

1-1-2010

## The Language Policy and Practice of Tanzania and Singapore: What Lessons for Nigeria, Africa.

Olufunson Fasanami

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### Recommended Citation

Fasanami, Olufunson (2010) "The Language Policy and Practice of Tanzania and Singapore: What Lessons for Nigeria, Africa.," *Academic Leadership: The Online Journal*. Vol. 8 : Iss. 4 , Article 69. Available at: <https://scholars.fhsu.edu/alj/vol8/iss4/69>

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# Academic Leadership Journal

## INTRODUCTION

Language makes a people. If a language is lost, the identity of the race is lost. Language is a universal concept and there is no society in the world where language is not used for communication. Many linguists have defined language as a means of communicating, ideas, thoughts, emotions and information, among others. The human race is imbued with the gift of verbal language, apparently, intelligible language for communication. There are other types of communication like the signs, symbols, gesticulations, braille for the blind and other non verbal communication media.

Sapir (1963) cited in Ogunsiji (2001) sees “language is a purely human and non-instinctive method of communication ideas, emotions and desires by means of a system of voluntarily produced symbols”. From the foregoing, it is quite evident that verbal and intelligible language is exclusively designed for the human race. It is acquired in the course of interaction with fellow human beings in most cases people who share the same linguistic experience with the speaker. The primacy of speech over writing has been emphasized by many linguists the world over. We learn to speak a language before learning to write. Quite naturally, more people speak than write. Language is used to express the cultural values of people.

Language is one of the aspects of culture of the people, as well as a vehicle for expressing culture. It is an instrument of action, it used for phatic communion, to convey information; it is used to keep records and to store useful information. Thus, there is no society in the whole world whose existence is devoid of a language of communication. It is quite interesting that much as languages are so many and found everywhere, nature has made it so that one needs to start the learning of a language right from the rudiments. Thus, it is everywhere but not loosely accessible. It has to be learned through a systematic process. Even the mother tongue which every member of a linguistic community has exclusive right to use is not just spoken overnight, but learnt over a period of time before proficiency is attained.

It is pertinent to note that globally, language is seen and considered as a tool of political and economic strength and power. This situation had been exploited in the past where colonization had deeply entrenched the language of the colonial masters. In effect, it has led to the problem of bilingualism or multilingualism. The development of multilingualism has compounded the problems of language planning and language policies in many nations of Africa. “Most African countries favour European languages as the languages of instruction in schools; Tanzania is an exception to this development in Sub-Saharan Africa, as is Somalia” (Phillipson et al 1986) in Rubagumya (1990), with their effort in making Swahili an Inter-African National Language. A national language according to Effiong (2009) cited in Adegbite and Olajide (2009) is a native language that is closely linked with the people’s national identity at politico-cultural level.

## The Geographical Location of Tanzania

The Islands of Zanzibar and Pemba; and Tanganyika form the United Republic of Tanzania. It is located

in East Africa. These three countries are situated about 40 kilometers from Dares Salaam, the nation's capital. Tanganyika also referred to as mainland Tanzania is on the south of Uganda and Kenya, East of Zaire and North of Zambia, Malawi and Mozambique. The country occupies about 939, 652 square kilometers (362, 706 square miles). There are over 130 ethnic groups of a population of 19,868 million as at 1982.

The population according to the United States Central Intelligence Agency was growing every year at the rate of 3.2%, the stock of Bantu origins form the Majority of the Tanzanians. The largest is the Sukuna stock of about over one million. The Nilotic origin are the Nomadic Masai and the Luo. The Asians, Arabs and the Europeans Population is only 1%. Their National Language is Swahili, although each ethnic group has its district language. Swahili has its origin in Bantu with heavy Arabic borrowings. The christians population is 30%, muslims 30% and 40% Animists.

In the mid-nineteen century, the Europeans began to explore Tanganyika with German in full control until the First World War when the territory was taken over by the United Kingdom. After the Second World War, Tanganyika became a United Nations trust territory and by December 1961, it got its independence. In 1964 Zanzibar was merged with Tanganyika and was given a new name. The United Republic of Tanzania.

### **The Language Policy in Education of Tanzania**

The following statements reflect the new language policy of Tanzania.

- (a) All subjects are taught in Swahili except English.
- (b) Kiswahili is the LO-language used at the primary level. This was meant to facilitate racial integration (Morrison (1976) cited in Wikipedia (2010))
- (c) The political education (SIASA) is taught in Swahili at the secondary school level.
- (d) English is the LOI and Kiswahili is a subject in the upper classes. (Wikipedia 2010)

What characterizes the features of the education system of Tanzania is

the bilingual policy which requires the learners to learn both Swahili and English; English links them with the international world while Swahili entrenches the cultural values and heritage in them.

English is a compulsory subject in the primary education whereas Swahili is used as a medium of instruction. At the post primary education, English is used as a medium of instruction whereas Swahili is taught as a compulsory subject. It is optional for students at tertiary education.

In Tanzania, formal Education and training last for a period (of two years) of pre-primary education, seven years of primary education, four years (OL) Junior Secondary School and two years of Senior Secondary School (AL) and about three or more years of tertiary education.

### **Language use in Tanzania**

Whereas it is estimated that only 10% of the Tanzanians speak Swahili as their mother tongue about 90% are bilingual in Swahili and an indigenous language (Abdulaziz 1971) cited in Rubagumya (1990).

On the other hand, only 15% of the populations speak English. Bar (1976) in Rubagumya (1990) in his survey indicates that men tend to have some knowledge of Swahili, younger people are more proficient in Swahili; and that the more literate and educated a person is, the higher his fluency in Swahili. It is discovered that children in the urban setting speak Swahili as their first language despite the fact that their parents are not native speakers of the language. Swahili is unceremoniously taking over the daily activities of younger generation in Tanzania. Incontrovertibly, the educational process of any society is expected to be conducted through a language that both the learner and the teacher understand well, also, the language through which education is to be conducted must be accessible to the majority of the population, for a wider scope in knowledge generation. These two considerations are essential in the choice of a medium of education. Thus, the French, the Indians and the Chinese, respectively, do not educate their children through English, but through French, Hindi and Chinese respectively. The British use English and no other language to educate their children. In consequence, Tanzania uses English Language as a foreign language. Only a small group of Tanzania use English Language and it is to communicate with foreigners and not with fellow Tanzanians. English is not used to address medical assistant in the hospital, or used to check a balance of account in the bank etc. Swahili is used. The Tanzanian learner encounters English only in the classroom, when the learner leaves the classroom, the English language is shed and Swahili takes over as he goes home into a completely Swahili environment.

It is quite apparent that the people of Tanzania are more comfortable with Swahili language and this had made the Tanzanian government to make known their intention to change the medium of instruction in schools from English to Swahili at all levels. The plan is to be put in place because Swahili is the medium of instruction in the primary school while English is used in the secondary schools. It is believed that the situation will create classes of people being educated in Swahili and English. It is considered as a dangerous development.

(1967/74 plans; Regemalira 1990).

It is true that the plan has not worked out on paper but Swahili language is being used in almost everyday activities in Tanzania. To this end, a performance designed to rehabilitate the Tanzanian, secondary schools are financed by the Britain Overseas Development Administration at £2million, (Criper and Dodd recommendations 1984) cited in Rugemalira et al (1990). Other provisions are; 20 scholarships in Britain for English teachers, seminars, regular supply of English books and class readers, audio-visual equipment among others. (Daily News, December (1998) in Regemalira 1990).

For Tanzanian, those gifts especially the set of books whose relevance to the Tanzanian people are quite questionable are expected to serve as the magic wand to entrench English language in Tanzania, as in other post colonial African nations. These efforts made to restore English language to its past glory are not sufficient conditions to make Tanzania consider using English as a second language. For the effort to yield results, a major shift in attitudes and values in language learning and use is highly required. It is expected that only the government of the country can bring about a squeeze on the coverage of Swahili language use; and for Tanzanians to accept a sharp reduction in the range of domains where the language is being spoken. Realistically, no government however totalitarian can achieve this; asking students to speak English only in the school will be considered highhanded enough, allocating six months of beginners class to a foreign country is generous enough. What positive result can this be to the Tanzanians. The English Language Support Project being funded by

the British Government at regular intervals has been trying to do the impossible; ascribing the status of a second language to English language. However, it is on record that their education system is efficient and that 83% of the pupils enrolled in the first grade make it to the fifth grade (UNESCO 1995) cited in Wikipedia, 2010).

## **Geographical Location and Population of Singapore**

Singapore can be found in the South East Asia. It is called the Island At The End of a Peninsula; it was called different names at different times in history. By the 14<sup>th</sup> Century the Sanscript name “Singapura” meaning “Lion City” was widely used with reference to Singapore. It is a multi ethnic and multi-cultural country (Tay 1982) cited in pride (1982). It’s population is about half a million of 76% Chinese., 15% Malays, 7% Indians ad 2% of other groups like Arabs, Eurasians, among others (Arumainathan (1973) cited in Tay (1982).

Singapore operates a multilingual or linguistic plurality policy. At independence, the Singapore elders chose Mandarin, Malay, Tamil and English as the four official languages. The first three reflect the three nationalities that had co-existed for over a decade. Since Singapore has a history of colonization, English is to have the same status as the three ethnic languages. Malay is however chosen as a national language out of the three languages.

## **The Language Practice of Singapore**

Singapore languages reflect the traditions of the three nationalities that inhabit the country. Thus, the language comprises an admixture of unrelated languages spoken by these three groups. They are Malaysians, Indians and Chinese. They speak languages like Hokkien, Cantonese, Mandarin, among others. Traditionally, the Malaysians speak Malay, majority of Indians speak Tamil and the Chinese speak Mandarin. It is believed by some linguists that all the languages have the tradition of the early inhabitants of the island where Singapore occupies today. Of all the languages spoken in Singapore, Malay is recongnised as the National Language because it reflects the historical and national position of the island-state. This role is symbolic. In effect, it is not taught in schools for non Malays and one does not need to pass a national language test to become naturalized citizen of Singapore. This is an evidence of ethnic liberalism prevalent in Singapore. Kuo (1999) points it out that Singapore is known for co-existence of several competitive cultural traditions, also that there is no strong indigenous host culture and host language Malay was just chosen as the National language.

It is hoped that there could be linguistic assimilation with Singapore as the “melting pot” in the midst of the heterogeneous population. It is for co-existence and con-habitation that people revert to cultural and linguistic pluralism as the guiding policy options in the multi-ethnic and linguistic Singaporean environment. Steward (1968) cited in Kuo (1999) identified a safety valve put in place in Singapore because of its linguistic and cultural pluralism. This is the recognition and preservation of important languages within the national territories, in addition, adopting one or more languages for official purposes and for communication across language boundaries within the nation.

In Singapore English is used to acquire education, so also is Chinese; Tamil and Malay up to the Secondary Schools as a first or second language. First language here means English taught in the English medium schools. English as a second language means English taught in a non-English medium schools. In Singapore English is used as a dominant working language and language of

government administration. It is used in writing documents, driving licence and other legal documents. Most educated Singaporeans can speak at least two languages, with the choice of what languages to use in inter ethnic and intra-ethnic communication.

Thus, English is just one of the several languages available to educated citizens is such communication. The only National language that a Singapore uses to express himself as one entity rather as a Chinese, Malay or Tamis is through the English language. It serves as a unifying factor 'linguistically. Despite this recognition, *it is observed that Singaporeans have a strong attachment to their indigenous languages, Malay is recognized as the National Language. Kuo (1999) opines that the role of the language policy of Singapore is for nation building, in economic development through the English language. That the strong attachment to traditional values is evident in their attachment to their ethnic languages.*

### **What Lessons for Nigeria, Africa?**

The problem of evolving a national language in Nigeria and in other African countries has been a thing of concern over the years. Tanzanian has made frantic efforts and considerable progress in cultivating Swahili (an indigenous Africa Language) as a viable National Language. It is found everywhere in everyday lives of the people of Tanzania. The existence of other languages does not affect the choice of this language. It is observable that what is in the policy statement about having secondary education in English is a far-cry from what is in practice. Swahili is being used in all schools at all levels. What is quite astounding is that having to interact with foreigners or an expatriate does not constitute a problem for Tanzanians, the Tanzanian child is not taught to master English to accommodate expatriates teachers, the teacher should learn Swahili to meet the needs of the learners. Borrowing a leaf from this, it is believed that, the fact that there are many languages in Nigeria is not enough justification to say that Nigeria cannot develop and have a national language, a lingua franca that is indigenous to the Nigerian people out of the three major or dominant languages. According to the Nigeria National policy Education (2004) (section 2, paragraph 14, section 3, and paragraph 17 e & f), which stipulates that the child be taught in his mother tongue Mt or the language of the immediate environment at the pre-primary school and at the initial stage in the primary school. In Singapore, their policy of bilingualism is that learners learn two languages from primary six. The languages are English and one of the indigenous languages. Subjects like Mathematics and the sciences are to be taught in English, History and Civic is taught in the various indigenous languages.

Whereas Singapore believes that the indigenous languages help to appreciate and retain their cultural heritage and traditions, Nigerians pride themselves in expressing their culture more through the English language. The Singaporeans Prime Minister, Lee Kuen Yew expresses the apparent attachment to indigenous languages thus:

*too much emphasis on English*

*may lead to the "detrimental*

*effects of "deculturalization" of*

*producing "anaemic" uprooted floating*

*citizens, without the social*

*cohesiveness and the cultural*

*impetus that give the people*

*the drive and the will to*

*succeed as a group*

*(Josey 1971: cited in Kuo 1999).*

In effect, the Singaporeans bilingual education policy does not only ensure the preservation of the nation's cultural heritage but helps the citizens to have access to modernization through the English Language. Most Nigerians do not have this penchant for their indigenous languages, rather they have special preference for English Language.

Whereas the Tanzania language policy and practice encourage indigenous languages, the Nigerian language policy which encourages the learning of indigenous languages, does not ensure compliance with the implementation strategies put in place by the policy statement. While some schools are strict on the use of the mother tongue at a particular level, some schools implement straight for English, for pecuniary consideration. Parents whose pre-occupation is to have their children speak English and not their mother tongue Mt encouraged them. In Singapore, the orientation of the people right from the primary school is the policy of bilingualism, guarded jealously and monitored by all and sundry.

However, it is worthy of note that there are inconsistencies in the policy and practice of English and indigenous languages in Nigeria and Singapore. The similarities inherent in them are not too far-flung as a result of the multilingual and multi-cultural atmosphere prevalent in the two countries. In a survey on the attitude of Nigerians towards the mother tongue carried out in Ibadan and Lagos, it was discovered that majority of parents prefer English language to their mother tongue Mt. Adegbija (2000) cited in Oyetade (2001) indicates that out of 600 respondents, 76.6 percent are in support of the English Language and that no indigenous language can replace English language especially, as they cannot cope with the modern sciences. A negligible percentage of 2.8 supported English and only 10.8 percent strongly agreed. Bamgbose (1985) cites in Oyetade (2001) observes that they are plagued by "linguistic imperialism" a situation that makes them stick to the use of European languages in all advanced sectors of the country. In Nigeria, many parents send their wards to fee-paying schools where only English language is spoken and no other language for teaching. It is their belief that this situation will guarantee good performance in English, often times, it does not consolidate proficiency in language learning. It is quite worrisome that most native speakers of indigenous languages cannot express themselves in their mother tongue Mt. some are ashamed of speaking their mother tongue while most schools inflict corporal punishment on students who speak their indigenous languages in the school premises. The retroactive effect of some of the attitudinal dispositions of some people, especially the barely literate parents is that they insist that their children speak English while they themselves speak English with bad grammar and defective pronunciation. This situations cause confusion for their kids who are still going to get exposed to many models like their teachers and peers at school. For example a child who hears his mother pronounce cupboard {k<sup>^</sup>pbcd} as {kcbcd} is not likely to get convinced by the version different from his mother's pronunciation which he listens to

everyday.

Another example is the word plumber (pl<sup>^</sup>me) which most Nigerians still find difficult to pronounce. They will rather pronounce it as (plcmba). Once a habit is formed, it takes a long time to drop, especially in kids and second language learners. It is therefore obvious that English or any other European languages will continue to enjoy acceptability as long as all these aforementioned situations persist.

Unlike the Tanzanians, Nigerians have negative attitude to their mother tongue; but like the Singaporeans, Nigerians are exposed to many indigenous language. Singapore chose Malay the language of one of the smallest groups, but up till now Nigeria has not been able to develop a National language. This is a problem with most multilingual countries in African and other non-African States.

The courage to reach a consensus and collectively choose a National language has eluded them perhaps for political reasons among others. Tanzania apparently is in the fore front of this move with Swahili as an INTER-AFRICAN LANGUAGE, spoken also outside East Africa. In not too long a time, Swahili may spread to other African countries like Western, Northern and Central Africa. In consequence a National language for the continent of Africa may be in the offing.

## **Conclusion**

For more than a decade the issue of multilingualism has continued to add to the problem of language development, especially in the post colonial continents of Africa, Nigeria being a victim. The need for a National language that will serve the same role that English language is serving has continued to generate controversies among nationalities and linguists. Prof. Wole Soyinka's proposal on Swahili as a lingua franca in Africa has met with a lot of oppositions and no one has been able to give a substitute so far. It should be noted that human beings can express themselves through any language, in consequence, no language should be seen as inadequate. A language that is living will continue to develop as the speakers use and have lexical, semantic, phonological borrowings from other living languages.

The English language spoken today is a conglomeration of different languages still living or moribund: Latin, Greek, French among others. People will continue to use languages and as long as there is the need to express feelings, ideas, opinions joy and anguish, they will find a way and a medium to express it. This is a reflection of language development and languages in contact. Nigeria and other African countries only need confidence and Unity of purpose that the Tanzanians had, to have been able to push Swahili this far, to the status of an inter-African language.

This is a welcome development. Other African countries can have their national languages. In consequence, all African nations can decide on Swahili or another African language as a functional, international linguistic contribution to global communication, a lingua franca for Africa which will eventually be accessible to the whole world. A language that is homely and first shared by the BIG BROTHER AND SISTER AFRICA, also spoken outside the shores of Africa, not a colonial language like English language.

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VN:R\_U [1.9.11\_1134]