

Why Are More African Countries Adopting English as an Official Language?

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Presented at African Studies Association Annual Conference, November 23, 2013

Baltimore, Maryland

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Abstract

At least 26 African countries list English as one of their official languages. Most recently Rwanda, long a French-speaking country, has switched to English as an official language. Burundi and Gabon are switching from French to English, and South Sudan is adopting English. The use of English as an official language in schools, universities, and government offices across the African continent raises a number of key issues. Why are African countries determining that English might be preferable to French, and why preferable to local languages? What are the positive and negative impacts of these decisions?

Keywords: Africa, education, development, English, language of instruction

Introduction

In fall 2010, President Bongo Odimbwa of Gabon visited President Paul Kagame in Kigali, Rwanda. The purpose of the trip was to discover how Rwanda has found success in its development goals, but more interestingly, how Rwanda has implemented English as an official language. President Odimbwa recognized English as “a necessary working language” and as important for “diversifying our partnerships, ensuring that the people of Gabon are armed and better armed” (Hasselriis, 2010). In a country where the majority of the 1.5 million citizens speak French, Gabon’s increased interest in promoting the English language is telling. In Rwanda, a fellow Francophone nation, English has been used as a language of instruction in the school system since 2008. Why is it that countries in Africa, and increasingly those that were not colonized by the British, are placing increased emphasis on the role of English in their political, economic, and education policies? What does such a trend mean for the future of English in Africa?

Background – Status of Languages in Africa

The purpose of this paper is to explore the increased demand for English language education and communication across Africa, including in formal settings such as schools and government offices, and in informal settings such as business. In addition to previously published works, this analysis will draw upon primary source material secured from Books For Africa, which has seen continued and increased demand for English-language educational materials across Africa, including to countries that have not had a history of English-language usage. Finally, it should be stressed that the authors of this paper do not take a position on whether these trends are the proper course of action as the authors maintain that these decisions are obviously best made by Africans themselves. This

paper does seek however to report obvious existing trends and seeks to analyze why they are occurring and what the ramifications are and will be for the future.

The Global Language

“English has become the second language of everybody. It’s gotten to the point where almost in any part of the world to be educated means to know English,” according to Mark Warschauer of the University of California, Irvine (Mydans, 2007). As the world continues to become ever more interconnected, the spread and importance of English on every continent becomes increasingly more pronounced. The link between globalization and English is tangible. It is a process that, as Mydans (2007) states, “started with the dominance of two successive English-speaking empires, British and American, and continues today with the new virtual empire of the internet.” The most powerful aspect of the English language’s role, as linguist David Crystal (2004) points out, is the speed at which the language has spread the globe. By 2050, it is projected that nearly half of the world’s population will be proficient in English (The Triumph of English, 2011).

The power of the English language is seen in the political, economic and educational spheres of the global stage. Politically, English is an official or working language of most international political gatherings throughout the world (Crystal, 2003) and 85% of international organizations use English as the language of official communications (The triumph of English, 2011). Economically, the Harvard Business Review calls English “the global language of business” (Neeley, 2012). As corporations expand the scope of operations to various countries, “geographically dispersed employees have to work together to meet common goals” (Neeley, 2012). A common working language is a requirement for that cooperation. Furthermore, as developing countries seek to compete in the global marketplace, English is the language in which most negotiation and marketing schemes must take place. English is also the primary language of academia, as the majority of

academic publications are written in English (Negash, 2011). As Crystal (2003) asserts, “access to knowledge is the business of education. When we investigate why so many nations have in recent years made English an official language or chose it as their chief foreign language in schools, one of the most important reasons is always educational.” Furthermore, Coleman (2010), writing for The British Council, highlights the link between countries’ educational and economic policies on English. Coleman cites a study that found that “countries pursuing an economic strategy based on exports and the attraction of foreign capital should adapt their language education policies to the requirements of that economy strategy” (Coleman, 2010).

Spread and emphasized via internet, global political systems, and colonial traditions, English has become the language of globalization. This study will further investigate how English, as the global language, manifests itself on the African continent. As more countries in Africa adopt English as an official language, and as more still write English into the public school curriculum, it is worthwhile to examine the economic and political reasons for these important linguistic shifts and the possible ramifications such choices have for the future of language in Africa.

Definitions

Some key definitions will now be provided to clarify terminology. The **mother tongue** is defined as the language one learns as a child growing up in the home. UNESCO defines the mother tongue as the “main language spoken in the home environment and acquired as a first language, sometimes called the home language” (UNESCO, 2013). In some African countries, such as Kenya, the mother tongue is also referred to as “ethnic”, “tribal”, “local”, and/or “vernacular” language (Cleghorn, Merritt, & Abagi, 1989). **Official language** is defined as one or more languages that a country utilizes as an official form of communication in education, government, or commerce. UNESCO (2013) defines official language as “a language designated by law to be employed in the public domain.” This is distinct from a national language, which is a “language spoken by a large part of the population of a country,

which may or may not be designated an official language” (UNESCO, 2013). **Language of instruction** (LOI) is defined as the language in which subject matter is taught in a public or private school setting. UNESCO defines LOI as “language(s) used to convey a specified curriculum in a formal or non-formal educational setting” (UNESCO, 2013). **Second language** has traditionally been used in different contexts and can mean (a) the second language learned (chronologically); (b) the weaker language; (c) a language that is not the mother tongue; or (d) the less used language.

English on the Rise in Africa

Today, 26 countries in sub-Saharan Africa use English either as an official language exclusively (like Nigeria and Ghana) or as an official language alongside another African language (like in Kenya or South Africa) (Negash, 2011; World Factbook, 2013). Several of those countries are traditionally Francophone nations (like Cameroon and Seychelles). However, English is used for communicative purposes in some 53 countries in Africa. As Negash (2011) states, “as an official language of the African Union and as an international language, English is important for the continent.”

The 26 African countries that currently utilize English as at least one of its official languages include the following (World Factbook, 2013):

Botswana
Cameroon
Eritrea
The Gambia
Ghana
Kenya
Lesotho
Liberia
Madagascar
Malawi
Mauritius
Mozambique
Namibia
Nigeria
Rwanda
Seychelles
Sierra Leone
Somalia
South Africa
South Sudan
Sudan
Swaziland
Tanzania
Uganda
Zambia
Zimbabwe

The world's top ten languages (defined as the number of speakers of the language regardless of mother tongue) are Chinese (Mandarin), English, Hindustani, Spanish, Russian, Arabic, Bengali, Portuguese, Malay-Indonesian, and French (Fishman, 2001; Krauss, 1992; World Factbook, 2013). A number of key European languages are now global languages, part of the colonial history of these lands around the world. Only nine percent of the global population are native English speakers (mother tongue), but almost one third of the population speaks English (World Factbook, 2013; Gordon, 2005). Some countries have more than one official language. Africa currently has at least 800 languages, and by some estimates as many as 2,400. Many of these languages are local, tribal languages with limited utility beyond their local region (Gordon, 2005). Of these estimated 800 languages only 50 have more than 500,000 speakers and only 10 have more than one million speakers. Key regional Sub-Saharan African

languages include Afrikaans and Xhosa in the South; Fulani, Yoruba, Hausa, and Igbo in the West; Amharic and Oromo in the East; and Kiswahili in the East (Gordon, 2005; World Factbook, 2013).

While researchers like Negash (2011) continue to highlight the increasing role of English in Africa, it is also notable that French is on the decline. While the decline of the French language can be seen throughout the Francophone world, the most striking examples are found in Africa: “South of the Sahara, countries which formerly had large French-speaking populations are making the switch to English due to its relevance in Southern Africa, as well as internationally. English, meanwhile, is becoming the most important Western language in Africa, replacing both French and Portuguese” (McGreal, 2009). It has been argued that in two decades, French may not be spoken in Africa at all. That reality seems possible in Rwanda, where “only a minority of the population speaks passable French” and where English has, since 2008, been emphasized in academic and political life (McGreal, 2009).

Adopting English as an Official Language

Rwanda is a distinct example of shifting English language policy on the African continent. English became an official language after the 1994 genocide, but more extensive language policy changes occurred in 2008, when the government created plans to present English as an official language of instruction in Rwanda’s public schools, replacing French as the dominant second language taught. Negash cites Plout, who says that “conversations in the capital, Kigali, are increasingly conducted in English...and the Kigali Institute of Science and Technology has for some time used English as the official medium of instruction” (Negash, 2011). While a report by Euromonitor International from 2009 showed that English language usage was highly localized to the urban areas, mainly Kigali, the report also predicted this division to shift overtime as the government implements its English language teaching policy and promotes rural education initiatives (Negash,

2011). Furthermore, the recently formed nation of South Sudan has also adopted English as the official language. A British Council official in the country was quoted in the BBC: "English has become a tool for development and, even if the British in Sudan are sometimes seen as colonial overlords, the English language is respected" (Goldsmith, 2011).

Though they may not have adopted it as an official language of state, English also plays important roles in traditionally Portuguese and French-speaking countries, as well as in Ethiopia, none of which are former British colonies. In Burundi, interest in the English language is growing rapidly. One reason for this, argues Nizonkiza, is that the countries around it, mainly its neighbor in geography and cultural identity Rwanda, have implemented such strong English language policies (2006). In Ethiopia, Negash (2011) cites an interview conducted with a Ugandan Academic in Addis Ababa: "English is a compulsory language to get jobs, even in government offices, and it is a compulsory subject one should pass to join university." What remains to be seen in countries like Burundi and Ethiopia is if future language policy will, like many of their neighbors, place increased importance on English by adding it as an official language of state.

English in Educational Systems in Africa

Countries' positions on the English language is perhaps most clearly seen by examining education policy. "English is used as a medium of instruction in many African countries, from primary school up to the tertiary level. In the former French colonies of Ivory Coast, Mali and Senegal, English is the first compulsory foreign language taught" (Negash, 2011). While courses at tertiary institutions have, in many countries, been taught in English for some time, countries are now recognizing the value of introducing English language learning in the early primary years.

In Rwanda, English has been the language of instruction in public institutions since 2008. 2011 the policy shifted such that full English language instruction, without any use of the local

language Kinyarwanda, is not mandatory until secondary school (Jury Out, 2010). McGreal cites a ministry official who described the choice to make English the language of instruction as a move toward the future: "It's choosing English as a medium of instruction so we Rwandans of today, and more importantly of tomorrow, will be able to benefit. If Spanish or any other language could get us to that, no problem. If Kinyarwanda could get us to that, that would be marvelous. It is not English for its own sake" (McGreal, 2009).

In Ethiopia, English has been taught as a subject for students starting in primary school since 1994, when a new education policy was implemented (Bogale, 2009). In addition, most universities in Ethiopia use English as the language of instruction because, as an Ethiopian professor explained to Negash, "90 per cent of [academic] resources we get in Africa or Ethiopia come from the West and this is almost all in English" (Negash, 2011). English can be considered the language of academia, and therefore, English proficiency is a necessity for success at the tertiary level. However Bogale, using qualitative research results in several regions of Ethiopia, argues that inconsistent language teaching practices and under-resourced teachers make the effectiveness of English language acquisition in the younger grades often inconsistent. These inconsistencies can make success in the higher levels of school more difficult for students, because they do not have the English language skills necessary to succeed. Despite these challenges, Bogale (2009) reports that population surveys reveal that both students and their parents recognize English as "the language of education." In this sense, there is a strong shared understanding of the importance of English language acquisition.

Ethiopia, one of the oldest independent nations which has its well-developed language of Amharic, also has used English as a language of instruction high schools and post-secondary schools since modern education started in the country after 1920. What makes the Ethiopian use of English unique is, English was given as a second language from grades 1 – 6, while Amharic, the national language of the country, is used for other subjects. When students transfer to 7th grade, the language

of instruction will change to English and this is continued all the way to colleges and universities while the country's working language remains Amharic (World Factbook, 2013).

The new governance structure of Ethiopia emphasizes self-determination of people based on their linguistic and cultural identify, and created nine regional states and two special administrative zones. Among the nine regional states only Amhara and the Southern Ethiopia regions use Amharic as their working language, which is also the working language of the Federal Government located in Addis Ababa and the Dredawa special administrative zone. Hence, this federal arrangement and freedom of language use for local language necessitated adopting English as well as Amharic as an official working language by the federal government of Ethiopia (World Factbook, 2013).

English Education Materials in Africa: A Books For Africa Case Study

As increasing numbers of African countries like Ethiopia seek to develop and implement consistent and effective English language teaching policies, there is a strong and rising need for quality English teaching materials for African classrooms. Books For Africa's work highlights the growing emphasis of English education in Africa, as the demand for quality English books from Books For Africa continues to grow. Books For Africa, the world's largest shipper of donated text and library books to the African continent, has shipped over 29 million books to 49 African countries over the past 25 years. In 2010 Books For Africa sent 1.6 million books to Africa; in 2011 1.9 million books; in 2012 2.2 million books; and in 2013 1.5 million books. This organizational growth is significant, as Books For Africa responds to a demand for books, and this demand is growing (Books For Africa, 2013).

Further data also suggests this demand for English language material. For example, Ethiopia received the third largest number of books shipped by Books For Africa in 2012, with 440,000 books shipped to university programs, primary and secondary schools, and new English learning libraries.

In Rwanda, prior to 2008 when the Rwandan government introduced its new English learning policy, Rwanda had only received one shipment of books in Books For Africa's first 20 years of operation. Since 2008, the number of containers shipped to organizations in Rwanda has increased substantially. In 2008, two shipments were sent. In 2012, six shipments, totaling 132,000 books were delivered to Rwandan schools, universities and libraries. This increased interest in English books from Books For Africa displayed by education organizations in Rwanda may suggest a response to those English policies introduced in 2008. Additionally, while Books For Africa ships many books to Anglophone nations, Books For Africa has also seen a demand for books in traditionally Francophone nations. For example, in 2013, Books For Africa sent its first container to Burundi (Books For Africa, 2013).

In Books For Africa's history, approximately 3.7 million books have been shipped to African countries that do not use English as an official language (Books For Africa, 2013). This demand is self-explanatory, showing that more and more Africans want access to English-language books. Fully 21% of the countries served by BFA historically do not have English as an official language.

One contact from Mozambique reported in a communication to Books For Africa as follows:

As you know our country is a Portuguese colony hence the official language is Portuguese. Recently we have had so many investors coming into the country from overseas and they are offering a lot of job opportunities. That is very much welcome in any developing country, our only problem and hiccup is that they require English as a prerequisite to get employment in their companies. Not just that there is a great need from the nation at large of learning English because they need to fit in with the rest of the world community. (Books For Africa, 2013).

Why is English Usage Increasing in Africa?

The above examples demonstrate that English is a vital thread in the fabric of modern day Africa. It is valuable to examine the driving forces promoting this focus on English language

acquisition, and encouraging countries like Gabon to consider making English an official language of the state. While researchers cite many driving factors that contribute to the rise of the English language in Africa, several are most compelling. While economic factors are perhaps the most obvious driving forces, viewing English as a unifying language is also a helpful explanation.

English is a Language of Commerce

Countries seeking economic development often turn to English as a means to engage foreign markets. In order to attract foreign investments, develop international trade opportunities and create tourism campaigns, countries in Africa often see English as an essential tool. As African economies look to increase their commodity exports, “the security of millions of African farmers depends on the negotiation and marketing skills--including their command of English--possessed by the leaders and exporters who represent them” (Negash, 2011). Further, international tourism, which is expected to grow rapidly in the next ten years, is seen as a worthwhile development opportunity. In fact, according to the United Nation’s Sustainable Tourism-Eliminating Poverty program, tourism is especially important to the economies of developing countries. A good command of English, not only for the leaders who market tourism programs but also the service workers who cater to tourists, is vital to the growth of tourism campaigns.

In Rwanda, the Director of Policy Planning at the Rwandan Ministry of Education stated a need “to make Rwanda to be equal... English is now a world language, especially in trade and commerce. Rwanda is trying to attract foreign investors — most of these people are speaking English” (McGreal, 2009). The business community in Rwanda as “pragmatically embraced English” and the economic impact of the government’s new push for English language acquisition will become “more evident as schoolchildren and university students graduate and join the labor force” (The Jury Out, 2010). Hasselriis comments that “Rwandans are working

hard to show they're competitive in an emerging African market" (2010), and there are some noticeable results. Impressive growth has occurred in both the service sector, and in the amount of foreign investments, which the government says is reflected in the high levels of activity in the construction sector. While this growth cannot be contributed, directly, to the governments' interest in English language programs, it is clear that the government values such policies as a key component of their economic development strategies.

In Ethiopia, as previously noted, English is one of the official languages and education is seen as a big priority. Ethiopia is among the ten fastest growing economies in the world and is the fastest growing non-oil economy in Africa. Crowe (2013) reported that "for a country that once made headlines for famine, poverty and war, Ethiopia is gaining a reputation as a development leader on the African continent. In just over ten years, the country has slashed mortality rates by half, rising in global rank from 146 in 2000 to 68 in 2012." In this fast-growing and fast developing country, "the Ethiopian Ministry of Education has launched one of the continent's most ambitious education programs. Early-grade enrollment has increased from under 30 percent in 1991 to over 90 percent in 2008. Despite this tripling of enrollment, however, 43 percent of Ethiopia's population remains illiterate" (RTI, 2013). The Ethiopian government's five year plan entailed a considerable increase in primary school education, going from 16,795 up to 25,217. The increased enrollment will call for large increases of textbooks and reading materials that are widely available in English, further increasing the domination of the English language in Ethiopia (RTI, 2013).

While the English language is valued by African countries as serving global economic interests, it also may serve economic and peace relations within the continent. English may be viewed as a tool that crosses regional, cultural and linguistic barriers. Countries that seek to develop trade relations amongst their neighbors may see English as a useful negotiation mechanism that cuts

through regional language barriers. For example, in Rwanda, the move to English “is intended to strengthen Rwanda's ties to its English-speaking east African neighbors, including Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania, with which it does much of its trade” (McGreal, 2009). In neighboring Burundi, Nizonkiza (2006) cites Burundi’s search for foreign trade partners in the Great Lakes Region as a factor contributing to the great upswing of attendance at English learning centers. In this way English is displayed not only as the language of world markets, but also as the language of inter-country trade and negotiation within the African continent.

English is a Unifying Language

Many scholars argue that in certain cultural contexts, the English language can be seen as a language of unity. For example, in Rwanda, it can be argued that adopting English as the second official language of state allows the country to “break from the colonial past and ties with Belgium and France, factors which the Rwandan government specifies as key in the development of genocidal ideology” (The cost and consequences, 2012). In this way, English gives post-genocide Rwanda a chance to create a modified national identity that eliminates linguistic “affiliations based on ethnicity” (The cost and consequences, 2012). Similarly, when South Sudan gained independence from Sudan, the news director of South Sudan Radio asserted that English allows South Sudan to “become one nation. We can iron out our tribal differences and communicate with the rest of the world” (Goldsmith, 2011). In this case, English became the language upon which the new government could create a new, unified state.

Dr. John Rutayisire, director of the Rwanda Education Board, stated “we were not prepared to wait for the conventional 10 or 20 years to adopt a more strategic longer plan, because the interests of this country are more paramount than the difficulties that people can face in the shorter term” (The jury out, 2012). The criticism does emphasize, however, the importance of, and need for, quality resources to aid in the implementation and execution of English language programs. For example,

Bogale (2009) argues that in Ethiopia, English should only be taught under optimal language acquisition circumstances. These circumstances are often unavailable in under resourced institutions.

Positive Aspects of Rise of English Language Usage

There are a number of arguments in favor of English-language donated books. English is currently an official language in 26 African countries (World Factbook, 2013). To systematically use local tribal languages for school instruction in Africa would require the preparation of educational materials in some 800 languages (Gordon, 2005), hence the use of English and other world languages for government, commerce, and education across Africa. The costs of producing books and other educational materials in local languages at the primary, secondary, and post-secondary levels may be cost-prohibitive, even when theoretically possible (World Bank, 2002). Additionally, strong evidence exists that the people of Africa want Western-language textbooks. Gomis and McCoy (2005), for example, found that without an official language policy in schools in Nugaal, Somalia, the language of instruction in high school defaulted to English because of a perception by the common people that this provided the best instruction for the future of the students. The World Bank (2002) also reported this same trend in favor of Western-language instruction across Africa. Local language education was viewed as second class, and a European language was perceived as necessary in most Sub-Saharan African countries for secondary education and, later, for higher education and for success in business or government. Adequate provision for transition to a second language of instruction was identified as necessary (World Bank, 2002). In Mali, for example, in 1994 “there was considerable resistance to [instituting] mother tongue instruction among rural peasants, who saw it as a second rate education keeping them from better-paying jobs and higher education” (World Bank, 2002, p. 32). Mother tongue instruction was also resisted by more educated parents, who complained

that it lacked good mathematics and reading programs (World Bank, 2002).

Crystal (2004) indicated that few African countries currently use indigenous languages in higher education and that English is the language of choice in the majority of cases. Approximately 75 percent of world mail, telexes, and cables, 60 percent of world radio programs, and 82 percent of all World Wide Web traffic are in English (Gordon, 2005; Crystal, 2001). Crystal (2001) cited a 1997 study showing the tremendous drop off in World Wide Web medium of communication, with English the top language at 82 percent, and German the second most common language at four percent.

Crystal (2004) found that the world is facing a language revolution that reflects changes in language that have always occurred throughout history, but that are now accelerating in the face of globalization and a perceived need for a global language. Crystal (2004) argued that languages have always been utilitarian by their very nature and that instead of thinking in terms of official languages, it would be better to embrace a concept of languages that are “official for a particular purpose” (p. 99). In this respect, the African context where there is a language for home, another language for the market, another language for school, and perhaps another language for government interaction should not be viewed as alarming, according to Crystal (2004). While Crystal (2004) did express concern regarding what he terms a language death that is occurring across the globe, and the loss of culture (96 percent of the world’s languages are spoken by just four percent of the world’s population), Crystal also asserted that languages have always evolved, changed, and borrowed from one another and that historically, the English language has been the borrower *par excellence*.

The world of multilingualism is full of purists – people who believe that there exists some form of a language which is intrinsically superior to all others and which it is their duty to protect against change, especially against the influence of other languages (and most especially against English) (Crystal, 2004, p. 99).

Crystal (2004) goes on to state that “Human language cannot be controlled. The more a language becomes a national, then an international, then a global language, the more it ceases to be in the ownership of its originators” (p. 45). Crystal (2004) reported that the English language has become the common language of the world, with approximately 1.4 billion users across the globe, and that this is due to “the need for a *lingua franca* – a concept probably as old as language itself” (p. 9). In the future, Crystal (2004) envisions the development of a whole English family of languages mixed with other, local, languages, and indicated that this will probably be the main linguistic trend of the 21st century.

Wakerley (2004) cited the example of Namibia, which gained independence in 1981 and had ample opportunity to choose any language as an official language. English was selected as the official language, even though it was a language with no previous history in the country.

Hurskainen (2002) concluded that we should “stop thinking that we either have all school teaching in English, or we have all school teaching in an African language” (p. 5). Hurskainen (2002) found that the current situation in Africa is positive because it is flexible in providing education in English and local languages. Johnson (2004) concluded that there are high stakes in the global language game, but that there is not much that individuals can do about it and that events will take their course.

“There seems to be an unhelpful labeling of foreign languages like English as languages of imperialism. This ignores the pragmatic, sociolinguistic, economic and political realities in Africa and beyond” (Negash, 2011). Negash argues that English’s power is not as much imperialistic, as it is empowering--an opportunity to join the global marketplace and to communicate ideas and cultures across boundaries. Similarly, Johnson (2004) says that “English has, in many ways, ceased to be the property of native speakers and has been appropriated, through its continued globetrotting, by the

many constituencies who use it to communicate across lingual borders.” In this way it cannot be argued that the English language still functions only to “serve the interests of English-speaking states” (Johnson, 2004)

Many scholars find it more helpful to define the spread of the English language as an empowering force, allowing for the sharing of cultural information between cultures rather than for the elimination of individual cultural identities. A government official in Rwanda stated this concern this way: "Kinyarwanda is our identity and our values. We adopt English for us to be able to compete globally, but we are Banyarwanda [people of Rwanda] and that is number one and not negotiable" (The jury out, 2010).

Negash blames negative perceptions of English teaching in Africa partially on “failures in the management of multilingualism, in the teaching of the mother tongues, and in the teaching methods adopted for ESL and EFL” (Negash, 2011). In this sense, it is not the introduction of English language acquisition programs in itself that may be detrimental for local languages, but rather the failure to structure those programs around multilingual learning.

In one study English language text and library books had significant influence upon the comprehension and fluency scores of some Tanzanian students with differing levels of access to the books (Plonski, 2010). It was also found that the Tanzanian teachers and administrators who participated in the study found the donated English-language books to be valuable and did not judge them to be harmful from a cultural standpoint. The results of the investigation indicated there were some significant differences in student fluency and reading comprehension achievement scores. The differences were influenced by different levels of student access to the donated English-language books and student gender. In addition, data from the interviews revealed that the teachers and administrators believed the donated textbooks had educational value for the students. Further, the data revealed an understanding by interview participants that donated English-language books did not cause cultural harm and did improve student achievement scores (Plonski, 2010).

Negative Implications of Growing English Language Use in Africa

Of course, not all agree that the rise of English in Africa is a good thing. Many argue that English bears negative impacts and resonances because it is a language of imperialism. “The real reason for the triumph of English is the triumph of the United States. Therein lies a huge source of friction” (The triumph of English, 2011). Johnson (2004) states that it can be argued that the growing importance of English is a way in which the power of the United States is wielded, and this linguistic power a new, post-colonial way of spreading influence. Language can also be considered a “repository of cultural identity” that shapes one’s perceptions and beliefs (The triumph of English, 2011). Johnson (2004) argues that “English threatens not only to make those who speak it more alike, but to mold them in the culturally specific American image that it carries in its syntax.”

Opponents of English-language programs have concluded that such English-based educational programs do not increase educational advancement in Africa (Brock-Utne, 2001a, 2001b; Prah, 2003; Bunyi, 1999). Bunyi (1999) asserted that Western education was brought to Africa by the European colonial powers and as such Eurocentricism was part of its baggage. Bunyi (1999) and Prah (2003) argued that in order for education to liberate itself from the Eurocentric colonial legacy, African education should be grounded in African indigenous cultures as primary vehicles for social transformation.

May and Aikman (2003) reported that in contrast to colonial history, and a history of failure of indigenous students, “education has now come to be seen as a key arena in which indigenous peoples can reclaim and revalue their languages and cultures, and in so doing, improve the educational success of indigenous students” (p. 14).

It has been suggested that Western-educated elites in Africa are clinging to unworkable colonial language policies in order to perpetuate their own political power over the majority of citizens less

proficient in the European languages. Monolingualism does not guarantee national unity, and the very fact that local languages are not widely taught in secondary and post-secondary African schools could be sending a strong message that these languages, and hence local African culture, is of low value. Prah (2003) argues that the language of instruction in any society is also the language of hegemony and power. Denial of instruction in the mother tongue, therefore, signifies the social and cultural inferiority of the culture and people whose mother tongue use is denied, and is a heritage of colonialism.

A report commissioned by Somali Family Services (Gomis & McCoy, 2005) argued that book donation programs to Somalia directly contributed to the devaluation of Somali language by giving the community more reason to become literate in English instead of Somali.

Brock-Utne (2001a, 2001b) is a particularly forceful proponent of the use of Kiswahili in Tanzanian schools, and extremely critical of Tanzania's current government policy of introducing English as a medium of communication at the secondary school level. Brock-Utne (2001a, 2001b) reported that the use of English is an elitist issue in Tanzania. Brock-Utne wrote of the diffusion of English, often to the detriment of the mother tongues of most people and reported that Tanzania's current education policies lead to social injustice for the masses and reinstate the inequality of pre-independence times. Tanzanian teachers admitted that the use of English as the medium of instruction was a great barrier to them (Brock-Utne, 2001a, 2001b). Brock-Utne (2001a, 2001b) further reported that both politicians and academics are divided on the language issue, pointing out that language of instruction is a very complex issue in Tanzania with class, economic, political, and educational implications.

The issue of English as a language of instruction in Tanzanian schools and as a tool for economic development remains an on-going topic of public debate in Tanzania, with local newspapers periodically raising the issue for discussion by readers (Should we use Kiswahili as a medium of instruction, 2007;

Mwabukusi, 2007). Some reference linguistic imperialism at work, and how in Tanzania some parents are convinced that Kiswahili is inherently inferior to English.

Some researchers argue that the introduction of English language instruction will threaten and eventually extinguish the regional and tribal languages of Africa. In Ethiopia, specifically, Bogale (2009) argues that the mother tongue should be the language of instruction in the younger grades, with English taught as a school subject. Bogale (2009) suggests that English as the language instruction for all courses is best when introduced in the secondary school grades, after proficiency in the mother tongue has been achieved. Multilingual education programs that teach subjects in the mother tongue and in Amharic, a significant lingua franca among most regions in Ethiopia, as well as in English are particularly effective. Both Bogale argues that such multilingual programs offer the English skills training that students need to succeed in a globalized world but also the local language skills necessary to retain cultural identity.

As discussed earlier, in Rwanda, the government introduced English as the language of instruction in public schools in 2009. Some have criticized the abruptness of this transition, which decreed that teachers would begin using English within four months, arguing that the transition has left teachers unprepared and under-trained to instruct in English, and that the resources needed to support such a transition did not reach all schools.

Bunyi (1999) and Prah (2003) argue that foreign language provides for imperfect education in Africa. They argue that local languages are, therefore, the best basis for literacy, since they are already understood by local populations and young children in particular can more easily learn academic content in languages they already understand. Bunyi (1999) found that the costs of providing instructional materials in numerous local languages are not excessive especially if such factors as poor performance, school drop-out rates, time invested, and use of culturally inappropriate materials are taken into account. Bunyi (1999) concluded that far from serving as a great unifying force, Western languages serve as a

great divider in Africa – dividing people along class lines with upper classes speaking Western languages and lower classes speaking indigenous languages.

Prah (2003) further suggested that use of European languages in Africa cuts off the elite from the population and that not understanding the official language, the ordinary people can neither identify themselves with the state nor acquire even the most rudimentary information about public affairs. Prah (2003) asserted that the common people almost never fully learn English as a rule, and that as a result its use as an official language only benefits the elites. Prah (2003) also dismissed the argument that European languages increase the global opportunities for the people of Africa, reporting that only a small percentage of the population will ever utilize this competence.

Issues of cultural relativism, ethnocentrism, and emics are very relevant to issues of the validity of foreign languages for instruction in developing countries (Pike & McKinney, 1996). The emic approach, deriving from sounds specific to a language, involves the discovery of native principles of classification and conceptualization and avoidance of pre-conceived models (Pike & McKinney, 1996). The goal of the emic approach is to focus upon the native point of view and to realize the cultural vision from the standpoint of the native. Pike & McKinney (1996), in particular, focused upon the emic approach, reporting that even with regard to how items or concepts are named, culture is inherent. Pike and McKinney (1996) suggested that some cultures may not have equivalent words for Western concepts, or may have concepts that are not named in Western literature. Mental constructs differ across cultures, and how questions are asked may differ from one culture to the next.

Conclusions

This analysis placed into perspective findings and data showing that English is on the rise across Africa. Some, in particular leader in those African countries utilizing English, assert that this is a positive development. Others argue that English-language education and its use in

official functions is a hold-over from a colonial tradition represents a tragic loss of cultural wealth, and presents imperfect educational outcomes. This analysis of the state of the English language in Africa allows us to draw several conclusions:

1. There is growing demand for English-language usage across Africa. Countries in Africa are, and will continue, to promote English acquisition programs in their countries, recognizing English as an important tool of development and opportunity. Therefore, as an emphasis on universal primary education continues to be promoted as countries participate in UNDP's Millennium Development Goals (and thus more students find themselves in the classroom) we can expect an increased demand for English teaching resources, learning tools, and adequately prepared English teachers in countries that are focusing on English education. Books For Africa's ongoing response to this demand in Africa provides additional documentable evidence of this on-going trend.
2. This demand for English-language usage across Africa will continue into the foreseeable future because of perceived advantages by Africans to this strategy. There is no real end in sight for English language dominance on the world stage, and this means an increasing number of Africans will seek strong English language competence in order to obtain work, attend university, and compete in the global marketplace.
3. There are clearly negative consequences to this continued increase of English-language usage across Africa. These negative consequences include cultural loss, imperfect education, and stratification of society as English becomes the language of the elites in African countries.

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