The contexts of language teaching and learning: A framework for analysis

Moira Chimombo

Abstract

A framework is proposed to facilitate the systematic comparison of the teaching and learning contexts of first, second, and foreign languages. The contextual framework consists of four major components overlapping in a quadrant: psychological, sociological, ideological, and technological. After being described, these contextual components are related systematically to the teaching and learning of languages in Malawi. Chinyanja is both a first language for 50% of the population, and a second language for another 25%. There are also a number of other vernacular languages which were not formally recognized under the dictatorship of Kamuzu Banda (1964-1994). English is the official second language, being also the medium of instruction from year 5 of primary school. French is taught as a foreign language from secondary level onwards. The psychological, sociological, ideological, and technological aspects of the contexts of language teaching and learning are finally related to previously developed frameworks for language and learning.

Key words
language teaching, language learning, educational contexts, psychology of education, philosophy of education, sociology of education, politics of education

Introduction

The cartoon below, which appeared in a local Malawian newspaper, The Nation, on 22 September 1997 (p. 7, reproduced with permission), illustrates certain features of the contexts of language teaching and learning in Malawi. First, it illustrates beautifully the linguistic context, in which languages from two completely different origins have co-existed for over a century: Chinyanja (like the other vernacular languages in Malawi) is a southern Bantu language which has tone as a major syntactic feature in addition to intonation, while English and French are Indo-European languages which have intonation but not tone. The cartoonist plays on the tonal ambiguity of mtengo, which when said with a high-low tone pattern means “tree”, but when said with a low-low tone pattern means “price”. Furthermore, the three languages, as a result of their different statuses, each have different roles to play in both the ideo-
Come down!
It's necessary. I did not case what goes!
And in this climbed trees!
Prices have increased!

ZAMBEZI
METEO

GOODS
CONSUMER

MECT
RATES

ELECTRICITY

MOIRA CHIMOBO
logical and the political contexts of education in the country.

But the wording of the cartoon also implies a socio-economic context of high inflation which, whether we like it or not, has had, and will continue to have, a major impact on educational policy and implementation. Moreover, the reference to "electricity rates" points to the interface between economics and technology—a major factor both in the implementation of certain language teaching approaches, and, more importantly as we begin the new millennium, in the globalization of education resulting from increasingly high technology.

As Stern stated, "The interpretation of context is an essential part of a theory. Language, learning, and teaching must always be viewed in a context, setting, or background" (1983:48). It is for this reason that an analytical framework is proposed for the systematic description of the multiple and varied contexts of first, second, and foreign language teaching and learning in the modern world, illustrated in the above cartoon. Such an analytical framework allows both theorists and practitioners, both academics and students, in the fields of language teaching, to systematically compare the inputs and outcomes of different types of language teaching and learning in different contexts. The framework is illustrated by applying it to the complex language teaching context of secondary education in Malawi. In Malawi, the students' first language is almost always one of the 15 or more vernacular languages, but for over 30 years, only Chinyanja was the medium of instruction in lower primary school, and taught as a subject at all subsequent levels; English is the official second language and the medium of instruction from year 5; and French is the only foreign language currently taught in secondary schools.

Each of the different aspects of the language teaching contexts is then related systematically to previously developed frameworks for language (adapted from Mackey 1967; see Chimombo 1986) and for learning (Chimombo 1986). Hypotheses are presented for the relationships between the different quadrants of the three frameworks, which hypotheses will ultimately need to be investigated in empirical research, but that research is outside the scope of this paper.

A Framework for the Analysis of Language Teaching Contexts

Some years ago, Fishman (1977:116) lamented the absence of a broad perspective on the context of English language learning taking account of social, cultural, economic, and political factors. Taking his lament as the point of departure, the analytical framework has divided the context of language learning and teaching into four major quadrants, in which four aspects overlap: psychological, sociological, ideological, and technological contexts, as shown in Figure 1 below. The framework is an attempt to synthesize ideas from many sources, both those directly concerned with language teaching and others focused on development issues (e.g. Bronfenbrenner...
1979, Galtung 1985), critical pedagogy (e.g. Giroux 1988), and cultural anthropology (e.g. Shore 1996).

**Figure 1: A framework for the analysis of language teaching contexts**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational</th>
<th>Cultural</th>
<th>Economic</th>
<th>Social</th>
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<tr>
<td>A1</td>
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**IDEOLOGICAL CONTEXT**

**TECHNOLOGICAL CONTEXT**

From the ecological perspective on human development (Bronfenbrenner 1979: 22-26), the psychological context concerns the interrelation of the individual with the immediate setting at the level of the microsystem. The sociological context, at the level of the mesosystem, moves outward to link the settings in which the developing person actually participates. Both the psychological and sociological contexts include the overlapping environments of the home, neighbourhood, peer group(s), school, health centre, and church (Galtung's [1985] “human space” and “social space”). The technological context concerns the settings in the person's immediate environment, at the level of the exosystem, including the workplace, local government, school administrators, and the mass media. Finally, the ideological context concerns the interconnected system, viewed as a manifestation of the overarching patterns of ideology and the organization of social institutions common to a particular culture or subculture, at the level of the macrosystem (Galtung's [1985] “world space”). These four categories are outlined in Figure 1, above.

As is shown in Figure 1, Area A is the interface between psychological and ideological contexts. As such, it highlights the educational and cultural, including lin-
guistic and religious, aspects of the ideological context. For example, societies "dis­
tribute and legitimate" (Giroux 1988:5) specific kinds of knowledge, through the cur­
rricula taught in schools or other formal or informal educational institutions. A major
question arises over "who decides what counts as educational knowledge" and how
"certain categories of knowledge and skill are guaranteed a place at the core of the
curriculum, other kinds are relegated to the perimeter, and still others, most, probably,
fail to qualify entirely" (Hornbrook 1998:89, citing Young 1981).

At the same time, societies also legitimate specific language practices, through
educational and cultural policies on language use, and again similar questions, "who
and how?" might be asked. This legitimation of educational and linguistic practices
constitutes a kind of "cultural capital" (Giroux 1988:5) or "cultural conditionality"
(Brock-Utne 1997:4). In other words, how a particular society "models" experience
influences basic aspects of perception (Shore 1996:4), so "the general perception of
values of the target language and of bilingualism [as revealed in] decisions to speak a
certain language or to encourage or discourage language learning" (Spolsky 1989:26)
is extremely important at home and in the community. Thus, for example, "the idea of
English as an international language which can be taught as though it were a unitary
and culture-free code is positively misleading" (Bex 1994:65).

A major ideological issue in many non-native English-speaking countries, partic­
ularly outside the west, is that of language identity and identification. At the level of
the individual in his or her culture and educational setting, where psychological con­
text overlaps with ideological, children who are not given the chance to-learn through
their first language may never have the opportunity to develop a "first language iden­
ty," in other words to identify primarily with their first language community. At the
level of the society, where it is the sociological context that overlaps with the ideo­
logical, certain ethnic groups may suffer from the fact that their first language and cul­
ture are not only not accorded any status, but are actively suppressed, as has happened
in a great many African countries, including Malawi.

Both religion and gender are additional aspects of the psycho-cultural and educa­
tional interface with ideology which are intimately woven into many language teach­ing contexts. Communism, Christianity, and Islam, for example, each legitimate dif­
terent kinds of knowledge to be taught in schools, and model experiences differently
for girls and boys. Even within one religion, such as Christianity, there can be notice­
able differences in language policies among different denominations (Schmied
1991:30). At the same time, in many parts of the world, boys are more often educat­
ed than girls, leading to their having different and/or higher level language compe­
tences. In Africa, for instance, men are twice as likely to be able to speak English as
women (Schmied 1991:30).

Thus we move to a consideration of Area B, the interface between sociological
and ideological contexts, whose focus is on how societies may distribute and legitimate particular economic goods and social services, constituting a kind of “material capital” (Giroux 1988:5). That the language competence of an individual is closely related to the socioeconomic status of his or her parents and community is amply illustrated by the trend among the educated in many third world countries to send their children to private primary schools at which the medium of instruction is English, a vernacular may or may not be taught, and French is not infrequently taught even at that level. Furthermore, the print media are usually available both in a vernacular and in English, but only the literate, and often only those literate in English, can afford to buy the newspapers (see e.g. Chimombo 1998, Chimombo & Chimombo 1996). Material capital thus parallels and controls the cultural capital referred to above.

Turning now to the bottom half of the framework, in terms of the technological context as a whole Rumelhart (1990, quoted in Shore 1996:136) reveals its pervasiveness in the modern world when he states that “the inspiration for our theories and our understanding of abstract phenomena is always based on our experience with the technology of the time”. The technologization of communication is having an ever greater impact on the teaching and learning of languages, leading to a potentially dramatic change in the role of the language teacher (Mchombo 2000). At the same time, Crystal (1997:360) points out that English is the language of 80% of the information stored in the world’s electronic retrieval systems, and the vast majority of people communicating through the Internet do so in English, resulting in an ever more pervasive form of linguistic imperialism.

Area C (the interface between psychological and technological contexts) specifically consists of all the psycho-legal aspects of culture as they impact language teaching, including language rights, educational rights, and other aspects of cultural rights. Relating the psychological and technological contexts, Shore (1996:141) considers the significance of the invention of an alphabetic printing press “a psychological breakthrough of the first order”, making the word “into a kind of commodity”. One of the most significant cultural rights recognized in the late 20th century is to literacy in one’s first language, which the printing press theoretically made possible from the 15th century onward, but which has remained a major difficulty in many countries, with substantial differences in literacy rates of men and women and from one vernacular to another. The invention of the printing press and subsequent technological advances, culminating in those referred to above, have thus constituted, to paraphrase Giroux’s terms, a kind of techno-legal capital, which has had long-reaching implications for the rights of people in technologically poor societies.

These rights are then translated into policies, such as language policy, language-in-education policy, and cultural policy, in the political arena, at the interface between sociological and technological contexts in Area D of the framework (cf Spolsky
1989:26). Phillipson (1992:91) argues that language policy and language-in-education policy need to be considered as an integral part of a theory of language teaching and learning, not as a mere "backdrop which is not of central concern to language pedagogy" (cf. Judd 1978, 1987). Schmied's theoretical framework of features of native, second, or foreign/international languages (1991:34) is useful for comparing the different types of language learning and teaching contexts within a country as descriptive of its language and language-in-education policies, and it will be returned to below for discussion of the language learning and teaching context in Malawi.

Schumann's (1978) model, although focusing on informal second language acquisition rather than formal teaching and learning, takes account of cultural, political, economic, and technical features of the sociological context, as well as the psychological impact of attitudes at the individual and community level, thus in effect summarizing the four quadrants of the contextual framework outlined above. For example, the target language group's view of the second language group may be characterized as culturally, politically, socioeconomically, and/or technically dominant, -dominant, or subordinate, and likewise the second language group's view of the target language. Thus, as is often the case in many former colonies, the second language group or individuals within the group may view the target language culture as dominant, its political system as superior, its socioeconomic status as more attractive, and its technical provision as unsurpassed, all of which attitudes undermine attempts to encourage a more balanced, less biased teaching and learning context for vernacular languages.

Having described the contextual framework in general terms, it is important now to apply it systematically to the complex context of first, second, and foreign language teaching in Malawi in order to provide researchers in other contexts with a model for application. To simplify this application, the same order of presentation is followed as above: psychological-ideological; sociological-ideological; psychological-technological; and sociological-technological.

The language teaching context in Malawi, past and present

So as to clarify the contextual framework, the issues are now translated into the specific ideological, technological, psychological, and sociological contexts prevailing in Malawi, from colonial times through the 30-year period of Banda's dictatorship, to the first five-year term of the new regime, which came in after winning the first democratic general elections in 1994.2

As was discussed above, the psychological-ideological interface (Area A) highlights the educational and cultural aspects of a society's ideological context. Both language and religion are historically significant features of the ideological context of language teaching in Malawi. These two aspects of education and culture are inextri-
cably linked as a result of religious involvement in education, leading to the legitimation of different kinds of knowledge and skills in different areas of the country, and thus leaving a somewhat incoherent educational and cultural legacy for post-colonial Malawi.

For example, "[e]very [Yao] village had its koranic school" (Alpers 1972:174), but, "[a]lthough Arabic and Swahili were taught in certain areas in the country, writing was fostered by Christian missionaries" (S. Chimombo 1980:47). This reflects the nature of education among the Yao, with a focus on Islamic education rather than western-style education, i.e. literacy in Arabic, in order to read the Koran (Matiki 1991). Clearly, then, Arabic was learned as a foreign language by Malawian Muslims, largely by rote (S. Chimombo 1980, Chapter 1, cf. Schmied 1991:30).

Christianity, by contrast, sooner or later reached all the ethnic groups of Malawi. The strongest education was provided by the Free Church of Scotland’s Livingstonia Mission schools in northern Malawi, such that “[b]y 1904, sixty per cent of the pupils receiving education in Malawi did so in Livingstonia’s schools, while all those obtaining post-primary training attended the Overtoun Institution [at Livingstonia Mission]” (McCracken 1972:231). This institute taught its courses through the medium of Chitumbuka (Kayambazinthu 1995:61) but “had a substantial English language component” (Vail & White 1989:154). The Henry Henderson Institute, founded by the Established Church of Scotland in Blantyre, southern Malawi, in the late 19th century, provided a similarly strong education, starting with Chinyanja as the medium of instruction and also moving on to English (K. Ross 1997, personal communication). By contrast, in central Malawi, which was culturally a much more homogeneous Chinyanja-speaking society, “education ... was controlled by French-speaking Roman Catholics and Afrikaans-speaking members of South Africa’s Dutch Reformed Church, both committed to policies that de-emphasized the use of English” (Vail & White 1989:174).

These differing mission/religious policies have had a major impact on Malawians’ language identity and identification. For example, the late President Banda insisted that English must be taught from Standard 1, not, as was recommend-ed by the Ministry of Education’s Primary Curriculum Review English Syllabus Committee in 1988, from Standard 3. On the other hand, one of the first moves on language policy of the democratically elected UDF government was to ease the ban on vernacular languages other than Chinyanja, first in the media, and subsequently, in early 1996, in primary education. This issue will be discussed in more detail below, when considering the significance of the language policies of the past 100 years for the political context of language teaching in Malawi.

Another aspect of the ideological context in Malawi is the position of women in the traditional society. This was, in the past, reflected in the imbalance between boys
and girls in full-time schooling, at least in the centre and south, a situation which the UDF government tried to redress by promoting free education at secondary level for girls (GABLE and SMC-EQ Projects3), with the assistance of donor input. This points to the economic aspect of culture. Prior to this initiative, under Banda, only one-third of places in secondary schools were for girls, and two-thirds for boys; a small percentage of girls of school-going age managed to complete secondary education, and an even smaller percentage made it to the University.

While the lack of places for girls was not a major issue until relatively recently, however, the policy of distribution of university places by district as well as merit, rather than by merit alone, discriminated against the northerners, favouring those in the central region in particular, who had been slow to see the advantages of western-style education. Just one example of the educational advantage northerners enjoyed compared with the centre, where "virtually no Chewa intellectuals emerged from [the] educational milieu" of the missions (Vail & White 1989:174), is illustrated by the Annual Report for Mzimba District, 1936: "compulsory education in Chikulasmayembe's country has ceased to be an experiment and is becoming an accomplished fact" (quoted by Vail & White 1989:159).

With respect to the sociological-ideological interface (Area B) arises the issue of both the sociological and the economic implications of a failure by the first post-colonial government to initiate a comprehensive language survey. Such a survey would have made it possible to get accurate information reflecting the actual language, educational, and cultural situation in the country, as the basis for a coherent policy on languages in education. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, it was the missions which assessed which language was appropriate for use in education and evangelization, and which bore the consequent costs. The British colonial administration initially accepted the various missions' language-in-education policies. In the late 1920s and early 1930s, however, they attempted to force "the adoption of a single official lingua franca [which] would both help unite the country and save money," but this failed as a result of Livingstonia Mission's express rejection of Chinyanja in favour of Chitumbuka (Vail & White 1989:164-165).

By 1966, however, Banda was able to claim that more than 50% of the population spoke Chinyanja (Vail & White 1989:180; see also fn. 157, p. 191). By 1968, he was in a position to impose Chinyanja as the national language, abolishing Chitumbuka as an official language and banning its use in the media.4 The national language was subsequently made a required passing subject for selection to secondary school (1989:183). Thus, while it was taught as a first language from the first year of primary education, it was actually a first language for no more than 50% of the population, the majority of children being forced to acquire literacy skills in a language at least half of them did not speak. In March 1996, however, the UDF government
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announced a policy change: every child should be allowed to use his/her mother tongue in the first three-four years of primary education. The new policy highlighted the need for a series of language surveys, which have indeed now been carried out with donor funding for Chiyao, Chitumbuka, Chilomwe, and Chisena (Centre for Language Studies 1999), and a language-in-education policy has been drafted and is awaiting approval from the Ministry of Education (Alfred Matiki 2003, personal communication).

Much of the above discussion has hinted at the issue of language rights in Malawi, bringing us to the psychological-technological interface (Area C) of the contextual framework. Clearly, while prior to independence there was a certain amount of flexibility in the absence of a specific language policy, between 1968 and 1994 there was no legal provision for the teaching of vernacular languages other than Chinyanja. However, although it became illegal to teach in Chitumbuka or in any other local language, in practice teachers did use local languages to help their pupils master literacy skills in the second and third languages, Chinyanja and English, at some risk to themselves. In terms of educational rights, in Malawi education was neither free nor compulsory either before independence or throughout the 30-year dictatorship. In the last two years of the Banda régime, 1992-1994, the first three years of primary education were free, but the policy change had very little impact on school attendance. It was only when the UDF government made all eight years of primary education free that children flocked to school, with enrollment doubling in the first year of the new policy. Nonetheless, primary education remains voluntary, the problems of hasty implementation of free primary education resulted in a large proportion of those enrollments not completing the first year (1994-1995), and there has been a serious drop in educational quality, all of which facts naturally have implications for the literacy rate in the country.

Thus economics has clearly had a major impact on language and educational rights. The vernacular-languages-in-education policy introduced in 1996 will require not only materials developed for the actual teaching of literacy skills, but also follow-up materials for reinforcing the newly acquired skills, by way of readers, newspapers, etc. Furthermore, given the suppression of languages other than Chinyanja in the 30 years 1964-1994, there is a dearth of teachers able to read and write their first language who would thus be in a position to actually teach the new generation of primary school pupils in that language, so the economics of teacher training and/or upgrading in multiple local languages is also at issue.5

The suppression of language and educational rights during the dictatorship, leading to restrictive language and educational policies, affected adversely the vitality of Malawi’s culture. While Chinyanja was accorded status as the national language of the country, English was the official language, and was (and still is) taught from
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Standard 1 as a subject, becoming the medium of instruction from Standard 5 onwards. But even more significant was Banda's apparent contempt for all local traditions, and emphasis on the Classics, as revealed by his establishment of Kamuzu Academy, at which students were required to study Latin and Greek to at least 'O' level, because he claimed that no one was educated unless they knew the Classical languages.

Thus, with the constraints on use of the local languages other than Chinyanja, and the undervaluing of their cultures, "[l]anguage was the means of spiritual subjugation" (Ngugi wa Thiong'o 1986:9). The rich storytelling tradition and the developing literatures in local languages, having been somewhat sidelined in the colonial era, were effectively further put on hold for the 30 years following political independence from Britain. Budding writers felt an obligation to mimic the literary patterns of alien cultures, such as rhyming verse and iambic metre, rather than developing their own traditions derived from oral poetry and performance (cf. S. Chimombo 1999, and Odora 1994, cited by Brock-Utne 1997, with reference to Uganda). Moreover, the analysis of Chinyanja was bound to a Latin-based grammar, with loanwords such as adevere-bu ("adverb") being introduced to describe the structures of a southern Bantu language.6

Given the lack of documentation of the history of French teaching and learning in the country, only what has been gleaned from conversations with staff at the French Cultural Centre, Blantyre, and the French Department at Chancellor College, University of Malawi, as well as the Catholic secondary schools opened by Canadian French-speaking Marist brothers, can be reported here.7 It appears that the teaching of French started formally in 1962, following an Organization of African Unity (OAU) meeting in Addis Ababa which decided that French should be offered in all Anglophone countries and English in all Francophone countries. The former president, Banda, went to Europe in the same year, at the time self-rule was first granted to Malawi by the British government, to seek aid. To this end, he met President de Gaulle, and a protocol was signed for the introduction of French as a subject in secondary schools, with France providing co-opérants as teachers, as well as all the necessary teaching materials, including reel-to-reel tape recorders, felt boards, and other audio-visual aids. French was offered as a subject at the University of Malawi as soon as it opened in 1965, but the local training of Malawian teachers of French did not begin until the 1980s. Prior to that, University of Malawi graduates in French attended short courses on teaching methods in France. The above outline clearly indicates the impact of political and economic imperialism in language teaching and learning.

The psychological, sociological, and ideological implications of the technological support provided by both the British and French governments, including the setting up of the British Council offices and French Cultural Centres, need to be carefully
analyzed in the context not only of Malawi’s language, education, and cultural policies but also of the educational aid policies of Britain and France over the past thirty years. Most grants have not been of the kind described by Brock-Utne (1997:4) as “educational aid for empowerment”, but rather, to use her term again, “culturally conditional” aid. Malawi is still far from the progress that countries like Namibia (Brock-Utne 1997:4-5) have made, for example in monitoring cultural and gender bias in the nationwide secondary school examinations.

Table 1: Sociolinguistic and linguistic features of native, second, and foreign languages taught in Malawi
(adapted from Schmied 1991:34)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Features</th>
<th>Vernacular languages e.g. Chinyanja</th>
<th>English as a second language</th>
<th>French as a foreign language</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>status</td>
<td>national</td>
<td>official</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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<td>communicative range</td>
<td>inTRAnational regional lingua franca</td>
<td>inTRAnational</td>
<td>inTERnational</td>
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<td>multilingualism</td>
<td>societal</td>
<td>societal</td>
<td>individual</td>
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<td>acquisition from</td>
<td>parents formal education</td>
<td>environment/media formal education</td>
<td>formal education</td>
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<tr>
<td>motivation for acquisition</td>
<td>expressive integrative instrumental</td>
<td>integrative and/or instrumental</td>
<td>integrative and/or instrumental</td>
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<tr>
<td>prestige</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>very high</td>
<td>high</td>
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<tr>
<td>target norm</td>
<td>indigenous national</td>
<td>utilitarian</td>
<td>utilitarian international</td>
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<tr>
<td>variation</td>
<td>ethnic social regional</td>
<td>ethnic educational</td>
<td>educational</td>
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<tr>
<td>interference/generalization</td>
<td>weak</td>
<td>strong</td>
<td>very strong</td>
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<tr>
<td>fluency</td>
<td>essential</td>
<td>important</td>
<td>restricted</td>
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<tr>
<td>stylistic range</td>
<td>very broad</td>
<td>broad</td>
<td>restricted</td>
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Schmied's framework (1991:34) provides a useful tool for summarizing the current first, second, and foreign language situation in Malawi, since it pulls together the main threads of the discussion. Table 1, above, presents an adaptation of that framework to the complexity of first, second, and foreign language learning and teaching contexts in Malawi implied in the discussion. The overall ideological context is implicit in the features of “status” and “prestige”; the sociological context in those of
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"communicative range", "multilingualism", "target norm", and "variation"; and the psychological context in those of "acquisition from", "motivation for acquisition", and "interference/generalization", as well as "prestige". The political context is not immediately apparent, but aspects of language policy are implicit in "fluency" and "stylistic range". What is clear, however, is the overall significance of contextual features for the teaching and learning of languages in Malawi.

The Language-Learning-Context Interface

The four contextual components outlined above and applied to Malawi's language learning and teaching situation are intended to correspond to the four components of language and the four components of learning. The language framework: Content, Expression, Substance, and Form (adapted from Mackey 1967 by Chimombo 1986), is plotted against the contextual framework (Figure 1 above), in Figure 2, below:

Figure 2: A synthesis of the frameworks for the analysis of language and context

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phenomena</th>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Economic</th>
<th>Social</th>
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<tr>
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In other words, theoretically, and this is a hypothesis that will need to be tested by empirical research, the content, expression, substance, and form of a first, second, or foreign language will be best taught in a congruent ideological, technological, psy-
Moira Chimombo

chological, and sociological context. Specifically, the content of a first, second, or foreign language (Areas A+B of the language framework), i.e. the meanings of the first, second, or foreign language culture as expressed in the semantics, discourse, and pragmatics of the language, will be best learned in a context which takes account of the ideology of the society with regard to educational, cultural, economic and social aspects (Areas A+B of the contextual framework). Therefore, the content of first language instruction should reflect educational, cultural, economic, and social aspects of the society's ideology and thus, at the same time, awareness of the ideological context of education in that society; and the content of second or foreign language instruction should take cognisance of educational, cultural, economic, and social aspects of both the source and target language societies' ideologies and thus, concurrently, awareness of the ideological contexts of both education systems.

The expression of the first, second, or foreign language (Areas C+D of the language framework), i.e. the phonetics/phonology, morphology, and syntax of the spoken language and the corresponding features of the written language, will theoretically be best mastered within a technologically appropriate context (Areas C+D of the contextual framework). So while the oral expression of the first language is normally mastered in the low-technology context of the home, its written expression may best be taught within a technology-rich classroom environment. On the other hand, both the oral and written expression of the second or foreign language may best be taught within a technology-rich classroom environment.

The substance of the first, second, or foreign language (Areas A+C of the language framework), i.e. the events and experiences that the language learner has been through and can talk or write about, will theoretically be best internalized in a psychologically favourable context (Areas A+C of the contextual framework). This means that the substance of the first language is likely to be best internalized in a context in which the parents and/or teacher value both the learners and their language and experiences; and similarly, the second or foreign language is best mastered when the teacher affirms both the source and target languages, as well as the experiences of the learners.

Lastly, the form of the first, second, or foreign language (Areas B+D of the language framework), i.e. the pronunciation, stress, and intonation of the spoken language and the spelling, punctuation, and organization of the written language, will theoretically be best mastered in an appropriate sociological context (Areas B+D of the contextual framework). So the first language spoken forms will normally be acquired most thoroughly in the course of the informal process of socialization into the first language culture, and the written forms will be best taught in the normal formal socialization process of that particular society, that is, the formal education system. The second language spoken forms will be best acquired in a similar way to the
first language, if the second language is being acquired in the target language coun-
try, that is, in the informal socialization process of the target language society. On the
other hand, both second and foreign language spoken and written forms will be best
taught in the formal educational system when the second or foreign language is being
learned in the home country, provided that the educational system takes account of the
enculturation processes of the target language.

Figure 3: A Synthesis of the Frameworks for the Analysis of
Learning and Contextual Theories

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<tr>
<th>COGNITION</th>
<th>AFFECT</th>
<th>PHYSICAL</th>
<th>SOCIALIZATION</th>
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<td>Y R</td>
<td>RECEPTIVE LEARNING-manifested in-&gt;PRODUCTIVE PERFORMANCE</td>
<td>R O</td>
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<td>G education, and cultural rights)</td>
<td>policy, and cultural policy)</td>
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</table>

The framework for analyzing the four types of learning: Meaningful Learning / Rote Learning, Cognition / Affect, and Physical Development / Socialization (Chimombo 1986), is likewise plotted against the contextual framework, in Figure 3, above. In other words, again theoretically, an approach which pays attention to meaningful learning (Areas A+B of the learning framework) is more likely to be congruent with a context which recognizes the ideology of the society with regard to educational, cultural, economic, and social aspects (Areas A+B of the contextual framework), and therefore more likely to lead to successful learning of target language meanings; a rote learning approach (Areas C+D of the learning framework) is most applicable within an appropriate technological context (Areas C+D of the contextual frame-
work), and will probably result in greater mastery of the expression of the language; an approach which recognizes the role of cognition and affect (Areas A+C of the learning framework) in learning will be more successful in a psychologically favourable context (Areas A+C of the contextual framework), reflecting the events and experiences of the learners; and an approach which takes account of the physical development and socialization of the learner (Areas B+D of the learning framework) will facilitate greater learning in an appropriate sociological context (Areas B+D of the contextual framework), enabling the learners to internalize effectively the target language forms.

Specifically, learning to speak the first language is almost inevitably meaningful because it occurs within the ideologically compatible context of the immediate family and community of the learner. On the other hand, it is much more difficult to achieve meaningful learning of a second or foreign language, whether speech or writing, because of the difficulty of ensuring the compatibility of the source and target language ideological contexts. However, it is hypothesized that an approach that takes account of meaning in teaching a second or foreign language will result in greater learning in a context of compatibility between source and target language ideologies.

Rote learning is more likely to lead to successful mastery of the expression of the language in an appropriate technological context, particularly in second and foreign language learning and teaching situations. Rote learning is generally not applicable in learning to speak the first language, but in learning basic literacy skills in the formal education system, rote techniques of teaching may help to ensure mastery. In the case of second and foreign language teaching, rote techniques may be extremely useful in helping learners achieve mastery of pronunciation, stress, and intonation of the target language, particularly in the early stages. For those having to learn a different writing system, similar techniques may be useful in teaching second/foreign language literacy skills. Such rote techniques may be greatly facilitated by the use of audio-visual technology, for example interactive video, and other forms of computer-assisted language learning, in technology-rich contexts.

Cognitive and affective development, i.e. internal learning, are most likely to be promoted in a psychologically favourable educational and cultural context of consonance between the family, community, and school environments. In the case of first language acquisition, cognitive and affective development go hand in hand with linguistic development. But once the learner enters the formal educational system, very often there is an overemphasis on cognition and the tendency to ignore affect as equally important components of internalization of literacy skills. The failure to balance cognition and affect in second and foreign language learning and teaching is generally more pronounced, and given the difficulty of ensuring a psychologically favourable context in this case, it is far more serious. It is thus hypothesized that, in the case of
second and foreign language learning and teaching, the more consonance there is between the educational and cultural contexts of family, community, and school environments, the greater the cognitive and affective development of the learners, and consequently the higher the level of mastery of the second and/or foreign language.

Finally, physical development and socialization, i.e. external learning, are almost inevitable in an economically and socially favourable family, community, and/or school context, particularly in the case of first language acquisition. In the case of second and foreign language learning, however, generally speaking, far less attention is paid to the learners’ physical and social development than even to affective development. It is hypothesized, therefore, that the more physical and socializing activity there is in the classroom or appropriate alternative facilities, i.e. the more economically and socially developed is the school context, the higher the performance of the learners will be in the target language.

In the above analysis, it is important to realize that the intention is not to advocate any one aspect of language, any one approach to language teaching, or any one aspect of context to the exclusion of others. On the contrary, it is the belief of the author that the most successful language teacher will be the one who takes account of the appropriate approach for a particular aspect of a first, second, or foreign language in a particular context. Just which approach for which aspect of content in which context needs to be researched, both for the teaching and learning of languages and for other subjects.

Conclusion

When one begins to analyze the contextual features of any particular language teaching situation, the danger is that one will be overwhelmed. It is hoped that, by presenting a framework to facilitate the examination of these contexts, the task is simplified, making it easier to systematically identify and consider the implications of each aspect of these contexts. The teacher should thus be in a better position to develop his or her own theory of teaching, taking account of all aspects of context, as well as content and learning.

In a short article, it is not possible to go into the detail that such a complex topic merits. Hopefully, however, the way has been opened up to further research, particularly in Africa and other third world areas, on the implications for all education, not just language education, of a broad range of complexly related contextual features. This article presents research in progress. Major revisions to the contextual framework in particular, but also to the frameworks for language and learning, will become necessary as more information is collected, especially when empirical research is carried out to test the validity of the hypotheses arising out of the integration of the three frameworks.
Notes

1Brock-Utne (1997:4) defines a cultural conditionality as “a conditionality set by the lender or donor which has direct implications for the content of schooling, for instance, the insistence on textbooks written and published abroad, the use of examination systems devised in the West, insistence on ‘international’ (read: Western) standards and the negligence of African culture, including African languages.”

2Malawi was named “Nyasaland” by the British in 1891, and retained that name until independence in 1964. Furthermore, the national language of Malawi under Banda was called Chichewa, although previously it had been named Chinyanja. To simplify matters, I refer to “Malawi” and “Chinyanja” throughout, without wishing at any point to suggest a political stance.

3GABLE (Girls’ Attainment in Basic Literacy and Education) was replaced by SMC-EQ (Social Mobilisation Campaign—Educational Quality) in 1998.

4There was no television in Malawi, except by satellite, until TV-Malawi was introduced in 1999.

5Chauma, Chimombo, & Mtenje (1997), for example, found that in Zomba, of 59 primary school teachers who spoke a first language other than Chinyanja, 21 stated that they were unable to read and write the first language.

6Fortunately, a new grammar of Chinyanja was published in 1999 (Nkhoma 1999), which employs descriptive terms more appropriate to the nature of an agglutinating language.

7Brother Gerard was one of the first teachers of French in the country. He introduced French as a subject at Likuni Boys Secondary School (personal communication, October 1997). Allan Lipenga, Lecturer in French Methods at Chancellor College, has researched the history of the teaching of French in Malawi, examining in addition the language policies of the French-speaking missionaries (personal communication, October 1997 and August 1999).

8The theory is still in the process of evolving, therefore subject to major revisions. Readers are invited to critique any or all aspects of the language, learning, and context frameworks and the hypotheses on their interrelationships, to make them more usable and user-friendly.

9Readers who wish to understand in more depth the language and learning frameworks are referred to Chimombo (1986). It is impossible in this paper to do more than touch on the definitions of the different components of these earlier frameworks.

10There is, however, mounting research evidence to suggest that literacy skills in both first and bilingual language acquisition may be better taught in a meaningful learning context similar to that of first language acquisition of speech skills (e.g. Chimombo & Soederbergh 2003).

References


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