

Language Policy in Kenya: Negotiation with Hegemony

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Abstract

This paper examines language policy in Kenya from colonialism to date, with a particular focus on education. The colonial period is appraised with regard to pre and post Second World War, while the independence era is analysed as pertains the government's position and the linguistic realities among lay people. Considering that in most cases lay Kenyans use language in ways that are incongruent to the official policy, the paper raises the argument that this is both mediation and contestation with linguistic hegemony. Results of an empirical study conducted in rural and urban centres in Kenya are used to validate the argument. Though the masses have shown no plan or organisation in their reaction to linguistic hegemony, the paper argues that they have mediated and contested it through abrogation of English and the assertion of African languages, appropriation of both English and Kiswahili to the people's circumstances, and through the evolution of patois like Sheng and Engsh. While both mediation and contestation are frowned upon by sticklers to the standard languages, the paper prospects that ultimately they are bound to impact substantially on the language situation and policy in the country.

Keywords: Language policy, colonial, post-colonial, hegemony, education, mediation and contestation.

Full text: <http://www.jpanafrican.org/docs/vol3no1/3.1%20Kenya%20Language%20Policy.pdf>