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LANGUAGE OF EDUCATION PLANNING IN ZAMBIA

REBEKAH GORDON

ABSTRACT

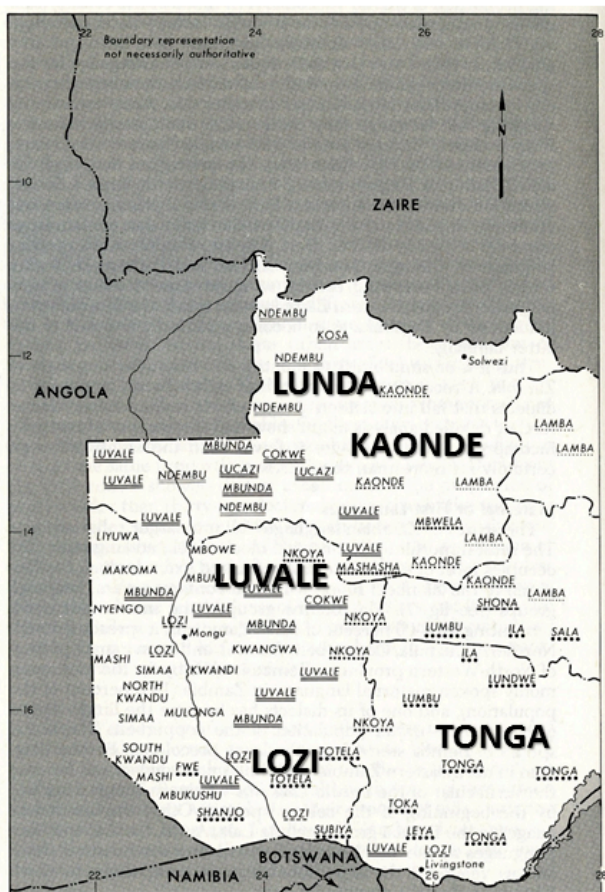
Zambia is a landlocked country in south central Africa. While its only official language is English, seven other languages are recognized as national languages. In addition, many other local languages are used. In education, however, not all Zambian languages are taught as subjects or used as mediums of instruction. This paper reviews the history of languages and their use in the educational system in Zambia. After considering what was done in the past, the current policies are examined. Finally, a Game Theory analysis is used to predict what kind of language of education policy would be most agreed upon in contemporary Zambia.

1.0 Introduction

“One Zambia, One Nation” was the motto adopted when Zambia gained independence from the British in 1964. This motto highlighted the people’s desire to become a unified nation after being disintegrated during the colonial period (Marten & Kula, 2007). Following the belief that “one nation equals one language,” Zambians adopted English as their only official language. Although Zambia has identified seven national languages, English still remains the official language and was the only language recognized in the 1991 Constitution. English is used in official governmental activities and has been the main language of instruction in Zambian schools. The majority of Zambians, however, are multilingual. Banda and Bellononjengele (2010) argue that complex multilingualism is an essential part of Zambian identity and communication. In order to not lose the linguistic resources available to Zambians, the roles local languages play need to be examined more carefully and protected. In particular, the role of local languages in education is crucial since schools are a primary site for the implementation of language policies and can have a strong effect on the overall vitality of a language.

2.0 Languages in Zambia

The history of Zambia reflects its current state of multilingualism. As far back as 300 AD, the area now known as Zambia was inhabited by Khoisan people. Around the 12th century, other groups, including the Bantu, Tonga, and Nkoya, settled in parts of Zambia. European settlers and missionaries began arriving in Zambia at the end of the 19th century. Shortly thereafter, the British colonized the area and became involved in the mining of copper. The area that is now Zambia underwent several name changes, including North-Western and North-Eastern Rhodesia and Northern Rhodesia before becoming the Republic of Zambia in 1964 (“Zambia,” 2013). The 1990 and 2000 censuses revealed that there are approximately 72 tribes within the current boundaries of Zambia and about 22 different languages spoken. Almost all of the local languages belong to the Bantu family, including the seven national languages: Bemba, Nyanja, Tonga, Lozi, Lunda, Luvale, and Kaonde. These particular languages were chosen because of their influence in various regions of the country (Marten & Kula, 2007). Figure 1 shows the general distribution of these languages.



Source: Sirarpi Ohannessian and Mubanga E. Kashoki, *Language in Zambia*, London, 1978, map 8. Used by permission of the publisher, the International African Institute, London.

Figure 7. Languages of Zambia

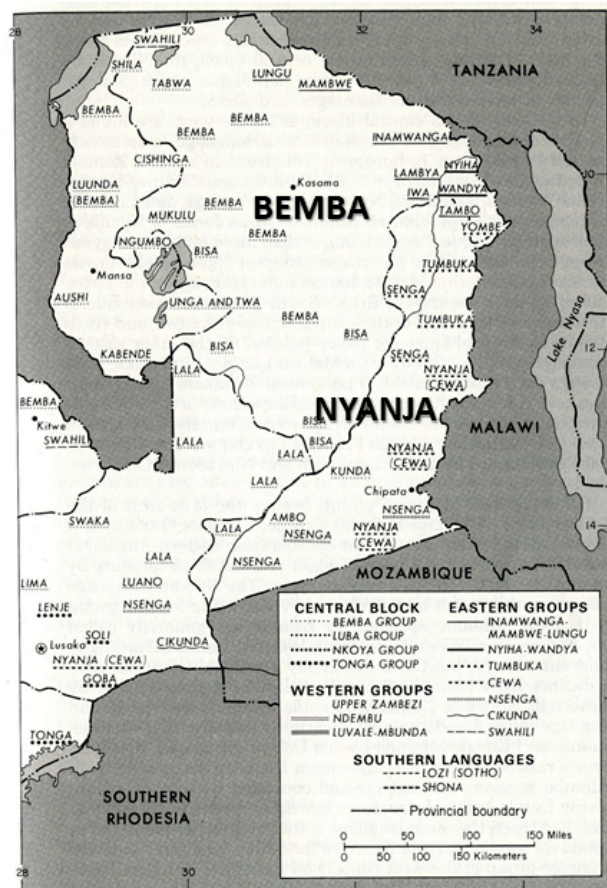


Figure 1: The Seven National Languages of Zambia

Photo Credit: *Zambia, a country study*. Washington: Foreign Area Studies, American University, pp. 64-65

Although some languages are more dominant than others, no language is spoken by more than 50% of Zambians; Koffi (2012) describes this situation as “ethnolinguistic equilibrium” (p. 194). Based on the 2000 census, Bemba is spoken as either a first or second language by 50.3% of Zambians, Nyanja by 30.2%, English by 28%, Tonga by 15%, Lozi by 10.9%, Kaonde by 3.9%, and Luvale by 3.6% (Marten & Kula, 2007). Figure 2 shows the relative numbers of speakers of each language.

Table 16.2 Language by numbers of speakers (based on 2000 census)

Language	Use as Predominant Language (%)	Use as Second Language (%)	Language	Use as Predominant Language (%)	Use as Second Language (%)
Bemba	30.1	20.2	English	1.7	26.3
Nyanja	10.7	19.5	Luvale	1.7	1.9
Tonga	10.6	4.4	Lenje	1.4	1.5
Lozi	5.7	5.2	Namwanga	1.3	0.8
Chewa	4.7	2.3	Ngoni	1.2	1.2
Nsenga	3.4	1.6	Mambwe	1.2	0.9
Tumbuka	2.5	1.3	Bisa	1.0	0.4
Lunda	2.2	1.3	Ila	0.8	0.8
Lala	2.0	1.0	Lungu	0.6	0.4
Kaonde	2.0	1.8	Senga	0.6	0.2
Lamba	1.9	1.4			

Figure 2: Percentage of Speakers of Zambian Languages
 Photo Credit: Marten & Kula, 2007, p. 294

3.0 Past Language Policies in Zambia

The language policy of Zambia has been strongly shaped by colonialism and its aftermath. Prior to 1899, the first European missionaries used local languages to preach and teach. Things changed, however, with the Phelps-Stokes Commission of 1924 which encouraged the use of local languages as lingua francas and taught them in a “three-tie model”: the first two years of education were taught in a local language, the next five years in a regional LWC, and any further education was carried out in English only (Muyebaa, 2009). This system allowed for Africans from different tribes to communicate with each other as well as with British settlers in the Copperbelt mining area. From the 1930s, English became more widespread and received high prestige. The main growth of the English language occurred after Zambia gained independence. There was an eagerness to become a unified nation; the country was ruled by a one-party democratic system headed by President Kenneth Kaunda (Marten & Kula, 2007). English was used as the only medium of instruction in schools in hopes of achieving this unity.

4.0 Present-day Language Policies in Zambia

Over the years, Zambians have begun to question and challenge the English-only language of education policy. As early as 1977, reforms were attempted, but did little to change the actual policies (Muyebaa, 2009). Various studies and research showed that Zambian students were performing below grade level in both English and local languages. For example, researcher Eddie Williams found in 1991 that reading levels among 452 students from five different schools were poor in both English and the local language, Cinyanja; most students were reading at two levels below their appropriate

grade level (Sampa, 2005). Also, a report from the Ministry of Education showed that only 25% of sixth grade students could read at minimum levels and only 3% at desirable levels in 1995; it became obvious that something had to be done to change these results. Finally, in 1996, the educational policies were re-worded after more reformation efforts; this was known as the “Educating Our Future” campaign. While English remained the only medium of instruction, local languages were encouraged to be used to help children achieve initial literacy skills. Unfortunately, the wording of the policy was vague and did not state when these efforts should begin and how long they should last. Due to this ambiguity, different teachers and schools implemented the policy in different manners. Depending on the teacher’s own language background as well as the makeup of the students in each class, local languages were used in initial literacy to various extents. In all cases, English remained the medium of instruction from grade 1 while local languages were used intermittently.

Further research showed that the 1996 policy change did not lead to higher achievement. A baseline study was conducted for the Primary Reading Programme in 1999 and revealed that students in grades 1-6 were still reading at an average of two grade levels below their own level in both English and local languages. Muyeaba (2009) believes that this is partially due to the fact that English and Zambian languages do not pair well together; initial literacy skills in a local language do not necessarily transfer to literacy skills in English. He claims that Zambian languages are phonetically based whereas English is not. Furthermore, the syllabic method of teaching local languages does not work so well with English. Students will be left confused if they are forced to transfer new literacy skills in such an ineffective manner as early as grade 1. He and others, like Mwila (n.d.) and Tambulukani and Bus (2011), believe that more time is needed to teach literacy in the local languages, “Let us allow the local languages enough time of 2 to 4 years in order to consolidate initial literacy. Thereafter, English can take over as medium of instruction” (Muyeaba, 2009, p. 11). Other Zambian linguists, such as Mubanga Kashoki, argue that African languages should be the sole language of instruction and should be associated with modernity since they can serve all national needs. He believes that English should serve only international needs as a second language (Marten & Kula, 2007).

Very recent efforts indicate that Zambia may be taking Muyeaba and other linguists’ recommendations into consideration. An article from *The Times of Zambia* from February 14, 2013 stated that the school curriculum was being revamped in several areas, including language of instruction. According to the Education Minister, John Phiri, one of the seven local languages is to be used as the medium of instruction in grades 1-4 and switch to English from grade 5 onward. A pilot program was run from January to April in 2013, but results are not yet available (Chusa, 2013). If this policy is implemented, it would mark a dramatic change in the language of education policy in Zambia.

5.0 Game Theory Analysis

To examine whether or not this change would be well received by Zambians, a Game Theory analysis of the current language of education policy will be used. The Game Theory has been applied to language planning by Laitin (1992) and Koffi (2012) to

analyze and determine which models would be the most agreed upon by all players involved in the language planning game. Before applying this theory, one must first understand the five basic components of the Game Theory: the game itself, the players, strategies, payoff, and the outcome. In this situation, the game itself is deciding what kind of language of education policy to implement in Zambia. There are many players, or stakeholders, in this game who have a strong or weak desire for a certain outcome. In this case, the players include Zambian politicians, parents, teachers, students, linguists, missionaries, expatriates, and the Ministry of Education (see Table 3). Each of these players has their own strategy for achieving their desired outcome; some may do nothing while others may vocalize their opinion in various manners. The language planning game in Zambia has payoffs, or rewards, for the players involved. The payoffs could be maintaining a local language that is important to someone's personal identity or supporting a language that could lead to socioeconomic advancement for the people that learn it. Finally, the language game in Zambia will have an outcome or end, although an equilibrium may be reached in which there is no clear outcome (Koffi, 2012).

After identifying the players involved in Zambia's language of education game (Table 3), the Game Theory can be applied using De Mesquita's (2009) Predictioneer's Model using the following weighted mean formula:

$$\text{Weighted Mean} = \frac{I \times S \times P}{I \times S}$$

To use this formula, the players must first be identified as well as their position (P), their level of influence (I), and their commitment to their position, or salience (S). The position scale created for this particular situation accounts for the various players' stances on using English and indigenous languages as mediums of education. Position 0 and 100 represent the most extreme positions on the issue. In this case, 0 represents never introducing English as a medium of instruction in Zambian schools while 100 represents immediately introducing English as the only medium of instruction. Table 1 summarizes the positions in between these two extremes. The current educational model in Zambia is represented by a position of 80 in which local languages are used for initial literacy, but English remains the only medium of instruction from grade 1. If the policy mentioned in Chusa (2013) is implemented, it would represent a position of 40 in which local languages are used as the sole medium of instruction until grade 5 when English becomes the language of instruction.

Position	Grade Level	Explanation
100	1	Use English as the only medium of instruction as soon as students enter school (grade 1).
80	1	Begin to use English as the medium of instruction as soon as students enter school (grade 1) in tandem with local languages for initial literacy (Zambia's current model).

60	3	Begin to use English as the medium of instruction in grade 3.
40	5	Begin to use English as the medium of instruction in grade 5 (this is the new model that Zambia piloted in January to April 2013).
20	7	Begin to use English as the medium of instruction in grade 7.
0	n/a	Never use English as the medium of instruction.

Table 1: Position Scale Matrix

After determining each player's position or stance on when to use English as the medium of instruction in Zambia, their level of interest was rated using a salience scale. A scale from 10-95 was used to represent the various interest levels; a 10 represents the extreme of having no interest in using English as the medium of instruction whereas a 95 represents a high interest in using English as the medium of instruction. The salience scale matrix is presented in Table 2.

Salience	Explanation
95	High interest in using English as the medium of instruction.
75	Moderate interest in using English as the medium of instruction.
50	Average interest in using English as the medium of instruction.
25	Low interest in using English as the medium of instruction.
10	No interest in using English as the medium of instruction.

Table 2: Salience Scale Matrix

Finally, each player's influence, or power, in the Zambian language of education policy game was rated. A scale of 0-100 was used where 0 represented players with essentially no power and 100 represented players with immense influence in relation to other players. Influence ratings can be found in Table 3.

The position, salience, and influence scores were assigned in accordance with information available about each of the players. Parents, for example, were divided into three different categories: rural, urban, and "elitist" to better represent each group's stance. While "elitist" parents have the most influence, they are less interested in lengthening the time spent teaching local languages. Since English is prestigious and associated with socioeconomic advancement, both rural and "elitist" parents are more interested in it being used as the medium of instruction as early as possible. Both of the groups were given a position score of 80 rather than 100 because local languages are still seen as being marginally important; many parents and researchers believe that using local languages for initial literacy can be beneficial. Mwila (n.d.) argues that learners achieve

better results when the home and school environment are similar. Therefore, teaching in a local language initially can help students adapt to classroom life.

Urban parents were rated at a position of 60 due to the multilingual nature of Zambia's large cities; urban parents realize the necessity of knowing various local languages in order to thrive in the local environment. According to Marten and Kula (2007), most Zambians in urban areas speak three or four languages (English, Bemba, Nyanja, and another local home language). For the same reason, urban teachers were rated at a position of 60 while rural teachers were rated at a position of 80. The Ministry of Education is obviously an influential player in this game and therefore received an influence score of 100; they were given a position rating of 40 to represent the proposed policy of using local languages as the medium of instruction until grade 5 (Zulu, 2013; Chusa, 2013).

Most contemporary Zambian linguists believe that every language is a resource and should be treated as such. Kashoki (2003) encourages Zambia to take a look at other African countries, like Namibia, Malawi, and Mozambique, to see how local languages can be protected in the constitution by addressing people's right to use any language and to support the national languages. For this reason, linguists and scholars were given a position score of 0, meaning that English should never be used as a medium of instruction. Similarly, progressive politicians would be interested in using only local languages as mediums of instruction while more conservative politicians would want to stick with the status quo of using English immediately as the medium of instruction in tandem with local languages for initial literacy. Hence, the positions scores of 0 for the former and 80 for the latter.

Player	Influence	Salience	Position	I x S x P	I x S
Parents, rural	10	95	80	76,000	950
Parents, urban	30	50	60	90,000	1,500
Parents, "elitist"	50	95	80	380,000	4,750
Politicians, conservative	100	95	80	760,000	9,500
Politicians, progressive	100	10	0	0	1,000
Ministry of Education	100	50	40	200,000	5,000
Linguists/Scholars	80	10	0	0	8,000
Teachers, rural	60	50	80	240,000	3,000
Teachers, urban	70	50	60	210,000	3,500

Students	10	50	80	40,000	500
Indians (Gujaratis)	20	95	100	190,000	1,900
Other Expatriates	30	95	100	285,000	2,850
Missionaries	30	10	0	0	300
Total	690	755	760	2,471,000	42,750
Weighted Mean					57.8%

Table 3: List of Players and Weighted Mean Score

In Table 3 above, all of the player's scores were used to calculate the weighted mean score using the Predictioneer's Model. The weighted mean score of 57.8% indicates that the players identified in this language planning game would agree most on a policy around position 60 on the scale in Table 1. A position of 60 means that English should be used as the medium of instruction from grade 3 onward; this was the model used during colonialism in most British colonies and is still used in some African countries today (Koffi, 2012). This position is in between the current position of 80 and the proposed position of 40; the weighted mean score of 60 indicates that the majority of Zambians would agree on delaying the introduction of English as a medium of instruction for at least one or two years. Waiting to introduce English until a later grade is in line with suggestions from various scholars who advocate for a longer period of initial literacy in the local language (Mwila, n.d.; Kashoki, 2003; Tambulukani & Bus, 2011).

As Zulu (2013) and Chusa (2013) mention, Zambia is headed in the direction of increasing the amount of time that local languages are used as mediums of instruction. The proposed policy, however, may be too much of an increase for many Zambians. The current policy recognizes only English as the medium of instruction from grade 1. The proposed policy would change this so that English would not become the medium of instruction until grade 5. According to the calculations from this Game Theory analysis, the people of Zambia would be more likely to agree on using English as the medium of instruction from grade 3.

6.0 Implications

Whether English becomes the medium of instruction from grade 3 or grade 5 is dependent upon several considerations. First and foremost, the language policy must be clearly and explicitly stated. Ambiguous wording and lack of detail led to 30 years of relatively unsuccessful language education in Zambia, so care must be taken to remedy this. Secondly, more materials and textbooks will be needed in the local languages. Thirdly, teachers will need to be trained to teach more core subjects for a longer period of time in the local languages. While both of these will cost money initially, the eventual payoff should exceed the investment. The majority of Zambians are already multilingual and rely upon their language resources to communicate specific messages in unique

ways. According to a study by Banda and Bellononjengele (2010), the English spoken by Zambians is inseparable from the local languages; unique nuances and clever meanings would be impossible without the multilingual repertoire available to most Zambians. A language of education policy that reflects the multilingual nature of Zambia and regards local languages as resources rather than problems will be well-accepted by most people in Zambia.

7.0 Conclusion

Although more and more Zambians are learning English as a second language, Bemba and Nyanja still have higher numbers of speakers (Marten & Kula, 2007). Even so, the language of education policy in Zambia currently recognizes only English as the medium of education. This policy has changed little over the years to reflect the multilingual nature of Zambia. While more radio broadcasts and government reading materials are available in local languages, Zambian schools are still using English as the main medium of education (Marten & Kula, 2007). According to this Game Theory analysis, the people of Zambia want local languages used as the medium of instruction for a longer period of time, but would still want English used as the medium of instruction around grade 3. People's attitudes regarding local languages in Zambia are changing and the current policies need to reflect that.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rebekah Gordon graduated from the SCSU Master's in TESL program in May 2013. She completed her undergraduate degree in special education at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. After that, she spent two years teaching English in Incheon, South Korea and discovered her passion for language teaching. She hopes to teach abroad again in either Africa or Asia. When not studying, Rebekah enjoys both indoor and outdoor activities, especially bicycling, inline skating, sewing, and crossword puzzles.

Recommendation: This MA Thesis summary was recommended for publication by Professor Ettien Koffi, Ph.D., Linguistics Department, St. Cloud State University, St. Cloud, MN. Email: enkoffi@stcloudstate.edu

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