Comments on the consultancy report by Eirini Gouleta

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> Outside Africa, no one questions why the languages of countries with smaller populations in Europe should be used as a medium, even up to and including the university level. What seems to be lacking in many African countries is the political will to break away from the colonial policy and practice of limiting mother tongue education to lower primary classes. Where such a will exists, much can be done in a short period of time (Bamgbose 2005:255)

Educational Theory and Research findings on Bilingual Education

The educational theory and research findings presented are in line with learning theory referred to in the text-books in the west, especially in the US. But some of the definitions are not in line with the usual definitions in the field. For example the consultant defines additive bilingualism as bilingual education which values the native language and culture and subtractive bilingualism as bilingual education where the student's native language and culture are viewed as inferior or of less value and importance. The concepts subtractive and additive language learning originally come from Wallace Lambert (1975). Additive language learning is normally taken to mean that a new language is learnt *in addition to* the mother tongue which continues to be used and developed. The person's total linguistic repertoire is extended. Subtractive language learning means that a new (dominant/majority) language is learned *at the cost of* the mother tongue, which is not developed further. The person's total linguistic repertoire does not show (much) growth as a result of the learning (Skutnabb-Kangas: 2000: 72). Baker (2001: 114) claims that when a second language and culture are acquired with little or no pressure to replace or reduce the first language, an additive form of bilingualism may occur. When a second language and culture are acquired with pressure to replace or demote the first language a subtractive form of

bilingualism may occur. An author may of course invent new definitions of words, but these concepts have a long history in the field.

The main problem I have with the summary of research findings is that many of them, especially those from the US, Canada and other industrialized countries, do not fit the situation in Africa. Concepts like bilingual teaching, second language learning, additive and subtractive bilingualism, immersion and submersion programs, early and late exit, maintenance and transition programs are concepts taken from the west, partly applied to affluent situations in Canada, partly applied to immigrant and minority children from third world countries being integrated into school life in the affluent west. Neither of the situations resembles the situations in Africa or other developing countries. Normally when the concept "bilingual" teaching or "second language learning" is used it means using the African's child's mother tongue or familiar African language as a stepping stone to the use - also as the language of instruction - of an ex-colonial language. The fact that children learn best when they understand what the teacher is saying is overlooked. So is the fact that the ex-colonial languages are foreign languages to most African children, languages they seldom hear around them. The consultant Gouleta also notes:

> Malagasy children cannot acquire the French language in a natural way because it is not spoken at home or in the community. In addition, it is difficult for them to receive *comprehensible input* because they are instructed in French, a language they do not understand and by teachers who do not master it. This may make learning stressful and difficult to learn a second language.

This is a correct observation. Some of the problems of the paper we are set to review have to do with the terms of reference. The consultant has been asked to look at what passes as bilingual education in industrialized countries, an education developed for minority populations, and to draw lessons from this to be used for the majority population of an African country. Instead the consultant should have been asked to look at the methodology used for the majority

population in the industrialized countries, both for learning subject matter and foreign languages.

The International Experience and lessons learned with respect to the Country Cases presented in the paper

The consultant claims that in the countries of West, Central and South Africa there were not large enough linguistic majorities to make a strong case for using their mother tongue as the language of publication (p.29). This is certainly not correct. Some of the languages of west-Africa like Hausa, Yoruba (30 Million speakers) and Akan have tens of millions of speakers. This could be contrasted to a country like Iceland with a population of 280 000. In this small and prosperous island in the far north the indigenous language, Icelandic, is used as the language of instruction not only in primary and secondary school but also in higher education. Thousands of books are published each year in Icelandic even though the language is not understood outside of Iceland (Holmarsdottir 2001).

A myth has been created about the many small languages in Africa. The work of the Centre for Advanced Studies of African Society (CASAS) in Cape Town, over the past 5 years has revealed that about 85% of Africans speak no more than 12 – 15 *core languages* (by core languages is meant clusters of mutually intelligible speech forms which in essence constitute dialects of the same language). These include Nguni; Sesotho/Setswana; Kiswahili; Dholuo; Eastern Inter-Lacustrine; Runyakitara; Somali/Rendile/Oromo/Borana; Fulful; Mandenkan; Hausa; Yoruba; Ibo and Amharic (Prah 2005).

When it comes to South Africa, it is interesting to note that during the time of Bantu Education when the mother tongue was phased in and maintained for 8 years as the primary language of learning, the matriculation results of black students steadily improved, reaching their zenith in 1976, which was an 83.7% pass rate. It was an inflexible implementation of Afrikaans as a medium for 50% of the subjects in secondary school in 1975 that led to the student uprising in Soweto the following year. The Government was forced to back down and in 1979, the Education and Training Act was passed, reducing mother tongue to 4 years of primary school followed by a choice of medium between Afrikaans and

English. Most schools opted for English medium. The reduction of the use of the mother tongue has, however, coincided with decreasing pass rates for African language speaking students, which dropped to as low as 48.3% by 1982, and 44% by 1992 (Heugh, 1999:304). However, after 1994, the matriculation results were no longer published according to a racial/ethnic classification of data. While in theory all the 11 official languages of South Africa are regarded as equal, in practice they are not. The small minority of white parents can have their children study in their mother tongues, English or Afrikaans all the way through primary, secondary and higher education. The majority population of black South Africans only use African languages through the first three years and then switch to English with disastrous results for the pass rates and further intellectual development of the African children in South Africa (Brock-Utne and Holmarsdottir 2004, Holmarsdottir 2005).

The South African socio-linguist Leketi Makelela (2005) notes that the language policy of South Africa in actual fact is just following up the Bantu language policy by maintaining the nine African languages which were the main languages in the Bantustans. Instead one should have promoted two main core languages Sotho and Nguni under which all the nine languages could have been grouped. This would have made it easier to go to scale in the publishing of text-books and other literature. A similar viewpoint is adhered to by Prah (2005) and Alexander (1989). Dr. Gouleta claims that when it comes to the language of publication South Africa and Namibia have established concurrent vernacularization and internationalization (English and Afrikaans) (p.28). It is difficult to understand how she can maintain this as there are hardly any books or even newspapers published in African languages in South Africa. In Namibia the number of books published in African languages is much smaller now than it was during the apartheid period. (Brock-Utne 1995, 1997, 2000)

Of the country cases presented in the consultancy report this reviewer finds the one from Vietnam the most interesting, as it shows the adoption of an indigenous

language as the language of instruction instead of an ex-colonial language. An example of the Sami people, a small indigenous population in the north of the Nordic countries, could also have been given. The Sami have a very different language from Norwegian but were forced to use Norwegian as the language of instruction in school even though they did not understand a word of what the teacher was saying. They were even punished for using their own language in school the same way African children have been and still are punished for using African languages. Almost forty years ago there was a revolt among the Sami supported by many progressive Norwegians against the forced use of Norwegian as the language of instruction. The language policy was changed and now a Sami child can study through the medium of his or her native language all through primary and secondary education and learn Norwegian as a subject. A lot of teaching material in the Sami language has been produced (Darnell and Hoëm 1996).

The International Experience and lessons learned with respect to other countries

When reviewing country cases using the so-called late exit model the consultant does not mention the well-known Six-Year Primary Project (SYPP) in *Nigeria* (Bamgbose 2005). Neither does she mention the situation in *Ethiopia* (Mekonnen 2005).

The SYPP in Nigeria was basically an experiment in medium of instruction involving a comparison of the traditional 3-year Yoruba medium plus 3-year English medium with a 6-year Yoruba medium in primary schools. Its origins go back to dissatisfaction with the learners in the traditional system as well as concern for falling standards of English. Ayo Bamgbose (2005) tells that the initial impetus for the project was a recommendation by the Ford Foundation-sponsored survey of English Language Teaching (ELT) in Nigeria in 1966. Faced with the problems of inadequate training of teachers, poor library facilities and poor levels of attainment, the survey recommended the mounting of a major research project to experiment on the most effective approach to the introduction

of English as a medium of instruction in schools (Jacobs, 1966 in Bamgbose 2005). Unlike views elsewhere that ignored the mother tongue medium, the survey concluded that the use of English as a medium of instruction could not be divorced from mother tongue language teaching, particularly in its use as a medium of instruction. Hence, it encouraged the Ford Foundation to support any effort designed to explore this link. The Foundation agreed to support an experiment in the use of Yoruba as an alternative medium of instruction to English.

Begun in 1970, the SYPP was based at the Institute of Education, University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University), Ile-Ife in South Western Nigeria. It started in a rural school with two experimental classes and one control class. The main aim of the project was to use Yoruba as a medium of instruction throughout the six years of primary education in order to find out whether primary education given in the child's mother tongue medium would be likely to be more meaningful and of greater advantage to the students who matriculated through the schooling system. Bamgbose (2005: 243)notes:

> Since in African countries, in general, primary education is terminal for most children, it is important that such education should have what has been referred to as a good "surrender value". Other subsidiary aims were an enrichment of the curriculum, development of materials in Yoruba, and a more effective teaching of English as a subject through the use of specialist teachers of English

The SYPP curriculum consisted of English, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, and Yoruba. English and Yoruba were taught as subjects from the beginning of primary education, while other subjects were taught through the medium of Yoruba in the experimental classes. The main differences between the experimental and the control classes were in the medium of instruction in the last three years of primary school as well as in the use of a specialist teacher of English as a subject for the experimental class. The advantage of the latter arrangement is that only the specialist teacher of English would provide a model of communicating in English for the class, since all other teachers would teach their subjects in Yoruba. With exposure to a good model of English, it was

expected that there would be considerable improvement in the pupils' mastery of the English language. During the duration of the project, detailed evaluation covering various subject areas and intelligence tests were administered. The results showed consistently that the experimental group performed higher than the control group on tests of all subjects, including English. The difference was shown to be significant.

Article 3.5 of the Education and Training Policy of Ethiopia issued in April 1994 recognizes the pedagogical advantage of mother-tongue education and mandates that primary education should be conducted in the local languages of the area (Haileselassie, 2001). Until the early 1990s primary education in Ethiopia was conducted in Amharic with little or no attention being paid to other ethnic languages. Since then several other ethnic languages including Tigrinya (most important language in Eritrea) have been introduced in the school system

Ethiopia is divided into ten regions. Gambella is the region closest to Somalia. In Gambella, English is being used as the language of instruction from grade 5. The fact that three regions, namely Tigray, Amhara and Oromiya, since 1994 use their mother tongues as the language of instruction for eight years, while six of the seven other regions use mother tongue only for six years and one region, Gambella, only for four years, makes Ethiopia an interesting case to study. How well do students who use mother tongues as language of instruction for four, for six or for eight years of primary school perform in subjects like mathematics, biology and chemistry? How well do students who use a foreign language – in this case English - as language of instruction from grade 5 or grade 7 perform in the same subjects? A study made by the Government of Ethiopia (MOE, 2001) with the assistance of US-Aid and a couple of American consultants is revealing.

Table 1: Mathematics, Biology and Chemistry Mean Achievement Scores in Grade 8 by Language of Instruction

	Region	Language of instruction	Sample Number	MATHS	BIOLOGY	CHEMISTRY
1	Tigray	Tigrinya	390	45%	56%	47%
2	Amhara	Amharic	580	44%	61%	45%
3	Oromiya	Oromifa	598	40%	56%	45%
4	Hareri	English	372	40%	48%	43%
5	AddisAbaba	English	548	39%	44%	40%
6	Benshangul	English	268	36%	43%	41%
7	DireDawa	English	377	37%	41%	39%
8	SNNP	English	1235	36%	43%	36%
9	Afer	English	394	36%	39%	36%
10	Gambella	English	400	27%	37%	33%
	Total		5163			

Source: MOE, 2001 (here taken from Mekonnen 2005)

Table 1 shows that students whose LoI is their mother tongue have scored higher in the three subjects mentioned above than students whose LoI is English, which is a foreign language. Mekonnen (2005) shows through the use of t-tests and the statistical program ANOVA that there is a significant difference in the performance between those students taught in their mother tongue and those students being taught through a foreign language. He concludes:

> In other words, students of the seven regional states who are using English as a LoI for the UPE are disadvantaged in terms of their mathematics, biology and chemistry mean achievement scores, when compared to the students of the three regional states who are using their respective mother tongues as languages of instruction in the entire primary education.

In fact, the students scoring the lowest in these subjects, so important for the development of science and technology, are the students from Gambella, the region where they start using English as the language of instruction as early as fifth grade. How do students perform in English in the ten regions?

Table 2: English Achievement in Grade 8 By Regions

	Region	Language of instruction	Sample Number	English Achievement score
1	Tigray	Mother tongue-Tigrinya	390	39%
2	Amhara	Mother tongue –Amharic	580	34%
3	Ormya	Mother tongue –Oromifa	599	39%
4	Hareri	Foreign Language-English	372	45%
5	AddisAbaba	Foreign Language-English	548	46%
6	Benshangul	Foreign Language-English	268	40%
7	DireDawa	Foreign Language-English	377	39%
8	SNNP	Foreign Language-English	1235	37%
9	Afar	Foreign Language-English	394	34%
10	Gambella	Foreign Language-English	400	36%

Source: MOE, 2001 (here taken from Mekonnen 2005)

Mekonnen calculated the average English achievement score of all the regions and found it to be 39%. Of the three regions which are using mother tongues as LoI in the entire elementary education (1-8), only students from the regional state of Amhara (34%) have scored below the average English achievement score. Students in the other two regions, Tigray and Oromiya, have scored equal to the average or 39%. Out of the seven regions which are using English, three regions, Hareri, Addis Ababa, Benshangul scored above the average, (45%, 46% and 40% respectively). Both in Hareri and Addis Ababa children are more exposed to English on a daily basis than in most other regions. One region – DireDawa scored equal to the average-(39%), and three other regions – SNNP, Afar and Gambella, scored below the average (37%, 34% and 36%). It is interesting to note that Gambella, the region among the ten which starts using English as the language of instruction at the earliest stage, already in grade 5, is the region where students have the next lowest score in English!

A comment on the models presented

Eirini Gouleta presents three models for the Ministry of Education to consider**.** She warns against the early exit models in current use in Madagascar as in many places in Africa. This is the same warning which came out of the recent stock taking exercise of the language of instruction situation in Africa commissioned by ADEA/GTZ/UiE (2005). She finds that if a transitional model is to be used, it would have to be a late-exit model. Here she argues along the lines of Cummins, an author she refers to extensively. She uses his findings about BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills) and CALP (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency) which state that BICS take 1-2 years to develop while CALP take 5 – 7 years. But these findings on the development of BICS and CALP are taken from environments where the children lived immersed in the language of the school, which is the majority language in the culture they live in. They meet this language everywhere, in the streets, in the market-places and shops, in the banks and post offices. It is the language spoken by a majority of their school mates. This is not the case in Africa. Even in Tanzania, a country where school children have a familiar African language, Kiswahili, as the LOI for the first seven years, the switch to English at the beginning of secondary school has detrimental effects (Brock-Utne 2005a, 2005b, 2006a, Mlama and Matteru 1977, Mwinsheikhe 2003, Roy-Campell and Qorro 1997). Students who have gone through six years of secondary education and three years of university education using English as the LOI still have great difficulties both when it comes to CALPS and even more to BICS (as witnessed by Puja 2003).

The second model she discusses is a model where the arts and humanities are taught through Malagasy and the sciences through French. This model I would also warn against. Ranaweera (l976) the former Director of Education at the Curriculum Development Centre, Ministry of Education in 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 l976: 423).

Ranaweera tells 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 need to switch over to the national languages to be greatest 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 the improvements of 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 mentions that in order to achieve the wider objectives of science education, such as incalculation 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.

> 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 (Ranaweera l976: 417).

Ranaweera's argument of bringing science to the people through the languages people naturally command, is an argument *for* democracy. The current trend in Sri Lanka, where the use of English as a language of instruction, especially in science and technology, is again being promoted, works *against* the democratizing trend adhered to by Ranaweera. The promotion has, however, been rather unsuccessful (Punchi 2001, 2006),

The fact that most African children speak several African languages is often ignored in the literature on second language learning. Many African children learn two or three African languages while growing up. The socio-linguist Adama Ouane from Mali, now Director of the UNESCO Institute of Education in Hamburg, once told me that he grew up learning and using three African languages. He could not tell what was his first or second language. Neither did concepts like additive and subtractive bilingualism apply to his situation. Even if an African child were to be trained in school in two African languages s/he would not be called bilingual. The concept bilingual teaching in the African context seems to be reserved for a situation where one of the languages is an ex-colonial one. It is my experience that this situation contributes greatly to the stupidification of African children. Instead of learning through an African language with which they are familiar, they have to struggle with two languages, one of which is a foreign language they are unfamiliar with. This does not mean that it is not important also to learn foreign languages and learn them well, but they should be taught as a subject and by experts in foreign language teaching. In such a case the whole bilingual notion can be thrown over-board.

Of the three models presented in this consultancy report it is only the third , the model where Malagasy is used as the language of instruction all the way through the educational system, which is likely to produce the desired results. In this model subjects would be presented in a language both students and teachers master. The language of instruction would not, as the case is now, be a barrier to learning. French would be learnt as a foreign language, which it also is in Madagascar, and be taught well by teachers who are specialists in the teaching of French (many African intellectuals support such a model, see Bamgbose 2005, Bgoya 2001, Desai 2003, Makelela 2005, Prah 2000, Prah 2005, Tadajeu 1989, Warsame 2001). To use a transitional model developed for minority children in the US or Europe for the majority populations of Africa does not seem right. The immigrant or indigenous children in the North hear the official language of the school around them all day and can also pick it up informally. This is not the case with French in Madagascar. Having some subjects taught in

Malagasy and some in French is not a good model. The subjects taught in French will be at a disadvantage. The consultant points at Tunisia, where the sciences are taught in French in the secondary school. “As a result students’ competence levels in the classroom and in exams are lower” she notes (p.38).

Issues for the Malagasy Ministry of Education and partners to consider

I would assume that for the Malagasy Ministry of Education, being committed to Education for All and taking into account its colonial past and its closeness to France there must be two aims:

1. That school children understand what the teacher is saying and are able to learn subject matter in many subjects well and quickly.

2. That they become well trained and as fluent as possible in the French language.

The third model is the only model that will allow these two aims to be fulfilled. The model would have to be introduced gradually in order not to be met with resistance. People have to see and be convinced that this would be the best model. Even though this is the model used by all *developed* countries, it is not used in Africa. The first steps might be:

- *To allow teachers to code-switch and students to answer their exams in Malagasy*. From my own experience sitting in the back of class-rooms in twelve different African countries – both in east and west Africa – I know that African teachers code-switch all the time between a language they and the children master well and the official language they are supposed to teach in. It may be a completely necessary teaching strategy, but in many countries it is outlawed or discouraged. Halima Mwinsheikhe (2001,2003), who has worked as a biology teacher in Tanzanian secondary schools for many years, admits:

> *I personally was compelled to switch to Kiswahili by a sense of helplessness born out of the inability to make students understand the subject matter by using English* (Mwinsheikhe,2001:16).

This code-switching goes on all over Africa (Brock-Utne 2003, 2005a, 2005b, 2006a, 2006b, Holmarsdottir 2005, Ndayipfukamiye 1993). In secondary- school classrooms in Tanzania I have observed teachers code-switching back and forth between English and Kiswahili while teaching, often using predominantly Kiswahili, but writing in English – often with several mistakes – on the blackboard (Brock-Utne 2001, Brock-Utne 2005b). The students copy directly from the blackboard into their note-books and regurgitate these notes in their exam-papers. If they answer in Kiswahili, they get zero points, even when the answer is correct (Kalole 2004). Safarani Kalole (2004) found that most of the exam markers in the National Examination Council of Tanzania, who have experienced these problems, were in favour of switching to Kiswahili as the language of instruction in secondary school. In South Africa teachers teaching in the black schools code-switch between one of the African languages and English. School-children in South Africa may choose to write their exams in either English or Afrikaans, but not in a language of the African majority population.

- *To start with a few experimental classes or schools before going to scale*. Even though we know that children learn subject matter better when taught through a familiar language, it may be important to show this again in a setting where one wants to make a major change in the whole educational system. The experimental classes should be taught through Malagasy in all subjects and have very good French language teachers who are specialists in the teaching of French as a subject. By demonstrating that also Malagasy children will learn both subject matter and French better this way, it will be easy to get parents convinced. It is important that these schools are well resourced, at least at the level of private schools, which are likely to continue to teach in French until the parents there also understand that the teaching through Malagasy would be better even for their children

The former Head of Department of Foreign Languages and Linguistics at the University of Dar es Salaam, an expert on the teaching of the English language Martha Qorro (2002), argues for the elimination of incorrect English by not using it as a medium of instruction. Though she agrees that mastering English is important in Tanzania, she is convinced that the best way to do this is through improved teaching of the English language as a *subject* and not to use English as a *medium.*

And then she adds:

> Not everyone who recommends a change of medium of instruction to Kiswahili is a Kiswahili Professor. I for one am *not* a Kiswahili Professor, I have been teaching English for the last 25 years, and to me a change to Kiswahili medium means:
>
> - Eliminating the huge amount of incorrect English to which our secondary school students are exposed.
> - Enhancing students' understanding of the contents of their subjects and hence creating grounds on which they can build their learning of English and other languages.
> - Eliminating the false dependence on English medium as a way of teaching/ learning English, addressing and evaluating the problems of teaching English.
> - Impressing on all those concerned that English language teaching is a specialized field just like History, Geography, Physics, Mathematics, etc. It is thus unreasonable and sometimes insulting to teachers of English when it is assumed that teachers of all subjects can assist in the teaching of English.

This statement will also fit the situation of Madagascar if one replaces English with French and Kiswahili with Malagasy.

The costs involved

There will be costs involved in switching into the use of Malagasy as the language of instruction. But in the recent ADEA,GTZ.UiE (2005) study it was shown that with new desk-top publishing techniques prices may be kept very low. When a calculation of the costs involved in getting new teaching materials are calculated, it is, however, also important to calculate the costs of thousands and thousands of Malagasy school-children having to repeat grades or drop out of school, without having learnt anything else than self-depreciation. Since Malagasy was used as the language of instruction all through the primary school

and also in secondary education from 1976 and for more than a decade, the academic vocabulary must have been developed and new and revised editions of some of the school-books should be fairly inexpensive to produce.

Language and culture

Will the use of an indigenous language as a language of instruction in school be a guarantee for survival of local cultures? Foreign thoughts from foreign cultures in an artificially created environment can be conveyed through local languages. Local culture and curricular content can likewise be conveyed through foreign languages. In a paper on the relationship between language and culture I have presented and discussed the following four models (Brock-Utne 2006c)

	Foreign language	Local language
Foreign content	A)Textbooks written and published abroad in a foreign language adopted for use without any modification	B) Direct translations of textbooks and curriculum material made abroad
Local content	C) Some well-known authors write from Africa in the ex-colonial languages. Some text-books have also been produced in foreign languages but with local content	D) Texts taken from the local culture written in the local language

Of these four models model A is the least desirable, but unfortunately most in use in Africa while model D is the most desirable but little in use. When new textbooks are produced in Madagascar, it is important that the textbooks for the teaching of French as a language come closer to the C than the A model and that textbooks for all other subjects come closer to the D than the B model.

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