Kiswahili Intellectualization Efforts in Tanzania*

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Kiswahili, the national and official language of Tanzania, has been employed in formal specialist communication since the 2nd half of the 19th century, when it was introduced as the medium of instruction in the missionary, and later, colonial elementary schools. It was also the working language of the lower levels of colonial administration. After Tanzania gained its independence in 1961, it further expanded the use of Kiswahili to include more domains, for example primary courts, national cultural activities, local business transactions etc., in addition to education and administration.

The use of Kiswahili in the above-mentioned domains went hand-in-hand with the intellectualization process of the language. That is, the conscious development of the language for professional use. This paper discusses the language planning activities that Tanzania has undertaken to develop and use Kiswahili in academic discourse, but with emphasis on its use in tertiary education. Specifically, the paper discusses the rationale for Kiswahili modernization, the initiatives undertaken pertaining to the status and corpus planning of the language, the actual usage of the language in higher education, and its prospects of further intellectualization.

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Keywords: Kiswahili, intellectualization, status planning, corpus planning, academic discourse

* Note that the name ‘Tanzania’ came about as a result of the union between two independent countries —Tanganyika and Zanzibar— on 26 April 1964. Before the union Tanganyika was colonized by Germany from the late 19th century until World War I. Then it became a protectorate of Britain under the League of Nations until its independence on 9 December 1961. The Island of Zanzibar, on the other land, was previously ruled first, by Oman Arabs, and later by Britain until it gained independence on 10 December 1963. However, on 12 January 1964 a people’s revolution seized power on the Island and shortly afterwards (i.e. on 26 April 1964) the revolutionary government agreed to unite Zanzibar with Tanganyika to form the United Republic of Tanzania.
1.0 Introduction

Ideally ‘language intellectualization’ refers to the process of developing a certain language and employing it as a tool of specialist communication. However, for the purpose of this paper ‘language intellectualization’ will focus on the development and use of language for academic purposes.

Specifically, we are going to discuss on Tanzania’s endeavours to develop and use Kiswahili language as a tool and medium for academic discourse, but with emphasis on the usage of Kiswahili in tertiary education.

The motivation for developing Kiswahili for advanced academic purposes lies in its being recognized by leading Africanists (see e.g. Bamgbose 1991; Khamisi 1983) as not only a lingua franca of East and Central Africa but also a pan-African language, with a long literary tradition and the potential of enhancing African identity and regional integration. Besides, the language has also an international recognition. Due to its linguistic and cultural importance, Kiswahili was adopted as a working language of the Organization of African Unity (now African Union) in 1986 (Msanjila 1997, p. 61). In April 2002 the Great Lakes nations adopted Kiswahili as their regional lingua franca. And early this year (2003) the East African Community’s Legislative Assembly adopted Kiswahili as its working language.

Below we briefly outline the status and corpus planning initiatives pertaining to Kiswahili.

2.0 Status Planning in Kiswahili

Kiswahili, which originally was an East African coastal language, evolved as a ‘form of proto-Kiswahili’ as early as the 2nd century (Posnansky 1966, pp. 106–107; Whiteley 1969, p. 31). However, as a result of the slave trade caravans of the 18th century, the missionary activities of the 2nd half of the 19th century, and the language policy of the German and British colonialists in Tanzania in the late 19th century and early 20th century, Kiswahili became an established lingua franca not only of Tanzania, but of the whole East and Central Africa by the middle of the 20th century.

In Tanzania Kiswahili was used as an instructional medium in the missionary and colonial government elementary schools and as a working language for the ancillary civil servants in the colonial administration. The use of Kiswahili in education and administration helped to consolidate and spread the language in the country, but more importantly, it called for the modernization (grammatical description and terminological development) of the language to cater for these new and more formal functions. In the pre-independence era the grammatical description of Kiswahili was mainly undertaken by the missionary linguists whereas the standardization of the language as well as its terminological development was done by the Inter-Territorial Language (Kiswahili) Committee (ITLC) established by the British colonial government in Janu-
ary 1930.

When Tanzania (then Tanganyika, until after 26 April 1964) gained her independence in 1961, English, which had already established itself as the language of the central colonial administration and post elementary education, continued to be the official language. Nevertheless, Tanzania’s search for ‘nationalism’ or socio-cultural integration led to its adoption of Kiswahili as her national and official language in 1963 and 1967, respectively (Abdulaziz 1972). The adoption of Kiswahili as a national and official language undoubtedly increased its prestige and functions. Subsequently, it became the language of conducting most of the government (internal) official business, including the parliament, the language of primary education (Std. I-VII, as of 1967), the language of lower courts etc..

The decision to use Kiswahili for conducting almost the whole gamut of political and public business and as a medium of instruction called for further modernization of the language. Discussion of the modernization activities of the language follows below.

3.0 Corpus planning in Kiswahili

As Fishman(1977, p. 37) has rightly indicated, when a language moves into functions for which it was not previously employed its modernization becomes necessary if it is to fulfil its new roles. The modernization of Kiswahili for specialist communication began, as noted earlier, with the introduction of formal education in Tanzania. Teaching using Kiswahili in elementary and primary schools and in teachers’ colleges necessitated the introduction of many Kiswahili technical terms into the language to express the concepts which were formerly ‘inexpressible’ in Kiswahili. For such terms to function efficiently, they had to be standardized and practically used in writing text books as well as general readers.

According to Mmari(1983) the first Kiswahili dictionary was produced by missionaries as early as 1879, while the writing of Kiswahili text books began in the 1920s. Formal standardization of the language’s orthography, phonetics and phonology, morphology, syntax, and lexicon began in 1930 by the ITLC. This was followed by a rigorous programme of writing Kiswahili textbooks throughout the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s. After independence a number of language planning agencies (LPAs) were established and charged with specific functions pertaining to further modernization of Kiswahili for specialist communication, including its use in the education sector. Such LPAs include the Institute of Kiswahili Research (IKR), responsible for conducting research in all aspects of Kiswahili, including terminology development; the Department of Kiswahili of the University of Dar es Salaam, which trains Kiswahili teachers for post primary levels as well as conducting research in various fields of Kiswahili scholarship; the Tanzania Institute of Education (TIE), responsible for curriculum development for schools and colleges and organizing subject panels for writing textbooks; and the
National Kiswahili Council (popularly known by its Kiswahili acronym, Baraza la Kiswahili la Taifa–BAKITa) which coordinates the activities of the other LPAs and standardizes their language related outputs, including terminology and textual materials.

As a result of the activities of these LPAs a big achievement in the technical development of Kiswahili has been recorded. For example, as far as terminology development is concerned, research conducted by this author (see Mwansoko 1998) shows that by 1996 there were well over 50,000 standardized basic terms for various school subjects and specializations. These may be found in BAKITA’s Tafsiri Sanifu and Lugha Yetu series and IKR’s Kiswahili and Mulika journals. The number of ‘raw terms’ privately coined and not yet formally standardized, is obviously enormous.

Apart from the above mentioned terminology lists, there are 17 specialized (Kiswahili) dictionaries covering various fields of knowledge (see Appendix 1).

And for further scientifically based terminology coinage and standardization, three booklets on theoretical and methodological aspects of Kiswahili terminological modernization have been prepared, viz.

- Usanifishaji wa Istitahi za Kiswahili (Standardization of Kiswahili Terms) (1989 by the IKR)
- Mwongozo wa Usanifishaji Istitahi (A Guide to Terminology Standardization) (1990 by BAKITA)

The available Kiswahili terms may be used as the basis for generating other terms as need arises. The Kiswahili language morphology is very flexible and therefore allows a variety of word formation patterns without any strain.

As for evolution of the Kiswahili academic register, research work on this aspect has been conducted and the findings are published in the book Mitindo ya Kiswahili Sanifi (Standard Kiswahili Styles) (1991 by Mwansoko).

In addition, a Kiswahili discourse style has been evolving as the language continues to be used in oral academic discussion mainly at the Department of Kiswahili, University of Dar es Salaam, but also Kiswahili units of other institutions of higher learning in the country. A thorough research into the salient features of this discourse style has, however, not yet been carried out.

4.0 Kiswahili as a language of learning and teaching

Although Tanzania is multilingual, with 131 ethnic languages (Ethnologue 1996) and a number of foreign languages (e.g. English, French, Arabic etc.) most of its population has been speaking Kiswahili since its establishment as a lingua franca in the 2nd half of the 19th century. Kiswahili has been used as a medium of instruction in the missionary elementary schools of the second half of the 19th century, and the colonial
primary schools of late 19th century and mid 20th century. During the colonial era it was possible to conduct efficiently post primary education in German (in German colonial period) and later in English (during British colonialism) because of the conducive infrastructural and socio-linguistic conditions which prevailed then. (See e.g. Roy-Campbell and Qorro 1997, pp. 116–120 for details on this).

After independence, and until now, Kiswahili continues to be used as a medium of instruction in primary schools and teachers’ colleges training primary schools teachers. For post primary levels of education English (for historical reasons) serves as the medium. The only exception is the teaching of Kiswahili language which is done through Kiswahili itself.

However, due to changes in the socio-linguistic climate of Tanzania, whereby Kiswahili language spread and usage has become deeply rooted in the country, while English has shifted from a second language to a foreign language and, therefore, dysfunctional as an instructional medium, the government adopted in 1997 a national cultural policy—Sera ya Utamaduni— which, among other things, submits that Kiswahili will be used as a medium of instruction throughout the country’s education system. Consequently:

Plans to enable education and training at all levels to be offered in Kiswahili language will be drawn up and implemented (pg. 9 of Sera ya Utamaduni ((Cultural Policy). My translation).

The new (i.e. 1997) education medium policy is yet to be implemented, but its most important aspect is the provision for complete ‘Kiswahilization’ of Tanzania’s education system.

With this background, let us now turn to the focus of our discussion, namely Kiswahili in tertiary education in Tanzania.

5.0 The position of Kiswahili in higher education

As submitted above, Kiswahili is not used as a medium of instruction in tertiary education, except for the teaching of Kiswahili language itself. The language is offered as a subject at university level and extensively used as a vehicle of preserving and disseminating research findings of language planning agencies (LPAs) within universities.

5.1 Higher education institutions using Kiswahili

In Tanzania the higher education (HE) institutions extensively using Kiswahili language in their operations include the Institute of Kiswahili Research (IKR) of the University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM); the Department of Kiswahili of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, UDSM; and the Kiswahili Unit of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the Open University of Tanzania (OUT). The Zanzibar University and
the State University of Zanzibar should also be mentioned here, although their student intake is rather small.

5.1.1 The Institute of Kiswahili Research

The IKR is essentially a research body entrusted with the study and furtherance of Kiswahili language in all its aspects. That is, it undertakes research in Kiswahili phonology, morphology, syntax, socio-linguistics, dialectology, oral and written Kiswahili literature. It compiles general monolingual and bilingual dictionaries as well as specialized subject dictionaries. In addition, it conducts research on terminology and, where necessary, coins new technical terms for the various aspects of Kiswahili scholarship. It also undertakes consultancy work in both terminology and translation.

The academic outputs of the IKR, including publications and seminar sessions, are mostly in Kiswahili language itself.

Given the leading role of the IKR in Kiswahili modernization, it would be appropriate to mention here at least some of its key publications. These include:

- Kamusi Sanifu ya Isimu na Lugha (Standard Linguistics and Language Dictionary, 1990)
- Kiswahili-English Dictionary (2001)
- Sarufi Miundo ya Kiswahili Sanifu (Standard Kiswahili Syntax, 1999)
- Sarufi Maumbo ya Kiswahili Sanifu (Standard Kiswahili Morphology, 2001)
- Kiswahili and Mulika Journals.

5.1.2 The Department of Kiswahili, University of Dar es Salaam

The Department of Kiswahili is essentially a teaching unit and its main purpose is to train future Kiswahili experts, especially the much needed graduate Kiswahili teachers and tutors for secondary schools and colleges of education, respectively. The Department also offers advanced courses leading to M.A. degrees and supervises extended research leading to Ph.D. degrees in Kiswahili linguistics and literature. Research on various aspects of Kiswahili language is also undertaken by the lecturers working in the Department.

Students in the Department follow courses in general linguistics, socio-linguistics, psycholinguistics, Kiswahili phonetics and phonology, Kiswahili morphology and syntax, advanced Kiswahili usage, creative writing and Kiswahili literature, translation theory and analysis etc. (For a full list of Kiswahili courses see the University of Dar es Salaam Prospectus).
The medium of teaching at the Department is Kiswahili itself, while most of academic staff’s research outputs (publications and seminar presentations) are produced in the same language (i.e. Kiswahili). The Department Journal, *Kioo cha Lugha*, for instance, is published wholly in Kiswahili.

### 5.1.3 Kiswahili Unit, Open University of Tanzania

This is also essentially a teaching unit, preparing Kiswahili graduate teachers for secondary schools and tutors for teachers’ colleges. As the Unit conducts distant learning due to the nature of OUT, its main preoccupation is to produce or to co-ordinate the production of Kiswahili teaching materials for those students studying Kiswahili and to disseminate them to the students.

It is worth noting here that OUT’s medium policy is bilingual. That is, students are allowed to do the rest of their courses (apart from Kiswahili course) either in English or Kiswahili. Despite the fact that until now no other course, apart from Kiswahili, is being taught through Kiswahili at OUT, the decision to formally avail opportunity of using Kiswahili in OUT’s academic endeavours is a significant step forward towards the ‘intellectualization’ of the language.

### 5.1.4 Zanzibar University and State University of Zanzibar

These are small recently established universities on the Island of Zanzibar (Tanzania Isles). They offer Kiswahili courses using the same language for instructional purposes. Most of their teaching and learning materials are taken from the University of Dar es Salaam.

The above discussion shows there are a number of agencies within the HE sector that are extensively using Kiswahili in academic discourse. Let us now have a look at the contribution of the university faculty in developing Kiswahili for specialist/academic purposes.

### 5.2 Role of faculty in Kiswahili development

In order for Kiswahili to be effectively and efficiently used for academic purposes at the tertiary levels of education, it needed, and still requires, to be modernized. That is, the language’s grammar needed to be more fully elaborated; its terminological vocabulary needed to be expanded by creating new concepts and terms and standardizing them; and a discourse style in the language had to be evolved.

It is the faculty specializing in Kiswahili at the University of Dar es Salaam and the Open University of Tanzania who have been responsible for writing precise Kiswahili grammars; for formulating the principles and guidelines of Kiswahili terminology coinage and standardization; for coinage and standardizing the Kiswahili technical terminologies; for translating into Kiswahili some of the text and reference books for advanced learning (e.g. UNESCO’s eight (8) volumes of the *Great History of Africa* (Abridged Version), translated by the IKR); and for developing the Kiswahili styles and
forms of discourse.

Of particular interest to note here is the IKR’s efforts to apply information technology (IT) in the development of Kiswahili. Through cooperation with the Department of Asian and African Studies of the University of Helsinki, Finland, the IKR has been able to access a Kiswahili corpus of over 10 million words; programmes for working in Kiswahili corpus; and a Kiswahili spell-checker. Besides, it has compiled its two sister dictionaries — the English-Kiswahili Dictionary and the Kiswahili-English Dictionary — into a CD ROM.

Apart from Kiswahili experts, members of other Departments, sometimes totally unrelated to language studies, have also been writing their research findings not only in Kiswahili but also sometimes on Kiswahili itself. Such scholars come from English, Economics, Literature, Political Science, History and Sociology fields.

All the same, it should not be thought that the Kiswahili intellectualization scheme is without any strains. Below we discuss the factors limiting further intellectualization of Kiswahili language in higher education.

5.3 Factors limiting further intellectualization of Kiswahili

The frequently mentioned reasons for the failure of extending Kiswahili medium to other subjects in institutions of higher learning include:

- Inadequacy of Kiswahili technical terms for advanced learning.
- Lack of teaching/learning materials, particularly specialist text and reference books written in Kiswahili.
- Untrained faculty (lecturers) and students in the use of technical/academic Kiswahili.
- Unfavourable, to certain extent, attitudes towards Kiswahili medium among stakeholders in the higher educational system. Specifically, (i) the belief that academic matters cannot be efficiently imparted in any other language apart from English. Hence using Kiswahili in academic discourse lowers the standard of education; (ii) the belief that Kiswahili is an underdeveloped language and therefore it does not fit to be used as a medium of instruction, particularly in advanced learning; and (iii) the belief that competence in a foreign language, e.g. English, can be acquired only if the language is used as a medium of instruction. (See Rubagumya 1986, Mwansoko 1990, Barret 1994, BAKITA 1997 for more details on this question).

As we have shown elsewhere (see Mwansoko 1998) most of these problems limiting further Kiswahili intellectualization may be solvable.

Let us now have a look at the future prospects of Kiswahili intellectualization.

5.4 Towards further intellectualization of Kiswahili in Tanzania

As demonstrated earlier (see 5.2 above), there seems to be a growing interest
among ‘non-Kiswahilists’ in higher education institutions, particularly the University of Dar es Salaam, in using Kiswahili for academic purposes. Concrete examples of this trend include the following publications:


(v) Mukandala, R.S. et al (2001) *Ushindani wa Kisiasa Tanzania* (Political Competition in Tanzania). The book series is published by the Political Science and Public Administration Department. Up to now eight(8) volumes have been published in Kiswahili language.

This trend ought to be encouraged to spread to more specializations and in more colleges and universities. What is needed is conduction of aggressive social marketing of Kiswahili as a viable vehicle of advanced education delivery through information and discussion articles in the print and broadcasting media; information leaflets or newsletters; promotional video tapes, etc. In addition, an incentive scheme (e.g. formal recognition, monetary and material rewards, consideration for promotion to higher academic ranks, etc.) should be put in place for specialists writing in Kiswahili as a strategy of speeding up and widening the scope of scholarly publications in Kiswahili language.

What is further encouraging is the observation made by this author at the University of Dar es Salaam that students following courses such as linguistics, literature, political science, history, etc., which are offered in English, refer extensively and with enthusiasm to the available in Kiswahili reference materials in those fields. This is an indication that students are likely to support further Kiswahili intellectualization schemes in universities.

For the Open University of Tanzania, whose medium policy is already bilingual, efforts should now be made to practically implement this policy by letting interested parties conduct teaching and learning in Kiswahili as well.

On the other hand, the Chancellor of the recently (2002) established Mzumbe University has, in his formal installation speech, expressed strongly his favour and desire of this University becoming fully ‘Kiswahilized’ in terms of instructional medium in the near future. This is a big challenge to the intellectualization endeavours of Kiswahili language. The Kiswahili LPAs should therefore strive to help this young University realize its Chancellor’s pro-Kiswahili medium policy.
Meanwhile, the Kiswahili experts in higher education institutions should continue relentlessly with the technical development of the language for specialist communication. That is to say, they need to continue elaborating more technical terminologies, producing more general and specialized subject dictionaries, translating and/or coordinating the translation into Kiswahili of major textbooks in various college/university subjects, devising guides and modules to teaching through Kiswahili for various subject areas being offered in higher education, etc.

6.0 Conclusion

We aimed in this paper to discuss the efforts that have been, continue to be, and ought to be made in Tanzania to utilize Kiswahili, the national language, for academic and analytic discourse in tertiary education.

In our submission we discussed the rationale for modernizing Kiswahili for specialist communication, the initiatives undertaken pertaining to the language’s status and corpus planning, as well as the actual usage of the language in academia, particularly at tertiary levels. The paper also presented the practical input made by the university academic members of staff in the modernization efforts of Kiswahili for academic purposes. Finally, the paper discussed the future prospects of Kiswahili intellectualization in the United Republic of Tanzania.

It is our opinion that, although at present Kiswahili is now widely used in delivering knowledge in colleges and universities, it has a huge potential of serving as a medium of instruction in tertiary education.

Appendix 1: Kiswahili Dictionaries

(i) Swahili Legal Terms (Weston A.B., 1965)
(iii) A Short English-Swahili Medical Dictionary (White, T.H., 1979)
(iv) Tafsiri Sanifu za Hisabati (Taasisi ya Elimu, 1982)
(v) Kamusi ya Ndege wa Tanzania (Musa Maimu, 1982)
(vi) Kamusi ya Waraama na Njoka wa Tanzania (Musa Maimu 1982)
(vii) Primary Technical Dictionary English-Swahili (Ohly, R., 1987)
(viii) Kamusi ya Magonjua ya Mifugo, Mimeo na Wadudu Waharibifu (BAKITA, not dated)
(ix) Kamusi ya Agronomia na Ufugaji (BAKITA, 1988)
(x) Kamusi ya Istilahi za Sautia na Teknolojia (BAKITA, 1994)
(xi) Kamusi Sanifu ya Isimizi na Lugha (TUKI, 1990a)
(xii) Kamusi Sanifu ya Biologia, Fizikia na Kimia (TUKI, 1990b)
(xiii) Kamusi Awali ya Sauti na Teknolojia (Irira, S.D., 1995)
(xvi) Kamusi ya Sheria/Legal Dictionary (Mlacha, S.A.K., 1999)
References


