

Rwanda's French-to-English “Language Switch” : A Discussion of Policy Motivations, Challenges and Implications - Paul Borg

Introduction

In 2008, the government of Rwanda—a country with a largely Francophone colonial history—attracted considerable media attention when it announced its intention to make English the primary language of school education, displacing French, which at that time functioned as the main medium of instruction in more than 95% of the nation's schools (McGreal 2009). In common with most government policy over the past two decades, the decision to implement this “language switch” (Clover 2012) can perhaps be best understood through the prism of the genocide that claimed hundreds of thousands of lives over a period of around 100 days in 1994, leaving an already impoverished country in need of complete social and economic reconstruction. Upon sketching out the politico-historical background to the genocide, this article will discuss the motivations for this radical shift in language-in-education policy, the challenges associated with its implementation, and the implications for Rwanda's society, economy and relationships with the outside world.

Politico-Historical Background

In the most basic terms, the 1994 genocide can be rationalised as the corollary of a long-standing and especially bitter rivalry between two indigenous ethnic communities—the Hutu, who currently make up around 84% of the population, and the Tutsi, who today constitute around 15% (Adekunle 2007:4). While it is certainly true that the so-called *genocidaires* were members of the Hutu community and their victims predominantly Tutsi, the underlying causal factors are manifold. Of particular relevance to the discussion here is the fact that Rwanda's post-genocide government ascribes culpability not only to the actual perpetrators of the genocide, but also to Belgium, the former colonial power, and perhaps especially to France, which enjoyed a close relationship with the Hutu government in power at the time of the genocide.

Despite the overwhelming numerical superiority of the Hutu, political power in pre-colonial Rwanda resided in the hands of the Tutsi, in accordance with a centuries-old system known as *ubuhake*. No consensus exists, however, as regards the state of inter-community relations. Some, like Bruce Jones (2001), have emphasised the fact that the communities coexisted peacefully until the arrival of European colonialists, whose excessive

pro-Tutsi bias provoked discontent among the Hutu population. Others have highlighted the inequality and lack of cohesion in pre-colonial Rwanda. Julius Adegunle (2007), for instance, describes a social order in which cattle-owning Tutsi 'patrons' were 'served' by their impoverished Hutu 'clients'. What most commentators do seem to agree on, however, is the highly divisive influence of colonial rule. In Adegunle's view, the ethos of colonialism did not merely coincide with that of *ubuhake*, but deepened further the social divide (Adegunle 2007:110).

Despite its long associations with the Francophone world, Rwanda was first colonised by Germany, whose forces arrived in the 1890s. According to James Orbinski, the German colonial authorities made the Tutsi their "chosen native overlords", having declared them to be more intelligent and 'European-like' than their Hutu counterparts (Orbinski 2008:41). Following Germany's defeat in World War I, administrative control over Rwanda was handed to Belgium under a League of Nations Mandate. The Belgians continued the German policy of granting preferential treatment to the Tutsi, allowing local power to become centralised in the hands of a single Tutsi chief. In 1933, in a move regarded by many as the institutionalisation of inter-community division, the Belgian authorities began issuing identity cards that classified Rwandans according to their 'ethnicity': as 'Hutu', 'Tutsi' or 'Twa' (Magnarella 2005: 808). Despite the existence of an indigenous mother tongue shared by virtually all Rwandans, i.e. Kinyarwanda, French was made the principal language of public administration and education, and consequently became the language of highest social status.

At the end of World War II, Belgium retained control over Rwanda under a United Nations trusteeship agreement. Amid a general tide of anti-colonialist sentiment throughout Africa, the Belgians attempted to introduce reforms aimed at fostering democratic political institutions, but faced opposition from some Tutsi leaders. In the late 1950s, the Belgians abandoned their long-standing pro-Tutsi stance, switching support to the Hutu. As Anthony Turton (2008) has explained, the Hutu launched a "social revolution", during the course of which some 10,000 Tutsi were massacred between 1959 and 1964. By the time Rwanda gained its independence in 1962, political power had become firmly entrenched in Hutu hands, while thousands of Tutsi had fled abroad, mainly to Uganda.

With the withdrawal of the Belgian authorities from the newly-independent Rwandan state, France began to take a more active interest, moving in, as Andrew Wallis (2007) puts it, "to take advantage of the cultural and linguistic roots already in place" (Wallis 2007:10). It is difficult to overstate the determination with which French governments, irrespective of their ideological persuasion, have striven to maintain a linguistic and cultural influence in Africa, particularly in the face of what they regard as an onslaught from English (see Melvern 2000; Wallis 2007). In this regard, Gérard Prunier (1995) has drawn attention to the so-called "Fashoda Syndrome", a tendency among French policy-makers to view the whole world as "a cultural, political and economic battlefield between

France and the 'Anglo-Saxons'" (Prunier 1995:105). According to Linda Melvern, France regarded Rwanda as especially important because of its location on a "political fault-line between francophone and anglophone east Africa" (Melvern 2000:24). Beginning with the 'friendship and cooperation agreement' signed in 1962, France became deeply involved in Rwandan affairs. Successive French governments provided generous aid to Rwanda's Hutu political leadership, which protected the status of French as an official language (alongside Kinyarwanda) and medium of school education. Rwanda was one of the founding members of the organization of Francophone nations, commonly known today as la *Francophonie*. Brian Weinstein (1989:53) has identified one of the principal goals of this organisation as "the maintenance and extension of French as an official or co-official language", while, according to Sue Wright (2008:51-52), French governments have traditionally sought to use it as "a bulwark against English".

As Touko Piiparinen has explained, Rwanda's Hutu government developed a "special relationship" with its French counterpart, while French political circles "saw Rwanda as part of '*le pré carré*', that is, 'our own backyard' in Africa" (Piiparinen 2010:68). "In almost every aspect of Rwandan life", as Wallis (2007) puts it, "France made sure it was present". According to Piiparinen (op. cit., p.68), France "administered Rwanda as if it were a former French colony", in that ministries other than its foreign ministry controlled policy. Rwanda became, to quote Wallis: "a little island of France, where French papers are available on the day they are printed, and everything else, from telephone systems and tanks to *paté*, are French" (Wallis 2007:10). Personal friendships—such as that between the sons of the French President, Francois Mitterrand and his Rwandan counterpart, Juvenal Habyarimana—ensured a particularly close political relationship between the two countries. Hence, when the Tutsi-led Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) launched its insurgency in 1990 against the Hutu government, France was quick to provide support to the latter. According to Peter Schraeder, French policymakers at the time perceived the Uganda-backed RPF to be "under Anglo-Saxon influence" and thus "hostile to France" (Schraeder 2001:42). In a bid to save the Hutu government, French military forces undertook a series of operations regarded by some (e.g. Lal 2007) as tantamount to facilitating the genocide. Wallis (2007:11) has interpreted this intervention as "first and foremost an attempt by Paris to keep its beloved francophonie intact".

In spite of the French intervention, the RPF rebels succeeded in overthrowing the Hutu-led government in 1994, a development that, as Schraeder (2001: 42-43) puts it, "constituted the first time that a francophone country had "fallen" to Anglo-Saxon influence". Ultimately, then, France's active intervention on the side of the Hutu government produced the opposite effect from that intended. With the overthrow of that government, France lost virtually all of its influence in Rwanda and, hence, the means to protect the French linguistic and cultural legacy.

The French-to-English 'Language Switch' Policy

From a linguistic perspective, Rwanda is unusually homogeneous, not least by comparison with most other countries on the African continent. According to the 2002 census, 99.4% of Rwandans shared a common language, Kinyarwanda. French was spoken by 3.9% of the population, Kiswahili by 3%, and English by 1.9% (Ministry of Finance & Economic Planning 2005).

Despite the presence of an indigenous *lingua franca*, the dominant language of education for several decades was French, having been introduced as an official language in 1923 by the Belgian authorities. In Rwanda's first post-independence constitution, French was named—alongside Kinyarwanda—as one of two designated 'official languages'. Prior to the RPF takeover, the country had been operating a bilingual system of school education, with lessons delivered through the medium of Kinyarwanda for the first three years of primary school, transitioning to French in the fourth year. English first became a feature of the Rwandan language demography upon the return of hundreds of thousands of Tutsi refugees from exile in Anglophone African countries. In 1996, the RPF government formally adopted English as Rwanda's third official language, according it equal status with French and Kinyarwanda. English-medium instruction was introduced in some schools, creating, in effect, a trilingual education system. Kinyarwanda was retained as the medium of education up to the fourth year, at which point children were given a choice of attending either a French- or an English-medium school. Pupils at French-medium schools were required to study English as a foreign language, while those at English-medium schools were required to study French on the same basis.

The 'language switch' decision was made in October 2008 by the Rwandan cabinet, which ordered the implementation of "an urgent program to teach in English in all primary schools, secondary schools and in all public institutions of higher learning and those supported by the Government" (Rurangirwa 2012:169). Such was the urgency that teachers were given less than four months from the announcement to begin using English in their classrooms. John Rutayisire, Director of the Rwanda Education Board, justifies the abruptness of the implementation as follows:

We were not prepared to wait for the conventional 10 or 20 years to adopt a more strategic longer plan, because the interests of this country are more paramount than the difficulties that people can face in the shorter term. (Cited by Clover 2012)

Under the new policy, English-medium instruction was to be introduced from the first grade of primary school (P1), prompting some, like Williams (2011) to label it a "straight for English" policy. Kinyarwanda was to be taught as an ordinary school subject, while French was relegated to the status of an "additional language" (MINEDUC 2010:14). As Beth Samuelson (2012) has explained, secondary school and university students

were told in 2008 that they would be required to pass their examinations in English by July 2009; while sixth-grade (i.e. primary school) pupils who up to 2008 had been studying primarily in Kinyarwanda and French would be required to take their national examinations in English in 2009 (Samuelson 2012:224). Although French lost its status as a compulsory subject in state primary and secondary schools, pupils still had the option of studying it as an elective subject. Moreover, as Assan and Walker (2012: 179) have clarified, private schools could choose to retain French as their primary medium of instruction. The Rwandan government has justified its decision to prioritise a single language on financial grounds, highlighting the unsustainable expense of providing learning materials and teacher education for three languages of instruction (MINEDUC 2010).

Although described in official documentation as "the bedrock of initial literacy and learning", Kinyarwanda was never likely to constitute the basis of Rwanda's new, post-genocide education system. Indeed, as Straton Rurangirwa (2012) has explained, language planning decisions in Rwanda have tended to be viewed as a choice between French and English. Given the government's overwhelming focus on English-medium education, it is not only French but also Kinyarwanda that loses from the introduction of the new policy. John Simpson (2012) has suggested that policy-makers, in their zeal for reform, failed to appreciate fully the role of the first language in promoting early literacy and learning (Simpson 2012:126). Although the government decided in 2011 to reinstate Kinyarwanda as the medium of instruction for the first three years of schooling when it became clear that teachers and pupils were struggling to adapt to the change, such a concession would not assuage the criticism of the many African academics that advocate complete mother-tongue school education. Below, one such academic, Kwazi Kwaa Prah (2008), argues vehemently against the kind of approach adopted in Rwanda (and, indeed, elsewhere in Africa):

The argument that Africans should use their languages for 3-4 years at the primary school level and then move into the colonial languages is another way of saying that African languages are irredeemably doomed to backwardness and perdition. It is a lie which serves ultimately the maintenance of neo-colonialism, at the cultural level. The idea also implies that the three to four year foundation is only meant to prepare African children to the later use of the colonial languages. (Prah 2008:14)

Motivations for the Language Switch

In simple terms, the language switch was viewed by the RPF government as a *sine qua non* of its overall plan to rebuild Rwanda in the aftermath of the genocide. Since assuming power in 1994, Rwanda's leaders have frequently expressed their intention to foster a new generation of fluent English-speakers capable of transforming their country's economy and society. At the same time, they have also identified the English language as the indispensable vehicle for the establishment of economic and political partnerships, both at the regional and global level.

In official discourse, the decision to prioritise English as a medium of school education in preference to French has been justified as a necessary step for the amelioration of the economic situation of Rwandans in the aftermath of the genocide. In this regard, the Rwandan language switch is reflective of a belief common among policy-makers worldwide that English language proficiency offers nation-states what Naz Rassool (2013) has referred to as "economic capital benefits". As she explains, such benefits are "associated with the access that English provides to the development of high technological, scientific and management skills, and therefore the ability to compete in the highly competitive global labour market". At the same time, as Rassool points out, the world role of English as a *lingua franca* is "seen as contributing to the ability of countries to develop their social capital through international networks that are of benefit to local business and trade and through this to attract foreign direct investment" (Rassool 2013:45-46).

In the Rwandan context, English is routinely presented as a potentially more valuable tool than French for the furtherance of the national development process. For instance, while English is described in one Ministry of Education document as "a gateway to the global knowledge economy" and "an important vehicle for trade and socioeconomic development" (Ministry of Education 2010:14), Claver Yisa, Director of Policy Planning at the same ministry, once claimed that Rwandans were "not getting anything out of French" (cited by Nolen 2008). Suggesting that the continued prioritisation of French would, given that language's relative decline as a global medium of communication, hinder the country's progress, Yisa argues that "using English is a way to make Rwanda to be equal" (cited by McGreal 2009). In the comment below, Theoneste Mutsindashyaka, State Minister for Education in 2008, also compares French unfavourably with English in terms of its global importance:

When you look at the French-speaking countries -- it's really just France, and a small part of Belgium and a small part of Switzerland... Most countries worldwide, they speak English. Even in China, they speak English. Even Belgium, if you go to the Flemish areas, they speak English, not French (Cited by McCrummen 2008).

A clearer perspective on the utilitarian motivations for the prioritisation of English may be gained by referring to the government's overall strategy for national economic development, as laid out in a document entitled 'Rwanda Vision 2020' (Ministry of Finance & Economic Planning 2000). Vision 2020 presents a highly ambitious blueprint for Rwanda's future development, based on the principles of self-reliance and entrepreneurship, and aimed ultimately at transforming the country from a "subsistence agriculture economy" to a "knowledge-based society" over the space of two decades. A central element of this transformation is the development of a domestic service sector and high-technology industries.

In the absence of significant natural resources, education is, as Joseph Assan & Lawrence Walker (2012:184) point out, "a key ingredient in Rwanda's development vision". In this connection, the country's Ministry of Education (MINEDUC) has, as its mission, "to transform the Rwandan citizen into skilled human capital for socio-economic development of the country". On this basis, the Ministry has set the following targets:

All Rwandans will be able to read and write and have diverse professional and technical skills. Rwanda will be endowed with an education system that is well adapted to the socio-economic problems of the country, and ICT skills will be widespread. (Source:<http://www.mineduc.gov.rw>)

In this context, the country's powerful president, Paul Kagame, argues the utilitarian case for an English-centric education system thus:

The kind of education we want for our children is that which is in line with the vision in place for the development of our country...we have to prioritise the language that will make them competent when they get on the labour market after completing school. (cited by Kimenyi 2008)

On the basis of statistical comparisons, English would certainly seem a more appropriate medium of education than French in terms of fostering manpower for the kind of knowledge-based, high-technology economy envisaged by RPF policy-makers. In terms of the Internet, English is used by 55.7% of all the websites whose content language is known, compared with just 4.1% that use French (Wtechs 2014). More than 45% of the world's scholarly journals are published in English, as compared with less than 5% in the case of French; a person literate only in French would have 7 times less access to scientific publications than a person literate in English (Koutonin 2013). Moreover, as one former Rwandan education minister has pointed out, English is spoken by about 1.8 billion people worldwide, compared with 180 million in the case of French. Thus, he concludes, "by teaching our children in English, we open them up to many more sources of information and knowledge" (Government of Rwanda 2013).

As a background to the above, it is worth noting that Africa's Anglophone nations have generally achieved greater success than their Francophone counterparts in terms of developing their economies and human resource bases. To consider a few statistics presented by Alain Faujas (2012), countries belonging to the mainly Anglophone East African Community registered a 5.4% economic growth rate in the decade up to 2012, compared with just 3.4% for countries of the predominantly Francophone Economic and Monetary Union of West Africa (UEMOA). Moreover, seven of the ten lowest-ranked countries (out of 187) by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in 2012 were French-speaking African states, with two of Rwanda's neighbours, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo, occupying two of the three last positions. According to Faujas, Anglophone countries offer potential investors more appealing, dynamic business environments than their Francophone counterparts. In this regard, Bouthelie Anthony, Deputy Chairman of the French Council of Investors in Africa (CIAN), has made the following observation:

Countries with the Anglo-Saxon culture are more oriented towards business and entrepreneurship, and people in those countries are less inclined to yearn to become civil servants than their counterparts with the French culture (Cited by Faujas 2012).

In official discourse in Rwanda, English is frequently held up as a tool for the betterment of all of the country's citizens, while French is portrayed as a language of declining global importance and hence of lesser value to the country's development project. Put simply, English conforms with the RPF government's declared socioeconomic vision for the country, while French, emphatically, does not.

English as a Vehicle for Facilitating International Relationships

Another of the government's declared motivations for switching the education system from French to English was to facilitate Rwanda's international relationships. While in pre-genocide times, such relationships had centred on the Francophone world, the country's post-genocide leaders have striven to establish ties with English-speaking countries. In this connection, one of their chief priorities has been to ensure that their landlocked, resource-poor country achieves economic integration with its Anglophone neighbours. Indeed, as outlined in 'Vision 2020', Rwandan leaders aspire to transform their country into a regional services and high-technology hub. The value of regional integration, as perceived by the government, is summarized in the following statement:

Regional integration can play an important role in driving growth and development in Rwanda by improving the business environment and enhancing competitiveness. Regional integration has the potential to address policy uncertainty and fragmented narrow markets which are the main factors in deterring Foreign Direct Investment. In other words, integration encourages foreign direct investment, adopting policies to promote competitive enterprises, exports and entrepreneurship. (Ministry for East African Community 2012:2)

In 2007, Rwanda joined the East African Community (EAC), an organization dominated by three Anglophone former British colonies, Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania. In addition to the economic opportunities it provides, EAC membership offers Rwanda numerous administrative advantages. One especially important consideration in the context of the language switch, according to a former education minister, is the fact that EAC member states have embarked on the process of harmonizing their education curricula, with English as the shared language of instruction (Murigande 2010).

Naturally, given the status of English as the *lingua franca* of international business, its prioritisation by the Rwanda government was intended to transcend the regional dimension. Indeed, since coming to power, the RPF government has forged a wide range of bilateral economic relationships. Aside from notable exceptions like Belgium and the Democratic Republic of Congo, most of Rwanda's current trading partners and overseas investors conduct their transactions through the medium of English rather than French. Notable countries in this regard are the UAE, China, Japan and the Asian "tiger economies". President Kagame has expressed a particular interest in Singapore, identifying

it as a developmental model worthy of emulation. Indeed, Kagame personally led a team to Singapore to study its transformation into a global business capital (Chu 2009). Rwanda has itself been labelled as the 'Singapore of Africa', with some highlighting its potential to occupy a similar role within its own region.

In addition to the business considerations, the decision to prioritise English was also a clear signal of political intent to set Rwanda on a fresh, Anglophone trajectory. Rwanda's geopolitical repositioning reflects the personal preferences and values of RPF leaders, many of whom are fluent English-speakers, educated in English-speaking countries. In the view of Helen Hintjens (2010:10), these leaders have "displayed particular political acumen in dealing with 'Anglo-Saxon' countries", cultivating especially close ties with Britain and the United States. As a statement of Rwanda's geopolitical repositioning, the country joined the Commonwealth in 2009, becoming only the second member of the organisation without a British colonial heritage. Helen Vesperini (2010) has suggested that part of the government's rationale for the prioritisation of English was its intention to join the Commonwealth. In this context, Daniel Plaut (2012) has suggested that the language switch might also be interpreted as a "public relations move", designed to solicit investment and aid from the global Anglophone community.

The 'Anti-French' Motivation: "Language as a Political Weapon"

While government officials have always been eager to stress the tangible advantages of English-medium education for the Rwandan people, some commentators opine that the language switch was motivated, at least in part, by a desire to retaliate against France, both for its support for the previous Hutu regime and, in the aftermath of the genocide, its hostile political stance towards the RPF government.

Rwandan leaders have certainly delivered a harsh assessment of the French involvement in their country's affairs. President Paul Kagame is reported to have described his "entire experience of France and French influence" as negative (Clayton 2007), and has accused France of supporting, training and arming the perpetrators of the genocide, even of "fighting against the forces that were trying to stop the genocide" (Lal 2007:481). According to one former Rwandan foreign minister, Charles Murigande, France's hostility towards the RPF continued long after its ouster of the Hutu-led government in 1994. As he explained in 2007:

In all international forums - the World Bank, the IMF - France not only voted against any development programme that these institutions would want to undertake in Rwanda but it even went out of its way to mobilise other countries to vote against them. (Cited by McGreal 2007:10)

While the country's political distancing from France began immediately upon the RPF's seizure of power, bilateral relations deteriorated markedly in 2006, after a French judge ordered the arrest of several Rwandan officials in connection with the shooting

down of a plane carrying Hutu former president Juvenal Habyarimana, the event seen by many as the primary trigger for the genocide. The Rwandan government immediately downgraded diplomatic relations with France and introduced a range of sanctions, including the closure of the French cultural centre in the Rwandan capital, Kigali (Hasselriis 2010). In this context, it is perhaps understandable that some observers should interpret the downgrading of French also as a pointed retaliatory action against France. For Agnès Poirier (2012), for instance, the move is tantamount to using language as "a political weapon" against France, while Chris McGreal (2009) opines that "there is little doubt that the decision to change the way a nation speaks has its roots in the still bitter legacy of Paris's role in the genocide of Rwanda's Tutsi population". Given the deep attachment of French policy-makers to the protection of their country's linguistic and cultural influence in the face of a perceived 'Anglo-Saxon onslaught', the decision to abandon French would seem an especially effective form of retaliation. Rwandan leaders would certainly have been cognisant of its likely effect on the French establishment. Indeed, in the following comment, a key RPF minister describes the lengths to which the French were prepared to go in the early 1990s in order to halt the spread of Anglophone influence:

The French armed the killers and they trained them even when they were saying they were going to kill the Tutsis, and France supported the genocide regime right up until the end, even helping the killers to escape. Why? Because they have this obsession with Anglo-Saxons. (Cited in McGreal 2007)

President Kagame, too, has criticised France's "obsession" with language, recalling how his own inability to speak French had incurred the anger of officials during a visit to Paris for peace talks (Clayton 2007). Of course, negative attitudes towards France and the French language are not the sole domain of the RPF elite. Commentators have drawn attention to the antipathy among the Tutsi community more generally. "In some quarters", McGreal (2007) explains, "French is thought of as the language of death; of those who killed and those who stayed to be murdered in the genocide of 1994".

The notion that the language switch was introduced as a punitive measure against France has been vehemently denied by Rwandan officials. In this connection, some have suggested that the downgrading of French may have been the manifestation of a general desire to uncouple Rwanda from its bitter Francophone colonial history. In this regard, it is worth noting that the RPF government has been highly critical of Rwanda's former colonial ruler, Belgium, accusing it of applying "contemporary Darwinian theories" and "deeply dividing the people of Rwanda", thereby "laying the foundations for periodic mass killings" that culminated in the 1994 genocide (Ministry of Finance & Economic Planning 2000:5). In the view of Izabela Steflja (2012), the decision to distance Rwanda from the French language "allows for a break from the colonial past and ties with Belgium and France, factors which the Rwandan government specifies as key in the development of genocidal ideology" (Steflja 2012:5). Although, in the Rwandan context, English possesses

none of the colonial baggage associated with French, it would nonetheless seem poorly suited to the role of a neutral, unifying language, given its association with one specific section of the population, i.e. the (mainly Tutsi) returnees from Anglophone countries.

Policy Implementation Challenges

In its mission to transform a predominantly French-based system of school education into an English-centric one, the government faces a range of formidable and ongoing challenges. Arguably, however, it compounded the difficulty of its mission from the outset by its own decision to implement the language switch after what many regard as an insufficiently long period of preparation. Certainly, it was apparent from the outset that Rwanda was suffering from a severe shortage of trained, English-proficient teachers. To illustrate: a 2009 MINEDUC survey found that 85% of primary school teachers and 66% of secondary school teachers had only beginner, elementary or pre-intermediate levels of English (Ministry of Education 2010:14). To address the human resource shortfall, the government began recruiting teachers and teaching 'mentors' from regional Anglophone countries, mainly from Kenya and Uganda. At the same time, an accelerated teacher-training programme was instituted to prepare local teachers (many with very limited English ability) for the English-medium classroom. Given its own lack of financial and technical resources, the Rwandan government has been heavily reliant on external support for the operation of its English teacher-training programmes. The centrepiece initiative in this regard, the 'Rwanda English in Action Programme' (REAP), was launched in 2009 under the direction of the British Council and with funding from the UK government's Department for International Development (DFID), with the aim of training approximately 50,000 school teachers. Although REAP exceeded this target and had by 2011 (the termination of the programme) provided training to some 85,000 teachers, training for each teacher lasted for a mere five weeks. In lieu of a comprehensive national language and pedagogical training programme for teachers of English, the government has had to rely on piecemeal measures, such as the school-based Mentor Programme introduced in 2012 by the Rwanda Education Board (REB) and a monitoring/self-assessment system to measure teachers' progress. Such a training structure hardly seems conducive to the fostering of a large-scale, competent English-speaking workforce.

In addition to concerns over training, surveys (e.g. Lynd 2010) have highlighted the problems of poor job satisfaction and low teacher motivation. Without question, working conditions for many Rwandan schoolteachers have been difficult, with salaries that are low by comparison with similarly qualified individuals in other occupational sectors; large class sizes; and long teaching hours (Lynd 2010:16). Teaching and mentoring recruits from other East African countries have also been involved in pay disputes with the Rwanda Education Board (Agutamba 2012).

Given Rwanda's situation as an impoverished country with limited natural resources

and a small export sector, funding for public investment in education will present a major ongoing challenge for the RPF government. Despite its declared determination to attain economic self-sufficiency and its impressive macroeconomic achievements thus far, Rwanda remains heavily dependent on foreign aid. Indeed, according to the Hotel Rwanda Rusesabagina Foundation et al. (2009:2), it remains "one of the most aid-dependent countries in the world". In the aftermath of the genocide, the RPF government benefitted from considerable goodwill from the international community—what Reyntjens (2004) has referred to as "the genocide credit". However, in recent years, dissatisfaction has grown over the RPF's actions in certain areas, leading to suggestions by Beswick (2014) and others that it has begun to exhaust its 'credit' with international aid donors. In 2012, several countries, including the United Kingdom, the United States and Germany, suspended aid to Rwanda over allegations of meddling in the neighbouring Democratic Republic of the Congo. If the government is to succeed in building the kind of comprehensive, high-quality system of public education envisaged in its 'Vision 2020, it will surely need to guarantee a high level of international financial and technical support for several years to come.

Implications of the Language Switch

In consideration of the formidable challenges highlighted above, I shall attempt to assess the implications of the language switch policy for Rwanda's society, its economy and its relationship with the outside world. Although, at the time of writing, barely six years have elapsed since English replaced French as the principal language of education, certain trends can already be discerned.

Socio-economic Implications

It is something of a paradox, in a country where virtually the entire population shares a common mother tongue, that language should have become a divisive issue. Yet, in the aftermath of the genocide, the English and French languages have come to serve—to use the expression coined by Jessica Walker-Keleher (2006:46)—as "quasi-ethnic identifiers", in that they differentiate families who returned to Rwanda from exile in Anglophone African countries (overwhelmingly Tutsis) from those who remained in the country throughout the period of Hutu rule. The abrupt introduction of English-medium instruction clearly placed the returnees at a considerable advantage over all other Rwandans. Hence, although the RPF government has always pledged its commitment to the creation of a cohesive, equitable society, it is questionable whether its overwhelming prioritisation of English-medium education is conducive to the attainment of this goal, at least in the short- to medium-term. Indeed, more probable outcomes of the new policy are the disadvantagement of educated Francophone Rwandans, and the perpetuation of long-standing social and economic inequalities between Rwanda's rural and urban populations.

While just a small minority of Rwanda's population (just 3.9%, according to the 2002 census) has ever mastered the French language, the country's educated French-speakers were obviously disadvantaged by the decision to de-prioritise French. The government's focus on the building of a new, English-centric economy was bound to have an adverse effect on employment opportunities for French-speaking professionals. Even individuals with successful careers and years of specialised training in the days of the previous Hutu-led regime have found a decline in demand for their skills, as in the scenario described here by the Hotel Rwanda Rusesabagina Foundation et al. (2009):

An example of this might be a Rwandan lawyer who has practiced in French all his life, but suddenly finds that English is the only language accepted in courts and in official documents. This lawyer would quickly find himself out of work, and replaced by an English speaker, who in Rwanda is almost by definition a supporter of the current regime. (Hotel Rwanda Rusesabagina Foundation et. al. 2009:9)

One large group of professionals immediately disadvantaged by the language switch were the country's teachers of French. As Samuelson (2012) has explained, Francophone teachers were "required to study English in their free time and expected to pass English competence exams if they wished to keep on teaching" (Samuelson 2012:224). The divisive effects of the language switch have been recorded by numerous researchers, like George Njoroge (2007), who conducted his research at the Kigali Institute of Education. Njoroge witnessed how trainee teachers defined themselves not as 'Rwandan' but as 'Anglophones' and 'Francophones'.

Although the prioritisation of English has undoubtedly created income disparities (and friction) between the Anglophone and Francophone elites, it is nonetheless probable that many urban, educated Francophones will possess the financial wherewithal to ensure that they and their children attain proficiency in English and are thus equipped to participate in the so-called 'knowledge-based society' of the future. For Rwanda's rural denizens, however, the prospects of prospering in such a society appear remote. While Rwanda is listed among the world's poorest countries, 92% of its most impoverished citizens reside in rural areas (UNDP 2008:4). In terms of school education, rural educational standards are considerably lower than in urban centres, with more poorly-resourced schools, fewer qualified teachers, higher pupil-teacher ratios, and lower rates of literacy and school completion. Moreover, as Emmanuel Uwambayinema (2013) has explained, English is entirely alien to the rural environment:

...typical Rwandan rural teachers and learners use the English language only in classroom situations. At home, on the streets, and with friends, they use only Kinyarwanda. There are no television programs, no street signs, no newspapers, and no conversations in English outside the classroom in rural areas. (Uwambayinema 2013:3)

Against this background, it is perhaps reasonable to assume that rural students (and, indeed, teachers) will continue to be disadvantaged disproportionately by the introduction of English as the medium of instruction. By contrast, the primary beneficiaries of the

language switch will be the new urban elite, particularly the small group sometimes referred to as "the Ugandans" that, according to Helen Hintjens, "virtually monopolizes the top echelons of the government ministries and of the military" (Hintjens 2008:13). For Eddie Williams (2011), the Rwandan situation is a clear example of 'élite closure', in that "a small dominant establishment ensures that they and their families have access to high standards of English while inadequate education systems mean that this is largely denied to the majority" (Williams 2011: 7-8).

By prioritising English-medium instruction to such an overwhelming extent—to the obvious detriment of mother-tongue education—the RPF government risks denying millions of Rwandan children the possibility of receiving a comprehensive education, which, in turn, is bound to limit their ability to thrive in the knowledge-based society. For Samuelson and Freedman, this policy jeopardises the development of the country as a whole:

Rwanda is in great need of well-educated workers and can't afford to waste the potential of any child, particularly the children who will benefit more from a solid literacy background in Kinyarwanda than from a mediocre mastery of English. (Samuelson & Freedman 2010:210)

From an economic perspective, it is inevitable that the English-centric policy will divide Rwandan society into 'winners' and 'losers'. Indeed, in the post-genocide period, proficiency in English has brought with it financial benefits for many. A survey conducted within just a year of the language switch estimated that a 25-30% salary gap had already opened up between English-speakers and non-English-speakers (Pinon & Haydon 2010:65). While the government has made significant macroeconomic achievements, the benefits have yet to filter down to the microeconomic level, especially to the country's rural population, which remains largely dependent on subsistence agriculture for its livelihood. According to a 2012 report, youth unemployment remains a major challenge to achieving inclusive growth in Rwanda, with an estimated 42% of young people (nearly 40% of the total population) either unemployed or underemployed in the subsistence sector. Significantly, the report identified, as one of the major causes of youth unemployment, "a mismatch of skills" (African Economic Outlook 2012: 2).

Implications for Rwanda's International Relationships

By comparison with pre-genocide times, when its foreign affairs were dominated by France, Rwanda has, since 1994, assumed a more active stance on the international diplomatic and commercial scenes. If one can assume that Rwandan schools will succeed in fostering a significant number of competent English-speakers on an ongoing basis, the introduction of English-medium education certainly has the potential to enhance the country's ability to maintain fruitful relationships with both its Anglophone neighbours and the wider 'non-Francophone world'.

At the regional level, Rwanda's adoption of English as a language of education, public administration and business has been an important factor in the country's ongoing integration with its neighbours in the East African Community. Although Rwanda joined the EAC at the same time as its 'Francophone' neighbour, Burundi, the former appears to have achieved a higher degree of integration than the latter. Rwanda has developed particularly strong relationships with Kenya and Uganda; the three countries ensure the free movement of labour among them, having abolished the requirement of work permits in 2014. Babajide Sodipo & Jacqueline Musiitwa speculate that the increased use of English among the Rwandan population will lead to the country becoming an exporter of skilled labour, thereby helping to fill the skills gap in other EAC countries (Sodipo & Musiitwa 2012:121). Rwanda's embrace of English-medium education has also begun to generate integration in the field of education, with some major regional universities, notably Kenya's two largest, establishing campuses in the country.

At the global level, the language switch has enabled Rwanda to reposition itself as a member of the 'Anglophone community', a repositioning welcomed by major English-speaking countries, perhaps particularly the United States and United Kingdom, which have furnished Rwanda with significant investment and development assistance. Indeed, as Robert Pinon and Jon Haydon have clarified, inflows of foreign direct investment (FDI) from English-speaking countries are "typically highest in countries where English is the lingua franca" (Pinon & Haydon 2010: 5). In Daniel Plaut's view, the introduction of English, as an element in the Rwandan government's "global public relations campaign", has already yielded significant dividends in this regard:

Though it is perhaps too early to see the developmental and political impacts of English proficiency among Rwandans, the policy in and of itself as a means of promoting Rwanda for investment and partnership has been a success. (Plaut 2012)

Given the long-standing Anglo-French rivalry in Africa, it is perhaps unsurprising that the United Kingdom should show itself especially eager to fill the diplomatic space vacated by France's departure from Rwanda in 1994. UK governments, of differing political persuasions, have emerged as important partners for the RPF government. As Plaut (2012) has reported, the UK government increased its funding to Rwanda by 50% over the 2010-2015 period, dedicating 27% of its total budget for Rwanda to education initiatives. In Plaut's opinion, "such an impressive commitment to education in Rwanda would be difficult to imagine had the country continued using French as its main language of instruction" (Plaut 2012). While the UK has in the past shown itself willing to suspend aid to Rwanda over its alleged involvement in the Democratic Republic of Congo, it continues to enjoy a close relationship with the Kagame government.

According to Pinon and Haydon (2010), Rwanda's economic development has been boosted by its increased presence on the "English-centric world stage". In addition to US

and UK investors, Rwanda has developed a particularly fruitful economic relationship with South Africa, which has made a number of high-profile investments in the country (Pinon and Haydon 2010:68-69). The fact that potential overseas partners are able to operate in an increasingly English-speaking environment—which is also ranked by the World Bank as among the most business-friendly on the African continent—may be expected to generate interest in the country.

Conclusion

Given that only two decades have passed since the ravages of the genocide, Rwanda is still in the early stages of its healing and rebuilding process, while numerous major challenges lie ahead. Nonetheless, a considerable degree of stability has been restored to the country, to such an extent that some have referred to "the Rwandan miracle".

All of the above assessments vis-à-vis the implications of the language switch have been made on the assumption that RPF will remain in power for the foreseeable future. In this regard, it is perhaps difficult to overstate the role played by the country's president, Paul Kagame, as a driver of reform. Kagame, who assumed office in 2000 yet is due to step down in 2017, has been an especially enthusiastic champion of English-medium education and, indeed, of the country's Anglophone repositioning more generally. Irrespective of whether Kagame remains at the helm, however, it is highly likely that English, having gained a significant foothold in education, public administration and business, will have a secure future in Rwanda. By contrast with the years just prior to the genocide, when external relations centred on France and *La Francophonie*, post-genocide Rwanda has forged a diverse range of international political and economic partnerships based upon communication in English. The longer-term prospects for English have been enhanced by Rwanda's institutional integration with neighbouring Anglophone countries, plus the fact that its 'Francophone' neighbour and fellow EAC member, Burundi, has also begun to embrace English.

French, in spite of its downgrading within state education, has remained part of the Rwandan linguistic repertoire, as one of the country's three official languages and a medium of instruction in private and church-run schools. Although Franco-Rwandan relations have remained complicated (an indication of which was the absence of French government representatives from ceremonies in 2014 to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the genocide), Rwanda has not, despite some reports to the contrary, relinquished its membership of *La Francophonie*. More recently, there have been tentative signs of a more pragmatic government attitude, with plans to reintroduce French as a subject in Ordinary Level examinations at upper secondary school level from 2016. Certainly, in its current economic circumstances, Rwanda can ill afford to squander the human resource offered by the repository of educated French-speakers in its midst. Although in recent years the RPF has positioned Rwanda firmly within the Anglophone political camp, the

country is nonetheless still well placed to function as an economic bridge between Anglophone and Francophone countries in Africa, not least in light of the government's plans to establish the country as a high-technology and services hub. On this basis, it is probable that French will retain a significant role in Rwanda.

In the longer term, the continuation of current policies cannot be taken entirely for granted, not least given the history of violent political change in Rwanda. In this connection, there remains the unresolved political issue of the estimated two million Hutu, including many former *genocidaires*, living in exile abroad. Some perceive Rwanda's switch to English as a potential source of future conflict. In the opinion of Elizabeth King (2013), the English-centric language policy "promotes collectivized and stigmatized groups, which could underlie future conflicts" (King 2013:147), while the education system as a whole "reflects and amplifies an exclusivist state" (Ibid., p. 146). For the Hotel Rwanda Rusesabagina Foundation et al. (2009:8-9), "the banning of French in schools and the administration" devalues the "human capital" of thousands of French-speaking Rwandans living in exile abroad. This, they warn, bodes badly for the future stability of Rwanda:

Since it is very unlikely that all these refugees will give up coming back to their homeland, and given this clear signal that they have no place in Rwandan public administration unless they speak English, it is not inconceivable that some of them might unfortunately consider violent means for their return, thus further perpetuating the cycle of elite violence that has historically plagued Rwanda. (Hotel Rwanda Rusesabagina Foundation et al. 2009:9)

Whatever the direction of Rwanda's political future, it is unlikely that policy-makers will give due priority to the one language that genuinely unites its people—i.e. Kinyarwanda, the "national language". Nevertheless, there are surely many ordinary Rwandan citizens who would concur with the view expressed by Straton Rurangirwa (2012: 174) that Kinyarwanda is "the only language that would guarantee the fulfillment of political, economic, social and cultural development of Rwanda".

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