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Abstract

This study examines the mediation of multilingualism, localism and the nation in the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation, henceforth, ZBC as the local content and multilingual broadcasting policies subsumed in the Broadcasting Services Act (2001) and the Broadcasting Services Amendment Act (2007) respectively translated into radio and television programming. This purpose is pursued by analysing the language choices and practices on the ZBC radio and television stations and programming. This study is informed by an eclectic approach within the critical theory tradition and therefore it disapproves the domination, marginalisation and exclusion of the indigenous African languages in the ZBC as a public sphere. Against this backdrop, the study envisages the promotion of linguistic diversity and indigenous African languages in the ZBC broadcasting. Data for this study was gathered from the ZBC employees, academics and the ZBC audience using questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussions. As the local content and multilingual broadcasting policies translated into ZBC programming, this study detected a hierarchical organisation of the languages spoken in Zimbabwe on the radio and television stations where English is the most dominant language, while Shona and Ndebele dominate the minority languages, Shona dominates Ndebele and the supremacy of the Zezuru dialect in the Shona language is easily felt. This is a confirmation of the fragility of Zimbabwean linguistic nationalism in the ZBC which is convoluted by the ideological and political nature of the media, electronic colonisation, the political economy of broadcasting, the transformation of the ZBC public sphere by the market and state interests, the influence of the global media firms, and the relentless hegemony of the western countries in the world system. This study established that broadcasting in indigenous African languages is obligatory if the informative, communicative and symbolic functions of the public service broadcasting are to be achieved. However, this study contends that it is remarkably insufficient for linguists to minimally identify, lament and deplore the marginalisation and exclusion of the indigenous African languages in the ZBC without taking into account the economic, political and technological factors which contribute to the marginalisation and exclusion of these languages in the ZBC broadcasting in the context of the local content and multilingual broadcasting policies. Therefore, this study implores scholars in the discipline of language studies to ameliorate their sophistication by espousing a multidisciplinary approach to the study of language if they are to make meaningful arguments which can influence meaningful language policy outcomes instead of parroting.