Preserving linguistic diversity: A critical analysis of the
language debate in postcolonial societies

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the argument for preserving linguistic diversity, using the works of Achebe and Ngũgĩ as the theoretical framework central to the analysis of the language debate in postcolonial societies. This in turn forms the basis for understanding the necessity of preserving linguistic diversity thus informing the strong reasoning behind preventing language death. Therefore, although the language debate is not embedded exclusively within the postcolonial paradigm, it is very much informed by it. In the wake of independence by former colonies, it is the subversion inflicted both by the self and by wider systems (such as globalisation and Ngũgĩ's conception of the 'cultural bomb') which fuel the prospect of language death. The primary argument of this thesis is: firstly, an intrinsic connection exists between a language, identity and the culture it carries; secondly, in postcolonial societies, it can be a positive step to reclaim native languages if desired, and finally, diversity in languages is a positive and enriching attribute for the intricate mosaic of the cultural repository of humanity. Ultimately, the thesis encourages the protection and preservation of endangered and indigenous languages as it recognises the invaluable knowledge bases which exist in different languages and cultures and sees this value as irreplaceable if lost.

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INTRODUCTION

Opening remarks

A debate exists in postcolonial societies surrounding the question of language choice. This debate exists within a broader one, centered on the tenets of linguistic and cultural diversity as a positive and enriching asset for the cultural repository of humanity. The contention of this thesis focuses on the opposing arguments of two prominent postcolonial theorists: Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, who calls for a return to native languages in the postcolonial era and, Chinua Achebe, who offers a critique of Ngũgĩ's views in suggesting that although colonialism was a blight on Africa's colonial history, it should not follow that the English language be abandoned (Achebe, 1977, 58).

The question of language in former colonies is relevant for the simple assertion made by Ashcroft *et al*, that roughly two thirds of the worlds' population have been affected by colonialism (1989, 2). The period between 1880 to the era of decolonisation saw massive upheaval and change come about in Africa through the imposition of foreign colonial rule (Baohen, 1990, 1). Though colonialism has been the practise of many empires throughout history, this thesis focuses on Britain's role in Africa's colonial history whilst acknowledging that other regimes (such as Arab colonial rule) also had similar (or even worse) effects on Africa's history. By 1914, the African continent (with the exception of Liberia and Ethiopia) was under the control of European rulers who quickly became powerful land-owners with a strong political presence, vastly altering the working lives of thousands of native field workers (*ibid*). It is at this point where Ngũgĩ begins his commentary on the language

debate and by doing so provides a clear trajectory for understanding the impact of colonialism on language. When an intrinsic asset such as language is under threat from extinction or subversion, the inherent link it has to culture and identity can be comprehended and it is this which Ngũgĩ manages to exhume throughout his works.

Moreover, the link between colonialism and language death is recognised as a strong one, as David Crystal identifies colonialism as being the point at which the big cultural movements 'spread a small number of dominant languages around the world' (2000, 1). Colonialism massively diverted the routes of many languages in the world, big and small. Boehmer defines colonialism as the 'settlement of territory, the exploitation or development of resources, and the attempt to govern the indigenous inhabitants of occupied lands' (1995, 2). McLeod argues that under colonialism, colonised people are 'made subservient to ways of regarding the world which reflect and support colonialist values', where a particular value-system is taught as 'the best, truest world-view' (2000, 19). In this respect, as well as the practical divisions colonialism enforced, it also included the intangible suppression and domination of the mental universe. Ashcroft *et al* use the term 'postcolonial' as covering 'all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonisation to the present day' (1989, 2). This thesis takes the view of Ashcroft *et al* in that postcolonialism does not signify a break from the period of colonisation, but rather, encompasses the inescapable effect on the culture, identity, and society of those once colonised (1989, 2).

Though Ngũgĩ's work focuses on the English language, other languages such as Arabic, Spanish, Portuguese and Russian have played similar roles in destabilising different mother-tongues (Crystal, 2010, 21). Whilst colonialism has played its role in bringing about (or certainly exacerbating) the extinction of native languages in former colonies, other reasons have come to the forefront as posing a threat to minority and endangered languages in the present day, which are critically examined in the latter chapters of this thesis.

Thesis argument and theoretical approach

Ngũgĩ addresses the effects that colonial rule had on native languages in Kenya, and the resulting language dilemma in the postcolonial era which still exists following the physical departure of the colonists. His essay, *The Language of African Literature* (1986) forms the basis for considering the link between the colonial subversion of linguistic and cultural identities with the preservation of linguistic diversity. Ngũgĩ's arguments are in sync with the works of the leading commentator on language death, David Crystal, in suggesting that linguistic diversity is necessary for the cultural progress of humanity and that language death should be halted and reversed where possible. Leading on from this, measures which have already taken place to prevent language death are identified, by examining the Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights (UDLR), as well as organisations dedicated to promoting linguistic diversity. Further measures are then considered which might be undertaken in order to ensure the elevated promotion and awareness of linguistic diversity thus securing the fate of indigenous and endangered languages.

The thesis draws a number of conclusions. Firstly, that when there is a choice between: the continued usage of the language of the coloniser, the reversion back to the native mother-tongue or the use of both languages, ideally, the resurgence of mother-tongue of the native people is desirable if chosen by the populace. In the case of the use of both, this is a question of choice wherein the concept of free-will plays an instrumental role. A person can certainly choose to relinquish their mother-tongue in favour of a different language. To have had that choice made by a colonising force however, through the embedding of Ngũgĩ's conception of the 'cultural bomb', can lead to an embedded inferiority complex in relation to different cultures. In this sense, where the acquisition of a colonial language did not come about in a positive manner, where two languages did not meet as equals, it is certainly worth questioning what was lost in the process. It concedes that there are benefits which can be found in multilingual societies; the use of two or more languages can widen the knowledge base and facilitate exposure to a different, or many different world views. It is the manner in which this comes about, however, that ultimately defines the resulting relationship people have with their mother-tongue and the language acquired through the colonial process.

Secondly, that linguistic and cultural diversity is a positive and enriching asset for humanity which should be protected from cultural assimilation and cultural imperialism. The question of linguistic diversity is a relevant one because the issue of language choice and having the freedom to speak one's mother-tongue is akin to a fundamental human right.

Finally, it argues that all languages, big and small, support knowledge bases and cultures which are irreplaceable once lost. Armstrong states that 'language deeply interpenetrates and affects all other systems of human activity and is the vehicle of most of our thought' (1960, 136). By preserving and protecting as many languages as possible, humanity benefits from a multitude of rich cultures, histories and heritage and for this reason, language death must be prevented.

Thesis structure

The Literature Review puts into context the background of the thesis and appraises the works offered to this debate by leading contributors.

Chapter 2 scrutinises the seminal works of Ngũgĩ and Achebe of which two essays in particular are identified as central pieces in this area of debate: *The Language of African Literature* (1986) by Ngũgĩ, and *The African Writer and the English Language* (1977) by Achebe. Ngũgĩ's views on the need for the mother-tongue to be reclaimed and retained in the postcolonial era, bears relevance from the time which Ngũgĩ was writing in, through to the present day where overt colonialism has been replaced by an underlying continuation of the manifestation of the 'cultural bomb' (Achebe, 1986, 28). Ngũgĩ and Achebe offer contrasting viewpoints with Achebe demonstrating a critical attitude towards what he sees as a draconian choice of the either/or approach to language choice (Achebe, 1988, 41) whereas Ngũgĩ sees it as his duty as a Kenyan writer to reclaim and nurture his mother-tongue for future generations of Kenyan children.

Chapter 3 draws upon Ngũgĩ's concept of linguistic identity and the relationship to culture to ascertain what is lost when a language dies and further, whether linguistic diversity is a positive and enriching attribute or whether it is limiting and divisive. The chapter puts forward arguments as to why linguistic diversity should be maintained and the advantages it affords to humanity's repository of knowledge and history.

Chapter 4 expands upon the ideas of preserving linguistic identity put forward in the previous chapters and addresses how this has been vocalised through the creation of the Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights, which supports linguistic rights, paying particular attention to indigenous and endangered languages. A number of organisations are identified which are dedicated to raising awareness of endangered languages and promoting linguistic diversity. The latter part of the chapter suggests further ways in which linguistic diversity can be preserved and promoted, to ensure that the position of language death can be reversed. By bringing the issue of declining linguistic diversity to the forefront of academic and public consciousness where awareness and acknowledgement is amassed, it can lead to the issues of language death permeating the academic, socio-political and economic conscience where the pressing urgency of the need to reverse language death thus preserving linguistic diversity, is acted upon.

CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1 Introduction

Of the estimated 6,000 languages in the world, 3,000 will die out in the course of 1,200 months; a language dies somewhere in the world every two weeks (Crystal, 2000, 1; 2010, 21). With the growing number of languages ceasing to exist, it is no wonder that linguists and anthropologists are eager to bring the issue of endangered languages to the forefront of the linguistic debate. The linguistic debate however, has a long colonial history, which is charted by Nicholas Ostler in *Empires of the Word* (2005), where languages have been subverted and replaced with those of colonisers. This thesis traces Africa's colonial history as this period saw native languages ceasing to be spoken and heard, albeit through a direct subversion of language rather than the indirect causes of language death which propel the problem of declining linguistic diversity today (Ngũgĩ, 1986, 1993; Crystal, 2000, 2004). For this reason, this thesis uses the postcolonial approach as its first level of analysis in relation to language, culture and identity. Consequently, the arguments which arise here inform the second level of analysis of the universal approach, to question why languages are important and more crucially, why a diversity of languages is important.

This chapter appraises the works that have been carried out in the fields of postcolonial, linguistic and cultural theory, which bear relevance to this thesis in order to provide a contextual background against which to place the current study. Firstly, in the postcolonial field, Ngũgĩ (1972, 1986, 1993), Achebe (1977) and Frantz Fanon (1963, 1993) are identified as seminal theorists who have contributed some of

the most pioneering works centred on African literatures. They all grapple with themes of language, culture and identity addressed from within the colonial and postcolonial paradigm, to investigate the influence and power the colonisers' presence had on the colonised.

Secondly, in the field of linguistic and cultural anthropology, Franz Boas (1965, 1976) is the seminal theorist who has argued that cultural relativism is the key to linguistics and an appeal to humanism is necessary to understand language and culture. A number of other theorists further inform Boas' ideas to lend strength to his arguments in relation to cultural and linguistic theory.

Finally, in the field of linguistic diversity and language death, Crystal (2000, 2004) has emerged in the past decade as one of the leading commentators on the issue of reversing the spread of language death. All of these writers have made substantial contributions in the field of linguistics dissecting the subject from differing but equally valid perspectives on the issues of: the choice of language in postcolonial societies, the link between culture, language and identity, and the question of preserving linguistic diversity.

1.2 Postcolonial theorists

Achebe's essay *The African Writer and the English Language* (1977) is set in the context of an uncertain and irrevocably changed postcolonial African age. Achebe looks to the pragmatics of the colonial situation to identify the benefits for those whose lives have been disrupted by the imposition of a foreign tongue (*ibid*, 55-62). Within the essay, Achebe demonstrates his belief in constructing a 'new voice' which

is coming out of Africa, speaking of the postcolonial era in a language which 'will be able to carry the weight of [the] African experience' (1977, 62). Achebe's strength lies in his attitude of opportunism. Although mindful of the negative impact colonialism had on the psyche of the African people, he is pragmatic in his approach to the English language and what it can offer; thus he is reluctant to throw out the 'good' with the 'bad' (*ibid*, 58). He demonstrates a logical and rational thought-process in accepting the past and using it to advance progress rather than allowing it to hinder. Achebe recognises and appreciates the value of a common tongue for a group of people otherwise separated by over 200 languages (Achebe, 1977, 56-61). Is it possible however, for Achebe to speak of three manageable languages, English, French and Arabic as being solely a unifying means of communication? Although they did unify and give a common tongue to a mass of people, the manner in which the unification came about, through the mental subversion of the native tongue, is what Ngũgĩ speaks out against. If the language was simply a unifying means of communication, why would the subverted create literatures with the colonisers tongue after independence? At the point when literatures have been developed and native tongues abandoned, the unifying tongue has become more than solely a unifier; it becomes a replacement for the native tongue and propels the decline in the use of native languages.

Achebe does not hold an overarching position on the colonial experience in denouncing the coloniser's impact as a wholly negative experience in respect to Nigerian languages. However, in the context of the image of Africa held by the West, Achebe is strongly opposed to the misconceptions propelled through western literature as seen in his critique of Joseph Conrad (1975). What Achebe brings to the

debate of African literature is a sense of moderation. In his essay, *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (1962), Achebe is cautious of both an entirely positive critic as well as the entirely negative but rather opts for the one which would critique on merit. Therefore, although the question of language choice commands a clear answer from Achebe (1977, 25-27; 1988, 40-41), this does not reflect a 'forgiving' outlook on the image of Africa created by Western explorers and writers and this is most keenly understood in his critique of Conrad. Achebe's lecture later amended as an essay, *An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's Heart of Darkness* (1975) is similar in tone to Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) in recounting the perception held by the West of the East (or in Achebe's case, of Africa), as the 'Other'.

Said's *Orientalism* (1978) offers a foundational piece of colonial critique in addressing the central issue of perception. It focuses upon the dichotomy that was created through dealing with the Orient by 'making statements about it, authorising views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it [and] ruling over it' (Said, 1978, 3). *Orientalism* was the 'western style for dominating, restructuring and having authority over the Orient' which allowed the perpetuation of false underlying assumptions of the East (*ibid*). His critique of Western attitudes to the East resonates in this work as he challenges the status quo in reference to the conventional views held by the West. Said contends that the political and literary discourse used served to create and crystallise an irrevocable divide between the East and the West. Césaire supports this view as Kelley summaries his argument as asserting that the colonisers' 'sense of superiority, their sense of mission as the world's civilisers, depends on turning the other into a barbarian' (Césaire, 1972, 9). Similarly, in his essay Achebe, asserts that the xenophobia displayed by Conrad can have no place

on a list of 'great novels' where the 'very humanity of black people is called into question' (1988, 10).

Achebe's struggle however, lies in his guilty admission of abandoning his mother-tongue in favour of the opportunities colonialism brought with it, and how the foregoing of the benefits it did bring would be counter-productive (Achebe, 1977, 62). Ngũgĩ and Achebe argue that the 'guilty feeling' which comes with the abandonment of one's mother-tongue need not come to fruition as it is possible to learn different languages so long as there is security for all languages, where they are each given a fair chance to develop and be maintained. This is possible as long as both a speaker of a minority or endangered language holds pride and self-worth in their own language alongside others respecting those languages and cultures which are different to their own (Crystal, 2005, 18-19; Ngũgĩ, 1986, 1993).

The tone in which Achebe advocates the use of the coloniser's language demonstrates his critical stance of colonialism in Africa: he states, when speaking of the few benefits colonialism brought with it, 'let us give the devil his due' (1977, 57). He does however, advocate the continued usage of English and his arguments resonate with the theme of modernity, and the benefits that world languages (particularly European languages), can have on economic and social mobility (1977, 62). Viewing the English (and European languages) as the only key to progress, modernisation and success is a disadvantageous reflection of non-European languages and the cultures which they support. It strengthens the connotations of progress and success lying solely with western languages and this is the view which

Ngũgĩ and Crystal seek to challenge through their works (Ngũgĩ, 1986; Crystal, 2000, 2004).

Ngũgĩ's analysis and interpretation of the events in colonial Kenya have led him to become a powerful commentator on the language debate in postcolonial societies (Sander & Lindfors, 2006, xi-xiii). Amongst his contributions, his essay, *The Language of African Literature* (Ngũgĩ, 1986) provides a defence of returning to the use of the mother-tongue, where he argues in favour of Kenyan writers writing in their native languages to reclaim what was lost through the colonial experience – its varied and rich collection of languages and oral traditions. Control over language was one of the main features of imperial oppression and in response to this he sees his writing in his mother-tongue, Gikuyu, as being 'part and parcel of the anti-imperialist struggles of Kenyan and African peoples', in an attempt to regain what had been taken away (*ibid*, 28).

The strength in Ngũgĩ's argument lies in his ability to give his audience privileged access to a world which essentially defined him. The ownership and internalisation of culture which he demonstrates and reflects through his writing on the language issue transcends the political and academic dynamic to the purely humanistic dimension; his reflection of growing up in the highlands of Kenya resonates with his descriptions of language and culture (1986; 1993). In this respect, Ngũgĩ's personal life defines his academic works, as his positive (and negative) experiences with language began at a young age which consequently shaped his thought on the linguistic problem of the post-independence era (Norridge, 2010). Furthermore, he is able to give context

to abstract formulations of 'culture' and 'linguistic identity' by relating it to his own life which strengthens his arguments within the linguistic paradigm.

On the count of nationalism which is levelled at Ngũgĩ for his hard-line position on retaining his native language (Ogude, 1999, 90), Crystal offers a solemn viewpoint of why language stirs such emotion, and why people have fought and died to protect their language; he says:

> They do so because they feel their identity is at stake, that language preservation is a question of human rights, community status and nationhood...Language nationalists see their language as a treasure house, as a repository of memories, as a gift to their children, as a birthright (1997, 44)

By choosing to write in Gikuyu, Ngũgĩ is employing a non-violent and peaceful method of reclaiming his language and attempting to effect change in the direction of African literature. Though the subject of non-violent and peaceful resistance is not within the remit of this thesis, it is worth mentioning that leaders who have fought against racial and civil discrimination have achieved their ends by adopting this method. One such example of peaceful resistance was Mohandas Gandhi's resistance of British colonialism which took the form of 'Satyagraha', the philosophy and practise of non-violent resistance (Merton, 1965; Borman, 1948). The philosophy of non-violent resistance resonated with the leader of the social justice and civil rights movement in America, Martin Luther King Jr., whose oratory and political

activism is credited with the passage of legislation outlawing discrimination on the grounds of skin colour (King, 1958; Carson, 1999).

Ngũgĩ's work focuses very much on the language dilemma from the postcolonial angle, but a gap exists where he does not refer to the issue of language death which is not affected by colonial domination, but rather is victim to the unequal balance of power created by an increasingly globalised world (Crystal, 1997, 25-27). Although Ngũgĩ purports a Universalist philosophy in deeming all languages as holding equal worth (1993, xvii), he does not actually approach the language dilemma from the universal platform but stops at the Africa-centric, postcolonial view. Ngũgĩ endeavours to free disempowered languages from the clutches of any given or enforced inferiority complex, which would then facilitate each language a platform from which they can thrive (Ngũgĩ, 1972, 13). Whilst his arguments are valid in the Africa-centric view, this thesis moves beyond the limiting scope of only evaluating the language debate from within the postcolonial paradigm by applying it to the broader field of universal linguistic diversity.

In his book *Black Skin, White Masks* (1993), Frantz Fanon addresses the question of language in relation to colonialism, ascribing a basic importance to language use. The central theme running through the first chapter, *The Negro and Language* is the idea which Fanon believes to be ingrained in the minds of both the coloniser and the colonised; that the closer the African person is to the 'white man' the more 'civilised' he is (Fanon, 1993, 26). This resonates with the ideas Ngũgĩ puts forward of the linguistic and educational problem in colonial Kenya where the English language was (and still is) celebrated as the key to success and achievement, whereas the Kenyan

languages were (and in some respects, still are) seen as regressive and damaging to the possibility of educational attainment. Indeed, Fanon states that 'to speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilisation' (*ibid*, 17).

Though the writings of the theorists mentioned reflect specifically on the African continent, Fanon's estimation of language as 'supporting the weight of a civilisation', leads to a further understanding of linguistic theory which transcends postcolonial literary theory in Africa. British rule in Ireland is cited, (amongst the effect of the blight and famine which led to deaths and mass emigration), as a key factor for the decline of the use of the Gaelic language as 'colonial policy sought to maintain Irish in a subservient position English' (Ó Croidheáin, 2006, 313). The introduction of 'national schools' saw the sole usage of English as a medium of instruction with Gaelic falling into disfavour with Irish people as they viewed it as a 'hindrance' to progress (Hindley, 1990, 13). This echoes Ngũgĩ's schooling experiences with language and evidences the subversion of native languages as a practice central to the colonial strategy.

1.3 Linguistic anthropologists and language death

At 25 years old Franz Boas spent time on Baffin Island to undertake anthropological and geographical study among the Eskimo. Whilst there, Boas witnessed the capture of two seals which were then shared out between every man on the settlement. Seeing this, he acknowledged the beauty in the custom among the 'savages', in

which they could 'bear all deprivations in common', as well as bearing happiness in common, and wrote in his diary:

> I often ask myself what advantages our "good society" possesses over that of the "savages" and find, the more I see of their customs, that we have no right to look down upon them. Where amongst our people could you find such hospitality as here? Where are people so willing, without the least complaint, to perform *every* task asked of them? We have no right to blame them for their forms and superstitions which may seem ridiculous to us. We "highly educated people" are much worse, relatively speaking (Boas cited in Cole, 1983, 33)

This extract is resoundingly in sync with the contention of this thesis. Boas' words evoke humanism and his book, *The Mind of Primitive Man* (1965) highlights his primary concern in asserting the equal importance of the facets of all human dimensions, with none being reducible to another. He concludes with a call for a 'greater tolerance of forms of civilisation different from our own' asserting that as all races have contributed in history to cultural progress, so could they continue to do so given a fair opportunity (1965, 278). Boas emphasised that 'every language represents a classification of experience [which] vary dramatically from language to language' (Lucy, 1992, 16). Edward Sapir elaborated on Boas' work but where Boas viewed language as reflecting thought and culture, Sapir saw language as yielding a shaping factor in the interpretation of cultural experience (Lucy, 1992, 23).

The concept of culture constitutes a prevalent thread throughout this thesis with its link to identity and language being a central argument for the retention of linguistic diversity. It is however, a contested concept and several theorists put forward definitions which attempt to provide an overarching understanding of what the term encompasses. Riley defines culture as having retained from its origins a 'metaphorical opposition to 'nature': it is a product of human activity and effort, the sum of knowledge which humanity has produced, accumulated, stored and transmitted throughout history' (2007, 22). Tylor provides a definition of 'culture' which has since come to be representative of cultural anthropology suggesting that 'culture or civilisation, taken in its widest ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as member of society' (Tylor, 1920, 1).

Culture as defined by Hall, encapsulates within it a shared 'set of concepts, images, and ideas which enable them to think and feel about the world, and thus to interpret the world in roughly similar ways' (1997, 4). Experiences can pass through generations and the accumulation of values in time become almost like self-evident truths of what is right and wrong or acceptable and unacceptable which are cemented through the evolution and understanding of cultural norms. Eventually, a way of life regarding these moral norms and values become distinguishable from other ways of life distinctive in their moral norms and values; they develop a distinct culture and history (Ngũgĩ, 1972; Hall, 1997). Ngũgĩ states:

> Culture, in its broadest sense is a way of life fashioned by a people
>
> in their collective endeavour to live and come to terms with their total
>
> environment. It is the sum of their art, their science and all their
>
> social institutions including their system of beliefs and rituals (1972,
>
> 4)

Cultural values are accumulated through language, interaction and communication; this allows groups to create and maintain identities which transcend the constraints of time and generation (Ngũgĩ, 1986, 15-16). The definitions of culture put forward by Hall, Riley, Ngũgĩ and Tylor all share a common thread of a set of integrated social and moral entities evolving to encompass a way of life, which is how culture is understood within this thesis.

Where the above theorists offer the theoretical foundations of the importance of language and its link with culture and identity, Crystal puts forward arguments in favour of preserving linguistic diversity and reversing the process of language death (Crystal, 2000). Crystal has established himself as an authoritative figure on linguistic theory and his numerous articles, books and lectures have informed the field of linguistics as well as the public arena on the issue of linguistic diversity and the plight of endangered languages (Crystal, 2006; 2004; 2003). Crystal's strong defence of linguistic diversity and his desire to stem the death of languages makes him a vital contributor to the field of linguistics from the universal theoretical approach. His arguments as to why languages matter, and especially why diversity in languages is important, feature heavily in the final chapter.

Within Crystal's work however, there is a lack of attention surrounding the impact of colonialism which has led to native languages disappearing. He does not analyse the issue of the forced subversion of a linguistic identity via colonial control though it is touched upon when he addresses the causes of language death (2002, 18). The lack of colonial-centric critique in his debates on language demonstrates a weakness in Crystal's work as colonialism has affected a large proportion of the worlds' population and has consequently moulded and changed language communities (Ashcroft *et al*, 1989, 2). For this reason, when looking at language death and linguistic diversity, it is logical to bridge the effect of linguistic imperialism to the death of a language as the former allows insight into the link between language and identity which informs the latter, the need to protect and preserve languages (Crystal, 1997; 1999; 2000).

1.4 Conclusion

Ngũgĩ's arguments resonate with the ideas put forward by Boas and others in the field of anthropological linguistics, of languages representing distinct cultures. The works of these theorists support the arguments running through the entirety of this thesis; that of each language offering different but equally valid world-views, and further, that endangered and indigenous languages ought to be protected from extinction. The inevitability of the end of a language's life cycle may, to some degree, be unavoidable and this is a practical truth which deserves to be stated: some languages cannot be saved. It is the causes which bring about the deaths of small, endangered and indigenous languages however, that necessitate debate. The growth or demise of languages can occur for complex, sometimes compounding reasons. Batibo cites sudden causes which bring about language decline, such as

genocide and devastating epidemics to gradual causes such as marginalisation and domination and globalisation (2008, 51). The effects that an increasingly globalised capitalist system has on propelling the decline of endangered and indigenous languages, are far-reaching and immediate (Crystal, 2000, 76-77).

Themes such as linguistic identity, its relationship to culture, the benefit and value of retaining one's mother-tongue and the psychological inferences explored, such as the 'cultural bomb' and the associated inferiority complex, are central to the works of Ngũgĩ and Crystal. However, Crystal does not draw these ideas from the link between colonialism and language just as Ngũgĩ does not draw these ideas from the link between universal language death and the threat of a decline in linguistic diversity. Nonetheless, the similarity in their arguments evidences the strong argument which can be made for the preservation of linguistic diversity; whichever platform the issue is viewed from, there is agreement that each language holds an irreplaceable repository of knowledge and to lose even one language is a loss for the montage of cultures and knowledge bases of humanity. Both defend linguistic diversity, the right each has to speak his mother-tongue and the benefit which can come from this.

This thesis addresses the gaps in the works of Ngũgĩ, Achebe and Crystal by addressing the language question from within the context of the postcolonial paradigm but is not exclusively informed by it. It connects relevant but previously unrelated works of theorists who have each contributed defining works in the language debate. By bringing together Ngũgĩ's defence of the mother-tongue with

the issue of language death, for example, the language debate is examined through

the paradigms of linguistic, postcolonial and cultural theory.

CHAPTER 2: NGŨGĨ, ACHEBE AND THE LANGUAGE DEBATE

2. 1 Introduction

Born in 1938, Ngũgĩ grew up at a time of great injustice and upheaval for the working class peasantry, spending his younger life in the central highlands of British ruled Kenya (Gugler, 1994, 329; Williams, 1999, 1-16). Ngũgĩ's homestead was the place where the community interacted through a plethora of gatherings of which the key link between the different elements was the Gikuyu language (Ngũgĩ, 1986, 10). His relationship with the Gikuyu language in turn forms the foundation of much of his anthropological and socio-political viewpoints that emerge in his writings, namely, his call for a return to the languages native to Kenya.

His desire for a reversion back to the mother-tongues of Kenya emerged as a response to the manner in which Kenyan languages were subverted and replaced. In order to 'decolonise the mind', Ngũgĩ feels it is imperative to first re-learn to value and respect one's own language, and to teach this to the Kenyan chid, which will then allow for Kenyan (and African) literature to hold an equal place next to other literatures (Ngũgĩ, 1986, 1993; Sander & Lindfors, 2006). It is only then that a Kenyan child can learn to appreciate the literatures of different languages without harvesting any given complexes about the status of their own language. This in turn makes it possible to derive great benefit from the learning of different languages, provided they are taught in a manner which does not subvert the native language (Ngũgĩ, 1986, 4-33).

Achebe, born in the former British colony of Nigeria in 1930 has become one of Africa's most widely read writers (Lindfors, 1997, ix-xv). Achebe explores his identification with the English language in his 1977 essay, *The African Writer and the English Language*. Conflicting with Ngũgĩ's desire to preserve his mother-tongue stands Achebe who takes a pragmatic viewpoint. Achebe views English as an opportunity rather than a constraint and feels that it is not possible to develop and sustain literatures in the multiple Nigerian languages which exist. He acknowledges the malleability in the English language which allows for it to diverge and so be able to host a 'new English', one that will be able to carry the weight of Achebe's African experience (1977, 62). The conflict arises in Achebe's decision to write in English, a decision which unsurprisingly, Ngũgĩ has been critical of (Wroe, 2010, Guardian). In the postcolonial era, Achebe sees the English language as the carrier of an experience which cannot be comprehended with the African language. It leaves space for the meshing of two languages rather than one, to carry the weight of the colonial experience (1977, 55-62).

This chapter critically scrutinises the question of language choice from the perspective of forced subversion and the consequent dilemma this poses in the postcolonial setting. Ngũgĩ's arguments are examined first as they focus on the impact of the coloniser on the colonised through subverting native languages and the impact of the 'cultural bomb'. The central thread of Ngũgĩ's argument is the defence of the mother-tongue and a call to return to native languages. Achebe then offers a critique of Ngũgĩ's ideas (1977, 62), and argues that it is sensible and desirable to create new languages which adapt to surroundings and carry meaning where the old languages simply cannot.

2.2 Ngũgĩ on language

For Ngũgĩ, language embodied more than a form of communication; it carried the songs, stories, proverbs and riddles which Sicherman acknowledges as the 'informal education' that allowed him to hold pride in his culture (Sicherman, 1995, 12). Through the powerful tradition of orature, words were valued as much more beyond their lexical meaning; they were valued for their nuances rather than just accepted as 'a mere string of words' (Ngũgĩ, 1986, 11). He notes:

> Our appreciation of the suggestive magical power of language was reinforced by the games we played with words through riddles, proverbs, transpositions of syllables, or through nonsensical but musically arranged words. So we learnt the music of our language on top of the content (Ngũgĩ, 1986, 11)

The language of his family home, his school and the wider world were one and in harmony (*ibid*). To this end, the role language played in the younger years of Ngũgĩ's life was a positive and harmonious one where he grew to develop a deep fondness and appreciation for his language and his culture (Ngũgĩ, 1986, 9-14). The harmony between language, culture and the home was broken when Ngũgĩ went to colonial school where the language of his culture was designated as inferior and damaging to educational progress and the newly imposed English language was encouraged as the key to achievement (Ngũgĩ, 1986, 13; Duke, 2006).

The replacing of the mother-tongue took the Kenyan child further and further away from the Kenyan world into another world; the latter shown as inferior and hopeless,

the former as the culture of civilisation and progress (Ngũgĩ, 1986, 17). Furthermore, it made the child distance himself from the failures associated with their own languages in favour of the coloniser's language (*ibid*). If culture was a 'product of the history of a people which it in turn reflects', then the child was now exposed exclusively to a culture that was a product of a world external to himself (*ibid*). Ngũgĩ declares that the colonists suppressed African languages and that imposing the colonial languages was 'abnormal' (Duke, 2006, 2). Ironically, many years later when Ngũgĩ would decide to revert back to his mother-tongue, would he be confronted with the rebuke 'why have you abandoned us?' as though to choose to use one's mother tongue is somehow abnormal (Ngũgĩ, 1986, 27).

The success of colonialism in Kenya was through the adoption of what Ngũgĩ describes as the 'cultural bomb'. The 'cultural bomb' was the biggest weapon of imperialism; the effect of which was to 'annihilate a people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves' (Ngũgĩ, 1986, 3-8). Through the phenomenon of the cultural bomb, the past of the Kenyan people was shown as a wasteland of non-achievement which instilled upon the people a disdain for their own cultures and languages, preferring them to identify with the 'saviour' of European cultures shown to be progressive and civilised (*ibid*). The cultural bomb was a psychological elevation of the coloniser's own culture and language combined with the conscious denigration and subversion of the culture of the Kenyan peoples (Ngũgĩ, 1986, 3; 17). Therefore, the two aspects of the process were part and parcel of a successful regime of mental domination; destroying and deliberately undervaluing the people's culture, their arts, languages, traditions, literatures,

religions and all of the many other forms of cultural expression whilst elevating the cultural expressions and language of the coloniser. Fanon supports this view by claiming that colonialism was 'not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content', but, 'by a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it' (1963, 169).

Ngũgĩ's resentment of the impact on language from colonial subversion led him to lament the neo-colonial situation, which meant that instead of Europe stealing art treasures as they did centuries ago, they were now stealing the treasures of the non-western mind to enrich their own languages and cultures through the seed of colonial attachment (Ngũgĩ, 1986, xii). The preoccupation for writers of African literature was whether their writings in the European languages would be accepted as good enough or whether the owner of the language would criticise their usage (Ngũgĩ, 1986, 6-7). Why though, should this be the preoccupation? Why not create literary monuments in African languages and do what William Shakespeare did for English, or Rabindranath Tagore did for Bengali? He asks:

> What is the difference between a politician who says Africa cannot
>
> do without imperialism and the writer who says Africa cannot do
>
> without European languages? (Ngũgĩ, 1986, 26)

How can African writers complain about a neo-colonial relationship with Western countries whilst paying homage to them on a cultural level by continuing to write in their languages? Ngũgĩ believes they cannot complain since it is those writers who

hold the power to choose to stop paying homage to Western languages. Crystal supports this view as he asks what 'splendours of literature' we may never have experienced if English, Spanish or Russian had been quashed at a time of vulnerability (2000, 45). Crystal goes further to argue that this can be applied to all languages, regardless of whether they have achieved prominence on the world literary stage (*ibid*). By accepting the English language as having a necessary position in African literature, the logic of imperialism is successful in its embedding and Ngũgĩ states that 'it is the final triumph of a system of domination when the dominated start singing its virtues' (1986, 20). The method for this to occur was through domination, not solely through physical means, but through the mental universe. Ngũgĩ writes:

> Its most important area of domination was the mental universe of the colonised, the control, through culture, of how people perceived themselves and their relationship to the world…to control a people's culture is to control their tools of self-definition in relationship to others (1986, 16)

Ngũgĩ's struggle is to change Kenya's perception of herself and to redefine or rather revert back to the time before colonisation when it held strength in its own culture and character. His hope is to release the African child from the shackles of negative qualities that he himself grew up with in Kenya. He does not want the same imperialist-imposed tradition of contempt of one's own culture to seep into the self identity young Kenyan children might have when they are growing up (1986; 1993). By the time students had gone through the system, they would graduate with a

hatred of their own people and cultures and the values of their own languages which were the cause of daily humiliation and punishment (1986, 28).

And it is this mentality which must be challenged for in Ngũgĩ's view, it is Africa which enriches Europe but Africa is made to believe that it needs Europe to rescue it from poverty (1986, 28). Africa enriches not just Europe, but the wider global society through its history of artistic traditions, cultures and its knowledge of its environment, much in the same way that all continents inform another. Similar to Ngũgĩ's conception of the 'cultural bomb', Trudgill argues that 'if rich and powerful people more technologically advanced than yourself tell you frequently that your language is inferior and backward' (Trudgill, 1995, 179), it is possible to end up believing them, even more so when you see those speaking your language treated 'unfavourably and discriminated against' which can be a further powerful disincentive against using a mother-tongue (*ibid*). Achebe also draws attention to the idea of the 'downgrading' of languages by the powerful in a society, who decide that an immigrant's language is not actually a language, but rather a dialect; their mindset, he suggests, is that of: 'Language is too grand for these chaps; let's give them dialects!' (Achebe, 1988, 13).

Therefore, the central force holding sway between the mutually opposing dialectic of continued oppression versus resistance was the medium of language, as the choice of language symbolised a standpoint of a person in relation to their cultural identity, their environment and the rest of the world (1986, 4). In order to address the deep underlying ills of the 'cultural bomb' and colonial subversion of Kenyan languages, Ngũgĩ sees himself as part of the resistance culture through the reclaiming of Kenyan languages through the written word. The *Ethnologue* states that there are 74

living languages at present in Kenya which make up 1.07% of all living languages in the world (Lewis, 2009). Moseley (2010a) identifies 13 of those languages as endangered in Kenya and a further 29 endangered in Nigeria. Ngũgĩ writes:

> I would like to contribute towards the restoration of the harmony between all the aspects and divisions of language so as to restore the Kenyan child to his environment... With that harmony between himself, his language and his environment as his starting point, he can learn other languages and even enjoy the positive humanistic, democratic and revolutionary elements in other people's literatures and cultures without any complexes about his own language, his own self, his environment. (Ngũgĩ, 1986, 29)

By advocating the use of Kenyan languages in education and aiding the re-emergence of Kenyan literature and orature in African tongues, Ngũgĩ wishes to move the Kenyan language back to its place as central to the lives of Kenyan people. In so doing, when harmony exists between the child and their language, they are free to learn and internalise different languages and enjoy the 'humanistic, democratic' elements of those languages and cultures with no complex about their own (*ibid*). When a language and culture has had the opportunity to develop in its own right, it is possible to exist alongside different ones having met as equals. Crystal supports this view by stating that 'the learning of other languages will always make your humanity grow, but it does not have to be at the expense of losing what you already have' (2005, 12).

Ngũgĩ's background allows for him to give an accessible and informed narrative of his own history of the Kenya he grew up in. Ogude (1997, 89) however is critical of Ngũgĩ's approach and ideas in his reflection of Ngũgĩ's concept of history. Ogude refutes the idea of Ngũgĩ having a monopoly over what constitutes Kenya's history and argues that the theoretical perspective affects the narrative one (1997, 87). Ngũgĩ does however have the monopoly of *his own* experience in Kenya and this will inevitably become the grounding for his theoretical perspective. Furthermore, Ngũgĩ, as seen through the recounting of his childhood colonial experience was indeed moulded to interpret the events within the socio-political paradigm. Ogude adopts an agenda of exacerbating the blame culture whereby the results of the actual political agenda of colonialism are realised but the victims are then accused of harbouring political agendas. Ogude states, 'no interpretation is value free' (1997, 87) but the interpretation Ngũgĩ has made is wholly valid just as interpretations by theorists such as Achebe taking a different stance, are also valid.

Boehmer states that Ngũgĩ's ideas, his 'language of resistance' and the strategies he proposes have not been modified to take into account the 'muddled nineties world' (1993, 67). The idea that Ngũgĩ's ideas are outdated is an unreasonable statement to make as the growing inequality in the world has never been more pronounced (Gentleman and Mulholland, 2010; Economist, 2011). Ngũgĩ's arguments are in fact exceedingly relevant in the present day, with the existence of anti-globalisation movements which bemoan the exploitative and unequal structure of the world's economic and political make-up.

Ngũgĩ's suggestion that he and other Kenyan writers should only write in their mother tongue may be deemed a slightly unrealistic one, but it does not take away from the heart of his argument – that the choice of language not be made via the process of colonialism. Moreover, if language use has come about through colonial subversion, Ngũgĩ believes it should be stripped back as 'language was the most important vehicle through which that power fascinated and held the soul prisoner' (1986, 9). Where the bullet was the means of physical subjugation, language was the means of the spiritual subjugation (*ibid*). The colonisers viewed their languages as having the capacity to unite African people against divisive tendencies inherent in the multiplicity of languages in the African state. And did this work? In the face of oppression, a common tongue did unite and perhaps even empower but Ngũgĩ's question in the postcolonial era is why should this continue if the continent is really free from subversion? In reclaiming linguistic identities Ngũgĩ argues that the imprisonment of the mind would be overcome and this would lead to creating arts in Africa which would transcend its subverted position into one of immense value to African arts and literature.

In essence, Ngũgĩ writes to return power to the powerless; to give back the control of self-identification to people whose identities have been shaped by something quite foreign to them. For Ngũgĩ it was the manner in which the Kenyan child found themselves exposed to different cultures which was the problem, not the exposure itself (Ngũgĩ, 1993, 35). He stresses constantly throughout his many works that to learn about and derive pleasure from the wonders of the worlds' cultures, one must be at ease with his own identity and background so that they should meet as equals (Ngũgĩ, 1993, 39). Where the colonial era overtly subverted African languages, the

postcolonial era continues to subvert, albeit covertly. In the post-independence era, it is the difficulty in resisting the languages of the former colonisers with their associated prestige and power which means there is a continuation of colonialism taking place. This is upheld through the possibility of growing economic wealth by partaking in the global capitalist system. Thus, the postcolonial era has seen if anything, a strengthening and acceptance of the coloniser's language. This is where theorists such as Chinua Achebe lead their arguments from.

2.3 Achebe on language

Roy identifies Achebe as presenting a critique of Ngũgĩ by describing his choice to write solely in Gikuyu as totalitarian and even extremist (Roy, 1995, 173-174). On the question of language, Achebe concedes that African unity is only spoken of as there now exists a 'manageable umber of languages to talk in – English, French, Arabic' (1977, 58). Achebe's position on the multiplicity of languages which exist is an adamant one – he argues that it would not be reasonably possible to learn 'the half-a-dozen or so Nigerian languages each of which can sustain a literature' and these languages will have to develop as tributaries to the present day world language of English (*ibid*). However, the English isn't the Standard English but one adapted as he writes;

> I feel that the English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experience. But it will have to be a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit new African surroundings (1977, 62)

This is where Ngũgĩ and Achebe come to differ as Ngũgĩ does not even write to create an English which is 'new', but rather, writes to reclaim African languages in their spoken and written form so as to create literary monuments which can enrich each language, as he believes it is up to the owner of the language to do so. So by adopting 'a new English' (1977, 62) does Achebe represent a resistance to the colonial past? Or is he succumbing to the overwhelming nature of colonialism's ability to infiltrate at the deepest level to the point that even in a postcolonial situation, the subject is still not free? Rather, Achebe views the English language as having to accept its adaptability for different uses; he states that 'the African writer should aim to use English in a way that brings out his message best' (1977, 61) without altering its role as a lingua franca. This view is supported by Gikandi who argues that Achebe's reason for writing in a 'new' English, and even the reason for his seminal status as the 'founding father of African literature' (Pilkington, 2007), is due to his ability in recognising the novel as providing a new way of reorganising African cultures in the wake of an African world 'turned upside down' with centuries of slavery and foreign domination (Gikandi, 1991, 3-5). Achebe's aim differs significantly and clearly from that of Ngũgĩ, where the latter writes to reclaim African languages, Achebe writes to 'evoke a new African identity' (Gikandi, 1991, 4). In the postcolonial situation then, Achebe uses his position to stake a claim on the English language (or his variant of it).

In this respect, Achebe represents the choice of hybridity where a language is adapted to suit the needs of the writer where neither the old African language, nor the colonisers' language will do. Achebe's reply to the question of whether a person can ever use English like a native speaker is: 'I hope not' arguing that it is neither

necessary nor desirable to do so (1977, 61). His answer reflects his belief in the malleability of English meaning one does not need to use English like a native speaker but can alter and adjust it to create different versions of English, versions which can support the speakers need for the use of it. He moves on to ask a further significant question:

> The real question is not whether Africans *could* write in English but whether they *ought to.* Is it right that a man should abandon his mother-tongue for someone else's? It looks like a dreadful betrayal and produces a guilty feeling.
> But for me there is no other choice. I have been given the language and I intend to use it (1977, 62)

The emotive language Achebe uses demonstrates unequivocally that he has as much resentment towards the predicament of African writers as Ngũgĩ has. The mother-tongue holds such power in a person that its abandonment evokes strong feelings of guilt and betrayal rather than liberation or freedom – so is it not something worth keeping? Joseph defines the mother-tongue as 'the dialect or language that one grew up speaking in the home' (2004, 183). The mother tongue is so closely reliant upon and intertwined with identity because the association children have with their language(s) exposes them to the culture(s) they carry. The difference is that Achebe chooses to view the English language as an opportunity partly because, in his opinion, it is one of the few good things to come out of colonialism but also because Achebe simply does not feel that his mother-tongue is able to carry the weight of the African experience (*ibid*).

Achebe views the question of language choice as a draconian one and sees no need for there to be an either/or approach; he insists on the use of both (1988, 41). Ngũgĩ's insistence on returning to the use of Gikuyu however, is not meant in draconian terms and to view his choice from this facet deviates from his reason for doing so. Ngũgĩ identifies African languages as having their potential halted by the imposition of English. Had this not been the case, African languages may (or may not have) developed literatures to support their cultures and languages. Ngũgĩ therefore sees it as his duty as a Kenyan writer to opt for the task of developing a literature in his language and restoring harmony between the Kenyan child and their language. For Ngũgĩ, the use of two languages is not the problem and this is a point which Achebe overlooks (Achebe, 1988, 41). Ngũgĩ appreciates the use and enjoyment of different languages so long as there has been a genuine and fair chance for the Kenyan child to engage with his mother-tongue without the prohibition of the 'cultural bomb' (Ngũgĩ, 1986, 28-29).

Achebe's insistence on his viewing the English language as an 'opportunity' leads to the question of what Achebe's view would be if he were among some of the last speakers of his mother-tongue – if his mother-tongue was facing extinction. Would he still choose English? It seems so, and this comes through in Achebe's writing, in his acceptance that the abandonment of a mother-tongue even when it produces a 'guilty feeling', is necessary for the benefit of speaking a lingua franca. As argued by Crystal, (2006, 11-15) it is possible and desirable to enhance and nurture a mother-tongue whilst gaining benefits from a second language.

Achebe moves away from a binary approach to language (Achebe, 1988, 41) and asks (or rather at times, avoids), practical questions which challenge the general assumption on any given issue; for example, on the controversy surrounding African literature in non-African languages he states that where English and French certainly qualify as non-African languages, Swahili and Arabic are more contentious which would mean that if one were to measure how African a language was, would it be by the number of years of 'effective occupation' (1977, 50)? For Achebe, this is a practical matter for which the solution is 'a language spoken by Africans on African soil, a language in which Africans write, justifies itself' (*ibid*). Achebe is critical of the image of Africa portrayed by the West but less critical of the aftermath of colonial rule in terms of the impact on language policy in Nigeria. In his essay *Africa and her Writers*, Achebe writes:

> But running away from myself seems to me a very inadequate way
>
> of dealing with an anxiety. And if writers should opt for such
>
> escapism, who is to meet the challenge? (1977, 27)

By his own admission though, Achebe does opt out of writing in his native tongue as he chooses to use the English language but then writes that he hopes there will always be men who 'will choose to write in their native tongue and ensure that our ethnic literature will flourish side-by-side with the national ones' adding also that 'for those of us who opt for English there is much work ahead and much excitement' (1977, 62). Achebe is not justifying colonial rule in Nigeria by abandoning his mother-tongue as a medium of expression; rather, it is his personal choice to write in a 'new' English which can articulate his experiences in a changed Nigerian setting. Where

Achebe affirms his position as choosing the English language, looking forward to the excitement of work there is to be done with that language, Ngũgĩ offers a different reply:

> Who indeed?
>
> We African writers are bound by our calling to do for our languages what Spencer, Milton and Shakespeare did for English; what Pushkin and Tolstoy did for Russian; indeed what all writers in world history have done for their languages by meeting the challenge of creating a literature in them (Ngũgĩ, 1986, 29)

The 'challenge' noted above by Achebe is met by Ngũgĩ's conviction in the belief that it is up to African writers to meet the challenge of creating, retaining and passing on a literature in African languages instead of European ones. If Achebe is advocating moving on from the anxiety which has been created within the African literary psyche, then the way to do this in Ngũgĩ's opinion is to revert back to the mother-tongue previously subverted.

Achebe responds directly to Ngũgĩ in his essay *The Politics of Language* (Chapter 60, Ashcroft *et al*, 2007, 268-271), and what emerges from this essay is again, his insistence that English is 'central' to Nigerian affairs and holds a unifying position in allowing the people of Nigeria, who between them consist of over 200 language groups, to speak to each other in a single language, English (Ashcroft *et al*, 2007, 269). English became the official language in Nigeria by 1940 and remained that way after independence (Bamgbose, 1996, 357). Achebe's critique toward the

sentimental nature of recounting or defending one's attachment to their mother-tongue is evident in his critique of Ngũgĩ's account of the control held by the English language (Ashcroft *et al*, 2007, 270). Achebe holds a critical stance of those who romanticise the African story; he rejects the scenario of European languages having been forced upon people when it was they who wanted to and chose to speak English (amongst other European languages) well before 1952 (*ibid*).

Achebe affirms that although there will be those who continue to resent the English language, he is adamant in not throwing the good (in his view, the English language) out with the bad (1977, 58). Writing in 1972, Césaire offered a similar viewpoint to Achebe stating that he did not wish to return to pre-colonial nor prolong the colonial society; instead it was a new society he wished to create (1972, 52). Achebe opts for the use of both languages, a practical option in making the best of an opportunity regardless of how it came about. This option differs vastly from Ngũgĩ's defence of the use of the mother-tongue as an entity intrinsic to a person and worth defending (Ngũgĩ, 1986; Crystal, 2000; 2004). Ngũgĩ's anecdotal approach to his defence of African languages runs parallel to his severe criticism of the imperialist tradition which has infiltrated the African consciousness at the deepest level. Ngũgĩ asks why an African writer or any writer is 'so obsessed by taking from his mother tongue to enrich other tongues', instead of enriching their own languages (Ngũgĩ, 1986, 8).

2.4 Conclusion

The significance of viewing the language debate from the colonial and postcolonial angle is to show the intrinsic connection that exists between a person and their mother-tongue as well as the damaging impact subversion of language can have on

the harmonious relationship which exists between linguistic identity and culture. Ngũgĩ would ultimately like to see the languages of Kenyan people carry the literatures which reflect amongst much else, the rhythms of the spoken expression.

Ngũgĩ's work is important because he is attempting to question the status-quo in the postcolonial era, by returning to Kenya something which had been labelled and portrayed as worthless; Kenyan languages. He writes to reposition the value of native languages and all they can offer in literature, in the arts and in everyday life. Ngũgĩ argues that only when the harmony between language and environment is in balance and the inferiority complex severed, that a person can learn to appreciate the wealth in different languages in a positive and free willed manner; he advocates universalism.

Achebe is adamant that the good should not be thrown out with the bad, that colonisation did bring benefits which should be embraced. If this results in the foregoing of one's mother-tongue, as is the case for Achebe, he is satisfied to do so. Ngũgĩ's contention however, is to restore his own linguistic identity and ensure this restoration for the Kenyan youth so as to ensure a harmonious relationship between their language and environment. This can then lead to several languages being used and internalised simultaneously; used strategically to ensure that the harmony is kept intact between the mother-tongue and the civilisation it supports to then gain the benefits which multilingualism can afford. It is not the use of additional languages which Ngũgĩ speaks against, but the manner in which they come to pass as a forced replacement of a tongue (like the Irish, Bengal, Gikuyu languages) which had no desire to be replaced.

The following chapter will build upon Ngũgĩ's arguments of retaining linguistic identities by preserving linguistic diversity. Echoing him, it will argue that a language, a mother-tongue, forms an intrinsic part of an identity and further, that diversity in languages (and by extension, in cultures) is a positive and enriching asset for humanity.

CHAPTER 3: PRESERVING LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY

3.1 Introduction

'There is no such thing as a primitive language...every language is capable of great beauty and power of expression' (Crystal, 2000, 30)

The present language population of the world lies somewhere between 6-7,000 languages identified by the first language they speak (Ostler, 2005, 7). The top ten languages in the world measured by the number of speakers they have are: Mandarin Chinese, Spanish, English, Bengali, Hindi, Portuguese, Russian, Japanese, German and Wu Chinese (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2002, 7). The ten languages account for 'approximately half the world's population but they represent only 0.10 − 0.15% of the world's spoken languages'. Moreover, Skutnabb-Kangas states that over 95% of the world's spoken languages have fewer than 1 million native users (*ibid*). Of the 6-7,000 languages which exist in the world, half are in danger of disappearing in the next few decades (Cahill, 2010). Krauss offers a detailed breakdown of the status of a number of languages putting the mortality rate at 50% in the coming century (Hale *et al*, 1992, 6).

The death of the last speaker of the Bo language, who lived in the Andaman Islands in India, was a highly significant event for linguists as she was the last speaker of one of the oldest languages in the world and with her death the language came to its end (Lawson, 2010). With her death, Professor Anvita Abbi declared that India had 'lost an irreplaceable part of its heritage' (*ibid*). The loss of this part of heritage highlights the need to protect endangered languages as they are irreplaceable and if

unwritten, can be lost forever. For every language that ceases to exist, so does a unique way of viewing and understanding the world.

Harrison suggests that the decision to abandon a language is often not out of free choice but due to external influences (cited in Moseley, 2010, 7). One such influence has been addressed in the previous chapter, that of colonial subversion and replacement of native languages. The plight of endangered languages has been a cause of concern for some time and a central commentator on the subject, Crystal (1997; 2000; 2007) argues for a renewed awareness around the declining number of languages in the world and the urgent need to stem the decline of linguistic diversity. It is, perhaps, too late to save the severely endangered languages in the present day, but it does not follow that the number of languages in the world rightly be halved in a few decades if it is preventable.

This chapter contests some issues raised by Achebe in relation to the perceived benefits of using fewer tongues by assimilation into larger languages. Having done so, it addresses why linguistic diversity is a positive and enriching attribute for the cultural and knowledge repository of humanity. By looking at the interrelation of language, culture and identity, it examines what is lost when a language dies and in so doing, provides a defence of preserving linguistic diversity. Themes central to this chapter are linguistic identity, culture, language death and the benefits of diversity.

3.2 Objections to linguistic diversity

Language death, simply put, is when a language ceases to exist though it is actually when the second to last speaker of that language dies that the language dies; for a

language to 'live' it must be spoken by at least two people who can communicate to each other in that language (Crystal, 2000, 2). When it is spoken by one person, the person acts as an archive, a repository for the language and everything associated with that language (*ibid*). Whether or not the language has a written literature or has been recorded in its written form exacerbates the situation as 'the moment the last speaker of an unwritten or unrecorded language dies, the archive disappears forever' (*ibid*).

The reasons for language decline are numerous. Harrison states that abandonment of language is often coerced by 'politics, by market forces, by the educational system in a country, by a larger more dominant group telling them that their language is backwards and obsolete and worthless', echoing Ngũgĩ's description of the 'cultural bomb' (cited in Moseley, 2010, 7). Other reasons for language death exist in the form of natural disasters wiping out small language communities, different forms of cultural assimilation, linguistic genocide and capitalism. The 'Foundation for Endangered Languages' identifies the impacts of urbanisation, westernisation, and global communications as threats to languages alongside discriminatory language policies and population movement all of which diminish 'self-sufficiency and self-confidence of small and traditional communities' (FEL Manifesto, paragraph 4).

Common objections to a diversity of languages exist. Easterly and Levine stated that high ethno-linguistic diversity has been a standard and central explanation for poor growth, weak governance and conflict, particularly in Africa (cited in Albaugh, 2009, 6). For example, although Ngũgĩ advocates returning to the use of the mother-tongues of Kenya, it is unclear whether Ngũgĩ gives thought to the possibility of rising

ethnic tensions between such diverse groups of people without a common language for communication. This question goes to the very heart of the causes of conflict, not between people with very marked differences in their cultures (of language, nationality and other cultural assets), but very marked similarities within state borders. Whether more languages would lead to heightened ethnic conflict within Kenya (or any country) leads to the very crux of the argument of a common tongue acting as a means of guaranteed peace.

The popular Babel myth 'that a single language on earth guarantees a mutually intelligible and therefore peaceful planet', is advocated by the majority (Crystal, 2003, 2). This view claims that a common language is desirable as it has a uniting force which can lead to better communication and ultimately a more peaceful society. The myth is exacerbated by the fact that the 'opinion-formers of this world', such as journalists, politicians, media personalities, businessmen are unaware of the language crisis (2003, 2).

The argument that a single language is more beneficial for humankind and would lead to greater peace is a fallacy because, as Crystal points out (2001, 6-7), monolingual countries both in the western and non western worlds have had their conflicts whilst speaking the same language; the concepts of conflict, war and peace are deeply complex ones which cannot be explained away by simplistic myths such as the Babel myth. Crystal argues that to advocate the sharing of a single language as being 'a guarantor of mutual understanding and peace' is naive in conception (2000, 27-28). Since monolingual countries have had their civil wars, it is impracticable to suggest that the emergence of a single language could eliminate

conflict (*ibid*). Furthermore, the argument that a single tongue would be more beneficial tends to come from speakers of one of the major languages in the world, languages not by the least which could be described as endangered (*ibid*). The role of the Lingua Franca is an important one in its role of facilitating international communication; Crystal notes however that though this may be the case, it is both possible and desirable to speak at least two languages; one for intelligibility and the other for identity (2000, 29).

The multiplicity of languages in Africa with its variety and diversity of dialects is a good thing and this should not be seen as an aberration but rather, as a beneficial asset (Armstrong, 1960, 137; Trudgill, 1995, 177). Trudgill makes two points to support this; not only would a monocultural world be dull, but it would also lend it to becoming a very stagnant place. Languages acting as partial barriers can be a good thing as it makes it 'more difficult for the cultures of economically powerful and populous societies to penetrate and replace those of smaller communities' (1995, 177).

Another common objection relates to the question of finance and time; it is both expensive and time-consuming to entertain a number of languages which can be seen to act as a barrier to commerce and in education. This is in no way a waste however, and the evidence of this is seen in the business and corporate world itself where speaking additional languages holds a firm in good stead in relation to its standing on a global platform (Crystal, 2000, 30). Moreover, in some industries, such as tourism, the arts and local manufacturing, linguistic diversity can have notable economic benefits (*ibid*). The value of recognising and encouraging the use of

numerous languages is possible and can be beneficial in ways that go beyond monetary value, for example, by contributing to the Arts.

A further significant argument levelled at the defenders of even the smallest language in the world is whether it is realistic or desirable to ask small communities to retain their language especially when they may be faced with bigger problems such as poverty, lack of education and healthcare (Crystal, 2010, 22). The answer to this is always yes; it is worthwhile, but the onus in this situation comes from the top-down approach, where governments, charities, academics and organisations must all play their part in securing a standard of living which then enables for attention to be given to the recording, archiving and development of the endangered language.

3.3 Preserving linguistic diversity

Languages deserve to be recognised and protected for the same reasons why efforts all over the world exist to preserve, protect and restore valuable cultural commodities. The National Trust in the UK, the World Heritage Sites organisation and other national and international projects and organisations were created to ensure the protection and preservation of the tangible results of man-made and natural fetes in culture. In the UK, listed buildings which are officially designated as being of special architectural, cultural or historical significance are protected by law preventing them from being modified or destroyed.

In the same instance, biological diversity in animals has international recognition with organisations such as the 'International Union for Conservation of Nature' (amongst 40 others as well as scores of national efforts in many countries) existing to protect

animals from extinction and raising awareness of endangered species (Hale *et al*, 1992, 8). To draw comparison between biological/zoological/botanical diversity and linguistic diversity is relevant, as commentators such as Crystal (2007, 2) and Hale (Hale *et al*, 1992, 1-4) see the correlation between the loss of diversity in any such asset. Crystal states that in a 'holistic conception of an ecosystem, cultural and biological domains are brought into a mutually reinforcing relationship; damage to any one of the elements can result in unforeseen consequences for the system as a whole' (2007, 2). Consequently, why is the intangible nature of languages any less deserving of preservation and protection? Linguistic diversity is of paramount importance because as Crystal argues, 'if diversity is a prerequisite for successful humanity, then the preservation of linguistic diversity is essential, for language lies at the heart of what it means to be human' (2007, 2). Thus, linguistic diversity, based on a 'holistic conception' of humanity is absolutely necessary in fundamentals; it is a positive and enriching attribute for the knowledge bases of humanity.

The case for preserving linguistic and cultural diversity begins with appreciating the link between language, culture and identity as intertwined and interdependent (Crystal, 2000, 36-40). Joseph identifies two primary purposes of language; language as communication and language as representation (2004, 15). At its core, a language provides human beings with the means to communicate, to convey ideas and thoughts and to move from day-to-day activities with co-operation and understanding.

Ngũgĩ also views language as having a dual character, both as a means of communication and a carrier of culture. English for example, is not just the means of

communication for the British but forms an inseparable part of the culture and history for the English people. However, to suggest that English is solely a form of communication and does not factor into the culture of countries it is used in, such as in Scandinavian countries, is slightly misleading (Ngũgĩ, 1986, 13). When a language is used in any capacity, whether as an official language, or whether it has a large but unofficial presence, it does impact upon the culture of the host community. In Great Britain for example, the Indian curry, the 'Vindaloo', became so popular that it inspired the unofficial football anthem of the same name for the England football team in 1998 even though the Asian community in Britain is a minority one.

Trudgill states that the connection between 'languages and cultures is an intimate one' (1995, 175) and further, that disappearing languages in the world suggest the speeding up of 'cultural homogenisation' (*ibid*). Armstrong further sustains that a strong link exists between language, culture and identity by stating that a persons' memory of their parents is bound up with their language; of their poetry existing in their own language and their ideas of morality and justice existing in their language. Their native language is 'the most elaborate and precisely organised system that most of them will ever learn' (Armstrong, 1960, 140). Therefore, to disregard one's language is to disregard the repository of whole lives which are lived through different languages. As languages can be the means through which cultures can be uniquely expressed, the value which people put in their language community is often strong and for this reason, Patten argues that language shift is an alarming phenomenon as for many 'it means being assimilated into a speech community in which their own culture and identity are lost' (2003, 363).

A further element of this is the naming of a person, as names can be as essentially bound up with identity and culture as language. Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights deals with inalienable personal rights, 'to be recognised as a member of a language community; the right to the use of one's own language both in private and in public; the right to the use of one's own name' and 'the right to maintain and develop one's culture' (UDLR, Article 3). Ngũgĩ's decision to reject his English name, James Ngũgĩ and reclaim his African name was one of a searing relation to his cultural identity. For Ngũgĩ it held a symbolic shift of replacing one identity to another (Sander *et al*, 2006, 361; 400). By losing a language, a way of life is lost and this loss of a culture bears down on the cultural weakness the repository of humanity is faced with.

The link between language and culture is undoubtedly a strong one which informs identities. So why does the loss of such a linguistic and cultural identity matter so much on the individual level as much as the wider local, national and international levels? One such reason is identified by 'Ethnologue', an international organisation which compiles and documents the world's languages. Ethnologue describes languages as being an intangible heritage which forms a part of culture that is transmitted and passed down to descendant generations through non-tangible means. Its global overview on language is:

> Language is an intangible heritage. It is the cultural thread that
> weaves generations together and contributes to the rich fabric of our
> common humanity. In the mosaic of our multicultural and multilingual
> world, it is often the ethnolinguistic minorities who face the greatest

challenges in preserving their unique identity and voice (SIL Global

Overview, 2010)

The living expressions and traditions of linguistic communities in the world are a reflection of the world's cultural diversity where each and every language reflects a unique world-view with its own value systems, philosophy and particular cultural features. Languages develop to encompass a larger, intangible repository of culture, identity and tradition disseminated over generations of families and communities (Trudgill, 1995, 177). Languages become carriers of knowledge for different groups of people which is gathered and passed on over generations. To this end, if a language dies, it is a significant loss for a local community as well as for wider global society.

Secondly, the loss of linguistic diversity translates to a loss of knowledge which is irreplaceable and irretrievable. Sapir states that 'no two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality. The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached' (1929, 209). Humboldt supported this view by suggesting that each language 'expresses only a part of the total possible thought available; it is a foray into the total potentiality of the world' (Foley, 1997, 194). The capacity for knowledge with the breadth of languages and experiences is exponential in the ability it provides for survival but more importantly, for knowledge; knowledge of the environment and of human nature.

Throughout his work on linguistics Boas maintained that 'all languages are equally viable vehicles for the expression of thought in spite of their formal differences, which might reflect differences in cultural interests' (Foley, 1997, 195). The famous example given by Boas from his time spent with the Inuit people on Baffin Island where the word for 'snow' in Eskimo was not used in its solitary form but was identified via many different terms to take into account its texture, position and longevity (Boas, 1966, 22). Boas strongly advocated the plurality of knowledge bases existing in a variety of languages moulded by a variety of experiences. Holding similar views, Sapir states:

> Human beings do not live in the objective world alone nor alone in the world of social activity as ordinarily understood, but are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society...No two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality. The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached (Sapir, 1929, 209)

This form of thinking transcends the notion of language as simply a means of communication and identifies it as being a medium of expression, observation and perception in society. We should care when a language dies because the extinction of a language results in the irrecoverable loss of the unique cultural knowledge which it embodies that has been accumulated through generations. Crystal supports this stating:

To lose a language is to lose a unique insight into the human condition. Each language shares a world view that is shared by no other. Each has its own figures of speech, its own narrative style, its own proverbs, its own oral or written literature (1997, 44)

For speaker communities, languages are the creations and the vectors of tradition which support cultural identity and are an essential part of its heritage. A prominent French linguist Claude Hagege (cited in Colls, 2009) states that when a language dies, an 'enormous cultural heritage, the way of expressing the relationship with nature, with the world, between themselves in the framework of their families, their kin people' is essentially lost. He believes that languages are not just a collection of words but are 'living, breathing organisms holding the connections and associations that define a culture' and when the language dies, the culture which it carried dies too (*ibid*). Rassool offers a means of evaluating the notion of language as a process of identification. Language, he argues,

Constitutes an important group and self-identifying variable; it represents *different ways of being in,* and *ways of seeing the world.* Language not only mediates reality; it also characterises the means by which different groups of people define themselves in relation to both the social and material world; it provides the means by which they *name* the world (cited in Phillipson, 2000, 61).

Endangered and indigenous languages therefore need to be protected for the linked concept of history and knowledge; they are a form of intangible repositories, hosting

historically and culturally significant knowledge which, if not written down or recorded, can be lost forever. If, as argued, each language affords a distinct view of the world, then the combination of all of these views allows us to learn an exponential amount about the world, no matter how small a language may be. The National Geographic's 'Enduring Voices Project' states that 'much of what humans know about nature is encoded only in oral languages' (National Geographic, 2011, paragraph 4). It goes on to state that indigenous groups that have interacted with the natural world for thousands of years often have 'profound insights into local lands, plants, animals, and ecosystems – many still undocumented by science' (*ibid*). Small languages hold invaluable resourcefulness in learning about the natural world around us and can offer their knowledge to the natural sciences in aiding understanding of the world.

We should care about protecting and preserving linguistic diversity because 'one story does not make a world view' (Crystal, 2000, 46). Every language is capable of the production of knowledge which transcends history and geography, to add to humanity's collective understanding. Harrison states that most of what humankind knows about the natural world is not recorded via the written word but exists in unwritten languages in the memories of people (2007, 15). Language has played a fundamental role in the evolution, progress and change in human history where the medium of language has played the key role in retaining timeless experiences (Crystal, 1997, 44). Crystal further states that the loss of a language signifies the 'loss of inherited knowledge that extends over hundreds or thousands of years' (1997, 44). Trudgill argues strongly for the preservation of linguistic diversity stating that if we are to foster and preserve linguistic heterogeneity in the world, then 'we

need all speakers of all languages and all dialects to be able to rest secure in the knowledge that their varieties of language are all amazingly structurally complex products of the human mind, of human societies, and of tens of thousands of years of human history...all these varieties of language are worthy of being passed on to the generations to come' (2000, 203).

Crystal identifies the three stages of events which occur practically universally when one culture assimilates to another. First is the 'immense pressure' upon an individual or group to speak the dominant language which can originate from political, social or economic sources and can be bottom-up or top-down (Crystal, 2000, 78). The second stage consists of a strong bilingualism in which people can gain increasing efficiency with the new language whilst remaining competent in the old one; the third sees the younger generation, who are 'proficient in the new language, identifying more with it, and finding their first language less relevant to their new needs' (Crystal, 2000, 79). By the third stage a feeling of shame emerges on the part of both parents and children, similar to Ngũgĩ's conception of the 'cultural bomb' and the languages eventually die out. This is a significant loss because as the 'Enduring Voices Project' states, 'many endangered languages have rich oral cultures with stories, songs, and histories passed on to younger generations, but no written forms' thus when such a language becomes extinct it takes with it not just unrecorded knowledge, but the nuances which can be found in the spoken word (National Geographic, 2011, paragraph 3).

Following on from this, when languages die, the bond between grandparents and grandchildren deteriorates or is lost as the generations live completely different

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cultures where common ground no longer exists. In this sense familial identity is threatened when a language is lost (Crystal, 1998, 3). The bond between young and old family members is threatened when they don't share the same culture anymore (Colls, 2009). Colls describes this as a cultural 'ache' - the ache of the old to see their cultural identity being lost or depleted and not passed down to their and the ache of the young to feel distanced and detached from the culture of their origins their parents and grandparents (*ibid*). Alternatively, it is possible for both generations to benefit from the opportunities of both cultures. This echoes with Crystal's calls for accepting, to a degree, language variation and change if it can aid the process of continuation (Crystal, 2004, 28).

The feeling of apprehension and mourning which can be felt by older generations when their language is no longer being used provokes strong emotional reactions. An Evenki poet, Alitet Nemtushkin, summarises the sadness which beholds those speakers of endangered languages in the following poem (cited in UNESCO, 2011, 19):

My Language

If I forget my native speech,
And the songs that my people sing
What use are my eyes and ears?
What use is my mouth?

If I forget the smell of the earth

And do not serve it well

What use are my hands?

Why am I living in the world?

How can I believe the foolish idea

That my language is weak and poor

If my mother's last words

Were in Evenki?

The deeper aspect of language dealt with in this poem is the case of the mother-tongue. Kerttu Vuolab describes the mother-tongue as 'the most valuable inheritance of human beings' – without it, human beings would not be able to create new ideas, explain, or teach new ideas to the following generations (Vuolab, 2000, 13). Vuolab, echoing Nemtushkins' poem states that 'no language in the world is poor or primitive. Every language is rich in some way or other' (2000, 14). Vuolab shares an anecdote of a warning by her community to refrain from using her mother-tongue as it would not get her as far as the nearest airport, which was disproved as she informs people now of her success as an international writer, stating that 'you can get to the other side of the earth by being yourself' (Vuolab, 2000, 16). In this respect, it strengthens the idea that a wealth of possibility and opportunity exists beyond the sphere of economics and capitalism for minority and indigenous languages. Each culture can offer a partial view or account of the world and put together, a valuable mosaic appears which enables a richer and more diverse global society. The extinction of a culture, of a language, reflects the extinction of a unique world-view with its

philosophical, cultural, environmental and other types of knowledge. For the speaker of an endangered language, especially one which is unwritten, it is a heavy loss to be faced with the knowledge that their language, their mother-tongue will be forgotten as though it never existed.

3.4 Conclusion

Linguistic diversity is desirable for the same reason biological and botanical diversity is desirable. The difference is that the latter are accepted universally as requiring protection and preservation, whereas linguistic preservation is still out of mainstream activism. The intangible nature of unwritten and unrecorded languages through a literary repository is perhaps the key factor in this being the case but this does not weaken the argument that there is a wealth of art, literature and humanity which exists and is under threat through disappearing languages.

The core argument of this chapter and the defining theme of this thesis lie in the words of Ezra Pound who stated: 'the sum of human wisdom is not contained in any one language, and no single language is capable of expressing all forms and degrees of human comprehension' (cited in Crystal, 2004, 59). Thus, diversity in world languages and cultures is an extremely positive and enriching asset. It builds the knowledge vault of the people of the world and all that can be learned from the variety in humanity. Linguistic diversity cannot survive without linguistic equality; for equality of languages, there needs to be respect for *all* of the world's languages, big or small, spoken by one or a million as the advantages of diversity validate its protection and preservation.

Furthermore, when a wealth of literary treasures and knowledge of the world is possible in *any* language, how can this be a hindrance? By recording and preserving the languages in their written form, languages can support not just the living and breathing aspects of a culture but can also support a whole written literature of that language. This idea of preserving linguistic identities has been vocalised by many different groups and people and has led to the creation of the Universal Declaration of Rights amongst other organisations founded to protect and preserve endangered languages.

CHAPTER 4: PREVENTING LANGUAGE DEATH

4.1 Introduction

'Whenever a language dies, a bit of the world's culture, history and diversity dies with it' (Economist, 2001).

UNESCO recognises 6 degrees of language endangerment: safe, vulnerable, definitely endangered, severely endangered, critically endangered and extinct (Moseley, 2010a). Moreover, of the approximate 6,000 languages in the world, it is only a few which have any kind of official status and those speakers of official languages tend to enjoy all Linguistic Human Rights (Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson, 1995, 2). The Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights (henceforth, the UDLR) was created in order to support and legitimise the safeguarding of linguistic rights, especially for speakers of endangered and minority languages. Numerous organisations and individuals worked to attain the objective of a 'just and lasting linguistic peace based on awareness and recognition of language rights' which was laid out in the UDLR (UDLR, paragraph 12). These activists included 'Poets, Essayists and Novelists' (PEN) organisations from all over the world, university academics, experts in linguistic legislation and a large number of NGOs and consulting bodies such as the SIL and UNESCO (*ibid*). UNESCO's 'Safeguarding Endangered Languages' identifies the core issue in preventing language death:

> Languages are humankind's principle tools for interacting and for expressing ideas, emotions, knowledge, memories and values. Languages are also primary vehicles of cultural expressions and

intangible cultural heritage, essential to the identity of individuals and groups. Safeguarding endangered languages is thus a crucial task in maintaining cultural diversity worldwide (Safeguarding endangered languages, 2011, paragraph 2).

This chapter focuses on endangered languages and the efforts that have been made to counteract the declining diversity of languages by exploring the tenets of the Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights. It identifies the UDLR as an actualisation of the ideas Ngũgĩ and supporters of linguistic diversity place on the right for every human to speak their own language. It concludes with considering whether enough has been done to address the question of language death and linguistic diversity but more pressingly, what more can be done to bring the issue into mainstream international public consciousness and create awareness.

4.2 Universal Declaration of Linguistics Rights

The Barcelona Conference of 1996 resulted in the adoption of the UDLR which detailed the rights people hold in relation to the use of languages which may not fall within the parameters of official state languages, but which occupy 'language communities' (UDLR, Article 1). The political element of establishing a universal convention on linguistics rights stems from a belief in the value of each individual and community along with their right to live with dignity and respect. This rests on the humanitarian position held by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) which states its conviction in the 'fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women' (UDHR, Preamble). The need for a separate declaration on linguistic rights exists because explicit

attention is not paid to the rights of 'language communities' but the UDHR does form

a strong basis and foundation for the adoption of a Declaration on Linguistic Rights.

The Declaration lays out a number of preliminaries in recognition of the

considerations taken in order to implement a universal declaration:

> Considering that invasion, colonisation, occupation and other
> instances of political, economic or social subordination often involve
> the direct imposition of a foreign language or, at the very least,
> distort perceptions of the value of languages and give rise to
> hierarchical linguistic attitudes which undermine the language loyalty
> of speakers; and considering that the languages of some peoples
> which have attained sovereignty are consequently immersed in a
> process of language substitution as a result of policy which favours
> the language of former colonial or imperial powers (UDLR, World
> Conference, 1996, 3)

This consideration of the declaration draws upon issues discussed in the previous

chapters relating to the role colonialism played in the problem of linguistics in the

colonial and postcolonial periods. The language used in the above extract resonates

strongly with the language and arguments used by Ngũgĩ in his works. The

'distorting perception' of the value of languages which feeds 'hierarchical linguistic

attitudes' is what Ngũgĩ refers to when he speaks of the 'cultural bomb' and the

English language being at the centre of different cultures. The consideration further

states that:

> A Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights is required in order to
> correct linguistic imbalances with a view to ensuring the respect and
> full development of all languages and establishing the principles for
> a just and equitable linguistic peace throughout the world as a key
> factor in the maintenance of harmonious social relations (*ibid*)

The 'linguistic imbalance' which defines the present day refers to several factors including, 'the age-old unifying tendency of the majority of states to reduce diversity and foster attitudes opposed to cultural plurality and linguistic pluralism' (*ibid*). This is echoed by Armstrong who states that in the present day, 'it is fashionable to deplore the linguistic diversity of Africa, which certainly sets us a severe practical problem of communication'. She goes on to argue however, that 'the multiplicity of languages in Africa constitutes a form of wealth, whose practical benefits will be very real, even if they are not to be realised immediately' (Armstrong, 1960, 137). The practical benefits Armstrong refers to may represent the possibility of developing African countries economically, artistically and politically without compromising or abandoning the mother-tongue; for example, through translation in arts, or through developing bottom-up, localised economic ventures. The UDLR reinforces this contention by stating that 'universalism must be based on a conception of linguistic and cultural diversity which prevails over trends towards homogenisation' (UDLR, Declaration, paragraph 15)

The declaration on linguistic rights (in this instance language policy *in favour* of protecting local vernaculars), stems from a belief in the freedom for all people to be able to speak their given or chosen language and for those languages to be

protected and respected even when they lack official recognition at state or international levels. Linguistic human rights at an individual level are the recognition of a person's right to have the freedom of identifying positively with their mother-tongue, and having this identification respected, irrespective of its status as a majority or minority language. Skutnabb-Kangas argues that language rights are inherent in human rights, are a prerequisite to many human rights and are a prerequisite for the maintenance of the diversity in the world which we are all responsible for (cited in Phillipson, 2000, 11).

UNESCO's Director-General, Koïchiro Matsuura, declares that 'languages represent a true reflection of humanity's cultural diversity, each expressing in a unique way a vision of the world, a coherent system of values and meaning' (Matsuura, UNESCO). Protecting and preserving languages forms a key part of the UNESCO project as they aim to promote linguistic diversity, multilingualism and cultural diversity. The value of a plurality of languages offers 'opportunities, traditions, memory, unique modes of thinking and expression', which in turn enables a better future for the global population (International Mother Language Day, UN).

'International Mother Language Day' is placed within the broader context of the ideals found in UNESCO's promotion of languages and multilingualism (Crystal, 2004, 2). Celebrated annually on February 21st, the day aims to 'promote the recognition and practice of the world's mother tongues, particularly minority ones' and does so through its educational and cultural programmes designed to protect the world's oral and intangible heritage. February 21st was designated by UNESCO as 'International Mother Language Day' in 1999 to formally recognise the Bengali

Language Movement, where Bengalis fought to retain the usage of the Bengali language over the forced imposition of the Urdu language, an event commemorated by Bangladesh since it occurred in 1952 (Crystal, 2004, 2-3, Anam, 2008, Guardian Online; Choudhury, 1972, 247 – 248; Oldenburg, 1985, 711-719). The weakness of the 'International Mother Language Day' and other language-related UN ventures, such as the 'International Year of Languages' in 2008, is the lack of promotion and awareness around such attempts to engage with a global public audience about language. (Crystal, 2007, 1-9).

The UDLR is in sync with the arguments put forward by Ngũgĩ and gained worldwide support from leading international figures and linguists at its inception. Ngũgĩ views it as a 'complement' to the UDHR to which parallels have already been drawn with, as he sees it as a 'good starting point for the liberation of all languages' (UDLR Follow-up Committee, 1998, 65). International figures such as Noam Chomsky, Nelson Mandela, and Seamus Heaney all gave their support to the ideals behind the declaration (*ibid*). With regards to the specific articles of the UDLR, the breakdown of each of the articles stresses the tenets behind its conception. Article 1 of the Declaration makes the important distinction between language communities (or a language group) and nation-states. This is an important and necessary distinction as even within states which have fought for independence; those who were denied the freedom to speak in their mother-tongue can go on to deny basic linguistic rights to new and emerging minority groups. Article 4 addresses the necessity of people moving to and settling into different language communities to have the attitude of integration toward the new community but condones the practice of assimilation where the replacing of the migrating culture is replaced with that of the host culture; it

states it cannot be forced or induced but must be entirely a free choice. Article 5 states the declaration is based on the principle that the rights of all language communities are equal and independent.

In the postcolonial era, there are those who choose to continue to speak, educate and conduct their official affairs in the colonial language. Even after the coloniser has left, the formerly colonised are left thinking they cannot progress and learn without the coloniser's language and influence; this is reflected by Ngũgĩ stating that 'it is the final triumph of a system of domination when the dominated start singing its virtues' (1986, 20). It is seen as the vehicle to success, wealth, acclaim, praise, status and progress. The spread of English in the present day Ostler argues, is one of the best examples of a language which has grown by 'the sheer prestige of the culture associated with it' (2005, 514). Crystal charts the growth and spread of the English language in particularly noting that it is the post-1945 era in which the niche for a global language seemed to emerge with English as the likely contender, through the political independence of former colonies choosing to keep English as an official language (1997a, 14).

The prestige associated with European culture is respected in some of the elite classes of former colonies; a UNESCO report states that Kenya's ruling class today speaks English more readily than Swahili (Daniel, 2006, 6). Annie Brisset, a UNESCO consultant on language issues, states that 'a symbolic decision is not enough...in some African countries, the old colonial language still carries such prestige that parents prefer their children to be taught in French or English because it still means going up in the world' (cited in Daniel, 2006, 6-7). On some level it is

thought acceptable to embrace that culture which offers the chance of a higher economic standard of living, but as Crystal argues, this need not be at the expense of one's culture (Crystal, 2000, 20-30). In some parts of the world however, indigenous cultures remain untouched by the furores of capitalistic cycles and western influences; in these places, the language of the mother-tongue remains at the heart of the social dynamic and it is these languages which must be protected from extinction.

4.3 Considerations to prevent language death

The defining consideration for preserving linguistic diversity lies in challenging attitudes and changing perceptions of language death as well as highlighting the benefits of retaining a plurality of languages. The case for challenging attitudes and perceptions has a dual approach: firstly, to change the self-perception of speakers of indigenous or endangered languages by developing positive attitudes (Crystal, 2005, 18-19) and secondly, to change the perception of non-speakers of the indigenous or endangered languages. For the former, the survival of a language is dependent on the present and latter generations seeing their own language as integral to their cultural and individual identity. Languages can be revitalised if the process takes place in time, as has been the case for languages in New Zealand, Australia and Wales (Crystal, 2010, 22). Whilst the needs of indigenous communities to develop economically must be respected which may mean accepting the need to learn a world language, it does not follow that an apathetic attitude towards their own language can't be challenged. A degree of responsibility lies with the speaker of an endangered, minority or indigenous language to recognise and acknowledge the value held in their own language. As Crystal argues, 'languages should be treated as

national treasures and treated accordingly' (2006, 12). It would be a positive step for people to see their own language as a precious commodity and this is precisely the bottom-up approach advocated by Crystal (2001, 6). The languages of power do dominate the cultural, political and economic make-up of global society though they are spoken by a minority of the world's population. Crystal supports this view and states that 'the terminology of 'domination' must disappear (2005, 10-11). Healthy bilingualism is a state in which two languages are seen as complementary, not in competition – fulfilling different roles, with each language being seen in a rewarding light' (Crystal, 2000, 81).

Article 8 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples states: 'Indigenous peoples and individuals have the right not to be subjected to forced assimilation or destruction of their culture' (2007, 5). The global political economy is perhaps the most pressing threat in the modern age for preserving endangered and indigenous languages. Where colonial empires throughout history have played their part in creating unequal balances of power between the colonisers and the colonised, the modern day sees this imbalance played out through wealth inequality between the rich and poor; the poorest 40 percent of the world's population accounts for 5 percent of global income whereas the richest 20 percent accounts for three-quarters of world income (Shah, 2010). With no direct rule over countries, the financially and politically powerful are still able to exploit and control the powerless through indirect means, such as through conditional aid or unfair trade (Oxfam, 2010) which leads to more people assimilating to the capitalist systems and leaving behind native cultures and languages.

Furthermore, another approach lies in challenging and changing attitudes of the wider society in which a minority or endangered language exist. A multitude of languages have contributed to the production of knowledge and have proved significant influences on other languages as well as disciplines applied universally, such as Algebra. Similarly, traditional local and environmental knowledge which evolved from enduring traditions and practices, can also educate on intensive structures such as for example, sustaining natural environments. The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples affirms the value held in this type of knowledge and recognises it in its charter (2007, 2).

Said's *Orientalism* (1978) offers a useful platform from which to argue for the need for perceptions to be challenged and changed as not every representation has been an honest reflection of people and their cultures. The way in which two languages or two cultures meet defines the way they will interact from thereon. The mutual relationship between one culture and another sets the tone as to why some languages are seen to be more prestigious compared to others (Ngũgĩ, 1993, 30-37). Ngũgĩ argues that African languages never had the chance to flourish because the English and the African languages never met as equals, but rather as the conqueror and the conquered (1993, 35). Armstrong sustains that the crux of racial and cultural prejudice directs the 'under-estimation of the importance and difficulty of the study of languages of other peoples' (1960, 14). He argues that as language is one of the most important things that make a people human, respect for that language is in a sense respect for the people themselves, and disrespect for the language is disrespect for the people (*ibid*).

Ngũgĩ argues that it is up to the colonised to rid himself of his own mental shackles of the cultural bomb and cultural and linguistic inferiority (1986, 4-34). Ngũgĩ's experience of teaching in the USA saw Third World literatures being treated as 'something out of the mainstream' (Ngũgĩ, 1993, 10). In this sense, schools have a central role to play in fostering positive attitudes towards a plurality of languages. Ngũgĩ argues that the 'languages and literatures of the peoples of Africa, Asia and South America are not peripheral to the twentieth century, that they are central to the mainstream of what has made the world what it is today' (*ibid*). He urges people to understand *all* of the voices coming from a plurality of centres all over the world. McLaren states that 'equality of languages is central to Ngũgĩ's position and grows out of his support of pluralism of centers' (McLaren, 1998, 393). It is a plurality of languages and 'centres' which he argues for which enables the growth of other cultures as opposed to impeding them.

Ngũgĩ addresses the metaphorical idea of 'moving the centre' from its sphere in the west towards the 'multiplicity of spheres in all the cultures of the world' (1993, xvi). The assumption of the West being at the 'centre' of the universe is what is understood by the term 'Euro-centrism' which Samir Amin describes as 'anti-universalist, since it is not interested in seeing the possible general laws of human evolution. But it does present itself as Universalist, for it claims that imitation of the western model by all peoples is the only solution to the challenges of our time' (cited in Ngũgĩ, 1993, xvi). Ngũgĩ states:

> When there is real economic, political and cultural equality among
> nations and there is a *democracy*, there will be no reason for any

nation, nationality or people to fear the emergence of a common language, be it Kiswahili, Chinese, Maori, Spanish or English, as the language of the world. A language for the world? A world of languages! (Ngũgĩ, 1993, 40)

Further, in order to increase support for linguistic diversity, it is imperative to disprove the Babel myth which suggests that a single language would lead to greater peace (Crystal, 2001, 6-7), as monolingual countries both in the western and non western worlds have had their conflicts whilst speaking the same language. In terms of poverty and education, indigenous and local languages can actually help improve and prove a resource for the betterment of lives if harnessed appropriately. The use of local languages can spur on development needs in the less economically developing countries. In 2000, the Millennium Declaration pledged by the member states of the United Nations agreed upon eight development goals ranging from healthcare to the environment in support of helping the poorest in the world. UNESCO has advocated the use of local languages in fulfilling the millennium development goals by 2015 (UN Millennium Development Goals, 2010). UNESCO vehemently believes that developing minority languages with writing systems and bilingual education is the key to helping people meet the challenges in their lives and that the cost and time which would be invested in doing so would be worth it (SIL International, 2008, 1).

Linguistic diversity can be preserved by recognising that knowledge comes from all sources and, as Ngũgĩ argues, there is no single language which has the monopoly on knowledge or the production and dissemination of that knowledge (1986, 25-34).

A language indicates the knowledge which is borne out of community and its environment, and by this judgement, all cultures contribute to knowledge bases which exist and should be respected as such. Further, no single language is superior to another just as no culture is superior to another. Ngũgĩ's belief is that languages must enable rather than disable. English shouldn't be seen as the only producer of knowledge - it is a language among many (Ngũgĩ, 1993, 25-42). Even though the English language is a global one, it does not follow that it has necessarily contributed more in terms of world culture; there are uncountable contributions which have simply not been recorded or passed on from many smaller tongues and even some of the most influential contributions from larger tongues are little known in the English speaking West. Chattopadhyay's Bengali novella, *Devdas* (1917/2002) is regarded as one of the greats of Bengali literature and is as far reaching in popularity in the Indian subcontinent as Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* (1994) is in the West. Similarly, the Arabic story of *Layla and Majnun* (1376/1966) which exists in numerous versions across the East was popularised as a classic in Persian literature in the 12th century and is still a defining piece of literature of the East in the present day.

Crystal does point out that whilst endangered languages should be preserved and protected, a certain degree of flexibility and adaptation needs to be endured so as to facilitate language change and language variation (Crystal, 2006a, 2-3). Diversity needs to be understood as existing inwards of a language as well as outwards. In this respect, there is a strong requirement to respect and accept diversity within languages, to allow for its continuance (Crystal, 2004, 28). This point diverges from what Achebe says as he abandons his mother-tongue altogether (as a vehicle for

literature) but adapts the English language to make a 'new' English which can carry the weight of his African experience (1977, 62). The point is proved here because part of the success of English is in its adaptability and Crystal suggests that the endangered, minority, indigenous and disadvantaged languages need to develop multilingual temperaments as the benefits can be vast (Crystal, 2006, 11). This does not however mean an abandonment of one's language altogether, but being aware of the benefits of adaption of one's mother-tongue.

In order to preserve linguistic diversity, awareness of the positive benefits of linguistic diversity and the perilous position of endangered languages can be raised. The UDLR is an example of awareness translating to action but there is a strong need for professional organisations to be the mouthpiece for this subject and to be the platform from which issues of language death and linguistic diversity are addressed. The great divide needs to be bridged; that of academic interest and that of public awareness (Crystal, 2003, 1-2). A number of organisations exist for this purpose. The 'Foundation for Endangered Languages' was created in order to combat the effects of the causes of language decline, strengthen languages against them, and highlight what is lost when a language dies by aiming to 'support, enable and assist the documentation, protection and promotion of endangered languages' (FEL Manifesto, paragraph 1-4). The philosophy of the organisation is the actualisation of the arguments of this thesis; that when languages cease to pass down, a 'large loss of inherited knowledge' occurs and when this happens, a community as well as the whole of humanity is poorer and consequently pride and identity can also diminish with the loss of a language (*ibid*). Therefore, the FEL is playing a crucial role in helping to protect endangered languages and promote

linguistic diversity. Its manifesto states that the FEL 'applaud and support [speakers] in their attempt to preserve the diversity that is one of humanity's greatest treasures' (*ibid*).

Similarly, the mission for 'Living Tongue Institute for Endangered Languages' is to promote the 'documentation, maintenance, preservation, and revitalisation of endangered languages worldwide through linguist-aided, community driven multi-media language documentation projects' (Living Tongues webpage). They take a dual approach to the problem of language death and take a bottom-up approach in working with local communities in order to enable writing systems and documentation and archiving of a language. Archiving a language can be deemed a top-down approach to helping to preserve linguistic diversity where it would become a financially backed incentive to record the endangered languages in the world. 40% of the world's languages have no written record (Crystal, 2001, 7) and this needs to be rectified as languages must be archived. By comprehending how dire the situation is and the severity of what it can become if things do not change, a combination of a top-down and bottom-up approach can work to reverse language death. The only safe policy Crystal states is 'being prepared – which means valuing and fostering a multilingual ethos' (2010, 22). For this, the top-down approach is important; money and support from governments to foster a multilingual ethos. Furthermore the 'Living Tongue Institute' works to help non-indigenous communities learn to appreciate the 'cultural and linguistic significance of minority communities, the unique knowledge systems encoded in small languages and the value of human cultural diversity' (*ibid*).

The National Geographic's 'Enduring Voices Project' is another such example of a project aiming to protect endangered languages. The goal of the project is to 'document endangered languages and prevent language extinction by identifying the most crucial areas where languages are endangered', and then embarking upon expeditions to understand the geographic dimensions of language distribution, determine how linguistic diversity is linked to biodiversity and to bring wider attention to the issue of language loss (National Geographic, 2011).

More can be done to inform the public to allow this subject to enter public consciousness and Crystal believes mediums such as the Arts, the internet, the school curriculum and the media have a powerful role to play (2003, 2). General interest programmes, periodicals and articles address the subject of languages and language death (Crystal, 2003, 2-4; O'Brien, 2009). Whilst these may not focus solely on language they do allow audiences a certain degree of accessibility in order to facilitate the appreciation of different cultures which are not well-known, such as the BBC series, *Tribal Wives* which portrayed an intimate visit to some of the most remote communities on earth (Tribal Wives, 2008-2010). Similarly, Simon Reeve's BBC series, *Tropic of Cancer* captured the humanity in different cultures in an informative and educational manner (Reeve, 2010). Programmes such as these provide a crucial stepping stone for issues of cultural and linguistic diversity to enter the public consciousness so that they become aware of such issues and debates surrounding the threat to that diversity. It allows an accessible gateway for those not inclined for the academic study of linguistics and allows the gap between awareness of the situation and action on the situation to be bridged (Crystal, 2003, 34).

The Arts have a central role to play on bringing the topic of language death into the mainstream. One of the most cited examples of the language issue in non-African literature is the play *Translations* by Irish playwright, Brian Friel (1980). The play, set in Ireland in the 19th century skilfully depicts the tensions between the Irish and English at a time when Irish place names were being anglicised. Reminiscent of Ngũgĩ's description of his young life in relation to schools using English as mediums of instruction, Friel's characters find themselves faced with similar themes of colonial alienation, the link between language and identity and the subject of names as being integral that identity. Crystal believes an alliance between linguists and those of the Arts would be truly beneficial and he is right to argue so (2003). By addressing the issue of linguistic diversity and language death in the arena of the arts, the issue can reach out to a vast number of people, the general public who can engage with issues via plays, films, books and music.

Considering further ways to prevent language death, Crystal suggests a range of ideas which may help bring the issue into mainstream public awareness. One such idea is to have celebratory days; though we already have 'European Languages Day' (September 26) and 'World Mother Language Day' (February 21), they are not publicised enough or celebrated universally (Crystal, 2008, 215). This is an area which can be developed significantly and one way to do this would be to incorporate the celebration of such days into other mediums of human interaction (such as the workplace, libraries, community centres) rather than just focusing on schools. Having locations to visit which bear some significance to, and celebrate linguistic cultures and identities would also be advantageous in raising awareness. Crystal suggests there is no place where one can learn about, celebrate and learn about languages,

their histories and origins in a similar fashion to that of museums (2008, 215). Similarly, establishing linguistics-related awards can be a appealing mechanism to draw interest to the field; in honour of 'International Mother Language Day', the Linguapax Institute which is dedicated to 'the preservation and promotion of linguistic diversity worldwide' (Linguapax.org/en) awards the Linguapax Prize to acknowledge outstanding contribution by those who promote linguistic diversity, revitalise linguistic communities, and foster multilingual education (*ibid*). This is a significant award for those in the field of linguistics dedicated to the preservation and promotion of linguistic diversity.

4.4 Conclusion

For the number of languages that exist, there are many worldviews, all valid, all equal; no one culture affords the authority to decide it is 'civilised' and another 'uncivilised'. All cultures have their shortcomings and pitfalls, their benefits and graces. It is Ngũgĩ's belief that once a language has its rightful place in the esteemed identities of people and the cultures which they practice, only then can they truly appreciate the education in languages apart from their own. Language death must be prevented because as Australian author David Malouf wrote:

> When I think of my tongue no longer being alive in the mouths of
>
> men a chill goes over me that is deeper than my own death, since it
>
> is the gathered deaths of all my kind (cited in Crystal, 2000, 25)

With the 'gathered deaths' of people, so do worldviews cease to exist and it is this loss of knowledge of a different and original point of view which will be lacking in the

repository of humanity. All languages have the capability of knowledge and have demonstrated so through all fields of human discovery; the preservation of these languages is a vital necessity for the present and future. If such measures discussed are taken or rather, reinforced, it is absolutely possible that language death can be reversed and linguistic diversity maintained and enhanced. The Welsh language is exemplary of this reversal, but reflects that commitment from speakers and the state is needed as well as monetary investment. Ultimately, saving languages is a most worthwhile task, whether reclaiming it through 'decolonising the mind' or protecting and preserving linguistic diversity as we are each all responsible to keep them alive because as Crystal states, 'when a language dies which has never been written down, it is as if it has never been' (2002, 20).

CONCLUSION

'Everyone loses if one language is lost because then a nation and culture lose their memory, and so does the complex tapestry from which the world is woven and which makes the world an exciting place' (Finnbogadottir, UNESCO).

The question of languages in the postcolonial era is a relevant one as it offers a dilemma which each person must address in terms of language abandonment and reclamation. For those whose languages had been subverted under colonial regimes, the postcolonial era offers a choice to revert back to the mother-tongue, use the coloniser's language or to use both. Ngũgĩ argues that there is much validity and even a duty to revert back to using one's mother-tongue as this holds a deeply intrinsic link to a person's identity. Moreover, he is vocal about reversing the impact of the 'cultural bomb' as he deplores the manner in which languages were subverted. Achebe takes a realist stance and argues that it would be disadvantageous to not take the opportunity of speaking or writing in a world language. Ngũgĩ's arguments resonate with the idea of preserving linguistic diversity because he identifies the value which exists in his mother-tongue and wishes to transmit this to the Kenyan young who might in turn, choose to carry on developing literatures in the Gikuyu language or may choose to adopt different languages as their mediums of expression. Whichever they would choose however, would be borne from a platform of recognition that all languages can be producers of knowledge.

Languages themselves fulfil more functions than just that of communication; they develop to become repositories of cultures, traditions, norms and values of groups of

people. All of the world's languages, big and small have their own distinct words and phrases which differ tremendously from each other in their sound, execution, capability and reception but which stir the creativity and human spirit in all cultures. Endangered languages (especially unwritten ones), represent an intangible heritage for the world and for each one that dies, the potential for the world to discover and grow lessens, the strong fabric of the make-up of the world becomes grossly homogenised. Linguistic diversity needs to be protected as the many views of the world inform and strengthen knowledge bases.

Language is a crucial element in relation to both identity and culture as they are interrelated and interdependent entities which define and inform each other. Both Ngũgĩ's resistance to colonial domination and the conception of the Universal Declaration on Linguistic Rights exist because both accept the fundamental truth in that language in its variety and diversity are greatly important to the sensibility of humanity's cultural wealth and further, that the suppression, subversion or death of a language, however it occurs is to be prohibited. By examining the tenets of the UDLR and other organisations which deal with promoting and documenting endangered languages, it found that although much has been done, there is still more to do if the threat of language death is to be stemmed.

The deepest respect for all individuals, their ways of life, their cultures and their languages is the key to respecting humanity's rich and valuable diversity. In essence, this thesis is a work in favour of the diversity of languages and by extension cultures, ideals, norms and values, songs, literature, arts, folklore, dress, festivals and food. It is a celebration of the many different tongues which make the

world a vibrant, heterogeneous and dynamic place to live in. The many languages in the world have much to offer in their literary and oral capabilities with histories and legacies spanning centuries. The world would be so much the poorer if it did not have the variety in cultures and languages which allows keeping in perspective the deeply enriching and truly humanistic aspect which communities encompass. Ngũgĩ affirms this in the following extract:

> I am an unrepentant universalist. For I believe that while retaining its roots in regional and national individuality, true humanism with its universal reaching out, can flower among the peoples of the earth, rooted as it is in the histories and cultures of the different peoples of the earth (Ngũgĩ, 1993, xvii)

Reclaiming native languages can be a positive step for indigenous communities as Ngũgĩ argues and by extension, greater linguistic diversity is a positive step for the cultural repository of humanity, as Crystal argues. Ngũgĩ's arguments form a common thread throughout the thesis as much of what he has said informs arguments on the need for preserving and protecting linguistic diversity.

By allowing all people the linguistic rights to strengthen, generate and pass down knowledge without impinging or oppressing them, humanity as a whole would be so much the richer. When all cultures have and are recognised as holding equal weighting amongst all others, and superiority/inferiority complexes are abandoned, only then can languages and all that cultures have to offer be enjoyed by all. The realisation that 'all peoples contribute to the diversity and richness of civilizations and

cultures, which constitute the common heritage of humankind' (UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 2007, 2) is an important one to be made. Diversity is the richness of humanity. Humanity is celebrating that diversity.

This thesis has aimed to lay a foundation for what will be an original piece of research by way of a PhD, which will provide a necessary commentary on the Bengali Language Movement of 1952. Although mixed up in a complex political situation, the philosophy behind the Movement is the same one running through this thesis; the belief that all languages have the right to exist and be nurtured as a repository of irreplaceable and invaluable knowledge, humanity and unparalleled artistic potential.

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