

Kiswahili: People, Language, Literature and Lingua Franca

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INTRODUCTION*

Kiswahili is a language which is better known in the world as Swahili. However, apart from linguists interested in Africa, and general linguists interested in the comparative study of languages, not too many people actually know the origin and structure of the language we call Kiswahili or Swahili today, its extensive literature, and its Pan-African identity. Many people still believe, like the sailors of the 15th to the 19th centuries, that Kiswahili is a kind of mixture of Arabic and African languages. In short, Kiswahili is a kind of pidgin or creole which was born out of trade and intermarriages along the Indian Ocean coast of Africa. This view is, however, far from the linguistic and historical discoveries of today. In fact, exactly one hundred and fifty years ago today, Dr. J. Ludwig Krapf completed the writing of the first ever Kiswahili grammar book in Mombasa. The year was 1845. It took another five years before the book was finally published in Europe. In remembering this important event, we need to re-educate ourselves about the language Kiswahili. In order to do so, we shall concern ourselves with the following themes: 1. The origins of Kiswahili and its speakers; 2. Some salient features of Kiswahili as a Bantu language; 3. The literature of Kiswahili; 4. How Kiswahili got its name, and 5. The spread and use of Kiswahili. We shall not discuss the structure of Kiswahili in any detail, since it requires, in its own right, a separate treatment.

1. THE ORIGINS OF KISWAHILI AND ITS SPEAKERS

Historians working in Africa have now concluded that all the African people were neighbours more than 10,000 years ago (c.f. Oliver and Fage (1988), Odhiambo, Ouso, and Williams (1977), Amidu (1985/89). To the north, we had and still have the caucasoid group who are now called Afroasians. Next to the Afroasians, we had and still have the Negro group or Black people. In the forest, lived the Pygmies, and in the eastern and southern savannas of East and Southern Africa, the Bushmen roamed freely. The last two, historically, have either a pale or a yellowish skin texture, according to Oliver and Fage (1988: 7). But today, both they and the negro qualify as black people. Linguistically, the Pygmy-Bushmen-Hottentot belong to a distinct linguistic type called Khoi-San. Comparative linguistic studies have also

shown that the languages spoken by all the negro peoples are related and that some 5-6,000 years ago they probably spoke one language. The common language began to change as the people discovered agriculture and started moving in groups further and further from each other to found new settlements and farms. The homeland of the early negro people, it is claimed, was probably located around the bend of the Niger (c.f. Alexandre 1972: 60-72). But, we think that the homeland was, most likely, spread between the bend of the Niger and the lake Chad basin, where fishing was carried on along the river lines. If our claim is right, then, in our opinion, there is no doubt that an intrusion of a successive wave of Afroasians through the middle of negro heartland was finally responsible for the definitive division of the negro people into two distinct groups, which then developed apart as two distinct linguistic types, the Nilo-Saharan and the Niger-Congo. The Nilo-Saharan group then had only room to expand eastwards and today they include Songhai (in Niger), Luo (in Kenya), Acholi (in Uganda), Maasai (in Kenya, Tanzania), Dinka (in Southern Sudan) etc. The second group, called Niger-Congo, could also only expand westwards and south-eastwards. For this reason the group became split up into two groups, the Western group and the Southern group. They appear to have maintained contacts with each other, albeit only in times of great necessity, and so the two groups developed virtually independently of each other. The Western group of Niger-Congo is found mostly in modern Western Africa. The Southern group of Niger-Congo moved into the forest and stayed between Mount Cameroun and the tributaries of the Congo, Logone, Chari, and Sangha rivers from where they moved to the region of Lake Mweru (c.f. Guthrie 1967). Within the comparative safety of the forest, this Southern group developed a different form of the Niger-Congo language, and this is called *Bantu* today. The Bantu people of today, therefore, emerged from the very heart of Africa into open savanna country further south. The people then moved to the east, the west, and south of Africa in gradual waves, till they were many enough to displace the Pygmies and Bushmen except in dense forests and in dry savanna and desert areas of Southern Africa. Later on, they also displaced some Afroasians of Eastern Africa. Among the first Bantu group to come to East Africa was the Washungwaya, a North-East Bantu group. The Waswahili are probably one of the better known members of this group. There is no doubt, in our mind, that the name Unguja is the modern derivation of Shungwaya. The Bantu original tribe of the Waswahili must have been simply the Shungwaya ya magunyani or Tikuu (Lit. 'The Shungwaya of the Homeland'), as opposed to the Shungwaya ya Shangazi (Lit. 'Shungwaya of father's sister'), who are the 'Mijikenda' and other groups. This is the surprise which many a learner does not expect or suspect. The Waswahili are, therefore, historically, a Bantu people by origin and language. They now live along the coast and on the off-shore islands of Eastern Africa. If you go to the East African coast and meet Waswahilis of varying shades and colour, it is due to centuries of contact and intermarriages with people from all over the globe. But, you will notice that the language they speak is understood by other Africans on the mainland, especially the hinterland, who have very little mixed features and mixed cultures, even if they have just met a Mswahili

for the first time; while no person from the Orient or Europe or even other parts of Africa further removed understands, on his first arrival, what both the Waswahili and their mainland (hinterland) cousins are saying to them without the help of an interpreter. Africans in the immediate hinterland understand the Waswahili because both groups are using forms of the same language, while the Orientals, Europeans, and others do not understand them because they are using different languages.

How do we know that Kiswahili was and is part of the Bantu languages like Zulu, Shona, Kikuyu and others? Linguistic scholars like Delafosse (1948), Baumann, Westermann and Thurnwald (1948), Greenberg (1963), and Guthrie (1962; 1967) employed a technique called lexicostatistics or glottochronology which was used in Europe to show that most European languages originated from the same parent Indo-European language as the ancient and sacred language called Sanskrit used in India. The theory says that because language is important to the survival of man, people will always take with them words of their languages which will preserve their identity and culture whenever they are moving from place to place (c.f. Bynon 1977: 266-272). This means that words which directly affect a person's very survival such as those which refer to things like numbers, words referring to the body or parts of it, those which refer to trades such as fishing, iron working, architecture, and so on, do not get lost easily. Guthrie (1967), for example, in his study of Bantu languages found surprisingly that the highest percentage of protoBantu word roots (old words) in 200 core sample Bantu languages could be found in Chi-Bemba spoken in Zambia. This language has 54% of the total. He found that the language Luba-Katanga (Chi-Luba), in Congo-Brazzaville and Zaire, has 50% old roots still surviving, while Ki-Kongo in Zaire, Congo-Brazzaville and Angola, and Ki-Swahili on the east coast in Somalia, Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique, the Comoro Islands, tie with 44% each of protoBantu roots. These roots are still present in these languages. The language Sukuma (Ki-Sukuma including Ki-Nyamwezi) in central Tanzania, spoken by 12,6% of Tanzanians, has 41%, while Yao (Chi-Yao) in Tanzania, Mozambique, and Malawi, has 35% of the protoBantu word roots. These words are still in use in the language. Other researchers have also been studying these languages from other perspectives, such as their common classificatory systems called classes, identical 'euphonical' concords, common sound laws, similar verbal and nominal derivational processes, and common constituent typology as (S)VO languages. Thus, one thing is clear to all the scholars: linguistically, Kiswahili is, in percentage terms, derived more from an older form of the African language family called Bantu than Sukuma and Yao, and is equal to Ki-Kongo. So, if we take modern Zaire-Zambia as the homeland of the Bantu people, then the Waswahili were one of the earliest people to migrate to the coast before the proto form changed significantly. This would also explain the high percentage of old roots in the language. This would, most likely, not be the case if the language were a mixture of Oriental, European, and unrelated African languages.

1.1 A NOTE ON THE TERMS NEGRO OR BLACK AFRICAN LANGUAGES

Some researchers object to the terms negro and black used to refer to a particular group of speakers. For example, they argue that the speakers of Kiswahili as a mother tongue cannot properly be said to be a negro or negroid people. They argue further that many black and negro people today speak Afroasian languages, and that there are some Afroasians who only speak the so-called Negro and Black languages. They argue, therefore, that the term Negro languages or Black languages is inappropriate, because this would be tantamount to equating people or racial types with languages and that this is inherently false or stereotypic.¹ It is true that the term Black is ambiguous since it does not imply only Negro but any person with a certain skin texture. Whereas the objectors to the use of these terms are certainly right to some extent, they commit the error of what Hempel (1966: 7, 23) calls the *modus tollens* argument, or alternatively, *the fallacy of affirming the consequent*. Let us briefly diffuse this fallacy. Let us take R to represent the race of any member of the human species and L to represent any language spoken by members of the human species. The modus tollens argument is like this:

Rule A. All R \neq L, therefore, no L \neq R

The problem with the argument in rule A is that whereas the first premise is true, the consequent is not true. That is, while speakers of a language need not be racial members of the languages they speak, it does not follow that no language has a racial type to identify itself with. In much the same way, the modus tollens argument in rule B is equally false.

Rule B. All R \implies L, therefore, All L \implies R

The argument B claims that all races are identifiable by some language, and, therefore, all languages imply a racial type. The first part of the premise in rule B is true, but its consequent is false. We have seen that speakers need not belong to the racial type identifiable with a given language. This is the problem of languages in contact and of multilingualism. These generalizations about language and race and, vice-versa, race and language are not informative. In order to make the argument meaningful we need to make use of Hempel's *deductive nomological-explanations*. That is, we need to define the sense or senses in reference to which we are using the terms language and race, negro and black, and the contexts of application. I propose, therefore, that negro, but not black, versus non-negro should be understood in historical linguistic terms as referring to linguistic genera or types.

¹ I am grateful to the anonymous assessor of my paper, Amidu, for this useful comment. I have sharpened my original use of the terms, but I have not abandoned them.

Within the bounds of linguistics and history or anthropology, and only linguistics, and history or anthropology, the modus tollens argument in rule C is true.

Rule C. Historically, (i) Some R \neq \Rightarrow L, but, (ii) all Ln genera \Rightarrow Rn genera

Ln = negro language, and Rn = negro race. The reverse of (ii) is, however, false, in view of (i) and in spite of the limitation of L to only negro and R to only negro genera.

The argument in rule C suggests that, (i) historically, not all races can be identified with a given specific language or linguistic type (in view of movements and migrations, intermarriages and absorptions, multilingualism, creolization etc.), and, (ii) all negro linguistic types, excepting intermediate cases like creoles, etc., stated in the preceding, are identifiable by a generic group of negro speakers who have propagated the form and structure of the linguistic type, and without whom the language would not have come into being. This deductive nomological argument is true irrespective of whether the generic speakers, in terms of numbers, are not in the majority or are even non-existent at the present time, or will not be existent in the future. The linguistic classification, purely and simply, identifies genera which is true irrespective of the composition of the speakers today. Now, we may choose, on the basis of sociology and political expedience, to resort the kind of *ex nihilo nihil fit* argument referred to by Quine and Ullian (1978: 46-47), such as we find in rules A, and B, and which is precisely what the opponents of the terms Negro and Black often evoke in their support. Since this reasoning is non-linguistic and non-historical or anthropological, its basic premise being rather non-evolutionary sociology and politics, we may quite rightly assume that it is only useful as an illustration of 'toyretical' argumentation.

With reference to Kiswahili, therefore, we take the position that when we view the term negro, but not black, in terms of linguistic genera tied to a genus of speakers as *primus mobile*, then, all Negro languages including Bantu and Kiswahili, in historical and linguistic senses, also have their Negro speakers who may also be black. The reverse of the argument is not true. This would exclude even dark people in places like the Indian sub-continent who might otherwise also qualify as a genus of negro language speakers purely on the basis of colour. It also excludes the Khoi-San who are generally black people. Socio-cultural factors, and linguistic assimilations are not our criteria for determining who is a negro language speaker, and who is not. It is the mother tongue of the individual which matters. If his/her language is negro in genera, then he/she is justified if he/she calls himself/herself a negro language speaker. So, if one points out that most of the present speakers of Kiswahili, a negro language, are not negro or black people in any strict sense etc., it constitutes an insubstantive argument. This does not mean, however, that non-negro or non-black peoples in Africa are non-Africans. In reference to Kiswahili, therefore, voluminous references to the racial mix of the Waswahili speakers does not prove that the language they speak is not a negro african language. Linguistic evidence shows that Kiswahili is Negro African as a

linguistic type and the *primus mobile* of the languages was a negro people who also happen to be black. Many of these negro people are clearly visible on the East Coast of Africa. This is as far as our interest in the subject of the race question and Kiswahili within linguistics should extend and no further. For, the alternative would be to say that if the protestors against the term Negro African as a cover term for all negro languages were strictly linguistic-empirical, then the term Afroasian is clearly inappropriate since it is clearly racialistic. It excludes speakers who may be negroid or black, but are certainly not asiatic stock. To be an African does not necessarily imply to be a Negro African. But an African-Asian or Afro-Asian is still an Asian in Africa, historically speaking.

1.2 SOME FEATURES OF KISWAHILI AS A BANTU LANGUAGE

What is the linguistic structural evidence for the claim that Kiswahili is typically negro Bantu?² A Bantu language is what we call an *agglutinating class language*. Agglutinating means gluing forms or particles called morphs of a language together to form a larger piece or pieces such as words or expressions or even predication-sentences. Kiswahili is an agglutinating class language within Bantu in the sense that it has the same manner of forming words, expressions and predication-sentences as any other language in the Bantu system. Consider the examples below:

- (1) A-ha h-antu | ni | ha-bi (This place is bad)
 A1 + P + A2 (SVO)

The examples (1) is from Kinyarwanda, a Bantu language, and is from Amidu (1980: 345). The informant is James Gashumba.

- (2) Ha-pa pa-hali | ni | pa-baya (This place is bad)
 A1 + P + A2 (SVO)

The datum (2) is from Kiswahili. Note that pabaya = pa-wi (bad, evil) in old Kiswahili.

We see in (1) and (2) that the locative system of Kinyarwanda uses the same prefixes as the 'place' class of Kiswahili. The phonological rule which relates the two is, /p/ → /h/ /- /a/, and vice-versa. Note that initial /h/ → ∅ in the Kinyarwanda demonstrative, possibly because is not a derived glottal fricative. In this respect, whereas Kiswahili has ha-pa (this), pahali (place), pabaya/pa-wi (bad), ni (be),

² The description in this section is, in some respects, slanted towards what I call Linguistic-empirical Grammar (LEG), which is founded on Amidu (1980). Any inconsistencies with current methods is a difference of opinion.

Kinyarwanda has a-ha (this), hantu (place), ha-bi (bad), and ni (be), in that order. If we look at Chichewa, we get similar correlations.

- (3) Pa-phiri a-po | pa-li | mu-nthu (at this mountain there is man)
A1 + P + A2 (SVO)
- (4) Ku-phiri u-ko | ku-li | mu-nthu (at that mountain there is a man)
- (5) Mu-phiri u-mo | mu-li | mu-nthu (on/in this mountain there is man)

Culled from Amidu (1980: 349). The informant is Francis Moto.

We may compare (3-5) with Kiswahili (6-8) below:

- (6) Ha-po mlima-ni | pa-na | m-tu (at this mountain there is a man)
A1 + P + A2 (SVO)
- (7) Hu-ko mlima-ni | ku-na | m-tu (at that mountain there is man)
- (8) Hu-mo mlima-ni | m-na | m-tu (on/in this mountain there is a man)

The grammatical forms differ very little. Chichewa uses pa- or ku- or mu- to mark locative expressions and predicate items. Kiswahili does the same to a large extent. We observe that the /h/ → ∅ rule applies to Chichewa demonstratives as well. For this reason, we find that hapo in Kiswahili = apo in Chichewa, huko = uko, and humo = umo. The [o] at the end of these demonstratives is called the 'O' of reference, or 'O' topicalizer in my usage. The bare forms of the demonstratives are hapa = apa, huku = uku, and humu = umu. The nouns differ both in lexical form and in class marker. Kiswahili has -ni suffix as the class marker of locative nouns, as in mlima-ni, while Chichewa use prefixes which are the same as for the demonstratives, hence pa-phiri, ku-phiri, and mu-phiri. The predicate items differ in their lexical roots but employ the same concord or agreement markers. Thus Kiswahili uses a non-infinitival (copular) predicate verb -na (have), (even though the grammar has -li and other types of verbs meaning 'be'), while Chichewa uses a non-infinitival (copula) -li (be). Both types of predicates have pa-, ku-, and mu- as the grammatical markers of their lexical roots. Even the object of the predicate verbs are identical. Kiswahili mtu = munthu in Chichewa. The medial nasal [n] is lost in Kiswahili, and the final voiceless alveolar stop /t/ may be aspirated in Kiswahili, but this is not specified in the written forms.

Kiswahili, therefore, shares not only grammatical forms with the other Bantu languages, but also a large measure of vocabulary items with all the about 640 languages in the Bantu family. Kiswahili also has an identical morphological and derivational system (both nominal and verbal) with the other Bantu languages. The phonological system is similar. For example, the pattern of stress, which is normally on the penultimate syllable of words, is almost uniform in these languages including Kiswahili. The syllable structure is the CV- or V or syllabic C, usually a nasal /m/, /n/ or /ŋ/, or CCV- types. CC is a tautosonant phoneme. There are three types. The first is traditionally called homorganic or prenasalized clusters in which

the first C is always a nasal /m/, /n/ or /ŋ/. The second of the tautosonants always has a glide, either labial or palatal, as the second element. The third are geminates in which both CC are the same. The last is not recognized as phonemic in the phonological system, though common among native speakers of Kiswahili, because it is phonetically conditioned. E.g. [pa-ta] 'get' is CV-CV, [u-a] 'kill' is V-V, [m-tu] 'person' is c-CV, [N-ge] 'scorpion' is cCV, [ɓwa-wa] 'marsh', [fyo-nza] 'suck' are C^cV-CV, C^cV-cCV, and finally, [nni] 'what' (conversational for nini) and [mbo-na] 'why?' are CCV and CCV-CV in that order. What Kiswahili lacks is the tonal system which is common in most other Bantu languages.

The typological classification of Kiswahili is said to be (S)VO, thus placing it among SVO languages in the world, as can be seen in data (1-8). In our view, however, the SVO constituent order represents only the S-structure typology of Kiswahili and Bantu. The underlying typology is (S)OV in the synchronic grammar and this is evident in the S-structure of the morphology of non-copular (i.e. infinitival) predicate items (V), and in the underlying structure of the syntax of predication-sentences.³ We shall not go into problems of typological classification in this presentation.

Another important feature of Kiswahili, and some Bantu languages, is that it has grammaticalized the distinction 'flesh and blood' versus 'non-flesh and non-blood'. This means that the language recognizes, in its everyday use, a formal distinction between **Animate Sentient Objects** versus **Inanimate ± Sentient Objects**. The way in which this has been done is simple and may be stated by rule D:

Rule D. **Grammaticalization of Animate-Inanimate Distinction**

- (i) Almost any noun or expression which is animate denoting as having flesh and blood or as having life equivalent to a flesh and blood object, will normally codify its animateness in the predicate of a transitive predication-sentence by means of an overt grammatical agreement affix of classes 1 MU- or 2 WA-, if it functions as the second argument A2, i.e., the object, of the construction, in normal everyday usage;
- (ii) All nouns which are not animate denoting as having life equivalent to flesh and blood will normally mark their inanimateness in the predicate of a transitive predication-sentence by the zero realization of their grammatical agreement affixes if they function as the second argument A2, i.e., the object, of a construction, in normal everyday usage;
- (iii) The occurrence of an A2 (object) affix may, however, be constrained by the transitivity of each specific predicate verb (p-v).

³ On my claim that Kiswahili is synchronically an (S)OV language, see my 'Kiswahili, An SOV Language: A Proposal', paper read at the 2nd Nordic Seminar in African Linguistics, held at Trondheim, Norway in November, 1994.

The above rule does not account for first arguments (A1) because all first arguments, if they are present, have an obligatorily overt relationship with the predicate, unless the p-item is an 'absolute predicate', such as *ni* or *si* (be, or not be) or if there is a morpho-phonological transformation or assimilation of an affix before some other element, or if the argument occurs before 'absolute affix markers' such as *hu-* of habituality, and *ku-* of infinitive in the predicate item. 'Absolute' means that no agreement is overtly possible before the given item, and sometime after the form, as in the case of *ni/si*.

The following examples confirm the rule D(i).

- (9a) Mpishi ali-m-piga mtoto (the cook beat the child)
- (10a) Kijana ame-mw-ona Juma (the youth has seen Juma)
- (11a) Mwewe ana-m-kamata kuku (the hawk is catching a chicken)
- (12a) Simba ata-wa-rukia paa (the lion will pounced on the gazelles)

All the underlined affixes refer to the underlined nouns which are animate denoting. If we leave out the affixes, the constructions will be unacceptable or inelegant, though not ungrammatical, to the native speaker. E.g. (9b-12b). Absence of the infix is shown by symbol \emptyset .

- ?(9b) Mpishi ali- \emptyset -piga mtoto (the cook beat the child)
- ?(10b) Kijana ame- \emptyset -ona Juma (the youth has seen Juma)
- ?(11b) Mwewe ana- \emptyset -kamata kuku (the hawk is catching a chicken)
- ?(12b) Simba ata- \emptyset -rukia paa (the lion will pounce on the gazelles)

The above data contrast with (13a-16a) below. The latter confirm rule D(ii). The data below are more acceptable without A2 (object) agreement markers in the p-item in normal usage.

- (13a) Mpishi ali- \emptyset -soma kitabu (the cook read a book)
- (14a) Kijana ame- \emptyset -beba gogo (the youth has carried a log)
- (15a) Tanga lime- \emptyset -pata maji (the sail is soaked wet) Lit: it has received water.
- (16a) Mti huu ume- \emptyset -zaa matunda mazuri (this tree has produced fine fruits)

All the underlined nouns are inanimate, non-flesh and blood objects. Consequently, no affix (indicated by symbol \emptyset) occurs in the predicate items in reference to the A2 objects. The distinction between (10a-12a) and (13a-16a), is not really a matter of the respect accorded to humans as opposed to non-humans, but rather the grammaticalization of an empirical experience of a people in line with everyday usage. The reason why the sociological factor of status is not a critical criterion is that, in spite of the broad generalizations of rule D(i-ii), the caveat in D(iii) occurs frequently. Firstly, some predicate items do not normally allow animate denoting

objects at A2 to show an infix either inherently or because the infix is meaning changing. E.g. (17-18).

- (17) Abunuwas ali- \emptyset -nunua punda/mtumwa/kiti (Abunuwas bought a donkey/slave/chair)
(18) Mpishi ame- \emptyset -panda farasi/kilima/ngazi (the cook has mounted a horse/hill/ladder)

In (17-18), whether the object is animate or not, the infix is realized as zero (\emptyset) in the p-item. The datum (17) inherently does not normally take the animate affix even if its object is animate denoting. The datum, (18) can have the infix -m- of class 1 for farasi (horse) but then the meaning would then also imply that 'the cook has had a sexual affair with a/the horse', a connotation which no speaker would want to convey unless he so intends. In a similar manner, (19-20) are common in the grammar. These show that the grammar does not allow nouns to move out of their own grammatical classes. They must have concords inside their own classes even if they are animate denoting.

- (19) Simba ana-li-shambulia joka kubwa (the lion is attacking the huge snake)
(20) Simba ali-vi-ua vitoto vyake (the lion killed its cubs)

Here again, even though the objects in the p-items are all 'flesh and blood' animates, the affixes which occur are class 5 -li-, and class 8 -vi-, and not the animate affixes -m- and -wa- as in previous examples. Traditionally, these uses are said to be associated with the SIZE of the objects referred to by the noun. But the reality is that, very often, the grammar does not work that way. For example, the grammar allows a choice, as in (20b, 21):

- (20b) Simba ali-wa-ua vitoto vyake (the lion killed its cubs)
(21) Simba ali-wa-ua watoto wake (the lion killed its cubs)

Even though the object noun phrase 'vitoto vyake' is supposed to imply 'baby cubs', its concord is still that of class 2 -wa- which is animate denoting in the same way as the noun phrase 'watoto wake'.⁴ In (20b, 21) there is no difference in meaning

⁴ The data have been constructed from a prose text of Mark Julius in Zaidi et al. (1971: 19). E.g. "Katika mwaka wa pili vitoto hivyo hukubaliwa kusaidia katika kuwinda, lakini huadhibiwa sana wasipojizua hamaki." Note how vi- goes with concord wa- in the next clause. At the beginning of Mark Julius's text we find the following predication-sentence: "Kwa kawaida watoto wa simba huwa wanne, na mmoja kwa desturi hufa pale tu wakishazaliwa na mwingine huwa mnyonge kunyonyeshwa." Here again, my underlined affixes show wa- has the expected concord wa- in the next clause. It is evident that vi- and wa- are allomorphs in this text. These types of examples are wide spread in the synchronic grammar of native speakers, but are excluded by the so-called Standard Kiswahili Grammars, resulting in largely artificial descriptive grammars of Kiswahili.

between the two phrases. This suggests strongly that *vitoto vyake* and *watoto wake* belong to the same grammatical class, in underlying structure. (20b) and (21) also confirm that noun arguments show only the agreement of the class to which they actually belong, rather than acquire new agreements (i.e. take concords of other classes) while remaining in their grammatical classes as claimed in traditional descriptions, and by recently by Mwinyi Kingozi (c.f. Amidu 1980, 1994b, 1994c).⁵ There is, therefore, a limit to which we can push the SIZE feature, or the "several nouns of cl. 9 or 10 may take a concord of class 1/2 etc." claim of Mwinyi Kingozi, or both, as a significant grammatical analytic tool, even if it is sociologically interesting to do so.

Finally, all the data (13b-16b) may have overt affixes if the speaker wants to refer to a definite description as opposed to an indefinite description or general term, or wishes to be emphatic.

(13b) Mpishi ali-ki-soma kitabu (the cook read the book)

(14b) Kijana ame-li-beba gogo (the youth has carried the log)

?(15b) Tanga lime-ya-pata maji (the chair is *soaked* wet) Lit: it has been soaked by the water

(16b) Mti huu ume-ya-zaa matunda mazuri (this tree has produced *fine* fruits)

(The symbol ? means not acceptable/not preferred usage).

Within, the general rule, therefore, we should make room, formally, for synthesis of types of usage, and without undue sociological interference. It appears that the grammaticalization of the distinction animate versus inanimate is one of the peculiarities of the Bantu languages. Perhaps, this grammaticalized characteristic feature could be used cross-linguistically to distinguish between the Bantu linguistic types and Kiswahili itself in terms of degree of historical evolution and separation from a common ancestry.

2. THE LITERATURE OF THE KISWAHILI

Kiswahili literature is as old as the people have been Kiswahili speakers. Oral literature, therefore, predates the written literature. For a long time, the oral literature was dismissed as not constituting literature in the classical sense of literature in Europe. Apart from a wealth of oral literature, Kiswahili has an impressive four centuries of written literary traditions. However, the evidence of this written literature dates only as far as the 17th century. The oldest surviving manuscript has been dated to 1652 and is called the **Hamziya**, according to Knappert (1979). It is a religious work. The truth is that the original written

⁵ Mwinyi Kingozi is the pen-name I use for an anonymous assessor of the JALL.

manuscript of the Epic of Liyongo (**Utenzi wa Liyongo**) which is older than the Hamziya cannot be traced. It seems evident that the original source of the written version was the oral literature of the Waswahili of the Tana River basin to the off-shore islands off the present Kenya-Somali coast. Most of the written versions which have survived are 19th and 20th century manuscripts of the epic. Nearly all the early written literature of the Waswahili was in poetry. Poetry was written in different verse forms. There are over eleven verse forms in Kiswahili today (c.f. Knappert 1979; Amidu 1990, 1993; Lodhi 1986). Until the last years of the 19th century, the Waswahili discouraged prose writings as forms of serious literature. In fact, it is only in the 20th century that prose and drama have become very popular. Prose and drama were considered by the coastal Waswahili to be uncouth or commonplace 'performance literatures' and as such were not considered as 'true' literature. Today, however, we have all kinds of literature in Kiswahili and on any topic. But poetry is still the yardstick by which people ultimately judge the quality of a writer as a true artist (c.f. Lodhi 1986: 13, 18). It is for this reason that Julius Nyerere wrote his literature in verse and not prose. It is also for this reason that letters to Kiswahili newspaper editors, and magazines are written in poetry and not prose to this day (c.f. Lodhi 1986). Kiswahili songs are typically written in the classical or traditional verse forms, but since independence, written free verse songs have become more the norm, especially on the mainland. A tentative chronology of Kiswahili literature is as follows:

A. Oral Literature (From about 100 B.C.)

1. Folktales
2. Free Verse Songs used in Dances
3. Aphorisms and Proverbs
4. Epics.

B. Written Literature

	Date/Topic	Title
1. Oldest manuscript (Discovered)	ca. 1652 Verse.	Hamziya
2. 18th-19th Centuries	Verse.	Chuo cha Tambuka, Al-inkishafi, Mwanakupona, Majimaji, etc.
3. Mid 19th-20th Centuries	Verse, Prose, Drama.	Juliazi Kaizari, Kijenketile, Simu ya Kifo, Utu Bora Mkulima, etc.

2.1 THE HOME LAND OF KISWAHILI LITERATURE

The cradle of Kiswahili literature is in the northern part of the Kiswahili country which is in modern Kenya close to Somalia. The Kiswahili written literary tradition began on Pate Island in Kenya in the 17th and 18th centuries. Later, the centre moved to Mombasa in the mid 1750 to the early parts of the 19th century. From about 1840, the centre shifted to Lamu, also in Kenya, and it stayed there until the arrival of European scholarship. The arrival of Europeans appears to have inspired

the south to use prose to compete with the north. Even, the appointee to the post of supreme court judge (Kadhi) of Islam under the sultanate of Seyyid Said and his successor Seyyid Majyid came from the north, and continued in that tradition at least until the closing years of the 19th century and the early 20th century. Today, the north still leads in traditional literature. For example, one of the innovations started in Lamu off the Kenya coast in 1975 and documented by us is the use of poetry as a tool for political campaigns, elections, and satire. This type of poem is called the KIMONDO meaning 'blinding meteor' (c.f. Amidu 1990, 1993) for details about this verse). But, we draw attention also to the fact that on Pemba island, between Mombasa in the north and Zanzibar in the south, a tradition of classical literature has taken root, especially from the end of the 19th century. However, in general, both Kenya and Tanzania produce many works each year especially in prose and on all aspects of life. Love songs are especially popular. The preferred dialect used in modern times is Standard Kiswahili (Kiswahili Sanifu) based on the dialect of Zanzibar town which is called Kiunguja. The increase in the number of speakers has given rise to Standard Kiswahili usages which are specifically not part of the native speakers' repertoire. For example, compare the use of the Vi- class, as in (22) below, to collectivize objects of different classes, where the native speaker would normally use Ma-₁ class (i.e. cl. 6), as in (23). (22) is Standard Kiswahili (Kiserikali 'government'), and (23) is Kiunguja.

- (22) Kikombe, sahani, na malimau, vy-ote vi-mepotea (the cup, plate, and lemons are all missing)
- (23) Kikombe, sahani, na malimau, y-ote ya-mepotea (the cup, plate, and lemons, are all missing)⁶

Detailed studies need to be conducted into language use and variation since the 'Nationalization' of Kiswahili in 1967. Kiswahili is now a language of all the peoples in East and Central Africa, and not just of muslims on the coast or of north versus south. The well-known dialects of Kiswahili are, Kiunguja (Zanzibar), Kimvita (Mombasa), Kiamu (Lamu), Kisiu (Siu), Kipate (Pate), and Kingazija (Comoro Is).

3. HOW KISWAHILI GOT ITS NAME

The name of the language Kiswahili has the following derivation. The prefix KI- actually means 'language, customs, way of life' of the people called Waswahili. The root SWAHILI means 'coast'. So, the word KISWAHILI means 'language, customs, way of life of people from the coast'. The word 'swahili' was a 'nickname' given to the East African coast by visitors from Arabia, especially from the 10th century

⁶ Personal communication from Mr. A.Y. Lodhi.

A.D. The Arabic word is 'sahil' which means 'coast' but the Arabs used the plural form 'sawahil', and it is from this form that we have the word 'swahili' in current usage. Today, there is a tendency to use the term Mswahili to describe any East African who speaks Kiswahili. The surface culture of the native Waswahili is islamic, but their underlying culture is Bantu (c.f. Lodhi 1994).⁷ Between 100 B.C. and the 10th Century A.D., the Arabs and Persians who came to East Africa used to call the people ZANJ (or ZINJ) which means black. Every Arab who was coming to East Africa said he was going to ZANJBAR, i.e. the land of black people. The term 'bar' means 'land'. This distinction was important because Ethiopians, Somali and other cushitic groups who are Afroasians like the Arabs lived and still live in the horn of Africa to this day. Today, the name ZANJBAR is used only to refer to an island whose modern name is ZANZIBAR (i.e. zanzbar) but whose Kiswahili name is Unguja.

3.1 THE HISTORY OF CONTACTS ON THE EAST AFRICAN COAST

The Arabs, some Greeks from Alexandria in Egypt, and some Chinese were, mostly, the only visitors to the East African coast between 100 A.D. and 1498. In 1498, the portuguese rounded the Cape of Good Hope and landed in Sofala in Mozambique. From there they came to Mombasa and Malindi on the modern Kenya coast looking for the sea route to India. Between 1500 and 1510, the Portuguese moved up and seized all the Kiswahili lands and islands and kept the East African gold, ivory, and slave trade in their own hands, and then blocked the route to India to everyone except themselves. In 1698, the Waswahili people, led by powerful and established Arab/oriental merchants and families of Mombasa invited the sultan of Oman to save them from what they perceived as the Portuguese threat to their survival. Little did they know what was to follow. The Omanis came and drove out the Portuguese. In 1798, when General Napoleon landed in Egypt, the British quickly signed a treaty of friendship and defence with the sultan of Oman to check the French, and, as a reward for the cooperation of the Busaidi dynasty, recognized the sultan of Oman as ruler of the East African coast and its possessions. This was resented by the Waswahili of all walks of life, but there was nothing they could do. In 1840, when the ruling sultan, Seyyid Said, realized that the Waswahili, and even Arab merchants, were not obeying him and were not prepared to share their wealth from the lucrative trade with India and Arabia with him, he moved his headquarters from Oman to Zanzibar, where the people were more friendly. Mombasa was very hostile to foreign domination. After this, all trade was in Arab and Indian hands and the East coast became an Arab colony, and

⁷ In order to verify this assertion, one only needs to attend a childbirth, naming, exorcism or medicine man's ceremony etc. Some references are Harries (1965), Middleton (1992) and Allen (1993).

trade emporium of international proportions for the first time. The sultan brought many Indian merchants from Indian to trade in East Africa, especially in the interior. The Americans (1837), the British (1841), the French (1844), all established consulates in Zanzibar to look after their trading interests until the scramble for Africa began in 1886. The sultanate lost control of the hinterland to the Europeans, but the dynasty in Zanzibar did not end until 1964 when it was overthrown in a revolution. The Europeans, who robbed the sultan of his control of the interior trade in East Africa, imposed colonial rule on their East African dominions. The people were forced to learn Europeans languages like German (up to 1914), English, and French. The situation has not changed since independence.

The fact of the matter is that, even when the sultan made Arabic his official language in East Africa, it was used only in his palace and by 'true' Arabs and diplomats. The 99% of the Waswahili never used Arabic because, even though they were muslims, they did not understand Arabic and regarded it either as a foreign nuisance (if a nationalist) or the language of Allah, and of mysticism or miracles (if devout), which could only be understood and used properly by the mullahs. So, even to this day, the people speak their Bantu language Kiswahili, but only a few can speak Arabic (c.f. Amidu 1985/89).

Summary of Contacts up to Independence

Date	People
200 B.C. - 950 A.D.	Arabs, Persians, Greeks, Indian, and Chinese traders.
1498 - 1729	Portuguese, Arabs, Persians (Iranians), Indian traders.
1798 - 1963	English and French traders, and colonizers from their countries.
1887 - 1914	German traders, followed by German colonizers.
1837 - 1963	Traders from the United States of America.
1961 - Present Day	Geo-political colonialism from the U.S.A, U.S.S.R (now just Russia), China, Japan, Britain, France, Belgium, South Africa.

4. THE SPREAD OF THE LANGUAGE KISWAHILI

As we can see, Kiswahili came from the interior to the coast. Later, it moved from the coast back into the interior again. How did this happen? Under the influence of Arabs, Persians, Indians, Europeans and Americans, there was a high demand for exotic goods and labour force such as ivory, slaves, animal skins and horns, live animals like cattle and sheep, African timber, gums, fragrant wood, cloves, copra, and minerals such as gold. To get these goods, it became necessary, especially in the 19th century, to send traders into the interior or cultivate them on the coast. Long caravans carried goods like silk and cotton cloths, beads, necklaces, sugar, and guns etc., from the coast into the hinterland and bartered these for the goods

they wanted. At times, when the Waswahili and Arab traders could not persuade the people to sell their goods willingly, they would use force. The traders from the coast spoke Kiswahili which was related to the languages in the interior. All the porters and assistants and slaves who helped to carry goods to and from the coast all used Kiswahili, and all the people who came to look for work with the traders on the trade routes learnt Kiswahili. By the time the slave trade was stopped in 1873, the language had become the lingua franca of several countries. Another thing which helped the language to expand was the arrival of missionaries to East Africa in the 19th century. The missionaries wrote grammars and dictionaries in 1850, 1870, and 1882 in order to spread Christianity. Since then a lot of grammatical work has been produced on the language. The German colonial government in Tanganyika from 1887-1914 made Kiswahili the compulsory language of junior civil and public service administration.

Kiswahili is spoken as a mother-tongue in Somalia and used by others (approx. 0.9 mill. out of 7.6 mill.), and Kenya along the coast and off-shore islands, in Tanzania on the mainland and off-shore islands such as Zanzibar, Pemba etc. (used by nearly all 25.9 mill. citizens), on the Comoro Islands (all 0.5 mill. inhabitants), along the northern coastal areas of Mozambique and off-shore islands (approx. 0.2 mill.), and the northern part of Madagascar (approx. 0.1 mill.). It is also spoken in the south western and northern parts of Uganda, and increasingly in the whole of Uganda (approx. 8.5 mill. out of 17.7 mill.). It is spoken as a mother tongue in eastern Zaire and used by other groups (ca. 9.1-12.2 mill. out of 34.9 mill.), the lake regions of Rwanda (0.9 mill.) and Burundi (0.5 mill.), Zambia (0.1 mill.) and Malawi (0.5-1.0 mill.). Today, Kiswahili is the national and official language of Tanzania, the language of Parliament in Kenya as well as its unofficial lingua franca (used by nearly all 25.5 mill. inhabitants). Total estimated speakers and users is approx. 66-72.6 millions and could be in excess of 80 millions (c.f. Lodhi 1993; Amidu 1994a). Externally, Kiswahili has spread to the Middle East, where there are pockets of Kiswahili speaking peoples, to Europe and America as well as Asia, and some parts of West Africa (c.f. Amidu 1985/89, 1994a; Lodhi 1992, 1993). In all these continents and countries, Kiswahili is a subject of academic study.

Summary of Spread of Kiswahili

Geographical Area	Country
1. East and Central Africa	Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Zaire, Zambia, Malawi, Rwanda, Burundi, Comoro.
2. West Africa	Ghana, Nigeria. (Academic use only).
3. Europe and America	(Academic use only).
4. Middle East and India	Small settlements, esp. Oman, and Gulf States. (Academic use).
5. Far East	Japan, China, the Koreas. (Academic use only).

5. CONCLUSION

Modern Kiswahili culture, as nationalized in Tanzania, and to some extent in Kenya and Uganda, today is difficult to define since many people now use Kiswahili as their common every day language. Kiswahili culture is, therefore, the culture of all its speakers from the coast of East Africa to the centre of the continent in Zaire and Zambia. But we should be careful to distinguish the Pan-African culture of Kiswahili from the traditional mother-tongue speaker's culture, which belongs essentially to the East African littoral area, to which we may add some settlements in the interior of Africa, and small pockets overseas. Kiswahili is the Key to all the languages which have spread from latitude 10° down to the tip of South Africa. Its oral literature, which goes back to 100 B.C., is rich in proverbs, aphorisms, anagrams, riddles and anecdotes, and a wide variety of music and dance songs. Kiswahili is not limited by race, colour or religion. Dr Krapf foresaw that, one day, Kiswahili would get to the West Coast of Africa. Kiswahili has indeed reached West Africa, not as the lingua franca he had dreamt about, but as an important academic subject. Whoever, wishes to understand the hearts and minds of Africa and Africans is well advised to begin with the tried and tested Kiswahili, because, it is full of diversities and surprises. It is also tailor-made for world communication as a result of contacts with all the really important languages of the world.

The topics discussed above reflect some of the questions which Kiswahili teaching and studies are most concerned with in Norway, and Scandinavia, and should be concerned with - the humanity of man as seen through an African people, their language, their literatures and cultures, and their civilization.

Summary of some Factors

A. Factors which made Kiswahili to spread

1. Trade with the hinterland and interior (esp. gold, slaves, ivory, cloth);
2. Colonial rule and Administration (Germans and British);
3. Missionaries (Krapf, Steere, Sacleux, Ashton, Taylor, Harries);
4. Independence struggle and national identity;
5. World interests (Education, aid, NGOs), and Pan-Africanism;
6. Refugees and migrants.

B. Estimated number of speakers (c.f. Lodhi 1993).

- | | |
|--------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Mother tongue | ca. 5-8 millions; |
| 2. Second Language | ca. 28-35 millions; |
| 3. Third language | ca. 30-42 millions. |
| Total | ca. 63-85 millions. |

C. Utility

1. Language of everyday activity in East and Central Africa;
2. Language of administration and education in Tanzania;
3. Language of Parliament in Kenya;
4. U.N. listed language of importance and one possible continental language of the O.A.U.;
5. Broadcasting media in East, Central, West African, European, and Far-Eastern countries.

D. Career

Education, fieldwork, government overseas organisations, non-government organisations, OAU, UNESCO, WFP/WHO IN E. & C. Africa, teaching in East, Central and West African universities and schools, communication and journalism, art for art, etc.

* This paper is a revised and expanded version of one part of a short lecture I gave to heads of secondary schools from in and around Central Norway, during the *Rådgiverseminar for rådgivere i den videregående skole* at the University of Trondheim on 11 February, 1994 on the subject 'Orientering om studiet i Swahili ved Institutt for Lingvistisk: Hva er Kiswahili?'. Since 1988, I have been working on just such a topic. Prof. Ebenezer B. Laing of the University of Ghana first asked me the question, and, then, suggested that I write something for a general readership. I am grateful to Prof. Lars Hellan of the Linguistics dept. for proposing me for the lecture, and for his tireless efforts in support of Kiswahili. I thank Mr. Tor Bollingmo, the Informasjonskonsulent at the Studieadministrasjon of UNIT for inviting me to deliver the lecture and assisting with the preparations. I also thank E.B. Laing for his encouragement and wise counsel. Finally, I wish to thank Mr. Abdulaziz Yusuf Lodhi of Uppsala for reading through the draft, and for his invaluable comments and numerous suggestions. All errors and shortcomings are my own.

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