Language of Instruction in Tanzania and South Africa – Highlights from a Project

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This book is based on chapters in a series of four books from the first five years (2002-2006) of the Language of Instruction in Tanzania and South Africa (LOITASA) project. LOITASA is a NUFU-funded (Norwegian University Fund) project which began in January 2002 and will continue through to the end of 2011. The chapters reflect the state of the research at the end of the first five years of LOITASA in 2006 and were selected by reviewers independent of the project.

The selection of chapters brought together bring to the forefront the dilemmas facing developing countries as they seek to position themselves in an increasingly interconnected global system, while at the same time maintaining a sense of national and regional identity. The chapters in this collection reflect both positive outcomes when the medium of instruction is a widely-known language as well as the challenges of mother tongue instruction in countries where historically a powerful language like English has dominated.

The four LOITASA books in this series from which the chapters in this book are drawn are:

1. Language of instruction in Tanzania and South Africa (LOITASA) published by E & D Ltd, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania
2. Researching the language of instruction in Tanzania and South Africa published by African Minds, Cape Town South Africa and
4. Focus on fresh data on the language of instruction debate in Tanzania and South Africa published by African Minds, Cape Town, South Africa.

All four books are edited by Birgit Brock-Utne, the Norwegian project leader of the LOITASA project; Zubeida Desai, the South African project leader and Martha Qorro, who is on the project steering committee in Tanzania.
Language of Instruction in Tanzania and South Africa – Highlights from a Project
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A Diversity of Voices
Volume 5

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Comparative and International Education: A Diversity of Voices aims to provide a comprehensive range of titles, making available to readers work from across the comparative and international education research community. Authors will represent as broad a range of voices as possible, from geographic, cultural and ideological standpoints. The editors are making a conscious effort to disseminate the work of newer scholars as well as that of well-established writers. The series includes authored books and edited works focusing upon current issues and controversies in a field that is undergoing changes as profound as the geopolitical and economic forces that are reshaping our worlds. The series aims to provide books which present new work, in which the range of methodologies associated with comparative education and international education are both exemplified and opened up for debate. As the series develops, it is intended that new writers from settings and locations not frequently part of the English language discourse will find a place in the list.
Language of Instruction in Tanzania and South Africa – Highlights from a Project

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1. ENGLISH AS LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION IN AFRICA

Policy, Power and Practice

This is a book about the choice of language of instruction in two southern African countries: Tanzania and South Africa. The chapters stem from a continuing project, Language of Instruction in Tanzania and South Africa (LOITASA). While the focus of the study is the efficacy of language of instruction, it would be a mistake to read this book as analysing the results of a simple comparison of the use of English, a second/foreign language, as language of instruction, with the use of mother tongue or dominant African national languages. Deeply embedded in the text are themes of policy, politics, concerns with equity, and an insight into the confused and confusing discourse on quality in education. The language of instruction, particularly in post-colonial countries with numerous indigenous languages, is a strongly contested issue. The papers in this collection reflect positive outcomes that can be realised when the medium of instruction is in the mother tongue of the students. Some chapters also problematise the issue, illustrating challenges of mother tongue instruction in a country where traditionally a powerful world language like English has been the norm.

THE LOITASA PROJECT

The Language of Instruction in Tanzania and South Africa (LOITASA) proposal was developed in Bagamoyo, Tanzania in 2000. Harold Herman (2008, 2009), who was present when the project was born, has described the start and the development of the project. He writes about the “spirit of Bagamoyo”. The project runs from 2002 to 2012 and is funded by NUFU (the Norwegian Programme for Development, Research and Education) and includes partners from the University of Western Cape (UWC) in South Africa, the University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM) in Tanzania and the University of Oslo (UiO) in Norway. The first phase ran from 2002 through 2006: a description of the project three years after its start can be found, written by Zubeida Desai (2006), the project leader from South Africa. Four books were produced in this period (see Brock-Utne et al. (eds) 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006). Concurrent with the first phase of the project (2002 through 2006) there were four other NUFU projects dealing with languages and education in Africa at the
University of Oslo, three in the Faculty of Humanities and two in the Faculty of Education. The five project leaders organised a joint conference in June 2006 called Languages and Education in Africa (Brock-Utne & Skattum 2009).

This book is based on chapters from the four Phase 1 books. The chapters have been selected by reviewers outside the project, assessing the quality of the chapters as well as their contribution to a book which could stand on its own giving readers an insight into an exciting research project in Africa. The contributions reflect the state of the research at the end of the first stage of LOITASA, in 2007.

The second phase of LOITASA runs from 2007 to 2012. One book has been produced from this second phase (Qorro et al. (eds) 2008) and a second book – the sixth LOITASA book – is currently being editing (Desai et al. (eds) 2010).2

The NUUF projects always include both a capacity-building side and a research component. The capacity-building is taken care of by having younger researchers work in cooperation with more experienced researchers. Almost 30 students have written their master theses connected to the LOITASA project. The first phase of the project also led to four doctoral theses (Holmarssdotter 2005; Nomlomo 2007; Mwinsheikhe 2007; Vuzo 2007).

The research component of LOITASA comprises two parts, a descriptive/analytical part and an experimental part. In the descriptive/analytical part the language policies of the two countries as well as classroom practices are described and analysed. The experimental study was planned as a set of controlled interventions in both primary and secondary school classrooms to observe the efficacy of instruction in a common curriculum, in English and in local language. In South Africa, student performance in two schools was studied over three years, as cohorts of students moved through Grade 4 to Grade 6. The subjects were Science and Geography, and the languages of instruction were English and isiXhosa. A similar study planned to go on in Form I and Form II of secondary school in Tanzania with English and Kiswahili did not proceed as planned, due to lack of ministry permission. Instead, a shorter three-month study in Form I in Tanzania took place (Mwinsheikhe 2007; Nomlomo 2007; Brock-Utne 2007) with research clearance from the University of Dar es Salaam.

The plan to implement longitudinal control comparison studies in two countries was ambitious. It is rare to see this approach outside the sanitised context of the laboratory, and not very narrowly implemented. To take classes in two schools in each of the two countries and in two core subject areas of the curriculum has provided insights not only into the substantive focus of the project, but also into the ways in which governmental policy and ethical issues impinge directly on what is possible and what is not.

The project, in its implementation, speaks to the complexities of conducting research in school systems. The need to reconcile system priorities and policies with the foci and methodologies of change-orientated research cannot always be fully resolved. Thus, in this case, the secondary school component planned for Tanzania was radically restructured in order to gain approval and access to the schools and their teachers. The problem is both an ethical and a political one.
THE EFFICACY OF TEACHING AND TESTING IN NATIVE OR FOREIGN LANGUAGE

The advantages of providing education, particularly in the initial years of schooling in the mother tongue have been well documented (Cummins 2000; Cummins n.d.; iteachilearn website; Baker 2000; & Skutnabb-Kangas 2000; among others). Skutnabb-Kangas (2006); Phillipson (1992, 2009) and Skutnabb-Kangas, Phillipson, Mohanty & Panda (in press) strongly advocate that education in one’s mother tongue is a linguistic human right. Despite all the evidence to the contrary and the serious equity arguments supporting mother tongue medium of instruction, educational linguistic policy has tended to favour powerful majority languages at the expense of indigenous tongues (Ricento 2006; Tollefson 2006). Such has been the case especially in post-colonial nations.

Cummins has often argued for bilingual education and the importance of mother-tongue instruction in the context of areas such as the southwestern United States where many children speak Spanish as a home language but where linguistic policies dictate unilingual English education. He notes that “children perform better in schools when the school effectively teaches the mother tongue and, where appropriate, develops literacy in that language” (iteachilearn website, n.d.). Although the context of the LOITASA studies is different, the argument holds. Children should not be forced to learn in a language that they do not understand well. As mentioned above, in Tanzania, the Ministry of Education did not permit the bilingual English Kiswahili study to be carried out over three years in two secondary schools, although a three-month project was approved. This shows the official resistance even to research on possible benefits of mother-tongue instruction. In the South African context, it is notable that despite the fact that since the end of Apartheid, 11 official languages have been recognised, nevertheless, it is still very difficult to offer education in the local mother tongue. Many still promote education in English as a guarantee of success in the globalised world where English has rapidly assumed the role of lingua franca especially in the business domain. The lack of resources in the various mother tongues has also been cited as an excuse not to use the mother tongue as the medium of instruction. Yet, in southeast Asia, as Kosonen reports (Kosonen 2002, 2004, 2005, 2007, in press) developing countries like Cambodia and Vietnam are making progress in providing at least early education in some of the many languages spoken in the area in addition to the national language.

Education practices in post-colonial countries coupled with powerful economic incentives to privilege English as the language of instruction made it difficult to promote mother tongue instruction, research findings notwithstanding. The papers in this volume derived from the LOITASA project offer insights into validation of mother tongue instruction.

The selection of chapters brought together here not only report on the work to date. They also bring to the forefront the dilemmas facing developing countries, as they seek to position themselves in the increasingly interconnected global economic system, while at the same time maintaining a sense of national and regional identity.
Within the context of the UNESCO drive for Education For All, and in the aftermath of years of the educational priorities of the World Bank and of the International Monetary Fund, the concern must be on Quality Education for All. The problem is: What constitutes such an education, and what is its character?

This concern goes beyond the content of the curriculum, as this book graphically expresses. In the world of post-colonial developing countries, the issue of language has emerged as a critical dimension (see Brock-Utne & Hopson (eds) 2005), as these countries grapple with concerns of identity, of equity and of their place in the economic world. The bilingual models developed in the industrialised countries for children from immigrant and minority populations cannot readily be transferred to the majority populations of Africans (Prah & Brock-Utne (eds) 2009).

QUALITY OF INSTRUCTION: ASSESSMENT AND PEDAGOGY

The work represented here turns first to the efficacy of English as the language of instruction in Tanzania and in South Africa. Brock-Utne and Desai have as a subtext the centrality of writing in the assessment process of students, and the validity threat which arises in gauging student knowledge and competence when the ability to express oneself in a language is not sufficiently developed. The examples provide a poignant insight into the problem. This raises the question of the validity of the measurement procedures, when the capacity to read and to write in a language can easily mask the true capabilities of students in the subjects putatively being assessed.

The issue of test validity arises again in Malekela’s contribution, as too does the concern with teachers’ capacity to teach in correct English. The dominance of Kiswahili in the general community contrasts with, and fails to underpin, the use of English in the schools. The emphasis on English appears to have a deleterious influence on the development in Kiswahili, particularly among rural children for whom a third language is that of the home. The English Only rule, which is applied to verbal communication in schools – perhaps more honoured by its breach than by its effective implementation – exacerbates the problem.

The testing problem becomes no less concerning when trying to compare the efficacy of teaching in local language or in English within a country. Langenhoven points to the complexity of interpreting the results of tests when comparing the languages of instruction within a country. The importance of the nature and timing of the assessment in order to get past the literacy within the language and to actually test the concepts relevant to the subject for which the test was constructed is central. If the student has not been given sufficient time to master the language of the test, then the validity of the instrument becomes at best compromised.

Qorro’s research indicates that students entering Form I in Tanzanian secondary schools are not sufficiently competent in English to handle the language of the curriculum. They are, on the other hand, reasonably good at written communication in Kiswahili. Unfortunately, the English Only policy is predicated upon outmoded theories of second/foreign language acquisition, which discouraged code-switching
and failed to recognise the nexus between improved first language competence and the successful development of a foreign language. Quality of instruction in English is further hampered by the lack of physical facilities, of curricular materials and of time.

Brock-Utne writes of the issue of code-switching in classrooms in Tanzania where the language of instruction is supposed to be English. In reality most teachers use code-switching. If they speak in English only, it is like “teaching dead stones” as one of the teachers says. The problems of chorus teaching, rote learning and recitation are, as Brock-Utne makes clear, reinforced by the limitations of teacher and student competence in the language of instruction. Nomlomo also observes that the linguistic fluency of teachers in the black townships in South Africa and their content knowledge are major stumbling blocks in moving away from a transmission model of pedagogy.

The problem is not confined to the primary and secondary schools: Galabawa and Senkoro point to the lack of the ability of teachers and of students at the university level, in Tanzania to communicate with any level of sophistication in English, noting there too a concomitant reinforcement of a knowledge transmission model of pedagogy, and the lack of the development of critical thinking in relation to the content of their studies on the part of students.

POLICY ISSUES

The concern with language of instruction is no mere academic exercise. The rapid expansion in the deregulation of trade through the removal of protectionist barriers, largely under the aegis of the World Trade Organisation, and also through regional and bi-lateral agreements, has been paralleled by a growth in concern about facility in the languages of trade and of power. In particular, English has become the focus of concern of many countries.

This preoccupation is evident in countries in the north as well as in the south, as recent observations in Malaysia and in France make clear. The Malaysian government introduced a comprehensive economic plan under which it was intended that the country should become a major information technology centre in southeast Asia. The plan included huge infrastructure investment, in the establishment of a new capital, Putrajaya, and a conjoined technology-driven city, Cyberjaya. Education policy is fully integrated into this approach, and the implications have been profound across the whole span of schooling. On the argument that the international language of the new technologies is English and that the proportion of fluent English speakers had fallen, the decision was made in 2003 by Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammed that all students should be taught in English, in Mathematics and Science. In July 2009 the Associated Press (New York Times, Asia Pacific) reported that Malaysia said on 8 July that it would abandon the use of English to teach Mathematics and Science. Bahasa Malay would be reinstated in Malay schools starting in 2012, as teaching in English caused academic results in those subjects to slip, Education Minister Muhyiddin Yasin said (Prah & Brock-Utne 2009: 2)
In another indicator of the perceived power of English, the French Minister of Education recently controversially asserted that every French student should become proficient in English as their second language. The argument was an economic one. There is, however, no plan for introducing English as the language of instruction in France. There is, of course, a vast difference between learning a foreign language as a subject and having it as a language of instruction. In the latter case it becomes a barrier to knowledge.

POLITICS: COLONIAL PASTS AND NATIONAL IDENTITIES

In the cases of Tanzania and South Africa, there is another compelling reason that English has a history of being a language of instruction. It is the language of the colonial power from the 19th century, and was a common second (or third … ) language for the elites in countries with a multitude of indigenous tongues. Most Africans are multilingual but in African languages (Prah & Brock-Utne (eds) 2009). In the so-called anglophone Africa less than 5% of the population speak English. In “francophone” Africa about 5% master French. Africa is becoming increasingly more multilingual, but in African languages (Prah 2009).

Students in the so-called anglophone Africa are asked to regard English as a second language, which it normally is in terms of its legal status. However, effectively English is a foreign language for many, who are exposed to it almost exclusively at school. This is particularly so in rural areas.

Both South Africa and Tanzania have emerged from long periods as colonies within the British Empire and more recently as members of the British Commonweal of Nations. This backdrop is significant in the location of the English language in the psyche of these societies: on the one hand, as the marker of a past of political subjugation, and on the other as a key to power and a better life. This tension has deepened in recent years as the so-called global economy, centred on advances in information and communications technology, has seemed to privilege English as the emergent lingua franca of the new economic world.

By situating the language debate in the context of grappling with colonial pasts and governmental desires for unifying institutions – including language – Kadeghe bases an argument for the role of English at the intersection of reaction to cultural imperialism and the backlash through cultural nationalism with pressures for location in the modern world with its languages of power.

The ideological power of English and its role in social stratification is at the heart of Rubagumya’s contribution. Linguistic capital and linguistic imperialism come into a dance, as beliefs based upon colonial experience interplay with the perceived socioeconomic power derived by access to English drives parents’ aspirations for their children. The false consciousness of parents in their belief that only through education in English can upward mobility and the attainment of a good life be achieved is counterbalanced by a reality in which the bulk of teachers are not themselves sufficiently competent to teach in English. Interestingly, Galabawa and Senkoro observed that, at the secondary level, rural parents did not see the relevance or usefulness of fluency in English to the realistic life paths of their children.
Galabawa and Senkoro argue that, in Tanzania, the language of instruction at the university ought to be Kiswahili, but historical pressures from the earlier colonial powers as well as pressure from the elites work in the direction of retaining English. An audit report from the University of Dar es Salaam mentions that students have great difficulties studying in English but still concludes that English must be retained since it is the language of information and computer technology. A recent study connected to the second phase of the LOITASA project has, however, shown that the students most advanced in computer technology are also those who use Kiswahili the most, in text messages, chat or for reading newspapers in Kiswahili on the Internet. They are also the ones who use the Kiswahili versions of Word, Excel and Power Point the most and they teach both fellow students and academic staff to use these versions (Halvorsen 2009).

Mahlalela and Heugh write of the rise and fall of African Language instruction in South Africa, from the 1970s. The chapter is strangely silent on the collapse of Apartheid in relation to the later history. Echoing Brock-Utne, Mahlalela and Heugh point to the terminology development in the African Languages in the 1970s. While the policy of teaching in black schools in native languages contributed to Balkanisation in the Homeland environments of the 1960s, the argument is mounted that, whilst mistakes have been made, there is ample evidence that it is possible – and desirable – to persist in the successful continuing development of African languages to accommodate modern concepts from Mathematics, the Sciences and other disciplines.

The relation of language of instruction and the organic development of local languages is countered to a degree by Kadeghe’s concern with the problem of distortion of meaning in translation, in particular when neologisms are needed to be created to deal with, for example, scientific concepts developed in a European linguistic setting. Clearly, words and concepts do not undergo untransformed nuances of meaning as they move between languages. To further complicate matters, the distinction between technical and common language is not peculiar to any language: for example, in English, the concept behind the use of the term “reliable” in relation to describing the quality of a test is quite different to its meaning in common parlance or when referring to the word of a witness in court.

Brock-Utne draws attention to the restraining influence of policies such as using English as the language of instruction in Tanzania for the development of the Kiswahili language and its ability to grow and incorporate new concepts. A language can only grow as an academic language, she argues, if it is being used at the highest levels of teaching and learning.

Beyond the classroom, the social ramifications of reliance on English are widespread: The Tanzanian lawyer and human rights advocate Haroub Othman (2009) writes about the injustice done to the people of Tanzania when the laws are written and the verdict in a law case given in English, a language most Tanzanians do not understand.

In striving to understand the power of English to so dominate the policies concerning language of instruction, Galabawa looks backward to the colonial language of wider communication: that of the colonial power, be it English, Spanish
or Portuguese. Flowing from this history, policies of language of instruction have been driven by rationales other than that of attaining the most effective education for all, as might be measured by the maximal conceptual and character development of the student. Carnoy’s characterisations of competitiveness, and financial and equity considerations are invoked to examine the mythology of English’s power to deliver a better life and employment for all in the face of the objective realities of rural Tanzania.

CONCERNS WITH EQUITY: QUALITY AND EDUCATION FOR ALL

The policies as to language of instruction are being made within the context of the UNESCO Education For All (EFA) initiative. One of the intractable problems with EFA is the issue of quality: both in comparative terms across systems, and as it relates to the quality of education required by a particular country and its society.

Nomlomo picks up on these colonial and Apartheid echoes, with the primacy of fluency in English (and Afrikaans) for success. In particular, the implications for the attainment of a quality education for all students are brought home here: the immersion approach leads to a double jeopardy in linguistic fluency for those students for whom the language of the classroom is not that of the home. Not only can parents not help with the language, but they are equally unable to assist their children in the substantive content of the various subjects. The hope, they observe, is in greater emphasis on mother tongue instruction in South Africa.

NOTES

1 see http://www.siu.no/en/Programme-overview/The-NUFU-programme
2 see http://www.loitasa.org

REFERENCES


2. EXPRESSING ONEWSELF THROUGH WRITING – A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF LEARNERS’ WRITING SKILLS IN TANZANIA AND SOUTH AFRICA

INTRODUCTION

Most of the students do not understand...we have to develop classroom management strategies like code-switching and translation ... students fail, not because they are dull but because they have a barrier in their use and understanding of the English language ... (secondary school teacher in Tanzania quoted by Vuzo 2002: 72)

The first time the authors of this chapter met was at the 1999 Oxford conference on Education and Development in a session on the role of African languages in education. Zubeida Desai (1999) gave examples from her research in South African classrooms whilst Birgit Brock-Utne, who gave one of the key-note speeches at that conference (Brock-Utne 1999, 2001), in a joint session with Desai gave examples from her research, her experiences as a supervisor of Tanzanian student teachers (Brock-Utne 2000) and the research of her students in Tanzanian secondary schools. Our experiences had very much in common. We agreed on the type of research needed in African classrooms and what type of research was not needed.

The type of research we thought was not needed was the kind consisting of questionnaires or interviews of students and teachers about the language of instruction they would prefer. We know the answers. The majority of teachers and students would say that they prefer the so-called international (in this case English) language to continue as the language of instruction. They will say this even though they can hardly understand what is being said and are unable to express themselves in English.

We agreed that types of studies needed were those that showed the actual competence of students in the language of instruction. Other, and even more important types of studies, would be those which, on an experimental basis, showed the results students would obtain if they were allowed to study in the language they normally speak. We are happy to say that we have just embarked on the last type of study.1 Yet we have also made some progress in the first type of studies. In this chapter we describe the actual competencies of some South African and Tanzanian students in expressing themselves in writing using the official language of instruction for their grade versus using a language that they are more proficient in and hear around them every day.

B. Brock-Utne et al. (eds), Language of Instruction in Tanzania and South Africa – Highlights from a Project, pp 11–31.
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The idea for this study came from Zubeida. In October 1998, as part of her doctoral study, she administered three written tasks to two classes of isiXhosa-speaking Grade 4 and Grade 7 students. The purpose of administering the three different writing tasks was to explore the students’ proficiencies in both English and isiXhosa in order to see whether they had greater proficiency in their primary language, isiXhosa, or not. The tasks administered were assessed on the basis of criteria developed by Zubeida and triangulated by a reference group set up for the purpose. The first task was a narrative task based on a set of pictures in an envelope provided to students. They had to arrange the pictures sequentially, then write two stories, one in isiXhosa and one in English, based on the six pictures. The two versions were not written on the same day. The one class in each grade wrote the isiXhosa story first, whilst the other wrote the English story first. There was a day between each version. The second task was a reading comprehension task based on an extract dealing with content matter from subjects they were learning at school. The Grade 4 learners had a passage dealing with caring for their teeth from their hygiene curriculum, whilst the Grade 7 learners were given an extract dealing with materials covered in their Geography syllabus about malnutrition. The third task was an expository written task where students were asked to give their opinions on a particular topic. All the tasks were translated into isiXhosa by a colleague of Zubeida’s. For the purposes of this comparative chapter, however, the authors only focused on the first task, the narrative piece of writing based on the pictures.

Being fascinated by the narrative task, and the results coming out of the study, Birgit Brock-Utne decided to make a follow-up of the cartoon story in Tanzania. She was able to recruit two Tanzanian master’s students as research assistants for this job. They used the same cartoon story as Desai had used as part of the empirical work on their master’s theses. Another Tanzanian student made a similar study in Zanzibar, using a different cartoon. The chapter gives some rather telling examples first from South Africa, then from Tanzania and makes some comparisons at the end. The examples showed the following results.

School X where Desai conducted her research with Grade 4 and Grade 7 students is situated in Khayelitsha, a sprawling African township just beyond Cape Town International Airport. The population is predominantly isiXhosa-speaking. The students all have isiXhosa as their home language. So do their teachers. According to the Deputy Principal the same position prevails in all the other classes. Despite this linguistic composition at School X and the environment in which it is located, the school decided in 1995 to bring forward the introduction of English as a medium from Grade 5 to Grade 6. The reason given to Desai by the Deputy Principal and the teachers for this step was the fact that parents were taking their children out of African township schools and sending them to the formally coloured schools because they wanted them to use English as a language of instruction earlier. School X did not want to lose its quota of teachers through low pupil enrolments and therefore decided to introduce English as a medium earlier. This means that officially students would have to do all their written work in English from Grade 4 onwards, except during the isiXhosa subject classes.
The decision to focus on written tasks was deliberate. Much of the research on language in education in African classrooms (Peires 1994; Arthur 1993) has tended to focus on oral interaction in the classroom with a particular focus on the kind of language used by both teachers and learners. These researchers would then comment on the fact that very little, if any, English was used in the classrooms and would come to the conclusion that the medium was actually an African language rather than English. The kind of English language used in the classroom, however, only emerges when it comes to literacy practices (if that is the most appropriate word to describe what happens in such classrooms) – the texts available in class and the written work by both teachers and learners are, and are required to be, in English only. It was customary for teachers in the township schools to teach predominantly in the relevant African language, then write notes in English on the board which are directly extracted from the subject-particular textbook. The learners would then dutifully copy these notes into their books. If any subject adviser or inspector or parent were to examine the learners’ books, they would see the requisite English required by the language policy.

It is precisely for this reason that we have deliberately chosen to examine writing tasks because learners are generally assessed on their writing abilities, and in the case of the schools chosen in the South African as well as the Tanzanian cases, their ability to write in English, specifically.
Zubeida Desai decided to start off with a fairly simple task, not content-subject based, as she thought it might reflect more accurately learners’ current levels of proficiency in isiXhosa and English. Pupils in both Grades 4 and 7 were given a set of six pictures (Figure 1) in an envelope. They had to arrange the pictures in such a way that they told a story. Pupils were then asked to write a story, first in isiXhosa and then in English, based on the six pictures. The task was translated into isiXhosa by a isiXhosa-speaking colleague of Desai’s who accompanied her to the school on the day the pupils were given the task.

We here want to show you some of the learners’ scripts in both English and isiXhosa. The isiXhosa-speaking colleague made a literal translation of the isiXhosa stories into English to highlight the contrast in proficiency in the two languages. Punctuation and capitalisation were largely absent from the isiXhosa version as well, but these have been inserted into the literal translation for easier reading.

As the samples below show, the English stories of the Grade 4 pupils were largely incomprehensible and often not even linked to the pictures, whilst the isiXhosa version was much more clearly expressed though in a descriptive, rather than narrative, mode. This was the case with all the scripts. Although the English used by the Grade 7 learners was markedly better, it still did not compare favourably with their isiXhosa. On being asked in isiXhosa how they experienced the task, all pupils said that they enjoyed the task but simply did not have the proficiency in English to express themselves clearly. We have here chosen three scripts randomly from the pile of Grade 4 scripts and two from the Grade 7 scripts to illustrate the point made above about learners’ proficiencies in isiXhosa and in English. For the Grade 4 scripts we will start off with giving the first example also in the isiXhosa version, followed by the literal translation from isiXhosa into English, and then the English version. For the rest of the examples in Grade 4 and for the examples in Grade 7 we only give the literal translation from isiXhosa into English, and then the English version.

**SAMPLE 1 – GRADE 4**

*Written in isiXhosa*

Kwakukho utata waza wabeka ibhokisi yakhe phantsi encokola notata wakhe kwasukha kwathi gqi omnye ubhuti wathatha ibhoks yala tata wabaleka waleqwa ngumntwana omnye wakhalisa impempe omnye emkhemba wabaleka wayo kuqabela imoto wayiqhuba kakhu lu abanye bavula ibhokisi kwavela inyoka wathuswa yinyoka kwade kwathaka idimasi.

*Literal Translation from isiXhosa*

There was a father (old man) who put his box down, conversing with his father. Then a certain young man (brother) appeared and took that old man’s box and ran away. He was chased by a child and the one blew a whistle, and the other one pointed at him. He ran away with it and got into the car and drove very fast. The others opened the box and a big snake. The other was shocked by the snake and his sunglasses fell down.
Once upon a time
Long long ago
Ly Buter ueatsha fourboy late my father
I taket my tyesi
I goiu my father is goiu boeke
Look my boy

SAMPLE 2 – GRADE 4

Literal Translation from isiXhosa

There was a young man (brother) and a child who went to an airport. When they arrived there was a father (old man) who was carrying a basket. The child talked to this father while the young man took the basket. They ran away with it. He called a policeman. The policeman didn’t hear him. They went away with it. They opened it and a big snake appeared. The young man was shocked. The sunglasses fell down. The child was also shocked.

SAMPLE 3 – GRADE 4

Literal Translation from isiXhosa

One father is standing and looking away. Another father arrived with a child and they stood. Then this child spoke with that father. Then, the other took the basket and ran away with it. That child also ran. That father was shocked and looked behind. No! There is no basket. He saw it. There they ran. He shouted, “Hey”. There, they are in the car, going away. They arrived at a certain place, and they opened that basket. They opened it and a snake appeared.
SAMPLE 4 – GRADE 7

**Literal Translation from isiXhosa:**

There was an old man who was going with his friend. This old man looked like a thief. There was a man who had put his suitcases down, one behind and the other one next to him. This man was looking at a distance, thinking. The short friend of this thief deceived this man by talking to him, while the other one took the suitcase. He ran away and the other one also ran. Then this man shouted, calling them and they ran very fast. The security officer appeared – blowing a whistle.

They ran to the car with this box while the owner of the box was pointing at them. They drove the car and put it next to the trees, and they got out of the car. They put it down and opened it, and a big snake appeared. The sun glasses fell off their eyes, and the hats were blown up. They thought that it was money.

**Written in English**

The farther they still handle with great care new town zoo. And Mr Alisingh they a stand and thinking. And this father they take this handle and Mr Alisingh they talk and son. And this farther they take this handle and the go away. And this farther and this son they running fast and security they see. And this farther and this son they go away and his car. They outside of this car they put down this handle and see this is a snake.

SAMPLE 5 – GRADE 7

**Literal Translation from isiXhosa**

There was an old man who had put his basket and bag.

1) He was with one old man and one child.
2) This old man had put his things down and spoke to that child. Now that old man who was going with that child took the old man’s basket who is speaking with that child.
3) There is a policeman who was on duty and the old man who was showing that policeman blew the whistle.
4) They drove a car and chased him.
5) That old man who was showing that policeman raised his two hands. The man and that child stood next to the airport.
6) When they were opening the basket they saw a very big snake. That old man and that child were shocked. They cried. The hat and spectacles of the old man were taken off.

**Written in English**

They was fathers and the boy father and boy.

1) take the bag and martji
2) This father talk the boy father take the bag we go to airport.
3) Father and boy we running and take the bag.
EXPRESSING ONESELF THROUGH WRITING

4) This police we talk pepar they father and boy we running.
5) Police and father cotin side the car the car working te spid.
6) Father and boy sit down the you see the bag father and boy open the bag you see the snake we going father and boy.

SOME COMMENTS ON THE SAMPLES

isiXhosa Version
- Learners are able to reflect what is happening in the pictures fairly accurately.
- Sentences are complex. In Grade 7 learners are also writing more.
- There is evidence of good vocabulary – “conversing”; “appeared”; “shocked”.
- In sample 3 there is evidence of direct speech – “hey”.
- Very few grammatical and spelling errors.
- Versions are largely in descriptive mode – learners in both grades have not yet mastered the narrative mode.
- Learners in both grades use the demonstrative pronoun “this” inappropriately.
- Learners have not yet mastered the use of cohesive devices.

English Version
- Learners are struggling to express themselves in English in Grade 4.
- Sample 1 has very little bearing on the pictures.
- The “story” aspect is completely lost in the English version.
- Spelling and grammatical errors abound.
- Sentences are generally very short.
- Samples show learners’ difficulty in forming sentences.
- Although there is an improvement in Grade 7, the learners’ proficiency is nowhere near the requirements for using it as sole medium of instruction.

The Results of the Narrative Task for both Grades

Comments on the results of Grade 4a:
1. All students did better in isiXhosa than in English.
2. Only seven of the 35 students passed the English task, that is, scored five or more marks out of ten possible.
3. Thirty-three of the 35 students passed the isiXhosa task, that is scored five or more marks out of ten possible.
4. The two students who failed the isiXhosa task scored more than the average class mark for the English task.
5. There were a few students who had extremely bad results in English, but did very well in isiXhosa.
6. Most of the students who did well in English, also did well in isiXhosa.

With regard to the results for Grade 4b the following needs mentioning:
1. The results show generally a similar pattern to that for 4a.
2. Only ten of the 38 students passed the English task.
3. 32 of the 38 students passed the isiXhosa task.
4. The six students who failed the isiXhosa task scored more than the average class mark for the English task.
5. The three students who obtained zero for the English task passed the isiXhosa task.
6. Students who obtained the same mark in English showed a wide variety of competence in isiXhosa, ranging from five to eight marks out of ten. This pattern repeats itself at other areas in the graph.
7. Most of the students who did well in English also did well in isiXhosa.

Comments on the Results of Grade 7

We wish to highlight the following features of the results for the narrative task for 7a:
1. All 24 students passed the narrative writing task in isiXhosa and did so reasonably well.
2. Less than 50% (11 of the 24) of the students passed the same task in English.
3. Those students who did well in English normally did well in isiXhosa but the opposite, as in the case of Grade 4 students, is again not true.
4. Compared to the Grade 4 results for the same task, it is clear that the results for the narrative writing task in Grade 7 were not much different. Desai used the same tasks and the same marking criteria for both Grade 4 and Grade 7, but expected more from the Grade 7 students than from the Grade 4 students. Although the Grade 7 students did better in both the English and isiXhosa tasks in terms of the class average than the Grade 4 students, neither class achieved an average score that was above 50%.

The results for Grade 7b tell more or less the same story as for 7a. It appears as if 7a performed slightly better than 7b. Two students failed the isiXhosa narrative writing task in 7b whilst all the 25 students in 7a passed the narrative writing task in isiXhosa. Only 32% of the 25 students in 7b passed the narrative writing task in English whilst almost 50% of the students succeeded in doing so in 7a.

What makes such evidence very worrying is that School X is not unique. There are many such schools throughout South Africa as the Threshold Project conducted in the former Bophuthatswana so ably illustrated (Macdonald 1990). Often, researchers are advised against single-case studies because the findings of such studies might not be applicable to other situations. Such criticisms might be levelled at this particular study. There is, however, an issue that needs to be raised here. As a teacher/academic for the past 30 years in South Africa, Zubeida Desai has a fairly good understanding of what is happening in South African, and in particular, Western Cape classrooms. It is such understanding that makes her realise that this study is not unique to School X. A similar task to a reading comprehension task used by Desai was administered as part of the Norwegian Research Council (NFR) project (see endnote 1) in three township primary schools in the Western Cape and produced similar results (see Holmarsdottir 2001; Brock-Utne & Holmarsdottir 2003).
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UNDERSTANDING OF ENGLISH IN TANZANIA

The same pictures making up a cartoon were given to the secondary school students in Tanzania. While English is used as a language of instruction already in the 4th Grade of primary school in South Africa, primary schooling in Tanzania is conducted in Kiswahili. English is taught as a subject in primary school but is then meant to be used as the language of instruction from the beginning of Form I in secondary school. We therefore decided to have the cartoon test in Form I, which, since it is the first year that the students have to study through a foreign medium, can be compared to the Grade 4 students of Desai’s sample in some way. We then chose Form IV which, in terms of years of exposure to English as the medium of instruction, should resemble Grade 7 in Desai’s study.

In another similar study conducted in Zanzibar Omar Mohamed Said (2003) administered a different cartoon to 20 students in Form I who had gone directly from primary to secondary school, an option which in Zanzibar is being used by high-achieving students. He administered the same cartoon to 20 students from the Orientation Secondary Course (OSC) programme – a one-year programme between primary and secondary school being offered in Zanzibar to help the not-so-high achieving students to master studying through the English medium in secondary school.

In the study conducted by Mwajuma Siama Vuzo we also decided to include students in Form VI since these students have had English as the language of instruction for six years and should be ready to enter the university. The students in the Vuzo and Mkwizu studies in Tanzania were not asked to arrange the pictures in a sequence. That had already been done for them. They were just asked to describe the story told through the cartoon, first in Kiswahili and later in English.

In the study conducted by Vuzo (2002a, 2000b) a total of 40 students participated, girls slightly outnumbering boys. In the study conducted by Mary Alphan Mkwizu (2002, 2003) a total of 20 secondary school students participated, half of the students from a rural area and half from an urban area.

The findings of these two studies, including 60 secondary school students in mainland Tanzania and 120 essays, largely coincided with those of South Africa despite the higher grade level in Tanzania. Some students’ English passages were largely incomprehensible. There were many grammatical errors and spelling mistakes. A lack of connection between the picture and the story presented was demonstrated in some of the written accounts. This was especially the case in Form I.

Generally all students performed poorly in the English story. The English used by Form VI students was somewhat better than the English used by Form IV and Form I students, but the difference in the English proficiency level of the students between the different levels of secondary education was surprisingly small. Most of the scripts from students in the upper levels of secondary education showed that they still do not express themselves adequately, despite the higher number of years that they have spent using English as LOI. The differences in Kiswahili were very minimal between the grade levels of secondary education. All the students expressed themselves adequately at all grade levels in Kiswahili.
In their master’s theses, Mwajuma Vuzo (2002a) and Mary Mkwizu (2002) also made a text analysis of all the essays written on the cartoon. Aspects that Mkwizu and Vuzo put into consideration were whether there was a correlation between what the students saw in the cartoon and what they wrote. They also assessed the consistency in the flow of the story and the amount of detail the students were able to come up with depending on the language used. Other things that they assessed were the student’s grammar (tense, spelling, punctuation, sentence construction), vocabulary, meaning and clarity of the story. Readers wanting this more detailed analysis of the texts are referred to the theses by Mkwizu and Vuzo.3

For the sake of comparison with the South African study we have here chosen six scripts, two per Form, from the pile of scripts to illustrate student proficiencies in Kiswahili and English. We have here concentrated on the examples given by Vuzo (2002a, 2002b) though reference is made in the analysis part to the research conducted by Mkwizu (2002, 2003). From each Form, we have chosen the poorest and the best example. In each Form the poorest example appears first, followed by the best example. When ranking from best to poorest we have ranked according to the best version in English. For each script we have started off with the English version followed by a literal translation from Kiswahili into English of the text the same student has written on the same cartoon in Kiswahili. In the first example we also give the Kiswahili version.

SAMPLE 1 – THE POOREST EXAMPLE FROM FORM I

Written in English

One day is not mather is going to market. Balind of thit man student. I am father is going to charch and children too. the market are the Box, Beg, fotball, is money. father is big than children. one day father is going to fotball. cry when to shool.

Kiswahili Version


Literal Translation from Kiswahili

One day a certain man went to the airport with his luggage. Then there appeared one boy who told the man: Look at that plane. But he was a thief and he took the
man’s luggage. He ran to the forest and opened the bag and he saw a snake in that bag. The man started looking for his bag. Then one boy appeared and told him get into my car and I shall take you to the boy who has taken your bag. He went where the boy who stole the bag was and he found him opening the bag and he showed the man his bag and the man found that it was already open. He did not ask him why he had opened his bag but asked him to look at what he had put in the bag. The man asked him why he stole his bag. He told the boy if you wanted the bag you should have told me to give you and not steal, what if you found a dog what would you have said? And he took him to the police to be jailed.

SAMPLE 2 – THE BEST EXAMPLE FROM FORM I

Written in English

One day a man come to the airport station and his bag. He want to travel. After a short time the two men come with traveler and one men he was ask many quation, when the traveller and one man was discation, another man take a bag after take a big all state to rain. He will go away and he stoped. A short man open the bag it was a big snake inside of the bag. This is a short story about a two thief.

Literal Translation from Kiswahili

One day there was one traveller who was waiting for transport, he reached the bus stop to wait for a car. While waiting he put his luggage down. After a while there appeared two boys, one of the boys started talking to the traveller. While he was talking with the traveller, the other boy ran with the suitcase. After seeing that the other boy also ran towards his colleague. the two of them disappeared into the forest When they reached the forest they opened the case: Aah! They were surprised, there was a big snake inside the case. All of them were stunned and wanted to run. This is the short story about two thieves.

SAMPLE 3 – THE POOREST EXAMPLE FROM FORM IV

Written in English

One day they was a one man at the Airport whose name was Mr ALI SAKU. MR ALI SAKU was there in order to wait transport from there to the certain place where he want to go/travel. For a short time the thief was appear and then he can take Ali’s bag and run away with it.

After run away up to away from MR ALI, thieves was open’s the bags. So as when they already open’s, the snake was get outside the bag and then it can affect him.

So as let me saying that (thief) to get things without permision is not good for us. When you want something try to communicate with your fellow in order to be helped with him/her.
One day there was a passenger at the airport who was waiting for transport to take him where he wanted to go. This man was known by the name Mr ALLY SAKU.

After a short while at the airport, there appeared two people, a child and an old man. These people are predicted to be thieves. The child went straight away to Mr Saku to greet him meanwhile the old man succeeded in stealing the suitcase of Mr Saku. After stealing the suitcase they both ran away. A policeman tried his best to blow a whistle but they did not succeed in catching the thieves. After crossing the road, a bit far from the airport grounds, they then, started opening the suitcase so that they could share the things that were inside the suitcase. Suddenly when they opened, a huge snake appeared and attacked the old man.

From this story, we are educated that we should not have the behaviour of stealing in all our life. Stealing is not good. You can loose your life because of stealing. Hence, we are supposed to work hard so that we live and not get involved in theft. Truly, stealing is dangerous in our life. This story warns people who are thieves to stop this behaviour, as it can lead them to serious consequences. As it is seen, the thieves who stole the basket and found a snake that could harm them.

Mr Ali was a stranger at a certain country from Bombay. He arrive at airport he did not know where to go. While standing, he saw the two men who were standing behind him. Mr Ali asked for a help from the young man between these two men. The young man argued to talk and help Mr Ali but when they were talking, the other man steal Mr Ali’s box, which was left behind. Mr Ali and he ran away followed by the man who was talking with Mr Ali. Mr Ali started shouting for the help as he realise that the men were thieves and had stolen his box.

Mr Ali’s voice was held by the policeman at the airport and they start chasing them, others show the direction where the thieves are passed. One policeman at the Airport blow a whistle for the help but the thieves were run very fast towards a parked car with the box they had stole. Immediately after getting into there car, the thieves drove the car away from the airport to the hidden place where they stopped their and got out of it.

The thieves walked hurry with care towards the areas with grasses and trees since they were all want to see what was inside the box without wasting their time. They arrive at a good place for them, the young man open the box while the older man was standing still looking at what will be seen inside. As the box was opened the men did not believed their eyes as they saw something beyond their wishes. There was a big snake standing angrily and the snake was facing the older man who was forward of the box. The men were confuse as they did not know what to do with the snake.
Mr Ali from Bombay was one of the passengers who had landed at the airport. He had two bags. Since he was a visitor to that place he had to stand for sometime meanwhile at his back there were two people who were looking at him so much. Shortly one boy who was one of those people joined and started speaking to Mr Ali but this was just their plan since the other person who was with the boy stole the box belonging to Mr Ali without him noticing. The thief together with that boy started running with Mr Ali’s box, this made Mr Ali to start shouting indicating that those were thieves so that he was helped, however the thieves continued running harder. Bwana Ali’s noise was heard in the airport and security guards blew the whistle to show that there was danger and the thieves were required to surrender but the thieves proceeded forward towards a car that was parked at the side of the road.

Immediately after entering the car, the driver drove the car at a terrific speed from the scene of the incident directing towards the forest neighbouring the game park and they stopped their car after being sure that they were safe. The two boys got off the car and together went towards the game park with the box that they had stolen so that they could open it and see what was inside. Enthusiastically the small boy started opening the box meanwhile the older boy was looking carefully. Lahaula! To their surprise the boys did not believe their eyes when they saw a huge snake which was furious and angry ready to attack anything that was in front of it looking at them and them failing to decide what to do either to run and leave the huge snake or to look for a way to save their lives.

SAMPLE 5 – THE POOREST EXAMPLE FROM FORM VI

Written in English

In this story there is a person come from another country and arrive at the airport. When he wait for his friends or his relatives two peoples comes and one start to talk with him while another steal or take his bags and thus start to run. The man and police man whirsteling thief thief. The two people run and take the car out of the airport building. They drive the car for a long distance and stop the car; they opens the bags and see the big snake.

Literal Translation from Kiswahili

There was a person who had arrived at the airport and was waiting for his relatives to receive him. While the person was standing waiting, suddenly there appeared two thieves planning strategies on how they would steal from the traveller. So the thieves arranged their plan and the younger thief pretended to ask the traveller something meanwhile he was just to confuse the passenger. While he was talking to the passenger, the elder thief took the bag of the passenger and started running with it, and the other thief followed him and they both ran away very fast.

The guard at the airport blew the whistle to show that there were thieves who have stolen somebody’s bag and have run away with it. Thus the thieves succeed in disappearing with the box which was the luggage of the passenger. They used their
taxi and so they went with the taxi to a place that was hidden and they parked the
taxi and removed the box and opened it expecting to find expensive precious goods
but instead, they found a big snake, a cobra and so the thieves were terrified to see
such a big snake inside the box.

SAMPLE 6 – THE BEST EXAMPLE FROM FORM VI

Written in English

At a certain airport, there was a person who was seem like a passanger. This person
was own two cases, the greater one and smaller one. He looks to think where he
can go or how to do at that particular time.

Beside him the two person seem to discuss about the passanger. The person
were two, Man and young man. These persons of cause they discus how to stole
the cases of the passanger.

After the short discussion two persons are decided to do their discussin. The
young man go straight to the passanger and pretend to ask some question to the
passanger. While the young man ask the passanger, the Man stole great case and
run away. These thieves run straight to their car and disappear. Before their disappear,
policeman try to stop them but he fall.

Thieves reach the place which they think it is seif for their purpose. They open
the case. Imediately after opening the case, the huge snake come out from the case
and made the two to wander about the event.

Literal Translation from Kiswahili

At a certain airport there is a one person who is a passenger. This person is
thinking of a place to go. Slightly beside the office and behind this passenger there
are two people, a young person and an older person discussing.

After a short while one of them, the younger one came and started asking the
visitor. At the same time the younger one was asking some questions, the elder
person meaning the colleague started taking one of the suitcases that the visitor had
as one was big and another one was smaller.

These two people who appear to be thieves ran away and left the visitor there
very surprised. While the thieves were running a policeman started whistling to
show that the thieves had already stolen so that they could be caught. The police-
man blew the whistle in vain. The thieves succeeded in escaping and they went to a
place where they thought it was safe.

When they reached there, they opened the bag. Suddenly after opening, shortly a
huge snake came out and surprised the thieves very much.

SOME COMMENTS ON AND COMPARISONS OF THE SAMPLES

Kiswahili version
– In the Kiswahili version there was an explicit correlation between what the
student had written and what was found in the picture. All the 60 students
who participated in this exercise reflected quite clearly what is happening in the pictures.

- When we look at the six samples presented above, we see that the stories in Kiswahili are much longer and clearer, in all the samples, particularly in sample 4.

- Likewise with regard to meaning most of the students relate the meaning of the story well and select the appropriate words. Expressions have been used suitably showing creativity, which is lacking in the English stories. Example – hawakuamini macho yao – they did not believe their eyes.

- There is consistency in the flow of the stories written in Kiswahili. There is generally coherence in most stories.

- There is evidence of rich Kiswahili vocabulary, such vocabulary is lacking in the English versions of the story.

- As for grammatical ability, in the Kiswahili version sentences are well formed and have appropriate sequential organisation. Connecting words have been used creating interest and increasing the narrative flavour of the story. There is a proper sentence construction. There are also almost no grammatical and spelling errors. Tense is not a problem in the Kiswahili stories.

In sample 1, there is a significant contrast between the English story and the Kiswahili story. From the Kiswahili version this student wrote it appears that the student had understood the story. S/he however seems to lack words to express the story in English. In her comments on sample 1 above, Vuzo (2002a) remarks that the student also had a few errors in the Kiswahili version like r/l interchange and addition of /h/ where a vowel /a/ or /u/ precedes in a word. For instance the student says, kupereka instead of kupeleka meaning to take, angaria instead of angalia meaning to see, and s/he also says humefugua instead of umefungua meaning you have opened. These types of errors, according to Vuzo, are quite common in Tanzanian class-rooms and are associated with mother tongue influence. In this case Kikuria.

Mwajuma Vuzo concludes her analysis of all the 80 scripts she has gathered and compared by stating that the 40 students in her sample narrate the story quite well at all the three levels in secondary school when they are allowed to write in Kiswahili. They have in most cases no mistakes in Kiswahili. This signifies a favourable command of Kiswahili. For all students, the Kiswahili stories were better presentations of the story in comparison to their English stories.

After having presented very similar examples to the ones above, taken from Form I and Form IV, and also having analysed all the 40 scripts (two scripts per 20 students) in her sample, Mary Mkwizu (2002, 2003) notes that her data indicates a drastic change when students wrote their stories in Kiswahili instead of in English. Both Form I and Form IV featured well. This is how Mkwizu (2002: 57–58) summarises her findings of the Kiswahili version of the students’ stories:

- All students proved to have enough vocabulary to narrate the story. This helped them to express their feelings imaginatively. There is frequent use of interjections and rare repetition of words. Students proved to have a wide stylistic choice when expressing themselves in Kiswahili (e.g formal and informal words).
Unlike the case when students write in English, their Kiswahili sentences are long. Students have managed to use more complex structures and various types of sentences including commands and questions. Some have managed to differentiate direct from indirect speech.

Since students have rich vocabulary and are able to construct good sentences, it is easy to understand what they write. Consequently the stories become interesting.

The details which are missing in the English version are found in Kiswahili.

The sequence is very good.

Students demonstrated good command of the Kiswahili tense system. Thus there is clear distinction between past, present and future.

There are no spelling mistakes by any of the students.

Studying the findings made from the cartoon story administered by Vuzo and Mkwizu, it is safe to conclude that required to write in English most students are unable to reflect adequately what is happening in the story. This is especially the case in Form I. There is often very little correlation between the cartoon and the written version in English. There is lack of consistency in most of the students’ stories. The stories from the Form I students are largely inconsistent. The best examples from the Form IV and Form VI students show that they, to some extent, have understood the story (see samples 4 and 6). Even these students, who master English better than their class mates write much better in Kiswahili. There is very little difference between Form I and IV. There are slight improvements in Forms IV and VI. There are some Form VI students, however, whose English is not much better than the one displayed by students in lower secondary school levels of education (see sample 5). In all cases, the stories are shorter in English compared to the Kiswahili versions.

There are many grammatical errors in all samples of texts written in English. There are also visible punctuation errors. There is general lack of sequence and sentences are not well formed. Tense and spelling are a major problem in all the scripts in English, even in Form VI, as illustrated in samples 5 and 6. In sample 6 for instance the student has spelt the word passenger as passanger, among other spelling errors. This student has not mastered tense. For instance instead of to steal the student says to stole. The scripts of Form IV and VI have grammatical errors of a type which one would not expect from students so high up in the secondary school system. The student behind sample 6 of the extracts of samples from Vuzo’s research is the student in her sample from Form VI who wrote the best essay in English. In some few months this student may enter a university and will certainly face difficulties when s/he is required to write a term paper or essay instead of filling in multiple choice questions.

In the analysis by Mary Mkwizu (2002: 57) of the English scripts she concludes:

The vocabulary of all Form I students is poor. They lack vocabulary that is necessary to name and describe what is happening in the pictures. Some words are written in Kiswahili. Form IV have similar problems though there is slight improvement.

The sentences are simple, short and uncoordinated. Students fail to use subordinators and coordinators which are necessary in forming complex and compound
sentences. In some cases the coordinators are wrongly placed. There is no notable difference between student scripts in Form I from those in Form IV.

– Due to the above weaknesses it is difficult to comprehend what the students write. There is an element of direct translation from Kiswahili. Some of the scripts will be difficult for a non-Swahili speaker to understand.

– The stories lack detail. Students fail to include in their stories items they can clearly see in the picture, and various activities which they could guess to be taking place.

– The proper use of tense has proven to be a problem. Present and past tenses are mixed up.

Mary Mkwizu (2002) in her analysis of the cartoon exercise where she and Mwajuma Vuzo used the same cartoon as Desai had used in South Africa claims that the cartoon itself had elements which were unfamiliar to some of the students in her study. She maintains that if the majority of students had been familiar with places like Air Port and Customs Office (which are in the pictures) they could have written with even more detail.

Omar Mohamed Said (2003) wanted to make a similar study in Zanzibar. He first looked at the cartoon which had been used in South Africa and in mainland Tanzania but decided that the caveats formulated by Mkwizu were even more relevant pertaining to Zanzibar. He decided to use a cartoon showing a scene which would be more familiar to students in Tanzania. The first of the six pictures he used shows a man in an Islamic dress and with an Islamic cap sitting on the top of goods being transported with a bull-cart. The next picture shows that it starts to rain heavily. In the third picture the bull and the cart get stuck and the man tries to push the bull and the cart up from the ditch but he fails. The fourth picture shows two men with shovels appearing in the horizon and the man with the cart waving to them. In the fifth picture the two men have come and they help the man to get the bull and cart up from where it is stuck. In the sixth picture the man leaves happily and waves to the two who have helped him. As mentioned, Said (2003) administered this cartoon to 20 high-achieving (HA) Zanzibar students in Form I who had gone directly from primary to secondary school and the same cartoon to 20 students from the Orientation Secondary Course (OSC) programme – a one-year programme between primary and secondary school. He asked the students to compose a story following the logical sequence of the pictures in the cartoon. He asked them to do this first in Kiswahili and the following week in English. He made a quantitative analysis of the answers by considering elements like grammatical competence/sentence formation, spellings, vocabulary, tenses and punctuation, discourse competence and correlation between the cartoon pictures and what is expressed in the students’ writings. He used ten elements in assessing cartoon comprehension. Each element was given a mark from one (very poor) to five (very good). The total possible mark a student could obtain was 50. Below we have taken the mean scores out from a larger table giving also median and mode scores as well as standard deviation and range. The table shows how much better both the high achieving students and the students taking the orientation course perform when they may write the cartoon story in Kiswahili than when they have to write it in English.
Below we are also giving a couple of the samples mentioned by Said in his thesis but, for reasons which have to do with space, we give only the English translation of the Kiswahili text and not the Kiswahili text itself. We have picked out the poorest version from the OSC class and the best version from the HA class.

SAMPLE 1: OSC PROGRAMME – POOREST ENGLISH VERSION

Written in English

The carry of main the carry is long or car is bigger behind of body the picture of the wind rising be low and than the carry of bigning the care main leight and the wishing the sleep of the car because is not wishing the car. I am person are very in person. I can the see and after this.

Literal Translation from Kiswahili

Once upon the time people used to conduct businesses and there was not any transportation system to move the goods from one place to another. They were forced to use bull carts to move their goods to the market. One day it rained heavily and all roads got damaged. The bull cart stuck in the mud and the bull was not able to pull it out. Then the man who was riding the bull cart let the bull out of the cart and moved the cart out of the mud. The man started to reload the cart and tried to let the bull in the cart but he failed due to the heavy load in the cart. Fortunately there were two colleagues who used the same transportation system to take goods to the market and then he asked them to help him carrying some of his goods and pushing the cart up the hill. They agreed and helped him. He told them to meet him at the market.

SAMPLE 2: HA CLASS – BEST ENGLISH VERSION

Written in English

Once upon a time there was a man his name was Said. Mr Said he lived in chaani village, he liked to wear hat and man dress (Islamic). He has a car and cow’s car for carrying cargo and get some money because he was poor man and he had not
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the government’s work. So he took fire from his village to the other village by his cow’s car and get some money for control his life. One day Mr Said took his cow’s and his cow and put a lot of lord in the cow’s car. When the rain raining the land get water and done mud, so the wheels of cow’s car sink in the mud and was tired because the cargo was very heavy and the rain mad the cow and Mr Said felt very cold, and now the cow’s car is stopping and the cow could not move the car so Mr Said decided to push it but can’t because the car was sink and had heavy cargo. Mr Said saw two men there were farmers so he called them and wanted them to help for his problem. Mr Said and two men started to push the cow’s car. It was difficult to move because it was sink and heavy cargo but unity is power and there were three men so the cow’s car started to move and Mr Said thank’s the farmers for their helpful and kindness. Then Mr Said and his cow continued their journey safely.

"Literal Translation from Kiswahili"

Once upon a time, there was a man whose name was Mr Said. Mr Said had two cows and a bull. He decided to find a bull cart so as to aid him in his daily activities. Mr Said was tall, thin and had black complexion. He normally wore an Islamic dress called “kanzu” and a cap. He was not a rich man and he was not employed by the government. He depended on himself by conducting personal business. He bought a bull cart. He earned his living by carrying people’s luggage and sometimes purchasing different commodities.

One day Mr Said was carrying sacks of sweet potatoes from his village. The load was very heavy. When Mr Said had ridden his cart a short distance from the village, it started to rain heavily. The cart got stuck in the mud and the bull got tired and was not able to pull the cart anymore. Mr Said got down from the cart and tried to push the cart out of the mud but failed. Then he saw two men and asked them for help. They helped him pushing the cart out of the mud. Mr Said thanked them and proceeded with his journey.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The examples from Khayelitsha township in South Africa, from Tanzania mainland and Zanzibar show the rich vocabulary children have when they express themselves in written isiXhosa or in written Kiswahili and the limited vocabulary they have when they express themselves in written English. We have demonstrated through the studies made in South Africa and Tanzania that African children can easily grasp the meaning in a cartoon, enjoy writing down a story built on a cartoon and can do so very well provided they may use a familiar language. We have shown the trouble African children have, even after having had English as the language of instruction for almost six years, as is the case in Form VI in the examples from Tanzania mainland. Being forced to study through a language they command to such a limited extent must slow down their learning process considerably. If we are serious about the intellectual development of African learners, then we need to give greater currency to African languages.
NOTES

1 We have been granted two research projects where we can pursue our research interests. The first project is a NUFU (Norwegian University Fund) project – the LOITASA (Language of Instruction in Tanzania and South Africa) project also involving Tanzanian colleagues. The funding for this project started on the 1 January 2002 and it ran until 31 December 2006. The other project is a Norway/South Africa project – the LOISA (Language of Instruction in South Africa) project which ran from 1 January 2003 until 31 December 2005. The LOITASA project involves experimental situations where a language more familiar to the students (Kiswahili in Tanzania and isiXhosa in South Africa) will be used for an extended period of time and results measured against students having English as the language of instruction (for further information on the LOITASA project, see Brock-Utne 2002). The LOISA project (see Brock-Utne 2003) builds on the LOITASA design but concentrates on South Africa. Before these projects started Brock-Utne had secured funding for an NFR (Norwegian Research Council) project dealing with the first part of LOITASA – that is describing the language policy and analysing the communication patterns of teachers and pupils in Tanzania and South Africa. That project started on 1 January 2001 and ran until 31 December 2005.

2 October is more or less the end of the school academic year in South Africa and just before the final examinations, so the pupils’ performance is a fairly good reflection of what they are capable of at the end of Grade 4 (after a year’s exposure to English as a medium) and at the end of Grade 7 (after four years of English medium).

3 Both of these theses as well as the one from Said (2003) are regarded as input into the NFR project on language of instruction in Tanzania and South Africa. They hold high student quality. The Vuzo (2002b) and Mkwizu (2003) studies have both been published in the “Education in Africa” report series which is part of the report series of the Institute for Educational Research at the University of Oslo. Mwajuma Vuzo has started her PhD studies connected to the LOITASA project.

4 This is one of the local languages in Tanzania. The Kuria people are originally found near Lake Victoria.

REFERENCES


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