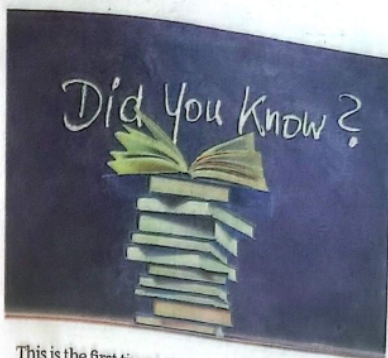


Letters

LETTERS

There is no language called Runyakitara



This is the first time I am going to break anyone's heart. And, I am going to do it with a whole lot. This is it. There is no such a language as Runyakitara.

Runyakitara was as a result of an academic experiment or an intellectual project at Makerere University that gained ground in the mid-1990s.

Today, hundreds of students have studied the subject at Makerere University but they leave it in the lecture rooms. No continuity, nothing. The students go back to the natural languages of Runyankore-Rukiga and Runyoro-Rutooro.

It may be said that the scholars who artificially created this language hoped that it would be a unifier and connector of the peoples of south western Uganda from Bunyoro to Kigezi and parts of northern Tanzania and eastern DR Congo.

While it received positive scholarly (academic and linguistic) and political acceptance, it failed miserably as a tool of communication. Let it be known though, that the inability for Runyakitara to find acceptance among the native speakers, does not make it an intellectual failure.

The argument behind the four Rs of Runyankore-Rukiga and Runyoro-Rutooro to form Runyakitara could have been that these languages share nearly 80 percent of their phonological and grammatical structure, and, therefore, easy to develop teaching materials for instruction.

So, why has Runyakitara experiment failed to take root? The reason is simple. It is a rootless. It's no one's mother tongue. I want to think when these scholars met in their boardroom, they said, "Let us create a language; Runyakitara that can counter Luganda/English!"

See, while these four languages are related, they are quite distinct. For example, one word that is used across but with different meanings is *ekitara*. Among the Banyankore and Bakiga, *ekitara* is a granary but to the Batoooro and Banyoro, *ekitara* is a sword. It is from the sword that Kitara Kingdom was named.

Relatedly, a sword in Luganda is *ekitala*. Yet, in Runyankore-Rukiga, a sword is *rurara*.

Interestingly, it is the only language/subject taught at the university but not examined at any of the lower levels of education. And, the scholars cannot blame the policy makers and the National Curriculum Development Centre. The policy for language teaching is based on the fact that the language must have native speakers. Makerere's Institute of Languages can continue to standardise the individual languages of Runyankore-Rukiga and Runyoro-Rutooro. We will then appreciate their creation.

Otherwise, to any listener and speaker in western Uganda, whose language that does not fall in the Runyakitara's 4Rs will dismiss this artificial creation. The region has such other distinct languages such as Lhukonzo, Rubwitsi, Rugungu, Rusongora, Rutuku, Runyaruguru, Runyabutumbi, Urufumbira and Kihaya, among others.

Elsewhere, English didn't subdue Welsh, Irish, or Scottish. They co-exist in the same kingdom. As an academic experiment, Runyakitara has done well. But if the intention was to achieve the universality of Luganda, then it was a pursuit in futility.

Western Uganda can never have a universal language and neither are its dwellers homogeneous. Let each language flourish and develop. Makerere's Institute of Languages can help to standardise, harmonise the orthography and perfect the grammatical structure of each of those languages.

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