

A SWOT ANALYSIS OF THE LANGUAGE POLICIES IN EDUCATION IN KENYA AND ETHIOPIA

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This paper compares the language policies in education (past and present) in Ethiopia and Kenya. It shows the role played by both international and indigenous languages, e.g. as languages of instruction in education in either country. Multilingualism is reflected in a different way in the education system of either country, as Ethiopia has over eighty languages, while Kenya has about forty-two. An analysis of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (i.e. a SWOT analysis) of the language policies in education in the two countries is carried out with a view to showing how each can be improved in their respective multilingual settings. In the specific case of language policies in Kenya and Ethiopia, the aim of a SWOT analysis is to help those concerned with them to think of a language policy in education that may strengthen the position of indigenous languages, so that these can coexist on an almost equal footing with the dominant languages of education. The main strength seen in the language policy in education in Kenya is the introduction of Kiswahili as a compulsory subject both in primary and secondary school. For Ethiopia, a major strength of its current language policy is the promotion of many indigenous languages through education, since some of them are learnt as school subjects. More relevantly, primary school education is conducted in the vernacular. A major weakness of the educational policy in Kenya is that none of the indigenous languages, apart from Kiswahili, is taught as a subject, while in the case of Ethiopia a major weakness is that a solid mastery of English is lacking, yet it is the medium of instruction for secondary and higher education. With regard to opportunities, both countries have an opportunity to develop all languages by having them in written form. In this connection, more elementary books for mother tongue education could be prepared for both big and small languages. In both countries, the only threat to the use of the mother tongue in education is the negative attitude of parents, teachers and students towards it.

1. INTRODUCTION

According to Whiteley (1971), countries may attract the attention of a linguist because of their differences. As he puts it:

...the three East African countries have attracted attention by their differences rather than by their similarities, and nowhere is this more striking than in their attitudes towards, and formulations of, language policy. It is true that all of them shared a colonial experience of a British pattern.... (p. 141).

The three countries whose language policies were seen to be diverse are Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. As former British colonies, one would have expected that their language policies would not differ much, but they do. Although Ethiopia is not one of the three East African countries, and not a former British colony either, its being a neighbour of Kenya and its using English as a medium of instruction for its secondary and tertiary education, would still make a comparison of its educational policy quite interesting.

This paper first identifies the language policies in education (past and present) in either country. It shows the role played by both international and indigenous languages, e.g. as languages of instruction in education. An analysis of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (i.e. a SWOT analysis) of the language policies in education in the two countries is then carried out with a view to showing how each can be improved in their respective multilingual settings.

2. THE LANGUAGE POLICY IN EDUCATION IN ETHIOPIA

In this paper, the information given about the education policy in Ethiopia (both past and present) is largely based on Yigezu (2006). This paper will only deal with the era of modern education in Ethiopia, an era which dates back to the beginning of the 20th century and which is divided into five different periods.

The first period, from 1908 to 1935, is that of Emperor Menelik's reign, during which the language used as a medium of instruction in education in government schools was mainly French (Yigezu, p. 37). French and Amharic were used by missionaries who were involved in modern education. Swedish missionaries opened schools in Addis Ababa and taught their students in Amharic, Oromo, English and French. Yigezu also states that:

Although French was the dominant language of instruction, other international languages such as English and Italian, and local languages

such as Amharic and Oromo and Tigrinya were also used in the school system (p. 39).

Amharic is said to have enjoyed a special status as the language of government and administration and “Amharic writing and reading skills [were] the sole entry requirement to all government schools” (Yigezu, p. 39). While Ge’ez was the official language of the Orthodox Church, Arabic had the same status in the Muslim community in the country. Therefore, there was linguistic diversity as seen in the media of instruction in various schools.

The second period is that of Italian occupation, from 1936 to 1941, during the Second World War (Yigezu, 2006). So, only five years of occupation, which means that, unlike most African countries, Ethiopia does not have a colonial past. The Italians put in place a policy that ensured that Africans were only given elementary education. The languages of education were “Tigrinya in Eritrea; Amharic in Amhara; Amharic and Oromo in Addis Ababa; Harari and Arabic in Harar; Oromo and Kefinonoo in Oromia; Somali in Somalia” ([Italy’s] *Ministrero delle Colonie* (1936), quoted by Yigezu (p. 40)).

The third period ran from 1941 to 1974. This is the period following World War II. English was, “the most common medium of instruction for education in Ethiopia, as a result of its increasing global significance and in recognition of its widespread international use” (Yigezu, p. 40). Headmasters were British and text books were mainly bought from Britain.

In 1963, the Ministry of Education decided to replace English with Amharic as a medium of instruction for government primary schools. This was done by Haile Sellassie’s government as a way of encouraging national integration and development. The goal was also to establish the monolingualism of Amharic, a language which was used as a tool to advance the ideology of the government (Yigezu, p. 43). Haile Sellassie thus dismissed the use of multiple languages in early education in an attempt to advance the ideology of his political system.

The fourth period ran from 1974 to 1991. This is the period of the military government led by Mengistu Haile Mariam. The need to develop languages other than Amharic was recognized. A number of indigenous

languages were introduced in literacy, but Amharic remained the medium of instruction.

Lastly, there is the current period, from 1991 to the present. Yigezu (2006) quotes Article 5 of the Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, which states that “All Ethiopian languages shall enjoy equal state recognition” (p. 48). This is an important provision since it shows that the importance of all Ethiopian languages is recognized by the government. The current language policy in education in Ethiopia is contained in a document entitled *Education and Training Policy (1994)*. The terms *nations*, *nationalities* and *peoples* are used in this language policy. The term *nations* refers to the bigger ethnic groups, e.g. Amhara, Oromo and Somali; *nationalities* refers to the smaller ethnic groups such as Tigre, Kunamu, Wolaita, etc., while *peoples* refers to the smallest ethnic groups, which do not have the status of nationalities and many speakers.

The main pillars of the strategy for vernacular education, as stated in the *Education and Training Policy* of Ethiopia, are expressed in the following terms:

- Cognizant of the pedagogical advantage of the child learning in mother tongue and the rights of nationalities to promote the use of their languages, primary education will be given in nationality languages.
- Making the necessary preparation, nations and nationalities can learn in their own language or can choose from among those selected on the basis of national and countrywide distribution.
- The language of teacher training for kindergarten and primary education will be the nationality language used in the area.
- Amharic shall be taught as a language of countrywide communication.
- English will be the medium of instruction for secondary and higher education.
- Students can choose and learn at least one nationality language and one foreign language for cultural and international relations.
- English will be taught as a subject starting from grade one. (Yigezu, 2006: 49)

Yigezu also suggests that Ethiopia is different from the rest of Sub-Saharan Africa in that for a long time an indigenous language (namely Amharic) has been used “in its formal education and as a national-official language, as well as a lingua franca” (p. 29).¹ Further, Gelaneh (2008) informs us that Amharic, as a language of wider communication, “is an official or working language of The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia

¹ It should be noted, though, that Kiswahili in Tanzania has enjoyed this type of “special” status for a long time as well.

(FDRE) and some regions within Ethiopia such as Amhara, the multi-ethnic Southern Nations Nationalities and People's Region, Addis Ababa, Benishangul Gumez and Afar" (p. 1).

It can thus be concluded, from all that precedes, that Ethiopia recognizes the advantage and importance of using the mother tongue from the onset of primary education, which does not seem to be the case in Kenya, as we shall see in the following section.²

3. THE LANGUAGE POLICY IN EDUCATION IN POST-INDEPENDENCE KENYA

Kenya's language policy in education is contained in reports of various commissions. After independence, the Ominde Commission of 1964 recommended the use of English as the medium of instruction right from class 1. The mother tongue was not given any place. Next was the Gachathi Report of 1976, which recommended the use of the mother tongue from class 1 to class 3. More support for the use of the mother tongue appeared in the Koech Report of 1999.

That Kiswahili should be taught as a compulsory subject was a recommendation of the Ominde Commission of 1964. The Commission also recommended that a department of Kiswahili be established at the University of Nairobi and that Kiswahili teachers be trained during school holidays. Mbaka (2010) notes that these two recommendations were not implemented.³ It was the 1976 Gachathi Report that recommended the introduction of Kiswahili as an examinable subject in primary school. Once again, Kiswahili was to be taught as a compulsory subject from class three onwards. This recommendation was implemented with the advent of the 8-4-4 system of education in 1985, a system recommended in the Mackay

² It is also worth noting that the different languages taught in school use different types of scripts: the Ethiopic script, the Roman script, the Arabic script, etc.

³ When the Kikuyu Campus became part of the University of Nairobi, in the late 1980s, a department of Kiswahili was established. However, in 2005, it was merged with the Department of Linguistics and African Languages (currently known as the Department of Linguistics and Languages). At the moment the University of Nairobi and other universities in Kenya train teachers to teach Kiswahili in secondary schools. Kiswahili teachers are also trained in various teacher training colleges in Kenya.

Report of 1984. As a result, today Kiswahili is a compulsory and examinable subject in both primary and secondary schools in Kenya.

For its part, since the recommendation in the 1964 Ominde Commission, English has remained the medium of instruction in Kenya, especially from standard 4 upwards. According to Mbaka (2010), nothing new was added by the Koech Report of 1999 to the existing language policy. This shows that in Kenya's education policy, English has always enjoyed a supreme position, followed by Kiswahili and then the mother tongues. All the indigenous languages, except Kiswahili, seem to operate at the same level as far as language policy in education is concerned, with each of them enjoying the status of language of instruction in only the first three years of primary school, wherever the indigenous language concerned is regarded as the language of the "catchment area".

Against this general background, presented in the preceding two sections, of what the language policies in Kenya and Ethiopia are like, a SWOT analysis is necessary in order to bring out the successes of these policies and to make recommendations on how they could further be improved.

4. WHY A SWOT ANALYSIS OF THE LANGUAGE POLICIES IN KENYA AND ETHIOPIA?

According to Grundy and Brown (2002: 24), the origins of a SWOT analysis (i.e. an analysis of "strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats") are not clear but the term has been in use since the 1960s. It is an analysis that is mostly used in business, especially in strategic planning. It "helps establish where an organization, team, or product stands in the marketplace" (Heller and Hindle, 1998: 174). A SWOT analysis is therefore one of the analytical methods used to come up with sound decisions or reach strong conclusions in the process of planning. Grundy and Brown (2002) suggest that it is an analysis that is easy to use and remember, but is maybe "pointless without drawing out the 'so what?' from it" (p. 26). For example, after carrying out a SWOT analysis, an organization may realize that it has only certain options for developing the new strategy.

In a SWOT analysis, organizations may decide to select “a few factors and issues relevant to them, and will analyse them systematically in terms of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats” (Cole, 2005, p. 40). Some of these issues may include product attractiveness, staff efficiency, financial position, etc. A SWOT analysis is seen to be useful because:

It is, after all, extremely important for a firm to recognize why it is succeeding, as well as where it needs to attend to problems.... It can help to focus senior managers’ attention on major strategic issues, enable possible problems to be identified before they occur, and provide an opportunity to identify organisational strengths (Cole, 2005: 41).

In general, a SWOT analysis helps in the development of strategies “that take maximum advantage of strengths and opportunities while minimizing the negative effects of weaknesses and threats” (Chadan, 1997: 153).

In the specific case of language policies in Kenya and Ethiopia, such an analysis, may help those concerned to think of a language policy in education that may strengthen the position of indigenous languages (especially in Kenya) so that they coexist on an almost equal footing with the dominant languages of education, particularly English.

An analysis of the strengths in the two language policies will try to identify the areas where the status quo should be maintained, while an analysis of the weaknesses will identify the areas where better policies should be tried. An analysis of opportunities will argue for these better policies, while an analysis of the threats will expose any hindrances from achieving the desired results from the existing language policies.

4.1. Strengths of Kenya’s and Ethiopia’s language policies in education

This section will first look at the strengths of the language policy in education in Kenya. There are two main strengths. The first has to do with the introduction of Kiswahili as a compulsory subject both in primary and secondary school, which in turn arose from the fact that Kiswahili has always been recognized by the Kenyan constitution as the national language of the country. The elevation of Kiswahili to the status of a compulsory subject has given students from all over the country a chance to know the language they can identify with as Kenyans. And since there are dozens of

indigenous languages in Kenya, it is definitely commendable that one of them (Kiswahili) should have been given a place in the education system. In relation to this, Kenya is lucky to have a language that is considered to be “neutral”. According to Wardhaugh (1992), in the specific case of Kenya a neutral language is one “which is not English and which gives no group an advantage” (p. 356). He points out that “in 1974 President Kenyatta of Kenya decreed that Kiswahili was to become the language of the country, the language of national unity ... Swahili was a neutral language” (p. 356). Kenya has had a change in the political system but without a change in the language policy. Since Kiswahili has kept its status as a national language throughout the different political regimes, it means that the language policy in education is currently not tied to any one political system, unlike in Ethiopia, as was pointed out in section 2. I find it a solid strength of a given language policy in education that it should not be tied to any political system.

The second strength lies in the fact that English is taught at an early stage in Kenya. This enables Kenyan learners to interact with the international English-speaking community with a lot of ease. The benefits of English as a language of international trade, diplomacy and Internet communication, and of education and training opportunities in the vast English speaking world, cannot be overstated for those with a good command of it. And on the national front, since English is the official language, that is that of instruction and administration, a solid mastery of it is undoubtedly necessary. Lightbown and Spada (2006) note that “research evidence is fairly strong that those who begin second language learning at an early age are most likely to eventually be indistinguishable from native speakers” (p. 186).

Turning to the case of Ethiopia, a major strength of its current language policy is the promotion of many indigenous languages through education since some of them are learnt as school subjects. Primary school education is conducted in the vernacular. The benefits of such a policy are recognized by Lightbown and Spada (2006), who observe that

Children who can begin their schooling in a language they already know will have more self-confidence, will be able to learn more effectively in the

early school years, and will not lose valuable time in a period of limbo during which they struggle just to understand what is happening in the classroom. (p. 186)

The use of many indigenous languages in education in a way also ensures that many of the Ethiopian languages do not become endangered. Some of these are taught as subjects even up to university level. This is likely to encourage adequate research on them. Eventually, a significant part of the population will be literate in more than one indigenous language. As a matter of fact, many Ethiopians are able to work in their offices using their regional languages.

Another strength in Ethiopia's language policy is that this ensures that teachers are prepared to implement the use of indigenous languages in education by training them to teach the mother tongue and in the mother tongue. Indeed, teachers in Ethiopia use the language recommended for the region.

4.2. Weaknesses in Kenya's and Ethiopia's language policies in education

Kenya's language policy in education suffers from five weaknesses. First, none of the indigenous languages, apart from Kiswahili, is taught as a subject. A recent study by Mbaka (2010) even shows that when teachers are given the opportunity to use the mother tongue from class 1 to class 3, they resort to a lot of code switching and code mixing, with the languages involved being English and the mother tongue, or Kiswahili and the mother tongue in rural areas. In most urban areas, the use of indigenous languages in education, apart from Kiswahili, is lacking totally. This gives the feeling that most of our languages, if not all, are endangered.

The advantage of using a first language from the onset of education is already expressed in the quotation from Lightbown and Spada (2006) in the preceding sub-section. In this paper, indigenous languages could be equated to what Trudgill (2000: 126) refers to as minority languages, though some of the Kenyan languages have many speakers (in some cases several million of them) actually. Trudgill, speaks in favour of teaching minority languages in the following terms:

The teaching of minority languages in this way is obviously of benefit to minority-group children, not only in the learning of reading and writing but in other subjects as well. It also has the effect of recognizing the child's social and cultural identity and integrity and encourages the development and growth of minority cultures. At the same time it does not deny the child access to the majority language, which is likely to be essential for upward social mobility. (p. 126)

Second, in Kenya, unlike in Ethiopia, even what is stated about the mother tongue in the language policy is not implemented. For instance, following the specification in the language policy, the Ministry of Education's Syllabus (2002: vi) says clearly that in classes 1 to 3, English and Kiswahili should be given five lessons each per week, while the mother tongue should be given three. According to Mbaka (2010), a mixture of the mother tongue and English or Kiswahili is used as a medium of communication in lower primary school in rural schools, while in urban schools it is a mixture of English and Kiswahili that is used. It is therefore doubtful whether the mother tongue is taught, as it should be, as a subject in lower primary at all. And yet, as Grenoble and Whaley (2006) remark,

A language policy that is positively disposed towards the use of local languages does not in and of itself guarantee positive results for local languages. The policy must be enforced and it must have provisions in it that allow the policy to move beyond a purely symbolic role. (p. 28)

The question arises here as to whether the language policy in education in Kenya really lacks provisions that would allow it to be implemented fully in lower primary school.

Third, in Kenya, most of the teachers who are supposed to teach the mother tongue as a subject are not literate in the relevant mother tongue.⁴ The education policy as it is at present has not contributed towards ensuring that teachers are at least literate in the mother tongues of the areas where they are teaching. Moreover, teachers have not undergone any formal training on how to use local languages in teaching.

⁴ It should be noted that in Kenya, Bible Translation and Literacy (BTL) programmes have, for a number of years now, tried to encourage literacy in indigenous languages.

Fourth, there is a weakness that is actually closely related to third one: there are not enough books designed for teaching mother tongues in Kenya.

Fifth, most of the young people living with their parents in urban areas do not know what is supposed to be their mother tongue, that is, one associated with their tribal affiliation. Those living in the major towns mostly use Kiswahili and English. Some begin by learning “their” mother tongue and before they have learnt it well, English or Kiswahili takes over when they start going to school, to pre-school, to be exact. Many of them end up losing the “mother tongue” they would have been associated with. This subtractive bilingualism, which consists in “the loss of one language on the way to learning another ... can have negative consequences for children’s self-esteem, and their relationships with family members are also likely to be affected... and [these children] may fall behind in their academic learning” Lightbown and Spada (2006: 26).

Let us now turn to the weaknesses in Ethiopia’s language policy in education. There are three of them I could identify. First, as is the case in Kenya, most of the young people living with their parents in urban areas do not know their mother tongue, that is, their parents’ mother tongue, actually. Those living in Addis Ababa, for example, consider Amharic to be their mother tongue, which indeed for them is their first language, though, in most cases, not that of their parents. Those children grow up using Amharic and when they go to school, it is Amharic that they are taught as a subject, and, in some schools, Amharic is even used as a medium of instruction. This is an issue that is of great concern in many urban areas as it threatens the survival of the indigenous languages not spoken in urban centres.

Second, a solid mastery of English is lacking in Ethiopia, yet it is the medium of instruction for higher education. The majority of people do not speak English well. Yet, as already stated, languages such as English are definitely needed for access to the world outside the boundaries of Ethiopia.

Third, though Ethiopia’s language policy clearly states in “nations and nationalities” children are allowed to learn in their own language, there are

not enough books prepared for teaching most of the country's mother tongues.

4.3. Opportunities for Kenya's and Ethiopia's language policies in education

These opportunities can be looked at from four angles, both in the case of Kenya and that of Ethiopia. First, academic departments such as the Department of Linguistics and Languages at the University of Nairobi should teach, and carry out research on, some of the indigenous languages to ensure that they remain alive. The situation is somewhat different in the case of Ethiopia: for example, the Department of Linguistics of Addis Ababa University already teaches some of the indigenous languages of the country. Nonetheless, it, too, could be encouraged to teach even the smaller ones. This would after all be in line with Ethiopia's language policy, which provides for even the very small languages to be developed and used in the primary school system.

Second, the use of the mother tongue in the homes in urban areas can be encouraged in an effort to help a child who is associated with a given tribe, and (rather too automatically) with a given indigenous language, to learn this language. If the parents use this as the family language, their children will have an opportunity to "continue both cognitive and affective development in a language they understand easily while they are still learning a second language" (Lightbown and Spada, 2006: 26). This would encourage "additive bilingualism", which, as these two authors argue, can only be beneficial.

Third, there is also the opportunity to develop all indigenous languages by having them in the written form, which would halt the processing of dying out completely which some of these languages already find themselves in. For instance, as part of the universal free primary education policy in force in both Kenya and Ethiopia, elementary books for mother tongue education could be prepared for all, big and small, languages in the two countries. In this connection, Trudgill (2000) observes that linguists believe "that the preservation of linguistic diversity in the world should

have a high priority in the same way that the preservation of biological diversity does” (p. 192). And linguists would definitely agree with him when he goes on to comment that

It is obvious, for example, that the connection between languages and cultures is an intimate one, and that the disappearance of languages from the world could greatly speed up the process of cultural homogenization. A monocultural world would not only be very dull but probably also a very stagnant place. (pp. 192-193)

Fourth, and for the particular case of Kenya, there is further the opportunity to develop mechanisms that would ensure that mother tongue education in lower primary school is adhered to. One mechanism would consist in training teachers to use the mother tongue while teaching: it is after all clearly stated that the mother tongue should be used up to class 3 in Kenyan (non-urban) schools. Another mechanism would have District Education Officers (DEOs) and all people engaged in inspectorate duties monitor the language policy implementation in schools so that it does not appear on paper only.

4.4. Threats to Kenya’s and Ethiopia’s language policies in education

The only threat to the language policy in Kenya seems to be the attitude of parents, their children and the teachers towards mother tongues which tends to be very negative. In Kenya, the prevailing trend is that parents want their children to be taught in English to eventually be able to get good jobs. Even parents who have the chance of teaching their children the mother tongue do not seem to see the importance of doing this, largely, one can assume, because they know that English, and not any other language in Kenya, is ultimately the medium of instruction in schools. That said, the same parents have less negative attitudes towards Kiswahili, since they are aware that this is recognized by the constitution as the national language. In this connection, the new constitution of Kenya, voted on and promulgated in August 2010, has raised the profile of Kiswahili even higher

by making it the other official language of Kenya.⁵ Since the same constitution also gives Kenyan citizens the right to speak any language anywhere (at least this is what seems to be implied), this should make everybody in Kenya be less negative about promoting the use of indigenous languages of Kenya. Hopefully, they will stop viewing these as being inferior to English. It is deplorable that in areas like Kisumu (the biggest urban area in western Kenya), and its surrounding areas, where one would expect Dholuo to be the language of the catchment area, most of the teachers who are willing to struggle to use Dholuo in teaching such children from class 1 to class 3 are actually unable to use it effectively.

Even in Ethiopia, where, as already pointed out, the language policy in education has been, for two decades now, pro-indigenous languages, the only threat to the promotion of these seems also to be the negative attitude of some parents and students towards the use of the mother tongues. In fact, some parents in Addis Ababa take their children to private schools to enable them to learn English early. In private schools, such as the Sanford school in Addis Ababa, English is used as the medium of instruction. Belete (2008) quotes a study by Birhanu G/Mariam (1976) which showed that generally students “[did] not want Amharic to be used as a medium of instruction in senior secondary schools” (p. 21), and that most students preferred English to Amharic.

5. CONCLUSION

This paper has described the language policies in education of Kenya and Ethiopia, two countries which, despite being neighbours and both highly multilingual, have had, due to different backgrounds related to their

⁵ Article 7 of the new constitution, which is about “National, official and other languages”, says the following:

7. (1) The national language of the Republic is Kiswahili.
- (2) The official languages of the Republic are Kiswahili and English.
- (3) The State shall—
 - (a) promote and protect the diversity of languages of the people of Kenya; and
 - (b) promote the development and use of indigenous languages, Kenyan Sign language, Braille and other communication formats and technologies accessible to persons with disabilities.

political histories, language policies in education that have led to the following main differences: first, English, although the medium of instruction in both countries, is much more widely used in the Kenyan system of education than in the Ethiopian. The main reason for this must be due to the fact that while English is a medium of instruction from as early primary school, it starts to be a medium of instruction at secondary school level in Ethiopia. Second, and arguably not unrelated to the preceding difference, indigenous languages play a much greater role in the Ethiopian educational system than in the Kenyan. This is due to the fact that Ethiopia's language policy explicitly provides for the teaching of the (major) mother tongues of the country and trains teachers to this effect.

That English is widely used in Kenya must certainly be seen as a strength of the educational language policy in Kenya. Similarly, Ethiopia's promotion of indigenous languages is equally a strength of its policy. However, what seems paradoxical is the fact that either type of strength has developed from what was presented, earlier in this paper, as a weakness: it was indeed argued that English became so widely used in Kenya because the language policy in education gives little room, although more in practice than in principle, to the development of the countries' indigenous languages apart from Kiswahili. And it was equally argued that the prominent role accorded to indigenous languages in Ethiopia's educational system is the thing that has contributed to English not being well mastered and widely used in the country.

The ideal situation (or should we say the opportunity?) for both countries should be to strike a "relatively fairer balance" between promoting such an internationally important language like English while at the same time raising the profile of the mother tongues, through actual teaching and use, up to a certain degree, in their educational systems and through academic research on them. But this is obviously easier said than done: the biggest challenge for the stakeholders, who would have to "agree" on what this "relatively fairer balance" would entail, is to overcome the rather very negative attitude that parents (and their children

and their teachers) have towards more room to languages other than English in the two countries.

All that can only confirm what language policy theorists have always pointed out, namely that language policy in education is a complex issue and should be handled with caution from one country to another. In my opinion, the bottom line lies in the following quotation, with which Okombo (2001) concluded his inaugural lecture on language policy in Africa:

All in all, there is only one important fact for us to remember: plurality is the African reality. Policies that cannot accommodate that fact are unlikely to be of any good to Africa and her people. (p. 35)

And perhaps there can be no stronger statement to reinforce Okombo's point of view than the following from Wolff (2000):

There is no successful and competitive national development of multilingual states in Africa without due recognition of the big three "M"s: multilingualism, multiculturalism, and mother tongue education. Any educational policy which amounts to depriving children of their mother tongue during education..., particularly so in environments characterised by social marginalisation, cultural alienation and economic stress..., will, most likely, create an unnecessarily high rate of emotional and socio-cultural cripples who are retarded in their cognitive development and deficient in terms of psychological stability. (p. 23)

Wolff's words would serve as a good starting framework for delineating the contours of my fairer-balance notion.

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