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Language & Inequality in Post-Colonial African Nations

Understanding language as a form of power might help deconstruct the hierarchies that produced the stark political, economic, and social stratification within post-colonial nations (Huss & Lindgren, 2011). My study explores the relationship between language and national inequality in post-colonial African nations. I compiled data on 19 African post-colonial nations and tested for a correlation between national inequality - measured by each nation's average household income ratio (the highest 10% household income distribution for each nation divided by its lowest 10% household income distribution) - and language officiality. I divided nations into two groups based on language officiality data from the CIA World Factbook website: Category 1 nations consist of those that employ only the previous European colonizer's language as an official language; Category 2 nations are those that have both the previous colonizer's language and a national/local language as the nation's official languages. My difference of means test yielded a real difference in average national inequality between Category 1 and Category 2 countries, although the difference was not statistically significant. Category 1 countries have a slightly higher (real) mean household income ratio than countries in Category 2. Future research in this area might explore the relationship between national levels of inequality and language use in specific societal sectors such as government, business/commerce, media, and education.