Exploring "linguistic complementarity" for intercultural communication in postcolonial African states

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This paper explores the concept of linguistic complementarity as a philosophical framework for intercultural communication in postcolonial African contexts. As a conceptual research paper, the study explores the idea of linguistic complementarity to highlight the significance of cultural diversity in fostering effective communication and mutual understanding. The paper argues that linguistic complementarity provides a panacea to the "language question" in postcolonial African society and, by extension, African philosophy. The paper also explores the advantages and difficulties associated with the application of linguistic complementarity in postcolonial Africa, as well as its implementation in education, government, and the media. The conclusion emphasises the importance of promoting intercultural dialogue and understanding through linguistic complementarity and recommends further research and implementation of linguistic complementarity in intercultural communication.

Introduction

The possibility of exploring language as a prism through which to consider intercultural communication and its complexity in today's globalised existence has drawn much attention in sociocultural scholarship. The investigation focused on the use of language in intercultural interactions and its potential impact on communication success rates (Liddicoat, 2009; Pikhart, 2014; Ruppel and Brahms, 2014; Tsang, 2020). The most common assumption is that measures of language comprehension determine successful interactions. The first assumption is that language, as a system of symbols, contains meaning in every word and has a coherent word structure. Along these lines, some people think it is important to understand how language changes and grows to determine why there are social, cultural, and political problems in a community (Sonderling, 1998; McConnell-Ginet, 2008; Prezi, 2020; Yu, 2020; Nefedov and Chernyavskaya, 2021). This dual assumption, based on language features and usage, was the motivation for this study.

Communication marked by contact between people from different cultural backgrounds is a present-day fact that is more pronounced in an era of revolutionary interconnections in multicultural societies. This necessitates interactions with leisure, business, religious, and socio-political activities. Naturally, the success of integrating such interaction processes into participant satisfaction varies widely. Having a grasp of such a variety has resulted in a considerable growth in interest among scholars for detailed elaboration of the history of these interactions and the process of resolving them (Scheinkman, 2008; Quiring and Schweiger,

2008; Nefedov and Chernyavskaya, 2021). Several studies in Africa have shown how important it is for people of different ethnic groups to be able to communicate with each other across cultures, both within and between African countries (Clark, 1969; Mazrui and Mazrui, 1992; Orbe, 1995; Sonaiya, 2003; Popoola, 2004; Uyanne and Oti, 2012; Chabata, 2013; Chigwendere and Louw, 2022; Ngonso and Egielewa, 2023).

This essay provides an overview of the various problems and issues that emerge in communication in postcolonial African countries. The significance of such an enquiry is largely because postcolonial African states are characterised by linguistic, ontological diversity, and multicultural paradigms. Such diversity, in contemporary times, is challenged by cultural modernisation and broader approaches to development, and it has a huge effect on overall cross-cultural relations and understanding within the states.

Looking at this issue from a philosophical perspective, this paper largely comes out as a genus of a concept research paper that aims to explore the conceptual underpinnings of the idea of "linguistic complementarity" and its viability to enhance social cohesion in postcolonial African states. To drive home the intellectual significance of this study and its stance as a research concept paper, the study aims to answer an important question: how does the idea of linguistic complementarity contribute to enhancing intercultural communication and social cohesion in postcolonial African states? Espousing LC as a philosophical framework for intercultural communication appears apt for this study, as it aims to address some key themes of language diversity, cultural understanding, and social cohesion, which are discussed in the paper.

The research method used in this study is a philosophical-phenomenological approach combined with the hermeneutical and logical methods of philosophical studies. Hermeneutical methods is used to reinterpret texts. This allows for a deep exploration of lived experiences and perceptions related to language-use in the postcolonial African context. Hermeneutics, as a theory of interpretation (Posholi, 2020; Serequeberhan, 1994) is significant in this study because hermeneutics deals with complexities of language and meaning. Thus, making a nuanced understanding of the issue of "language question" and its implication for African philosophy and intercultural dialogue possible. The philosophical method of logical reconstruction is applied to facilitate the creation and application of envisioned "linguistic complementarity."

The paper examines the ongoing discourse on "the language question" in African philosophy, as well as the effect the issue has on language use and intercultural dialogue, with recourse to some regions in postcolonial Africa: South Africa, Nigeria, and Tanzania, representing the southern, western, and eastern regions of the continent, respectively. This study focused on these three African states based on the following criteria.

1. Colonial legacies: all three countries have a history of colonialism, which in turn has a significant impact on their linguistic architecture. This aligns with the focus of this paper on postcolonial African states.
2. Linguistic diversity: each three countries is characterised by linguistic diversity. For example, Nigeria has over 450 languages, whereas South Africa has 12 official languages.
3. Different approaches to language policy: each country has adopted different strategies (as shown below) to deal with

linguistic challenges. This provides various case studies on the application of LC.
4. Regional representation: above all, each of these three countries represents different regions of Africa, and this diverse geographical representation provides broader perspectives on linguistic issues across the continent.

Furthermore, the consideration of Africa in this study does not imply that Africa possesses a uniform socio-cultural and political experience, since Africa is culturally diverse, and that any phrase prefixed to "Africa" in a generic context does not eliminate the significant cultural differences within Africa (Kaphagawani and Malherbe, 2002, p. 220). In other words, the term Africa in this paper denotes a process of abstracting essential thoughts from the common practices and experiences of Africans to develop concepts and ideas. Identifying any view, idea, or concept as "African" relies on the shared elements of sub-Saharan thought prevalent across diverse cultures within the African continent (Metz, 2012, p. 389).

Indeed, a comprehensive understanding of cultural orientation in Africa shows that resemblance sociocultural practices are integrated into all aspects of African life, despite the diversity of beliefs and practices across the continent (Oyekunle, 2021). This strategy helps identify African epistemic realities shared by African civilisations and is impacted by a common intellectual heritage. Nonetheless, one might argue that using observable facts from certain regions of Africa to generalise a concept or practice is inadequate for accurately representing the entire continent. In response to this query, it is important to recognise that geographical labels, whether Asian, Western, or African, are "not exclusive to, exhaustive of, or fixed in the relevant locale' (Metz, 2015, p. 1176). The word "African" as a suffix to the prefix –"postcolonial" in this research offers an identifying role that is usual in intellectual literature connected to geographical labels or classifications, notwithstanding the limits in evaluating all civilisations or segments within the continent. Thus, the examination of South Africa, Nigeria, and Tanzania in this study supports the notion that specific practices, experiences, realities, and ideas are recurring themes prevalent in African existential realities that are not found in other regions of the world (Metz, 2007, pp. 332–333).

This paper examines African philosophy as a genus of language usage in African society as well as the corollary of issues associated with language use in Africa. The next section on colonial legacy, linguistic diversity, and the -à-language question explores the complexity of language diversity in Africa vis-à-vis the language question on the continent. Next, the paper investigates the envisioned idea of linguistic complementarity and explores how it resonates with the contemporary existential realities of language use in Africa. This was done by examining the realities of LC in three regions of Africa: South Africa, Nigeria, and Tanzania. The next section borders the challenges and limitations that ensued in the quest to strengthen intercultural communication through LC. It should be noted that this section is somewhat critical of the dominant and indigenous languages that the LC framework seeks to argue for. Such critical engagement, although appearing as a tone shift in this study, is in tandem with the evaluative stance of the second-order nature of philosophy. In addition, a critical tone is needed to ensure that LC is not erected on the platform of the "Methodic Crisis Two: Deification of Indigenous Knowledge Forms (IKF) as Sacrosanct" (Oyekunle, 2024). This is because it amounts to inadvertent overprotection of the idea of LC

against any form of critical questioning. A set of recommendations garnered from the previous sections is presented in subsequent sections. The paper concludes by emphasising linguistic complementarity as a valuable framework for promoting intercultural understanding, communication, and social cohesion in postcolonial African states.

Language use in postcolonial African society

In contemporary African society, and by extension, the language question concerns the use of indigenous languages for philosophical discourse and their effects on African thought and intercultural communication (Bassey, 2018; Egbunu and Eleojo, 2014; Masolo, 2005; Oguejiofor and Ezenwa–Ohaeto, 2015; Olatunji, 2020). The argument is whether African philosophy should be expressed in African languages to preserve intercultural identities and authenticity, or in colonial languages to engage with global philosophy (Bassey, 2018; Chabata, 2013; Tangwa, 2017.). Literature and philosophy have advanced worldviews and cultures. Both have been considered fundamental aspects of national and socio-cultural identity (Jaja and Badey, 2013; Oguejiofor and Ezenwa–Ohaeto, 2015; Olatunji, 2020). Africa's language use includes the age-old practice of using indigenous languages and the more modern heritage of writing in European languages that Africans have embraced. African scholars face language difficulties because of this form of concept generation in the face of the intellectual critiques of Eurocentrism.

However, some scholars advocate for the creation of an indigenous cultural language, or Afrolingualism, to facilitate philosophical discourse (Mazama, 1994; Bassey, 2018; Ugwuona, 2020), while others emphasise the African languages' potential to convey African philosophical ideas (Mabe, 2020). The goal is to explore whether African thought processes can be decoded into alien languages without sacrificing their conceptual and ontological meanings. Therefore, a major linguistic issue is the ability to translate meaning across cultures without modifications. This study proposes linguistic complementarity in which African languages can communicate old wisdom and address contemporary philosophical challenges. According to Afolayan (2006, p. 42), language quest is important because African heritage philosophies have shown that much of the causes of philosophical problems in Western languages do not always cause problems in most indigenous languages. Language is flexible, evolving, and changing to satisfy socio-cultural needs. Language shapes society's identity and culture by facilitating communication and thought diffusion. However, discussing and analysing African existential issues in the conceptual framework of foreign languages reinforces the dismemberment of indigenous knowledge and hinders linguistic diversity in intercultural communication within the continent's diverse geo-space.

Colonial legacy, linguistic diversity, and the "language question"

Colonial history artificially etched a tapestry of languages throughout African nations, imprinting them with a linguistic pluralism that amounts to a European language and polyglottal blurring of indigenous dialects (Languages of Africa, 2001; Souag and Jaggar, 2012). In the quest by postcolonial scholars to make African thought processes meet a competitive global challenge, attempts at indigenising ideas were carried out employing foreign languages as vehicles for conceptualisation. The relevance of this quest increases when one considers that postcolonial scholars prioritise concerns about conceptual frameworks for indigenous inventions, national integration, and statism within the African plurality context over language-related issues (Tangwa, 2017; Bassey, 2018; Olatunji, 2020). This reality becomes worrisome considering the historicity of human personality and the conceptualisation of the colonies, as well as the huge cultural ideals and intellectual heritage that abound in African states. Nigeria comes to mind as it offers a simple example of a copious overabundance of over 450 languages (Curry, 2006; List of Ethnic Groups in Nigeria, 2014).

This speaks volumes about a particularly striking spider web of languages, which, given the incredible variety of tongues, creates a highly complex landscape of linguistic challenges across postcolonial Africa. Africa consists of almost 2,000 documented languages that cluster into a dozen large families, including Afro-Asiatic and Niger-Saharan (Sands, 2009; Souag and Jaggar, 2012; Doochin, 2023; Mugane, 2023). Nonetheless, only a handful of these languages are completely interethnic, and have become part of the broader lingua franca. Africa's "linguistic zygote" renders interethnic discourse more complex and feeds economic and political barriers into unity. In addition, identity politics regarding language aggravate tensions, representing language as a powerful tool for socio-political dominance and the conflictual nature of ethnolinguists' desire for recognition. Some postcolonial African countries have retained colonial language policies by maintaining European languages over indigenous languages in governance and education in a diglossic configuration.

Initially, the dream of post-independence was that European language education precipitated its development. However, there has been growing disillusionment, as it has emerged that European language education not only alienates communities from their roots without attendant economic rewards but also engenders "epistemicides" (Santos, 2014; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2020). This has resulted in a split between rejectionists and accommodationists in the pursuit of a solution to the language question issue in Africa (Albaugh, 2007; Zhang, 2017). Rejectionist scholars of the African revolt favour the use of African indigenous languages to recreate African cultural values and experiences. Rejectionists have defined African work as an indigenous language. The rejectionist argument asserts that the production of authentic African intellectual output must take place through the use of an African language, mostly within Africa (Ilo, 2016; Ejede, 2023). The linguistic difficulty facing Africa raises the question of how pragmatic the rejectionist argument is, given Africa's current linguistic reality. Despite its attractiveness, this author holds that rejectionist reasoning fails to consider the pragmatic force required to resolve the African linguistic dilemmas.

On the other hand, accommodationists prefer European languages to African works. The accommodationists argue African indigenous concepts should be presented in European languages (Ukam, 2018; Mabe, 2020; Mamuye, 2021). Accommodationists believe European literature is historically and pragmatically respectable and should be included in the African literary canon. The accommodationist perspective argues that the use of European languages in African literary expressions allows for wider global recognition and

accessibility (Botwe-Asamoah, 2001, p. 753). Their perspectives are based on a shared concern for Africa's vital role in the globalised world of competing civilisations. According to Oyesile (2005, p. 136), language is armoured by multiple types of conceptual commitments, making their concerns believable. Every language has ideological, philosophical, sociopolitical, economic, pragmatic, and ontological commitment. Hence, language should not be considered superior.

Linguistic complementarity as a philosophical framework

This paper, using African philosophy as a genus of language use in African society, examines the tricky language problem that characterises existential realities in Africa and concludes that a practical approach is needed to overcome this language dilemma. The concept of "linguistic complementarity" (LC) has become pivotal to the quest for a practical approach. This is because LC is a critical effort to establish complementary relationships between African indigenous languages and European languages, which are presently used as a means of creative expression. The concept of linguistic complementarity is taken as an application of (Asouzou 2005; Asouzou 2007; Asouzou 2011) "complementary reflection" to bear on the language question within the African philosophical discourse. Asouzu's complementary reflection emphasises the interconnectedness and interdependence of all entities within a gamut of existence. Asouzu's principle posits that a deep-seated and critical understanding of any phenomenon requires consideration of such phenomena in relation to other phenomena.

Complementary reflection, thus, thus encapsulates the thought process of moving away from exclusive or isolated thinking and entrenching a wholistic perspective to understand any phenomenon in a manner that values the contributions of diverse elements to a coherent whole. Complementary reflection asserts that reality is best understood through the synthesis of various viewpoints, harmonising different ideas to achieve a balanced understanding. Within the complementary thought system, opposing elements coexist and are necessary for complete comprehension of reality. As such, contrasts such as light and dark, good and evil, and life and death become fundamental syntheses to the structure of existence. These opposing forces are not seen as mutually exclusive, but as partners that together create a dynamic and ever-evolving reality, leading to more profound insight into the nature of being.

Linguistic complementarity is an exploration of the complementary thinking principle to engender a comprehensive approach to the linguistic dilemma within the context of postcolonialpost-colonial African states. It respects the distinct contributions of the individual languages of the varying distinct groups inherent in a multi-ethnic-cultural African state, and integrates them within a wider context of language use in the stance of language use in an African state. LC, through via this synthesis, fosters a deeper and more inclusive understanding of the complexity and realities of the language question in a postcolonial African state. LC is employed to emphasise the complementary relationship between different languages, particularly in the context of postcolonial African states. It advocates for the coexistence and mutual enrichment of indigenous African languages and colonial languages. Accordingly, LC engenders and enhances a practical symbiotic combination of the

accommodationist approach and a complementarity relationship between indigenous and European, particularly in light of Afolayan's "Grammaticality of Language" (Afolayan, 2006, pp. 45–46).

A practical example is the literary works of the Nigerian literary giant, Chinua Achebe (1930–2013). As a highly regarded African novelist, Achebe considers the use of both English and Indigenous languages to convey the complexities of his cultural upbringing, and he uses them accordingly. Therefore, it is imperative to manipulate the complexities of these languages to effectively convey the nuances of African cultural experiences through expressive forms. Undoubtedly, I am cognisant of the fact that he achieved this in large part through a variety of imaginative creations, including Things Fall Apart (1958) and The Arrow of God (1964). The concept of linguistic complementarity describes the ability to conduct thought processes in indigenous languages, and then express them in any European language. This suggests that writing should be encouraged in both European languages and in indigenous modes of expression.

The explanation of Innocent Asouzou's General Theory of Complementary Reflection bolsters this notion (Asouzou, 2005; Asouzou, 2007; Asouzou 2011). Adopting a complementary perspective towards African Indigenous languages and colonial languages would significantly impact the advancement of intercultural understanding, as previously stated by Afolayan. This is due to the fact that comprehension and explanation of reality would flourish on a universal platform, which would not only fulfil Wiredu's (1998) cultural universal purpose but also provide guidelines for resolving conflicts at different levels of human relationships. However, this still leaves the challenge of translation uncertainty, and intercultural communication becomes more difficult. LC, as shown below, solves the problem of translation uncertainty and makes language use more useful by making it easier to handle immediate non-linguistic existential situations. This in turn promotes the development of robust national and internal relationships among diverse cultural agencies within the state.

LC assumes that language diversity is a positive resource for intercultural communication and that clearer, more effective intercultural communication is not solely a matter of individual language learning, but also accommodates proficiency in the second language of another language community. This assumption is based on the complementary understanding of when and how distinct communication systems are clear, concise, and effective. When a language lacks task-specific features, a lack of competencies in certain communicative settings can lead to inefficiency. Howeve, language diversity can also cause communication inequalities and disadvantaged language communities often view their work as a process of adapting to the dominant group's language. Most often, the disadvantaged group bears the responsibility of rectifying these situations by altering their language and enhancing their proficiency in the second language. It is widely recognised that language groups are unequal in terms of number and economic and political power, and the linguistic heritage that it is desirable to protect is that it continues to provide an essential and meaningful way of life for a speech community (May, 2000, 2005; UNOHCHR, 2013; Little, 2017; Murungi and Opinde, 2018).

As such, it is possible to reverse language shifts for languages whose continuous coexistence does not compromise the fundamental rights of other speech communities in the same state. Thus, to help weaker languages become stronger without hurting their position of stronger languages, LC calls for dynamic status-planning measures in language

policy. This set of special tasks is designed to improve a language's relative position so that it can perform its tasks in certain areas. They include status, corpus, and acquisition planning and usually require positive discrimination or affirmative action. In this stance, measures for minority language communities should not be viewed as special privileges but rather as crucial for upholding a balanced multilingual ecology and enhancing language relations. This is because the equilibrium of linguistic human rights is vital to preventing further linguistic polarisation and intergroup conflict in postcolonial states. Such linguistic equilibrium would better engender effective engagement among various ethnic groups as well as sound intercultural communication. Thus, it contributes to the overall advancement of society.

The use of the term "Linguistic Complementarity" (LC) instead of terms such as language complementarity can be accounted for based on some critical factors. First, the use of "linguistics" in the term LC signals that the concept is grounded in rigorous academic study. This is because linguistics is more commonly used in scholarly contexts in fields such as psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, and the philosophy of language. In addition, linguistic is a more comprehensive term that encompasses not only language as a discrete entity but also the study of language, the use of language, its structure, and variation. Thirdly, this study presents LC as a philosophical framework. The term "linguistic" better captures the philosophical nature of the enquiry, as it relates to the study of language in its broader sense, including its cognitive and social dimensions. Finally, the use of linguistics suggests an interdisciplinary approach, which is evident from the paper's combination of philosophical, sociological, and educational perspectives on language use in postcolonial Africa.

As such, when examining the sociolinguistic situation of postcolonial African states, linguistic complementarity promotes the growth of a balanced relationship between languages. This balance improves the state's overall communication capabilities, protects everyone's right to use their own language in public areas, and ensures the highest level of language and cultural preservation within each speech community. To demonstrate the practicality of LC in making intercultural communication efficient in postcolonial Africa, let us examine some practical examples in three different regions of Africa:

South Africa

South Africa can be considered an exciting example of how linguistic interactions influence intercultural processes in several languages in a particular state. Having 11 officially recognised languages, the nation still strives to promote a sense of inclusivity and common identity among culturally diverse citizens (Madiba, 2014; Lekau and Mphasha, 2017; South Africa's Languages and Culture, 2023). These 11 languages include: Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, siSwati, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, Afrikaans, English, isiNdebele, isiXhosa and isiZulu (Brenzinger, 2017; Chaka, 2024; South Africa's Languages and Culture, 2023). Recently, the government has approved the inclusion of Sign Language as the twelfth official language (Parliament Release, 2023). Many urban area communities, such as Sunnyside or Muckleneuk in Pretoria, for instance, are multicultural oriented. These communities are filled with people from different parts of South Africa and other countries of the world communing together and engaging in multicultural and social interactions. Furthermore, the government has undertaken numerous initiatives to promote equal status and accessibility of these languages in

schools and public areas. The results are clear: Multilingualism and culture-specific language appreciation are on the rise in the country. Many institutions and communities in South Africa have developed language preservation projects to promote cultural awareness and pride. For instance, the University of South Africa's community engagement program organises a program of multilingual spelling bee competition among grade schools in local languages to showcase the educational value and benefits of teaching and learning in students' own languages (UNISA, 2023). In addition, the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) encourages policies that promote the implementation and use of all 12 official languages in teaching, learning, research support, and public communication, especially via digital technology. Such initiatives guarantee a more efficient mode of communication in a specific native language (Edwards and Ngwaru, 2014; Mncwango, 2010). Additionally, they encourage societal cohesion and meaningful intercultural relationships. These initiatives serve as an inspiration for cultural and intellectual development within South Africa, helping to develop new theories and practical solutions to existing problems. This approach to inherent linguistic diversity in South Africa is particularly significant for other postcolonial African nations, as it allows other African states to learn how language can be harnessed to contribute to the equitable development of local societies by incorporating previously underrepresented voices.

Nigeria

The compromise between colonial and indigenous languages in Nigeria is an example of promoting an equitable balance of foreign languages with local dialects when it comes to intercultural dialogue and languages. Nigerian education aligns with the principle of equal perception of both English and local languages (Adeyemi, 2020; Ezekwe, 2018; Nwokoro et al., 2020). Nwokoro et al. (2020) argue that students in the Nigerian education system are becoming bilingual speakers. They emphasise that such students are competent not only in English but also in their native language, which develops a sense of bicultural identity and prepares a person to communicate uninhibited in multiple subjects, thereby facilitating social integration in the state (Nwokoro et al., 2020, pp. 184–185). In Nigeria, indigenous languages are essential in school curricula and are the basis for developing language skills and a societal identity blueprint. As a matter of fact, in the 80s up to early 90s, an indigenous language was the mode of teaching-learning processes in the first 3 years of primary education (Ezekwe, 2018; Nwokoro et al., 2020; Adeyemi, 2020). Primary school pupils are taught all subjects and save English language studies in a language that is specific to the location of the school. Thus, in the Southwest, Yoruba, North, Hausa, and Eastern parts, Igbo was the medium of teaching from primary classes 1–3, respectively. Nigeria is committed to saving its language for the next generation, guaranteeing the preservation of linguistic diversification and cultural uniformity. Thus, it is possible to identify and promote language used to bring about cultural uniformity. In addition, Pidgin English is emerging in Nigeria as a language of unity that unites diverse language barriers and differential regional communication (Ezekwe, 2018). The use of pidgins appears more viable, as people who are not trained within the four walls of an educational institution use them for communication. Interestingly, the use of pidgin English allows for intercultural communication among various ethnic groups within the country. This illustrates both formal and informal instances of appropriating LC

principles in language use in Nigerian linguistic contexts. This demonstrates the power of language to foster societal cohesion and engenders a flourishing society that relies on intercultural integration.

Tanzania

In contemporary Africa, Tanzania's language realities are another example of practical LC. Tanzania recognises that unity in its linguistic diversity can only be achieved through language reform. Thus, Tanzania aims to eradicate linguistic disparities and to establish a national identity. To this end, both English and Swahili (also known as Kiswahili) are official languages (UNICEF, 2017). Used in different context, Swahili is the national language and is widely used in government, education (particularly primary school), and daily communication. While English is primarily used in secondary and higher education, diplomacy, and international commerce (Abdala, 2024; Robinson, 2024). The adoption of English and Swahili as Tanzania's national language has been instrumental in achieving the national identity goal because it has enabled various ethnic communities to communicate freely, thus enhancing linguistic egalitarianism and respect (Swilla, 2010). Swahili's soft structure has encouraged its assimilation among different demographics, enhancing intercultural comprehension through societal participation. For instance, in Tanzania, Swahili becomes a flag-bearer for unity and identity, enriching and integrating different groups of Tanzanians. Swahili's prevalence also reduces linguistic discrimination, enabling societal cohesion for the nation's development (Ulmer et al., 2023) Indeed, the adoption of Swahili as a national language in Tanzania despite the multi-ethnic nature of the country, is a contributive basis for strengthening national identity, cohesion, and preservation of Tanzania's cultural heritage for the coming generation (Muzale and Rugemalira, 2008, pp. 73–75; Yoneda, 2010). These are achieved through government initiatives, such as the development of language resources, digital libraries, and materials for educational and public use in Swahili, provision of teacher training programs to enhance Swahili language proficiency, and establishment of national language policies that priorities Swahili. The effect of these initiatives in everyday life activities of the people is seen in how the Swahili language made cordial interactions possible among people of diverse languages and ethnic orientation in common public places like *daladalas* (public minivans), restaurants, and *mitumba markets* (second-hand clothing shops) (Ulmer et al., 2023, pp. 1385–1387). Tanzania's commitment to unity through Swahili represents a post-independence country's commitment to cultural preservation, thus building a legacy. By giving Swahili language priority, alongside the use of English language, as a unifying stratum in a postcolonial state like Tanzania, the incorporation of speech equality will be the best measure to promote unity, demonstrating how linguistic diversity can be a blessing for societal cohesion and growth (Hiza and Paschal, 2023; Wawire et al., 2023).

Strengthening intercultural communication through language: challenges and limitations

It is a popular view that children learning a language different from their native language often struggle to understand concepts,

comprehend teachers, and absorb new information. The result is a high failure rate that effectively blocks progression to higher levels of education. Idowu Biao, in a study on sub-Saharan Africa, attributes the pervasiveness of illiteracy and low school retention rates in Africa to the majority of school-going children receiving instruction in a language they do not understand (Biao, 2018, p. 183). The same study's statistics revealed that 63% of each group of starting students dropped out before the end of primary school and only 3% progressed to university. The steady encroachment of English on national languages in the Tanzanian educational system, which has already displayed signs of failure due to its own continuation of a previous English policy and the promotion of Swahili, is positively correlated with this (Marwa, 2025). Thus, the adverse effects of these polyglossic situations lead to a drop in education. Due to the advent of globalisation, English has become the primary and international language in many postcolonial African countries. As a result, many governments focusing on efficient mass education and national unification have made English the sole or official language of instruction and government communication. This often comes at the expense of marginalising indigenous languages and their speakers, as is the case in Tanzania, where English has been the sole language of instruction since the second year of primary school, since 1967.

The idea here is that despite some evidences that the use of African languages in education and the media leads to better learning, as well as being more cost-effective, many governments persist with colonial languages. Bamgbose (1999) describes the "folk theory of political determinism" - the belief that political independence and socio-economic development are magically going to cause a "reversal of language shift" back to African languages. Bamgbose's theory may be true for African populations in the diaspora, whose shift to foreign languages is often linked to social and economic advancements in a wider society. However, among postcolonial African speech communities, "children of the poor" have the same aspirations for social and economic advancement and a global language has a better chance of providing it for them. In addition, it is the power associated with the prestige of being able to use the European language in a postcolonial African state, and it is clear that the language shift takes a very long time to reverse, if it ever does, without strong and interventionist language policies.

Indeed, effective use of language requires an understanding of social and cultural attitudes acquired through history; therefore, an understanding of existing language attitudes is necessary to alter them when they may inhibit the use of an African language. This includes developing an understanding of both prestigious and non-prestigious languages. For example, Ngonyani (2001) described a survey conducted in Tanzania that identified English as an urban language with high prestige and Swahili as a rural language with low prestige. This is important at a practical level for students learning to use it in formal settings, or for those wishing to advance in non-rural environments. The identification of language attitudes is often achieved by considering the relative status of languages, their functions, and the nature of their speakers. Ngoyani's survey indicated that the nature of Swahili speakers being predominantly rural was a direct reflection of the low status of the language compared to English (2001, pp. 247–249).

This establishes the idea of sound correlation or a relationship between the attitudes and motivation of speakers and their learning of a second language. Consideration of such attitudes is important in

predicting how a change in language use affects the connotations speakers attach to their language. The African knowledge divide is strongly linked to the existing language divide. 80% of the world's languages are spoken in 20% of the world's countries, with a disproportionate number of them being less developed nations, such as those in Africa. The digital age is predominantly in English. Over 80% of the present Internet content is in English and 85% of the current global computing capacity is in English. Despite the widespread use of English, native English speakers represent only 5% of the world's population (Flammia and Saunders, 2007; Petrosyan, 2020). The differing language mix between African countries and the developed countries of Europe and North America means that even with access to ICTs, the ability to step into the information society is limited. In an already highly unequal flow of global information, it is most often English content that carries information of greatest relevance and impact. This linguistic dimension of the global knowledge divide places less developed African countries at a great disadvantage. In postcolonial African states, linguistic complementarity has the potential to create a balance among different language communities. However, this can only happen if speakers of different languages can communicate meaningfully with each other. For the most part, interethnic communication does not occur across significant language boundaries in Africa.

The use of European languages as official or national languages or as languages of wider communication is a powerful factor in promoting inequality. Speakers of one African language can learn the European language more easily than speakers of another African language with whom they want to communicate. In most African countries, the number of local languages serves as a symbol of national pride and identity, yet the continued use of such languages has been threatened by the forces of globalisation. English, French, and Portuguese remain languages of opportunity for Africans seeking social and economic mobility, and the result has been that local languages are cast aside to attain higher proficiency in official languages. This is most apparent in the case of the Igbo language in Nigeria. Igbo people have traditionally been among the most enterprising in Nigeria, and this has led to a mass exodus of young Igbo school leavers to major cities and other African countries. In doing so, they found that proficiency in English, the language of wider communication in Nigeria, is crucial for securing good jobs, and many have neglected the use of Igbo beyond basic levels. However, the same can be said for those who struggle to attain higher proficiency in official languages to seek employment outside their home country.

The Nigerian socio-linguistic reality immediately stated above represents a significant loss of human resources for African states, and this problem can only be remedied by ensuring that education in official languages is accompanied by the development of indigenous languages as languages of wider communication. This does not necessarily impede the learning of other languages, but the development of local languages should provide more opportunities for African people and reduce the social and economic disparities between those who are proficient in official languages and those who are not.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are concerned with measures that should be taken by African governments, which, in the view of

the author, are imperative for realising the vision of Africa, where Africans can communicate and share knowledge and information in any African language of their choice.

Effective language policies

It should be recognised that Africa's multilingualism and global interconnections make the development of functional multilingual competences a complex but essential tool for the future. However, this can only be best achieved if African countries can take control of language policies in their education systems, so that language decisions become a vehicle for intellectual emancipation and a unifying force, rather than a barrier to education and a source of division. An example is the South African government's policy to commit to the use of all 12 official languages in teaching, learning, research support, and public communication. Another angle to the discourse here is the issue of government investment in language and technological resources. A holistic approach to investing in language technology and resources envisions a partnership among African ministries of education, science and technology, and communication. For instance, the Tanzania education supervising ministry invests deeply in the creation of digital libraries and educational resources in Swahili and supports the development of Swahili language keyboards and input methods through various digital and technical hubs (Abdala, 2024; Namunaba, 2023). Similarly, a special-purpose task force should be set up, seeded with technical expertise, and charged with developing a plan to identify all the technology and resource requirements for implementing the Pan African Language Framework in each education system of various postcolonial states, assessing the current status and future trends of relevant technology, and establishing priorities for action.

The execution of this plan should be a major focus for international partners who support education in Africa. They should pool resources to support the African plan, avoid duplication of efforts, work in partnership with African nations to place the required technology and expertise at their disposal, and monitor its efficacy in terms of the agreed-upon plan of action for technology implementation. This call is an instance of an area of leapfrogging, in which Africa may exploit its latecomer status in the implementation of new technology. By leapfrogging, the study is refereeing to a situation of skipping a stage of technological development that is more readily available to early adopters to introduce innovations that would otherwise not be possible. In the case of Africa and language technology, this might not mean investing millions of dollars in printed dictionaries and other pedagogical materials concerning official languages, but moving directly to the use of computational tools and resources for the African languages themselves. By investing in language technology and resources within the LC framework for postcolonial language policy, Africa may take the lead in using advanced technology for hands-on language development and maintenance.

Promoting multilingual education

The implementation of language-friendly policies and options undoubtedly depends on people's attitudes towards language learning. Promoting multilingual education is vital for improving language use.

Multilingualism is a normal part of many people's daily lives, both in Africa and elsewhere. People speak and learn a new language most easily when surrounded by it at home or in a strong community. Children also make use of their entire linguistic repertoire most effectively in education if they are able to see how each language can help them acquire new knowledge and succeed in their studies. This may indicate that there are different things in different regions and communities. In some cases, it entails learning to read and write in a language other than the "national" or international language. This is the case of the multilingual spelling bee competition undertaken by the College of Human Science, University of South Africa, through a community engagement research programme. In other cases, this will mean developing a strong foundation in a national or international language before adding a second language. For instance, in Nigeria, Pidgin English is a viable option for interregional communication and engagement (Ezekwe, 2018). Noticing the sociocultural and political advantage of the use of pidgin English for cohesion and peaceful engagements in Nigeria, the Oxford English Dictionary board accepted the enlistment of 29 Nigerian pidgin words into English vocabulary (Ugwuanyi, 2020). In all cases, well-trained teachers who can understand the language needs of children and have suitable materials and resources to support their learning are required. Hence, postcolonial governments must establish a national language policy that prioritises the application of the LC framework. The emphasis here is not on learning many languages but on using all the languages that people command as a resource for education. Education in a second language does not need to come at the expense of the first language, and learning to read and write in a second language is more psychologically efficient and effective if preceded by a strong foundation in the native language. The strategy must be to add functional competencies in additional languages to the cognitive and linguistic skills already acquired in the first language.

Conclusion

This paper has explored the idea of linguistic complementarity as a philosophical framework that emphasises the ideal process, whereby different languages and cultural perspectives complement one another in intercultural communication. Linguistic complementarity can be a valuable tool for promoting mutual understanding and respect among groups. One key aspect of linguistic complementarity is the unique strengths and perspectives that each language and culture brings to the table. For example, in African contexts, indigenous languages may offer insights into local knowledge systems, histories, and ways of understanding words that are not captured in dominant languages, such as English or French. By valuing and integrating these perspectives, intercultural communication can become more nuanced and inclusive. Another important aspect of linguistic complementarity is the power dynamics of play in terms of language use. In many postcolonial African societies, dominant languages are often associated with power and privilege, while indigenous languages are marginalised and stigmatised. By promoting the use of indigenous languages in intercultural communication, linguistic complementarity can help challenge these power imbalances and promote greater equality.

In addition, this paper has shown that while the concept of linguistic complementarity posits a constructive framework for

national development, its application presents numerous challenges and scant success in postcolonial Africa. A pivotal issue is how to cultivate a national language and its functional mastery without sidelining indigenous linguistic identities and skills. The emergence of diglossia, contrasting local, national, and global languages, frequently inclines towards linguistic shifts and demoting the local vernacular. Economic demands and international influence position the mastery of a prestigious language as the cornerstone for upward mobility, steering African parents to ensure their children's fluency in their European tongues.

As a viable contribution to studies on intercultural communication and language diversity, especially in the African context, this study can engender future research directions in the following areas: It should be noted that the suggested future study area is neither exhaustive nor exclusive. LC and Curriculum development in Education Systems, where studies can explore how LC can be integrated into education systems across Africa. Also, empirical studies on LC implementation where practical implementation of LC are examined, that is, the role of technology in supporting LC implementation. In addition, future studies could be conducted on how LC contributes to the preservation of cultural heritage and the advancement of indigenous knowledge systems in Africa.

Overall, this study reveals linguistic complementarity as a valuable framework for promoting intercultural understanding and respect in postcolonial African states. Indeed, by recognising the unique strengths and perspectives of different languages in contemporary African states through the principles of linguistic complementarity, it would be possible to create more inclusive and equitable spaces for dialogue and intercultural exchange. Thus, social cohesion, political stability, socioeconomic growth, and sustainable development are achievable in postcolonial African states.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Author contributions

AAO: Conceptualization, Investigation, Methodology, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

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Conflict of interest

The author declares that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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