

Multilingualism, Language Policy and Creative Writing in Kenya

Esther K Mbithi

Abstract

Language use and creative writing go hand in hand. In the process of exploring language, we also engage in the study of literature. An engagement with literature is, indeed, a continuing process of improving our capacity to use language and refining our sensibility to good language use. In Kenya, there are clearly discernible patterns of creative writing which may be linked to language policies. In this article we trace language policies in Kenya's formal education sector since 1963, drawing parallels between the prevailing policies and the patterns of creative writing. In the first instance it is an overview of literary output in Kenya since 1963. In the process, however, we shall engage in literary appreciation of selected pieces. Our discussion includes creative writing produced locally in English by writers for whom English would not be considered their mother tongue, as well as creative writing in the local languages. The issue of multilingualism and translation is central to our literary appreciation; whether translation is a subconscious activity during the writing process, or is formally undertaken by a different person after the work has been published, or is in the minds of those reading the work.

Keywords: multilingualism, language policy, creative work, official language, African language, indigenous language, Kenya

Full text: <https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1186/s13616-014-0019-9.pdf>