

*Amil to universita*

# University Report

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NARRATOR -  
JOHN BANKOLE  
JONES:

It's always interesting to observe how yesterday's controversies become to-day's platitudes. For instance, from politician to linguist, most would now agree that somehow Africa has got to develop a lingua franca of its own, albeit on a regional basis. Secondly, French speaking and English speaking Africa must become increasingly bilingual if the barriers that history has built up between us are to disappear. Both are continuing and contemporary problems which academic and politician alike are grappling with in their own different ways. And this week we highlight each of these problems - first from Makerere University College in Uganda and then from the Federal University of Cameroun.

So far, and unlike Tanzania and Kenya her neighbours, the Uganda Government has not yet adopted an official position towards Swahili either as a national language or as a language of government. Up to now, English is Uganda's official language. But at Makerere University College students in the English Department are currently taking a keen interest in the future development of the language. One of them is Francis Katamba a second year student who plans to specialise in Linguistics when he graduates. In Kampala, Elizabeth Keeble asked Francis how he, as a student of Linguistics, sees the case for the adoption of Swahili as the national language for his country.

FRANCIS  
KATAMBA:

There are many good arguments for making Swahili the official language of Uganda. Swahili is already the most, perhaps, widely spoken language in the country. But many people who have political consciousness feel it is a shame to keep the language of our former colonial masters as our own official language. We cannot have full political independence, it is argued, if we do not have full linguistic independence, we may call it. Besides, if you want to build one nation, you must have one language or you must have a few languages spoken all over the nation. And besides, we want to involve the common man in government. The business of government of the nation is the business of everyone, but if English is the official language and if people have had little or no education and do not speak English this automatically eliminates them from the business of government. Ideological movements often, perhaps, fail in Africa because of the problem of language. For instance, in Uganda we have our move to the left. When it is translated into an African language it becomes next to meaningless, in many cases, because it is an alien concept. And when put in an African language it does not have the meaning its framers intended it to have, so a genuine African resolution perhaps is often hampered by lack of communication between the leaders and the people. Perhaps that's why Tanzania has done little better than most of us because they use the language of the people and the Arusha Declaration can be read by everyone who is literate in Swahili. You cannot have a national culture in a borrowed language. You must have an authentic African expression and it's difficult to imagine how we can have it in a European or foreign language. Swahili would make it much easier to overcome this difficulty because it is not the language of educated people - it's the language of everybody.

ELIZABETH  
KEEBLE:

Well, why do you think that, in spite of all those good reasons, the Government still has not made any comment on the situation?

FRANCIS  
KATAMBA:

The Government is probably still considering the problem. However, I don't think this silence of the Government is because they believe an African language is primitive and unable to handle problems of modern society. Language can be modernised to suit the needs of the society that uses it at a particular time. But there are many short term problems in the process of modernisation. We need to employ many efficient translators who are often lacking, to translate the laws and all the Government documents and all the books used in schools and so on into vernacular languages. This is quite expensive and for a politician it may be quite a difficult decision whether to have more hospitals and more bridges or to have more linguistic experts to carry out such a programme. But perhaps the real reason why it is difficult to make Swahili or any other African language for that matter the official language is that English, Russian, French and German are the languages of higher education and scholarship. It would be making it very difficult for our people to have to go to school in Swahili and then when they go to University to have to change over from an African language. But this can be done. Other countries have done it. And making Swahili the official language, by the way, does not mean that English would cease to be taught in schools. Students could still learn English but it would be studied just as a school subject and would be used only where efficiency cannot be maintained where Swahili is used rather than English.

ELIZABETH  
KEEBLE:

And how do you feel yourself about a situation which will, in the future, be of professional concern to you?

FRANCIS  
KATAMBA:

I very much regret that the question of language does not receive any attention from many of our leaders. Language is a very important element in nation building because the lives of everyone of us and the life of the nation is very closely tied up with language.

NARRATOR -  
JOHN JONES:

Francis Katamba, a linguistics undergraduate at Makerere University College, talking about the prospects for Swahili as a national language in Uganda.

Over now to the Cameroun in West Africa where, to the students at any rate, the prospect seems frightening. In Cameroun, the official languages are the two received languages of French and English and, at the Federal University there, courses in all the Schools and Faculties are taught in either French or English. This fact of bilingualism has, of course, imposed several problems on both the staff and the students who cannot always cope with both languages with equal facility; and this in spite of preparatory courses given to the students at home and abroad in whatever their second language may be. Now, the duty to bilingualise all students at the University has been taken on by the Department of English - they teach French to the Anglophones and English to the Francophones. The Head of the English Department is Mr Francis Mbassi Manga. On the campus, he told John Hadley how the University is coping with the situation.

FRANCIS  
MBASSI MANGA:

In fact, they are expected to follow courses in both languages when they come up to University. And I think the best of them have not got sufficient competence in the English language or in the French language, as the case may be, to follow courses in the First Year in both languages. So we devise a scheme whereby we separate them in the First year, give them a very, very intensive course in English for the francophones, and a very, very intensive course in French for the anglophones. After that, the anglophones go to France for a year and then when they return we mix them up and now they are able to follow instruction. These are the best. Now in the Science Faculty, linguistic science has helped us, as you know, a little bit to devise courses which are specific to certain registers

such as Science, Journalism and so on and so forth. And within Science we can easily divide Psychology, Physics, Medicine, Chemistry, Mathematics. But during the first year when Science or Agriculture or Law students arrive we give them a common course - i.e. syntax, vocabulary acquisition and so on. Then, in their second year, the waters part. They begin to tend towards their specialised idioms and vocabulary so that they now are able in some degree to follow lectures in the two languages, anglophone and francophone. During the Third Year they have specialised in their course and although their standard is not yet very high, they are relatively more bilingual now and can even answer questions in the exam in the other language.

JOHN HADLEY: In your estimation, the date at which the bilingual University will really find its feet will be in how many years from now?

FRANCIS  
MBASSI MANGA: Well, "find its feet" is too much to say. We have found some of our feet already - if I can say it that way. But I think what is happening is that when we have less difficulty then we may assume a priori that we can now teach in French and English without asking the francophone whether he has understood my English or asking the anglophone whether my English is clear. When we begin to get mass entrance in all the faculties of students from bi-lingual grammar schools, who will then go to Science, Law and so on, Medicine and Arts, without difficulty, then it will work. I think this

year the entrance to the Faculty of Medicine has proved that they can be bi-lingual even if they are going to Science because our lecturers who teach French and English - from the English Department - who teach English in the Faculty of Medicine report that they are considerably bi-lingual and, in fact, more bi-lingual than most of the others. So that we might be on our feet yet some time to come because until every student who enters this university has been bi-lingual at the secondary or from the primary to the secondary level, shall we then say the lecturer shall be monolingual in either French or English. But now I think the lecturer ought to be more bilingual than the student.

NARRATOR -  
JOHN BANKOLE  
JONES:

Francis Mbassi Manga, Head of the English Department at the Federal University of Cameroun.

Finally, while still on the campus, John Hadley spoke to a third year student in the Faculty of Letters who is from English speaking Cameroun. He is Joseph Wambo and John asked him how he was facing up to the problems of bi-lingualism at the University.

JOSEPH WAMBO: Well, as a student studying Languages, my problem differs greatly from that of a student studying, say, Law. I wouldn't say it is a problem for me to learn two languages, to understand lectures in two languages.

That is not the problem. The problem I face here in studying French and English is the same problem a student of Geography would face undergoing his course. But I would like to talk about someone who is doing, let us say, Law in the University of Cameroun. Very often the lecturers are monolingual and the students are supposed to be bi-lingual even though they haven't got access to the mechanism that would enable them to become bi-lingual. A student may be an English-speaking student from West Cameroun and his lecturer is French-speaking. And he has to make an effort to learn in French and to ask questions in French.

JOHN HADLEY: Do you find there are some of your fellow-students who find this is almost too much? Do you get any cases where, say, their health suffers as a result of having to make too strenuous an effort?

FRANCIS  
MBASSI MANGA: Yes, I think so. In the Federal University here there are some people who don't have a good knowledge of the two languages, who possess a first foreign language and a very feeble knowledge of the second language. And you sometimes find certain situations where they have to make enormous efforts in the study of the second foreign language. And in this case I take the West Camerounian in the Federal University who is studying in the Faculty of Law. I take that very example because about nine-tenths of the lecturers in the Faculty of Law are French speaking, and I would say

nine-tenths of the lectures are delivered in French. Therefore, if he hasn't got a good working knowledge of the French language he has to sacrifice a considerable amount of his time.

JOHN HADLEY: But you think it's all worth while?

FRANCIS  
MBASSI MANGA: Well, I think it's a considerable burden. It's worth while. But I pray, however, that in the near future a solution will be found.

NARRATOR -  
JOHN BANKOLE  
JONES: Well, let's hope that his prayers are granted. Joseph Wambo and the problems of learning and being taught in a second language -in his case, French.