

CONGOLESE LANGUAGES VIS-À-VIS FOREIGN LANGUAGES: STATUS, FORMS AND FUNCTIONS

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ABSTRACT

The existence of African native languages deteriorates vis-à-vis foreign languages such as English, French, Portuguese and Spanish. The former colonies keep using the later as their official languages. The status of the African native languages is either Mother Tongue (MT) or first language (L1), facing that of foreign language (FL) and second language (L2). Unfortunately, the functions of most of these languages are limited to oral communication because their scriptural forms do not exist. This study tries to draw the connections between status and the form, using the Larry (MT or vernacular language), the Kituba and Lingala (L1 or vehicular language) as main communicative languages in Brazzaville. Results show that these Congolese languages are gradually getting menaced and losing ground. This is due to the outstanding intellectualism that takes Congolese people – who are African people as well – to use more and more French words and expressions when speaking them daily. The use of the Roman alphabet would help the Congo, as some African countries have done it, to glocalize their languages in the written form in order to link their status, form and function better. Didactically, African children should first learn their MT and L1 orally and writingly before they tackle with the learning of foreign languages.

Keywords: African language, foreign languages, form, function, status.

1. INTRODUCTION

The sociolinguistic relations between African languages and foreign languages seem to be deteriorated in disfavor of African languages. Native languages, in fact are being menaced of disappearance in many countries within the African continent. Among these countries there is the Republic of the Congo which is not aside this reality, since many words and expressions are being used in the place of the native ones. This shows a gradual loss of Congolese languages vis-à-vis foreign languages, notably in front of French and English. It is to think that if a lot of efforts are not made by African population notably by public authorities in order to counter the possible whole destruction of African languages in general and Congolese languages particularly, the future of African native languages will be compromised. In this way, the population that is in charge of the practice of these languages will stop existing or their languages will become simple creoles or might be doomed to extinction after some decades to come. That is why such a danger that still stays far from the horizon justifies this survey in order to take precaution.

1.1 Research Problematic

Our research problematic tackles two issues which are the statement of the problem with the research question and the purpose of the study. The details of these points are developed beneath.

1.2 Statement of the problem and research question

African languages are referred to as native or vernacular languages. Native languages are those which have been spoken by African local populations from generation to another before the arrival of white man in Africa. There are those that have the status of mother tongues, MT and those which have the status of first languages (L1) or vehicular language. Most of African languages still have only oral form as writing system is lacking. That is to say they are not written yet, except in some West African countries like Nigeria where the Yoruba and the Hausa languages which were originally vernacular languages are written nowadays. Even in Kenya, Tanzania and other in Eastern African countries Swahili is written, too. It is the same thing in South Africa where Zulu and Xhosa are written as well. These up-cited languages play a lot of functions in respective countries, since Yoruba and Hausa of Nigeria, Swahili of Kenya and Tanzania, Zulu and Xhosa of South Africa are used in daily communication as official languages of some newspapers, book and magazines. They are also total or partial educational languages among youngsters of the population in these countries.

The same thing is ascertained in the Republic of the Congo where Kituba or Kikongo and Lingala which are vehicular languages still remain oral languages, since they are not written yet. Meanwhile a mother tongue, MT like Larry which is a widely spoken vernacular language in Brazzaville and Pointe Noire in the Republic of the Congo is not written yet. All these languages are not standardized because no newspaper is written in it. On the contrary the educational language remains French in the Congo. The absence of the African languages in schools and written supports represents a real danger for they run the risk of disappearance. The impression that is on is that sixty-two years after the independence days, the wide spread majority of Africans do not exist yet thanks to their languages, since they are still embarked to the foreign language practice in their life activities and daily communication which contribute to decay their own native languages. In face of this danger, it would have been necessary to wonder this way: what is the situation due to? What could be done to stop the deterioration of the African languages, notably Congolese native languages? This questioning is worth leading the reasoning of this piece of research.

1.3 Purpose of the study

This study focuses on linguistics and the glocalization of African languages for sustainable development needs to give importance to African languages and even to enable them reconstitute the cultural dignity and identity to African native populations. It is known that most African languages are losing ground for many parameters contribute to this kind of plague. Among the indexed parameters there are the colonial burdens, the intellectualism and elitism, the lack of support policies of native languages, the international surrounding media.

The colonial burden means that Africans have inherited French, English, Spanish and Portuguese that have become the official languages of independent African countries used in media, administration, education and diplomacy. This constraint has not permitted the young independent States to set up national languages that could supplant the colonial language burden; rather the African elite should speak and write these languages and behave as colonists did. This state of affairs has developed intellectualism among different populations in Africa. Knowing and speaking English, French, Spanish and Portuguese has become a condition of richness and privilege and a symbol of life success in town and cities, encouraging the rural exodus. Reversely speaking native languages is synonymous to failure, poverty and disgrace.

Therefore, this has pushed many families to speak one of these official languages at home for the sake of preparing children to become intellectuals and next civil servants. For example, speaking French in the Congo - and even in French speaking countries - has become a clue of life success, neglecting mother tongues and vernaculars that characterize Congolese people. That is why the lack of State support policies of native languages that should have the charge of organizing African languages most countries have created a gap. This gap has permitted the former colonial state-powers to set up organization like 'the Commonwealth' and 'Organization Internationale de la Francophonie, (OIF)' in order to keep English and French speaking countries under control by using English and French. These policies from the former colonial State-powers that often offer bursaries are implemented by the so powerful media such as BBC, VOA, CNN and RFI that compel Africans to listen and communicate in these languages. All these parameters have kept deteriorating many African languages in diverse countries. This is why the objectives of this piece of work are:

- To check what the real function that African native languages play vis-à-vis foreign languages;
- To suggest some tracts of solution as a remedy to the situation which does not honor Africans.

This permits us to set up a methodology of research that can help us conduct the inquiry related to the function of Congolese languages, as a setting of research on the ground.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The Republic of the Congo counts twelve provinces and has about four million of population split into ethnic groups that speak more than one hundred dialects, (European Parliament 2003: 40). Among the languages that are spoken in this country there are two vehicular languages which are Kituba previously recognized by Kikongo most in use in the Southern part of the country, and Lingala most in use in the Northern part of the Congo. However, these two languages are spoken in Brazzaville, the capital city of the country, even if a dialect from Kituba or Kikongo, meaning Larry, remains massively spoken in there. The population of Brazzaville alone is estimated near 1.200.000. (Ministry of planification 2010) So, one third of the sample population has been drawn from the target population or 400.000 individuals. As a tool of enquiry, a questionnaire with two sections has been made use of.

Section one was concerned with the information about respondents. Section two displayed the different preoccupations made up with five questions of which there were three semi-instructional questions and two instructional ones. As an instrument, a check list has been used to assess the empirical consequences of the utilization of French among Congolese. These consequences have been drawn from the language's facts in markets, churches, bus stations, schools, colleges and universities. Variables of study have been: oral communication, studies and success, tradition and national identity.

At last, three languages of studies have been selected: Lingala, Kituba that are vehicular languages, and Larry which is a dialect of Kituba. It is to be noted that for practical reasons, the questionnaire has been distributed according to the importance of community language. Thus, 220.000 questionnaires have been issued to Larry speakers; representing 55%; 110.000 or 27.5% to Lingala speakers and 70.000 questionnaires have been provided with Kituba speakers, indicating 17.5%.

Concerning the importance of each question of the questionnaire, question n°1 aimed at knowing the number of Congolese languages that the respondents could speak in general.

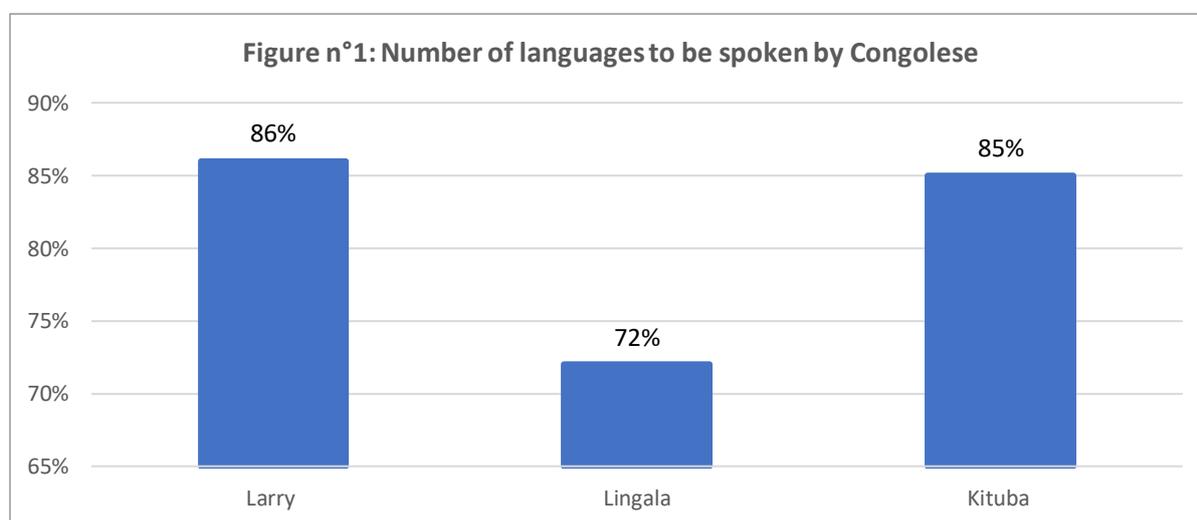
Question n°2 has the objective of checking about which language they use to speak at home. Question n°3 was asked in order to know why they were speaking this language. Question n°4 has been put to discover whether the informants spoke native language well or not. At last, question n°5 targeted to verify why the respondents could not speak their native languages well.

3. RESEARCH FINDINGS

In the current research work, the research findings are presented into five subsections in accordance with our research tool, namely the questionnaire and the observation checklist. Those subsections are developed in the beneath lines.

3.1 Languages spoken by respondents

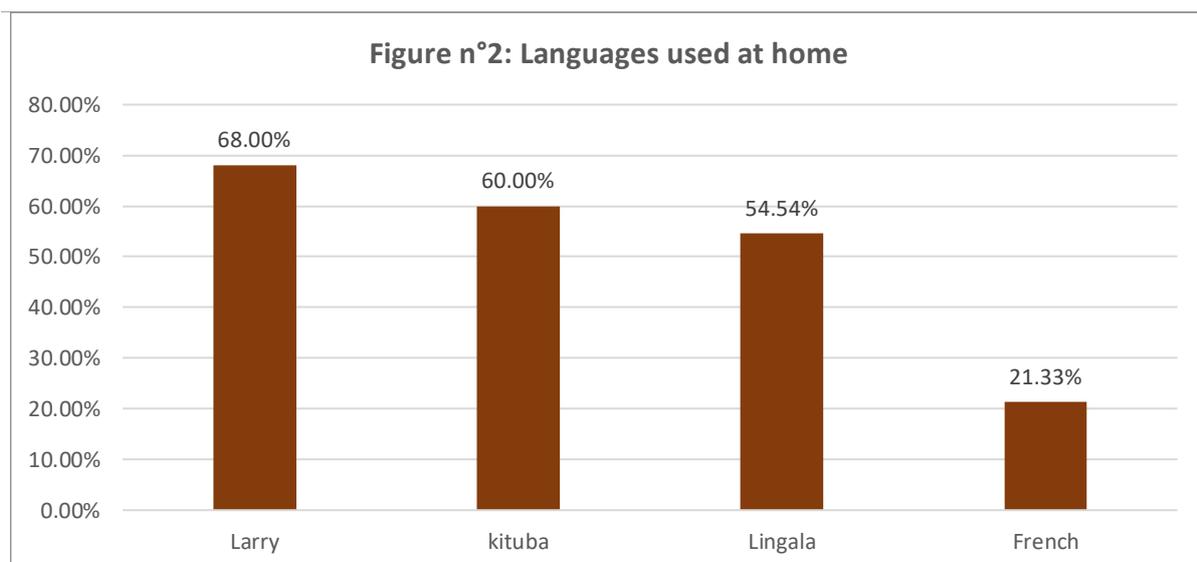
The first finding is from question n°1. It shows that Larry, Lingala and Kituba respondents can speak three languages at an average of 81%: the individual MT or vernacular language which is Larry and the two L1 or vehicular languages which are Lingala and Kituba as shown by the following graphics:



From the above figure, it appears that in Brazzaville, most people speak Larry as a vernacular language. As far as the two vehicular languages, namely Lingala and Kituba, are concerned, Kituba is spoken at 85% following by Lingala which is at 72%. So, as said above, the respondents in this research are trilingual respondents at 81%.

3.2 Languages spoken by respondents at home

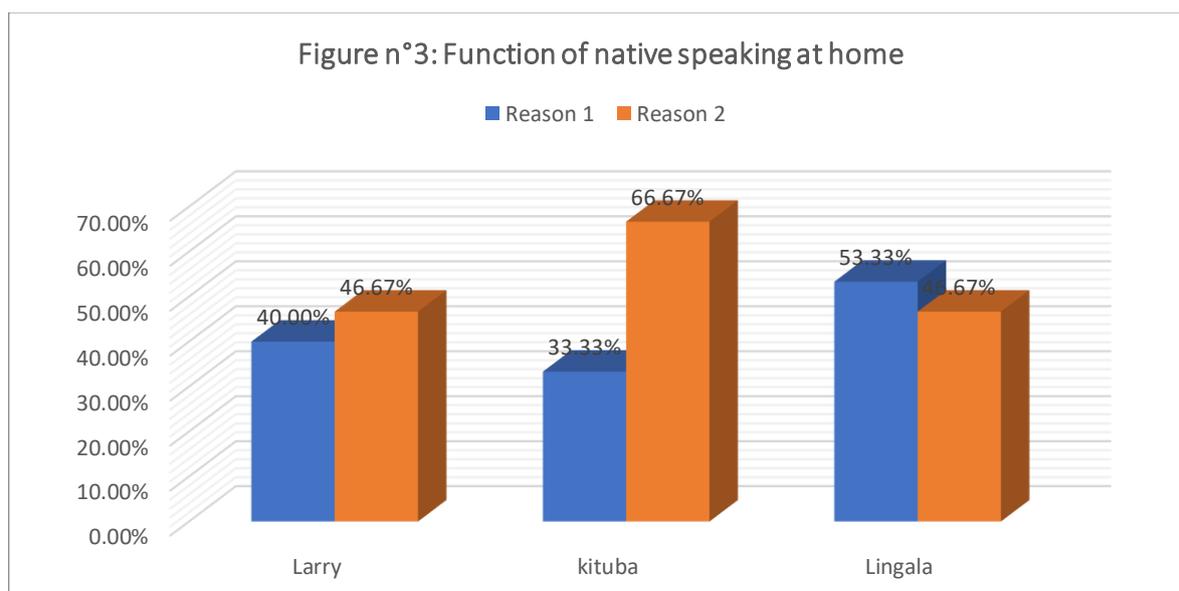
The second finding which is in relation with question n°2, about the language spoken at home, indicates that rates of Larry informants, Kituba respondents and Lingala informants who speak MTs and L1s decrease respectively at 68%, 60% and 54,54% whereas 21,33% of them speak French at home. The forthcoming figures show the situation like this:



It appears that even at home, the informants speak more than one language. They are multilingual to the extent that, apart from French which rate at 21,33%, other languages (Larry, Kituba and Lingala) were chosen by respondents at more than 54% as their languages spoken at home.

3.3 Reasons leading respondents to speak the referent languages

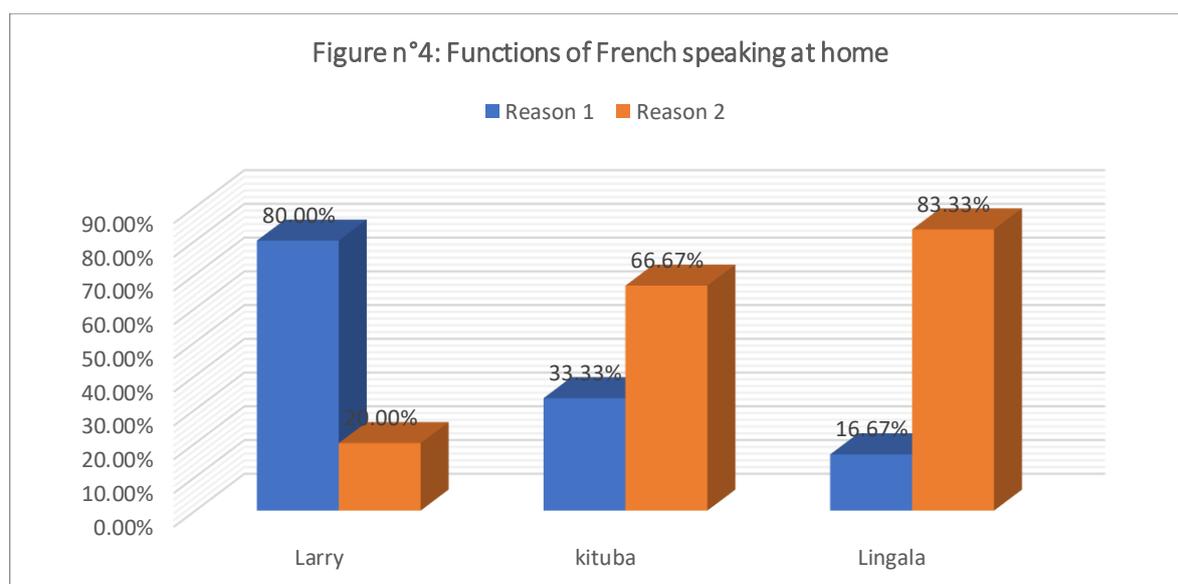
The third finding that is linked to question n°3 is dually presented. The three-community languages have justified their speaking of native languages for the function of communicating orally with neighbors of same and different dialect at an average of 53,33% respondents while an average of 42,22% of them recognized to keep the Congolese identity as shown by the beneath figure with two main reasons referring to reason one “to maintain the Congolese identity” and reason two “to communicate orally with neighbors”:



From the above figure, it appears that Congolese local languages (Larry, Kituba and Lingala) are used for two main functions representing in the figure n°3 as reasons. The first

function for what these languages are used is the oral communication for the Congolese speech community. The second function is the function of cultural identity. So, apart from the fact that the Congolese mentioned languages are widely spoken and lacking the special scripture form or are not officially taught at school, they remain vehicular languages in the republic of the Congo and in Brazzaville, in particular.

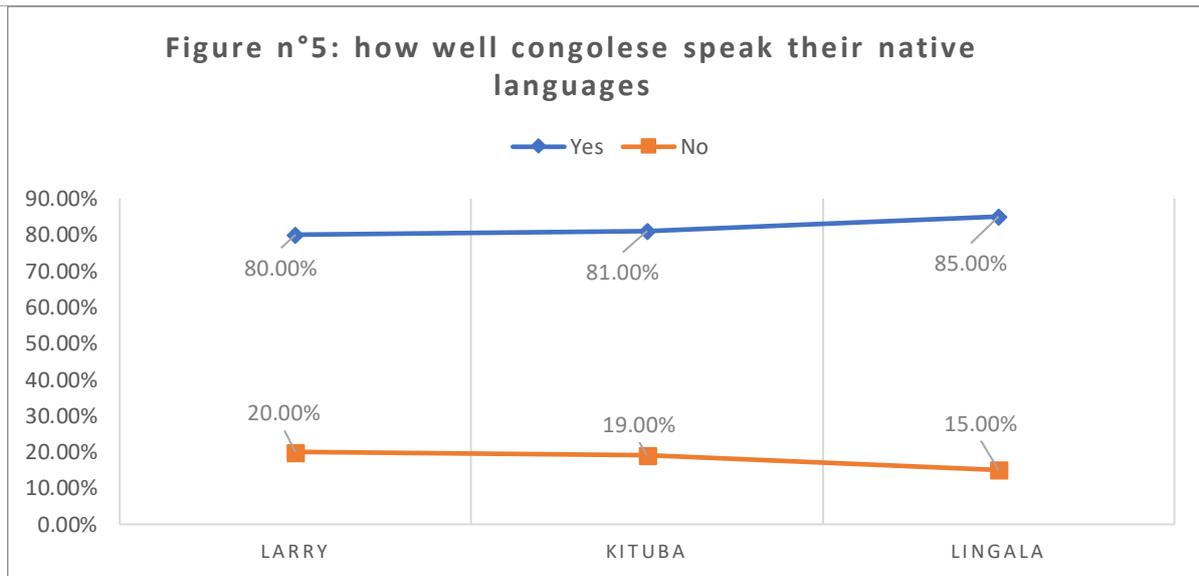
Since the French language is also spoken by the three community languages, we thought better to investigate also the function of the French language within the three community languages. The results about the function of French for the speakers of Larry, Kituba and Lingala are presenting in the beneath figure.



The results presenting in the figure n°4 revealed that the French language is used for two reasons: n°1: the French language is viewed as language of intellectualism preparing elites. N°2: the use of French prepares children to school success. The three community languages users have justified their speaking of French at home by the fact that it is the language of elites at an average of 43,33% respondents, versus an average of 56,67% informants who have justified the use of French as a means to prepare their children to school success.

3.4 Handling of Vernacular and Vehicular Languages

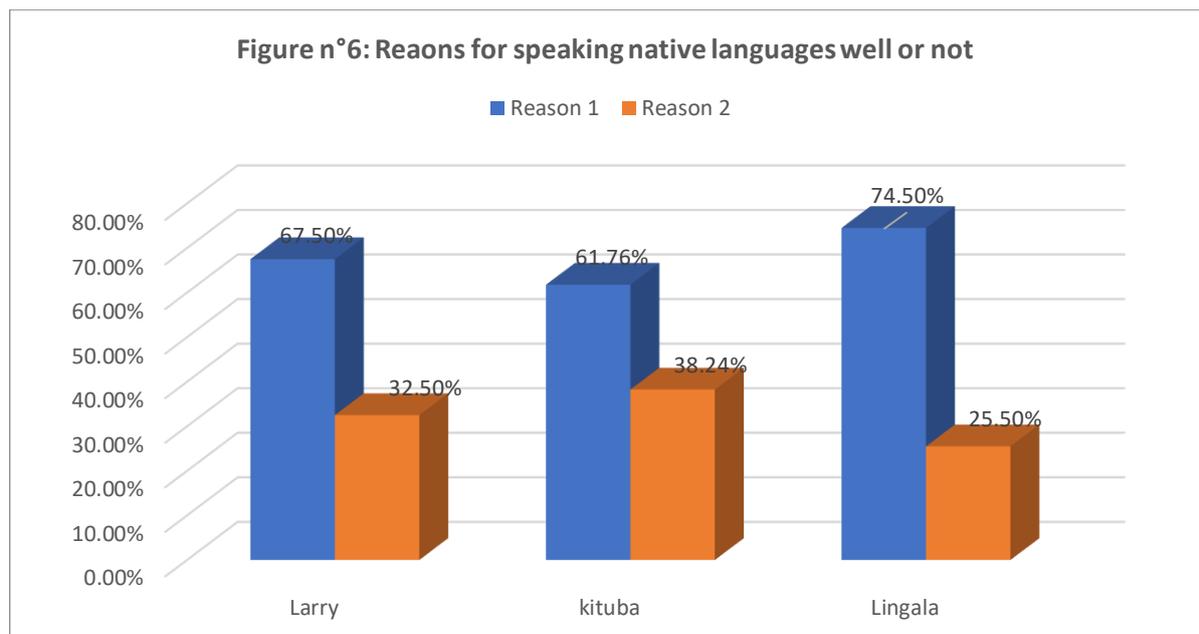
The fourth finding linked to question n°4 is that an average of 82% informants have recognized not to speak Larry, Kituba and Lingala well. Meanwhile, an average of 18% respondents has asserted that they can speak these native languages well. The graphics below display the details of such a situation:



The results of the fourth question related to whether the informants speak well or not the Congolese languages are displayed in the above figure. It reveals that they do speak well Larry, Kituba and Lingala. All the three languages are well spoken at more than eighty (80) per cent. Therefore, one can notice that the speakers of those languages acknowledge that they do not speak very well at one hundred per cent. By the way, the following subsection is devoted to factors preventing informants to speak well Larry, Kituba and Lingala.

3.5 Factors preventing the good handling of Local Languages

The fifth finding having a link with question n°5 shows that an average of 67, 92% informants has justified the fact not to speak the native languages well because of French. However, an average of 32, 08% respondents have thought that their failure is due to the lack of permanent contacts with villages as displayed by the graphics down below:



This figure shows that the informants have pointed out two main reasons which prevent them to speak well their local languages. The first reason is the presence of French in most administrative domain in the Republic of the Congo. The second one is the lack of permanent contact with villages where the pure local languages should be spoken. So, at more than 67%, the informants recognize the influence of French language on their local languages speaking skills.

Apart from data collected from the questionnaire, we also used a checklist to get empirical reality from the settings. The analysis of that checklist displays empirical reality related to the consequences in using French.

From the analysis of data collected through the checklist, it appears that French language has great impact on users of Congolese native languages to the extent that, in their daily communication, they frequently substitute native languages' words into French words. Because of this French transfer or interference into Congolese native languages, Congolese people are destroying their culture, civilization and philosophy. The following extracts of Congolese oral communication bring evidence:

➤ **Extract one:** Among Larry speakers

1-Bantu **trois** mbueningi mu nzila. *Instead of* Bantu ba **tatu** mbueningi mu nzila.

-I have met three people on the way.

2-**Beau-frère** ya Sita wa fuidi mazono. *Instead of* **Ndzadhi** ya Sita wa fuidi mazono.

-Sita's brother-in-law was dead yesterday.

3-Ngana **clé** za **chambres**! *Instead of* Ngana **vungula** za **Makati**!

-Give me the keys of rooms!

➤ **Extract two:** Among Kituba speakers:

1-Bika kusala **marque** yina! *Instead of* Bika kusala **pilina**!

-Don't do like that!

2-Mume kudia makondi **sept**. *Instead of* Mume kudia Makondi **sambuadi**.

-I have eaten seven bananas.

3-Pesa munu ba **clé** ya inzo! *Instead of* Pesa munu ba **sabi** ya inzo!

-Give me the keys of the house.

➤ **Extract three:** Among Lingala speakers:

1-Biloko **tout** emati talo *instead of* Biloko **nioso** emati talo.

-Prices of all goods increase.

2-Bato **vingt** ba kufi. *Instead of* Bato **tuku mibale** ba kufi.

-Twenty people are dead.

3-Pia ngai **clé** ya ndako! *Instead of* Pia ngai **fongola** ya ndako!

-give me the key of the house!

This is to say that quantifiers like 'tatu', 'sambuadi', 'tuku mibale' meaning respectively 'three', 'seven' and 'twenty', words like 'nzadhi', 'sabi', 'vungula', 'fongola',

‘makati’, ‘pilina’, ‘niosio’ ‘signifying ‘brother-in-law’, ‘key’, ‘room’, ‘like’, ‘everything’ exist in Larry, Kituba and Lingala. But all these sample words of Congolese native languages are being replaced by French words in their daily life communication. That is why these languages are very badly and terribly losing ground progressively, destroying terribly Congolese culture, civilization and philosophy. Africans should remember Marcus Garvey’s saying reported by Babimba (2010:13) like this: “*A people without language and culture is like a tree without roots*”. It is in this context that African but Congolese ego permeability is getting terrible in Larry and Kituba and worse in Lingala, tending to disappear little by little.

It is known that learning and speaking a foreign language means to be aggressed psychologically. This signifies that Congolese and Africans should restore their ego permeability so their languages remain and do not experience genocide. This joins skutnabbkangas’ (2000:XXXIII) view, that is: “*I insist on linguistic human rights and outline the role of education in helping to solve the problem of linguistic genocide. I am not opposed to the global spread of English, except in places where English is learned at the cost of the mother tongue*”. In parallel, it is something to be feared about as French may take the Congolese native languages to linguistic genocide. If populations of Congo lose their native languages for which they are called Congolese, they will definitely cease existing, since even a mixture of local languages and French could turn into Creole.

4.DISCUSSION

The findings in using Congolese native languages and the consequences in using the French language constitute the centerpiece of this piece of study in order to examine fully the so tricky situation of the African languages vis-à-vis foreign languages. The context of the Congo in this domain could justify the African success or failure and might let us make some suggestions in the perspective of improving the African languages situation.

It is so obvious that Congolese represented by Larry, Kituba and Lingala speakers are able to speak corresponding MTS and L1s in a rate of 81% (figure n°1). Unfortunately, these Congolese languages are losing ground at about 61% in the profit of the French language speaking at about 21, 33% among the sample population (figure n°2). In fact, the functions of the Congolese identity keeping as respectively claimed by 53, 33% and 42, 22% from the sample population (figure n°3). Meanwhile, the functions of speaking the French language among Congolese have been discovered. By the way, Congolese speak French because it is the language of elites according to 43, 33% of the sample population. The order functions of speaking French remain to prepare the Congolese school learners to school success as 56, 67% have pointed it out (figure n°4). Thus, the use of French which is increasingly remarked in the Congolese society has abandoned its integrative motivation (Green: 1993, 2-3) since parents forcibly would like their children to succeed in their studies at school. This attitude seems to generate a lot of damage according to 67, 92% of sample population (figure n°6) when using native languages. As a matter of fact, 82% of Congolese have recognized not to speak their native languages well, versus 18% of those who pretend to speak them well (figure n°5). As consequences, French words are terribly replacing native languages words among Congolese native language speakers.

The situation is not better for learners in schools, colleges and universities. A mnemonics storming has been noted terribly through a confusion that reigns in their mental system when using local languages and English. The words ‘mbote’ which is used all the day long and means ‘good morning’, ‘good afternoon’ and ‘good evening’. Sometimes, a lot of learners say ‘good morning’ to greet someone or the teacher in the street in the afternoon. This is actually a clue of damage resulting from instrumental motivation: learning English for

exams, job getting. Such a situation often happens because learners that constitute the greatest stratum of the society do not learn to speak their native languages that should ensure a positive transfer in learning foreign languages and sciences rather terribly creates a negative transfer among Larry and Kituba; this is also valid in French, as learners can speak it well but experience a lot of difficulties in writing this foreign language up to university. So, the Congolese and broadly the African learners suffer from negative transfer, since the mastering of French, English and other foreign languages before that of their native languages do not permit the acquisition of new linguistic and scientific knowledge. This is linked to Chinese realities, experienced by Zhilong (2009:112). In these conditions, there is a real danger that the interlanguage that is due to plurilingualism brings Congolese and African learners to speak lects which are the negative stabilized forms of the language in use.

All these limiting factors prevent the Congolese languages from being valuable. The situation is due to the weakness of the native languages that are not standardized and that easily undergo the influence of foreign languages. What is to retain is that the function of these languages is not wide spread, since they are strictly used orally. As a matter of fact, they cannot experience a sustainable development. The other thing is that the instrumental motivation as to use foreign languages replaces the integrative motivation. It is a pity that the majority of parents make their children learn and speak French, English or other foreign languages because they would like them to succeed in their school studies and to become elites of the country. This state of affairs is responsible of the loss of ego permeability leading to the progressive loss of African roots. This leads us to set up some perspectives for the globalization of African languages.

5.PERSPECTIVES

The perspectives which are being made are in relation with the involvement of African States in the defense of native languages thanks to some strategies. There is also the didactic side of general education which must be improved so that learners have a new go for their future.

- The African States should be involved more in the defense of native languages by conducting some punching actions and strategies.
- Creating the writing system should be an emergency so that native African languages are written for keeping records in terms of literature: poems, recitals, legends, tales, and proverbs. Today many Africans know to write their own languages, except in Nigeria with Yoruba and Hausa, in South Africa with Xhosa and Zulu and in Eastern African countries like Kenya, Tanzania where Swahili is written, even these countries use the roman writing system.
- Why do the other countries like the Congo not use the same writing system to keep Kituba, Lingala and Larry in books, newspapers and other forms of supports? This could help learners to read and write their own native languages in completion of listening and the speaking that they use to. Even, this writing system could be introduced gradually into the educational system in cohabitation with the foreign language ones. The better strategy to keep a language is writing so learners become readers of their own languages and exercise fully the form, the status and the functions characterized by listening, speaking, reading and writing which are the four skills. In the Congo, for example, only listening and speaking are in use. Reading and writing do not exist at all.
- The didactic side of these perspectives is related to the order of priority. Today, the large tendency for the majority of parents is to make their children begin learning

foreign languages for sake of success in studies. This seems to be artificial. Why not reverse this tendency? Thus, the following strategy is suggested so that African children restore their integrative motivation:

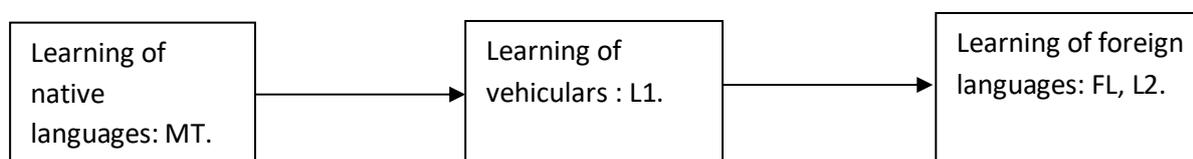


Diagram n°1: Didactic chronology of Languages Learning

This strategy would permit our children to acquire the mastery of their native languages prior to having the one of foreign languages and insure a positive transfer in literature and sciences. African erudite of the early independence days knew their own languages first before tackling successfully with literature and sciences at school. As children they were at that time most of them succeeded because they knew how to transfer the new language from their mother tongues. This is why the first acquired African native tongues should be very determining in the acquisition of other languages and sciences. These three suggestions may help African people to glocalize their native languages which remain essentially oral nowadays.

6.CONCLUSION

Throughout the study that has been conducted in the Congo, the results are not only valid for this country. The case of the Congo could be applied to many other countries of Africa. So, there is an attempt to generalize these results. It is known that the specific form of the African languages in terms of writing characters is not yet found but Africans may borrow the roman characters that languages like Yoruba, zulu and Swahili are using to keep African languages being standardized. This way of doing could enrich the functions of African languages which are still oral. The majority of African cannot keep records for their history, culture and civilization in books. Having a writing system could change the roots definitely since many foreign language words are replacing the African language ones. This could also permit the African learners not to be out rooted, since they will begin learning the native languages before embracing the study of foreign languages. Such a way of doing could ensure positive knowledge transfer among them and avoid mnemonic and the African native ones. It is known that multilingualism is a good thing to support, however, this becomes positive if it permits interlanguage not to last for long and contribute much to new knowledge acquisition.

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Appendix

Checklist n°1: Congolese languages usage vis-à-vis French language

Consequences	Laurry					Kituba					Lingala							
Substitution of native language words by French words.	0*	1	2	3	4	5	0	1	2	3	4	5	0	1	2	3	4	5
Loss of ground among Congolese native languages																		
Destruction of Congolese culture, civilization and philosophy																		
Disappearance of ego permeability																		
Mnemonic storming																		
Negative knowledge transfer																		

*0=nil; 1=bad; 2 very bad; 3=terrible;4=worse; 5=catastrophic