

Kiswahili as a National and International Language

By

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INTRODUCTION

Kiswahili is *officially* one of the four national languages of the Democratic Republic of the Congo – DRC (former Zaire), and the national language of Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. In this paper we shall, however, limit our discussion to the status and situation of Kiswahili as a national language in Tanzania. The situation of Kiswahili in the DRC, Kenya and Uganda, and beyond, will be highlighted when we discuss the issue of Kiswahili as an international language in the second part of this presentation.

The story of the rise of Kiswahili as a national language in Tanzania is well-known and we shall not repeat it here (cf. Whiteley 1969; Chiraghdin and Mnyampala 1977; Khamisi 1974; Mbaabu 1991; Heine 1990; Legere 1990). Suffice it to say that the rise and spread of Kiswahili from a community language to a lingua franca, and finally a national language, was largely demand driven in the socio-economic sense. This development was assisted by many factors, among them the following:

Pre-1900:

- (a) The maritime trade;
- (b) The caravan trade into the interior and the accompanying commercial empire building, especially in the Congo;
- (c) The rise of Zanzibar as East Africa's commercial capital;
- (d) The Bantu cultural complex, with its close affinity to the Swahili complex, and its cultural and political tolerance;
- (e) The relative cultural and linguistic homogeneity of the Swahili communities;
- (f) The factor of Islam.

1900-1960

Most of the above factors, plus:

- (g) German colonial language policy, which made Kiswahili the language of the lower levels of administration, education and the military;
- (h) Christian missionary activity, including alphabetization, book printing and publishing;
- (i) The mass media, especially introduction of Kiswahili newspapers, magazines and periodicals, and, after 1950, the radio and television;
- (j) Cultural activities, especially pop culture, such as music, games and sports, ceremonies, rituals, dances, dramas and movies;
- (k) Economic and social changes, including urbanization, migrant wage labour (notably plantation economy), and the accompanying trade unionism, new infrastructures, especially the railways and roads;
- (l) Nationalist politics (the Maji Maji war, the workers movement from the 1930, the peasants movements; the struggle for independence from 1940s onwards);
- (m) The school system.

In this paper, we shall focus on the post independence period, that is from about 1960 to the present, with emphasis on the last decade, i.e. 1990-2000. We shall look briefly at the process of development and consolidation of Kiswahili as a national language in Tanzania, the factors that favored its adoption or acceptance, and the obstacles that have to be overcome. For our present purpose, we would define a national language as *a language that is widely spoken, understood and accepted by a given national community as constituting their common heritage, serving as their collective cultural and political symbol and identity, and expressing their common ideals and aspiration.*

On the “international” level, we shall review the spread and consolidation of Kiswahili as a sub-regional language in Eastern and Central Africa, its potential as a pan-African language, and its spread and status as a world language in the age of globalization and the cyberspace.

Kiswahili as a national language in Tanzania

Tanzania comprises former Tanganyika and Zanzibar, which united in 1964 to form the United Republic of Tanzania. The country has a population of about 33 million. About 120 different languages are spoken. Kiswahili has been the language of Zanzibar and the Tanzanian coast for centuries. It spread upcountry in the 18th and 19 centuries, thanks to the factors mentioned above. Hence, at Tanganyika’s independence in 1961, most people in Tanganyika already spoke or understood Kiswahili. Naturally, soon after independence, in 1962, Julius Nyerere, the first president, declared Kiswahili the national language, and made a dramatic departure from colonial practice by address the parliament in Kiswahili.

Nyerere realized that simply declaring Kiswahili the national language was not enough; policies, structures and programs for its development and dissemination had to be put in place. This was largely accomplished by 1970. Policies that directly or indirectly impinged on the fortunes of Kiswahili included the following:

- (a) Adoption of Kiswahili as the national language: 1962
- (b) Adoption of the policy of Ujamaa and self-reliance: 1967
This included creation of factories, state farms and Ujamaa villages which brought together people from different linguistic backgrounds, hence enhancing the use of Kiswahili;
- (c) Adoption of Kiswahili as the official language of government: 1967
- (d) Adoption of the policy of Education for Self-reliance: 1968
This included adoption of Kiswahili as the sole language of instruction in primary schools; This entailed translating most of the existing government documents, forms, labels, designations, etc. into Kiswahili. It also meant that the Advanced Kiswahili Examination was now compulsory for all senior civil servants who did not have the requisite Kiswahili language qualifications;
- (e) Abandonment of the Cambridge School Certificate Examinations : 1970 (?)
Henceforth a student had to pass Kiswahili in order to get a certificate (prior to that, one had to pass English),
- (e) Adoption of the Cultural Policy (Sera ya Utamaduni): 1997

The following governmental structures that were put in place to implement the new policy on language:

- (a) Creation of the Ministry of Culture: 1962
- (b) Creation of the IKR: 1964
- (c) Creation of Tanzania Publishing House 1966
- (d) Creation of the national Kiswahili Council BAKITA: 1967
- (e) Creation of the Department of Kiswahili at UDSM: 1970

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| (g) Establishment of EACROTANAL: | 1976 |
| (f) Establishing of Institute of Kiswahili and Foreign Languages, Zanzibar – TAKILUKI: | 1978 |
| (g) Establishment of the Zanzibar Kiswahili Council (BAKIZA) | 1986 |
| (h) Creation of <i>Mfuko wa Utamaduni Tanzania</i> (Tanzania Culture Fund): | 1998 |

This is in addition to pre-existing structures/institutions, such as Radio Tanzania, Sauti ya Zanzibar, Newspapers, publishing houses such as EALB, and NGOs (such as The Poet's Organization, UKUTA, established around 1958). The impressive list of institutions does indicate that the government of the day was committed to the promotion of the national language, since many of these were government-funded. Yet, there was a catch that was to have serious consequences later, as we shall show. That catch concerned the language of education.

By 1970, Kiswahili was already by and large accepted as the national language by practically all Tanzanians. Most national activities in Tanzania, including most government business, parliamentary debates, primary courts, primary education, etc. were being conducted in Kiswahili. Only one area of contention remained, i.e. secondary and higher education.

The *Five Year Development Plan of 1969* noted this problem, and proposed to introduce a gradual change over of the medium from English to Kiswahili, so that by 1974, Kiswahili should have taken over as the sole medium of secondary education. Unfortunately, this did not happen. Meanwhile, a heated national debate regarding "English-versus-Kiswahili" in education raged on between 1965 and the early 1980s. The draft Makweta Report on Education (1982) proposed that Kiswahili should become the medium of secondary education from 1985. The final version approved by government and issued in 1982. But the government had a different opinion: it directed that English should remain the medium of secondary and higher education, apparently indefinitely.

This unleashed the language debate anew. The government and pro-English elite defends its position in various fora, and is duly rebuffed by the pro-Kiswahili group. The debates take place mostly in the media, but also occasionally in journals, books, seminars, and parliamentary sessions. While the debaters may have changed, the arguments have not: The pro-English arguments are largely technical and international: They reject Kiswahili for now (if not for ever) because there are not enough scientific terms, not enough books, the cost would be prohibitive, we need an international language ; English is the doorway to science and technology; we have to communicate with other peoples. Some like Nyerere add that if we change the medium to Kiswahili English would die, since there would be no incentive to learn it. The pro-Kiswahili debaters emphasize the pedagogical aspects, that children learn better in a language that they know best; the general lack of English mastery among teachers and pupils; the failure of English to deliver "the goods" up to now; the alienating role of English in Tanzania; the danger of sacrificing knowledge to foreign language acquisition; the need to democratize education, national and cultural pride, etc.

When Benjamin Mkapa became president in 1995, he cleverly evaded the language question by directing that the debate should continue. And so it continues!

In 1997, the Ministry responsible for Culture issued the Cultural Policy document, which was duly endorsed by the parliament. The policy, for the first time, recognized the other indigenous languages (besides Kiswahili) as a major national heritage, and proposed that they should be studied, researched and documented, and that they should serve as a resource base for the national language (*Sera ya Utamaduni*, page 17-18). It also proposed that

Mpango maalumu wa kuiwezesha elimu na mafunzo katika ngazi zote kutolewa katika lugha ya Kiswahili utaandaliwa na kutekelezwa.

A special action plan to enable education and instruction at all levels to be given in Kiswahili shall be prepared and implemented (Translation: M.M. Mulokozi)

(Wizara ya Elimu na Utamaduni, *Sera ya Utamaduni*, p. 19).

A meeting held at Arusha on 24-28 May 1999 to discuss and lay down strategies for implementation of the Cultural Policy proposed that a program of implementation of the proposed changeover of the medium should be prepared immediately so that Kiswahili can become the medium within five years, starting from Form I and moving up gradually. The National Kiswahili Council (BAKITA) was entrusted with the task of coordinating the drafting of the program, which task has now been completed. We are now eagerly awaiting the government's reaction.

What is certain is that the initiative for change in the sixties and early seventies came from above, and was thus given political sanction and the needed resources. That is why it succeeded. Today, the pressure for change is coming from below, and the government does not seem to be willing to move along with the democratizing forces. Hence the impasse.

One possible reason for this obstinacy on the part of the government is the changed socio-economic and ideological reality. The so-called collapse of communism changed the political and economic landscape in Tanzania and Africa generally. Tanzania, like other small, formerly one party, states, was forced to "liberalize." The liberalization ushered in so called "pluralism" which really meant multi-partism politically, and "free enterprise" economically. With the government divesting from economic management, foreign capitalists, mostly from South Africa, Europe and the Far East, rushed in to fill the vacuum. This has increased control of the economy by foreigners and their local, mostly non-patriotic collaborators. These in turn have acquired a stake in, or are in a position to pressurize, the government. As a result, formerly patriotic or people-oriented agendas have been abandoned.

This, coupled with the current atmosphere of globalization and Anglo-American hegemony over the world, has ensured that the national culture, including language, is sidelined in favour of foreign, mostly Anglo-American, culture and language.

This phenomenon is also reflected in a new disturbing development on the education scene - the rise of the English medium primary schools, dubbed "Academies" by their proprietors. Partly perhaps in reaction to the pathetic state of government schools, and partly as an expression of rejection of Kiswahili and fascination with English as the language of the new elite, parents who are able and willing are herding their mesmerized little kids into these schools, where they are taught to sing English lullabies, play English games, worship English gods, recite English snow-and-daffodils rhymes, etc. So far these schools are doing good business financially if not pedagogically. That their hybrid products might eventually fit into neither Tanzanian nor English society is a matter for the future, and does not seem to worry the parents at present (on Kiswahili, globalization and the future see: Mdee, J.S and Mwansoko, H.J.M (eds): *Kongamano la Kimataifa: Kiswahili 2000: Preceedings*. TUKI, 2001; Kihore, Y & Chuwa, A.R *Kiswahili katika Karne ya Ishirini na Moja*. TUKI (no date)

Obstacles

The main obstacle in the way of the flowering of Kiswahili as a national language in Tanzania is the absence of a viable, robust national economic base that can engender a proactive bourgeoisie and a strong working class, and hence foster patriotic policies. This situation has led to: (a) The current economic, outward-looking liberalism that has inevitably fostered outward-looking cultural and linguistic policies; (b) The rise of a compradorial, non-patriotic, Anglophile bourgeoisie that is bent on enriching itself at the expense of the national interests; (c) The erosion of self-confidence among Tanzanians, especially the youth and the elite, reading to a resurgence

of a slavish, aping mentality and practice, known in Kiswahili as *kasumba*, which had been more or less successfully combated in the 1960s.

These factors have encouraged admiration and worship of foreign things, including the huge Japanese cars known as *shangingis*, and foreign cultural manifestations, including music, cinema and videos, dress, technology and languages. Concomitantly, they have led to rejection, or being ashamed, of ones African traits and practices, including skin colour and hair, beliefs, religion, languages, names, music, etc.

The reaction of the common people, who are the victims of these developments, has been mixed. Some have resorted to strikes, street riots and anarchist actions; some, out of frustration, have taken the spiritual route and joined the mushrooming born-again churches, many of them linked to American churches; and some have rejected the Western values altogether and opted for Eastern ones (the Muslim youth) or traditional African ones (cf. the resurgence of traditional religion and rituals, e.g. MIDEA in Kilosa).

The other obstacle in the way of Kiswahili is a legal one: Kiswahili became the national language through popular proclamation and practice, but not legally. There is no law passed by parliament declaring Kiswahili the national language. The Constitution of Tanzania of 1977, which was written in Kiswahili, does not even mention Kiswahili as the national language.

The final obstacle is competition from English, which also vies for a national status in Tanzania, and has ample material support from Britain and America, and significant moral support from within Tanzania. The final show-down between the two languages is yet to be enacted.

Factors favouring Kiswahili

The same factors that favoured the spread of Kiswahili in the past two centuries are still at work today. The demand for Kiswahili is still there, not only in Tanzania, but also in the neighbouring countries. The phenomenal urbanization now taking place means that Kiswahili is becoming the mother tongue of millions of Tanzanian town-dwellers who speak no other language; the failure of efforts to promote English means that even “educated” Tanzanians are more comfortable speaking Kiswahili than English (thus students at the University of Dar es salaam currently conduct their social and political activities in Kiswahili, not in English as was previously the case).¹ The liberalization has brought about unprecedented increase in Kiswahili-language private newspapers, television and radio stations.

On the political level, multipartyism has even made the need for Kiswahili more evident – whoever wants to rule Tanzanians has to be able to campaign successfully in Kiswahili so as to get votes. Parliamentary debates are still conducted in Kiswahili, so are most public functions.

On the social level, the increasing mobility, intermarriages and interactions are blurring the ethnic differences, kneading all Tanzanians into a more or less homogeneous nation. Popular culture (such as music, fiction, drama, festivals, etc) is also entrenching Kiswahili more and more into the social fabric.

Problem areas for the future

Three problem areas remain to be addressed in future. The first area is secondary and higher education. Teaching at these levels is still formerly conducted in broken English, though in practice most teachers in secondary schools resort to Kiswahili to make themselves understandable. The other area pertains to the law courts (district and high courts), which still use English to record judgements, although the sessions are usually bilingual. The final problem area is science (including social sciences) and technology. Swahilists will have to work hard with professionals in different fields to develop an adequate corpus of terminology in all fields, and to write or translate books and papers from those fields into Kiswahili.



KISWAHILI AS AN INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGES: RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

On the international level, Kiswahili has scored more marks than was thought possible twenty years ago. Kiswahili is now spoken or understood by about 80-100 million people in the following countries:

COUNTRY	EST. NO. OF SPEAKERS
- D.R. Congo:	15,000,000
- Burundi:	2,000,000
- Kenya:	20,000,000
- Rwanda:	2,000,000
- Tanzania:	32,000,000
- Uganda:	8,000,000
- Others: ²	1,000,000
TOTAL	80,000,000

The following four anecdotes may serve to illustrate the demand for Kiswahili as an international language within Africa and beyond.

Anecdote 1

This first anecdote was narrated to me by a Malawian politician of the Independence struggle, Kanyama Chiume when we met at the UDSM on 21 September, 2001. He said that in May 1959, a meeting of all leaders of freedom movements was convened by Sekou Toure in Conakry, Guinea. The leaders who attended the conference came from both “French speaking” and “English speaking” countries. Among the participants were Chiume himself and Patrice Lumumba of Congo. The delegates duly assembled in the conference room, but for the first two hours nothing happened because the delegates had no common language in which to communicate. It was Kanyama Chiume who saved the day. He proposed that since the Francophone comrades could not communicate with their Anglophone counterparts, why not use an African language to bridge the gap? Then he went on to propose Kiswahili as that language. Lumumba came from Eastern Congo and could speak Kiswahili and French. Chiume came from Nyasaland (now Malawi) and could speak Kiswahili and English. It was therefore proposed that the Francophone delegates would speak in French, Lumumba would translate their speeches into Kiswahili for Chiume, and Chiume would translate them into English for the benefit of the Anglophone delegates. Likewise, the Anglophone speeches would be translated into Kiswahili by Chiume so that Lumumba can in turn translate them into French. Thus the meeting went on successfully.³

Anecdote 2

In 1965, the Cuban revolutionary, Che Guevara, went to Eastern Congo to try and organized a guerilla war in collaboration with Laurent Kabila and others, against imperialism. He and his Cuban comrades soon discovered that in order to operate in the Congo bush they needed to learn Kiswahili, which was the main language of the struggle. Thus the Cubans had to adopt Kiswahili *noms de guerra*, such as Moja, Mbili, Tatu, Nne, Tano...Kumi, Ishirini, Arobaini, Sitini, Agano, Baraka, Bendera, Tembo, etc. Che himself was known as Tatu. (Cf. Ernesto Che Guevara 2000: xxix).

Anecdote 3

In 1988, I had an opportunity to visit Zimbabwe for the first time. While strolling in the city, I and was surprised to come across a pub labeled “Nyama Choma.” Later, I went into a shop to buy some item, and as soon as I spoke, the shop attendant, a young man in his thirties, asked me in Kiswahili: “Wewe unatoka Tanzania?” “Ndiyo, umejuaje?” I answered back. He explained that he could tell from my English accent. Henceforth we switched to Kiswahili, and he explained to me that he was a former freedom fighter, and was trained at Nachingwea in Tanzania; that’s how he came to learn Kiswahili. [I had a similar experience in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in 2000, where a female shop attendant and a manager of the hotel in which I was staying spoke to me in perfect Kiswahili; they had both lived or studied in Kenya for a while].

Anecdote 4

In 1986, I was in Britain on a short fellowship. I went to Glasgow in Scotland one weekend to visit a Tanzanian friend who was studying there. In the evening we went to a pub for a drink. There were a number of local customers, mostly old or aging men. We sat in one corner and talked animatedly in Kiswahili as we drank our beer. Then, after about thirty minutes, an old man who had been sitting alone in another corner came over to our table and said in perfect Kiswahili: “*Hamjambo mabwana? Nimekuwa nikiwasikiliza kwa muda wote. Nadhani mnatoka Tanzania. Habari za Tanzania?*” He then offered to buy us a drink, and conversed with us in Kiswahili for a while; he told us that he had been a British government official in Kenya before Independence.

These five anecdotes (and one could give a lot more) contain one message: That Kiswahili is indeed a widely spoken international language that can crop up in the most unexpected corners. Its recent development in this respect has indeed been spectacular.

In Kenya, Kiswahili has been gaining in strength since the mid-eighties, thanks to a deliberate push by government. It was made a compulsory subject in all secondary schools; the products of the schools are the new young Kenyan adults whose command of the standard language is discernibly better than that of their parents’ generation. The expansion of University education in the eighties and nineties has also produced many Kiswahili scholars and teachers, probably not less than 2000 graduates a year. As a result, Kenyan schools now have a cadre of well-trained Kiswahili teachers whose products will also hopefully be good Kiswahili speakers.

The Kenyan Kiswahili print media (newspapers) has not expanded, but the book publishing media has expanded considerably. Kenya is currently producing more Kiswahili general and text books than Tanzania, and its publishing and distribution network is still intact, unlike in Tanzania where publishing has largely collapsed. The broadcasting media (radio and TV) is also doing quite well though its expansion lags behind that observable in Tanzania. Kiswahili programs dominate the main radio and television channels, and Kenyan Kiswahili soaps and to dramas, such as *Tausi*, are extremely popular in Tanzania. This has somewhat popularized Kenyan Kiswahili in Tanzania, so that some Tanzanian TV dramas are now employing it to humourous effect.

Yet Kenya still has more work to do so as to introduce Kiswahili in all spheres of public life, including parliament, government operations and education. At present, Kiswahili is mainly used at political rallies, and in commerce, culture (e.g. music and drama), religion and sports. Mugambi (1999: 117) complains that in Kenya Kiswahili is more of an academic and political language, but is yet to serve an integrative function. The Finish example shows that such a function can also be performed by literature, such as a national folk epic like *Kalevala* (Mulokozi 1992).

In Uganda, the use of Kiswahili has also expanded gradually, in spite of resistance from hard-core Baganda traditionalist. More Ugandans are now interested in learning Kiswahili, and the government has, from next year, made Kiswahili a compulsory subject in primary schools. If this policy survives after Museveni, it may in future produce a new generation of Kiswahili speaking Ugandans (including *Bugandans*) who will probably not be so hostile to the language.

The recent revival of the East African Community has brought East African nations and peoples even closer together, and Kiswahili is obviously stepping in to fill a possible linguistic vacuum in the arrangement as the only viable potential language for the Community.³

In Rwanda and Burundi the unfortunate genocide of the early nineties, and the subsequent upheavals have paradoxically increased the knowledge and use of Kiswahili in those countries. This is partly because of the millions of refugees who fled to neighbouring countries, acquired Kiswahili in the process (since the language is widely used in the refugee camps), and are now coming back armed with the language. Moreover, the new regime in Rwanda and its army is made up largely of former refugees, people who grew up in Tanzania, Uganda, Kenya and the Congo, and are therefore fluent Kiswahili speakers. They are thus more disposed towards promotion of Kiswahili in Rwanda.

The same case applies to the DRC. There, the new Kabila regime is overwhelmingly Eastern and hence Kiswahili speaking, not to mention the fact that the young Kabila himself grew up in Tanzania.

Briefly, we can say that within Eastern and Central Africa, Kiswahili is now in a better position than ever before, and its demand is on the increase. The peoples of this area have realized that they need this language to be able to survive, cooperate and operate effectively in the sub-region.

Education

Kiswahili is taught as a language in more than 100 (my estimate) universities and higher education institutions in worldwide. This estimate does not include the many African-American black schools in the U.S.A that teach Kiswahili as a second language to black students. Most of the universities teaching Kiswahili are in the U.S.A, but there are also famous schools of Kiswahili in U.K. (SOAS), Germany (several universities), Russia (St Petersburg and Moscow State University), France, Belgium (Gent and Antwerp), Italy (Naples), Switzerland, Austria, Netherlands, Poland, Norway, Sweden and Finland, China, Japan, Oman and Mexico. Within Africa, Kiswahili is taught in more than 10 universities in Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, DRC, Madagascar, Ghana, Sudan, Nigeria and Libya. Though it is not possible at this point to give an estimate of the number of students, it is safe to assume that Kiswahili is the most widely taught African language in the world.

The media and publishing

Kiswahili is used in more than 100 radio and TV broadcasting stations worldwide. About ten of these are in Tanzania and Kenya. Other African countries that broadcast in Kiswahili include DRC, Rwanda, Burundi, Egypt, Iran, Sudan, Uganda, South Africa. Many Asian and European countries also broadcast in Kiswahili. In America, apart from the Voice of America, there are many black FM radio stations that have Kiswahili programs. The Swahili services of the BBC, Deutsche Welle and Voice of America appear to have the widest reach.

In book publishing, Kiswahili has been the favourite target language of translations from different world literatures. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, numerous books from English, French and Arabic were translated into Kiswahili. At the height of communism, many books from China, North Korea and the Soviet Union were also made available in Kiswahili. In this sense, one can say that Kiswahili gained from the cold war. With the collapse of communism,

books from China, Korea, and Russia are no longer being as widely translated into Kiswahili. However, more classics from all over the world are still being translated. Recent ones include Gogol's *The Government Inspector* and Elias Lönnrot's *Kalevala*, not to mention books by African luminaries such as Achebe, Soyinka, Ngugi, Mongo Beti and Ousmane Sembene.

In the early 1980s, UNESCO decided that the 8-volume *General History of Africa* should be translated into at least 3 African languages (apart from Arabic) for a start: Hausa, Fulfulde and Kiswahili. The Kiswahili translation is now ready and all the eight volumes have been published. They form a monumental contribution to the Kiswahili scholarly repertoire, and a landmark in the history of Kiswahili translation.

Pan-Africanism

The Pan-African movement arose among the black people of the Diaspora in the nineteenth century, and reached its peak between 1910-1950. Freedom fighters such as Jomo Kenyatta and Kwame Nkrumah were products of that movement, so was the Organization of African Unity (established in 1963). From the beginning, pan-Africanism had a cultural and political agenda (return to Africa, defense of African values and heritage, equal rights for Africans, unity of all Africans, freedom of African countries from the colonial yoke, etc). However, the movement rarely emphasized the revival or promotion of African languages. It was only in the sixties that some African scholars began calling for a pan-African language. The first call was made by Wole Soyinka of Nigeria in the mid-1960s. He proposed that Kiswahili should be declared the continental language of Africa (cf. Mulokozi 2000).

In 1985, this call was taken up by the Ghanaian writer, Ayi Kwei Armah, who wrote:

There is one African language admirably suited to function as our common ancillary language. That is Kiswahili. It enjoys structural and lexical affinities with a lot of African languages over large areas of the continent: East, South, Central and even the lower West. Flexible and highly absorptive, it can take inputs from practically every African language in its future development... The technical problems likely to arise are soluble. It may be desirable, for instance, to simplify the syntax or at least to streamline it. In addition, the existing vocabulary would have to be constantly enriched, as in every living language. This could best be done in a conscious, systematic way, by drawing from the vast lexical storehouse constituted by the continent's languages, especially those of the West and the South. That might facilitate final acceptance as our common language, since each region would recognize its genius in the common pool..." (p. 832).

African governments heeded this call by admitting Kiswahili into the OAU; otherwise, not much else has been done to date.⁴

Conclusion: Towards the future - Kiswahili, globalization and ICT

Everybody is now talking about globalization and information and communication technology (ICT) and we too are expected to do the same. But before we do that, let us recap what we have said up to this point. We have argued in this paper that the development and expansion of Kiswahili as a national and international language has usually been dictated by demand, both economic and social. So long as such a demand exists, Kiswahili will continue to develop and expand. In this process, Kiswahili will face obstacles from both within and without. From within, the triumph of Kiswahili may arouse narrow nationalism among certain groups or nations, and these could be manipulated by unscrupulous politicians to hamper the adoption of Kiswahili as a national or pan-African language in some of the countries. Within the Swahili communities also, there might arise similar chauvinistic sentiments seeking to reconfine Kiswahili to its "original"

coastal Islamic shell. Such sentiments are already in evidence, but being ahistorical, will probably not have much impact. However, if they were to succeed, they could trigger a negative reaction from the millions of those who are abandoning their languages in favour of Kiswahili.

A more serious obstacle is the threat from foreign languages, especially Arabic, English and French. It might be much harder for Kiswahili to win this fight, in the short term, mainly because our ruling elite cliques are mesmerized by things foreign. The current English/French/Portuguese speaking elite that has ruled and ruined Africa is unlikely or perhaps unable to abandon its Europhilia. A new generation with less *kasumba* will have to take over first. Certainly the French, Britons, and Portuguese will do everything in their power to ensure that their languages remain dominant, for language for them is a political, economic and strategic question. Arabic is less of a threat on the national and sub-regional level, but it can be on the pan-African level.

As far as globalization is concerned, Africa is currently on the receiving end: we are simply being globalized, just as we have been for the past 500 years. Yet there are areas in which we too can globalize the world if we are serious enough, areas in which Africa excels, such as certain cultural and scientific manifestations, and African languages, in this case Kiswahili. Since globalization in the modern sense is impossible without ICT, Kiswahili speakers, promoters and lovers need to be proactive in this area by:

- Developing the language actively and quickly in the areas of science and technology;
- Developing new teaching and research programs that take into account the current global trends and needs, especially in the area of ICT;
- Developing new up-to-date teaching and reference materials, including online and electronic instruction materials;
- Developing Kiswahili-based computer programs, software, and copora; already there are some Kiswahili-speaking computer programs that can serve as examples (e.g. the Google Kiswahili language search engine; programs reportedly developed at the University of Helsinki (Hurskainen 1995; Sewangi 2001), and the electronic CD-Rom version of IKRs bilingual dictionaries issued in March 2002);
- Translating all relevant up-to-date information in various fields available in foreign languages into Kiswahili;
- Above all, we need human resources grounded in ICT and Kiswahili studies; we need to train and train and train more and more and more young people. That is the best way to ensure sustainability.

In order to succeed in this endeavour, Kiswahili developers, promoters and teaching centers in all parts of the world need to work together and cooperate and coordinate their activities more and more so as to learn from one another, share resources, and reduce costs. Such cooperation can be through joint projects, fellowships, scholarships, external examining, conferences and electronic interaction.

NOTES

1. When I served as an oral English examiner during the matriculations exams at the UDSM in 2000, more than 50 per cent of the students who appeared for the oral interviews could not formulate correct English sentences. They therefore resorted to short one word or single-phrase answers even for questions that needed explanations or brief narratives. Moreover, many supervisors of masters and doctoral dissertations complain about the poor mastery of English shown by their students.

2. Others include speakers residing in countries such as: Somali/Mozambique, Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Comoro, South Africa, Oman, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, India, UK, USA, Madagascar

3. I am grateful to Mzee Kanyama Chiume for checking and correcting this anecdote through electronic mail.

4. The Nation Group in Kenya introduced an English language East African weekly, the *East African*, in the mid-nineties. It seems to be doing well. The IPP Media Group in Tanzania is currently in the process of introducing a Kiswahili East African magazine to be known as *Afrika ya Mashariki*.

5. Kiswahili has been used in the UNESCO General Meeting in Paris. In sub-regional organizations such as SADC, it has not been used. The reason given recently by the Tanzanian foreign minister is that the venture would be expensive. And in a just-ended Conference of leaders and specialists from the Great Lakes Region (April 2002) held in honour of the late Mwalimu J.K. Nyerere, the participants reportedly called for promotion of Kiswahili as the language of the Great Lakes Region, creation of a sub-regional organ to coordinate its development, and encouragement of its use as a medium of education (reported in *Mtanzania* April 11, 2002: 2)

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