The concepts of discerned and designed languages and their relevance for East Africa

Bert van Pinxteren, Leiden University Centre for Linguistics

Abstract

This article starts with a dream: the dream that one day, the countries of East Africa will be middle- to high-income countries, with an education system to match that status. What would that mean for the medium of instruction in tertiary education? Using Estonia as a benchmark, and comparing that with data from Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda, I show that in future, it will be impossible to keep English as medium of instruction. Local languages will have to be used. However, how can that be done in a practical way? In order to discuss that, the article introduces the concepts of *discerned* and *designed* languages, inspired by the earlier concepts of 'Abstand' and 'Ausbau' languages as introduced by Heinz Kloss (1967). The concept of discerned languages is a more linguistic concept. The concept of designed languages is more sociological and is similar to that of intellectualized languages. Using these two concepts points to the social and political nature of how languages are classified and to the possibility that one designed language can serve as a formalized language for speakers of a number of related discerned languages. This is of great relevance to East Africa. The article proposes five principles for rational designed language choices. It expands on one of these – the importance of looking at ease of language learning and teaching when making rational choices. The article then ends with a number of policy recommendations, slightly different for each country.

Keywords: *Tertiary education, Medium of Instruction, indigenous languages, ease of language learning, language policy, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda*

1 Introduction: let's dream…

Let's suppose for a moment that poverty in East Africa is not here to stay – let's assume that one day, the region will be able to boast a modest level of affluence. The region will make use of its fair share of natural resources for its own benefits, staying within planetary limits. This will enable it, one day, to eliminate the high poverty levels still found today and give all its citizens a good standard of wealth. Institutions like the World Bank and the IMF (if they still exist in that future) would then classify the countries in the region as upper-middle to high-income countries.[1]

[1] The World Bank currently shows Kenya and Tanzania as 'lower-middle income countries', Uganda as 'low income' – see https://datatopics.worldbank.org/world-development-indicators/the-world-by-income-and-region.html accessed 10 July 2024.

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We hold that for this to happen, one thing will be essential: the region's brain power will need to be fully utilized. In other words, it will be necessary to achieve the UN's Sustainable Development Goal number four, which calls on countries to 'Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.' (United Nations, 2015). What will that mean for medium of instruction in tertiary education? In the region, the current policy is to use English as the medium of instruction, starting either after the first few years of primary education (Kenya, Uganda) or at the start of secondary education (Tanzania). In tertiary education, English is the single medium of instruction in all countries. However, is this a sustainable policy, that one could maintain also into the rosy future evoked above? How do other countries handle this? That will be the topic of this article. Spoiler alert: at some point, things will have to change. It is a fiction to think that African education systems will be able to expand indefinitely using English as the (sole) medium of instruction.

In order to make the case, section two starts with a discussion of the conceptual distinction between language as *discerned* and language as *designed*, taken from the theoretical framework developed by van Pinxteren (2022). It makes the claim that one *designed* language can serve the needs of speakers of several related *discerned* languages in formal domains (such as higher education).

Section three reviews how well the region's educational systems are currently performing in giving students the English-language skills they need in order to enable them to take tertiary education in that language. It compares that with current enrolment levels to check if currently, there are any deficits in this area. It then compares the educational systems of East Africa with one of the best-performing educational systems in the world, that of Estonia. This section will argue why, at some point, a transition to using other languages than English will become necessary.

Section four then discusses how equitable choices for medium of instruction can be made and zooms in on one under-researched domain, the issue of how easy or difficult it is to teach and learn a certain language for speakers of a given other language and what that means for language choices in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. This will illustrate how choices can be made that are rational, equitable, as well as practical.

Section five ends the article with some conclusions and policy recommendations for each one of the three countries.

2 The theory of language as *discerned* and language as *designed*

The theoretical approach used for investigating the relationship between educational systems and medium of instruction is taken from van Pinxteren (2022). A first clarification that this calls for is precisely what is meant by 'medium of instruction'. A medium of instruction is a language that is used for giving oral instruction, but also the language that is used in teaching materials (written material) and, significantly, in carrying out assessments and exams. In general, these categories represent diminishing degrees of variation and freedom: in class, teachers and students can and often do use whatever speech registers are available to them. This may include using dialectal variants, code-switching, translanguaging, in-class translation, etc. However, the teaching materials and exams are usually in some form of standardized or intellectualized language. Furthermore, at the primary level, more freedom in how to speak and how to test is generally allowed as compared to secondary and tertiary education.

Van Pinxteren (2022, p. 40), inspired by earlier work by Kloss (1967), has proposed to distinguish between language as *designed* and language as *discerned.* Kloss used the terms *'Ausbau'* and *'Abstand'* languages; van Pinxteren has proposed the terms of 'designed' versus 'discerned' languages as English approximations. The term 'discerned' (or *Abstand*) languages is, according to Kloss, a *linguistic* concept that refers to all languages, whether they have a developed writing system and grammar or not. He assumed at the time that linguists have a way of determining the 'intrinsic distance' between languages and deciding on the borders between languages using those criteria (p. 30).[2] The concept of 'designed' (or *Ausbau*) languages, on the other hand, is not a linguistic concept: it is *sociological*. It refers only to those languages that have been deliberately shaped and built to become standardised vehicles of literary and scientific expression (which could include oral cultures). The way Kloss describes his concept of *Ausbau* languages is similar to the concept of 'intellectualisation.' Prah (2017, p. 216) quotes the definition of Sibayan from 1999: an intellectualised language is a 'language which can be used for educating a person in any field of knowledge from kindergarten to the university and beyond.' This terminology is also used by Kaschula and Nkomo (2019, p. 604), who see intellectualisation of languages 'as a counterhegemonic process that seeks to empower

[2] Kloss was wrong about this – there seems to be no objective way of teasing out what different 'languages' are within a given dialect continuum – see Gooskens (2013).

communities through language' (p. 606). I agree with this approach, but prefer the terminology of 'discerned' and 'designed' languages. The term 'intellectualisation' could imply a value judgement on those languages that have not been 'intellectualised' and does not help our understanding of the importance of distinguishing between the linguistic and the sociological aspects of language.

Kloss points out that there is a degree of freedom here: forming of designed languages is a historical process that can be sped up or indeed reversed as a result of either shifts in power relationships or changes in policy or (as will most often be the case) both. Djité (2008, p. x) asks: '[I]sn't it the case that some languages have simply not been *allowed* to develop as others have? Isn't it the case that evidence of literacy tradition in some languages has intentionally been destroyed […], forbidden […] or ignored […]?' Kaschula and Nkomo (2019, p. 607) also make this point:

> The arrival of foreign traders, explorers, missionaries, and colonial settlers resulted in cross-cultural encounters and the transformation of economic, cultural, religious, and political domains, which devalued indigenous knowledge and African thought systems. This not only alienated indigenous people from the socioeconomic and political organizational structures of the new societies, but also de-intellectualized their languages.

Kloss stresses that a certain amount of formalised learning is always required to master a designed language. This is what Lo Bianco (2008, p. 114) refers to as 'secondary lingual socialization.' It also helps to explain why, in countries that use an indigenous language as medium of instruction, this language is also taught as a subject in its own right, usually up to the end of secondary school. Kloss gives the example of German (p. 35): speakers of several German-like languages, such as lower Saxon (*Plattdeutsch*), Swabian (*Schwäbisch)* and Ripuarian all use standard written German (*Hochdeutsch)* as their common 'designed' language, but this standardised version is different from the spoken languages and requires learning in order to master it. However, learning standard written German is easier for speakers of Ripuarian and of lower Saxon than it would be for speakers of, for example, French.

This situation – where speakers of several discerned languages are served by one related designed language - is in fact not specific to Germany. It is common the world over, in countries

as diverse as China, Indonesia, Italy or Turkey, to name a few. This insight is key also for East Africa, as will become clear in section four below.

In this article, when reference is made to 'language' or to 'medium of instruction', we mean the formalized, intellectualized or designed form of language that often serves speakers of several related *discerned* languages. In most countries, the 'mother tongue', the speech register the child acquires before going to school, will be in some ways different from what is taught in school. Still, children whose mother tongue is closely related to the designed language taught in schools are usually considered to be 'monolingual'. However, many children learn to use more than one speech register before they enter school and these registers may be considerably different from one another. This may be the case for children who have parents with two different first languages (and who each use their first language with the children) or for children raised in extended family settings, such as prevalent in some parts of Africa. These multilingual children can effectively acquire more than one 'mother tongue'.

It does not always work: in some situations, parents or other caretakers may not have a good command of the standard *designed* language. If these parents nevertheless choose to use that standard language with their children, this may in fact have adverse consequences, with children entering school with low proficiency in *any* language (Barac and Byalistok, 2012). In general, it seems that raising children bi- or multilingually from birth is possible and generally beneficial for them, but only if those that use the different speech registers with the children are themselves highly proficient users of those registers.

With this in mind, we can now investigate how well the education systems in East Africa fare in giving their youngsters the skills they need in order to take tertiary education in the designed form of English that is used in the region.

3 How many students learn enough English for taking tertiary education in that language?

Teaching students in a language they do not understand well enough is bound to be inefficient and frustrate all involved: it means that students may be intellectually able in principle to understand what is being taught (for example in a field such as engineering), but if they lack the required language skills they may still fail. Therefore, institutions of tertiary education that

accept students from abroad generally specify a minimum proficiency level. For English, this can be established through a minimum score on the well-known IELTS test.[3] In Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania, Universities equally have English language-related entrance requirements. For our discussion, we assume that the minimum proficiency level that is required for tertiary education in English corresponds to a C+ grade on the examination at the end of senior secondary school in Kenya, a C in Tanzania, and the 'University level admission grade' in Uganda. We also assume that this is roughly equivalent to the 'B2' level of proficiency as specified in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.[4] It would be important to do research into whether or not these assumptions are correct – in Ghana, Stoffelsma and De Jong (2015) found that only 48 percent of first-year students for a Bachelor of Education had a B2 level in English reading proficiency, even though there, a 'credit pass' is a requirement for admittance. Therefore, one might expect that all students have the B2 level – yet Stoffelsma and De Jong found this not to be the case.

If we multiply the percentage of students who obtain at least this grade by the completion rate in senior secondary education as published by UNESCO,[5] we obtain an estimate of the proportion of youngsters that education systems can give the minimum level of proficiency in English that is needed to take tertiary education in that language. We can then compare this to the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in tertiary education (as also published by UNESCO), to get an approximate idea of how well education systems are doing in comparison to the current needs of their tertiary education systems.

In order to give a comparison with one of the better-performing educational systems in the North, we also provide data on Estonia from 2012, taken from an EU-commissioned survey of a number of EU countries (European Commission, 2012).[6] The significance of this is further explained below.

The figures are given in table 1 below.

[3] https://www.ielts.org/
[4] https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages/table-1-cefr-3.3-common-reference-levels-global-scale accessed 10 July 2024.
[5] http://sdg4-data.uis.unesco.org/ - the completion rate is indicator 4.1.2.
[6] For Estonia, we give the percentage of secondary school students with at least a 'B2' level of proficiency in English, according to the survey.

Country	Completion rate in %, (year)	% obtaining minimum score (year)	% of youngsters with minimum score	GER in tertiary education (year)
Kenya	58.86 (2022)	22.27 (2023)[7]	13.11	20.48 (2022)
Tanzania	11.50 (2019)	99.23 (2018)[8]	11.41	7.51 (2020)
Uganda	15.68 (2019)	70.30 (2022)[9]	11.02	4.76 (2016)
Estonia	83.01 (2012)	41 (2012)[10]	34.03	72.94 (2012)

Table 1: English proficiency levels and tertiary education GER, selected countries

The table reveals some striking facts. The first is that many more children complete senior secondary education and enroll in tertiary education in Kenya[11], as compared to Tanzania and Uganda. However, even the Kenyan figure is far below that of Estonia. By contrast, the percentage of students obtaining a minimum level of proficiency in English is much lower in Kenya compared to either Tanzania or Uganda. The result is that in all three countries, a small minority of around 12% of youngsters achieve a level of proficiency in English that is high enough for them to take tertiary education in that language. For Tanzania and Uganda, this is currently not a problem: tertiary education places are currently available to fewer than 10% of all youngsters. For Kenya, there is a problem: tertiary education institutions now seem to admit students who do not have the minimum required level of English proficiency. This must be putting undue strain on the system and be a cause of frustration for students and their parents.

The situation must be worse for children entering technical and vocational training and education (TVET). Those children will typically have obtained lower grades in English than their peers who are destined to go on to University. Providing TVET education in English is bound to cause undue strain on the system, thus unnecessarily frustrating parents, teachers, and children.

[7] https://www.knec.ac.ke/2024/01/08/2023-kcse-results-essential-statistics/ accessed 11 July 2024
[8] https://assets.globalpartnership.org/s3fs-public/document/file/2020-05-Tanzania%20Mainland-ESP-IR_0.pdf?VersionId=J5Ua3bLZCMGrCU1Dd7gu4qvqIOMGkaRX accessed 11 July 2022
[9] https://uneb.ac.ug/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/2022-UACE-STATEMENT-OF-RELEASE-OF-RESULTS-ED.pdf accessed 11 July 2024.
[10] Taken from the First European Survey on Language Competence.
[11] Note that the GER in tertiary education in Kenya has almost doubled compared to 2019.

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There is a huge contrast between the countries of East Africa and a high-performing educational system such as that of Estonia. Estonia roundly outperforms East Africa when it comes to giving a good level of English to its youngsters: it manages to give around a third of its adolescents such a level, compared to only one in ten in East Africa. Note that this does not mean that English is the medium of instruction in Estonia! Instead, English is taught as a subject; the medium of instruction is Estonian (Santiago et al., 2016).[12] Clearly, teaching English as a subject can be at least as efficient, if not more efficient, than using it as medium of instruction. However, using English as medium of instruction in tertiary education in Estonia would be a recipe for disaster, because, even though one in three of all adolescents has a good enough level in the language, tertiary education is actually offered to three in four of all Estonians! The Estonian education system would have to give more than twice as many youngsters a good enough level in English in order to be able to use English as medium of instruction in tertiary education.

The same situation actually prevails in all countries of the global North.[13] In theory, given unlimited resources, it might be possible to give almost all youngsters a good enough level of knowledge in English. However, in practice, resources are never unlimited. Therefore, in order to know what is practically possible in the real world, the reference point should be the best-performing educational systems that currently exist. If we take that reference point, one conclusion becomes abundantly clear: if the dream referred to in the introduction is to become a reality, changes in the medium of instruction will become unavoidable.

However, how could such a change become practically possible? What would be the principles underlying rational language choices? That is the topic of the next section.

4 Rational designed language choices

According to the *Ethnologue* (Eberhard et al., 2023), Kenya currently has 60 living languages (plus the Kenyan sign language), Tanzania has 120 and Uganda has 40.[14] Clearly, it is not feasible to offer tertiary education in such a high number of languages. However, as the

[12] Note also that Estonian (approximately 1.2 million native speakers) belongs to the Uralic language family and is very different from English; the significance of this will be explained further down in this article.
[13] There is one exception: Singapore. There are reasons for this related to the specific situation of the country, but discussing those would fall outside the scope of this article.
[14] Estonia has two, Standard Estonian and Võro.

discussion in section two above has shown, this is not necessary: as is the case elsewhere, a more limited number of *designed* languages could serve the needs of speakers of several related languages as *discerned* by the Ethnologue or others. Van Pinxteren (2022, p. 213) has proposed five principles on which a rational choice could be made:

1) 'Develop a limited number of designed languages for education
2) Designed languages should be chosen in such a way that they are easy to learn for as many speakers of discerned languages as possible.
3) Strive for inclusivity: choose designed languages in such a way that all have to exert a relatively low but relatively equal effort to learn them.
4) Make use of existing bilingualism as a resource.
5) Build incentives for linguistic collaboration, especially for related linguistic communities.'

One of the key elements of this is the ease of language learning (and teaching) – it means that designed languages should be closely related to the discerned languages whose speakers they serve, although they do not need to be mutually intelligible in the strict sense of the word: they need to be learned and taught. In very general terms, teaching a *designed* language that is close to what children already know is easier and more efficient than teaching one that is very different from what children already know. This is an area that is under-researched, but van Pinxteren (2022, p. 94) gives information from US research, to the effect that teaching a very different language takes around four times as much time and effort as teaching a closely related language. In the following subsections, we will examine what this might mean for Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania, given the different language ecologies of these countries.

4.1 Kenya

Kenya is a linguistically very diverse country, with millions of speakers of languages belonging to three different language families: the (narrow) Bantu family, including languages such as Kiswahili and Kikuyu; the Nilotic languages, including languages such as Dholuo and Maasai; and the Cushitic languages, of which Somali is the most important. These language families are

each very different. It means that the future of Kenya will have to be multilingual: an equitable solution will require that at least one language will have to be chosen from each one of these families for use as a designed language for the related speech communities. Some have argued that Swahili should be developed as Kenya's national language (Kanana, 2013). For speakers of Bantu languages, this might be a solution. However, for others, it will not do: learning Swahili is just about as difficult for them as learning English. If speakers of Nilotic or Cushitic languages have to invest their energies in acquiring a difficult language, most will prefer English due to its higher worldwide possibilities for use, and only a minority will want to use Swahili. Introducing Swahili as the single national language for use in tertiary education would certainly lead to massive resistance by speakers of the Nilotic and Cushitic languages. Therefore, in future, tertiary education in Kenya will have to be delivered in at least three languages, possibly in addition to English.

4.2 Tanzania

The language ecology of Tanzania is different from that of Kenya, in that more than 98% of all speakers speak one of the many Bantu languages in the country. There are historical explanations for the fact that Swahili has higher status in Tanzania, as compared to Kenya, related for example to a different colonial history and to the role of the first president, Julius Nyerere (Temu, 1998). However, the linguistic ecology of Tanzania provides an additional explanation for the success of Swahili: in contrast to Kenya, Swahili is an easy language to learn for the great majority of all Tanzanians.

Van Pinxteren (2022) has used the Automated Similarity Judgement Programme (ASJP) and database[15] in order to develop an approximation of which language pairs form easier or more difficult combinations. He has proposed five groups, ranging from 'very easy' to 'very difficult', based on Normalized Edit Distances.[16] For selected Tanzanian languages, this leads to graph 1 below (adapted from van Pinxteren 2022, p. 137).

[15] https://asjp.clld.org/

[16] This is also known as the Levenshtein Distance. For an explanation of the ASJP and how it computes Levenshtein Distances, see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Automated_Similarity_Judgment_Program accessed 7 July 2023.

2 SYNONYMS, AT LEAST 28 WORDS
LOANWORDS EXCLUDED
LDND

	HADZA	SUKUMA	ISANZU	MBUGWE	MWINI	NILAMBA	RIMI	SWAHILI	VALANGI	DATOOGA	MAASAI	ALAGWE	IRAQW	ENGLISH
HADZA	0													
SUKUMA	97	0												
ISANZU	94	65	0											
MBUGWE	91	77	71	0										
MWINI	95	70	65	79										
NILAMBA	96	62	51	65	67	0								
RIMI	92	75	47	74	75	68	0							
SWAHILI	95	73	71	76	62	60	75	0						
VALANGI	92	77	71	57	83	68	76	68	0					
DATOOGA	98	101	102	99	101	99	105	101	101	0				
MAASAI	96	97	96	95	96	97	98	98	98	96	0			
ALAGWA	98	102	100	102	101	101	101	98	99	97	100	0		
IRAQW	98	97	96	98	95	97	99	94	98	95	98	53	0	
ENGLISH	97	96	100	99	97	101	100	97	100	100	98	100	100	0

ASJP distance score	Category
< 60	Very easy
≥ 60, < 90	Easy
≥ 90, ≤ 95	Medium
> 95, < 100	Difficult
≥ 100	Very difficult

Graph 1: Distance between selected Tanzanian languages

As can be seen from the graph, the Bantu languages (Sukuma, Swahili, Mbugwe and others) all form ‘easy’ or ‘very easy’ combinations. Almost all other languages (Alagwa, Datooga. English, Hadza, and Iraqw) form difficult or very difficult combinations. That means that, like in Kenya, for a speaker of, for example, Maasai, Swahili is not easier to learn than English would be. However, speaker numbers in the non-Bantu languages are far lower than in Kenya. Many of these speakers may be bilingual or near-bilingual from birth. This makes Swahili a much more feasible national language in Tanzania than it would be in Kenya.

4.3 Uganda

The situation in Uganda is more similar to that of Kenya than to Tanzania. Even though most Ugandans speak one of the Bantu languages (Luganda being the largest), there are large minorities of speakers of Nilotic languages such as Acholi and Karamojong, as well as of Central Sudanic languages such as Lugbara. There are smaller speaker groups of Kuliak languages, notably Ik. This means that, like in Kenya, introducing Swahili or one of the other Bantu languages as a single language for use in tertiary education would not be an equitable option.

Like in Kenya, in Uganda, in future, tertiary education will have to be delivered in a number of languages, possibly in addition to English.

5 Conclusions and Recommendations

This article set out to examine the question of what a continued expansion of education in the region would mean for medium of instruction policies. In order to do that, it first introduced the distinction between language as *discerned* and language as *designed*. It argued how, in many countries all over the world, speakers of several related discerned languages can be served by one common designed language and it suggested that this might also provide a practical way forward for East Africa.

It then tried to answer whether or not the educational systems in East Africa currently manage to give all the students that want to take tertiary education in English the required language skills. The data shows that currently, Uganda and Tanzania seem to manage to give enough youngsters the required language skills; for Kenya, this may not be the case. This means that there is no pressing need at the moment to change the current medium of instruction policies. The comparison of the region with a country like Estonia shows that in future, the current model will no longer be sustainable. Estonia does much better than any of the East African educational systems in teaching English to its youngsters. However, it does even better in providing tertiary education to its youth. Therefore, using English as medium of instruction would not be possible in Estonia; instead, one of the two Estonian-like languages spoken in the country is used.

If we accept that in future things will have to change, what would be the principles upon which to base rational and equitable choices for indigenous designed languages? Section four outlined five basic principles. Key in those principles is to choose languages that are relatively easy to learn (and to teach) for speakers of as many related discerned languages as possible. For Kenya and Uganda, that means a multilingual future, due to the very diverse language ecologies in those countries. For Tanzania, Swahili would seem to be an acceptable candidate, although special attention would be needed for the relatively small numbers of speakers of minority languages in the country.

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This then leads to a number of recommendations, some that can be applied across the board, some that are country specific. In general, it is important to stress that a transition of this type can easily go wrong, as has been documented in the literature (for Uganda, see for example Altinyelken et al., 2014). It is impossible within the framework of this article to provide a concrete scenario or blueprint, but it is clear that long-term commitment and long-term planning will both be essential. Prestige planning may have to be part of that (Kamwangamalu, 2016; Brock-Utne, 2017). Mufwene (2022) discusses a number of relative successes and failures and points to two key factors that may influence the success of a language policy. One of these is that policies should be consistent with existing language practices that are already in place. Languages that already have currency as a 'lingua franca' should be used, not in their 'pure' or pristine form, but in a form that is close to the actual usage people already make of it. The other important factor is economic. People should derive tangible benefits from the effort required for learning any language, 'including being able to attend adequate schools in a language they speak fluently or can learn well in a short time, having access to adequate health care in the same language, being able to interact with their nation's administration and security systems without the mediation of interpreters, and, among others, not being automatically disqualified from some jobs for which they are academically qualified for not speaking the official language or (regional) lingua franca of employment.'

Any transition would probably have to be based on a broad societal debate, informed by sound linguistic expertise and knowledge. It would probably have to lead to a discussion and decision in Parliament.

One important move would be to start teaching one another's languages. Those who are gifted enough in language to take for example French or Arabic could also take Acholi or Kikuyu in secondary school. A multilingual future is going to require greater numbers of translators and interpreters; therefore, teaching and studying African languages should receive more attention and prominence than is the case at present. In general, linguistic knowledge is bound to become more important in the region and the role and expertise of African linguists will increase – this also means they should prepare themselves for a greater role in the public debate and should engage with policy issues more than is currently the case.

For the individual countries, some specific recommendations could be formulated:

5.1 Kenya

- Already at present, the method of teaching English by using it as medium of instruction seems to be approaching its limits; change to more efficient teaching methods, in which English is taught as a subject instead of used as medium of instruction, is to be considered; this would be immediately beneficial to the country.
- Swahili is a good candidate for medium of instruction in Kenya for speakers of the Bantu languages; for others, alternative languages will be needed as well.
- In order to ensure an orderly and well-prepared transition to introducing a limited number of indigenous languages as medium of instruction in higher education, preparing strategies and plans would need to start as soon as possible.

5.2 Tanzania

For Tanzania, Swahili seems the obvious choice as medium of instruction in higher education. However, it would be important to pay more attention to other languages, in two ways:

- Even though Swahili is ‘easy’ or ‘very easy’ to learn for speakers of all other Bantu languages spoken in the country, it does not seem to be the same for all. Specific attention to the difficulties experienced by speakers of individual languages would probably help to make teaching more efficient.
- Special attention and more research are needed into the position of speakers of minority non-Bantu languages. Introducing these languages as medium of instruction in (parts of) primary education would probably help children also in acquiring a higher level of Swahili later on; bilingualism from a very early age should be encouraged and could probably be helped through pre-school offers.

5.3 Uganda

The recommendations for Uganda are similar to those for Kenya, with the exception that the situation in Uganda seems to be less urgent than that of Kenya. Also, Swahili is not an indigenous language of Uganda; therefore, it might be feasible to choose one of the Bantu

languages indigenous to the country in tertiary education, although from the point of view of ease of learning Swahili could be used as well. Like in Kenya, it would be necessary to also develop several other languages for tertiary education.

A future in which all East Africans receive an education that is appropriate to their intellectual abilities is not an impossible dream. The brainpower of all its people will be needed if the region wants to eradicate poverty and overcome the challenges it is currently facing in a sustainable manner. It is necessary to be conscious of what this means for medium of instruction. This article has argued that it is a fiction to think that African educational systems will be able to expand indefinitely using the current medium of instruction policies. A gradual transition to using designed African languages in higher education is going to be inevitable. It is also a practical possibility. If that is so, then research and planning with that objective in mind should start now.

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