ENGLISH VERSUS KISWAHILI IN TANZANIAN SECONDARY EDUCATION

by

M M Mulokozi (Dr)

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The problem of language and educationn in Tanzania has been under discussion among Tanzanian educators and political authorities for the past twenty years. In the sixties, it was usully assumed that the use of English as a medium of instruction in secondary schools was then a necessary but temporary measure, that by 1974 Kiswahili should have taken over the function (see Second Five Year Development Plan). In the seventies, there were heated discussions at the University of Dar es Salaam and elsewhere on the problems of education vis-a-vis Ujamaa in Tanzania, leading K Hirji to declare, in 1973, that the education system in Tanzania is in shambles." Such discussions, however, rarely touched on the question of language as a factor in the alleged disintegration of the educational system in the country.

In the late 1970's and early 1980's the linguists took over the debate from social scientists and government functionaries. These scholars were almost unanimous in their findings and recommendations.

(a) They found that very little learning is taking place in secondary school classrooms, mainly because both the teachers and the pupils lack competence in the English language.

(b) They often recommended the improvement of English teaching as a stop-gap measure pending the

> adoption of Kiswahili as the only viable final solution to the problem.[1]

Unfortunately, in most cases the question was all along viewed as a solely pedagogical, rather than cultural, and therefore political problem. As such, the demand for adoption of Kiswahili in secondary schools (SS) was easily dismissed on technicalities. It was argued that there were not enough teachers, books, terminologies or teaching materials in Kiswahili, and that the government did not have the funds to alleviate the shortages.

Since it was believed that the problem was essentially technical, it was normally technical solutions that were sought. Language planners, curriculum developers, linguists, etc. were mobilized to write or translate books, to coin terminologies, and to produce study materials in Kiswahili. The outcome of these efforts, twenty years later, is impressive. Yet Kiswahili has still not been adopted as the language of instruction in Secondary schools.

This paper attempts to review the debate and the efforts that were expended in the cause of Kiswahili in education in the last twenty years (1968 - 1988). It argues that the biggest obstacle to adoption of Kiswahili was not technical, but political, that the Tanzanian ruling class appeared to be on the verge of abandoning its historical mission of forging a new nation and a national identity, and that this was reflected, interalia, in its inconsistent language policy.

Finally, the paper proposes various steps that should be taken by the government to enable Kiswahili to assume its rightful role in the education system.

2.0 SURVEY OF POLICY DECISIONS (OR INDECISIONS) AND ACTIONS

Before independence in 1961 the status and roles of Kiswahili and English in Tanzania were clearly defined. Kiswahili was a cultural and commercial language. It was also the language of African politics, of education up to standard VI, and of the lower adminstrative levels. English was the official language, the language of education (from class VII to university), science and technology. After Independence, Kiswahili became the national language and assumed some of the official functions of English. In 1968, Kiswahili was declared the language of primary education.

The decision to make Kiswahili the sole language of primary education from 1968 has two important results. Firstly, it enhanced the status of Kiswahili as a language of education, and contributed directly to its subsequent rapid expansion terminologically and geographically. Secondly, the decision led, as a consequence, to the decline in the status of English and in its mastery among Tanzanian pupils and students. There was loss of linguistic continuity between the end of primary schooling and the beginning of secondary schooling. The few pupils who entered secondary schools had to grapple with an unaccustomed, practically alien, medium even as they struggled to master the new concepts. The result was a pedagogical absurdity.

In addition, the decision to use Kiswahili in primary education had two implications:

(a) It implied that the change in the language of instruction would be carried through to the secondary, and eventually tertiary, levels;

(b) It also implied that, in the meantime, the

> English language would be taught well in primary and secondary schools so as to enable the students to cope with the instruction and the readings that were still in English.

THe government responded to this situation by proposing a program of gradual replacement of English by Kiswahili starting in 1971. According to the program, the following subjects were to be taught in Kiswahili with effect from the dates indicated:

1	History	1971
2	Geography	1971
3	Political Education	1969/70
4	Mathematics	1971
5	Agriculture	1971
6	Domestic Science	1971

(Source: Lugha Yetu 3 - 4, 1970:6)

Except for Political Education, this proposal was not implemented. Nevertheless, preparation for the changeover continued as shown by the following chart:

1970	The Institute of Education (IE) began to translate (into Kiswahil) some of the SS text books.
1970	SS headmasters/headmistresses, meeting in Dodoma, proposed that Kiswahili should become the medium of instruction for all subjects in SS from 1972
1970-80	The IE, BAKITA, Institute of Kiswahili Research (IKR) etc. were busy coining and standardizing terminologies for various SS and tertiary level subjects. By 1988, about 15000 terms were ready, out of which about 9000 were already standardized by BAKITA.
1974	IE proposed that Kiswahili should become the medium of instruction for the social sciences and agriculture from 1974, and for all the remaining subjects from 1977. The proposal was, however, not endorsed by the government.
1978	Following the report by Mlama and Matteru on problems caused by the use of English in secondary schools, the ministry of Education set up a committee to advise the government on the question of changing the medium of Kiswahili. The committee considered all the relevant points, including availability of books, manpower, etc. and eventually submitted a report to the government proposing that Kiswahili should become the medium of instruction in

	SS from 1982 and at the University from 1990.[2]
1982	The Presidential Commission of Education (Makweta Commission) presented its report to the government. Regarding language policy in education, the Commission recommended: (a) Adoption of Kiswahili as the medium of SS education from 1985; (b) Strengthening the teaching of English in primary and secondary schools. The first recommendation was rejected, and the second accepted, by the Party and Government.[3]
1984	Criper and Dodd presented their report to the government. It revealed that English is no longer effective as a medium of instruction in SS, and recommended its rehabilitation.
1987	Roy-Campbell and Qorro presented their report on reading competence in English in SS, revealing that on the average the pupils competence is extremely low (actually lower than their competence in Kiswahili). They recommended various measures to raise the pupils' competence in English pending the eventual change of the medium from English to Kiswahili.
1988	The Ministry responsible for Culture, and BAKITA, started a project of translation of

SS text books into Kiswahili.

The above survey shows that much was being done in the last 20 years to enable Kiswahili to become the medium of instruction in SS. The scholars and educators were generally ahead of the government and usually in favour of the changeove. Yet the changeover did not happen, why? In our view, the reason for this delay was plitical; the technical momentum was there, but the political push was lacking.

3.0 THE DEBATE

The government's decision to continue with English, contrary to the Makweta recommendations, unleashed a heated debate between the government and its supporters on the one hand and the promoters of Kiswahili on the other. The main arguments and counter-arguments were as follows:

1	English is the international language which Tanzanians need when they go abroad to study, to attend conferences, etc, It is the "Kiswahili of the world."	a) 90% of all SS leavers will probably never go abroad, but will need and use Kiswahili in their daily tasks. b) Students who go abroad have to learn the language of the country where they do their studies (eg

		French, Russian, etc) English is not enough
2	English is the language of science and technology	a) Every language has a right to become a language of science and technology for its users. b) Tanzanians working in in those fields will be given the opportunity to study English and other foreign languages
3	English will die out if it is eliminated as an educational medium, for there would be no incentive to learn it.	That problem should be left to the British Council to tackle, the Tanzania government has more serious problems to worry about. In any case, English will continue to be taught seriously in the schools.
4	Kiswahili is already well established; there is no need to worry about it.	If it is well-established let it be used in higher education and technology, and stop complaining about its lack of terminology, precision, etc.

5	Kiswahili lacks the necessary terminology, books, specialists, etc.	Those have to be created through conscious policy, planning etc. without a felt need, they wont just come about.
6	Use of Kiswahili has led to a drop in our education standards.	On the contrary, it is probably use of English, coupled with other socio-economic factors, that have led to the alleged fall in standards. Indeed, Kiswahili is not yet the language of instruction in SS.
7	We are a democratic country; everybody should have access to English.	For that very reason, we should democratize our education through the use of Kiswahili - a language which is familiar to the majority.
8	The source of the problem is the change of medium from Kiswahili to English at the end of primary schooling. To avoid this problem it is better to make English the medium of Education even in primary schools.	That would be very costly and impracticable. It would be easier and more sensible to change the SS medium.

9	Where is the money? Where are the resources to meet the costs of the change over?	It would cost only about 800 million shillings to effect the changeover. That is far less than the than the money we spend on less useful projects such as celebrations, renovation of the Central Bank building, etc. If we accept that Kiswahili is our national language, it behoves us to give it the resources to match that status.

4.0 CONCLUSION:

WHAT'S TO BE DONE?

This paper has shown that great efforts in last twenty years were put into the development of Kiswahili as a national and educational language. We have also shown that these efforts have not led to adoption of Kiswahili in SS and higher education because the government (i.e. the political authority) has not been in favour of replacing English with Kiswahili. The arguments of both sides have been outlined for the reader.

The most fundamental argument in favour of Kiswahili is, however, not pedagogical but political: Tanzania is at a stage of creation of a nation and forging of a national identity and pride. Kiswahili is the natural vehicle of retarding or diluting it.

One possible reason for the government's failure to implement this process is that the (bourgeois) ruling class in Tanzania is still divided on the issue. The patriotic faction of that class favours Kiswahili, but cannot implement its wishes because it is already losing ground in the political and economic fronts. The compradorial faction, with the assistance of the IMF, seems to be in ascendancy. This class needs English to enable it to divide and rule the people internally and to facilitate its integration into the world capitalist system externally. The question of which of the two factions will win is as yet indecided. We are, however, optimistic that the patriotic faction, or better still, the lower, currently voiceless classes, will eventually win. In anticipation of such an eventuality, we venture to make the following recommendations:

1 The present educational language policy should be assessed to determine its consequences for the learner and the nation at large.

2 A patriotic language policy should be formulated and implemented without delay.

3 Training of language specialists should be accorded priority. This should include expansion of the existing institutions, such as the Department of Kiswahili and the Department of Foreign Languages and Linguistics at the University of Dar es Salaam.

4 More resources should be ploughed into the current efforts to develop Kiswahili, especially in the areas of translation of scientific books, creation of terminologies, preparation of dictionaries, and publishing of books and magazines.

NOTES

1 See, for instance, the following studies: Mohamed (1975); Mlama and Matteru (1978); Criper and Dodd (1984); Rubagumya (1986); Schmied (1986); Mulokozi (1986; 1989); Rugemalila et al (1987); Roy-Campbell and Qorro (1987); Nchimbi (1989); Besha (1989; Mmari (1983; 1989); Yahya-Othman, S (1988); Amijee, (1989); Kasagwa (1988); Senkoro (1988)

2 Refer to File No HU/11.20/8. 1976, Ministry responsible for culture.

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