

## LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION AND STUDENT PERFORMANCE: NEW INSIGHTS FROM RESEARCH IN TANZANIA AND SOUTH AFRICA

BIRGIT BROCK-UTNE

**Abstract** – This article, drawing on a set of studies conducted in the framework of the Language of Instruction in Tanzania and South Africa (LOITASA) research project, shows how well African students express themselves if they are allowed to use a familiar African language, and conversely the difficulties they have when forced to use a foreign language, a language they hardly hear and never use outside of school, as a language of instruction. A key finding of the research is that when the foreign language, English in this case, is used, there is a much larger spread in test performance between students. This means that a small group of students succeed while the vast majority sinks. The author therefore argues for working towards a goal whereby African children like children in industrialized countries may study in their own language. Pursuing this goal should be a centrepiece in poverty reduction strategies.

**Résumé** – LANGUE D'INSTRUCTION ET RÉSULTATS SCOLAIRES Cet article illustre la situation des élèves en Afrique par des exemples concrets empruntés à un projet de recherche portant sur la langue d'instruction en Tanzanie et en Afrique du Sud. Les exemples montrent que les étudiants africains s'expriment bien si on leur permet d'employer une langue africaine familière. En outre, les exemples soulignent les difficultés que les étudiants africains rencontrent quand ils sont contraints d'employer une langue étrangère, une langue qu'ils n'entendent pratiquement pas et n'emploient jamais en dehors de l'école comme langue d'instruction. Les exemples montrent de plus que lorsqu'on utilise une langue étrangère, l'anglais en l'occurrence, l'écart se creuse entre les étudiants en ce qui concerne leurs performances durant les épreuves. Ceci signifie qu'un petit groupe d'étudiants, dotés de parents fortunés pouvant leur fournir des ressources supplémentaires et des cours particuliers, surnagera dans le système, tandis que les masses restantes y feront naufrage. Cette situation contribue davantage à l'allourdissement de la pauvreté pour les masses qu'à son allègement. Une éducation de qualité ne peut faire l'objet d'une discussion sans que ne soit pris en compte sérieusement le problème de la langue d'instruction et sans qu'on ne travaille à réaliser un objectif grâce auquel les enfants africains, comme les enfants des pays industrialisés, pourront étudier dans leur propre langue.

**Zusammenfassung** – UNTERRICHTSSPRACHE UND SCHULISCHE LEISTUNGEN – Dieser Artikel befasst sich auf der Grundlage eines Forschungsprojekts zur Unterrichtssprache in Tansania und Südafrika mit konkreten Beispielen zur Unterrichtssituation von Schülern in Afrika. Die Beispiele belegen eine gute Ausdrucksfähigkeit afrikanischer Schüler, solange sie die ihnen vertraute afrikanische Sprache benutzen. Darüberhinaus belegen die Beispiele die Schwierigkeiten, die entstehen, wenn afrikanische Schüler im Unterricht zum Gebrauch einer Fremdsprache gezwungen werden, die sie außerhalb der Schule kaum hören und nie selbst benutzen. Die

Beispiele zeigen ferner, dass beim Gebrauch einer Fremdsprache, in diesem Fall des Englischen, die Prüfungsleistungen der Schüler viel stärker voneinander abweichen: Eine kleine Gruppe von Schülern mit wohlhabenden Eltern, die sich Sonderunterstützung und Nachhilfe leisten können, durchschwimmt das System, während die verbleibende große Menge untergeht. Diese Situation verstärkt die Massenarmut noch, anstatt sie zu lindern. Man kann nicht über Bildungsqualität diskutieren, ohne die Frage der Unterrichtssprache ernst zu nehmen und auf ein Ziel hinzuarbeiten, das es afrikanischen Kindern ermöglicht, genau wie Kinder in Industrieländern in ihrer eigenen Sprache zu lernen.

**Resumen – LA LENGUA DE LA ENSEÑANZA Y EL RENDIMIENTO DE LOS ESTUDIANTES** – Este artículo nos hace ver la situación que viven los alumnos en las aulas de escuelas de África, mediante ejemplos concretos tomados de un proyecto de investigación que se ocupa de la lengua de la instrucción en Tanzania y Sudáfrica. Los ejemplos muestran cuán bien se expresan los estudiantes africanos cuando se les permite usar la lengua africana que les es familiar. Además, los ejemplos ponen de relieve las dificultades que tienen estudiantes africanos cuando se los obliga a usar una lengua extranjera, un idioma que apenas escuchan y jamás usan fuera de la escuela, donde es la lengua de la enseñanza. Además, estos ejemplos muestran que cuando se usa la lengua extranjera (en este caso, el inglés), existe una brecha mucho más amplia entre los resultados de pruebas que presentan los estudiantes. En consecuencia, un pequeño grupo de estudiantes de familias acomodadas, cuyos padres disponen de recursos para brindarles un apoyo extraescolar, saldrán a flote en este sistema, mientras que la gran mayoría restante se hundirá. Esta situación contribuye a aumentar la pobreza de las masas, en lugar de aliviar su situación. No se puede debatir sobre la calidad en la educación sin tener en cuenta seriamente el tema de la lengua de enseñanza y perseguir el objetivo de que también los niños africanos, al igual que los niños de los países industrializados, puedan estudiar en su propia lengua.

**Резюме – ЯЗЫК ОБУЧЕНИЯ И СНИЖЕНИЕ УРОВНЯ БЕДНОСТИ** – Данная статья вводит нас в класс африканских школьников и создает ситуацию конкретных примеров, взятых из исследовательского проекта по проблеме языка обучения в Танзании и Южной Африке. Эти примеры показывают, насколько хорошо африканские школьники могут изъясняться, если им разрешается использовать знакомый африканский язык. Более того, эти примеры демонстрируют те трудности, с которыми сталкиваются африканские школьники, когда их заставляют использовать иностранный язык как язык обучения – язык, который они мало слышат и никогда не используют вне школы. Далее примеры показывают, что существует намного большее расхождение в результатах тестирования среди школьников. Это означает, что небольшая группа школьников, имеющих состоятельных родителей, которые могут предоставлять им дополнительные ресурсы и платное обучение, будут плыть по системе, в то время как остальные будут тонуть. Такая ситуация содействует росту уровня бедности среди масс вместо ее снижения. Качественное образование нельзя обсуждать, не рассматривая серьезно проблему языка обучения и не направляясь к цели, где африканские дети, как и дети в промышленно развитых странах, могут учиться на своем родном языке.

**Education for all – in whose language?**

In 1982 the Ministers of Education in Africa met in Harare in Zimbabwe to discuss the use of African languages as languages of education. They stressed that:

there is an urgent and pressing need for the use of African languages as languages of education. The urgency arises when one considers the total commitment of the states to development. Development in this respect consists of the development of national unity, cultural development and economic and social development. Cultural development is basic to the other two.... Language is a living instrument of culture, so that, from this point of view, language development is paramount. But language is also an instrument of communication, in fact the only complete and the most important instrument as such. Language usage therefore is of paramount importance also for social and economic development (ED-82: 111).

As we see here, the Ministers were not only concerned about retaining African languages in order to preserve culture but they also used educational arguments. Language is more than culture (Brock-Utne 2005). This meeting took place a quarter of a century ago. Since that time little progress has been made to fulfil what then was characterized as “the urgent and pressing need for the use of African languages as languages of education”. The question seems to have been forgotten in most of the donor-driven initiatives to ensure that children in developing countries receive schooling. The initiatives can be found under labels like education for all, poverty reduction strategies, fast track initiative.

The “education for all” strategy formulated at the important educational conference in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990 was meant to target the poor (Brock-Utne 2000). In an article titled “Education for All: Policy Lessons From High-Achieving Countries”, Mehrotra (1998) draws our attention to what he sees as the most important characteristic of those developing countries that really target the poor and have the highest percentage of the population with a completed basic education: “The experience of the high-achievers has been unequivocal: the mother tongue was used as the medium of instruction at the primary level in all cases.” (p. 479).

Yet in the 2000 World Education Forum in Dakar there was, according to Dutcher (2004), no mention of the language issue in the plenary sessions of the conference. There is also little consideration of the language issue in the resulting documents from the Forum. There is limited reference in official documents to the fact that millions of children are entering school without knowing the language of instruction. Many of these children are in Africa. The only type of formal schooling available to them is in a language they neither speak nor understand. Dutcher (2004:8) argues:

It is shocking that the international dialogue on Education for All has not confronted the problems children face when they enter school not understanding the

medium of instruction, when they are expected to **learn** a new language at the same time as they are learning **in** and **through** the new language. **The basic problem is that children cannot understand what the teacher is saying!** We believe that if international planners had faced these issues on a global scale, there would have been progress to report. However, instead of making changes that would lead to real advancement, the international community has simply repledged itself to the same goals, merely moving the target ahead from the year 2000 to 2015.

With the help of expatriate consultants, teacher guides are being worked out and teacher training courses given to have African teachers become more “learner-centred”, to help them activate their students and engage them in critical thinking and dialogue. Teachers are asked to abandon a teacher style where students just copy notes from the blackboard, learn their notes by heart and repeat them at tests. Little thought has been given to the fact that this teaching style might be the only one possible when neither the teacher nor the students command the language of instruction. Africa is called anglophone, francophone or lusophone according to the languages introduced by the colonial masters and still used as official languages. These languages are, however, not the languages most widely spoken in Africa. They are comfortably mastered only by 5–10% of the people. The great majority of Africans use African languages for daily communication. Africa is *afrophone*. In an article on the role of language in education and poverty alleviation Senkoro (2004: 56) notes that:

The insistence on using foreign languages as languages of instruction in African schools is not only unethical but also tantamount to committing intellectual and cultural genocide to the African youth at large. This calls for a change in the mindset of policy makers, for indeed development is being stunted and poverty elevated rather than alleviated.

### **The LOITASA research project**

What do children actually learn in the schools in Africa today when they are forced to try to acquire knowledge in a language they do not understand? This is the question we have posed ourselves in the Language of Instruction in Tanzania and South Africa (LOITASA)<sup>1</sup> research project. The first phase of the project ran from 2001 until the end of 2006, and is described in a DVD/video and four books (Brock-Utne, Desai and Qorro 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006). The second phase started in 2007 and will go on until 2012. The aim of the LOITASA project is two-fold: to build up research competence in the South and to study the effects of having as a language of instruction a language which is unfamiliar to the students and not well mastered by the teachers. The project involves an action research component where students

in Form I in secondary school in Tanzania and grade 4 (later 5 and 6) in the township Khaylitsha in Cape Town are taught some lessons in the language they normally speak. The results (both from achievement tests and observation of classroom interaction) are compared to classes taught in English.

Among the results of our research, discussed in this article, are the findings of studies that looked comparatively at creative writing skills in the two countries. There is a vast amount of research literature on language in education in African classrooms (see e.g. Alidou 1997, 2002, 2007; Brock-Utne 2000; Brock-Utne and Hopson 2005; Fafunwa 1990; Makoni and Kamwangamalu 2001; Prah 2000; Rubagumya 1994). Much of this literature has been referred to in a stock-taking exercise undertaken by a team of researchers appointed by the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA), UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL)<sup>2</sup> and GTZ<sup>3</sup> (Aliou et al. 2006).

### **Comparing learners' writing skills in Tanzania and South Africa: a summary of research findings**

In October 1998 the current project leader of LOITASA in South Africa, Zubeida Desai, administered three written tasks to two classes of IsiXhosa-speaking Grade 4 and Grade 7 students (Desai 1999).<sup>4</sup> The purpose of administering the writing tasks was to explore the students' proficiencies in both English and IsiXhosa in order to see whether they had greater proficiency in their primary language, IsiXhosa, or not. The tasks administered were assessed on the basis of criteria developed by Zubeida and triangulated by a reference group set up for the purpose. The first task was a narrative task based on a set of pictures in an envelope provided to students. They had to arrange the pictures sequentially, and then write two stories, one in IsiXhosa and one in English, based on the six pictures. The pictures, arranged in a sequential order, are attached here as an appendix. One class in each grade wrote the IsiXhosa story first and 2 days later the same story in English. Other classes in the same grade wrote the English story first and 2 days later the same story in IsiXhosa. The second task was a reading comprehension task based on an extract dealing with content matter from subjects the students were learning at school. The third task was an expository writing task where students were asked to give their opinions on a particular topic. All the tasks were translated into IsiXhosa by a colleague of Desai's.

Being fascinated by the first task, and the results coming out of the study, I decided to do a follow-up of this narrative task in Tanzania. I was able to recruit two Tanzanian master's students as research assistants for this purpose. They used the same cartoon story used by Desai (see Desai 1999, 2000; Vuzo 2002a, b; and Mkwizu 2002, 2003). Another Tanzanian student

conducted a similar study in Zanzibar, using a different cartoon (Said 2003). The results of these studies were first presented at the 7th Oxford international conference on education and development and later published as a chapter in the third LOITASA book (see Brock-Utne and Desai 2003, 2005). In the following I display some examples from the study first from South Africa, then from Tanzania. I then analyse the scripts displayed.

### **Expressing oneself through writing in IsiXhosa versus English: a South African case**

#### *Context and rationale*

School X, where Desai conducted her research with Grade 4 and Grade 7 students, is situated in Khayelitsha, a sprawling African township just beyond Cape Town International Airport. The population is predominantly IsiXhosa-speaking. The students all have IsiXhosa as their home language. So do their teachers. Despite this linguistic composition at School X and the environment in which it is located, the school decided in 1995 to bring forward the use of English as a medium of instruction from Grade 5 to Grade 4. The reason given to Desai by the Deputy Principal and the teachers for this move was the fact that parents were taking their children out of African township schools and sending them to the former coloured schools because they wanted them to use English as a language of instruction earlier. School X did not want to lose its quota of teachers through low pupil enrolments and therefore decided to introduce English as a medium of instruction and learning earlier. This means that officially students would have to do all their written work in English from Grade 4 onwards, except during the IsiXhosa subject classes.

The decision to focus on written tasks was deliberate. Much of the research on language in education in African classrooms had tended to focus on oral interaction in the classroom with a particular focus on the kind of language used by both teachers and learners (e.g. Peires 1994; Arthur 1994). The researchers would then comment on the fact that very little, if any, English was used in the classrooms and would come to the conclusion that the medium was actually an African language rather than English. The kind of English language used in the classroom, however, only emerges when it comes to literacy practices (if that is the most appropriate word to describe what happens in such classrooms) – the texts available in class and the written work by both teachers and learners have to be in English only. It is customary for teachers in the township schools to teach predominantly in the relevant African language, and then write notes in English on the board which are directly extracted from the textbook. The students then dutifully copy these notes into their books. If any subject adviser or inspector or

parent were to examine the learners' books, they would see the requisite English required by the language policy.

It is precisely for this reason that we deliberately chose to examine writing tasks because students are generally assessed on their writing abilities, and in the case of the schools chosen in the South African as well as the Tanzanian cases, their ability to write in English.

*Data display*

Below is a sample of the learners' scripts in both English and IsiXhosa. An IsiXhosa-speaking colleague of Desai made a literal translation of the IsiXhosa stories into English to highlight the contrast in proficiency in the two languages. The scripts presented were chosen randomly one each from the pile of Grade 4 scripts and from the pile of Grade 7 scripts to illustrate the point made above about learners' proficiencies in IsiXhosa and in English. For Grade 4 scripts, the IsiXhosa version is first provided, followed by the literal translation from IsiXhosa into English, and then the English version. For Grade 7 scripts only the literal translation from IsiXhosa into English is provided, followed by the English version.

*Sample 1 – Grade 4*

IsiXhosa	Literal translation into English
Kwakukho utata waza wabeka ibhokisi yakhe phantsi encokola notata wakhe kwasukha kwathi gqi omnye ubhuti wathatha ibhoks yala tata wabaleka waleqwa ngumntwana omnye wakhalisa impempe omnye emkhemba wabaleka wayo kuqabela imoto wayiqhuba kakhulu abanye bavula ibhokisi kwavela inyoka wathuswa yinyoka kwade kwathaka idimasi.	There was a father (old man) who put his box down, conversing with his father. Then a certain young man (brother) appeared and took that old man's box and ran away. He was chased by a child and the one blew a whistle, and the other one pointed at him. He ran away with it and got into the car and drove very fast. The others opened the box and saw a big snake. The other was shocked by the snake and his sunglasses fell down.
<b>Written in English</b>	
Once upon a time Long long ago Ly Buter uteatsha fourboy late my father I taket my tyesi I goiu my father is goiu boeke Look my boy This is a man is luck This boy is prat is the man This is put the bag Poliec check thi man aurineng the bag I two poliec thu au poit the man and boy auraning the car A man is raning in thi car A man and boy open the bag aut the snack	

*Sample 2 – Grade 7*

<b>Literal translation from IsiXhosa into English</b>	<b>Written in English</b>
<p>There was an old man who was going with his friend. This old man looked like a thief. There was a man who had put his suitcases down, one behind and the other one next to him. This man was looking at a distance, thinking. The short friend of this thief deceived this man by talking to him, while the other one took the suitcase. He ran away and the other one also ran. Then this man shouted, calling them and they ran very fast. The security officer appeared - blowing a whistle. They ran to the car with this box while the owner of the box was pointing at them. They drove the car and put it next to the trees, and they got out of the car. They put it down and opened it, and a big snake appeared. The sunglasses fell off their eyes, and the hats were blown up. They thought that it was money.</p>	<p>The farther they stil handle with great care new town zoo. And MR Alisingh they a stand and thinking. And this father they take this handle and MR Alisingh they talk and son. And this farther they take this handle and the go away. And this farther and this son they runing fust and security they see. And this farther and this son they go away and his car. They outside of this car they put down this handle and see this is a snake.</p>

*Analysis of the scripts*

As it appears in the literal translations of the IsiXhosa versions, the learners are able to reflect what is happening in the pictures fairly accurately. The sentences they write are complex. In Grade 7 in particular, they clearly write more. There is evidence of good vocabulary, e.g. words like ‘conversing’; ‘appeared’; ‘shocked’. There are very few grammatical and spelling errors.

When it comes to writing in English, we can see that learners in Grade 4 are struggling to express themselves. The ‘story’ aspect is completely lost in the English version. Sample 1 has very little bearing on the pictures. Spelling and grammatical errors abound and sentences are generally very short. The samples show learners’ difficulty in forming sentences. Although there is an improvement in Grade 7, the learners’ proficiency is nowhere near the requirements for using English as sole medium of instruction.

As the samples above show, the English stories of the Grade 4 pupils were largely incomprehensible and often not even linked to the pictures, whilst the IsiXhosa version was much more clearly expressed though in a descriptive, rather than narrative, mode. This was the case with all the scripts. Although the English used by the Grade 7 learners was markedly better, it still did not compare favourably with the IsiXhosa version. On being asked in IsiXhosa how they experienced the task, all pupils said that they enjoyed the task but simply did not have the proficiency in English to express themselves clearly.



**Expressing oneself through writing in Kiswahili versus English in Tanzania***Overview of the studies*

The same pictures making up a cartoon were given to secondary school students in Tanzania (Mkwizu 2003; Vuzo 2002b). While English is used as a language of instruction already in the 4th grade of primary school in South Africa, primary schooling in Tanzania is conducted in Kiswahili. English is taught as a subject in primary school and later used as the language of instruction from the beginning of Form I in secondary school. We therefore decided to have the cartoon test in Form I, which, since it is the first year that the students have to study through a foreign medium, can be compared to the Grade 4 students of Desai's sample in some way. We then chose Form IV which, in terms of years of exposure to English as the medium of instruction, should be comparable to Grade 7 in Desai's study.

In another similar study conducted in Zanzibar, Omar Mohamed Said (2003) administered a different cartoon to 20 students in Form I who had gone directly from primary to secondary school, an option which in Zanzibar is being used by high-achieving students. He administered the same cartoon to 20 students from the Orientation Secondary Course (OSC) programme – a 1 year programme between primary and secondary school being offered in Zanzibar to help the not-so-high achieving students to master studying through the English medium in secondary school.

In yet another study, conducted by Vuzo (2002a, b), we also decided to include students in Form VI since these students have had English as the language of instruction for 6 years and should be ready to enter the university. A total of 40 students participated in that study, girls slightly outnumbering boys. In the study conducted by Mkwizu (2002, 2003) a total of 20 secondary school students participated, half of the students from a rural area and half from an urban area. The students in the Vuzo and Mkwizu studies were not asked to arrange the pictures in a sequence. That had already been done for them. They were just asked to describe the story told through the cartoon, first in Kiswahili and later in English. One hundred and twenty essays were collected for analysis.

Vuzo (2002a) and Mkwizu (2002) did a text analysis of all these essays. They were interested in whether or not there was a correlation between what the students saw in the cartoon and what they wrote. They also assessed the consistency in the flow of the story and the amount of detail the students were able to come up with depending on the language used. Other things that they assessed were the students' grammar (tense, spelling, punctuation, sentence construction), vocabulary, meaning and clarity of the story. Readers wanting this more detailed analysis of the texts are referred to the theses by Mkwizu and Vuzo.<sup>5</sup>

*Data display*

For the sake of comparison with the South African study I have here chosen two scripts from the pile of scripts to illustrate student proficiencies in Kiswahili and English. These are examples given by Vuzo (2002a, b) though reference is made in the analysis part to the research conducted by Mkwizu (2002, 2003). The examples include the poorest script from Form I and the best script from Form VI. The Kiswahili version is provided in the first example while only the literal translation into English is provided in the second example.

*Sample 1 – The poorest example from Form I*

Kiswahili	Literal translation into English
<p>Siku moja mzee mmoja alikwenda uwanja wa ndege akiwa na mizigo yake. Akatokea kijana mmoja akamuambia yule mzee kuwa angaria hire ndege. Kumbe alikuwa ni mwizi akachukua mizigo ya yule mzee. Akakimbia vichakani akafungua ulu mizigo wa yule mzee akakuta nyoka kwenye ulu mizigo. Yule mzee akaanza kutafuta mizigo wake. Akatokea kijana mmoja akamwambia panda gari langu nikupereke kwa yule kijana aliye kuchukulia mizigo wako. Akaenda mpaka kwa yule kijana akamkuta anafungua mizigo wake akamuonyesha ulu mizigo wake yule mzee akakuta ameshafungua. Hakamuhuliza kwa nini humefungua mizigo wangu akamwambia hebu angaria ulicho kiweka kwenye mizigo wako. Akamwambia kwa nini ulihiba mizigo wangu. Akamwambia yule kijana kama hulikuwa hunalitaka sihunge sema nikupe sio kuhiba je hunge kuta mbwa hungesemaje. Akampereka polisi kufungwa.</p>	<p>One day a certain man went to the airport with his luggage. Then there appeared one boy who told the man: Look at that plane. But he was a thief and he took the man's luggage. He ran to the forest and opened the bag and he saw a snake in that bag. The man started looking for his bag. Then one boy appeared and told him get into my car and I shall take you to the boy who has taken your bag. He went where the boy who stole the bag was and he found him opening the bag and he showed the man his bag and the man found that it was already open. He did not ask him why he had opened his bag but asked him to look at what he had put in the bag. The man asked him why he stole his bag. He told the boy if you wanted the bag you should have told me to give you and not steal, what if you found a dog what would you have said? And he took him to the police to be jailed.</p>
<b>Written in English</b>	
<p>One day is not mather is going to market. Balind of thit man student. I am father is going to charch and children too. the market are the Box, Beg, fotball, is money. father is big than children. one day father is going to futball. cry when to shoool.</p>	

## Sample 2 – The best example from Form VI

Kiswahili	Literal translation into English
<p>Katika uwanja Fulani wa ndege anaonekana mtu mmoja ambaye ni msafiri. Mu huyu anafikiria pahala pã kwenenda. Pembeni kidogo ya ofisi na nuyma ya mtu huyu wanaonekanawatu wawili mkubwa na mdogo wakijadili.</p> <p>Muda mfupi akatokea mmojawapo yamani yule mdogo akaanza kumuuliza yule mgeni. Muda huo huo alipokuwa anamuuliza maswali Fulani, yule mtu mkubwa yaani mwenzake akaanza kuchukua moja kati ya masanduku ya mgeni ambayo yalikuwa moja dogo na jingine kubwa.</p> <p>Wale watu wawili ambaowanaonekana ni wezi walitoroka na kumwacha yule mgeni pale akishangaa, Wakati wezi wanakimbia ,ndipo askari akaanza kupiga filimbi kuashiria kwamba wezi wamekwishaiba ili waweze kukamatwa. Askari alipiga filimbi bila ya mafanikio Wezi walifanikiwa kutoroka na kwenda sehemu ambayo wanaona kwamba ni salama kwao. Walipofika na kufungua ule mzigo. Mara baada ya kufungua muda mfupi joka kubwa likatokea na kuwashangaza sana wale wezi.</p>	<p>At a certain airport there is a one person who is a passenger. This person is thinking of a place to go. Slightly beside the office and behind this passenger there are two people, a young person and an older person discussing.</p> <p>After a short while one of them, the younger one came and started asking the visitor. At the same time the younger one was asking some questions, the elder person meaning the colleague started taking one of the suitcases that the visitor had as one was big and another one was smaller.</p> <p>These two people who appear to be thieves ran away and left the visitor there very surprised. While the thieves were running a policeman started whistling to show that the thieves had already stolen so that they could be caught. The policeman blew the whistle in vain.</p> <p>The thieves succeeded in escaping and they went to a place where they thought it was safe. When they reached there, they opened the bag. Right after opening a huge snake came out and surprised the thieves very much.</p>
<b>Written in English</b>	
<p>At a certain airport, there was a person who was seem like a passanger. This person was own two cases, the greater one and smaller one. He looks to think where he can go or how to do at that particular time</p> <p>Beside him the two person seem to discuss about the passanger. The person were two, Man and young man. These persons of cause they discus how to stole the cases of the passanger.</p> <p>After the short discussion two persons are decided to do their discussin. The young man go straight to the passanger and pretend to ask some question to the passanger. While the young man ask the passanger, the Man stole great case and run away. These thieves run straight to their car and disappear. Before their disappear, policeman try to stop them but he fall.</p> <p>Thieves reach the place which they think it is seif for their purpose. They open the case. Imediately after opening the case, the huge snake come out from the case and made the two to wander about the event.</p>	

*Analysis of the scripts*

In the Kiswahili version there was an explicit correlation between what the student had written and what was found in the picture. All the 60 students who participated in this exercise reflected quite clearly what is happening in the pictures. When we look at the two samples presented above, we see that the stories in Kiswahili are much longer and clearer. Most of the students relate the meaning of the story well and select the appropriate words. Expressions have been used suitably, showing creativity, which is lacking in the English stories. There is consistency in the flow of the stories written in Kiswahili. There is generally coherence in most stories. There is also evidence of rich Kiswahili vocabulary. Such vocabulary is lacking in the English versions of the story. In the Kiswahili version, sentences are well formed and have appropriate sequential organisation. Connecting words have been used, creating interest and increasing the narrative flavour of the story. There is a proper sentence construction. There are also almost no grammatical and spelling errors. Tense is not a problem in the Kiswahili stories.

In sample 1, there is a significant contrast between the English story and the Kiswahili story. From the Kiswahili version this student wrote it appears that he/she had understood the story. S/he however seems to lack words to express the story in English. In her comments on this script, Vuzo (2002a) remarked that the student also had a few errors in the Kiswahili version like r/l interchange and addition of /h/ where a vowel /a/ or /u/ precedes in a word. For instance the student writes *kupereka* instead of *kupeleka* meaning to take, *angaria* instead of *angalia* meaning to see, and he/she also writes *humefugua* instead of *umefungua* meaning you have opened. These types of errors, according to Vuzo, are quite common in Tanzanian classrooms and are associated with mother tongue influence; in this case Kikuria.<sup>6</sup> The findings of Vuzo's and Mkwizu's studies largely coincided with those of South Africa despite the higher grade level in Tanzania. Some students' English passages were largely incomprehensible. There were many grammatical errors and spelling mistakes. A lack of connection between the picture and the story presented was demonstrated in some of the written accounts. This was especially the case in Form I.

Generally all students performed poorly in the English story. The English used by Form VI students was somewhat better than the English used by Form IV and Form I students, but the difference in the English proficiency level of the students between the different levels of secondary education was surprisingly small. Most of the scripts from students in the upper levels of secondary education showed that they still do not express themselves adequately, despite the higher number of years that they have spent using English as LoI. The differences in Kiswahili were very minimal between the grade levels of secondary education. All the students expressed themselves adequately at all grade levels in Kiswahili. This points in the same direction as the more quantitative data treated in the next section showing that the

use of a familiar language as the language of instruction keeps the class of students as more of a collective and at a generally higher achievement level and prevents the large spread in achievement scores, the creation of winners and losers.

### **Variability in student performance as a function of language of instruction: insights from Tanzania**

#### *Methodological overview*

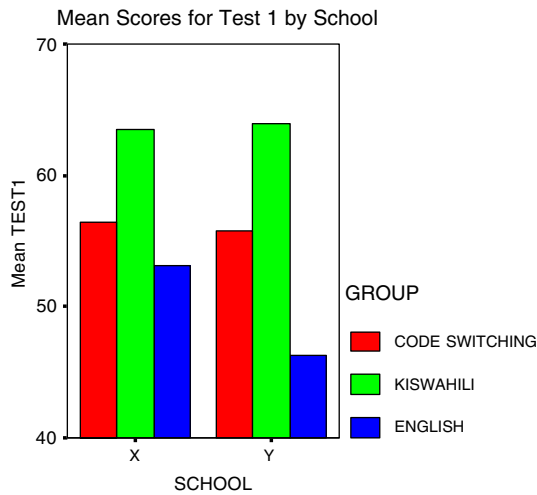
In their Ph.D. theses which were undertaken under the umbrella of the LO-ITASA project Mwinsheikhe (2007) and Vuzo (2007) explored the difference in learning results and classroom interaction between secondary school classes taught in Kiswahili and classes taught in English. The studies were conducted in Form I in two secondary schools. Each of the researchers spent 6 weeks in her participating school. They each conducted an experiment whereby they let the same teacher teach the same topic first in English or Code-Switching (CS) and then some days later in Kiswahili. Mwinsheikhe concentrated on biology lessons while Vuzo concentrated on lessons in geography. They gathered both quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative data appeared as test scores on achievement tests taken after the termination of the experimental teaching period. I spent 3 weeks with the Ph.D. candidates in the first school and 2 weeks in the second school. The purpose of my involvement in the field studies was partly to increase the reliability of the findings, supervise their work and conduct my own research. My own data were of a qualitative kind (see Brock-Utne 2007a). I concentrated on the classroom interaction, both the verbal and the non-verbal. In which situations did students pose questions or contribute additional information? In which situations did teachers punish students by having them stand by their desks? What did their body language tell me? I shall later provide an excerpt from these data.

#### *Results from the achievement tests*

A large standard deviation suggests a large amount of variability of scores around the mean, whereas a small standard deviation indicates little variability. After the classes had been taught the same topic in Kiswahili (experimental mode), in English throughout the lesson with no code-switching (experimental mode) and in code-switching (CS) (normal) mode students were given achievement tests testing their comprehension of the topic. In her study, Vuzo (2007) found that the results from the achievement tests showed that there was a much higher standard deviation in the group which was taught through the medium of English compared to the groups taught in code-switching or in Kiswahili. The least standard deviation ( $SD = 13.18$ ) was obtained in the group that had Kiswahili as LOI, then came the code-switching

group ( $SD = 15.83$ ), and the largest standard deviation was found in the group with English as the LOI ( $SD = 18.01$ ).

This indicates that the use of Kiswahili as LOI facilitates a more equitable performance among students. Some of the teachers had the same impression. They claimed that students did not differ much in performance when Kiswahili was the LOI. It is also implied from the mean scores and from graph 1 below that there are immense differences in mean scores particularly between the group with Kiswahili as LOI and the one with English as LOI in school Y. In both schools, the mean scores are much higher when students are taught in Kiswahili.



Source: Vuzo 2007

In both schools both Mwinsheikhe (2007) and Vuzo (2007) found that students scored best on the achievement tests when they had been taught in Kiswahili and worst when they had been taught in English only. When taught in a code-switching mode students did better than when taught solely in English but worse than when taught solely through the medium of Kiswahili. The large spread of scores when English was used shows how the use of English as language of instruction contributes to increased inequality, which benefits children from homes with plenty of resources, especially access to private tutoring, books and DVDs in English. This spread of scores works to the detriment of children from homes without such resources.

#### **Variations in classroom dynamics as a function of language of instruction: the case of a biology lesson in Tanzania**

As mentioned earlier, I also spent some weeks together with Mwinsheikhe and Vuzo in the schools where they conducted their experiments, observa-

tions, interviews and tests. My own observations are summarized in Brock-Utne (2007a). From these I have picked out two lessons which were taught by the same female biology teacher, the first one in English, the second one in Kiswahili. I here call her Mwajabu. The description that follows is rather typical of the situations I experienced during my 20 hours of observation in August 2004. Asides and interpretations are put in brackets.

*Biology (1A)**Lesson script*

When we came into the class-room 5 minutes too late since we had been changing classes, we were surprised to find about two thirds of the students standing by their desks. The teacher, Mwajabu, saw our surprise and said: "I told them to stand up because some of them are sleeping" (this is a strategy this teacher never uses when she teaches in Kiswahili)

She went through the classes of phylum chordate. When she asked for examples, at first no one raised a hand. At long last a student, who was standing, attempted an answer. The teacher asked the class:

T: Is she right?

Ss: Silence

T: Is she right, class?

Ss: No

T: No, she is not right. Keep on standing

S: Bird (he pronounced it Beard)

T: Spell

S: B-I-R-D

The teacher then wrote "bird" on the blackboard and pronounced it bird. She asked: "Is bird a fish? Keep standing. Don't use the material which you have given" (instead of have been given) (such humiliating experiences do not happen when the teaching is in Kiswahili)

T: Have you understood what I asked you to do? Yes or no? Who has not understood?

Ss: Silence

T: You have to talk. Speak English please.

The teacher asked the students to go into their normal five groups. One of the five groups did not know whether they were group three or group five. They asked the teacher in Kiswahili

"Hatujui sisi ni kundi cha tatu au kundi cha tano" (we do not know whether we are group three or five)

Before the teacher tried to clear this question up with them she said:

Speak English, please.

She was not able to get through the lesson plan for the lesson

*Analysis of the excerpt*

The students in this lesson were silent, grave and looked afraid. They were trying to guess the answers the teacher wanted. The student who came up with the answer “bird” when the teacher asked for an example of a fish did either not understand the word “fish”, the word “bird” or neither of them. He was trying to look in his book for an answer, which would have made it possible for him to sit down instead of having to stand as a form of further punishment. Mwinsheikhe (2007) observed the same lesson together with me and talked with one of the students after the lesson. He said to her: “Kuwasimamisha wanafunzi darasani kunamsaidiaje mtu kuweza kujibu maswahili kwa ‘English’ kama alikuwa hawezi tangu mwanzo?” (How can making students stand in the classroom, enable one to respond to questions in English if one was not able to do so in the first place?).

Using qualification analysis as a theoretical framework<sup>7</sup> (see Brock-Utne 2007a), one can ask: What qualifications was the teacher in this lesson giving the students, the prospective labour force? Students are hardly given any general proficiency qualifications at all and certainly no creative qualifications. The qualifications given are adaptability qualifications, both directly and indirectly accepting ones. They learn to obey, learn to keep quiet. They learn that if they do not answer the way the teacher wants, they get punished. They learn to memorize. Some sink into apathy and become indifferent. Some learn that they are dumb, that they are unlikely to succeed.

We shall now turn to another classroom where the same teacher teaches the same subject in a different language a few days later.

*Baiolojia*

*Lesson script*

Mwajabu was now teaching in Kiswahili. She was smiling and seemed relaxed. She again asked for examples of failam kodata. A lot of hands went up.

T: Now could you tell me about the importance of the Failam kodata. I would like you to work in groups and give me examples of the advantage or economic importance<sup>8</sup> of the animals and the disadvantage or danger.<sup>9</sup>

The students worked quickly, were very lively and came up with many and very good suggestions. In some cases they even taught the teacher things she did not know. One of the students said that many of the large animals brought foreign currency to Tanzania (fedha za kigeni). The teacher could not understand how this was possible but the student went on at great length and explained that when tourists came to Mikumi or Serengeti (national parks) for instance to see lions,



giraffes and elephants they bought souvenirs, used the hotels and paid guides and drivers etc. The teacher had to accept that that was certainly correct.

The students said that many of the animals could be used for transport. The teacher asked which ones could be used for that. They answered donkey, camels and horses. One student mentioned elephants but the teacher first said that elephants were not used to transport people. The student insisted she was right because she had been informed that in India elephants were indeed used for transport of people. Another student supported her and said that he had seen on television that in India people rode on elephants and also brought goods with them tied to the back of the elephant. Again the teacher had to give in and was learning from the students. (Mwinsheikhe (2007) noted that the teacher remarked jokingly: *Inaelekea hapa kuna malingwa wa baiolojia kunipita* (it seems in this class there are people who are more knowledgeable in biology than me)). Another student mentioned “kobe” (tortoise) and told about the huge ones she had heard of. People rode on those too.

There was a lot of smiles and laughter during this lesson and it went very fast (both for the teacher, the students and the observers). At one point the teacher wanted to know what on the cow could be used for what. After some obvious answers one student said that the blood could also be used for drinking. Some protested. The student said: “*Wachagga wana kunywa damu*” (the Chaggas drink blood) and looked at the teacher knowing that she is a Mchagga. Many students laughed. The teacher asked about the advantage of a lot of animals and the class was really with her. She wanted to know which animals were the “*rafiki wa binadamu*” (friend of human beings) and all hands were up to give her examples. Students were competing to answer.

### *Analysis of the excerpt*

In this lesson students were arguably trained in general proficiency skills like combining earlier knowledge with new knowledge. They were developing creative qualifications like independence and critical thinking. They trained the ability to enter into constructive cooperation with others. There was no need for the teacher here to say: “Do not look in your books.” Here the students were encouraged to activate the knowledge they had, build on the knowledge of each other, teach each other and the teacher. This was a lesson of give and take between teacher and students, not a lesson where the teacher pours bits of knowledge into students’ heads.

### **Conclusion**

There is a frequently mentioned claim in official documents on development aid that education is a condition for development (e.g. MFA 2003; Brock-Utne 2007b). This depends totally, I would argue, on the type of education being promoted. It is not enough to say that it should be an education of good quality. Such a claim begs the question: What is quality education? In light of the research findings reported in this article, one can argue that a

minimum prerequisite should be that it is a type of education which builds on what the student already knows and takes his or her culture, language and experiences into account.

The findings reported show clearly that students learn better when they can use a familiar language as the language for acquiring new knowledge. It is only when students understand what the teacher is saying that they can engage in meaningful conversations and build on previous knowledge as well as the knowledge of their class-mates and teacher. The findings reported here also show that using English as language of instruction increases differences among students. In other words, the use of a language of instruction which is unfamiliar to most students is a recipe for increased inequality. It may benefit a very small group of students who have well to-do parents who take them to English speaking countries, have English speaking guests and a lot of books, videos and games for their children in English. Frequently these children are also given extra tuition in English. The use of an unfamiliar language as the language of instruction appears therefore as a strategy to keep the masses down, to *stupidify* them and make it difficult for them to rise out of poverty. The opposite entails working towards a goal whereby African children like children in industrialized countries may study in their own language or at least in a familiar African language which they master well. Pursuing this goal should be a centrepiece in genuine poverty reduction strategies and in development aid in general.

## Notes

1. The LOITASA research project is sponsored by NUFU (The Norwegian Programme for Development, Research and Education). It involves researchers at the University of Dar es Salaam, University of Western Cape and University of Oslo.
2. The Institute was called UIE – the UNESCO Institute of Education – when the team started its work. The Institute is located in Hamburg.
3. Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit
4. October is more or less the end of the school academic year in South Africa and just before the final examinations, so the pupils' performance is a fairly good reflection of what they are capable of at the end of Grade 4 (after a year's exposure to English as a medium of instruction) and at the end of Grade 7 (after 4 years of English medium education).
5. Both of the theses as well as Said's are regarded as input into the LOITASA project.
6. This is one of the local languages in Tanzania. The Kuria people are originally found near Lake Victoria.
7. Qualification analysis builds on a theoretical framework derived from the neo-Marxist Frankfurter school of thought. It looks at the type of qualifications needed in the work force of a given society.
8. She used the word "faida" which I have here translated advantage or economic importance.
9. She used the word "hasara" which I have here translated disadvantage or danger.

## Appendix



## References

Alidou, Hassana, Aliou Boly, Birgit Brock-Utne, Yaya Satina Diallo, Kathleen Heugh, and H. Ekkehard Wolff. 2006. *Optimizing Learning and Education in Africa – the Language Factor. A stock-taking Research on Mother Tongue and Bilingual Education in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Hamburg: UIL. Presented to the ADEA 2006 Biennial Meeting in Libreville, Gabon, March 27–31, 2006 as Working Document prepared by ADEA, UIE and GTZ, as Working Document B-3.1.

Alidou, Hassana. 1997. *Education Language Policy and Bilingual Education: The Impact of French Language Policy in Primary Education in Niger*. (Ph.D. dissertation. The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1997). UMI Digital Dissertations, 9737030.

Alidou, Hassana. 2007. Promoting Multilingual and Multicultural Education in Francophone Africa: Challenges and Perspectives. In: *Languages and Education in Africa*, ed. by Brock-Utne, Birgit and Ingse Skattum. Oslo: Unipub. (in press).

Alidou, Ousseina. 2002. French Colonial Education and its Postcolonial Legacy in Francophone Africa. In: *Visionen für das Bildungssystem in Afrika (Education Systems in Africa- visions and prospects)*, ed. by Imunde, Lawford, 51–64. Loccum Protokolle 05/02, Rehburg-Loccum: Loccum Akademie, (July) 2002.

Arthur, Jo. 1994. English in Botswana Primary Classrooms: Functions and Constraints. In: *Teaching and researching language in African classrooms* ed. by Rubagumya, Casmir 63–78. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Brock-Utne, Birgit. 2000. *Whose Education for All? Recolonization of the African mind*. New York: Falmer Press. Reprinted in 2005 by <http://www.africanabooks.org>.

Brock-Utne, Birgit. 2005. The Interrelationship between Language and Culture. In: *Evaluation of Education – on Whose Terms?* ed. by Halvorsen, Torill Aagot, 115–129. Report from the NETREED Conference 2005. Report No.2 2006. University of Oslo: Institute for Educational Research.

Brock-Utne, Birgit. 2007a. Learning Through a Familiar Language Versus Learning Through a Foreign Language – A Look into Some Secondary School Classrooms in Tanzania. *International Journal of Educational Development* 27(5) (in press).

Brock-Utne, Birgit. 2007b. Worldbankification of Norwegian Development Assistance to Education. *Comparative Education* 43(3) Special Issue on Global Governance, Social Policy and Multilateral Education (in press).

Brock-Utne, Birgit, and Rodney Kofi Hopson (eds.). 2005. *Languages of Instruction for African Emancipation: Focus on Postcolonial Contexts and Considerations*. Cape Town: CASAS and Dar es Salaam: Mkuki na Nyota. Also published in Oxford, UK by African Books Collective and in East Lansing, US by Michigan State University Press.

Brock-Utne, Birgit, and Zubeida Desai. 2003. Expressing Oneself Through Writing – a Comparative Study of Learners' Writing Skills in Tanzania and South Africa. Paper presented at the Seventh Oxford International Conference on Education and Development, September 2003.

Brock-Utne, Birgit, and Zubeida Desai. 2005. Expressing Oneself Through Writing – A Comparative Study of Learners' Writing Skills in Tanzania and South Africa. In: *LOITASA Research in Progress*, ed. by Brock-Utne, Birgit, Zubeida Desai and Martha Qorro, 224–256. Dar es Salaam: KAD Associates.

Brock-Utne, Birgit, Zubeida Desai, Martha Qorro (eds.) 2003 *Language of Instruction in Tanzania and South Africa*. Dar es Salaam: E & D Publishers 222 pp.

Brock-Utne, Birgit, Zubeida Desai, Martha Qorro (eds.) 2004 *Researching the Language of Instruction in Tanzania and South Africa*. Cape Town: African Minds. 280 pp.

Brock-Utne, Birgit, Zubeida Desai, Martha Qorro (eds.) 2005 *LOITASA Research in Progress*. Dar es Salaam: KAD Associates. 320 pp.

Brock-Utne, Birgit, Zubeida Desai, Martha Qorro (eds.) 2006 *Focus on Fresh Data on the Language of Instruction Debate in Tanzania and South Africa*. Cape Town: African Minds. 279 pp.

Desai, Zubeida. 1999. Unlocking Potential: A Case for Extending the use of African Languages in Education. Paper presented at the Fifth Oxford International Conference on Education and Development. September 1999.

Desai, Zubeida. 2001. Multilingualism in South Africa with Particular Reference to the Role of African Languages in Education. *International Review of Education* 47(3–4): 323–339.

Dutcher, Nadine. 2004. *Expanding Educational Opportunity in Linguistically Diverse Societies*. Washington DC: Center for Applied Linguistics.

ED-82/MINEDAF/REF.5. The Use of African languages as Languages of Education, 111–131. The 1982 Harare Meeting of Ministers of Education in Africa.

Fafunwa, Babs A. 1990. Using National Languages in Education: A Challenge to African Educators. In Unesco-Unicef, 1990: *African Thoughts on the Prospects of Education for All*, 97–110. Selections from papers commissioned for the Regional Consultation on Education for All, Dakar 27–30 November, 1989. Dakar: Breda.

- Makoni, Sinfree B., and Nkonko Kamwangamalu, (eds.) 2001. *Languages and Institutions in Africa*. Cape Town: CASAS (The Centre for Advanced Studies of African Society) CASA BOOK SERIES No.5.
- Mehrotra, Santosh. 1998. Education for All: Policy Lessons from High-Achieving Countries. *International Review of Education*, 5/6: 461–484.
- MFA (Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs). 2003. *Education – Job number 1. Norwegian Strategy for Delivering Education for All by 2015*.
- Mkwizu, Mary Alphan. 2002. The Pedagogical Implications of using English in Teaching Civics in Tanzanian secondary schools. *Master thesis*. Oslo: Institute for Educational Research. 120 pp.
- Mkwizu, Mary Alphan. 2003. *The Pedagogical Implications of using English in Teaching Civics in Tanzanian secondary schools. Report. No. 5. Education in Africa*, vol. 12. Oslo: Institute for Educational Research. 155 pp.
- Mwinsheikhe, Halima Mohammed. 2007. Overcoming the Language Barrier. An In-depth study of Tanzanian Secondary School Science Teachers' and Students' Strategies in Coping with the English/Kiswahili Dilemma in the Teaching/Learning Process. Ph.D. dissertation. University of Oslo: Faculty of Education.
- Peires, Mary-Louise. 1994. Code-switching as an Aid to L2 Learning. In *South African Journal of Applied Language Studies (SAJALS)* 3:1.
- Prah, Kwesi Kwaa. 2000. *African Languages for the Mass Education of Africans*. Cape Town: CASAS, (The Centre for Advanced Studies of African Society) Book Series No.7.
- Rubagumya, Casmir. 1994. *Teaching and Researching Language in African Classrooms*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Said, Omar Mohamed. 2003. Orientation Secondary Courses and the Language of Instruction in Zanzibar Educational System: An Evaluation Study. *Master thesis*. Oslo: Institute for Educational Research. 104 pp.
- Senkoro, Fikeni E. M. K. 2004. The Role of Language in Education and Poverty Alleviation: Tool for Access and Empowerment. In: *Education, Poverty and Inequality*, ed. by Galabawa, Justinian and Anders Närman. Dar es Salaam: KAD Associates.
- Vuzo, Mwajuma Siama. 2002a. *Pedagogical Implications of Using English as a Language of Instruction in Secondary Schools in Tanzania*. Master thesis. Oslo: Institute for Educational Research. 119 pp.
- Vuzo, Mwajuma Siama. 2002b. Pedagogical Implications of Using English as a Language of Instruction in Secondary Schools in Tanzania. *Report. No. 9. Education in Africa*, vol. 11. Oslo: Institute for Educational Research.
- Vuzo, Mwajuma. 2007. *Revisiting the Language of Instruction Policy in Tanzania A Comparative Study of Geography Classes taught in Kiswahili and English*. Ph.D. dissertation. University of Oslo: Faculty of Education.

### The author

**Birgit Brock-Utne** is a Professor of Education and Development at the University of Oslo. She has a doctorate in peace studies. She worked as a Professor

of Education at the University of Dar-es-Salaam (1987–1992) and has since written numerous articles, books and chapters in books on education in Africa. She is the Norwegian project leader of LOITASA (Language of Instruction in Tanzania and South Africa). She has been a Visiting Professor in the USA and in Japan.

*Contact address:* Institute for Educational Research, University of Oslo, P. B. 1092, Blindern, 0317, Oslo, Norway. E-mail: [birgit.brock-utne@ped.uio.no](mailto:birgit.brock-utne@ped.uio.no) Homepage: <http://folk.uio.no/bbrock>