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GWYNETH HENDERSON:

In this week's 'University Report' a Zambian linguist considers the question of whether African languages are dying out, and an academic who became a government minister looks back on his first year in office.

It was on January 25th last year 1971 that to the sound of intermittent gunfire General Idi Amin led East Africa's first successful military coup d'etat. Many doubts and misgivings were expressed then both in and outside Uganda at the prospect of long term military rule. However, all in all, the first year has been relatively untroubled and surely one reason must be that contrary to people's expectations General Amin did not appoint either soldiers or politicians to the majority of government ministries and posts but technocrats - men who were technically qualified to do the work. One of these men is Professor William Banage - now Minister of Animal Industry, Game and Fisheries.

Professor Banage did his first degree in Zoology, Botany and Geography at Makerere, got his Phd in Zoology in Britain, returned to Makerere in 1960 to a junior post and ended up in 1969 being appointed Professor and head of the Department of Zoology - one of the first Ugandans to get a chair at Makerere. Well how did Professor Banage react a year ago to his new appointment? In his office in Kampala Elizabeth Keeble asked him if he was surprised when President Amin made him a Minister?

PROFESSOR W. BANAGE:

It came as a complete surprise to me because I had not been expecting that I should be called upon to serve in government. I had not taken part in politics although I have taken, I hope, a respectable part in public affairs in other technical fields. My friends, both amongst students and the staff, were equally surprised, but they were very pleased about it, perhaps more pleased than I was because even then I didn't anticipate how hard the work would be and I think they have continued to support me so they must have been genuine about their pleasure.

MRS. E. KEEBLE: Were you given hand-over time as it were?

PROFESSOR W. BANAGE: Well not quite, because this has been regarded to be a government action, and I did surrender my present job immediately. Nevertheless, I have been asked by Makerere to continue to advise in the department since they have not been able to get a replacement for me.

MRS. E. KEEBLE: It is, I believe, extremely rare, although I think there was one other example in Africa, that a senior academic should be appointed over-night as a minister in a military government. What qualities of your former background do you think you bring with benefit to your new post?

PROFESSOR W. BANAGE: Well you're right in saying that there has been one other academic Professor in the Sudan who became a minister with the military government. I think this is not in itself a bad thing because it means that a technical person can be called upon to serve in his technical field in government, in the execution as well as devotion of government policy apart from the amassing of new knowledge and techniques.

Now, I, being a zoologist, do not find a lot of work in this ministry as strange because the ministry includes five sections, or departments - there is a Department of Veterinary Services and Animal Industry, I am not a veterinarian, but I know quite a lot about animals. I have worked in the Department of Agriculture with the agriculturists who have been doing animal breeding and nutrition and so-on, so I am able to talk to these people in a language which is not too strange to me. The department also studies things like animal diseases and animal parasites and so-on. There is also a Department of Game, which deals with wild life, and that is right in my own field of Zoology. There is a Department of Fisheries, again as a biologist, I know something about things which live in water, fish, crocodiles and so-on. There is a National Park's organisation, and I have been connected with the National Parks for quite some-time. In fact I was a member of the Board of Directors of National Parks and also an Honorary Warden.

There is a field in which I am completely at sea and that is the Dairy Corporation which deals with milk. Now that one I know very little about but I have been able to learn a few things since I've been here. I have found that as one who is not a specialist in animal production or veterinary matters, but one who knows about it, as one who knows generally about biological matters in wild life, fisheries and so-on, I am able to bring a fresh outlook which I can impart, I hope, to my

PROFESSOR W. BANAGE: technical officers, and they can also educate me with matters of detail and techniques, and together I think we form a not too bad a team.

MRS. E. KEEBLE: You did mention that you are still in an advisory capacity at the university. What of the future, I mean do you plan to return to university, are they going to release you?

PROFESSOR W. BANAGE: This of course is a very difficult question to answer, because I don't know, it depends upon His Excellency, the President and the government. But I must make it clear that what Makerere has done is to second me to the government on leave without pay, so technically I am still the head of the Zoology Department, and a member of the Zoology Department, and that is why I retain my title Professor although I am a Minister. What will happen we do not know because it depends on how long it takes to put this country back to a respectable level of organisation, administration and so-on, and then I think I would very much like myself to get back to University. How long this will take we just do not know because the government has been given five years in which to do the job, it may be less, it may be more, I don't know.

GWYNETH HENDERSON: Professor William Banage, Uganda's Minister of Animal Industry, Game and Fisheries, talking to Elizabeth Keeble in his Ministry in Kampala.

And now to something that is also very political in many countries all over the world - language! We've discussed many times in 'University Report' some of the problems of language - like which language to choose for a lingua franca - the colonial or one of perhaps many national - like which language should you use for teaching in primary schools - the children's mother tongue or the language they will have to use later anyway when they reach the secondary stage. And so it goes on, and of course very often beneath all these issues there lies another, which also gives rise to that 64,000 dollar question - are African languages dying out? Well we'll come to that later! But basically not enough is known about national languages. This was a point that Mubanga Kashoki made when he talked to us last year. Then he also expressed the fear that he wouldn't be able to continue his work in Zambia because he was only on secondment to carry out the Zambia part of the survey of Language Use and Language Teaching in Eastern Africa. Well the survey work is done and Mr. Kashoki is now a permanent member of staff at the University of Zambia as a research fellow in the Institute of African Studies and his work continues. In particular he is, at present, studying the growth of Zambian languages - in other words how the main languages of Lhosi, Tonga, Bemba and Nyanja are absorbing 'loan' words from

GWYNETH HENDERSON: English and elsewhere. In Lusaka Mr. Kashoki explained to Graham Mytton why.

MR. M. KASHOKI: I would like to find out the extent to which these languages are borrowed, the kinds of borrowings we have, why these borrowings are coming into the language and so-on, just to see how we are adapting to what you might call social/cultural changes in the country. This is one type of study I have already submitted to the Research and Higher Degrees Committee of the University of Zambia and I do hope that this will receive favourable consideration because I do feel that it is a very important study to undertake, because it might indicate how these languages are, in effect, adapting to new requirements in the life of the people.

GRAHAM MY TON: Are you studying these languages as they are spoken in the towns or also in the rural areas, because there is a difference in 'loan' words isn't there? Because Bemba in the towns does borrow from other languages, particularly English. Does it to the same extent in the rural areas?

MR. M. KASHOKI: Well it does, but to a limited extent. You see, here I would say that it is the urban areas which are in the vanguard, so to speak. You see they are the ones who come in contact with new changes in economic terms, in social terms, in political terms and so-on, even education is more advanced in the urban areas than it is in the rural areas although we are trying to narrow the gap. But borrowing is going on at the same time in the rural areas, and the study will cover both areas, that is the urban and the rural area.

GRAHAM MYTTON: Perhaps you could just talk about this borrowing because it is interesting to me in my research into broadcasting. One finds that words are borrowed from English perhaps when it is not necessary to borrow. Take a news bulletin on the ZBS - Zambia Broadcasting Corporation - which may be in Bemba. One listens to it and one hears a lot of words which are in English, and people have said to me in the rural areas that they don't understand. Now is it because these words are not translatable or do the people who live in the towns prefer to use the English?

MR. M. KASHOKI: Well there is a tendency among many people to want to use English rather than the language which is spoken in the rural area in one of the corners of Zambia. So there might be this tendency to use an English word where in fact you have an indigenous word for the same term. This might be attributed in the man to the fact that a knowledge of English, even a very bad knowledge of English, is a status symbol among many Zambians. So in

- MR. M. KASHOKI: order to display your knowledge of English many people tend to use English so that other people get the impression that this man is a man of the world, you know, is knowledgable. So this might explain this tendency and might lead to the incomprehensibility in the rural areas which you've talked about..
- GWYNETH HENDERSON: Mubanga Kashoki also hopes to be able to fill in some gaps which he had to leave in his work for the survey last year. But now to that 64,000 dollar question I referred to earlier - the question of the survival of African languages in countries where the official lingua franca is a European language, or as Graham put it to Mr. Kashoki:
- GRAHAM MYTTON: So one last question Mubanga. What is the practical value of research into Zambian languages? Some people would say that these languages will disappear, or that they will become less important, but you are doing a lot of research into them. What is the practical value of doing this research?
- MR. M. KASHOKI: This is a very interesting question in the sense that the contention is, in many people's minds, that these languages are in fact dying because of the predominance of English. But I indicated at the beginning of the interview they have started to look into long words, they would like to show in some way that in fact these languages are growing rather than dying, that is they are adapting, and when you adapt you improve on the, not the quality, but you improve on the number of words in the language, and when you add to a language, this is an indication that the language is alive, that it is very much alive in the sense that it is taking in this new concept, new circumstances of life. And when a language does this it is a very clear indication that the language will be around for some time to come, very much so in terms of the future. Another point is, and I would like to emphasise this point very much, in spite of the practical use English has in our national life, many of our Zambian languages are used to a great or less extent in communication. The majority of the people in the rural areas do not use English, they use their local language and I'm not talking in a pre-judicial sense but in the sense that this language is used in the area in which people live. To this extent we have to take cognisance of the value of these languages for purposes of communication. English is very useful, but it has its limitations, and when the limitations come in, local languages take over, and this is attested by the fact that many of the things written in English, many of the things said in English are translated. In fact, they have to be translated for questions of policy, they have to be translated into the seven languages, but this is not usually the case.

MR. M. KASHOKI:

Either languages are used in the local area depending on who is making the speech and where you see. So what we are doing is simply because recognise that these language have value, and will continue to have value for some time, and this is, I think, a very important point to make. When we are studying these languages, it is not because we would like to go and put our studies in a museum for other people to come and look at, it's simply because we would like to apply the knowledge about language to the practical situation. How these languages could be used to a greater extent if it is desirable; how we might write grammar so that children can learn their languages and understand them; how possibly the Zambia Broadcasting Service could look at the studies we have undertaken and apply the knowledge we supply to them for whatever they want to do. Your studies, this research project in broadcasting, has very much to do with language, and you have to understand what raw language is playing before you can really go out to the people and communicate.

GWYNETH HENDERSON:

Mubanga Kashoki, Research Fellow in the Institute of African Studies at the University of Zambia proving the immediacy and relevance of understanding how language is used if we are to be able to communicate. He was talking there to Graham Mytton in Lusaka. And I hope that I'll be communicating again with you next week in 'University Report'.

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