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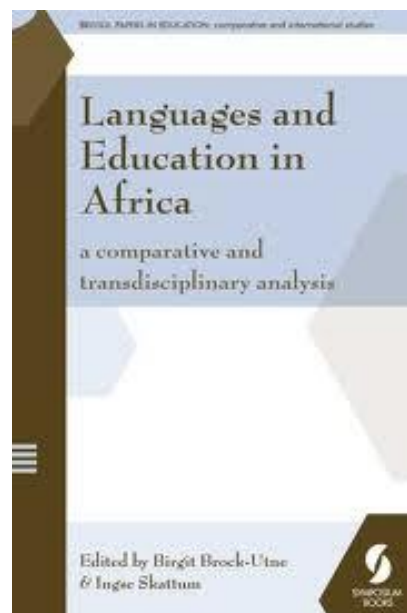
Brock-Utne, Birgit & Skattum, Ingse (Eds.) (2009) *Language and Education in Africa: A Comparative and Transdisciplinary Analysis*.

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Thousands of languages are spoken in Africa in addition to colonial languages including French, English, Portuguese and Spanish. The topic of language and education in Africa is crucial for a number of reasons. First, it affects hundreds of millions of students in Africa. Second, language and education are essential for the economic development of Africa, and particularly, its participation in the global economy. Third, Africa is also the victim of linguistic imperialism, a phenomenon whereby the dominance of colonial languages is asserted and maintained by the establishment and continuous reconstruction of structural and cultural inequalities between colonial languages and indigenous languages



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(Phillipson, 1992).

To better understand the challenges related to language acquisition and instruction in Africa, it is important to know what happened historically to this continent. In November 1884, Otto Von Bismarck, the chancellor of the German Empire, convened a conference of 14 states in Berlin, Germany to politically partition Africa. The countries represented at the conference included Austria-Hungary, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Russia, Spain, Sweden-Norway (unified 1814-1905) and the United States. No African nation was invited (de Blij & Muller, 1997).

France occupied most of West Africa from Mauritania to Chad, Gabon and the current Republic of Congo. Great Britain sought a Cape-to-Cairo collection of colonies and almost succeeded through their control of Egypt, Sudan, Uganda, Kenya, South Africa, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Botswana. Great Britain also controlled Nigeria and Ghana. Leopold II, the king of Belgium, took control of the Congo (Democratic Republic of Congo). Portugal grabbed Mozambique in the East and Angola in the West. Italy seized Somalia and a portion of Ethiopia. Germany claimed Namibia and Tanzania (de Blij & Muller, 1997).

The Berlin Conference erected artificial borders in Africa. Tribes were separated and colonial languages surimposed on people. By the time of independence in the late nineteen fifties and early sixties, the continent had become so fragmented socially, politically, economically and culturally that these artificial countries could not operate satisfactorily (de Blij & Muller, 1997).

This book is the product of five projects on “Language and Education in Africa” sponsored by The Norwegian Centre for International Cooperation (SIU) and the Norwegian Programme for Development, Research and Education (NUFU). Birgit Brock-Utne, one of the two book co-editors, initiated this project in 1991 and facilitated the cooperation between research projects. Her work led to a conference on “Language and Education in Africa” at the University of Oslo, Sweden, in June 2006 and consequently to the publication of this volume.



Birgit Brock-Utne



Ingse Skattum

Both of the editors spent several years working in Africa. Birgit Brock-Utne, currently a Professor of Education and Development at the University of Oslo and Director of the M. Phil in Comparative and International Education, was a former Professor at the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania. Her research focuses on language in education, donors' influence on education in the developing world and higher education. She is fluent in Kiswahili.

Ingse Skattum is a Professor of Francophone Culture and coordinates African Studies South of the Sahara at the University of Oslo. She has lived and worked in the Ivory Coast and Mali. She studied Bambara at the Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales in Paris. Her research interests include: sociolinguistics, stylistics/rhetorics, and language in education, orality/literacy, oral literature and African francophone literature.

The book features educators, linguists and trans-disciplinary scholars from seventeen African countries: Botswana, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe, as well as three European scholars. Twenty-eight scholars, mainly from Anglophone and Francophone African countries, contributed twenty chapters to this book. Thirteen chapters are concept papers and seven chapters are research papers. Seventeen chapters are written in English and feature both English and French abstracts. Three chapters are written in French with both French and English abstracts.

The book is divided in four parts. Martha A. S. Qoro, Kwesi Kwaa Prah, Hassana Alidou and Rajend Mesthrie contributed the first five chapters. They examine the general considerations on language and education in Africa. In the second part; Mamadou Lamine Traore, Tal Tamari, Irene Rabenoro, Mekonnen Alemu Gebre Yohannes, Sivester Ron Simango, Lazarus M. Miti and Kemmonye C. Monaka, and Halima Mohammed Mwinsheikhe discuss language as a means of instruction and as the subject of formal education. The third part features a discussion about language standardization and harmonization by Herbert Chimhundu, Nhira Edgar Mberi, Nomalanga Mpofu and Samukele Hadebe. In the fourth part Kristin Vold Alexander, Aissatou Mbodj-Pouye and

Cecile Van den Avenne, Foluso O. Okebukola, Philemon Akach, Eline Demey, Emily Matabane, Mieke Van Herreweghe & Myriam Vermeerbergen examine the use of language beyond formal education.

I structured this review in three sections. In the first section, I summarize the argument of the book specifically the complex set of issues and problems that arise from the chaos created by the colonial domination of Africa. In the second section, I examine the counter-argument. In the third and last section, I share my reflection about language and education in Africa.

The Argument

What should be the language of instruction in Africa: colonial languages or local languages? Most scholars represented in this book express considerable consensus in favor of employing local languages as languages of instruction. There are those who focus particularly on the argument of using local languages as LOI. Others discuss the prerequisites for local languages to become LOI. Few scholars discuss work done in the past to address the language issue in a number of countries. A number of contributors proactively examine the counter-arguments. Mwinsheikhe investigates the English proficiency of students and teachers in Tanzanian secondary schools and the coping strategies with English/Kiswahili dilemma during science lessons. He collected data through participant observation, interviews and a quasi-experimental research design. His findings suggest that English was problematic for the majority of teachers and students. Both teachers and students were unable to express themselves clearly. To address their limited English proficiency, teachers would teach in Kiswahili, using code switching, safe talk and negative reinforcement (punishment). Test results suggested that the use of Kiswahili as a medium of instruction (MOI) tended to promote performance and minimized the differences between students, while for English it was the opposite and code-switching produced results somewhere in the middle. He concluded that English as a MOI is a barrier to effective teaching/learning in Tanzanian secondary schools and that barriers could be surmounted by using Kiswahili as MOI.

Mekonnen Alemu Gebre Yohannes examines the implications of the use of the mother tongues versus English as language of instruction for academic achievement in Ethiopia. The 1994 Education and Training Policy of Ethiopia recommended a shift from English into mother tongues as languages of instruction (LOI) in upper primary education (grades 7 & 8). Four of eleven regional states followed this recommendation while seven opted for the use of English as the LOI. The author collected data from the 2000 and 2004 Grade 8 National Assessment Examinations. Findings indicate that the use of mother tongues in education resulted in better achievement in sciences and math and not significant differences in English achievements when compared to the use of English as LOI.

For Kwesi Kwaa Prah, the whole African education should be in the mother tongue just like all European states conduct their education. He remarks that even Iceland, a country of no more than 300,000 people, use Icelandic language at all levels of education as a medium of instruction. He dismisses the argument that because English is a universal language and Iceland has a limited population, they should use English. If this is the case, he says, the same can be said for countries like Luxembourg where again 400,000 Luxembourgers who are practically multilingual in the use of German, French and Luxembourgish insist on the development and maintenance of their mother tongue.

Prah argues that promoting the use of African language, as LOI is not an “either-or” argument. He describes the Dutch educational system that encourages students to develop language proficiencies in all of the major Western European languages including French, German and English. However, these languages are not acquired at the expense of the mother tongue. Languages are learned as subjects.

Another study by Tal Tamari investigated the role of national languages in Mali’s modernizing Islamic schools (Madradas). The author examined the role of Arabic and national languages (Bambara, Songhay, and/or Tamaacheck) in 14 modernizing Islamic schools located in Bamako, Touba, Segou and Timbuktu. Unlike secular schools discussed in Traore’s article where the teaching is

exclusively in French, the Madras do not have a policy of total immersion in the foreign language. At the primary level, these schools stress the oral translation of Arabic texts into national languages; this translation is carried out at the level of syntactical units. Arabic composition and oral expressions are taught by means of specific exercises.

Madrasas tend to be mixed-medium schools, based on the continuous situational interplay of two different languages. Meta-communication takes place at Madrasas in Arabic: that is, some greetings, teachers' requests for pupils to sit down or be quiet, and queries as to whether they have understood the lesson are enunciated in Arabic. Much or most other oral communication, however, may take place in a local language. The author argues that with their frequent recourse translation and simultaneous maintenance of two languages in the learning environment, they offer a viable model for the state schools in their efforts to teach French.

The use of the national language as language of instruction is not without challenges as expressed by Mamadou and Traore. There are more than three thousands languages in Africa. To use all these languages as LOI, policymakers, researchers and educators must work together to standardize and harmonize these languages (Chimhundu, Mberi & Adebé, 2009).

Standardization and harmonization are related processes to which lexicography contributes significantly. They include a common orthography, a descriptive grammar and the use of comprehensive dictionaries (Mpofu, 2009). Harmonization should increase the pool of, vocabulary and the potential for terms creation from internal resources of the languages own varieties. Standardization is the evolution of a form of a language that draws the least attention to itself, as opposed to, other marked or peak dialects to which one would automatically assign a dialectal or regional or class label. In fact there are a number of projects in Africa working on standardization and harmonization of national languages. The CASA project directed by Kwesi Prah, a sociologist and pan-Africanist focuses on revitalizing African languages by first bringing out affinities through the design and use of common orthographies or writing systems for all the language varieties.

Prah also discusses the role of researchers, policymakers and educators if these countries want to truly advocate for the use of African languages as languages of instruction. The researchers must be the avant-garde in matters of harmonization and standardization, teacher training and the development of teaching materials for instruction. Teaching in African languages pertains to the recognition of African cultures and the historical place of this continent and the desire of its inhabitants for dignity.

The Counter Arguments

Arguing in favor of using local languages as LOI, the book contributors had to address the counter-arguments made by the opponents. Few contributors play the devil's advocate while taking on the counter-arguments. The book would have benefited from greater engagement with opposition to local languages as LOI. In this section, I summarize the counter-arguments put forward by those who believe that colonial languages must remain languages of instruction in Africa.

Martha Qoro inventoried the various counter-arguments against the use of African languages as LOI. They included: globalization, English as language of science, technology and international relations, the use of English literature in African schools, English mastery and social mobility, the plurality of indigenous languages and their lack of standardization and harmonization and the need for national unity. Other reasons for not using African languages as LOI include but are not limited to globalization, African elite attitude, multiplicity of languages and teacher training and proficiency and lack of materials. The common wisdom, as expressed by a Kenyan parent is that "At the end of the day children are tested in colonial language."

Globalization as a rationale to use colonial language as LOI

Economic globalization consists of flows of goods and services, capital and people across national borders. Although it has occurred for centuries in each of these realms, it is now going through a period of rapid change (Anderson, Cavanagh, & Lee, 2005). High tech

communication, lower transport costs and unrestricted trade are turning the whole world into a single market. This is not a natural phenomenon but rather a trend shaped by governmental policies worldwide (Martin & Schumann, 1996).

Africa experienced this process century ago. African countries are the creation of European imperialism. They all have maintained their relationship with colonial powers thus reinforcing economic, political and cultural dependency. Hassane Halidou argues that while African governments recognize and express their desire to promote the use of African languages in education, their reliance on loans provided by the World Bank and aid supplied led by bilateral donors limit their ability to fully implement these policies. He further suggests that African languages are cultural, political, and economic reproduction tools and as such their promotion within formal education constitutes a serious threat to European languages which have been used almost two centuries to dominate Africa culturally, politically and economically. Hence, African countries remain dependent on these former colonial powers in part as a result of neo-liberal global; policies. This dependence reinforces negative attitudes directed at African languages and the lack of political will on the part of African leaders to promote the use of African languages.

Irene Rabenoro argues in favor of using Malagasy language as LOI to force respect for the language and its speakers in the global world. The author acknowledges that for Malagasy to be used as a language of instruction, it requires standardization. She adds that to adopt it as a LOI it should prove to be more efficient than French, the current LOI in Madagascar. She suggests that the only rationale for using Malagasy language as LOI is to put the country ahead in this era of globalization. The author concludes that once the students are comfortable with their own language and are proficient in one or two international languages, they will be more self-confident and better equipped to face competition within the context of globalization.

African elites resistance to local language as LOI

In general, African elites tend to resist the idea of using African language as LOI especially for their children.

They attribute their socioeconomic and material success primarily to their knowledge of colonial languages and the education that they either acquired abroad or in some local elite school.

Fluency in colonial languages is very limited in African countries. For example, Trudell (2009) makes the point that 65% or more of Africans who live in rural areas are quite likely to be multilingual, but not in colonial languages. Muthwii (2004) observed that only 15% of Kenyans speak English well enough to use it in any situation and this is one of the most strongly Anglophone nations of the continent.

Prah explains that many African elites were groomed by colonial powers. Hailey (1938) writes “quelques indigenes d’elite pour nous aider dans notre oeuvre de civilization” “few educated indigenous people to help us in our work of civilization.” (p. 1265). The elites distinguished themselves from the rest of the people by their education, their socioeconomic status and their proficiency in colonial languages. In former French colonies, they were known as assimile, in former Portuguese colonies, they were known as assimilado and in the former Belgian colonies, they were known as evolue. The granting of this status was based on fluency in the colonial language, familiarity with colonial literature and arts, use of colonial dress and manners and even travel to the colonial country.

Multiplicity of languages in Africa

How can unity be maintained in Africa if there are thousand of languages spoken? Opponents of the use African languages as LOI often cite this legitimate concern of the multiplicity of languages as a major impediment in making them LOI. They also voice their opinion about the dearth of teaching materials in the local language as well as which language may be chosen as the medium of instruction.

Chimhundu who specializes in language standardization and harmonization addresses the issue of the linguistic work that needs to be done to use various local languages as LOI. He discusses what needs to be done for a language to develop the capacity to function in all spheres of life and to be used as an effective tool for education and development. The language must go through a process of

standardization. Such work has a cost attached to it. Opponents of the use of African languages as LOI consider harmonization and standardization a waste of money. However, the real fear is that both harmonization and standardization might signal the end of the vernacularization and marginalization of African languages and the beginning of meaningful development of a firm cultural basis. Harmonization well implemented is a sign of a process of economic, political and cultural unification, which does not necessarily suppress diversity. It is a way of ensuring that African languages can be modernized and can play a more meaningful role in the development of African societies.

Teacher training and proficiency, lack of materials

Teaching any language is a profession requiring the teacher to have an acceptable level of proficiency, as well as adequate instructional materials and training. When teachers who are not proficient in the LOI are required to teach, students come to speak substandard forms of the language. Qoro (2010) reviews several studies and concludes that teaching in Africa should be conducted in the language in which teachers and students are proficient and parallel to that the teaching of colonial languages should be left to those who have been trained and have qualified to teach those languages. However, in countries where the training of teachers has been conducted, e.g., Botswana, Zambia, teachers use local languages in first grade only to prepare the children to learn English. Making matters more complicated, the language of delivery is English in which teachers are not necessarily proficient (Miti & Monaka, 2009).

Colonial languages are ineffective as medium of instruction for a number of reasons. Trappes-Lomax (1990) details such reasons. First, colonial language lacks authenticity because they are foreign. The use of these languages in education makes education a culturally alienating process. This is how education makes itself irrelevant to the real issues of the masses and to Africa development. Second, foreign languages are hardly teachable in the sense that it is difficult to ensure language proficiency of teachers and students in the foreign media. Foreign languages are secondary languages to both teachers and students and are rarely used outside

classrooms with poorly trained and equipped teachers. Yahya-Othman (1990) explains that the students enter secondary education without an adequate understanding and knowledge of the medium of instruction. This handicap hampers students in their critical observation, their questioning of ideas and facts and in the interpretation of what is communicated to them. Last, the upkeep of a foreign language perpetuates cultural and linguistic dependence that is counter to the maintenance of national identity.

Another argument advanced by opponents of the use of local languages as LOI is that they marginalize Africa and prevents it from benefiting from social, political economic innovations. However, proponents of the use of local languages as LOI see this argument as a way to perpetuate the control of African continent and subjugate it to the whim of Western powers. There are also those who say that Africans are multilingual. Learning a foreign language is an extension of this multilingualism.

Reflection

The book's sponsorship from Norwegian scholars and institutions speaks volumes about the nature of relationships that have existed and continue to exist between African countries and ex-colonial powers. It is difficult if not impossible to imagine such sponsorship from former colonial powers.

Africans' multilingualism is a gift and a resource. The mastery of other languages allows communications with others, broadened access to knowledge outside one's own cultural milieu, and participation in civic entities beyond one's community. Multilingualism can also reinforce one's own local identity in order to permit healthy engagement with the rest of the world (Trudell, 2009). Djite (2008) describes the economic value of multilingualism in the African market where people buy and sell enabling them to use whichever language will communicate with their customers and traders. Adejunmobi (2004, p. 161) remarks that learning a new language for a market purpose does not imply the loss of "distinct and localized identities"; neither the home culture nor the home language is in danger in this environment of multilingualism.

This argument resonates with the proponents of the use of foreign languages as LOI but does not necessarily validate their use as LOI. Language performs different functions including a means of communication, expression and conceptualization. Unlike many countries where people have voluntarily chosen their foreign language, in Africa colonial languages were imposed on people and used as colonizing tools. They were used as means of domination and discrimination; an instrument to give or restrict access to economic and political processes. Once the functions and the importance of language are recognized, the choice of languages of education is often made on historical, political and cultural grounds as much as on the basis of pedagogical and linguistic ones (Hameso, 1997).

The imposition of artificial borders gave birth to inorganic states and “artificial languages” and cultures that were irrelevant to the people’s daily needs. While a nation by definition is based on linguistic, cultural and ethnic affiliation and homogeneity, African states were forced to operate differently. The need to communicate across these newly formed states required a language and the only one available and thought of as neutral was the language of the former colonial administrations. Robinson (1996) argues that no provisions were made in reference to indigenous languages. Therefore, most of these countries settled on inconvenient compromises, often choosing the language of former colonial powers for official and educational purposes. This move, according to Hameso (1997), represented an acceptance of authoritarian and repressive political methods, the perpetuation of economically dependent centrism, and the socially pervasive assimilationism of the past. Africans’ own institutions, nations, and nationalisms were denigrated as backward, tribal and narrow contrasted with the progressive, modern, civilized and universal ethos of capitalist nationalism (Hameso, 1997).

Using African languages or not using them as LOI is a complex topic. Hameso (1997) discusses the advantages and disadvantages of doing so. On the plus side, he argues that foreign languages are used in different countries in business, diplomacy, media and scholarship. Inability to understand these languages costs resources while knowledge of them can only be an asset. Negotiations that led to the independence of many African countries were conducted in colonial languages. African representatives

had the advantage of knowing the colonist languages while colonists could not control the communications that took place among African delegates in indigenous languages. Second, knowledge of colonial languages has become the prerequisite for acquiring science and technology. Without acquisition of these languages, western education, scholarship, business, and science and technology are rendered impossible. Third, colonial languages are viewed as symbols of power and a means of securing good, secure jobs. For the elite, the use of such languages is a sign of prestige, and higher competence. It entitles the speakers to a legitimate claim to power.

The use of mother tongue in instruction ensures that the child's education is rooted in her own cultural heritage (Hameso, 1997). Rugabumya (1990) and Robinson (1996) contend that international research shows that the use of first language is a factor in educational achievement and that the educational process in any society ought to be conducted through a language that both learner and teacher command well. Barrett (1994) maintains that it is important to start where the students are with their experiences and existing knowledge and position them as knowers and allowing them to use their own language within the classroom.

There are also obstacles in the adoption, use and promotion of indigenous languages. Many Africans despise their languages that they see as primitive, tribal and vernacular. Armstrong (1963) argues "If we are ashamed of our own language, then we must certainly lack that minimum of self-respect which is necessary to the healthy functioning of society." (p. 69). Therefore the tendency to favor foreign language as LOI is the first impediment into using mother tongue as LOI. More important the retention of foreign language as LOI best serves the interest of the elite who use these languages as screening devices to higher positions and hence maintain their position. Elites use all types of argument to justify the status quo including but not limited to the teacher training cost, developing grammars and orthographies, producing and translating textbooks and supplementary materials. Basically they argue that education in mother tongue is not affordable. This argument does not consider the educational needs met through the indigenous

languages, and the fact that ability in these languages already exists without cost.

Last, I would have liked to see the contributors of this volume reflect on whether or not they benefit from their knowledge of foreign languages. None of the contributors raised this point except for Prah who quoted Otabil who challenges opponents of using foreign language as LOI to look at their own success and how their knowledge of foreign language propelled them in the elite position they find themselves today. Otabil writes:

It is too hypocritical for those already of sound English proficiency to advocate empathic switch to local languages. For exactly to such proficiency do they probably owe their social and symbolic capital. They have already 'made it' with the aid of English, then what defensible motive would they have for disrecommending it for posterity.

The contributors to this volume are an elite academic group. I would not be surprised if most of them were educated in Europe and/or in some prestigious universities in Africa. Irrespective of what side of the argument they adhere to, writing in either English, French to advocate for the use of African languages as LOI would lead any thoughtful reader to wonder if this fact might offer, at least in part, an argument in favor of continued colonial language dominance. Specifically, for proponents of using African languages as languages of instruction, refer to Otabil's quote. For opponents, foreign languages become a sorting machine whereby access to the power structure is controlled and monitored. I also wonder how many of them could write proficiently in African languages. Despite these issues, the authors deserve kudos for reflecting on the damage being caused by the use of foreign languages as a means of instruction and the necessity to examine African languages and their potential educational contributions. None of the arguments advanced in the book is conclusive or decisive. The topic, the context, the history are complex. More work and thinking need to be done on how African nations can use their languages to educate their children, affirm themselves, grow socially economically and politically while cooperating with other countries.

The contributors to this book do not nor intend to provide a final solution to the question of whether colonial languages of African languages should be used as LOI. They present and defend their position and also succeed in articulating the complexities involved in this issue. The topic carries implications for the education of children in Africa, its economic development and participation in the global world. Hameso (1997) summarizes the issue by explaining that the argument is not that colonial languages are necessarily an obstacle to national growth and hence should be banned, but rather they are useful and should be learned. What is in dispute is making these languages the medium of instruction (Hameso, 1997).

A recent student of mine, taking a course entitled Critical Issues in Education and Guidelines from Abu Dhabi (Arab Emirates) sent me her five top critical issues that she observed in the education system. The first one:

The death of the Arabic language for the domination of the English language. Part of the overhaul of the Abu Dhabi education system includes the requirement that all subjects be taught in English: Math, Science, ICT, PE. The result has been that students are at best mediocre in English as well as mediocre in Arabic. ... The result will be a society that has turned its back on its language in an attempt to be more Western.

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