

Pre-School Child Multilingualism and its Educational Implications in the African Context

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Pre-School Child Multilingualism and its Educational Implications in the African Context¹

1 Introduction

1.1 The study of language contact

Given the observation that the number of languages spoken in Africa ranges between 1 250 and 2 100, depending on source and definitions of what is counted as a separate 'language', the study of language contact in Africa is one of prime importance and interest for linguists, social and cultural anthropologists, historians, and educationists. Restricting myself to linguistics, the vastly different and complex phenomena of language contact, of which multilingualism is but one facet, can be approached from at least three different angles or perspectives, each implying a particular set of methods, axioms and theories:

- the psycholinguistic perspective;
- the sociolinguistic perspective;
- the historical linguistics perspective.

In the end, of course, it will be the concert of several legitimate perspectives viewed in all their complementarity which should allow us to gain a full understanding of what language contact, and hence bilingualism or multilingualism (I shall henceforth use the terms synonymously), is all about.

1.2 Multilingualism in Africa

No matter whether we talk about multilingualism in terms of individuals or speech communities, of particular public or private institutions, or even in terms of complete sociolinguistic profiles of modern independent states, multilingualism is almost the norm rather than the exception in Africa and elsewhere in the world. For easy reference, I would like to distinguish between:

1. multilingualism as a feature of sociolinguistic *state profiles*;
2. *institutional* multilingualism within a given state; and,
3. *individual* multilingualism.

The focus of my presentation will be on **individual** multilingualism and its implications for institutional language planning in education.

I shall attempt to bring together aspects of sociolinguistics proper and psycholinguistic issues of language acquisition and language learning, if only by implication.

Let me begin by illustrating one case of state-profile multilingualism in Africa, founded on a high degree of individual multilingualism. The reference is to Nigeria.

According to one source

... about 105 million people speak around 410 languages in Nigeria ... The[se] [naked] numbers conceal facts which need to be brought to light for a better understanding of the context and the challenge of multilingualism as a problem. In Nigeria 397 languages out of 410 are 'minority' languages, but the total number of their speakers account for 60 per cent of the population. Among them are several languages with more than 1 million speakers, with a few of them having a number of speakers close to 10 million ...

In a survey related to the case of Nigeria, the number of languages spoken by each of the subjects of the speech communities studied ranged from two to five as follows: 60 per cent of the subjects spoke two languages; 30 per cent three; and 10 per cent over four languages. A similar observation could be made regarding many if not all the African countries, where there is a widespread tradition of handling multilingualism.²

1.3 Studies in individual multilingualism in Africa

Despite the fact that individual multilingualism is virtually an everyday phenomenon in Africa, and that any number of languages between 1,200 and 2,100 are candidates for partaking in individual multilingualism, there is frightfully little in-depth research available on this subject in the published literature. A possibly not-exhaustive review of the literature conducted in 1993/94 revealed a rather bleak picture. Practically all published work on African languages (24 bibliographical items were found in the survey, not taking into account Afrikaans-English bilingualism) look at the issue in terms of what I would call 'colonial di- and triglossia', i.e. indigenous African languages paired with the language of a former colonial master.³ Only two projects were found which did not automatically involve an ex-colonial language.⁴ Out of the 26 language pairs or triplets, 19 involved English, and five French; all in all only 16 indigenous African languages (i.e. about 1%) were involved; in 50% of cases

this was Swahili or a variety thereof. In eleven of the 24 studies, the same author, Carol [Myers-]Scotton, is involved, i.e. her contributions cover almost half of the available literature!

Given the observation that millions of multilingual African adults and teenagers must have acquired their particular linguistic competence during childhood, it is hard to believe that there are virtually no studies on early childhood language acquisition in general, and multilingualism in particular, in the African context. One notable exception is a PhD dissertation from the University of Hamburg which I had the privilege to supervise.⁵ It is needless to point out that outside Africa, in Europe and the USA, early childhood bilingualism has been made the object of study since at least 1913.⁶

However, one particular issue in the psycho- and sociolinguistic study of multilingualism needs to be looked at in some more detail before sharing with you the results of a fascinating case study of the highly elaborate pragmatics of a group of tri- and quadrilingual preschool children in the village of Bombo, Uganda. It is the issue of what shall be referred to as code-mixing.

1.4 A closer look at code-mixing

The literature on *code choice*, *code changing*, *code-mixing* and/or *code-switching* and related issues in the psycho- and sociolinguistic study of individual multilingualism is so massive that it is already beyond the control of the average linguist. Competing models to describe the linguistic processes involved exist, and different authors may use the same terms with completely opposite meanings.⁷

For the purpose of this presentation it may suffice to say that I shall use the term **code-mixing** to refer to any instance of interchanging usage of two or more languages within the same conversation or discourse by the same multilingual speaker. Code-mixing may thus take the form of either *borrowing* (more accurately *nonce borrowing*⁸ or *ad hoc borrowing* or *insertion*, as opposed to borrowing in the sense of *loan words*), or *code-switching*. Note that I consider *code-switching* as such to represent a third code in its own right which is available to bilingual speakers, besides the two other codes represented by the two languages as used in monolingual discourse without code-switching. It is a code which is often favoured among bilingual speakers and is either used, as Myers-Scotton sees it, as the 'unmarked choice' of possible codes, or, as I have often observed myself, as a special code consciously signalling absence or consciously

overcoming tradition-controlled social distance, thereby indicating recognition of mutual belonging to a not exclusively ethnically nor linguistically defined group. Or, as S. Gal (1988: 247) said:

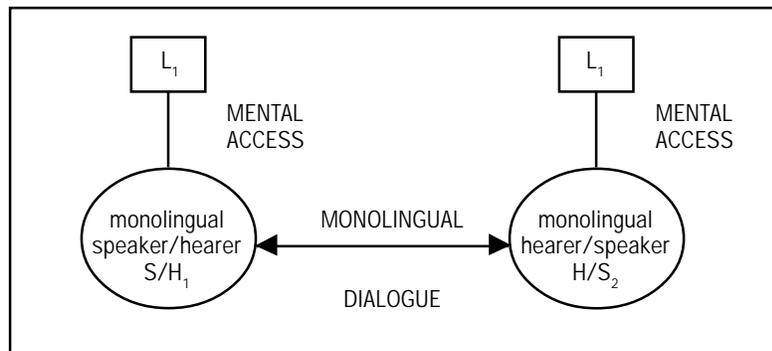
Code-switching is a conversational strategy used to establish, cross or destroy group boundaries; to create, evoke or change interpersonal relations with their rights and obligations.

In the absence of a generally accepted theory of code-switching, I shall introduce here some highly schematic (and thus possibly oversimplistic) graphic representations for the sake of illustration to provide easy entry for the non-initiated.⁹

The first two graphic representations aim to show the highly complex competence patterns in terms of code choice which are characteristic of a bilingual speaker/hearer as compared to the fairly simple pattern of a monolingual speaker/hearer.

The monolingual speaker/hearer has no choice between languages. However, he/she has, and this is not shown in the diagram, the choice between language-internal varieties (for instance, standard, dialect, sociolect, etc.).

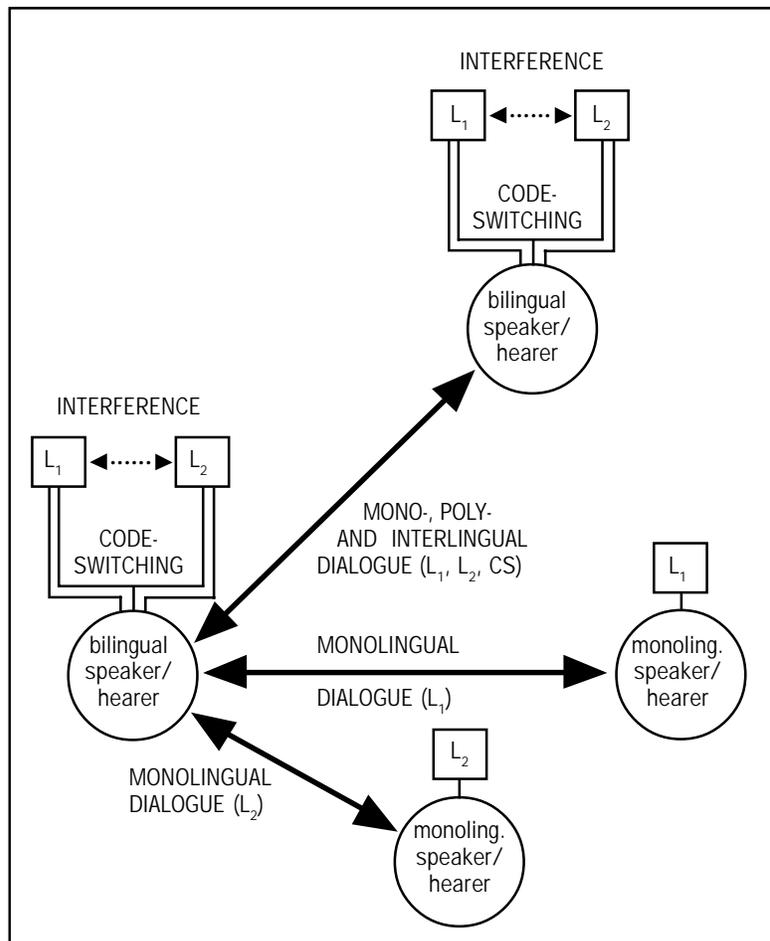
The monolingual speaker/hearer



The bilingual speaker/hearer, in addition to language-internal choices of varieties for all 'codes' which he/she uses (which again is not shown in the diagram), has the choice, depending on dialogue participants, between:

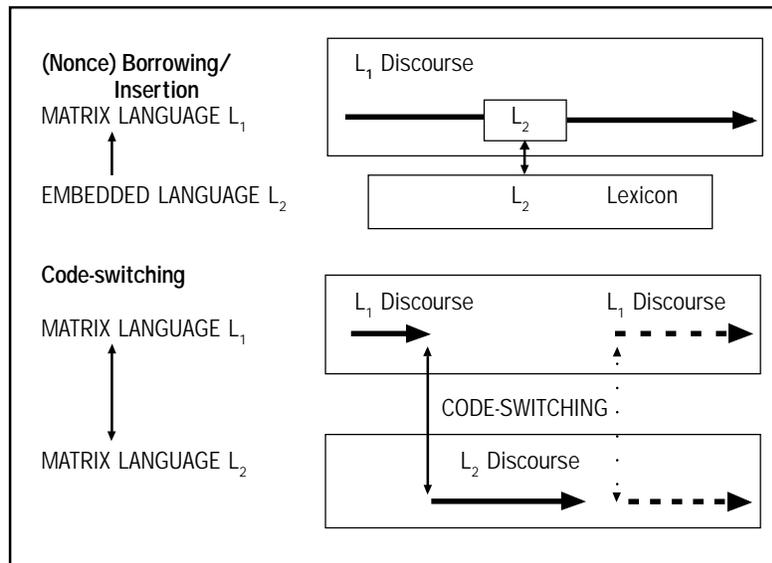
- monolingual dialogue in L1;
- monolingual dialogue in L2;
- polylingual dialogue in L1 + L2;
- code-switching involving L1/L2.

The bilingual speaker/hearer



The following diagramme illustrates the two basic types of code-mixing: nonce borrowing (or insertion) which rests on the distinction between *Matrix Language* and *Embedded Language*; and, code-switching which rests on the distinction between two *Matrix Languages*.

Basic types of code-mixing



Code-mixing among bilingual adults, besides being a third 'interlingual' code in itself, may be controlled by various pragmatic and/or extra-linguistic factors. In the literature a distinction is made between some of these as *situational code-switching* as opposed to *metaphorical code-switching*, depending on whether it is a change of dialogue situation or a change of topic or social role that is assumed to have triggered the switching.¹⁰ It appears safe, as well, to assume that the linguistic structure of the relevant languages influences exactly at which point in the linear structure of the utterance the change from one code to the other may take place. Switch points may be found virtually anywhere: at turn-taking points in a conversation, between two consecutive utterances by the same speaker, between sentences within the same utterance, within sentences, even within words.

2 Early Child Multilingualism and Communicative Competence

2.1 Introducing the case study

In the following section I would like to draw your attention to a highly interesting study of the linguistic behaviour of some pre-school and primary school children who grow up in a particular multilingual environment in Bombo village, Uganda.

The object of study (Khamis 1994) was the linguistic behaviour of altogether 17 children between the ages of 2 and 8, who belong to two different families. The two families live in two different quarters of Bombo, characterised by distinctly different ethnic and linguistic compositions. (In this paper, I will only draw examples from Family 1.¹¹)

Family 1 lives in a quarter which is inhabited in equal proportions by mother-tongue speakers of Nubi and Ganda. (**Nubi** is a creole based on the Arabic originally used by military forces in Sudan; **Luganda** is a Bantu language.) The children in this family have been exposed to both languages since birth. We refer to this as cases of simultaneous language acquisition. Both languages, therefore, would qualify for 'mother tongue' or 'L1' (paradoxically, we might wish to talk about two 'first languages' in such cases because none of the two languages can be said to have been acquired prior to the other). The children are exposed to Swahili over the radio and elsewhere in Bombo far from home, since they live quite far from the main road, market and barracks. Upon entering primary school or the pre-school kindergarten, they are exposed to English. Thus we find the following psycho-sociolinguistic pattern¹² for the children of this family:

Family 1: psycho-sociolinguistic type	language
simultaneous <i>acquisition</i> L1 + L2	Nubi, Ganda
successive L3 <i>acquisition</i> (or ' <i>learning</i> ')	Swahili
L4 <i>learning</i>	English

What is fascinating to observe is how masterfully the young children use their individual multilingualism as a resource of their overall

communicative competence which would appear to be much broader than that of monolingual children at their age. Let me quote from the summary and conclusion of the study under review (Khamis 1994: 269ff.) which makes reference to the Western European (specifically German) cultural background of the author and which holds true for the children of both families.¹³

It turned out that the older children, as a rule, take into account the language preferences of their younger siblings and other members of the play group. The reverse case of the younger child's waiving the use of his preferred language will only be observed if the older child is monolingual or rather dominant in another language ['dominant' meaning that the child's competence in one language is much higher than in another]. Such parameter of language choice has never before been mentioned in the literature of child bilingualism [as observed in Europe and the USA]. It will appear to be the result of the particular socialisation of children in an African village context where one of the goals of education would be to enable children to consider themselves as part of a group and respect the needs of other members of that group. Individualism and the urge connected with it to enforce one's own wishes and desires in opposition to [and at the expense of] other members of the group are not reinforced [by African societies], quite unlike the usual [socialisation patterns] in our own context ...

It was confirmed that the command of English is higher among older children as compared to the younger ones. It also turned out that the frequency of nonce borrowing and instances of code-switching increases with the age of the children. The older children in both families switch much more often between languages and use more nonce borrowings. This would prove that neither code-switching nor nonce borrowing is to be seen as the child's lack of linguistic competence or indiscriminate mixing of languages, but rather that both phenomena have to be seen as indicators of multilingual competence ...

Nonce borrowing helps the children to overcome short term lexical deficits [in the matrix language] ... Nonce

borrowing occurs quite regularly and is an accepted phenomenon in the multilingual discourse of the children ...

Generally can be said that the linguistic behaviour of the Bombo children regarding nonce borrowing is largely congruent with what has been observed in several other studies on child bilingualism ... Consequently, the results of this study can serve to prove the universality of nonce borrowing in child bilingualism.

... With the increasing age of the children also the instances of code-switching increase. Furthermore, the reasons for code-switching are much broader in the case of older children as compared with younger children. The older the child, the more he becomes capable of wilfully using the full range of the potentials of switching between languages.

The major reasons for code-switching were:

- code-switching performing a certain function in discourse, e.g. marking reported/direct speech or creating a topical contrast;
- code-switching triggered by phonological and lexical stimuli;
- code-switching triggered by changes in pragmatic-linguistic requirements, e.g. change of addressee, in role games, songs and plays;
- code-switching to meet pragmatic intent, such as arousing attention or rebuking disturbers of dialogue.

The full pragmatic range of functional code-switching reveals the astounding mastery of the children's individual multilingualism and testifies to their highly developed communicative competence. Let us take a closer look at some of the above-mentioned triggers.

2.2 Situational code-switching to acknowledge language preference

The first example testifies to addressee-triggered situational code-switching. The speaker is Bogere, a boy of 6, with a language preference for Nubi and Ganda (from Family 1). Although all children in the group would understand either Nubi or Ganda, the little speaker takes into account each of the children's language preference:

Code-switch	Language	Addressee (Preference)	Discourse	Translation
1	Nubi	all children	ajama ne kum so ne Mama Yasin kungu wayi aya, ne gayi-kum	Folks, let us sing a song for Mama Yasin Okay, let us all sit down
2	Ganda	Shamim (Ganda)	<i>Shamim, tuyimbire Mama Yasin</i>	<i>Shamim, we sing for Mama Yasin</i>
	(English)	Abudu (Ganda)	<i>aya tuyimbe, mutule ku line, ggwe Abudu</i>	Okay we sing, sit in one <i>line</i> , you <i>Abudu</i>
		Shamim	<i>Shamim, Shamim, yimuka</i>	<i>Shamim, Shamim, get up</i>
3	Nubi	Hasad (Nubi)	Sadi, Sadi, gumu fo	Sadi, Sadi, get up
4	Ganda	Marjan (Nubi, Ganda)	<i>ggwe Moses, Mosesi</i>	you <i>Moses, Mosesi</i>
5	Nubi	all children	aya ne abidu-kum	Okay let us start
6	English	all	<i>on your marks, one, two, three, four, five</i>	<i>on your marks, one, two, three, four, five</i>
7	Ganda	Shamim	<i>emu</i>	one
(8)			A-B-C-D-	(the children begin to sing the A-B-C)
9	Ganda	Shamim	<i>tuyimbe, Shamim, muli kukyi</i>	let's sing, <i>Shamim</i> , what are you doing
(10)			A-B-C-D-E-F-G-	
11	Ganda	Shamim	<i>okaba yi, okaba yi, musoke muveko mwena mutule bulungi, Shamim, vako Nenda kulopa bakukube Nenda kulopa bakukube</i>	why do you cry, why do you cry get up, all of you sit nicely, <i>Shamim</i> , go away I shall take you to court (so that) they will beat you I shall take you to court (so that) they will beat you
12	Nubi (SWAHILI)	Hasad, Marjan	aya Sadi, gayi-kum boyi na, Marjani, num aya Sadi, juri ita na, ah juru ita na bakan wede Marjan, juru ita, numu seme, numu Marjani shauri taki kan ita fi ma, shauri YENU	Okay Sadi, sit (all) over there Marjani, sleep Okay Sadi, move over there, ah move over there to that place Marjan, mover over, sleep well, sleep, Marjani it is your own business if you are not there your business

2.3 Situational code-switching in role games

The following example testifies to code-switching triggered by role games. Not surprisingly, the children will use as much English as they can when playing, for instance, during school activities (teaching, sports¹⁴). The children will, on the other hand, use the little Swahili at their disposal when they play their favourite game 'radio broadcasting'. It would appear from the recorded examples that the radio news make as little sense to the children as their attempts to put Swahili words together:

Code-switch	Speaker	Language	Discourse	Translation
	Salim	<i>Ganda</i>	<i>mavulire gagano gava wano mu Kampala</i>	here are the news from Kampala
	Shamim	<i>Ganda</i>	<i>tebasomasa</i>	one doesn't teach (= read the news) like that
1	Bogere	SWAHILI	HABARI, WEZA, MTOTO	how are you, be able, child
	Zam-Zam	SWAHILI	NZURI	(I am) fine
2	Salim	SWAHILI	MTOTO HABARI GANI	child how are you
3		<i>Ganda</i>	MTOTO IKO <i>nakuwata njovu</i>	this child catches an elephant
4		SWAHILI	MTOTO	the child
5		<i>Ganda</i>	<i>nakwata</i>	carries
6		SWAHILI	NA	(and/with)
7		<i>Ganda</i>	<i>baana</i>	children
8		SWAHILI	NA GALO IKO NA MTOTO NA	and a girl is here and child and
9		<i>Ganda</i>	<i>bigege</i>	Tilapia (fish from Lake Victoria)
10		SWAHILI	IKO NA	here is
11		<i>Ganda</i>	<i>binyonyi</i>	birds
12		SWAHILI	IKO NA	here is
13		<i>Ganda</i>	<i>bantu</i>	people
14		SWAHILI	IKO NA	here is
15		<i>Ganda</i>	<i>gejja</i>	getting fat
16		SWAHILI	NA MTOTO NA	and a child and
17		<i>Ganda</i>	<i>kumaliliza</i>	to finish
18		SWAHILI	IKO NA MTOTO MZURI NA	here is a nice child and
19		<i>Ganda</i>	<i>mpologoma</i>	a lion
20		SWAHILI	NA	and
21		Nubi	pilili Koromojong	a naked Koromojong
22		SWAHILI	NA MTOTO NAKULA NVAMA YIKO NA	and the child eats the meat here and
		Nubi	pilili Koromojong	a naked Koromojong

2.4 Emphatic code-switching

Quite typically, this involves the repetition of a command or question in another language, or to highlight a section of a report or description. In the following example Bogere (aged 6) looks at and describes to the other children, pictures in a book which are used as stimuli:

Code-switch	Speaker	Language	Discourse	Translation	
	Bogere	<i>Ganda</i>	<i>... eno ziri kumpi kugwawo.</i>	... these are almost finished.	
1		Nubi	wede sunu?	what is that?	
2		<i>Ganda</i>	<i>eno kyɪ?</i>	<i>si nnyanja. eno njovu</i>	what is that? that is no lake, that is an elephant
			<i>ndabye enjovu enkulu</i>	<i>eno kyɪ?</i>	I have seen a big elephant what is that?
		Nubi	wede sunu?		what is that?
4		<i>Ganda</i>	<i>ndabye enjovu ziri mu nnyumba yazu</i>	I have seen elephants in their house	
5		Nubi	kaku	a monkey	
6		<i>Ganda</i>	<i>enkima okyilabye enkima?</i>	a monkey did you see the monkey?	

2.5 Code-switching to mark asides which are not part of the discourse

When the children are interrupted while reporting or telling a story, they would address the 'disturber' in a different language to that of the report or story, disregarding the language preference of the disturber. In the following example, Bogere tells a story in Ganda. He is interrupted by Shamim with whom he normally also speaks Ganda since this is her preferred language. However, in this case, when Shamim disturbs his discourse he rebukes her in Nubi.

Code-switch	Speaker	Language	Discourse	Translation
	Bogere	<i>Ganda</i>	<i>ne ndaba abantu nga bali mu mazzi</i>	and I see people who are in the water
1		Nubi	ana bi dugu ita	(to <i>Shamim</i>): I will beat you
2		<i>Ganda</i>	<i>ne ndaba emotoka</i>	and I see a motor car
3		Nubi	ayaya ayina Shamim, musu ana kelem	ayaya look, Shamim, I have told you
4		<i>Ganda</i>	<i>ne ndaba ebasi nga ono aweese ebintu bye babitwale</i>	and I see a bus which carries these loads (so that) they take them

2.6 Code-switching to mark reported/direct speech

Interestingly, it is not only the quotation which may be marked by changing the language. In order to maintain the language of the discourse in the quotation as well, the speaker may change the language before the quotation in order to switch back for the actual quotation:

Code-switch	Speaker	Language	Discourse	Translation
	Hasad	Nubi	ayinu Marjani kelem	look, Marjani said
1		<i>Ganda</i>	<i>omuserikali</i>	'a soldier'
	Marjan	Nubi	... nyereku yegif fi bakan ta basi.	... the child stood at the bus stop.
			dukuru yala ja milan.	then many children came.
1		<i>Ganda</i>	<i>mbadde ngamba Bogere</i>	I said to Bogere
2		Nubi	yala ja milan ini	'here many children have come'

Within a narrative discourse, the direct speech is marked simply by changing the language; thus there is no need to use a quotative verb:

Code-switch	Speaker	Language	Discourse	Translation
	Bogere	Nubi	... dukuru galamoyo ja.	... and then the goat came:
1		<i>Ganda</i>	<i>bana bange muggulawo</i>	'my children, open up'
2		Nubi	dukuru umon fata ...	then they opened ...

2.7 Code-switching to indicate an unintentional change of topic (rather rare)

The children look at a book containing pictures of various animals. Bogere speaks in Nubi, but, for some reason, borrows and inserts the Ganda word *ttimba* for 'python'. Zam-Zam, in Nubi, quotes Salim who had said, in Ganda, that the correct word in Ganda for 'snake' would have been *musota*. Bogere accepts the correction by stating the whole matter in Ganda. He then returns to the original topic, the next picture in the book, and accordingly switches back to Nubi. For the following picture, however, he addresses Abudu in Abudu's preferred language which is Ganda:

Code-switch	Speaker	Language	Discourse	Translation
	Bogere	(Ganda)Nubi	<i>ttimba fuwen</i>	where is the 'python'?
	Zam-Zam	Nubi	Salim kelem gali	Salim said
1		Ganda	<i>eno musota</i>	that is a 'snake'
2	Bogere	Ganda	<i>anti musota ye ttimba</i>	so, the snake is a python
3		Nubi	<i>wede kaku musu</i>	that, then, is a monkey
4		Ganda (to Abudu)	<i>ggwe Abudu, ndagirira omuti</i>	you Abudu, show me a tree

2.8 'Tag-switching' to indicate awareness of social hierarchy

The term 'tag-switching' refers to interlarding utterances occasionally with idiomatic expressions from another language with which the speaker is not necessarily very familiar. (For instance, I could have interspersed my presentations with occasional short passages from Latin to show my classical education, e.g. *quod erat demonstrandum*, or *hic et nunc, et cetera*). The purpose may be to 'show off' linguistically or, as in the case of the Bombo children, for the younger children to signal to the older children that they are aware of the older children's language preferences but that they are socially exempt from using the preferred language of the older child.

Tag-switch	Speaker	Language	Discourse	Translation
	Shamim (younger)	Ganda	<i>encha genda, Marjani, encha genda</i>	tomorrow you go, Marjani (older) , tomorrow you go
tag		Nubi	<i>ita ayinu</i>	you see

2.9 Summary

In closing this section of the paper, let me quote once again from the conclusion of the study on the Bombo children (Khamis 1994: 275):

‘It can be maintained that the children of Bombo do not handle code-switching in a haphazard and accidental way, but use it to serve various [pragmatic] functions. Both phenomena of language contact ..., i.e. nonce borrowing and code-switching are manifestations of multilingual linguistic competence. The children make use of it as [the communicative] need arises. The exploitation of several languages in [the same] discourse [definitely] enriches the children’s inventory of linguistic expression.’

3 Educational Implications

Paedolinguistic observations like those presented in this paper have far-reaching implications for language planning and education in Africa:

- If multilingualism is the norm rather than the exception in Africa,
- and if, even before entering any kind of formal education, multilingual African children are known to have mastered adequately and creatively their command of two, three or more languages,
- and if this linguistic competence testifies to more elaborate and complex patterns of the broader communicative competence of these children as opposed to monolingual children,
- then anyone who bears some responsibility in planning and deciding on the linguistic aspects of educational policies would, in my opinion, be well advised to view multilingualism as an important resource to be utilised as widely as possible since this draws on the children's prior experience, their established abilities, and relates directly to their linguistic, social, and cultural environments.

More than 1 800 years ago the Roman writer Quintilian¹⁵ in his *Institutio oratoria* had already pointed out the usefulness for any child to acquire a second language, since the advantages were not only in the intellectual development of the child, but also in an increased potential to enhance the child's mother-tongue competence. The more surprising it is then to note that early multilingualism, or even multilingualism in general, is not generally accepted as a blessing in 'western' cultures who, unfortunately in this regard, have a tremendous negative influence on educational debates in Africa. This 'western' heritage is described by R. Wardhaugh (1992: 101) in the following way and with obviously the situation in the USA in mind. With its:

1. masses of seasonal farm workers from south of the border;
2. continuous influx of often poor immigrants, legal or illegal, from eastern Europe and the Balkan; and
3. jobless juvenile delinquents who use Spanish more than English;
plus
4. the experience in monolingual English-speaking households which employ, legally or illegally, bilingual Spanish-English domestic servants:

There is a long history in certain western societies of people actually 'looking down' on those who are bilingual. We give prestige only to a certain few 'classical' languages (e.g., Greek and Latin) or modern languages of 'high' culture (e.g., English, French, Italian, and German). You generally get little credit for speaking Swahili and, until recently at least, not much more for speaking Russian, Japanese, Arabic, or Chinese. Bilingualism is actually sometimes regarded as a 'problem' in that many bilingual individuals tend to occupy rather low positions in society and knowledge of another language becomes associated with 'inferiority'. 'Bilingualism' is seen as a personal and social problem, not something that has strong positive connotations. One tragic consequence is that many western societies appear to have adopted the bizarre policy of doing just about everything they can to wipe out the languages that immigrants bring with them while at the same time trying to teach foreign languages in schools. What is more, they have had much more success in doing the former than the latter.

Oksaar (1989: 314) adds that in western (particularly European) cultures multilingual adults are generally admired, but multilingual pre-school children tend to be pitied. In the African context, the negative attitude towards multilingualism particularly when involving indigenous African languages often rests, at least implicitly or subconsciously, on the idea of the superiority of colonial languages and cultures and the general inferiority of the languages and cultures of the colonised populations.

Modern paedolinguistic, psycholinguistic and neurophysiological research on the cognitive development of children, however, tend to support Quintilian's early theory rather than the quoted western heritage, the latter being intimately linked to neo-romantic notions concerning the Western European nation-state ideology of the 19th century: 'one country – one nation – one language – one culture = monomania'.

It is often overlooked that language acquisition and learning, particularly in early periods, is not restricted to the acquisition of phonetic inventories of sounds, phonological patterns and grammatical rules plus an ever-increasing lexicon, but automatically involves

cultural and social learning, i.e. of culture-specific *behaviouremes* or *culturemes* (Oksaar 1988). Learning to speak a language in a natural setting involves the acquisition of interactional patterns in terms of a wider socio-cultural and communicative competence for which Gumperz (1972:205) offers the following definition:

Whereas linguistic competence covers the speaker's ability to produce grammatically correct sentences, communicative competence describes his ability to select, from the totality of grammatically correct expressions available to him, forms which appropriately reflect the social norms governing behaviour in specific encounters.

Individual multilingualism, therefore, and especially that of early childhood, is an asset of increased intellectual and social competence. Who would want to sacrifice such resourcefulness on the altar of traditional concepts of monolingual education in a language which is often, if not always, not part of the child's linguistic repertoire? Such outdated concepts, nevertheless, are still virulent among policy-makers all over Africa whom (for this and other reasons) I refer to as the modern African elites who had undergone 'alienation brainwashing' during their formal education in colonial, missionary or military institutions, and therefore suffer from 'monomania'. Die-hard prejudices and misconceptions relating to multilingualism particularly in Africa rest on implicit assumptions that modern science has proven to be wrong, namely that:

- national unity requires official monolingualism;
- the official language must be an international language;
- initial mother-tongue education is at the expense of the international language, even if only taught in the first two/three years;
- if children are taught too many languages, they will master none properly.

We should also be warned by the fact that psychological studies to the effect that bilingualism in early childhood might lead to split personalities and an imperfect mastery of each of the two languages were strongly propagated by adherents of racist theories, particularly in Germany (e.g. Epstein, Blocher, Ries and others)¹⁶ at a time when national chauvinism and fascism were virulent in their society.

However, if the constitutional stipulations for plurilingualism, as in the case of South Africa, are taken seriously and which would

imply multilingual institutional profiles on both national and provincial levels, the enhancement and fostering of individual multilingualism involving the mother tongue becomes a primary goal for all educational planning and implementation activities. The results of paedolinguistic and psychological studies over the last 80 years strongly suggest that multilingual exposure should ideally take place from the earliest stages of the child's development, because,¹⁷ and I refer to various sources between 1914 and 1989:

- pre-school children learn most effectively through play and social interaction with peers and adults;
- 50% of intellectual development is achieved by the age of 4, and a further 30% before the child reaches the age of 8 (Bloom 1964);
- the progress and impact of mental development, and social and intellectual competence within the first three years of one's life is virtually equivalent to that of the rest of your lifetime (W. Stern 1914, White/Kaban/Attanucci 1979 [Harvard Pre-School Project]);
- before the age of 6–7 years children make easier contact with their social and linguistic environments – they do not yet reflect, or reflect to a lesser extent on mistakes and deviations from norms (Wieczerkowski 1978);
- pre-school children are more likely not to be stunned or confused by 'alterity' phenomena, i.e. they accommodate unfamiliar concepts much easier than older children or even adults;
- they generally have more time and more favourable environments for acquiring a second language;
- small children who acquire two languages simultaneously keep these two languages distinct and associate different value systems with them (Stern/Stern 1928);
- bilingualism enhances analytical skills, allows for more complex views of reality, and facilitates learning of a third language (Arsenian 1945, Spoerl 1946, Peal/Lambert 1962, Tabouret-Keller 1963, Oksaar 1971, 1978, Feldmann/Shen 1971, Janco-Worall 1972, Titone 1979);
- bilingual children tend to show a greater ability to imitate, show higher cognitive flexibility and spontaneity, and are less inhibited (Titone 1979, Lambert 1980, Ben Zeev 1972);
- bilingual children tend to reflect on structural properties of their mother tongue and the other language much earlier, i.e. at the

age of 4-5 years, testifying to abstract operations which, following the model of Piaget (1972), would only be expected from much older monolingual children;

- bilingual children tend to learn read and write in both languages much earlier (65% of the bilingual children in the Hamburg Project could do so by the age of 4–5) which also testifies to abstract comparative operations and analytical properties (Oksaar 1989).

Emphasis in education, therefore, has to be on the acceptance of multilingualism as the norm and corresponding issues of *linkage* (Pattanayak 1995) and *awareness*:

- awareness of the need for and the benefits of, mother-tongue education;
- awareness of the differences between home dialect and the standard, as much as differences amongst other geographical and social variations;
- awareness of the need to link the mother tongue with the school language which may be a different dialect or even a different language;
- confidence in the adequate structure of the mother tongue and its potential capabilities, and the possibility of creating a formal grammar and dictionaries;
- awareness of the distinctions between the first, second, possibly third and the foreign language (in exoglossic education-policy environments).

4 Conclusion

Let me conclude by listing four strong and slightly provocative claims which I do not tire of repeating on occasions like these:

1. Multilingualism and multiculturalism are so normal not only in Africa but world-wide that monolingual situations must be viewed as being strange and definitely as limiting.
2. Multilingual education involving the pre-existing multilingual competence of children is superior to monolingual education, given the acquired superior intellectual and social competence of multilingual children.
3. Optimised education presupposes adequate mother-tongue education.
4. There could be no successful and competitive national development of multilingual states in Africa without due recognition of the big three 'M's':
 - multilingualism (and multiculturalism);
 - modernisation of the mother tongues;¹⁸ and
 - mother-tongue education.

Any educational policy which in consequence deprives children of their mother tongue during education – in school and possibly even at home, for instance, by well-meaning parents making a fetish of English – and particularly in environments characterised by social marginalisation, cultural alienation and economic stress as is true for many communities in Africa will, most likely, produce an unnecessarily high rate of emotional and socio-cultural cripples who are retarded in their cognitive development and deficient in terms of psychological stability. Faced with heavy institutional multilingualism, particularly in urban agglomerations, with English as the preferred target language to which they have only restricted access and largely in the form of inadequate role models ('Black Urban Vernacular Englishes'), joblessness and juvenile delinquency are just two of the likely social consequences; the other is the emergence of 'new' languages filling the vacuum left by linguistic and cultural 'homelessness' in terms of expressions of identity and solidarity: *Tsotsitaal*, *Iscamtho* and *Pretoria Sotho*, for instance, in South Africa, and *Sheng* in Nairobi, *Nouchi* in Abidjan. Educationists, linguists, sociologists have barely begun to look at a totally new set of problems arising from this consequence.

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Notes

- 1 An earlier version of this paper was originally solicited under the title *Individual Multilingualism in the African Context* for a workshop on *Language Planning and Institutional Language Policy*, organized by Profs Sonja Bosch and Rosalie Finlayson for the Northern Branch of ALASA, held at UNISA on March 13, 1998. It has been modified for presentation at the PRAESA Forum at UCT on July 2, 1999.

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- 2 UNESCO Working Document for the Intergovernmental Conference on Language Policies in Africa. Harare, March 17-21, 1997. (Unpubl.)
- 3 For the full bibliographical references, the reader is referred to Khamis (1994):

Diglossia Studies	Author(s)	Year of publication
Swahili-English	Scotton & Ury	1977
Kikuyu-English	Scotton	1979
Akan-English	Forson	1979
Adangme-English	Nartey	1982
Yoruba-English	Goke-Pariola	1983
Hausa-English	Madaki	1983
Lingala-French	Kamwangamalu	1984
Hausa-English	Bickmore	1985
Lingala-French, Swahili-English	Bokamba	1988
Swahili-English	Myers-Scotton	1990
Shona-English	Myers-Scotton	1991
Wolof-French	Deprez-de Heridia	in preparation
Senufo-French	Tabouret-Keller	in preparation
Shaba Swahili-French	De Rooij	in preparation
Swahili-English, Shona-English	Myers-Scotton	in preparation
Triglossia Studies	Author(s)	Year of publication
Asu-Swahili-English	O'Barr	1971
Kipare/Kinyakusa-Swahili-English	Mkilifi	1972
Larteh-Twi-English	Johnson	1975
Luhya-Swahili-English	Scotton & Ury	1977
Luhya-Swahili-English	Myers-Scotton	1988
Lwidakho-Swahili-English	Myers-Scotton	1990
Lwidakho-Swahili-English	Myers-Scotton	in preparation

4 These are:

Shaba Swahili-Swahili Bora	Myers-Scotton	in preparation
Lwidakho-Swahili	Myers-Scotton	in preparation

- 5 Khamis (1994). This study of the linguistic behaviour of quadrilingual pre-school children in Bombo, Uganda, contains references to just two more studies on language acquisition of African children: one on two monolingual Baganda children carried out by their mother (Byangwa-Matovu 1990), and an unpublished M.A. thesis on language acquisition of children in a multilingual setting in Niamey, Niger (Kümmerle 1993).
- 6 E.g. J. Ronjat: *Le développement du langage observé chez un enfant bilingue*. Paris 1913.
- 7 This is not the time and place to review the rich literature in which we would have to quote at least the major publications by the following outstanding authors – listed in order of first year of publication (for full bibliographical references, the reader is referred to Khamis 1994): McClure and McClure (1975), Myers-Scotton (1976, 1979, 1982, 1983, 1988, 1990, 1991), Wentz and McClure (1977), Poplack (1980, 1981, 1988, 1990), Goke-Pariola (1983), Bokamba (1986, 1988), Di Sciullo, Muysken and Singh (1986), Appel and Muysken (1987), Boeshoten and Verhoeven (1987), Poplack, Wheeler and Westwood (1987), Poplack, Sankoff and Miller (1988), Sankoff, Poplack and Vanniarajan (1991).
- 8 The term was first used by Weinreich (1953) and was later taken up by Poplack (e.g. in Sankoff, Poplack and Vanniarajan 1991).
- 9 Note that L1 and L2 are used to refer to any number of languages available to any speaker/hearer; the symbols are not to be construed in terms of sequence of language acquisition or learning!
- 10 One of the most obvious situational triggers of code-switching is when the speaker turns to a hearer whom he knows to be monolingual or to prefer one of the languages. *Preference choice* has hardly ever been described for multilingual adults but is rather characteristic, as we shall see later, for multilingual young children. The following are examples from conversations among multilingual adults in Gambia who code-switch between Wolof, Mandinka, and English. In the first example, the addressee, a man named Fabakary, is monolingual in Mandinka and is therefore immediately addressed in that language – without any further instances of switching or insertions – when the otherwise happily code-switching speaker turns to him, this happens in the course

of a lively conversation with several participants who all freely code-switch back and forth between Wolof and Mandinka (examples taken from Haust 1995):

Wolof	French ('grave')- Wolof		<i>Mandinka</i>
naka la moo	garaaw-e,	Fabakary,	ν μαΝ τοονψαα φο βαΝ?
How can that	be serious,	Fabakary,	don't I speak the truth?

In the following example, the matrix language of one and the same speaker is changed several times from Mandinka to Wolof, back to Mandinka, and then again to Wolof; the passages both in Mandinka and in Wolof are 'interlarded' with insertions (nonce borrowings) from English:

Matrix Language	Discourse	Translation
<i>Mandinka</i>	... BECAUSE viN i ψε ωο λα PROOF nyo-lu je i be a je-la ko SOCIETY-lu doo-lu kono niN i diyaamu-ta suruwaa kaNo la i ye	... because when you look at the proof you will see that in certain societies when you speak Wolof to them
Wolof	nga am MISTAKE yooyu	(and) you make mistakes
<i>Mandinka</i>	i be a je-la ko daal i si a START	you will see that they start
Wolof	di la ree ak yooyu	to laugh about you and such things

11 Family 2 is a case of straightforward Nubi monolingualism at home. However, they live near the market and the army barracks where a lot of Swahili is spoken. (Swahili is L1 for many soldiers who also use this language in their homes and in communication with other inhabitants of Bombo.) Through the ubiquitous holes in the fence around the barracks, even small children before the age of three freely enter the barracks' premises to play with the children there. In the Army's kindergarten and in primary school, Swahili and English are used as media of instruction. Exposure to Luganda, on the other hand, is much later, for instance, on Bombo market. On the radio, in addition to broadcasting in Swahili, there are also programmes in Luganda which the children would be occasionally exposed to. It is not before they enter pre-school or school that they regularly have contact with Luganda speaking children, i.e. at the age of 3 or later. For some children, Luganda is acquired almost simultaneous with Nubi and

Swahili. Thus we find the following psycho-sociolinguistic patterns for the children of this family:

Family 2: psycho-sociolinguistic type	language
simultaneous acquisition L1 + L2	Nubi, Swahili
successive L3 acquisition (and/or learning)	Ganda
L4 learning	English

and/or (for some children)

Family 2: psycho-sociolinguistic type	language
simultaneous acquisition L1 + L2 + L3	Nubi, Swahili, Ganda
L4 learning	English

- 12 Note that the terminological difference between *language acquisition* on the one hand, and *language learning* on the other reflects different psycholinguistic processes related to the age of the individual person and the conditions under which the exposure to language takes place. The critical age range is generally, but to a certain extent arbitrarily, assumed to be before and after the age of 3 years (McLaughlin 1978).
- 13 All translation from the German original by HEW. The author of the study, Cornelia Khamis, was related by marriage to one of the families living in Bombo. She is referred to in the following examples as 'Mama Yasin' (mother-of-Yasin); Yasin is one of her own two children who were part of the playgroups under observation. The data were collected on video and audio tapes and transcribed on the spot.
- 14 Note Bogere's codeswitching to English in the previous example (instance no. 6) alluding to school sports practice.
- 15 Edited and translated by H. Rahn (1972). Quoted from Oksaar (1989).
- 16 According to Titone 1979, quoted from Oksaar (1989:314).
- 17 Based on Oksaar (1989).
- 18 For reasons of time and space and the restricted topic of the present paper, I have not discussed this highly important issue which goes hand-in-glove with democratisation and strategies towards solving the educational crisis of the African continent, cf. Wolff 1999.