An 'Impact Model' of Language,
Mission and Development in East Africa

Jim Harries

"… we should write ...in African languages because otherwise there are so many misunderstandings" Bénézet Bujo, cited in Stinton (2004:141)

Abstract

A re-examination of communication theory in this article reveals that coding / decoding models of understanding of language widespread in missiological literature have been misleading. Because they always meet and are affected by contexts, the author suggests that words are more helpfully understood as having 'impacts' than 'meanings'. This is illustrated by comparison with 'touching' someone's body. As 'meaning' is not found in the hand that touches, but in the meeting of a hand with a part of a body (a handshake as against a thump or a tickle for example) such is the impact of words on the mind. The problems of the use of English in East Africa are explored from colonial times up to today. Leaving power in English was an embarrassment to Britain. This has had a major impact on East African society. The prominence of English is not based on its indigenous usefulness, says this author. He presents clear arguments that demonstrate this. Rather, use of English internally to East Africa can encourage incompetence, and certainly produces dependence. English flourishes by drawing on powers outside of the region. The problems in the current linguistic situation in East Africa are illustrated using examples that draw on the discipline of pragmatics. Because English is not working in people's long-term interests, and this is shown giving examples especially from Kenya, missionaries (especially native-English speakers) from outside of the region are strongly encouraged to minister using local languages, as well as by drawing on local resources.

Introduction

The development literature on Africa tends to be dominated by economic and technological approaches and concerns. This article represents a break with that tradition. Instead it takes a basic look at the nature of language and how it is used in impacting Africa, especially in inter-cultural perspective.

A reconsideration of linguistic theories in line with post-modernism herein profoundly alters the appearance of the development scene. The value of analyses; be they economic, technical, social or otherwise from the West using English for Africa is questioned. This is a challenge to the current model in which the West dominates the elite of the African-educated, almost invariably using Western languages. Instead of being a means to assist indigenous development, such can easily be a hindrance to local initiative, rooted in a basic theoretical error.

This article constitutes an appeal for contextually sensitive approaches to mission and development in Africa. A particular context examined is the linguistic one. Insights that promote development, it is suggested, should be derived and articulated using the language(s)

of the people being reached. The difficulties involved in working this way, it is suggested, are exactly the difficulties that need to be overcome in order for 'development' to succeed.

Communication Theory

One of modern man's assumptions is that language is a vehicle, and that words carry meanings. As many theories that have long but fallaciously been believed[1], the 'error' of this assumption can appear so plain, that one wonders how so many could have overlooked it for so long. How can a spoken word, which is a variety of wavelengths of vibration carried through various media but typically air, *carry* anything? How can ink drawn in patterns on a paper, two merely physical entities, 'carry' thoughts?[2] Clearly theorists were right to say that meaning is in the reader.[3] But have these theorists gone far enough?

Some have spoken of coding and decoding as being part of inter-human communication.[4] According to this theory, people seem to resemble computers. Computers these days communicate with one another digitally. Hence a binary code can be exactly transmitted and received. If programmed in the same way as the sending machine, a receiving machine can identically reproduce whatever was encoded at the sending end. But, what the code-theorists seem to forget are the prior and post stages to such communication with people as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1 Communication between Computers, and between People and Computers

Person A → **computer B** → **computer C** → **Person D**
ab   bc   cd

In Figure 1 above we have 3 communication processes going on: ab, bc and cd. Whereas bc can be a precise process of coding and decoding, I suggest that neither ab nor cd are of this nature. That is, whatever is in the mind of person A can be translated into computer B in different ways. Two scientists (or even one scientist on different occasions) reporting on the same experiment using the same language will not give computer B an identical binary input. Their inputs may be vastly different. Two people asked to take pictures of the same tree, will not produce identical binary patterns. The cd process is of the same order. No two people (or one person on different occasions) will respond to the same output from a computer in the same way. Some may be caused to laugh, others to cry, others to jump in the air, others to be bored, and some perhaps to pick up the computer and smash it onto the ground! This is because no-one ever comes to a computer with a blank mind. What they see and read from the computer will be interpreted in relation to what is already in their mind.

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[1] The comparison that comes to mind is with Newtonian physics that is so clearly fallacious in the light of the further insights provided by Einstein.

[2] "What we have put down on paper are little dark marks, a copy of which you are now looking at. As for our thoughts, they remain where they always were, inside our brains" (Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson, *Relevance: communication and cognition* (second edition), Oxford: Blackwell, 1995, 1.

[3] Stanley Fish, Is There a Text in This Class? the authority of interpretive communities, London, Harvard University Press, 1980, 2-3.

[4] For example see Hesselgrave (David, J. Hesselgrave, *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally.* Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978, 29.)

Still the coding-decoding model may seem to make sense. In a misleading way that is. Sometimes, that is, two people's contexts resemble one another so strongly that the responses of the two of them seem to be identical[5] when both are exposed to the same written or spoken stimulus. For example, two children are sitting in the same room watching a pornographic film on the same television at the same time that they know they shouldn't be watching. When mum comes in and says sharply "switch it off", both may reach for the off button of the same television at exactly the same time.

The above kind of instance however is rare. Someone told "switch it off" listening to the radio is likely to understand that what needs turning off is the radio and not a television. A child saying the same to an adult who is talking may get slapped for being disrespectful. A student saying it to a teacher may get suspended. A doctor saying it to a nurse looking after a patient on a life support machine may be imprisoned. A congregation in a church listening to a preacher say the same may well take him as referring to the need to turn-away from the world. Referring back to Figure 1; indeed communication by coding and decoding might exist. But that is almost beside the point. Inter-subject communication is not of this ilk.

One theory that attempts to articulate interpersonal communications is that of 'relevance'. Sperber and Wilson suggest that people will communicate in a way that will help a hearer to know what they are meaning according to the principle of relevance. According to this principle, to find the most relevant information the human mind will sift communication it receives for the meaning that has the "greatest possible cognitive effect for the smallest possible processing effort".[6]

A simple aspect of the above that I consider for the purposes of this article, is that words have *impacts*. Visually we can illustrate this using simple three dimensional models. One is that of a keyboard, in which a 'word' is represented by someone's finger. If a finger 'impacts' in one place, an *e* emerges on the screen. If in another, a *+*. In another a *b*. In another, a *space,* and so on. Yet it would clearly be wrong to say that either of these letters are encoded in or carried by the finger. A finger's striking an *m* key does not make a finger into an m. So a word the impact of which has a particular meaning, cannot be said to be that meaning, carry that meaning or even have that meaning encoded in it. Rather – meaning arises as a result of the peculiar impact of the word.

Another helpful model to illustrate this point, although a more complex one, is the human body. 'Touches' on someone's body differ in meaning according to position, speed of impact, direction of travel, impacting surface, person doing the impacting, and so on. A girl's putting her finger on my lips is different from an old man putting his finger on my lips. A hand on my shoulder gently from a friend may mean encouragement, but a pin prick at the same point an act of aggression. Someone jovially punching the palm of my hand is a playful act of greeting but punching my bottom (ear, foot, head etc.) could be quite different. Yet in each of the above cases to suggest that the meaning of the act is in the finger, pin or hand is clearly nonsense. Rather, meaning arises from the *impact* of a finger/pin/hand on a context.[7]

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[5] i.e. for practical purposes they are very close.

[6] Dan Sperber, and Deidre Wilson, *Relevance: communication and cognition* (second edition), Oxford: Blackwell. http://cogweb.ucla.edu/Abstracts/Sperber_Wilson_95.html (accessed 17th March 2007), 1995.

[7] Many more questions of context would need to be asked to acquire the 'meaning' such as: Whose cultural norms are being presupposed? Am I standing or lying down? What time of day is it? Who is responsible for the impact? Am I playing rugby at the time, ...and so on.

Words can very helpfully, I suggest, be understood as 'impacts'. While a choice of word can affect the nature of the impact (a tap on the shoulder is different from a prick on the shoulder) the 'meaning' of the impact depends on many factors in addition to and other than the word itself.

Implications of the Impact Model of Language in Intercultural Context

The implications of this model of language for intercultural communication are I suggest widespread and profound. I will here consider such, especially its ramifications for the missions' task of the church, and more widely for the majority world (or Third World) 'development' project as a whole. I take East Africa[8] as my case study.

The colonial power for Kenya having been Britain, the language of choice for higher-levels of governance in colonial times was English. The same applied to British colonial Africa as a whole – Zambia, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Uganda, etc. and beyond. This adoption of the colonial language for official uses in these countries was not a part of the original plan of the colonialists. Rather, 'independence' was thought to be a distant ideal that would take many more decades to achieve up to late in the colonial era. "Buffeted by the notion that the spread of English brought civil unrest a wave of fear of English education swept across the British empire" records Brutt-Griffler,[9] indicating the awareness of the British Colonial authorities of the problems being produced by the wide spread of English. The British carried out indirect rule as a way of attempting to delegate authority to the people to rule themselves: "Purged of those elements offensive to British morality, it was thought that traditional African institutions could provide a stable base for British rule".[10] This long-term plan was upset by, amongst other things, certain African people's acquisition of a detailed knowledge of English and the ability to use it to tilt the political balance in their own favour.[11]

The anticipated course of waiting many more decades before handing over power being denied to colonial authorities, the need to hand over governance suddenly became urgent in the 1950s and 1960s. Political and other structures designed for 'indirect rule', British settlement and (probably) exploitation in the interests of the mother-country, had to be adapted quickly for African self-rule for which they were not originally designed.

One clear (and really rather embarrassing for the British) fact – was that power was left in the English language. Structures of delegation of power to regions and indigenous languages, upheld as they were through principle and not through a natural evolution of power balance, collapsed.[12] Indigenous languages were disenfranchised. Power was centred in English.[13]

An increasingly globalised world has affected the playing out of this situation. Had Kenya been totally 'cut off' from its ex-colonial ruler, things might have been very different. One would expect that imported political structures and languages would have been severely

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[8] My own experience is especially in Nyanza Province in western Kenya.

[9] Janina Brutt-Griffler, *World English: a study of its development.* Bristol, Multilingual Matters, 2002, 77.

[10] Kenneth R. Curtis, 'Indirect Rule.' James Stuart Olson, and Robert Shadle, *Historical Dictionary of the British Empire*, Connecticut, Greenwood Publishing Group, 1996, 569-570, 569.

[11] Brutt, *World English, op.cit.,* 78.

[12] That is, the power delegated to ethnic groups was due to policy emerging from Whitehall, and not as a result of indigenous peoples having forced the hand of colonial rulers in Nairobi or elsewhere. The British themselves had trouble protecting "the 'native authorities' from obsolescence" in the 1950s, according to Curtis (1996:570).

[13] Shadrack Malo, *Jaluo*, Nairobi, Professor J.O. Malo, 1999, 2.

tested, and the Kenyan people would have opted for something much more closely resembling their pre-colonial ways of life. Instead though, emerging African states found themselves in a new global order of the rule of international law and the administrative influence of the UN. The language dominating this new order, thanks especially to the ever growing power of the USA, was English. Africa's own people were traditionally animists living by subsistence. Much real power (economic, military, political and so on) originated outside the continent. It came in largely through English.

What has often not been sufficiently realised is that English has continued to grow on the same basis – on the back of the fact that real power has been coming from outside of the continent. Any inadequacies of English on the home front in Africa have easily been eclipsed by the advantages of its use as a means of accessing international networks. Let me illustrate this using a simple example. Imagine a Kenyan man running a business. This business could be run most effectively using his home language, say Kikuyu, as such will ensure that all people understand each other clearly. Let's say this way he would make $10,000 per year. Should he instead choose to use English to communicate in his business, his profit will be lower because of the confusion that will arise as a result, so maybe his profit will be only $5,000 annually. But because the advantages gained through benefitting from inputs from the international sector should English be used are (say) $8,000 – the profit-maximising businessman will put up with local 'confusion'[14] for the sake of having a part of the international pie and in the example above make an annual profit of $13,000.[15]

The preference for English found in much of Africa, in other words, does not arise from advantages gained internally, but from relationships obtained externally. The 'cost' of maintaining this access to the external has, I suggest, been major. Once the decision was made to opt for 'internal incompetence and dependence but links with external powers', there has been no clear or easy way out. Kenya's internal affairs have come increasingly to be externally controlled. Many Kenyan people appear to be resigned to that state of affairs.

While in some ways resigned to external control, African people are clearly not so resigned in other ways. 'Corruption' is a clear demonstration of this. Kenya is said to be the third most corrupt nation in Africa.[16] I am not sure whether it is also the 'third most outside controlled' but I wouldn't be surprised if this was also the case. Kenya's people do not take outside dictation of their lives entirely passively. Instead, they specialise in appropriating funds for their own priorities, even when such is contrary to donor wishes. Sometimes this is no doubt because the wishes of donors, guided as they are by non-indigenous languages, may be absurd. Sometimes it is just a way of demonstrating an active and independent 'spirit'.

Unlike some other African countries or regions, East Africa does have another language 'available' that could take over from English.[17] That is Kiswahili. Already having received much scholarly attention inside and outside of East Africa, Kiswahili seems to be constantly growing in strength. One sign of this is the recent introduction of compulsory Kiswahili into primary and secondary schooling in Uganda – a step already taken by Kenya some years

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[14] Of linguistic origin.
[15] $5,000 plus $8,000 = $13,000.
[16] Peter Orengo, 'TI ranks Kenya third most corrupt Sub-Saharan country.' *The Standard.* 8.06.2009. http://www.eastandard.net/InsidePage.php?id=1144016332&cid=4 (accessed 8.07.09), 2009.
[17] Countries such as Zambia and Zimbabwe do not have an indigenous language that unites their whole country.

earlier.[18] There are indications that Kiswahili could take over more official language status from English in parts of East Africa in the foreseeable future.

One reason behind the ongoing widespread promotion from the outside of English in East Africa is the supposition that it enables development and technological advance. This generally supposes a model of language that we have here critiqued – that assumes that language 'carries meaning'. Because words do not 'carry meaning' but rather they merely contribute to the creation of meaning by impacting contexts (including linguistic contexts), I have shown that this 'advantage' of English is largely mythical. Instead, use of English in East Africa often creates considerable confusion – and the more so as globalising powers prevent the development of independent 'Englishes' outside of the original native English speaking world. It is this kind of confusion, presumably, that caused Bujo to say on behalf of African theologians: "we should write ...in African languages because otherwise there are so many misunderstandings".[19] I will continue this critique of the use of foreign languages in governance in Africa using a further argument below.[20]

Language as Recipient and Donor

Sapir and Whorf argued that language can *determine* thinking.[21] The strong deterministic version of their theory has largely been discredited, and rightly so, as it would imply that use of a particular language somehow 'forced' the speaker into certain behavioural tracks. These days many people would go along with "moderate Whorfianism".[22] This is because, I suggest, it is possible to use a language without complying with the original cultural contours of that language.[23]

What I want to point out here, however, is that doing the above is as far as native speakers are concerned for their language to be *abused*.[24] A language that is not used in the way that it is used by its native speakers will according to native speakers be being misused. This is in the sense that because communication is effected through the interaction of language with context language is normally used in a certain way in relation to a certain context. This context includes the physical, climatic, social, historical, as well as the linguistic context and so on. An outsider or foreigner will not be able to know the nature of all these as perceived by native speakers of a language. Hence a foreigner, even after having learned a new language, will inevitably 'use it' in relation to different contexts to those supposed by native speakers. As a

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[18] Arthur and Abimanya Hope Baguma, 'Uganda: Why Isn't Swahili Compulsory in Schools?' The New Vision: Uganda's Leading Website. 28th April 2009. http://allafrica.com/stories/200904290112.html (accessed 8th July 2009)

[19] Cited in Stinton (Diane, B. Stinton, *Jesus of Africa: voices of contemporary African Christology*, New York, Orbis Books, 2004, 141) – see also above.

[20] Note my emphasis on use of language in 'governance'. Learning of English, or another language, as a second language is in my view not at issue. It is the use of a non-indigenous language to run one's affairs that I suggest can be harmful.

[21] Daniel Chandler, 'The Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis.' http://WWW.aber.ac.uk/media/documents/short/whorf.htm/ (accessed 3.03.02), nd.

[22] Chandler, 'Sapir-Whorf', *op.cit.*

[23] I have expanded on this point at length in another article: Harries (Jim Harries, 'Intercultural Dialogue – an overrated means of acquiring understanding examined in the context of Christian Mission to Africa', *Exchange, Journal of Missiological and Ecumenical Research*, 37, (2008), 174-189, (176-178).)

[24] The term used by Cenos and Valencia is "deviation" (Jasone Cenoz and Jose F. Valencia, 'Cross-cultural Communication and Interlanguage Pragmatics: American vs. European Requests', In: Lawrence F. Bouton, (ed.) *Pragmatics and Language Learning. Monograph Series Volume 7*. 1996, 41-54, (50)).

result; the way they use the words of the language will not be the same as that of native speakers.

As the use of the same words in a different context will change their impact, so we suppose will the use of different words in the same context. In order for English used in East Africa to have an equivalent impact (however assessed) to that in the native English-speaking world, it must be used differently in response to the different context. If it is used in the same way as it is used in the native-English speaking world, then clearly its impact in East Africa will be different. In today's globalising world, where Africans see English as giving them access to the global world, English that is spoken is intended to be the same as that in the West.[25] It follows that it will not make good sense in its non-Western context.[26]

We have ascertained that the meaning of a word arises from its impact onto a context. The nature of the impact will depend on how a word is used. That is, the context (historical, social, interpersonal, physical, economic, linguistic etc.) in which it is used, plus the force and direction it is given and so on, will determine the meaning. I now want to consider the linguistic context into which a word is introduced in more detail.

A new word introduced into an existing language will find the existing space to be crowded.[27] Without good reason to the contrary, may be rejected. The process of rejection of words that are introduced to a language is constantly going on. If it were not, then all the world's languages would have grown unmanageably large. Sometimes, however, on the basis of certain criterion, a word is accepted into a language. Thus the language grows. Not only does it grow as a result, but also the rest of the language adjusts to the new word(s). As a result of the taking on board of a new word, many of the other words in the language are used differently. The new word will be used differently in the context of its new host language than the way in which the same word was used in its language of origin.

This can helpfully be compared to the role of a new person entering a community. In one 'community', say his family, a man is a father. In another he is a work-colleague. In another he may be a thief, or a church elder, or a football team-mate. The person is the same, but the people who respond to him and the ways they respond to him, i.e. the ways in which he is 'used', differ majorly in each case.

The contexts that I want to look at here are linguistic. Hence *safari* (a word originating in Kiswahili) is used in English to mean a trip to see wild animals in Africa, whereas in Kiswahili its impact is typically much more similar to that of 'a journey' in English. Because a newly introduced word enters a crowded space and is 'impacted from all sides' in that space, it is extremely difficult to predict just how it will be used in that space. What can be said with certainty, however, is that its use will be different from that in its original location; and that this difference may be major.

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[25] R.A. Kanyoro Musimbi, 'The Politics of the English Language in Kenya and Tanzania.' Jenny Cheshire (ed.), *English around the World*: *sociolinguistic perspectives,* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991, 402-419, (403).

[26] For a discussion of the options between translating in a way that appears to be true to the original, as against that which results in 'successful communication' see Gutt (Ernest-August Gutt, 'The so-what Factor and the New Audience.' 2nd keynote paper presented at the Bible Translation Conference February 2008, "The Bible translator and audience considerations", 5-6 Feb 2008, ETP, UK Campus, Horsleys Green, UK. http://homepage.ntlworld.com/ernst-august.gutt/ (accessed 11.06.2008))

[27] George Steiner, *After Babel: aspects of language and translation* (third edition), Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998, 314.

This means that once a word (or thing or person etc.) enters a new space (such as a new language), those who knew it in its original space will only have a limited ability at predicting its role in the new space. Hence (to take our above parallel example) a man's child may not be the best person to predict how his father will function as part of a football team. Similarly a man's boss at work may not know how good a father he is. Intelligent interaction with the word/person/thing in a new space will require a close knowledge (preferably as insider) of that new space.

Coming back to our main example in this article, we have said that when a word or a language (say English) enters East Africa, its use and impact changes. If adopted and not ejected in East Africa, then the way that word (or that entire language) will be used will arise from the nature of existing cultural, linguistic, and other contexts. Its use will be correctly understood from within East Africa. Note that we are talking of one word (or one language) entering into a context. The context is the larger entity. While undoubtedly the context will adjust to the word (or language), the adjustment of the latter to the context will typically be much greater than the other way around.[28]

East Africa[29] is constantly receiving inputs from outside its borders. Some it accepts in various ways, others it rejects. The identity of every new 'input' (person, thing, word, etc.) is transformed as it becomes part of the East African context. We can add that while a process of adjustment occurs on both sides on every occasion, the changes imposed on a 'new thing' are (almost invariably) greater than the changes the new thing imposes on the overall East African community.[30]

Another analogy that illustrates the above is that of two cups, one called R containing red liquid representing the UK, the other called Y containing yellow liquid representing East Africa. Recent decades have witnessed a lot of pouring from R to Y. That is red liquid poured into yellow liquid, then into pink liquid (as the colours mix) but notably never into red liquid. That is to say that the context of the reception of red liquid in this process is always Y. This continues to be the case even when Y ceases to be yellow and becomes pink. Even when the pink begins to resemble red – the impact of the original yellow will continue to be felt as the red coming in will have been transformed as it entered into the original yellow-ness.

In other words, continuing with the above analogy, red does not enter red! Words, things, or people entering East Africa from the UK will always be received differently than the same 'entering' the UK or as found in the UK. Socially speaking for example, unless British people move to East Africa and live *totally in isolation* from African people, the African people are bound to transform those British people's language, way of life, culture etc. in various ways. It is a fallacy to think, therefore, that the impact or meaning of a particular word / thing or person in East Africa will be the same as that in the UK, just because East Africa uses some English.

The practical conclusion I am moving towards I think is evident; in order to take its place in its new context, what is of foreign origin will be transformed. To fail to account for and be aware of such a transformative process is to misunderstand intercultural communication. As a

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[28] An illustration: a tennis player who joins a football team will have to make more adjustments than a football team who has a new member who used to play tennis, and so on.

[29] As of course every other region in the world.

[30] The nature of 'human communities' imply boundaries to languages in use. For example, human communities all need provision of water, words for greeting, and means for resolving conflicts, and so on.

result of such transformation the use of an international language does not necessarily engender understanding. The familiarity of terms can easily give a deceptive and false impression of mutual comprehension. Such deception can be very harmful.

The Impact of Western English on East Africa

Attempts continue to be made to transplant English to much of Africa in its original form: "… both Kenya and Tanzania, despite political pronouncements on adapting the English language to the local usage still consider British English as the ideal for school textbooks".[31] Educational institutions prepare students in Africa for further study in the UK, the USA or Australia (native English speaking peoples). Musimbi cites a book produced by the Kenyan government titled *Teaching English in Kenya Secondary Schools*: "… the importance of English as the most widely used international language in the world has increased so much that ability in English is often the yardstick by which young Kenyans are judged".[32] The kinds of dynamics that have been explored in this article are being ignored. What are the implications of this? I attempt to illustrate some outcomes of such ignoring of the realities mentioned above, here using real-life examples from Kenya:

1. The Rise of Sheng '*Sheng'* is said to be constantly on the rise in Kenya.[33] Equivalent 'street' languages are also found in the neighbouring countries of Uganda, Tanzania and Ethiopia.[34] *Sheng*, created by youth, is "a code that makes good use of all the major languages spoken in the country".[35] In Kenya, despite much opposition to *sheng,* a dictionary of *sheng* has already been produced.[36]

Sheng seems to be an outcome of the 'artificial' (outside funded) imposition of a language into Africa, that does not have roots in Africa and is not allowed to adjust to the African context.[37] English does not fit to the African way of life. But because English is used to 'run' the 'modern sector' in countries like Kenya, neither are African languages like Kiswahili or local mother tongues given opportunity to grow to appropriate that which is increasingly becoming a normal part of life especially for urban youth. One result of this is that the youth reject all the other entrenched and inflexible languages and invent their own, that are to many languages of backbiting and deceit,[38] and threatening the sanctity of East African society.

2. Language in the Church   A research project carried out by students of Kima International School of Theology into what is the language for use in the church in East Africa, came up with various interesting findings. One student reported having visited a Pentecostal Church in Kisumu city in Kenya. The church was well attended, we were

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[31] Musimbi, 'The Politics', *op.cit.,* 403.

[32] Musimbi, 'The Politics', *op.cit.,* 405.

[33] "… it has become a characteristic linguistic phenomenon of Nairobi and other multiethnic urban areas in Kenya," (Peter Githinji, 'Bazes and Their Shibboleths: Lexical Variation and Sheng Speakers' Identity in Nairobi', *Nordic Journal of African Studies,* 15(4), 2006, 443–472, (444).

[34] According to sharing by students researching on 'the language to be used in church' at Kima International School of Theology from May to July 2009.

[35] Clara Momanyi, 'The Effects of 'Sheng' in the Teaching of Kiswahili in Kenyan Schools', *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, vol.2, no.8, March 2009, 127-138, (136).

[36] See http://africanlanguages.com/swahili/sheng/ for an online dictionary of *sheng*.

[37] See Githinji (Bazes, *op.cit.,* 444) for more theories as to reasons for the arising of *sheng*.

[38] This is how *sheng* was considered by visitors to Kima International School of Theology in Western Kenya who came in June 2009 to talk about 'the language to be used in church'.

told.[39] All services were conducted entirely in English, the student told us, but yet informal conversation after the service was universally in Kiswahili. To these, as it seems to many church-goers in Kenya, what is important is not understanding of the words used in a church service, but has more to do with the feeling of being modern and *with the times* which arises when English is used – a kind of cargo cult.[40]

3. Out-oriented Education An incredible feature of the educational system in Kenya by comparison with those in Western nations is that it is not oriented to its own needs and context, but to that of others. If it recognised the Kenyan context and were a means of changing it, that would be one thing. But instead, its being strongly modelled on British education means that the Kenyan educational system assumes that which is not there. Both linguistically and in terms of curriculum – the educational system in Kenya prepares its people to function in a society that does not exist. This includes even the university system that 'should' be interacting with local realities. Success in Kenyan education is not the ability to operate in the local context, but (it appears often) the ability to function in the West, or to latch onto the Western sector in Kenya.[41]

4. Stultification of Indigenous Initiative As already illustrated above with the example of the Kikuyu business man, a society's being rewarded more for copying than for intelligence, is going to stultify indigenous initiative. In other words, forcing people to follow the intelligence of others as if it is their own is slowing them down in developing their own.

5. The Role of Kiswahili Originating on the coast and containing a significant Arabic vocabulary, Kiswahili spread far inland reaching Western Tanzania, Uganda and Congo many years ago. While known to have been spread frequently by traders, Kiswahili is widely recognised as the language of the church in East Africa.[42] Its spread and rise in popularity continues. Outsiders to East Africa may be surprised at how many local people despise fellow Africans who would deign to use English in talking with fellow Africans. Kiswahili is much more acceptable as an inter-ethnic communication medium. Politically Kiswahili is also increasingly recognised – as illustrated by its adoption into formal education in Uganda (where it is already in use by the police and military, as in Kenya and Tanzania) in recent years. It appears that Kiswahili may be being groomed eventually to take over official roles from English perhaps throughout the East African block? Certainly those who recognise the problems caused by the use of English are likely to be in favour of this happening.

6. The Pragmatics of African Leaders Not all African leaders share Westerners' view of Western superiority. Western 'superiority', that is, can look different from an African perspective. Linguistically many Westerners come across as very naïve in Africa. Many are mono-lingual – confined to the use of English. Given what has already been said

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[39] In the course of discussion regarding 'the language to be used in church'. The student was Lawi Haile-Selassie.

[40] The use of English embodies "… particularly for the young–the 'feel' of hope, of material advance, of … mass consumption, of international exchange … of technocracy…" says Steiner (*After Babel, op.cit.,* 493).

[41] See also Githinji ('Bazes', *op.cit.*).

[42] This was a finding from research by students on 'the language to be used in church' at Kima International School of Theology in Kenya from May to July 2009.

above in this article that is a major drawback when it comes to understanding African contexts.

African people on the other hand, demonstrate much ingenuity. The appointing of the son of a man raised in Africa as president of the USA caps the list of their achievements! Whereas almost all Westerners coming to Africa are forced to float on the surface of African society through lack of linguistic and cultural acumen, many African people can find themselves much more at home on both sides of the divide. Most, if not all, Western missionaries coming to Africa are forced to rely for their own upkeep on donors amongst their own people. Many Africans who go to the West quickly convince Western institutions and people to support them and their needs, often to the extent that they can send money 'home'. In Africa African people can be 'fellow tribesmen' and then, helped by anti-racism legislation in the West and the vast Western education system that spreads deep into Africa, they can also be 'insiders' in the West. Positive discrimination in favour of Blacks may be enshrined in law in the USA[43] but certainly from Africa it looks very much as if 'our sons' are very bright when they land on top of the pile on Whiteman's home turf'![44] The Africans clearly appear to be the clever ones in the system.[45]

Cries from the West that the system is built on dependency are conveniently ignored.[46] The 'proof of the pudding' is far too evident for many Africans to be over concerned by this. Their calculated actions (even if often considered to be corrupt by the West) are clearly enormously fruitful, as evidenced by the massive amounts of money that they convince Western donors to give: "Sometimes African people can be dumbfounded by the way the globe seems to see them as the 'basket case of the world'. From the inside, we in Africa see ourselves, with very good reason, as having made and continuing to make enormous progress."[47]

The fact that dependence is a much more attractive option for many Africans than the poverty that arises from its absence should continue to result in alarm-bells ringing in the West. What has not always been recognised but should be clear from a reading of this article – is that

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[43] As referred to, although not supported by Knechtges (Eric Knechtges, 'Positive discrimination' doesn't belong in U.S. society.' http://www.collegiatetimes.com/stories/6742 (accessed 9th July 2009), 2006.)

[44] Surely there is much discussion about the value of 'positive discrimination' in the USA and elsewhere. It existence could be used to devalue African people's achievements in the Diaspora. Even where not enshrined in law, however, my personal experience tells me that it is very widespread in the West, or at least much of the native-English speaking West.

[45] There does not appear to be a system of positive discrimination in favour of Whites in Africa equivalent to that in favour of other races in many Western nations. This is for many reasons, considered in more detail in: Harries, Jim, 2007. 'Issues of Race in Relating to Africa: linguistic and cultural insights that could avoid traps.' http://www.civilizationoflove.org/httpdocs/archives/faceofafrica/Jim_Harries.pdf (accessed 28th January 2010)

[46] "A major barrier to development in Africa has been the two-sided psychological and operational state of "dependency." Evolving from the historical realities of slavery, colonialism and the rise and fall of socialism, the African tendency to look to the international community to solve Africa's problems undermined local initiative. Weighed by guilt and national interest, the West/North frequently assumed responsibility to identify solutions for Africa, based on the implicit assumption that Africans were not capable of taking care of themselves. The ensuing relationship of African dependency fundamentally undermined attempts to transform Africa; no one anywhere has produced sustainable development unless the people concerned take responsibility". (Constance J. Freeman, 'Summary of Dr. Freeman's paper.' Conference that was to have been held on 'The erosion of African dependency' in Nairobi, 24th January 2006, under the auspices of the *Southern African Regional Poverty Network*, http://www.sarpn.org.za/documents/d0001814/index.php (accessed 9th July 2009))

[47] Jim Harries, *Jim's Journal*. 2011 http://www.jim-mission.org.uk/journal/j201102.pdf (accessed 9th March 2011)

linguistics has a role to play in countering dependency and the massive risk to human life and prosperity implied by it. The current system in which Africa builds on a non-local language that butters the African bread in favour of dependency and deceit (that is implicit in ongoing dependence for many social and other functions on African languages while Western languages are official) is far from satisfactory. There is a desperate need for recognition of and investment, even by Westerners, into African languages. Already widespread regional languages like Kiswahili are certainly a case in point. The acquisition of even more detailed and close knowledge of African ways requires Westerners to familiarise themselves with mother-tongues learned in context.

A common language is not a guarantee of good relations and development. The model being promoted by the European Community should be making this clear to the world. Much more powerful, the ongoing effects of the history of which enable European unity, is the unity brought by a common allegiance to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. While much of Africa is very Christian, God in Africa is often (whether overtly recognised or not) the White man.[48] This is another source of the continent's problematic state.

Conclusion

The article presents a case for the *necessity* of the use of indigenous languages for the effective achievement of development in Africa. In the process it challenges the credibility and indigenous value of much that passes as 'education', including theological education, using English in Anglophone Africa today. Perhaps the use of English is a root cause for Africa's much lamented ongoing 'poverty'?

The article begins by looking at basic linguistic theory. It questions many existing models of communication through the use of language that are based on coding and decoding. It understands words as having impacts on contexts, much as a finger's impacting a typewriter produces letters. This linguistic theory applied to East Africa with due consideration of power issues, reveals that the popularity of 'foreign' languages such as English arises from an interest in piggy-backing on the international sector and may not be an aid to indigenous understanding.[49]

The author suggests a modified application of Sapir Whorf's hypothesis on language determinism – that failure to use a language according to its indigenous categories is to native speakers a misuse of their language.[50] Such can interfere with communication processes. Because the impact even of a familiar word in a foreign language is certainly different from that in the language of origin, and because the East African context will dominate the impact of an outside language like English on it, the assumption that English will function in East

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[48] (See Harries, Jim, 2011. ''The Name of God in Africa' and related contemporary theological, development and linguistic concerns.' 1-22 In: Harries, Jim, 2011. *Vulnerable Mission; insights into Christian Mission to Africa from a position of vulnerability*. Pasadena: William Carey Library.). I suggest in this article that 'African theology' cannot be done using English. When attempts are made to do so, the White man inevitably appears to be G(g)od.

[49] Musimbi, 'The Politics', *op.cit.,* 405.

[50] This is considered in the area of 'pragmatics'. For example see Bardovi-Harlig (Kathleen Bardovi-Harlilg, 'Pragmatics and Language Teaching: bringing pragmatics and pedagogy together, Lawrence F. Bouton, (ed.) *Pragmatics and Language Learning. Monograph Series Volume ,* 1996, 21- 39).

Africa as it does in the West is found to be incorrect. Hence again the usefulness of English as educational media for East-Africans is questioned.

Some outcomes of the widespread use of English as language of instruction for schools, and as official language for governance are given in the case of Kenya. The lack of fit of English in Kenya is resulting amongst other things in the rise of *Sheng* (a new language being used in Kenya's urban areas that combines existing languages) that is creating confusion especially in urban centres. The presence of English in the upper strata of Kenyan life is stunting the growth of other languages.

This is an appeal to outsiders to cease slanting aid and other inputs into East Africa strongly in favour of English speakers as is the case at present. More specifically this author's concern is with the church – that God's word be presented to and made relevant to people in a language that they understand, and as a result for the confusion between the White man and God in East Africa to cease. Western missionaries, it is suggested, should carry out their ministry with African people using African languages.