

Cross-linguistic influence: The case of Oluchiga L1 speakers in Rwanda's monolingual education system

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Abstract

Most of previous research has reiterated that Rwanda is a rare monolingual country where the entire population shares one language: Kinyarwanda. This is reflected in the national, educational language policy which states that Kinyarwanda is the sole language taught at school as the L1 for all Rwandan children. This language policy affects local speakers of minority languages, namely Oluchiga, Amahavu, Kirashi, and Amashi who are treated throughout the educational system as L1 speakers of Kinyarwanda while in actual fact, it is their second language.

This study examines the written data in the form of essays that was produced by young children whose L1 is Oluchiga and are learning writing in Kinyarwanda assumed to be their mother tongue. These children learn essay writing and other writing skills in Kinyarwanda following monolingual curriculum of Grade 1 to Grade 3. The main objective of this study is to identify morpho-syntactic intrusion from the L1 (Oluchiga) into the L2 (Kinyarwanda) in a context where both languages are Bantu languages. I collected the data using a corpus of the learners' essays as a part of the daily activities in a writing classroom in the Northern Province of Rwanda. The morpho-syntactic analysis of a corpus of 109 essays reveals a clear influence of the L1 on the L2. The influence can be mainly characterized by three types of transfer errors from Oluchiga (L1) to Kinyarwanda (L2). The first type comprises of concordial agreement errors which affect affixes, noun class markers, adjectives and demonstrative markers. The second type is errors affects the agglutinative structure of words and includes augment and phonological transfer errors. The last type may be identified as lexical transfer errors.

The influence of the L1 on writing in the L2 hence affects several different levels of the language system. My analysis indicates that a monolingual language policy that is aimed at creating national unity and social coherence display monolingual language ideology. The fact that young children learn writing in a language which is not their mother tongue might violate their linguistic rights and be detrimental to their academic success of L2 speaking.

Keywords: morpho-syntactic analysis; concordial agreement; monolingualism and cross-linguistic influence; Oluchiga; Kinyarwanda; transfer errors; academic writing; L1 advantage; language policy