

LANGUAGE AND POLITICS IN DEVELOPING AREAS

Monika Kehoe, University of Guam

(Revised Version of Paper presented at the Annual Conference Comparative and International Education Society of Canada - St. John's , Newfoundland June 11, 1971).

Introduction

The topic "Language and Politics" might be handled in various ways according to the particular competence of the speaker and concern of the audience. One might describe the variety of devices which go to make up the politician's use of language and mass media communication to manipulate voters; one might study the role of second language in a politically disruptive situation such as that now existing in Pakistan, or one might look at the rationale behind the French insistence that Britain's admission to the Common Market must not alter the use of French as the organization's working language. The disadvantages of bilingualism as a national policy might be reviewed or the extravagant cost of promoting functional redundancy in two major languages (as in Canada) might be examined. In short, there are numerous ways in which the topic "Language and Politics " might be treated.

Academically, the study of the language problems of developing countries falls into the relatively new discipline of sociolinguistics which combines what used to be termed the sociology of language with the findings of contemporary linguistics, particularly those in its applied branch dealing with the learning of second languages.

An impressive number of publications concerning language use in developing areas began to appear as new states emerged in Africa and Asia after the mid-century. Few, however, attempted to handle the subject of language and national development on a comparative basis; there was enough to do just to describe what was happening in individual countries. One of the most important co-operative international* efforts to study the role of second languages in Asia, Africa and Latin America was undertaken in 1959 on a Ford Foundation grant to the Center for Applied Linguistics in Washington, D.C. The aim

* Involving the British Council, the French Bureau d'Etude et de Liaison pour L'Enseignement du Francais dans le Monde, the Commonwealth Office of Education in Australia, the English Language Education Council, Incorporated, of Japan.

of the survey was to investigate the nature and extent of the problem of second language learning as a factor in national development but many other issues of linguistic concern to multilingual societies were touched on. Among them were three basic concerns of developing areas: 1) official language policy; 2) the place of language in education (as a medium of instruction); and 3) the choice of a language of wider communication (LWC).

Here and now, I shall attempt to consider these three issues as they are affected by the use of English as a second language in two areas only, Korea and Ethiopia, countries I know best (having spent several years in each) and which present a rather remarkable basis for comparison.

Political and Social Background

Obviously, the choice of language for education is a political decision of greatest importance to nationhood for any emerging state. In various ways, both Korea and Ethiopia were "emerging" states after World War II: Korea, throwing off the colonial yoke of Japan; Ethiopia recovering from the Italian occupation (1936-1941) and the decades of feudal isolation which preceded it. Both peoples, custodians of ancient cultures, estranged from the world, aloof from twentieth-century progress, had a long history of reclusiveness: Korea, "the Hermit Kingdom," drawn in upon herself, renamed Chosen by her conquering neighbor, Japan, who dominated and colonialized her throughout this century; Coptic-Christian Abyssinia, secluded in her inaccessible mountain citadel, surrounded by infidel Moslems and held together by the charismatic personality of Haile Sellassie, the first emperor of modern Ethiopia. The ruling power in both countries, which had been unified only after centuries of tribal conflict, was intent on retaining the values of a religio-agrarian society designed to continue support of the existing regime.

From early in the present century, the governments concerned clearly had a self-interest in fostering an attitude of detachment and suspicion as well as ignorance of the world outside. On the one hand Japan, with such a small amount of arable land on its own islands, had been eager to keep Korea as its rice bowl. Only the sons of the most politically cooperative and aristocratic Korean families were encouraged to pursue formal education (available only in Japanese) beyond the primary level. On the other hand, the ruling dynasty in Ethiopia, together with the rases who linked the outlying provinces somewhat tenuously to the throne, relied on Church-connected religious teaching, along

with literacy training in classical Ge'ez, to mold the sons of the nobility into a common spiritual devotion to the Emperor.

Language and Education in Ethiopia

Menelik II, monarch of Abyssinia at the turn of the century, opened the first modern school for the sons of his tribal chiefs in Addis Ababa in 1907. Among them was Haile Sellassie who was to be his successor as emperor. French, then the official European language of the country, was taught by imported Egyptian teachers and later became the court language of Haile Sellassie I and his generation. In 1928, there were two government schools in Ethiopia; by 1935 there were twenty, ten of them in the capital city. The predominant European language of this period was French which was also used as the language of instruction in the early Catholic mission schools. The war interrupted all formal schooling, including plans for a national university. Without native teachers (most educated males had died in the Italian conflict) or other educational resources, recovery was slow. The most important change resulting from the war and affecting the schools was the transition from French to English as the official LWC and the language of instruction beyond the primary level. The first college, begun by French-Canadian Jesuits, was founded in Addis Ababa in 1950 and the national university which incorporated it, in 1961 (the year I joined its staff). Both used English as the language of instruction. (I shall return to the specific causes of this radical alteration later.)

The Official Languages and Some Linguistic -pedagogical Problems

We are generally aware that, in any determination of language policy by government authorities, decisions are likely to be based on political realities rather than on linguistic assumptions. "Language engineering," as it is sometimes termed, may be directed toward national unity with relatively little regard for pedagogical advantages. In those societies such as the Korean or Ethiopian, where the entire function of education, limited though it was, had been to maintain the traditional social order, the language of instruction would normally be the classical languages of the indigenous cultures involved. However, in both cases, these languages, Korean and Amharic (the official Ethiopic language and the Emperor's mother tongue), are not equipped to handle efficiently the required courses in science and technology found in a modern university. Korean had been a proscribed language for almost half a century and Amharic, a still more exotic tongue with relatively few speakers, had never been used to communicate ideas beyond those of ordinary village life. As a result, other LWCs had to be introduced to meet the needs of education as well as to bring the

state into the world communication network.

While Korea is in a fairly enviable position, in terms of internal communication, in that it has one dominant language spoken by the majority of its population, Ethiopia must cope with some eighty mutually unintelligible tribal-languages and at least four major Ethiopian languages (Galla, Tigrinia, Sidama and Amharic), all competing for official recognition. Because of its universality as a mother tongue, and its well-developed phonetic alphabet, Korean can be used throughout the primary and secondary levels of education even though it may not fully satisfy for instruction beyond middle school. Amharic, on the other hand, must be taught as a second language to the majority of Ethiopian elementary school pupils who must then acquire English as a third language before completing secondary school or entering the national university. Such requirements, and the fact that the mother tongue of most Ethiopian children has no written form, place on those who have school opportunity the extra burden of learning to read and write in a foreign language, Amharic (a Semitic language) which, for those who speak Sidama and Galla (Cushitic languages), belongs to a different linguistic group altogether. One child in ten survives this regimen through the six years of primary school.

English in Pre-World War II Korea

In Korea, where all formal education since early in the century had been conducted in the "metropolitan" language, Japanese, by Japanese teachers who emphasized moral training and relied on Shinto ethics to bind the people to the Emperor, the beginning of a modern education system was also deferred until the end of World War II. In both areas, a limited amount of Western missionary effort (Roman Catholic in French and Protestant in English) had been tolerated -- more in Ethiopia, already a Christian country, than in Korea where Confucianism and Buddhism had deep roots beneath the required performance of Shinto rites. The English-language Protestant mission schools, predominantly British in Ethiopia and American in Korea, were patronized mainly by the children (sons, generally) of the elite, some of whom aspired to further Western education in English, hopefully on missionary scholarships for study in England or the U.S. Although, until 1945, Koreans could pursue higher education in Japanese in their own country, at Keijo (Seoul) University, or in Japan, Ethiopians had to seek it abroad.

Since western education, especially occidental Christian education, was viewed with

considerable distrust by the Japanese, the mission schools conducted by Americans in Korea in this century were always relatively curtailed in their activities. As antagonism to the U.S. mounted, restrictions on them were greatly augmented and fewer and fewer Koreans enrolled. During the thirties, as Japan geared herself for war, the only European language encouraged, or later even tolerated, was German. From the end of World War I, German influence had been increasing and Prussian-style education had provided the most important model for the authoritarian-militaristic training preferred in the Japanese sphere of influence. By 1940, the pressures against the use of English made it almost treasonable to own a book in that language, and English studies at Keijo University disappeared. Even in Japan itself, colleges were closed down by imperial edict for what seemed to be a sympathetic approach to teaching about the Western democracies. But that pattern of oppression is familiar to us in North America where, in that hysterical time, we committed equally irrational acts against both our German and Japanese citizens on this continent.

I should like to mention here a curious political result of this anti-English language policy in Korea.

English in Post-World War II Korea

By the time of the American occupation, the situation was such that almost no educated Koreans, who could speak English, and only a few repatriated American missionaries, who knew Korean were available to serve as "advisors" to the Civil Affairs section of USAMGIK (U. S. Military Government in Korea) which was assigned the responsibility of setting up an interim Korean government. The result was chaotic. Korean-speaking American missionaries with little background or inclination to be involved in military or political affairs were recruited from their retirement or resettlement in the U. S. and placed in the most sensitive U. S. -Korean government advisory posts. Koreans who had acquired "kitchen" English, along with a certain amount of savoir faire, as domestic servants in pre-war English-speaking homes served as interpreters for important paramilitary legal and economic decision-making groups. In their vital role as go-between, some of them discovered they could profit handsomely from slight alterations of meaning introduced at crucial points in the translation, when sums of money were mentioned, for example. For several months, an "interpreters government" controlled the political and economic destiny of Korea and the "fast buck" of the ordinary blackmarket operations became pennyante in comparison with the fortune to be made as a government interpreter. A knowledge of English, as in Indochina today, became

the magic key to wealth and business success. In spite of this unpropitious interlude, English has retained its prestige as an LWC in Korea and even in Japan where it continues to be the most popular foreign language taught in the schools.

English in Postwar Ethiopia

The Italian occupation of Ethiopia, although brief by comparison with that of the U.S. "presence" in Korea (which by now has passed the quarter century mark and bodes ill for its parallel in Vietnam), was equally traumatic in its affect on language usage. From 1936 to 1941, all education in Ethiopia came under Italian control. Government schools were closed, a few Catholic mission schools were allowed to continue but with Italian replacing French as the dominant European language. An abrupt halt came to the Italian domination, however, in 1941 as Ethiopia was "liberated" by the Allied Forces made up of British and English-speaking Indian troops. The Emperor, who had been in voluntary exile in England, at Bath, returned. From then on, English was the official second language of Ethiopia and, although Italian continued to be used in Eritrea until federation in 1962, English was decreed the language of instruction for all education beyond the primary level. The British Council supplied the staff for the first high school opened in Addis Ababa in 1943 and all textbooks were provided by the British and, of course, were in English. Free education was initiated at all levels in this urgent, improvisation period, and by June 1949, twenty-six Ethiopian boys had taken the London Matriculation Examination.

Not only British intervention in Ethiopian affairs has been responsible for the adoption of English as the nation's official LWC and the language of instruction for higher education, U.S. political involvement and financial aid have also played a part. In 1952, a cooperative agricultural education program was agreed to between the U.S. and Ethiopian government in which Oklahoma State University would operate an Agricultural College in Ethiopia for Ethiopians. The language of instruction in this undertaking was naturally English. Through grants from AID (Agency for International Development), the national university spent, in its first year (1961-1962) \$1,200,000 of American funds. Since money talks, this represents quite a declaration in a country with a per capita annual income of less than \$100. In addition, there is a giant American military "communication" installation, Kagnew Station, which hires hundreds of English-speaking Ethiopian personnel who help provide a convenient American surveillance over the Red Sea area.

The predominance of English as the lingua franca of most of East and sub-tropical Africa has also exerted its influence on maintaining the Anglophone perspective in Ethiopia. The meetings of international bodies (such as ECA- Economic Commission for Africa) and Pan-African congresses (such as OAU - Organization of African Unity) held in Addis Ababa are conducted in English. Ethiopian government IBM installations must be programmed and serviced in English. The Emperor is interviewed in English on British and American T. V. networks. The Imperial Ethiopian Air Lines is operated by English-speaking TWA personnel. During my stay in Ethiopia, traffic was changed from the left to the right side of the road to accommodate the growing number of American-made left-hand-drive vehicles, all sold and repaired by English-speaking agencies. Perhaps its most significant political effect will prove to be its place as the principal language of communication among the educated youth of Africa. Certainly, the anti-government student unrest at HSIU (Haile Sellassie I University), that resulted in its being closed, received most of its thrust from the injection of revolutionary ideas brought to Addis Ababa by English-speaking students of former British colonial areas. During the decade of its activity, HSIU was probably unique in that many of its "foreign" students from other states in English-speaking Africa spoke the language of instruction better than its own nationals. Another curious anomaly could be found in the circumstance that forced Ethiopian professors to teach Ethiopian students in English, a language which they neither fully understood or controlled.

Summary and Conclusion

The use of English as a second language in education in developing areas of Asia and Africa, as well as in other parts of the world, including mainland China, will continue to have its, in some cases direct and in others oblique, impact on world affairs. As more people learn to think in English, they become less impervious to the political ideology English-speaking nations express. As long as English maintains its predominant position as the language of science and technology, it will continue to spread around the globe, gradually losing altogether its specific British cultural and national identity. This chameleon quality is perhaps its greatest advantage as a world language. It becomes Indian-English on the Asian sub-continent, or Nigerian-English on the West coast of Africa; Philippine and Chinese-English in the Pacific, South African and Australian-English down-under. American and Canadian-English are being deployed in the remote arctic (and uninhabited antarctic) regions where native populations working in it are already beginning to produce a distinct Eskimo-English idiom and phonological overlay. We might pause here to consider

this facility for adaptation to local conditions which, by the way, is a notable characteristic of both spoken English and spoken Chinese . It may one day make them rivals as second languages and as media for the audio-lingual global communication networks of the future .

The present wide geographical distribution of English as a first language, together with its increasingly non-ethnic character, serve to give it readier acceptance as a second language among ex-colonial peoples where previous contact with Western culture and other European tongues has left a bad taste in their mouths. Another factor which may contribute to the greater ease of adoption of English is the relatively flexible attitude toward pronunciation which is one of the distinguishing marks of American Applied Linguistics. This permissive approach to second-language learning is in rather clear contrast, for example, to the Francophone insistence on standard metropolitan ("Parisian" to the layman) French as the only acceptable form of that language, either spoken or written. (Witness the rejection of Canadian-French by Quebec education authorities.)

Another effect which Applied Linguistics of the last two decades has had on second-language learning is to change its immediate aims as well as its ultimate goals. Instead of emphasizing literacy skills, with a view to reading the literature of the target language as a key to its culture, the modern approach begins with proficiency in audio-lingual skills as its immediate aim and native control of the language for total communication as its ultimate goal. Applied Linguistics recognizes that a person needs to be bicultural as well as bilingual before he can appreciate literature as an art form. The fact that there can be many kinds of "good" English around the world (based on effectiveness of communication rather than on prestigiousness of a particular dialect), with more native speakers than any other language except Chinese; the fact that English-language communication networks circumvent the globe, that there are more publications in English than in any other language, that international transportation operates in English both on sea and in the air - all of these put together probably insure the preeminence of English as the international language of the foreseeable future. As such it will continue to feature importantly in politics. It is already the first language of the U.N. - all employees are required to be proficient in it. And it will continue to play a significant role as a second language of developing areas, shaping and being shaped by their political destiny.