The Portuguese language in Mozambique: focus on linguistic ideologies

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Part of a larger ethnographic research work in the area of Applied Linguistics, this presentation focuses on the Portuguese language in Mozambique, questioning its use as the sole medium of instruction in schools and the linguistic ideology underpinning efforts to achieve national unity. The presentation includes a sociohistorical contextualization of Portuguese as the colonial language in order to explain the adoption of this language – the language of the colonizer – as the official language in the post-colonial era. It also addresses the educational problems in the country and the legacy of the long civil war.

The study, whose research participants are teacher educator trainees in Mozambique, aims at building interpretations of these trainees’ positionings regarding the following questions: what is the relation of the Portuguese language with the Bantu languages spoken in a country where the populational census of 2007 indicates that only 10.7% of its 20,579,265 inhabitants speak Portuguese? How do the teacher educator trainees attending a course in their area of expertise, i.e., bilingual education, position themselves in relation to the Bantu languages and to Portuguese?

The data, examined from a postcolonialist perspective, show that the research participants’ positionings range from fully accepting to questioning the linguistic ideology of Portuguese as a symbol of national unity derived from the Nation-State ideals. While the student-teachers point out the relevance of the Bantu languages in the construction of identity and advocate bilingual education in a curriculum that fosters intercomprehension among the speakers of these languages, the researchers go beyond and suggest that intercomprehension should also be developed among speakers of Portuguese in relation to other Romance languages. The authors call attention to multilingual approaches that can strengthen the local languages based on plural linguistic policies which do not focus on identity but on difference.

Keywords: positioning, Portuguese language, linguistic ideologies.