

# The Globalized World Languages: The Case of Kiswahili

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## 1. Background

The dictionary meanings of the term *globalize* is ‘make something become adopted on a *global* scale’. The term *global* has two interesting meanings: (1) “relating to or happening throughout the whole world, and (2) “taking all the different aspects of a situation into account” (Source: “Globalization” 1999:759). Most scholars who have written about globalization bear out some of these meanings in the definition of globalization. In his discussion on globalization and discontents, Joseph Stiglitz (2003) notes that globalization has been celebrated because of its assumed potentials. Not only is globalization a means to reduce the sense of isolation of those living in the developing world but also a conduit for the world’s access to knowledge and innovations in technology. Globalization is seen as a means to forge closer integration of countries and peoples of the world by affording them unrestricted transportation and communication and by eliminating economic barriers that restrict a free flow of goods, services, capital, and knowledge. Jagdish Bhagwati (2004) notes that globalization has economic potentials that are evident in the way local economies have been integrated into international economies. Cumulatively, these considerations give us a foundation for the discussion on the role of language in globalizing the world and the potentials for the 99% of the world languages that have not been integrated in the global market. The potentials for Kiswahili as a global language reside in the ability to attain and sustain prominence in the world as a global language.

There is a difference between developing a language for global use and developing a language as an ideological tool. Global usage of a language enhances global understanding. However, when it is used for ideological purposes its function assumes an imposing and threatening value to the culture of other group of speakers. A shared language should be a bridge between cultures, a bridge that connects speakers and allows people to share cultural values, diverse views and knowledge, and promotes a global understanding and a polycentric society. If the ideology behind the spread of a language is to demonstrate power (military or economic), or to secure a competitive edge, or to manipulate a system at the expense of the less politically and economically powerful, then the global function of that language is defunct and the possibility to be globally acceptable is lessened.

Before we discuss the potentials for Kiswahili as a global language, we need to examine the influencing power of the English language, the language of choice during the colonial period in East Africa where Swahili now serves as either an official language or a national language and in some cases as both.

## 2. The Power of English

When speakers of English, particularly native speakers, refer to English as a global language, they often do so with a sense of pride and comfort. They do so because there is a lot of encouragement from political circles as well as the media that expresses the idea that English is the preferred communication tool across national boundaries. Those who do not agree with this sentiment, point out that designating English a global language provides an explicit excuse for L1 speakers of English to avoid learning another language (Crystal 2005). Needless to say, not everyone in the world speaks English. At the most it is the language of the elite and those who speak it do not always achieve communication because there is no clear common ground for all speakers whether native or non-native.

Let me also point out that not all native speakers of English are thrilled with the idea of making English a universal (global) language. Their main concern is the loss of the cherished English cultural

values and identities associated with the language. L-1 speakers clearly see significant differences between their culture and the cultures of non-L1 English speakers and fear that the culture and purity of their language will be replaced by a hybrid that is both alien and degenerate. This same racial exclusiveness of English was invoked in the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century when Britain was establishing its colonies around the world. Mazrui and Mazrui (1999) note that English colonist learned the local languages of their subjects and insisted on speaking them even in those cases where the local subjects could speak English because they wanted to discourage the local people from considering themselves equals with their masters. In addition, the Englishman wanted to define the social distance that needed to be maintained with their subjects. According to Mazrui and Mazrui 1999, Lord Lugard was not enthused by the native's acquisition of the Queen's language and contended that spreading the language to non-English people, was disrespectful to the English people and their cultural values. He could not fathom the possibility of non-native English speakers assuming a monopoly of the English language. Of course, Lord Lugard's concerns did not stop the spread of English in the colonies. The British produced the United States, which has, linguistically, been more successful in spreading English. The role of the United States in the world has also become more critical since Britain lost its power and prestige in its colonies and elsewhere in the world. The United States not only outspends Britain in teaching the language and broadcasting English news to the world but also contributes more than any other nation to science, technology, trade, sports, military power, literature, and theatre, all in English. Of course, the English native speakers are not very happy with that either. They do not consider the varieties of English in the United States and elsewhere to be legitimate and resent the way their language has and continues to be degenerated.

For non-native speakers of English, the spread of the language conjures mixed feelings. While the good is obvious, it is nevertheless a point of concern for those who consider globalization to be a dangerous path for the world to travel. There is concern that there is no regulatory body that would ensure that prejudice, exploitation, and unilateralism are not tagged onto the globalization ideology. It is without doubt that the language that we use selectively shapes our perceptions, the names we apply emphasize particular aspects of reality and neglect others, language names what exists, and the world is named by those who hold power. Because power is reflected in language and exists in the discourse it is not neutral. As such, language reflects the cultural values and perceptions of the user, the power in and behind language can be used to define who has control and determines when, how, and where a particular language should be used. Before we discuss these concerns further, let me turn my attention to the status and role of Kiswahili and try to answer the critical question, whether Kiswahili merits consideration for global use.

### **3. The Power of Kiswahili**

There is no doubt that Kiswahili has gained ground as a language of choice by millions of people in East Africa and its neighbors. It has been transported to different parts of Africa and the West due to migration, both voluntary and as a consequence of ethnic wars, including the fight against colonialism and apartheid. Refugees from neighboring countries learn Kiswahili during their short stay in Kenya or Tanzania and keep the language when they finally immigrate to England, the United States, or other western countries. This is evident in the increase in demand for Kiswahili translators for agencies like the American based Language Line Incorporated and Pacific Interpreters Inc. that offer services to law enforcement, hospitals, legal services, immigration services, airline companies, and schools.

The number of people learning Kiswahili at institutions of higher education in the United States has also attained impressive numbers even though the enrolments are only high at the elementary and in special cases intermediate levels. We are also encouraged when we look at Europe and Asia where the enthusiasm is stronger and the objectives are better defined. At many of the European institutions of higher education, including private organizations, the study of Kiswahili is intense and purposeful. European institutions offer a more serious program of African languages, with Kiswahili topping the list. Many of their objectives are tied to development projects that are sponsored by the European Economic market, and specific agencies such as DANIDA and NORAD, to name only a few. Such examples offer us some perspective of the power and potential for a global use of Kiswahili. There is also another motivation for learners and users of Kiswahili, namely the global performing arts. As we all know, hip-hop is no longer confined to the West where it has strong roots. Those who have had the opportunity to travel to East Africa recently would agree with me that Swahili hip-hop is gaining much

popularity among the young people. That global dimension of hip-hop plays a role in attracting non-Swahili speakers to the lyrics and the associated performances even when the language used is not fully understood. Hip-hop offers a new avenue for learning the language through soft emersion and a way to share indigenous knowledge and cultural values that are not easily accessible through print media. The attraction of Kiswahili hip-hop music to non-native speakers of Kiswahili is evident in the number of foreigners, particularly students and tourists, who buy hip-hop CDs and audio cassettes of this music and their keen interest in learning both the lyrics and the accompanying dance moves. The poetic nature of the lyrics makes it relatively easy for Kiswahili learners to learn the language and the dance moves. Interest in attaining fluency and high proficiency levels of the language also seems to be on the rise both at institutions in the West and at language centers in both Kenya and Tanzania. A good example is the MS-training Center for Development in Tanzania that, for many years, used to attract only a handful of learners from Europe. Currently, they register more than two hundred students from Europe, the Americas, and non Swahili speaking countries in Africa. The majority of these clients attend their summer programs while a minority group requests their services between January and April.

Such examples demonstrate that Kiswahili is attaining a prominent status. Not only is this language powerful but also very symbolic. It has and continues to be used to shape the understandings of the world about Africa (even when we view this as being done at the expense of other African indigenous languages). Undoubtedly, Kiswahili will achieve a recognized global power. The challenge is to establish a sustainable global need and importance among other global languages. The signs are there considering the growing use of Kiswahili in world media such as the *Voice of America*, and *Radio Deutsche Welle*, *BBC radio and Television*, and *Asia radio and TV* programs that come to many homes in East Africa. Some of these programs are broadcasted to East Africa (especially Kenya, and Tanzania) on a regular basis (in some cases twice a day). In addition, Kiswahili has been identified by Microsoft for the development of scanner OCR that would identify Kiswahili text. Mr. Opiyo of the Nairobi Microsoft office (cf. *Majira Newspaper*, June 2004:2) noted that Kiswahili was selected because of its status, a strong African language that can stand a global test as a language of business and communication in East Africa. Other African languages that are being targeted include: Yoruba, Hausa, Somali, and Amharic.

The growing interest to expose Kiswahili to technology is also demonstrated in the move by Vodacom and Celtel phone companies to regularly place advertisements in newspapers in both English and Kiswahili to advertise their services. Both companies have seen the wisdom of reaching all sectors of the public since the buying power or usage does not reside in the affluent only<sup>1</sup>.

There is also growing Kiswahili literature including language textbooks and computer assisted programs for language and literature (cf. Moshi and Omar 2003). Several scholars including Ali & Mwakilo (2001) and Chuwa (2003) have developed manuals in Kiswahili that are intended to facilitate the understanding of how the computer works and how other writing programs such as Word Perfect could be utilized in Kiswahili. Microsoft (MS Word Journal 2002) listed a selected number of African languages (Amharic, Edo, Fulfunde, Hausa, Igbo, Kanuri, Swahili, Oromo, Somali, Sesotho, Berber, Tigrigna, Tsonga, Setswana, Venda, Xhosa, Yoruba, and Zulu) as prime targets for the development of user friendly operational manual in the local language. Needless to say, the expansion to cover these many languages is refreshing and demonstrates the growing global understanding of the need to be linguistically inclusive. Kiswahili leads the pack while it offers both the model and encouragement to other languages. Let me add that, currently, a spell-checker is in progress (spearheaded by Professor Arvi Hurskainen, University of Helsinki) to help editors who choose to write in Kiswahili. Without doubt, similar programs will be developed for other African languages using the established template for Kiswahili (Legere 2005). As noted in *Tafsiri Sanifu* v. 6, published by the Institute of Kiswahili in Dar Es Salaam, a comprehensive terminology was developed and released by the Tanzania Swahili

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<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, these and other companies are beginning to feel the pressure to provide service information in different languages. Thus in Namibia, where English is the official language, MTC telephone company decided to advertise in other local languages spoken by Namibians.

Council (BAKITA)<sup>2</sup>. Furthermore, Kiango (2004) attests that more than 20,000 lexical items were compiled by 1989.

These are, therefore, elements that are speeding up the process of globalizing the use of Kiswahili. The prediction is that once the need and value of learning and using Kiswahili is recognized like that of English, the quest for Kiswahili to attain a global status will be realized. The anticipation was demonstrated in a June 2004 surprising move by President Joachim Chisano of Mozambique at the African Union (AU) Assembly in Addis Ababa that offered a model for what is expected from African leaders, namely leading by example. President Chisano showed the hidden power of African languages by, unexpectedly, deciding to address the Assembly using Kiswahili. The Assembly was not prepared for this bold move and there was a brief moment of panic as the delegates scrambled to get translators to provide simultaneous translation. Needless to say, President Chisano was not swayed and continued with his remarks without worrying about the inability of the delegates to comprehend what he was saying. President Chisano's bold move, prompted President Obasanjo of Nigeria to follow suit by greeting the delegates in Kiswahili and thanking President Chisano for his bold move. Though symbolic, this move was both bold and commendable. President Chisano demonstrated the uniqueness of Kiswahili, reminding the delegates that they have been debating on the use of African languages at the assembly for over a decade and yet they had not moved to implement it. He wanted to show that this was the time to implement it, at the birth of a new organization, the African Union (that replaced the Organization of African Unity – OAU). President Chisano wanted to emphasize that the organization should change to reflect the world as it changes in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Africa and Africans should not continue to do business as usual. Rather, Africa and Africans have to assume their place in the global world and that language is one avenue through which they can assert their authority and cultural power. President Chisano demonstrated the power of Kiswahili and its prospective global use. Needless to say, other delegates at the assembly who could have used Kiswahili did not follow suit. These included the AU Pan African Parliament President, the Presidents of Tanzania and Kenya, including their representative Ministers of Foreign Affairs, all of whom Kiswahili is either their first language, national language, and/or an official language in their countries. Other delegates who could also have seized this opportunity included Presidents and representative Ministers from Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo whose Kiswahili is at least a second language, compared to President Chisano and Obasanjo who learned Kiswahili as their third or fourth language, undoubtedly for non-cultural reasons and motivations. President Chisano acquired the language when he lived in Tanzania as a refugee during the Mozambique liberation war from the Portuguese. The war lasted for more than fifteen years. It is not clear what President Obasanjo's Kiswahili skills are because his use of the language at the summit was limited to the salutation and the recognition accorded to of President Chisano for advocating for a wider use of African languages at the AU summit. Nevertheless, his gesture is well taken in the larger context namely demonstrating the global power and status of Kiswahili.

One other factor that we need to consider is the fact that Kiswahili affords us with examples that fit linguistic globalization. Compared to English, its use is not associated with the establishment of colonies. It is also not used for ideological reasons alone. Mazrui and Mazrui (1999) note that while Kiswahili was used to influence ethnic loyalties it was also an instrument for changing ethnic behavior, creating social classes and religious affiliations, and for providing racial identity and national consciousness. Its origins are believed to be along the coast of East Africa. It spread into rural areas around 1800 where it assumed the role of transforming East African peasants to proletarians, changing rural farmers to urban workers. Furthermore, although Kiswahili was deeply associated with the legacy of the mosque, it was later exploited by the church in its ministries for the purposes of Christianization. Among the Muslims, Kiswahili was a socialization tool among different ethnic groups and regions. This promoted a comprehensive culture of its own that transcended language as a mere communication tool.

Unlike English, Kiswahili averted a parochial form of ethnicity and a universalistic orientation. Mazrui and Mazrui (1999) correctly observes that the Swahili culture and Islamic religious background did not perpetuate a single heritage but multiple heritage that include a variety of cultures symbolized by food, ways of doing, and dress that brought Africans, Arabs, and Indians together. The

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<sup>2</sup> A comprehensive terminology list of 1307 entries on AIDS and other health related issues was compiled and released to the public by BAKITA in 2003

language became a tool of communication for indigenous speakers to bond with others. The language thrived and spread despite initial resistance shown by missionaries who associated it with Islam and scholars whose description of the language tended to pit the coastal communities with the mainland communities. It was impossible to overlook its importance and the role it played in combining and synthesizing people from different ethnicity and backgrounds. The missionaries could not downplay the Middle-eastern monotheism exemplified by modified lexical items from the Old Testament found in the Qur'an.

Kiswahili shares some similarities with English in its effect of enhancing social interaction between different groups, breaking down ethnic loyalties and identities. People from different groups intermingle with ease creating a decline in ethnic customs. This, however, does not mean that these groups have abandoned their core cultures. Like in the case of today's English speakers, members of an ethnic group do organize themselves to meet their ethnic socialization needs, an aspect that explains the acceptability of different varieties that reflect the ethnic background of the speaker. In such interactions (includes wedding rituals, burial rituals, and other community festivities), ethnic languages are used interchangeably with Kiswahili, perpetuating code switching and code-mixing (Scotton 1979). Such endeavors afford the groups the pull of ethnic loyalty.

In East Africa, Kiswahili serves as a lingua franca among different ethnic communities and it is usually the language of the work place, market place, educational systems, and in Tanzania --more than the other East African countries, the language of government business. Evidence of Kiswahili's role as a lingual Franca is in the way it fostered the spread to other parts of sub-Sahara Africa. This extent of its spread provides us the confidence to speculate its potential as a global language in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Furthermore, the rapid nature of its spread and the ease at which it seems to be accepted by other communities explains its adopted role in the early 50s when it assumed a political function of fostering nationalism. It was the language the new breed of African political leaders used to impel for African nationalism and the African right to self-determination and independence.

Kiswahili assumed a major role as a lingua franca when politics became a nationalistic movement in the 50s. It also assumed a bigger role in the armed forces of both colonial and post-colonial East Africa. The Uganda experience is interesting because of the relationship between who ruled the country and who dominated the armed force. Both Milton Obote and Idi Amin come from the northern part of Uganda and were linked to the Nilotes. Consequently, the armed forces recruited mostly from the Nilotes who were very conscious of their separateness from the Bantu groups that were predominantly settled in the southern parts of Uganda. The Nilotes were especially alienated from the Baganda (Mazrui & Mazrui 1999). This relationship created ethnic rivalry among the groups (Acholi, Langi, Kakwa, Lugbara, Baganda, and Nilotes). It is also interesting to note that the rivalry necessitated the use of a common language for communication between them. Kiswahili became the language of choice across ethnic boundaries and even when Idi Amin came to power and eliminated many of the Acholi and Langi members of the armed force, Kiswahili remained the lingua franca of the army. Outside the army, Kiswahili gained political importance, especially during Idi Amin's reign despite the hostility and political decline associated with his brutal regime. This is because the Baganda saw wisdom in changing their resistance to Kiswahili and became the propagators of Kiswahili and its integrative functions in the army. The society responded well to this change and warmed up to the use of Kiswahili. The increasing functional role of Kiswahili in Kenya and Tanzania, its neighboring states, was also a factor that assured the Ugandans that it was not just a military language. They did not want to view the role of Kiswahili in the same way as apartheid South Africa viewed Afrikaans considering the image of brutality associated with the Ugandan armed forces under the various regimes especially that of Idi Amin. That era was disconcerting to many of the Ugandans. Kiswahili gained additional importance after Obote's return from exile to Uganda and the formation of the National Resistance Army (NRA) in the south under Yoweri Museveni<sup>3</sup>. Because Kiswahili facilitated the expansion of the Ugandan's social interaction circles, it was adopted later in 1986 as the official language of the army.

There is also historical evidence of the power of Kiswahili as demonstrated by its ability to penetrate areas like the Francophone countries of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Rwanda, and Burundi, where French was introduced through the Belgians. To understand the mitigating factors, one has to look at the linguistic implications of the Belgians and not the French

<sup>3</sup> Note that Obote was ousted by General Okello, who was later ousted by Museveni and his NRA group.

introducing French to the people of these countries. Belgians have two languages, French and Flemish. At the on-set, it was not clear in Belgian Congo whether French or Flemish would be the language to be adopted. The Belgians revered and feared French because of its association with autocracy. The Flemish cultural affiliations with German afforded the Belgians the linguistic distance between the master and the subject as is often associated with the Germanic culture. This attitude allowed French to thrive even though it was sandwiched, in some parts, between indigenous African languages and Flemish which suffered from the Germanic chauvinistic legacy of creating a distance between the master and his subjects. It was important, therefore, to instill it in the schools that were largely controlled by the Flemish Belgians.

The attitude that prevailed among the Flemish Belgians at the time, allowed Kiswahili to penetrate the Eastern and Southern parts of the Congo. Kiswahili provided the bond that the subjects needed. By the time the DRC achieved its independence a substantial number of Congolese spoke Kiswahili with reputable proficiency. Kiswahili has since remained one of the important languages in the DRC in addition to Lingala, and Kikongo. Of the three, Kiswahili has been the most widespread of them especially in the economically rich parts, specifically the Shaba Province (formally Katanga). Lingala thrived due to the functions of the military and recruitment from predominantly Lingala speaking regions while Kikongo has an upper hand in the political centrality of the Bakongo and their access to political power (Mazrui and Mazrui 1999). The survival of Kiswahili in the DRC reflects that of other areas in East Africa (except for Tanzania where it is a national language). It is tied to economics.

A more recent evidence of the expansion of Kiswahili can be found in its integrative role in migrant labor communities in sub-Saharan Africa, states that achieved independence after a period of liberation struggle, and misplaced communities in refugee camps in Eastern Africa, and those who have been settled overseas after spending a number of years in refugee camps in Eastern Africa (these include Somalis, Rwandans, Burundians, and Congolese). These groups learned Kiswahili and now use it as a lingua franca in their new communities. Often, these groups select Kiswahili as the language of their identity when requesting an interpreter in England and America and also as a medium of communication with other displaced peoples from these four ethnic groups when they find themselves in the same communities abroad.

#### **4. Further Considerations**

As presently defined, globalization espouses a unicentric view of the world where the only surviving super power reserves the custodianship of the English language. To bring about a polycentric equation, advocates of a linguistic and cultural diversity need to be engaged in a much wider struggle for the creation of a polycentric world. If globalization is allowed to eliminate linguistic and cultural diversity, then there will not be a chance for the development of a polycentric world where diverse experiences and knowledge contribute equally to science and technology, the two driving forces of global understanding in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and beyond.

Walters and Brody (2005) correctly notes that when we advocate for a global language, we need to contend with the concerns of both sides of the debate. There are real concerns by both native and non-native English speakers about political, economic, and cultural consequences as they affect them should English become global and spread to all corners of the world. If Kiswahili should assume a recognized global role and in order to avert regional as well as continental fears, it should avoid the unicentric and possessive characteristics of English. The fear of accepting English as the only global language is rooted in early histories of European languages that spread as a result of political, economic and military prowess. The Greek language, for example, existed in the Middle East for two hundred years due to the armies of Alexander the Great. Latin was spread by the legions of the Roman Empire, and Arabic spread in North Africa and the Middle East to foster Islam through the Moorish armies of the 8<sup>th</sup> Century. Included are Spanish, Portuguese, and French that resemble the English in the way they found their way to the Americas, Africa, and the Far East, mostly through expeditions and the quest to establish colonies through different means, including military force. Thus, we cannot blame those who fear that military power might come to play once again in the era of globalization.

We cannot overlook the fact that economic and military powers are the avenues of political influence around the world in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. While globalization aids economic competitiveness, it also creates a 'survival of the fittest' attitude amongst the competitors. The media is going to play a major role in aiding and abetting the economic competitions. Consequently, the language or languages

that occupy the central and subject positions stand a better chance of acquiring a global status due to the ability and opportunity to assume a multifaceted role of communication. The United States is currently the only standing super power and the custodian of English. The major currency of the world is the dollar (despite the fact that the Euro has gained the buying power slightly). The language of the world is English. The Europeans use English to communicate across their own borders and the rest of the world. As a result of colonization, Africa communicates with each other in English. As such, the center and subject positions of communication are currently occupied by those that have enhanced their economic and political power through the use of English.

The question that we need to address is, should the world accept the power of English as linguistically inevitable and therefore disregard any efforts to have a linguistically diverse world? Crystal (2005:508-514) enumerates the risks of accepting one language to serve the world. These include:

- 1) *Elite monolingual linguistic*: where one group assumes the monopoly of the language encouraging the development of complacent and dismissive attitudes towards other languages and cultures.
- 2) *Manipulative tendencies*: where the privileged group use their competitive edge to manipulate the system at the expense of those who have less power and lack the ability to use it. Consequently the gap between the poor and the rich would increase.
- 3) *Marginalization*: where some languages become marginalized and rendered not worth learning.
- 4) *Language death*: when a language is considered not worth learning, it becomes irrelevant and its ultimate death is hastened. This is a real danger for small languages and languages spoken in less powerful nations. This also perpetuates the mentality of “survival of the fittest”.

Presently, Africa is confronted with these risks because of its dependency on foreign languages for communication, education, and trade. Thus, any of these risks are real. In his discussion of the Status of English in Africa, Schmied (1991) correctly observes that there are persistent inequities in practice and application of resources available to L-2 English speakers. Specifically African scholars face sociolinguistic or grammatical problems as they try to express their ideas in English in an English only academy. Furthermore, despite the claim for global English, many written works in English around the globe remain unpublished due to sociolinguistic stereo-typing of both the authors and the texts. Oftentimes, research by Africans that is enhanced by firsthand knowledge of linguistic phenomena that is particular to their first language is considered intuitive. This is an effort to distinguish between ‘mainstream’ researches from ‘other’ research practices. Unfortunately such categorizations reinforce Crystal’s concern of manipulative tendencies by the custodians of the designated global language. The categorizations also explain why large amounts of works by non-L1 English speakers have limited access to English-based publications. Unfortunately, such limitations indicate missed opportunities for the exchange of ideas in written form between scholars of diverse cultures and linguistic backgrounds. It also defeats the meaning of globalization noted earlier that calls for the need to take all the different aspects of a situation into account. It is without doubt that information regarding interesting questions and phenomena are missed when we allow theoretical speculation from limited data source regardless of whether we are researching on language or anything else.

Because Kiswahili has emerged as the most developed African language, should the rest of Africa become apprehensive about its potential power in the future? Considering the role that Kiswahili assumed from the onset and the functions it continues to foster, it is unlikely that Kiswahili will be a threatening language if it were to become one of the global languages. The origins of Kiswahili do not include political or economic power. The communities that have a rich culture associated with the language are not imposing to the extent of threatening the cultures of other communities where Kiswahili has spread or might spread in the future. Because those who currently hold the monopoly of the Kiswahili are non-threatening, the function that the language can successfully perform is that of building a bridge for global understanding. As noted earlier such a function is globally acceptable. By leading the pack, Kiswahili has an opportunity to advocate for the development of other African languages to fulfill both regional and continental communication needs. Kiswahili cannot be expected to fulfill that role alone. To avoid being compared to English, Kiswahili has to avoid being as racially or regionally exclusive of its indigenous speakers. In fact this would be out of character for Kiswahili since the speakers do not have the history of possessiveness of the language. As scholars, we should

continue to encourage the practice of learning other languages and to persuade African political leaders to institute the learning of other African languages from as early as primary school and to reinforce it at secondary school level.

It is important to emphasize that a language does not become global or universal because of the size of the population it serves. Rather, it is determined by the function it serves and the recipients of these functions. We have historical evidence that provides us with this caution, the rise and fall of Latin which has largely remained a language of scholars of religion and classical studies. It became an international language throughout the Roman Empire and around the world as a consequence of the Roman's military power but not their numbers. As their power declined so did the language except where religious power remained (e.g. its association with the Roman Catholic Church). Adding to this example are Hebrew, Greek, Arabic, and French that were revered because of their supposed aesthetic values, clarity of expressions, literary power, or religious standing. Kiswahili has attractive attributes too, but scholars should refrain from using them as pre-conditions for their prominence and sustainability as a global language. Its resilience, success, and sustainability at the national, regional, continental, or international levels cannot be guaranteed by any one or multiple attributes it may exhibit. The attributes of Kiswahili should be viewed as motivating factors for students of language and their instructors as well as an example that could be used to encourage the development of other languages to promote global understanding.

There are those who would argue that promoting Kiswahili creates a grave yard for other indigenous languages (including associated cultures) in East Africa, particularly in Tanzania. I would argue that, contrary to such views, Tanzania has shown and has enhanced its cultural appreciation and diversity by the fact that its citizenry has accepted Kiswahili as a national identity and something that unites the people. Kiswahili is a national language that bears out some key cultural aspects that are shared across tribal boundaries. Needless to say the identity of East Africans around the world is associated with the unifying language of Kiswahili. Many individuals and communities have or are learning Kiswahili (these include many parts of Europe, Asia, America, and several African countries). In each of these places, one would tell you that there are a variety of reasons for teaching and learning Kiswahili. In the United States, there are over 100 institutions of higher education that have integrated Kiswahili in its mainstream curriculum, and it is often the popular choice for undergraduates who are required to study a foreign language for their graduation requirement. Some have higher goals and objective and may have found a career move that they think would put them ahead of their classmates after graduation. There are quite a number of students who have been studying Kiswahili over the years across the many institutions around the world who have made good use of that skill, perhaps working with key institutions of higher education, government and private agencies, and a variety of NGOs in Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, some work with the UN refugee settlement programs both in Africa and elsewhere. These individuals add to the numbers in Europe and Asia and constitute the growing power of Kiswahili and its potential for becoming a global language.

## **5. Concluding Remarks**

As we consider the globalization of world languages, one would expect East Africans to find the national will to invest in Kiswahili. Though on a small scale, there is movement to incorporate Kiswahili in technological advancement. The recent investment by Bill Gates in the development of a Kiswahili version of the Microsoft (July 2004) and the utilization of new technologies like the cell-phones are encouraging aspect that create opportunities for Kiswahili as well as establishing an important role for Kiswahili in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. It is also testimony to the current and future power of Kiswahili, dispelling the myth that technology and modern science can only be achieved through colonial or European languages, something that is a concern to many as the winds of globalization surge on.

It is obvious that scholars and leaders of the field of Kiswahili cannot afford to let these developments pass by and not seize the opportunity to place Kiswahili on the global languages map. By its ability to exploit innovations afforded by science and technology, Kiswahili has proved its new status among the world languages. The success attained by Kiswahili is, undoubtedly, an inspiration and encouragement for other African languages that have a large body of written literature that can be exploited by scholars of language, linguistics as well as other disciplines including science and technology. African scholars should realize that while it is important to continue to seek the important



technological and scientific stimuli from other cultures, it is also important to be placed in the center of it all in order to encourage interdependence rather than dependency. Africa cannot continue to shy away from making critical contributions to the world cultures and the global world of the future. The globalization ideology will not do justice to Africa if Africans stay on the sideline and watch the winds of change go by. Africa has to view itself as an innovative constituency of the global world of the future. Africa must do justice to its own cultures, views, and use its scientific and technological culture as a potential to new global innovations.

The development of Kiswahili and its contribution to the development of the East African societies are part of Africa's preparations for a fuller involvement in world cultures, a global culture that is needed but must be compatible with the present stage of human understanding of the world and their realization of their potential as full contributors in the global village.

While Kiswahili strengthens its place among the world global languages, it is expected that other African languages will develop rapidly following the examples offered by Kiswahili. As a global language, Kiswahili stands the chance of becoming the mediator between the continent's constituencies, including the Diaspora. Kiswahili, therefore, is a piece of the African culture whose power to penetrate the global world stands as a model for all other African languages. Its functions in society have clear consequences in the role as a world language in so far as knowledge expansion and dissemination is concerned, specifically in the political, scientific, technological, and social interaction spheres. At its early stages of expansion, Kiswahili passed the test of transforming class structures across communities in East Africa by promoting nationalism and social interaction between ethnic and religious communities. It can compete with English despite the fact that English will continue to aid various advancement processes (Mazrui & Mazrui 1999:188). Allowing English or other foreign languages to assume an exclusive role in Africa's technological advancement would, undoubtedly, encourage dependency while thwarting global innovations that could be influenced by the African cultures and experiences. It would also encourage the divisions that exist between rural and urban communities, pitting those who live in cities/towns against those who live in rural areas. Considering that African economies rely more on rural agricultural developments and productions and that the majority of the population is rural based, it would be a sad commentary if African leaders and scholars continue to allow foreign science and technology to be dispensed through the gates of foreign languages only.

Africans on the continent and the Diaspora have a responsibility to ensure that African languages assume a permanent place in the functional role of global languages. Africans should cultivate an optimistic view of the potentials for African languages in the global village of world languages. There is need to encourage the formation of a polycentric world that is defined and characterized by linguistic diversity. The role of the Diaspora is in ensuring that African languages assume a permanent place in the functional role of global languages. As noted earlier, the demand for African languages by the children of slaves and subsequent immigrants to the new world served as a catalyst for the need to teaching African languages of the languages in Europe and America. The demand allowed some African languages, such as Kiswahili, Yoruba, Hausa, Arabic, and Zulu, to name only a few, to gain prominence as the commonly taught African languages in Europe and the West. Without doubt, the efforts of Africans are critically needed to continue to advocate and sustain the African languages at home and abroad. Compared to the teaching of African languages and linguistics in the 60s, 70s, and 80s, today's efforts appear weakened. The demand does not appear as intense, and the learner profile has changed dramatically. Consequently the teaching of African languages is, in some institutions, a service component of the curriculum instead of a critical academic component for a holistic curriculum that would contribute to the general knowledge and experience of the globalized learner. Kiswahili has paved the way for such endeavors.

It is also important to encourage leaders and the citizens of East Africa not to succumb to the pressure to de-emphasize Kiswahili by promoting English medium schools. It is sad to note that many of these schools have resorted to the colonial style of enforcing an English only environment in the English only schools. Students who are caught speaking their local languages or Kiswahili on school compounds are punished by hard labor or by withholding certain privileges like a trip to town for shopping or taking away their free time. There have been reports of students who were kept out of class to work in the school gardens as a form of punishment. The sad part is that these English medium schools have children in primary one who are hardly eight years old. The message these kids are getting from such punishments is that their local language or Kiswahili is inferior to English and that

mastery of the English was the most important thing in their academic endeavors. Another message that these young people infer from the punishments they endure is that their language and cultures are unworthy of learning and would not make them successful in life. This was, unfortunately, the ideology that was perpetuated in education during colonial periods.

There is also need to encourage those in the Diaspora who advocate for a global use of Kiswahili to refrain from being contented with the minimal utilization of Kiswahili as is often demonstrated in the US in the adoption of Kiswahili names, words, and phrases in naming practices, the scattered use of Swahili words in children's books, children's theatre and films, and product labels (especially beauty products). Also, if Kiswahili is to be one of the global languages, we cannot be contented with the teaching of Kiswahili as an academic subject when its major accomplishment is to enable the learner to name objects. While we encourage those small steps, we should also cultivate the interest of those who want to learn the language because of their interest and hope to use it purposefully. Such learners are the likely global users of Kiswahili. As scholars we need to encourage life long learners, those that are willing to go beyond the object naming exercise. Accuracy in usage and the need to be functional in the language should be the key objectives both for the teacher and the learner.

Scholars should not take part in undermining the power of Kiswahili. When a language is trivialized, its power is also diminished. We should not allow a global language to be trivialized by inaccuracies that are correctable by scholars who maintain an activist role in promoting and perfecting a language. English, French, German, or other global language users do not trivialization their language. Kiswahili users should likewise take an active role in protecting and promoting it as accurately as possible. Using the word 'possible' here allows us to draw a distinction between standard and colloquial Kiswahili. A non-standard use of the language is acceptable while an inaccurate use of the language should be discouraged.

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