

LANGUAGE-BY-RADIO IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA: FOUR CASE STUDIES

Edmun B. Richmond

ABSTRACT

In the summer of 1981, the author was engaged in pedagogical research in language program development for the governments of Senegal and The Gambia.¹ During that period, he further participated in an eight-country language teaching survey throughout West, Central, and East Africa, under the sponsorship of the United States International Communications Agency. Included in that survey was an analysis of the use of radio broadcasts as a means to teach foreign languages. This article will describe the language-by-radio programs in four countries, i.e., Senegal, Burundi, Rwanda, and Kenya. Of special interest is the use of radio to teach English.

Introduction

The value of radio broadcasts in African nations is two-fold. Of prime importance is the problem of vast geographical expanses and inaccessibility of these expanses to the capital cities. Although newspapers are available in each capital, their circulation in the bush country is severely limited, if existent at all. Radio, therefore, remains the one cohesive factor, not only overcoming these distances, but also aiding national unity. This unity has not been effectively established in all African countries, due to severe tribal rivalries. The central governments, however, are committed to the concept of national unity and pride, which they hope will in time prevail over tribal provincialism. These governments have further grasped the importance of utilizing radio as an educational tool, not only for children, but for adults as well. Not only are educational programs broadcast, but also in-service programs for teachers.

The Countries

Senegal

The Republic of Senegal is located on the west coast of Africa, at that section of the continent closest to North America. A former French colony, it gained its independence in 1960. Senegal is bounded by Mauritania in the north, Mali in the east, and Guinea-Bissau and the Republic of Guinea to the south. The Republic of The Gambia is a small enclave located within Senegal. The main ethnic groups are the Wolof, Pulaar, Djola, Serer, and Mandingo. French is the only official language, while Wolof is used by nearly 50% of the population.

Language-by-radio programs in English are utilized by the Senegalese government, and are produced and aired through the cooperation of the British-Senegalese Institute, in Dakar, the capital. The Institute is concerned with the scheduling of programs, and with producing supplementary written material and exercises for the taped broadcasts. The actual language tapes are produced in London, by the BBC, and are sent to the Institute in Dakar. The Institute consults with the Senegalese broadcasting networks, and works out monthly schedules. The lessons are broadcast over the national as well as over the international networks. The national network includes regional broadcasts from Kaolack, located on the central west coast, from Tambacounda, in the eastern reaches of the country, and from Ziguinchor, on the southern coast, near Guinea-Bissau.

The series, entitled "Let's Speak English," is broadcast Monday through Friday at 7:30 pm. It consists of three sections, i.e., the actual language program itself, a program entitled "Pedagogical Pop," in which popular songs in English are aired, along with chosen vocabulary from these songs, and their explanation. This program is broadcast every Wednesday. The third type of program is called "Listener's Letters," which is broadcast once each month. It contains letters written in English by those people who participate in the course. There are usually two courses in progress at the same time. Both the elementary and the intermediate courses are repeated twice a week. One day during each week, there is a more advanced, specialized course in English, such as commercial English or maritime English.

These language broadcasts were originally intended for adult listeners, but the Senegalese government has encouraged these programs to be utilized for secondary school pupils as well. Teachers are encouraged to interface the programs into their class work. The British-Senegalese Institute supplies the written material and exercises to the teachers free of charge.

Several times each year, the staff of the English-by-Radio program visits each region in the country to promote a more personal interest in the programs. They also provide information by which the broadcasts can be better used by the public and by the teachers. These visitations are announced in advance by radio, and are quite popular.

Burundi

The Republic of Burundi is a small country in East-Central Africa. Along with its neighbor to the north, Rwanda, it formed the former Belgian trust territory of Ruanda-Urundi. Burundi is also bounded on the west by Zaire, to the east and south by Tanzania. Its official languages are French and Kirundi. Swahili is used as a trade language in the commercial centers. Ethnic composition is very homogenous, and along with that of Rwanda, forms a cultural continuum through the two countries. The main ethnic groups of both countries are the Tutsi and the Hutu. Independence was received in 1962.

Burundi, like Senegal, has two radio networks. One network broadcasts exclusively in Kirundi, the second broadcasts in French, Swahili, and English. Both networks use the same transmitters, two of which are in the short-wave tropical bands, the other two in the FM band. The main transmitter, along with studios and offices are located in Bujumbura, the capital. In addition, a three-kilowatt FM relay station is located in the mountains at Momonga, to cover the outlying areas of the country. Three transmitter sites are now under construction, and plans call for a total of ten regional transmitters in the 500 watt category to be completed sometime in 1982.

The broadcasting center in Bujumbura contains both network services. Each acts independently of the other. The production and engineering offices, studios, maintenance, and newsrooms are all centrally located. The Kirundi network uses the major studio and control room, along with a smaller studio and control room. The second network has its own smaller studio with control room. Both networks make use of a mobile truck, which can transmit live broadcasts back to the main transmitter, or record programs for transmission at a later time. The newsroom has teletype printers for four international news services. The broadcast day is from 5am to 9am, for both networks. Since the Kirundi network broadcasts exclusively in that language, it is beyond the scope of this article. The second network, however, is the one responsible for language-by-radio programs, as well as in-service programs for teachers. The programs are divided 70% French, 25% Swahili, and 5% English.

The BBC course, "English by Radio," is broadcast on a daily basis over a four-month period. The unique feature of this program, however, is that although "English by Radio" is the basis for the courses, they are rewritten locally. Two distinct programs of English language are offered, one for French speakers and one for Swahili speakers! The BBC program is received in tape form, and is dovetailed with other BBC topical tapes, as well as tapes from the Voice of America, supplied by the American Cultural Center in Bujumbura.

In addition to these English language broadcasts, news in English is transmitted twice a week, to keep local English speakers abreast of happenings within the country. One of the most popular programs is a record request series in English, which attracts listeners in western Zaire, Rwanda, Uganda, and Tanzania, as well as listeners within the country.

The Swahili programs are broadcast on a special schedule. These programs are aired in the early morning, and again in the late afternoon. Since most of the merchants in the country are Swahili speakers, they are unable to listen to programs broadcast during the workday. These programs are educational, featuring agricultural information, variety, record requests, sports, and news.

The French programs are more comprehensive, due to the official status of that language. Programs include variety, news, discussion, dramas, youth-oriented, and women's programs, as well as programs received from the BBC, VOA, Deutsche Welle, Radio Moscow, and Radio France International. A feature of the French service is the broadcasting of special programs for teachers "Magazine des Enseignants," a one-hour programs broadcast every Tuesday and Friday.

Rwanda

The Republic of Rwanda lies to the north of Burundi, and forms the other half of the Tutsi-Hutu cultural continuum. Its borders include Burundi to the south, Uganda and Zaire to the west, and Tanzania to the east. Official languages are French and Kinyarwanda, with Swahili spoken in the larger towns.

Radio Rwanda, broadcasting from Kigali, the capital, transmits programs in Kinyarwanda, French, and Swahili. Although the types of programs offered are more oriented toward information for a rural population as well as entertainment, Radio Rwanda does transmit educational programs directed toward the public schools on Wednesday and Friday. Along with these programs, a series of methodological programs, each thirty minutes in length are broadcast for teachers.

The broadcasting service is in a period of transition, changing over from transmitters located in the shortwave bands, to a national service in the FM frequency range. Although two transmitters will remain in the shortwave bands, six FM stations have been moulded into a national network. This changeover was necessitated by poor radio conditions which are found year-round at the Equator. For several hours of the daylight period, all shortwave frequencies are totally useless, and programs have to be suspended between 8am and 11am each day.

One of the tasks of the government is to advise the public of the changeover, how to locate the new stations on the radio dial, as well as how to install a modest FM antenna. Figure 2 illustrates an ad placed in the monthly Radio Rwanda program showing the location of each transmitter, where they are to be found on the FM dial, and how to tune them in by proper placement of an antenna. The ad also explains how to conserve battery life, since there is a severe shortage of batteries in the country.

The physical facilities of Radio Rwanda are reminiscent of those of Radio Rurale, in Upper Volta.² One building contains five studios, production offices, as well as technical laboratories. The production staff is quite large, consisting of 53 full or part-time "animateurs" or community service workers who direct programs in the field, and act as liaison between the villages and the Radio Rwanda staff. In addition, twelve journalists and writers are employed. The service owns one mobile truck which tapes programs in the countryside, to be aired at a later time.

The broadcast day is divided into Tranches, or segments. The Morning Tranche begins at 5am and lasts until 8am. Programs are in the three languages and are basically music and variety. The Mid-Day Tranche begins at 11am with local music, service programs and variety until 2pm. At 3:30pm, the Swahili Tranche takes over until 4:45pm. The Evening Tranche begins at 5pm with programs of folklore, education and culture, music, sports, and "Flash Information" in French and Kinyarwanda, until 9pm. The French Tranche rounds out the broadcast day, from 9:30 to 11pm.

Although there is a great interest in the English language, there are no immediate plans for broadcasts in that language, due to limited hours of operation and scheduling. The English Section of the Bureau Pédagogique is planning to propose a series of programs in English directed to the public schools. With the current educational reforms program, such a series is sure to become an integral part of the language program in Rwanda.

Kenya

Of the four countries discussed in this article, Kenya has a unique feature of having more than 40 separate cultural groups within its borders. In spite of this fact, while English is its only official language, Swahili, Kikuyu, and Luo are used extensively. The Republic of Kenya was formerly a part of British East Africa. It is bordered on the east by the Indian Ocean and Somalia, on the south by Tanzania, on the west by Uganda, and on the north by Ethiopia and Sudan. Kenya received its independence in 1963.

Of the four countries discussed, Kenya has the most ambitious and most exciting language-by-radio program. The Kenyan Ministry of Basic Education and the United States Aid for International Development are jointly developing a pilot program in grades 1, 2, and 3 in teaching English, improving existing programs in English-by-Radio, and are assuming responsibility for the teaching of understanding of oral and written English, as well as curriculum development of English in the country.

The pilot programs will first be aired in January, 1982, and will be broadcast over the Voice of Kenya national radio network for thirty minutes per day, for 165 days each year. The program format is based on a past AID program in mathematics, which was used with great success in Nicaragua, from 1973 to 1978.⁹ The thirty-minute broadcast is divided into mini-segments which last from 30 seconds to three minutes. The programs have two main characters, with four animal characters, and is complete with music and sound effects.

Pilot production for the programs has been under way for several months. Four weeks are needed from writing the script to airing the program. Included with the introduction of new material will be the re-entry of previously learned material, although the re-entry and se-

quencing schedules had not been established at the time of this author's interview (July, 1981).

The pilot testing stages consist of writing and taping the program, playing the tapes in various villages chosen for the pilot study, and testing the results in the field at the village level. The Ministry is providing Kenyans to observe these village visitations, to complete a questionnaire and to return the results of the observations to the Radio Language Arts office in Nairobi. The observations include both teacher and pupil behavior. In addition to developing the tapes, the RLA is developing a teacher guide, oral lessons based on the half-hour programs, and pupil worksheets.

An important feature of the program is that the speakers on the tapes are Kenyan speakers of English. No native English speakers are used. Interviews with members of the Ministry have stressed the desire to develop a Kenyan Standard English, as opposed to an American or British standard. The Kenyans believe that such a concept as a Kenyan variety of English has already been in the developmental stage since British colonial days, and that since a standardized Kenyan English will aid the process of national unity.

Summary

Language-by-radio programs in these countries are in their infancy, and are experiencing growing pains. Problems in scheduling, government funding, interfacing the programs with public schools, training teachers to use the programs to their greatest potential, and the preparation of supplementary material, all play a part in the speed of their success. But each country knows the impact of radio broadcasts in general, and are gradually realizing that radio can be used as a pedagogical tool, not only in the cities, but in the outlying areas as well. One of the main problems in Black Africa, is the lack of qualified teachers. Some countries are resorting to the use of high-school graduates as public school teachers, and are giving them additional training by in-service courses in teacher education centers and by offering radio programs of methodological content to supplement these courses. But this is viewed as a stop-gap activity only, and is not the long-term answer to the problem. Government backing and funding is the key here. With those two high-priority ingredients, such language-by-radio programs will be on the rise in Sub-Saharan Africa. This is exactly what Kenya is doing with their endorsement of the RLA pilot study. If this study proves to be successful in terms of fulfilling its stated goals, it will undoubtedly become the model for other such programs in Africa, and the rest of the Third World.

Edmun B. Richmond
Modern Language Department
Georgia Institute of Technology
Atlanta, GA 30332

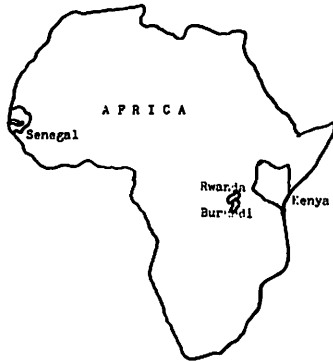


Figure 1. Map of the Study Area

**WAKWUMVA UTE
FM NEZA ?**

SW 1	SW 2	FM
100.0	100.0	100.0
100.1	100.1	100.1
100.2	100.2	100.2
100.3	100.3	100.3
100.4	100.4	100.4
100.5	100.5	100.5
100.6	100.6	100.6
100.7	100.7	100.7
100.8	100.8	100.8
100.9	100.9	100.9
101.0	101.0	101.0

- Fungura ijwi litoya utamara amabuye
- Shakisha mu mirongo ya FM uko ari itanu, uvuga neza
- Zamura antene yose uyerekeze aho ikurura amajwi neza

UR

Figure 2: Ad for Rwandan FM Stations

Footnotes

¹Sponsored by a grant from the Georgia Tech Foundation. See Edmun B. Richmond, "Literacy and Language Teaching in The Gambia," *Modern Language Journal*, 64/4 (1980), pp. 414-421.

²For a complete description of the Upper Volta project, see Edmun B. Richmond, "Radio Rurale: Education and Information for an Illiterate People," *NALLD Journal of Technology and Mediation*, 15/1 (1980), pp. 35-37.

³The Radio Mathematics Project: Sample Lesson Materials, Institute for Mathematical Studies in the Social Sciences, Stanford University: 1980.

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