

Using Literacy Practices to Promote Positive Perspectives of African Languages

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Abstract: Through a participatory action research to address the need for reading materials while promoting the use of home languages in Tanzania, 119 sixth-grade students, 19 teachers and 19 parents in one primary school in Northwestern Tanzania worked together to create supplemental books for their school library using either English, Swahili and/or their home languages through a writing workshop. The patterns and themes from interviews and participant observations suggest the following happened: (1) teachers recalled home languages' place in history, (2) teachers revealed home languages' place in contemporary society, (3) parents reflected on the social and political value of home languages, and (4) students reflected on reasons for using home languages in their writing.

Key words: writing workshop, African languages, indigenous languages, literacy

1. Introduction

Education quality can be defined in different ways but in essence, it means a learning system in which the content, method and means work interdependently in ways that positively affect how much and how well children learn and the extent to which their education translates into a range of personal, social and developmental benefits.

Obtaining quality education in Sub Saharan Africa (SSA) is undermined by a number of factors including these two: the use of imperial languages in schools, specifically English or French brought to Africa during the colonial rule, and the lack or limited availability of books. In the last decade, efforts to improve education quality in this part of the world have focused on promoting the use of indigenous languages as medium of instruction (Dutcher, 2004). Donations from foreign countries have been the prominent way to supply books to African countries (Elley, 2000). While donated books are better than nothing; they are written in imperial languages not understood by most students, leaving the quality of education unchanged.

However, since English and French have historically enabled people acquire good-paying jobs and hence, gain economic success and high social status, most African leaders, parents, teachers and even students look down on their own home languages (Heugh & Skutnabb-Kangas, 2010). In addition, English or French and a national language such as Swahili are the only ones used in schools; leaving local languages exclusively used outside of school walls, and in doing so, undermining their status in African societies (Gudhlanga, 2005).

The following article presents results from a participatory action research study I conducted at one primary

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school to create supplemental reading materials, while creating space for students' home languages to be used not as a medium of instruction, but in their learning process. I will begin by presenting the issue of language ideology in SSA and its implications for the attainment of quality education. More directly, an overview of linguistic ideology in Tanzania will follow. A presentation of a review of the literature pertaining to efforts to encourage and discourage the use of indigenous languages in academia, efforts to supply reading materials to impoverished countries, and the various implications involved, will come next. Last, the methodology and results of my analyses are discussed.

1.1 Language Ideologies and Implications for Quality Education

Language ideologies refer to the belief systems related to and informing linguistic behavior as well as frameworks shaping decisions about language acquisition and use (Kroskrity, 2004). Also known as linguistic ideologies, they are based upon how a language furthers individual and group interests, hence, what people think about language permeates schooling and contributes to language shifts and maintenance around the world (Woolard & Schieffelin, 1994).

Most people in SSA prefer learning in either French or English in spite of studies indicating students perform better academically when they learn using their familiar languages (Birgit-Utne, 2007). Studies showing positive educational achievement due the use of African languages in school have not changed how most Africans feel about their own languages partly because their language ideologies have not changed (Rubagumya, Oksana, John Clegg & Kiliku, 2011). The attainment of quality education in SSA, among other things, depends on a critical understanding of the role language plays in mastering knowledge dispersed in school institutions (Birgit-Utne, 2007). But even more importantly, the decision for people to use a language depends solely on their language ideology and hence, determines whether or not that language will help them succeed in school and in society.

1.2 Linguistic Ideology in Tanzania

Three language ideologies exist in Tanzania. First, most Tanzanians believe English promotes individual and societal development because it offers better economic benefits (Brock-Utne, 2007). The recent mushrooming of English medium private schools is a testament to this belief (Rubagumya, 2003). Second, Tanzanian educators and political officials suppose bilingual education in Tanzania allows the maintenance of Swahili while promoting the use of English (The United Republic of Tanzania, n.d). However, no language policy articulates the place of local languages in school and the society. Currently, many people in Tanzania do not know and value local languages; most speak Swahili as their first language (Brock-Utne, 2007). Third, the notion that local languages and Swahili impede academic and economic success is prominent. In many schools in Tanzania, signs of "Speak English only" are still posted and students are still forced to wear t-shirts with degrading phrases such as "I am stupid, I spoke Swahili" to discourage them from using Swahili and home languages (Vavrus, 2002). Even with these beliefs, there is a growing effort to restore the use of home languages around the world and specifically African languages in education (Chumbow, 2005).

1.3 Relevance of the Study

This research is relevant by a theoretical as well as a realistic and economical perspective. Understanding the value and place of African languages in African societies may help eliminate negative perceptions associated with their use in school. By introducing suitable solutions to the need for books and language issues in which quality education is affected, helping educators to better integrate literacy practices geared towards promoting the use of

home languages without undermining the desire for Africans to learn and use imperial languages; parents, teachers and students will begin to discover the significance of their languages not only in school but also in their society.

2. Review of the Literature

This section offers a review of the literature related to efforts to encourage and discourage the use of indigenous languages in school institutions. This review also underlines efforts taken to address the need for books to impoverished countries. The need for more scholarship to merge the promotion of African languages while creating texts through literacy practices aimed at building a positive perspective of such languages is made apparent.

2.1 Restoring Home Language(s): International Background

In the last two decades, an increased effort to restore home language(s) use in academia is indisputable (Heugh & Skutnabb-Kangas, 2010). The use of African local languages in primary education since independence, for example, rose over the last decade from 43% to 81%; from use in 20 African states to use in 38 states (Albaugh, 2007). Two important developments in language policy which happened during the last two eras (1985–2005) may explain efforts to revitalize minority languages through formal education.

First, the adoption of international frameworks, conventions and charters to protect languages was agreed upon. During this period, transnational organizations agreed upon giving “small” languages around the world some degree of support. Such organizations include the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (1994); the Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (1993); the Council of Europe (CoE) which produced the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (1992); the United Nations (UN) which drafted the Declaration of the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities (1992), and most recently the European Union (EU) which published Promoting of Language Learning and Linguistic Diversity: An Action Plan, 2004–2006 (July 2003). These documents gave minority language communities prestige or authority to ask international organizations to support and fund efforts to restore minority languages.

The second concerns the use of minority languages in formal education as a way to improve the quality of education and to revitalize dying languages (Albaugh, 2007). Such programs include the foundation of so-called Language Revitalization Programs (LRP) (Huss, 1999); and the TeKōhanga Reo or “language nests” programs of New Zealand (McClutchie, 2007; TeKohanga Reo, 2003). Even the colonizers (French and British) support the use of home languages in school because they now believe (1) children learn best in their first language, and (2) children learn a second language better if they begin in their first language (Heugh & Skutnabb-Kangas, 2010).

2.2 Reasons for Restoring Home-languages

Many scholars argue, each language is embedded with unspoken network of cultural values, which, though on a subliminal level, shape each person’s self-awareness, identity, and interpersonal relationships (Norris, 2004). Each language displays a unique beauty of human culture (Fishman, 1991); has unique and irrecoverable knowledge (Blair, Rice, Wood, & Janvier, 2002), but even more importantly, within each language there is a sense of history as well as progress (Stark, 2009). This understanding propels many language activists to work toward the re-establishment of home languages in a number of contexts.

2.3 Reasons and Efforts for Restoring Home-languages in School

Several studies show benefits to using home languages in school settings. For example, Williams (1998) conducted a 6-year study comparing Malawian and Zambian reading proficiencies of 900 students in both their home languages and English as a foreign language. Both countries have Primary Reading Programs, that is, bilingual literacy programs using mother tongue. The language policy in Malawi is that students learn using their mother tongue (Chichewa) for the first 4 years while in Zambia, they go straight to using English as the medium of instruction while also using their home language, Nyanja. The results showed Malawian students scored approximately 5 times higher at year 3, 3 times more at year 4, and 2 times more at year 6 than their Zambian counterparts in their reading proficiencies in their home language and English. These findings suggest students master their reading skills better and faster when they learn first in their home language.

The Project for the Study of Alternative Education in South Africa (PRAESA) encourages South African indigenous languages to be used in school (PRAESA, 2011). This project facilitates research studies to illustrate the difference home languages make in academia. October's (2002) study was part of their publication series. She investigated the low matric pass rate among African language speakers in comparison with the better results obtained by their Afrikaans and English speaking counterparts. The results showed there was a correlation between the language medium subject and performance in the matric exit exam. The academic performance in Biology, Mathematics, Geography, Science and Physical science indicated that students who used English as their first language performed more than 20% better than those who used English as a second language. On the other hand, when their reading comprehension was tested in their mother tongue, the students learning through Xhosa performed better than the English speaking students. These findings indicated home languages use in school was critical in ensuring academic success for African language speakers.

Obanya's (2004) study in Nigeria also revealed significantly higher academic performance by learners taught in their first language (Yoruba) and higher levels of bilingual language performance by the same group of learners. The results indicate students had an easy adaptation to English medium requirements at the secondary level. More recently, Dörthe and Trudell (2008) reported on the *Pédagogieconvergente* model used in Mali, where students use their national languages in their first six years of schooling instead of French. *Pédagogieconvergente* students had significantly higher academic achievement than those in French-only schools since it was started in 1996. Since 2005, Mali uses 11 of the 13 national languages in school: Bamanankan, Fulfuldé, Songhay, Tamasheq, Dogon, Soninké, Bomu, Syenara, Tyeyaxo, Mamara and Khassonké (UNESCO, 2006, pp. 10–11).

2.4 Opposing Efforts towards Home-language use in School

Several initiatives have also been taken to discourage educators using local languages in school. While English proficiency is rather low in most African countries, Alan Mazrui (2004) highlighted a number of attempts to encourage its use in school and the detrimental effects such movements have on the languages of Africa. In 2002, Ghana switched from using mother tongue medium in education and introduced a new policy of English only from the first year of primary school (Owu-Ewie, 2006). De Klerk (2000) showed the failed efforts of the South African policy makers to revitalize indigenous languages; conversely, he underscored progress in strengthening English use in public schools. Setati (2005) observed, Africans still oppose mother tongue education in support of English which they view as a language of knowledge. Many African communities do not show an awareness of the rich linguistic and cultural backgrounds children from non-English environments speaking

backgrounds have, perhaps because of lack of knowledge or indifference to support and pride, even though this affects children's learning (Murray & Smith, 1988).

In Tanzania, where education in primary schools is conducted in Swahili, Roy-Campbell (1996) showed how students supported the maintenance of English as a medium of instruction at secondary level. He found many Tanzanian students wanted English to be maintained as the medium of instruction though they could hardly carry out a conversation in English with him. Roy-Campbell argued that even when given the option to use their own language in learning, the students preferred to learn using a language they did not understand because they do not value their mother tongue. Currently, English continues to gain momentum in Tanzania as private schools using English as the medium of instruction continue to grow, despite the LOITASA research studies project supporting the use of Swahili (Rubagumya, Afitska, Clegg & Kiliku, 2011).

Other studies in Africa also show students and parents want the continual use of foreign languages in school. Ndamba (2008) reports findings from a study conducted to examine children and parents' language preferences in view of the Zimbabwean language policy derived from the 1987 Education Act, which requires instruction to be conducted in the mother tongue in grades 1–3. The study used interviews and questionnaires to gather data from students, parents, and school heads. The sample consisted of 60 pupils, 42 parents, 25 school heads, 152 infant teachers and 17 teachers-in-charge of infant departments (TICs). All respondents came from urban, peripheral-urban, and rural schools in Masvingo district in Zimbabwe. The results showed students and parents preferred English as the language of instruction at infant level, in spite of challenges faced in accessing the curriculum through the use of the second language. The author suggested the need for a serious campaign for all stakeholders to appreciate the role played by the mother tongue in the early years of schooling.

The highlighted scholarship attests to reasons, efforts, opposition and promising outcomes of using a familiar language in the learning process. However, all the above studies focus on using home languages as medium of instruction as the way to promote home language use in school. My study offers another alternative of using African languages in school.

2.5 International Efforts to Supply Books to Impoverished Countries

Around the world, a number of organizations and programs use varied strategies to provide access to print in different countries (LaFond & Harpe, 2000). Concentrated Language Encounters (CLE) program in South East Asia, seeks to increase the amount of texts in schools at lower cost by teaching students to use starter books and create parallel books in Thai (Walker, Rattanavitch & Oiler, 1992). The Book Flood program works to supply at least 100 books to every classroom especially in developing countries (Elley, 2000). Adkins (2009) reported on a number of NGO groups working to improve literacy skills through the building of libraries and providing access to donated reading materials in Honduras. Nagai (1999, 2001) showed how his research in Papua, New Guinea assisted the newly established vernacular elementary schools in creating their own story books as reading materials for school.

Additional organizations include Basic Learning Materials Initiative (BMLI) sponsored by UNESCO to provide learning materials mainly in African countries such as Burkina Faso, Malawi, Mozambique etc., and (Basic Learning Materials Initiative, n.d.). UNESCO also works with African Publishers Network Online (APNET), and other international donors on the KAWI project to supply a series of pan-African scientific books written for children from an African cultural perspective (APNET, n.d.). Additionally, Rosenberg (2000) and Salzano (2002) describe a number of programs that supply books specifically in Africa. Book Aid International

(BAI) seeks to increase book access and has offered literacy, education and development support in sub-Saharan Africa since 1954 (Book Aid International, n.d.). In Tanzania, the TusomeVitabu Project (TVP) (CARE, n.d.), managed by CARE International, also helps with book production and distribution. The TVP even received the UNESCO King Sejong' Literacy Prize for its work promoting the love of books among children and adults in Tanzania. Due to limited funding, it unfortunately ended in 2007.

All these efforts show a unified understanding of the significance of literature for the development of a literate society. They also indicate book donation has been the prominent method or strategy used to meet this need. Just a few of the studies and organizations mentioned above have sought to help school communities create their own books.

The literature above shows book donation has been the prominent method or strategy employed to meet the need for books in schools. They also highlight home languages used as the medium of instruction as one way to promote them in academia. My study uses writing workshop as a way to bring the utility of Tanzania's national language and other home languages while seeking to increase access to texts at Manyara Primary School, with a goal to cultivate positive attitudes and change negative beliefs regarding African languages in school and society.

3. Methodology

3.1 Materials and Method

This study was sponsored by both the Walker Institute for African Studies in partnership with the Instruction and Teacher Education department at the University of South Carolina (USA). The project is part of an initiative to help schools in Tanzania create their own texts and use the many languages currently undermined in the school system. I started the project in May of 2010 and will continue till 2015. It is divided into five separate studies. This article presents part of the results from 5 focus group interviews from the first study. Specifically, this study addressed the section on language ideologies and the role of literacy practices as a possible panacea to revitalize positive attitudes towards African languages in academia and society. The 119 students participating in the study were comprised of 65% girls and 35% boys enrolled in 6th grade in a school with a total number of 19 teachers. More than 80% of the teachers had more than 10 years of teaching experience but attended professional development workshops only once or twice in those years. Among the 19 parents in the study, 10 female and 9 male, 90% of them are farmers and all literate. The students, teachers and parents came from 11 different linguistic groups; all of them speak Swahili while 65% speak Sukuma, the rest speak Chaga, Jita, Haya, Ruli, Hehe, Zinza, Iraq, Nyiramba, Nyaturu or Matta.

I conducted the writing workshop for three weeks and students used any language(s) they wanted to write their books. Teachers assisted students at school while parents worked with them at home. After the workshop, all three education stakeholders shared their perceptions about their home languages through separate group meetings (5 focus group interviews: 2–4 hours each) with the following open-end questions: *Tell me about your experience in the writing workshop; what do you think about the three of you (teachers, students and parents) working together in this way? Share your thoughts about the language(s) we used during the workshop; share any thoughts, suggestions or input regarding what we did to create reading materials for this school and what you would like to see done in the future; do you have any question or comment?*

A thematic mechanism was used by which words, phrases and statements were grouped into themes. The themes were put together in light of literature review and a social cultural perspective of literacy. First, key words

and phrases found in statements concerning language issues were labeled as flag-words. These led to the formation of descriptor ideas which in turn birthed themes from which categories of participants' explanations were grouped. The findings captured the ideas behind this process to show the impact of writing workshop in the participants' perceptions about national and home language use in school and society.

Table 1 Data Analysis Process

Flag word	Descriptor	Topic	Category	Finding
my local language, my language, I never used my language,	Students' talk about using Swahili/ home language in class	Learned	Students identified value of home language for their writing	Students reflected on reasons for using home languages in their writing
I didn't know, made me think back, I now start to see, opened my eyes, local languages are useful, the value, woke me up, language treasure, English, Swahili	Teachers' ideas on the use of home languages in literature, media, in and outside of school	Realize Recognize	Teachers explored linguistic diversity	1. Teachers recalled home languages' place in history 2. Teachers revealed home languages' place in contemporary society
I thought, raise/raised, believe/believed, now I see	Parents' ideas on home language use in and outside school	Cause Start	Parents acknowledged language role in community and school	Parents reflected on the social and political value of home languages

4. Results

A qualitative analysis approach of grouping words, phrases and concepts according to themes- thematic approach was utilized. The above data analysis process (Table 1) indicates the key words (labeled as flag words in the chart) found in participants' responses to interview questions. I examined what the teachers said and found among the 19 teachers, nine of them commented on the use of home languages historically (in literature and music), and others in contemporary society. Each comment was supported by the rest of the teachers by verbal agreement (*ndiyo* = *yes*), head nodding, and many times by a follow-up comment. To highlight each finding, below I take a one major comment and two follow-up comments. By examining what the teachers said, the findings indicate that as a result of participating in the writing workshop and having the opportunity to witness how home languages were used, they were able to reflect on the positive value of home languages. Their responses revealed that they recalled home languages' place in history, and they revealed home languages' place in contemporary society. Similarly, the 119 students divided into 20 groups commented on language use. Twenty students (one representative from each group) expressed advantages of using home language in writing. The 19 parents also did the same and their comments focused on the social as well as political value of local languages.

4.1 Teachers Recalled Home Languages' Place in History

Because I used Sukuma, my home language to create a text demonstrating ways students could use their home languages to write, one of the books students wrote also used "Sukuma" a prominent language at the Manyara community. Teachers discussed ways local languages were used in literature. They gave several examples of prominent writers who saw the value and use of indigenous languages in writing, and all of their fellow teachers agreed with them by saying "ndiyonikwelikabisa" (yes it is true). Below I highlight one of the teachers, Magdalena who reflected upon how one prominent writer used and valued local languages. I also show the comments other teachers made following her statement.

This project made me think back. I now start to see that even our local languages are useful even in writing a book. There is one writer, Kinjekitile, he wrote a book a while ago; I can't remember the name — but he

wrote it in a type of a Makonde Swahili speaker. For example, when he said stand up; in Swahili — it is supposed to be *simama*, but he wrote as *nchimama* — just like a Makonde would say it, or *chichuchumae* instead of *tuchuchumae*. You see, he used his local language in a great way and we used that book even in our classrooms; I remember we even used some portions for final examinations (Magdalena, 2010).

The writing workshop repositioned Magdalena in ways that allowed her to think back to and draw from her past experience. It was a tool that enabled her to see how home languages have been useful historically. John, another teacher also commented, “I think this project woke me up from my sleep regarding the value of my home language. When I think about it now, I see why Kinjekitile used our languages; I think it was because people could hear their own voices in those books.” Yet one more teacher, Nkanda added, “Sometimes it takes someone else to help you see the value of what you have. Kinjekitile knew this language treasure a long time ago; he knew writing in our home languages meant honor. I remember people loved his books and they would say how proud they were to have their languages in print, just as English and Swahili were.”

The comments Magdalena, John and Nkanda made demonstrate the writing workshop to some extent resulted in a positive perception of African languages. In addition to literature, more than five teachers discussed the use of English, Swahili and home languages in other social areas such as music. I highlight just two. For example, Mama Shomari showed great understanding about language diversity in songs composed in the past. She noted, “Decades ago, most of us were in the Swahili and English tradition. We listened to songs in Swahili and those in English openly. However, I remember how we used to go home and play music in Jita or Haya — our home languages. We loved the songs in our languages and we listened to them at home all the time.”

Mama Shomari’s comment indicated that there were songs composed in home languages, in Swahili and some in English. She elaborated the place where songs in home languages were permissible — at home. And she expressed how people felt about listening to those songs — they loved it. Not only Shomari, but Mwajuma made a similar comment: She said, “I remember in the mid-seventies, every family had many tapes of songs in Sukuma, Haya and Chaga. In those days, people were proud to have those records.” In addition, Mwinshehe recalled, “Do you guys remember Chidumule’s Gogo songs, you could bet in those days that if you searched people’s houses, you would find one. And I remember in the 80s, Tanzania had artists who sang in different languages. Take the song — “Harusi” by that Nyakyusa old man, it used about ten 10 languages of Tanzania and it was one of the popular songs in those days.”

Once again, Mama Shomari, Mwajuma and Mwinshehe articulate positive aspects of African languages by examining their use in the past.

4.2 Teachers Revealed Home Languages’ Place in Contemporary Society

In our discussions, four teachers commented on how home languages are used in modern day Tanzanian society. Their reflections focused on big celebrations, big gatherings such as funeral and evangelistic crusades. They also shared students’ use of home languages in school and outside of school. The data suggests that the writing workshop opened a door for them to expose their experience and perspectives regarding the use of linguistic diversity in this decade. One teacher, Yusufu, explained how people and different music groups use local languages in their songs.

I feel that in many societies around the world, local languages are coming back. In big gatherings, especially celebrations like weddings, people sing in their local languages. For example, if mama Nyamoko stands up and sings a Sukuma song, even if I don’t understand it, I end up dancing and joining in the singing. If SaidaKaroli stands up and sings a Haya song, people are so happy and they join in even though they may be

Sukumas, Jitas or Kulyas — they all participate and are so happy (Yusufu, 2010).

Yusufu illustrated how language diversity is still evident in Tanzania's today society today. He mentioned its presence in big celebrations, like weddings, where people sing in their home languages. He also showed that Tanzanians dance to any song regardless of its language. In addition, he revealed how people feel singing in home languages - happy. Similar to what Yusufu shared, Nkanda also noted, "In many funerals I attend, it seems people like to sing in any language. I remember people sang in Jita when Nyamisi's dad passed away last month." And Kadete explained, "Many evangelistic crusades nowadays bring speakers of many Tanzanian languages. Sometimes they bring preachers who speak the home language of the people or have translators. It is also common to see many Christian musicians compose songs in different languages, especially youth groups like New Life Band" (Kadete, 2010).

In addition, Gideon elaborated that even though the use of home languages in schools is discouraged, for the most part, he hears students use them to converse in school. He said, "Unless students see a teacher walk by, often students talk to each other in their home languages. And, as soon as they leave the school compound, you will hear them (students) joke in their home languages." Looking at their comments, these teachers demonstrated how the writing workshop led them to talk about linguistic diversity in contemporary society. And in their discussions, they exemplified their knowledge that local languages still have a place in Tanzania's contemporary society.

4.3 Students Reflected on Reasons for Using Home Languages in Their Writing

The students also shared their thoughts regarding seeing home languages as a resource in the writing process. Among the twenty group representatives, I highlight two comments as they capture most of what the other groups shared. Their comments centered on how they felt about using the languages to write, and a new realization that it was possible to write using local languages. One student — Filemoni, for example, recounted a day when I invited parents to see and listen to the books students wrote.

I want to say that yesterday, when you read our parents one of the books we wrote, especially when you read the book with the Sukuma word "lilugutu," all parents were so happy. If you recall, they all clapped their hands after you read that book. So now I see and believe that using our languages can send a powerful message in our community. We thank you for opening our minds on this because in our minds we thought that only Swahili and English are useful in these matters of education but now we see that even our local languages — like saying "lilugutu" sends a message just as effective if not more (Filemoni, 2010).

Filemoni underscored why he believed using local languages in writing was important — it can send a powerful message. His comment demonstrated that the workshop allowed him to see the usefulness of home languages to write. Similar to Filemoni, another student, Mageni, also shared about her experience seeing the use of their home languages for writing at school for the first time. She said, "It was sad that we had never had to write in our own languages. When you read your book to our parents, the book which included a portion in Sukuma, I was amazed at how good it sounded. Now I believe it is important to use our native languages in writing. I thought it couldn't be done, but now I believe and I like that" (Mageni, 2010).

Her articulation "Now I believe..." is a testament to how the workshop raised awareness about home language use in school. Mageni underscored what caused this new understanding to happen: hearing me read a book with a portion written in Sukuma. In essence, I used literacy to lead students to see the usefulness of home languages to write. And, the interview then positioned them to express how they felt about using their local languages in light of their experience in this research project.

4.4 Parents Reflected on the Social and Political Value of Home Languages

Because parents worked with their children at home, their observations concentrated on ways in which local languages facilitates learning by allowing parental participation. Parents also explored issues of language use and identity. First, parents appreciated the use of home languages in writing. They were able to help their children to write their books, something they were not able to do when their children used English. For example, Mr. Swade said, “When you told the children to ask us to help them with their writing, I was so scared because I couldn’t do it in English and even my Swahili is not that good. When my son said I could use my Sukuma, I gave him the history of the school in Sukuma and it was so easy because I knew all the words.”

Mr. Swade underscored a reason which had previously prevented him from participating in the learning process of his children. His explanation highlighted the connection between language and domination (Janks, 2010). He said, “When you told the children to ask us to help them with their writing” I felt “so scared” and gave the underlying reason, “because I couldn’t do it in English and even my Swahili is not that good.”

The connection between Swade’s limited proficiency in English and Swahili related to Janks’ (2000, 2010) notion that language is connected to access. Because English and Swahili are the two languages used in school, Swade’s participation in his children’s education limited his access to what his children were learning at school. However, when his son said he “...could use Sukuma” he was able to give “the history of the school in Sukuma” and he made it clear that telling the history of Manyara primary school in his own language was so easy because he, “knew all the words.” This parent is evidence to the fact that using local languages in a multilingual state broadens parental participation in the learning process, and illustrated a clear link between language and access specifically in school as an institution.

Second, parents reflected upon home language use and identity. Writing in home languages means honoring one’s identity (Ngugi, 1989). One parent noted that using the local languages in writing showed students that to be educated does not mean abandoning your identity. She passionately narrated a conversation she had with her daughter who was writing a book on malaria, a prominent disease in Tanzania,

I told my daughter when you write in your own language, you are one with yourself and you can add more to who you are. I would like to see you write in your own language, in Swahili and in English. When you write in your own tongue, you allow your grandparents to hear you; you extend their lives and validate your being in many generations. I like to use what is ours while welcoming other languages. Your language makes you be you: it is important you use it in writing because those who preserve their history and contribute to knowledge in this world use their own language and wisdom” (Shukuru, 2010).

First, Shukuru’s statement here demonstrated how language is linked to issues of identity, domination and access (Janks, 2010). For one, she spoke confidently about what she felt regarding the relationship between language and self, “When you write in your own language, you are one with yourself.” This notion of being, “one with yourself,” expressed a connection she felt exists between people and a language they know very well, a language familiar to them, a language they use a lot or a language they learned first. Also, the idea of, “self” denotes the concept of a person’s identity as tied to the language that person speaks. Later on she also repeated this idea of a language as a reflection of self through these words: “Your language makes you be you.”

Moreover, Shukuru illustrated a sense of belonging reflected through a language one speaks, and she articulated that idea through these words, “I like to use what is ours.” According to her, therefore, using a local language allows people to show what belongs to them, and in this case, Shukuru highlighted the concept of home languages being tied to a people and allows them be able to say a particular language is theirs. This statement

showed another expression of language as tied to a person's identity. At the same time, she wanted her daughter to understand that it was acceptable to use other languages, and she encouraged her to do so. She said, "I would like to see you write in your own language, in Swahili and in English." Later, she also added "I like to use what is ours while welcoming other languages." Through these statements, Shukuru was essentially explaining that a person can keep her own linguistic identity while adding more languages.

Still, she went back and provided another reason why she still felt so strongly about her daughter using her home language in writing. She continued, "When you write in your own tongue, you allow your grandparents to hear you; you extend their lives and validate your being in many generations." Notice, she moved from using the word "Your own language" to stating local language as "Your own tongue" and then stated a connection between languages and how they provide an intergenerational link. Her use of "Your own tongue" validated that many grandparents still use local languages. It also showed that the way to communicate with them is through a mother tongue: the language a mother was taught by her mother or a language that links three generations, daughter, mother and grandparent. This phrase foregrounds why Shukuru used the expression: "You allow your grandparents to hear you." What is more, she continued, a mother tongue allows grandchildren to extend their grandparents' lives, in other words, what the grandparents know can be extended through the lives of their grandchildren. Not only for grandparents, but using home languages offers all people means to "validate" their being, to give confirmation that they existed because what they know can be passed down "In many generations."

Shukuru's concluding statement, "Those who preserve their history and contribute to knowledge in this world use their own language and wisdom" illustrated her understanding of the connection that exists between language, access and dominion (Janks, 2010). She started by using a distant demonstrative "those" and a third-person possessive "their" to distance herself from two main categories of people, "Those who preserve their history and contribute to knowledge in this world." She proceeded to make it clear that using one's own language allows that person to "preserve" his or her history. Furthermore, people who are able to contribute to knowledge "In this world," they, "Use their own language and wisdom."

Shukuru underscored the link that existed between language and a peoples' identity. She also showed the role of local languages in preserving, extending and validating intergenerational values and experiences, which in turn reinforce and preserve a peoples' identity. Furthermore, she demonstrated the link between language and access in contributing to knowledge, and clearly stated that people are able to keep their linguistic identity while adding to it. In all, the writing workshop repositioned parents to reflect upon language issues on parental participation and those on identity.

5. Conclusion and Discussion

When I designed a participatory research project with intentions to promote the use of home languages in school while creating supplemental books, I hoped for students to create even a few texts entirely in their own home languages, but this is not what happened. Only one group wrote their text with some words from their home language. I realized that, although students desired to write using their home languages, many could not do so because they lacked the literacy skills in their home languages. However, through this study, they became aware that using their home languages to write was not only possible but valued by their parents, school mates, and teachers. It preserved their identities, sent powerful messages about social issues within their communities, and built intergenerational bridges which allowed a flow of knowledge between the young and old in the community.

Hence, I would suggest future research explorations that might look closely at possible strategies to promote home language use in Sub Saharan African schools while considering issues of language shift, pragmatics and national language policies. For example, while bilingualism supports students' learning in school, does it support their goals on a more global platform? Furthermore, much scholarship is needed to explore critical approaches to topics so laden with issues of power, privilege and equity.

While this study was conducted in a short amount of time, I was able to facilitate creation of sixteen supplemental books, bring awareness that home languages have value and can be used in school (even when they are not the sole medium of instruction). Furthermore, students and teachers became aware that parents have a wealth of knowledge from which students can draw and that literacy is a tool to help people reflect on the place their identity within their social-cultural contexts.

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