A THREE-TIER CITIZENSHIP: CAN THE STATE IN TANZANIA GUARANTEE LINGUISTIC HUMAN RIGHTS?

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CONTENTS

Abstract

This paper explores how the concept of linguistic citizenship can be applied to the Tanzanian situation in terms of the delivery of bilingual education and addressing issues of equity, quality education and tackling the problem of poverty. It starts with a brief overview of how the concepts "linguistic human rights" and "linguistic citizenship" are theorized. It then goes on to show that in the Tanzanian context in particular, and Africa in general, the "linguistic human rights" paradigm cannot adequately address the concerns of speakers of marginalized languages. The paper argues that all efforts to guarantee linguistic human rights in Tanzania have so far been top-down and have to a large extent failed. The paper further argues that it is the people who can empower themselves by giving value to their marginalized languages. This valorisation will make education meaningful in people's struggle towards socio-economic development. Finally it is shown how the on-going EdQual RPC Language and Literacy Project is an attempt to empower rural communities through a linguistic citizenship-based innovation of language and literacy development in Tanzanian schools.

1.   Introduction

The work of Tove Skutnabb-Kangas and Robert Phillipson (see for example, Phillipson, 1992; Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson, 1995) has been instrumental in pushing to the top of sociolinguistics agenda the notion of linguistic human rights (LHR). Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson (1995:1-2) assert:

> *"Linguistic rights should be considered basic human rights. Linguistic majorities, speakers of a dominant language, usually enjoy all those linguistic human rights which can be seen as fundamental, regardless of how they are defined. Most linguistic minorities in the world do not enjoy these rights. It is only a few hundred of the world's 6-7,000 languages that have any kind of official status and it is only speakers of official languages who enjoy all linguistic human rights".*

However, recently this concept of linguistic human rights has been critised. Among the major critics of linguistic human rights are Stroud (2001) and Blommaert (2001). Stroud (2001) has suggested that the concept of linguistic citizenship is a more powerful theory to analyse issues related to marginalized languages.

2.   Linguistic citizenship vs. linguistic human rights

Stroud (2001:353) defines linguistic citizenship as *"the situation where speakers themselves exercise control over their language, deciding what languages are, what they may mean and where language issues (especially in educational sites) are discursively tied to a range of social issues, policy issues and questions of equity".* Four main criticisms are directed at LHR by the advocates of linguistic citizenship as defined above. First, LHR is selective, potentially discriminatory and socially divisive in nature. It accepts the mainstream categorization of languages as dominant and dominated, and tries to "assist" dominated languages.

Second, LHR views "language" as an unproblematic construct. What do we mean, for instance, by "English language" or "Kiswahili language"? These are constructed and at times contested objects. That is why the concept of "Englishes" has been with us for quite some time now (Kachru, 1983). That is equally why in Tanzania today you hear people talking about the emergence of "Viswahili" (i.e. different varieties of Kiswahili). Norwegian acquired the status of a language in 1905 when Norway gained her independence from Sweden. Likewise, Serbian and Croatian languages were "created" as two distinct languages for Serbia and Croatia respectively after the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia (May, 2000).

Thirdly, LHR assumes that rights are granted and monitored through and by state institutions. For example, Blommaert (2003: …..) comments:

> *"The argument of linguistic rights usually identifies the state as a crucial actor in the process, both negatively (the state denies rights to people) and positively (the state as the actor that should provide and secure rights for the people)."*

Fourthly, by indexing language rights on the collective rights of groups, LHR assumes that the linguistic community in question necessarily identifies itself with its language. The reality however,

is more complex than this. There might be members of a linguistic community who, for one reason or another might have already abandoned their language (May, 2000).

Linguistic Citizenship on the other hand, deconstructs the social order in which language discourse is based. For example, non-Setswana speakers in Botswana do not accept the labeling of their languages as "minority" languages. It also questions the definition of "language". For example, in South Africa speakers of Northern IsiNdebele have struggled to have their variety recognized as a language alongside Southern IsiNdebele (Stroud, 2001).

Linguistic citizenship does not take rights for granted, nor does it assume that they will necessarily be protected by the state or the constitution. Perhaps the most glaring example of how an LHR based policy has failed is South Africa. The South African constitution recognizes eleven languages as official. In principle these eleven languages are equal. However, in practice English is the dominant language in all spheres of public life: education, law, government, media, etc. de Klerk (2000:213) puts this succinctly when she argues:

> "Despite the efforts of (South African) policy makers to assist the revitalization of indigenous languages, the crucial involvement of the speakers themselves seems to be lacking, and it is they who must shoulder the responsibility of carrying these languages forward into the future…… The constitution provides the means to promote the vitality, versatility and stability of these languages and the rights of their speakers, but whether the political will to do so exists is a separate issue."

Heugh (2007:200) also shows the inherent weakness of the South African LHR based language policy:

> "The fragility of the rights-based planning … and the tendency to default to earlier practices is evidenced in the contemporary South African situation. Although the equal status of 11 official languages was prefaced in the interim Constitution, this was diluted in the final constitution of 1996. Instead there are now simply 11 official languages with little compulsion towards equality. This strategic weakening of the original principles has led to a situation whereby instead of two official languages operating vertically across the country as was the case under Apartheid, **and instead of a shift towards better resourcing and tapping into the horizontal use of 11 languages, there has been a default to one language of power, namely English.**" (My emphasis)

It is therefore people themselves engaged in grassroots agency and struggle who can develop and use their language if they wish to do so. In the next section of the paper, I will discuss these differences between linguistic citizenship and LHR in the context of Tanzania.

3.   A three-tier citizenship for Tanzania

I would like to suggest that if one looks at "citizenship" in terms of language repertoire, one is able to distinguish three types of citizens in Tanzania: global citizens, local citizens, and for lack of a better term, semi-citizens.

"Global citizens" will have access to English, Kiswahili and in most cases one or more of about 120 Ethnic Community Languages (ECLs). This is the group that by and large constitutes the local elite. It is English that makes this group "global citizens" because with English they can easily communicate with the outside world. They can also compete for international jobs, often leading to brain-drain from Tanzania to Western Europe and the U.S.A. A weaker version of this brain-drain is what one might call "muscle-drain" caused by young people with the rudiments of English who go overseas in search of a better life. They often end up doing menial jobs, or being drug peddlers or prostitutes.

"Local citizens" will have access to Kiswahili. Most of them will also have access to one or more Ethnic Community Languages. This is the largest group, probably accounting for around 90% of the population. This group can actively participate in many political, social and economic events that are transacted in Kiswahili. They are, however, excluded from domains where English is used as a medium of communication.

"Semi-citizens" are those individuals who have access to neither English nor Kiswahili. They can only function in domains where an ECL is used. For this reason, this group is excluded from domains where Kiswahili or English are used. The inability to exercise their rights as Tanzanian citizens has to be mitigated through a third party. For example, they would need somebody to help them during general elections because they are unable to read and write.

This three-tier citizenship is not fixed. There is movement up the ladder (and sometimes down the ladder). The movement is both resource-based and geographical. The "global citizens" will usually have access to more resources and are more likely to be found in big cities (Dar es Salaam, Arusha, Mwanza, etc.). "Local citizens" have fewer resources, but they can be found both in urban and rural areas. "Semi-citizens" have the least resources and are usually to be found in very remote rural areas.

Within the context of the three-tier citizenship outlined above, it is clear that the group most deprived of their linguistic human rights is that of "Semi-citizens". These are disadvantaged in two main ways. First, they don't have access to the two languages of power in Tanzania: English and Kiswahili. Second, the languages that they have access to are not accorded any official recognition. Users of ECLs can use these languages in informal situations, but they cannot use them when dealing with state institutions.

However, it should be noted that most economic activities in rural areas in Tanzania, as indeed in other African countries, are transacted in ECLs. As Djite (2008: 146 -147) argues:

> "Whilst millionaires in the formal economy in Africa often tend to be politicians or senior public servants who embezzle public funds, genuine self-made millionaires… travel from Nigeria to Sierra Leone or from the Southern Mozambican Province of Gaza to South Africa, Malawi and Zimbabwe for business transactions carried out in various local languages, and create and continue to build their wealth without speaking a word of the languages of the formal economy."

"Local citizens" are also disadvantaged in as far as they don't have access to English. They are therefore either excluded from domains where English is used, or are made to work with a

language they are not competent in. This situation is best illustrated in the educational system and it is to this that I now turn.

4.   Linguistic human rights and education in Tanzania

Kiswahili has been the medium of instruction at primary school level since 1967. At face value, this would seem to be an attempt by the state to give linguistic human rights to the citizens by empowering them to learn in a language they are familiar with. Indeed, since that time there has been a heated debate on whether Kiswahili medium of instruction should be extended to secondary schools (Mlama and Materu, 1978; Roy-Campbell and Qorro 1987: Rubagumya 1993 to mention but a few).

The fact that the change of medium at *secondary* level has not happened 40 years on since 1967 despite several attempts by the state (Ministry of Education and Culture 1984, 1997) would seem to suggest that either the state does not have the political will to give linguistic rights to its citizens, or that the citizens do not want these rights. This suspicion is further strengthened by the fact that since the 1990s an increasing number of private English medium primary schools are being established (Rubagumya, 2003).

What then is the problem? I have argued elsewhere (Rubagumya, 2003) that the emergence of English medium primary schools is a reaction by parents to the deteriorating quality of primary school provision by the state. Some English medium primary schools are popular, not necessarily because of providing education in English but mainly because of the relative quality of education that they offer compared to public Kiswahili medium primary schools. This quality is measured in terms of qualified teachers, availability of books, school lunches, transport to and from school, etc. It would therefore be wrong, in my view, to suggest that parents have rejected their linguistic rights by sending their children to English medium primary schools. If the public system of education was working efficiently and effectively, perhaps we would not see as many parents "voting with their feet" by taking their children out of the system.

A more plausible explanation of what is going on would seem to be the inability or unwillingness of the state to genuinely create a conducive environment that will ensure all citizens enjoy their linguistic rights.

5.   Why have attempts by the State failed?

Elite vested interest is one of the reasons why creating an environment for linguistic rights has always been half-hearted. English is seen as a gate-keeping mechanism that will allow the elite to reproduce itself. This always leads to conflicting and contradictory signals from the state. Whereas initiatives to extend linguistic rights to citizens come from the state, the same state puts in place impediments to the implementation of these initiatives. For example, while the *Sera ya Utamaduni* (Cultural Policy) of 1997 seems a progressive document that recognizes the importance of developing all languages of Tanzania, ECLs remain banned in the mass media. It is not allowed to publish newspapers or to broadcast in ECLs. Likewise, despite the stated intention of eventually extending Kiswahili medium of instruction to all levels of the educational system, no concrete steps have been taken by the state to realize this. All these contradictions are, in the final analysis, to the advantage of English and those who have access to it, the elite.

The second reason why attempts by the state have failed has to do with external pressure. The state is increasingly becoming weaker as globalization and neo-liberalism assert themselves and impact on state structures. Again the beneficiary of this external pressure is likely to be English at the expense of Kiswahili and ECLs. For example, in the 1980s Tanzania sought assistance from the United Kingdom to strengthen the teaching of English in Tanzanian secondary schools. This assistance was granted in the form of the English Language Teaching Support Project (ELTSP), but on condition that English should continue as the medium of instruction at secondary level (Criper and Dodd, 1984). Today, about 40% of the Tanzania Government budget comes from the external donor community. In such circumstances it is very difficult for the government to assert its independence from external influence.

6. What would a paradigm based on Linguistic Citizenship entail?

A mixture of top-down and bottom-up approaches to language planning would be more likely to work in ensuring that all citizens enjoy their linguistic rights. In other words, although the state has a role to play in providing the needed infrastructure, ultimately it is the people themselves who can develop their own languages and use them to educate successive generations and for socio-economic development. This has worked in several countries and there is no reason why it shouldn't work in Tanzania. For example, in Papua New Guinea in the 1980s there was a movement which championed non-formal education in indigenous languages. The main objective was to empower village people to live full and productive lives and to be in control of their own development. This could only be achieved in their indigenous languages. By 1994 there were literacy programmes in over 200 languages. The success of these programmes was due to the high level of community control and support in teacher selection, finances, curriculum development, planning and monitoring (Siegel, 1997).

Similarly, the Bolivian Educational Reform of 1994 succeeded in developing teaching/learning materials in three major indigenous languages (Aymara, Guarani and Quechua) because of the participation of all stakeholders at grassroot level in decision making. The people claimed ownership of the reform because of their involvement at all stages. They therefore had an interest in seeing the Reform succeed (Hornberger and Lopez, 1998).

In Africa, the Breakthrough to Literacy Programme in Zambia has been one of the few success stories. This is based on the Molteno Project in South Africa. The Breakthrough to Literacy Programme has been successful because it involved all stakeholders right from the beginning: parents, teacher-trainers, and Ministry of Education officials. The sensitization of parents and the local community generally was very instrumental in ensuring the success of the programme (Sampa, 2003).

A linguistic citizenship-based agenda in Tanzania would therefore entail the utilization of all linguistic resources at our disposal: Kiswahili, ECLs, English and other foreign languages. The development of literacy programmes in Kiswahili and ECLs must mainly come from the people themselves. Grass-root participation is of utmost importance. If local communities are not involved in the decision-making process, they may not see these decisions as binding to them. In the next section of the paper, I would like to show how the on-going Language and Literacy Project in Tanzania (part of a larger Research Programme Consortium involving five countries – UK, Tanzania, South Africa, Ghana and Rwanda) is relevant to the linguistic citizenship theoretical framework.

7. Embedding the Language and Literacy Project within the Linguistic Citizenship theoretical framework

The main purpose of the Language and Literacy Project is to generate new knowledge that will lead to initiatives of improving the quality of education in Tanzania. The project will specifically address issues of literacy and language development, since there can be no quality education if learners do not have the language competence to access knowledge. The project intends to target disadvantaged groups in the community as the main beneficiaries of the research project; i.e. the poor, the disabled and women. The involvement of community members at every stage of the research project is built into the research design. The research group will work very closely with four key stakeholders: Ministry of Education officials, Teacher Training Colleges, school teachers and school committees and local community leaders. The Ministry of Education is crucial if the research outcomes are to influence school policy. Teacher Training Colleges will be involved in developing new materials and piloting them. School teachers will be involved in action research and will participate fully in the preparation of new teaching/learning materials. The involvement of school committees and community leaders will ensure that innovations are streamlined into day to day life experiences at local level (RPC, 2006).

The Language and Literacy Project seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the characteristics of current classroom interaction in Tanzanian schools? What would make this interaction more effective?

2. What is the nature of the current teachers' competence in teaching through Kiswahili and English? What strategies can be used to improve teachers' competence?

3. What is the nature of current learners' competence in learning through Kiswahili and English? What strategies can be used to improve this competence?

4. Is there any difference in the nature of interaction between boys and girls? If so, what are the underlying causes of this difference?

5. To what extent are textbooks in Kiswahili and English accessible to learners? What measures can be taken to make textbooks learner-friendly?

For the baseline study, 12 schools (6 each from Morogoro and Kilimanjaro Regions) have been sampled. For each Region the sample includes 3 primary and 3 secondary schools. In each school, video recordings of Mathematics, English and Science lessons were made. Interviews with Head Teachers and teachers whose lessons were recorded were carried out. Some pupils were also interviewed.

From the baseline data, some preliminary observations can already be made about the nature of classroom interaction. First, classroom talk is teacher-dominated, especially when the language of instruction is English. Secondly, a good number of teachers are not competent enough to teach through the medium of English. Thirdly, learners are not comfortable engaging with textbooks. Fourthly, boys tend to be more active in the classroom than girls, and because of this, teachers tend to give more opportunities for answering questions to boys, thus reinforcing the view that girls are less capable than boys.

After a detailed analysis of the baseline data, action research involving some teachers in four sample schools will be carried out with the view to undertaking interventions to address the challenges identified above. Some of these interventions might be:

- Discussing with teachers how to provide reading and writing support to their pupils both in Kiswahili and English.

- Improving the way teachers elicit responses and give feedback during lessons.

- Increasing the number of pair/group-work events and making group-work more efficient and meaningful.

- Devising strategies to encourage girls to be more active in class.

- Looking at ways of involving the local community in supporting school activities, and making school literacy relevant to community concerns.

Within the framework of linguistic citizenship (Stroud, 2001), efficient and effective literacy programmes linked to communities will empower pupils and their communities to better understand their environment and therefore lead to better health and increased production. It is envisaged that bilingual programmes that take into consideration learners' first language and how to build on the first language competence will lead to more effective acquisition of subject knowledge, and therefore better quality education (EdQual RPC, 2006).

The following expected outcomes of the Language and Literacy Project are relevant to the concerns of linguistic citizenship:

- New teaching and learning materials for literacy development in both Kiswahili and English.

- Teacher development programmes aimed at helping teachers realize the link between subject knowledge and the language in which that knowledge is delivered.

- Community involvement in school literacy activities by creating and piloting programmes that link school knowledge to practical application at home.

- Literate pupils at the end of primary education, who can use the education gained to improve their standard of living.

- Better access to subject knowledge because of increased language competence.

- Community use of knowledge generated in schools.

8.   Conclusion

From what is said above, it is clear that linguistic rights can neither be "given" nor imposed by the state. We have seen that in South Africa, with the best intentions of the state, enshrining the 11 official languages in the constitution has not done much to empower the indigenous languages. English remains the most powerful language. We have also seen that in Tanzania the emergence of English medium primary schools can be seen as a reaction to LHR based initiative by the state to "give" linguistic rights to citizens. However, the "right" to use Kiswahili is in a way being rejected not because Tanzanians don't want Kiswahili, but because the whole educational package is seen as inadequate for the needs of the citizens. It has been suggested that the on-going Language and Literacy Project in Tanzania is an attempt to empower people by involving communities in literacy activities within the linguistic citizenship theoretical framework.

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