

## Kinyafanglais as a newly created “language” in Rwanda: Will it hamper the promotion of the language of instruction at Kigali Institute of Education?

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### **Abstract**

*The Constitution of the Republic of Rwanda (2003) recognizes Kinyarwanda as the National Language, and Official Languages as Kinyarwanda, French and English (Art 5). However, it does not specify exactly how these languages ought to be used in de facto practice. At Kigali Institute of Education (KIE), the use of the three languages has given birth to a new “language” often coined as “Kinyafanglais” for its combination of the three. The KIE community has however perceived this new language differently. Some perceive it as having a negative impact on the promotion of languages of instruction and on quality of teaching and learning, while others understand it from linguistic and pedagogical perspectives as a legitimate linguistic tool. The aim of the present article therefore, is to examine how members of the KIE community understand and perceive “Kinyafanglais” and its impact in the teaching learning process, whether positive or negative. It also highlights the potential contribution of Applied Linguistics in helping to understand this linguistic phenomenon and its context within KIE community’s academic activities.*

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**Key words:** Code mixing, language interference, language community, language variety, medium of instruction

### **Introduction**

For a while, a number of people in both academia and the general Rwandan community have often questioned the use of a combination of languages at Kigali Institute of Education (KIE). This combination has in fact resulted in the formation of a new “language” locally coined as “Kinyafanglais”. In a bid to limit the spread and impact of the language that some have viewed as negative for its potential hindrance of mastery of English, the KIE senate had conducted informal discussions and decisions were taken on the subject (Niyomugabo, 2008).

A simple observation of all academic activities in KIE until now, indicates that this issue has hardly been formally addressed. On one hand, most of the members of the KIE community, if not all, seem to ignore the problems resulting from the use of “Kinyafanglais” or they simply consider it as a simplistic problem of language interference. On the other hand, some are worried that French and English are being “conquered” and/or “polluted” by Kinyarwanda while others think that the foreign languages could equally pollute the latter.

However what must be considered is the fact that contact between Kinyarwanda and French /English has resulted in the creation of new varieties commonly known as “Kinyafrançais” and “Kinyenglish”. Based on scientific considerations such as sociolinguistic status of KIE, its linguistic factors, as well as the social and political plan of the country, these varieties cannot be neglected. They should be recognised as legitimate and therefore, be regarded necessary, or identify the problems they may cause so as to prevent possible negative impact on the current language of instruction at KIE.

This article does not warrant need to establish ownership of the coinage “Kinyafanglais” as it is not easy to determine. In addition, the term has become a variety that is used at KIE by many members of the KIE community to mean a combination of Kinyarwanda and French or English. Therefore several views have been aired regarding the

characteristics and attitudes towards the mixed Kinyarwanda and French known as “Kinyafrançais”; and Kinyarwanda and English known as “Kinyenglish”.

## Methodology

To investigate the use of “Kinyafrançais” in KIE and its perceived implications, a study was conducted. A sample of 550 participants (respondents) was selected from members of KIE community (lecturers, students, administrative staff and support staff). Their views were gathered through questionnaires as well as individual and focus group interviews. Questions concerning perceptions of “Kinyafrançais” (the mixture of Kinyarwanda, French and English) at KIE were asked. Apart from the qualitative methodology that this study based on, it was also guided by the model of language management developed by Spolsky (2004) and Shahomy (2006). The key advantage of this model is that it allows capturing discrepancies among the three levels, which are: “a, declared policy or an agreed language management guideline (e.g. Constitution/organic laws); b, perceived /ideological policy (what people think should be done); c, practiced policy (what people actually do)”.

## Findings

The respondents’ perceptions and attitudes of members of KIE community vis-à-vis “Kinyafrançais” are summarized in the table below:

<b>Kinyafrançais</b>	<b>Responses/perceptions stated</b>	<b>Number of informants in %</b>
<b>Kinyafrançais</b> Kinyarwanda+French:	It is a variety which interferes or parasitizes with French	11
	It is a low variety of French	19
	It is a variety of French speakers	8
	It is a “false” French	27
	It is French created from Kinyarwanda	23
	It is creolized French	46
	It is a starting point of interference	9
	It is an irregular form of standard French	41
	It is a “hybrid form”	43
	It is a dialect of French (a local variety of French)	49
	It is a “linguistic bastard”	61
	It is an easy form of French	18
	It is a form of Kinyarwanda-made French (a variety of Kinyarwanda with morphological deficit)	7
	It is a fair support to education	43

	It is a deviation of the norm	21
	It is a coverage of linguistic knowledge deficit	39
<b>Kinyanglais (Kinyenglish):</b> Kinyarwanda+English	It is a variety which interferes with English	23
	It is a low variety of English	11
	It is “bad” English	32
	It is a sign of cultural integration	17
	It is a pidgin of English	14
	It is a deviation of the norm	17
	It is Kinyarwanda-made English (a form of Kinyarwanda with morphological deficit)	15
	It is a “tolerable” English	7
	It is English	12
	It is the language I like most	7

### Discussion of the findings

The analysis and interpretations of the salient answers and perceptions made by the respondents led to the following findings, as discussed in the next subsection.

#### ***“Kinyafranglais” as a legitimate offspring of the contact between Kinyarwanda and other languages at KIE***

Kinyarwanda plays a crucial role in this combination of languages and that is why the coined term “Kinyafranglais”, starts with the noun marker of the seventh class *Ki-*, which includes names of languages among others. In further explanation of this concept, Gafaranga’s (1992) analogy of language as a “marriage” is pertinently relevant. Accordingly, there must be “wedding” or marriage to have an offspring or a child. For the child to be considered as legitimate, the “Marriage” must be legitimate as well. In the KIE context, Kinyarwanda and English or French are respectively the bride and groom and the “wedding” has been legitimised by official introduction of multilingualism in Rwandan education. Just like is the case for human beings where one may get married willingly or forced; languages operate in a similar manner. When two communities using two different languages willingly decide to live together, the “marriage” is consented.

However, it can also be forced in instances where one group of people imposes the use of its own language on another group due to historical, political or economic advantages over the other. For languages as well as with people any “marriage”, whether forced or otherwise; often leads to the birth of a child if all conditions are fulfilled. On a linguistic level, the son or daughter from the “wedding” between two languages is the third party that inherits from them but without necessarily resembling any. The trend of combining Kinyarwanda with languages of instruction commonly known as “Kinyafranglais” is observed at KIE, and it is noted that the spoken language takes precedence

over the written one in this amalgamation. For a “marriage” and its offspring to be considered genuine, it must be legitimate or legal wedding. Similarly, the legitimacy of languages in society and the status accorded to each as a result is determined by the law. For instance at KIE the “wedding” has been legalized by the Constitution of the Republic of Rwanda of the 4<sup>th</sup> June 2003 (Article 5), which stipulates that Kinyarwanda is both the national and official language while French and English are official languages only.

In establishing that “Kinyafranglais” is an offspring of Kinyarwanda and the languages of instruction of KIE, one may then wonder if “the parents are not pampering and spoiling this offspring”. In linguistics, such “kindness of parents” is shown by positive attitudes expressed towards “Kinyenglish” or “Kinyafrançais” as less complicated French; it is an easy French; it is a tolerable English; it is a language that I like most; it is an easy English; it is a fair aid for teaching/learning, etc.

These attitudes are evidenced by the frequent use of that language variety. In fact it has been observed that voluntarily opting to use a language without the imminent need to communicate may indicate that one’s wish to be a member of linguistic community. The frequency of usage may also be linked with false social prejudices that the environment associates with the language and its speakers. For example, it is bad French/English; it is a variety of French speakers, it is a low variety, it is a linguistic bastard, it is a variety, which interferes with others, it is a pidgin, it is a deviation from the norm, etc..

At KIE, it is apparent that this combination of languages is prioritised as is evidenced by the majority of people opt to use it. The ‘majority’ takes into consideration two categories or groups of the KIE community: the academic staff comprised of bilingual and/or multilingual intellectuals that speak French and English, Kinyarwanda and English or the three languages simultaneously and the non-intellectuals/non-educated who only speak Kinyarwanda or sometimes with minimal English or French but who cannot code-switch between the two languages. Therefore, to speak “Kinyafranglais” can be considered as one way of attempting to upgrade one’s status into the intellectual community. In conclusion, it is clear that “Kinyafranglais” is like a unique legitimate child because a big majority tend to use it in the KIE community.

### ***“Kinyafranglais” as a variety of Kinyarwanda with morphological deficit***

Kinyarwanda is the national and official language, as well as the mother tongue for most members of KIE community. Kinyarwanda is also a common language for all Rwandans. It is a language spoken by Rwandans in their everyday life, etc. As a language used in interpersonal conversation Kinyarwanda remains a language that everybody living in Rwanda would like to know. It should however be noted here that there is a question of knowing the variety of Kinyarwanda we are talking about. For instance, Gafaranga (1997) distinguishes between standard Kinyarwanda and “Kinyarwanda-for-all-practical-purposes”. “Kinyarwanda-for-all-practical-purposes” is to be understood as a language variety very common among bilingual Rwandans with a Kinyarwanda structural base and lexical contributions from

other languages. Thus, in Kigali Institute of Education (KIE) the varieties in contact are Kinyarwanda, French and English and in the case of Kinyarwanda, standard Kinyarwanda and Kinyarwanda-for-all-practical-purposes.

As has been mentioned above, the KIE community is home to many languages, where interlocutors code-mix and code-switch from Kinyarwanda which is regarded as the root language. The survey I conducted (Niyomugabo, 2008) has proven that more than 90% of members of KIE community are not consciously aware of code-mixing and yet they agree that speaking Kinyarwanda; whose words are predominant in this variety is understood by the interlocutors; in this case both the speakers and listeners. Even with the current surge of foreign languages [French and English] at KIE, Kinyarwanda's status as a language predominantly known and spoken by people in this context takes prominence; and as such the varieties are not able to camouflage the fact that it is still recognisable as a modified version of Kinyarwanda.

It is apparent that the mixture of French and Kinyarwanda ("Kinyafraçais") and the one of English and Kinyarwanda ("Kinyenglish") are two autonomous languages; one to another and as such it is important to examine whether both languages can exist without any modification in one or another. Such a consideration is not possible and that is why it is evident that some words or structures that are incorporated into another language from Kinyarwanda will undergo some morphological and phonological changes.

On a morphological basis for instance, Kinyarwanda and French/ English are totally two different structures in such a way that when code-switched from French/English into Kinyarwanda, words are concocted following the Kinyarwanda trend; and this concoction is evident in all the grammatical parts of speech such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, etc. At the verb level, for instance, words are inflected and take on the Kinyarwanda infinitive marker "**Ku-**" and the inflection "**- a**", which is the ending of infinitive in Kinyarwanda (Coupez, 1980; Dubnova, 1984 ; Kimenyi,1980). Therefore forms of code-mixing such as "gukorija" (**ku-corrig-a**), "kwegisipulika" (**ku-expliqu-a**), "kumanajinga" (**ku-manag-ing-a**) are common. At the noun level, some nouns in French or English take on different morphemes as the noun class marker in Kinyarwanda, as follows:

Class 1/2: **umubosi**: u-**mu**-bosi / a boss / ; **Ababosi**: a-ba-bosi / bosses.

**Umujeni**: u-**mu**-jeni / un jeune / ; **abajeni** / les jeunes.

**Umuregicara**: u-**mu**-legicara / a lecturer/; **abaregicara** / lecturers

Here, the singular nouns take the plural form in class 2 as is in Kinyarwanda.

Class 9/6: **ø- ø** - sabujegiti / a subject /; **amasabujegiti**: a-**ma**-sabujegiti / subjects.

These singular nouns are classified in class 9 of nouns in Kinyarwanda and they take the plural form in the class 6.

Utterances such as this: *iyi sitori iranyenteresa* (i-rany-intéress - a): **Ku-** intéress-**a** (this story is interesting to me, or this story interests me) are common. It is clear that for spontaneous borrowed verb forms, the structure is first of all "**ku-**" (standing for the 15<sup>th</sup> class of words) + French verb and "**-a**" (the inflection of all infinitives in Kinyarwanda). But in English and Kinyarwanda there is **ku-** English verb stem +suffix -ing form - **a** (for inflection of all

Kinyarwanda verbs). There are fixed rules. Therefore for other verbs simply combining the words in Kinyarwanda speech will create utterances such as:

*“...we want that buri student amenya his obligations here kuko vrayment moyens zose ngo mwise in good conditions zihari. Ikigamijwe ni education ya qualité muri KIE”. (... we request every student to know his/her obligations here because you have all the requirements so as to study in good conditions. KIE priority is quality education).*

In such a speech production, which is a combination of three languages, it is not easy for a listener to distinguish the type of language used.

### ***Kinyafranglais as a linguistic variety***

As stated earlier, Kinyafranglais is a linguistic variety born from a combination of languages used at KIE. This variety can be considered as a language, a social dialect, a pidgin, a Creole, etc. Although it is difficult to assign a clear concise and full definition of what is called ‘language’, various authors (Ricento, 2006: 66-67, Saussure, 1972: 23-35) have highlighted some criteria which may help you define a language. Fishman (1975) has asserted that two people understand each other when speaking the same language or what is also known as mutual intelligibility. Based on this reasoning it can then be argued that Kinyafranglais is a language because its users are able to understand one another regardless of total (100 percent) comprehension. Even though the listener does not know the original meaning of words used in French or English when using this variety, it is easy to understand the message because Kinyarwanda words are recognisable and used in a way that the users are able to understand them. For instance: *“Umutica wacu aratwegisipulika amasabujegiti muri afternoon, muze twatendinge”* (Our teacher is going to explain to us all subjects this afternoon, come and attend).

The second criterion, which many linguists highlight in defining a language is the arbitrariness of the speech (Todd, 2000: 6-7; Saussure, 1972: 100-102). For a variety to be called a language it must develop a system whereby there is no immediate and direct link between the object and its meaning: the signifier and the signified (Saussure, 1972:97-99). We assume that “Kinyafranglais” fulfils the conditions in this case.

The notion of expressiveness is also important when defining a language as a language is defined as such when it reveals the socio-culture to which the speaker belongs or wishes to belong. In this case, the “Kinyafranglais” is a language because it helps identify the social cultural sense of belonging of the speaker at KIE or it simply helps assign the speaker to a determined social cultural group. For instance certain English speakers whose desire to demonstrate their limited knowledge of Kinyarwanda may opt to use Kinyenglish and vice versa. And the same trend is synonymous with French speakers and “Kinyafrançais”.

According to Fishman (1971: 41-43), a language can also be defined according to its history, autonomy and livelihood. With regard to “Kinyafranglais”, it is clear that it has no history as it does not have clear linguistic heritage. In addition it is not autonomous because it borrows words from French, English and Kinyarwanda and is not “alive”

because no one uses it as his/her mother tongue. These weaknesses may categorise it as pidgin because it falls within the aforementioned criteria. However when in analysing the full definition of a pidgin as suggested by different authors (Blanc & Hamers, 1983: 255-259), “Kinyafanglais” is not a pidgin because it is used by speakers who are able to use other languages namely Kinyarwanda, English and French. It is undoubtedly not a Creole (Hamers & Blanc, 1983: 259-261) because it is not spoken by anyone as his/her mother tongue.

The findings (Niyomugabo, 2008) also revealed that 41% of the respondents stated that “Kinyafanglais” is an obvious “interference”. Interference occurs when a speaker of a given language uses some elements of another language (Garmadi, 1981). It is to be noted that a classical interference is a result of the non-mastering of a language and it is normally produced from a mother tongue to a second language (Bouton, 1974: 169-170). A valid question would be whether Kinyarwanda interferes with English/French at KIE. The answer is negative because as has been discussed, English and French are both mediums of instruction at KIE. They therefore adapt/adjust to Kinyarwanda. Are the languages of instruction hindering communication in Kinyarwanda at KIE? The answer is equally negative as the interference to take place the two languages must be known. Here, it has been observed that even those who do not know French or English try and dare to speak “kinyafanglais” when interference is not taken into consideration.

Therefore, as “Kinyafanglais” is neither a full language nor a pidgin or a result of interference and since it is specifically spoken by the Rwandan members of KIE community, it can be taken as a dialect of Kinyarwanda among other languages. By definition, a dialect of a language is a variety which is closely related to it or through a series of other mutually intelligible dialects (Fishman, 1971). If we compare “Kinyafrançais” and “Kinyenglish” to Kinyarwanda, we find that they have both similarities and differences that confirm their “dialect nature”. Among the categories of dialects there are differences made between regional and social dialects. For the case of “Kinyafanglais”, it is not a regional dialect. Rather, it is a social dialect or a sociolect which is used by an elite social class at KIE as well as other people who may wish to appear intellectual.

### ***“Kinyafanglais” as a deviation from the standard***

According to some bilingual and multilingual members of the academic community at KIE, French and English are envisaged as idealized powerful standards while “Kinyafrançais” and “Kinyenglish” are considered as low varieties of French and English that do not deserve to be called ‘languages’. Those varieties reflect a kind of deviation from the academic standard. In this regard, a statement made by one participant- a senior academic, confirms this attitude:

*“Kinyafrançais and Kinyenglish are serious deviations from the academic standard and it is something which should be discouraged if we plan to achieve the expected level of quality teaching/learning of French and English at KIE. We should undermine those varieties and we should not set up strategies to value them”* (Niyomugabo, 2008: 216).

What is implied in the statement above is the fact that “Kinyafrançais” and “Kinyenglish” are perceived as “an insult” to the languages of instruction at KIE as they serve to worsen one’s mastery of the languages that are considered important [French and English]. Purists who are ardent advocates of the purity of French and English

languages hold a similar viewpoint. However it is necessary to mention that the standard is linguistically arbitrary and that the mixture of languages should be considered as deviations rather than errors or mistakes. It should however be noted that this view does not trivialize the fact that we should give privilege to prescriptive grammar in teaching/learning of English and French.

### ***“Kinyafranglais” as a necessary aid to teaching/learning***

A number of lecturers of science subjects at KIE argue that the combination of languages helps unlock meaning of abstract ideas and makes cognitive knowledge understandable. Some of the English and French- speaking lecturers (45% and 61% respectively) at KIE are sometimes compelled to use “Kinyafranglais” as the language of communication in their teaching so as to be understood by their students. However, it is apparent as has been previously illustrated that “Kinyafranglais” and “Kinyenglish” are not considered “mainstream” varieties, stigmatized by less educated people, and even undermined by some educated people (87%) as well as some academic organs, including the academic senate (reference is made to the senate decision held on 12/05/2005), that have made judgements about the varieties as “wrongly spoken French or English”. Lecturers are in turn blamed for hampering the teaching / learning of “good English” and “good French” and therefore are strongly discouraged from these practices at KIE. During our survey one lecturer elaborated on such a situation related to the practicing of “Kinyafranglais” when s/he said:

*“I explain in French or in English for 15 minutes, and then I realize that no student seems to have understood because I ask question and no one provides the required answer. Then, I start explaining using the mixture of Kinyarwanda and French or English and students begin to show signs of understanding. For exercises, they do them systematically, using French or English. As you already know, the important thing for us is not the French or English languages, but rather the understanding of physics or mathematics, which have no language. I myself studied Physics in another language and now I teach it in French or English” (Niyomugabo, 2008: 217).*

In this statement, the apparent issue here is that the teaching of science related subjects is not reason enough for not mastering the languages of instruction (French and English) as it is not only a medium for cognitive content, but also a skill in itself. In conclusion, the slow progression in the use of “Kinyafrançais” and “Kinyenglish” by Rwandan lecturers in teaching is evident.

### ***“Kinyafranglais” as a disguise of language deficiency***

41% of respondents stated that in many cases the combination of languages is a result of lack of mastery of English and French. Therefore the use of this variety is reflective of an attempt to disguise this incompetence. Through my research (Niyomugabo, 2008), it was discovered that the perception of the status of certain languages may be related to generation. Only the respondents above 50 years of age (mainly French speakers) for example, “showed apprehension” about language mixing. They argued that they studied French in the 1960s at a time when the



mastery of French was considered prestigious in Rwanda. However for English speakers language mixing appeared not to be a problem. In fact according to bilingual young students, language mixing is normal for people who have studied in bilingual or multilingual contexts. Among the respondents, 40% of young students revealed that the level of bilingualism is sometimes partial to one language over another and so code mixing helps disguise those limited abilities.

Code mixing can also be seen as a result of non-mastery of both languages due to the fact that the Rwandan educational system has recently changed from French to the use of English as a medium of instruction in schools. This linguistic phenomenon is more specifically due to the fact that some schools deny the opportunity to children to learn in their mother tongue (from primary one to primary three as decided by the Government ) which is a privilege for the good mastery of languages as many language scholars have asserted (Dabène, 1994; Niyibizi, 2010). Therefore the young generation values code mixing not only because of their language incompetence as such but also because of the need to accord similar value to their mother tongue.

A keen observation reveals that KIE has a significant number of students with French language background, and they would feel better if they were taught in French, but currently they have to study in English. Therefore, such a situation does not favour them even if English language modules such as “Foundation English” are being provided at KIE. It appears that such courses are not helping them especially if factors such as the few hours allocated to these un-credited courses in comparison to other credited courses are taken into consideration. As a result students put more effort into the credited subjects at the expense of the aforementioned English courses which is reflected in their poor written and oral skills. Code mixing is then viewed as a compensatory alternative for poor French and English.

### **Conclusions and implications**

The aim of the study was to examine how members of KIE community perceive “Kinyafranglais”, the new “language” “born” of the contact (or marriage) between English/French and Kinyarwanda. The paper reveals that members of KIE community perceive “Kinyafranglais” in different ways and that these perceptions are underpinned by various linguistic, social and pedagogical factors. While some members of KIE community perceive “Kinyafranglais” as hampering the promotion of languages of instruction, and suggest discouraging it; the findings suggest that it is in fact a linguistic and pedagogical tool that is used by both lecturers and students in the teaching and learning process. Lecturers perceive it as facilitating smooth transmission of subject content and knowledge while students perceive it as helping them understand their courses.

It must be acknowledged that “Kinyafranglais” can have a negative effect on the promotion of English and French as languages of instruction if it is valued to the detriment of these two languages. However it should not be stigmatized or sidelined as its contribution to the teaching and learning process at KIE cannot be ignored. Moreover, “Kinyafranglais” seems to help students build confidence and self-identity and facilitates interaction.

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