



English Language in a Tanzanian University

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Abstract: The dominance of Kiswahili in Tanzania limits the use of English and its proficiency to citizens who wish to interact with the wider world where English enjoys a special and widespread usage. Though the Tanzania language policy with regard to teaching and learning in post-primary schools favours English, proficiency in English is still far from being a reality. Most university students in Tanzania experience unusual difficulty in communication (especially first year students) due to their background with the use of English as the medium of instruction. This paper highlights the problems encountered by learners of English at a Tanzanian university and presents the results of a study conducted at St. Augustine University of Tanzania, which assessed if the students' poor communication in English reflects in their writing. The study focussed on first-year students from four different Departments studying for the Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA), Bachelor of Science in Procurement and Chain Management (BSCP), Bachelor of Arts in Economics (BAEC) and Bachelor of Science in Tourism and Hospitality Management (BSCT). The participated students were given a topic to write within a period of 60 minutes; afterwards, all grammatical errors identified in the essays were classified and analysed. The analysis of the errors provided feedback to the researcher on the level of writing skills of first year students of the University.

Keywords: Error analysis, second language learning, proficiency, English language, Tanzania

Introduction

Tanzania is a multiethnic and multilingual country. It is home to approximately 120 languages (Ström, 2009: 229) in addition to English and Kiswahili. At the secondary education, most of the learners struggle

throughout the school trying to master English, which is the MoI, and at the same time working hard to understand the subjects' contents being taught in English. Tibategeza (2009) reveals that teachers themselves do not assist

learners to improve with their English. This is because of their focus on subject content and never on the language issue when teaching or marking students' assignments. According to Swilla (2009:5), the students who attended English-medium primary schools have an advantage over those who attended Kiswahili-medium schools, because English is the MoI in secondary education. This different primary school background of the learners categorises the students into two: those who can read and speak English and those who cannot read or speak English fluently.

Though English is the official language and MoI in post-primary education, it is poorly used in the classroom and often not in use outside the classroom. This situation leads to lack of proficiency in English, and causes students to withdraw from anyone who does not possess adequate proficiency in the use of Kiswahili. With regard to this language situation, Qorro (2008) states that:

“Students in Tanzanian universities acquire medium level of proficiency. Here, the students are able to give person directions on where to go, or how to reach a certain place. They have superficial understanding of what s/he hears or what is taught in the language. The chances of students not understanding at all or misunderstanding the intended meaning of the speaker exists. Language is still a hindrance in active participation during teaching/learning and normal conversation”.

As observed, students understand and fluently speak Kiswahili and prefer its use in all contexts. The context of

English usage is limited and affects proficiency in the language. The mastery of English remains a challenge to students and also to lecturers who examine students' work. In most cases, lecturers hardly understand students' thought or what they want to express. On how to find solution to the lack of English proficiency, St Augustine University of Tanzania (SAUT) management exercises caution on their approach. For example, the management of the institution said in the meeting with the academic staff on April 18th 2011 that “the University is not a secondary school where you can wake up and command all the staff and students to start using English in every context in order to help the students to improve their spoken English”. This comment was in response to the suggestion made by the Head of the Department (HOD) of Linguistics that the school should create more avenues to make students speak English. In the opinion of the HOD, the University authority should ask all the lecturers to interact with their students only in English. However, the management of SAUT acknowledges the problem the students encounter with English, which is the medium of instruction and official language of the institution. In their quest to improve the students' English, they introduced the “Basic English Language Course” in addition to “Communication Skills” to all first-year students during the first and second semesters. The course was designed to raise the English language proficiency of the students in both academic and professional communication. The course was also to

assist the students in handling their academic work better and to improve their spoken and written communication. The course takes a practical approach, such as group presentations and regular exercises in order to minimize errors in both spoken and written contexts.

According to Lennon (2008), language errors are not only inevitable among second language learners but also, very importantly, a necessary feature of learner language, without which improvement cannot occur. Errors are not seen as indications of failure to learn the target language; errors are seen as positive evidence that learners are making progress in testing hypotheses about the language they have already acquired. Therefore, error analysis is systematic observation of learner's language. In other words, it is what scientific study could reveal about the real problems of second language learners. Richards (1971) cites four types or causes of errors, they are overgeneralisation, ignorance of rules restrictions, incomplete application of rules, and false concepts hypothesized.

English in Tanzania

English is not the mother tongue of any segment of the Tanzania population; this means that access to the language is limited (Swilla, 2009). However, it was declared a co-official language in Tanzania, and was taught as a compulsory subject in primary schools, though with unqualified teachers (Ideh, 2012) up to the first four years of secondary education (o'level). English has remained the only official MoI at post-primary level, leading to a situation which does not promote multilingualism (Tibategeza, 2009). According to Stegen (2005:2),

restricting education to only one language as the medium of instruction (in this case English) is equivalent to limiting the educational opportunities in a multilingual environment like Tanzania to very few people. The dominance of English is only in post primary school classroom, even at that context, it competes unfavourably with Kiswahili (Ideh, 2012).

The position of English in Tanzanian institution of higher learning (except in the classroom and in documentation) goes against the language policy of the country with regard to language use. The language policy states that the "medium of instruction for teachers' education at degree level shall be English, except for foreign language teaching, which will be in the relevant language itself" (United Republic of Tanzania. 1995:49). The dominance of Kiswahili in all contexts in Tanzania, especially in the school environment, even in classrooms, creates poor spoken English among the students. That is, English is rarely heard outside the classroom, except in transactions involving a foreigner (Tibategeza, 2009). Some studies (such as Qorro, 2008) have shown that lack of English language proficiency by students in institution of higher learning affects their academic performance. Swilla (2009:3-4) states that the retention of English as the MoI in post-primary education in Tanzania may have been influenced by the need to avoid the high costs of financial and human resources required in the preparation of teachers and teaching materials. According to Kamwendo (2006), there is no doubt that the policy of official linguistic pluralism is not cheap, that one thing that is clear is that the government is reluctant to invest in

language policies on account of the cost. One of the reasons for using English as official language as well as language of education is to acknowledge the country's membership in regional and international communities. Globalisation may have played an important part in the resurgence of English as a MoI in Tanzanian private primary schools (Swilla, 2009). Whatever the reason for the choice of English might be, there is need to re-assess the language used in teaching and learning in post-primary schools in Tanzania.

The MoI in the Tanzanian seven years of primary education is Kiswahili, while English is MoI in post-primary education. English, however, is a language which most learners do not possess adequate proficiency for effective learning to take place, and this affects their success in school. The poor English proficiency among the students calls for concern with regard to the standards and quality of academic writing produced among the students both in secondary schools and institutions of higher learning. There is an outcry from many lecturers on difficulties they encounter with the students who are unable to express themselves convincingly in spoken English. Moreover, there is the effect of Kiswahili transfer to English among the Tanzania students. For example, in personal interaction with many of the students, they would often say "I come to *collect* my report/assignment" while what they meant is "I come to *submit* my report/assignment". Some students prefer to keep quiet than to utter any word in English. Some are afraid that people may laugh at them when they speak English; some feel that they have

not mastered the language and might make mistakes; instead, they prefer not to speak English to avoid the errors. Others just do not feel comfortable speaking the language no matter the situation. The problem of English as MoI in universities is causing a great challenge both to the students and the lecturers.

Lack of proficiency in English language has continued to be a common problem for the students, where they feel marginalized and excluded. The fact that some knowledge, technology, skills and techniques relevant to and acquired for national development are confined to and transmitted in a foreign language used by relatively small fraction of the population means that the majority who do not speak the official foreign (English) language are literally marginalized and are excluded from development equation (Chumbow, 2009: 24). Students are generally expected to have acquired high levels of proficiency in the language they use in reading, writing and receiving instructions. However, many studies (such as Tibategeza, 2009; Qorro, 2008) have indicated that students have not mastered the use of English as a language of learning. The poor English leads to dominant use of Kiswahili in all contexts of the university. In the classroom where English is the MoI, students make announcements and communicate with one another in Kiswahili. Some students sometimes also request to ask questions in Kiswahili or request the lecturer to explain concepts using Kiswahili. From interactions with some students and hearing their views on the same issue from members of the academic staff, it is evidence that many of the students

have not yet reached adequate proficiency in spoken English. One staff that teaches the “Basic English Language Course” and the “Communication Skills” in an informal chat with this author, narrates how a student came to his office and spoke Kiswahili to him and in response, he asked the student to use English. The student in disappointment quietly walked out of his office. Also, from informal class observation at SAUT, it is discovered that some lecturers sometimes resort to teaching in Kiswahili and some do not in any way discourage the use of Kiswahili in the classroom by the students.

Review of Literature

There are many studies on the challenges of English language teaching and learning in Tanzania. Some of these studies have assessed language as the medium of instruction (Roy-Campbell, 2001), the contradiction in ideology, policy and implementation of language in education (Swilla, 2009), and the analysis of language-in-education policy implementation (Tibategeza, 2009), among others. The study conducted by Qorro (2006 cited in Qorro 2008:11) reveals that most Tanzanian secondary school students have extremely low-level proficiency as they cannot understand anything in English language but learn everything by heart, which makes quality education impossible (Qorro, 2008:10). Other studies such as Mlama & Matteru (1978 cited in Qorro, 2008); Tibategeza (2009) also show that most students and teachers are seriously handicapped when using English as the language of teaching and learning. Trappes-Lomax (1985:11-12) attributes the reasons for the decline of success in

school to the position of English and English language teaching in Tanzania; the absence of opportunity and incentive to use English particularly in the primary school, lack of specialist English teachers at primary level; and inadequate qualification of many primary school teachers. After almost four decades of Trappes-Lomax’s study, the problem of English language in Tanzanian schools continues to increase. Other studies (such as Tibategeza, 2009 & 2010) have shown that not only do the learners who graduated from primary school do not possess good knowledge of English to be able to access learning in the language in secondary education, but they are also faced with learning from teachers who themselves have not master the language.

Recent studies on problems of English in Tanzania, such as Mosha (2014) investigates the factors that have contributed to students’ poor performance in English in Zanzibar ‘O’ level secondary schools. The data for Mosha’s study was collected from interviews, classroom observation, questionnaire and documentary review. The study outlines certain factors as responsible for the low performance of students. These include untrained, and under qualified teachers teaching the subject, infrequent use of English language at school and at home, large class size, teachers’ other responsibilities, poor conducive teaching and learning environment in the classrooms, skipping of difficult topics in the syllabus by the teachers, the absence of teachers’ in-service training to raise the quality of teaching, excess work load, lack of teaching facilities particularly textbooks, the

absence of school debates and English clubs.

In another study, Mbaga (2015) examines effectiveness of classroom interactions in promoting English language learning in secondary schools in Tanzania. The study reveals the factors which hinder meaningful classroom interactions to include; large classes, lack of books, limited classrooms, teaching equipments, and lack of teachers who are well trained and motivated.

With the continuous use of English in education and its effects on the learners' performance, comes a proposal for Kiswahili to be used in all levels of education as a MoI. But for the fear of English to lose ground in Tanzania, the British government established English Language Teaching Support Project (ELTSP) in 1987, with the goal of eradicating the problems related to English language teaching and learning, and to ensure continued use of English as the MoI. This project includes: The Zanzibar English Language Improvement Programme (ZELIP); The Form 1 English Language Orientation Programme (FIELOP), and the Secondary English Language Orientation Programme (SELOP). However, different studies such as Lwaitama and Rugemalira (1990); Byoya (1992) and Brock-Utne (2005) as quoted in Tibategeza (2009:127) indicate that "ELTSP did not achieve its main objectives of improving English teaching and learning in secondary schools".

From literature, many studies have been conducted on challenges facing English language teaching and learning in Tanzania and analysis of English language errors both within and outside of Tanzania. For instance, Al Karazoun

(2016) investigates some linguistic errors committed by Jordanian EFL undergraduate students when translating news headlines in Jordanian newspapers from Arabic to English and vice versa. Results of the study indicate that the EFL students commit grammatical and lexical errors. Ali (2011) is an empirical cross-sectional survey research on errors and feedback in second language acquisition in Bangladesh. The study generalizes the way the Bangladeshi English language teaching practitioners view their students' errors and the ways they correct the errors. The survey consisted of a questionnaire which aimed at producing quantitative data. The participants were sampled from the English language teaching (ELT) practitioners in Bangladesh, practising at different levels: primary, secondary, higher secondary levels. The findings of the study reveal that learners' English as a Second language (ESL) error correction is important. The result also indicates that the ELT practitioners in Bangladesh have tolerance for the errors made by their students, and that the teachers believe that learners' errors are indeed part of their learning process.

Sebonde and Biseko (2013) examine the issues related to morpho-syntactic errors among secondary school students in Tanzanian English Language Classrooms. The study specifically assesses the corrective feedback techniques that teachers use to handle their students' morpho-syntactic errors in speech and writing. The study was carried out in Dodoma region of Tanzania. A total of 54 students were involved from nine randomly selected secondary schools from three districts of Dodoma in

Tanzania. The study also involved 20 teacher training college (TTC) diploma trainees, as well as nine secondary school teachers of English language (one from each secondary school) with an experience of more than five years at work. The study reveals that a total of four Corrective Feedback techniques are commonly used in Tanzanian English Language Classrooms (ELCs). These techniques include focused Corrective Feedback, direct Corrective Feedback, indirect Corrective Feedback and metalinguistic Corrective Feedback. The study also reveals that teachers prefer the use of indirect Corrective Feedback when they mark written assignments while explicit and recast are the most applied techniques in handling students' oral errors.

Msanjila (2005) gets closer to the present study but the focus is on Kiswahili writing problems among

some secondary school learners. However, there are relatively scarce researches that have focused on the analysis of university students' English language errors in Tanzania, which this study sets to bridge.

Data/Methodology

This study was conducted at St. Augustine University of Tanzania, Mwanza, among some selected first year students from for programmes, totaling 482. They all have gone through approximately the same number of years of education through primary and secondary education in Tanzania. All of the participants come from non-English speaking backgrounds and rarely communicate in English outside the classroom. The distribution of the students according to their disciplines/programmes is shown in Table 1:

Table 1: Participants and their programmes

Discipline/Degree in view	No. of Participants
Business Administration, BBA	198
Procurement and Chain Management, BSCP	93
Tourism and Hospitality Management, BSCT	51
Economics, BAEC	140
TOTAL	482

The participated students were asked to write in three paragraphs within a period of 60 minutes on the topic, "My Home Town". The study identifies all the errors in the essays and classifies them into various categories. The idea was to assess the students' writing skills, and identify errors (if any). The analysis of the errors made by the participants on the given essay

provides feedback to the researcher on the level of their writing skills.

Analysis and Discussion

The findings of this study show that 51% of the students' English expressions were either incomprehensible or takes the reader quite a long time to understand the sentence(s). There were many errors associated with grammar and spelling. There was also the lack of connective

words. The assessed essays show six most common errors committed by most participants. These errors are summarised under the following headings:

- i. wrong use of verb tense;
- ii. wrong choice of vocabulary;
- iii. subject-verb agreement errors;
- iv. spelling errors;
- v. omission of some sentence elements, and
- vi. wrong punctuation.

These aspects of writing in English pose the most difficult problems to the student participants and are seen as a challenge also to lecturers who are unable to read the students' written tasks. The analyses of the errors are shown below:

(i) *Verb Tense*

The study shows that some of the participants are not aware of the different rules for tense usage. The examples of such errors are shown in the following sentences.

- i. I am (was) born in a quiet city by the name Dar-es Salaam.
- ii. The main economic activity are (is) agriculture.
- iii. My home town Arusha have (has) got a lot of tourist attraction.
- iv. This make (makes) the economic performance very actively.

(ii) *Choice of Vocabulary*

In the following sentences, the words in brackets are the correct forms of the wrongly used words, which were underlined. In sentence (vi), the underlined pronoun "it" is redundant.

- i. The one thing I lovely (love) mostly (most) about my home town is electricity.
- ii. There (they) sell yam.

iii. Kigoma is a place where culture is grately (greatly) maintained.

iv. My home town as (has) got so many tourists.

v. the people who live their (there) have been blessed

vi. Dar-es-Salaam it is a big town with a lot of activities...

vii. There (they) sell beans.

(iii) *Subject-Verb Agreement*

Subject-verb agreement is another aspect of grammar that poses as a challenge to the students. The students are unable to select the correct verb form that matches the subject of the sentence; in other words, they are unable to show the agreement between the subject and the verb in a sentence. Some of the examples in the data are shown in the following examples.

- i. Those things makes (make) me miss my region
- ii. Tabora are (is) found in Tanzania country
- iii. This make (makes) the economic performance very actively
- iv. Nera have (has) several social services...

According to Firth (1978:157), errors which omit the third person singular morpheme (-s) remove the necessity for concord, thus reducing the learner's linguistic burden.

(iv) *Spelling Error*

Most common words were wrongly spelt as they do not align with either the British or American spellings. Examples are shown below:

- i. Beatiful (Beautiful)
- ii. Agustine (Augustine)
- iii. Discipline (Discipline)
- iv. Dispite (Despite)
- v. Becouse (Because)

- vi. Histori (History)
- vii. Tuarisim (Tourism)
- viii. Atract (Attract)
- ix. Satification (Satisfaction)

(v) Punctuation

All the participants punctuate either the sentence wrongly or do not punctuate the sentence at all. One student wrote this:

“On the issue concerning business. Dar es Salaam is the best one most of the investors and famous business man invest at that town and got more profit”

From the above sentence, incorrect punctuation leads to either a run-on sentence or sentence fragments.

(vi). Omission

Some of the participants often omit some verb elements and add some pronouns (e.g. “it” where they are not required) as seen in the following sentences:

- i. is the District which (is) found at Kilimanjaro. (second ‘is’ omitted)
- ii. Kagera is found (at) North West of Tanzania. (‘at’ omitted)
- iii. There (is) somebody who do not want to give his or her money... (‘is’ omitted)
- iv. Dar-es-Salaam it is a big town with a lot of activities... (‘it’ not required)

Conclusion

The roles of English in Tanzania as well as in most African countries as the official language and primary medium of instruction in school, as

well as the language of international communication, and language of the Internet empower the development of the language, and the prestige it enjoys in the entire country. This study explores the challenges of English language in Tanzania in general and identified common errors of English usage by university students in particular. The study reveals that the problem that the students face with regard to spoken English also reflects in their writings. The errors cited from the students’ essay are of great concern. These errors are consistent in the assessed students’ writing. The study sheds light on the “trouble-spot” of the students where the teachers need to put extra effort to help the students in minimizing the errors and improve their written English. The results of this study can also be used in the preparation of a more effective program on “Basic English language course” at SAUT.

Since the institution has introduced “Basic English language course” to reduce the challenges facing students with the use of English, a subsequent study will be conducted to assess the level at which these students improve after completing the two semesters’ course in “Basic English Language Course”. The assessment will compare the first-year errors in written work to the ones in the final year.

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