transform and modernize the country” (Gellar, 130). He thought that the African languages were not efficient languages in which to study scientific concepts and philosophical thoughts (Diallo, 2011). However, this idea actually led to these subjects being taught in French, a language that very few understood. The outcome was that these subject matters fell on ears that could not comprehend the concept because the medium of communication failed. The failure of this idea is inexcusable, considering Senghor’s education in linguistics. How could Senghor think that French was the most important language for the Senegalese to know? Senegal has a very high percentage of Muslims (current percentage is around 95%), many of whom learn Arabic. In addition, Wolof is the most commonly shared language in Senegal, with around 90% of the population able to speak it. It spearheads the family of indigenous languages and is considered the lingua franca of Senegal (Gellar, 2005). The discourse by Senghor is pro-European and pro-neocolonialism, dripping with desire to be the savior of his country by forming it into the spitting image of a more successful and more financially and linguistically secure Europe, a place nothing like the colonized and disadvantaged countries of Africa.

Cheikh Anta Diop, a writer and scholar for which the Cheikh Anta Diop University in Dakar (UCAD for short) was named, was one of the first to protest against the use of French as the

medium of education in schools and he did so during the post World War II colonial era. Diop emphasized the importance of the indigenous languages in education, believing that the language policy would “denigrat[e]” (Gellar, 130) the indigenous languages. Diop went so far as to show the versatility of Wolof by translating Shakespeare and scientific principles into the Wolof language “to demonstrate that Wolof could adapt to the modern world and recommended that Wolof...be adopted as Senegal’s national language” (Gellar, 130). This discourse was a warning even before colonialism ended to the people that Article 1 of the Constitution was going to be tough on the Senegalese.

One positive effort Senghor made in preserving the language culture of Senegal was to declare six of the most prominent indigenous languages in Senegal as “national languages.” He did this in order to appear to give increased power to the most widely spoken indigenous languages, perhaps simply to please his critics. However, during Senghor’s presidency, from 1960-1980, they remained toothless in the educational, social, economic, and political systems of Senegal. Gellar states “recognition, however, did not mean that these languages would supersede French as the official language, require that all official documents be translated into the local languages, or that primary school instruction would be given in these languages” (131). The appointment of these six languages was merely a sign that Senghor knew the actions to take to be perceived as adhering to his principles of Negritude as these languages did not grow in prominence and power until Senghor had retired from the presidency. Senghor “saw national languages as relics of the past and ill-suited for the tasks of nation-building and development” (Gellar, 132). Senghor’s retirement in 1981 paved the way for politicians that better understood the importance of the indigenous languages such as his successor, Abdou Diouf, who “proved to be more sensitive to Senegal’s historical traditions than his mentor Senghor” (Gellar, 132).

Senghor never asks the question: What if we had not been colonized? He chooses to ignore a world in which Africans innovate in their own way, in which they had their own industrial and technological revolutions, in which the years of colonization had been instead years of sovereignty, peace, and development. Instead of supplying the people with the confidence and courage they needed to break free of European dominance, he led them in the direction of continued servitude to a system that cannot account for their needs. Mabana concludes “it is precisely the tone of his poetry, the pretentiousness of his statements and the ideological background of his thought which have harmed the entire Negritude” (Mabana, 10).

I believe that Senghor had the best intentions for his country in preserving the French systems, but he did not foresee the negative outcomes of doing so. His discourse is confident and boisterous, using Negritude to create the appearance of African cultural values innovating and ruling in Senegal. However, fear of the unknown was a powerful force in Senghor’s presidency. His actions, although detrimental to the development of Senegal after independence, show that he wanted the best for his people because he was significantly concerned by the question: What are we without the French? Senghor’s every written and spoken word that formed the body of discourse communicated to the Senegalese, to Europe, and to the world at large stated that Senegal’s best interests lie in preserving European influences. This discourse started the conversation for shaping post-colonial Senegal. It played a significant role in forming the current ineffective and unjust language system through the conviction that success for Senegal without Europe is impossible.

Discourse on Decisions in Public and Non-Formal Education

After the ages of colonialism and Senghor, education continues to be undersupplied and malfunctioning, unable to give the Senegalese a chance for an educated life. Walter Rodney, a

Guyanese writer and activist who revolutionized the way in which we understand underdevelopment in Africa, stated “education is crucial in any type of society for the preservation of the lives of its members and the maintenance of the social structure” (Rodney, 238). The more educated a person is, the more likely they are to succeed in their lives and their journeys to self-actualization. Education is the way that children learn and understand the functions of the human world in order to find their own place within it. Unfortunately, Senegalese children rarely have the ability to earn a quality education. Even in primary school, resources are scarce, books are too few, students are too many, and the teachers are often undertrained and underpaid. These problems contribute to the most significant barrier education faces, the language barrier. When Senghor signed the first article of the constitution of Senegal into effect in 1960, he made it mandatory for French to be the medium of instruction in all Senegalese schools.

To help demonstrate what this means, I want us to imagine a student entering a classroom on the first day of school. This student speaks Mandinka as a first language and Wolof as a second language. He/she has heard French before but has never spoken it with family, as none of his/her family or friends speaks fluent French. The teacher begins to teach and every word is French, a language that this student cannot comprehend, in part because he/she never learned it, and in part because African languages and the French language are linguistically unique from one another. According to the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), most of the codified national languages in Senegal function as transparent languages while the French language is an opaque language. The more transparent a language is, the easier the words are to read and pronounce because the letters “consistently correspond to one sound” (USAID). Consequently, children who speak a transparent language for their entire childhood and then try to switch over to an opaque language in school have a very difficult time doing so. At such a vociferous rate of change, the students are set up to fail from their first day of school.

One solution to this language problem has found success in many post-colonial African countries as a method of teaching the European language. It entails a gradual conversion from the student's first or second language to the French language. This is referred to as transitional bilingual education and it has yielded positive results for both students and teachers in its classroom trials (Albaugh, 2014).

Non-governmental organizations, or NGOs, have been instrumental in introducing this education system to the Senegalese since the 1980s. NGOs are organizations that operate for no profit as all of their funds go back into their projects. These projects focus on humanitarian aid in issues with the environment, poverty, and in this case, culture loss and illiteracy as well as other social problems. These NGOs work together to facilitate transcription of local languages, to create a program that has positive long-term results, to implement this program in schools, and to help sensitize the community to the foreignness of a new language program. This program was first introduced to the non-formal, or private, education system, in order to gain support for the program while analyzing its efficacy (SIL, Albaugh, 2014). In Senegal, this program has been tested in a non-formal setting because of a lack of program funds, learning materials, and governmental support for implementation in public schools (Albaugh, 2014).

The NGOs involved in making models for the mother tongue program in schools are numerous and there is a debate over which model is able to serve the population the most efficiently. SIL has been instrumental in the development and production of the education materials utilized by students in the L1 to L2 (mother tongue) program (SIL). ELAN (National Languages and Schools in Africa) is the most significant language program because it is the official model for the mother tongue program in schools. ADEF (Association for the Development of Education and Training in Africa) has had the most significant contribution in this area by forming Community

Foundation Schools and in turn facilitating the creation of a specific department in the Ministry of Education. This department is called the Directorate for Promotion of National Languages (DPLN henceforth) and was created specifically for the implementation of this program in public schools.

Issues in Literacy: Why Does Changing the System Matter?

Before the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885, Africa was a continent without boundaries. Tribes ruled their parts of the land and spoke their own language, free from colonial cultural imperialism. These “artificially created” (Leonie, 1) African states have found it difficult to reconcile the differences between their many indigenous languages and the European languages forced upon them. There was an assumption about colonialism that a process of rationalization would occur, which means that over time, a large number of languages would be pared down to one language that would be for general public use. This happened in most European countries because they slowly formed into their current boundaries (Leonie, 1). For example, in France there were many different languages present before the 16th century, including the dominant Latin language, but a decree in the mid-1500s made it so that French was the official state language and from there, the country was slowly rationalized so that everyone spoke French (SLMC). This has not been the case in Senegal or any other African country. Instead, “speakers have changed their language repertoires while still maintaining their indigenous language” (Leonie, 1). Whereas France lost their indigenous languages, African countries have clung to theirs, which is a positive development for culture and a clear sign that a different approach to teaching the colonial language needs to be taken, with greater regard to the indigenous languages.

In questioning why changing this system of education from monolingual to bilingual is beneficial to the Senegalese, I found a striking example when speaking with my host mother in Senegal. I had noticed that the three male children in the family, with ages ranging from three to

nine years old, all spoke a high level of French for their ages. However, I never heard them speak Wolof, the indigenous language that most in Dakar speak, nor could they understand when my host mother spoke in Wolof to her son. I inquired about this and found that my host mother ensured they learned French at the expense of learning Wolof so that their entrance into school would not be a struggle for them. In my eyes, she made the choice for her grandchildren to have the ability to learn in school without a significant language barrier so that they have a chance to succeed in school and in future endeavors and she shunned culture as a result. It is unjust that a family should have to choose between teaching children the culture and languages of their homeland and teaching them the language of a European power in order that they do not fail out of school. It is important to note that these children are lucky to have a family that is literate in French and is able to prepare them adequately for the challenges posed by the education system because the majority of children of Senegal do not.

To further explain why this system must change, one must examine the disadvantages of a low literacy rate in the French language and a low school attendance rate as well as the advantages a literate population could bring to the culture and productivity of the country. This problem starts in the classroom where “non-mastery” (ARED, 2) of the French language causes miscommunications between student and teacher, which in turn affects student and teacher behavior (ARED, 2014). This lack of communication fuels classroom conflict and weakens a student’s opinion of themselves as well as causing a teacher’s resolve and confidence to wane. Teachers are an integral part of the education system and these teachers are only allowed, by law, to speak French. This creates a sort of parrot effect in which the children only learn specific phrases and learn to repeat them back, without sufficiently learning the language. The language divide in the classroom causes the teaching and learning of scientific concepts to be problematic (ARED, 2014). In addition, the children go home

and speak their indigenous language with their family and friends. This is certainly a difficult language environment in which a child is expected to succeed.

The lack of literacy and low school attendance weakens and divides the population between those who are able to speak, read, and write in the dominant and state-mandated official language and those who are unable to do so. Lack of literacy in French means that a person is unable to gain employment through the governmental sector as well as in the private sector, in which most business comes from outside of Senegal, which begs the necessity for a common language. In addition, a low literacy level in a population makes a country weaker, as a large percentage is unable to improve their livelihood and knowledge base through reading and writing and must rely on trades that do not require such skills. Senegal's language problem is rooted in an inability to teach the French language efficiently in education, where a monolingual system has been used in formal education since the colonial age and continued after independence in 1960. This system is a hindrance to moving the country forward and bilingual education must be given priority as an alternative to the current education system.

The school attendance rate is low with “fewer than two-thirds of children” that attend primary school and out of that number, only one in seven pass the exit exams at the end of primary schooling (OXFAM, 47). This number compares to 95% of enrollment in similarly developed African countries (OXFAM, 47). Students who fail primary school will often seek education from the private schools, which comprised 20% of secondary students in 1988. In addition to this low success rate, a mere 2% of students attend university (OXFAM, 47). The reasons for this lack of school attendance and lack of success while in school is not a lack of desire in the students, it is because of a lack of opportunity. There is a serious shortage of school supplies, schoolbooks, and school buildings that contribute to this low attendance rate, as well as a shortage of qualified

teachers and a language barrier. These scarcities in materials, teachers, and school buildings are most notable in the villages of the countryside, where the least amount of resources are allocated.

OXFAM records one villager who speaks about these shortages:

“There are no schools in our village. The nearest is 9 km away, with no means of getting there. That’s the government for you. School is free, but for a good education you have to pay.” (OXFAM, 47)

Senegal’s progress has been slowed by these inadequacies in education at the most basic level. Most students living outside of the big cities have little opportunity to attend school and consequentially, will most likely never become literate, even in their indigenous language(s).

The low school attendance rate in combination with the inefficient system that uses French as a medium of instruction makes for a population with an incredibly low literacy level, especially in the French language. The literacy rate comes with cold percentages that cannot possibly account for the true situation the Senegalese face. According to UNESCO, the youth literacy rate is 55.9% and the adult literacy rate is 42.82%, which means that on average, a mere half of the population is literate. However, in what language are these groups literate? Considering the literacy rate in the French language is 21.7% as of 2003 (Diallo, 27), a large percentage of youth and adults are literate in an indigenous language that holds no power or prowess in the official Senegalese systems. While literacy in any language is an empowering force that improves the quality of life, almost 80% of people are not literate in the country’s official state-mandated language, which means difficulty in participating in politics and in the formal sector. This low French literacy level also means difficulty in knowledge acquisition, which is a hindrance in understanding occurrences and consequences within Senegal and abroad, further dividing the people from their own government and from world events.

Another important piece that factors into the low literacy rate is a shortage of adequately trained and paid teachers. A lack of funds in education has made teaching an unappealing profession because of “low salaries, overcrowded classrooms and poor working conditions” (Gellar, 133), which has in turn caused the quality of French language education to decrease. This lack of funds may attribute to the complete absence of quality teacher training schools that are based on the national languages as a medium of education (Diallo, 2011). This ensures that these schools “rely heavily on volunteers and well-wishers” (Diallo, 213) who believe in the national languages as a medium of education but do not have the skills or the numbers to make the program a reality.

This shortage of adequate teachers has made way for a volunteer teaching program, which consists of hiring university graduates on a “contractual basis” (Badiane, 105), which means they are paid less than a graduate with a teaching degree and given no benefits. They are sent to work in schools with little to no training and this is extremely detrimental to the education system. These graduates are taking teaching jobs because they do not have alternate employment in their own fields. According to Badiane, “the level of the students keeps regressing and the teachers are not motivated to make any improvement” (105). However, if more money had been allocated to paying teachers, it is possible that bilingual education could have been introduced much earlier into the education system. There is a Senegal Teachers’ Union that is in full support of the mother tongue program and has been advocating for it since the National Conference on Education Reform, which took place from 1981-1984. If there had been more qualified teachers that care about literacy education present in education, it is possible that their voices could have made a difference in education reform much earlier than the 21st century (Albaugh, 10).

As mentioned by the villager, this inadequacy in schools stems from problems with government funding for education. In 1978, at the tail end of Leopold Senghor’s presidency, he

called on the World Bank and the IMF (International Monetary Fund) for a structural readjustment program that would help the failing economy (Badiane, 105). Through the Structural Readjustment Policies, the government made cuts in public education starting in the early 1980s (Badiane, 105), which translated to these shortages in school supplies, buildings, and teachers, and which still affects the education system to this day, despite an influx of donations and grants from developed countries in the 2000s to help correct these problems. Considering discourse acts in the linguistic and the non-linguistic, the non-linguistic is certainly seen here in the actions of the IMF and the World Bank. Literacy is gained through education and “literacy is seen as an important element in the struggle against poverty” (Nordtveit, 5). The structural adjustments were necessary for Senegal’s economy but taking money out of education was not the correct action to take. This ensured that “the poor people are the victims of this situation” (Badiane, 105) because they are the ones that cannot pay for private education and must attempt to learn despite shortages in schools, learning materials, and teachers. This non-linguistic discourse showed the Senegalese that debts matter, not people, and especially not poor people. Education was cut because it does not present an immediate short-term solution to paying back the debts Senegal incurred after France picked up and left. The structural adjustment program has weakened the education system since the 1980s and although things are slowly improving, the people have paid dearly in literacy level and access to quality education.

A Language Education Alternative

There are many different systems that can be an alternate to the current education system. One of them is the method of teaching half of the student’s subjects in the native language and half of the subjects in a student’s target language, in this case, French. However, there is another system that has been more prevalent tested in West Africa, named transitional bilingual education, which involves the gradual switch from L1 (a student’s mother tongue) to L2 (a student’s second language,

in this case, French), over a period of two years (ARED, 2). This effort has manifested itself in an experimental program that has yielded success rates in Senegal. In percentages, this success means a 43% completion rate by children in experimental schools where material was taught in an indigenous language for two years with the gradual switch to the French language in the third year. This is compared to a 33% completion rate in control schools where material was taught in French from the first day of class (USAID, 2015). This program's success is notable because 10% more children were able to gain an education, even through the struggles of an education system that has never left the non-formal sector, meaning any education that exists outside of government-funded formal schooling. This sector must cope with a lack of learning materials and insufficient teacher training. If this education system was given all of the money and attention the government-supported education system receives, there is no doubt that this 43% would be higher.

The various inadequacies of this program, such as lack of learning materials and trained teachers, are combatted by a number of NGOs that work specifically for advancement of African society, especially for advancement in literacy education in order to combat the low literacy levels that plague many African countries. The NGOs that make mother tongue program models in schools are numerous and there is a debate over which model is best able to serve the population. Some of the most prominent of these models have been created by SIL Senegal, ELAN (National Languages and Schools in Africa), and ADEF (Association for the Development of Education and Training in Africa). SIL has been instrumental in the development and production of the education materials utilized by students in the L1 to L2 (mother tongue) program (SIL). ELAN is the most significant language program because it is the official model for the mother tongue program in schools. ADEF has had the most significant contribution in this area by forming Community Foundation Schools and in turn facilitating the creation of a specific department in the Ministry of Education called the Department for National Languages (DPLN henceforth). The DPLN was created for “the

promotion of national languages” (Diallo, 2011) and is the only governmental organization that exists for the purpose of implementing this program in government-run public schools.

SIL International is an organization with a powerful presence around the world because of its attempts at preserving languages and their cultures. SIL was originally started as a literacy summer camp and has since evolved (SIL). SIL helps various language communities to preserve their language and culture by performing linguistic research, codifying languages, developing learning materials, training teachers and more. This organization has “conducted linguistic analysis in more than 2,590 languages spoken by 1.7 billion people in nearly 100 countries” (SIL, 2016). Senegal has its own organization called SIL Senegal, which has been present since 1982 (SIL, 2016). SIL Senegal has truly been the most efficacious organization involved in developing teaching and learning materials for the various “linguistic minority communities” (SIL, 2016) present in Senegal and it has certainly been a driving force in changing the education system through its work in small village communities. As a testament to this, they have reached an impressive number of fourteen indigenous languages with which they work. SIL has been performing linguistic research, translation, and forming literacy programs for all of these fourteen languages since 2013 (SIL). SIL works with local speakers in order to develop these materials and because of this, the learning materials are not only helpful for increasing literacy in indigenous languages and in the French language, they are also culturally appropriate for the children that will receive the education (SIL).

SIL has been particularly effective in village communities in non-formal education, which is where this change from monolingual to bilingual change had its beginnings. In one example, Albaugh speaks of a situation in which SIL hired a Saafi-Saafi speaker, Alioune Dione, to teach literacy courses in a Saafi village using the Saafi-Saafi language as the medium of instruction (Albaugh, 2014). SIL gave Dione everything he needed to succeed, including teaching seminars in

which Dione was able to prepare the teachers in the village to instruct the literacy courses because without trained teachers, this education system cannot exist (Albaugh, 2014). This program was a success as Albaugh's surveys showed that "virtually every respondent preferred that children begin education in their mother tongue" (Albaugh, 112). In this example, SIL was able to aid a small community in becoming literate and the success of the program was able to convince the villagers that the mother tongue program is better than the system that they have known all their lives. It is clear that the French language as a medium of education is outdated, unsupported by the people, and needs to change and SIL is certainly aiding in this.

Shortly after SIL Senegal was formed, an organization called ADEF (Association for the Development of Education and Training in Africa) surfaced in 1992 and became the most significant NGO to influence the education system. Mamadou Ndoye was the pioneer of this organization, who, as the leader of the Teachers' Union of Senegal had the ability to form ADEF to push the mother tongue language program in schools (Albaugh, 2014). Their influence came in the form of non-formal education because of the observation that "the majority of school-aged children are not attending formal school" (Albaugh, 2014). ADEF saw a way to push their bilingual education agenda in non-formal education because the program's impact would be clear and unfettered and there would not be any management by the government on the testing of this program on students. This organization formed the Community Foundation Schools (Écoles Communautaires de Base or ECBs) where the mother tongue language program was tested (Albaugh, 2014). Implementation included using the mother tongue language as the medium of instruction in all subjects for two years and upon the third year French was slowly phased in as the medium of instruction (Albaugh, 2014). The Minister of Education at the time, Ndoye, hailed it as a success, stating: "We showed that in three years, pupils in the ECBs performed equal to or better in French than did their counterparts who had had six years of French" (Albaugh, 111). Although the

government did not adopt this program for use in public schools, the positive results of the ECBs did not go unnoticed and the program is used as a model for a bilingual education in the formal sector.

In addition to constructing a program that was effective in the span of a mere three years of a student's education, ADEF and other NGOs that hail similar literacy programs aided in fostering a positive public opinion towards the mother tongue program, especially in the small village communities. This mostly came in the form of educating parents on the importance of using the local languages as a medium of education in order to form a positive opinion for the program so that, when adopted by the government in formal schooling, there would not be a strong pushback by the parents. In doing so, they fostered pride in the families for their indigenous languages in addition to convincing them that the key to French language acquisition for their children lies in the child's first language, and not in a French-taught classroom (Albaugh, 2014).

This sort of discourse has been practiced by many NGOs as they have a more effective role in influencing parent opinion than does the government. They are more effective because of the nature of NGOs as grassroots organizations. With people who have contributed their time to caring about the success of individual communities, sensitization has come easier to the families. The people that work for NGOs are regular people wanting to make a change whereas government officials can be seen as intimidating, sent in to change things against the wishes of the people. The people in the villages may accept NGOs more readily than government intervention because the organizations often come in and take time to learn about the specificities of the village and in turn, learn to work with these unique characteristics. When NGOs come into the non-formal sector, meaning any education that exists outside of government-funded formal schooling, and succeed in improving literacy in the indigenous language as well as in the French language, this helps to convince people to

try this approach to literacy education. When there are positive results in the non-formal sector, the people will accept this program when it is indoctrinated into government-funded schooling. Even though this program comes from the government, families will not shy away because they already trust that it is effective. In this way, NGOs help to sensitize the people to this mother tongue program and once it has been successful, it can be successfully moved into government hands, as long as the government has the resources it needs to implement the programs in public schools country-wide.

This discourse by ADEF did not only affect the families in the villages, it also affected government opinion of such a program. Mamadou Ndoye not only started ADEF, he pushed its agenda all the way to the government. The success of the Community Foundation Schools (ECBs) was met with worldwide attention and because of this, the Senegalese government decided to fund NGOs to implement programs in non-formal education (Albaugh, 113). Ndoye went even further in the government and was appointed the position of Minister for Literacy and National Languages and through this position, elevated the importance of the bilingual education program from non-formal schooling to formal schooling (Albaugh, 2014). This change in outlook by the government eventually lent for the creation in about 1994 of the Directorate for the Promotion of National Languages (DPLN) inside the Ministry of Education which “was the decisive turn in Senegal, as now there is an institution for implementing the mother tongue policy” (Albaugh, 114). This made the program a legitimate method of education and DPLN does not take this responsibility lightly. With increased national importance, the people of Senegal could be reached much more easily and DPLN created an office that deals specifically with turning public opinion in favor of bilingual education. The work this office has done in terms of forming public opinion has manifested itself in large part through the media and includes a children’s television program that will help to convince

parents and children that the mother tongue program is important to furthering the education goals the Senegalese government has set (Albaugh, 2014).

Still, in order to take bilingual education one step further and actually introduce it into the formal education system, there must be a program in place with a specific educational framework to implement this program in public schools. In 2006, a survey called LASCOLAF was conducted by the OIF (International Organization of the Francophonie), which is a coalition of all countries where the French language or culture have a presence, with intent to “study the interaction” (Amun General Assembly, 2012) of the French language and African languages with African languages as the languages of learning. This was done in order to “discover an effective way to promote multilingualism without being deprived of cultural diversity” (transcript of French government meeting). The Ministry of Education now utilizes this education plan for the mother tongue program in the formal education system (ARED, 2014). This is certainly not the first successful study of its kind done. For example, ADEF did conduct a successful study in 1992 when the problem of literacy and French language acquisition was first being seriously addressed. Despite this, the government of Senegal has been slow to act on the successes of these organizations. This specific study was able to pool resources from a number of different countries, including the country of France. This meant the mother tongue program was able to gain the traction with the government of Senegal more so than the approaches that were less well funded and less prestigious. Additionally, the OIF also has considerable pull with the government, much more so than any NGO. It is with the LASCOLAF study that the continuation of the relationship between Senegal and France becomes apparent.

From the LASCOLAF studies came the organization called ELAN, which, in English, means National Schooling and Languages. ELAN was formed in 2011 by a partnership of eight Sub-

Saharan African countries including Senegal and four institutions which are the AFD (French Development Agency), the AUF (Francophonie University Agency), the MAEE (French Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs), and the OIF (International Organization of the Francophonie) (ELAN, 2014). ELAN is the vehicle organization to implement the LASCOLAF program in schools. Its main purpose is to “offer support for bilingual education” (ELAN, 2014) to the Ministry of Education. This support has two parts to it, the first being a type of discourse to the people and to various entities in Senegal to “raise awareness and advocate” (ELAN, 2014) for the indoctrination of this program into schools and the second being a form of support in implementing this program. ELAN has in no way claimed responsibility for the implementation of this program but instead is a support organization to the government in order to correct limitations in literacy and education.

These organizations have made all the difference. Since Jean Dard’s voice was silenced 200 years ago, these organizations have been the sole actors in pulling Senegal out of its ineffective education system and into a new age of improved literacy and cultural identity while attempting to lessen the effects of poverty and destitution. The government has been slow to act but it seems possible that positive changes are coming for education, in the form of a system that is Senegalese and not French. Senegal could soon be home to a new generation with reading and writing skills in not one, but two languages, bringing an empowering and innovating force to the country.

Roadblocks in Implementation

However, despite the success of the program, it has not been implemented widely. Currently, the lack of government funds is the most significant problem this campaign has. I question whether it is a lack of funds or merely an allocation issue. In testament to this, to produce the initial materials needed for the program, “the cost of producing [indigenous language] materials would be 1 percent

of the education budget where orthographies and language development exist” (USAID, 7). Furthermore, “the initial costs are estimated to be recovered in the long-term through improved efficiency” (USAID, 7). In this, the perpetuation of this language program seems unjustified. It seems as if simple reallocation of funds would, at the very least, give these programs a chance for success. Considering all of the evidence that this is a successful and worthy program, the government continues to lag. The reasons for this seem unclear. With all of the evidence I have presented, we must ask, why is the system staying the same?

It is certainly not the average Senegalese that is halting progress. A study done by Ibrahima Diallo, conducted in 2011, shows overwhelming evidence of support for mother tongue education with respondents from “a large spectrum of backgrounds” (Diallo, 217) using quantitative and qualitative data. The results of Diallo’s survey are overwhelmingly in favor of mother tongue education with 87% of respondents to the survey in favor of mother tongue education and only 11% not in favor (Diallo, 2011). It seems shocking that this sample of the population is so overwhelmingly in favor of the program. This means that if the people were able to vote on whether to adopt the mother tongue program or not, they would overwhelmingly vote in favor and the program would be implemented.

In examining the narratives given by the respondents for the specific reasons they are in support of mother tongue education, I am surprised at the depth of knowledge these respondents have pertaining to this education program. Diallo inquired about the most important reasons for indoctrinating national languages into the general curriculum and it is apparent that people have a wide range of reasons for implementation, all of which I have discussed as part of my research. 18% of respondents stated that the national languages “facilitate access to knowledge” (Diallo, 219). The next three most important reasons are to “make communication/understanding more effective”

(16%), that people “feel very comfortable with these languages” (12%), and that this program will help with “cultural maintenance and preservation...” (13%) (Diallo, 2011). These responses are overwhelming evidence that NGOs have made all the difference, both in sensitization and success.

It is clear that the majority of the population is in favor of this program but what does the other 11% think? The most popular reasons for rejecting bilingual education are “that the national languages are ‘just spoken in Senegal’” (Diallo, 222) which accounted for 23% of respondents and that these languages are “languages of division” (Diallo, 222) which accounted for 22% of respondents. These reasons seem to belong in the past, in the age of Senghor, when the mother tongue education had not yet been tested and proved successful and when Senegal was newly unleashed from the colonial power, unsure of their own future or place in the world systems.

While these reasons certainly hold significance as opinions, they are not justifiable as reasons to not implement this program. For example, the fact that the national languages are only spoken in Senegal degrades the importance of Senegal as a country and assumes that most people will leave the country at some point during their lives. Polish is only spoken in Poland and Czech is only spoken in the Czech Republic but instead of degrading themselves, they take pride in their linguistic uniqueness. It is high time Senegal does the same. In addition, the claim that the indigenous languages divide the population is untrue. With the implementation of this program, children would start learning French in their third year of school, when they are still young enough to grasp the language quickly. At this point, these children will already be literate or at least partially literate in their native tongue and feel ready to learn an additional language. This education system ensures that the children, at the completion of primary school, have a strong knowledge of two languages, while the current system is unable to educate a large majority of children in even one language, let alone

two. This program would in fact unify the population because the French literacy percentage would increase and this would facilitate unity, not division, of the people.

The population is mostly in favor of the mother tongue program and the evidence exists that it is more successful than the current system. Yet, the system remains. My argument is that this system is not changing because government officials have something to gain from the French education system. This is evidenced through a study conducted by Ericka Albaugh, in which she examines the opinions on mother tongue education of different groups within the government in order to understand more fully the very system holding literacy education back from its full potential.

Nationalist leaders in Senegal are present on both sides of the argument of language in education. For these leaders, it is the conflict between personal gain and advancement for their country. Nationalist leaders desire ease of administration which begs the French language but also desire political favor from the people, which begs the promotion of Senegalese languages (Albaugh, 2007). It is more beneficial for them in some ways to keep a broken system that is already in place than to change the system and struggle through a change while in office, which would risk low popularity ratings and could elicit protest.

Presently, it is common in Senegal for nationalist leaders to speak Wolof or another national African language during campaign speeches. However, in the actual discourse of the speeches, “language [is] a marginal issue” (Albaugh, 8), meaning that although these politicians speak in a language that the entire population can understand, the language problem goes unmentioned. The oxymoron here is that this use of an African language is necessary for comprehension of these speeches by a large majority of the Senegalese population which means that the system that these politicians have advocated for since 1960 has completely failed the majority of the people. By

speaking a national language in their political speeches, these politicians use discourse to appear more African and less colonial, conveying the message that these languages are important to the country's culture but not the country's systems, including the system of education. Albaugh refers to this blatant ignorance of the language problem as "a passing reference to the intrinsic value of all of [the languages]" (Albaugh, 8). While nationalist leaders talk the talk, they do not walk the walk in indoctrinating the national languages into the education system because this change would be a risk to everything on which they have laid claim- their power, prestige, and popularity.

Another group is the civil servants of Senegal, 67% who actually favor the local languages policy in schools (Albaugh, 2007). However, knowing that this system is an improvement over the current and taking action to push it into schools are two different things. The ability to speak a European language serves these government employees well in the current system and ensures that they maintain their prowess in administration. They have seen the evidence that this program works and the majority of them are in favor but that does not mean they want to compromise their prized positions for fear that they will not be looked upon fondly.

Civil servants in the Ministry of Education, on the other hand, are completely in favor of the national languages policy because they "have absorbed intellectual reasoning about the pedagogic benefits of mother tongue education" (Albaugh, 5). They fully realize that the only way for children in Senegal to grow up as contributing members of the society in which they live is to teach them French in a more constructive and effective matter in lieu of the current laborious and disadvantage-causing system. However, the civil servants in the Ministry of Education are similar to the civil servants in the rest of the government. Changing this system does not improve their lives; in fact, it does not affect them at all. If they dislike the system, they have the funds to send their children to private school. In addition, changing the system may compromise their positions in some way.

In both cases of civil servants, the discourse, or lack thereof, is non-confrontational and accepting of the current system. They have no motivation to fight against the French language law because it benefits them. Considering that people are inherently self-interested, not to say that they are selfish, merely interested in their own well being, there is no rational reason for them to sacrifice their livelihood simply because they believe that the current system is not working. If these civil servants have not taken action in the past fifty-six years, I would argue that the discourse coming from them does not have much hold in this discourse on language situation. They are the inconsequential middle, plodding along with half-baked opinions and silent voices.

Regional language elites are the lacking piece of this discourse puzzle. Regional language elites are the educated sector of the population that are experts in linguistics and usually speak multiple languages. One regional language elite is Souleymane Faye, a professor at the University of Cheikh Anta Diop in Dakar with whom I worked closely while I was in Senegal. He speaks a plethora of languages including Serer and Wolof, African languages, as well as French, English, and Hindi. Albaugh writes about him in her article and explains his role in an experiment conducted on a native Serer population. This experiment included the use of a control French school and an experimental mother tongue program in which education was first taught in Serer and eventually changed to French. Albaugh states, “only the Serer classroom lasted the entire five years of the experiment” (15). It is people like him that are lacking in Senegal and “without the regional language elites, there are no strong advocates for local languages in education” (Albaugh, 16). Albaugh explains the effects of a low number of these language elites in relation to the education system by noting that without numerous language elites representing every national codified language and more, the intent of introducing the bilingual model to schools “lacks a stimulus” (Albaugh, 16).

This lack of regional language elites is a real problem when it comes to approaching the government of Senegal to propose possible solutions and provide support. For example, a regional language elite would most likely work with an NGO such as SIL to create indigenous language learning materials for teachers to use in the initial years of schooling to “switch” the student’s brains from their primary language to the French language. They may also use their field expertise to provide consultation to the government in order to plan and execute an effective program. Albaugh states, “without the regional language elites, there are no strong advocates for local languages in education” (16). This is a problem for the discourse advocating for the mother tongue program because these educated voices are simply not numerous enough to make a lasting difference. While the opinion of language elites certainly matters, a change takes many voices, not simply those of a few. Where administration and leaders continue to push for French language dominance, the discourse coming from published works and consultation by the language elites is not enough to push this language agenda. These men and women are the lifeblood of the language in education debate and there are not enough of them to start Senegal’s education system on a path to increased literacy and cultural identity.

Education in Senegal will see improvements in the future but how long will it take to change from the French education system to an education system that is uniquely Senegalese? Education is gridlocked by a centuries old system and stubborn politicians, who have been slow to change even with a solution at hand. I firmly believe that this integral change in the education system must occur in order for Senegal to grow in its nationhood and become increasingly sovereign. The current education system shuns Senegalese identity and instead embraces a system that is disconnected and foreign, boasting a prestigious world language in which most Senegalese will never be literate. To advance the country and improve the livelihood of all of the citizens of Senegal, the education system must be changed from French monolingual to a bilingual system. Change is difficult for a

government and for a population but without change, Senegal's literacy rates may never improve and the dividing line between the haves and the have-nots will continue to be visible. Angela Carter, an English writer, once stated, "Language is power, life and the instrument of culture, the instrument of domination and liberation." It is time that some power is shifted in favor of education in the indigenous languages, or else Senegal will continue to be a country with an identity crisis and untapped potential, catering to a minority of the population instead of to the masses.

Additional Research Ideas

I desire to take an additional trip to Senegal in order to conduct a large-scale ethnographic study of my own. This study would include interviews with teachers, representatives from the Ministry of Education, parents, children, and various NGOs. This would help in my research because I would be able to conduct a study firsthand and instead of relying on others to supply the opinions of the people. I would be able to write about this subject from my own experience, more so than I already have.

When in Senegal, I would research the funding of the NGOs mentioned in this paper, as there was not enough time or available data to confidently state funding information. This information would show who controls the education system, whether it be the French, the Senegalese, the Western world, or a combination, I am interested to look into this further when I have more time and resources available to me.

I also find that this research is lacking comparison. While I wanted to focus on Senegal specifically for this undergraduate piece, in the future I would like to expand this research to include comparisons to other African countries as well as to the United States, a country that is familiar to most that will read this. I find that making comparisons helps to see the situation from an aerial

viewpoint. Instead of zooming in on Senegal so closely, comparisons are needed to truly grasp the gravity and distinctiveness of this situation.

I would like to do this by exploring the language policies mandated by other West African countries that were colonized by the French by juxtaposing the state of the Senegalese education system with the state of the education systems in these countries. This would include a look inside the evolution of the language in education policies in these countries from the year 1960 on.

I would add to this by investigating the differences between the French colonial education system and the English colonial education system and how these differences have translated into the present. Are the former English colonies more successful linguistically than the former French colonies?

In addition, I would like to look at the United States, a country with no official language. This is also a way of helping the audience of this research to understand a country that they have never visited, such as Senegal, by juxtaposing it with a country of which they are citizens. How do these same problems in literacy and minimization in culture take form in a country where there is not a law in place that mandates an official language?

Works Cited

- Albaugh, E. A. (2007). Language choice in education: A politics of persuasion. *The Journal of Modern African Studies* *J. Mod. Afr. Stud.*, 45(01), 1. doi:10.1017/s0022278x06002266
- Albaugh, E. A. (2014). State-Building and Multilingual Education in Africa. doi:10.1017/cbo9781107323735
- Badiane, C. T. (2007). A Study of Three Senegalese in American Higher Education in Light of Ogbu's Theories. *State University of New York at Binghamton*. Retrieved March 27, 2016.
- Diallo, I. (2010). *The politics of national languages in postcolonial Senegal*. Amherst, NY: Cambria Press.
- Diallo, I. (2011). 'To understand lessons, think through your own languages.' An analysis of narratives in support of the introduction of indigenous languages in the education system in Senegal. *Language Matters*, 42(2), 207-230. doi:10.1080/10228195.2011.585655
- Diawara, B., & Mughal, M. (2011). Education and Employment in Sub-Saharan Africa: Some Evidence from Senegal. *Theoretical and Applied Economics*, XVIII(5), 59-76.
- ELAN. (2014). Retrieved April 20, 2016, from <http://www.elan-afrique.org/>
- Faal, C. (n.d.). The Partition of Africa | The Black Past: Remembered and Reclaimed. Retrieved March 14, 2016, from <http://www.blackpast.org/gah/partition-africa>
- Fall, A. (2010). Understanding The Casamance Conflict: A Background. *Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre*. Retrieved April 11, 2016, from <http://www.kaiptc.org/publications/monographs/monographs/monograph-7-aissatou.aspx>
- Gellar, S. (2005). Democracy in Senegal: Tocquevillian Analytics in Africa. *Palgrave Macmillan*. Retrieved January 20, 2016.
- Ischinger, B. (2012, October 17). OECD Better Life Index. Retrieved November 20, 2015, from <http://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/blog/the-meaning-of-better-lives.htm>
- Mabana, K. C. (2012). Leopold Sedar Senghor and the Civilization of the Universal. *Diogenes*, 59(3-4), 4-12. Retrieved February 16, 2016.
- Nordtveit, B. H. (2005). Country Case Study: Literacy in Senegal.
- Rabaka, R. (2015). Critical Africana Studies: The Negritude Movement: W.E.B. Du Bois, Leon Damas, Aime Cesaire, Leopold Senghor, Frantz Fanon, and the evolution of an insurgent idea. *Choice Reviews Online*, 53(04). doi:10.5860/choice.193618
- Rodney, W., Babu, A. M., & Harding, V. (1981). *How Europe underdeveloped Africa*. Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press.
Part 6, Chapter 3: Education for Underdevelopment

Senegal profile - Timeline. (2016, March 23). Retrieved March 2, 2016, from <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-14093813>

Senghor, L. S. (1974). Negritude. *Indian Literature*, 17(1/2), 269–273.

Sharp, R. (1994). Senegal: A state of change. Oxford, England: Oxfam.

SIL International: Partners in Language Development. (2016). Retrieved March 30, 2016, from http://www.sil.org/sites/default/files/flagship_2014_english_web.pdf

Summary of the Evaluation and Use of Local Languages in Primary Education in Senegal. (2014). *Associates in Research and Education for Development (ARED)*.

THE OFFICIAL POSITION OF THE FRENCH REPUBLIC INCLUDING THOSE TOPICS TO BE DEBATED IN THE 47TH SESSION OF THE AMUN GENERAL ASSEMBLY. (2012). Retrieved April 10, 2016, from <http://uca.edu/politicalscience/files/2012/11/2012-France-Position-paper.pdf>

III. Cultural Globalization and the Threat to Global Linguistic Diversity

United States, United States Agency for International Development, RTI International. (2015). *Report on Language of Instruction in Senegal*. Washington D.C.: USAID. Retrieved January, 2016.