

Research Article

English as Second Language in Education: Challenges and Opportunities for the Kenyan Teachers and Learners

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ABSTRACT

In any given social settings, people acquire, learn and use language in different ways and for different purposes. These purposes can be driven by either instrumental or integrative motivations. Within the Kenyan context, English is learnt and used for its instrumental purposes; a practice common in situations where a language is learnt and used as a second language (SL). Kenya is a multilingual setting with estimated 42 languages, rendering it multicultural. English is learnt as a SL and used as an official language while Kiswahili doubles up as the National and official language alongside English. Indigenous languages are valued as vehicles of transmission of the rich and diverse Kenyan culture. Learners' and teachers in Kenya are orientated to use and learn English for its extrinsic and instrumental motivations rather than the intrinsic motivation associated with the integrative motivation. This paper therefore examines the challenges learners encounter learning and using English as a SL; the role of English within the Kenyan education system given its centrality as language of instruction (LOI) and subject within the curriculum; the existence of varieties of English in the world, and the rise to the Kenyan English variety. This is examined in the context of the cultural-linguistic inclinations and identifies, juxtaposed against the demand in Kenya that only the Standard English variety should be taught and used. The paper underscores both the challenges the Kenyan English SL learner and teacher face and the opportunities available in knowing and using English not only in their local but also from the global context. It then provides reflection points for negotiating English SL teaching and learning based on the existing sociocultural-linguistic realities.

Keywords: Cultural inclinations, Language learning, Language planning and policy, Language teaching, Motivational orientations, Multilingualism, Second language, Varieties of English

INTRODUCTION

In order to understand the context within which English is taught, learnt and used in Kenya, it is imperative to have a presentation and analysis of selected sociolinguistic elements that shape the manner in which people assign cultural-linguistic identities to the various languages they are exposed to. Thus, the ideas in this paper are discussed against the backdrop of motivational orientations that are deemed to drive the language teaching and learning processes. This is further discussed on the backdrop of the knowledge that learning a language that is not one's first language is a great challenge. In addition, exploration of the fact that the challenge is further compounded when the English language teacher is also a non-native speaker of the language being taught. This means that the teacher is equally linguistically challenged at certain levels and will most likely transfer these challenges to the learners in different measures depending on the different learner language abilities and individual differences. Abdullah (2015, p. 371) observes that, "every teacher who teaches any subject matter in English to ESL students is not only a teacher of the content area but also is a teacher of English as well so he/she should have to continually reflect on teaching and update practice to address the needs of the learners." In order to explore and advance this argument, the discussion focuses on motivational outlooks to language use; languages, language planning and policy in Kenya; varieties of English; opportunities of SL education; challenges of SL education and thoughts about the future of learning and teaching English.

Motivational Orientations to Language Learning

Research shows that motivation is a great determinant of success in any educational setting. With particular reference to language education, various models and theories have been advanced to explain how the process of SL learning is motivation determined. Dornyei (1998) notes that 'motivation provides the primary impetus to initiate learning the L2 (second language) and later the driving force to sustain the, long and often tedious learning process; indeed, all the other factors involved pre suppose motivation to some extent' (p. 117). Therefore, it is important to understand the motivational orientations students have towards the learning of any language, in this particular case English SL in the Kenyan context. Rifai (2010, p. 5217) notes "Motivation and reasons for learning English are very important issues to address to enable one to design better curriculum materials or teaching strategies to stimulate students' motivation in learning. There is a need to consider students' motivation within the subject content and the classroom contexts of curriculum, instruction, and teachers".

Motivation can broadly be viewed at two levels: Integrative and instrumental motivations vs intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. In this paper, the discussion covers both perspectives with the view of creating a platform upon which to highlight challenges

and opportunities in learning and using English SL in the Kenyan educational context. Extrinsic motivation is triggered by external factors while intrinsic motivation draws from internal factors that determine the behaviour of a person. Some studies underscore the fact that learners who are intrinsically motivated will engage in the task willingly. In the context of this discussion, this learner is more likely to improve their skills, abilities and competences in the SL.

The meanings of instrumental and integrative motivations have similar implications as regards how they influence learning and performance of any behaviour. Instrumental motivation is engaged when a person wishes to use a language for individual gain; whereas, integrative motivation refers to using and learning a language in order to be accepted in the community of its speakers (Gardner and Lambert, 1972). In SL teaching and learning, it is a strongly held belief that learners who are integratively and intrinsically motivated are more successful than those who are instrumentally and extrinsically motivated. Nonetheless, studies have gone further to propose that the outer drive, derived from the desire to achieve may equally propel learners to engage in effective language learning. These two language competencies according to Noam Chomsky are complementary but separate facilities through which any language user is able to utilize their linguistic knowledge and practically appropriate the same knowledge in performance. What obtains here therefore is that in a language teaching and learning situation there is the need for the language teacher to establish the various reasons their learners have for learning the SL.

Language learning environments driven by extrinsic or instrumental motivation can be created by the teacher of English to ensure that the SL learners remain engaged. In the context of SL learning in Kenya, the descriptions of intrinsic, extrinsic, integrative and instrumental motivations are used in this paper to analyse the actual language use situation. This should aid in understanding how teachers, parents and learners assign various motivations to the use of various languages in different contexts and the implications these have to the cultural-linguistic identities in learning, teaching and using English SL in educational settings.

Languages, Language Planning and Policy in Kenya

Kenya is a multilingual country with an estimated 42 languages spoken and used by its people. This scenario calls for the process of language planning and policy (LPP), a government legal procedure, where decisions determining how languages are used and maintained are made in bilingual and multilingual environments. Language policy (statements of intent) and planning (implementation) (LPP) is defined as planning – often large scale and national, usually undertaken by governments – meant to influence,

if not change, ways of speaking or literacy practices within a society (Baldauf, 2004). There are four major factors that determine language policy of a nation-state: the sociolinguistic ecology (language practices), a set of beliefs (language ideology) relating language to national identity, the effects of globalization (the pull towards international languages, especially English), and pressure for attention to the rights of indigenous or migrant linguistic minorities (Spolsky, 2009). These factors have shaped the prevailing multilingual education context in Kenya, consequently the existing language policy driving the language in education space is a product of the recommendations of the Gathachi Report of 1976, reiterated by the Kamunge Report of 1988, and enshrined in the Kenya Constitution of 2010.

There are four major levels at which LPP is conducted: Status planning referring to deliberate efforts to influence the allocation of functions among a community's languages (Cooper, 1989) providing the social standing of a language; Corpus planning focusing on aspects of language planning which are primarily linguistic and hence internal to language (Haugen, 1983); acquisition planning describing planning processes that relate to organizational efforts to promote the learning of a language (Cooper, 1989), basically language-in-education, and lastly, prestige planning which describes elements of language image. Based on the discussion in this paper, the focus is on status, acquisition and prestige planning. It is imperative to mention that the status of a language in any given domain of use will always be interlinked with the esteem and role of that language. This will be predominantly established through four basic factors: the origin of the language based on whether it is an indigenous or imported language; the state of standardization established through the development level of the language linked to its linguistic correctness; its juridical status based on if it is an official, promoted, tolerated language; and lastly, the language vitality as relates to the number of users of the language.

Acquisition planning on the other hand is influenced by various elements of language through education, like: language status, distribution and literacy. The main goals of acquisition planning outlined by Kaplan and Baldauf (2003) are to: decide what language should be taught within the curriculum, determine the amount and quality of teacher training, involve local communities, determine what material will be used and how they will be incorporated into the syllabi, establish a local and state assessment system to monitor progress and determine financial costs of using specific languages in education for a specific country. Besides these, the responsibilities of the education sector in this case will also be to: select the language to be used as the LOI and examination; select the language to be used for official communication within schools; determine the amount and quality of content in teacher training in the various languages and lastly, determine the languages that will be used in the various teaching and learning materials.

LPP procedures facilitate the process of making decisions on which languages will be official and national. Bourdieu (1991) observes with regard to the official language that this language is the one which, within the territorial limits of that unit imposes itself on the whole population as the only legitimate language, the official language is bound up with the state both in its genesis and its social uses, this State language becomes the theoretical norm against which all linguistic practices are objectively measured. On the other hand, a national language with reference to Africa according Brann (1994) is a “territorial language” of a particular people or “regional language”, or “language-in-common or community” a language used throughout a country, and lastly, a “central language” used by government and perhaps having a symbolic value. Generally, an official language is used for governance, in education, business, the judiciary and media.

Whereas the “the language policy in Kenya is more inclined to the educational needs though the national needs have also been catered for,” (Omulando and Barasa, 2009, p. 105) the LPP process in Kenya has been hazy, and with the inception of the new Competence Based Curriculum (CBC) in 2017, and expanded role of indigenous languages in education, Kenya will have to rethink and seek to go through the process of LPP. Based on the existing policy, English and Kiswahili are designated official languages, their roles encapsulated as symbols of bureaucratic identity; Kiswahili the national language functioning as the Kenyan lingua franca, the symbol of national identity. On the other hand, the local languages play the role of indigenous identity. They are revered as a symbol of the Kenyan people’s social, cultural and regional identity and as the vehicles through which the rich culture of the Kenyan people is carried on from one generation to another. In Kenya’s language policy there is clarity, especially from the Constitution of 2010, on which languages should be spoken in formal and informal situations. However, in reality the national and official languages play interchangeable roles. Nonetheless, this paper underscores the basic facts of the language policy which articulates that English is both the language of education and a compulsory and examinable subject in the school curriculum from early years to secondary school education. Kiswahili has achieved the status of being a compulsory and examinable subject similar to English while indigenous languages are designated as the official medium of communication in lower primary education. As alluded to, Kenya is currently instituting a change in its curricula and basic education system to the CBC. The variation is that indigenous languages shall be taught from Grade 4 as subjects and the learners shall be expected to select and be taught an indigenous language. Besides this, the indigenous languages do enjoy recognition at regional levels within the Kenyan setting.

Based on these descriptions of the language use patterns in Kenya in the preceding sections, this paper apportions the following as the various motivations inclined to the use of each language by Kenyans: Kiswahili is used and learnt for both instrumental and

integrative purposes; English is learnt and used for its instrumental and extrinsic purposes; while the indigenous languages are used for their intrinsic and integrative purposes but now going to have an expanded motivational scope of use in education in the CBC. On a general scale, the instrumental motivations of learning and using English in Kenya are based on the following reasons:

- a) Language of education – used and taught at all levels of education.
- b) Language of Prestige –used as a tool for upward mobility and attainment of esteemed status in society
- c) Language of opportunities –it is a window into the lingua franca of the world and international connections

It is noted, the multilingual education complex in Kenya has led to prevalence of code switching and mixing both in and out of the classroom situations by both teachers and learners (Barasa and Omulando, 2008; Omulando and Barasa, 2009). Based on this, it is best to get learners to a level where they are both integratively and instrumentally motivated to learn and use English, as a way of creating a balance for successful SL acquisition and learning. Certainly, learners engage in learning English as an academic requirement, even though they may integratively connect with the target language culture. Hence, “The successful learner of a SL must be psychologically prepared to adopt various aspects of behaviour which characterize members of another linguistically cultural group” (Gardner and Lambaert, 1972, p. 3). Ironically, to parents in Kenya, English reigns supreme in an environment whose education system is assessment driven. Success in learning is pegged on ones’ ability to affect knowledge acquisition through mastery of the LOI. Therefore, the attitude of parents requires a realignment to make them consider the use of indigenous languages for instruction in class. They consider this the very reason why their children fail to achieve in academics.

Varieties of English

There are about 6000 languages spoken around the world, of these English is the second most widely used native language after Chinese, and most widely spoken second or third language. It is observed, as an international and a world language, its influence spans the entire globe, and there is hardly any country today that does not use English in one way or another or that is not affected by its spread (Mohd-Asraf, 2005). This widespread use renders it vulnerable to variations in the manner in which it is linguistically appropriated due to variations in social settings. This has given rise to emergence and use of different varieties of English in different regions of the world. A language variety is a form that linguistically differs from other forms of the same language systematically and coherently, however maintaining internal intelligibility among them. Louis-Jean

Calvet(nd) notes, History shows us that the larger a language's territory, the more it has a tendency to diversify, to morph into dialects. The same thing is happening to English today. English spoken in the US differs from British English, English spoken in India differs from Nigerian English, among others.

Linguists observe that socio-linguistically, linguistic variation is governed by two main circumstances of language use. First, there are those determined by the language use form based on the field of discourse, medium and attitude (situation and purpose of language use relating to activities, form of language (spoken or written) and participants relationships. Typical of the Kenyan context, the speaker of English will have varieties determined by ones' educational background, social setting, and the number of languages one speaks and more important whether the discourse is formal or informal. Second, there are those defined by the language users established based on regional and social setting dynamics. The regional variations arise due to the different places or localities where people live and the language variety can change if change of region occurs. In the Kenyan setting, it would be difficult to speak of a regional dialect or variety of English, but there is a form of Kenyan English characterized by phonological variations influenced by accentuation of the English vowel and consonant, and vocabulary. The concept of variation exists at the level of class distinction with those speakers of English who coin their own variety to the extent that in their vocabulary English words are very few; they prefer *Sheng* (an unstable code that draws its lexis from indigenous and Kiswahili languages). The urban speakers of English oscillate between the formal use of the English language and "*English*" (mainly English code with a sprinkle of Kiswahili and indigenous languages). These two unstable codes of communication have had serious impact on the teaching and learning of English in Kenya. From whatever perspective one explores the language classroom in Kenya s/he cannot fail to recognise the role of attitude and cultural inclinations in determining circumstance within which languages are appropriated. Omulando and Barasa (2009, p. 106) observe, "this can be attributed to the social pressure and competition between languages because the question of language is the question of culture and power." However, "it is clear that Kenya needs to be pragmatic about the medium of instruction and the role that foreign and indigenous languages play..." (Ogechi, 2009 p.143).

Further attention on language varieties, the focus on social variety forms has given rise to the existence of what may be informally be referred to as the educated or standard and non-educated or non-standard forms of English. Emerging from the educated form of language is the development of the standard form of language like Standard English (SE). The SE is increasingly enjoying a prestigious status because of growing levels of globalization. In the education system in Kenya SE is the variety of English that is held by many to be 'correct' because it is used as the language of instruction and examination,

in testing learners' abilities to speak and write the language. Even though many of the distinctions between the British and American English are well established, the situation is generally complex. This is occasioned by the influence of various linguistic cultures in the English spoken in Kenya, for example, different registers or genres of English. Battistella (2005) has argued that, we need to know SE, but we need to know it critically, analytically, and in the context of language history. We also need to understand the regularity of nonstandard variants. This way the study of language will be a liberating factor, not merely freeing learners from socially stigmatized usage by replacing that usage with new linguistic manners, but educating people in what language and linguistic manners are all about.

Opportunities of Second Language in Education

The debate in Kenya currently is not whether English should continue to be the LOI but if it is true that the Kenyan learner has been taught well enough to master the English language. The import of this being the view that, many learners are wasted and drop out of school because they fail to master the language and so deemed did not benefit from being in school. But what are the opportunities that English offers a SL learner in Kenya?

- a) Window into the lingua franca of the world and language of globalization and internationalization
- b) Tool of upward mobility and establishment of status in society
- c) Language associated with prestige and elitisms in society

These are opportunities that teachers of English should harness to ensure that learners of English SL build a positive attitude towards English. As observed by Barasa and Omulando (2008, p. 142), despite Kiswahili growing to be very popular ... "English remains important in Kenya and retains higher status than Kiswahili" at functional levels.

Challenges of the Second Language in Education

The objectives of learning English SL in Kenya are geared toward well-developed language skills and communicative competence. However, this is likely to present challenges because language does not develop and operate within a vacuum and "Meanings of words are determined by the uses of words within linguistic and cultural settings, never the same in any two cultures," (Abdullah, 2015, p. 372). Language is clothed with culture, so intertwined that it is impossible to think of the two as separate entities within a given social group and setting. Language is the medium of social interaction that is specific to each culture and is passed down as heritage from one generation to the other to give identity and pride with a sense of belonging to a community or even a nation, with distinct culture and beliefs.

In multicultural societies like Kenya, the dominant language in a given majority group becomes the code of social interaction with the minority cultural groups who however maintain their own language to interact with their own community. This has given Kiswahili a prominent position such that it is the language of common and informal communication; consequently, the Kenyan indigenous languages remain in the minority linguistic position however valued for their ethnic, cultural and regional identity. In such situations, for English SL to be accepted and infused at any cultural-linguistic environment, is an uphill task. Therefore, the cultural inclinations to English language present a notable challenge if learners have to be initiated into appreciating and learning English not only for its instrumental and also the integrative purposes.

In Kenya there is a concentration on building a national identity around the Kiswahili language as a way of fostering national unity and cohesion. As stated by Musau (1999, p. 138), nation building simply means “the process of building a modern nation-state with a sense of national identity and unity”. An idea he further substantiates by saying that, “If national building is to become a reality, it appears that a common indigenous language, among other things, is important” (p. 139). In advancing the argument above scholars like Mazrui and Tidy (1984) and Mazrui (1996) are convinced that English which they refer to as a European language, would be ill-equipped to promote integration. In Kenya, such notions have compounded a situation in which English continues to operate and forge ahead as an official and global language in the context where the policy on the role of Kiswahili, the indigenous lingua franca remains struggling to appropriate the roles of English. Ogechi (2009) observes that “although English is now considered to be a Kenyan Language by some ... to a large extent it has to be learnt formally,” (p. 144). This is the challenge to balance the perceived position of national identity and acceptance and promotion of English as a language beyond national identity. Habwe (2009), observes that, Kiswahili as one of the inner agents of unity in East Africa is challenged by the roles of languages such as English, French among others have assumed in the face of globalization. He asserts that in this situation, people in East Africa are bound to coalesce around Kiswahili, prefer their allegiance to Kiswahili. Barasa and Omulando (2008, p. 142) observe that “Kiswahili has grown to be very popular in Kenya and has thus gained recognition in many other spheres other than as a language of national cohesiveness.” This becomes an extremely significant space for the teacher and learner of English SL, a challenge because the cultural-linguistic environment then favours another language. Therefore, the following ideas endeavour to point out difficulties teachers and learners of English SL are likely to face in using English as a LOI and learning it as a compulsory subject in schools:

- a) The attitudes that English is a foreign language, not an African language

- b) Establishing differences among the varieties of English, particularly the American and British varieties against the background of the growing Kenyan English variety in the face of maintaining the use of the required British Standard English
- c) The likely questionable proficiency levels of teachers of English SL against the backdrop of ensuring language learning takes place, and that learners are positively motivated.
- d) Scenarios of direct translation when using English due variations in semantic, pragmatic and syntactic orientations in Kiswahili and the indigenous languages.
- e) Scenarios of misinterpretations of English words and statements due to differences in socio cultural use contexts of various words, phrasal verbs and idioms in Kiswahili and the indigenous languages.

METAREFLECTION

In the face of the multicultural-linguistic scenario in Kenya, the teachers and learners of English SL must interact with and embrace all the languages cognizant of the following realities:

- a) The evolution of the Kenyan variety of English is not within their ability to manipulate or to directly engage with at policy level; they can only restrict their jurisdiction to the interplay of languages within the language classroom.
- b) The fact that both teachers and learners of English in Kenya have the distinct task of examining and interrogating how English works for them instrumentally and integratively.
- c) The institution of English SL within the global needs and functions of English, necessitating that the language is taught “properly”, learnt and used intelligibly by the learners for upward mobility, communication and innovation.
- d) The realization that in the CBC being rolled out, schools will from 2020 begin teaching the Kenyan indigenous languages. The teaching of these languages, it is argued, will provide learners with opportunities for growth and development to be able to function locally and internationally and also enhance an understanding of the various cultural orientations and appreciation of the diversities therein.
- e) In CBC, the learner in Kenya will be expected to learn at least one foreign language from a repertoire of French, German, Spanish, and Mandarin among others to expose them to international cultural-linguistic contexts.
- f) In the spirit of inclusion, CBC will provide learners with the opportunities to take lessons in Kenya Sign Language, a language with its unique cultural repertoire.

In the context described above the Ministry of Education in Kenya states that, as noted by Dr. Mary Gaturu, Director Quality Assurance, “the introduction of indigenous and foreign languages in grade four is in line with the Constitution and international trends.” This view is upheld by Prof. Ogechi, a sociolinguist who argues that, “Learners have the right to access both the school curriculum in their indigenous language and to get quality English language experiences,” (Daily Nation, 2019, p.12).

It is evident that the plate of the language policy in Kenya is overflowing as a result of the envisaged role of various languages in the CBC dispensation. The emerging challenge is the fact that CBC is both resource and labour intensive. The country has neither of the two, and unfortunately it is already instituting the CBC education system. The country will need to source for experts in the indigenous languages to develop books in the various languages while some will need both books and the development of an orthography before the languages can be taught effectively. Further, it is not yet clear what the benefits of foreign languages are beyond a career in translation and the ornamental value associated with learning a foreign language. Efforts are being made the Ministry of Education to ensure the objectives of the language policy are attained on the implementation of the language curricula. However, English still remains at the centre of the curricula. Therefore, teachers of English SL should endeavour to source and include multicultural reading texts to provide the SL learners with opportunities for comparisons to enhance learning, and continually seek greater understanding of the sociocultural inclinations of learners and interplay with regard to the various languages they possibly know, use and learn.

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