

The Language of Instruction in Asia and Africa: Some Issues

Birgit Brock-Utne

Department of Education, Faculty of Educational Sciences, University of Oslo, Norway.

Abstract

Children learn better if they understand what the teacher is saying. In Africa and some countries in Asia, children are taught in languages they do not speak at home and do not naturally hear around them. Examples from Africa are here contrasted with examples from some Asian countries like Sri Lanka and Malaysia. These countries show the benefit for students of studying a difficult subject like science in a language they command well. This theme cannot be understood unless one looks at the capitalist policy ruling in the world today, increasing differences between people, making the rich richer and the poor poorer. When it comes to Africa and Asia, it is also necessary to look at the colonial history of these continents. In many African and Asian countries, education policy decisions are influenced by global discourses created in the capitalist world and shaped by multilateral organizations. The role of the elites adhering to private schooling for their own children has to be understood.

Keywords: Language of instruction, science teaching, private schooling

Suggested Citation: Brock-Utne, B. (2022). The language of instruction in Asia and Africa: Some issues. *Sri Lanka Journal of Education*, 1(1), 29-49

Email: birgit.brock-utne@iped.uio.no

Introduction

In my article, I shall focus on languages of instruction, on languages that are threatened as academic languages or not used in education at all, even though these are the languages people speak. Few years ago, I wrote an article on African and Asian Studies (Brock-Utne, 2013). In the article, I looked into the unfounded belief in many so-called anglophone countries in Africa that mathematics and science are best taught in English and not in an African language, the language pupils and teachers normally speak and command much better than English. Examples were given from Tanzania, South Africa, Botswana, Lesotho and Ghana. The reintroduction of English from the 5th grade in primary school in math and science in the Kiswahili speaking island of Zanzibar was discussed at some length. Examples from Africa were contrasted with examples from some Asian countries like Sri Lanka and Malaysia. These countries show the benefit of studying a difficult subject like science in local language for students. The theme cannot be understood unless one looks at the capitalist policy ruling the world to-day, increasing differences between people, making the rich richer and the poor poorer. When it comes to Africa and Asia, it is also necessary to look at the colonial history of these continents. The role of the elites adhering to private schooling for their own children has to be understood.

The language situation on the African continent

In a lecture on the detrimental effects of the structural adjustment policies on the economic development of Africa, Abugre (2010), the leader of the millennium development campaign for Africa, reminded the audience that within the borders of Africa, one could place all of China, all of India, all of the US and most of the Europe.

There are some similarities between the countries in sub-Saharan Africa which have to do with their colonial past, the work of missionaries, the policy of colonial governments and now the donors using rescheduling of debt payments as a reason for imposing conditionalities leading to greater inequality within African countries.

Except for South Africa's use of Afrikaans in some South African universities, there is not a single country in sub-Saharan Africa that uses an African language as the language of instruction at secondary or tertiary level. Even languages with millions of speakers like Kiswahili (131 million speakers) and Hausa (53 million speakers) are not used as languages of instruction at higher levels of education. When the colonial powers divided Africa among themselves in Berlin in 1884, they did not care about the languages people on the continent spoke. The country Niger became "francophone", getting French as the language of administration and education. The neighbouring country, Nigeria, became "anglophone". But in both countries millions of people speak Hausa and can understand each other through using that language. All African languages are cross-border languages and most Africans are multilingual in African languages. But an African who speaks two

very different African languages perfectly is not called “bilingual”. They are called bilingual only if they can speak of the European languages (English, French, Portuguese, etc.).

CASAS’¹ research shows, according to Kwesi Kwaa Prah, the Director of CASAS, that 90% of the total population of sub-Saharan Africa can be grouped into 23 language clusters; in fact 12-15 such languages would suffice for 75%-85% of the population (Prah, 2005, 2009b).

The identification of language communities in Africa has been approached in a way which favors the recognition of practically all dialects and phonological variations as separate languages. Many of the missionaries who came to Africa and wrote down African languages in order to bring the Bible to the people in their language “never looked at African societies outside the framework of colonial boundaries or the immediate areas of missionary settlement and evangelical zeal” (Prah, 2005, p. 39). The fragmentation approach adopted by missionaries from Europe and the US has led to written languages which are in effect dialects much closer to each other than many Norwegian dialects. In the book “The Role of Missionaries in the Development of African Languages” (Prah, 2009a) African scholars from all over the continent note that, much of the work of missionary groups laid the foundations for the literary rendering of African languages, the wider object of African education was not their principal aim. The central purpose of missionary endeavors was to use African languages to win African souls for Christianity. The authors in the book edited by Prah (2009a) show that missionary approaches to the writing of African languages have—because of rivalries between missionaries from different countries, through the unsystematic selection of languages and the use of western linguists who were not native speakers—created classificatory confusion, multiplication of ethnicities and effectively an African Tower of Babel. In the north-west of Namibia, for example, where most of the indigenous population live, several OshiWambo dialects are spoken. Two of these dialects, OshiNdonga and OshiKwanyama, have been written down as if they were separate languages. While OshiNdonga, the first of the two dialects to be written down, was put into writing by Finnish missionaries, OshiKwanyama was put into writing by German missionaries. However, there are other OshiWambo dialects that are much more different than the OshiKwanyama and OshiNdonga so-called “languages” (Brock-Utne, 1995; Brock-Utne, 1997).

¹CASAS (Centre for the Advanced Study of African Society) is a research institute based in Cape Town. The scope and political profile of CASAS is Pan-African, and its scientific focus is linguistics. CASAS was established in 1997 to lay the foundation for the development of African languages based on unified orthographies for cognate and proximate languages, which had to that date been written differently. Structurally cognate languages have a similar grammatical structure, as they share a common ancestry.

From one colonial language to the other in Rwanda

The new language policy of Rwanda is likely to have disastrous effects on the learning of school subjects for thousands of children. Since independence from Belgium, Rwanda had retained French as the official language and was termed a 'francophone' country, although the whole population, Hutus and Tutsis alike, speak Kinyarwanda and many of them also speak Kiswahili. In Parliament, in administration at the national level and in the Supreme Court, Kinyarwanda is the language predominantly used. Before the genocide Kinyarwanda was used as the language of instruction in the first three grades in schools, then a switch to French occurred. Schweisfurth (2006) mentions that the Government of Rwanda after the genocide insisted on a trilingual education policy (Kinyarwanda, French and English) to secure greater equity between groups who favored one or the other language. A trilingual policy might have been good for Rwanda, provided that Kinyarwanda – a language that is spoken by 99.4 per cent of the population, according to the Government – had been the language of instruction with French and English learnt as foreign languages (as subjects). In 2008, the international 'development' partners and the new elite in Rwanda decided to do away with French and to introduce English from the first grade of schooling. English is the language of Rwanda's new elite – especially the Rwandan Patriotic Front under the leadership of Paul Kagame and other Tutsi returnees from so-called anglophone countries (Isabela, 2012). This did not work and in 2011 Kinyarwanda was reintroduced as the language of instruction, but only for the three first grades and then a switch to English as the language of instruction occurs. In many schools, especially in the capital Kigali, English is the language of instruction from the very first grade of primary school. This policy was implemented in violation of recommendations by UNESCO and the African Union (Brock-Utne, 2017).

Coyne (2015, p. 619) has examined the relationship between inequality and education through the lenses of colonial language education policies in African primary and secondary school curricula. He has used data from 33 African states. He concludes:

When colonial languages are the medium of instruction, income inequality is significantly higher even controlling for robust predictors of cross-national inequality. Results suggest that very heavy emphasis on such languages increases inequality by impeding progress through school, particularly for marginalized groups.

Prah (2012) considers the asymmetric conditions created by the colonial languages, a chief component undermining the edifice of development in sub-Saharan Africa.

The International Year of Indigenous Languages

In the 55th plenary meeting of the United Nations, which took place on 17 December 2018, the year 2019 was declared the International Year of Indigenous Languages (Brock-Utne, 2019b). On the 17 December 2019 a high-level event for the closing of the International Year of Indigenous Languages was organized at the UN Headquarters in New York. The official website from the high-level event² mentions that there are at least 2600 indigenous languages in danger of disappearance. It mentions the risk that parents and elders can no longer pass on indigenous languages to their children and that indigenous languages fall out of daily use. Some years back I met a well-known, high-profile Professor from Mozambique. I asked him what African language he spoke. He said English and Portuguese. I said I did not mean the language of instruction in school, but the language he communicated in at home, the language his mother sang the lullabies in. He said: “Portuguese”. He did not have an African language anymore and was not able to talk with his grand-parents who lived in a rural area. In South Africa, I have met black upper-class parents who send their children to expensive private schools with English as the language of instruction and speak only English with their children at home. The website from the UN Year of Indigenous Languages mentions that the survival of local languages will depend on the prosperity and political influence of the language users and their ability to speak and use the languages in all spheres of life.

The fate of the Sami in the Nordic countries is very similar to the fate of many other indigenous peoples in the world. The relationship between the Norwegian, Swedish and Finnish states vis-a-vis the Sami is colonial in origin as the former president of the Norwegian Sami Parliament, Ole Henrik Magga, (1996) has described.

In an article on the Indigenous and Minority Languages of Northernmost Scandinavia and Finland, Huss (2017) writes that during the 1970s the ethnopolitical Sami movement gained strength. Today official language acquisition planning in Norway, Sweden and Finland includes explicit protection and promotion of indigenous and minoritized languages, regarded as part of the national heritage of these countries.

Huss (2017) mentions studies which have compared the education in and of the Sami language in Sweden, Finland and Norway and come to the conclusion that all countries have taken steps forward but the school has not yet become a sufficient counterforce to the far advanced language shift among the Sami. She notes that the terms of learning Sami and maintaining Sami identity through school education varied considerably from country to country. Norway stood out as offering the best terms in all respects. She also noted that the

²<https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/news/2019/11/high-level-event-iyl/>

fulfillment of Sami language rights through compulsory school education was least satisfactory outside the official Sami administrative areas, and also regarding the smaller Sami languages such as South Sami, Lule, Inari, and Skolt Sami.

Outakoski (2015) studied literacy development among 9 to 15 year old North Saami learners in the core Sami areas of Finland, Norway, and Sweden. She found that all these school-children were exposed daily to at least three languages - North Sami, English and Norwegian, the national majority language. Their exposure was through the school but also through the media, popular culture, tourism, literature and the home. The languages were, however, unevenly distributed in these contexts and North Sami could easily be sidelined by the other languages. While the pupils found plenty of written content in Norwegian well as in English, there was less written content to be found in their Indigenous Sami language.

Privatization of education

In an article on the Worldbankification of Norwegian development assistance to education, I show that even in a period with a Minister of Development from the social-democratic party, money given to the World Bank to assist secondary education in Tanzania was given with the conditionality that the money should be used for private schooling only (Brock-Utne, 2007). It is sad to note that privatization of education in Africa has happened through Norwegian “development” aid. Insisting that the money should be used for private schooling only was against the official policy of Tanzania at the time as well as against the policy of the Social Democratic Party of Norway. When in 1989 the Minister of Development, Kirsti Kolle Grøndahl, who had earlier been the Minister of Education, proposed that support to the education sector in Tanzania be expanded. She probably had not foreseen that the \$US 8 million that was granted, based on her initiative, would be given to the World Bank to create a new non-governmental organization which would be disliked by many officials in the Tanzanian Ministry of Education. Nor would she have predicted that this organization would further the privatization of the secondary school sector with the outcome of creating larger disparities between regions and groups of people in Tanzania. The World Bank established an NGO called the National Education Trust Fund (NETF) totally financed by Norway, but running according to the neo-liberal policies of the World Bank. A frank consultancy report prepared for NORAD on the Fund stated: “There is lack of local support for the Fund. The Fund is designed for dependency on donor support.

Without donor support the Fund would be non-existent’ (Galabawa & Alphonse, 1993, p. 3). Most of the program officers I interviewed in the Ministry of Education in the spring of 1992 disliked the NETF because the support was only supposed to go to private secondary schools, thus weakening the government sector (Brock-Utne, 2000). The officers I talked with in the CCM headquarters, were especially annoyed at the NETF, claiming that it would lead to greater disparities in the country, disparities between regions, between

religions and between the rich and the poor. In a clear protest against NETF the CCM office started another fund they named Nyerere Educational Trust Fund-using the same acronym - NETF. This NETF was to support able students coming from very poor homes to get to secondary school.

When Nyerere was in power, he was very much against an introduction of private primary schools in Tanzania. He argued against the introduction of private primary schools arguing that they would be likely to create a more unjust society, create schools for the rich and for the poor. But after he stepped down, the road was open to adopt the “Education and Training Policy” (MOEC, 1995), which opened up for private primary schools. Buchert (1997, p. 52), who made a study of how this policy paper had been conceptualized, reports that many of the government officials as well as bilateral aid agencies and people from the academic environment saw “a determined World Bank hand behind it.” One of her interviewees said about the Education and Training policy of 1995: “It has been stuffed down the throat of the Government by the IMF and the World Bank”. These private primary schools use English as the language of instruction. The richest parents in Tanzania send their children to very costly private primary schools, where there is plenty of instructional materials, DVDs, video and teachers who have English as their first language. Furthermore, for these children it would have been better had the language on instruction been the one they are most familiar with, but in competition with children in less expensive schools they have an advantage. Moreover, middle-class and even some lower-class parents send their children to private, English medium primary schools, but schools where they pay less, there is not enough instructional material and the teachers are not fluent speakers of English. Some hardly master the language at all, neither the oral nor the written form. These pupils run into insurmountable problems. Their parents have not understood the difference between learning a foreign language as a subject and having the foreign language as the language of instruction. For these children it would have been a much better alternative to have had all their lessons in Kiswahili, a language they master well, and learnt English as a subject from teachers who are trained to teach English as a foreign language.

Norwegian linguists, missionaries, volunteers working in secondary schools and Norwegian academics working at universities in Africa have been concerned with the fact that the foreign language used as the language of instruction prevents African children from learning subject matter and developing their own language. It acts as a barrier to knowledge. Though we are just five million Norwegians, we use Norwegian as the language of instruction all the way through primary and secondary school and the first years of university education. We shall later see that Norwegian as an academic language is increasingly being threatened by English at master and doctoral levels. We still mostly retain our own language as the language of instruction. Children of asylum seekers and other immigrants coming to Norway have to learn Norwegian, the language we speak. Though various Norwegian governments have said that they want more of the Norwegian development budget to go to education, there is little evidence that Norway at

governmental level has supported developing countries in their struggle to retain their mother tongues or familiar languages as languages of instruction. The clearest expression of government support to the use of familiar languages as languages of instruction came from Hilde Frafjord Johnsen when she was the Minister of Development (Brock-Utne, 2004). Based on her own experiences, growing up in Tanzania, she talked about the importance of being taught in a familiar language.

There has, however, been research in this area by Norwegian academics working with counterparts in Africa through the NUFU program (in e.g. Zimbabwe, Ethiopia, Mali, Tanzania and South Africa), (Brock-Utne & Skattum, 2009). The NUFU program between universities in the North and the South led mostly by academics has been taken over by a new organization of academic collaboration between universities. The last four – five years, such cooperation has taken much of my time and given many head-aches. While the official reason for the new cooperation between universities in the North and the South through the so-called NORHED³ program has been to build capacity in the South, it does not work that way as long as NORAD is in control and can stop the cooperation at any time they like (Brock-Utne, 2019a). The program also puts less emphasis on research and NUFU projects like those described in a book edited by Skattum and myself (Brock-Utne & Skattum, 2009) are not likely to take place. One of the few Norwegian official recognitions of the problems children in Africa have since they have to learn through a language they do not master comes from the Norwegian Councilor Meyer (2019)⁴ stationed in Mali. In an article, he notes that it is good that we use 50 million Norwegian kroner to further Norwegian literature in the Frankfurt book fair. “But what about using 50 million Norwegian kroner for teaching material in local languages in Africa?” he asks. He mentions that Norway uses lots of money on development aid. We ought to be in the forefront among donors to secure the use of mother tongue in schools in Africa, he claims. Unfortunately we are not.

The rhetoric of English and development

The growing craze for English all over the world is associated with the rhetoric of English and development, permeating into popular perception of the significance of English often without any critical scrutiny. Broadly, English is projected as a global language (Graddol, 2000) or a language needed for maintaining a competitive edge in a globalized world. Yet, as Coleman (2011, p. 104) notes:

³The Norwegian Program for Capacity Development in Higher Education and Research for Development (NORHED) is a program which was launched by Norad in 2012. See: <https://norad.no/NORHED>

⁴ <https://www.bistandsaktuelt.no/arkiv-kommentarer/2019/norge-bor-sikret-morsmalets-plass-i-utdanningsbistanden/>

Globalization and competitiveness are associated with a need for English and then with a need to use English as a medium of instruction, although the logical relationships between these concepts remain unclear.

A look at the situation in India

Mohanty (2017, p. 266) drawing on his work in respect of English in Indian society and education, discusses the processes through which English in India gets situated in a position of dominance, disadvantaging the other language communities. He analyses the role of English in Indian education in perpetuating social discrimination. He shows that while some groups benefit from English, most do not.

In the struggle for Indian independence Mahatma Gandhi warned that English represented cultural alienation. Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India (educated at Cambridge University and imprisoned by the British before independence) was very concerned about the language question in India and how the choice of English as the language of instruction created a class society. As leader of the socialist part of the Indian Congress party he had fought against the caste system of India. He saw that a new caste was being developed: an English speaking caste, separated from the rest of the people. He expressed in a letter that he was “convinced that real progress in India can only be made through our own languages and not through a foreign language. I am anxious to prevent a new caste system being perpetuated in India – an English knowing caste separated from the mass of our public” (cited in Gopal, 1980, p. 25). Philipson (2003, p. 6) comments:

In fact, an English-using caste has emerged, because the management of multilingualism in India has largely been left to market forces. These strengthen the position of users of English, here as elsewhere. Roughly 30 million Indians are fluent users of English, but they account for under 5 per cent of the population.

Philipson (2003) mentions that there are elites in Africa and India who speak exclusively English to their children. Mazrui (1975) called such Africans the Afro-Saxons. It is not uncommon for Indian grandparents, who do not speak English, to have no language in common with their grandchildren. Philipson (2003, p. 75) further laments: “The young upwardly mobile, internationally-oriented generation of Indians and Africans have more in common with “global” culture than with the mass of inhabitants of India and Africa.”

Mohanty (2017, p. 275) notes that even though Prime Minister Nehru feared a development of an “English knowing caste” in India, he was not able to stop this development. Mohanty writes that in fact there are now English knowing sub-castes in India, differentiated on the basis of the level of competence in English: those with excellent English who have been schooled in very expensive private schools with excellent teachers; those with average English who have also gone to private schools but less expensive ones and the pupils with poor English from low-cost private English medium schools. He

questions the practice of low-fee private schools, which claim to be providing English-medium education, but which in reality fail to teach English and fail to teach the subjects which are supposedly being delivered through English. Mohanty (2017, p. 275) describing the English knowing sub-castes asks: Whose development does English promote? As my example from Tanzania shows, the same question could be asked there as well as in the other so-called “anglophone” countries in Africa, where only about five percent of the population are fluent speakers of English. It could also be asked in the so-called “francophone” Africa where only about five percent of the people are fluent speakers of French.

In their chapter on Language Policy and Education in the Indian Subcontinent, Mohanty and Panda (2017) write about the “double divide” – the hierarchical relationship between English and the major national/ regional languages and the other divide between the major languages and the Indigenous tribal minority ones (ITM). On the Indian subcontinent English is promoted along with the major national regional languages, while the ITM languages are grossly neglected. Languages in education reflect the linguistic double divide; private schools use English as the medium of teaching-learning whereas public schools are in the medium of the dominant regional languages. The affluent send their children to the English medium private schools. This situation is rather similar to the one we find on the African continent where there is a double divide between the former colonial languages English, French and Portuguese and the larger regional languages like Kiswahili, Hausa, Oromo, Amharic. The Tanzanian linguist Martha Qorro and I describe the double divide in Tanzania between English and Kiswahili on the one hand and Kiswahili and the many community languages on the other (Brock-Utne & Qorro, 2015). In Tanzania English becomes the language of instruction in secondary schools. At this stage a third of the students drop out of school, mostly because they do not understand what the teacher says in the class.

The situation in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka's population has a literacy rate in the local languages, Sinhala and Tamil, of 92%, one of the highest for a developing country. This is also the highest literacy rate in South Asia and overall, one of the highest literacy rates in Asia in general. Sri Lanka is home to a population of 21 million people. Of this population, 74 percent are estimated to be Sinhalese, 18 per cent Tamils, 7 percent Moors, 0.3 per cent Malays, and 0.3 per cent Burghers.

By 1940 two tiers of education existed in Sri Lanka. The English medium education was provided by private schools which charged school fees. These drew children from the rich and the influential. Government schools imparted education in vernaculars to students from ordinary families who could not afford to pay for their education. This policy became a barrier for the development of local languages to a higher academic level with an

expanded vocabulary. Furthermore, it led the country into unpleasant social disparities. While those who received education in English had every opportunity for lucrative employment, those who received education in the local languages were confined to less aspiring jobs. Opportunities for higher education and access to science education were confined to a small elite group that studied in the English medium. Only 7 per cent of the native population was considered literate in English and it was this small group that received opportunities for upward mobility. After a long political debate school fees were abolished and the use of the vernaculars, Sinhala and Tamil as languages of instruction was introduced. This took place in all primary schools in 1945, secondary schools in 1953 and at the university level in 1960. The shift of medium from English to local languages in teaching science subjects brought science to the great majority of people by removing the language barrier.

Ranaweera (1976), Sri Lankan researcher and former director of education at the Curriculum Development Center, Ministry of Education, Sri Lanka, writes about the great advantages to the population of Sri Lanka of the introduction of Sinhala and Tamil as the languages of instruction to replace English, especially for the teaching of science and technology:

The transition from English to the national languages as the medium of instruction in science helped to destroy the great barrier that existed between the privileged English educated classes; between the science educated elite and the non-science educated masses; between science itself and the people. It gave confidence to the common man that science is within his reach and to the teachers and pupils that a knowledge of English need not necessarily be a prerequisite for learning science (Ranaweera, 1976, p. 423).

Ranaweera relates that the change of medium of instruction in science and mathematics always lagged behind the other subjects because of special difficulties, like the absence of scientific and technical terms, textbooks, and proficient teachers. Yet he found the greatest need to switch over to the national languages in the science subjects. He gives two reasons for this claim. First, science education was considered the main instrument through which national development goals and improvements in the quality of life of the masses could be achieved. Thus, there was a need to expand science education. He tells that the English medium was a great constraint which hindered the expansion of science education. Secondly, he notes that in order to achieve the wider objectives of science education, such as inculcation of the methods and attitudes of science, the didactic teaching approach had to be replaced by an activity- and inquiry-based approach which requires greater dialogue, discussion, and interaction between the pupil and the teacher and among the pupils themselves.

As Ranaweera (1976, p. 417) notes:

Such an approach makes a heavy demand on the language ability of the pupils and will be more successful if the medium of instruction is also the first language of the pupils.

Wedikkarage (2009) notes that for him too, it was a great opportunity and an experience to learn science subjects in his mother tongue, Sinhala, which is spoken only in Sri Lanka. It was new and exciting for all of his class-mates in the class to learn various science concepts in Sinhala. He tells that his learning experience of science took place after about eighteen years since the initiative to teach science in the mother tongue was introduced in Sri Lanka. The enthusiasm of teachers and students were quite high as well. Every parent wanted their children to learn sciences as far as possible. It was thought that by teaching science in the local languages it was possible to create a healthy nation with literacy not only in language but also in health, agriculture and environment that will finally contribute to the total development of the country (Wedikkarage, 2009).

After having used the two local languages, Sinhala and Tamil, for more than half a century, the Sri Lankan education authorities decided to bring back English medium in the teaching of science subjects at secondary level. Their reason for this change they claimed was an apparent decline in English language fluency of students at this level.

During the last half century when Sinhala and Tamil began to be used as languages of instruction in education, the Sri Lankan public witnessed intermittent debates about the appropriateness of the use of local languages in education. Although few groups engaged themselves in such a debate, the vernacular language policy in education continued up to the new millennium almost unscathed (Udugama, 1999). However, the educational authorities decided to reintroduce English as a medium of instruction for collegiate level science classes which prepare students for General Certificate of Education (Advanced Level) (G.C.E. – A/L) in selected schools from the year 2002. This reintroduction was not to replace the two local languages Sinhala and Tamil as languages of instruction at this level. It was to be used as a third language of instruction for those who wish to learn in that language. Therefore, students still have the option of selecting the language they like most to study in at this level. This decision was taken at a time when the concept of globalization was beginning to shape the manner in which educational services, particularly the medium of instruction in education, were provided across the world. It was widely debated that English should become the most dominant and preferred academic language in the world in the context of globalization. This was to the detriment of the countries that had already pledged to provide education in the mother tongue medium. In Sri Lanka too, such discourses were already beginning to take their shapes. Research studies by Wedikkarage (2006, 2009) showed the failure of the attempt to reintroduce English as the language of instruction for science and maths in Sri Lanka.

In a special issue of the International Review of Education on the use of a narrative approach in researching literacy and non-formal education in Africa and Asia, Weddikarage (2018) tells about his interviews with four teachers who had all taught in the mother tongue medium in all their teaching careers. The four teachers selected by Weddikarage taught physics, chemistry, biology and combined mathematics respectively. They were selected from top National Schools⁵ in the area. In these schools English medium was reintroduced in the year 2002 for science classes. The open-ended interviews were conducted in 2014, twelve years after the implementation of the new policy. The narrative analysis of the stories of the four science teachers gives valuable insights into the hardships experienced by both teachers and students when teaching and learning has to take place in a foreign language such as English. The teachers tell that they themselves had been taught science in the local languages, Sinhala or Tamil. A teacher of physics says that she would never have been able to learn physics herself had the subject been taught in English. She tells how her own teachers translated English science textbooks into the local languages. The four teachers tell that very often students now find it difficult to understand the lessons when they are taught in English. When the teachers see this, they explain the lessons in Sinhala or Tamil. When they do so, teachers give more detailed explanations in the mother tongue than they do when the lessons are conducted in English medium. Students expect their teachers to provide laborious explanations about various topics they study because they need a lot of facts to be successful in their examinations. However, most teachers teaching in English medium lack the ability to give elaborate explanations in English because their own English language skills are limited. The teachers tell that the students talk all the time in Sinhala in discussions in the classroom, even if the language of instruction is supposed to be English. The lived experiences of the teachers as told by them, Weddikarage hopes, will challenge the idea of reintroducing English as a medium of instruction in science subjects in Sri Lanka. If the point is to improve the English language fluency of the students, this would more easily be done by strengthening the teaching of English as a foreign language.

Furthermore, it is important to mention that that the World Bank gave its entire support for the program by allowing the Ministry of Education to purchase expensive English books required to be used by students at this level and dispatched them to the schools where the reintroduction of English medium teaching was reintroduced (Weddikarage, 2018, p. 798).

In July 2009, Associated Press (*New York Times, Asia Pacific*) wrote that;

Malaysia said Wednesday (8.7.2009) that it would abandon the use of English to teach mathematics and science, bowing to protesters who demanded more use of the national Malay language. Malay will be reinstated in state-financed schools starting in

⁵ A national school in Sri Lanka is a school that is directly funded and administered by the Ministry of Education of the central government as opposed to provincial schools which are run by the local provincial councils supported by government funding.

2012 because teaching in English caused academic results in those subjects to slip, Education Minister Muhyiddin Yassin said. There have been months of high-profile demonstrations by politicians and linguists, especially from the ethnic Malay majority, who say a six-year-old policy of using English undermines their struggle to modernize their mother tongue. English was once the medium of instruction in most schools in Malaysia, a former British colony. Nationalist leaders switched to Malay less than two decades after independence in 1957.⁶

Referring to the role of ‘the superimposed international languages’ in the African context, Heugh points out that “these languages serve only the interests of the elites” (1999, p. 306). Thus, any claim of a positive role of English in development cannot be taken to be a universal phenomenon. English is not a culturally neutral medium that puts everyone on the same footing; it empowers some and disempowers many.

Anglification of Norwegian higher education

Privatization of Norwegian education has not witnessed a large growth, even under the neo-liberal policy of the current government. The growth in the use of the English language both as the language of **instruction** in higher education and even more in academic publishing has, however, been so rapid that this growth now is a real threat to the survival of the Norwegian language as an academic language. The changes have occurred rather rapidly within the last couple of decades. They have occurred under any government we have had and they have occurred in all the Nordic countries, in fact all over Europe. Thomas and Breidlid (2015, p. 354) quote the former British Prime Minister Gordon Brown from an article he published in the Wall Street Journal in 2008 where he argues for the indispensable role of English in defining the ‘special’ Anglo-American relationship: “So, finally, I propose that together Britain and America strive to make the international language, that happens to be our own, far more freely available across the world. I am today asking the British Council to develop a new initiative with private-sector and NGO partners in America, to offer anyone in any part of the world help to learn English”.

His wish was already promoted through the Bologna Declaration. The intention of the European Union with its Bologna Declaration⁷ was to streamline educational standards in Europe. The streamlining also had the consequence of strengthening English as the language of instruction. According to Luc Soete, the Rector of Maastricht University,

⁶Malaysia drops English for 2 Subjects. The Associated Press (*New York Times, Asia Pacific*).

8th July 2009. A version of this article appeared in print on July 9, 2009, on page A5 of the New York edition. http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/09/world/asia/09malaysia.html?_r=2 Retrieved 2nd April 2011.

⁷The **Bologna declaration** (in full, Joint **Declaration** of the European Ministers of Education convened in **Bologna** on 19 June 1999) is the main guiding document of the **Bologna** process.

“National languages were perceived as a hindrance for student mobility akin to customs barriers, so the creation of an open market in English is another way for them to sell their educational products.” (referred to by Thomas and Breidlid, 2015, pp. 350-351). Some years back I was involved in organizing a European master degree program involving three universities, one in Belgium (Leuven, where the languages of instruction are Flemish and French), one in Finland (Oulu, where the language of instruction is Finnish) and one at the University of Oslo. The language of instruction of the whole master program was to be English, whatever university the students visited.

When I taught at the University of Dar es Salaam (1988-1992), many of my students said they wanted to come to Norway and continue their Ph.D. studies at my university. I had to tell them that if they wanted to do so, they had to learn Norwegian. At that time we did not have any Ph.D. courses in English. Neither did we have any Master’s program in English.

But this has changed as witnessed in the table below:

Table 1

Studies in English at Norwegian universities and colleges

Year	2007	2012	2016
Number of studies, all places of study	2 379	4 543	5 798
Percentage of all studies offered, all places of study	8,9	15,7	19,6

Source: Schwach and Elken, 2018, p. 61

In 1997, I took the initiative of organizing a Master’s program in Comparative and International Education at the Institute for Educational Research at the University of Oslo. The program started in 1998 and I was the leader of it most of the years until 2008. It was a study program intended mostly for our students from Africa, Asia and Latin America but some few Norwegian students also enrolled. I noticed that the Norwegian students actually commanded the written English language better than e.g. the Tanzanian students and for the Norwegian students it was the first time they were exposed to the use of English as the language of instruction while the Tanzanian students had used that language for at least nine years.

Academic publishing – in whose language?

The Swedish language activist Per Åke Lindblom notes that during the period 1960 to 1979 ninety per cent of Ph.D. theses delivered at the University of Copenhagen were written in Danish and 10% in English. From 2000 to 2004, all the doctoral thesis were written in English (Lindblom, 2009). Schwach and Elken (2018, p. 51) note that in 2017, 90.8% of the

Ph.D. theses examined at Norwegian universities were written in English. Only 8.5% were written in Norwegian. Of these 7.9% were written in the urban variety of Norwegian⁸ and only 0.6% in the more rural variety of Norwegian⁹.

At the level of Master theses, there has been a clear increase in the number of theses delivered in English over the last twenty years.

Higher rewards for academic publications in English

In 1991, Norwegian state institutions were given the possibility of introducing "performance salary" as a part of local salary negotiations. Before that all associate professors had the same salary and so did all professors. The whole reward system fits well with the commercialization of higher education which has also hit European universities (Brock-Utne, 2002).

In 2004, the Norwegian Association of Higher Education Institutions published a dossier called: *Vekt på forskning*¹⁰ (UHR, 2004). This publication institutionalized a reward system dividing journals and publishing companies into three levels, level zero (no reward given to the institution or researcher – most publishing companies in developing countries belong to this category - even if they publish in English), level 1 (reward given), level 2 (higher reward given – normally three times higher as level 1).

On the Internet, one can find a list of 486 ranked publishing companies. Of these, 55 companies are ranked at level 2 while 431 companies are ranked at level 1. No Norwegian publishing company is ranked at level 2, not even the University Publishing Company. More than 80% of the publishing companies ranked at level 2 are based in the US.¹¹

When it comes to academic journals, a list of 1758 ranked journals are given, among which a tenth are ranked at level two and the rest at level one. Only three of the many peer-reviewed academic journals published in Norwegian have been ranked at level two journals. Within the field of educational research, no academic journal, where any of the articles is written in another language than English, has been ranked at level two (Brock-Utne, 2001, Brock-Utne & Garbo, 2009).

The engagement of many Norwegian academics in the defence of Norwegian as an academic language can be contrasted with the attitude of many Dutch academics. In 1989 Prof. Ritzen was appointed the Minister of Education in Holland. Minister Ritzen, who has

⁸This variety is in Norwegian called bokmål and is developed from Danish

⁹This variety is in Norwegian called nynorsk and is built on dialects spoken all over Norway

¹⁰In English: Emphasis on Research

¹¹This is the web-site dealing with the ranking of publications:

<https://dbh.nsd.uib.no/publiseringskanaler/Forside>

a doctoral degree both in economics and physics, and had studied in the United States, had as a professor of economics in Holland felt frustrated because of the use of Dutch in the academia. As a minister, he now proposed that English should be the sole medium of instruction in all Dutch universities. His proposal met with overwhelming support from the academia. His proposal met, however, with harsh critique when it was presented in the Parliament. The Parliament insisted on regulating the language issue because it didn't trust the minister¹² and the academics. Therefore, the Parliament passed an amendment to the university law saying that no course can be offered in another language if it is not offered in Dutch. This was actually seen as a step backwards for those professors who wanted more English language instruction in Dutch higher education system. There has, however, still been a steady growth of Master's courses taught in English within the Dutch higher education.

Some years back, I felt that there was an acute need for a textbook in comparative and multicultural education written in Norwegian. I took the initiative to edit such a book which appeared in 2006 (Brock-Utne & Bøyesen, 2006). With two exceptions all the authors were native Norwegians. They all did most of their academic writing in English. Almost all the authors, including myself (Brock-Utne, 2006) had problems finding academic terms in Norwegian describing phenomena they normally wrote about in English. Not long after the book was published, my institute decided that the course in comparative and international education at the Bachelor level, which had been taught in Norwegian, should hereafter be taught in English. That may be one of the reasons why the book has not reached the sale figures we had hoped for.

The Norwegian case shows how a smaller European language like Norwegian is threatened as an academic language. When Norwegian academics are discouraged from publishing in Norwegian, it means that academic Norwegian will deteriorate and vocabulary will not be further developed. We shall reach a situation which African academics are in when they have difficulties discussing academic matters in African languages because the academic concepts have not been developed in their languages. All languages develop through the use and they also fail to develop or stagnate through disuse. The Norwegian case also shows the threat to Norwegian publishing companies. The language policy of Norwegian universities and colleges is in Norway, as in developing countries, a political question which has to do with distribution of power between social classes, between the elites and the masses.

A university in Africa or Asia needs to take the culture and languages of the majority of Africans and Asians into account. There is a need to rewrite the content of textbooks, change curricula and restore the languages Africans speak. There is a need for narrative study of lives in Africa and Asia. Many Western language learning theories are irrelevant to

¹²Former Minister Ritzen later worked in the World Bank in Washington DC.

the African or Asian continent. They are based on a different empirical reality, different life experiences and a different world-view. It is important to work toward a paradigm shift in the thinking on language in education in Africa and Asia. This means also searching for concepts that are built on non-Western roots, such as ubuntu translanguaging. A narrative approach is also more likely to grasp the realities of people in developing countries than many of the research methods developed in the West.

References

- Abugre, C. (2010, November 25-27). *Structural adjustment policies in Africa* [Paper presentation]. A Focus on the Washington Consensus: The Consequences of the Neo-Liberal Policies in the North and the South. Voksenåsen, Norway.
- Brock-Utne, B. (1995). *Teaching of Namibia MUn languages in the formal education system of Namibia*. Unpublished consultancy report commissioned by Ministry of Basic Education and Culture, Republic of Namibia. National Institute for Educational Development (NIED), Windhoek: Namibia.
- Brock-Utne, B. (1997). Language of instruction in Namibian schools. *International Review of Education*, 43(2/3), 241-260.
- Brock-Utne, B. (2000). *Whose education for all? The recolonization of the African mind?* New York/London: Falmer.
- Brock-Utne, B. (2001). The growth of English for academic communication in the Nordic countries. *International Review of Education*, 47(3-4), 221-233.
- Brock-Utne, B. (2002). The global forces affecting the education sector today – The universities in Europe as an example. *Higher Education in Europe*, 27(3), 283-300.
- Brock-Utne, B. (2004). Education-Job Number 1: What education and for whom? *Forum for Development Studies*, 31(2), 371–377.
- Brock-Utne, B. (2006). Innviklet utdanning for utvikling (Difficult education for development). In B. Brock-Utne & L. Bøyesen (Eds.), *Å greie seg i utdanningsystemet i nord og sør: Innføring i flerkulturell og komparativ pedagogikk, utdanning og utvikling* [How to survive in the educational system in the North and in the South: Introduction to multicultural and comparative education, education and development] (pp. 221-236). Bergen: Fagbokforlaget.
- Brock-Utne, B. (2007). Worldbankification of Norwegian development assistance to education. [Special issue]. *Comparative Education*, 43(3), 433-449.

- Brock-Utne, B. (2009). Is Norwegian threatened as an academic language? In B. Brock-Utne & G. Garbo (Eds.), *Language and Power. The implications of language for peace and development* (pp. 275-282). Dar es Salaam: Mkuki na Nyota.
- Brock-Utne, B. (2013). Language of instruction and learning in mathematics and science in some African countries. *African and Asian Studies*, 12(1-2), 83-99. DOI: 10.1163/15692108-12341252
- Brock-Utne, B. (2017). Multilingualism in Africa, marginalisation and empowerment. In H. Coleman (Ed.), *Multilingualism and Development* (pp. 64-80). London: British Council.
- Brock-Utne, B. (2019a). Models of cooperation between a university in Norway and two universities in Africa: An autoethnographic report. In T. Halvorsen, K.S. Orgeret & R. Krøvel (Eds.), *Sharing Knowledge, Transforming Societies: The NORHED Programme 2015-2018*. (pp. 379-403). Cape Town: African Minds.
- Brock-Utne, B. (2019b, June 21). Engelsk-språklig kastesystem? (An English speaking caste?) *Klassekampen*, pp.16-17.
- Brock-Utne, B., & Bøyesen, Liv. (Eds.). (2006). *Å greie seg i utdanningsystemet i nord og sør: Innføring i flerkulturell og komparativ pedagogikk, utdanning og utvikling* [How to survive in the educational system in the North and in the South: Introduction to multicultural and comparative education, education and development]. Bergen: Fagbokforlaget.
- Brock-Utne, B., & Garbo, G. (Eds.). (2009). *Language and power. The implications of language for peace and development*. Dar es Salaam: Mkuki na Nyota. Oxford. African Books Collective. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press.
- Brock-Utne, B., & Martha, O. (2015). Multilingualism and Language in Education in Tanzania. In A. Yiakoumetti (Ed.), *Multilingualism and language in education: Sociolinguistic and pedagogical perspectives from Commonwealth countries* (pp. 19-30). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Brock-Utne, B., & Skattum, I. (Eds.). (2009). *Languages and education in Africa: A comparative and transdisciplinary discussion*. Oxford: Symposium.
- Buchert, L. (1997). *Education policy formulation in Tanzania: Coordination between the government and international aid agencies*. Paris: International Institute for Educational Planning.
- Coleman, H. (2011). Allocating resources for English: The case of Indonesia's English medium international standard schools. In H. Coleman (Ed.), *Dreams and realities: Developing countries and the English language* (pp. 89-113). London: British Council. <http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/transform/books/dreams-realities-developing-countries-english-language>
- Coyne, G. (2015). Language education policies and inequality in Africa: Cross-national empirical evidence. *Comparative Education Review*, 59(4), 619 -637.

- Galabawa, J. C. J. & Alphonse, N. R. (1993). The National Education Trust Fund: Implementation, initial take off, constraints and sustainability. *A consultancy report prepared for NORAD*. Dar es Salaam: NORAD.
- Gopal, S. (Ed.). (1980). *Jawaharlal Nehru: An anthology*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Graddol, D. (2000). *The Future of English*. London: British Council.
- Heugh, K. (1999) Language, development and reconstructing education in South Africa. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 19, 301-313.
- Huss, L. (2017). Language education policies and the indigenous and minority languages of Northernmost Scandinavia and Finland. In T. L. McCarty & S. May (Eds.), *Language Policy and Political Issues in Education* (3rd ed., pp. 367-381). Springer International Publishing.
- Isabela, S. (2012). The high costs and consequences of Rwanda's shift in language policy Reform from French to English. <http://www.africaportal.org/articles/2012/05/31/costs-and-consequencesrwanda%E2%80%99s-shift-language-policy>.
- Lindblom, P. Å. (2009). Are the Nordic languages threatened as academic languages? In B. Brock-Utne & G. Garbo (Eds.), *Language and power. The implications of language for peace and development* (pp. 283-288). Dar es Salaam: Mkuki na Nyota.
- Magga, O. H. (1996). Sami past and present and the Sami picture of the world. In E. Helander (Ed.), *Awakened voice. The return of Sami knowledge* (pp.74-80). Guovdageaidnu/Kautokeino: Nordic Sami Institute
- Mazrui, A. (1975). *The political sociology of the English language*. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton & Co.
- Meyer, J. (2019). Fransk eller hausa? Om morsmålets betydning i skolen. (French or Hausa? The importance of using the mother tongue as language of instruction). *Bistandsaktuelt*. 20.11.2019
- Ministry of Education and Culture. (1995.) *The Tanzanian Education and Training Policy*. Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.
- Mohanty, A. (2017). Multilingualism, education, English and development: Whose development? In H. Coleman (Ed.) *Multilingualism and Development* (pp.261-281). London: British Council.
- Mohanty A. K. & Minati P. (2017). Language policy and education in the Indian subcontinent. In T. L. McCarty, & S. May (Eds.), *Language policy and political issues in education*. (3rd ed., pp. 507-519). Cham: Springer International Publishing.
- Outakoski, H. (2015). Multilingual literacy among young learners of North Sami. Contexts, complexity and writing in Saapmi. Umeå University: Department of Language Studies.
- Phillipson, R. (2003). *English-Only Europe? Challenging language policy*. London & New York: Routledge.

- Prah, K. K. (2005). Languages of instruction for education, development and African emancipation. In B. Brock-Utne & R. K. Hopson (Eds.), *Languages of instruction for African emancipation: Focus on postcolonial contexts and considerations*, (pp. 23-51). Cape Town: & Dar es Salaam: Mkuki naNyota.
- Prah, K. K. (2012). The language of development and the development of language in contemporary Africa. *Applied Linguistics Review* 3(2), 295–313.
- Prah, K. K. (Ed.). (2009a). *The role of missionaries in the development of African languages*. (CASAS Book Series 66). Cape Town: CASAS.
- Prah, K. K. (2009b). A tale of two cities: Trends in multilingualism in two African cities: The cases of Nima-Accra and Katatura-Windhoek. In K.K. Prah & B. Brock-Utne (Eds.), *Multilingualism - An African advantage: A paradigm shift in African language of instruction policies* (pp. 250—275). Cape Town: CASAS.
- Ranaweera, M. (1976). Sri Lanka: Science teaching in the national languages. *Prospects*, 6(3), 416-423
- Schwach, V. & Mari, E. (2018). Å snakke fag på et språk andre forstår. Norsk fagspråk i høyere utdanning og arbeidsliv. (To speak on academic matters in a language normal people understand. Norwegian language in higher education and work). Oslo: NIFU-STEP. *RAPPORT 20/2018*
- Schweisfurth, M. (2006). Global and cross-national influences on education in post-genocide Rwanda. *Oxford Review of Education*, 32(5), 697-709.
- Thomas, P. & Anders B. (2015). In the shadow of ‘Anglobalization’, national tests in English in Norway and the making of a new English underclass. *Journal of Multicultural Discourses*, 10(3), 349-368. DOI: 10.1080/17447143.2015.1041963
- Udugama, P. (1999). *Rhetoric and reality: Education in Sri Lanka after independence*. Colombo: Amal Publishing Company.
- UHR (Universitets og Høgskolerådet – the Norwegian Association of Higher Education Institutions) (2004). *Vekt på forskning . Nytt system for dokumentasjon av vitenskapelig publisering*. (Emphasis on Research. A new system for documentation of scientific publishing)
- Wedikkarage, L. (2006). English as medium of instruction for collegiate level science classes in Sri Lanka: Theory, policy and practice. (Unpublished *Ph.D. dissertation*). Oslo, Norway.
- Wedikkarage, L. (2009). Science education and English medium: The Sri Lankan experience. In B. Brock-Utne & G. Garbo (Eds.), *Language and power* (pp. 253-258) Dar es Salaam: Mkuki na Nyota Publishers
- Wedikkarage, L. (2018). Measuring the effectiveness of teaching science subjects through English medium: A narrative analysis of teacher experiences and perceptions in Sri Lankan secondary school. *International Review of Education*, 64(6), 779 – 801.