

Attitudinal Factors as Determinants of Language of Educational Instruction in Kenya: A Case Study of Nairobi

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Abstract

Using Nairobi as a case study of attitudinal factors determining language in education in Kenya and my familiarity with Kenyan language attitudes at large I in this paper try to make a case for and against the use of Kiswahili, Kenyan endogenous languages, and English at all levels of education in Kenya. This paper therefore aims at revealing the attitudinal factors that determine the languages of educational instruction in Kenya. The attitudinal factors that are revealed will go along way in showing how they impact on the language in education generally and on language education policy for Kenya in particular. Data for this paper were collected by means of library research, field visits, interviews, observation, and discussion. This work, being field based, used tape-recorders also and the information recorded was transcribed and analyzed focusing on the specific items of the interview schedule. The work purposively selected its sample and was conducted with the participation of 282 respondents. Using the Sociological theoretical framework and the Social Psychological theory, the study found out that the attitudinal factors towards the languages of educational instruction in Kenya range from integrative to instrumental with the instrumental attitudinal factors being given much prominence.

Key words: Language attitudes, Language policy, Language planning, Endogenous languages

1. Introduction

The essence of this papers is the role of attitudes in the language of instruction in Kenya because attitudes play a big role in guiding language policy particularly in a multilingual setting like the one in Kenya(see Abdulaziz 1982). Thus, this paper seeks to address the place of language attitudes in the process of language in education policy formulation and language in education planning in Kenya and particularly in relation to the development of education communication and overall national development.

It has to be acknowledged that generally language policy is required to meet certain fundamental goals namely; build national unity, develop a cultural identity and facilitate access to information, science and technology (Le Page 1964). Therefore to achieve the above, in a multilingual nation like Kenya, inevitably involves language choices. The question this paper seeks to answer is; What are the motivating factors that lead Kenyans to prefer language A as opposed to B as a language of instruction in her education system?

2. Theoretical framework

Studies on language attitudes have become interdisciplinary combining methods used in anthropology, education, sociology, social psychology and linguistics. Because of this, this paper uses two theories namely; the social psychological theory and the sociological theory with an aim of capturing many variables in our data. The social psychological framework is mainly associated with Lambert whose thesis is that attitudes towards a particular language are also attitudes towards speakers of that language. In this paper therefore, attitudes towards either English, mother tongues or Kiswahili in Kenya will mean attitudes towards the speakers of these languages especially in matters of education in Kenya.

The sociological framework is mainly associated with Joshua Fishman. The major contribution of Fishman's approach to language study is his concept of domains of language behaviour that he calls analytical variables and which contribute to an understanding of who uses what language, to whom and when in speech communities that are multilingual like the Kenyan one (Kembo-Sure, 1988,Kembo-Sure and Webb 2002). This paper therefore benefits from Fishman's theory in soliciting factors that are attitude based that lead Kenyans in using or not using Kiswahili, mother tongue or/ and English in her education system.

3. Methods of Data Collection

The researcher did a case study of Nairobi because case studies are the preferred strategy when *how* and *why* questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context. Therefore, the need for present case study arose out of the desire to understand a complex social phenomenon that is *language* attitude in education in Kenya. Case studies such as the present one use *how* and *why* questions which are more explanatory. Such questions deal with operational links needing to be traced over time, rather than mere frequencies or incidences.

By focusing on the *how* and *why* questions in one city with residents of all social classes, the researcher did a multiple case study. The first condition for doing the multiple case study was to identify the type of research questions to be asked. The *why* and *how* questions were mostly favoured in this study because such questions do not give the researcher much control over actual behavioural events. This was because, to the researcher, the event being investigated is contemporary and so the behaviours cannot be manipulated. Besides, case study investigation uses direct observation and systematic interviewing as sources of evidence. Furthermore, the case-study's unique strength is in its ability to deal with a full variety of evidence- documents, artifacts, interviews and observations. Therefore, the essence of a case study such as the present one is that it tries to illuminate a decision or sets of decisions: why they were taken and with what result.

Besides, in case studies, theory is by no means considered with the formality of grand theory in social sciences; rather the goal is to have a sufficient blue-print for study. Therefore the role of a theory in case studies like ours is analytic generalization.

Case study researches are normally of an open-ended nature in which an investigator can ask respondents for the facts of a matter as well as the respondents opinion about events. Besides this, a second type of interview that was used in our research was focused interview in which respondents were interviewed for some time. Then the third type of interview used in this research entailed more structured questions, along the lines of a formal survey.

Questionnaires and interviews were in English and Kiswahili for these are Kenya's working languages.

The researcher visited a number of urban estates in Nairobi to acquaint him with the language matters in education in Nairobi and by implication Kenya. From the discussions conducted during the visits, it was decided that this study be confined to Nairobi's estates of Kangemi, Buruburu and Kileleshwa- each representing a social class instead of covering the whole city of Nairobi or the whole country – Kenya. The decision to confine the study to Nairobi was due to its status as capital city of Kenya, its size, its population density, its highly multilingual nature and its accessibility to the researcher. In carrying out this study, the researcher randomly selected a sample from the population of the areas to be studied. The selection procedure was largely based on the factors of time, money and accessibility besides representability.

In view of these limitations, the researcher decided to collect information from a small group of subjects of the population in such a way that the results obtained would be representative of the total population under study. However, when designing and planning this study, the researcher took into account other main points which included the requirements of a minimum number of cases in order to collect enough data and the minimum sample size that would accurately represent the population being studied.

Nairobi is a vast city with a population of over 6 million people (see 1999 Kenya population census). It is impossible to select truly random samples from such populations. Because selection of truly random samples is not practical for very large populations, we selected the three estates. These Nairobi estates were conceptualized as consisting of linguistic characteristics of all Nairobians if not all Kenyans. Here, we used a variant of random sampling called area sampling. This was done through the use of social metric questions: the 3 major geographical regions of Nairobi (Westlands, Southlands, and Eastlands); the 3 social classes in Nairobi (Upper class, Middle class and Lower class represented by Kileleshwa, Buruburu and Kangemi estates respectively).

After purposely selecting Nairobi's geographical regions, and identifying the estates in each region, a subset of housing units was purposely selected in each estate.

The researcher's problem was how to choose a sample which is representative of the whole group. Here, the researcher chose to use a sample which is biased towards a certain group. The sample was biased towards the group of Nairobians who belong to different classes, 18 years and above, and of both sexes. In this case, the study assumed that the sample gave information about the whole population.

Within each estate, the study identified who the residents were and their classes, according to their relations to the production and acquisition of goods. The researcher then approached the individuals within the estates, told them what he was doing, its benefits and how he needed their input. This completed the process.

From each of the three estates, the study needed to interview a certain number of people. The questionnaires were applied to two hundred and eighty two Kenyans from Nairobi.

The study sample size was two hundred and eighty two Kenyans aged 18 years and above and of both sexes. The study used 282 subjects for the survey for a number of factors:

- i. It would be wasteful to use too many subjects since unnecessary time, effort, and expense would be involved.
- ii. Small-sample assure the researcher of acceptable reliability before making decisions about his data.

The responses from the respondents to the questionnaire were marked and the views of each established. All these helped to establish the percentage of the respondents' views on language attitudes in education in Kenya.

Data analysis began by the researcher taking one question at a time and showing how the respondents were distributed on it. The researcher started by constructing a frequency distribution of the answers for each question. This gave the researcher a table showing how frequently each question was rated on the large attitude toward

language of educational instruction in Kenya scale The next step was to convert these into percentages. This, it is hoped, virtually exhausted the information to be gotten out of the answers to each question concerning the attitudes of Kenyans towards English, Kiswahili, mother tongue and even the peer languages of Sheng and English as languages of educational instruction in Kenya.

4. Results and Discussions

The purpose of the research we are reporting was to measure the manifest language attitudes of Kenyans towards English, Kiswahili and mother tongue as languages of educational instruction in Kenya. We thus here report the findings about the attitudes towards English, Kiswahili and endogenous Kenyan languages as languages of instruction in Kenya. This way, we shall isolate the factors which determine a particular attitude towards languages in education in Kenya. This way we shall attempt a justification of the continued use of English in education in Kenya fifty years after independence. The justification of the continued use of the language in education will lead us to suggest which way forward for future researchers in the field of language in education in Kenya. The result of this research indicates that the following are the factors which determine language attitudes towards English, Kiswahili and other languages in use in Kenya in education in the country.

4.1 Linguistic Pressure

In some cases, Kenyans are able to give language attitudes in which a language is either favourably or unfavourably rated as a language of educational instruction. In Kangemi, Kiswahili is favoured by especially the elderly respondents while in Buruburu it is especially by the youth. In both cases, it is observed that this favour to use Kiswahili in education is mainly due to tremendous pressure. In Kileleshwa, the youth are under pressure to communicate in English and to use it in education. In general, Kenyans are under pressure to favour English because use of English in education does promise to find work for the Kenyans and their families. Therefore, in Kenya a working knowledge of English due to an education in the language is an assurance of good life. In many cases, knowledge and usage of English due to its use in education becomes identified, for Kenyans interviewed, with success in business and the attainment of social status. This knowledge and usage of English due to its use in education increases the pressure on individual Kenyans to learn and use English in whatever manner and context possible.

Knowledge of English due to its use in education in Nairobi and Kenya generally implies an upper middle class background and/ or intellectual superiority. On the other hand, knowledge and use of Kiswahili in Kenya is for practical purposes rather than social success. The same argument contributes to the negative attitudes towards Kiswahili and mother tongues. In these instances, the issue of linguistic pressure prevails.

The attitude of Kenyans toward English and Kiswahili in education in Kenya is a factor to do with prestige. In many cases, Kenyans tend to follow the average language attitudes prevalent in all the estates we studied: - they come to regard the use of Kiswahili in education in Kenya as hindrance to potential achievements in the present - day world that is full of competition. Consequently, Kenyans place a high value on the usage of English in education in Kenya.

Among other Kenyans, particularly the more cohesive, patriotic and well-established ones, different language attitudes prevail. To such Kenyans, Kiswahili being Kenya's national and first official language often assumes a very high value and is viewed as needful of being defended. The positive attitudes towards Kiswahili in education as an official domain are meant to keep the language pure, and free from interferences which can lead to its being polluted. The argument such defenders of Kiswahili give is that as an indigenous national and official language, Kiswahili adheres to Kenyan's old customs which should not by any means be lost in an important domain like education. This kind of argument is enshrined in highly developed nationalistic feelings. These Kenyan people who favour Kiswahili have what is called national language pride and in Kenya. The same nationalistic linguistic feelings are expressed for mother tongues, but with lots of reservation when it comes to the issue of their use in education in Kenya.

4.2 Prestige

The attitude Kenyans have toward English, Kiswahili and even mother tongues as languages of instruction is a factor to do with prestige. In many cases, Kenyans tend to follow the average language attitudes prevalent in all the estates we studied: - they come to regard use of Kiswahili in education as hindrance to potential achievements in the present - day world that is full of competition. Consequently, Kenyans place a high value on the usage of English as a language of instruction in education.

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developed nationalistic feelings. These Kenyan people who favour Kiswahili as a language of instruction in education have what is called national language pride and loyalty.

4.3 Language Loyalty

Language loyalty is another factor that is behind the attitudes Kenyans have towards either English or Kiswahili's usage in education in Kenya. Some Kenyans do not care how much English as a language of educational instruction will benefit them economically. Such Kenyans therefore desire to defend and retain Kiswahili as a Kenyan language when asked to choose between Kiswahili and English or any other language in use in Kenya as a language of educational instruction. This kind of attitude to Kiswahili is language loyalty and is related to educational linguistic pride.

It has been noted that many residential estates in Nairobi reflect where people originally came from in terms of their ethnic group besides their economic classes. Thus, many Kenyans live in certain estates in Nairobi just because their mother tongues are the predominant languages there. Such Kenyans feel they can speak their mother tongues and be certain to be understood without any embarrassment about lack of proficiency in other languages. This attitude constitutes language loyalty and is related to language pride. Mother tongues are "symbols of group identity and collective solidarity". In such areas therefore the languages of educational instruction will not be Kenya's national lingua franca but mother tongues. This language in education sentiment was articulated by the Abaluhya and Gikuyu ethnic groups in the lower class estate of Kangemi in Nairobi.

4.4 Language Pride

Unlike the language loyalty factor which is only one-sided in the Kenyan educational case, pride has to do with positive attitudes toward English, Kiswahili and mother tongues and is closely related to the prestige function discussed in section 4.2 earlier. Some Kenyans will want to preserve their national identity at whatever cost. Such Kenyans therefore have positive attitudes towards Kiswahili as a language of instruction in education in Kenya. This language attitude that favours Kiswahili as a medium of instruction is itself a manifestation of how proud Kenyans are to be Kenyans. The Kenyans have pride in their national and first official language and so believe each nation has a right to be proud of its national and official language. Such Kenyans oppose English as being a language of educational instruction for a few advantaged, which in itself does harm to Kenyan national unity.

But there are other Kenyans who give less weight to Kiswahili and mother tongues in educational instruction as opposed to English when it comes to the issue of linguistic pride in education. To such Kenyans, English is regarded as an infinitely superior language and therefore by using it in educational instruction one automatically becomes superior educationally. Therefore, the language that is relatively poor in education for some Kenyans is relatively good for others. Kiswahili in education in Kenya used as a symbol of personal and ethnic pride, where its use can only be equated with self respect as individuals and as members of a particular national group. Therefore, disrespect for Kiswahili in educational instruction matters to some Kenyans means disrespect for themselves as people and also as a nation.

4.5 Financial Success

Upward social mobility, which also goes with financial success, is a criterion of positive language attitudes towards English use in education by some Kenyans. Because of financial success, one might expect Kenyan English educated people to be the most financially successful people, and those who are Kiswahili to be the least. This criterion about financial success, for Kenya, is true in a general way, but only at the ends of the scale. In the middle range, there is no clear correlation. Many of the comparatively wealthy people in Nairobi have succeeded in business where English as a language did not count much. Some poor English speakers in Nairobi (mostly of Asian origin) are the most successful businessmen. On the other hand, many Kenyans with good English ability and knowledge because of education in English in Nairobi are retired artisans or small and only moderately successful businessmen. However, it should not be ruled out that an education in or through English offers some Kenyans financial success, which leads to upward social mobility. International jobs, for example, require English knowledge and this earns one high paying white-collar employment.

4.6 Career Aspiration

Career aspiration too plays an important part on the Nairobi's attitude toward English and Kiswahili as languages of instruction in education in Kenya. Historically, the Kenyans who moved up in to the middle class by means of entering one of the professions like medicine, law, teaching or pharmacy needed proficiency in English. But this language requirement, in some cases, was not more than the minimum needed to qualify in the professions for there are many such professionals whose English show many English substandard features; many of them do not even need English because of their type of profession and linguistic nature of many of their clients. Overall, generally paying careers need the knowledge and usage of English as opposed to Kiswahili in Kenya and so it makes many Kenyans to have positive attitudes towards English as a medium of instruction in Kenya.

4.7 Language Patriotism

In Kenya Kiswahili's use in educational instruction is seen as a sense of symbol of national identity. Thus Kiswahili's use in education assures Kenyans of non - alienation. Kiswahili is a symbol of national freedom. Therefore, Kiswahili is a symbol of patriotism by Kenyans. Thus, Kenyans with positive attitudes towards the use of Kiswahili in educational instruction see it as a symbol of Kenya's patriotism and is only comparable to Kenya's national flag, national anthem, and national holidays.

5. Conclusions

In conclusion, this paper has stressed the importance of English and Kiswahili – and to some extent mother tongues - as tools for educational instruction in Kenya. English is mostly favoured as the preferred language of educational instruction in Kenya. Therefore, this paper is of the opinion that Kenyans should work toward developing English and fully adopting it for the country's education. It is only this way that language attitudes of Kenyans towards the language of educational instruction can be linked with the issue of sustainable educational development. Therefore, there are many advantages of using English in education in Kenya as opposed to Kiswahili.

From the findings of this paper, it is evident that obstacles hampering the use of Kiswahili as a language of instruction in education are many and they all centre around the attitudes Kenyans have toward this language. Kiswahili's limited capacity to express technical concepts, coupled with the fact that it is limited in reward gives English an edge over it in education. Due to these shortcomings very few books are written in Kiswahili and so every day usage of the language depicts lack of reference books and reading and educational materials in the language. All these obstacles make some Kenyans to have negative attitudes towards Kiswahili in educational matters. Due to this negative attitude, English is preferred as a language of instruction in education because it has remained the language of power in Kenya. It is because of this English preference that independent Kenya's language in education policy has, in essence not differed very much from the British colonial language in education policy. This policy is due to the fact that no language in education policy can be dissociated from economic, social and cultural realities. Kenyans have more positive attitudes toward English as a language of educational instruction.

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