

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

By

A F Lwaitama

and

C M Rubagumya

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)

### THE CURRENT POLICY

Very briefly stated, the current language policy in education consists of:

- teaching Kiswahili as a subject to all pupils at primary and secondary school level,
- teaching all subjects (except English) in Kiswahili at primary school level,
- teaching siasa (political education) in Kiswahili at secondary school level,
- teaching all the other subjects in English at secondary and tertiary levels of education.

Several assumptions underly the present policy. First, it is assumed that it is possible to teach in English at all levels where English is currently the medium of instruction. In other words, students are assumed to be proficient in English enough to be taught in that language. This assumption is questioned by several educationists (Trappes-Lomax, 1986; Yahya-Othman, 1987)

Secondly, it is assumed that all (or at least most) teachers and instructors called upon to teach in English have adequate levels of fluency to enable them to do so as envisaged, and that this position has not changed over the years and is not expected to change in the near future.

Thirdly, for the proponents of the present policy, the most cost-effective means of getting access to scientific and technological advances in the world as a whole (e.g. through documentation, conferences and exchange of personnel) is to have as many Tanzanians as possible acquire adequate levels of fluency in English for the purpose. The alternative option of training a few Tanzanians to get access to such knowledge in English and then having these Tanzanians make

such knowledge available to as many Tanzanians as possible in Kiswahili is rejected.

Fourthly, it is assumed that adequate levels of fluency in English for the purposes of getting access to scientific and technological advances in the world as a whole cannot be achieved if English is not used as medium of instruction. However, people in other parts of the world master foreign languages without having to use them as media of instruction.

Finally, it is assumed that all knowledge currently being generated in the world is originally in English, and that all foreign personnel currently working in Tanzania are competent in English.

#### Problems inherent in current policy options

(a)

It is difficult to envisage a situation where there will be adequate numbers of teachers and other instructors with adequate levels of fluency in English to implement the present policy option (see next section).

(b)

Where local publishing in English is difficult, foreign currency would be required for the importation of books and other teaching materials and this dependency on foreign resources may prove unsustainable. This problem is currently perhaps made less obvious by the British Government funded English Language Support Project.

(c)

It is difficult to envisage a situation whereby the currently acknowledged inadequacies among students in the mastering of English language as a medium of instruction would be eliminated in the foreseeable future. This being

that it is impossible to continue getting such foreign funding as would be adequate to meet the ever increasing demand for secondary and tertiary education. Even if it was possible one could argue that it is undesirable both economically and politically. Economically such dependency would tend to stifle the development of indigenous scientific and technological capacities with respect to local publish of educational materials. This would in turn tend to accentuate Tanzania's economic dependency thus further weakening its political sovereignty. Tanzania's non-aligned posture in international relations which, since 1964, has facilitated the diversification in the sources of foreign funding for its development programmes could then be put in jeopardy. The international economic situation in the 1980's does not augur well for availability of foreign funds for socioeconomic development in countries like Tanzania. This should be all the more reason for the diversification of the possible sources of such funding. One could further argue that such an hostile international economic climate demands that even diversification in foreign sources of funding for socio-economic development is not the basic solution to these countries' problems. The situation would seem to demand for the development of indigenous scientific and technological capacities on a self-reliant basis. We assume that these countries will eventually realise this and act accordingly.

(c)

As far as the problem of the student's mastery of English as the medium of education is concerned, we assume that sociolinguistic environment prevailing in Tanzania today will inevitably lead to Kiswahili taking over (initially in a de fact manner) as the medium of education. It will

the case difficulties may be encountered in fulfilling the country's manpower training targets. (Yahya-Othman 1987 discusses some of the implications of this aspect of the current policy options.)

(d)

It can be assumed that communication problems must be experienced where foreign technical assistance personnel with inadequate levels of fluency in English work with their Tanzanian counterparts whose levels of fluency in English is equally inadequate. Technological transfer is in this case likely to be hampered thus affecting adversely Tanzania's socio-economic development.

#### ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

The alternative options are based on the following assumptions relating to the current problems:

(a)

Relating to the problem of the shortage of teachers and instructors with the requisite knowledge of English, we assume that this problem is likely to be exacerbated by the political impossibility of stemming the tide of the proliferation of secondary and tertiary level institutions. Political education in Tanzania since 1967 appears to have made it difficult for significant regional-ethnic-imbances in educational provision to be easily accepted. Unless this 'mushrooming' of secondary and tertiary institutions is matched by appropriate teacher-training, which is not the case at the moment, the problem of teachers who are not proficient in English will remain.

(b)

With respect to the problem of dependency on foreign funding in securing books and other educational materials we assure

appear to us that policy makers will eventually have to address themselves to this inevitability of Kiswahili becoming the medium of instruction. It does not seem helpful to sit back and pretend that this inevitability could be reversed especially given the inadequacies in foreign funding currently available for the financing of projects to boost the teaching of English in secondary and tertiary education. We think that it is better to start now planning for the inevitable change of media rather than leave such to occur in a spontaneous and hapazard manner. We suspect that the country's entire educational system is likely to be damaged substantially if current trends are allowed to continue unchecked. (Yahya-Othman 1987)

In relation to possible communication difficulties between foreign and local technicians working on foreign funded development projects, we assure that there are more foreign technicians from non-English speaking countries than there are from English speaking ones.

A general survey of foreign countries that have supported Tanzania's major development programmes in the 1980's bears out our assumption (Baregu, 1988). There has been a substantial contribution made by the Nordic Countries, Netherlands and Federal Republic of Germany to water provision programmes in the country for example (see Table in the Appendix) The Ministry of Water's Master Planning Co-ordination Unit was established with Nordic assistance in 1980.

In the agricultural sector, the Netherlands has provided Tanzania with more technical peronnel assistance than any other single foreign source in the period 1970/71 to 1986/87 (Msambichaka: forthcoming). There has also been substantial contributions made by Japan in the field of power rehabilitation and road construction (Daily News -

Tanzania 5.3.1988) Other countries such as The Peoples Republic of China, The Democratic People's Republic of Korea, and the Islamic Republic of Iran have also made significant contributions with technical assistance personnel especially in the field of modern farming involving irrigation (Daily News 7.2.1988). The Soviet Union and the German Democratic Republic have also committed a lot of resources involving technical assistance personnel in the technical education fields in addition to involvement in other fields.

We assume that processes of technological transfer in Tanzania would be enhanced if there was no assumption on the part of foreign technicians that Tanzania was an English speaking country! Until Kiswahili becomes both the de fact and the de jure medium of education at secondary and terial levels of education, this erroneous tendency to anglicize Tanzania will persist with the consequences that it entails in respect to the potential for communication difficulties between foreign and local technical personnel on foreign funded projects.

Below are the alternative policy options which could be implemented in the order in which they occur:

- (a) the current policy option of teaching English in all secondary schools with a policy of teaching in English only in a few secondary schools. Let admission to these admittedly elite schools be competitive on the basis of student ability rather than parental economic strength or social status. Switch the medium of education in the rest of the secondary schools to Kiswahili in a planned manner. We consider all claims that such a policy will be elitist to be demagogic the current policy option is equally

elitist with the difference that it is elitism based on parental economic and/or social status rather than students' ability. A non-elitist policy will be one where every primary school leaver had the opportunity entering secondary school and where the socio-linguistic environment was equally favourable to all students wishing to acquire adequate levels of fluency in English. The current policy option penalizes students whose parents' economic and social status does not facilitate such students' acquisition of English. In the alternative policy option we are proposing, students such as these are given a real choice between pursuing secondary education in English or in Kiswahili.

- (b) Continue with current policy of teaching English as a subject in all secondary schools and improve on the implementation of this by setting realistic objectives to guide ELT. Also explore possibilities of students exchange programmes with countries where English is predominantly used e.g. Australia, New Zealand, Canada, U.S.A., Jamaica, etc.
- (c) Discontinue present policy of teaching English as a subject at primary school level. Instead strengthen implementation of the current policy of teaching Kiswahili as a subject and the teaching of all other subjects in Kiswahili. (The gradual shift in the status of English from being a second language to being a foreign one would seem to justify its removal from the primary school curriculum).
- (d) From both the Kiswahili-medium and the English-



medium secondary schools select a number of schools where other foreign languages will be offered as optional subjects. These foreign languages do not have to be only West European! If current patterns of international co-operation continue (with Tanzania increasingly co-operating more with non-English speaking countries than with English speaking ones), then languages such as Japanese, Korean, Arabic, Swedish, Norwegian, Dutch, German, Russian, Chinese, Spanish, French, Danish and Finnish could be selected. It is not being suggested that all these languages be offered as options in any one school. Nor is it being suggested that they be offered immediately and all at the same time and at the same level.

- (e) Kiswahili should eventually be the main medium of education at tertiary level. Only in a few elite institutes of foreign languages would the relevant foreign languages be used as media. In all tertiary institutions English is likely to remain the most important foreign language for most students to have a functional knowledge of. Therefore, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) programmes should be established in all tertiary institutions. However, the ESP programmes currently organized by quite a number of Communication Skills (in English) Units may need to be re-examined in the light of all the elements constituting the proposed alternative policy options.
- (f) Programmes in the teaching of a number of other foreign languages (other than English) for specific purposes should also, where possible, be established. A French language programme offered in the Faculty of Engineering at the

University of Dar es Salaam for a number of years demonstrates that this policy option is not far fetched! There is no reason why, for example, a course in Japanese for Specific Purposes (JSP) should not be offered to students undertaking specialist studies in Kiswahili whose modern lexicon is said to have borrowed a lot of lexical items from Arabic (Kihore, 1983: 164).

## CONCLUSION

We have discussed policy options which appear to have been taken by the current political leadership in Tanzania. Like in most African countries the main option has been to continue with the use of the language of the former colonial power in as many fields of communication as possible. Unlike in many other African countries, however, Tanzania opted quite early to intensify and extend the use of an indigenous language, Kiswahili, as the language of wider communication in the political and social spheres. The adoption of this language policy option bolstered by some of the political and economic measures taken to implement the Arusha Declaration on the building of "a socialist and self-reliant country" would appear to have set in motion processes leading to the present situation whereby English has virtually ceased to be a viable medium of communication in the education system as a whole (Criper & Dodd, 1984; Trappes-Lomax 1986).

We have looked at the problems inherent in the options that have been taken, suggesting that the assumptions on which the options were based were erroneous.

We have put forward alternative policy options based on assumptions which are in our view more plausible.

Tanzania would appear to be facing a crisis in language policy formulation which some observers may find hard to understand. On the one hand it is often cited as an example of a country in sub-Saharan Africa which is an exception (together with Somalia and Ethiopia) to the rule that "foreign colonial languages are more favoured now than they were before independence" (Mateene, 1980): vii quoted by Phillipson et al 1986: 91). Tanzania is seen as a country which has opted to promote the widest possible use of an

its languages, were nevertheless masters of African languages which they often reduced to writing". Contemporary political and economic leaders in Africa are likely to be forced by current political and economic necessity to begin to learn from the European Christian missionaries vis-a-vis the use of indigenous African languages.

indigenous language. On the other, it has, especially since 1983, opted to rationalize (like every other sub-Saharan African country) the continued use of a 'colonial language' as a medium of education at the secondary and tertiary levels.

The political and economic dimensions of the current and proposed alternative policy options are not hard to see. The current policy options are based on the assumption that African countries cannot develop socially and economically without former European colonial powers. Hence the perceived necessity to continue to rely on the use of languages of former European colonial powers for wider communication in the sphere of scientific and technological education.

The Alternative options that we propose are based on the assumption that African countries are actually unlikely to develop if they continue to rely to a very large extent on technical assistance from former European colonial powers. Current political and economic trends in world dictate a reappraisal of past language policy options which did not give due weight to the need for diversification in international contacts and the intensification of efforts to develop indigenous capacities. Political and economic necessity would seem to dictate that African countries begin teaching some of their people Japanese, German, Russian, Korean, Chinese, etc. through the medium of African language rather than through the medium of English, French or Portuguese. Economic and political trends will also tend to demand that African countries must begin to disseminate both elementary and advanced technical information in languages in which most of their peoples are most fluent! As the Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiongo (1986: 26) has put it, even "the most zealous of European missionaries who believed in rescuing Africa from itself, even from the paganism of

## R E F E R E N C E S

- Baregu, M (1988) 'The Arusha Declaration Paradox or How Self-reliance Policy Reinforced Tanzania's Dependence' in Maji Maji, No. 46.
- Criper, C and Dodd, W A (1984) Report on the Teaching of English Language and its use as a medium in Education in Tanzania, The British Council/ODA, London/Dar es Salaam.
- Kihore, I M (1983) 'Maandishi ya Kiarabu yaliyo na umuhimu wa Kiswahili'.  
Makala za Semina ya Kimataifa ya Waandishi wa Kiswahili,  
Institute of Kiswahili Research,  
Dar es Salaam.
- Msambichaka, L A & J A Rugumyamheto (1988) A Study of High Level Agricultural Manpower and Technical Assistance, Final Report Vol.1 Ministry of Agricultural & Liverstock Development,  
Dar es Salaam.
- Ngugi wa Thiongo (1986) Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature, James Currey,  
London.
- Phillipson, R et al (1986) 'Namibian Educational Language Planning: English for Liberation or Neo-Colonialism? In Spolsky, B (ed.)  
Language and Education in Multilingual Settings, Multilingual Matters Ltd.
- Schmied, J J (1986) 'English in Tanzanian Education'  
Bayreuth African Studies Series,  
No. 5

Trappes-Lomax, H R (1986) 'Can a Foreign Language be a national medium?' in Proceedings of Conference on English in East Africa 24-27 March 1986, The British Council Nairobi, pp. 57-67.

Yahya-Othman, S (1987) 'When International Languages Clash; The Possible Detrimental Effects on Development of the Conflict between English and Kiswahili in Tanzania' Paper presented at the Association of Teachers of Language and Literature (ATOL) Conference, Harare, Zimbabwe, August.

## APPENDIX A

Table 1: DONORS IN THE TANZANIA WATER PROGRAMME

<u>REGION</u>	<u>WATER PROJECT</u>	<u>DONOR</u>
1 Kagera	Rural Water Supply	Swedish International Development Agency
	Bukoba Urban Water Supply	Italian Government
2 Mara	Rural Water Supply	Swedish International Development Agency
	Musoma Urban Water Supply	Italian Government
3 Mwanza	Rural Water Supply	Swedish International Development Agency
	Urban Water Supply	European Economic Community
4 Shinyanga	Rural Water Supply	Dutch Government
	Urban Water Supply	African Development Bank
5 Singida	Rural Water	Australian Government (have the country) Tanzania Christian Refugee Service
	Manyoni District	Precious Blood Fathers
6 Dodoma	Rehabilitation Rural Water Supply	Water Aid (British Government)



	Mwisanga/Ntomoko Project	Christian Council of Tanzania (CCT)
7	Morogoro Rural Water Supply	Dutch Government
8	Mtwara Rural water Supply	Finnish International Development Agency
	Urban Water Supply	European Economic Community
9	Coast Bagamoyo Rural	Danish International Development Agency
10	Lindi Rural Water Supply	Finnish International Development Agency
11	Mbeya Rural Water Supply	Finnish International Development Agency
	Urban Water Supply	European Economic Community
12	Ruvuma Rural Water Supply	Danish International Development Agency
13	Iringa Rural Water Supply	Danish International Development Agency
14	Kigoma Rural Water Supply	Norwegian Agency for International Development
15	Arusha Urban Water Supply	Government of the Federal Republic of Germany

16 Tanga	Rural Water Supply	Government of the Federal Republic of Germany
	Urban Water Supply	Government of the Federal Republic of Germany
17 Rukwa	Rural Water Supply	Norwegian Agency for International Development
18 Kilima- njaru	Water Master Plan	Japanese Government
19 Tabora	Water Master Plan	World Bank
20 D'Salaam	Water Master Plan	Canadian International Development Agency

Source: "Daily News", TANZANIA, 22.3.88

## APPENDIX B

Table 2: FUNDING AGENCY FOR TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE  
PERSONNEL IN AGRICULTURAL SECTOR (1970/71-1986/87)

Funding Agency	Technical Assistance Personnel				Total 74 - 87
	70 - 75	75 - 80	80 - 86	86-87	
ADB	-	-	-	2	2
Bangladesh	-	1	1	-	2
Belgium	18	2	9	2	31
Bulgaria	-	-	-	3	3
CFTC	-	-	-	1	1
China	18	17	18	19	72
CIDA	6	1	-	4	11
DANIDA	3	6	14	6	29
DPR-Korea	-	2	14	27	43
Dutch Aid	5	27	78	30	140
East Germany	-	-	1	2	3
EEC	-	3	9	14	26
Egypt	-	-	2	2	4
FAO	11	15	53	52	131
FINIDA	-	2	-	5	7
France	-	-	2	6	8
FRC	5	6	36	17	61
Hungary	2	2	1	-	5
ILO	-	1	-	-	1
India	5	3	7	-	15
Ireland	-	2	4	-	6
Italy	1	-	1	14	16
JIC	1	7	16	14	38
Mexico	-	1	-	-	1
New Zealand	-	3	2	4	9
NORAD	-	2	3	3	8
ODA	8	26	35	14	83
SIDA	2	1	11	7	21

Sudan	-	7	4	-	11
Switzerland	-	-	3	1	4
Tanzania Gvt	45	68	47	16	176
UNDP	3	3	3	4	13
USAID	12	23	41	4	80
USSR	-	-	7	4	11
WFP	-	-	-	1	1
World Bank	2	11	16	14	43
Yugoslavia	-	-	-	1	1
Others	2	15	29	7	53
Unspecified	6	4	3	4	17
TOTAL	155	261	467	304	1187

Source: Rugumyamheto & Msambichaka (1988:72)

## APPENDIX C

Table 3: TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PERSONNEL INAGRICULTURAL SECTOR (1970/71-186/87)

POST/TITLE	No. of Technical Assistance				Total
	Personnel/Period				Personnel
	70 - 75	75 - 80	80 - 86	86 - 87	70 - 87
Admin. Advisor & Magnt	10	28	55	31	124
Agric. Mechan- ization	-	-	-	-	3
Agric. Educ- ationists	14	43	69	39	156
Agric. Extn- tionists	1	2	4	8	15
Agroforestry	-	-	-	2	2
Agronomists	9	8	25	24	66
Animal Health & Vet Off	6	4	-	2	12
Animal Prod & Husbandry	5	3	11	4	23
Animal Science General	-	9	2	2	13
Computer Experts	-	-	-	3	3
Crop Protection	7	9	7	4	27
Dairy Experts	1	4	3	7	15
Economists	10	13	34	20	74
Eng. & Mech. Experts	40	47	109	73	269

Environmental Scientists	-	-	5	1	6
Financial Experts	9	32	35	29	105
Food Processing	1	2	-	-	3
General Agriculturists	4	3	22	8	37
Horticulturists	2	3	1	1	8
Info/Docmnt Experts	-	-	3	-	3
Land Use Planners	-	-	4	-	4
Market. & Distrib. Special	1	-	6	1	8
Medical Officers	2	2	3	1	8
Nutritionists	1	3	-	-	4
Plant Breeding	9	5	12	5	31
Research Officers	8	11	8	11	38
Technologists	8	4	12	11	35
Unspecified	7	24	37	26	94
Miscellaneous					
TOTAL	155	261	467	304	1187

Source: Rugumyamheto & Msambichaka (1988:60).

## LANGUAGE PROBLEMS IN SECONDARY EDUCATION IN TANZANIA

WITH FOCUS ON THE PLACE OF ENGLISH IN TANZANIA'S

EDUCATION SYSTEM

By

C M R MONGELA (Mrs)

INTRODUCTION

It is very common today, in Tanzania, to hear people saying that our educational standard has fallen. One of the criteria they use is poor spoken and written English by school leavers, especially, secondary school leavers. It is difficult to deny the claim by the public that the standard of English in Tanzania schools has been falling tremendously. Although it is not the only measure of a falling standard of education, language poverty can be one of the major contributors. It is language which facilitates communication of ideas as well as development and expression of thought. I believe that the higher institutions of learning in our country introduced Communication Skills course in the early nineteen eighties, as a reaction to the bitter fact that the standard of English has fallen. At the University level, there is, in addition, the Screening Test which is administered to all First Year Students. Those who score very low marks have to undergo an Intensive Grammar Programme.