

The construct of ‘national’ languages in independent Angola: towards its deconstruction

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Abstract: This article discusses the construct of the concept of ‘national language’ in Angolan society in general, and in intellectual circles in particular. For a clear understanding of the concept, two others are also considered. One is the concept of ‘official language’ and the other is that of ‘regional language’. Three questions will be of paramount importance to help delineate the focus of the article. Firstly, how is the term ‘national language’ used in the literature and in the context of communication in Angola? Secondly, how different is it from the other two terms? Thirdly, how can academia help to clarify this concept in the Angolan context, where it seems to be used inaccurately?

Keywords: national languages, precolonial languages, educational system, regional languages.

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Introduction

The problem discussed in this article is that Portuguese has been constituted as the official language of Angola (Webb & Kembo-Sure 2000: 46; Lei n.º 17/16), while 11 precolonial languages are referred to as ‘national languages’ (Webb & Kembo-Sure 2000; Fernandes & Ntongo 2002; Kambuta 2021), although they are generally used *de facto* at the regional level. Considering this ‘incorrect’ use of precolonial languages, the article discusses the concepts of ‘official language’ and ‘regional language’ in order to clarify and sustain a more accurate concept of ‘national language’ for the Angolan context.

Three important questions will be considered here. Firstly, how is the term ‘national language’ used in the literature in general, and in Angola in particular? Secondly, how different is it from the concepts of ‘official language’ and ‘regional language’? Thirdly, how can academia help to ensure these concepts are understood and used accurately? This work takes a qualitative approach, using a literature review (Snyder 2019) and document analysis (Bowen 2009) as instruments for data collection. It has been concluded that, as happens elsewhere, there seems to be a tendency to use the term ‘national language’ for ‘regional languages’ or ‘local languages’ or even ‘precolonial languages’ in Angola. It is therefore recommended that concepts should be reviewed and clarified on the basis of language sciences so as to mitigate the vagueness of the term now that the government has decided to include some autochthonous languages in the educational system.

In the whole, the article focuses on the treatment of Angolan languages both *de facto* and *de jure* over time. In its concluding remarks, the article proposes a consideration of the various contributions of (socio-)linguistics when referring to Angolan languages. Moreover, language-related specialists, lawmakers, historians, anthropologists, ethnologists and others should be and feel invited to work together with others on interdisciplinary research to help (re)define the terms and ensure they are clearly understood when put into use throughout Angolan society.

A brief description of the sociolinguistic context of Angola

The Republic of Angola is located in the southern region of Africa. Bordering the Atlantic Ocean, it has comprised 18 large provinces since the proclamation of independence by the ruling MPLA (People’s Movement for the Angolan Liberation) in 1975. The population in 2016 was 25,789,024 (INE 2016: 31).

Figure 1 shows the regional distribution of the main Angolan languages in 1970, while Figure 2 shows the languages and respective percentages as published in 2016. As is clear, Angola is a multilingual country. The government has selected some languages

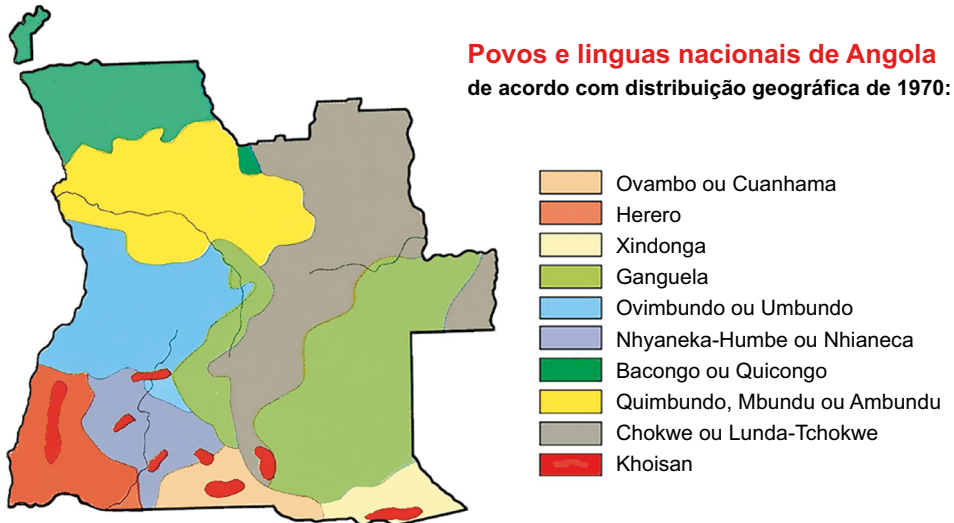


Figure 1. Regional distribution of the Angolan languages.

(source: <https://palavraearte.co.ao/proposta-de-mapeamento-linguistico-em-angola/>)

to be taught in the educational system. Umbundu, a native language, has the greatest regional coverage (23 per cent of the population) as it is mostly spoken in four of the 18 provinces (constituting the Ovimbundo region) of Angola (i.e., Namibe, Benguela, Huambo and Bié) (INE 2016: 51). Kimbundu is spoken by the Ambundu and it holds the second position among the ethnolinguistic groups in Angola (around 8 per cent of inhabitants). They occupy the northern provinces of Luanda, Malange, Kwanza-Norte, Bengo and Kwanza-Sul. Kikongo is spoken by the Bakongo people (about 8 per cent of Angolans). They are located in the northern provinces of Uige and Zaire. Fiote is spoken by the ethnolinguistic group called Mbinda (about 2 per cent), who live in Cabinda province. The eastern flank of Angola is occupied by the Luchaze or Chokwe (about 7 per cent), whose language is Chokwe. They occupy the provinces of Lunda Norte, Lunda Sul and Moxico.

In the southern part of the country there are two ethnolinguistic groups: the Kwanhama (or Ovakwanyama/Ovambo) in Cunene province, whose language is Oshikwanyama/Oshivambo (making up 2 per cent of Angolans); and the Ovanyaneka, who inhabit Huila province and speak Olunyaneka (about 3 per cent). In the south-eastern part of Angola there are the Ovangangela in the province of Cuando-Cubango, who speak Nganguela (about 3 per cent). South-western Angola is inhabited by the Ovahellelo, in Namibe province, whose language is Oshihellelo (less than 1 per cent). Namibe is also home to the Hotentote (the Bushmen), who speak a monosyllabic click language. They are a minority and are widely known as the Khoisan group, the only non-Bantu group (less than 1 per cent) (Redinha 1969; Fernandes & Ntongo 2002;

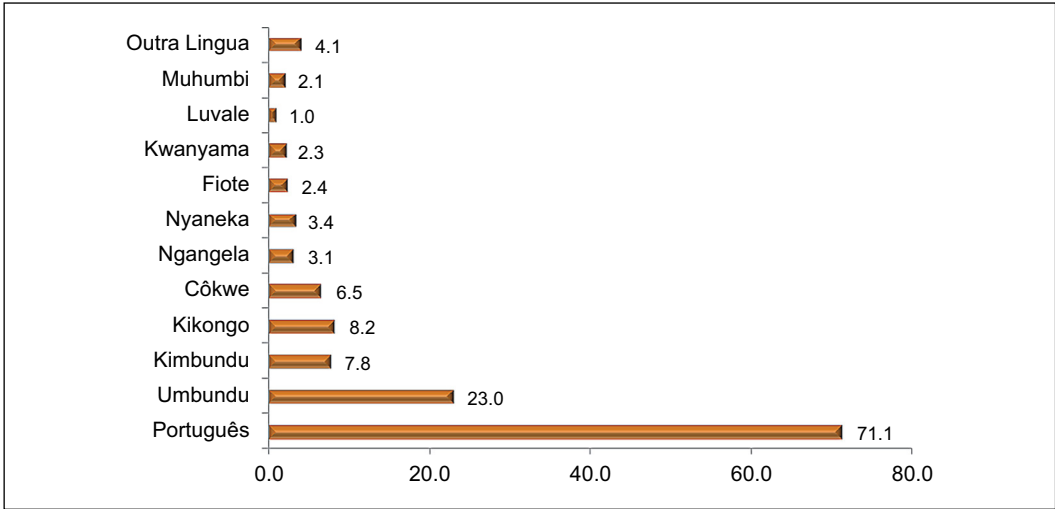


Figure 2. Percentages of commonly used languages in Angola (INE 2016: 51).

INE 2016). This is what makes Angola a multilingual country. On the one hand, the Bantu languages originated in north-east Africa, whereas the Khoisan languages originated in Southern Africa. The Khoisan group comprises the Kóhi and the San groups, characterised by the prominence of clicks in their speech (Severo 2015: 7). Portuguese, an exogenous language, was implanted across the whole country through the process of colonisation and became the most important language in Angola, now spoken by 71 per cent of the population. While the native languages are called national languages, Portuguese has attained the position of official language, language of instruction and language of the polity.

National language, official language and regional language

To understand the concept of ‘national language’, one has to consider it in both the strict sense and the broader sense. In the strict sense, ‘national language’ refers to that language which serves as a ‘source or sign of identity for a nation’ (Richards *et al.* 1992: 240; Trask 1997: 147; Matthews 2007: 258). For example, the Ovambo constitute a precolonial nation whose language is Oshikwanyama. In the broader sense, a ‘national language’ can be any of the regional languages existing within a territory. For example, Umbundu and Kimbundu (Angolan regional languages) are generally considered ‘national languages’ by Angolans (Fernandes & Ntongo 2002; Fonseca 2012). As is to be expected, nation-state building in multilingual postcolonial countries may imply the suffocation or even the elimination of ‘minority’ languages when

these are perceived by rulers as a threat to the unification of peoples for common socio-political and economic goals. In fact, [Batibo \(2014\)](#), when discussing existing language policy choices in Africa, includes Angola among the 36.2 per cent of African countries with a 'Colonial National Language Policy' through which the language of the former colonial power – Portuguese – has been selected to be the only official language and the only language with nationwide coverage ([Batibo 2014: 17](#)). Although many indigenous languages are called 'national languages' in Angola, in practical terms many feel ashamed to use them in comparison with 'international languages' such as Portuguese; this is similarly echoed with the marginalised 'Khoesan' language in Southern Africa ([Batibo 2014: 18](#)). This marginalisation prevents many people from accessing their basic rights to education, health care and the right to use, develop and be creative in their own languages.

Angola is not the only country where the understanding of the concept of 'national language' is problematic. In Mozambique, for example, regional languages are also considered 'national languages', in contrast with the official language, Portuguese ([Cossa 2011](#)). This becomes problematic in that the concept of 'national language', as discussed above, implies that the language can be used nationwide, at all levels, for communication, while the concept of regional language does not. A regional language covers only a certain region of a country made up of many other regions, each with a specific language. However, in Uganda, Swahili, which has also been adopted in both Kenya and Tanzania as official languages, is the national language ([Daoust 1998: 440](#)).

Most often, the concept of 'national language' is understood as including one or various languages that can stand as symbols or as a source of identity and cultural integration of the nation but that are not necessarily recognised as official languages ([Phillipson 1992](#); [Matthews 2007: 258](#); [Richards & Schmidt 2010: 385–6](#)). In turn, [Daoust \(1998: 443\)](#) defines a 'national language' as one that is spoken by the majority of the population and is, in general, a vernacular language of the population, which uses it either officially or not, and which may or may not be used in the educational system. In Uganda, for example, Swahili, apart from being the national language ([Daoust 1998: 440](#)), is taught at the secondary school level as a third language for use at the regional level to facilitate contact with neighbouring countries of the eastern region of Africa whose official language or lingua franca is Swahili ([Masengo 2019](#)). Other examples of national languages can be given, including French in France, Tetum in East Timor and Filipino in the Philippines ([Richards & Schmidt 2010: 385–6](#)).

Often, national languages are established by law. [Spolsky \(2004: 12\)](#) states that around 100 constitutions around the world have specified a national language. That is the case of the Gabonese Constitution of 1997, the Indonesian Constitution of 1945, the Cameroon Constitution of 1996 and the Constitution of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) of 1997. In the case of Indonesia and the DRC, the

national languages are named. For example, Bahasa Indonesia is the national language of Indonesia and Kikongo, Lingala, Swahili and Tshiluba are the national languages of the DRC (Spolsky 2004: 12–13). In Angola, the only law that uses the expression ‘national languages’ is Law 13/01 of 31 December 2001, the Base Law of the Education System. However, the laws on languages make no direct reference to any specific names of languages classified as national languages of Angola, although Portuguese has been clearly mentioned as the official language (Constituição da República de Angola 2010).

The above discussion makes it clear that it is not easy to apply the concept of ‘national language’ to multilingual countries such as Angola given the fact that it does not usually include the name of a specific language, making the purpose for which it is used diffuse. Thus, unless the law names the specific ‘national languages’ to be taken into account, it becomes difficult to understand why the autochthonous languages of Angola, used on a regional basis, are referred to as ‘national languages’. The following subsection explores the concept of ‘nation-state’ and looks at its relationship with the concept of ‘national language’.

The ‘nation-state’ and ‘national languages’ in postcolonial Africa

Over time the concept of ‘nation-state’ emerged, which Moco (2015: xiv), for example, defines as an autonomous political grouping which occupies a territory with defined borders and whose members (people) share institutions (laws, constitutions and government), although not necessarily the same ethnic origin, religion or language. In fact, Moco’s position is influenced by the revision of the concept of ‘nation’ proposed by Ernest Renan at a conference held at the Sorbonne University on 11 March 1882, in an address entitled ‘Qu’est-ce qu’une nation?’ (What is a nation?), where he proposed that the concept of nation should go beyond the limits of a common language, religion, culture or place of birth. Similarly, Judge states that ‘in defending the newly independent United States of Belgium’, perceiving the union of provinces of the ‘Brabantois, Flemish, Hennuiers, Limbourgeois, Luxembourgers, Tournaisiens, Gelderlandes, Namuriens, Malinois’, the particular interests of all should be effective ‘in the unity of a common constitution’ (Judge 2016: 299–301).

As a matter of fact, the nation-state resulted, to a great extent, from the expanded possibilities that the study of different *a priori* non-powerful vernacular languages by lexicographers, grammarians, philologists created. As Anderson (1983: 71) states, ‘the energetic activities of these professional intellectuals were central to the shaping of nineteenth-century European nationalisms’. Seton-Watson (1977: 11) has convincingly advocated that ‘just because the history of language is usually in our time kept so rigidly apart from conventional political, economic and social history, it has

seemed [...] desirable to bring it together with these, even at the cost of less expertise'. The production of a plethora of literary genres by these specialists in these vernacular languages was responsible for the 'Ukrainian national consciousness' and the 'Finnish nationalist movement' (Anderson 1983: 74), since they produced for the printing industries which in the end distributed to a variety of consumers, from the working class to the upper classes, thereby creating national identities.

All in all, the nation-state has come to be seen as an interesting and potentially useful political model because there is no better reason than a widespread national identity for the inhabitants of a territory to combine forces and to make sacrifices to achieve results (Canovan 1996). Ideally, the links which the inhabitants of a territory have with each other and with the state are influenced and habituated by a sentiment of nationhood and a feeling of commitment to all that it stands for (Frahm 2014: 30). In the conviction of Münkler (2011: 52),¹ where both came together, a political order emerged that was far superior to all other models of political order in terms of social cohesion (solidarity) internally and political self-assertion externally. The importance of using language as a code of communicating all the necessary information for a nation-state to remain united behind a common goal seems to be undeniable.

The previous discussion helps explain the domestic instability faced by postcolonial African 'nation-states' (Herbst 2000: 109) as a result of having their current borders imposed by the colonial powers. Among the instabilities is one linked to the endogenous languages of Africa which, being the sole means of communication for the majority of the population, are threatened with having 'little or no official status', to their detriment in comparison with the officially promoted European languages (Sukumane 2000: 199–200). This situation 'depoliticises' endogenous languages because 'resistance to the official language is seen as opposition to national unity and modernization' (Sukumane 2000: 200). The disadvantaged endogenous local languages are paradoxically called 'national languages' (Legère *et al.* 2000: 4–11) while the European languages, such as Portuguese and English, are called 'official languages'. Thus, in order to preserve 'nation-state' unity, local endogenous languages were called 'national languages' without nationwide coverage and European languages were called official languages and, most of the time, are the only ones used in schools (Kangira 2016: 158 ff).

The previous discussion is important in that use of the term 'national language' to refer to regional languages is not limited to the Angolan context. In Namibia, language-related specialists use the term to refer to Namibian precolonial languages,

¹ The author's original words read as follows: 'Wo beides miteinander zur Deckung kam, entstand eine politische Ordnung, die an sozialer Kohäsion (Solidarität) nach innen und politischer Selbstbehauptung nach außen allen anderen politischen Ordnungsmodellen weit überlegen war.'

implying that the language was ‘nationalised’ after the proclamation of independence of these countries. It seems that a brief comparison of the concept of ‘national language’ with the concept of ‘official language’ may help clarify not only the differences between them but also the concept of the former.

In contrast to the concept of ‘national language’, the concept of ‘official language’ seems to be easier to define given that it is used for governmental and state affairs, having been legally designated for the official business of a country, and is used in the law and the main institutions of the country (Richards & Schmidt 2010: 385). For example, German, English and French are among the official languages of the European Union (Matthews 2007: 276). In Angola, as will be shown in more detail below, the constitution states that Portuguese is the official language.

When it comes to the concept of ‘regional language’, a language is referred to as such when it is spoken in a specific region of a country (Matthews 2007: 339). For example, Catalan is only spoken in certain parts of Spain and France (Richards & Schmidt 2010: 492).

Understanding the terms discussed above is crucial not only for academic discourse but also in terms of the purpose for which they are used and to prevent users from misconstruing their meaning. As seen above, many of these misunderstandings result from the failure of those who are responsible for the accurate use of the terms – journalists, lawmakers, linguists, politicians and the like – to exchange specialist knowledge with one another in an interdisciplinary context before communicating the terms to the language users.

Legislation has been a very important instrument for assuring that terms are used accurately among the linguistic communities, so as to avoid their inappropriate use and the consequent proliferation of misunderstanding.

What are the *de facto* and *de jure* statuses of the Angolan languages?

Angolan native languages, other than Portuguese, have *de facto* been called ‘national languages’ for quite a long time, either by force of the *habitus* from the colonial period (see da Silva 2009: 38) or due to the lack of analysis and careful application of the scientific signification of the term ‘national language’ by specialists in the area of language sciences. In fact, da Silva (2009: 38) reports on an interview in 1970, in the late colonial period, in which the interviewer asks about the characteristics of the Angolan school population (‘Quais as características da massa escolar angolana?’), to which the interviewee replies that the desire to learn the national language – Portuguese – both orally and in its written versions is characteristic of all the people:

[o] desejo, por exemplo, de aprender a língua nacional – o Português, entende-se, quer a sua expressão oral quer escrita, manifesta-se em todos. A ordem e a disciplina são cultivadas pela grande maioria dos alunos, o que facilita sobremaneira a acção da Escola ... [r]elativamente aos escolares das outras etnias, europeia e africana, estou que, em linhas gerais, não se distinguem dos colegas metropolitanos em condições normais. (da Silva 2009: 38)

(The desire, for example, of learning the national language – Portuguese, be it in its oral form, be it in its written form, has been generalised. Order and discipline have been adopted by the majority of students, which facilitates, to a greater extent, school action ... in relation to learners of other ethnic groups, European and African, I believe that, in general terms, they do not differ from their metropolitan colleagues in normal conditions.)

As was stated here, logically, the Portuguese language used to be considered a 'national language' in all Portuguese territories, including those under colonial administration. It was Portuguese – the 'national language' – which the state chose as the vehicle of order and discipline for learners, facilitating the school policies to a point that ethnic differences would pass unnoticed both in Europe and in Africa. As a matter of fact, the famous decree '77' issued on 9 December 1921 under José Mendes Ribeiro Norton de Matos, who was Governor General of the then Portuguese province of Angola (today the Republic of Angola), prohibited the use of the *indígenas's* languages (the languages of the autochthonous inhabitants) in the following statements of its second article (our translation): 'Art. 2. Não é permitido [*sic*] ensinar nas escolas das missões líguas [*sic*] indígenas' (i.e., indigenous languages are not allowed to be taught in the missions' schools). Norton de Matos's decree has had consequences for the post-independence approach to governance. To illustrate these consequences, a well-positioned governmental member thinks that the investment in 'national languages' should be discouraged in favour of Portuguese, English and French (Fonseca 2012: 12–13). Thus, language policy has been intimately connected to colonial and postcolonial nation-building projects.

Other contexts in which the expressions 'national language' and 'national languages' have been used in the post-independence period – in fact, the expressions have come into vogue by means of mass communication and in the contexts of power relations (mainly in the political and ideological context) – are academic/specialist content publications. To illustrate this, the book *Histórico sobre a Criação dos Alfabetos em Línguas Nacionais* [A report about the creation of alphabets in national languages] (MPLA/Instituto Nacional de Línguas 1980) presents a study of the phonological systems and alphabets of six 'national languages' and a programme of linguistic instruction for six Angolan languages chosen for an experimental stage towards implementation in the educational system. Another work is *Estão as Línguas Nacionais em*

Perigo? [Are national languages in danger?], which presents the linguistic situation in Angola and the statistics on the use and dissemination of the alphabets in ‘national languages’ (i.e., the precolonial languages of Angola) by the Institute of National Languages (Pedro 2014). The book *Harmonização das Línguas Bantu de Angola* [Harmonisation of the Bantu languages of Angola] refers to users of native languages of Angola as ‘utilizadores das línguas nacionais’ (national language users) (Pedro *et al.* 2013: iii). Additionally, some important events have been held to consider local languages as ‘national languages’, such as the Colóquio Internacional sobre as Línguas Nacionais (International Colloquium on National Languages), held at the Jean Piaget Higher Polytechnic Institute in Benguela from 7–9 May 2015, where, among others, the universal elements of Angola’s ‘national languages’ were discussed, with a focus on their history and perspectives on their orthography and writing systems. Finally, a more recent publication by a journalist in Benguela province refers to Umbundu as a ‘national language’ (‘língua nacional *Umbundu*’) (Freitas 2020: 226). In fact, mass media outlets have been a very important factor of dissemination of the concept of ‘national language’ in the way it has been conceived by common Angolans because they usually refer to the autochthonous languages as ‘national languages’.

All the above can substantiate the wide use of the expression ‘national language(s)’ to mean regional languages of Angola, and it has become commonsensical among intellectuals, including a significant number of linguists, to consider as ‘national languages’ all the precolonial languages of Angola. References to regional languages as ‘national languages’ are made in a diverse range of contexts, including political rallies, classrooms, conferences, church services and others.

With regard to the status of the Angolan languages in the legislation, they are not often described and protected as ‘national languages’. In fact, the Constitutional Law of the People’s Republic of Angola of 10 December 1975 does not contain any articles that clearly refer to the Angolan languages as ‘national languages’ or give them legal standing. Rather, Article 5 of the Constitutional Law seems to discourage the use of precolonial languages of Angola, stating that:

Será promovida e intensificada a solidariedade económica, social e cultural entre todas as regiões da República Popular de Angola, no sentido do desenvolvimento comum de toda a Nação Angolana e *da liquidação das sequelas do regionalismo e do tribalismo.*

(Economic, social and cultural solidarity will be promoted and intensified between all regions of the People’s Republic of Angola, towards a common development of the whole Angolan Nation and the liquidation of the sequels of regionalism and tribalism.)

The sentence in italics in the quotation above, ‘liquidação das sequelas do regionalismo e do tribalismo’ (translated as eliminating the consequences of regionalism and

tribalism), may be interpreted as conveying the idea of the elimination of regional languages so as to avoid the development of regional sentiments towards political self-determination through language use in a period when the newly born nation-state is being built. Furthermore, the motto during that one-party state period, when the MPLA was in power, was 'one people, one nation', which may have influenced the conceptualisation of regional languages as 'national languages'.

A comparative look at language legislation in Cape Verde and Mozambique

It is striking to compare this with the situation in other former Portuguese colonies in Africa. As in Angola, in the Cape Verdean Constitution the expressions 'national language' and 'national languages' are not used. Rather, all the languages are taken as official, as stated in Article 9 on official languages ('Línguas Oficiais'):

1. É língua oficial o Português.
2. O Estado promove as condições para a oficialização da língua materna cabo-verdeana, em paridade com a língua portuguesa.
3. Todos os cidadãos nacionais têm o dever de conhecer as línguas oficiais e o direito de usá-las.

- (1. Portuguese is the official language.
2. The State promotes conditions for the officialisation of the Cape Verdean mother tongue in parity with the Portuguese language.
3. It is all national citizens' duty to know the official languages and the right to use them.)

Taking into account the points 1, 2 and 3 above from the Cape Verdean Constitution, Capeverdean Creole is to be considered official and its development is to be promoted and protected by the Constitution. In the case of Cape Verde, no language has the legal status of 'national language'. However, research shows that Capeverdean Creole is the mother tongue of most of the population, while children learn Portuguese when they enter school at the age of six (Alexandre & Gonçalves 2018: 5–6).

Only 51.3% of the Cape Verdean speakers evaluate their own Portuguese proficiency as 'sufficient', which [...] is related to the importance these speakers devote to Portuguese and how they reproach themselves. [...] Cape Verdean society lives a kind of 'modal diglossia' [...] since 90% of the young people [...] interviewed prefer to speak in Capeverdean and only 5% in Portuguese, whilst 80% would rather read and write in Portuguese (only 7% would do it in Capeverdean). (Alexandre & Gonçalves 2018: 6)

The statistics quoted above make it clear that although Portuguese is the official language, people prefer to speak in the Capeverdean Creole language (which is supposed to be progressively officialised), giving it a pragmatic position as ‘national language’. However, the importance given to Portuguese literacy (by 80 per cent of the study’s respondents) may constitute a threat to the practical officialisation of Capeverdean Creole over time in that the 7 per cent who would choose to read and write in Capeverdean Creole may ultimately feel forced to choose Portuguese as a language of science and technology and to abandon Creole altogether in a process of language loss. Thus, it is important that the level of literacy in Capeverdean Creole is increased so as to preserve its use at the national level.

In the case of Mozambique, the Constitution clearly states that there are ‘national languages’ of Mozambique (precolonial languages) and an official language (Portuguese). In its Article 9 on ‘national languages’ (‘Línguas Nacionais’), the Mozambican Constitution makes it clear that the state values the ‘national languages’ as cultural and educational patrimony and promotes their development and wide use as vehicular languages of identity (‘[o] Estado valoriza as línguas nacionais como património cultural e educacional e promove o seu desenvolvimento e utilização crescente como línguas veiculares da nossa identidade’). However, it is not clear which specific national languages are referred to here, despite the fact that it is clear that the official language is Portuguese, as stated in Article 10 on ‘official language’ (Língua Oficial).

The context of legislation on languages in Angola

From 1975 to 1991, Angola was ruled by a single-party Marxist system, supported by the Soviet Union and Cuba. During that period the motto was ‘one people, one nation’. With the emergence of the multiparty system in 1991, as a result of the peace accord between the Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA, the rebel movement which fought for a democratic state and multiparty system, mainly supported by South Africa, Zaire and the United States of America) and the People’s Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA, the ruling party), the government found itself compelled to replace the 1975 Constitutional Law with a new one, which would overrule the democratic Constitutional Law in 1992, approved by Parliament (the National Assembly). The multiparty Parliament passed many new laws to adapt to the new era of democracy. The Base Law of the Education System passed by the National Assembly, designated Law 13/01 of 31 December 2001, states in its Article 9, points 2 and 3, that:

2. The state promotes and creates human, technical-scientific, material and financial conditions for the expansion and generalization of the use and teaching of national languages.

3. Without jeopardy to point nr. 1, of the present article, particularly in the adult instructional subsystem, education may take place using national languages.

It should be noted that in its point 1, it states that '1. O ensino nas escolas é ministrado em língua portuguesa' (teaching in schools is carried out in Portuguese). In that context, it is crucial to understand that the verb 'poder' ('may') in point 3 above represents a certain doubt or flexibility about the willingness expressed in point 2, considering the emphasis given to Portuguese as expressed in point 1. In other words, the key sections of the Angolan Constitution which deal with this issue are opaque and, in fact, inconsistent with one another; the fundamental element is reduced to that of the first clause, that all teaching should be done in Portuguese.

Thus, despite the fact that it is expressed in the Base Law of the Education System promulgated in 2001, the *a posteriori* pass of the Angolan Constitution in 2010 (see below) came up with a change to the expression 'national language' which has become 'languages of Angola'. The Base Law of the Education System of 2001 was abolished in 2016 by the Law Nr. 17/16 of 7 October so as to conform to the 2010 Constitution. This new law's Article 16 makes the following points about the language of teaching:

1. Instruction must be carried out in Portuguese.
2. The State promotes and guarantees human, technical-scientific, material and financial conditions for the expansion and generalization of the use of the other Angolan languages for instruction, as well as the sign language for impaired individuals.
3. Without jeopardy to the disposition in paragraph 1 of the present article, and as complement and means of learning, Angolan languages may be used in the other instructional subsystems, under the terms to be regulated in proper diplomas.
4. The State promotes public policies for both the insertion and the massification of the teaching of the main international languages in all the instructional subsystems, with priority to English and French.

The law states, in point 1, that Portuguese should be used for teaching; in point 2, that the state will create conditions to promote other Angolan languages; in point 3, that under complementary legal diplomas, other languages will be allowed to be taught in other subsystems; and in point 4, that other international languages will be taught, mainly English and French. It can be clearly seen that no reference has been made to 'national language'. On the contrary, languages are specifically called 'Angolan languages'. This is because, in reality, the languages belong to the territory called Angola without necessarily being in use nationwide. This may indicate that, upon reflection, use of the term 'national language' in the Base Law 13/01 of the Educational System was found to be inappropriate.

The new Base Law of the Educational System seems to be designed to respond to the Angolan Constitution, whose Article 19 ('Languages') states the following:

1. The official language of the Republic of Angola is Portuguese.
2. The State values and promotes the study, the teaching and use of other Angolan languages, including the main languages of international communication.

The analysis above helps to problematise the definition of the legal position that has been adopted relating to Angolan precolonial languages (autochthonous languages): we can understand this on the basis of the scientific constructs of the concepts of ‘national language’, ‘official language’ and ‘regional language’ compared with the ideological, political conception that prominent members of Angolan society tend to adopt. Given that these concepts are clearly different from each other, it is crucial to distinguish between them both in law and in academia, as they are the main resources people use for the construction of knowledge about this socio-cultural and political phenomenon. Thus, utilising the most recent research in the areas of sociolinguistics and applied linguistics can help legislators clarify what each of these terms really means for the intended audience of the law – the citizens.

For example, if legislators engage in interdisciplinary reading in linguistics-related areas, they may be aware that in the Vanuatu Constitution (the Republic of Vanuatu is situated in the south-west Pacific), in its section 3(1), Bislama is given as a national language among 114 registered ones, and that Bislama, English and French are the official languages (Meyerhoff 2006: 107). Another example can be taken from the Constitution of South Africa, whose section 6(1) states that ‘the official languages of the Republic of South Africa are Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, siSwati, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, Afrikaans, English, isiNdebele, isiXhosa and isiZulu’ (Meyerhoff 2006: 105), and none of the languages are defined as ‘national languages’ (Webb & Kembo-Sure 2000: 50). An understanding of the terms under discussion in this article is desirable in the Angolan context of communication, not only for those who study them in the realms of their specialisations, but also for those who are able to learn them accurately for future use.

Conclusions

There has been a clear contextual change of attitude in relation to the status given to Angolan precolonial (autochthonous) languages in the principal Angolan laws. That is to say, since the proclamation of Angolan independence in 1975, only one law (already revoked) has considered Angolan languages as ‘national languages’ – Law 13/01 of 31 December 2001. While it is clearly stated that the principal international languages to be taught are English and French, only seven of more than 41 Angolan local languages (Fernando 2020: 179) have been chosen for instruction in the educational system (Jimbi 2018: 478). Moreover, after the passing of the new Angolan

Constitution in 2010, the term 'national languages' disappeared and the expression 'other Angolan languages' appeared, showing, to some extent, that the mention of 'national languages' had been deemed inappropriate but without any further explanation of the reasons behind the change.

Taking all the above into consideration, it seems plausible that the definition of concepts of national languages, official language, local languages, native languages and related terms should be fully understood in the light of linguistic studies, sociolinguistics and language-related areas. One of the benefits of gaining an understanding of these terms will be greater clarity of communication in the future. To that end, the name of the Institute of National Languages should be changed to the National Institute of Languages so as to conform to its actual role of conglomerating and dealing with all the existing languages of Angola.

A lesson out of all the above

Considering the discussion above, it seems to be necessary to officialise the autochthonous languages used in schools, not so much as 'national languages' (for none of them has reached a national level) but at least as languages of instruction, *de facto* and *de jure*, as advocated by many researchers in language policy and planning in Africa (e.g., [Batibo 2007](#); [Bangbose 2011, 2014](#)). [Djité's *The Sociolinguistics of Development in Africa* \(2008\)](#), for example, asks why African children should learn foreign languages when there are so many African languages to learn, and why governmental leaders and doctors do not take the learning of African languages seriously when they know that their direct interlocutors and patients, respectively, rely on these languages for communication.

The reinterpretation of the concept of 'national language' in the Angolan context promises to have significant social, educational and political implications in many ways. Firstly, it will demand deep reflection on how language-related concepts, such as the ones discussed in this article, should be reformulated, understood and transmitted to the target consumers – the Angolan citizens, including academics, the media, lawmakers, students and the like. Secondly, it will spark the need to take the study of all other Angolan languages more seriously in the light of their gradual promotion, recognition and protection as the cultural heritage of Angola. Thirdly, it will boost the population's awareness of the status of the languages they speak, elevate their self-esteem and deter linguistic prejudice on the part of both speakers and non-speakers of Angolan regional languages. Lastly, it will represent a change in mindset in relation to how citizens use the term 'national language' in daily life and make them aware of the differences between 'national language', 'regional language', 'official language' and related terms. Moreover, the understanding of these terms in a multilingual context of Angola clearly indicates the status of each language of Angola, or the

ones they would like to learn in a given time and in a given place. It also helps people become informed about the survival potential of their local languages and encourages them to promote their maintenance and/or revival.

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