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ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE USE OF SONJAY AS A LANGUAGE OF EDUCATION IN GAO (NORTHERN MALI)

Abstract

Experimentation of the mother tongues as media of education started in Mali in 1979. In 1994, mother-tongue based education started to be generalised to all the Malian public schools. But, how do key school stakeholders feel about this policy? Adopting the mentalist approach to attitude study, the researcher has used the self-report method for the data collection. The analysis of the data shows that most participants have an aversion for Sonjay as their children's language of education and advocate French as the only language of instruction. It equally displays that educated and wealthy people withdraw their children from public Sonjay-based schools and send them to private classical French-based ones.

Keywords: attitudes, native languages, Sonjay, French, Sonjay-French based education.

Introduction

Mali is a multilingual and multicultural nation. Multilingualism is recognised by law N°96-049 of August 2nd 1996 which confers on thirteen local languages the status of national languages allowing their use in education. Since the first days of independence, the Malian authorities have been aware of the importance of mother tongue based education and have begun to design language policies in that sense. While different sources come up with different figures (Canvin 2003, 40 languages, SIL-Mali, 36 languages, and Ethnologue 2005, 50 languages) regarding the number of languages in use throughout the country, only thirteen have acquired the status of national languages. They are: Bamanankan, Bomu, Bozo, Dogoso, Fulfulde, Hasaniya, Mamara, Maninkakan, Sonjay, Soninke, Syenara, Tamasheq, and Xasongaxanoo. Sonjay is dominant throughout the North and Bamanankan remains not only dominant but also a lingua franca throughout the South. In central Mali, the principal language is Fulfulde, often side by side with spreading Bamanankan.

In addition to these thirteen languages, the French language inherited from colonisation is present and dominant in every sphere of the public administration. It has been the language of education, the public administration, mass media, the government, etc. In short, French has been the language of educated people who use it to ‘communicate’ with about eighty percent of the population (who unfortunately, do not understand it), and to dominate them.

In fact, when Mali became independent in 1960, only 7% of its population could read and write (Traoré, 2001). The new government quickly undertook a system of mass and quality education. The results achieved were somewhat poor. The Education Reform of 1962 was meant to solve this state of illiteracy by advocating the use of native languages in education as soon as conditions would allow. The assumption behind that policy was that language (and the mother tongue in particular) is the main instrument of development. Education should therefore begin with/and in the mother tongue for the reasons Joseph Poth (1988) states: *“yes, the child is at ease in his mother tongue as when he is in the hands of his mother, and in denying him the possibility of using the familiar linguistic support which can meet his basic need of expression and creativity, the school by the same token, puts him in a situation of regression”*.

Most sub-Saharan African people tend to perceive education as learning in/a foreign language, i.e., the acquisition of skills which the wider majority of the population does not have (elitism). In Mali, the use of French as a medium of instruction has resulted in school failure: high rate of school drop-outs (15.6%) and exclusion, class repetition (28.8%), and a psychological blockage on the part of the learner (Konaté and Tamboura, 1999). The point is that language usually stands as the vehicle of social and cultural values. The use of a foreign language (in the case of Mali, French) implies that the system is using that language to inculcate the French social and cultural values, disconnecting by the same token, the learner from his/her true social environment. In addition, pupils learning in French are faced with a double task: they have to cope with the new language they are exposed to; they also have to cope with the acquisition of science in that language. The Sonjay-French medium pupil faces only one task, that of learning science.

Language attitudes are often defined “as the feelings people have about their own language or the language(s) of others. These may be positive or negative: someone may particularly value a foreign language [e.g. because of its literary history] or think that a language is especially difficult to learn [e.g. because the script is off-putting]” (Crystal, 2003:256). Attitudes about language can affect the use of a language/variety over an area and

may even impact the users of that language/variety. Studies on language attitudes abound and there are theories related to their orientation.

1. Literature review

Research on language attitudes can be traced back to the early 1930s. A pioneering work by Pear (1931) attempted to find out if a speaker's voice can display enough cues for reliable and valid personality assessment. The study concludes that assessment is done on the basis of stereotypes of the personality of the speaker according to the kind of voice sound produced. Fay and Middleton (1939, 1940) carried out studies in the same direction and came to like conclusions.

Increasing awareness about the salient role of language in citizens' lives has led most governments to design policies to regulate the use of one or more language(s) in specific areas. Whether poor or rich, all nations tend to defend their languages because denying a people the use of its own language(s) is tantamount to denying it its identity. Policies seem more urgent in multilingual nations where the choice of one official language and/or one language of education for all children may become a threat to, otherwise, a thorn in the flesh of governments.

When a policy is designed and implemented, it is important to stop at times and look back to the people who are affected by that policy and investigate how they feel about it, i.e., there should be an analysis of their feelings, perceptions or even behaviours about that policy. Baker (1988:112) considers that the success or failure of a language policy partly depends on attitudes surrounding the language(s) in question. Lewis (1981:262 cited in Baker 1988) observes that every language policy, especially in the field of education, has to account for the attitudes of the people who are likely to be affected by that policy. In the long run, no policy can be successful if it does not conform to the expressed attitudes of those who are involved, persuade those who have negative attitudes about the rightness of the policy, or try to remove the causes of disagreement. Crystal (2003) defends that trend and posits that understanding people's attitudes remains an important aspect of assessing the likely success or failure of a language programme or a piece of language planning and determine how to remedy, and underlines, by the same token, the great importance which should be ascribed to knowledge of language attitudes among users.

Schiffman (1997:4) expresses like feelings and stresses that attention should be given to attitude studies in policy design because *"they may affect the implementation of policy and cause it to fail. Or results may be obtained that are not anticipated or predicted, THE LAW*

OF UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES, resources may be wasted, no changes result, with perhaps even backlash against the policy”.

Research on language attitudes in sub-Saharan Africa shows that there is usually a reticence (to) and even a rejection of the native languages as media of education at school, and a positive perception of former colonial languages. Adegbija (in A Kwaa. 1996: 1) recognises that, *“there are disproportionate attitudes of superiority toward European languages in sub-Saharan Africa, while there are attitudes of low esteem and inferiority toward indigenous African languages”*. He gives two basic reasons behind such attitudes: first, European languages as the languages of the conquest of Africa are considered as superior to the African ones. Second, Europeans have continued in their former colonies to pursue highly aggressive language policies which ended up by definitely convincing even educated African people that their cultures and languages are inferior to European ones. In this sense, Kwaa (1996:2) argues that, *“In the French and Portuguese territories, the use of African languages was proscribed. Such policies created, in the minds of the students and in the general public, the impression that African languages were inferior and less suitable for use at higher levels of education”*. That statement appears all the more true that in sub-Saharan Africa, education is seen as learning a foreign language (usually languages inherited from colonisation) that the big majority of the population does not know so as to keep that majority under control and manipulate it. Diakité (2002:6) very explicitly depicts the policy behind the adoption and maintenance of colonial languages as medium of education. He maintains that the use of the native language as the first medium of instruction seems to better guarantee success at school, but that success at school simply pertains to success in the French language. In fact, the concern is not to replace French by native languages in education, but to prepare pupils for better learning, mastery and success of that French language; that can be achieved through the development of automatisms that allow the learners to improve and do better than when they start school straight in French. Diakité succinctly highlights how important the colonial language is in the eyes of African people: *“In the system set up right from the beginning of experimental classes, the native languages have been made ‘bastards’ which were to gradually disappear and to be replaced by the legitimate medium, the only one capable of promoting both success at school and success simply, that is, success in life”*.

Educated people tend to be the first ‘enemy’ of their own languages in the sense that they are the first to *reject mother tongue based education just because, according to Kwaa (1996:3), they are “the Western-educated elite (who are also the policy makers and political*

power brokers in their respective countries) for hanging on to unworkable colonial language policies in order to perpetuate their own political power over the majority of citizens less proficient in the European languages". In plain words, they do not just want to perpetuate their own power, they also want to perpetuate that of their children who usually have the means and the opportunities to go abroad to learn foreign languages and science and techniques. The poor (the overwhelming majority of people) will not have such opportunities. In this sense, Kwaa (1996:3) is right when he postulates that *"generally, then, while all the languages are apparently equal, it does seem that in terms of national and official functionality, at least, some are more equal than others"*.

Attitude studies in the Malian context are scanty. Mariko (1993:27-38) conducted a study on parents' attitudes toward the introduction of native languages into the educational system. The study concluded that while some parents did express worries about the innovation, most of them were in favour of mother-tongue based education. The results of this study correlate with those of the first experimental studies which showed that parents were unfavourable at the beginning of the process but accepted the approach because they could not do otherwise. However, when they perceived the positive results (100% admission rate by the pupils of the Banakoroni school in the region of Ségou in 1985) achieved by their children, they all became favourable.

Haidara (1998) investigated parents' perception about mother tongue based education in Ségou. The study displays that 63.8% of parents value the native languages and have favourable perceptions about them. The study also demonstrates that while some parents send their children to experimental schools because there are no French based schools nearby, the majority of them are satisfied with the results.

While a number of studies have been carried out about mother tongue-based education in Mali (Traoré 2001, Haidara 2004, Konaté and Tamboura 1999), very few have tackled the issue of the *attitudes* of people. Regarding the Sonjay language in particular, no study is known to have taken place on attitude studies. This paper aims to identify the attitudes of key school stakeholders towards their children's languages of education in Gao. The research also aims to analyse problems that could arise from the use of Sonjay-French in a bilingual educational context and to propose solutions.

Two hypotheses have been developed:

1. People in the Commune of Gao prefer the Sonjay-French combination as the languages of education for their children.

2. People in the Commune of Gao prefer French as the only language of education for their children.

2. Theoretical framework

Different researchers differently perceive the concept of ‘language attitudes’. There are two major competing theoretical approaches to language attitude study: the behaviourist and the mentalist (Appel and Muysken, 1987, p16). The behaviourist theory perceives and explains attitudes in terms of their actual use in communicative interaction and has just an affective component. A proponent of this theory is Fasold (1984:147-48) who perceives attitudes in terms of reactions that people display in social situations. The mentalist theory considers attitudes as an inner mental state or disposition that may be conducive to overt behaviour and involves the following three components –affective, conative and cognitive. Most attitude studies rely on the mentalist approach (Appel & Muysken, 1987; Baker, 1992; Bosch & De-Klerk, 1996; Cargile & Giles, 1998; El-Dash & Busnardo, 2001; Hoare & Coveney, 2000; Ioratin-Uba, 1995, 2001; Long, 1999; Payne, Downing & Fleming, 2000; Pieras, 2000).

Smit (1996) suggests that when researching language attitudes, the specificities of the nature of multilingual communities should be taken into account. For this study, Giles, Bourhis and Taylor’s (1977) Theory of Language in Ethnic-group Relations appear particularly useful in determining why attitudes are formed as a result of those relations. The theory perceives language as one of the principal bases for categorising people into social groups. Language in intergroup contexts may represent in-group inclusion or solidarity or out-group exclusion. Inferior or subordinate group members usually have negative perceptions about their language/variety or speech style. Edwards (1994), in the same vein, considers that in a multilingual area, the high-status language or language variety group is often positively perceived by the in-group and out-group (lower-status) members; that of the lower-status group is often negatively perceived by either group (Aziakpono and Bekker, 2010:41).

In inter-group comparison, language holds an important function in the sense that the importance of the language of a group seen as a symbol of group identity appears highly significant when the in-group is compared to the other groups. Members of a lower group who through intergroup comparison, perceive options to the prevailing situation generally embark on linguistic strategies to improve their social identity. The consequence at the individual level will be social mobility that often involves the adoption of the high-status language or variety, while at the group level, there will be the alternatives of assimilation and

redefinition of negative characteristics that respectively involve the shift of a whole subordinate group to the language of the dominant group or a re-evaluation of the language of the group in a more positive light. That re-evaluation may inspire in the relevant language variety and positive attitude towards it (Giles et al., 1977 in Aziakpono and Bekker, 2010:41). In the same vein, Sonjay speakers of Gao may want to shift from Sonjay to French in the sense that they may not want their children to be in a bilingual Sonjay-French system, but in a French-only based system just because that language may be seen as a high status one. Therefore, they may just want to upgrade their status and integrate the users of that French language. That does not necessarily imply that they do not like their mother tongue, but they have come to develop a better image of the French language and its users: colonial languages symbolise power; and s/he who masters them masters power.

3. Research Methodology

Research on language attitudes requires the self-report method. The researcher's decision to use this method stems from the fact that the hypotheses he is working on can only be best elicited by a descriptive approach, the most appropriate research tool to measure attitudes. In this sense, a questionnaire is designed and administered to a random sample of eighteen (18) teachers; the questionnaire is coupled with a series of interviews with a sample of twenty-nine (29) pupils, five (5) Parent Teacher Association (PTA) members, nine (9) members of the School Management Committee (SMC), three (3) members of the Child Mother Association (CMA), and (30) laymen making a total of 98 informants.

Both research tools have their strengths and weaknesses. The questionnaire gives time and freedom of thinking to the respondent and frees him from psychological pressure, while at the same time it deprives him of the possibility of asking for clarifications about items he might not understand. The interview on the other hand gives the respondent the possibility of understanding every item put because of the presence of the researcher or his assistant, but that same presence of the interviewer might have a negative impact on the interviewee.

The type of interview adopted used is the focused one. Robson (1993:240-1) citing an earlier study by Merton, Fiske, and Kendal (1956) describes it as *“an approach which allows people's views and feelings to emerge, but which gives the interviewer some control”*. The questions to ask are printed on a form; but the interviewer keeps a tape recorder, and written records, with the permission of the interviewee, of everything that is said. Then, the interview papers and tapes are assembled and analyzed in the same conditions as the questionnaire papers.

The type of questions adocated is the closed form-characterised by the limitations imposed upon the number of options proposed to the respondent in each item. C. Robson (1993:247) thinks that “*closed questions are usually preferable to open questions,*” though they are not always easy to design and though they do not always give freedom of response to the informant. But they are usually easier to analyse. The author also maintains that “specific questions are better than general ones” as they ensure greater standardisation.

4. Results

4.1. French based Teachers’ Attitudes

The respondents have all been teaching in French only. Most of them (75%) would like to carry on teaching in French only, which they consider superior to the Sonjay-French system because, in their views, the students perform higher starting from the seventh grade. Interestingly, one informant assumes that the students do not learn better when the teaching medium is French, and as we shall see later, he thinks that they learn better under the Sonjay-French system.

The informants further agree that language is a factor in the development of a country, and (75%) that French can play this role. It is significant to underline that French is often perceived as an elitist language giving people access to elitist knowledge. Consequently, these teachers may also be proud to be elitist teachers sharing elitist knowledge in an elitist language. The same respondents (75%) equally consider that French as a language of education opens up equal opportunities to all Malian children.

In terms of self image, the majority of these teachers (75%) ascertain that they are on equal footing with their Sonjay-French medium counterparts. All of them think that they are equal to their Sonjay-French based counterparts who, in their turn, express the same feeling. Additionally, they (75%) believe that the products of the French based school system have advantages over their bilingual Sonjay-French counterparts, and by the same token, express the view that French as the sole language of education has a bright future in Mali. The table below illustrates.

Do you feel-----to Sonjay-French counterparts?						Do your Sonjay-French counterparts show that they’re-----to you?					
inferior		<i>equal</i>		superior		inferior		<i>equal</i>		superior	
0	0%	4	100%	0	0%	0	0%	4	100%	0	0%

Table N°1: French based teachers’ attitudes towards their Sonjay-French based counterparts.

The teachers all have children who go to school. Most of them (75%) send their children to private schools where French is the only language of education, and where they have nevertheless to pay tuition fees; distance, wind, heat, money or any other negative

factors will not prevent them from sending their children to French based schools where education carried out in French. In short, the majority of French based teachers support French as the only language to use in the ducation of children.

4.2. Sonjay-French based Teachers' Attitudes

Most of the teachers in this group (78.57%) have already taught in the Sonjay-French system, while three (21.43%) are new. While 42.85% do not want to continue to teach in Sonjay, 50% would like to. Coupled with that, the issue of the teaching conditions has been stressed by most Sonjay-French based teachers (64.28%) who posit that they do not have adequate didactic materials for their classes. The rest of the group (35.71%) defends the opposite view.

The importance of the use of Sonjay as a language of education has been emphasised by the majority of Sonjay-French based teachers (64.28%) who believe that students learn better under the Sonjay-French based approach. At this level, it clearly appears that the majority of the bilingual Sonjay-French teachers defend the superiority of Sonjay-French based system over the French based one; but it is useful to signal that the same majority asserted earlier that there were no adequate teaching materials. In other words, they consider that Sonjay-French based education is good in essence, but poorly implemented: the current teaching conditions appear inadequate. This perception goes hand in hand with one headmaster's statement that the Sonjay-French based system is superior to the French based one if the teaching conditions are improved; and he sadly recognises that this has not been the case. Sonjay-French based teachers (57.14%) also maintain that the bilingual Sonjay-French based system does not reduce the rate of school failure (at least in its current form); only six inforlants (42.85%) contend that it does.

Regarding the place of Sonjay in science and technology, most teachers (64.28%) think that this language cannot express most scientific concepts. The responses provided suggest that the Sonjay language needs further research for standardisation, dictionary-making, borrowing, etc. (status and corpus planning); and the work is being conducted by the Malian Language Academy (AMALAN).

Sonjay-French based teachers (71.42%) also assert that their system is not meant for poor families (well to do families are said to send their children to private schools); they (57.14%) equally argue that it does not weaken the learners' level of education. While most Sonjay-French based teachers (78.57%) believe that language is a development factor of a

country, only a handful (35.71%) considers that Sonjay can play this role. A significant number of informants (42.85%) supports that Sonjay cannot play this role; but French can.

language can be a factor for a country's development				Sonjay can play this role			
<i>can</i>		<i>cannot</i>		<i>can</i>		<i>cannot</i>	
11	78.57%	3	21.42%	5	35.71%	6	42.85%

Table N°2: Negative attitudes towards Sonjay as a factor of development in Mali.

Sonjay-French based teachers seem to like and defend the Sonjay language, and would like to see it preserved as a language of education; nonetheless, most of them do not think that this language can ensure the development of Mali.

A look at how French is perceived by Sonjay-French based teachers reveals that most teachers (57.14%) believe that language can be a country's development factor and that French can play this role, disagreeing with the commonly held view that *no country can develop in a foreign language*. A wider number (64.28%) defends that this language as the sole language of education helps guarantee equal opportunities to all Malian children. Further respondents (57.14%) ascertain that knowledge of French ensures elitism, and therefore favours a minority group over the wider majority.

The overwhelming majority of Sonjay-French based teachers (78.57%) supports that teaching in French has a bright future in Mali. Half of the Sonjay-French based teachers (50%) also believe that the products of the French based French based system have advantages over their Sonjay-French based counterparts. This appears all the more true that the students who benefit from the French based system receive education in an elitist language.

Sonjay-French based Teachers' Lack of Pride: Most Sonjay-French medium teachers (57.14%) recognise that they do not feel proud of Sonjay as the language of education, but would be proud of French. This group of teachers strengthen their attitude when they state that they would not choose to teach in Sonjay had they to do it all over again, i.e., they prefer to teach in French. Few teachers (42.85%) defend that they feel proud of Sonjay as their language of instruction and would choose it had they to do it all over again.

Proud to teach in Sonjay-French				Would you choose to teach in Sonjay-French, had you to do it all over again?			
<i>proud</i>		<i>not proud</i>		<i>Would choose to...</i>		<i>Would not choose to...</i>	
6	42.85%	8	57.14%	6	42.85%	8	57.14%

Table N°3: Sonjay-French based teachers' lack of pride towards the Sonjay medium of instruction.

One salient element the analysis of these responses reveals is that the school administration does not seem to create any discrimination among the teachers. This view is expressed by the great majority of the teachers (85.71%) who ascertain that they are put on equal footing with their French based counterparts. The group is backed up by another significant group of informants (71.42%) who argue that they feel equal to their French based counterparts whom they believe share the same feeling towards them.

In sum, this analysis has shown that the majority of Sonjay-French based teachers do not like the approach, but they do not suffer any discrimination neither from the school administration, nor from their French based counterparts. The informants expressed the superiority of Sonjay-French based education, but at the same time stressed the inadequate and inappropriate conditions under which it is being implemented.

4.3. French based Pupils' Attitudes

The significance of the determination of the students' feelings towards Sonjay-French versus French only based systems is very important since the pupils are the subjects who undergo 'experimentation' and who will be the products of the innovation produced. An analysis of the data discloses that all the eight informants (100%) like to study (or continue to study) in French, but not in Sonjay, most pupils (75%) understand a little bit what their teacher says in French. Nevertheless, they all (100%) appear to be proud of themselves and their school type. Most of them (62.5%) even believe that they are superior to their Sonjay-French system counterparts, while few (38.5%) consider that they are equal. More strikingly, the overwhelming majority (87.5%) assume that their bilingual Sonjay-French based friends think that they (the French based pupils) are superior to them because of the French language they study in.

Do you think that you are----to your bil counterparts?					
superior?		equal?		inferior?	
5	62.5%	3	38.5%	0	0%

Table N°4: French based pupils' feelings of pride towards their language of education.

Following the same general trend, the pupils (62.5%) maintain that they freely chose to go to the French based school while few of them (38.5%) note that they were sent by their families. Finally, all the pupils (100%) would like to continue in the French based system; and more significantly, they (100%) would all choose to go to the French based system, were they to do it all over again.

4.4. Sonjay-French based Pupils' Attitudes

The majority of this Sonjay-French group (71.42%) does not like the Sonjay-French based education they have followed so far and consequently prefer the French based system while most of them (80.95%) ascertain that they understand everything the teacher says in Sonjay, but few only (28.57%) understand everything the teacher says in French. Coming closer to the very feelings of the pupils towards Sonjay-French based education, the pupils (80.95%) do not feel proud of the Sonjay-French based system and would there prefer to be in a French based system. They however maintain that they (52.38%) do not feel inferior or superior, but equal to their French based counterparts while a handful (38.09%) feels inferior to them. The majority also (76.19%) confesses that their French based counterparts do not care about the school type they follow; only few (19.04%) ascertain that they do.

Proud to be in a Sonjay-French based school				Do you think you are----your Sonjay-French based counterparts?					
proud		not proud		Superior?		Equal?		Inferior?	
4	19.04%	17	80.95%	1	4.76%	11	52.38%	8	38.09%

Table N°5: Sonjay-French based pupils' attitudes.

Proceeding further, some respondents (42.85%) claim that they freely chose to go to the Sonjay-French school system. In fact, there was not a choice of school because when these pupils went to school for the first time, Sonjay-French based education had already been extended to all the public schools of the Commune. They probably chose the closest school, but not a specific school type. Another group of pupils (33.33%) sustain that they were sent to school by their families. Again the reasons behind the parents' choice of a school is not always easy to determine because of factors like distance, extension of the Sonjay-French based system, or the parents' lack of awareness of the existence of Sonjay-French based education in their schools. Thus, pupils were just sent to school. But, some pupils (19.04%) very explicitly pointed out that they were forced by their parents to go the Sonjay-French based school. A fourth year pupil even openly confesses "*I am ashamed of Sonjay*".

The majority of Sonjay-French based pupils (80.95%) maintain that they would choose to go to a French based school, had they to do it all over again. The feeling is backed up by fourteen informants (66.66%) who believe that they are not well perceived by people when they tell them that they study in Sonjay-French based schools.

Which school type would you choose to go to, had you to do it all over again?			
French only based school		Sonjay-French based school	
16	76.19%	4	19.04%

Table N°6: Sonjay-French system pupils' preference for the French only based school system.

In short, while the use of Sonjaj-French as concomittant languages of education appears to be more effective and superior to the French based one (Sonjaj is the pupils' mother tongue and the teachers have received training, first in French, then in Sonjaj), the overwhelming majority of the Sonjaj-French medium pupils have expressed their dislike, disapproval, shame, and lack of pride vis-à-vis the Sonjaj language as a language of education, and by the same token, advocates the French for their education.

On the whole, the findings yielded by the two pupil groups have demonstrated that the majority of both French only based and Sonjaj-French based pupils advocate the use of French as their sole language of education and thereby, reject the Sonjaj-French system. More strikingly, bilingual Sonjaj-French pupils seem to have developed a negative image of themselves because of the Sonjaj language. This is all the more understandable because it is a novelty and old habits die hard.

4.5. Attitudes of PTA¹, SMC² and CMA³ members towards the Languages of Education

This section analyses the attitudes of key school stakeholders' attitudes towards the language(s) to use for the education of their children. Being civil society, they can influence education objectives.

A look at the data shows that most of them (64.70%) would not send their children to a Sonjaj-French based school, but to French based one, had they to do it all over again. They (52.94%) further argue that children who go to Sonjaj-French based schools will not easily get a job and that the system will not lead to successful future life; they (82.35%) contend that those who attend French based schools will easily get a job, will have successful life and will not be jobless. Last, the majority (52.94%) holds that it is a good thing to study in French based schools only. The table below is more explicit about the respondents' feelings.

If child sent to Sonjaj-French based school	Will s/he easily get a job?	yes	6	35.29%
		no	9	52.94%
		abstention	2	11.76%
	Will s/he succeed in life?	yes	6	35.29%
		no	9	52.94%
		abstention	2	11.76%
	Will s/he be jobless?	yes	7	41.17%
		no	8	47.05%
		abstention	2	11.76%
	Will s/he easily get a job?	yes	14	82.35%
		no	0	0%
		abstention	3	17.64%

¹ Parent Teacher Association

² School Management Committee

³ Child Mother Association

If child sent to French based school	Will s/he succeed in life?	yes	14	82.35%
		no	0	0%
		abstention	3	17.64%
	Will s/he be jobless?	yes	0	0%
		no	14	82.35%
		abstention	3	17.64%

Table N°7: Feelings about the impact of the languages of education.

While most informants (82.35%) recognise that it is advantageous to study in Sonjay-French, half of them (41.17%) perceive the advantages as cultural and another half (41.17%) as both cultural and financial. The overwhelming majority (94.11%) however sustains that it is advantageous to study in French only, and the advantages (82.35%) are both financial and cultural, with more stress on the financial aspect.

Interestingly, the wider majority of the respondents (82.35%) do not appear to regret the type of school they sent their children to possibly because the children have at least learnt to read and write: some people (47.05%) are proud to have sent their children to the French based system; some others (23.52%) are proud to have sent their children to both school types.

But do informants actually say what they actually do? Nearly all informants (94.11%) have children who go to school; and the children are in the French based schools which are private and where they have to pay school fees. Few of them only (23.52%) have children in either school type. Sortly put, most SMC, PTA and CMA members (52.94%) have expressed negative behaviour toward the use of their mother tongue as a medium of education for their children.

All in all, it clearly appears that overwhelming majority of the informants have negative attitudes towards the use of the Sonjay-French based system and by the same token advocate the French-based system. In this population, the basic advantage lying behind the use of the Sonjay in education is the preservation of culture. The French based system is perceived differently with its financial aspect being predominant. But there is still a question left: What do people in the street think about the languages of education?

4.6. Attitudes of Laymen

The significance of this section lies in the variety of the points of views expressed and collected during the investigation. While the majority of the people interviewed (53.33%) speak Sonjay only, a few (46.66%) can speak both French and Sonjay. All of them have heard about bilingual Sonjay-French schools; but most of them (86.66%) disagree with the use of Sonjay-French based education in their schools, and advocate the French based system. The

informants equally reject Sonjay-French based education when they (83.33%) defend that it is not a good thing and cannot help develop Mali.

Agree with use of Sonjay-French at school		Agree with use of French only at school	
4	13.33%	26	86.66%

Table N°8: Laymen's negative attitudes toward the Sonjay-French based system.

Almost all the informants defend the French language at the expense of the Sonjay one. The overwhelming majority (96.66%) considers that the French language alone (not in association or combination with another language like Sonjay) can ensure the development of Mali. This appears all the more true that the commonly held view among these people is that education means studying French or in French. This general trend is further defended by the informants (90%) who reject once more the Sonjay-French system when they state that they prefer to send their children to a French based school. They sustain (80%) that if they send them to a bilingual Sonjay-French school, they will not succeed in their future life.

Use of Sonjay at school is a good thing				Use of Sonjay at school can help develop Mali				Use of French only at school can help develop Mali			
a good thing		not a good thing		can		cannot		can		cannot	
5	16.66%	25	83.33%	5	16.66%	25	83.33%	29	96.66%	1	3.33%

Table N°9: Laymen's negative attitudes towards the Sonjay language.

Finally, almost all the population of informants seem to be convinced of their attitude and are subsequently ready to go and convince other people to send their children, not to the Sonjay-French based school, but to the French based one. This feeling is supported by twenty eight respondents (93.33%). The opposite attitude is held by two people (6.66%) who are not ready to go and convince the other people to send their children to bilingual Sonjay-French schools.

But do lay people do what they? A close look at their answers displays that they (56.66%) have children who go to French based schools while a few (33.33%) have children who go to bilingual Sonjay-French schools. They also feel proud to send their children to study in French. It is important to indicate that attendance in such schools (which are all private) requires the payment of tuition fees.

Proud to send your children to a Sonjay-French school				Proud to send your children to French only based school			
proud		not proud		proud		not proud	
2	6.66%	8	26.66%	17	56.66%	0	0%

Table N°10: Laymen's pride towards French as the language of education for their children.

Informants appear very sensitive to the issue of Sonjay-French based education, which they do not like. The analysis has shown that most of them have their children in French based schools.

5. Conclusion and recommendations

Sonjay-French based education has been rejected on two major grounds. First, people just do not want their children to go and study (in) Sonjay, but in French only. Second, most people have not been sufficiently informed and sensitised about the Sonjay-French system; to them, children go to school to study the Sonjay language over which they already have full mastery, but which will not be very helpful to them in terms of employment. Full mastery over the French language will be required. Education, in their eyes, is learning (in) French. So these people need to be informed and sensitised about Sonjay-French based education which they even call '*koyra sennoo lokkoloo*' (Sonjay language school). That is why some recommendations are proposed in order to improve the ongoing Malian language policy.

There seems to be a discrepancy between what the education authorities are preaching in terms of national language policy and field action. For the government have created a number of agencies to carry out linguistic research in local languages, develop didactic materials in them, design policies and plan strategies for their teaching/learning, in short, to promote them. At the same time, the languages are said to be taught in basic education (up to the sixth grade) just to facilitate the learning of the French language in which 'true education' will continue because the pupils are gradually prepared to transfer the knowledge stored in the national language to French language learning.

The government of Mali should be coherent in their language policy. Their policy should be clear-cut in the sense that if the native languages are to be used for the education of children, that should be at all levels-from basic to higher education. The languages should all be used for education, probably at different levels (local, regional and native languages). How can we truly promote the native languages? It has been noted throughout this investigation that it is mainly educated people who appear reluctant to the use of native languages in formal education. The point to make here is that a person usually learns and uses a given language only if he sees some usefulness to doing so. If educated people do not like Sonjay-French based education, the government should find out a way to compel them to 'like' and learn to work in the native tongues. One strategy may be to require a certificate from all candidates to a position-including even a local one. For instance a law can be enacted as: **to be director of a school, a Center of Pedagogic Animation, an academy, or to be a mayor, a Member of Parliament, a Minister, President, etc., the candidate must first of all hold**

a certificate at least in his/her mother tongue showing mastery in speaking and writing.

The law can further indicate that access to the civil service requires the same competence in a national language. For instance, every hired civil servant can be obliged to take a three-month course in one of the thirteen national languages before he starts working. The native languages can further be promoted through their introduction in the civil service recruitment: during the national exams and competitions, a national language exam subject can be required of all candidates.

The present Malian language policy does not intend to use the native languages as the only media of instruction at school. It proposes to use them (and only in public, not private schools) as one of the media until the end of basic education (the 6th grade).

The government of Mali should have a clear objective in its language policy and planning. Their policy should be clear-cut in the sense that if the native languages are to be used for the education of the children, this should be at all levels-from basic to higher education. The languages should all be used for education, probably at different levels (local, regional and national).

As the popular saying goes, “one can force the horse to the stream, but one cannot force it to drink”. In other words, never try to impose a language on people. Let the language impose itself. This principle applied to the Malian context seems to go against the current view held by some people who think that Bamanankan being the most widespread language in Mali, the government should simply adopt it as the national and official language of the country.

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