

# **Kiswahili, a Continental Language: How Possible Is It? (Part I)**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

African leaders, officials of the Organisation of African Unity, African citizens of the continent and sympathizers of African problems have for many years now been calling for one or more African languages to be used as the continent's official lingua franca(s), for official as well as intra-national business, and other social interactions in place of colonial languages. Among the languages most favoured for this task is Kiswahili.

What, it seems, the advocates of the use of Kiswahili as Africa's lingua franca have not taken into account is how far these hopes, aspirations and objectives can be attained satisfactorily. For example, how easy will it be to use Kiswahili for official national business or for intra-national transactions and communication? Another question which is equally relevant is for what purpose will Kiswahili as a continental lingua franca serve? We need to bear in mind that in terms of prestige and social status, education and social advancement, science, technology and international relations, European 'colonial' languages still predominate in Africa and in African affairs. It is undeniable that Kiswahili is a negro-african language of black peoples enriched by contacts with Oriental and European cultures for the expression of 'international knowledge' (c.f. Amidu 1995). Even so, we observe that on the African continent Arabic is predominant in the north of Africa as a lingua franca, Hausa is widely used in West Africa as another lingua franca, Lingala is used in Zaire, Congo-Brazzaville, and the Central African Republic as a lingua-franca, and Zulu is also widely used in South Africa. Apart from these, there are a few lingua francas peculiar to some African nation-states: for example, Akan

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<sup>1</sup> This work is a revised version of a paper of the same title originally submitted to the **African Studies Review** of the University of Ghana in July 1992. The report of the assessors was not received until August 1993. I delivered a lecture on the same topic at the university of Uppsala, on 20 January, 1994. The present version takes into account the advice of the assessors appointed by the ASR journal, and the questions of the audience in Uppsala. The decision to publish the work elsewhere is based on practical considerations. I am grateful to ASR for the comments of its assessors. I thank Prof. E. Laing of the University of Ghana whose many questions inspired this work. Finally, I am indebted to the Kiswahili Section of the University of Uppsala, headed by Mr. A.Y. Lodhi, for providing me a forum to test my ideas. All shortcomings are entirely my responsibility.

in Ghana and across the border in Cote d'Ivoire, Chichewa in Malawi, etc. The list is long (c.f. Alexandre 1972: 8-17). We may add also that apart from the distribution of lingua francas on the continent, there is also the question of national or ethnic pride, or both, associated not only with the present lingua francas but also with the hundreds of indigenous languages of Africa. So the question may be posed about what kinds of people in Africa are going to use Kiswahili as a continental lingua franca or working language? Will they be drawn from the elite classes such as those in business and governmental organisations, as well as educational institutions and other similar bodies, or from the broad majority of ordinary men and women on the streets of Africa or even from a mixture of the two types of people? Perhaps the crucial question is why should any of these people wish to use Kiswahili (or any other language, for that matter, apart from their own) in the first place, either in place of their own languages or lingua francas, or in conjunction with these? Lastly, at the level of implementation of a continental lingua franca policy, the question may be asked as to whether, given Africa's multifaceted problems of war, hunger, disease and over-population, we have sufficient financial resources and budgetary arrangements to carry such a policy through to the end, assuming we have the total commitment and support from the African people and their governments. Lastly, is it even desirable to have a continental lingua franca or a common working language for Africa? The O.A.U. ministerial conference in Abuja, Nigeria, in 1990, proposed Kiswahili as the working language of the organisation and brought into the open the question of lingua franca. We have, therefore, selected Kiswahili for special study, but our arguments could benefit other potential continental lingua francas as well.

Part I of our survey begins in Eastern and Central Africa where we trace the course of some of the actions which have made Kiswahili the lingua franca of these geographical areas. Next, we shall look at Kiswahili in other Bantu speaking areas of Southern Africa. Lastly, in part II, we shall look at Kiswahili in the Sudan, North Africa, within the context of Pan-Arabism, and in West African institutions. We shall then propose some solutions which, in our opinion, might hasten the advent of a continental lingua franca in the form of Kiswahili, or some other language. We conclude, however, by claiming that the idea of Kiswahili as a continental language will remain for a long time elusive.

## 1.1 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This paper is ultimately a survey of the development of Kiswahili studies in some countries in Africa, especially in higher education. As such it is limited in scope and range. Our objective is to find some answers to the questions we have asked above and to bring up new ones through debate which will engender deeper studies by individual scholars. As a result, we may not be as exhaustive in this paper as some readers might wish. But the plan of the work is to enable the reader to

compare the growth of Kiswahili within its Bantu sphere (part I) with its development in the rest of Africa (part II). If, therefore, this work serves to focus attention on some of the pressing problems we come across in the survey, then our purpose has been fulfilled.

## 2. KISWAHILI AS AN OFFICIAL LINGUA FRANCA OF EAST AND CENTRAL AFRICA: THE EARLY ATTEMPTS

Kiswahili was first recognised as a potential continental lingua franca by the German missionary, scholar and grammarian of the Church Missionary Society (C.M.S.), Dr. Ludwig J. Krapf. In his preface of 1845 to the first ever grammar book of Kiswahili (1850) and in the preface to the first dictionary of Kiswahili (1882) one finds these views clearly expressed. Dr. Krapf saw a pattern developing which would link Kiswahili on the East coast of Africa to the languages of Western and Southern Africa, a sort of caravan from the East coast to the South and West coasts and back again. Dr. Krapf also asserted that Kiswahili was the key to all the languages in the interior of Africa from Latitude 10° down to the Cape Colony. Krapf noted that Kiswahili was already widely used by merchants and traders from the Middle and Far East and from Europe and America for trade on the coast of East Africa and with inland people of Bantu stock. What then were the advantages of Kiswahili which made it an unofficial lingua franca in Eastern Africa?

### 2.1 ADVANTAGES OF KISWAHILI OVER OTHER LANGUAGES

Dr. Krapf noted that the main advantages that Kiswahili has over the other languages are: (1) Close grammatical affinity with the languages of the hinterland of Africa all the way to South Africa and perhaps West Africa; (2) It is the vehicle of international and intra-national commerce and business transactions on the East coast; (3) It is the key to the rapid propagation of the Gospel in Africa, and he might have added also the Koran; and (4) It is also the key to a rapid and accelerated education and training of the Africans in the Humanities, Science and Technologies of the more advanced parts of the world. Not all of these advantages have been exploited, notably no. 4 (c.f. Amidu 1995). Dr. Krapf played down the role that national and ethnic sentiments could play in the acceptability of Kiswahili as a lingua franca in Africa. However, we cannot afford to ignore today these sentiments in the build up to a possible future declaration of Kiswahili as the continental (working) lingua franca of Africa.

### 2.1.1 The German Solution

The Germans ruled Tanganyika from 1886. They accepted the Krapf arguments that ethnic and national sentiments must not be allowed to stand in the way of the development of an official lingua franca centred on Kiswahili in order to speed up the opening up of the continent to investment, trade, education and proselytism. The Germans, therefore, made Kiswahili the official language of administration, trade, commerce and education throughout the territories under their jurisdiction. However, they limited Kiswahili to 'grassroot' administration to be used by administrators, educationists and others, such as the 'akida' (headman/headmen) who acted as the intermediaries between the Africans and the German officials. German remained the language of senior level administration and of international affairs.

### 2.1.2 The English Solution

Great Britain inherited the German colony of Tanganyika after the First World War and decided to carry on with the German Kiswahili lingua franca policy in that country. They also decided to extend this policy to Kenya and Uganda. Unforeseen difficulties arose in Uganda. According to Whiteley (1969: 70) Governor Sir W.F. Gowers proposed in 1927 that Kiswahili be adopted as the lingua franca for most of the country except Buganda along lines similar to those proposed in Tanganyika and Kenya. This modest request drew strong protests from the Kabaka of Buganda, Sir Daudi Chwa in the **Uganda News**, dated 22 February, 1929. But he was not the only opponent of Kiswahili. Support came from an unlikely source. The Uganda Bishops also protested to the Secretary of State over the same issue, preferring Luganda to Kiswahili (c.f. Whiteley 1969: 70-1). Kiswahili, the former claimed, was a language of slaves and of bondage, and the latter detested it because it was associated with Islam, a possible rival to Christianity. So, the question arises as to whether today Africa can implement a continental or working lingua franca policy successfully in the light of the experiences of the East African countries, past and present. We need, therefore, to turn our attention to the current state of the language in East Africa and elsewhere to find an objective answer to the question.

Before concluding this section, we wish to point out that Kiswahili is also spoken as an unofficial lingua franca in parts of Malawi bordering Tanzania, in parts of Rwanda and Burundi, such as Ujiji, parts of Zaire (the former Belgian Congo) where it is actually recognized as one of the official languages of the country, and in small locations in Zambia, and parts of Madagascar (c.f. Amidu 1995).

### 3. THE PLACE OF KISWAHILI IN EAST AFRICA SINCE INDEPENDENCE

The struggle for independence in the former colonies of Tanganyika, Kenya and Uganda brought to the fore the fact that these emergent nations were made up of various ethnic groups welded together by a common colonial heritage. Even though many of the leaders spoke one or more colonial languages, these languages were, for the most part, not spoken or understood by their fellow countrymen. Many of those could, however, speak or understand Kiswahili. Many of the educated elite could also speak Kiswahili. In such a multi-cultural environment, Kiswahili was God sent. However, today we have problems in post-independent Africa of strong ethnic and religious consciousness. The problem may be stated in the following manner: Given the fact that Kiswahili has great use as a unifying factor, as the independence struggle in East Africa showed, and as a political tool for social cohesion across ethnic and religious divides, how can those parts of the country or the continent where Kiswahili is little used or not used at all also acquire it as a useful means of communication and education without the proclivities of ethnic or national loyalties and identities in our present day and age? Let us turn to the countries of Tanzania and Kenya for an answer.

#### 3.1 SURVEY OF EAST AFRICAN COUNTRIES I: TANZANIA

The United Republic of Tanzania was the first to gain independence in December, 1961 among the countries of Eastern Africa. The new country declared under the banner of T.A.N.U. (Tanganyika (later Tanzania) African National Union) led by Julius Nyerere, that Kiswahili was its official language, but English was to be retained as the joint official language for transnational transactions (c.f. also Bamgbose 1991: 30-33). In this way, Kiswahili occupies in Tanzania almost the same position in the administrative set up as was the case under German and British rule. This is evidently a contradiction of nationhood. In 1967 the National Swahili Council, known as Baraza la Kiswahili la Taifa (BAKITA) was established, and in 1977 a Universal Primary Education (UPE) was adopted for the nation centered on Kiswahili. We wish to point out, therefore, that in modern Tanzania, Kiswahili is not restricted to any particular class of people, but is available to peoples from all walks of life. Kiswahili is the language of the ruling Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM), the successor to TANU. It is heartening to note also that all the political parties which have sprung up since multi-party politics was introduced into the country in 1992 make use of Kiswahili and not English. There is an on-going conflict (via words rather than blows) between Muslims and Christians/traditionalists over national rights and the sharing of economic resources which threatens to split the union between islanders, seen as Muslims, and mainlanders, seen as mostly Christians and traditionalists. The wider conflict is

seen as a question of Islam versus Christianity and traditional religions (c.f. Mazrui and Shariff 1994; **Shaba**, Aprili 14-17, 1995, pp. 1, 3, 6; Hamad 1995). The irony of Islam versus Christianity/traditionalist conflict is that the debate over political, economic, and religious rights is conducted entirely in Kiswahili, suggesting that the Kiswahili language itself is neutral in all matters of the national life of Tanzania! It belongs to neither Muslims, nor Christians nor traditionalists, but to all Tanzanians. Newspapers, magazines, broadcasting etc., are all conducted principally in Kiswahili. A statistical survey, in *Africa South of the Sahara* (1994: 904), shows that since the Universal Primary Education policy of 1977, the number of primary school pupils has gone up. There were 3,258,601 pupils in 10,431 schools in 1989. Since Kiswahili is the language of all primary education, this represents an increase in the number of people who are acquiring formal education in the language. By contrast, the number in secondary schools was only 132,485 in the same year. Another success story for Kiswahili is in the area of adult literacy. The figures show an increase from 33% in 1967 to a staggering 90.4% by 1986. This means that since the medium of instruction is Kiswahili nearly every adult Tanzanian was literate in Kiswahili in 1986. In spite of all these achievements, the contradictions of nationhood referred to above dug the language status of Kiswahili. This is because in important areas, such as university education in arts, medicine, science, technical and agricultural education, and diplomatic intercourse, English ranks higher than Kiswahili. These factors show that despite years of effort and expenditure, Kiswahili has still not come of age as the language of the people and of all national affairs. This gives the impression that Kiswahili is still a second rate language in its own nation and in the world. If, however, other countries outside of East Africa are to be persuaded to use the language, then this second class status we have referred to will have to be done away with.

The use of Kiswahili in the field of education is interesting. At university level, courses were first offered in 1964 as part of the linguistics programme. However, no degree courses were offered until 1971. Dr. Chagula, Principal of the University College of Dar es Salaam, explained the reasons for the difficulties which Tanzania and East Africa faced in developing Kiswahili as a full university subject in a letter dated 23 January, 1967, in reply to a request for staff assistance dated 4 January, 1967, from Professor R.F. Amonoo, the then acting Head of Department of the Department of Modern Languages, University of Ghana. Dr. Chagula writes:

... I am very much aware of the difficulties which you will continue to encounter in connection with the teaching of Swahili at University level. We ourselves are still developing a programme of Swahili at University College, Dar es Salaam but we cannot finalize this programme until a comprehensive course in Swahili has been worked out for the 5th and 6th forms in East Africa. We hope that when this is done, Swahili will take its rightful place as one of the modern languages taught in the University.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The quotation has been taken from the Department of Modern Languages, University of Ghana, Swahili, File No. ML/E/10 (d). m 1964-1980.

The letter was copied to the Head of the Department of Languages and Linguistics of the University College, Professor W.H. Whiteley. Whiteley (1969: 102) refers to some of the efforts made by various ministries to hasten the use of Kiswahili at School Certificate and other levels of education.

What progress was made in the attempt to uplift Kiswahili education to "its rightful place...in the university"? In the 1968-69 academic year, the total number of final year students who were taking Kiswahili courses was around 15. It included students who have gone on to become very well-known in literary and academic circles such as Ebrahim Hussein, the famous Tanzanian playwright, Farouk Topan, a well-know academic scholar of literature and creative writer, U.A.H. Turuka, an academic with the University of Dar es Salaam who has been writing his Ph.D at the SOAS, University of London for some years now, and many others. According to the Head of Department, 1968/69, one Dr. J.W. Woodhead, a full degree programme was due to begin in July 1969 in his department, the Department of Languages and Linguistics. A letter he wrote to R.F. Amonoo on 22 January, 1969, in reply to another request from the latter for assistance with staffing, dated 15 January, 1969, explains that the Kiswahili programme would consist of B.A. Swahili and Linguistics and B. Phil Swahili and Linguistics courses. The latter was, according to Dr. Woodhead, "...designed both to continue work of the B.A. Swahili and Linguistics to a good academic level by means of course work, and as a preparation for research to M.A. and Ph.D."<sup>3</sup> The student enrolment for the proposed courses was 25, and the first graduates were expected in 1972 (see Footnote 2). Following Maganga (1991: 7), however, it appears that this programme was overtaken by events. The University College became a full University in 1970, and, in the same year, the Department of Kiswahili was created to offer degree courses in Kiswahili in combination with subjects from other departments, such as linguistics. The Kiswahili degree programme of 1969 referred to above was consequently divided between the new Department of Kiswahili and other relevant arts and social science departments and not just linguistics. The distinction between B.A. and B.Phil became blurred.

In 1971, the year when the present writer studied briefly at the University of Dar es Salaam, Professor Clement Maganga was the Ag. Head of Department with the official designation 'Kaimu mkuu wa Idara ya Kiswahili'. Among the staff was the late Professor Lyndon Harries who was mostly in-charge of Kiswahili literature in the 2nd and final years. As short-term students from Ghana, we attended lectures with all the years I-III. Perhaps the most famous member of the 1971-72 final batch was my colleague the Rev. Felician M.V. Nkwera. He is a known creative writer. He has produced a grammar book for secondary schools and is a controversial charismatic prelate well-known to the Vatican.

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<sup>3</sup> c.f. p. 4 of Working Paper I: Development of Swahili, 1968.

### 3.1.1 The Expansion of Kiswahili in and outside Tanzania by Tanzanians

Let us consider how Tanzania spearheaded the formal development, expansion and integration of Kiswahili into its national fabric. The National Kiswahili Council (Baraza la Kiswahili la Taifa) was the main body charged by Parliament in 1967 with the task of spearheading the development, expansion and integration of Kiswahili into all areas of Tanzanian life. Its functions were twofold: 1. To ensure the total development of Kiswahili for use in all national and official functions and life of Tanzania; and 2. To provide the means for achieving this goal. Shortly after receiving this mandate, Kiswahili was introduced as a full subject at University level with its own department, while a review of Kiswahili curricula took place in schools of the East African Federation. These reforms brought Kiswahili to the same academic and international status as the official language English. Preparations were made towards Universal Primary Education and this took place, as we have seen already, in 1977. At the international level, the University of Dar es Salaam receives and provides training or remedial courses to students from all over the world (such as Ghana, Nigeria, China, Western Europe and until recently the former Eastern Block countries) who can afford to pay, or who hold scholarships.

### 3.1.2 Staffing, Student Enrolment and other Academic Activities

Even though the Department of Kiswahili is a smaller unit than one would expect, it is supported by the Department of Foreign Languages and Linguistics, where we have Professor H. Batibo among others, the Institute of Kiswahili Research (Taasisi ya Uchunguzi wa Kiswahili) and the School of Performing Arts, where the reputable playwright Penina Mlamba (alias Penina Muhando) is doyenne. The veteran Prof. C. Maganga is still with the Department of Kiswahili, but will soon retire. The department is also well-known for its distinguished novelist and poet, Professor Euphrase Kezilahabi. According to Maganga (1991) the total number of students produced from 1970-1989 stands at 1,887. Also at 1989, there were 4 Associate Professors in the Department, 4 Senior Lecturers, and 1 Lecturer. Maganga also states that with regard to post-graduate training, "Since the 1975/76 academic year, the Department started offering an MA in linguistics (by course work). This programme is run jointly with the Department of Foreign Languages and Linguistics" (Maganga 1991: 10).

In addition to the University of Dar es Salaam, a political university or rather college, known as Chuo Kikuu cha TANU Kivukoni, was established to cater for the political ideology of the country and the one-party state. The fate of this university in the present political system is in the balance since the country is due to embrace pluralistic democracy after elections in October 1995. The Kiswahili

native heartlands were not left out of the formal educational system. On the Island of Zanzibar, a Taasisi ya Kiswahili na Lugha za Kigeni (Institute of Kiswahili and Foreign Languages) was established. It also provides courses in Kiswahili for Tanzanians as well as for students from all over the world who can afford it. It has representatives on the National Swahili Council. One of its former directors, Dr. Said A. Mohammed is a well-known writer of prose and poetry.

Before independence, the main body in-charge of developing and expanding the use of Kiswahili was the Institute of Kiswahili Research (Taasisi ya Uchunguzi wa Kiswahili). It was founded in 1930 and has changed its name several times, 1954, 1964 and 1972. Since 1964, its main activity has been in research and research oriented activities which relate directly to Kiswahili. One of its major achievements has been in lexicography or dictionary making and the publication of journals. For example, the Institute conceived the idea of a dictionary in 1964, upon its elevation from a mere committee to that of an institute (c.f. Whiteley 1969: 93, 105-110; Mwansoko 1984: 18-33; Noronha 1991: 3). But it was not until 1981 that it finally published its long awaited dictionary of Standard Kiswahili under the title *Kamusi ya Kiswahili Sanifu* (Dictionary of Standard Kiswahili). Part of the delay was due to a change of focus. When the National Swahili Council was established, it was charged by Parliament to ensure that the new dictionary would be entirely in Kiswahili. 1990 was another successful year for the Institute. The much expected complete version of the dictionary of biology, physics and chemistry was published under the title *Kamusi Sanifu Ya Biolojia, Fizikia, na Kemia*. Several other smaller works have been published and an English-Kiswahili dictionary has been in the offering for some time. The National Swahili Council (Baraza la Kiswahili la Taifa) was different from the Institute and in fact more powerful than it. The Institute of Kiswahili Research was perceived to be too theoretically oriented, less directly beneficial to the nation. The National Swahili Council offers a practical avenue for implementing research findings on Kiswahili for the benefit of all Tanzanians.

Given the success of the National Swahili Council in integrating Kiswahili into Tanzania's national life, continental language programmes will do well to establish a similar body instead of a mere research oriented Bureau of Languages, if they hope to expand and integrate Kiswahili into the national life of other African countries, even as a working language. The experience gained by the staff of the National Swahili Council would be invaluable to the working lingua franca project.

Two comments are, however, relevant before we lay the subject to rest. Firstly, even though the dictionaries produced by the Institute of Kiswahili Research in Tanzania are remarkable achievements, in the light of the projected development of a continental language these monolingual dictionaries will be of little use to the rest of Africa where Kiswahili is yet to gain a foothold. It is perhaps time to produce bilingual versions of the dictionaries, but in the major languages of Africa, to begin with, and then in the other national languages of Africa, perhaps at the request of and in association with national language institutions in African countries. The 'colonial language' dictionaries are still useful and cannot yet be put into the archives. For the present, therefore, Africans will continue to rely on bilingual

dictionaries produced largely with the initiative of the Western World. Secondly, the cost of studying in Tanzania is prohibitive. The policies of institutions in Tanzania (the same is true also of Kenya) have been to charge African students, who go to study in the country, very high dollar fees, the same in fact as for non-Africans whose countries have stronger economies and wealth. This has made it increasingly difficult for countries like Ghana and Nigeria to send significant numbers of students to Tanzania for additional proficiency training. This situation in which fellow Africans are charged 'economic' fees, does not encourage the development of Kiswahili (or any other African language) as a continental working language, particularly at a time when most African countries face severe economic hardships. A way must be found to encourage African countries to be willing to invest in a continental language programme.

### 3.1.3 Difficulties and Reforms

From 1981, the internal situation in Tanzania itself was unclear, particularly within parts of the educational system. A survey in **Africa Now**, December (1981: 72), concluded that:

In fact the past few years have been marked for their "review" character. In 1974 the major innovation in the Tanzanian educational system - Nyerere's Education for Self-reliance - underwent a second look at a meeting in Musoma of the Party's national executive. The outcome was the Musoma Resolution... Now comes the commission...; another this time a "Ministerial" commission was formed a few weeks ago. Its terms of reference were to examine the language situation in Tanzania - the use of English and Kiswahili - and to recommend the exact place that each language ought to take in the educational system.

These educational bottlenecks give a clear indication of the place of Kiswahili in the country as a whole and an insight into the kinds of problems that a continental lingua franca project will face. We know now that through much work Kiswahili has become the common basic means of communication not just in the primary schools but for all intra-governmental activities. Kiswahili is the language of Parliament and at least the lower and middle courts of the Judiciary and is used at all public functions. In order to achieve this feat, a massive drive to train teachers of various disciplines was launched as early as 1967. Old colleges of education were expanded and new ones set up. The College of Education at Iringa, for example, was active in the development of new terms and expressions for use in primary education and the training of teachers as far back as 1971 when the writer and his class-mate from Ghana Mr. Isaac Aggrey paid a brief visit to it. Most primary school leavers can communicate fluently and competently in Kiswahili as in their mother tongue, but they know too little English. Vocational training and technical education underwent similar transformations including the use of technical and specialised terms many of which change rather rapidly. All these reforms cost

money and Tanzania is a poor country. The path, therefore, has not always been easy. Consider the situation of near desperation which faced the country in 1969 as can be seen in the letter of Dr. J.W. Woodhead dated 22 January, 1969, referred to above. The letter states with reference to the University of Ghana's need for teachers that:

However, almost all our students are on Ministry of Education bursaries and are bonded to teaching for five years after graduation. The need for teachers - and especially teachers of Swahili - is so great that up to date we have not even had anyone released from bonding to take a post-graduate course with us (see Footnote 2).

The enclosed copy of a proposal for B.A. Swahili and Linguistics in Dar es Salaam (c.f. Section 3.1) to Prof. Amonoo states in the introduction that:

There is very serious lack of linguistic work on Swahili, of teaching materials, and of texts; and this is also true of the schools. We have two members of the Department devoting the major part of their time to Swahili research and the preparation of teaching materials, and some Swahili teaching has begun. It is, therefore, essential to plan the whole development so that it is in line with Tanzanian needs and priorities, and so that it is clear where each particular piece of research undertaken fits into the general plan (see Footnote 2).

By 1974, therefore, even though a lot had been achieved, it became necessary to resolve some of the contradictions of the national language policy. For example, English remained (and still remains) the official language used for international relations and higher education. There were fears in 1974, and there are fears today, that this modest but important role played by English would affect manpower development unless English was used more and more in intermediate education, such as second cycle schools and colleges, to train middle and high level manpower for accelerated economic and technological growth. In short, by 1974, the nation could not wait, and today it can no longer wait, for Kiswahili to mature sufficiently enough to replace English in a changing world. It was this explosive contradiction which prompted the "review" of 1974. By 1982, the economic situation in the country generally had deteriorated to the extent that "Nyerere suspended all new development projects and launched a three year structural adjustment programme (SAP)" (Buren 1994: 888). This finally culminated in the IMF rescue package of 1986. Even so, Buren reports (p. 888) that by 1990, "Five-year plans have virtually been abandoned, and development planning is now undertaken year by year; priority areas for 1990/91 and 1991/92 were transport infrastructure, health and education." One of the areas affected by the Economic Recovery Programme is Kiswahili. The IMF conditions favour English over Kiswahili. For example, the severe economic recession has affected Kiswahili book production in recent years especially from about 1984. English books are more easily available from Britain and other countries, and cost less to produce. This situation is not different from that described by Whiteley (1969: 102-103). The collapse of the East African

Literature Bureau following the demise of the East Africa Economic Federation worsened the book situation. But the fact that the countries of East Africa cannot hold together in cooperation and linguistic development due to political differences, makes it difficult to see how a viable continental lingua franca which depends on close cooperation between states can develop and survive on the continent.

The main problem with Kiswahili in the midst of the economic problems of Tanzania is that it is increasingly difficult to give a proper place to the language in national development. For example, since 1990, the journal of the Institute of Kiswahili Research has either failed to appear due to lack of funds or has appeared irregularly. This is a clear set back to the development of the language inside and outside Tanzania. In this kind of situation, it will be difficult to convince other Africans outside of East Africa of the international usefulness of the language, especially if linguistic materials can become so scarce as to be unavailable elsewhere. We shall return to this topic again later on. This type of contradiction is likely to militate against the development of Kiswahili as a continental lingua franca.

We conclude this study of Tanzania by observing that a lot has been achieved since the recognition of Kiswahili as a full subject in higher education in Tanzania along with the colonial languages. Despite these considerable strides, English remains the 'primus inter pares' among the official languages. So, the question that is increasingly being asked, and which is now also of continental interest is: How soon can Kiswahili become the sole official language of Tanzania? This question is important since if other African nations are to introduce Kiswahili as a continental working lingua franca, they would want it to replace the colonial languages, and be used in all international endeavours. The outlook is rather bleak for a Kiswahili based continental lingua franca or working language. The dilemma is that Kiswahili which remains a continental language without any international, i.e. extra continental dimension, will not prove convincingly its usefulness either on the continent as a whole or in the individual nations of Africa. In order to break out of its narrow East and Central African base three things need to be done. Firstly, bodies for accelerating the development of Kiswahili to the international level and higher education would have to be established. Secondly, educational reforms which would ultimately replace English at all levels of education will be required. Thirdly, sustained book and reading material development, including up-to-date dictionaries, to support all spheres of learning in Kiswahili and not just the literary field, would have to be undertaken vigorously. In all the three problem areas one could learn from Tanzania's experiences.

### 3.2 SURVEY OF EAST AFRICAN COUNTRIES II: KENYA

Kenya, under the banner of the Kenya African Nation Union (KANU) led by the late Jomo Kenyatta, gained independence in 1963. In 1969, President Kenyatta

proposed that Kiswahili should be used as the language of Parliament (c.f. Harries 1976: 153). English was, however to remain the official language as in Tanzania. In July, 1974 Kiswahili was made the national language of Kenya and remains so to this day. The constitution was amended to make Kiswahili the official language of Parliament following a move by some members to declare Kenyatta's announcement unconstitutional. Predictably, the declaration that Kiswahili was the national language of Kenya run into the same difficulties it faced in 1927-29. Firstly, many Kikuyu people (President Kenyatta belongs to the same ethnic group) opposed the decision out of fear that Kiswahili might dwarf their language and supplant their political position in the country.<sup>4</sup> Secondly, members of parliament from various ethnic groups in the country also feared that they might be kept out of public affairs or eclipsed by their inability to express themselves well in Kiswahili. Thirdly, there was the elite who enjoyed the success which education in English brought them and who feared that education in Kiswahili would diminish that prestige. Fourthly, there was the 'hostage-syndrome', according to which everything African was inferior. Therefore, the elite could not see how they could do without English. For example, the Attorney General remarked after the 1969 declaration, "...what should I do in drafting legislation?" (c.f. Harries 1976: 154). The belief that Kiswahili could not be used to draft legislation is typical of the prejudices which even well educated people have about indigenous languages. We may expect such reactions and views to become strident at the continental level where there are different colonial and African lingua francas. Lastly, there was no guarantee in the declaration that graduates of Kiswahili will have priority or parity in job placements over those who now use English, and this made parents apprehensive. For all these reasons, even though Kiswahili was the language of Parliament, no attempt was made to enforce it and English was, and still is, more frequently used than Kiswahili in Kenya's Parliament. Furthermore, no attempt was made to enforce the national language requirement in schools or colleges in Kenya until 1986. That is to say, Kiswahili is simply one of the many subjects of study in the curricula, but courses are not necessarily taught in it at any level of education. For many years, before 1981, Kiswahili was compulsory as a subject in primary education only, but it was not the medium of instruction as in neighbouring Tanzania.

In higher education, the University of Nairobi established a Department of Linguistics and African Languages in 1970. Initially it had one teacher and six students. Since then, the Department has grown.<sup>5</sup> Dr. Karega Mutahi later became

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<sup>4</sup> c.f. Harries (1976) for his views on this subject

<sup>5</sup> In 1985, the present writer received a handbook from the late Mr. E.K. Kazungu, a member of staff acting for the Chairman of the Department. The handbook was prepared in 1978/79. The Chairman of Department was then Professor M.H. Abdulaziz. Quite apart from seven (7) visiting professors and lecturers like Carol. M. Eastman, there were five other members of staff as follows:

*Senior Lecturers:* Mutahi, Karega, B.A. (Nairobi), M.A. (U.C.L.A), Ph.D. (Nairobi).  
Omondi, Lucia (Mrs.), B.A. (E.A.), Dip. Applied Linguistics (Edin.),  
B.Phil.Ling. (Nairobi), Ph.D. (London).

professor and head of the Department when Prof. Abdulaziz became chairman of the commission on educational reforms in 1984/85. Among the staff, Prof. Abdulaziz, Jay Kitsao, Mr. Kazungu, and Mr. Bakari were all publishing in Kiswahili.<sup>6</sup> Even though other members of staff taught some Kiswahili as part of general linguistics, they were generally preoccupied with other Kenyan languages. Dr. F. Katamba is now a well established international scholar of phonetics and phonology and morphology. He has not returned to the Department since he left in 1979. There were six M.A. students in that year and five were writing their theses on Kiswahili.

Other universities have been established in Kenya and these are 1) the Kenyatta University College which is a College of Education and External Studies at Kikuyu campus, under the University of Nairobi. It is at this college that the bulk of future instructors in a wide variety of subjects are trained. There is a Department of Kiswahili at Kikuyu where, hopefully, teachers will be trained to replace English as the principal language in schools and colleges 2) the Arap Moi University, based in the current President's home-town.

### 3.2.1 Problems of a Lingua Franca and Educational Reforms

We can see that although Kiswahili is taught in the universities of Kenya, it does not have the same status as English. That is, while separate departments of English exist in these institutions, there is only one department of Kiswahili based at the University College which is training future teachers for secondary schools and colleges. At the University of Nairobi, out of the five M.A. thesis topics in 1979, only one was written in Kiswahili. The rest were written in English. In this situation, English will continue to dominate in University education for a long time to come. We hasten to add that the situation has improved somewhat since 1979, but we have no exact figures for these. We may also note that while a language skill course in English called 'Service English' has been established in the Department of Linguistics and African Languages of the University of Nairobi, no such course for Kiswahili is available. There is no doubt that Kiswahili as a national language of Kenya deserves an even more serious 'Service Kiswahili'. It does not seem that even Kenyatta University College makes up for this shortcoming. Since no special status has been given to the use of Kiswahili in the Universities, it would seem difficult to imagine that the goal of an official lingua franca replacing English can seriously be

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*Lecturers:* Kitsao, Jay, B.A., M.A. (Nairobi).  
Mould, Martin, B.A. (Mass.), M.A., C.Phil., Ph.D. (U.C.L.A.).  
*Assistant Lecturer:* Bakari, M.M., B.A. (Nairobi), B.Phil. (York), M.A. (Nairobi).  
*Staff Leaving in Aug. 1979:* Dr. Francis Katamba, B.A. (Makerere), Ph.D (Edin.).

<sup>6</sup> In 1991, Kitsao had 3 literary titles, Mr. Kazungu et al. produced course books for forms 3 and 4, all in the O.U.P. publications list.

attained in the foreseeable future. In this situation, the case for a continental (working) language, it may be argued, is weakened rather than enhanced.

Under the leadership of Daniel Arap Moi, some great strides have been made in the educational system in an attempt to accelerate education and to raise the poor status of Kiswahili as a language of peasants and migrant workers to a higher level. The credit given to President Moi is due to the fact that it is during his time that reforms affecting Kiswahili have taken place. The educational reforms are known popularly as the '8-4-4' system. The reforms, which began in 1981, were precipitated by various commissions which took a look at Kenya's educational objectives and structures from the 1970's. A report in the Daily Nation of Kenya of October 14, 1986, makes this clear. There was the ILO (International Labour Organisation) report which led to the setting up of The National Committee on Educational Objectives and Policies, out of which came the Gacathi Report of 1976 recommending reforms. As part of the reforms, the old Certificate of Primary Education (CPE) was replaced by the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE).<sup>7</sup> Even though these changes have come more than 20 years after independence, it is significant that at last Kiswahili is compulsory for all Kenyans who go to school. Furthermore, under President Moi's leadership, Kiswahili and English are obligatory requirements for leadership positions in KANU party, and for elections to public office. However, the question: Kiswahili for what purpose?, is valid in Kenya as it is in Tanzania, and has a bearing on the continental language question. This is because English has an edge over Kiswahili in most national spheres. However, as long as Kenya continues increasingly to make career opportunities dependent on ability to speak and write Kiswahili, as in neighbouring Tanzania, this question will increasingly become redundant. It may then serve to illustrate that Kiswahili can indeed be the continental lingua franca, given half the chance, and have the same or even better prospects for jobs, especially in teaching and other careers than the colonial languages. Only in this way will the idea of continental lingua franca attract support on the continent. It is, however, doubtful whether Kiswahili or any language for that matter can resolve the unemployment situation in the continent significantly. But it may reduce it markedly.

At the moment, the book situation in Kenya is slightly better than in Tanzania, since apart from local publishing companies, many foreign publishing houses such as Oxford University Press, Heinemann Books Ltd., etc., operate actively from there.<sup>8</sup> Kenya also has some very prolific prose, poetry and play writers of Kiswahili such as Ahmad Nassir Juma, Angelina Chogo Wapakabulo, Jay Kitsao, and others. However, the number of university graduates who write in Kiswahili is

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<sup>7</sup> Mr. Wamahiu Muya, the **Daily Nation** correspondent, observes that "Thus, practical subjects have been coopted into the new examination and so is Kiswahili" (1986: 26). On the next page (p. 27), the correspondent adds that: "These objectives led the secondary education to be broader than before... For example, Kiswahili is now a compulsory subject in secondary school."

<sup>8</sup> See *Africa South of the Sahara* (1994: 472, 901-902).

negligible. Between 1984 and 1988 it was difficult to get well-known Kiswahili books on the market. The situation appears to have changed for the better since 1991. This is encouraging for Kiswahili, since no continental language programme can succeed without a strong and thriving book industry to support it.

### 3.3 SURVEY OF EAST AFRICAN COUNTRIES III: UGANDA

An attempt was made to introduce Kiswahili as the official lingua franca outside of Buganda and Bunyoro in Uganda in 1927. Due to strong opposition spearheaded by the Kabaka Sir Daudi Chwa (c.f. Whiteley 1969: 70-71), the attempt failed. Independence came on October 9, 1962, under Prime Minister Milton Obote (later president). After independence, no serious attempt was made to introduce a systematic Kiswahili development programme because of strong opposition from the Baganda.<sup>9</sup> A second opportunity came in 1971 when General Idi Amin seized power from Obote. Amin spoke Kiswahili reasonably well and used it on public occasions. He even proclaimed Kiswahili the national language of Uganda but no decree was issued to back this up. By the time Idi Amin fell in 1978, the only achievement in favour of Kiswahili in Uganda was the establishment in January 1973 of the O.A.U. Inter-African Bureau of Languages in Kampala. Even this modest achievement has been taken away. Since 1986, the Bureau has been based in a small office in Addis Ababa, an area where Kiswahili has no strong hold or promise. With the restoration of the Kabaka in 1993, the prospect of Kiswahili becoming a national language in Uganda appears slim, unless, of course, the new Kabaka is less ethnocentric than his predecessors. It has been noted, however, by Mazrui and Shariff (1994: 72) that Kiswahili is the language of the present ruling National Resistance army. We know that President Museveni himself speaks Kiswahili, and that Uganda Radio and Television make use of Kiswahili in their programmes. But English is still the official language of Uganda in all national endeavours. Kiswahili is just one of many utility languages which have no systematic place in the nation state.

#### 3.3.1 Survey of East African Countries IV: The O.A.U. Inter-African Bureau of Languages, Kampala and Addis Ababa

The Inter-African Bureau of Languages of the Organisation of African Unity appears to me to have made only a little impact on the continent as regards the use, development and expansion of Kiswahili, or some other language, as the continental lingua franca. The bureau has, however, hosted several conferences

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<sup>9</sup> See, for example, the derisive comments of the Acting Attorney General of Uganda cited in Whiteley (1969: 98).

which have passed lofty resolutions. For example, the bureau tried to answer the question: Why a continental lingua franca? at a conference it organised on the theme "Linguistic Liberation and Unity of Africa" in September-October 1982. According to the programme announcing the conference, the objective was to discuss,

the hitherto unresolved problem of linguistic independence and linguistic unity of African countries, taking into consideration on the one part, the fact that colonial languages have been kept and are still kept in our politically independent countries and on the other part, the linguistic diversity of these same countries.<sup>10</sup>

The idea was that at the end of the conference, a linguistic 'Charter for Africa' would be developed and an Inter-African Linguistic Association formed. In April 7-9, 1988, a conference was held in Addis Ababa to form such an association. Kiswahili was to be developed as the working language of the O.A.U. and of the continent. African ministers meeting in Abuja in 1990 voted for the adoption of Kiswahili as the working language of Africa, and urged that steps be taken to bring this about.<sup>11</sup> The resolution on the language question adopted at the Abuja Ministerial Conference and endorsed by the summit of Heads of States, was a step in the right direction, and would seem to justify the efforts of the bureau. As far back as 1977, African intellectuals had been campaigning for the use of Kiswahili as the continental language of Africa.

A close examination of the results of these conferences shows that they have not resolved the questions: Kiswahili for whom, what?; How is such a programme to be financed, developed, disseminated, and integrated into the continental fabric?; and What varieties of Kiswahili are most suitable for the whole continent, given its linguistic diversity? Firstly, many leading intellectuals oppose the use of Kiswahili as the sole lingua franca of the continent. For example, Bamgbose (1991: 58) advocates that "The model of communication between African states has to be multilingual, since no single language is available as a means of inter-African communication." Bamgbose, therefore, criticizes strongly the advocates of the use of Kiswahili as the Pan-African language of the continent, especially the call made in support of Kiswahili by Wole Soyinka in 1977 at the Festival of Black Arts and Culture in Lagos. Secondly, there is no agreement on the variety of Kiswahili that should be adopted for the continental programme. We note that Mensah (1991: 66), quoting a Tanzanian newspaper which unfortunately was not specified or dated, states that:

...at a recent seminar of Swahili-speaking nations on 'policy and programme for promotion and expansion of Swahili through the mass media', it was noted that

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<sup>10</sup> A copy of the announcement can be found in *J.A.L.L.* 3(2), 1981, p. 208.

<sup>11</sup> This was reported on page 2 of the *Ghanaian Times* on 5 December, 1990.

differences in spelling and pronunciation are so widespread that the residents of the East African coast hardly understood the dwellers of the hinterland.

Evidently, if the East Africans to whom the rest of the continent is looking for leadership on this subject of Kiswahili hardly understand each others' Kiswahili, we may expect the situation to get worse at the continental level, thus defeating the whole objective of the working language programme. One solution would be to adopt the Standard Kiswahili of Tanzania and Kenya. Even so, there are still differences in linguistic usage and spelling conventions within the Standard Kiswahili of these countries, which have not yet been overcome. The differences are, perhaps, natural, especially when languages are spread over a wide area. In our view, this problem should not in itself constitute a serious obstacle to continentalization. However, we see that while the bureau has successfully pushed through ground breaking resolutions on the need for a continental language for Africa, it has not been able to address directly the rather old question of standardization, and multilingualism, a step necessary in the promotion of Kiswahili to continental status. Instead, the bureau has produced many useful bilingual books on, for example, how to learn Arabic written in Kiswahili and also one on how to learn Lingala, also written in Kiswahili. But the simple matter of fact is that these achievements are not enough or sufficient to rid us of the colonial languages, or even usher in a continental working language. The pressing issue, then, is how Kiswahili can replace the colonial languages, given the problems enumerated above, and also given the difficulties of Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda in making Kiswahili acceptable to all and sundry as a working means of effective official communication on all subjects, internally and externally. It should be noted that in both Kenya and Tanzania where Kiswahili is compulsory for all government and quasi-government functions as well as the diplomatic services, there is no requirement that citizens must use the language at any international gathering, at least the way Arabs use their language. All East and Central African officials and intellectuals, including their Presidents and Ministers of State, use English or French outside their borders and at the O.A.U.! So another question that Africans are legitimately asking is this: Does it make sense to have a national or official language which is never used in international fora? Africa has a choice. It may either legislate on the lingua franca question i.e. introduce a kind of fiat, or lacking the will and courage, be content with its colonial languages. In any event, if we readily communicate with each other in English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, etc., then, it may be argued, there is no reason to go through much trouble and expense to change the status quo, since the elite are unwilling to speak African languages (except Arabic) in international circles. This problem of theory versus practice shows the kinds of difficulties that the lingua franca programme is now faced with. On the brighter side, it appears that, so far, the colonial languages have failed to contain growing ethnic and nationalistic feelings of separatism. Perhaps, a single continental language could mitigate these incidences. The relative stability of Kenya, Tanzania, Zaire, and other Kiswahili speaking areas show that Kiswahili

may be one of the answers to Africa's ethnic conflicts. It is noteworthy, however, that the O.A.U. summit of June 1993 was more concerned with conflict resolutions and the economic crises on the continent than with linguistic unity or liberation, or the part that a continental language can play in containing such conflicts.

#### 4. KISWAHILI IN SOUTHERN AND CENTRAL AFRICA

The picture for Central African countries like Zaire could be much better than it is at present. In Zaire, Kiswahili is recognized as one of the official languages of the country. However, there has not been any significant elevation in the status of Kiswahili compared with French. French is the language of prestige and Kiswahili has a minor role as one of the languages recognized along with Lingala and others. Since Lingala is in fact used also in Congo-Brazzaville and the Central African Republic and is expanding more than Kiswahili as a result, it does not appear certain that the trend can be reversed to bring Kiswahili to the fore. It would appear that the prospect for Kiswahili as the lingua franca in these areas extending to Burundi and Rwanda, where Kiswahili is also used to a moderate extent, is only fair. There is no doubt that, since the language is already in use in parts of these countries, that a little effort and education could turn the tables around dramatically.

The situation in Southern Africa is even more dismal. Zambia which has a frontier with Tanzania has a small number of people who use Kiswahili. Nevertheless, Kiswahili has no specific role in Zambia. The dominant language ChiBemba is the main language promoted within the University of Zambia and in the nation as a whole. It is clear that even though Kiswahili could grow in Zambia, it is for the present far from becoming a working language, much less a lingua franca of the country in the foreseeable future. If we turn to Malawi which also has a frontier with Tanzania, we discover that many frontier dwellers speak Kiswahili and that residents on both sides of the border belong often to the same ethnic group. Yet, we find that the main concern of the University of Malawi and the Malawi government is the development of the main language of the nation which is Chichewa. It is used in Zambia, Zimbabwe and Mozambique as well. Such is the national appeal of this language, that a whole Department of Chichewa has been set up for it. For this reason, as in Zambia, it is reasonable to conclude that the future of Kiswahili as a working language or lingua franca in Malawi is not very encouraging.

From 1985 to 1988, the present writer contacted the Universities of Botswana, Swaziland, and Zimbabwe about Kiswahili teaching and job opportunities in Kiswahili in their languages and linguistics departments. There were none. Lesotho also has no programme in Kiswahili. Coincidentally, each department of African languages stated that its priorities were the study and development of the local languages for the present.

Very little is known of the development of Kiswahili in Namibia, Angola, Mozambique and South Africa. Even though the University of Witwatersrand's publishing house has published important works on Kiswahili such as Hichens' *Diwani ya Muyaka bin Haji*, 1940, the policy of apartheid had no room for any African continental language. Independent South Africa might reconsider the continental language question in the face of competition from IsiZulu and IsiXhosa.

We conclude part I by stressing that the evidence so far suggests that, for a long time to come, the continental lingua franca programme will be very limited in scope and have little impact on the majority of the intellectuals of Africa. This indicates that a working language for more people beyond a handful of diplomats and the elite is, perhaps, far into the next century.

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