10

Empowering the marginalised through language supportive pedagogy in Tanzanian secondary education[1]

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Introduction

This chapter addresses the issue of empowering the marginalised through language supportive pedagogy in secondary education in Tanzania. Like many African countries, Tanzania uses a local language that is familiar to students (in this case Kiswahili) during the early years of schooling; and a European language, English, in secondary and higher education. This means that the switch from the local language, Kiswahili, to English takes place at the beginning of secondary schooling. The main problem is that, because of the existing policy[2] that allows only English in secondary schools, many students who enter these schools become marginalised because they are not fluent enough to use English for communication and for learning school subjects. There has been a six week bridging baseline English course to address the issue, but research (e.g. Murasi 2013) has shown that because of its duration and poor management, this course does not facilitate smooth transition from Kiswahili to English-medium education. A project on 'Language Supportive Teaching and Textbooks' (LSTT) has been implemented since 2012 in response to the problem.

Our discussion in this chapter is about marginalisation and empowerment in this context. In the chapter, we begin by discussing the concepts of marginalisation and empowerment in education. Then we discuss how Tanzanian language policies and practice in the schooling system create a situation that marginalises the majority of students. After that, we use the LSTT project to discuss how it is possible to empower marginalised students through a language supportive pedagogy. We finally discuss some implications after outlining a few lessons drawn from the project.

Marginalisation and empowerment in education

The two concepts of 'marginalisation' and 'empowerment' are complex and can be used with different meanings in different contexts. Central to them, however, is the issue of power. In this context we choose to begin with definitions from the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* in which to 'marginalise' is 'to make somebody or a group of people become or feel less important and less powerful'. 'Empowerment' is the opposite of marginalisation and is defined as 'to give somebody the authority

or power to act.' In the context of schooling, which is the focus of this chapter, the two concepts relate with the power students are accorded in the learning process. The concepts relate with the question, for example, of how much the students are free and able to interact among themselves, with their teachers and with the learning materials they use. From Wenger's (1998) theorising, participation in meaningful practice is necessary for learning. In classroom situations, such participation involves interaction with others (students and teachers) and with the learning materials. Those with enough freedom and ability to interact are empowered; and those whose freedom and ability is constrained are marginalised. From Vygotsky's perspective (Philips and Soltis 1998), language is conceived as a powerful tool for facilitating this freedom and ability to interact; and, in this sense, it is a potential means for both empowering and marginalising learners. It is important therefore, that in order to avoid the marginalisation of some learners, a language that is the medium of instruction in schools is carefully chosen and well taught so that all learners are free and able to interact through it.

Tanzanian language policy and practice in schools

Tanzania is multilingual, with a complex linguistic landscape. There are many language varieties[3] that belong to different language families and rich indigenous cultures. Among them, the policy allows only Kiswahili and English to be used in schools. Kiswahili is the *lingua franca* and national language. It is the medium of instruction in public primary schools and is taught as a compulsory subject in the primary and secondary schools. The language is spoken and used for written communication all over the country. In urban areas, it is the first language (i.e. mother tongue) to a large number of children and youths. But, in most rural areas, it is the second language, used in schools, in most public activities and in communication as a *lingua franca*. English, the ex-colonial language, is also taught as a subject in primary and secondary schools. It is the medium of instruction in most private primary schools[4] and currently it is a compulsory medium in all secondary schools[5]. Its use outside classrooms is very limited. It has been estimated (for example by Campbell and Qorro 1997) that only five per cent of the Tanzanian population use English in daily life communication. Because the language policies do not match well with the linguistic landscape of the country, there is a mismatch between the existing policy and practice in schools.

The 1995 education and training policy (MOEC 1995), which is still in practice to date, emphasises monolingualism in schools. The authorised medium of instruction is the only language allowed for communication in the school compounds. In classrooms, teaching has to be done using the authorised medium of instruction only. Code-switching among languages is forbidden; and thus, in public primary schools, Kiswahili is the only language allowed. Children's home languages are not allowed at all even if students have already developed a lot of conceptions of their environment through them (Osaki 2005). In secondary schools, it is English only which is allowed for communication. The practice in schools, however, does not follow the policy in terms of language use. In rural primary schools, for example, many children use their home languages for communication at school. Teachers complain that this is the case even in classroom discussions. In secondary schools, students and teachers communicate by switching between English and Kiswahili (Rubagumya 2008; Swai 2015). In the case of secondary schools, teachers feel that the use of both English and Kiswahili

is necessary for learning (Barrett et al. 2014); but they feel guilty because they know that, by doing so, they are violating the government policy (Brock-Utne 2004).

A new education and training policy (Jamhuri ya Muungano wa Tanzania 2014) came out in 2014 and was officially inaugurated in 2015. In this new policy, there are statements concerning the use of both Kiswahili and English as media of instruction at all levels of education. However, directives on how to implement the language policy have not yet been made public. Therefore, up to the moment we are writing, it is not clear how the two media of instruction are actually to be used in the schools. This situation reflects the persistent lack of clarity and fear of commitment to a particular language of instruction beyond primary education.

Marginalisation in Tanzanian secondary schools

Policies and practice in the schooling system in Tanzania have created a situation in which the majority of students, especially during the early years of secondary schooling, are marginalised through the use of English as the medium of instruction. This is because they are not fluent enough in the language to understand subject content and to express themselves during classroom learning. This is the result of the fact that the distribution of resources for teaching English does not provide equal opportunities for all students in primary schools to access the language and become fluent enough to use it for learning school subjects when they enter secondary schools. While only a minority have relatively good access to English (e.g. those in English medium schools), the majority have very limited access (Mtana 2013), leading to an early level of marginalisation. The English language is poorly taught in public primary schools (due to a lack of adequately qualified English teachers at that level), while access outside the classroom is almost non-existent, hence, a second level of marginalisation. At entry to secondary school, the majority of the students are not fluent enough in English and, because of this, they are marginalised (a third level) in the learning of school subjects and in communication in school compounds.

It needs to be emphasised here that in addition to the extent to which learners are fluent in the language of instruction, pedagogical practices in schools can play a similar role of either marginalising or empowering students. Pedagogical practices that are learner-centred give students authority and power to participate in learning activities, to take responsibility and to become active in their learning. This means that, in such practices, students are empowered. On the other hand, pedagogical practices that are teacher-centred marginalise students by making them passive and by prioritising what the teacher does rather than what students do for their learning. In such practice, learners are not given the authority and power to act during learning. In the case of teaching and learning in Tanzanian secondary schools, partly because of the language problem and partly because of teachers' competence in pedagogy, teacher-centred approaches are dominant in classrooms (Swai 2015), making students passive in the process and therefore marginalising them.

Context and practice in secondary schools

As already explained, the policy currently in use (MOEC 1995) allows the use of Kiswahili for teaching and communication in primary schools but only English in secondary schools. While Kiswahili-medium primary schools are public[6], there are

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a few English-medium schools in which parents have to pay school fees for their children. This means that the majority of Tanzanian children go to public, Kiswahili-medium primary schools but there is a relatively small group of children from economically more powerful families (particularly in urban areas) which goes to English-medium primary schools. Although English is taught as a compulsory subject in the seven years of public primary schooling, the language is badly taught and this leads to the majority of students from the Kiswahili-medium schools failing to communicate fluently in English at entry to secondary school (Mtana 2013). However, it has been common practice to restrict students in the secondary schools from communicating in Kiswahili or in any of their home languages, despite the fact that such languages are rich, especially in local environmental and indigenous knowledge. As evidence of this, we see posters stating 'ENGLISH ONLY HERE' and 'NO ENGLISH NO SERVICE' in many secondary schools. This means that only those few who are fluent in English can communicate freely in the school compounds, thus again marginalising children by ignoring their school experience and preventing them from linking home and school learning experience.

In classrooms, as already explained in the previous section, teaching has to take place through English only. But this is difficult because of the language problems experienced by many students. Research in this area (e.g. Rubagumya 2008; Swai 2015) shows that students and teachers use several strategies to cope with the situation when they are supposed to use English only during classroom interaction to discuss concepts learned at home in other languages, including Kiswahili (Osaki 2005). Strategies such as code-switching, code-mixing, translation and safe-talk[7] are common. In rural areas, the situation is more complex as students come to primary school knowing their home languages to start learning both Kiswahili and English in school. As already explained, teachers use these strategies with a consciousness of guilt and would not like to be seen doing so by outsiders to the schools, including school inspectors. In addition to the guilty consciousness of teachers, another issue is that although strategies such as code-switching and translation facilitate understanding of subject content, they are not used to develop students' knowledge and skills in English, the language of instruction. Also, these strategies are used in oral classroom work only. At the end of lessons, students are given some notes which they have to copy for their revision. Many teachers make notes that are complex and difficult for students to follow. Also some of the notes contain language errors including grammatical and spelling mistakes (Roy-Campbell and Qorro 1997). Because they do not understand the language, the students have to memorise the content to reproduce it in examinations (Swai 2015). When asked to explain simple concepts in English during examinations, the students exhibit a number of misconceptions[8], some of which they have acquired in the classroom and others at home in their vernaculars, Kiswahili and then English (Osaki and Samiroden 1990). This hinders meaningful learning and acquisition of new concepts, especially in science, maths, social studies and even literature.

In terms of reading materials, most of the locally written textbooks which are used are very difficult for the students to understand. The language in these textbooks is often challenging and – as established since the mid-1990s (Chonjo et al. 1995) and later confirmed in the baseline study of the LSTT project (Barrett et al. 2014) – the

readability of the texts makes reading for understanding too difficult for most of the students. So far there has been little support available for learners struggling to read and also to understand the concepts as taught in the classroom. As a way to support students' transition from Kiswahili medium education in primary schooling to English medium education in secondary schooling, the Language Supportive Teaching and Textbooks (LSTT) Project was established.

The LSTT project: What is language support?

As a way to address the issues of language and pedagogy in the early years of secondary schooling, we established the project 'Strengthening Secondary Education in Practice: Language Supportive Teaching and Textbooks in Tanzania (LSTT).' The LSTT project,

> … is a collaboration between three universities and the Tanzania Institute of Education. The university departments are the Graduate School of Education, University of Bristol; the College of Humanities and Social Sciences and the College of Education, University of Dodoma; and the Institute for Educational Development, Aga Khan University East Africa Campus. (Barrett et al. 2014)

The project aims at supporting students' transition from primary to secondary schooling, which is mainly a transition from Kiswahili to English-medium education. It is implemented in rural community secondary schools in three educationally disadvantaged[9] regions, Dodoma, Lindi and Morogoro. The subjects chosen because of their diverse language demands are English, Biology and Mathematics. While English is the vehicle for learning other school subjects, biology and mathematics have different demands in terms of language and pedagogical principles.

After a baseline survey and a pilot study to determine needs, textbook chapters for these three subjects have been written and are used in schools for evaluation. These chapters are language supportive in several ways. First of all, they are easily accessible to students in that they have relatively simple and familiar vocabulary, the sentences in them are short and not complex, they have many illustrations, and they have English-Kiswahili glossaries. This aims at helping students to easily understand their content. Secondly, they have many learning activities for supporting students' understanding of content and developing language knowledge and skills. Thirdly, they encourage the use of Kiswahili during pair and group discussions followed by the use of English during reporting back in class. Some language support cues are provided to help students on how to report in English. Equality of gender is emphasised during classroom activities. Finally, the students are encouraged to take the books home so that learning continues outside the classroom. In this way, support is provided to students in both subject content learning and language development.

Students' empowerment in LSTT

In LSTT students are empowered by being enabled to interact actively using bilingual strategies during the transition from their familiar language to the official medium of classroom discourse. In the classrooms where we are working, LSTT strategies allow students to read, talk and listen to discussions in both languages in an effort to clarify their understanding of key concepts. Then they may be able to clearly

Box 1: Extract from specimen materials for Biology (Mosi et al. 2015)

GLOSSARY

Production = uzalisjhaji

Harvest = vuna

Consist of = zinajumuisha

Materials = vitu anuai

Substances = vitu

Utensils = vyombo jikoni

Rubbish = takataka

Waste = mabakitaka

Collect = kukusanya

Store = kuhifadhi

Treat = kutibu

Discard = kutelekeza

Recycle = rudisha kwenye mzunguko

Waste management = kuthibiti uchafu

Undesired = visivyotakiwa

Source of accidents = chanzo cha ajali

Manufacturing process = mchakato wa kutengeneza

Generated = iliyozalishwa

Unit 4.1 Waste

In everyday life at home or at school there are materials you do not need. For instance banana or potatoes peels, used papers, plastic bags, empty cans and bottles, used batteries, worn out clothes, broken utensils, dirty water, spoiled milk, etc. All these things are called **waste**. They are also called rubbish, trash, junk, or garbage. They are unwanted or **undesired materials** or **substances.** They can be a **source of accidents** or diseases in our environment.

Waste may also **consist of** the unwanted materials left over from a **manufacturing process** such as industrial, commercial, mining or agricultural operations.

Activity 4.1: Whose waste?

Different places make different types of waste.

1. In a group, record a list of all the waste you can think of.
2. Share your ideas as a class and write your ideas on the blackboard.
3. Different places make different types of rubbish. Copy this table. Write down the waste from each place.

Waste

A home :
A school :
A farm :
A factory :

Activity 4.2 Where does your family waste go?

All the waste material must go somewhere. Do you know where it goes?

Work with your partner. Look at the 5 ways of disposing waste. Talk in Kiswahili and check that you understand them.

It is burned

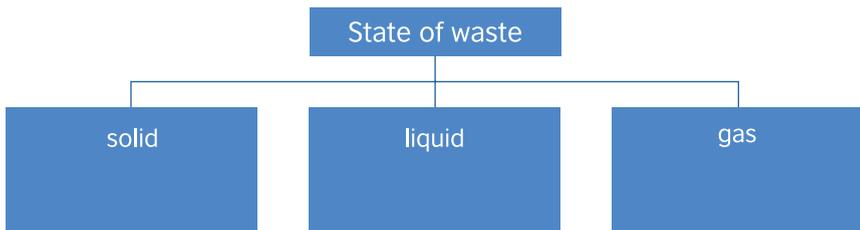It is put into landfill

It is composted

It is recycled

It is re-used

Look at the list of kinds of waste in the diagram below. Say what you think happens to each one. Report to the class.

Waste materials may be collected, stored, or treated before being discarded or recycled. This process of collecting, storing, discarding, and recycling wastes is known as waste management. This process is very important in our schools and at home because we need to control accidents and diseases in our communities.

Types of waste

Copy the diagrams into your exercise book. Read the text and give more examples from your environment.

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            ┌─────────────────┐
            │  State of waste │
            └────────┬────────┘
        ┌────────────┼────────────┐
   ┌────┴────┐  ┌────┴────┐  ┌────┴────┐
   │  solid  │  │  liquid │  │   gas   │
   └─────────┘  └─────────┘  └─────────┘
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There are several ways to classify **waste material**. For example, if we think of the physical state of waste, there are three kinds of waste: solid, liquid, and gaseous wastes. **Solid wastes** include plastics, containers, bottles, cans, papers, or scrap iron. **Liquid wastes** include domestic waste water, chemicals, oils, waste water from ponds, manufacturing industries and other sources. **Gaseous wastes** include smokes and **smog** from burning substances mainly from industries, cars, or in kitchens.

understand and later express the concepts in the official language, in this case English. Observations show that the students participate much more actively during lessons conducted in this manner. They learn more easily from the texts, from each other and from their teachers. The glossaries and illustrations enable them to translate the difficult concepts and improve their learning. The learning tasks provide an opportunity for them to practise language use and hence improve their language ability and concept understanding. An example, from a biology lesson, is shown in Box 1.

Some preliminary findings and their implications

The findings of the final evaluation of the LSTT study have not been published yet, but several lessons can be drawn from the baseline and pilot studies. We would like to put forward two such lessons here. The first one is that legitimising the use of Kiswahili-English bilingual strategies in the secondary school classrooms is a move which is welcomed both by teachers and by students. It helps the participants to get rid of the feeling of guilt that they experienced when this was not allowed by policy. The second lesson that can be drawn from the study is that it is possible – and is of benefit – to use Kiswahili in the classroom to develop students' understanding of subject content and to develop their English language skills. As Barrett et al. explain:

> *Well-designed activities, with explicit directions for use of language, support students to access their prior learning in Kiswahili and develop their English language skills so they can articulate and build on their subject knowledge in English.* (Barrett et al. 2014, 45-46)

On the basis of these two lessons, we can now discuss some implications for policy and practice.

The LSTT language supportive teaching and materials represent a radical change in policy and pedagogical practice. They emphasise that learners' familiar language can be used advantageously to support the learning of subject content and to improve the learners' knowledge and skills of the second language. The two languages – English and Kiswahili – do not have to be kept separate for this matter. As Cummins (2005, 5) explains, using both the more familiar and the second language provides learners with the opportunity to transfer cognitive and academic (or literacy) related proficiency from one language to another and can enhance the development of both languages. Such transfer includes five elements:

- Conceptual elements (e.g. understanding the concept of photosynthesis)
- Metacognitive and metalinguistic strategies (e.g. vocabulary acquisition strategies)
- Pragmatic aspects of language use (e.g. ability to use visuals to aid communication)
- Specific linguistic elements (e.g. knowledge of 'photo' in photosynthesis)
- Phonological awareness (e.g. awareness that words are made up of single sounds).

In addition to this transfer, the pedagogical practices encouraged in the LSTT teaching and learning materials facilitate translanguaging, which Park (2013, 50) defines as a pedagogical practice that allows 'shifting between languages in a natural manner' to assist multilingual speakers make meaning, shape experiences and gain deeper understanding and knowledge of the languages in use and of content that is being taught. During the process of translanguaging, students get opportunities to freely and flexibly incorporate the language practices of school into their own linguistic repertoires. This implies that using both English and Kiswahili in learning, as the LSTT materials suggest, has not only the potential of improving students' understanding of subject content and their competence in both languages, but also helps them to relate what they learn in school with their daily life experiences out of school and to communicate this freely and fluently. Creese and Blackledge (2010) explain that monolingual instructional practices have dominated language teaching for a long time; that is why policies are resistant to change and some teachers feel guilty when they use strategies such as code-switching and translation. However, they suggest that, because of the advantages of translanguaging, it is necessary to change practices (and policies) to allow for the use of both the familiar and the second language alongside each other.

In the LSTT Project, we are working with the government curriculum development institution (Tanzania Institute of Education, TIE) in the hope that once this study shows the way, policy will unfold in a direction that helps all learners to become more fluent in the language of instruction and access a truly high quality education. Because the new policy allows the two languages, Kiswahili and English, to be used as media of instruction at all levels of education, it is recommended that the lessons learned from the LSTT be used in translating the policy to practice in classroom teaching, in textbook writing and in teacher education. If the policy allows the languages to be used alongside each other in teaching, as it is in the LSTT project, students are likely to benefit from the transfer of literacy skills as suggested by Cummins (2005) and from the pedagogical advantages of translanguaging as outlined by Park (2013). By doing so, the currently marginalised students, who form the majority, are very likely to be empowered and to benefit more from learning.

Notes

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[2] As is explained in more detail later in the chapter, the old 1995 policy is still in use, even though a new 2014 policy exists.

[3] They are known as ethnic, community or tribal languages. More than 120 of these exist.

[4] Private means not owned by the government. These are available in urban areas and have high school fees.

[5] The 2014 policy that allows the use of Kiswahili is not yet in operation.

[6] Owned by the Government and offering free education

[7] In safe-talk, the teacher uses strategies that do not require students to speak independently, for example by asking questions which all learners respond to in chorus, usually by repeating

information which is already well known (Chick 1996). In this way the momentum of the lesson is maintained but nobody loses face by having their lack of ability exposed.

[8] These misconceptions can be understood as alternative or unscientific explanations about phenomena.

[9] Children's achievement, as reflected in national examination scores, is relatively low in these regions. This is attributed to the poor socioeconomic background of the parents and communities surrounding the schools.

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