

## **Language Skills for Higher Education in Tanzania**

Josephat Rugemalira

*Tumaini University, Tanzania*

### **Abstract**

*This paper argues that there are two radical policy options available to the higher education establishment in Tanzania with regard to the issue of the language medium of instruction. The first option requires the establishment of a strict filtering mechanism in order to exclude all applicants who do not possess the English language skills required in an English medium university. The second option seeks to develop a bilingual language policy for higher education. This would allow partial use of Kiswahili in the system e.g. in lectures, seminar discussions and examinations, even while most literature has to be accessed in English. The paper presents an account of the conditions that call for such a radical departure from current practice, showing that the much utilized 'University of Dar es Salaam Model' of Communications Skills courses has not had the expected impact.*

### **Background to the language problem**

The problems arising out of the use of English as a language of instruction (LOI) in secondary and tertiary education in Tanzania are well-documented (Brock-Utne & Desai, 2005; Criper & Dodd, 1984; Roy-Campbell & Qorro, 1987; UDSM 1999, 2004). The consensus is that the learners at all levels are held back from realizing their full potential on account of the language barrier. Although the post-independence LOI debate has been going on for half a century, the failure to resolve the issue serves to underline the complex nature of the problem; it is not evidence of mere ignorance on the part of the education administrators / experts; nor is this failure simply an illustration of the lack of resolve and daring on the part of the politicians.

Already in the Second Five Year Plan the government expressed a concern regarding the continued use of English in secondary and higher education when the primary level had already converted to Kiswahili medium (Mlama & Matteru, 1978). By the early eighties the Makweta commission (Tanzania Government, 1982) actually

set the year 1985 for a change to Kiswahili medium beginning with Form One. This proposal was not implemented and subsequent policies have remained equivocal on the LOI question (Tanzania Government, 1995b; 2014b).

The LOI problem is not unique to Tanzania but is a serious public policy issue in multilingual societies. It is more acute in post-colonial states, but is increasingly becoming a headache in rich but small countries as English progressively becomes the language of higher education in Europe because of the global dominance of the USA ( CIMO, 2009; Coleman, 2006; Dearden, 2014). In Sweden, for instance, students can access university education in the mother tongue viz. Swedish; but in a country with a population not exceeding 10 million people even this language is under pressure from the imperative to ‘internationalize’ higher education, i.e. offer courses in English and so attract foreign students and academics. Spain has a Spanish medium higher education system and yet is under pressure to catch up with the global competition to sell the service within and abroad using English (University World News, 2013). In Iceland, where the total population of less than 300,000 speak the national language i.e. Icelandic, the English menace is even more acutely felt, even though Icelandic is used in the education system up to university (Hilmarsson-Dunn, 2009).

The language malaise in Malaysia is instructive. The post-independence expansion of education went hand in hand with the promotion of the national language (Bahasa Malay) as LOI. The initiative was introduced in 1967, ten years after independence, at lower levels of education and culminated in the conversion to Malay medium at university in 1982. However this policy was reversed in 2003 when English as LOI was reintroduced for science and mathematics at all levels of education. A further reversal came in 2009 when Malay was reinstated (Chan et al. 2015), and a subsequent modification in the form of a “Dual Language Programme” to allow some mix in Malay and English in some schools has been reported (*Daily Express*, 5 November 2015).

Many other countries in a similar predicament have not been as bold (or unstable) regarding the LOI policies and have largely stuck to English. And in each case the language problem has refused to go away irrespective of the number of years of teaching English as a

subject or its use as LOI (Coleman 2011). In Hong Kong, 98 percent of the population speak Cantonese (Chinese) as their first language; English, the school language, is spoken as a home language by less than 1 percent of the population. Research has shown that:

...pupils with high language proficiency scores performed better in both the English and Chinese versions of the achievement tests. However, when tests were set in English only, pupils with low English language proficiency tended to perform at a lower level than those taking the same tests in the Chinese or the bilingual versions. ... There appears to be a threshold for English language proficiency at and above which the use of English as the teaching medium is feasible. There also appears to be a level below which pupils suffer an educational disadvantage if English is used as the medium of instruction. ... Pupils of low English proficiency preferred their teachers to use more Chinese, and *bilingual texts and tests improved their test scores*".(Hong Kong 1986:28-9)

Turkey, which has never been ruled by the British or Americans, teaches English to everyone from primary school to university, but the results are dismal. "The entry level of most students is too low to benefit fully from (English medium instruction), even after a year of preparatory school" (British Council, 2015, p. 5). Myanmar, like Turkey, has a viable national language (Burmese) that could fulfill the LOI function, but it has chosen to suffer the English disease (British Academy, 2015). India, with its many well-developed indigenous languages (Hindi, Malayalam, Bengali, Kannada, Telugu, etc), as well as its own established Indian English, provides another case that fits the pattern in the LOI jig-saw puzzle (Jayaram, 1993). South Africa, with a sizable population of native speakers of English who should provide a model for learners, and in spite of its very progressive language policy, also ends up with a LOI problem as complex as that of Tanzania (South Africa Govt. 2002, Brock-Utne et al., 2004). The government of Rwanda boldly ditched one colonial language (French) in favour of another (English) but may have in reality jumped out of the frying pan only to land in the fire (Samuelson & Freedman, 2010, Kagwesage, 2013). Although neighbouring Kenya and Uganda may seem to be faring better than Tanzania on the LOI issue this layman's impression does not stand up to scrutiny and may at best be a reflection of a relatively more effective educational

performance than just good LOI policy/outcome (Kembo-Sure et al., 2016; Namuchwa, 2007; Uwezo, 2011<sup>1</sup>). “Universities have voiced concern about receiving freshers who can hardly write, read, and hold discussions in English” (Barasa, 1997).

## **2. Existing policies and practices**

The current education and training policy (Tanzania Government, 2014b) affirms the decades-old status quo: Kiswahili remains LOI at primary level, while English is the LOI at secondary and tertiary levels, and may also be used at lower levels from nursery to primary school. There have been pronouncements in recent years to the effect that English would go further down into all primary schools as LOI<sup>1</sup>, reflecting the increasing influence of the pro-English forces. In Zanzibar the official policy does mandate the use of English as LOI from Standard Five (Maalim, 2015) even though the implementation may have been delayed or suspended till a time when there will be enough teachers with the requisite skills. And while there are English medium primary and nursery schools, there are no Swahili medium secondary schools or universities in spite of the expressed wishes in the education policy that appropriate measures would be put in place to ensure the sustainable use of the language at all levels of education and training (Tanzania Government 2014b, p. 38).

In order to address the problem of students’ poor command of English, higher education institutions have almost universally adopted the University of Dar es Salaam ‘model answer’, viz. Communication Skills (CL) courses (Rugemalira, 1990). Initially introduced in 1978, the CL courses were a compromise solution to a problem that by today’s standards was only emerging. The main solution consisted of essentially a study skills course whose basic assumption was that the *students had an adequate mastery of English* and the

---

<sup>1</sup> “The government is planning to introduce English as a medium of instruction from Standard Three in a bid to raise the confidence of Tanzanian job seekers in the East African common market. Education and Vocational Training minister Shukuru Kawambwa said recently the poor background in English language made Tanzanians fear East African job market. ‘Tanzanian education is not inferior as people think. The problem we face is poor background in English language, we are going to make sure that in three years English will be the medium of instruction’, said the minister” *The Citizen*, 21 October 2010.

course sought to teach students how to study efficiently. The main skills included note taking, summarizing, reading strategies, library and reference skills, report writing, and oral presentation skills. A supplementary product in the battery of services offered by the Communication Skills Unit consisted of the Intensive Grammar Programme (IGP) meant for a minority of students who had failed the English University Screening Test (UST). The contents of the course were laid out in a custom made workbook and in effect were an outline grammar of English to be covered in ten hours spread over ten weeks.

Even in the formative years of the CL courses it was clear that the formula was not working: the courses were unpopular with the students; the instructors wondered what it was that they were supposed to be teaching; and the university community at large saw no improvement in the students' "communication skills" (Msuya, 2011; Osbiston, 1982). Yet it is this formula that has largely been scaled up over all tertiary educational institutions in the country. The duration varies from one to four semesters. The content is a merger of the original CL study skills package with the IGP type material. In some cases instructors have chosen to focus on 'communication' and subjected students to theories of communication (sender, receiver, channel, sign, obstacles to communication!) - an interpretation that even the founders of the programme would have regarded as outlandish.

### **Obstacles to cracking the language problem**

*Massification* of education: In all education systems, the provision of education on a mass scale has repercussions on the quality of service. This is so because massification rules out the exclusivity associated with serving an elite whereby those who cannot meet the standards of the select few are weeded out. Even in English native countries the increasing numbers of non-native students has resulted in the need to institute various measures to handle them, viz. language centres and language screening policies (e.g. Australian Government 2013)<sup>2</sup>. In the post-colonial societies the imperative of an expanded education system clashes with the desire that

---

<sup>2</sup> Massification of higher education in the developed countries is much more formidable as these countries aim to enroll 50% of the relevant age group in the universities (cf. Coleman, 2006, p. 3)

every citizen access the prestigious global language and become a member of the *imagined international community* communicating in English. Even in countries like Turkey where mass education up to university can be accessed in the local language (Turkish) the clamour for English is a challenge because mass English proficiency cannot be guaranteed.

Tanzania's post-independence expansion of primary and secondary education was facilitated by the conversion to Kiswahili as LOI at primary level. However the floodgates remained locked at the secondary level, and this by design: the vision of Education for Self-Reliance (Nyerere, 1968) was of the rural masses content with Standard Seven schooling and only a select few going on to secondary school and fewer still to university. Until the mid-1980s the primary to secondary school transition rates were below 5%. Only the community secondary schools of the past ten years have raised that rate to above 50% (Tanzania Government, 2014a)<sup>3</sup>. And in higher education, it is only in the last twenty years that non-government universities were even allowed to exist (Tanzania Government, 1995a). So if the English skills of today's university students appear to have deteriorated compared to the students of the 1970s and 1980s, part of the answer has to do with massification: while more numbers can be accommodated in a science or history classroom, it does not follow that similar numbers in an English classroom will result in mass English competence.

*Inappropriate theory of second /foreign language learning and teaching:* A major problem for the English Language Teaching (ELT) industry has been the popular belief that the best way - the cheapest and easiest way - to teach English is to use it as LOI. It is taken as a self-evident truth that requires no demonstration as this typical formulation on the situation in Myanmar shows:

---

<sup>3</sup> "The transition rates from primary to secondary, that is, proportion of standard seven finalists selected to join secondary (Form 1) education, has increased from 36.1 percent in 2004 to 59.5 percent in 2012 .... Since the proportion of primary school leavers selected to join secondary education depends on the *Std VII pass rate which has been fluctuating from year to year*, the transition rate has also been fluctuating though with an increasing trend."(Tanzania Government 2014a, p. 36)

“The prevalent view among local policy makers and university administrators when discussing the restructuring and revitalization of the national education system is that *instruction should be given in English*. This reflects a widespread perception in Burmese society that *English is the most important foreign language for university students to master...*” (British Academy 2015)

The English as LOI policies are in effect based on a *wish* to master the language<sup>4</sup> when in fact sound educational policy should be based on choosing a LOI because the students, and their teachers, have undisputed mastery of it. But sound policy is clouded by the predicament of post-colonial systems of education whereby education is equated with mastery of the language of the colonial master (UK)<sup>5</sup>, or the current global master (USA)<sup>6</sup>.

The Canadian immersion model (Baker, 2001) and the Content and Language Integrating Learning (CLIL) approach promoted by the European Union (Coleman, 2006) do share with the LOI model of ELT the assumption that practice in authentic contexts of use promotes language learning by maximizing the amount and duration of exposure. But these models work for a tiny fraction of self-selected ELT subjects even within particular countries; the personal characteristics of these learners and their families, as well as the human and material resources available to them, make a comparison with the vast educational systems of countries that adopt the LOI model meaningless. The Sri Lanka example is a case in point: in order to implement the English as LOI policy, some schools had to deploy their best teachers of English to teach other subjects for select classes because the other subject teachers felt incompetent when it came to using English; this meant that most

---

<sup>4</sup> See also Lindberg et al. 2005, p. 320 on Sri Lanka: “English is now being *reintroduced as an optional medium of instruction...* as a response to the fact that a large majority of the Sri Lankan population can still *manage English so poorly*”

<sup>5</sup> See accounts from some countries: Lindberg et al. (2005) on Sri Lanka, and Coleman (2006) on characterizing the availability of English in Pakistan as an “urgent public requirement”.

<sup>6</sup> Brown, P. (2014). The problem of English dominance in higher education globalization. (<https://paulgordonbrown.com>)

pupils could not be taught the English subject because the teachers would be overloaded (Lindberg & Narman, 2005).

Studies have shown that the LOI function does NOT improve mastery of English. Criper and Dodd (1984, p. 43) found that “less than 20% of the (University) sample tested were at a level where they would find it easy to read even the simpler books required for their academic studies”. These were the cream in a system that had exposed them to English as subject for at least *nine* years in primary and secondary school, and to English as LOI for *six* years of secondary school. Twenty years later Brock-Utne (2005, p. 236, p. 246) found that the “English of Forms 6,4, and 1 students is inadequate.... the difference between the three levels is very small”, and that “there are some Form VI students... whose English is not much better than the one displayed by students in lower secondary school levels of education”. Again after so many years of learning English and using English as LOI, the best of the crop, having reached the peak of the educational pyramid, could still not function in English.

Almost in tandem with the LOI belief of language learning, is the ‘tell and memorize’ practice in ELT. Even well-educated people appear to believe that all that is needed to fix the English problem is for teachers to tell the learners what the rules of grammar are and get the learners to memorize them. The IGP list of ten grammar topics is an extreme illustration of this practice, all the more inexcusable because it was done by ELT experts who should have known better. The English syllabuses at primary and secondary school levels are largely lists of language structures to be covered in a given period. Even when there are good textbooks, the dearth of good English teachers dooms the whole ELT endeavour: good English language teachers are invaluable! None of the ELT departments in the universities has even started to address this problem. At one time the A-level English syllabus was a reflection of the university linguistics lectures, apparently drawn up on the assumption that it is preparation for university entry.

When, as expected, there is less than satisfactory results in a ‘tell and memorize’ approach to ELT the response will be to do more of the same. That is why in virtually all the countries with a LOI problem the number of years for teaching /learning English is relatively high



- typically beginning in the early years of primary school and lasting through the duration of higher education, with dire consequences for failing English<sup>7</sup>. It may be argued that, after an initial critical investment in time and effort, success in ELT diminishes with the amount of time invested in it. Even specially designed programmes i.e. English for Specific Purposes courses, designed for particular types of learners (e.g. by occupation or discipline) have not been shown to make a difference in comparison with general language programmes (Master, 2005).

Every normal human child will literally pick up the language used around him or her effortlessly. The child does not need any tuition for this, and any attempts at tutoring will be ignored. This genetic endowment does not depend on the intelligence of the parents or of the people raising the child. So a baby born to Swahili speaking parents and adopted at birth by Chinese speaking people will acquire Chinese as his/her mother tongue or first language. If the baby is kidnapped by monkeys and is raised by them, this child will not acquire any human language. But by the age of *three to four* years any normal child will have mastered the intricate rules (i.e. the *grammar*) governing the language used around him/her. The vocabulary may be limited, and we all learn new vocabulary the rest of our lives, but the abstract rules constitute the critical skill. And this natural ability of humans to acquire the first language must be activated during a particular period - the so called 'critical period'. If by the age of ten to twelve a human has not been exposed to natural language, then language acquisition may never happen, or not satisfactorily so.

Adding another language (second language - L2) after the first has been acquired is a different kind of business altogether. That is why there is a whole industry around language teaching/learning - teachers, schools, books and all types of teaching/learning materials; there are language promoters - to tell you which languages are worth learning, which ones will give you linguistic capital.

---

<sup>7</sup> cf. this report about Rwanda's higher education: *The New Times* - Pass English or repeat: How best can universities deal with proficiency tests? (Solomon Asaba, August 19, 2015)

Second language learning does not proceed in the same way as first language acquisition since the original biological programme has already been modified by the first language. And that first language can sometimes be a help and sometimes a hindrance in the learning of L2. There are various factors that come into play resulting in differential achievement rates among L2 learners, such as the level of motivation and effort, styles of learning, an aptitude for languages, and personality traits. Also there are factors associated with the material and social conditions of teaching and learning.

Success in L2 learning is itself a relative concept. It is not usually considered necessary that every L2 learner must attain the same level of performance as a native speaker in all domains of use of the language in question. Even a famous polyglot like Pope John Paul II could deploy only a subset of his reputed language skills very well (Boston Globe, 2005). But this is often a bone of contention in the ELT industry - what is the standard of success? An easy example relates to the standards of pronunciation: the books say that learners in Tanzania should learn to speak like the Queen (Elizabeth II of UK; they call her accent 'Received Pronunciation'). But the people preparing these materials do not even approximate the queen's speech! Similar examples relating to rules of word formation and sentence construction raise controversial questions about what to regard as errors and bad learning, what to regard as legitimate variation in a local version of English.

### **Success Stories?**

The small Nordic countries, particularly Sweden, Finland, and the Netherlands have a reputation for their success in the ELT business. In Sweden apparently you may be excused for failing all other subjects at school, but NOT Mathematics, Swedish, and English! And it also appears that this formula for success in the teaching and learning of English is not replicated in connection with other languages of their neighbours like German, French or Russian. Schools in England offer second language options from primary level but the proportion of students taking up these chances to learn a language from the continent (German, French) has been declining, and achievement levels are not encouraging (BBC, 2005). In the USA schools offer students a second language option. In higher education in particular, many colleges require a student to take at least two semesters of a second language course and

pass before they can graduate. And a common PhD requirement in the USA is evidence of reading knowledge in one or two second languages, although this requirement may be lapsing because of the dominance of English in the publishing industry.

The moral in this overview of practices in various countries is that success in second language learning is an elastic concept. From the masses that go through these L2 courses *only a fraction of the learners develop a lasting functional grasp and go on to make any significant use of the language in question*. In particular it is worth noting that these various education systems do NOT require the learners to use the L2 in learning other subjects. In higher education, in countries as diverse as China and Sweden, the increasing marketisation and competition using English as LOI targets a select elite (among staff and students) that seeks to be internationally mobile. The vast majority of learners may ignore or actively resist Englishization of higher education.

On the other hand it may be possible to assess how well the education system, and higher education in particular, has empowered the learners. For instance, to what extent do the youth in China, Taiwan, or Korea gain mastery of skills and spawn new ideas as they progress through the education system, and what contribution does the LOI have in the process? And to what extent do Tanzanian learners master the skills and grasp the ideas encountered in the schools and universities and then take the learning further with creative confidence? It has been suggested “that the failure of education to have an impact on development indicators in many African countries is due not to the lack of availability of education but, rather, to the ineffectiveness of the education which is available. The ineffectiveness of education, in turn, can be partly attributed to language policy” (Coleman, 2011, p. 3).

### **Gaps in the language component in higher education**

Besides the LOI problem facing higher education, there is an unappreciated potential for language education and innovation. The languages (being part of the humanities / arts disciplines) have suffered a general neglect, being perceived as irrelevant to development and not priority areas for investment, in comparison with the sciences. They are regarded as not subjects that will result in tangible products and without a contribution to make in the

eradication of poverty. Even as the indigenous languages (other than Swahili) are reluctantly kept out of this discussion, it is clear that the education system concerns itself with only two languages, viz. Swahili and English. The study of French involves such a small number of learners that most people do not know that it exists in the system. Chinese is only now just pushing itself in on account of the enterprising nation out to make its impact on the planet in line with its economic muscle. In the large universities (viz. Dar es Salaam, Dodoma) the language departments largely exist for the purpose of producing secondary school teachers. A traditionally science based university like Sokoine University of Agriculture, or the public administration based Mzumbe, can only establish language departments if they establish education programmes with English and Swahili as teaching subjects. But of course they all have staff in small language centres/units to offer Communication Skills courses as already noted.

These arrangements are extremely narrow and provide very little room for the nurturing of literary talents. Nor do they allow students in the various disciplines, who have an interest in languages to do optional courses to develop such interest, e.g. an engineer who takes a language option or as some kind of minor subject. But what is even more troubling is the climate in which science students are raised to look down upon the languages as not worthy of their time and talent. The current arrangements fail to make use of a *creative* potential that goes with a holistic perspective on knowledge, de-emphasizing the disciplinary boundaries between the humanities, the social sciences, and the natural and applied sciences.

### **Policy Recommendations**

*Strict filter:* Establish a strict screening mechanism for English language competence so as to admit students who have the requisite skills to study in English. The UST of the 1980s at UDSM could be a useful benchmark; it was a simple test, but it would probably weed out more than half of the applicants today. Use of a TOEFL<sup>8</sup> standard would be catastrophic! The later UDSM tests during the matriculation era were also simple but they did not differ significantly in their results from the National Examinations Council of Tanzania (NECTA) results and so they were not useful tools for

---

<sup>8</sup> Test of English as a Foreign Language

identifying those students who could study effectively using the English language (Osaki, 2008).

Special arrangements may need to be put in place to offer pre-entry intensive English courses to unsuccessful candidates for six to twelve months. These do not need to be part of university establishments. Careful planning is crucial with provision of requisite investment in materials and personnel for the courses to be effective. It is important to avoid the Turkish model which has a preparatory year of English language before university, and also sustains the teaching of English throughout the duration of university studies; this would be too wasteful (British Council, 2015)<sup>9</sup>. It is also not recommended to adopt the Rwandese arrangement that teaches English alongside the academic subjects at university and withholds the degree for failing English: the language skills should be acquired and proved to have been acquired before embarking on university study.

Even if the whole higher education system does not adopt this option, a few enterprising (perhaps private) universities should have the freedom to go this way. (If it were not for the 'curse' of sucking the private universities into the students' loans system some private universities would already be doing this - the way some private secondary schools were groomed into elite institutions!)

---

<sup>9</sup> Experiences from Turkey are worth keeping in mind (British Council, 2015, p. 73, 78):

"Preparatory school classes are usually compulsory but noncredit-bearing. Teachers frequently complained that students felt they were at the preparatory school because they had to be, rather than because they needed or wanted to be, and students echoed this view in their comments on the questionnaire. All universities enforce a rigid attendance requirement, and failure rates because of inadequate attendance reach ten percent in some universities....

...Teachers in one foundation university claimed that they were pressured by management to inflate exit exam marks to allow students to 'pass' and move on to their undergraduate studies. This practice is fairly common in other countries where there are preparatory schools but only one example of this practice was encountered in the current project. Nevertheless, this example further emphasizes the need for rigorous testing and ethical standards."

Prospects: This is a politically delicate option because too many applicants would be kept out of the university system. There were protests on the streets in Malaysia in 2009 because of the English requirement for science and mathematics in the schools and universities. And if the test standards are lowered in order to allow more applicants to pass, the whole purpose will be defeated. If only some (elite, private) universities use the filter some form of 'linguistic apartheid' (cf Coleman, 2011) will develop whereby those who have the social capital to obtain good English skills will access higher quality tertiary education in an exclusive language; the rest will be condemned to lower quality education in institutions where both instructors and students are struggling to make sense of the curriculum and the educational materials.<sup>10</sup> Indeed there already does exist a sentiment against English medium primary schools because they are perceived as catering for the rich and powerful while the children of the poor masses are relegated to decrepit Swahili medium public schools (Rugemalira, 2013).

Caution is also in order regarding the effectiveness of a remedial intensive programme. Many learners subjected to this more-of-the-same treatment are psychologically unprepared to invest the effort in a new learning. The level of their grammar after so many years of instruction may have reached a plateau and *fossilized* into an inter-language - a stage short of the perfect grammar of the native speaker that is judged as inadequate (Han & Selinker, 2005). Additionally it is doubtful that the requisite investment in materials and human resources will be forthcoming at the appropriate level of quality and quantity. For instance, for the programme to have any chance of success, teaching ought to be organized in small classes of 20 to 30 students per teacher rather than in lecture crowds of hundreds of learners.

*Bilingualism*: Evolve an appropriate bilingual policy that allows deliberate partial use of Swahili in the system e.g. in lectures, seminar discussions, and examinations, even if most literature has to still be accessed in English. Allow code-switching and code

---

<sup>10</sup> In Malaysia a class and ethnic divide is reported whereby *lower class Malay* students study in public Malay medium universities, whereas *middle class Chinese* students go to private English medium universities (Puteh, 2010, p. 198).

mixing modes of presentation e.g. in an essay written in Kiswahili, accept insertion of English ‘technical terms’ (Treffers-Daller, 2005). The arrangements would require an attitudinal and policy relaxation of the ban on code-switching in lectures and discussions.

Code-switching (CS) is prohibited because of the belief that the LOI function of English serves to teach the language and so, by engaging in code-switching, the teacher and the learner are adulterating the language and developing bad linguistic habits (Atetwe, 2013). Also in the purist linguistic tradition, CS is regarded as evidence of laziness and linguistic lack of discipline. But it has already been noted that the LOI role does not enhance language learning (but jeopardizes the learning of the content subject matter). And a positive view of CS celebrates the user’s readiness to bring all of his/her *linguistic resources* into play in order to communicate (Zakharia 2010)<sup>11</sup>. Even good bilinguals do not have an equal mastery of the languages in question, and particularly in speaking, some words or constructions from one language may be more readily available than those from another language. This will be particularly so in the case of technical terms.

This view of CS would seek to discourage the translation mode of CS where the instructor says every sentence in English and then repeats that sentence in Swahili. It is unnecessary and wasteful, unless the point is to explain some text from the reading materials. And this is where the instructor can feel challenged because it is

---

<sup>11</sup> “While commonplace language management in Lebanon seeks to separate languages in the classroom, creating discrete areas for usage, a heteroglossic approach would favor translanguaging. This approach recognizes the linguistic repertoire of students and allows them to draw from that repertoire as they interact with each other, with the educational materials, and with teachers and other school staff. In this way, students are allowed to draw on their strengths in both languages as they negotiate meaning. In the classroom, such practices signal to students the value of the mother tongue as a significant resource for developing the second language. Whereas commonly held notions of languages view code-switching as a deficit in student bilingual competence, *translanguaging allows for an active engagement of the student’s bilingual resources*. Furthermore, purposeful use of code-switching by teachers can be productive, when it is part of an intentional set of practices that address language asymmetries.” (Zakharia, 2010)

important to explain a concept in a language that the learners can grasp and to make sense of definitions, laws and principles in plain language. It is not the case that such statements consist solely of 'technical terms' that have not yet been coined in Swahili.

Such a development would have the salutary impact of mustering the considerable skills in Kiswahili that most students in Tanzania bring with them to university study. It would formalize much of what is already going on in the teaching and learning process at secondary and tertiary levels (Brock-Utne, 2004). It would also help de-emphasize the significance attached to the English language in the education system (*'English = education'*). This depreciation would be a good result because it would help us move towards an improved conception of what 'education' is all about.

This option may help many of us accept the fact that most Tanzanians will work and live in a predominantly Swahili speaking environment, that they will be able to access more and more materials/information in Swahili as the regional lingua franca, that they need just enough knowledge of English to interpret some of the information into Swahili in order to function effectively and communicate within their work / life situations. It will also help us accept the fact that most Tanzanians will not be diplomats abroad, international businessmen/women, or university academics. The change will set the standard of being educated linguistically to be proficient in Swahili. And yet this arrangement does not close the opportunities for many people to learn English and become sufficiently proficient to be able to use it in English speaking contexts as academics at international conferences or diplomats at the United Nations.

Caution: The strongest opposition to this option is the galloping Englishization of higher education globally, even in the large economies of Germany and France, at least at the level of the master's and doctoral degrees. Although the EU policy seeks to promote several languages for an integrated Europe, English has effectively become the dominant language in an increasingly marketized higher education system (Coleman 2006, pp. 7-8). Since this trend is global, a move that diminishes/cuts back the use of English in Tanzanian higher education might derail attempts by local universities to compete for resources (research funds) and



talent (academic staff and fee-paying students) globally<sup>12</sup>. And if local branches of foreign based higher education institutions have to follow the same arrangements, there will be fewer such institutions wishing to set up camp in Tanzania.

*Language centres of excellence:* Establish language teaching and research centres of excellence in some universities. Admissions into such programs are to be highly selective, based on language competence. The core mission would be to produce language teachers, language teaching materials, language curriculum developers / syllabus designers, publishing editors, translators and interpreters. Such centres would conduct research on language in education, and language teaching and learning. The centres could spearhead the setting up of translation initiatives of books and journal articles from English into Swahili and centrally archive/digitize scholarly materials produced in the universities and in this way they would take positive steps to participate in the creation of internet content and make materials available to a growing Tanzanian audience in Swahili. They could develop IT applications to language materials - including spell-checkers and grammar checkers for Swahili, translation assistants for Swahili into/from other languages, dictation machines, and reading machines.

For this latter type of endeavour in the IT realm it will be necessary to exert influence on the education ministry planners and policy makers to overhaul the subject combination system so as to make it more flexible and blur the sharp distinction between science and arts subjects, e.g. allow the possibility of an A-level 3-subject combination that has 2 science subjects and one arts subject and vice versa, e.g. Mathematics, Physics, Kiswahili; English, French, Mathematics; Biology, Chemistry, History; Economics, Mathematics, Fine Art etc. In similar vein, it will be helpful to overhaul university curricula to allow greater interdisciplinary courses e.g. teachers with a science and arts subject combination, B.Sc. with a Mathematics major and English minor, B.Sc. Engineering with a minor in Fine

---

<sup>12</sup> “Based on data from UNESCO, during the period 2000-2012 university enrolment of internationally mobile students has almost doubled rising from 2 million to more than 4 million students. Additionally, it is estimated that these international students represent approximately 2% of all tertiary enrolments globally”. (Theodoridis, 2015]

Art, B.A. Languages with a minor in Law, M.D. with a minor in social anthropology, B.Sc. Geology with a minor in political science etc. Even when such alliances have an eye on employability, they should also seek to enhance the student's *learning and adaptability* abilities as well as the cultivation of a wide range of the student's talents and interests<sup>13</sup>.

*6.4 English syllabus overhaul:* It is important to exert pressure on education planners (Tanzania Institute of Education) to overhaul the language teaching curricula at school level to give serious treatment to the development of reading skills - via a **reading programme** component in the syllabus from primary school to A-level. A central weakness in the current syllabus is the absence of any reading worth the name - even in the Swahili syllabus. For academic purposes at least, reading skills are indispensable in language learning, besides the added advantage that this will promote a reading culture in society.

## **Conclusion**

Tough decisions must be made if some progress is to be made. Temptations to sit and wait in the hope that matters will improve would be delusional; there will not be any improvement as the history of the past forty years has demonstrated. Decisions will be tough because they are likely to involve theories and practices that are controversial and unresolved, or research findings that are amenable to alternative interpretations. Controversy may arise because decisions may appear to favour/advance the interests of particular sections of society at the expense of other sections, for example elites vs the masses. Disagreement on the best course of action may arise out of differences regarding goals and priorities, or regarding the value of a particular outcome. For instance, the LOI function of English is often associated with people who place a high value on the acquisition of this language while the opponents would appear to place a higher value on efficient mastery of the content subjects.

---

<sup>13</sup> Note the case of Ben Carson, the famous neural surgeon, who, after high school went on to do science at Cornell University, but could have equally done music! Or consider the case of a friend of mine from our graduate school days in the USA, who did a PhD in Linguistics, taught Linguistics as Assistant Professor for some three years, before going to medical school to become a doctor!

Viewed in this way, it is unlikely that there will be a perfect solution from experts. That is why the politicians have so often been blamed or praised for maintaining the status quo. Even irrespective of their own personal inclinations, they have been forced to read and interpret indicators from conflicting constituencies - mainly the elites and privileged members of society, the masses with a love-hate relationship to the English language, and the multinational powers with a vested interest in the continued dominance of English. Nevertheless this paper has indicated that at this particular juncture a change of course is imperative.

## References

Atetwe, J. (2013). Analysis of the influence of mother tongue on students' performance in English in KCSE in Public Day Secondary Schools in Gatundu district, Kiambu county, Kenya. M.A. Thesis, Catholic University of East Africa.

Australia Government. 2013. *Quality assessment: English language proficiency - Terms of reference*. Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency.

Baker, C. 2001. *Foundations of bilingual education and bilingualism*. (3<sup>rd</sup> ed). Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Barasa, L. P. (1997). English language teaching in the Kenyan Secondary School: Policy, Training and Practice. PhD thesis. University of Hull.

*BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation)*. (2005). School language decline continues. Retrieved September 11, 2016 from [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/education/4404998.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/education/4404998.stm)

*Boston Globe*. (2005). Language may be key for next pope; John Paul II's abilities set high standard, 15 April 2005.

British Academy. (2015). *Language choice in higher education: challenges and opportunities*. Summary of a workshop discussion organized by the British Academy in partnership with the Ecole Francaise d'Extreme Orient. Yangon, Myanmar Feb 2015.

British Council. (2015). *The state of English in higher education in Turkey: A baseline study*. London.

Brock-Utne, B. (2004). English as the language of instruction or destruction- how do teachers and students in Tanzania cope? In Birgit Brock-Utne, Z. D., & Qorro, M. (Eds.). *Researching the language of instruction in Tanzania and South Africa*. Cape Town: African Minds.

Brock-Utne, B. & Zubeida, Di (2005). Expressing oneself through writing - a comparative study of learners' writing skills in Tanzania and South Africa. In Brock-Utne, D. & Qorro, M(Eds). *LOITASA research in progress* (pp. 224-253). Dar es Salaam: KAD Associates.

CIMO (Centre for International Mobility). (2009). *Degree programmes taught through a foreign language in Finnish higher education*.

Chan, S. H., & Abdullah, A. N. (2015). Bilingualism in Malaysia: Language education policy and local needs. *Social Sciences and Humanities* 23(S), 55-70.

Coleman, H. (ed.). (2011). *Dreams and realities: developing countries and the English language*. London: British Council.

Coleman, J. A. (2006). English-medium teaching in European Higher Education. *Language Teaching*, 39(1) pp. 1–14.

Criper, C. & Dodd, W. (1984). *Report on the teaching of the English language and its use as a medium of education in Tanzania*. Dar es Salaam: British Council.

*Daily Express*. (5 November 2015). Independent National Newspaper of East Malaysia.

Dearden, J. (2014). *English as a medium of instruction– a growing global phenomenon*. London: British Council

Han, Z., & Selinker, L. 2005. Fossilization in L2 learners. In E. Hinkel (Ed), *Handbook of research in second language teaching and learning* (pp. 455-470). London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Hilmarsson-Dunn, A. (2009). The impact of English on language education policy in Iceland. *European Journal of Language Policy*, 1(1), 39–59.

Hinkel, E. (Ed). (2005). *Handbook of research in second language teaching and learning*. London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Hong Kong Government. (1986). *EDUCATION COMMISSION REPORT NO. 2* Education Bureau. ([http://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/en/about-edb/publications-stat/major-reports/ecr2\\_e.pdf](http://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/en/about-edb/publications-stat/major-reports/ecr2_e.pdf))

Jayaram, N. (1993). The language question in higher education: Trends and issues. *Perspectives on Higher Education in India*, 26(1), 93-114.

Kagwesage, A. M. (2013). Coping with English as language of instruction in higher education in Rwanda. *International Journal of Higher Education*, 2(2), 85-96.

Kembo-Sure, & Ogechi, O. N. (2016). Literacy through a foreign language and children's rights to education: An examination of Kenya's medium of instruction policy. *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 25(1), 92–106.

Lindberg, J. & Anders, N. (2005). Special situation on language and education in Sri Lanka - from self-reliance to neo-liberalism. In Brock-Utne, Desai, Z & Qorro, M (eds) *Loitasa research in progress*. Dar es Salaam: KAD Associates.

Maalim, H. A. (2015). The replacement of Swahili medium of instruction by English from Grade 5 in Zanzibar: From complementary to contradictory. *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 24(1), 45–62.

Master, P. (2005). Research in English for specific purposes. in Hinkel, (2005). *Handbook of research in second language teaching and learning*. London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Mlama, P., & May M. (1978). *Haja ya kutumia Kiswahili kufundishia katika elimu ya juu*. Dar es Salaam: BAKITA

Msuya, E. (2011). Communications skills course relevance and effectiveness at the University of Dar es Salaam. PhD Thesis, University of Dar es Salaam.

Namuchwa, C. E. (2007). Challenges of using English as a medium of instruction in the upper part of primary schools in rural Uganda: A case of one primary school in Mpigi district. PhD Thesis, University of Oslo.

*New Times*. (2015). Pass English or repeat: How best can universities deal with proficiency tests? (Solomon Asaba, August 19, 2015). Kigali - Rwanda.

Nyerere, J. 1968. *Ujamaa: Essays on Socialism*. Dar es Salaam: OUP.

Osaki, K. 2008. Matriculation examinations and relevance. *UDASA Newsletter*.

Osbiston, Rachel. 1982. Communication Skills in the University of Dar es Salaam: a personal overview of the CSU in its first four years. ms. University of Dar es Salaam.

Puteh, Ales. 2010. The Language Medium Policy in Malaysia: A Plural Society Model? *Review of European Studies* Vol. 2, No. 2.

Rugemalira, Josephat. 1990. The Communication Skills Unit and the Language Problem at the University of Dar es Salaam. in Casmir Rubagumya. ed., *Language in Education in Africa: Tanzanian Perspectives*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Rugemalira, Josephat. 2013. Language Policy and Planning – the Tanzania Experience. In Pius Akumbu & Blasius Chiatoh (eds). *Language Policy in Africa: Perspectives for Cameroon*. Kansas City: Miraclaire Publishing

Samuelson, B. L., & Freedman. S. W. (2010). Language policy, multilingual education, and power in Rwanda. *Language Policy*, 9(3), 191–215.

South Africa Government. (2002). *Language policy for higher education*. Ministry of Education.

Tanzania Government. (1982). *Mfumo wa Elimu ya Tanzania 1981 - 2000. Ripoti ya mapendekezo ya Tume ya Rais ya Elimu*.

Tanzania Government. (1995a). *Education (Amendment) Act*.

Tanzania Government. (1995b). *Education and training policy*. Dar es Salaam: Tanzania Government.

Tanzania Government. (2014a). *Basic education statistics in Tanzania (BEST)*. Dar es Salaam: Prime Minister's Office - Regional Administration and Local Government.

Tanzania Government. (2014b). *Sera ya Elimu na Mafunzo ya Ufundi*.

Theodoridis, D. (2015). Internationalization of higher education – Teaching challenges in an international, multicultural classroom. Department of Economy and Society, Göteborg University, Sweden. ms. ([www.pil.gu.se/publicerat/texter](http://www.pil.gu.se/publicerat/texter))

Treffers-Daller, J. (2005). *Code-Switching in Sociolinguistics: An international handbook of the science of language and society* (2nd ed). (Vol.2). Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.

UDSM (University of Dar es Salaam). (1999). *Report on the 1998 UDSM Academic Audit*.

UDSM (University of Dar es Salaam). (2004). *Tracer studies in a quest for academic improvement*. Dar es Salaam University Press.

*University World News*. (2013). English as the lingua franca of higher education? Paul Rigg 22 November 2013 Issue No:297. (<http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=20131121152245865>)

Uwezo. (2011). *Are our children learning?: Numeracy and literacy across East Africa*. Dar es Salaam: Twaweza East Africa.

Zakharia, Z. (2010). Language and vulnerability: How educational policies exacerbate inequalities in higher education. Retrieved from <http://www.mei.edu/content/>