Issues in multilingual education in Burundi: The ‘old’ multilingual education system

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ABSTRACT
From 1967 to 2012, Burundi had a formal system of education referred to, today, as old system. This system had initially three languages in education before Swahili was added in 2006. Since 2013, Burundi has a new educational system with four languages in education. This paper aimed to discuss the so called old education system of Burundi as far as languages in education are concerned. It explores issues related to the Burundian old multilingual educational system. Content materials designed by policy makers for languages of instruction and languages taught as subjects have provided substance for the discussion. Furthermore, documents including language education policy documents, content materials and the existing literature were consulted and analysed through content analysis methods. The way the languages were presented and introduced to learners through the content materials was discussed to understand underlying policy makers’ philosophy about how multilingual education should be carried out to achieve expected multilingual competence in the languages involved. It was realised that the system privileged separation of languages to avoid language transfer in order to achieve expected language competence. Crosslinguistic Transfer (interference) was considered to be a hindrance to language competence development and it was to be avoided both through the content materials and the teaching methods during classroom practices.

KEYWORDS
multilingual education; reforms; multilingual competence; beliefs on language in education; language transfer

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Introduction
Multilingual education is a phenomenon that has attracted many scholars in order to examine how individuals, communities and societies become multilingual users. Multilingual education is a phenomenon with different meanings depending on different scholars, contexts and approaches. Any debate on this phenomenon is therefore expected to discuss its features and the perspective to be taken depending on the context being discussed. Moreover, it would be incomplete to discuss multilingual education without ever mentioning the concept of bilingual education at least for the sake of comparison. Hence, in order to discuss multilingual education system of Burundi, and how Burundi has become a multilingual society, it is vital to start by conceptualizing this phenomenon from different viewpoints of scholarship. The different definitions on multilingual education are provided by different scholars studying different contexts and taking different approaches. Cummins (2007) refers to the concept of multilingual education to mean a series of concepts including classrooms that focus on English as the target language for students who are learning English as an additional language, bilingual and second language (L2) immersion classrooms that use two or more languages for instructional purposes. In this viewpoint, multilingual education is synonymous to bilingual education.

This leads to the debate on whether bilingual education and multilingual education can refer to the same thing, a debate that is controversial. Some scholars (Franceschini, 2011; Cenoz, 2013) view these two concepts as synonymous whereas scholars such as (LaMuCuo 2019; De Groot 2011) make a clear difference between them. Other researchers (Ortega, 2013) use multilingual and bilingual education interchangeably while others (Garcia and Lin, 2016) differentiate between these concepts. The common ground is that both bilingualism and multilingualism are usually (but not always) achieved through formal education.

In addition, different scholars define bilingual and multilingual education in both the number of languages involved and the educational contexts. This is the case of contexts in which there is a use of at least two languages for instructions and aiming to produce multilingual speakers (Mwaniki, et. al., 2016; Lasagabaster, 2015). Here, the number of languages in use is as important as the educational contexts. According to Cenoz & Jasone (1998) multilingual education refers to “educational programmes that use languages other than the first languages as media of instruction (although some teach additional languages as school subjects) and they aim for communicative proficiency in more than two languages”. The above perspectives tally with the case of Burundi in the sense that a number of languages are taught as subject instead of being medium of instruction but the aim is to produce people who will be competent in those languages.

In the case of language education system in Burundi for example, the country has been monolingual for a long period of time. Before missionaries and colonizers introduced their languages, the country was monolingual with the use of Kirundi. The country turned into bilingualism when French was made an official language (especially in education). Later on, more foreign languages
Reforms and Language Choice in Education

There have been numerous reforms in education in Burundi as far as languages are concerned. However, the soundest reform considered to have impacted languages in education is that of 1973. This reform advocated for a community school accessible to the population and learners without discrimination. To achieve this objective, the most important of its aspects was the process of ‘Kirundization.’ The intention in this process was to transmit the knowledge of primary education in the national language Kirundi. ‘Kirundization’ was then considered as logical because it proposed to provide education in the mother tongue understood by all children and their teachers. According to Rwantabagu (2011), this policy was drafted by a few specialists and it was imposed on teachers, the population and learners without exception.
any form of consultation, awareness and involvement. This led to the policy being strongly opposed especially by the parents of Bujumbura, the main city of the country. Albeit it was implemented, “for a long time, teachers’ guides were written in French whereas the lessons were to be delivered in Kirundi” (Rwantabagu, 2011). This illustrates how French has been considered as the superior language, since even content material for teaching in Kirundi were written in French except the illustrations.

In practice, with the 1973 reform, Kirundi became the language of instruction from grade 1 until grade 4 of primary school and French became language of instruction from grade 5 primary school onward. As a language taught, French had been on the timetable since grade 3 of primary school. Kirundi was also taught as a subject from grade 1 onward, a situation which changed in 1987, with French being introduced (taught as a subject) from grade 1 of the primary school.

Another reform was attempted in 1998. This reform intended to introduce English into the primary education curriculum since 1998 school year. This attempt was based on an activity proposed in 1998 by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education aiming to open the country to the world in general and it was formulated in terms of operationalization of a broad opening to the world by introducing the teaching of English at the level of primary and secondary education (CNDIH, 2014).

In this reform two classes per school and per province for 5th and 6th grade were selected to participate in the pilot study during a period of two school years. Even if the sampled schools were overloaded in terms of course subjects considering other schools timetable, pupils improved their performance at the level of national competition. Even though the results showed that the project was successful, the means to make the reform national did not follow and it was therefore abandoned.

Moreover, based on the analyses, conclusions and recommendations of the round table on the Burundian Education System of January 1998, a number of actions were proposed in an additional 1999 and 2002 reform. Proposed actions that can interest this discussion included: establishment of modalities for the transmission of elementary lessons in the mother tongue in the 5th and 6th years of primary education; and the operationalization of a broad opening to the world by introducing the teaching of English and strengthening the French language in primary education. Once again, these reforms were not implemented (CNDIH, 2014).

While the preliminary results showed that the project was successful, it was not implemented nationwide. Even though, it was argued that this was caused by the lack of means, one can argue that in the same spirit of the superiority of French, it was difficult to introduce any other language which was felt to compete and possibly fight off French as the language of the elite. Hence any attempt to challenge the supremacy of French would be deemed to fail. A similar analysis has been done by Panda & Mohanty (2014, p. 106) who analysed the language policy and education supposed to lead the country (India) in a comprehensive multilingualism, especially in education. They realised that “some languages, such as English, are privileged and endow their speakers with greater power and access to resources.” whereas other languages are associated with disadvantages and are marginalised. In the case of Burundi, it can be argued that French was associated with power and privileges and therefore should be maintained at all costs.

As years went on and that new generations came to power, new reforms were also introduced with a different philosophy as far as languages in education that create multilingualism are concerned. It is in this perspective that another reform was introduced in 2005. One of the main appeal of this reform was the introduction not only of English but also Kiswahili at primary level. It was during the 2006-2007 school year that Kiswahili and English started being taught from the first year of primary school in addition to Kirundi and French which made four languages from grade 1 of primary school in education.

This changed the status quo of French which has been in place since decades. French had to give space to the new languages to accommodate the four languages on weekly timetable in classes at primary level. Moreover, time allotted to English at secondary level was increased and English was introduced at Grade 7 of secondary level instead of Grade 8. All this made French lose a number of hours to the expense of English on the weekly schedule. This can be considered as one step towards the disillusionment of the establishment of French as the sole language of the Burundian educated. In addition, Kiswahili had been in use as a language of small business by uneducated (or less educated) people. The introduction of this language in formal education was a complete shift of what more people thought about Kiswahili as a foreign language of the uneducated and associated with lying and playing tricks around people.

The most recent reform in terms of language in education is that of 2019. In this reform, the four languages are kept since primary level but at different grades. The basis of the reform is that it was found that the teaching of the four languages, namely Kirundi, French, English and Kiswahili from the Grade 1 of primary school complicates the progression of the learning process. Therefore, this reform stipulates that in Grade 1, Kirundi would be taught with focus on written form while French would be taught with focus on oral form, and the latter will be taught in writing from the grade 2. English would be integrated from Grade 3 with focus on oral form, then in writing from the Grade 5. Kiswahili will be introduced in the grade 5 with focus on oral form before an integration of the written form in Grade 6. The same reform posits that there will be a linguistic transition. This involves shifting from teaching from Kirundi to French in the disciplines of Mathematics, Science and Technology. This would be done in Grade 4, to prepare the pupils for French as a language of instruction from Grade 5.

This reform was also felt to introduce much of the Kiswahili language and English, two languages which have been tried many times. These languages were felt by supporters of French, a dominant language, as a threat. Therefore, they would be limited in education for some reasons: Kirundi would close doors to the elite child and English would collapse French since it was becoming far more a language of wide communication outing French. English being the language of the powers of the East African regions including Tanzania and Kenya on which Burundi depends due to its status as a landlocked country. English could therefore attract many of the youth who would turn their back to French which would become obsolete.

Such fears about the coming of a language (thought as powerful and challenging) was also reported in Airey (2004) amongst some lecturers in Sweden. The group of lecturers is also a group of people that might be looked at as making the highly educated elite of a nation. They are reluctant to changes and have arguments as too much requirements and extra effort and time and not willing to invest in all those charges. The current educational system of Burundi is operating on a system that has replaced an older one. The next section discusses multilingual education issues in this older system.

**Language Influence an Evil to Fight for Multilingual Development**

The educational system that Burundi has today replaced another system that had lasted for many years. Since the goal of this section is to describe the multilingual education system of Burundi from a historical perspective, I have judged it appropriate to look at the organisation of languages in education by looking back at what has been in education as far as languages are concerned. To this end, this part is interested in revealing the languages which have been in education, the main goals that the language
education policy makers wanted those who would be produced by the system to achieve with the languages they will have learned. This will be achieved by analysing the micro-level of the language policy i.e. by looking at the proposed curriculum content materials, their goals and objectives.

As argued by Brisk (2006) one of the possible factors that affect the quality of bi/multilingual education are found at the curricula, and instruction levels. One of the main aspect of curriculum for the approach to multilingual learning is the content materials (Garcia, et al. 2013) which highlights what the learners are supposed to practise in order to become multilingual users. It is through the lenses of the content materials designed for languages learners in order to become multilingual users that this discussion was done. At this level, aspects of goals of the language policy makers can be captured at the lowest level where the articulated intentions of policy makers together with the guidelines for practice are implemented to create the real multilingual users (Paulston, 1992). This can also be done by looking at the content materials descriptions, introductions, forewords, and a snapshot of some examples of the language contents.

As has been discussed earlier, by the end of the 1960s, three languages were in education and constituted the multilingual education system of Burundi. These languages were Kirundi, French and English. At this time, Kirundi and French were taught from primary education. English was introduced in the second year of the secondary level. In this section, I will only discuss languages at secondary level in the old system. The reason being that the primary level had only French and Kirundi as languages in education in this old system.

I make the description of this old system language in education by looking at the micro-level of the content material designed by language education policy makers for English. The introduction to the content material that was provided to the learners to study English made it clear that after being exposed to the content of English for their first time, they could be able to say many things that American, Australian, British, Canadian, and New Zealanders learn when they are children. At this level students are also believed to be able to learn to say many things Botswanan, Kenyan, Tanzanian, Ugandan, and Zimbabwean children learn in their schools. This means that as a start, the Burundian learner of English is supposed to start being part of the international community of English language learners and users. An idea that shows to what extent language policy makers believe in the trend and role of English in the world. The learner is later encouraged to practice what they have learned with either their siblings or foreigners who can speak English. To encourage students in being able to learn and achieve the above goals, the actual learning manual is entirely in English. Its content is built on dialogues, linguistic structures, and vocabulary in the first nine units. Subsequent units make focus on exercises for practising reading and writing. All these to ensure the Burundian learners who is newly introduced to English can integrate the English speaking community in general.

This content material is a revised version and has made changes to the older version. As a revised version, the major change for learning and practising English was that the pace in the learning of English was quickened. The rationale for this quickening, according to the designers, was the need to prevent students from "translating in their own minds". If they are given many words and concepts in functional settings, they will absorb the content in a less unconscious fashion. However, though in practice students will translate, "the less they are encouraged to do so by a new pace of presentation, the less they will have to develop interference from Kirundi and French". From this perspective, it is believed that the introduction of English can have challenges based on already existing L1 (Kirundi) and L2 (French) in terms of crosslinguistic transfer (here referred to as interference).

Another new aspect is the fact that first, "French has been completely removed from both students and teacher texts, except for the glossaries" (BEPES, 1995, p. 3) to increase possibility of avoiding translation. Second, phonetic transcriptions have been removed except in the teacher’s glossaries so that teachers and students will not spend much time on phonetics.

There are, however, certain general guidelines that are basic not only to the samples presented here but to the proposed strategies of teaching English in the Burundi schools. These strategies are presented to the teachers to form the basis of their classroom practices. The main ones are as follows:

- French or Kirundi is always avoided. They can be used occasionally for classroom explanation as a method of last resort. These are English classes and the language used is English. If more than 5% of class is in French and Kirundi, too much time is being spent in those languages. Except for cognates (words in French and English coming from the single origin, usually Latin, which have parallel meanings), words or phrases in the dialogues are supposed to be presented through drawings, pictures, and so forth. Even if comprehension is slow, the context of a word or phrase will eventually make it clear to the students without recourse to translation. On the other hand, to pantomime, act out, or otherwise avoid cognates recognition is equally wrong. Cognates can be a source of valuable additional vocabulary, especially when students begin to write. However, for the 8th Grade, no false cognates should be introduced. Caution is advised in presenting additional vocabulary of this kind: for example, actual-actual. Teacher talk should be kept to a minimum. The recorded dialogues will give students the best representation of pronunciation. Once students begin to hear native speech, the teacher should make every effort to minimize his/her own speech. There are several reasons for this:
  - If the teacher is talking, the students are not having opportunities to speak
  - Teachers tend to talk about the language; students need to learn the language itself
  - Unless the teacher is a native speaker of English, s/he is teaching accented English.

From these English teaching strategies, I argue that the belief for developing appropriate competence of English in the multilingual landscape was that the other existing languages should be controlled to avoid their influence. However, there is an exception on cognates. These types of words exist mainly in French and English. The belief is that the true cognates can enhance students’ vocabulary. The role of the teacher is that of insuring the learners can practice for example the appropriate (native speaker like) pronunciation. That is why teachers are expected to talk in strict minimum and let learners listen to the recordings as models. The other languages are controlled to limit their influence. For this reason, translation is to be avoided. However, it is well documented now that transfer is unavoidable during the learning of a foreign language and that transfer can result in true learning.

Moreover, the content in the new material does not provide phonetic symbols nor does it place stress on phonetics. It assumes, however, that careful pronunciation is emphasized at all time, but especially when new words or sounds are introduced. Difficult sounds in English, such as /r/ and th are used frequently in the dialogues so that practice is part of the learning. Teachers are expected to give extra help on these sounds as the necessity arises.

Furthermore, students are supposed to develop English the same way native speakers do. That is why the language is presented in the spoken form first. The writing form is to be introduced later when learner have got some familiarity with the language. According to the language policy makers, writing of English is not introduced until the second trimester. For this reason,
teachers should not write any word on the board. The books in English should not be given to the students either until the second trimester. The reason for presenting spoken language first is that English is not written the same way it is pronounced. It is believed that for example words like live (verb) and live (adjective) can cause learners endless pronunciation problem if they are seen before they are heard. The students are supposed to learn such words as words like live (verb) and live (adjective) the same native speakers do as they do not see words until long after they learned to pronounce them.

As learners get to be introduced to English, they are expected to be able to say the prepared dialogues with understanding and then be able to substitute with other words and phrases for those in the dialogues as they develop their ability to use what they have learned outside the classroom. From what they learn in classroom, they will be able to speak English to friends for fun or practice. They are also supposed to use English to be able to talk to visitors from neighbouring English speaking countries. If they practice English in this sense, they will realise that they have learned to speak many of their own thoughts. To achieve this level of using English, students are presented with exercises for practising both speaking and writing that will help them to learn the words and phrases to speak their own thoughts and ideas in English. This set high the expectations from these learners at this level after three years of being introduced to English (a school subject). Considering the amount of time these learners practise English (in classroom) and the learners’ linguistic environment, these expectations are ambitious. However, since the English language was supposed to be fully practised in classroom without wasting time by using any other language, policy makers believe that learners can achieve the set level of competence and be able to use English as wished.

After this first three years of the first cycle of secondary school, there was another three years for general humanities education which generally included fields in Languages and sciences (with a field of pedagogy extending on four years). There were two completely different programs for learners to study English. One for those of Sciences (which was also used for students of pedagogy) and another for students of languages. The next section attempts to uncover the language designed for students of languages and sciences and the beliefs on what kind of language competence learners were expected to develop based on practising the content material designed for English (taught as a subject).

Languages for Advanced Learners

This section describes briefly languages learned at the upper level of the old system in the Burundi multilingual educational system through the lenses of English as one of them. The English language in the Languages (one of the fields of study) was the only content material that was fully adopted. The English proposed to the learners is found in respectively Today's English Classe de Troisième, Today's English Classes de Seconde and Today's English Classes de Première. As can be seen, the titles of each of the books are in two parts: one written in English whereas the other is in French. This series of content materials have been designed for African learners of English but who mainly speak French.

What can be seen is that the content used to teach the learners at this level of languages is in a content material which was completely adopted from outside with no change. The material was not developed neither by the Burundi ministry departments of curriculum design nor for Burundian students. Even though the material seems to be designed for students of similar profile as those of Burundi, the beliefs on how Burundian students can develop English language competence where other languages are used is not clear. There is a huge contextual difference in the target learners for whom this content material was developed and Burundian learners. One of them is that Burundian learners share the mother tongue. This aspect should be considered during the design of any additional foreign language. The content materials designed for some students are not necessarily going to yield same results in a different context. Moreover, according to Heugh (2019) “multilingualism in one place is not the same as in another”. Taking contents designed for Senegalese learners or Cameroon learners without any adaptation to teach Burundian learners is wrong. The content materials used by these learners do not tell much about the beliefs on the languages involved in the multilingual education system at this period.

Whereas students of languages did not have a content material specifically designed for them, the learners of sciences had their content material designed by the Burundian bureau for curriculum design. At this level, the students in sciences had their own programme as far as languages in education are concerned. As was done in previous sections, I have used the content material for English to highlight the philosophy on the languages in the multilingual education at this period. The English designed for them was called ‘Project Aftermath’. It is a content material fully written in English and which has been produced in Burundi by the staff of educational bureau in charge of secondary school curriculum elaboration as opposed to the content material designed for Languages as a field of study. This ‘Project Aftermath’ is an intermediate course in functional technical English.

The aim of the content that the learners are exposed to is to develop listening, speaking, reading and writing skills, to help learners communicate in a technical context. To be able to develop the four language skills in English, the content is built upon a range of technical areas including engineering, electronics, building and medicine. The content is structured on forty episodes and assume to provide learners with the English language necessary to advance their knowledge of technical and scientific subjects through English. It concentrates on functional English which learners studying technical subjects will need to use. Therefore, the book contains many examples of informal social interchange in a technical context such as responding to questions, asking for information and explaining processes simply.

‘Project Aftermath’ also gives learners the opportunity to practise technical English through task-based exercises. Each task-centred activity consists of a thinking process and its outcome in the form of a tangible result. This programme presupposes that learners should be able to use the English language ‘in a creative way’. They should be able to put into practice without diffidence what they have already acquired. So, the stress is no longer on speaking and writing flawlessly, but on expressing thoughts in a clear and creative way. Teachers are encouraged to use synonyms and antonyms, illustrations with pictures, drawings, gestures, mime and avoid the use of translations to teach English at this level.

As can be seen, at this period advanced Burundian English learners had two kinds of English programmes. Those produced in Burundi by the offices in charge of English language curriculum elaboration (English for Sciences) and those adopted from outside (English for Languages). Those adopted were designed for francophone learners of English. A group in which Burundian learners fall. However, the books designed by Burundians for Burundian learners were mainly designed in English with introductions and forewords in English with the presence of some very limited elements of French which makes feel that the use of other languages in the teaching and learning of English for example was felt to be inappropriate.

On the one compared to English, French has been the main language both in education and as a language used in professions and in everyday communication besides Kirundi the mother tongue. This can be the reason why French was given more importance
especially on time allocation and the content materials. On the other hand, Kirundi, has been in education at secondary level since the introduction of formal education. It is and it is the learners and the teachers’ mother tongue. This makes it special especially for the teaching of other languages. Whereas in different countries students and teachers come to class with different mother tongues, in Burundi everyone speaks the same language as a mother tongue. Kirundi has been a subject (as opposed to the language of instruction which has been French until today) in education. It has been in all classes of all fields of study. The difference being the time allotted to it in different classes and different fields of study.

Conclusion

Since the arrival of missionaries and later colonizers, Burundi, as a monolingual society, entered a new era: that of being a multilingual society. Due to different reforms, as far as languages in education are concerned, languages which were earlier introduced were no longer felt useful and have been dropped whereas new ones have been introduced. This has led the country into a multilingual society through multilingual education.

To understand the beliefs and considerations of the language policy makers about how to reach true multilingual competence, content materials (mainly seen through the English language teaching material) discouraged the use of other languages in teaching foreign target languages like English. This is an indication that the other languages were seen to hamper the development of expected language competence in a target language (like English for example). Moreover, the Burundian trained through the material designed was supposed to learn and practise the languages (English for example) and be able to do what other speakers of English do with English. This standard, which is high, was set already from the beginning. The languages in the old multilingual system of Burundi were supposed to be separate especially during language classrooms in order to achieve the language competence that will allow the learners to become true multilingual users in the languages involved. In addition, educational language policy makers expected teachers to limit influence of other languages and try to let learners learn from the native like conditions whereby they were supposed to speak less in order not to teach foreign accent of English for example. The present findings imply that the learners produced by this system are supposed to be able to reach and maintain these languages and actually use them in real situations without such aspects of crosslinguistic transfer for example. This study could have provided data on how multilingual speakers trained during this period can truly produce the languages that were in the multilingual education system of Burundi to truly find out how they can use these languages separately. Due to time and space, this was not achieved. In the future, such involvement of speakers in the production of languages would yield more insights on what the educational language policy makers philosophy on the learning and use of the involved languages ended up producing for the language use in real situations especially the foreign languages specifically English and French. The phenomenon of not making Kirundi a language of instruction in a context of Burundi where it is the only L1 that all Burundians understand and how such context can enhance the learning of foreign languages also needs investigation.

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