

The revival of the status of English in Tanzania

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What future does the status of the English language have in Tanzania?

Background

Discussion about the official or national language in Tanzania is basically a discussion about Kiswahili and English. These two languages have been competing for official status in Tanzania since Tanganyika (Tanganyika refers to the Tanzania mainland before it united with Zanzibar in 1964) gained its independence from Britain in 1961 (Rubagumya, 1991; Schmied 1991: 195; Mulokozi, 2010). Yahya-Othman & Batibo (1996) describe the competition between English and Kiswahili in Tanzania as a swinging pendulum. In a certain period of time, the status of English rises, and in another period of time the status of Kiswahili rises, and vice versa.

Kiswahili is an African language that developed as a lingua franca in the East African region as far back as the 18th century. Factors such as long-distance trade, the slave trade, writings, religion, colonial rule, communication, wars, education and post-independence government policies, just to name a few, aided the development of Kiswahili to its present status (Mukuthuria, 2009: 1). In Tanzania in particular, politics and famous political figures aided Kiswahili to become the national language and the language of wider communication (see Legere, 2007).

English was introduced in Tanganyika in the late 1880s by the missionaries as a medium of education in some schools they established in the country. However, a significant growth of English took place between 1919 and 1961 when Tanganyika was under British colonial rule (Swila, 2009). It is within this period that English played the role of the official language and was the medium of education from the fifth year of primary education (pupils aged 12–13) to higher education.

The status of English was badly challenged in Tanganyika after Tanganyika had gained independence from Britain in 1961. Kiswahili had played a major role in mobilizing the masses of Tanganyika for gaining independence from Britain, especially from 1954 when the Tanganyika African National Union was formed. Consequently, by the time of gaining independence from Britain in 1961, Kiswahili had acquired a positive image as the language of *Uhuru* ('independence') (Legere, 2007; Swila, 2009). Afterwards, the country set to build an African socialist nation under the policy of socialism and self-reliance. To achieve this objective, Kiswahili was deemed to be a patriotic language, suitable to be employed for this task. The decision had a great impact on the status of English in Tanzania. The landmark was in 1967, when the socialist policy was officially announced in what is called in



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the history of Tanzania as the Arusha Declaration (Schneider, 2007: 198). Kiswahili took over more roles in domains that had been basically English domains (Legere, 2006).

Similarly, due to the politics of the day, the period witnessed the development of negative attitudes towards English as the language of the colonizers. Whoever praised English or spoke English in public was considered to have a colonial hangover. However, despite that backlash in the hegemony of the English language in Tanzania (Neke, 2003), English retained its highest status in Tanzania (Abdulaziz-Mkilifi, 1972). English remained the language of education in secondary and higher education institutions, the language of district and high courts, the language of science and technology, the language of international diplomacy, and the language of international transactions, among having other functions (Rubagumya, 1991: 69; Mulokozi, 2010).

Of more interest to this paper is the fact that the early 1990s saw the revival of the status of English in Tanzania, to the extent of it reclaiming some of the former domains it lost to Kiswahili in the 1960s, such as the language of education and the language of the media. This period also witnessed a change of attitude from the 'hate attitude' of the 1960s, which associated English with colonialism, to a 'love attitude' as the language of science and technology. Ironically, the period also witnessed a landmark development in the rival Kiswahili language in terms of the number of resources, uses, and users. Similarly, the period also witnessed a strong advocacy for Kiswahili to be used as the medium of education in all levels in Tanzania.

Rapid advancement of the rival Kiswahili language in resources, use, and users

Critics of Kiswahili as the official language cite the perceived inadequacy of its corpus to cater for science and technological development needs and its limitations in catering for international affairs (Barret, 1994; Yahya-Othman & Batibo, 1996). However, the period between 1990 and the present time (2014) has seen Kiswahili advancing rapidly in number of speakers and domains of use (Legere, 2006; Moshi, 2006; Mulokozi, 2010; Onyango, 2010). Kiswahili has surpassed the expectation forecast by Diedrich Weserman in 1933 that the language would be a lingua franca in East Africa (Onyango, 2010). Kiswahili has become one of the languages of the media

broadcast internationally (Moshi, 2006; Mulokozi, 2010; Onyango, 2010). According to Mulokozi (2010), more than 100 radio and TV stations broadcast in Kiswahili worldwide. Similarly, there is an increased amount of teaching of Kiswahili in the USA and in Western universities (Moshi, 2006).

Additionally, the status and proficiency in Kiswahili has changed in countries such as Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, DRC Congo, Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda, and others (Moshi, 2006; Mulokozi, 2010). The total number of Kiswahili speakers is now approximately 80 million in the countries mentioned above (Mulokozi, 2010). It is also observed that urbanization is greatly fuelling the growth of the language, as almost all children born in urban areas in Tanzania only acquire Kiswahili as their mother tongue (Mulokozi, 2010; Onyango, 2010). This implies that Kiswahili is adding new speakers daily, and is denying other African languages their new candidates at an alarming rate. Furthermore, Kiswahili's 'hip hop music' is increasing in popularity, especially among young people. This is a potential avenue through which Kiswahili spreads worldwide (Moshi, 2006). Furthermore, Kiswahili has found its way into the world of ICT in recent years. For example, the Microsoft Corporation has developed some programs and manuals in the Kiswahili language (Legere, 2006; Moshi, 2006) and Kiswahili has become one of the languages in the Google Translate service provided by the Google Corporation.

Advocacy for "English out" and "Kiswahili in" in Tanzania

The major hurdle to overcome in order for English to prosper in Tanzania is the "English out" and "Kiswahili in" advocacy in academic circles. The advocacy deems English to be impractical in Tanzania by citing its shortcomings as compared with the Kiswahili language. "English out" advocates provide arguments such as the benefits of using the mother tongue in education, poor competence in English, the question of identity, culture, linguistic freedom, cognitive development, barriers to learning and development, and limited access to English by the majority of Tanzanians (Mbunda & David, 1980; Rubagumya, 1990; Yahya-Othman & Batibo, 1996; Sigcau, 2004; ADEA, 2005; Birgit-Utne, 2007; Swila, 2009).

Taking these arguments into consideration, one would think that English would dwindle in significance in Tanzania, more so now than ever before.

Contrarily, English has gathered new momentum in Tanzania amidst this strong advocacy and development of Kiswahili. I detail the domains and the reasons for the revival of the status of English in Tanzania in the following sections.

Where and why has English revitalized its status in Tanzania amidst its critical challenges?

To begin with, the rejuvenation of the status of English can easily be seen in primary education in Tanzania. From 1969, the language of education in primary schools in Tanzania was solely Kiswahili (with English taught as a subject from the third year of primary education, that is for pupils aged 10–11 years old). Only nine primary schools in the whole of Tanzania were licensed to use English as the medium of education by 1992 (see Rugemalira, 2005: 2). The remainder of the over 1,000 primary schools solely used Kiswahili as their language of education. In other words, only 0.7% of the primary schools in Tanzania used English as their medium of education. Nevertheless, the Education Act of 1995 legally allowed the establishment and the running of private primary schools (Rugemalira, 2005; Swila, 2009)—the schools that are mainly English-medium schools. Swila (2009) reports that until 2008, there were 1,500 primary schools in Tanzania, out of which 503 were private primary schools so nearly 33% of all the primary schools in Tanzania. The increase of English-medium primary schools from 0.7% to 33% is thus a significant boost in the status of English in the domain of education. It is an indication that English is recapturing the domain it had lost to Kiswahili in Tanzania in 1969. Interestingly, this is happening amidst strong advocacy for Kiswahili as the medium of education in secondary and higher education in Tanzania (see Mbunda & David, 1980; Rubagumya & Lwaitama, 1990; Roy-Campbell & Qorro, 1997; Brock-Utne *et al.*, 2004; Sigcau, 2004; Birgit-Utne, 2007).

The revitalization of English in the primary education domain is attributed to parents in Tanzania who consider it to be an avenue for development and employment in Tanzania and elsewhere in the world. The statement by the Village Education Project Kilimanjaro (VEPK) (2011) best captures the attitudes of many parents regarding the use of English as the language of education in Tanzania:

English is essential for any individual development after primary school as all manuals, instruction books

and text books are in English. Increasingly, many young Tanzanians need to find work in the developing economy rather than being subsistence farmers. Knowledge of Basic English improves their educational and employment opportunities. Village Education Project Kilimanjaro seeks to play a full part in this process.

Though there might be a degree of exaggeration in the above quotation by VEPK, it echoes the attitudes of many parents in Tanzania regarding the English knowledge of their children. In fulfilling the desire for their children to acquire English, well-off parents would take their children to Ugandan and Kenyan primary schools to learn English in the early 1980s (because there were not many English-medium primary schools in Tanzania at that time). Realizing this opportunity, private investors heavily invested in the English-medium primary schools in Tanzania following the liberalization policy of the 1990s. Thus, the early 1990s saw the “mushrooming” of English-medium primary schools all over Tanzania. The trend extended to the “mushrooming” of English-medium day-care centres and kindergarten centres in almost every street in urban areas (Swila, 2009).

In view of these developments, some parents would either demonstrate (as noted by *Mwananchi*, 2002 and Temba, 2003) or protest if the government of Tanzania declared Kiswahili as a medium of education in secondary schools and higher education today. The same of course occurred in Hong Kong when the Government of Hong Kong Guidance of September 1997 instructed that 100% of schools be compulsorily Chinese-medium. It is reported that parents and principals opposed the decree, and eventually only 70% of the schools became Chinese-medium in Hong-Kong by 1998 (Li, 2002).

Furthermore, the revival of the status of English in Tanzania is the function of its instrumental role in training and providing work opportunities outside Tanzania. For instance, English proficiency is the requirement for scholarships, fellowships and training opportunities in many countries (besides English-speaking countries) such as Korea, China, Finland, Japan, Germany, the Netherlands, and Denmark. As a developing country, Tanzania heavily depends on such countries for training and developing its human resources. This makes English the most needed language by the elite class in Tanzania.

Working at the Department of Linguistics at the Open University of Tanzania, I am a witness to the

value of English among Tanzanian professionals. Almost every day, the department receives a visitor or two seeking English proficiency certification to enable them to apply for scholarships, internships, or fellowships. Similar requests are even more frequent in the English Department of the University of Dar es Salaam and private centres for TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) and IELTS (International English Language Testing System) all over the country.

Apart from the primary education domain, English has significantly rejuvenated its status in the investment and trade industry in Tanzania. Socio-economic changes of the 1990s paved the way for companies and enterprises from South Africa, Canada, China, and elsewhere to operate in Tanzania. Many of these chose English rather than Kiswahili as their working language. A travel company in Kenya captures the use of English by the internationally oriented companies and organizations in Tanzania and Kenya as follows:

English is the “language of communication” in Tanzania and Kenya. It is widely spoken in hotels, restaurants and visitor establishments. Swahili is the national language in both Tanzania and Kenya. And a little Swahili goes a long way here. It is worth learning a little and locals are thrilled to hear visitors attempt to use any Swahili at all. For example, *jambo* means hello and is often the first word learned by visitors (Kenya.com Safaris, n.d.)

I would argue that English is not only the language of communication in the hotel industry but also in many firms owned by foreign investors in Tanzania. From this follows the fact that the National Investment Policy of 1996 does not stipulate the language that the foreign investors should use, as is the case, for example, in Germany. Eventually, internationally oriented firms in Tanzania often choose to run their business in English because they might have acquired it in their home country or are certain of the plausibility to use it in the context of Tanzania. It is also worth noting at this juncture that the government of Tanzania is no longer the major employer since the change of economic policies in the 1990s. As a consequence, Tanzanians depend on non-governmental companies and institutions for jobs, most of which are foreign. This makes English mastery an ultimate goal for jobseekers in the country. Swila (2009: 9) puts it as follows:

Proficiency in English is a crucial qualification in securing well-paid employment within Tanzania, the sub-region and beyond. Even in government, middle

level and senior posts require a minimum of secondary education, for which English is the LOI. Doctors, engineers, lawyers and accountants must know English well, in order to qualify but also to succeed in their careers.

In order to verify this assertion, I carried out a survey of job advertisements in Tanzania’s newspapers. I sampled *Mwananchi* and *Daily News* issues of March 2011. I found the newspapers convenient to access due to the fact that they are issued daily and have provisions for vacancy advertisements. I identified 40 job vacancy advertisements in the newspapers and for each I looked up if English was the requirement for the advertised position. Ultimately, I found out that a good command of English was a requirement for the advertised positions in 37 advertisements (92.5%). More importantly, English proficiency is not only stipulated in the advertisements, but is also checked during the interview sessions for the positions in question. In other words, not only do skills count when seeking a job position in Tanzania today, but also a good command of English (Swila, 2009).

Similarly, the liberalization policy has caused Tanzania to become a greater consumer of industrial products than it was before 1990. Many of Tanzania’s companies and industries closed business in the 1980s because they could not compete with outside industries and companies (Olayiwola & Rutaiwaha, 2010). Consequently, the country turned, more than ever before, towards importing industrial commodities from outside (DFID, 2001; Clayton, 2009). This new mode of the economy led to the emergence of a class of Tanzanian business people travelling to Dubai, Japan, India, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Bangladesh, Thailand, Indonesia, and so forth to import various ranges of industrial goods to sell in Tanzania. Business transactions by this group are negotiated in English and are based on documents written in English. The need for using English by this business group, among other social groups, is reflected by the rapid increase in formal and informal English tuition centres in Tanzania, such as Si Uchawi, Ongeza Salio, St. James, and so forth.

Moreover, the rejuvenation of English is exhibited in the media industry in Tanzania. During the socialist era in Tanzania (before the 1990s), the media industry was fully monopolized by the government of Tanzania and their major language was Kiswahili. For instance, in the Tanzania mainland, only Radio Tanzania Dar es Salaam existed by 1993 (broadcasting in Kiswahili for Tanzanians) along with an external service

targeting the international community. Moreover, there were only four government newspapers, i.e. *Uhuru*, *Mzalendo*, *Elimu Haina Mwisho*, and *Daily News*. This means there was not a single television station based in the Tanzania mainland by 1994 (Sturmer, 1998). Nonetheless, the liberalization policies of the 1990s did away with the government's monopolization of the media. Since then, there has been a huge increase in both digital and print media in Tanzania. I surveyed scholarly articles, books, and websites to identify the major media in Tanzania to date and the languages they use in practice. I identified 11 TV stations, 24 radio stations, 13 Internet news media, and 31 newspapers. The following are the major media in Tanzania to date:

- TV stations: Star TV, ITV, TBC, DTV, CTN, Mlimani, Channel 10, Abood, Pulse, EATV, CNN.
- Radio stations: EAR, RFA, Radio 1, Clouds, Kiss, Uhuru, PRT Parapanda, Orkonei, Times, Living Water, Passion, Wapo, Upendo, Maria, Praise Power, Magic, Sauti ya Qurani, Tumaini, Morning Star, Kwizera, City Radio, United Radio, SAUT, Mlimani.
- Internet news media: East Africa Tribune, IPP Media, Transverse, Afric, All Africa, Ellin News, Equatorian, Index Mundi, Inside Africa, IRIN, One World, Tanzania News, Topix.
- Newspapers: Daily News, The Guardian, Nipashe, This Day, The East African, Arusha Times, Alasiri, Dar Leo, Business Times, The Citizen, The Express, Habari Leo, Lete Raha, Majira, Mwananchi, Mwanaspoti, Tanzania Daima, Mtanzania, Uhuru, Mzalendo, Daily Mail, The African, The Democrat, Kipanga, Kasheshe, Mfanyakazi, Family Mirror, Sunday News, Taifa Letu, Kweupe, Mwanahalisi
(Source: Ogunade, 1986; Sturmer, 1998; ABZ News Link, 2001; IREX, 2009; Matumaini, 2009; BBC, 2011; Press Conference, 2011.)

Out of the above 11 TV stations, 7 (63%) use both English and Kiswahili, 1 (9%) uses Kiswahili, while 3 (27%) use English only. Moreover, out of 24 radio stations, 6 (25%) use both Kiswahili and English, 8 (33.3%) use English only, while 10 (41%) use Kiswahili only. With the Internet news media, 12 (92%) use English only, while 1 (8%) uses both English and Kiswahili. Furthermore, out of the 31 major newspapers, 13 (42%) use English, while 18 (58%) use the Kiswahili language. Moreover, many of the academic journals and newsletters I surveyed are in

the English language. Similarly, 80% of government and institution's websites in Tanzania are written in English. The survey indicates that English is contemporarily the dominant language of the media in Tanzania. The reason for this situation is likely to be that the media use English to target the elite class, which is the class with access to the English language in Tanzania. We detail the correlation between access to English in Tanzania and class in subsequent subsections.

The re-emergence of social classes and the future of English in Tanzania

The status of English fell after Tanganyika gained independence from Britain in 1961. The fall was a consequence of strong support for its rival language, Kiswahili, by influential political figures such as Mwalimu Nyerere (Legere, 2007). The leaders of the independent Tanganyika aimed at giving a similar education to all citizens, regardless of their social class and Kiswahili was considered the most suitable medium for the purpose. Conversely, the economic liberalization of the 1990s marked the re-emergence of class distinctions which had otherwise been blurred during the socialist era. The 1990s policies such as privatization, cost-sharing, and investment, among others, all fostered social stratification. Of interest to this paper is the implication of the re-emergence of such social classes for the present high status of English in Tanzania.

English is accessed and maintained by Tanzanians who are in better socio-political and economic positions (leaders, business people, and the elite) (Rubagumya, 1991). According to Rugemalira (2005: 3), parents who can afford English-medium schools are in the middle and upper classes and are mostly from urban areas. From this it follows the fact that the cost of enrolment in an English-medium school per annum is between \$500 and \$2,700, whereas the annual income of parents from the lower social class in Tanzania is reported to be \$280 per annum (International Small Group and Tree Planting, 2011). Consequently, the children of parents from low income families in Tanzania always attend government primary schools, which are synonymous with Kiswahili-medium education.

In secondary schools, English is the medium of education for all students. Nonetheless, the mastery of English depends on the type of secondary school one attends. The children of parents from low-income families in Tanzania often attend public secondary schools, well known for their poor

facilities and learning environment. As a result, many graduates from all levels of public education and training in Tanzania do not have sufficient mastery of English upon their graduation (Mbunda & David, 1980; Rubagumya & Lwaitama, 1990; Roy-Campbell & Qorro, 1997; Brock-Utne *et al.*, 2004; Sigcau, 2004; Birgit-Utne, 2007; Swila, 2009). On the contrary, the children of the upper class families in Tanzania attend private secondary schools, renowned for their good facilities and learning environment. Rugemalira (2005: 5) confirms this assertion in his report on Kibangu English-medium primary schools:

During the years 2001–2004, 22 Kibangu pupils were selected to join government schools. Only three did actually take the places offered. The rest went to private schools. (Rugemalira, 2005: 5, footnote)

It is at this juncture that English proficiency functions as a segregating agent and as a gate-keeping tool between the lower and upper classes in Tanzania, more so now than ever before. That is, only a few graduates who had early and/or long exposure to English or who attended English-medium primary schools, plus perhaps good private secondary schools, have a good command of English. Ultimately, if English is the criterion for job positions, fellowships, and scholarships in Tanzania, as it is, then the product of English-medium primary schools and private secondary schools definitely excels over the product of Kiswahili-medium and government secondary schools. In other words, the generation of the powerful class has greater access to the said job opportunities, fellowships, and scholarships because of their English language advantage, among other things. However, this development is the most important factor for the sustainability of the high status of English in Tanzania. It implies that English is performing the function of gate-keeping in the new society order that recognizes social classes, it is a marker of the status quo (Barret, 1994: 12). In this regard, it is likely to be favoured and protected by the class that benefits from it. The advocacy for Kiswahili is no longer a threat to the status of English in Tanzania because it is only by Kiswahili academies, scholars, and NGOs (via seminars, the media, and journals), not political leaders as it was in the early years of independence. This is to say that the advocates of Kiswahili have little power to bring the changes they wish to achieve with regard to language planning in the country. In other words, the economic

liberalization of the 1990s removed the protection and nurturing of Kiswahili in the Tanzanian context, leaving it to face competition from English on a level ground. Therefore, it is in this context that English has maintained its position as having the highest status in Tanzania, and will likely further its status in the future.

Conclusion

In the current paper, I argue that English having the highest status in Tanzania is a function of the prevailing international political system, international economic system, the technological front, and international relations. Within this view, neither the advancement of Kiswahili nor its advocacy will subordinate the position of English in Tanzania today and in the near future. I am therefore of the opinion that the focus on language planning in Tanzania should no longer involve replacing English with Kiswahili in any domain, but rather on how to teach English better and widen its access to the majority of Tanzanians. ■

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