

THE PURPOSES OF TEACHING ENGLISH  
IN TANZANIA: THE NEGLECTED PILLAR

By

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INTRODUCTION:

The past two decades have witnessed a decline in standards of English in Tanzania, and lately a consequent decline in standards of education. This followed the country's decision to make a change of policy after independence. In these changes Kiswahili was made the national language soon after independence, and it was officially made the language of national and governmental transactions and the medium of primary education in 1965. All these were steps designed to make it possible to move towards the replacement of English with Kiswahili in all functions.

The adoption of Kiswahili as a medium of primary education was not accompanied by any elaborate programme for the improvement of English teaching at any level. This created uncertainty as to whether English was really necessary at primary level or not. The outcome was that primary school graduates who were selected to continue with secondary education faced the problem of failure to cope with English medium of education. They lacked both exposure and a good background in English. This problem was felt immediately for as early as 1968 language specialists and teachers were beginning to observe that students were unable to communicate fully with their teachers. A year later the

'Learning through language' course designed to help students to cope with their studies in English was launched (Isaacs 1970:70).

The situation got worse year after year and by the mid-70's the students' knowledge of English had deteriorated to the extent that even Learning Through Language was no longer effective. The reason was that the students' competence did not match the course for it was not meant for elementary beginners.

Although the standard of English continued to deteriorate at all levels in the educational system (Cripser and Dodd 1984), it was some time before any concern was voiced. In fact to many people falling standards in English were regarded as part of the process of phasing out English, in line with the implementation of the long awaited policy designed to introduce Kiswahili as a medium of secondary and higher education. The situation changed in the early 1980's when it was felt that the waiting period for the changeover was becoming much longer than first expected and the consequent deterioration in standard was generating too many educational problems.

This paper examines English teaching in Tanzania since the late 1960's and relates the problems encountered so far to the purposes of teaching the language in the country. It tries to establish the relationship between the purposes of teaching English and teacher training, the syllabus, and teaching materials. It also touches on the status of English in the country, before commenting briefly on the remedial measures which are being taken by the government. In the final section of the paper some measures are recommended as a contribution to the search for a lasting solution to the problems highlighted in the paper.

## THE PURPOSES OF TEACHING ENGLISH

A brief survey (Kibogoya: 1988) has shown that the official aims of teaching English in Tanzania in the past 20 years were vaguely defined, too general and not universally acceptable. In my opinion, this can be attributed to the government's failure to work out exactly what roles English is expected to play in Tanzania. Teachers and students were presented with statements which simply told them some of the possible uses of an international language, and which told them in general terms what students can possibly do with the language once they have mastered it.

The statements posed practical problems in that they were difficult to interpret in pedagogical terms. This was reflected in the teachers' concern about those aims, saying they were difficult to incorporate in the day to day pedagogic practice. It is difficult for example, to give appropriate answers to questions such as: how can the teaching of English be organised in such a way that it enables the students to 'grow to appreciate the cultural and political values of Tanzania and to develop socialist values' (Institute of Education: 1979:3)? Which aspects of English should be taught in order to realise this long-term aim? How is success or failure going to be evaluated?

It is also important to note here that these statements of purpose contradicted reality as did the assumptions on which they were based. The students were expected to come to appreciate their country's cultural and political values through the medium of English. This was an unfortunate and unjustified expectation as all these values were primarily taught in the national language, Kiswahili.

Another dilemma was that while students were expected to come to appreciate their cultural values in English by

reading the relevant literature, the reading list for the reading programme contained only two titles by Tanzanians! These were Blood on our Land by I. Mbise (1978) and Ujamaa: Essays on Socialism by J. K. Nyerere (1968). Apart from these, the list consisted of texts by authors from other parts of Africa.

It is apparent now that the country needs a policy which sets out clearly the roles that are to be assigned to foreign languages; that is which languages should be taught, at what level and why. In the case of English for example, it is very important to make it clear what English is needed for, what kind of English skills are needed, and who should learn it. This view is summarised by Lwaitama et al. They argue that the teaching of English should be seen as:

"An operation whose goals and methods are determined by the proper socio-economic requirements of the people of Tanzania... (and) ... different people in Tanzania will require to acquire different 'target competenceies' in the language for different purposes. (Moreover) ... some Tanzanians may not need to have to learn English at any level, (although) they may, instead, need to learn some other foreign languages ..." (Lwaitama et al: forthcoming).

This view was also reflected in the teachers' responses. They all felt that our aims of teaching English should be: to support the transition from Kiswahili medium to English medium secondary education; to prepare the students for English medium tertiary education; and to give them access to a language associated with science and technology; and to prepare them for their final exams. All these aims are both realistic and within the teachers' capability, and

their achievement can be dully evaluated. However, none of these key aims was part of the officially stated aims.

#### TEACHER TRAINING AND THE PURPOSES OF ENGLISH TEACHING

Lack of a clear language policy has also affected teacher training programmes in the country. Various studies (eg. Roy-Campbell: forthcoming; Roy-Campbell and Qorro: 1987) have reported that teachers are aware that they are not being well trained for foreign language teaching. Their complaints show that they lack not only pedagogic competence but also linguistic competence. It was also revealed in this survey that teachers admit lacking communicating skills, basic knowledge of grammar, mastery of the language, fluency in the language and correct pronunciation. Commenting on this inadequacy in teacher training, Moshi makes the following observation:

"One of the main problems with courses for English language teachers is that they are not sufficiently emphatic of the need for the teacher trainee to be conversant with the language" (Moshi 1984 as quoted in Roy-Campbell: op cit: 34)

The teachers' difficulties with English combine with a lack of awareness of different approaches to language teaching to complicate the situation even further. Attributing this to the type of training which these teachers get in colleges, it has been reported that the teacher trainees are provided with "knowledge about the language, and exposure to some techniques for teaching the language, but very little training in how to use the language" (Roy-Campbell ibid: 39). This has led to the current practice of teaching

about the language rather than teaching how to use the language.

The question of teachers' proficiency in English cannot be looked at in isolation from the aims of teaching English in the society. Once there are clear aims and the learning environment has been clearly analysed and taken into consideration, then these will determine the direction and extent of teacher training together with the "minimal acceptable level of proficiency for the teacher" (ibid:44).

In practical terms, this means that teacher training must be determined by what teachers are expected to do in a specified sociolinguistic environment rather than being defined in general terms. It may be considered unnecessary, for example, to demand that teachers should have complete fluency in spoken English if they are expected to teach students who only require knowledge in order to be able to read English texts for their homework and general reading. This does not mean, however, that teachers should not be fluent in English; in fact the more fluent they are the better, but given that limited resources characterise every operation and that the language itself is not widely used in the society, specialisation of this sort seems to be one of the reasonable alternatives.

#### THE (ENGLISH) SYLLABUS:

The syllabus is one of the main resources which the teacher of a foreign language draws upon in his/her teaching. This document tells him/her what to teach, in what order, how to teach and where to go for references. There are various views regarding what should be included in a syllabus, but this discussion is beyond the scope of this paper.

However, a foreign language teaching situation which involves non-native teachers requires a comprehensive syllabus which not only tells them what to teach, but also how to teach it. As Hills put it, "it is no good just giving the teacher ... a list of syntactic structures... and then hoping that he will manage all the rest" (Hill 1967:99). Non-native teachers need to be given as much guidance as possible to make sure that what they teach is not their own version of English but the required standard.

Apart from giving prominence to structural items, the English Language Syllabus (1979) had no proper guidance for the teacher on how to go about teaching these items. As for methodology, the only guide which was given regarding the teaching of structures was that they should be taught "mainly through situational methods and supplemented by analytical methods" (Institute of Education op cit:4). From what we have seen it is unlikely that all teachers will know exactly what situational and analytical mean, let alone being capable of adopting them.

Reference materials which were recommended (eg. Pronunciation Teaching and The Teacher's Handbook) provided mostly exercises with no proper methodological guide. As a result teachers resorted to teaching what they thought they could handle, which has almost always been something to do with the description of structural items. This lack of proper guidance is partly responsible for the ways in which teachers teach about the language. It is also responsible for the lack of focus on the teaching of individual skills.

As the Revised English Language Syllabus of 1979 has been officially replaced by the English Language Syllabus for Forms 1-4 (1986); it is worth noting here that the 'new' syllabus marks a significant departure in this country's design tradition. It has four new distinctive features.

Firstly, there is a column which gives suggestions about the kind of activities teachers and students should be involved in. This provides a valuable guide as to how a language lesson should be conducted. Secondly, apart from general and year by year objectives, there is a column which shows the objectives for each topic. This provides the teacher with something specific to aim at and a basis for continuous evaluation. Thirdly, there is a column for references and teaching aids, which directs the teacher to reliable sources of information for every topic.

The fourth feature, unfortunately, is a negative one. This 'new' syllabus does not say anything about the purposes of teaching English in Tanzania. After frequent criticisms about the lack of clarity in the previous aims, it seems the syllabus designers have decided to omit the 'aims' section from the syllabus. Once more the policy makers have failed to make it clear why Tanzanians should learn English. It is due to this, that the 'new' syllabus is likely to give rise to the same problems and may fail to provide a badly needed solution to the prevailing problems.

TEACHING MATERIALS

The importance of teaching materials especially in a foreign language situation cannot be overstated. These are a reliable guide without which the non-native teacher's work is made more difficult. For most of the past two decades our teachers were expected to draw mainly on their own knowledge of the language, sometimes with no support at all. It should be recalled that the problem started in the late 1960's and early 1970's when books and other materials from outside the country were banned on cultural and political grounds. Although this step was appropriate given the prevailing circumstances, it was taken at the time when there was nothing to be used instead.



The problem was compounded by the language policy which made it clear that English was to be replaced by Kiswahili as a medium of secondary education. This gave rise to the misconception that English was also to cease being a school subject. The policy was reaffirmed at regular intervals: 1969, 1970, 1974, 1979, 1982 (Trappes-Lomax: 1986: 58), leading to an undermining of both the teaching and the use of English in the country. Consequently, English came to be seen as a language that was being phased out and people lost interest in its maintenance. Local experts and authors could not invest in writing materials for use in teaching English, because nobody was ready to risk publishing materials which would not be marketable in the near future.

It must also be pointed out that due to economic problems the use of audio-visual aids like video machines and language laboratories has never been on the agenda. This has denied to both the teachers and their students the only means of getting exposure to the spontaneous models of first language speakers of English. In almost all schools at the moment, it is not easy for teachers to prepare even handouts because of lack of paper and inadequate printing and reproducing facilities.

The solution to the problem of materials lies in the adoption of a clear policy (Batibo: forthcoming), and in the readiness of the Ministry of Education and the Institute of Curriculum Development to help teachers and authors who are willing and ready to write materials. With a clear policy, people will know why English is needed and what skills are to be given prominence. This will also enable them to give advice on the selection and production of the right materials. The Ministry and the Institute should be prepared to help both financially and technically, and to

ensure that the materials are published in time and that they are suitable for use in schools.

#### THE STATUS OF ENGLISH:

The status of English in Tanzania has recently been the subject of considerable debate. However, it is maintained here that given the sociolinguistic environment obtaining in Tanzania it is only reasonable to say that English is a foreign language. This is in line with Stern's distinction between second and foreign language situations:

"In the 'second language' situation where the language is used within the environment in which it is learnt, teachers and learners have immediate and regular access to opportunities of language use ... In the 'foreign language' situation the environmental support is lacking and therefore has to be compensated for by special pedagogical measures". (Stern 1983: 279)

The status of English in Tanzania has reached the situation which also fits Richards' description of a foreign language: it has become an important school subject, the language of certain courses at university and of textbooks, the language which may be needed for people who work in tourism, business, etc. and the first foreign language studied at school. (Richards 1986:2)

The only second language function which English is left with is that of being a 'medium' of secondary and higher education. However, it is now widely conceded that English collapsed as an effective medium and there has been a clear shift in its status from second to foreign language. This is acknowledged even by those who still claim that it is a second language (eg. Trappes-Lomax; op.cit.).

Unfortunately, this fact seems to be very much ignored or underrated by policy makers.

#### ENGLISH AS A MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION

Although the question English as a medium of instruction is beyond the scope of this paper, it is worth noting here that English is evidently being pushed aside in actual day to day practice in the classroom. Criper and Dodd estimated that "up to 75% of teaching at any rate in Form 1, is being done in Kiswahili (1984:34). Mlana and Matheru (1978) had earlier reported the students' failure to respond to questions asked in English and their quick response when the questions were asked in Kiswahili. The reason for this is given by Criper and Dodd thus:

"Only a handful of pupils are at a level of adequate for English medium education - 1% of Form 1, and the same figure for Form IV" (1984:23).

The problem is also worrying the teachers most of whom are complaining that their students can no longer cope with subjects taught in English. Some teachers see English as an obstacle to learning, and therefore think that its retention in that capacity will cause more harm than good to our education system. This is corroborated by the findings that Kiswahili is used even in the teaching of English itself. Some teachers have even argued that they do not see any reason why English should be made an obstacle to learning, and they find the decision to retain it as the sacrifice of knowledge in favour of language medium.

REMEDIAL MEASURES:

The only main remedial measure taken so far is the English Language Support Project (ELSP), run with the aid from the British Government. This is the only project that is covering nearly the whole country. It is a bit difficult to say whether the project is a success or not, for it is still too early for any reliable evaluation to be done.

However, it is worth making some observations while we are waiting for a full evaluation. While everybody appreciates the help this country is receiving through this project, it has to be accepted as well that it is difficult for a package-like project to really provide a vitally needed solution for our language (English) and educational problems. The project needs a wider and stronger base, and it has to be incorporated in the curriculum as a long-term measure.

The materials that are being imported through this project are still not enough to cover the number of students in secondary schools. A good example is one school in Morogoro which was given about 40 copies of Things Fall Apart (among other titles). This novel is supposed to be read by Form III/IV students, and this school has about seven streams in each form! To compound the problem, the students are not allowed to take the books away, and the books are only issued during the respective class periods.

The level at which the project starts is also worth examining. If the project is aiming at raising the students' standard of English for use as a medium of instruction, then the question of whether or not Form I students should also follow their studies - at least for the first term - in English should be answered. Given their primary school background, Form I students are at a very

elementary level, too elementary for them to make any meaningful use of the language.

On the other hand, the project is bound to succeed - at least temporarily - in raising the standards of teaching and learning English as a subject. The students who have started Form I after the introduction of the project are expected to come out of Form IV better - at least in English - than the earlier ones. However, this is possible only if there are effective systems for both follow-up and on-going evaluation of all activities in the teaching/learning process.

#### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The foregoing discussion has made it clear that inadequate teaching and use of English in Tanzanian Secondary Schools is due mainly to policy issues. The trend of events clearly shows that the cause of the current deterioration in English is traceable to a deliberate move by the Party and the Government in the sixties aimed at promoting Kiswahili at the expense of all foreign languages. The main argument has been that first and foremost the role of English in the country must be better defined, for this will determine its place in our education system. This will in turn influence the kind of syllabus and the type of teaching facilities, materials and methodology to be used.

We have also seen that while it is true that English standards are deteriorating the responsibility for this trend has been wrongly assigned to the teachers. The teachers have always been the scapegoats may be because it is easy to assess the results of their work. Unfortunately efforts to establish the causes of the falling standards have concentrated on what goes on in the classroom and the students performance in exams, consequently failing to

address the main source of the problem: vague and unrealistic language policies.

It has also been pointed out that we should consider using a differentiated approach in English teaching, and that immediate action should be taken, especially in the areas of teacher training and materials production. This is because English has been and will remain an important foreign language, regardless of whether or not it is a medium of education at any level.

Now that we are all aware that the teaching of English in the country has seriously deteriorated, it is our duty to rectify this situation. A number of steps should be taken to make sure that the teaching of English - like all other school subjects - is a successful undertaking and a worthwhile investment.

To start with it must be officially accepted that the status of English has changed and it has become a foreign language. This will help in setting realistic policies and a practicable language curriculum. Secondly, an intensive language policy review should be effected in order to clearly define the purposes of teaching English in Tanzania.

Thirdly, teacher training programmes for English teachers should also be reviewed, aiming at giving them adequate/appropriate preparation for foreign language teaching. Fourthly, if English is to continue as a medium of instruction in secondary schools, an intensive English course before Form I - at least for 3 - 6 months - should be introduced. This can be done either by introducing a pre-Form I stage and therefore leave Form I syllabus as it is; or by reducing Form I syllabus in order allow some time (up to 6 months) to be used for English language teaching only. This is based on the fact that most students leave primary

schools with very little knowledge of English to enable them to follow their lessons through the language.

Fifthly, the Ministry of Education in collaboration with the Institute of Curriculum Development should encourage and support co-operation among teachers and other people who are interested in writing and publishing teaching materials. They should sponsor regular professional meetings, after which they should also help in publishing proceedings and deliberations of such gatherings. To achieve this the Ministry should also operate a publishing unit which would cater for teaching materials and other educational publications.

Lastly, the government should arrange to purchase the copyright of some of the books that are currently being imported through the ELSP locally so that such books can be locally produced. This is necessary if the project is to continue after the expiry of the project contract. It will also help in producing more copies in order to reduce the present deficit of these materials in schools.

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THE PLACE OF ENGLISH IN THE TANZANIAN EDUCATION  
SYSTEM ; THE POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC DIMENSIONS  
TO CURRENT AND ALTERNATIVE LANGUAGE POLICY OPTIONS

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INTRODUCTION

In this paper, we discuss the place of English in the Tanzanian Education System. The discussion takes the form of a critical description of the problems underlying the current and alternative language policy options in Tanzania. Our point of departure is that language policy has to be placed within the framework of a wider political and economic context of society. We argue that given the present level of socio-economic underdevelopment of Tanzania, the present policy can only retard, rather than accelerate our development. It is important to stress this point because the proponents of the present language policy give as their main argument the need for Tanzania to 'catch-up' with the rest of the world in scientific and technological development. For example, in 1983 the Minister for Education said, "we must learn from foreign nations and in order to do so we must use English to promote understanding (of what is learnt) in schools." (Quoted in Schmied, 1986: 109)