

The politics of language and the underdevelopment of African language press in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

The importance of African language press, its volatility and underdevelopment are issues that have received scholarly attention. Zimbabwe is a multilingual nation characterised by complex politics of language that revolve around language competition, different forms of linguistic hegemony, marginalisation and exclusion. This chapter interrogates the nexus between the politics of language, and the underdevelopment and unsustainability of African language press in Zimbabwe, from the colonial period to post-independence. It analyses the country's sociolinguistic landscape; colonial and post-independence language policies, ideologies and practices; and the character and evolution of the African language press. The chapter deploys strands from language politics, linguistic hegemony and Salawu's (2015, "A Political Economy of sub-Saharan African Language Press: The Case of Nigeria and South Africa," *Review of African Political Economy*, 42(144): 299–313) mainstream and subsidiary models of African language press management. I show that the entrenched hegemony of English, and to some extent two dominant African languages – Shona and Ndebele – create a steady and predominantly English language press, and a volatile African language press that exclude many other languages spoken in the country. This shows that the structure, management and unsustainability of Zimbabwe's African language press broadly replicate colonial and post-independence language politics and ideologies.