

LANGUAGE POLICY IN MALAWI: A STUDY OF ITS CONTEXTS, FACTORS FOR ITS DEVELOPMENT AND CONSEQUENCES

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Abstract

The article examines the different factors and contexts which have influenced language policy in Malawi from the time of early missionaries to the present, and highlights the implications and consequences of the language policy—both politically, educationally and socially. However, given the conceptual framework of language policy and the historical, linguistic and cultural disposition of the Malawian society which emphasize education, the article has its main focus on the education system. In addition to intensive literature review and document analysis, semi-structured interviews, mainly with secondary school teachers, were conducted in Mzimba District in July 2014. The study ascertains that current language practices were founded on the framework and philosophies of various missionary groups which have highly influenced and affected the development of both indigenous and foreign languages in Malawi. It further discovered that the long-standing leadership of Hastings Kamuzu Banda has had a huge impact on language attitude, practices and the overall language policy. However, since the election of Bakili Muluzi and the new multi-party democracy, the policy has generally been characterised by linguistic pluralism although not much has been done to make it more favourable to vernacular languages due to lack of resources and improper implementation. The paper concludes that the implementation of language policy in Malawi, like in many other African countries, faces many challenges and is riddled with contradictions whether implicit or explicit.

Keywords: Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT), linguistic justice, vertical communication, language attitude, language policy, linguistic pluralism.

1.0 Introduction

Language policy can be described as a deliberate effort to change or influence a community's use of a particular language, a variety of a language or languages. It is concerned with official efforts to influence the relative status and use of one or more languages. In a homogeneous or monolingual society, language policy is usually concerned exclusively with promoting an approved standard grammar of the common language. Although language policies of one kind or another have featured in societies since time immemorial, governments always view language as a potentially sensitive

issue and handle it with care to achieve national identity or other forms of social engineering.

In a situation where several languages are in contact or even in conflict, decisions have to be made to better serve the interests of the general public and at the same time achieve what is known as linguistic justice. This article discusses the language policy in Malawi, a small multi-ethnic and multilingual landlocked country in Southern Africa.¹ The article highlights major factors that have shaped the country's language policy from the colonial to the present era of multi-party democracy. It points out the implications and consequences of major decisions on language use at various stages in the country's history and suggests the possible future directions in language policy using the current debates and in the light of existing political and social contexts. Different areas of language policy are analysed in the article, with the main focus on the education system.

An education system has a significant and long-lasting effect on the use and development of languages. Within a formal education setting, there is need to select one or more languages as the Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT) as well as to select which language(s) is/are taught as (a) subject(s). Such (a) language(s) must undergo a continuous development of its/their orthography, grammar and vocabulary if (it is) they are to be used holistically. Since the education system is at the centre of language policy, it goes without saying that language development requires ongoing linguistic research and investment. However, this thinking has led some authors to posit that education system should be seen to be representative of monolingualism. Skutnabb-Kangas, for example, mentions this fact when she implied that educational systems are dangerous to society because "assimilationist subtractive education is genocidal. Educational systems and mass media are [the most] important direct agents of linguistic and cultural genocide" (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2006, p. 277).

In this connection, many educationists and international organizations have highlighted the importance of using vernacular languages as LoLT side by side with or substituting international languages. Letsie (2002, p. 196), for instance, argues as follows:

The use of the mother tongue will further promote better understanding between the home and the school. What the children learn can easily be expressed or applied at home. [...] Most educationists have taken it as axiomatic that children benefit most – emotionally and cognitively – if instruction in the early stages of primary education is conducted in the mother tongue.

In a related development, some authors insist that there is a close link between the quality of education, the LoLT at schools and national development. They view qualitative education as not only having an impact on the economic well-being of individuals and society but also on good governance and democratic structures. Usually, language policy in the education system is mostly directly linked to language policy in other government spheres. It is, however, surprising that the majority of African

¹ There are a few contradictory statements regarding the number of languages spoken in Malawi which range between 13 – 15 languages on the one hand (Matiki, 2006, p. 240; Kamwendo, 2008, p. 354; Kamwendo and Kachiwanda, 2002, p. 175) and 16 on the other seen by Ethnologue (M. Lewis, 2014).

countries do not use their indigenous languages as LoLT as is the case all over the world, which has made Africa a huge exception to the rule as lamented by Djité (2008, p. 55) who states thus:

Fifty years after political independence, Africa is the only continent where access to knowledge and science is negotiated only through a language other than the one the child speaks at home or in her immediate wider community. It is the only place where the language of education is largely exogenous to its own people.

This article is the outcome of an extensive literature review, documents analysis and oral interviews with secondary school teachers in Mzimba District in July 2014 using a semi-structured questionnaire. The article begins by presenting the conceptual framework of language policy, which is a description of key concepts regarding language policy in Section 2.0. This is followed by the Methodology in Section 3.0. Section 4.0 describes the historical and social contexts of language policy in Malawi and is followed by Section 5.0 which discusses different components and factors of language policy in Malawi as well as their implications and consequences. The paper concludes in Section 6.0 with a highlight of possible future developments of language policy in Malawi.

2.0 Language policy

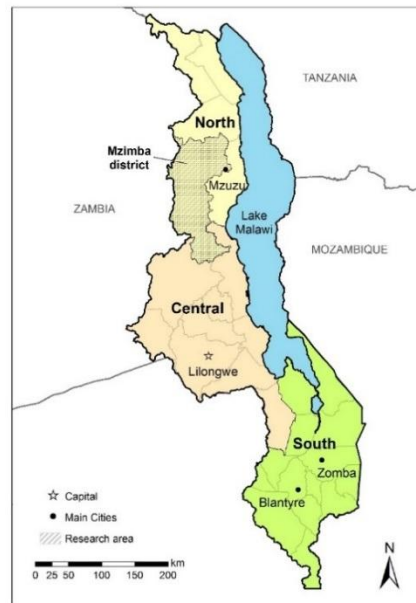
In academic discourse, language policy is divided into language practice, language management and language attitude (Spolsky, 2004; Orman, 2008). Status, corpus and acquisition planning are the three parts of language management. Language practice summarizes all aspects of day-to-day use of a specific language or language variety in different social spheres of life. Language attitude describes why some languages or language varieties are preferred and others are not. These differences can exist between different social settings and also between different social groups, regions. The differences could be attributed to some other factors all of which can be partly influenced by the overall existing societal language attitude as well as specific individual language attitudes. A substantial amount of research has been conducted regarding the language attitude of teachers, specifically Science and Mathematics teachers, as well as specific language groups or students in general (Webber, 1979). Kloss (1968) introduced new terms such as status and corpus planning which were complemented in 1989 by Robert Cooper together with the new term of acquisition planning (Kloss, 1968; Cooper, 1989). Status planning summarizes all judicial regulations like the place of language in the constitution, language policy act, regulations or documents regarding the use of specific languages in administration, business and education. On its part, corpus planning describes all steps undertaken to develop or maintain a language. These include producing the orthography, grammar, dictionaries of the language and developing new terminologies/vocabularies. Acquisition planning is the umbrella term for all steps done to put a language to use, including the publishing and delivery of school books or documents within the system and their availability in different official websites. In brief, there are a number of elements that go into language policy development and implementation. Sometimes the failure of language policy is due to lack of certain elements or improper handling of

some of the elements of language policy highlighted in this section. Section 4.0 and 5.0 describes the various areas of language policy mentioned above and analyses their reciprocal interactions at different times in Malawian history.

3.0 Methodology

The authors conducted an intensive archival research that ultimately culminated into document analysis which led to this article. This archival research covered several scientific books and journal articles, pamphlets and official documents. Document analysis of the relevant language policy documents and other education documents as well as policy documents from different political parties and other stakeholders was done. Furthermore, field research was done in July 2014 in Mzimba District in the Northern Region of Malawi (see figure 1).

Figure 1: Research area in Malawi



Source: Own compilation, based on National Spatial Data Center (2012).

In preparation for this fieldwork, the authors developed a semi-structured interview guide. The study design was mainly qualitative, the reason being that the authors wanted to obtain in-depth information about language attitude(s) and language practice(s) of secondary school teachers that were involved (Creswell & Clark, 2009, p. 207ff). In addition, another interview was conducted with the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST) officials at the Northern Region Education Division. The significance of having a variety of data has been highlighted by several scholars such as Alvesson (2011, p. 52ff) and Kvale (2007, p. 46). In line with the foregoing, some interviews were also conducted with lecturers in the Department of Languages and Literature at Mzuzu University and with language teachers at some selected secondary

schools in Mzuzu City. As all interviews were conducted in one region, these results may not be representative of the entire country. They nevertheless provide interesting insight into the views of the involved stakeholders and can be a foundation for further quantitative and/or qualitative studies.

4.0 Historical background of language policy in Malawi

Before Malawi became a British colony, each ethnic community used its own vernacular language more or less exclusively. The only noticeable change came about when the languages of invading groups like the Ngoni (Nguni) and Lomwe came into contact with those of the areas in which they settled in the 17th and 18th century respectively. To a certain degree, the inevitable intermarriages led to the absorption of ‘invading’ languages by the local languages. Ultimately these ‘invading’ languages diminished in use and eventually there was language shift to local languages as was the case with ChiNgoni.

According to Kayambazinthu (1999), the first deliberate effort aimed at influencing language use in Malawi was experienced during the colonial era when the colonial government, through status planning, made sure that English was the official language and Chinyanja (CiNyanja), Chitumbuka (CiTumbuka) and English were made languages of instruction in schools as part of acquisition planning². In fact, Chinyanja was used in elementary years of education in central and southern regions while Chitumbuka was used in the northern region. It must be pointed out that at that time, the entire formal education was introduced by and remained in the hands of the European Christian missionaries. Due to the work of these missionaries and their frequent demands for protection from the British government, Malawi became a British colony which was later called Nyasaland. In 1861, the Universities Mission to Central Africa (UMCA) arrived and started their work in the south of present-day Malawi. The second mission was established in 1875 by the Free Church of Scotland. After registering some successes in their missionary work, the UMCA finally moved to the interior of present-day northern Malawi, and named the mission they constructed there ‘Livingstonia Mission’. They used Chitumbuka as LoLT in their educational initiatives since it was the dominant language in the northern parts of Nyasaland.³ Kayambazinthu (1999) reiterates that English and Chinyanja were the first official languages for both vertical and horizontal communication and that the choice of Chinyanja and Chitumbuka was based on the fact that these two were already established languages that were widely spoken in their respective regions. However, the move led to the remarkable spread of the two indigenous languages and it also helped to establish them at the expense of other indigenous languages in the country since they were now acquired as second languages and as compulsory languages of colonial education in the central and southern and

² The literature is replete with different writing styles for the Malawian languages such as Chitumbuka as ChiTumbuka or chiTumbuka. Differences have been noted for other languages too. In this article, the prefix Chi- is used for the languages.

³ At the beginning of their work in Nyasaland, the missionaries at Livingstonia Mission first used Chinyanja (later re-named Chichewa). During their northward movement they also used Chitonga for a short period of time until they finally settled for Chitumbuka as their language of evangelization (Kamwendo, 2009, p. 151).

northern regions respectively. Kayambazinthu (1999) observes that as soon as the colonial administrators and missionaries made attempts at status planning in line with the colonial government's ideology and objectives, the treatment of various linguistic groups and their cultures changed—a situation which re-defined the relations between language groups in terms of their status and prestige. The colonial government and the various missionary groups took measures to document, describe and standardise the two languages to bridge the differences between various dialects, a situation which raised their status even further⁴. Hence, the Phelps-Stokes Commission report on education in Africa in the 20th century dealt with the language question and highlighted the importance of indigenous languages at the beginning of formal education as follows:

The appeal to the native mind cannot be effectively made without the adequate use of the native language, nor can the essentials of sound character be taught nor interest in agriculture or industry be developed without its use. It is equally important that advanced pupils shall have opportunity to learn some European language as they themselves demand (quoted by Lewis, 1962, p. 45).

Until 1929, the whole formal education in Nyasaland was in the hands of the various missionary groups and mainly the Livingstonia Mission. This astonishing situation prevailed throughout the colonial period as only about 4,000 students went to government schools, but approximately 280,000 went to missionary institutions. It was only in 1926 that the government Department of Education was established in Malawi. This indicates lack of interest on the part of the colonial government as Malawi was short on natural resources. It is no secret that the main reason for colonising Malawi was to prevent a possible annexation by Germany or Portugal (Küster, 1999, p. 208). But it is noted that English gained more prestige than any of the languages in Malawi because proficiency in English was closely associated with the level of formal education as Moto (2002, p. 38) argues in the following paragraph:

Because the knowledge of English opened up opportunities for some jobs in the lower ranks of the Nyasaland civil service, it began to dawn on the 'natives' that knowledge of spoken and written English was more useful and economically rewarding than enhanced knowledge of the local languages.

As Moto (2002) further observes, teachers were divided into two groups depending on their proficiency in the English language. In that grouping, the so-called English Grade Teachers had a higher social standing than the so-called Vernacular Grade Teachers.

Kishindo (1998) observes that much as Chitumbuka became a regional lingua franca and assumed great status in the country, it ranked fourth in terms of the total

⁴ The prospects and pitfalls of the various missionary groups regarding the development of indigenous languages are very complex and partly contradictory. On the one hand they helped to develop various indigenous languages due to the fact that Christian missionaries present the Bible in the language of the target communities, unlike Islamic missionaries. On the other hand missionaries are often seen as responsible for selecting specific dialects or variations of one indigenous language and developing that variety to the extent of standing above all the other varieties and partly "created languages and ethnic groups which had not existed before" (Kamwendo, 2009, p. 149).

number of speakers it had nation-wide. And indeed the first national census revealed that Chinyanja had the highest number of speakers seconded by Chilomwe and then Chiyao and lastly Chitumbuka (Malawi National Statistical Office, 1989). Although English was the official language and had the highest status and prestige, it had very few speakers compared to these major vernacular languages. It was also observed that the language policy pursued by the colonial government led to gradual death of Chilomwe, Chiyao and other local languages as the speakers of these languages began to view their languages as posing a severe handicap or liability to their socio-economic advancement (Kayambazinthu, 1999). It is widely acknowledged that language policy may result in language shift, a scenario where one language displaces another or where a community either consciously or unconsciously gives up its language completely in favour of another as it has happened in Malawi where Chilomwe has, to a greater extent, been displaced by Chichewa in the homes of originally Lomwe-speaking people.

5.0 Language policy in independent Malawi

5.1 Language policy during Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda's presidency

After independence, the language policy in Malawi should be viewed in the light of an assertion by Kishindo (1994) that in most cases, the postcolonial African state has chosen one language as a national language to create a sense of national identity but that it has also largely retained the overall structure of the language policies inherited from the colonial era. Under the long leadership of President Hastings Kamuzu Banda, all political actions were influenced mainly by his national unity philosophy. In pursuit of his desire to forge national unity and cohesion, the language policy highly favoured linguistic and cultural assimilation towards Chinyanja, which was later renamed Chichewa (Kamwendo, 2008, p. 354). However, Banda's language policy shows a great deal of contradiction between the country's need to construct a national identity through Chinyanja on the one hand and the desire to preserve English on the other. This has manifested through the over-privileging of English during his thirty years (1964-1994) of one party rule. The situation in neighbouring Tanzania was quite different because it became the only country which, in its post-independent language policy formulation, introduced a single indigenous language, Kiswahili, on a national scale (Albaugh, 2014, p. 62). This is contrary to what Kamuzu Banda did after attaining independence in 1964 as his government retained the language policy inherited from the British colonial period until 1968 when at the annual convention of the ruling Malawi Congress Party (MCP), the following declarations on language were pronounced:

- (a) That Malawi was to adopt Chinyanja as a national language
- (b) That the name Chinyanja was henceforth to be known as Chichewa
- (c) That Chichewa and English were to be the official languages of the state of Malawi
- (d) That the other vernacular languages would continue to be used in people's everyday private lives in their respective areas (Malawi Congress Party, 1978).

The new policy had political undertones in the sense that the change of the name 'Chinyanja' to Chichewa was meant to align the language to Dr Banda's own Chewa

ethnic group. The policy also meant more research on Chichewa was to be undertaken and the University of Malawi was instructed to set up a Chichewa Department and a Chichewa Board. The Chichewa Board was established as a statutory body in 1972 and its main task was to carry out corpus planning. In this respect, Kishindo (2001, p. 265-266) notes the following:

Language planning in 1968 in Malawi, just as elsewhere, was inevitably coloured by ideological imperatives—and the driving imperative was nation-building. So, what may have appeared as progress to some was seen as persecution to others.

Similarly, Kayambazinthu (1999) argues that Dr Kamuzu Banda's policy decisively turned the balance of power in favour of Chichewa, his own ethnic language as the Chichewa Board only promoted the writing of Chichewa orthography, a Chichewa dictionary and grammar. This policy allowed Chichewa to spread more swiftly compared to English and other languages since it was attached to formal schooling. Furthermore, the focus was not only on education but also on the media. Regarding acquisition planning, in 1973 President Banda ordered that specialists from the Chichewa Board should be responsible for coordination of all Chichewa programmes on the national radio instead of staff at the Malawi Broadcasting Cooperation (MBC), the only radio station the country had for the entire thirty years of Banda's rule. There were many didactic programs in radio broadcasts such as '*Tiphunzitsane Chichewa*' (Let us teach each other Chichewa) or '*Chichewa cha kumudzi*' (Chichewa from the village), which spread the use of Chichewa and provided a platform to discuss Chichewa linguistic problems (Kishindo, 2001, p. 275). But what needs not be forgotten is the fact that the colonial government had already made Chinyanja (Chichewa) a national language to the extent that civil servants used to be assessed for their proficiency in Chinyanja as a precondition for employment and subsequent deployment to their work stations as extension workers, police officers or other categories of civil servants. Kishindo (1994) sees some contradictions in Dr Kamuzu Banda's language policy in that on the one hand, the policy was meant to promote national identity by making Chichewa a national language while on the other it uplifted English at the expense of Chichewa. The contradictions of Banda's language policy became very clear at his Kamuzu Academy, which focused on English and classical languages like Latin and Greek. Even at the University of Malawi, a Department of Classics was established since Kamuzu Banda regarded proficiency in these languages as a sign of sound education. Kamwendo (2010, p. 275) points out this contradiction more clearly as he notes:

Not only was Chichewa not amongst the subjects offered at the president's elite school [Kamuzu Academy], speaking Chichewa (or any other of Malawi's indigenous languages), even outside class, invited punishment from the school authorities. The repudiation of Malawi's culture extended to native teachers who were not welcome [to teach] at the elite school.

As Matiki (2001) also observes, both English and Chichewa were made national languages, though Banda's policy promoted English by ensuring that branches of

government performed their functions in English thereby providing it with a wide range and depth of usage. Matiki's thinking is that when the two languages were declared official languages at the 1968 Malawi Congress Party convention, it was implied that both languages would have roles in all official domains of national life such as in government and administration. Matiki (2001) also notes that there was an unwritten policy whereby Dr Banda promoted the teaching of classics, namely Greek and Latin, at both the University of Malawi and his Kamuzu Academy, and silently scrapped off Chitumbuka on the national radio and in schools. It can be speculated that the removal of Chitumbuka from the national radio and scrapping it from the school curriculum was a strong confirmation of the MCP government's distaste for people of the northern region, itself being dominated and led by the Chewa-speaking people.⁵ The only thing that arrests that kind of thinking is that the removal of Chitumbuka from the school curriculum also saw the removal of all vernacular languages from being used in the elementary years of the child's education instituted by the colonial government, a situation which resulted in Chichewa being used in the central and southern regions and Chitumbuka being used in the northern region. But the fact remains that this policy directive affected Chitumbuka more than Chichewa as the latter would still be learned in schools as one of the subjects. Mphande (1987) argues that Kamuzu Banda's policy on language and the arts was in line with his objective of maintaining a certain kind of hegemony but to do so as part of an overall plan of and for an African autocracy.

5.2 Development of language policy in Post-Banda Malawi (since 1994)

When Dr Kamuzu Banda lost the first multi-party elections in 1994, it was not long before the new President, Bakili Muluzi, a Yao and leader of the United Democratic Front (UDF) and his government adopted language policy reforms in line with what Kayambazinthu (1999) calls the '*zasintha*'⁶ (things have changed) philosophy. During Muluzi's presidency from 1994 to 2004, the language policy reforms were a paradigm shift from linguistic assimilation to linguistic pluralism. As Green (2007, p. 61) notes:

During his reign as president, Muluzi was commended for re-introducing native Malawian languages in the media, especially on the national radio and proposing their integration into the education curriculum, and supporting literacy for all.

Hence, the former Chichewa Board was renamed and transformed into the Centre for Language Studies and it no longer conducted research on Chichewa only.⁷ This shift also took place in the media as the former bilingual radio system (English and Chichewa) became multilingual and more inclusive. In addition to the use of Chichewa

⁵ In a related study, Posner (2004) analysed why the Chewas and Tumbukas are allies in Zambia but adversaries in Malawi. His major thesis was that the size of the involved groups in relation to the other involved groups was a major variable for political salience.

⁶ The '*zasintha*' philosophy was a transformative kind of thinking that focused on changing 'everything' that had been put in place by the previous (M.C.P.) government as a sign that the country was now in a new political dispensation governed by democratic ideals.

⁷ It now carried out various researches e.g. sociolinguistic surveys of Chiyao, Chitumbuka, Chilomwe and Chisena (Kamwendo and Kachiwanda, 2002, p. 175).

and English, other vernacular languages such as Chitumbuka, Chiyao, Chisena, Chitonga and Chilomwe could now feature on the national radio. As a result, Chitumbuka and Chichewa were now used as LoLT, and, in some districts such as Salima and Machinga, Chiyao was used. In other districts, other languages were offered as subjects. For example, Chingoni was taught as a subject in Dedza (Centre for Language Studies, 1999, p. 37).

However, in the 1998 published long-term plan (Vision 2020) by the Malawian Government, it was observed that the citizens of Malawi had low self-esteem and were not proud of their local culture, products or just about being citizens of Malawi. “Therefore Vision 2020 shall address and change these negative societal attitudes⁸” (The Government of Malawi, 1997). Surprisingly, throughout the Vision 2020 document, language is never even mentioned, just like the case with documents of the African Union (AU) or scientific literature where the close link between culture and language is mentioned (African Union, 2006; Moto, 2002, p. 37). In this regard, Kamwendo (2010, p. 277) laments,

This silence on language creates the erroneous impression that language is not relevant to matters of national development. If language is the medium through which human beings communicate, and if communication is a critical tool for national development, how can a nation genuinely prepare its vision without taking the language question on board?

Furthermore, in March 1996, the MoEST formulated a new directive (Reference no IN/2/14), which was much more in favour of the vernacular languages and preferred mother tongue education up to standard⁹ 4 (MoEST, 1996). This new language policy in the education system would allow the use of mother tongue in standard 1 to 4 of primary education, with the introduction of English in standard 5. With this new policy, Chichewa remained one of the subjects on the curriculum to be studied throughout the primary and secondary school curriculum. In the interview responses, many teachers highlighted the importance of language-related obstacles during the lessons mainly while teaching Mathematics and Science (see also Chauma, 2012). Earlier research already described the high importance and effects from the LoLT on the achievement levels on science education (Bangbose, 1984; Eiselen, 2002). Furthermore, research in Mzimba District analysed the effects of language attitude and practice on the subject of Agriculture within the Malawian education system and revealed that most teachers feel that students would learn better in mother tongue than in English or any other international language (Engler & Kretzer, 2014, p. 229).

Nevertheless, after this change of language policy, a number of concerns or even fears developed in the Malawian society. In addition to the ubiquitous concerns in many African countries regarding the implementation of mother tongue education, there were specific concerns related to the Malawian history and a huge opposition against the

⁸ It is important to keep in mind that the Vision 2020 document was translated into Chichewa and Chitumbuka (Moto, 2002, p. 42).

⁹ Since ‘standard’ is used as a terminology in Malawi to describe different school grades, levels or stages in primary school, it will be used in this article, too. In secondary school, the term ‘form’ is used while in university the ‘year’ or ‘level’ is used.

new language policy initiated by Bakili Muluzi's government that favoured the re-introduction of Malawian indigenous languages ensued as noted by Green (2007, p. 61) in the following excerpt:

His [Bakili Muluzi's] opponents in the elite class, many of whom were supporters of Dr Kamuzu Banda, greeted Muluzi's attempts at education reform with criticism. These members of the Malawian society accused Muluzi of lowering the status of English in the nation, therefore corresponding to a decrease in future prospects for Malawian youth and the place of the nation in the international community.

The critics of mother tongue policy objected to this policy by raising the following disadvantages: Firstly, limited materials existed for the promotion of indigenous Malawian languages as LoLT such that their development would be too costly for a developing country like Malawi. Secondly, mother tongue education would affect proficiency in English and result in declining English competencies. Thirdly, the majority of parents were highly in favour of English. Fourthly, with a specific reference to the Malawian scenario, the society feared the revival of '*kwanunkwanu*' ('let everyone work in their home area') as it was implemented during the presidency of Kamuzu Banda (Kamwendo, 2008, p. 355). Furthermore the "Bantu Education Act" of 1953 in the Republic of South Africa highly affected language attitudes not only in South Africa, but also in many other African societies like Malawi (Kamwendo, 2008, p. 356). It was felt that mother tongue education in South Africa was ideologically motivated and not based on pedagogical principles or ideological neutral. Scholars had argued that the aim of the South African curriculum was to prepare black and non-white students for subservient roles in society (Heugh, 1999, p. 302). The "Bantu Education Act" of 1953 established persistent negative perceptions of mother tongue education on the African continent and has remained a sticking point up to today. Research at selected schools in North West province in South Africa, for example, showed that even in a predominantly monolingual setting, negative language attitudes towards indigenous languages exist. Many principals from Setswana-medium schools have the plan to either change the school language policy or implement an already existing school language policy which favours English (Kretzer, 2013). As mentioned above, Kamuzu Banda's language policy favours English and Chichewa, which has had a significant and lasting negative impact on the development of other indigenous languages in Malawi. Furthermore, due to the economic struggles in Malawi coupled with the fact that only English is seen as an economically relevant language for upward social mobility, mother tongue has a very low reputation in Malawi. Matiki (2006, p. 246) laments this situation as follows:

Given that the indigenous languages do not seem to have any apparent economic value, parents are not likely to support the wholesale introduction of indigenous languages in the school system.

In the language policy initiated by the Bakili Muluzi regime, all the teaching and examinations from standard 5 upwards were to be conducted in English in all subjects

except Chichewa. English was also compulsory during the first year at university regardless of the degree programme being pursued by the student. In addition to the bilingual language policy which expanded the role of English as the students progressed, the UDF government also introduced several local languages on the national radio mainly for news bulletin and adverts. However, Kayambazinthu (1999) observes that even after independence and multiparty democracy, the government is still silent on the place of migrant languages such as Urdu, Somali, Lebanese and Kiswahili, which are used in business circles. It is also noted that after the MCP era, the significance and relevance of classics diminished significantly. Kishindo (1998) argues that after the MCP regime, classical languages disappeared noting that Dr Kamuzu Banda's rhetoric and enthusiasm about these languages far outweighed their usefulness within the Malawian context. According to Matiki (2001), language policy needs to take into account national and pedagogical concerns, resources, social and human rights, none of which applies in the case of the classical languages in Malawi.

Currently, the language policy still has English and Chichewa as official languages. On paper, the policy stipulates that all teaching should be done in the dominant mother tongue in a region from standard 1 to 4 except in the two subjects, English and Chichewa, which are supposed to be taught in those languages. As mentioned before, the Chichewa Board has been replaced with The Centre for Language Studies to encourage research, rehabilitation and use of all Malawian vernacular languages. Although this is the case, it is not sure how such moves will salvage languages that are already on the brink of death such as Chilomwe, Chikhokhola, Chingoni and others whose practical usage has greatly diminished.

Malawi's language policy is also influenced by many international donors like the World Bank and many other agencies since the country is aid-dependent and cannot decide on issues independently. Further, it is worth noting that Mazrui (2004) is sceptical about the role of some international organisations such as the World Bank on language policy decisions in third world countries. It is not surprising that some authors highlight the fact that the mother tongue policy in Malawi was mainly possible due to donor funding from the German "*Gesellschaft für technische Zusammenarbeit*" (GTZ), and, as the funding stopped, the implementation of the policy nearly halted too (Albaugh, 2014, p. 260).

For critics such as Chauma et al. (1997), allowing pupils to learn in their mother tongue will produce inferior learners and encourage tribalism, a scenario that works against the overall government objective of achieving national identity and unity through language. Criticism of mother tongue policy is also expressed by Msothi (1997) who found out that parents in Malawi have a negative perception of mother tongue education and would rather have their children learn in English due to its prestigious socio-economic status and advantages. Furthermore, the positive attitude towards English as a language of education compared to the negative attitude towards indigenous languages is ubiquitous and overt in the Malawian society. In the university campus, people make unsavoury remarks about indigenous languages like: '*za Chichewa zomwe zija mpaka kukhala nazo professor?*' ('You mean that Chichewa has made him rise to full professorship?') or '*Inu kubwera ku university kudzaphunzira ndakatulo basi?*' ('You came all the way to the university simply to study Chichewa poetry?') (Kamwendo, 2010, p. 278). Hence, it is not only a question of the attitude of parents but

also of teachers, students and the other stakeholders, and this is in addition to the general lack of implementation of policies in the country. As Mtenje (2004, p. 154) notes:

There is also no office, department or section in the [government] structure and set up of the Ministry of Education assigned to specifically manage the process of developing and ensuring the approval of the language policy. As a result, the ministry is unable to offer a rapid response to the complex issues of language planning. All this has led to considerable delays and lack of attention to matters pertaining to the policy.

Mtenje (2004) further argues that lack of proper government structures to holistically manage language policy issues is a common phenomenon not only in Malawi but in many other African countries. This leads to contradictions. One of the areas of concern observed by scholars like Mtenje is that language policy in education usually focuses on monolingual media such as the language of the colonial era or the language spoken by the dominant ethnic group, while the cultural policy embraces all ethnic groups. In such cases, the two policies are expounded and coordinated by two different ministries. For some time now in Malawi, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology operates a different language policy from the one operated by the Ministry of Sports, Youth and Culture. The question of mother tongue education, for example, is therefore caught in the activities of these two related but largely uncoordinated ministries, which results in Malawi hesitating to fully implement the mother tongue policy in schools. This is in spite of the fact that the principle has been generally embraced by each president since the first multi-party general elections. While it may be assumed that lack of full implementation, lack of resources and other logistical problems, a closer scrutiny reveals the major reason as fear of the consequences which such implementation may entail politically and culturally. This reasoning is plausible because some African countries where financial resources may not seem to be much of a challenge, such as Botswana, for example (which has a small population, few indigenous languages¹⁰ and a high GDP per capita) hesitate to fully implement mother tongue education (Arua & Magocha, 2002).

Further development in language policy was noticed when Bingu wa Mutharika, the former President of Malawi, (elected in 2004) introduced the new Curriculum and Assessment Framework (CASF) in 2007, whose main aspects are learner-centred lessons, Outcome Based Education (OBE) and continuous assessment rather than an examination oriented education (MoEST, 2006; Chirwa & Naidoo, 2014, p. 342). It is very important to note that after his re-election in 2009, Bingu wa Mutharika gave his inaugural speech solely in English. In his speech, he highlighted some areas which were central to his political agenda under the umbrella 'Education, science and technology,' where he summarised his educational goals. Surprisingly he never mentioned any of the Malawian indigenous languages or the question of LoLT, but rather general educational obstacles and challenges (Mutharika, 2009).¹¹ President Bingu wa Mutharika's public

¹⁰ Batibo (2005) mentions 28 languages spoken in Botswana and the degree of knowledge competence of the lingua franca Setswana is highly disputed, too (Letsholo, 2009, p. 582; Nyati-Saleshando, 2011, p. 571).

¹¹ Kondowe (2014) gives a detailed analysis of Bingu wa Mutharikas inaugural speech which was delivered on the 22nd May in 2009 after his landslide election victory a few days earlier. Furthermore, Green (2007)

disregard of Chichewa strengthens the question of the legitimacy of Chichewa as the national language, which is being raised by some Malawians. In fact, Kishindo (1998) observes that since the inception of multiparty democracy which saw the formation of several political parties along regional and ethnic lines, people inevitably started agitating for change in several spheres of social life including language policy due to the re-awakening of ethnic consciousness (ethnic nationalism). Questions about the legitimacy of Chichewa as the national language are fuelled partly by the fact that the Malawi constitution is silent on the country's national and official language. Kishindo (1998) notes that it is only on the basis of the current linguistic practice that we can say that the country is still upholding, with some modifications, the 1968 MCP convention resolutions on language use.

As we go into the future, the criticism of Malawi's language policy, both past and present, shows potential changes in language policy. Firstly, Matiki (2001) argues that current and past language policies in the country which have enabled the dominance of English in administrative and legislative spheres implies that nearly 90% of Malawians are excluded from making decisions that affect them. Matiki (2001) worries that the promotion of a democratic culture is at stake as the linguistic discourse in use effectively alienates the very same people it is meant to serve. It is also noted that the 1996 national policy plan of action recommended change of name for the national language from Chichewa back to Chinyanja to reflect the international status of the language since it is also spoken in Zambia and Mozambique (Kayambazinthu, 1999, p. 17). Critics who are agitating for this change in the nomenclature argue that the change is necessary for political neutrality since Chichewa is closely associated with Dr Kamuzu Banda's ethnic group (Kayambazinthu 1999). One can rest assured that the current ruling party, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) which draws its support from the Lomwe speaking areas in the Southern Region may consider reverting to the previous name, Chinyanja, to delink the national language from the MCP which draws its political support mostly from the Chewa of the central region.

Considering the current level of political and social activism, it is also expected that ethnic groupings, some of which have wielded significant political power, may succeed in pushing for drastic policy changes that would see their languages gain national or even regional importance. For instance, there are strong sentiments that there was deliberate and active denigration or repression of the development of other languages apart from Chichewa by the Kamuzu Banda regime which saw Chilomwe, for example, replaced by Chichewa in the homes in the southern region. Certain sections of the Malawian society do not support the argument that Dr Kamuzu Banda's choice of Chichewa as the national language because the majority of Malawians already spoke the language, but that the choice was motivated by tribalism (Vail and White, 1989). However, Matiki (2006) argues that using Anderson's (1983) idea of 'imagined communities', Kamuzu Banda realised that Chichewa is the language through which Malawi is imagined. In his study, Matiki (2006) found that 94% of Malawian Members of Parliament indicated Chichewa as the language which represented Malawi's national character. This position may change as the Democratic Progressive Party-led

highlights the abundance of materials about language in connection with Hastings Kamuzu Banda and with Bingu wa Mutharika as well as Joyce Banda (p. 62).

government sees this scenario as a threat to its very existence and continuation as a ruling party.

On the question of English as an official language, the language (English) might continue being promoted because according to Dr Kamuzu Banda, English is the proverbial window to the world and to technological advancement. But some scholars such as Matiki (2006) insist that this does not justify the lofty status accorded the language. Matiki (2006) observes that there is need to open up the space for some indigenous languages to play their rightful part in education, administration, judiciary and other spheres of life to mitigate the alienation of the majority of Malawians from national activities. This step is necessary because current and past policies have made the majority of Malawians not to participate adequately in the economic life of the country, especially women and the rural poor, most of whom are denied opportunity to use their vernacular languages in economic and administrative spheres. For active utilisation of mother tongue, there is a need to raise the teaching of vernacular languages in schools and broaden their usage. As mentioned before, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, in its circular Number IN/2/14 dated 28th March 1996, introduced mother tongue education, but also insisted that pure introduction of mother tongue in schools would significantly undermine the learning and teaching of English. Despite recent research findings on the benefits for Non-Chichewa speakers of learning in their mother tongue (Langer, 2010, p. 107), the majority of schools still use English and Chichewa. Only a few use mainly Chitumbuka and to a lesser extent other indigenous languages as mentioned earlier (Albaugh, 2014, p. 260). Even the Malawi Institute of Education (MIE), in a study conducted in 2010, noted that the achievement levels when children learn in mother tongue are two or sometimes three times higher than in English (2010, p. 14-15).

Other scholars such as Sharra (2002) worry about the depiction of a modern global identity through the way English is taught in the classroom. His worry is that the way English is taught does not make room for Malawians to appreciate the role of their own histories, culture and languages in the representation of modernity and globalisation. If English leads to the construction of a one-sided image of modernity as only associated with Britain and America (the West), Sharra argues, this would lead Malawians to always think their answers are in the West. Already, there is a perception that as a country, Malawi must try to solve its problems the Malawian way and design programmes and policies entirely on its own, guided by local factors. This perception, which is very nationalistic in nature, might weigh heavily on language policy in the near future and lead to a possible change in language policy.

6.0 Conclusion

This paper has argued that the language policy in Malawi is a product of natural, historical and political factors. It has shown that before colonialism, the language use was regulated as languages came into contact. However, when the colonialists settled into the country, they formulated a language policy that considered the linguistic situation on the ground for evangelisation, communication with the natives, administrative purposes and promotion of English values and culture. Furthermore, the

paper has shown that with the end of the colonial rule, the language policy development has been inconsistent because it has been driven largely by political interests. The language policies which the country has pursued have seen Chichewa, which had 50.2% speakers nationally in 1966, increase its number of speakers substantially to almost 80% in 2015, while speakers of other indigenous languages have diminished significantly. The status of English has also risen significantly as it has remained the main language of education, governance, the judiciary, legislature and media. However, with the rise of indigenous consciousness, it is expected that language policy in Malawi will change significantly to accommodate vernacular languages, whose speakers are slowly gaining political power and are making efforts to rectify the mistakes of the past with regards to language policy.

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