

TOWARDS A LANGUAGE POLICY FOR NAMIBIA

FOREWORD

It was for the first time in the history of a non-self-governing country that a decision was taken, even before its independence, to introduce as its official language a language other than the language of the colonizers or one of its own indigenous languages. The language of choice was none other than English. The nation in question is Namibia. The implications of this policy therefore present one of the greatest challenges to the people of Namibia.

The purported aim of introducing English as the official language is to steer the people away from linguo-tribal affiliations and differences and create conditions that would promote national unity. Inherent in this policy are a number of issues. What are its pedagogical implications? What is the timeframe envisaged to achieve the aim? Will English become an elitist language, thereby defeating the egalitarian goals for which it was intended? How cost-effective and cost beneficial will the choice of English prove to be for Namibia? These and other pertinent issues were discussed at the *International Seminar on English as the official language for Namibia* held at the United Nations Institute for Namibia in Lusaka, Zambia, from 5th to 8th May 1980.

At that seminar, I presented a paper titled, **CONSTRAINTS IN INTRODUCING ENGLISH** to highlight some of the problems to be resolved before language strategies were formulated. **Given below is the text of that paper.**

1.1.Introduction

Influenced by global ideals, newly emerging nations consciously attempt to change the status quo and create a more hopeful future for the people through state-controlled systems of education and community development programmes. In the course of planning this, fiscal and manpower claims for consideration can so easily become lopsided unless language constraints are recognized objectively and long-term decisions taken. Where there is unity of language, neither the educationist nor the economic planner faces such constraints.

Namibia, in sharp contrast, exemplifies a milieu of linguistic fragmentation, which raises problems in terms not only of achieving national integration but also of planning socio-economic reconstruction. No amount of finance made available can diminish these stubborn problems. That this is so is largely due to the absence of a viable Namibian language that can serve as the lingua franca. Needless to say, the language of the colonizer obtaining now, i.e. Afrikaans, cannot be an option for obvious reasons. True, Eiselen, the Minister of Bantu Education in South Africa, paid lip service to the idea of

developing Bantu languages in order to include terminologies and also effective numerical systems.

But in the event, each indigenous language, like its speakers, was by law confined to a 'reserve' without its being given a chance to flex its muscles against Afrikaans within South-African administered Namibia. The Bantu education system relegated the indigenous Namibian to an inferior position in his own country by effectively denying him access to the South African controlled educational system and thereby closing the doors for him to positions of responsibility in the colonial administration.

A quick look at the figures for **1979** would give us an insight into the insidious nature of the system. The total number of scholars in the Namibian educational system was **224,861**. This figure is spread over **920** schools across the country. Almost **900** of these are primary schools. The **28** or so post-primary institutions account for **22,876** secondary pupils who have managed to survive in the system. Of these, almost a third is White. Even for the White school children, the bottleneck at the end of the primary stage claims a dropout rate of almost **50%**. This is by no means a heartening picture. But for the indigenous Namibian, the figure for those who have fallen by the wayside is an abysmal **90%**. And this, for a nation in the making!

The secondary system too takes a large toll. There are only **10** full-fledged secondary/teacher training schools in the whole of Namibia. The system is further warped by the blatant inequilibrium of educational provision in that only **5** of these are made available to close to **75%** of the total population. It is heavily loaded in favour of the Whites, and, in particular the Afrikaans-speaking Whites who form only **8%** of the total population. With its predominance of Afrikaans, the system effectively discriminates against the indigenous Namibians except for a small number, i.e. **88,500**, for whom Afrikaans is the first language.*1. For them, the system employs other means to 'keep them in their places'.

When Namibia becomes independent, all this will change. Afrikaans will surely lose its pride of place, as part of that change. How soon and to what degree, only future events will unfold. Ideally, an indigenous Namibian language is needed for local inter-communication. There is no language that need be inherently inadequate for this purpose. Any language has the potential to develop as new challenges are posed. No such demands have so far been made on any indigenous language in Namibia. Besides, it is a slowly evolving process that takes time. That has prompted the Namibian leaders to agree to choose a highly-developed language like English, which has the added advantage of enjoying universal prestige, as the official language for a future independent Namibia. They are, however, aware that there are constraints that would bring pressure to bear upon the implementation of this policy. What are these?

1.2. General Constraints

The leaders would prefer to address themselves nationally to these constraints, unaided. 'Language is a manifestation of social cohesion, and education must be based on a

society's own interpretation of its future needs; the language in education is far too important to natural development to be directed by visiting experts.'*2. And yet, the efforts that have so far been made to determine a language policy for Namibia appear to have had a Euro-centric orientation. An instance of this was the *Seminar on Language and Education in Namibia* convened by the International African Institute in London on 29 June 1978 at the London School of Economics. Apart from an introductory appeal to the Seminar by Shapua Kaukungwa, the SWAPO (South West Africa People's Organization) representative in London 'to consider the provision of facilities for training Namibian students, and (to consider) how best the education system in a free Namibia could be designed to facilitate the use of English as Namibia's common language, both for the purpose of national unity and (for) ease of communication with the outside world', the SWAPO participants remained at the periphery of the discussion, while the initiators and prime movers of ideas were non-Namibians. The consensus of opinion was that English language teaching and training programmes should be formulated bearing in mind the eventual transposition of techniques and materials to an evolving educational system.*3.

This anticipates a system patterned along European lines. One would not like to question the altruism of this approach, but would like to ask whether this is based on pragmatic considerations rather than on theory, which may not have much relevance to Namibia.

For instance, would the political leaders of Namibia envision, in the short term at any rate, an industrialized society for Namibia without the wherewithal, either in local manpower or in capital, to sustain the system?

The seminar also let it be known that the use and development of Namibia's local languages, while perhaps a matter for eventual consideration, was felt to be of SECONDARY (emphasis added) concern. One detects a certain reluctance on the part of decision makers to grasp the nettle of multilingualism at this stage. In Professor Mubanga Kashoki's words, "Africans have been psychologically conditioned to believe that only European languages are structured to aid development".*4. Besides, some of the African educationists who have been academically baptized in European waters remain staunch believers in metropolitan languages, if only for self-preservation. Clearly, this is as pernicious a residual effect of the colonial system as any.

1.3. Specific Constraints

A possible breakdown of the specifics can be as follows:

1.3.1 Sociological

1.3.2 Pedagogical

1.3.3 Administrative

1.3.4 Economic

1.3.1 Sociological

SWAPO's decision to adopt English, as the official language of Namibia, as one that is apt to have far-reaching social consequences, has to be looked at in the cold light of reason. It is axiomatic that a common language can become the corner stone of national unity. Conversely, a plethora of languages in a given situation lends itself to social cleavage. This is a compelling argument. The question is, can a language that is alien to the indigenous cultures prevent social cleavage and sustain the edifice of national identity for as long as the local languages continue to be used among the mother-tongue speakers at the social and traditional economic levels, as surely they will be. In all likelihood, would not this super-imposed language create further cleavage not only by its inherent exclusiveness, which accentuates competition, but also its relative lack of utility at the grassroots level?

The Indian experiment proved this point. When India became independent, Macaulay's legacy of English as a medium of instruction (not unlike the much more recent 'legacy' of Afrikaans in Namibia) was already a hundred years old. That had only helped to separate the 'educated' from the rest of the masses. So, the Indian intellectuals argued for ridding the society at a certain level of its infatuation for English. Gandhi complained that because of the time taken to learn English, the standard of attainment in everything else was 'pitifully inadequate'. The Punjab University Enquiry Committee of 1932-33 drew attention to the time spent on English at the expense of the vernaculars and concluded that 'a large proportion of pupils were unable to think and write clearly in any language'. Most of the evidence available since does seem to indicate that children taught in a foreign medium are at a disadvantage compared with those who learn in their mother tongue.*5.

Clearly, there was need for an Indian medium in education and in public life. But which of the several Indian languages would fill this need? There were two forces pulling in different directions. One was the logical urge to have a strong central establishment for holding together the disparate state units. The other was the centrifugal claim by different and fairly well defined linguistic areas, which if given free play could lead to 'Balkanization' (very similar to the projected fragmentation of South West Africa by its colonial powers, aided and abetted by Odendal and his ilk). These two forces were reconciled by a political compromise. English, the language of colonial dominance, was allowed to continue as the link language.

But this was fraught with dangerous socio-economic consequences. It perpetuated a small English-knowing elite, largely urban, who clamoured for a policy of keeping education, as one commentator put it, 'in a linguistic polythene bag'.

In sharp contrast, 80% percent of the population, who lived in rural areas, continued to be a disadvantaged group equally hampered by English. Thus the danger that making Hindi

the national language would tilt disproportionately in favour of the Hindi speaker also came to apply to English, only more blatantly.

The educational scene in India is now undergoing a change. While English and Hindi are taught as subjects, the home language or at the very least the regional language (state language) is used as the medium of instruction in schools. Where Hindi is the regional language, and therefore the medium of instruction, a third language has to be learned as a subject at school. The starting point of teaching these languages as subjects is determined by the policy of each state.

There are a few private schools that use English as the medium of instruction. These schools cater for minority interests. Whether they can justify their purported existence as 'schools of excellence', only time will tell. The available evidence among the youth of India indicates that the pace-setters to date in all spheres of activity are products not of the English medium schools but of the more modestly appointed schools in every one of which a regional language is the medium of instruction.

At the tertiary levels of education, with some exceptions, English continues to be used as the medium to facilitate individual mobility and international communication. This offers scholars the opportunity to study at other Indian universities that offer disciplines that they cannot opt for at the local universities. Equally, for the academic highfliers, competence in English is an advantage in the pursuit of their studies especially in Anglophone universities overseas.

Despite problems, the Indian experiment has had some gains. "The regional languages are developing apace as media for education in certain disciplines at all levels, and there are some signs that Hindi is beginning to consolidate its position as a national language"*6. The indigenous languages continue to meet the demands for the widest possible spread of oracy, literacy, numeracy and civil rights awareness at the grassroots level at the same time as enriching work experience of a rural nature. This clearly shows that different languages can be institutionalized for playing entirely different roles in nation building. One language cannot be a substitute for the other.

1.3.2. Pedagogical

English has aptly been described as our 'window on the world' and for good reason, but it is doubtful if it can be used as a 'door' to reach that window unseasonably. Psychologists are generally agreed that a foreign language cannot be the language of early concept formation and of socialization. True, among the intelligentsia of newly emergent countries, political consciousness was maintained in a state of ferment through the medium of metropolitan languages. English may thus have marginally integrated people at the leadership level, but as an instrument of national integration it would not do nearly as well. Teaching the concept of pluralism must begin early.

The most natural aid to the growth of concepts and formation of attitudes would appear to be the language a person is born into. Educators who introduce a foreign language as the

medium of instruction prematurely run the risk of producing a generation with a mechanical verbal knowledge unrelated to its environment. That such a generation could further engender generations of woolly-minded and half-baked men and women is not altogether an alarmist view.

Nicholas Hans, the well-known comparative educationist, substantiates this view and provides a classic example. He concedes that in learning a foreign language, terms denoting concrete objects perceived through the senses would present no difficulty to the child. They would either be directly connected with the objects or translated from the mother tongue. But abstract ideas are a different matter. He continues: "...in any original language, the words denoting ideas and relations were gradually built up from a simile based on some sense impression and changed their meaning through a long process of linguistic adaptation. For a child speaking its native tongue, it is not difficult to recover the connecting links between the original and the transferred significance of the word. For a child learning a foreign language the second transferred meaning has to be learned by heart. The child thus loses the intermediate stage closely connecting the idea with sense impressions and his knowledge of the meaning of the word is only verbal".*7.

What happens to an individual is a measure of what may happen to the sum total of individuals, namely a community. Hans gives the example of Haiti. Before independence Haiti was a medley of various tribes of Africa. There was no unity of tradition or, for that matter, a common dialect or language. They had to attempt to learn French to understand each other. On gaining independence from France, the leaders, inspired by the ideals of the French Revolution, initiated a school system with French as the medium of instruction. That was several generations ago. The best they have achieved so far is a French patois for the masses and a small elite who, having completed their education in France, continue to exploit the people, still primitive and illiterate. The patois, it transpired, largely precluded linguistic skills "necessary for the verbal expression of any logically coherent analysis. Since academic education demands such expression, it seems clear that children who are handicapped in linguistic skills will be handicapped academically".*8.

A Namibian child who goes to school at 6 or 7 will have already internalized his mother tongue through experience and social behaviour, which create the necessary link between language and thinking. To superimpose on that another language, which is not only outside his experience but is phonologically and morphologically different from his own, is to impose contextual constraints leading to the inhibition of the child's thought processes and, consequently, to his production of language. The predominance of Afrikaans has in some measure already created this problem. To the present generation of school-going children, therefore, a shift of emphasis or, if you like, a switch from Afrikaans to English can only aggravate its vexation even further, for it is doubtful if there can ever be sufficient reduction of needs in the learning situation for the pupils to be able to set their sights higher.

B. W. Tiffen, an educationist with a wealth of African experience asks, “Would it be better culturally as well as easier for children to learn through an African language?”*9. Tiffen contends that there are two basic conflicts behind the choice of the language of instruction. The first concerns the real purpose of these schools. Are they aimed at basic education for the majority of the pupils who will receive no further education or are they to be seen as preparatory schools for the minority who go to secondary and tertiary education? Secondly, acquiring fluency in English as the key to technology and international communication may absorb much of the teaching time to the detriment of fluency in an African language and of understanding the culture of the society.

Let us take a look at the first conflict. In view of the anticipated abundance of resources that would be forthcoming for the task of developing independent Namibia, the educationist might well question the validity of this conflict. He might argue that providing education to all and sundry through all levels without bottlenecks, either academic or social, could obviate this dilemma. But such a contention would be untenable in the first place even in the most egalitarian societies; for, aptitudes, abilities and attainments in children vary considerably. Secondly, even if for argument’s sake, we claim that such education is possible, it would only lead to creating an academic surfeit that is apt to fill up the town streets with jobless, idle youths who would eventually be alienated from society. A society cannot be sustained if it is unable to rejuvenate itself periodically with ‘new blood’ committed to the national cause.

As for the second conflict, one cannot do better than quote Lyson B. Tembo of the University of Zambia. “...Either we enforce the importance of African culture or we conclude that what we need for our existence as human beings is only economic development without the values that have guided our existence on personal, social and aesthetic levels.”*10. It would be folly to hope that sustainable economic development is possible without regard to a society’s traditional economic activities bound up with its social life.

Zambia tried to resolve the conflict by settling for English in 1966. John Mwanakatwe, the Minister of Education at the time said, “I would emphasize that the decision is one to make learning easier”. Purportedly, it would help the pupils in the long run to grapple with the tremendous advances that have made education more linguistically saturated. Is this axiomatic? Surely, it is not as if children are so many *tabulae rasae* that you can record anything in their minds at your bidding?

Nine years after the Zambia Education Act, R. Sharma and P. L. Higgs had this to say in their report: “We know of no researches which establish that children learn better through the medium of a second language than through their mother tongue”. On the other hand, “...findings... indicate that academic achievement is lower among children who have learned through a language which is not their mother tongue’.*11. In particular, they mention research on such indicators of ability as speech, auditory comprehension, reading and problem arithmetic. They reinforce their argument by citing the study completed in 1974 by Omani Collison of Ghana. “Collison conducted an experiment with two groups of primary children using some science materials. The

children spoke different Ghanaian vernaculars as first languages, whilst English was their second language. Collison found that the children, aged between 12 and 14, made for more deductive leaps and recognized more analogies when taught science in the vernacular than in English, even though they had been studying English for six years". Collison affirms, "When the language is foreign, the children may mime adult concepts without any appreciable contribution toward their own conceptual growth. If they cannot express ideas or discuss them with their peers, conceptual growth may be stunted or impaired". The Sharma/Higgs report also cites Professor James Britton who, in his article 'Schools and the Mother Tongue' says, "In so far as teachers in pursuing a fresh-start language policy –in Zambia's case English medium- succeed in outlawing the kind of language that an infant has acquired, they will outlaw also the kinds of learning that have developed in infancy".*12.

An earlier report (1/73) by Dr. R. Sharma, 'The Reading Skills of Grade Three Children', showed how deplorable the reading skills as supposedly developed by the fully integrated Zambia Primary Course in English were. "Only about 18 out of every 100 can manage all the Grade One words while only 7 out of every 100 can read all the words at the levels of Grades One and Two". The Namibian educator who has conjured up visions of a future Anglophone Namibia must pause, seeing how disquieting the implications of these findings are, especially considering how English was not altogether alien to Zambia even before its independence in 1964.

A report by Dr. R. Sharma and T. Henderson on 'Numeracy at Grade Three Level' (1/74) showed that the results were poorer than the ones obtained by Grade Three pupils in the Reading Skills referred to in the foregoing paragraph. They ascribe the poor performance to the medium of instruction. "Pupils are expected to develop skills and concepts in Mathematics using English, after only six weeks of initiation into what is for many a totally new language". In an earlier investigation Dr. Bryson McAdam, though himself an ardent advocate of the English medium for Zambia conceded that non-English medium pupils were superior to English medium pupils in Grade Four problem arithmetic (Page 8 of Sharma and Higgs). Of course, this grudging concession was only to damn it with faint praise, for he went on to argue that the exclusive use of English as medium of instruction throughout the primary school would develop in the child a higher degree of verbal skills than if instruction were provided in more than one language at various stages.

But the assumption that pupils '*learn*' enough English at the primary levels to be able to '*use*' it in the secondary classes is untenable. Language is never such a self-sufficient skill in this sense except when children learn it through its use, as with the mother tongue. *13. Without this reinforcement, English can only encourage rote learning without cognition. McAdam erred, according to Sharma and Higgs, because his survey was conducted only along the line of rail, where English is more often spoken inside as well as outside of school than it is in the rural areas of the country. "He also ignored socio-economic factors, which have indicated in other studies that the higher the income of a child's parents the more likely he is to be academically proficient, and, in Zambia, the more likely that English is spoken in the home", they added.

Those who argue the case for English might well be tempted to point to the proven competence in English of the relatively better educated indigenous urban South African and to the fact that teaching of English has an established tradition in certain parts of South Africa. However, it would be less than objective to use this insignificant example to make a vast generalization. Besides, such an indigenous South African had a favourable milieu in which to learn English. L. W. Lanham in his essay, 'English Teaching in African Schools' says, "Until the Second World War the African School child learning English in South Africa had considerable advantages over his counter parts further north because of opportunities afforded him to learn by natural assimilation (emphasis added). These advantages derived from contact with the largest concentration of mother tongue speakers of English on the continent". *14.

The situation obtaining in Namibia, such as it is, does not lend itself to this sort of assimilation. Learning a language calls for assimilating a great deal of information in an organized way and committing it to the level of habit. The problem with English is that the child makes false analogies with a previously learned language. To make matters worse, the vagaries of English orthography often prove to be an inhibiting factor. It is unrealistic to squander money to attack the cumulative effect of mother tongue interference and the orthographic complexities of English. We often hear the proposition that children are better at language learning than the older ones. But there is a rider to it; it is only true of learning a language in a situation of immediate use. Learning a language in a classroom is a different kettle of fish. Without the immediacy, it is the older pupil who shows the stronger motivation.

Under pedagogical constraints, one could also consider the problems involved in developing a cadre of teachers equal to the task of meeting the educational needs of Namibia. Assuming that the medium would be English, even with a massive teacher-training/upgrading programme, it is doubtful if a cadre of fully qualified teachers can be produced in less than a generation span, if that. "It is not so much teachers of English as teachers of all subjects in English who must be trained in a fashion not hitherto attempted. ...Undertaking such programmes implies having a long-term language policy and sticking to it".*15. And what of the interim?

The English the Namibian pupil might acquire would derive primarily from the existing primary school teacher. When we consider this, we can see that the die of a deviant form of English would be cast irrevocably for the upcoming generation or two. Recent research has shown that almost all children in Anglophone Africa have their first real exposure to English when they enter a primary school. And yet, only a very small percentage of primary school teachers, mostly the older ones, can boast of acceptable English standards that can help children to benefit from the aural-oral approach which has to precede reading and writing.

The majority of the younger teachers are woefully inadequate in their English. To quote Lanham again, "Teacher training institutions concentrate, perforce, on bolstering the inadequate English of the trainees and provide very little that is likely to be effective for oral-aural language teaching. Once in the classroom, the average teacher quickly resorts

to such timeworn practices in African Education as the endless repetition (in her own aberrant pronunciation) of the same word or sentence. ... This kind of teaching sets a deviant pattern of linguistic behaviour, which is carried beyond the primary stage into the speech of many adult Africans". *16.

This tendency is not confined to Africa alone. In 1959 the following statement was made at a conference called by the British Council, "... It is no exaggeration to say that the vast majority of those responsible for teaching English language in East Pakistan (now, Bangla Desh) are themselves incapable of understanding a single sentence spoken by a native speaker, of producing, orally or on paper, a single correct sentence, however simple".*17. Very harsh indictment this, coming as it does from the British Council, which would have been pardoned even if it had been less direct in its frankness.

1.3.3. Administrative

An English medium scheme should be embarked upon only after such constraints as writing of text books, training of teachers, building of more schools with adequate facilities and providing supporting services for education are tackled effectively. A British Council document states succinctly some of the lessons drawn from Zambia's experience with an English medium scheme, which is useful to other countries planning a similar scheme. *18.

No English medium scheme should be embarked upon on a nationwide basis until the material produced has been thoroughly tried out and tested in a small number of controlled institutions over a period of some years.

The scheme should not be started unless sufficient teachers with adequate educational background and command of oral English can be trained in English medium techniques for a period of at least three years.

The schools themselves should be conducive to the starting of such a scheme i.e. they should have cupboards for storage of equipment, facilities for group work etc.

Supervisors must be thoroughly trained and available in adequate numbers to ensure successful supervision.

The inspectorate should be fully trained in and conversant with the English medium scheme. Otherwise, the help they will be able to offer to teachers to improve standards will be minimal.

Centres should be established in the regions where supervisors can distribute material, give demonstration lessons, conduct seminars and workshops and work through the lessons that should be taught in the immediate future.

In addition to these, there must be centres for evaluation of material and further research, as also local examination agencies suited to the system that is likely to evolve in a newly

independent country. Namibia lacks all these at the present moment. In a system where almost half of the initial intake drops out by the end of Sub A and two thirds by Standard 2, such resources as mentioned above were deliberately kept meagre to subserve the South African designs. Needless to say, all that will change when Namibians can control their resources without the South African administration holding the purse strings as it is now.

1.3.4. Economic

Even supposing that Namibia's economic potential to launch such an economic blitzkrieg is sufficient, one has to consider the cost benefits or otherwise of an all-out assault on ignorance by using English so pervasively. A politician's immediate concern is how to implement not so much what is pedagogically desirable as what is feasible in the short-term, given the need to reconcile contending socio-economic forces in operation. Admittedly, it is impossible for him to formulate an apolitical scheme. It is politically expedient to presume that linguistic dissensions can be pre-empted by introducing English. Yet, this is essentially a negative approach. More positively, the Namibian politician is apt to argue that investing in English progressively, in a staggered fashion, would pay dividends in the long run. The accepted thinking is that such investment would over a period of time create greater job opportunities and would broaden the economy. But, how soon will this happen?

Although diversification of the economy and of employment is important, agriculture with pastoralism is likely to remain the main occupation for most Namibians in the foreseeable future. The contention that whatever English a rural Namibian could muster would make him a better farmer and pastoralist or, for that matter, a small trader is specious. If anything, teaching pupils English from the beginning would create job expectations far removed from what his rural environment has to offer – expectations that are most unlikely to be fulfilled. A rural-urban drift with its inevitable socio-economic consequences would ensue.

In this regard, what Njekwa Kamayoyo, formerly of the Lusaka Curriculum Centre, did say some time ago in the context of Zambia would apply to Namibia just as well: "...for a long time from now, the diversification of our economy, especially in the vast rural areas, will not rely on technology. To cherish such an idea is to cry for the moon. People whose standard of living is more or less below the breadline cannot suddenly find themselves operating complicated machines on their individual farms and in other small scale economic activities".*19.

Referring to the Botswana Primary School Leaver (taught in English), Brian Rose in his essay, 'Economic Problems in African Education' emphasizes the wastage involved in such a scheme. 'So, whilst discontented with his traditional place in the extended family, he discovers that he has not those skills that ensure his place in the 'new nation', and he very easily becomes an out-of-work, lounging around whatever town takes his fancy.*20.

In a developing country, educational planning cannot afford to be uncoordinated with the country's economic potential. For that reason it cannot be permissive. The aim of propagating English as the language of technology in anticipation of quick industrial expansion might precipitate a rural-urban drift, thus upsetting the rhythm of development. As K. G. V. Krishna in his paper, 'Resources and Problems of Economic Development' foresees, in the context of East Africa, the displacement of resources for agriculture directly into industry might interrupt the general tendency of moving from subsistence agriculture to cash cropping. World Bank missions have time and again emphasized the need to raise the earnings of the agricultural sector as a pre-requisite for industrial expansion. In this context, Brian Rose continues, "Hence preliminary attempts at industrialization should not be for export but to meet the needs of a growing local market created by agriculture."*21.

One is persuaded to believe that one could be a good farmer or a trader and what have you without the benefit of English. In the light of this, the cost benefit of unrestricted Anglicization is doubtful. In economic terms, rather than being investment, the effort could only be categorized as consumption, at best.

1.4 Conclusion

Would English be a panacea for all the ills of Namibia? Or would it open a Pandora's box of unpleasant surprises? Or could there be hope for Namibians at the bottom of it, after all? What role can Namibian languages play in the new nation of Namibia? At independence, its leaders will be in the unenviable position of having to determine whether the prospect of letting English into the country, either totally or partially, can be likened to that of letting into Namibia either a "Trojan Horse" or a 'Liberator'. Their task would be easier if they can be sure of the answers to the following questions:

Would the introduction of English create in Namibia a disadvantaged group that will be handicapped by its relative lack of English?

Conversely, would its introduction lead to the creation of an elitist group that would be anathema in a projected egalitarian society?

Would English as medium of instruction inhibit cognition and promote rote learning?

How easy would it be to erase Afrikaans from the Namibian psyche, by the stroke of a pen as it were, when it had been a 'bread and butter' language for some for so long?

Would a non-mother tongue medium of instruction from a related group of languages make academic performance any better?

At what level should English be introduced as a subject?

Allowing that it would serve the purpose of maintaining international contact, at what level should it be introduced as a medium of instruction?

How soon and in what manner can an infrastructure and a cadre conducive to the spread of English be created?

Would the progress that the nation aims to achieve through the introduction of English be any more efficiently and/or cheaply achieved by encouraging local languages?

Reference and Notes

- *1. Extrapolated from UNIN 'Language Profile Summary' and 'SWA/Namibia Prospectus, 1980'
- *2. G. E. Perren: 'Education through a Second Language' in 'Education in Africa'. Richard Jolly (Ed) (East African Publishing House 1969) Page 205
- *3. The first of the five factors mentioned in a report on the Seminar
- *4. Mubanga Kashoki: This was said at the Annual General Meeting of the Zambian Language Group almost a year ago (as reported in the Zambia Daily Mail of 19 June 1979) He goes on to say that, as a result, African languages have had to settle for roles on the extreme fringes of development, while European languages have been accorded strategic and functional centrality.
- *5. Nigel Grant: 'Education and Language' in 'Education and Nation Building in the Third World' J. Lowe et al (Ed) (Scottish Academic Press. 1971) Pp. 90-191
- *6. Ibid 198
- *7. Nicholas Hans: 'Comparative Education' (Routledge Paperback 1967) Page 41
- *8. Peter Herriot: 'Language and Teaching; a Psychological view' (Methuen 1971) Pp. 42-43. In this context he mentions both **Maturation** (physiological development) and **Experience** as being necessary to create the environment in which language skills develop. But if there is environmental deprivation, it leads to impaired language skills resulting in what he calls 'language deficit'.
- *9. B. W. Tiffen: 'English versus African Languages as the Medium of Education in African Primary Schools' in 'Conflict and Harmony in Education in Tropical Africa' Godfrey Brown and Meryn Hiskett (Ed) (George Allen & Unwin Ltd.) Pp 319-320
- *10. Lyson P. Tembo: 'The African University and Social Reform' African Social Research (Journal) 25 June 1978
- *11. R. Sharma and P. L. Higgs: 'The Impact of English Medium on Children's Learning' A report by the Evaluation Committee of the Curriculum Council (25 Aug. '75) Pp 6-8

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