

THE INFLUENCE OF LANGUAGES AS SOFT INSTRUMENTS OF POWER: THE CASE OF KISWAHILI IN TANZANIA

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1. 0 Introduction

There has been a significant shift in international relations and diplomacy as a result of new international undertaking strategies. The current focus is on solicitation rather than coercion. Most countries are investing in attracting others through questing rather than resorting to the barrel of a gun. Countries use several persuasion techniques to accomplish this. The Kiswahili language, which is widely spoken both regionally and internationally, is Tanzania's soft power tool. The effort to empower Kiswahili began with Tanganyika's birth as a new nation. Yahaya -Othman¹ remarked, 'Kiswahili had made it possible to rally Tanganyikans to the *uhuru* cause, and Nyerere decided to put in place the cultural policy based on language. On 10 December 1962, the President addressed the first Tanganyika Republic National Assembly in Kiswahili.' The language has been adopted in different regional organisations, including the East African Community (EAC), Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) and African Union (AU). It has also gone above and beyond to be recognized by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Indeed, the language has gained international recognition by being celebrated on July 7th each year as International Kiswahili Day. Apart from that, individual countries, academic institutions and other platforms have been using it as a formal medium of instruction.

In its various forms and manifestations, language is central to everything human beings do and a matter of fact, human beings can hardly function without it. Indeed, language as a tool for communication has inextricably become a tool for development. It is difficult to imagine progress without communication. Human communication is effectively achieved using language. Therefore, language issues could not be separated from international relations issues. Communication has a crucial role to play in diplomacy, and language issues will always emerge during any efforts to foster bilateral and multilateral relations. Language, therefore, becomes an important component of the development of international relations.² Mutembei³ rightly substantiates, 'Language has always been important in the Department of Defence...but it is particularly important now because we are operating in parts of the world where English is not widely spoken, where we need to work with local leaders and local populations and where we need to understand more about their culture.' Mutembei's assertion has a grain of truth because Tanzania is not isolated in international affairs. Indeed, the world is now free of the colonial era. Countries do not dominate one another by using coercion since it is against the laws of international communities, particularly the United Nations. It also violates the *jus cogens* norms. The ability to influence tends to be the focus of many states. This is done in several ways, cultural diplomacy being one of them. Hence, it is defined as a specialized branch of the foreign policy of many states. This is why teaching the national language as a soft power strategy becomes an effective policy action⁴.

¹ See Yahya- Othman (2020)

² See Toboso et al., (2018)

³ Refer to Mutembei (2011)

⁴ See Rivas (2014)

2. 0 Kiswahili as a Soft Power Strategy in relation to other Languages

Power is the ability to influence the behaviour of others to achieve the desired outcomes. While soft power is the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments, seduction is always more effective than coercion⁵. Tanzania has every reason and intention to embrace soft power as a means of gaining international support because of its peaceful nature. Soft power appears to be gaining deeper roots in many jurisdictions as a result of the global wave in furthering and nurturing their foreign policies. Thus, soft power is a diplomatic strategy for positively influencing foreign perceptions in favour of your foreign policy agenda⁶.

Kiswahili was declared an official language in Tanzania in 1967.⁷ However, before that, it played a great unifying role during the independence struggle. Due to this diversity, Nyerere's first strategy was to emphasize the use of Kiswahili as a national language to play a unifying role, while individual tribes maintained their ethnic language.⁸ Nyerere united 120 tribes into a unified state, preventing the tribal conflicts that plagued much of Africa⁹. Recent research, however, has shown that Tanzania has 150 languages.¹⁰ All these examples demonstrate that Kiswahili can be received and spoken even outside the Tanzania's borders. This is because Tanzania is one of the few multi-ethnic countries with one national language spoken by every tribe. Both Tanzania and Nigeria have diverse ethnic languages, but the latter, like many others, has failed to adopt a national language that is spoken by everyone in the country.

Tanzania differs from some of its neighbours in the sense that, Kiswahili is spoken as a second language by the vast majority of the population (and the first language of some people in the coastal areas and on the islands).¹¹ It is both an official and the national language. It is estimated that Kiswahili is currently being spoken by 200 million people globally.¹² More specifically, the number of Kiswahili speakers has increased since the language was designated as one of the AU's official languages. Kiswahili, along with English, French, Portuguese, and Arabic, is undoubtedly one of the world's major languages. In this context, it is clear that Kiswahili is a primary language with a broader range of applications because of the bigger number of speakers (users). The language is ranked second among the languages spoken by most people in Africa. Kiswahili is the world's sixth most widely spoken language.¹³

3.0 Some Strategies for Fostering Kiswahili as a Soft Power Strategy

Tanzania has long multilateral relations with various states. Numerous embassies around the world represent her interests. For instance, in the southern African region, these relations emerged during the period of the liberation struggle and continued to the post-colonial era. Indeed, Tanzania was a pioneer of such liberation movements. It trained freedom fighters. Tanzanian soldiers also participated in the struggle for independence in Zimbabwe, Angola, Namibia and Mozambique. Some freedom fighters from these countries lived in Tanzania, specifically in Morogoro, Bagamoyo,

⁵ See Nye (2004)

⁶ Ibid

⁷ See Othman (2008)

⁸ See Shivji (2020)

⁹ See Othman (2005)

¹⁰ See Yahya – Othman (2020)

¹¹ See Kishe (2004)

¹² See UNESCO (2020)

¹³ Ibid (2014)

Dodoma and Nachingwea. In essence, their time in Tanzania allowed them to learn Kiswahili, and when they returned, they already knew a lot about the language.¹⁴ Mozambique gained her independence through armed struggle, and the majority of FRELIMO freedom fighters were trained in Tanzanian soil. Apart from the African experience of spreading Kiswahili, the language is also widely spoken on other continents such as America, Asia and Europe. Kiswahili's widespread use is critical to the country's promotion of international relations and diplomacy. It is a good soft power strategy since most countries are becoming more interested in the language and cooperating with Tanzania in various fields. Another strategy involves signing inter universities agreements. The University of Zimbabwe began teaching Kiswahili and later Bachelor's Degree of Applied Arts in Kiswahili under the Faculty of African Languages and Literature in August 2013. According to the Memorandum of Understanding between the University of Zimbabwe and the University of Dar es Salaam, the lecturers were coming from the Institute of Kiswahili Studies of the University of Dar es Salaam. In addition, through a Memorandum of Understanding between the University of Dar es Salaam and the University of Zimbabwe, three graduates of Kiswahili from the University of Zimbabwe got scholarships to pursue Master's Degrees in Kiswahili at the University of Dar es Salaam in 2016.¹⁵ Apart from the University of Zimbabwe, more than 200 institutes outside Africa engage in teaching Kiswahili and undertaking post graduate research. For instance, Yale University in the United States of America has embarked on a significant project of writing a Kiswahili Dictionary.¹⁶

Kiswahili is one of the fast-growing and extending languages in its application in the artistic field. For instance, modern Tanzania movies, famously known as Bongo Movies, and new generation music, popularly known as Bongo Flavour, have crossed the borders all over Africa, to America, Europe and Asia. In Zimbabwe, musicians use Kiswahili in their works. Additionally, Kiswahili songs are also played on radio stations and televisions in Zimbabwe. A good example of Bongo Flavour Musicians is Nasibu Abdul (Diamond Platnumz) who in 2016 jointly performed with Mukudzeyi Mukombe (Jah Praizah), a famous Zimbabwean musician. Their performance included Kiswahili.¹⁷ The media play greatly promotes Kiswahili. Due to its regional and global reception and acceptance, Kiswahili scooped front pages in several media houses. In this sense, approximately 30 radio stations broadcast in Kiswahili outside Tanzania. These radio stations in Africa include Radio Malawi, Radio Kenya, Radio Uganda, Radio Burundi, and Radio Congo. Other international radio stations are Radio Vatican, Russia Radio, Deutsche Welle, BBC London and Voice of America.¹⁸

Additionally, the influence by higher-ranking leaders from other countries is another strategy. National leaders from other countries also speak Kiswahili. The former President of Zimbabwe, the Late Robert Mugabe concluded his speech on 19 November 2017 by thanking the audience in Kiswahili by saying 'Asanteni Sana,' meaning *thank you so much*. Another good example is the 2004 AU Summit, where the then Mozambique's President, Joaquim Chissano, addressed the audience of his counterpart presidents in Kiswahili. In any case, Kiswahili is no longer the language of only Tanzania; it is the language of the entire African continent, having been

¹⁴ See Dzomba (2019)

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ See Kishe (2014)

¹⁷ See Dzomba (2019)

¹⁸ See Kishe (2014)

adopted as one of the African Union's official languages. The audience applauded enthusiastically when former Mozambican President Joaquim Chissano addressed the African heads of the State Summit in Kiswahili for the first time.¹⁹

In addition, the then Nigeria's President Olusegun Obasanjo, at the 2005 AU summit, greeted the audience in Kiswahili.²⁰ The Late Kofi Annan, the former Secretary General of the United Nations supported Kiswahili. He used some Kiswahili proverbs in his book, 'Intervention: A Life in War and Peace.' He aptly used a Kiswahili proverb: 'Tembo wanapogombana, nyasi ndizo zinazoumia'. In English this simply means that '*When the elephants fight, it is the grass that suffers*'.²¹ This demonstrates that Kiswahili has crossed borders and thus presenting itself as a global commodity.

Two of Tanzania's three former presidents, Mwalimu Julius Nyerere and Ali Hassan Mwinyi, were strong supporters of Kiswahili from the country's independence in 1961 to 2005.²² This scholar further argues that President Kikwete delivered his first speech in Kiswahili at the AU Heads of State Summit. Subsequently, his successor; the late Dr. John Pombe Joseph Magufuli was a staunch advocate of Kiswahili on both domestic and international platforms. He supported Kiswahili from the time he took over power in 2015 until his sudden demise in 2021. President Samia Suluhu Hassan began to promote Kiswahili domestically almost immediately after taking office, signing Act No. 1 of 2021 which calls for the use of Kiswahili in the judiciary. The law provides for extended use of the language in all judicial proceedings. It also provides for all proceedings that were recorded in English to be interpreted and translated in Kiswahili. Although Kiswahili is not explicitly mentioned in the United Republic of Tanzania's constitution, which would give it more power and status, the implementation of Act No. 1 of 2021 is a significant step towards promoting the language. The culmination of all these efforts by Tanzanian leaders and other stakeholders resulted in Kiswahili being recognized by UNESCO in 2021. Meanwhile, every year on July 7, International Kiswahili Day is observed. Furthermore, the African Union began to use Kiswahili as its working language. Consequently, it is the first African language recognized by UNESCO and used in the African Union.

In the defence sector, a Tanzania Peoples Defence Forces (TPDF) officer teaches Kiswahili to Egyptian officers at the Ministry of Defence Language Institute (MODLI) in Cairo. Similarly, Tanzania Officers learn Arabic at the same institute. Both countries are using the soft power strategy to influence one another via cultural interaction. Tanzania sends military personnel, police officers and civilians to various Peace Keeping Missions to spread Kiswahili throughout the world. Currently, Tanzania works with countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, the Central African Republic and Lebanon. Through these missions, officers interact with numerous officers from other nationalities. They use this opportunity to teach them Kiswahili. When they return home, they continue to speak and learn Kiswahili. The country also uses joint military exercises and sports. Tanzania participates in several regional and international joint military exercises and sports. This event allows TPDF officers to interact with officers from other countries and a chance for cultural, as well as, linguistic, interactions. All these efforts are meant to promote the use of Kiswahili language as one of the instruments of soft power.

¹⁹ See Othman (2008)

²⁰ See Dzomba (2019)

²¹ Seen Annan (2012)

²² See Othman (2008)

4.0 Conclusion

The widespread use of Kiswahili is expected to rid Africa of the colonial syndrome and mentality. From a historical standpoint, Tanzania managed to unite more than 120 ethnic diversities into commonality during and after the struggle for independence. In this sense, we can unite Africans and do away with the mental boundaries imposed by the colonialists. There will be no more 'Divide and Rule.' Business ties between countries are expected to grow stronger. For instance, landlocked African countries, like Zimbabwe and Zambia, depend on the Dar es Salaam Port. Due to a language barrier, they may not be persuaded to use it. Kiswahili's popularity may compel them to visit Tanzania for commercial purposes. This may contribute to government revenues and ultimately boost the living standard. Kiswahili's expansion beyond Tanzania's borders has also opened doors and increased job opportunities. Since it is taught in several countries, Tanzanians have greater opportunities to secure jobs. More importantly, the use of Kiswahili at the regional and international levels has significant implications for national security. It will improve human security by increasing government revenue and ensuring a decent standard of living. Furthermore, it will reduce threats among nations due to good diplomatic relations fostered by the use of Kiswahili as a one of the powerful instruments of soft power strategy, which if used properly, Tanzania as a country stands to benefit more than other African nations.

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