

Ethnolinguistic Identity and Language Policies: Negotiating Identity and Diversity in Modern Linguistic Environment in Malawi

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Abstract : The question of language and identity in the post-colonial Africa has resulted in the policy inconsistencies and perceived wayward practices regarding language use. The need to reside and situate oneself in the global village has alienated local identities, with most countries, Malawi in particular promoting exogenous colonial language(s) at the expense of local languages that mirror people's identities. This has brought a mismatch between language policy and implementation. The resultant effect has been alienation of the 'Self' from one's indigenous identity and creation of the 'other' in the foreign identity, and the undermining of the linguistic rights of the minority language speakers. The need to negotiate the identity and modernity in the global village is thus imperative. The paper attempts to review the language situation in Malawi in light of the growing desire for international integration vis-à-vis the cultivation and maintenance of national ethnolinguistic identity. It further highlights the dilemma that the promotion of vernacular languages is facing in the modern Malawi. It also examines the Malawi language policy and its implementation. The failures, challenges, and inconsistencies are discussed in order to negotiate the position of minority languages in the modern Malawi. The paper notes that identity construction and maintenance within the framework of language policy in Malawi is undermined by attitudinal factors towards one's culture and language. The paper then provides suggestions of negotiating identity in Malawi within the framework of globalisation through the placement of premiums on the minority languages.

Keywords : identity, language policy, minority languages, vernacular language

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