

CHASING INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGE: GENESIS OF LANGUAGE OF CURRICULUM IN KENYA

Jerry Agalo

*School of Information, Communication and Media Studies
Rongo University College*

Caroline Mbai

*School of Information, Communication and Media Studies
Rongo University College*

ABSTRACT: *This paper draws attention to the cross-linguistic problems that have made minority languages lose their prominence and allow stronger languages to dominate in international linguistic space and in education. Schools and universities crave stronger languages for medium of instruction in the classroom in developing countries again dictates of science and technology have influenced the use of a stronger language for global use. The paper therefore investigates the states of early use of language (English) in Kenyan schools and its relationship with other vernacular languages in the country. It also identifies reasons why English became so prominent than other languages spoken in Kenya.*

KEYWORDS: Global Worlds, Curriculum, Society, Bootstrapping, Language, Syntactic-semantic Interface.

INTRODUCTION

The history of language choice for the medium of instruction in Kenyan schools, started off in colonial time as a tug-of-war between the British authorities pressing hard for English for administrative purposes on one hand, and certain evangelical missions advocating for separate vernaculars, on the other hand. As time passed, positions became modified. But right up until 1963 - the end of the British rule, the main preoccupation of the vestigial colonial administration remained silent as a way of placating neither side.

The early missionary lobby side was concerned with the importance of the vernaculars and argued that, 'Christianity can only become part of a people if it is preached in their own tongue' (Adjaye 2005, p. 23). But early local British administration had a different view. It saw colonies as places where European languages and their way of life could take a firm root. The reason behind all this was to build an empire unified not only politically but also culturally and linguistically. The colonial government therefore seemed to have given a prelude of the place of English in Kenya today; though such a view was heavily loaded with negative connotations as seen by Kenyans today.

Thus, the colonial administration made English, largely by virtue of its identification with the ruling power, occupy a privileged status in the country. During this period, the colonial administration's attempts in fostering the teaching of English gave a sign of a beginning of early formation of foreign language speaking 'elite'. as claimed by Sifuna (1986, p. 210), "those who showed any special ability in English advanced as pupil teachers, teachers, catechists, readers and sub-deacons." Many found themselves working also as clerks, interpreters, and

translators. Others also worked closely with the British as farm managers, merchants, Missionaries, and administrators, earning money and making themselves indispensable and their roles in society enviable. Education therefore brought prestige and privilege and, as a result, created a class of local 'elites'. This was the case in early twentieth century when only a small minority of people in Kenya went to school yet education was beginning to be highly valued.

The Beecher Report (1949) again brought a significant boost to the teaching of English in Kenyan schools. It strongly advocated the teaching of the 3Rs (Reading, Writing, Arithmetic) in lower primary schools, and stronger use of English in Upper Primary (Intermediate) schools. But as could be seen in Swynnerton Plan (1954), the Africans were still least impressed. Their bone of contention was that too much time was given to the work on farm training and workshops in lower primary schools and very little on 3Rs. They argued that, to Kenyans, education should mean reading books, writing, speaking English and doing arithmetic as was done in the Asian schools. They did not like too much time wasted on the farms and workshops. They argued that the approach was discriminatory

Toward the attainment of Kenya's independence in 1963, the Ministry of Education thought of whittling down the flaws in the curriculum such that a unified primary school curriculum (one that combined the education needs of Africans and Asians) could be designed. These ideas began to take shape by 1962, for the purpose of strengthening the teaching of English in primary schools. This time, the curriculum planners focused on strengthening the English medium teaching, later known as the New Primary Approach (NPA), to African children. Its inception targeted primary school classes I – 3.

In 1964, the Kenya Education Commission under Prof. Simeon Ominde, was established and it approved a New Primary Approach (NPA) policy which discredited the use of vernacular as a medium of instruction in lower primary schools. The use of mother tongue was then abandoned and English immediately became the medium of instruction in all NPA classes in schools. Soon after, the success of the NPA classes in urban schools began to be seen as fruitful when the first groups completed their first three years in primary education. The rapid success of NPA in the urban areas was due to heterogeneous composition of pupils in lower classes. Heterogeneity checked the spread of any use of mother tongue in a classroom as was its use in the rural areas. When the urban primary class 3 pupils were promoted to class IV where the teaching was mainly in the medium of English, they were found to be far ahead of the English course materials which were available, because the piloted NPA materials were of higher standard. What was significant here was that the NPA group of children seemed to have attained a high vocabulary control having used language texts with high readability measurement. Thus, their English vocabulary load was above that of class 4 pupils who did not go through NPA English curriculum, but learnt English only as a second language subject as was stipulated in the non - NPA curriculum.

In this case, some considerable discrepancies emerged in the reading materials and therefore new ones were needed for the NPA pupils' English course materials in Std. 4. Later, apprehension developed with claims that the new NPA course materials tended to alienate the pupils and took them beyond the basics of their cultural life skills. Critics argued that these pupils were beginning to become strangers in their own country, which they need to keep to their roots by also being literate in their mother tongue (MT) which obviously is rich in African

folklore. Mother tongue is the language that children will grow up to use in gatherings of families, friends and ceremonies. It gives them a channel through which they will establish their self-affirmation and self-identity. Hence, the suspicion over the relevance of English as a medium of instruction in lower primary schools developed into a great debate. It set the Ministry of Education once again to think of finding the best approach to the teaching of English in primary schools. It led the Ministry of Education to introduce a language series, including Kiswahili - Tujifunze Kusoma Kikwetu (TKK) (Let us learn our language) in 1968 alongside the NPA English medium materials. Materials meant for the learning of Kiswahili as a national language featured prominently in the early series. Later, other vernacular languages were once again reintroduced as media of instruction in lower primary school - these included Dholuo, Luhya, Kikuyu, and others. in homogeneous rural schools. The idea was to help the pupils master reading skills both in MT and in English. For those pupils in urban schools, Kiswahili was taught for the same purpose. The great debate of English and that of other languages in the primary school curriculum did not end here. It continued to be a problem in curriculum planning leading to the thinking of a new education system that could best suit the country.

The continuing debate led to unfolding of uncertainty among education planners which led to a restructuring reform. The decision to revert to the use of vernacular languages (Gathathi Report 1976) alongside English slowly failed to capture the intended task of improving the standard of English language for the pupils' lifetime education. In fact, with the combination of Kiswahili, English and mother tongue in lower primary schools, the pupils became neither satisfactorily competent in English, Kiswahili nor their vernaculars. Apparently, the concern for the place of English in school curriculum and for the nation has dominated considerations in a number of reports, including Beecher Report(1949), Gachathi Report (1976), Ominde Report (1984), and the MacKay Report (1984). These reports strongly advocated the need for improvement of the teaching of English in schools. The McKay Report which introduced the 8 years (primary), 4 years (secondary), 4 years (university) - the (8 - 4 - 4) nomenclature system of education as opposed to the then 7 - 6 - 3 nomenclature, emphasized the need for strengthening the essence of English in universities, having identified the ills that beset the education system, which included low standards in English and Mathematics. This led to the creation of common courses, for example, the communication skills courses for the students in first year classes in universities. Indeed, the communication skills courses should be made to run throughout the four years of undergraduate program in the universities. Today, this need continues to be relevant. The case for vernacular languages was not given any emphasis in the McKay report though they were retained in the curriculum as had been in the lower primary level. The MT reading materials were recognized in lower primary level for their mode of transmission of content of African traditions.

In the current Kenyan (8-4- 4) education system, English language has been designated as the major medium of instruction, largely because of practical considerations; these include the availability of teaching materials and structural capacity to facilitate the learning of English language to express scientific concepts needed for technological development. The guise for this consideration could be the hidden dynamics of language to penetrate the pores of evolving ways living among Kenyan speakers of English and infiltrate them through commercialization, bureaucratization and science and technology. The need to express scientific concepts and understanding technology help to enhance the cognitive load of a pupil in learning to operate fully in a communicative setting and in a scientific and technological situation. However, the

emphasis that has been given to English seems not to have brought the intended ideal to full fruition, as concerns the proficiency of English, both written and spoken in schools and colleges. One wonders whether this is due to the malaise in education which often causes education to overlook facts in teaching situations.

As illustrated below in table 1.1, English is taught today as a subject in primary classes 1-3, while the medium of instruction recommended is Mother Tongue in rural areas or Kiswahili in urban and catchment areas. English then is the medium of instruction from class 4 to secondary school (forms 1-4). It also continues to be one of the major subjects in all these classes and remains a medium of instruction again in tertiary colleges and universities.

Using Mother Tongue in Classes 1-3 is assumed to place the learner (pupil) at ease with the learning task. Jibril (2008, p.5) has claimed that "it has been proved through numerous experiments that teaching children through their mother-tongue or language of the immediate community raises the efficiency of learning significantly". Thus, mother tongue is the totality of declarative knowledge the learner possesses for comprehension and production. Thus, it is the mother-tongue therefore that represents the learner's mental representation which is often called upon for comprehension and production of the declarative knowledge the learner possesses even in his L2 usage. But from class 4 (upper primary level), the assumption is that the learner's comprehension, on the basis of input (i.e. English as a subject), interacts with L2 parameters, which later lead him to the construct an L2 grammar in English which, at this time, universal grammar is meant to develop towards a steady state of English language at secondary school level,

Table 1: 8-4-4 Education System and Medium of Instruction.

AGE	LEVEL	DURATION	LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION	LANGUAGE COURSE TAUGHT
18 plus	University and Tertiary colleges	4, 5 or 6 years depending on programme	English.	English, Kiswahili, French, German, Spanish, Japanese
14-17	Secondary	4 years	English	English and Kiswahili subjects compulsory. French, German, Spanish, in few schools.
8-13	Upper Primary	5 years	English	English and Kiswahili subjects compulsory. French, German, Spanish, In few selected elite schools.
6-8	Lower Primary	3 years	As designated. Mother tongue in rural schools and Kiswahili in Urban Schools.	Subjects in English and Kiswahili are taught. Classes In reading Kiswahili and Mother Tongue are taught.

The Status of English in Kenya

In Kenya, as in other countries, a question on language will always touch on politics. This is due to ethnolinguistic diversity in the country. As such, the status of English in Kenya's education certainly must be understood as complex and interrelated with other issues regarding

national integrity and development. Harlech - Jones (1990; p.68) posited that "education is thus a directly political activity, regarded and utilized by decision-makers as a major instrument of social policy". This begins to sound convicting especially when we see a national language (Kiswahili) not being the medium of instruction in schools. For most part, Kenya's multilingual and ethnographic factors provide the basis for sketching the language policy, which usually is a great task for language planners and policy-makers in multilingual contexts deciding which languages to designate for specific purposes, eg official language, national language, and language of instruction.

Today the medium of instruction for upper classes (4-8) in primary schools, all secondary schools, tertiary colleges and the universities. This choice reflects the importance of English as the official language in Kenya. It's recognition as an international language has caused its regional neutrality. This has led to its widespread use to express concepts in scientific and technologically salient areas of discourse throughout the world.

Remembering what Latin was in the medieval times as the language of scholarship, so is English today. It has become the Latin of the 21st century and that for scholarship. It is central for communicating knowledge worldwide and for instruction even in countries where English is not the language of more research because higher education worldwide must grapple with its role. Increasingly, English is becoming the medium of almost all of the internationally circulated scientific journals. Again, current practices in international and regional scientific meetings tend to be dominated by the use of English, thus placing a premium on the fluency in the language. In an attempt to safeguard scholarship, countries using 'small languages' tend to change the medium of instruction entirely to English, an example is that of Tanzania where Kiswahili has dominated social sphere and had been a language of instruction in schools, colleges and universities.

Learning and Society Bootstrapping

Making a quick inventory of ideas that matter for in this paper we see that there is need for the government to place emphasis upon quality of education to engender the idea that learning in school needs to embrace societal values and be part of a child's total, purposeful, adaptive living and learning. Thus, if English language needs to be satisfactorily learnt in the lower primary classes all over the country, there must, therefore, be attempts to explore ways of relating the curriculum and the school to the child's home and peer culture. Thus, the English classroom must connect what the child brings to the class with what the class presents to him. This proposition does not challenge the learning theory where human learning is defined as a special form of human behavior, but here we regard learning as human behavior at its most typically human - a kind of experiment on the part of the child.

Ask Kenyans what they believe is needed to guarantee an effective education. What will come out strongly is the need for 'a strong curriculum' which is sensitive to societal needs. That is, a need for a strong curriculum that will build a strong cultural and linguistic relativism, i.e. sensitive to traditional mores of the society. And ask them to identify the elements they would like included in the 'strong curriculum', a variety of answers will be given, but more importantly they will include those touching on the socio-cultural and political imperatives of the society. It remains clear that establishing curricula with definitive standards in Kenya continues to baffle those concerned. Everything is changing so fast beyond the grasp of the group of curriculum developers. The very structure of Kenyan society is changing; the proportions of

the different groups making up the population are continually evolving, and the children who are the target for early acquisition of English language in schools are becoming constantly bombarded by a variety of media symbolic forms for linguistic input.

New needs and aspirations are coming to light. Customs, behavior, lifestyle and relations between individuals, groups and the sexes are changing in their turn. How does this impact on language use? In a study by Kembo-Sure (1991) on language attitudes in Kenya it was demonstrated that the attitudes towards Kiswahili as a national language and English as an official language, were sufficiently positive to sustain balanced bilingualism among Kenyans. Yet the positive attitude towards the two languages exists in competition. There are Kenyans whose competence in English is higher than that in Kiswahili and vice versa. This competition has brought to light the need for understanding the pressure that causes the two languages to have two different degrees of competence among Kenyans. The emerging socio-political pressure on the two languages is also creating deviance in use such that, for English, according to Kembo-Sure (1991, p.24) "a distinct non-native (or substandard) form is emerging that could be described as Kenyan English. The emerging form is referred to as Sheng, meaning a 'medium of communication whose lexical items have been formed through a phonological and morphological combination of Kiswahili and English'. At the beginning, Sheng lexical items were a clear result of morphological manipulation of English and Kiswahili words. But we are witnessing today an emergence of complex words in Sheng worth an in-depth morphological study. However, this area of Sheng is not of our interest in this paper, though it is interesting. Nonetheless, such an emerging linguistic scenario in Kenya continues to pose problems in higher education and education in general. The higher education is faced with the challenge of preparing itself to fulfil its mission adequately in a world in transformation, which is increasingly becoming a society of knowledge and information, the role of language for efficient communication is increasingly becoming very vital. The role of language - materially and discursively - is significantly crucial in production and contestation of power at all levels of society, and also vital are the effects of power of language use in the daily interactions with ordinary people and in the official policies of the government.

CONCLUSION

Non-standard use of English among higher education graduates can be claimed to do a disservice to society at large, which has a right to expect every graduate to be a proficient communicator in English for internationalization ideals. Often when Kenyan academics are asked for the source of the problem of non - Standard English, they push the blame back to schools. Could it be that the problem was at the initial learning level - the early lower primary school level, where the semantic space needs careful approach in teaching for the acquisition of the L2? It is conceivably appealing therefore, that the children must be well grounded in their L2 acquisition / learning through the use of appropriate input materials early enough to stem the loss of conceptual formation/expression in various semantics - syntax interface structures in English. But then, the approach needs to use mother tongue of children as a base for conceptual formation among children as they will bring a huge content of tradition into language learning situation.

For three decades Since inception of the 8-4-4 educational system, the English language has continued to see profound changes in the educational environment and this has affected materials development for the learning of English language in schools. Yet, however

evolutionary these changes might have been, their cumulative impact has even remained less tangible.

Again, information age is creating a profound alteration in the nature of communication as Electronic media continue to have effect in ways young people learn languages and respond to imaginative experiences. Too often, linguistic structures used in most electronic media are perceived to be stylistically different from those needed for language learning in the classrooms, yet today's pupils continue to be surrounded by a plethora of electronic media where language use vary stylistically according to the tastes of audiences, e.g. those for soap operas, sports, rap music, and other evangelistic teachings and news broadcasts. We should not therefore in the present day, regard language from a biblical way as merely 'a weapon in the Babylonian Civil war' of our society – making language choice for internalization among the vernaculars of French, English, Spanish or Kiswahili. Language will remain a major strand in the fabric of our society where its use in the media continues to construct a small global village.

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