

Language and the Postcolonial Condition¹

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The outcome of the South African language debates saw the country adopting a multilingual language policy that *gives official recognition* to eleven languages, including English and Afrikaans and *nine indigenous languages*. While it is politically justifiable for the language policy to reverse the injustices incurred by speakers of indigenous languages through colonization, and later apartheid, I intend to caution against an unrealistic assumption that the introduction of indigenous languages as medium of instruction at all levels of education in South Africa will be a reality, and that, if it were to happen, that would result in economic development and improvement of living conditions for all.

Given the strikingly powerful status of English in most of South Africa's educational institutions and in the world of business and commerce, and the accompanying limited and/or non implementation of the new language policy-in-education, the success of the policy is unlikely. Jansen (2002:271f)

¹ This paper is part of a National Research Foundation (NRF) funded project that ran from 2002 – 2005. The theme of the project was *Revisiting the Postcolonial Condition: A South African Perspective*. The project leader was Professor Michael Chapman. My contribution represents an attempt to give voice and/ or space to the so-called postcolonial subjects around the issue of language policy in education. The grand narrative of decolonization, with its accompanying populist rhetoric on language as both a product and reflection of culture, 'has for the moment, been adequately told and widely accepted; smaller narratives are now needed, with attention paid to local topography, so that maps can come fuller' (Hulme 1994:71f). This contribution hopes to achieve exactly this.

ascribes limited and/or non-implementation of most educational policies after apartheid to what he calls 'the theory of political symbolism', by which he means 'a struggle for the achievement of a broad political symbolism to mark the shift from apartheid to post-apartheid society'. In many respects our language policy-in-education, I want to argue, achieves such a symbolism. To have eleven official languages, nine of which were previously marginalized and only used to divide and discriminate against their speakers, is the best the local masses and the international community can expect after the first democratic elections.

Using Kenya, Tanzania, and Namibia, to include a comparative element, this article offers a critical reflection on South Africa's language policy-in-education by contrasting policy intentions and implications with the practical realities that, like sunrise and sunset, are here to stay. The article will argue that the South African language policy-in-education is a response (by the government) to the pressure to succumb to discourses of freedom, equality, fairness, justice, liberation, and the grand narrative of decolonization. The latter (grand narrative of decolonization), with its accompanying populist rhetoric on language as both a product and reflection of culture,

has, for the moment, been adequately told and widely accepted, smaller narratives are now needed, with attention paid to local topography, so that maps can come fuller (Hulme 1994:71f).

Through providing reflections on research I conducted in the three countries referred to previously, I hope to offer 'smaller narratives' as each one of them responded differently to post-independence demands with regard to language policies-in-education. Of the four countries, South Africa is the only country that has boldly given indigenous languages, and nine of them for that matter, an official status. To better understand South Africa's choice, on the one hand, and to be in a position to monitor, either its implementation or revision, on the other hand, it is crucial to understand how Tanzania, a country that took a similar decision hundreds of years ago by adopting Kiswahili as the official language and the medium of instruction, experiences such a policy decision in institutions of learning today, how Kenya, a country that has chosen to adopt English as the only official

language and Kiswahili as a national language, manages such a policy in a country where there are forty two indigenous languages, and how Namibia, a country where, even though there are nine indigenous languages and Afrikaans seems to be the widely spoken language in almost every sector of society yet English is the only official language, tackles implementation challenges. It is within the context of finding answers to these questions that this article aims to re-examine South Africa's Language Policy-in-Education and the specific demands of the South African situation.

A Brief Survey of Some Postcolonial States in Africa

A closer look at language policies in various postcolonial contexts in Africa reveals that more often than not the language of the former colonizer continues to occupy prestigious positions. This is despite the effort made by political leadership to give local languages a more meaningful, or should we say *symbolic*, place in policy documents. With the exception of Namibia, the majority of African countries, whether former French, English, Portugues, Spanish or Belgian colonies have continued with the language policies of the colonizer. This is especially true with the choice of the official language and the medium of instruction in secondary and post-secondary education. Of course there have been changes in some countries, especially with regard to the role of local languages, but generally the position of the language of the former colonizer has still remained a privileged one. Many African countries south of the Sahara, for example, have elevated some selected local languages, but only to the position of *national languages*, and few have adopted them as official languages and/or as media of instruction. Countries such as Burundi, Botswana, Rwanda, and Somali, are almost monolingual, with Kirundi, Setswana, Kinyarwanda, and Somali, respectively, spoken as mother tongues by more than 75% of the population. In these countries the adoption of indigenous languages as both official and medium of instruction at all levels of education would make sense. But, in spite of this advantage, these countries still adopted English as their medium of instruction at all levels of education and the language used in the central economy.

Some countries, furthermore, have one language that, initially, became the second language for the majority of speakers of different languages but ultimately a first language for later generations. This is the case of Kiswahili in Tanzania and Amharic in Ethiopia (Whitely 1969;

Marcos 1970). In such countries it has been possible to choose such a language as the official, national language, as well as a medium of instruction for part, if not all, of the primary education, but not for secondary and/or tertiary education. The exception is Senegal where, similar to the four countries south of the Sahara mentioned earlier on, even though Wolof is spoken by 80% of the population, French was declared the official language at independence because of the need to ensure operational efficiency and to provide continuity and unity (Mansour 1980). It is also the medium of instruction at all levels of education. Six of the major languages are given the status of *national languages*, but they are only used for cultural activities on television and radio.

Other countries have many languages, none of which is spoken widely enough beyond its borders to be accepted by speakers of other languages. In many such cases, no local language has been designated as an official or national one or as a medium of instruction. The majority of African countries fall into this category. Cameroon provides a good example, with two European languages, English and French, as official. Post independence governments in this country decided to drop the use of vernaculars in education, *even though* they had been used during the colonial period (Todd 1983).

South African Language-in-education Policies

The South African situation with regard to debates around language-in-education policy, like with the foregoing discussion, cannot be understood in isolation from the historical account of the development of English as an official language. According to Reagan (1988), from 1652 to 1806, the question of the language of instruction was not an issue because the majority of the white population spoke Dutch. At the time, African communities had not by then realized the implications of the sidelining of their languages and culture in education. While native languages occupied no position whatsoever as usable media of communication, the position of English as a medium of instruction came into play. Reagan (1988) reminds us that preparations for this began as early as 1809 when General Colin proposed that English teachers be imported to ensure that the next South African generation, both black and white, would be 'English'. When the British

settlers took charge of the Cape administration in 1814, General Colin's proposal received an official boost. All teachers who spoke English as an additional language and were efficient in teaching it received huge salaries *to promote the optimum use of English throughout the country*, that is, both in urban and in rural areas. In 1825 the implementation of policies that legitimized English as the South African first official language were effected, and this was followed by the Smuts Education Act of 1907 which made the teaching of English obligatory, stipulating that every child had to learn English at school. At this stage it was never dreamt that any African language would ever become the medium of instruction in education, let alone become an official language of the country. It was only towards the mid 1930s that indigenous languages found space in education. Wright (2002:8) records that

From about 1935 in black schools a minimum of four years schooling ... took place in the mother tongue, with English as medium of instruction in subsequent years.

African children attended mission schools, for the most part, and were taught by clergy or by lay teachers, sometimes with government assistance. This state of affairs gave black children ideas of growing up to live in a world of equal rights between black and white. The large portion of the white community, however, did not receive racial integration with enthusiasm. McArthur (1998:12) records that

Throughout the nineteenth century, Afrikaners resisted government policies aimed at the spread of the English language and racial integration, and many educated their children at home or in the churches.

As elections were approaching, the National Party (NP) election campaigns focused on criticizing government policies and, as a result, was able to capitalize on the fear of racial integration in the schools to build its support. The NP's election victory in 1948 gave Afrikaans new standing in the schools, and after that, all high-school graduates were required to be proficient in both Afrikaans and English. Following the recommendations of

Dr. W.M. Eiselen Report (1951), Dr. Hendrik F. Verwoerd introduced a bill in 1953 to remove black education from missionary control to that of the Native Affairs Department. This bill became the Bantu Education Act (No. 47) of 1953 which widened the gaps in educational opportunities for different racial groups.

Two of its architects, Dr. W.M. Eiselen and Dr. Hendrik F. Verwoerd, had studied in Germany and had adopted many elements of National Socialist (Nazi) philosophy. The concept of racial 'purity', in particular, provided a rationalization for keeping black education inferior. Verwoerd, then minister of native affairs, said black Africans 'should be educated for their opportunities in life', and that there was no place for them 'above the level of certain forms of labour' (McArthur 1998:11). The government also tightened its control over religious high schools by eliminating almost all-financial aid, forcing many churches to sell their schools to the government or close them entirely. Addressing the Senate on Bantu Education, Verwoerd had the following to say:

I will reform it [black education] so that Natives will be taught from childhood to realize that equality with Europeans is not for them (McArthur 1998: 17).

He later explained to the Senate that there was 'no place' for blacks outside the reserves 'above the level of certain forms of labour'. So, 'What is the use of teaching a Bantu child mathematics when he cannot use it in practice?' He added, as McArthur (1998:13) puts it: 'Education must train and teach people in accordance with their opportunities in life'. Christian National Education supported the NP programme of apartheid by calling on educators *to reinforce cultural diversity and to rely on mother-tongue instruction* as means to achieve this government's separatist philosophy. This philosophy also espoused the idea that a person's social responsibilities and political opportunities are defined, in large part, by that person's ethnic identity and the language they speak.

It is precisely this philosophy that we, as young people, were committed to destroy during the 1970s and 1980s. Student strikes, vandalism, and violence were part of the attempts to undermine the ability of Bantu schools to function, although this had negative long-term effects on

the majority of learners from such schools. By the early 1990s, shortages of teachers, classrooms, and educational facilities had taken a huge toll on education, and black education in particular. South Africa's industrial economy, on the other hand, with its strong reliance on capital-intensive development, provided relatively few prospects for employment for those who had only minimal educational credentials or none at all. According to the Human Science Research Council's Report of 1999, this is because nationwide literacy was less than 60 percent throughout the 1980s, and an estimated 500,000 unskilled and uneducated young black South Africans faced unemployment by the end of the decade. At the same time, job openings for highly skilled workers and managers far outpaced the number of qualified applicants. These problems were being addressed in the political reforms of the 1990s, but the legacies of apartheid, the insufficient education of the majority of the black population, and the backlog of deficiencies in the school system promised to challenge future governments for decades, or perhaps generations.

On Deconstructing the Grand Narrative of Decolonization

Given the foregone brief survey of language-in-education policies of South Africa, it seems impractical, to say the least, for our government to achieve linguistic equity for eleven official languages, nine of them previously marginalized and only used to divide black people on linguistic grounds. Further complications have to do with the fact that the nine languages still need informed technical elaboration and standardization. Other related, rather ambitious projects by the South African government are endeavours to support the other cultural and heritage languages, including sign language, and helping to maintain dialects. All of this does not include the need to solve the problems of unqualified teachers, lack of teaching and learning materials, large classes, and shortages of classrooms and desks. Have I left out the perpetual challenge to make Outcomes Based Education modifications and adaptations a success?

If the South African education system is obviously confronted by these hugely complicated and two-pronged challenges; language related and resources availability, what is the rationale behind resorting to such an ambitious and, arguably, unrealistic language policy-in-education? Part of the reason, it may be argued, is a general belief that freedom from the

shackles of colonial and apartheid oppression warranted opportunities to reconsider, and ultimately recognize and adopt, to use Ngugi's (1986:8) words: 'the languages ... which ... were associated with negative qualities of backwardness, underdevelopment, humiliation and punishment'. Introducing such languages in formal education, furthermore, is thus seen as part of the decolonization process and the continuation of the liberation process. Kadege (2003: 80) offers a useful explanation with regard to the origins of such ideas:

There has been a general conviction that one only learns within the familiar habits of thought, experience and expression suggested by one's traditional culture; and that colonialism occasioned a disruption of the *natives'* traditions and experience that left them culturally impoverished, spiritually dislocated and in a state of moral decline.

Implicit in this view is a claim that it is within their traditional culture that people are most at ease with themselves and that there is a comfortable co-existence between the world and them. The logic in this claim is the idea of African identity as an irreducible essence of the race whose objective existence is the traditional culture as the only thing that defines the world. This has developed into some kind of an African philosophy or way of life and society. Irele (1981:2) summarizes this philosophy as 'an appeal to traditional culture as a remedy to our manifold problems'. Prah's (2002:1) introductory remarks in *Rehabilitating African Languages*, a collection of essays he edited, offer a classical example of this philosophy:

The need for the rehabilitation of African languages is a simple one. Africans learn best in their own languages, the languages they know from their parents, from home. It is in these languages that they can best create and innovate. Such innovation and creativity are crucial not only for development in an economic sense, but also necessary for the flourishing of democracy at a cultural level; they are languages which successfully engage the imagination of mass society. It is in these languages that the culture and histories of

African people from time immemorial have been constructed. It is in these languages that knowledge intended for the upliftment of the larger masses of African society can be effected.

Within the context of South Africa, and other countries in Africa, this philosophy has had a huge impact on the language-in-education policy debate. That language is both a product and reflection of culture, thus the use of an additional language as a medium of instruction alienates one from one's culture is a direct manifestation of this philosophy. The Department of Education document of 2002a:5 insists that 'the learner's home language be used for learning and teaching wherever possible' and, as though to clarify this, Section 29 of the South African Constitution affirms that everyone has the right to receive education in the official language(s) of their choice, (although this is qualified by an additional comment), 'but only where this is "reasonably practicable"'. One witnesses the manifestation of this philosophy again in Vic Web's (2002:214) assertion that 'African linguists, it seems to me, ... suffer from intellectual and spiritual colonization'. These are but a few illustrations of the extent to which the so-called African philosophy of life underpins much of the language-in-education debates in this country. Inherent in such assertions is an erroneous belief that African traditional values and world concept form significant, if not permanent, essences of our identity and, as such, the use of languages other than our own leads us to become something other than our 'real selves', a state of affairs at the root cause of our underdevelopment. It follows then that as a corrective measure, the way forward is to reclaim African languages as media of learning and academic expression. One may ask: is the use of an additional language as a medium of instruction necessarily alienating? Can one only learn within the familiar habits of thought, experience and expression suggested by one's traditional culture? Is the crisis in education in South Africa and in Africa in general reducible to the choice of language so that reversion to indigenous languages is the answer to our educational problems? The findings of the research project I conducted in Tanzania and Kenya in July 2003 and Namibia in July 2004 will attempt to feed into these and other related questions into the next sections.

Tanzania, Kenya and Namibia

My observations in this section draw on a study conducted by Kadegehe (2003) about which he reports in his 'In defense of continued use of English as the language of instruction in secondary and tertiary education in Tanzania', a chapter published in *Language of Instruction in Tanzania and South Africa* edited by Brock-Utne, Desai and Qoro. In Tanzania, Kiswahili has historically been a second language for the majority of the population, but has increasingly assumed first language status for later generations over the centuries. In an interview with Doctors Qoro and Professor Ragumbayi of Dar Es Salaam University, it became apparent that the older generation and academics that work as linguists resent the fact that Kiswahili has literary displaced indigenous languages in many Tanzanian people's lives. It is increasingly becoming a common phenomenon to come across Tanzanians who cannot speak a word in their indigenous languages, and can only speak Kiswahili. It is on the basis of these reasons that Kiswahili has become the medium of instruction in Tanzania from grade one to grade eight, after which English takes over up to tertiary education, although there are exceptions with English private schools. Kiswahili is the mother tongue, and so the hypothesis is that if the medium of instruction is this language, such learners should not experience huge learning difficulties because of language-related problems.

When I got an opportunity to interview four school teachers from the four schools where Kadegehe's research was conducted, it became clear that the Kiswahili advocates, whenever talking about Kiswahili as a suitable medium of instruction in Tanzania, they, probably unaware, were talking about the non-technical Kiswahili register that is claimed to be known by all students. It is the same version of Kiswahili that some science teachers have been unofficially using bilingually for many decades now when teaching science subjects. One of the teachers, herself referring to the Kiswahili science dictionary, observed that the Kiswahili words that were used by teachers did not appear in the technical Kiswahili science dictionaries. Thus, most of the terms failed to drive home the concepts intended and were sometimes misleading:

Clearly, to assume that learners' achievement levels will increase should we use languages they bring with them in the classroom is not necessarily true. This can probably work in the acquisition of initial literacy.

Wright (2002:9) correctly points out that rushing to use indigenous languages before they are properly developed to suit the demands of the modern world may

... disguise situations where learners in African languages are failing to move steadily towards greater linguistic and cognitive sophistication, remaining in the safety zone of general communication. They may be failing to learn because their teacher does not have a sound approach to language education, or because appropriate text-books are not available.

While Professor Mwansoko (2003) argues that there is still a lot to be done by Kiswahili lexicographers, Dr. Yahya-Othman (1997; 1990) also discusses at length the status of Kiswahili terminology and its ineffectiveness in academic circles. This is pertinent to the South African debate around the use of indigenous languages as medium of instruction in education. If to date Kiswahili, whose 'origin has been dated around the 7th and 8th century at the eastern Kenyan coast, near the mouth of Tana River' (Nurse 1987: 168), still needs more development, how much time do we need, have, and are we prepared to spend, to develop our nine historically marginalized languages?

The challenges and dilemmas experienced by Tanzania echo Kenya's adoption of English as an official language and the medium of instruction, with Kiswahili as a national language. In the words of the Eldoret District officer: '... of course we have Kiswahili as a national language, but when you come into the office you have to speak English. That's the way it is here' (2003), it is clear that Kenyans have made their choice to have English. Based on my research findings, attitudes towards English tend to cluster around two extreme positions – acceptance of the dominant position of English among some academics and the mass population, on the one hand, and strong opposition, in Professor Kembo-Sure's words: 'of the imposed colonial language among sections of the educated elite', on the other.

The interviews I conducted with the District Director of languages (English and Kiswahili), the retired magistrate, a parent, an English school teacher, two academics, four university students and four pupils gave an

impression that for many Kenyans there is no point in finding out whether Kenya needs no English or more of it. Broadly speaking, it is a given fact that access to the learning and teaching of English, especially in rural and semi urban areas, needs to be addressed. According to the high school teacher,

even though the new government has made education free, not all children have access to education, and to learning English. All depends on parents' ability to provide basic necessities for their children. Not all the children can come to school.

The most interesting finding is that, according to the teacher,

most learners display extreme readiness to learn English as subject, and in English as medium because of the job prospects that the language carries with it. Most of them come from [financially] struggling families and they see English as promising some kind of a way out of poverty.

Of course they have their own ethnic languages but, according to the interview with one of the parents, his language

... has no status outside specific ethnic groups and play no role to the fulfillment of their future dreams. If I go to a shop and speak my Nandi no one will pay attention to me.

Several responses during the interview further confirmed a trend that one observes in most postcolonial contexts that knowledge of the language(s) of the colonizer tend(s) to determine individuals' social mobility. According to one of the senior citizens, a retired magistrate from Kenya's supreme court,

for those of our old folk who have not had time to buy these foreign languages, that is, buying literacy by going to school to be educated and get it, they are restricted in terms of getting jobs. Even for entry into higher education you are asked how did you do in English. So English is central to Kenyan life.

It is mainly the educated elite who is opposed to the status of English as an official language. The link of English with the past causes this group to assert that Kenya will not be fully free from neo-colonialism until it breaks itself away from the language of slavery and oppression. The suggestion is to have Kiswahili developed, adapted and adopted for the roles played by English today, a project that Tanzania has been engaged with 'since the time of the Arabs in the 18th century, [to make Kiswahili] become an effective medium of communication in education and administration' (Batibo 1997: 58), without any impressive successes (see the above section).

Relatively speaking, Kenya, on the other hand, has managed to introduce English as a medium of instruction from primary to tertiary education, with significant success stories. According to the Eldoret district officer for English and Kiswahili, his government, as early as the 1960s,

made bursaries available to [the then] school leavers who intended to take teaching as their career, and encouraged such candidates to take English as one of their specialization subjects.

This arrangement was further complemented by the availability of overseas scholarships for selected student teachers that performed exceptionally well 'to spend three to twelve months, depending on the nature of the funding, in respected English universities to further their studies in the teaching and learning of English'. This is similar to what happened in South Africa during missionary education in that first language speakers of English gave instruction to learners who were to learn English as an additional language, and who in turn taught other learners of English as an additional language. Such decisions guaranteed future and upcoming generations of both countries the necessary *linguistic capital* crucial for survival in *modern world*.

Namibia has a population of just over 1,8 million people with a mere 0,8% (less than 1%) of this population speaking English as a first language. Yet English was chosen by the government as the official language after Namibia's independence from South Africa in 1990. Throughout Namibia's history the medium of instruction played a crucial role. The pre-independence era was dominated by Afrikaans and, in many respects; this state of affairs undermined the self-concept and cognitive growth of the

African language speakers. From this era, two notions were born, first: that African languages are deficient within the context of modern advances; secondly, the use of indigenous languages as medium of instruction is a self-destructive decision. According to Heugh (1995:43), among African language speakers in Namibia 'the notion that English was the key to empowerment therefore grew ever stronger'.

Data Collection

The fourteen days I spent in Namibia in July 2004 revealed the extent to which, more often than not, policy making, especially in postcolonial contexts, tends to be political responses and reactions to the oppressive past. As the data will show, Namibia's adoption of English as an official language and the medium of instruction in institutions of learning was, in many respects, a strategy to marginalize Afrikaans as a way of throwing-off, symbolically, the legacy of colonialism, apartheid and oppression. To have English as a medium of instruction from pre-primary to tertiary education, in other words, had other primary motives behind other than transforming realities of teaching and learning in classrooms.

The purpose of the research in Namibia involved finding out first, reasons behind the choice of English as the only official language, secondly, challenges around English language use in the school classrooms and lecture theatres at university, thirdly, the proficiency of English teachers and students and, finally, basic education teachers' and principals' perception of English language use in their schools. I visited the University of Namibia and ran interviews with colleagues in the English and Linguistics departments and the Language Centre. I then travelled to Okahandja, a region where there is an institute called the National Institute for Educational Development (NIED). I managed to hold interviews with the English language development officer and four officers who deal with the development of four Namibian indigenous languages, and, finally, two schools: Eros Primary School where I met with the principal and observed two lessons and interviewed one Social Studies teacher. I then visited the Jan Jonker Afrikaner High School where I interviewed the principal and two teachers after observing their History and English lessons respectively.

There were two broad research questions. Do Namibians have adequate proficiency in English to succeed in the job market? Are the

teachers able to use their proficiency in English to teach it as a subject and in the medium of English?

The NIED alone yielded relevant and useful data that almost served the broader purposes of this research project. As a national organization responsible for educational development for the whole country, it has officers for all subjects, including both English and Namibian local languages. Its duties involve designing syllabuses, curriculum, and workbooks for all school subjects from pre-primary to secondary levels, and evaluating school textbooks produced by different publishing companies. My interviews involved five candidates, four of which are responsible for the development of Namibia's indigenous languages and one who deals with the development of material for the teaching and learning of English, both for learners and in-service teachers.

The interview I conducted with the education officers responsible for the development of indigenous languages for classroom purposes was done with all of them present. Four of them had an opportunity to respond to questions as they saw fit. Although not often, there were occasions where as individuals they would respond to a specific question differently. At the beginning it was explained that a response to a specific question by one individual must not hinder others to comment about, substantiate on, or challenge what the other person had said. The first interviewee is responsible for Kimbukushu, the language spoken in the North East of Namibia, and, according to the education officer, 'a minority language in terms of the number of its speakers'. The second interviewee is responsible for Oshindoka, the language spoken in the North and it draws form other languages and has several dialects, with an average number of speakers. The third officer is responsible for Koi Koi Kovamp, a language spoken by the Nama and the Damara. According to the educational officer, 'in terms of the 1999 census the language was spoken by 175 000 people, but I think it must have improved closer to 200 000'. It is one of the languages that stretches and branches into the North and closer to the Angolan border. It is spoken all over Namibia, North, South, West and East. The last interviewee is responsible for Romana, a language spoken in the North East of Namibia.

I drew my respondents' attention at NIED to Crystal's (1995) assertion that a 'global' language has to be taken up and be given an official status and become the medium of learning in countries where there are few

or no speakers of such a language as first language. I then asked them if they thought a similar idea could not be said to have informed the Namibian government's decision to make English the only official language and the medium of instruction, even though it is spoken by less than 1% (0.8%) of the population as a first language. The respondent responsible for Nama and Damara languages argued that for him

that statement is very narrow and is also seen against the background of linguistic imperialism, and very elitist because if one chooses such a language it results to the elite of a country becoming the beneficiaries of such a policy and the general population losing out.

Generally speaking, the concept of a global language suggests that the language is used, both orally and in writing, in many parts of the globe for different purposes ranging from education, economy and trade to politics and diplomacy. But, as mentioned earlier, respondents gave different, and sometimes contradictory responses to this understanding. While the officer responsible for Kimbukushu language saw a global language as 'a language of wider communication which makes possible communicating across borders and across nationalities', the Oshindoka officer argued that English, in the first place, is not necessarily a global language, and he referred to SADC where quite often in academic conferences one finds that most conference participants cannot in fact speak English. French and Portuguese seem to be predominant languages. He further pointed out that in some conferences one finds that the forum uses French and/or Portuguese, which then makes him begin to wonder whether English is a global language. This is just around the SADC region, not to speak of the whole continent where the West Africa is predominantly French and the East predominantly English, with North Arabic and South English. Thus there is already a disparity already in Africa, not to speak of the whole world, 'which makes one to wonder how global is English'. The respondent responsible for the development of Kimbukushu, however, insisted that the state of affairs his colleagues were referring to would not last longer. For him:

all the countries that do not 'use' English at the official level are in fact making advances towards such a decision. Mozambique and

Tanzania, for instance, have already made funding available to secondary school leavers to go overseas in institutions where they can get advanced tuition in English, and where it is the medium of instruction.

It has to be acknowledged, however, that although such moves are made for the benefit of a country and generally English ultimately plays a vital role in international trade and industry, not every citizen actually benefits.

The respondent responsible for Nama and Damara languages points out, for instance,

India was the British colony for more than five decades, and yet one finds very few Indians who speak proper English. Mozambique is another country where, outside Maputo, very few people can follow Portuguese. So, as long as English remains elitist, only the haves will have access to the language of empowerment like in the Namibian case, and the have not will largely be excluded.

The principal of the Jan Jonker Afrikaner High School raised poignant issues around the question of the place and/or role of English in most postcolonial contexts. When asked about his perceptions on the use of English in his school, his response revealed several rather painful facts about postcolonial Africa. Unlike Germany, France, Japan, to name a few, where technological, economic and social advancements occurred side by side with language development,

Africa's problem is that our economies do not grow with our languages. Unlike the European Union (EU) where, during meetings all European languages are used (through the headphones), even our African Union (AU) uses either English or French, but not a single African language. We basically leave our languages behind as we develop economically. No wonder the Germans and the Japanese command their economies because they are developing with their languages.

It has to be acknowledged, at the risk of sounding like I am contradicting the

thesis of this article, that Africa's talent and potential lie dormant in most rural areas because brilliant ideas that could lead to social and economic upliftment of most local communities cannot be communicated and be taken seriously if they are not communicated in the language of the former colonizer. In Okahandja, one of the rural places in Namibia, for instance, the principal reported,

I discovered that most indigenous people could not get funding for their small scale farming projects because proposals had to be written in English, the language they do not understand.

When asked whether he would change the country's language policy-in-education if he were to get an opportunity, the principal insisted,

if our leaders have inherited the boundary demarcation from Europe after the Berlin conference of 1884, and the resultant plundering of the continent's natural resources, all of which resulted in endless cultural and economic dependency of all former colonies, how can anyone change the status quo? As a principal of a high school, my duty is to see to it that this generation does not go through the difficulties and dilemmas that the previous generation had to endure because of limited or no access to the language that is on its way to becoming *the only world language*.

Classroom observations in two schools, Eros Primary School and Jan Jonker Afrikaner High School, revealed that the high school principal's commitment to 'see to it that this generation does not go through the difficulties and dilemmas ... because of limited or no access' to English needs as much support as possible. Quite often teachers themselves, let alone learners, seem to have difficulties in using English as a medium of instruction. The use of English for several teaching purposes, particularly explaining concepts, was disappointing. Teachers in the upper primary (grades five, six and seven) and in junior secondary phase (grades eight, nine and ten) seem to have struggled more than teachers in the lower primary phases. Heavy reliance on the textbook by the lower primary phase teachers is the reason why they never committed as many linguistic errors as their

counterparts in the upper primary and junior secondary phase where there is much pressure to go beyond the textbook. As the Afrikaans speaking principal of Eros Primary School pointed out, 'the syllabus for the lower primary phase allows teachers to stick slavishly to the textbook and, as a result, do not use language creatively, thereby minimizing the chance of making mistakes'.

I spent two periods (35 minutes each) observing two grade seven Social Studies lessons at Eros Primary School. Quite often the teacher would switch to Afrikaans in order to clarify some concepts, with learners doing the same thing. Both learners and teachers seemed more comfortable with using Afrikaans as a medium of instruction. I noted with concern, furthermore, that most of the time was spent on writing notes on the board, word for word from the textbook, than on explaining concepts and responding to learners questions during the actual lessons. These observations confirm the large-scale investigation of teachers' English language proficiency that was done in 1999 by the English Language Teacher Development Project (ELTDP). The Namibian government, in conjunction with the United Kingdom Department for International Development, instructed the ELTDP to coordinate a research programme with its Namibian educational colleagues to 'design and conduct research into English language use and the proficiency of English teachers' (ELTDP 1991:1). For the purposes of this article it is sufficient to note that the results of the vocabulary test by region (seven regions in total) indicated that

26% of teachers in the Rundu region (across all phases) do not achieve a 2000 word vocabulary level. We must keep in mind that a 2000 word vocabulary level was deemed the minimum level to be able to teach in the lower primary phase, but more than a quarter of these teachers do not achieve that level ... Katima Mulilo region only 12%, in Rundu only 17%, and in Ondangwa East and West only 14% of the teachers achieved a vocabulary level which could enable them to follow academic studies in English, compared with 47% in Khorixas, 45% in Windhoek and 64% in the Keetmanshoop region. (ELTDP 1999:24)

Looking at these results, one simply cannot avoid the question: if the

teachers' vocabulary is so low, what happens to their learners' vocabulary? It is not surprising then, that during my classroom observations learners, both at primary and high schools I visited, have insufficient vocabulary in English and that is why they resorted to Afrikaans during lessons. Furthermore, as I spent time taking walks around schools and public places, both in Windhoek (city) and Okahandja (rural) I noted that more and more the younger generation, the middle-aged and older people, during their informal conversations, speak Afrikaans as a first language of choice. It is only at the University of Namibia that quite often I would come across students using English in their conversations. I then began to wonder if it is not better to strengthen the language which people are comfortable in?

One of the realities, certainly in the sub-region is that political decisions are taken to decide which language to use as official language after independence. The Namibian case is an example of this. The decision to go for English directly after independence, it seems, was a distancing mechanism from the old colonial power, but also because it meant Namibia's integration within the region will be easier. As demonstrated by evidence drawn from Namibia's classrooms and public places, the lingua franca still seems to be Afrikaans. Adopting English as an official language was in many respects a strategy to marginalize Afrikaans as a way of throwing-off, symbolically, the legacy of colonialism, apartheid and oppression.

In spite of the negative legacy of Afrikaner Nationalism, Afrikaans is, in many respects, an indigenous language that, according to Professor Hacker of the linguistics department at the University of Namibia, 'has so many loan words from the Bantu languages', that it may be argued that in fact Afrikaans is an African language, even if it ended up being associated with the language of oppression because of the Nationalist government's policies from 1948 onwards.

A crucial related question, especially in the context of Namibia, can be raised about English. If Afrikaans is seen as an oppressor's language, at least by the government of the day, which explains reasons for not giving it official status after independence, why is the same thing not said about English? This could be associated with the Soweto Uprising of 1976 in South Africa that was to specifically choose English as it was regarded as the 'less oppressive language'. Of course, South African history reminds us that the origins of racism can be traced back to the British miners who came

over to South Africa in the 1920s. They had just gone through the trauma of the closure of the tin mines in their country and came to South Africa and pushed for job reservations and did not want black people to be trained for jobs in the mines (www.anc.org). All of this came from the English speaking community. Furthermore, English is associated with the empire as it is the language of Britain. Partly because of Britain's policies of indirect rule, where basically so long as people paid their hut tax and did not cause trouble, what they did with their languages was their own affair. The trick, however, was that people needed to master English in order to get official jobs, and this has always been the 'blossom' of English as it implied the mastery of the culture, at least as far as the perception goes from without, of the dominant group. As in South Africa, English in Namibia seems to have been the easier option because the 'score settling' was with the Afrikaners and not with the English.

Implications for South Africa

The indigenous languages advocates, in an endeavour to persuade South Africans that their judgment is correct, argue that countries such as Switzerland, Holland, Finland, Japan, Germany, and others, all use their own languages as languages of instruction, both in secondary and higher education (see Alexander 1994; Rabagumya 2003; Qoro 1999; Web 2002), and this is the reason why such countries are economically better off. Such simplistic assertions cannot be used as one of the valid arguments for implementing indigenous languages as medium of instruction in a postcolonial context. None of these countries has gone through what Africa experienced in 1884 when the colonial powers during the Berlin Conference decided to subdivide Africa between themselves. The direct implications for Africa, as a consequence of such invasions, range from political, economic, to social, cultural and educational spheres. The African history of education alone reveals that, as Batibo (2001:9) points out:

Many African societies placed strong emphasis on traditional forms of education well before the arrival of Europeans. Adults in Khoisan- and Bantu-speaking societies, for example, had extensive responsibilities for transmitting cultural values and skills within

kinship-based groups and sometimes within larger organizations, villages, or districts. Education involved oral histories of the group, tales of heroism and treachery, and practice in the skills necessary for survival in a changing environment.

If things were to remain this way, that is, assuming no European invasion whatsoever, probably it would be fair to compare Africa to the developed countries referred to above. Otherwise I find it to be an irresponsible, subjective and shortsighted comparison. It requires very little, if any, sophistication to understand that as early as the 17th century Africa's future (in every sense of the word) was in the hands of the colonial powers, and still is through, for instance, financial institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Countries such as Burundi, Botswana, Rwanda, and Somali who have deliberately decided to adopt English as the only official language and the medium of instruction at all levels of education need not be read as a betrayal of indigenous languages and cultures, but as a brave policy decision that acknowledges the irreversibility of the 1884 Berlin Conference resolutions concerning the future of the African continent. To have 75% of the population speaking the same indigenous language, yet choose not to give it an official status is the best these countries could do for later generations.

In the context of South Africa, the example of Afrikaans is often advanced as an argument in support of the capacity of indigenous languages to be developed as languages of learning and teaching. Foley (2002:56) reminds us that:

In the case of Afrikaans, the development of the language served as part of an intense political and cultural struggle for power and identity in the form of Afrikaner nationalism. A single, distinct people were united and mobilized, and, once power was achieved, vast amounts of human and material resources were channelled into the drive to expand the status and utility of the language

It is not surprising that as a result of all these efforts Afrikaans became the medium of instruction from primary to tertiary education. Foley (2002:57) mentions 'the socio-historical context ... the ideological fervour

... and the monocultural solipsism of Afrikaner nationalism ...' as reasons of the success story for Afrikaans. The current South African historical context is different and as such, does not encourage any tendency towards monocultural solipsism. Probably this is one of the reasons why Afrikaans, after all the efforts and expense for its development,

... has become, and will continue to become, an ever diminishing language – in the media, in public life, in politics, and, most pertinently, in education, where, for instance, students numbers in Afrikaans language courses at English-medium universities are almost nil, and where even at nominally Afrikaans-medium universities, the use of the language as a medium of instruction has been drastically eroded by English (Foley 2002:57).

The story is even worse for the nine other indigenous languages. African Languages Departments in most universities have dwindling enrolments to the point where one wonders where the expertise is to be drawn for the future development of indigenous languages. Wright (2002) records that

According to UNISA, the only institution that offers tuition in all African languages, the number of undergraduate students registered for these courses has dropped from 25000 in 1997 to 3000 in 2000. The number of postgraduate students has also decreased, 511 to 53 in the same period. Other institutions confirmed an annual decline of 50% (quoting from *Sunday Times*, 4 March 2000).

Even though the constitution has granted nine indigenous languages official status, this is not surprising. The opening of the job market to the previously disenfranchised, the majority of whom are starting out with their careers, means that more and more young graduates will be attracted to English. Research findings show that speakers of languages other than English will want to gain access to those discourses that are communicated in English, for the globalized world of economic possibility is symbolized by English. A recent observation in the *Mail and Guardian* (2005) under *Economy and Business Section* confirms this:

Research estimates that the United States and United Kingdom could send five million jobs offshore during the next decade, provoking vociferous complaints from trade unions. The US and the UK tend to be the biggest offshores because of the global dominance of English language ... (*Mail and Guardian Online* 26 January 2005).

This does not mean South African indigenous languages cannot become part of the world of the economy. But are they, and, will they ever be ready to become part of it? This leads to other questions: to what extent has the teaching and learning of indigenous languages been developed? Are there any cutting-edge research discoveries that feed into the study of indigenous languages as disciplines, thus making it possible for such languages to be part of the central economy? According to Wright (2002:17),

Rather than focus on African languages as living cultural media, the academic study of African languages in South African universities has in general followed the international pattern of change in the field of general linguistics: briefly, grammatical studies on the lines established by C.M. Doke in the 30s, 40s and 50s were followed in the 60s by structuralism, pioneered in South Africa by E.B. van Wyk. The 70s saw work shaped by the transformational-generative approach (L.W. Lanham, A. Wilkes, D.P. Lombard, H.W. Pahl et al.). The African Linguists who now work in the field have generally stayed with this model of academic linguistic inquiry, seeking ever more accurate descriptive and analytical knowledge.

The above is a clear indication that the development of indigenous languages so that they can carry all aspects of a modern technological society and become a medium of instruction in our schools is unlikely to be achieved. One wants to see an environment where indigenous languages' teaching also moves to becoming more relevant and more engaged with the reality of the language as experienced by people on a day-to-day basis.

Kamwangamalu's (2000) research on language practices in South Africa's institutions further demonstrates the extent to which English, and not indigenous languages, continue to dominate South Africans' lives. In his *A new language policy, old language practices: status planning for African*

languages in a multilingual South Africa, Kamwangamalu exposes the extent of the fact that even our own national broadcasting co-operation, by the look of things, does not necessarily seem convinced about the value and development of indigenous languages. According to the TV guide of the 10 – 16 May 1998, the weekly air time distribution of the eleven official languages of this country, English was ‘taking up 20855 (91.95%) minutes of the total weekly time; Afrikaans 1285 (5.66%), and all the nine African languages a mere 520 (2.29%) minutes, or an average of 0.25 air time per language’ (see Kamwangamalu 2000:54 for more details).

Conclusion

It is important to understand that the line of argument of this article is not advocating English or British culture. From the historical surveys on language policy-in-education in some African countries and South Africa, the interrogation of the grand narrative of decolonization and the so called ‘African’ philosophy of life and society, the findings gathered from the results of the academic tests in four Tanzanian schools, and data collected in Kenya and Namibia, one can determine that English as a language is not necessarily the root cause of academic underachievement. Prah’s (2002) claim that ‘Africans learn best in their own languages’ does not clarify which Africans, taught by whom, with which resources and teaching styles, teachers with which qualifications, which textbooks, and in which register. While it can be successfully argued that the rehabilitation of African languages will have positive effect on the strengthening of cultural ideals and identities, it is rather naïve to suggest that this would guarantee a successful economic upliftment.

The development of our indigenous languages in order to become the media of instruction is too complicated, a fact emphasized by Neville Alexander (2000). Even if we were to succeed in such an endeavour, there is no compelling evidence in any postcolonial African country to suggest that indigenous languages can compete where the primary desires are fuelled by capitalism, and South Africa cannot pretend to be an exception. We thus need to consider the fact that the adoption of any language as the medium of instruction in this country needs proper contextualization, that is, the social, political, economic contexts and the history that produced that context.

Ignoring this reality will render our language policy documents as, to use Wright's (2002:3) words: 'a paper fantasy of merely ideological import'.

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