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English in Kenya or Kenyan English?

Introduction

The present monograph is based on my doctoral dissertation and is targeted at researching the characteristic features of English used in Kenya, also taking into consideration the sociolinguistic factors. The aim of this study is to confirm or reject the status of Kenyan English – a hypothetical new variety of postcolonial English.

The book consists of six chapters (two introductory and four analytical), Conclusions and seven Appendices. It opens with Chapter one which provides (1) the historical and sociolinguistic background for English in Kenya, (2) an account of Schneider's Dynamic Model for postcolonial Englishes used as a reference point in this study, (3) a review of related literature and an outline of the previous research into the issue of English in East Africa and, finally, (4) a presentation of the aims of the study.

Chapter two contains a brief outline of problems, methods and tools connected with corpus linguistics as applied in this study and discusses the issues of language contact found relevant in light of this study.

Chapter three is based on the fieldwork data collected by the author in Kenya and attempts to clarify the status of English, Kiswahili and tribal languages in light of Labov's extralinguistic variables (2001: 147): age, gender, education, social background and occupation.

Chapter four contains a quantitative comparison of the selected stylistic features of English in Kenya (ICE-K) and English in Great Britain (ICE-GB) to decide upon differences in formality levels between a non-native, multilingual and a native, monolingual use. The chi square test is used to confirm the statistical significance of the findings.

Chapters five and six offer a qualitative analysis of the characteristic features of English in Kenya. Chapter five concentrates on Africanisms in the ICE-K, which are presented in light of various theories of borrowing. Also, this chapter contains their semantic, grammatical and stylistic analyses. Chapter six focuses on morphological and syntactic features as well as productive word formation patterns, as reflected in the ICE-K in comparison to the universal criteria for new varieties of English as set up by Kortmann (2008: xxv-xxix) and Szmrecsanyi — Kortmann (2009: 68). This is done in order to facilitate the future comparative studies of various emerging and emancipated varieties of English.

The results of the analyses performed in this study are summarized in the Conclusions, where a number of broader observations and closing remarks are made concerning social, stylistic, semantic, morphological and syntactic aspects of English in Kenya. In an attempt to put the findings of this study into the wider context of the postcolonial varieties of English, the results of this study are summarized and confronted with Schneider's Dynamic Model. Finally, some suggestions for further research are put forward.

In the course of preparing my work I have had an occasion to be grateful to a number of people and institutions. First of all, the completion of this monograph would not have been possible without the support, encouragement and advice from my supervisor Professor Jerzy Wełna from the Institute of English Studies at the University of Warsaw, for which I wish to express my warmest gratitude. Secondly, I would like to thank all the Kenyan informants who agreed to be part of this research and with their dedication proved to be an incredible inspiration and motivation to finish it. As regards the theoretical framework of this monograph, I have done the most extensive parts of this research as the Academic Visitor at the Faculty of English, University of Cambridge in 2010/11, financed thanks to a scholarship from the Clifford and Mary Corbridge Trust. During the course of this research parts of this study have been presented at several international conferences financed with the support of the University of Warsaw and finally published in Budohoska (2011a & b) and (2012a, b, c & d).

Chapter one
The history and status of English in Kenya

1.0. Preliminary remarks

It is hard to estimate how many people in the contemporary world speak English, since already almost 30 years ago Quirk claimed that English has become the language "on which the sun does not set, whose users never sleep" (Quirk 1985: 1). Today, English enjoys the official, semi-official or an even informally special status in over seventy countries worldwide. And if we combine it with the number of speakers who use it as a means of international communication it becomes clear that the non-native speakers form a majority. These statistics alone suggest that English is no longer synonymous with British or American Standard but rather that a number of varieties all over the world are in the process of emerging (Swann 2007: 11).

Before examining the *International Corpus of English* for Kenya (from now onwards referred to as the ICE-K) and drawing conclusions about the Kenyan variety of English it is essential to become familiarized with the history and status of the English language in that country. Taking into account the general characteristics of the Kenyan society before, during and after the period of British colonisation allows one to achieve a better understanding of the consequences that the historical events had on the linguistic situation. The sections below contain a brief description of Kenya's historical background followed by an account of the sociolinguistic situation. This is followed by a brief characteristics of postcolonial Englishes, a review of related literature, and finally a statement of the purpose of this study is formulated.

1.1. Historical background

In the spread of English around the world, the process of colonisation clearly played a significant role. Leith defines British colonisation as the "sometimes forcible establishment of communities of English speakers, who maintained economic and cultural links with England and who positioned themselves in a relation of power with pre-existing inhabitants." (Leith 2007: 117). This defini-

tion, being accurate in the context of Kenya, most importantly lacks in a description of the linguistic aspect which in the context of the postcolonial varieties of English needs to be accounted for.

Colonisation processes which started at the end of the 16th century had three distinguishable underlying motives: economic, e.g. profits from trade; social, e.g. overwhelming unemployment in the homeland; and political, e.g. international competition. And although each colony is unique in its character the general pattern of events was: settlement, political incorporation and nationalist reaction of culturally distinct communities (Leith 2007: 119-120).

Colonies in Africa began being established after 1880 and within two decades practically the whole continent was taken over by the Europeans. British colonies, consisting mostly of East and West African territories, were settled by small numbers of English speaking officials. The majority of population were native Africans and only their small proportion gained access to the English language and to education, which was initially provided by missionaries.

Undeniably the settlement of the British in Kenya was the turning point in the country's history and a decisive factor in shaping the linguistic reality in existence today. Inhabited by numerous different tribes, with different languages, Kenya created a peculiar context for the English language to evolve in. Over the years, English influenced the lives of Kenyans in the rural and urban areas, notwithstanding their education, occupation or tribe.

When discussing the historical background of Kenya one must constantly bear in mind the fact that it was not a unified nation at the time the British claimed it as a colony in 1910. It was rather "a plural society that encompasse[d] within its boundaries a diverse population of ethnic nations" (Githiora 2008: 235), all with recognized rights to their languages and cultures within the country. The entity created by the British and in 1920 named Kenya (after the Kikuyu name for the highest mountain in the area: Kere-Nyaga 'Mount Kenya'), was an artificial construction devised by Europeans according to international colonial policies disregarding the original tribal distribution of the local people. In consequence separate tribes with strong ethnic identities were made to function as a single nation in a strictly designated area. Some of them had been nomadic, or spread over a larger area than the new Kenyan boundaries included. Imperial and colonial interests forced the concept of European national identity on a culturally and linguistically pluralistic people. This fact, further strengthened by a multitude of religions, made a homogeneous Kenyan identity very difficult to establish. An identity in postcolonial Kenya was hence born out of a variety of peoples confined by official boundaries imposed by the government rather than the other way around.

English was introduced early in Kenya's colonial history and because of that it has mostly been a taught language, conveyed to people through formal educa-

tion. The first schools to be set up in the colonized areas of East Africa orga-
nized by missionaries in the mid 19th century were to resemble closely the Brit-
ish standards. In consequence very quickly the ability to read, write and com-
municate in English became synonymous with being well educated. The signifi-
cance of English was strengthened by its association with better employment
opportunities, prestige and a higher salary. Access to education, however, was
seriously limited due to the low numbers of such schools, and the majority of
population was not able to acquire English.

The choice of English as a language of tuition at that time seemed to have
been a natural decision. The primary reason being that the African languages
were neither literary nor covering a wider part of the country than a particular
tribe. There was simply not enough native material to provide for the scholarly
needs of the pupils, and English translations of British texts into the native ver-
naculars at that time were scarce (McGregor 1971: 2). In consequence, since
most of the native African literature and traditions remained oral, replacing in-
digenous languages with the English language and literature in schools, contrib-
uted to the loss of the African tribal literature and cultural heritage (Odaga 1985:
xiii). Today, in the words of a Kenyan writer Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, "African
thought is imprisoned in a foreign language (...)", i.e. English (cf. Kachru 2006a:
76). As a result of that he claims that not only Kenya but other African countries
with a similar colonial history, already during the colonial period but also today
continue to be defined by people from the outside and even by themselves in
terms of languages of Europe spoken by the colonists, i.e. as English-speaking,
French-speaking or Portuguese-speaking African countries.

The missionaries controlled education in Kenya until 1911 when the coloni-
al administration took over this responsibility. Soon after, in 1919 the officials
decided that tuition should be conducted in local languages, while English
would be introduced as a foreign language. This was encouraged by the British
because by "linguistic enclosure" (Peterson 2006: 200), they had a way of main-
taining influence over Kenya. Keeping a linguistic heterogeneity meant cutting
Kenyans off from participating in the political life of their country and the whole
world. Hence in 1929 a new syllabus was introduced in Kenya making Kiswahi-
li[1] an obligatory subject in the first four years of education, and the instructional
language in secondary schools, once more putting tribal languages aside.

The situation for English in Kenya began to change after 1947 when India,
the Jewel in the Crown of the British Empire, became independent. This threat-
ened the British, who quickly became aware that in order to secure their eco-

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1   The term Kiswahili instead of Swahili is used throughout as to refer to this language
     specifically in Kenya.

nomic and political influence in Africa beyond the colonial era, a more wide-spread knowledge of English among Africans would be necessary. English became extensively taught in schools in Kenya and began to function as a second language for a larger African population. The teaching was in the hands of British teachers and once again based on English literature, e.g. Shakespeare or Dickens, hence simultaneously imposing the British culture and consistently overwhelming the tribal linguistic and cultural heritage.

The next important period in Kenya's history was the Mau Mau uprising (1952-1960). It was a conflict, including military actions, stemming from the anti-colonial atmosphere that was beginning to spread among the Kenyan population, especially the Kikuyu who formed the largest tribe and felt that they were being exploited by the British. Mau Mau was an acronym of the Kiswahili *Mzungu Aende Ulaya, Mwafrika Apate Uhuru,* meaning 'Let the European go back abroad, Let the African regain independence' which was what the Kenyan population demanded after years of British dominance. The main reason for these events was the growing feeling of economic deprivation experienced by the indigenous populations due to land being taken over by the British settlers. Despite the fact that the movement did not manage to gain support throughout the whole African population, blood was spilt and as a result of the unrest large numbers of British settlers left Kenya. Finally, in December 1963 Kenya gained independence and control of the political, social and cultural issues, opening a new chapter in her history.

After the fall of the British Empire, the emerging independent countries were determined to create new identities of their own, somehow distancing them from their earlier colonial history and the overwhelming British heritage. This could be seen in the majority of cases for the former colonies and was manifested in various ways, such as creating new national anthems, introducing new currencies, new national flags or establishing new national holidays. In the case of Kenya these shifts are very pronounced as they began with a change in the pronunciation of the name of the country itself. Under the colonial rule the accepted pronunciation was /ˈkiːnjə/ but after independence this was changed to the more local /ˈkɛnjə/ derived from the name of the first president Jomo Kenyatta. Furthermore, many geographical names and street names were changed as to reflect the Kenyan heritage and to praise the new leaders who were thought to be the founding fathers of the new nation.

Immediately after gaining independence, education was put high on the priority list of the new government. Putting an end to racial differentiation the new system guaranteed free education, finally placing more emphasis on tribal languages making them the medium of instruction (supported by Kiswahili in areas of great linguistic variation) during the first three years of the primary school.

Beyond that point, however, tribal languages are not taught, and English (still supported by Kiswahili) becomes the main medium of instruction including tertiary education. English came to be regarded as a key to modernization and a means of overcoming tribal divisions. Since the 1970s school instruction in Kenya is done almost exclusively by African teachers and based on locally published textbooks.

1.2. Sociolinguistic situation

The tribal languages in Kenya today represent three African language families: the Cushitic, the Bantu and the Nilotic. Figure 1 presents the tribal statistics for Kenya as of 2013 according to the CIA World Facctbook showing the population percentages of the biggest tribes. As can be seen the five most numerous tribes, Kikuyu, Luo, Luhya, Kalenjin and Kamba, account for over 70% of the whole population. The most significant group are speakers of Bantu languages which add up to about two thirds of the whole population. Originally, they mostly inhabited Central Kenya and the area of Lake Victoria close to the Ugandan boarder. The remaining almost one third of the population are the speakers of Nilotic languages who inhabited the remaining part of Western Kenya. The Cushitic languages are spoken by only about 3% of the population and include mostly pastoral nomads who inhabited or rather traversed with their cattle the North Eastern part of the country. Today, this pattern of distribution of the tribes is still valid to a large extent, especially in the rural areas, but Nairobi and other urban areas, due to increased mobility, are home to a mix of the representatives of all tribes.
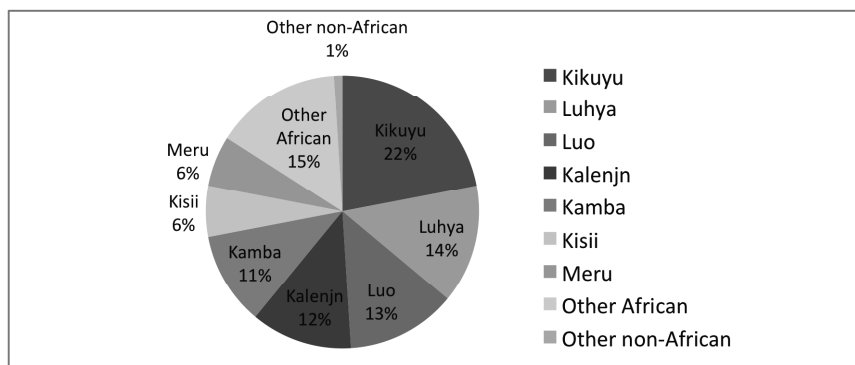

Fig. 1.   The biggest tribes in Kenya

In countries like Kenya where a vast number of languages are spoken daily by most of the population, language problems appear to be a natural addition to the everyday events. English, Kiswahili and tribal languages form a melting pot but due to numerous factors "the use of a particular language comes to be characteristic of a particular social domain in much of the same way that domains are characterized in England by the varieties of English." (Whiteley 1974a: 1). As these languages continued to be used throughout the colonial and postcolonial times, they themselves began to be associated with different emotions, prestige, etc., which apply to each of the domains. In the case of Kenya we can differentiate three such domains with different languages used respectively. The first would be the numerous tribal languages which may be linked to the rural homestead, family and traditional values. Secondly, Kiswahili may be associated with town life, trade, and certain kinds of jobs. And thirdly, English refers to government, high status jobs and education.

This distinction immediately implies large-scale bi- or multilingualism and it is true that individual speakers in Kenya often have a linguistic repertoire ranging from two to three, or even four, or five languages. The number of languages known and the level of competence are determined by the speaker's ethnic background but also to a very large extent by the socio-economic status and the level of education. The knowledge of only one, i.e. the corresponding tribal language, is rare in contemporary Kenya since even in the most remote parts of the country intertribal communication is part of day-to-day life and brings about the necessity of knowing Kiswahili (rural and urban areas) and/or English (mostly urban areas) to be able to interact.

According to Githiora (2008: 236), the traditional distinction between Kiswahili and English which continues to function, is that the former serves as the language of *solidarity* while English is regarded as the language of *power*. This is confirmed by the fact that Kiswahili is known by around two thirds of the population while English is speculated to be spoken by 10-20% of the population. Despite such low numbers of speakers English in Kenya is used in all four functions distinguished by Kachru (1982: 59-61):

(1) Instrumental function – medium of learning at various stages in the educational system of the country.
(2) Regulative function – contexts in which language is used to regulate conduct; for example, the legal system and administration.
(3) Interpersonal function – performed in two senses: first, as a link language between speakers of various (often mutually unintelligible) languages and dialects in linguistically and culturally pluralistic societies; and second, by providing a code which symbolizes modernization and elitism.
(4) Imaginative / innovative function – various literary genres.

Considering the linguistic situation it should also be pointed out that there is no single, uniform kind of an English language user in Kenya. Following Angogo — Hancock (1980: 71) the four silhouettes could be distinguished:

(1) Native English of African-born whites;
(2) Native English of blacks;
(3) Non-native English used fluently as a second language;
(4) Non-native English used with varying degrees of competence as a foreign language.

The first group of speakers (a), very limited in number and representing backgrounds, acquisition, the frequency and the competence of use different from those of the remaining three groups, was excluded from the study. The second group of speakers (b), also limited in number, has a chance to become significant in the future because an ever increasing number of indigenous Africans claim English to be their first language. According to Skandera (2003: 7), at the moment it is the fourth group (d) which has the highest number of speakers. In reality though, English as an official language is widely used in the media and at schools, hence avoiding exposure to it on an intranational level and daily basis is hardly possible. The most likely source of Kenyan English according to this distinction is therefore the language of the third group (c) consisting of the non-native second language users of English. This last group will be in the centre of attention in this study.

1.3. Postcolonial Englishes in the framework of Schneider's Dynamic Model

One of the more significant consequences of colonisation was the appearance and development of the new varieties of several European languages around the world. Depending on the circumstances some of them have remained locally spoken and kept their low social status while others became widely used, underwent the process of standardisation and gained recognition as separate languages. Among these parent-languages English undoubtedly became the most globally spread and is fast becoming the universal language enabling international communication and by that replacing all attempts of creating artificial languages like Esperanto constructed for such purposes. English, without any strict language planning has become the world's lingua franca but at the same time it ceased to be homogeneous and has fragmented into local varieties, among others Cameroon English, Ghanaian English, Indian English, Liberian