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Language of Instruction: a question of disconnected capabilities

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Language of Instruction: a question of disconnected capabilities

This paper focuses on the issue of language of instruction, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, and considers the persistent preference for monolingual learning environments in multilingual societies. The perception that the use of African languages in education interferes with the acquisition of a global language is shown to be incongruous with current research and theories about multilingual learning and translanguaging. Moreover, drawing from an empirical study in Tanzania, it is observed that the rigid separation of different languages not only has implications for effective language acquisition, but is also associated with negative social consequences for learners. This paper argues that the capability approach can contribute to improved understanding and analysis of these phenomena. In particular, it suggests that several issues relating to language of instruction can be usefully reframed as a problem of disconnected capabilities.

Keywords: language of instruction; capability approach; secondary education; Tanzania; translanguaging

Introduction

This paper contributes to the debate about language of instruction in education. The discussion is primarily situated within arguments relating to schooling in Sub-Saharan Africa, but the conceptual argument developed may resonate across a wide range of multilingual contexts. This is particularly significant as the influence of colonial histories, combined with forces of globalisation, have resulted in the increased popularity and availability of English-medium instruction across a variety of countries where English is not the dominant language (Rose and McKinley 2018; Airey et al. 2017; Hamid, Nguyen, and Baldauf 2013; Dearden 2014). This paper suggests that one of the limitations of existing debates about language of instruction is that those on different sides of the argument are focused on different goals for language. This results in the narrowing of the lens through which the issue of language-in-education is viewed, and in evidence being side-lined or ignored that clearly demonstrates that the use of an unfamiliar medium of instruction has negative effects on learning.

This paper argues that the concepts and tools offered by the capability approach can usefully support a broadening of focus when considering issues of language-in-education. The capability approach came to the fore initially through the work of Amartya Sen (1980, 1992; 1999) and acts as a tool with which to '*conceptualize* and *evaluate*' the situations of individuals (Robeyns 2005, 94). The capability approach supports the analysis of the all the conditions, including personal, material and social factors, that enable or constrain a person to have the opportunities or *capabilities* to 'be' and 'do' the things that they value (Sen 1999). When used to frame the question of language of instruction, the concepts and vocabulary of the capability approach enable the development of a socially-situated account of language-related aspirations, beliefs and practices. Particularly relevant to the issue of language-in-education, and thus to

this paper, is the commitment made within the approach to the recognition of *value pluralism* (Robeyns 2017). Individuals can, and do, value multiple different 'beings' and 'doings' simultaneously. The examples and discussion in this paper demonstrate that students hold plural values relating to their multiple languages, but also that language use is importantly connected to a series of other valued, social capabilities. As a result of this analysis, which demonstrates that students frequently feel forced to make choices and trade-offs between different 'beings' and 'doings' that they value, this paper argues that the language of instruction debate can be usefully reframed as an issue of disconnected capabilities.

The insights in this paper are drawn from an ethnographic study in two Tanzanian secondary schools that looked at students' experiences of negotiating their school language environments. In this context, students' and teachers' different languages were clearly demarcated. Although multiple languages were used in school, and valued by participants, the use of the national lingua franca, Kiswahili, was firmly positioned as a regrettable necessity to compensate for students' shortcomings in English, the official language of instruction. This paper demonstrates that consideration of different languages as discrete capabilities sits counter to the most up-to-date research in the field of multilingual learning and translanguaging, and results in missed opportunities for students' and teachers' capabilities in their first languages to purposefully connect to and enhance their capabilities in an additional language (Clegg and Simpson 2016; Cummins 2015; García and Li 2014).

This paper also looks beyond these linguistic arguments about the practice of effective language learning and communication. By sharing examples from students' broader experiences of language in schooling, it is argued that the separation of language capabilities also results in disconnection and even conflict and trade-offs

between other capabilities that are valued by learners. In particular, this paper identifies tensions and disconnections in the relationships between students in a context where cooperation is highly valued. Moreover, it highlights disconnection within the majority of learners who are torn between two (or more) valued senses of 'being'. Ultimately, this paper argues that there could be significant benefit in highlighting the connections between language capabilities. It suggests that policy makers and practitioners in education should no longer be asking the questions, 'What should be the language of instruction?', or 'How can students best learn *X* language?', but instead asking, 'How can policy and practice celebrate and strengthen connections so that students can effectively develop their capabilities in *X* languages, whilst simultaneously protecting and nurturing other valued capabilities?'

Language of Instruction: the great debate?

Language policy and practice are absolutely central to good quality education as language is the medium through which learning is most commonly negotiated and assessed (Milligan, Desai, and Benson 2020; Afitska et al. 2013; UNESCO 2016). It is a source of significant frustration for many commentators, then, that the language of instruction is all too often neglected in education and development planning (Taylor-Leech and Benson 2017; Tikly 2016; Prah 2012). In Sub-Saharan Africa, where the language of instruction debate has been constantly rumbling since the 1960s, there is a growing body of evidence about the ineffectiveness of existing language practices for learning, but this has not resulted in noticeable change on the ground (Brock-Utne 2010; Qorro 2013; Clegg and Simpson 2016; Milligan, Clegg, and Tikly 2016; Kamwangamalu 2018). In a review of language policy in 21 countries in Eastern and Southern Africa, Trudell (2016b, 2016a) noted that all of these systems used an

international language as the language of instruction for some years of schooling, but that the transition from local or national African languages was planned for different stages. Trudell's review also observed, though, that language practice did not always align with policy. At school level, she identified a trend for early transition to the international language, which was most commonly English. Concerns raised about the negative impacts of the use of English as the language of instruction have not only been raised in Sub-Saharan African countries, but are becoming increasingly relevant globally as there is a clear trend for the growth of English-medium instruction in countries where English is not a majority first language, both in well-resourced and poorly-resourced schooling contexts (Dearden 2014; Hamid, Nguyen, and Baldauf 2013; Bhattacharya 2013).

Compared to other countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, Tanzania stands out as having one of the latest transitions to a global language, with the national language and lingua franca, Kiswahili, used as the language of instruction throughout seven years of primary schooling. The shift to English as the language of instruction happens at the beginning of the secondary stage. There was some confusion caused by the release in February 2015 of the 'Education and Training Policy 2014' (Jamhuri ya Muungano wa Tanzania 2014), which was reported in the press to mean that 'Tanzania dumps English as its official language in schools' (Mohammed 2015). However, elsewhere, the policy has been translated more directly and, in fact, allows for both Kiswahili and English to be used (Mohr and Ochieng 2017). Thus far there have been no reports of noticeable changes in school language practice (Tibategeza and du Plessis 2018), and in June 2019 the Minister for Education was reported as having reassured Tanzanian MPs that English would remain the language of instruction in secondary schools (The Citizen 2019). Arguably, this policy change simply better reflects the reality in classrooms

where Kiswahili has consistently been used alongside English (Mwinsheikhe 2009; Webb and Mkongo 2013; Mligo and Mwashilindi 2017).

In 2009, after years of research and advocacy relating to language-in-education in Tanzania, Martha Qorro lamented that 'it is not easy to talk of new ideas when discussing the language in education…since for 50 years African countries such as Tanzania have been debating the language of instruction issue, with the debate almost going stale at times'. She continued that 'it is hard to argue in a systematic manner…because all sorts of reasons are thrown into the language of instruction debate or parameters are changed' (Qorro 2009, 58). This paper suggests that she is describing a situation in which the different sides of this debate have not meaningfully responded to one another's arguments, but instead have prioritised different goals for language. The vast majority of policy makers, and public opinion, have ignored a growing body of evidence about the effects of language choice on learning in their defence of English as the medium of instruction (Brock-Utne 2007; Desai, Qorro, and Brock-Utne 2010; Hamid, Nguyen, and Kamwangamalu 2014; Vavrus and Bartlett 2013). But researchers and educationalists on the other side of the argument have perhaps not gone far enough to communicate their findings, conclusions and suggestions in a way that does not make people feel that their access to English is being threatened and adequately recognises the crucial and multiple social roles that language plays in people's lives.

Researchers, educationalists and linguists have focused on language as a form of communication for learning, concluding that familiar languages would be much more effective media of instruction. However, those who argue for the retention or extension of English as the sole language of instruction tend to prioritise the potential benefits of English and what they believe it represents in terms of their national, community, family and individual aspirations. Muthwii & Kioko (2003, 99) claim that, in Africa,

‘the aspiration to acquire English is almost fanatical’. The desire for English has historical roots in many postcolonial contexts as English and formal education have been, and continue to be, associated with social position and social mobility (Simpson 2008; Adegbija 1994; Roy-Campbell 2001). The fact that English continues in many African countries to be used for, or associated with, official functions at the highest levels, both nationally and internationally, contributes to the perpetuation of a linguistic hierarchy which endows English with a higher status than African languages (Blommaert 2005; Billings 2011; Pennycook 2017). A desire for English is by no means limited to postcolonial Africa. The contemporary forces of globalisation, internationalisation and neoliberalism have been identified as powerful motivations underpinning the demand for English-medium education in a wide range of countries and at different levels of education, including, for example, in secondary schooling in Nepal (Sah and Karki 2020) and Thailand (Liu 2019), and in higher education in Saudi Arabia (Le Ha and Barnawi 2015) and Japan (Rose and McKinley 2018). This positioning of English as the gatekeeper to the promises of globalisation and development has been met with varying levels of criticism (Crystal 2003; Kayman 2004; Canagarajah 2007; Phillipson 2008; Thiong’o 2018). This paper argues that even though it is crucial to be critical of the structures of power and inequality that underpin language politics and the position of English, it must be acknowledged that the students, teachers and communities that experience the effects of language policy, and who enact language practice, hold strong language-related aspirations that relate to their lived realities.

The common public viewpoint on language of instruction in Sub-Saharan Africa is heavily influenced by strongly held beliefs about how competency in English is best acquired. Brock-Utne (2012) argues that, although it is a misconception, the belief that

the best way to learn English is to use it as the medium of instruction has been so pervasive that it has become an 'undeniable "truth"' in the public narrative (Brock-Utne 2012, 787). Moreover, she notes that this belief suits the interests of several powerful groups and so the political will to challenge it has perhaps been lacking. Going hand-in-hand with the belief that English should be the language of instruction is another assumption that use of any other language will take away from the learning of English, a belief that Phillipson has identified as 'fallacy', but has also argued is 'intuitively commonsensical', contributing to its continued influence (Phillipson 1992, 210). It is a very common sight in Tanzanian secondary schools to see signs that read, "English Only" or "No English, No Service" (Qorro 2006; William and Ndabakurane 2017), and studies have reported students being punished for using other languages (Vavrus 2002; Tibategeza 2010; Joyce-Gibbons et al. 2018). Against this background, classroom codeswitching between English and a language with which students are more familiar has been branded as an 'illicit' practice, but one that is necessary to compensate for students' deficits in the language of instruction (Heugh 2015; Li and Martin 2009; Probyn 2009; Clegg and Afitska 2011).

These beliefs and assumptions about monolingual English instruction being the gold standard are persistent and have significant impact on the way that teaching and learning are approached in schools. Research, though, has repeatedly shown them to be false, and Cummins (2015, 274) argues that 'the research community has largely discarded what I have called the 'two solitudes' assumption that suggests that instruction should maintain a strict separation between the bilingual's two languages' (see also Cummins 2007). But the public strength of belief in keeping different languages separate perhaps goes some way to explaining why suggestions about changing the language of instruction in Tanzanian secondary schools to Kiswahili have

often been taken to mean the abandoning of English. In fact, this has rarely been the intention. In 1997, Roy-Campbell and Qorro explained that they wanted to move the debate away from an 'either…or' choice between English and Kiswahili to a discussion of 'both…and' (1997, vii), drawing attention also to the potential role of local languages in education.

In recent years, there has been a shift in how some researchers and linguists in Sub-Saharan Africa have framed discussion and analysis of language-in-education that supports the potential of 'both…and' as language practice (Tikly 2016; Brock-Utne 2016). They have drawn on insights from the field of bilingual education, and in particular the concept of translanguaging, that has already been highly influential in work with bilingual students in Wales (Jones 2017) and the USA (García and Kleyn 2016). There is now a significant body of research considering translanguaging in the context schooling in South Africa (Probyn 2015; Krause and Prinsloo 2016; Makalela 2015), but there are also examples from Botswana (Bagwasi 2017), Kenya (Kiramba 2017) and Zimbabwe (Charamba 2019). García and Wei (2014, 14) map the development of thinking about bilingualism and bilingual education. They explain that the traditional view positioned a bilingual individual's languages as 'autonomous linguistic systems'. Cummins (1979, 2008) later made a huge contribution to the field when he argued that these two language systems were not completely separate, but interdependent. But the view of dynamic bilingualism or translanguaging is that 'there is only one linguistic system' and that there are no linguistic borders between what have been socially designated as different languages (García and Li 2014, 14). This has important implications for the discussion in this paper because it challenges the view of different languages as indisputably separate and potentially in tension. Instead, advocates of translanguaging argue that flexible but purposive connection and

interaction between languages is not only natural, but can be beneficial and supportive of both the strengthening of the weaker language and understanding of the content being taught and learned (Creese and Blackledge 2010; García and Li 2014).

This section has offered an introduction to the language of instruction debate in Tanzania and elsewhere in Sub-Saharan Africa, arguing that it faces obstacles, in part, because the different parties have been arguing with different goals in mind and from different bases of 'truth'. This discussion has also shown that strongly held beliefs about the value of monolingual instruction are at odds with developing linguistic understanding in the fields of bilingual education and translanguaging. The next section will demonstrate how this relates to the capability approach and how an understanding of capabilities can helpfully contribute to the analysis of language-in-education.

The capability approach and language-in-education

The capability approach is a framework for the assessment of well-being that was initially introduced by Amartya Sen in 1979 (Sen 1980). Since then it has been discussed, critiqued and developed by scholars across a broad variety of fields, including economics, philosophy, political science and education, to name just a few. In 2017, Ingrid Robeyns published an introductory text in which she offers a generalised definition and outline of the capability approach, based both on Sen's work and the work of other scholars in the past 35 years (Robeyns 2017). Here she describes the capability approach as 'a flexible and multipurpose framework' (24), but one that always focuses on 'what people can do and be (their capabilities) and what they are actually achieving in terms of beings and doings (their functionings)' (9). The capability approach does not specify narrow sets of outcomes against which well-being should be measured, such as wealth or reported satisfaction or happiness, but rather views well-being as multidimensional and related to the extent to which people have the necessary

capabilities to 'lead the kind of lives they value – and have reason to value' (Sen 1999, 18). As such, the capability approach has been promoted, and in some cases is now well-established, as an alternative to more traditional and mainstream approaches across a wide variety of fields, for example as a challenge to income-based measures of poverty in development studies (Sen 1999; Alkire 2002, 2005; Stewart and Deneulin 2002; Nussbaum 2000b), or as a counter to human capital discourses in the field of education (Walker and Unterhalter 2007; Tikly and Barrett 2011; Robeyns 2006).

There are some recent examples of the capability approach being used in relation to language-in-education, but this paper argues that the potential contribution of the approach in this area has not yet been fully realised. The capability approach has usefully been applied to the question of language policy to highlight issues of inequality and justice. It has influenced both theoretical work (Lewis 2017; Shorten 2017; Tikly 2016) and has been used in the analysis of empirical research across a variety of contexts, including Zanzibar (Babaci-Wilhite 2015), Ghana (Bronwin 2016), Turkey (Cin and Walker 2016), India (Mohanty 2009, 2017) and Pakistan (Tamim 2013). Capabilities have also been analysed in relation to processes of language learning and inter-cultural dialogue in in Ireland (Crosbie 2014) and Gaza (Imperiale 2017). Additionally, the importance of language as both a discrete capability and a crucial component of other valued capabilities has been highlighted, both in and out of educational contexts (Wolff and de Shalit 2007; Wilson-Strydom 2015, 2016; Mutanga and Walker 2015). Thus far, however, the potential for the capability approach as a tool for analysing how competence in different languages interact, and how language connects to an individual's broader capability set and values is under-explored.

Perhaps the key feature of capabilities work is the distinction between capabilities and functionings, analytical classifications that Robeyns (2016, 405) terms

as the '*core concepts* in the capability approach'. 'Functionings' refer to an achieved state of 'being' or 'doing', while 'capabilities' refer to the opportunity that a person has to enact the related functioning, whether they choose to or not. Nussbaum (2000a, 84-5; 2011, 20-3) makes it helpfully clear that capabilities are about more than a person's natural abilities. She distinguishes between 'basic capabilities', 'internal capabilities' and 'combined capabilities'. Although there is some confusion caused by the use of the term 'capabilities' for all categories (Robeyns 2017, 93-4), the key point is that a person's 'combined capabilities' are comprised of a combination of: their innate potential to do or be something (basic capabilities); which can then grow or be nurtured into the related, developed skill (internal capabilities); plus a set of external circumstances that can enable or constrain. Tikly (2016) explains that this is particularly relevant to the consideration of language when he writes:

> 'a basic capability can be defined as the innate capacity to develop linguistic competence in one or more languages. The development of these skills requires, however, access to specific opportunities to develop this innate capacity and the removal of barriers to these opportunities. In the case of language acquisition this might relate to opportunities and barriers at a number of levels from the immediate pedagogical environment to the home and community and the wider education system' (Tikly 2016, 413).

Nussbaum's conceptualisation of the construction of 'combined capabilities' highlights the importance of recognising and analysing the connections and relationships between internal language processes and the social environments in which language is used. This paper argues that the capability approach is particularly well-placed for analysing the interaction of these different domains. Tikly (2016) discusses the influence of three overlapping environments on students' linguistic capability: the school environment; the home and community environment; and the wider education

system. This paper points a magnifying glass at the school and classroom environments to explore how the forced separation of language capabilities relates to language learning and understanding. Moreover, it considers how disconnection between language capabilities interact with students' other related capabilities.

In addition to the contribution of the concepts of capability and functioning, another aspect of the capability approach that is crucial for the study of language is its requirement that value pluralism be recognised. Robeyns (2017, 38) includes this amongst her 'non-optional core' elements that she argues all capabilities work should share. Students can, and do, simultaneously value multiple different 'beings' and 'doings'. These should be identified and every effort made to enable students to retain these plural values. But Robeyns (2017, 152) observes that, in 'the actual reality of our chaotic and often messy world, there are all sorts of complications that need to be taken into account'. These include trade-offs between different valued capabilities. Considering the frequency with which individuals and governments make decisions about which capabilities and functionings can and should be traded-off, there is remarkably little written in the capabilities literature guiding these decisions. But they must not be overlooked as a point of analysis. Unterhalter (2012, 340) helpfully warns, though, that 'informational limitations may well obscure particular features of the trade-off'. Unterhalter offers the example that global development planning could be 'implicitly sustaining a gender bias' (2012, 343). But similar concerns could be raised about language, where the dominant and pervasive narrative about the importance of English and monolingual instruction could mask, not only students' full set of language values, but also the other learning and school-related capabilities that students value. This paper raises concerns that the separation and forced disconnection between

students' different language capabilities results in a wide range of trade-offs being considered acceptable and even inevitable.

The Study

The insights in this paper emerged from an ethnographic study, conducted over 8 months, in two secondary schools in the Morogoro Region of Tanzania. The study aimed to develop a rich understanding of students' experiences of negotiating their school language environments as it was felt that a broad picture of the complexity and social-embeddedness of language beliefs and language use was missing from the Tanzanian language of instruction debate.

The two schools were selected to offer contrast. The first was a well-established, urban school with more than 1500 students enrolled across Forms 1-6. The second was a rural community school, built as part of a rapid expansion of secondary schools between 2004 and 2009, and had approximately 600 students enrolled across Forms 1-4. There were notable differences in the backgrounds of the students at the different schools, with the majority of rural students coming from families of farmers and being the first in their families to progress to secondary education. The urban group included a number of students who had professional parents, and many had older siblings who had already progressed through secondary schooling. There was, though, significant diversity within the urban student group. There were some students who had attended rural community primary schools and travelled long distances, or boarded with friends and family, in order to access the town school. In addition, there was a small group of

students who had attended private, English-medium primary schools.[1] This resulted in very different levels of capability in English between different students.

Data was generated through a variety of methods. In addition to the fieldnotes from participant observation throughout the period of fieldwork, the data set includes 51 lesson observations and 31 group interviews including a total of 146 students. The author of this paper was the principal researcher, but also worked with a group of 10 student researchers. The student researchers conducted 18 of their own interviews and co-designed and facilitated two workshops which brought together more than 80 students from across both schools and generated data through group activities and follow-up discussion. Data was collected in Kiswahili, English, or a mixture of both, depending on the preference of the participant.

The linguistic implications of disconnection for language and learning

The discussion of the literature above presented the argument made by proponents of translanguaging that 'there is only one linguistic system' (García and Li 2014, 14). Viewed in this way, the different languages that a student speaks should not be considered as distinct, but as connected parts of a single linguistic capability. But this was certainly not how the students and teachers in this study thought and talked about language. The two languages most often discussed were English and Kiswahili, and not only were they clearly demarcated, they were also positioned in oppositional conflict. This tension was brought about, at least in part, by the influence of the popular belief in

[1] Of 115 students in Forms 1 and 2 at the urban school who completed questionnaires about their home and family background, 13 reported having attended private, English-medium primary schools.

the '"two solitudes" assumption' and the 'undeniable "truth"' that the best way to learn English is to keep it completely separate from students' other language(s) and to use it as the sole language of instruction (Cummins 2015, 787; Brock-Utne 2012). One student, who was re-sitting Form Four because he had failed the previous year, blamed school leaders for not enforcing stricter language separation:

> "Leaders or heads of these schools should place different rules in place that force students to use the English language in all locations… I mean, if we look at the large proportion of our heads of our schools, they permit students to speak the Kiswahili language, so this hinders the development of the English language." [Interview conducted by an urban Student Researcher with a student from the urban school].

As this student indicates, students and teachers routinely used Kiswahili in school, both outside and inside the classroom. The vast majority of teachers frequently code-switched, using Kiswahili alongside English in their lessons. The use of Kiswahili was explained as regrettable, but necessary, because of the significant shortcomings in students' levels of English. One rural student explained that, at the beginning of secondary school they were told that there was a rule that Kiswahili should not be used. But she stated: *"It wasn't possible. We don't know English."* It is undoubtedly true that English posed a significant challenge for the vast majority of students, but from observations and interviews, it was not true that they didn't know any English. Moreover, there was significant diversity in students' English levels, with a handful of students at both schools able and willing to talk to the researcher in English, or a mixture of English and Kiswahili.

But the positioning of Kiswahili use as illicit and interfering with the process of learning English meant that, despite its crucial role in enabling understanding of lesson content, there was no discussion of *how* Kiswahili was being used in the classroom (see

also Probyn 2009; Mokgwathi and Webb 2013, for similar observations from South Africa and Botswana). The most common form of code-switching between English and Kiswahili that was observed as part of this study was for the teacher to translate points that had already been made in English. One student described the importance of this practice:

> "Those who don't translate to Kiswahili can't be understood. For example those teachers who speak English with you from start to finish, you can't understand. It's necessary that you speak English and then later you come to speak a little Kiswahili, translating what it means, then later you return again to English." [Female student in Form Two at the urban school].

From observations it was evident that the teacher talking in English, and then the teacher talking in Kiswahili, were two clearly different events rather than the more flexible, but strategic switching back and forth between languages that is discussed in the translanguaging literature. The separation between the two languages was even clearer when teachers used the common practice of writing notes in English on the board for students to copy, but then translating and talking about the notes in Kiswahili. Although there were a few examples of teachers asking students to translate individual words, these were not common, and it was extremely rare to see students writing anything down during translations. There have been questions raised elsewhere about the effectiveness of this form of translation, with concerns that it is time-consuming, preventing teachers from covering the whole curriculum, and that students will not listen to the original explanation if they know it will be translated into a language with which they are much more comfortable (Brock-Utne 2004; Brock-Utne, Desai, and Qorro 2003).

The linguistic insights from the multilingual and translanguaging literatures draw particular attention to the fact that the clear separation between the different

languages prevents connections being made that would allow students to use their existing language resources to negotiate understanding of both subject content and the English language. Students are even further restricted from these potential benefits by the fact that, overwhelmingly, although teachers used both English and Kiswahili in their teaching, students were not allowed to use Kiswahili to respond to questions. One student, Haadia, explained:

> "…the teachers ask in English, then they translate for us, and if we ask them if they want the answer in Kiswahili language or English language, they say English language, so then every person feels weak. Even if they have a question they won't ask it." [Haadia, Form One, Rural School].

Because Haadia was prevented from answering in Kiswahili, her capabilities to demonstrate her learning, or to ask a question were constrained. In this situation, and many others that were observed, the forced disconnection between students' different languages resulted in students being unable to achieve valued functionings relating to learning and participation. Yet the most recent understandings about multilingual learning suggest that, by fostering connections between languages, students might not only be able to participate and have improved opportunities for learning subject content, but these connections might also support language development.

Social implications of disconnection between language capabilities

The previous section presented a strict separation between different languages in the context of learning. Although, at a linguistic level, these demarcations may be argued not to exist, the strength of belief about the best way to learn English being 'English Only' instruction in most subjects contributed to the cementing of socially constructed language boundaries and tensions. But beliefs about the language learning process were not the only way that these disconnections were created. Writing about language policy

in Botswana, Bagwasi (2017, 203) states that 'languages are compartmentalized and ranked according to their status, there are boundaries put around them and each language is used for a distinct and separate social function'. This is also the way that different languages were conceived of by the participants in this study in Tanzania. Although the reality of language use was often 'messier', with significant amounts of cross-over, the fact that there was both a language hierarchy, and sanctioned times and places for different languages to be used, further contributed to tensions between languages. These inter-language conflicts were yet further encouraged by the association of different languages with other dichotomies, such as 'educated / uneducated' and 'modern / traditional'. Policies that encourage this 'either/or' approach to language planning have been staunchly criticised (Heugh 2014), yet the consequences of these oppositional choices were very present in the data from this study. This section explores the ways that these disconnections and tensions between different languages resulted in students being constrained from achieving other valued capabilities.

From the comments that students made about the importance of English, it might be easy to assume that it was the language that they most valued. Students pointed to its international importance, one female student from the urban school calling it *"that language of the world"*. But students also highlighted the importance of English in their daily lives. Talking about his schooling experience, one rural student explained that English was *"the most important thing in the life of a student"*. English was inseparable in students' imaginations both from the process of education and from the futures they aspired to. Firstly, it had an instrumental role as the medium of communication that acted as the official language of instruction and examination. In order to succeed in the national examinations that guarded progress between different levels of education,

students would require enough mastery of English. It was also a pre-requisite of many of the jobs they believed would support their idea of a 'good life'. English also had intrinsic value for students as it was associated with the status of 'being educated'. But because of the separation and tensions between different languages, and in particular the language hierarchy, using English could also be seen as a marker of superiority.

A group of students explained how this tension discouraged them from using English outside of lessons as they would face criticism from others:

> 1: "Others say "Ah…that guy…he's pretending like he's…"
> 2: "…in a higher class…"
> 1: "Yeah…like he's already become a star…because he speaks a little [English]"
> 2: "So they break a person's heart…even if you are interested in speaking, you shouldn't speak…because you are afraid of things like this."
> [Two male students in Form Four at the rural school]

Although these students noted that they valued the capability of 'speaking English' to the extent that they considered it heart-breaking to have to restrict their use of the language, they also valued the capabilities of 'being free from ridicule' and 'having good relationships with others'.

These concerns also filtered back to the classroom. Although speaking English was in theory sanctioned in this context, students felt that it was only safe to speak if they were very confident that the answer was correct. One female student in Form Two at the urban school explained the consequences of making a mistake, explaining, *"You will be laughed at, which means we are afraid of the shame…"*. In this case, students' fear of being considered 'boastful'[2] was compounded by their fear of being humiliated

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2 Term used by a male student in Form Two at the urban school.

for being ‘mentally slow’[3]. As a result, many students chose not to participate, even when they wanted to. In this case, the separation and disconnection between the different languages meant that students felt that they could only answer questions in English if they were already confident with that capability. The majority of students were not willing to take that risk. The fact that they were not allowed to use Kiswahili to respond meant that they had no scaffold to enable them to participate and practise the language that they wanted to develop.

The gap between languages also caused tensions in the relationships between students in another way. When asked about how students manage to understand and complete work if they are struggling with the language, many mentioned that they sought help from their classmates. On the whole, this collaboration was discussed as positive. But there were also points of conflict. For example, one day one of the urban students, Grace, was very upset. She had attended a private English-medium primary school and so had a higher level of English than the majority of her peers. On the whole, she was happy and proud to be able to support her classmates with their work. But on this occasion, a group of students from her class had shouted at her because she had not allowed them to copy her answers in a test. They also accused her of abandoning her friends and only spending time with other students who spoke good English in the run-up to the exams. Grace was forced to make a trade-off between being a ‘good student’ who doesn’t support cheating, and supporting her friends. Her choice, in turn, risked exposing her friends, meaning that they could not achieve their valued capabilities of ‘passing the exam’ and ‘being free from humiliation and shame’. Though greater

3 Term used by a female student in Form One at the rural school.

connection between different languages might not entirely remove these risks, the gap between knowing English and not knowing English might be expected to be less stark.

The examples discussed in this section so far have focused on conflicts and disconnections between students as a result, or exacerbated by, the rigid separation between language capabilities. But this last example also points to the fact that students experienced tensions and disconnections within themselves. In the exam, Grace felt that she was forced to make a choice between 'being a good friend' and 'being a good student'. In addition to these micro-level trade-offs, conflicts between different aspects of students' identities were also noticeable when the wider picture of students' language values was considered.

The crucial role that English played in students' aspirations and ideas for who they wanted to become has already been discussed, and when students talked about the importance of English in their lives, which they associated with being educated and being modern, they also downplayed the value of their other languages. But when the focus of discussion was not on education or future employment, students did reveal that Kiswahili, and other local languages, were also highly valued for the important roles that they played. Kiswahili was the most frequently used language in this study and this held true both outside and inside of school. It has been shown that Kiswahili was absolutely central to school life and played a significant role in the classroom to enable understanding. But Kiswahili also acted as a crucial marker of identity and culture. It was frequently referred to as *"lugha yetu"* (our language) and was clearly distinguished from English, which was termed, *"kizungu"* (language of the European/foreigner). Students also valued their familiarity and comfort with Kiswahili, often remarking, *"tumeshazoea"* (we are already used to it).

But the positioning of Kiswahili as a hindrance to learning English placed the two languages in conflict. In this face-off, the strength of the narrative of the importance of English contributed to the devaluing of Kiswahili and the labelling of those who only spoke Kiswahili as 'uneducated' or 'traditional'. Many students in this study also had some proficiency in at least one other local language. When asked about these languages it became clear that they played a valuable role enabling students to communicate with grandparents and to participate in traditional cultural activities.[4] With the show-down between English and Kiswahili occupying centre stage, though, these other local languages were side-lined to such a point that most students didn't even mention them unless specifically prompted.

The separation between students' different languages, then, meant that they experienced tension between different aspects of their identities. Their sense of how they came to be who they were was in conflict with the versions of themselves that they aspired to become. These conflicts were not resolved but sat side-by-side in students' experiences. The disconnection between students' different languages meant that they were not able to articulate their plural language values.

Conclusion: fostering connections between language capabilities

This paper has argued that the conceptual and analytical tools offered by the capability approach can usefully contribute to the framing and understanding of issues of language-in-education. In particular, Nussbaum's notion of 'combined capabilities' clearly draws attention to the fact that students' language capabilities are constructed

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4 It should be noted that the position of local languages would undoubtedly vary depending on the geographical location studied as some regions of Tanzania have a predominant language that plays a similar role to that played by Kiswahili in this study.

through the combination and interaction of both internal factors, including linguistic potential and developing language skill, and factors from the external social environment in which the student is situated. Consideration of the literature relating to language of instruction along with the ethnographic data from a study in two Tanzanian secondary schools has helped to highlight some of the external social factors that shaped, and themselves were shaped by, the processes of learning English and learning using English as the language of instruction.

Of central significance was the social understanding of different languages as necessarily separate and disconnected. The narrative around the value of English, and pervasive beliefs that English would be most effectively learned if used as the sole language of instruction, resulted not only in the demarcation of different languages, but also in languages being positioned in conflict with one another. Although teachers regularly code-switched between English and Kiswahili, the framing of this as an illicit and regrettable practice, and the restriction of this option for students, meant that students' capabilities in different languages were disconnected and there was no consideration how the use of two languages might be managed with pedagogical purpose. This paper has pointed to insights from the field of bilingual education and translanguaging that suggest that embracing and celebrating the flexible use of multiple languages in the classroom to make connections could allow teachers and students to draw on linguistic resources from all of their language capabilities and prevent the necessity of making trade-offs between understanding content and learning English.

This paper also looked beyond the linguistic implications of disconnection between different languages. By considering students' language capabilities within a broader picture of the multiple and varied capabilities that were valued within the schooling environment, this paper has argued that there were significant, related, social

implications of disconnection that had a noticeable impact on students' experiences of schooling. Examples were shared of tensions and conflict in peer relationships where students felt forced to make trade-offs between maintaining good relationships with friends and being a good student, or between practising English and avoiding ridicule and humiliation. Finally, this paper identified that the forced disconnections between students' different language capabilities were at odds with their plural language values. The data collected as part of this study showed that students valued all their languages. But social language assumptions, and particularly the language hierarchy that ascribed English the highest status, resulted in students experiencing tension and disconnection between different parts of their own identities and valued states of 'being'.

Ultimately, this paper argues for publicly identifying, fostering and celebrating the connections between different languages. Although this conclusion has been reached through analysis of students' experiences in two schools in Tanzania, the importance of recognising and strengthening connections between languages is considered to be relevant across a wide variety of multilingual contexts. The conceptual and analytical frame offered by the capability approach allows for differences in the languages being used, different social meanings attached to languages, and differences in the range of different capabilities that are valued by students in relation to language and education, whilst still highlighting the connections between these elements. It is suggested that an approach that prioritises connections could not only enable teachers and students to draw on their full linguistic resources for the challenging tasks of teaching and learning, but could also reduce the number of trade-offs that students are forced to make between valued capabilities. Moreover, introducing an option into the language of instruction debate that is not framed as a language 'switch', but rather focuses around connections and the acknowledgement of the social importance of all languages to students and their

communities might help in some way with Roy-Campbell and Qorro's (1997, vii) ambition to nudge the conversation further from 'either…or' to 'both…and'.

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