

## THEORY IN PRACTICE

*Research article*

### **CONTEMPORARY LANGUAGE POLICY IN TANZANIA: *CUI PRODEST? CUI BONO?***

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**Abstract.** Contemporary Tanzania is one of the few African countries where the population speaks the indigenous language of Kiswahili, with English playing a major role as one of the two official languages. The article explores the reasons for the language policy the country has employed since independence and the key factors that determine it. Analyzing the political functions of the two languages, the author comes to the conclusion that English is perceived mostly as a means of social mobility (status value) and promotion of Tanzania's cultural and economic diplomacy abroad (foreign policy value), while Kiswahili serves as a tool for national self-identification, communication, political participation, and unification. At the same time, the country's policy in this field sometimes appears inconsistent as far as the proportion of language choices is concerned, which is especially evident in education. In addition to the insufficient teaching qualifications and learning resources, a stakeholder analysis reveals that a significant part of the Tanzanian elite tends to resist or even sabotage Kiswahilization, viewing English as a gateway to better employment prospects and even a way to emigrate. This viewpoint is supported by the Anglophone countries, in particular the UK, which is interested in maintaining Tanzania within the sphere of its political and economic influence. However, as the Tanzanian government's resolve to promote Kiswahili internationally seems to be gaining ground, it is unlikely to abandon the language in the public space over the medium term. In this regard, it would be appropriate for Russia to participate in joint programs and projects with Tanzania that involve the development of Kiswahili and its promotion in other African countries.

**Keywords:** Tanzania, East Africa, language policy, political functions of language, Kiswahili, Mendelow's matrix, stakeholders

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## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the development of African languages, the choice of official and state languages have regained their relevance against the backdrop of anti-neocolonialist rhetoric. In the Sahel countries, calls for abandoning French as the language of colonizers are heard increasingly often. The language factor remains politically charged in Ethiopia, Cameroon, and South Africa in the context of secessionist risks. Multilingualism is a given for all African countries, but the language planning models used are completely different.

In this light, of great interest is the linguistic picture and language policy in Tanzania, one of the few countries where the indigenous language of Swahili/Kiswahili has developed significantly in the postcolonial era. It is spoken by 150 to 230 million people, including native and near native speakers, and is widely spread throughout Eastern Africa, which includes the former British East Africa, the Horn of Africa, and the Great Lakes region, as well as the small island states off the East African coast. Tanzania, however, is a unique case: not only does Kiswahili have de jure official and national (state) status, but it is also de facto used in education, public and corporate governance, and in communications with individual external partners.

What caused such an unconventional choice after decolonization, compared to the overwhelming majority of African countries? Who influences the formation of the language policy in the modern Tanzanian state? Will the trend of Kiswahilization stay intact in the near future? These are the research problems that the author will try to resolve in this article.

## LITERATURE REVIEW AND METHODOLOGY

One may distinguish between three main strands in the body of literature on language policy in Africa. The first is associated with the concept of language imperialism by Robert Phillipson, which postulates the fact of structural (material) and cultural (ideological) dominance of English in relation to other languages [Zieng, Ponce, Li 2023]. In the academic environment of East Africa, his ideas have been developed by Gervais Kawonga (Tanzania) [Kawonga 2017], an East African and US citizen, Maulana Karenga [Gromova 2020], a prominent activist of African American unity, Adventina Buberwa (Tanzania) [Buberwa 2022], Hassan Marshad (Kenya) [Marshad 1993], and others.

The second proceeds from the liberal paradigm of *language rights*. According to Xavier Arzoz, many human rights are indirectly related to language: “freedom of speech includes freedom to choose the language of speech; the right to respect for private and family life includes the right to respect for the culture and language that a person uses in his private life. The right to a fair trial implies the right of the accused to understand the essence of the charge brought against him and, accordingly, the right to receive the services of an interpreter, if necessary” [Markarov 2014: 188]. In a more general sense, Russian legal scholar Alexander Markarov proposes to link language rights to national and cultural identity, communication in society, culture, healthcare, and education, obtaining relevant and reliable information, including through the media, and, finally, exercising such rights in relations with the public authorities [Dzhanaeva 2021]. Arguments along these lines are to be found, for example, in works by Paul Musau (Kenya) [Musau 2003], Sinfree Makoni (US) [Makoni 2012], Dumisile Mkhize (South Africa) [Mkhize 2017], and other researchers.

The third approach is concerned with the functions of language in the context of development, viewed in a broad sense as positive socio-economic changes and the evolution of human potential while minimizing damage to the external environment. Some of the major works include those by Ayo Bamgbose (Nigeria) [Bamgbose 1999], Kitula King'ei (Kenya) [King'ei 2000], Felix Ndhlovu (Zimbabwe/South Africa) [Ndhlovu 2021], H. Ekkehard Wolff (Germany) [Wolff 2016], and several others.

In academic science, the language policy of African countries is the subject of research mainly in the field of sociolinguistics, philology, and cultural studies. The works of Soviet and Russian researchers A.Yu. Zheltov, N.T. Petrenko, N.V. Gromova, A.A. Zhukov, S.B. Beletsky, I.S. Ryabova, A.D. Lutskov, and others can already be considered classic in this field. A significant share of publications is also issued directly in the Kiswahili language in Tanzania in journals such as *Kiswahili Mulika*, *Nuru ya Kiswahili*, *Jarida la Afrika Mashariki la Masomo ya Kiswahili*, and others. Tanzanian intellectuals (for example, Issaya Lupogo and others) publish on this topic in the *Kenyan Journal of Kiswahili and Other African Languages*, which is part of the prestigious Pan-African platform African Journals Online (AJOL), aggregating academic publications by African scholars.

In the literature on the Tanzanian approach to language, two dilemmas are usually identified as central. The first is related to the search for an optimal proportion between Kiswahili and English in the public space [Kawonga 2017, Dzahene-Quarshie 2009]. The second is the question of the legitimacy of the prevalence of Kiswahili to the detriment of the other 125 languages of Tanzania [Isingoma 2016]. In this sense, this work does not contradict existing research. However, in it, the author considered it necessary to go further, addressing the reasons for the choice of the language model that was made in Tanzania at a certain stage of development.

Table 1. **Political functions of language**

<b>Expressive identification</b>	Language symbolizes culture and collective identity
<b>Communication</b>	Language ensures interaction between the people and has instrumental value for exchange of ideas and information
<b>Unification</b>	Language consolidates the social and political structures of a given country
<b>Participation</b>	Language is used in public discussions, debates, election campaigns, in making political decisions and conflict resolution
<b>Status value</b>	Having command of a language has a positive, neutral, or negative effect on vertical social mobility
<b>Foreign policy</b>	Language is used as a tool to implement national interests outside of a state

Source: Nikolskaya M.V. Political dimension of Kiswahili in East Africa: country and regional aspects. *Comparative Politics Russia*. 2022. Vol. 13, № 3. Pp. 74–93. (In Russ.). <https://doi.org/10.46272/2221-3279-2022-3-13-74-93>

The main research method used here is content analysis of legal documents governing the state language policy of Tanzania. In particular, this concerns national development programs, decrees issued by the Ministry of Education, and other legislation and by-laws. A number of documents that are not publicly available are reviewed based on secondary sources, namely reports of humanitarian organizations and news articles.

The functions of the Kiswahili language are examined on the basis of the classification proposed by the author of this article in other publications. According to it, language is an instrument of nation-building, and in this sense, it can perform a number of political functions (*Table 1*).

## BACKGROUND

Tanzania's language policy before independence was regulated by colonial administrations: first of German, then British East Africa. The first Western-style schools were established in the 1870s throughout what later constituted the continental part of Tanzania, Tanganyika, through the efforts of missionary communities. In the vast majority, Kiswahili was designated as the language of instruction. This was done, firstly, for reasons of convenience (translating educational materials into numerous indigenous languages would have been both difficult and expensive) and secondly, due to the colonizers' ideas about the need to limit the share of the educated African population [Swilla 2009]. Kiswahili was also used as the lingua franca of the King's African Rifles, a colonial regiment recruited from the population of African territories controlled by London. English was the official language used in colonial administration, as well as the language of communication for people from other parts of the British Empire, such as India, residing in East Africa. At the same time, the calls of another part of the population, the Zanzibaris and the descendants of Arab settlers on the mainland, for the introduction of the Arabic language into circulation did not get heard or fulfilled [Cameron, Dodd 1970: 75].

In 1930, a so-called Inter-Territorial Committee was established to work on the standardization and development of the literary Kiswahili. The committee's decisions applied to the whole of British East Africa. It was the committee that defined Kiunguja, the Zanzibar dialect, as the standard and launched the "process of developing language norms, writing unified grammars, and compiling dictionaries" [Petrenko 2023: 181].

The first attempt to formulate a consistent language policy was made immediately after Tanzania gained independent statehood in 1964, with the unification of Tanganyika and Zanzibar. Almost immediately, Kiswahili was proclaimed the national language, or *lugha ya Taifa*.

What exactly did that wording imply? Firstly, the decision was partly taken in opposition to English as the language of the ex-colonizers. Prominent Kenyan researcher Ali Mazrui spoke back in 1967 about the relatively smooth end of British colonial rule, contrasting it with the language policy in Tanganyika after independence. "While Kenya had a violent anti-British insurrection and Uganda had its moments of rioting and boycotting against this or that aspect of British rule, the nationalist movement in colonial Tanganyika sometimes seemed to be almost Anglophile. Yet that old Anglophile Tanganyika has now become, in the area of language policy, anti-English." [Harries 1969: 275].

The main advocate of Kiswahilization of Tanzania was, in fact, its first president, Julius Nyerere. The ideology of *ujamaa* he developed was based on collective values—in economic terms, collective labor in the spirit of what could be dubbed East African

socialism, while in cultural terms it relied on Kiswahili as the cornerstone of national identity. In addition, during this period, a common African language was an important solidarity component of the Pan-African movement. It was Kiswahili that freedom fighters used as a means of communication within the national liberation movements [Williams 2011]. Thus, Kiswahili was assigned important functions of expressive identification and unification. All of this was largely initiated by Nyerere himself, who regularly spoke in Kiswahili at all public venues and published his articles in the party newspaper, *Sauti ya TANU* (“The Voice of TANU”).

Why then did the nation choose Kiswahili, out of all 126 languages of the Tanzanian mainland and archipelago? According to the theory of linguistic planning, the choice of an official or national language can be dictated by three main considerations:

- how the language itself is structured, what is the ability of potential speakers to master it at a level sufficient for social communication;
- how adequate it is to perform certain functions;
- whether it is acceptable and suitable to the speakers, who may be emotionally attached to it [Kassim 1991].

Kiswahili matched all three criteria. First, Kiswahili is a Bantu language, closely related to many other African languages. Given that the continent has around 30% Bantu-speaking peoples, constituting an overwhelming majority in Tanzania, learning Kiswahili is not difficult for the average Tanzanian. Second, the Kiswahiliophones occupied a privileged position in relation to their brethren during the era of European encroachment into Africa. Numerous traders and minor employees of the colonial administration, teachers and translators provided a layer of intermediaries between the administrators and the local population [Kassim 1991]. Third, for the residents of Tanganyika and Zanzibar themselves, Kiswahili had acquired the most neutral connotation possible due to its non-attachment to only one specific tribe or people. According to Prof. Bart Rwezaura of the University of Dar es Salaam, “by independence in 1961, Kiswahili had attained a high degree of political prestige as well as wide acceptability in the whole country. Even more significantly, Kiswahili was not clearly associated with a particular ethnic group, and hence its use did not provoke any of the political problems associated with ethnic domination.” [Rwezaura 1993: 111]. Due to its “non-ethnicity”, it did play, for example, a major role in the Maji-Maji rebellion against colonial rule in 1905–1907 [Njogu 2023], and later united Tanganyika nationalists who advocated for national liberation.

The proclamation of Kiswahili as an official language in 1962 was one of the first decisions of the new leadership of what was then Tanganyika. During the 1960s, parliamentary debates were completely Kiswahilized. In addition to a strong awareness campaign, the authorities introduced universal primary education in Kiswahili. The use of other ethnic languages in school was considered an offense. Kiswahili wove a common social fabric between students of different ethnic backgrounds in state secondary schools, between workers in agricultural cooperatives, and in the military [Rugemalira 2013]. All of this was being done to overcome tribalism, as well as secessionist sentiment, which could have undermined the emerging Tanzanian state [Malipula 2014].

The late 1980s and early 1990s were not an easy time for Tanzania. Shattered by the Kagera War with Ugandan dictator Idi Amin (1978–1979) and its own socialist experimentation, the Tanzanian economy grew to become dependent on donor aid. Much of this aid would come from Western countries, both indirectly through international financial institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, and directly through official development assistance programs. In terms of

language policy, this had two implications. First, as a national priority, it faded into the background, giving way to issues of everyday economic significance. Second, English supplanted Kiswahili in the popular consciousness as the language that offered opportunities for more profitable employment and, in some cases, emigration to English-speaking countries in search of a better life. This gave rise to *commodification*, i.e., the acquisition of monetary value by language and its transformation into a kind of commodity [Khilkhanova, Ivanov 2023].

The search for a new optimum of the language model and language policy reemerged under the third president, Benjamin Mkapa (in power 1995–2005). The Tanzania Development Vision-2025<sup>1</sup> emphasized the values and cultural foundations in the country's new era. While previously the feeling of attachment to a nation-state was forged by means of collective work for the good of the homeland, the vision suggested doing so through encouraging democratic participation in politics and entrepreneurial initiative, overcoming illiteracy, and raising the level of education among Tanzanian citizens. In essence, the main guidelines remained the same, but independence and self-reliance were now to be achieved by “detaching” from donors, replacing the idea of waiting around for an allegedly “easy success” with the concept of productive work.

#### EDUCATION: BATTLES FOR THE BEST LANGUAGE MODEL

As follows from national policy documents, the main imperative of modern Tanzania is *development*, which is understood in a broad sense as capacity building, or increasing potential, including human potential. In this context, it comes as no surprise that the main battles over language models are unfolding in education. According to a 2023 survey, only 40% of all schoolchildren aged 10–14 are able to read and understand a simple sentence written in Kiswahili, and more than half cannot even read standalone words. However, teachers themselves have failed to recognize these problems: for example, teachers are confident that more than half (53%) of second-graders can read, although in fact this figure is only 20%.<sup>2</sup> Every year, the country renews a heated public debate on the topic of the language of instruction in schools and universities, which does not only have a political dimension but is also directly related to the tasks of overcoming illiteracy and improving the quality of the workforce.

Successful implementation of language policy is hampered by its inconsistency, both in conceptual and practical matters. In August 1997, under President Mkapa, the government of Tanzania published the so-called “Cultural Policy” (Sera ya Utamaduni)<sup>3</sup>, which called for plans to use Kiswahili as the language of instruction in primary and secondary schools [Mkwizu 2002]. However, it was only partially implemented. Up to 15% of the population in 2007 spoke neither Kiswahili nor English, and this percentage was even higher among primary school-age children living in rural areas [Rubagumya 2007]. A similar attempt was made under President John Pombe Magufuli (in power 2015–2021): the School and Vocational Education Policy, originally developed by his predecessor, Jakaya Kikwete (in power 2005–2015), was approved in 2015. It introduced compulsory education in Tanzania on a free basis: 6 years of primary school and 4 years

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<sup>1</sup> The Tanzania Development Vision 2025. *Planning Commission*. [https://faolex.fao.org/docs/pdf/tan\\_154578.pdf](https://faolex.fao.org/docs/pdf/tan_154578.pdf) (accessed: 20.07.2024)

<sup>2</sup> Taylor B. New education policy to start imminently, but gradually. *Tanzanian Affairs*. 01.01.2024. <https://www.tzaffairs.org/2024/01/education-34/> (accessed: 20.07.2024)

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

of lower secondary school<sup>4</sup>, and the language of instruction in schools throughout Tanzania was supposed to eventually become Kiswahili.

In January 2024, under President Samia Suluhu Hassan, a new education policy was approved with the aim of carrying out another reform of the school system. The plan is “1+6+4+2/3+3+,” which stands for 1 year of pre-school education, 6 years in primary school, 4 years in lower secondary school, 2 or 3 years in higher secondary, depending on the further choice in favor of higher or secondary technical education. Higher education is considered complete starting from three years of bachelor's degree; following are master's programs, postgraduate studies, and so on.

The focus of the new document is on professional skills relevant for the 21st century, the so-called 4Cs: communication, collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking<sup>5</sup>, which are to be developed through practical classes. The key objective is to bring all levels of education in line with the demands of the labour market, which is reflected in new academic disciplines, including science, technology, and economics-related ones. At the same time, Tanzanian history, civic culture, and ethics will be taught in Kiswahili in order to “foster patriotic and responsible citizens.”<sup>6</sup> This choice links Kiswahili with Tanzanian culture and a sense of national and civic identity.

Another important policy document in the area of education policy is the Tanzania Development Vision-2025, which serves as the basis for more specific five-year plans. It is also fraught with ambiguity: for example, the national plan for 2021<sup>7</sup> suggested introducing Kiswahili as a second language of instruction, but secondary school examinations continued to be conducted in English<sup>8</sup>.

### IRRECONCILABLE DIFFERENCES

This expression, usually voiced during a divorce in Hollywood when the parties are unwilling to talk about the true reasons, very accurately paints the picture of language policy in the education sector. One might find it reasonable to assume that the resources to carry out language planning are simply insufficient. Among the rather predictably and commonly listed problems, one finds the high cost of educational materials and school infrastructure and the low quality of teaching. Indeed, contrary to plans and targets, at present in Tanzanian schools for every 20–25 children there is often only one textbook<sup>9</sup>. However, it is the author's opinion that in reality, language policy is never planned solely for technocratic reasons. It affects the interests of different groups of people, some of whom generally disapprove and resist the Kiswahilization of education, if not openly sabotage it altogether.

One interesting way to dissect this conflict is suggested by Mari Yogi, who identifies several categories of stakeholders concerned with building and sustaining a particular

<sup>4</sup> In 2022, two more years of secondary education were made available free of charge.

<sup>5</sup> Tracking Africa's progress on AfCFTA. *United Nations Economic Commission for Africa*. 20.03.2023. <http://uneca.org/eca-events/stories/tracking-africas-progress-afcfta> (accessed: 20.07.2024)

<sup>6</sup> Mosenda J. The changing face of education as new policy implementation kicks off. *The Citizen*. 03.01.2024. <https://www.thecitizen.co.tz/tanzania/news/national/the-changing-face-of-education-as-new-policy-implementation-kicks-off-4480560> (accessed: 20.07.2024)

<sup>7</sup> National Five-Year Development Plan 2021/22–2025/26. *Ministry of Finance and Planning of Tanzania*. 2021. <https://smartdatafinance.org/storage/2021-10-19/5tWlz4vFWrcMarJ.pdf> (accessed: 20.07.2024)

<sup>8</sup> Education Budget Brief 2018 Tanzania. *UNICEF*. 2018. <https://www.unicef.org/tanzania/media/1236/file/UNICEF-Tanzania-2018-Education-Budget-Brief.pdf> (accessed: 20.07.2024)

<sup>9</sup> Educate the children with “Hearts in Unity”. *Hearts in Unity*. 2015. <http://www.heartsinunity.org/Educate.html> (accessed: 20.07.2024)

language model in Tanzanian education [Yogi 2017]. Contingent on the degree of their influence on the processes and direct interest in the implementation of educational policy, Yogi breaks them into four types: Apathetics, Latents, Defenders, and Promoters (*Fig. 1*). From this matrix, it follows that the two most important groups in this educational policy are the promoters and the defenders. International organizations and donors can be counted as either in the sense that they support educational initiatives and make financial contributions to education.

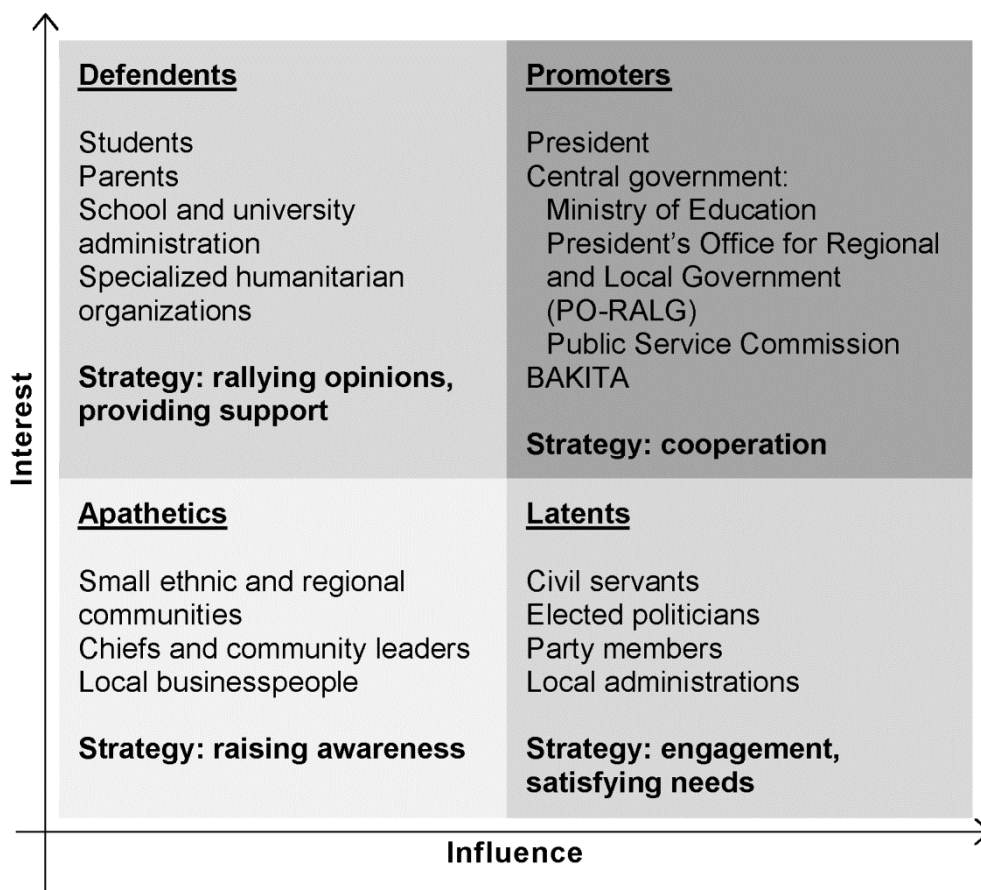


Fig. 1. Mendelow's stakeholder matrix for Tanzania's foreign policy.

Source: compiled by author based upon Yogi M.C. *Kiswahili or English: A Policy Analysis of Language Instruction in Tanzania*. Capstone Collection. 2995. Vermont: SIT Graduate Institute, 2017. <https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/capstones/2995> (accessed: 20.07.2024)

The "Promoters" (*Fig. 1*, upper right) include the national executive authorities and, separately, specialized institutions that deal with the standardization of the language and its promotion abroad and are in charge in this field among all Kiswahiliphone countries. In 1965, just one year after the union between Tanganyika and Zanzibar took shape, the Institute of Kiswahili Studies (Taasisi ya Uchunguzi wa Kiswahili, TUKI) was established. By 1970, it had been incorporated into the University of Dar es Salaam, and later the National Kiswahili Council (Baraza la Kiswahili la Taifa; BAKITA) came to the forefront, promoting this language as an instrument of national integration in Tanzania.

Other institutions for the standardization and dissemination of Kiswahili include the Zanzibar Kiswahili Council (Baraza la Kiswahili la Zanzibar; BAKIZA); the Kiswahili Associations in East Africa (Chama la Kiswahili Afrika Mashariki; CHAKAMA), the Global Association for the Promotion of Kiswahili (Chama cha Ukuzaji wa Kiswahili Duniani; CHAUKIDU), the Kiswahili Students' Association in East African Universities



(Chama cha Wanafunzi wa Kiswahili Vyuo vikuu Afrika Mashariki; CHAWAKAMA), and the East African Kiswahili Commission (Kamisheni ya Kiswahili ya Afrika Mashariki; EAKC).

Despite the declared consultations with a wide range of interested agencies during its formulation, in fact, language policy in Tanzania meets the interests of only a small group of people [Brock-Utne, Holmarsdottir 2004] who would like their children to receive an English-language education. This is mainly part of the Tanzanian establishment (the lower right quadrant in the matrix and partly the upper left), represented by the descendants of national liberation activists, many of whom studied in the West, and present-day professionals hailing from well-off families. Throughout Tanzania's independent history, private schools, regardless of the state language policy, have continued to provide paid English-language education [Legère, Rosendal 2015].

Accordingly, the ability of this part of the elite to reproduce itself—in its view—is dependent on its ability to send its children to schools and universities abroad. Students in such a program are more likely to choose to continue their education at a university, and they have more competitive advantages when applying for a job. Therefore, parents believe that depriving their children of knowledge of English is the same as blocking their opportunities to build a career and find a job [Telli 2014: 14]. Some even insist on maintaining English as the medium of instruction since they consider Kiswahili *underdeveloped* for use in higher education [Ngonyani 1997], despite the presence of an extensive body of Kiswahili educational and fiction books.

In addition, there is a popular opinion among officials that English is a *conditio sine qua non*<sup>10</sup> for trade, investment, and international relations, all of which make for vital reference points for Tanzania's economic diplomacy. This belief is strong in East Africa as a whole, extending, for example, to Rwanda's language policy [Nikolskaya 2022], but little is this claim verified by the experience of other countries in the Global South, such as China or the Gulf States.

Russian researcher Stanislav Beletsky adheres to a similar point of view: the main hindrance to economic development, he says, is not the simultaneous presence of several languages in the linguistic landscape but rather certain underlying factors associated with the fragmentation of society along other (ethnic, social, family, etc.) lines [Davydova 2023]. Moreover, among some Kiswahili politicians and intellectuals, the English language is often associated with the image of *kasumba*—"opium"/"hangover,"—which implies "intoxication," an exaggerated fascination with everything English and, in a broader sense, Western, foreign, provoked primarily by an imperfect education system or cultural institutions. The main danger it entails for a person is the loss of natural connection with their roots [Kawonga 2017].

Partially the shaping force of such beliefs is the English-speaking countries, primarily the United Kingdom, which needs to maintain its influence in the former colonies. Tanzania, in this paradigm, should remain an important source of raw materials and a market for goods from the English-speaking states. For more than 70 years<sup>11</sup>, the English language and English-language education have been popularized in the country by the British Council, which remains one of the most influential international institutions, organizing numerous teacher training programs and language proficiency examinations.

As for other beneficiaries ("Defenders") of the national language policy, the picture is very different in public schools, where Kiswahili remains the language of instruction in

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<sup>10</sup> A necessary prerequisite (Lat.).

<sup>11</sup> *British Council, Tanzania*. 2024. <https://www.britishcouncil.or.tz/about> (accessed: 20.07.2024)

primary education. Examination results published in November 2023 showed that only 34% of schoolchildren received a C grade on a CEFR scale<sup>12</sup> or higher in the English exam. In contrast, the year-end pass rate for Kiswahili was 88%.<sup>13</sup>

A number of teachers and academics in Tanzania are unhappy with the “unprecedented” anglicization of education, arguing that it will only exacerbate class divisions<sup>14</sup>. Some of them are even calling this change “unconstitutional.” Indeed, more than 75% of private schools are located in areas that fall into the fourth or fifth income quintile of the country. Moreover, some of the principals of public primary schools are interested in converting them into English-medium schools, which may ruin the already dire state of public education.<sup>15</sup> Supporters of Kiswahili as a medium of instruction insist on keeping English in the school curriculum but as a subject, i.e., as a foreign language [Tibategeza, Du Plessis 2018].

In the area of higher education, public opinion at first glance is somewhat closer to consensus: since the language of the humanities and natural sciences throughout the world is predominantly English, it is the medium of instruction in Tanzanian universities, too. However, since the level of proficiency among students and graduates leaves much to be desired, there are proposals coming up from time to time for stricter filtering of applicants based on their knowledge of English, or, as an alternative, introducing bilingual educational programs (with some lectures and workshops conducted in Kiswahili), setting “language competence enhancement centers,” whose tasks would include, among other things, the development of digital teaching materials in Kiswahili [Rugemalira 2017]. In 2024, Prime Minister Kassim Majaliwa instructed the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology to prepare a special program for training experts at the PhD level whose knowledge of the language would correspond to international standards. What is meant by the latter, however, is not entirely clear, since a general system of language certification that would be officially approved as such at the international level has yet to be built.

## LANGUAGE OF LAW AND GOVERNANCE

Kiswahili has made more clear progress in recent years in the area of justice. Court hearings, courtroom communications, and records are often conducted in Kiswahili. Given the high prevalence of the language among the Tanzanian population, its widespread use in this area will help ensure access to justice for all.

In 2021, the Tanzanian parliament passed amendments to the law requiring Kiswahili to be the language of legal proceedings, including military tribunals.<sup>16</sup> From 2022, lawsuits/claims and judgments must be filed in two copies: one in English and one in Kiswahili. Subsequent comments from the Supreme Court have clarified that court proceedings may be conducted in English in the following cases:

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<sup>12</sup> *Common European Framework of Reference* is an international standard for describing language ability, widely used in Europe.

<sup>13</sup> Taylor B. New education policy to start imminently, but gradually. *Tanzanian Affairs*. 01.01.2024. <https://www.tzaffairs.org/2024/01/education-34/> (accessed: 20.07.2024)

<sup>14</sup> Francis L. Stakeholders Rattled as More Govt Primary Schools Transform into English Mediums. *The Chanzo Initiative*. 18.01.2024. <https://thechanzo.com/2024/01/18/stakeholders-rattled-as-more-govt-primary-schools-transform-into-english-mediums/> (accessed: 20.07.2024)

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Swahili proposed as Language of Tanzanian Law and Courts. *FB Attorneys*. 11.02.2021. <https://fbattorneys.co.tz/swahili-proposed-as-language-of-tanzanian-law-and-courts/> (accessed: 20.07.2024)

- if the parties or their representatives do not speak Kiswahili;
- if the dispute concerns an international dispute in the field of investment, foreign trade or business, financial and currency matters, taxation, international, regional issues, science and technology;
- if the law governing the subject of the litigation, as well as the law enforcement practice, are not translated into Kiswahili.

Thus, the use of Kiswahili in court is effectively limited by the availability of laws written in this language, of which there are very few at present.<sup>17</sup> In practice, depending on the presiding officer, the District Courts, Magistrates' Courts, Supreme Court, Court of Appeal, and administrative tribunals use both Kiswahili and English in oral proceedings. However, the minutes and decisions of these courts must be written in English.<sup>18</sup> It should be noted that the document does not propose drafting investment agreements in Kiswahili or translating them. In addition, English remains the language of higher education in the field of jurisprudence.

Since 1965, Kiswahili has been used in debates and sessions of the unicameral National Assembly. With the exception of the 1977 Constitution, bills and Acts of Parliament have been published in English since colonial times. Subordinate legislation is drafted in either Kiswahili or English, or both. Election campaigns and elections are conducted only in Kiswahili, with an interpreter used when necessary. From independence to the present day, the law does not support the use of ethnic languages in the media, as this would make it difficult for the authorities to monitor the appearance of potentially seditious materials [Rugemalira 2013]. Party platforms, websites, and communications with voters are completely Kiswahilized. A significant share of online portals and other government resources are duplicated in English.

Signs and notices in public places are by law only in English and Kiswahili, although banners in Chinese have already appeared at the Julius Nyerere International Airport in Dar es Salaam in 2024. Major national hospitals also use Kiswahili in explanatory signs and notices to reach the majority of patients [Maganda 2024]. At the same time, the need for English-language displays is driven by the large influx of tourists and expats.

The Tanzania Communication Regulatory Authority (TCRA) rules prohibit the use of other indigenous languages in broadcasting. Section 15a states: "Every free-to-air licensee shall: (a) ensure that only official languages, namely Kiswahili and English, are used for all broadcasts except where specific authorization has been given to use non-official languages" [Maganda 2024].

## LOOKING OUTWARDS

Kiswahili is the only African language that has been approved as an official language by major regional economic communities—the East African Community (EAC), the Southern African Development Community (SADC), as well as the African Union (AU). It has achieved its greatest success within the EAC: in five of the eight countries, it has official and/or national status. This is largely thanks to Tanzanian diplomacy under the leadership of Magufuli and later Hassan, who have advocated for a common East African identity (*East Africanness*) and the promotion of Kiswahili, which the Tanzanians perceive as their national project.

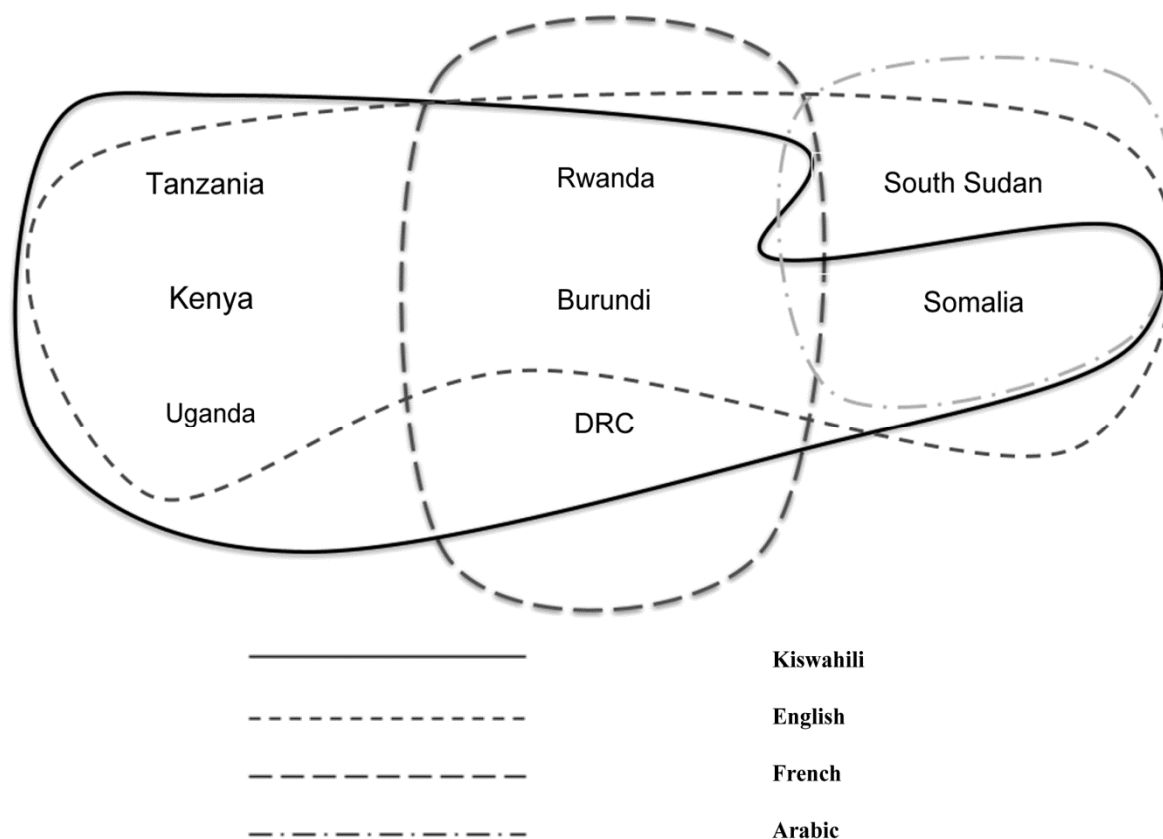
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<sup>17</sup> Bilingualism in Court proceedings remains confusing. *FB Attorneys*. 09.09.2022. <https://fbattorneys.co.tz/bilingualism-in-court-proceedings-remains-confusing/> (accessed: 20.07.2024)

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

In Rwanda and Uganda, Kiswahili was “promoted” to official status following the accession of new members to the EAC and the deepening of integration. In order to form a common market, where the free movement of goods and services, migration, and financial flows between states is the norm of the day, a common language should facilitate the establishment of cross-border business ties. In other EAC countries, Kiswahili has historically been assigned the role of a lingua franca at the national (Kenya) or regional level (Democratic Republic of the Congo), or the language of communication for one of the ethnic and/or social groups (Burundi, Somalia). As can be seen from *Fig.2*, only South Sudan completely falls outside the Kiswahili area since its culture is very different from the rest of the region.

Thus, the languages most widely spoken in the EAC are English and Kiswahili, followed by French. This understanding is reflected at the legal level, where these three languages are proclaimed as official. In practice, the Community summits, where fundamental decisions for the organization are made, are held in English, and behind the scenes, as a rule, leaders and delegates communicate in Kiswahili, English, and French. Whether Kiswahili can become a universal language of communication between the Community countries will depend on the political will of the Tanzanians first and foremost, but also of their neighbors in the region and external actors, who in this case also present as stakeholders in Tanzania’s Kiswahilization project.



**Fig. 2. Most widespread languages in the East African Community (by country; not proportionate to the population).**

Source: compiled by the author.

The expansion of the African language beyond national borders is fueled by the concept of *ubidhaishaji* (marketing), which involves using it as a tool for economic and cultural diplomacy, promoting a positive image of the country in the African and international space. The corresponding fundamental document, i.e., the national strategy for marketing Kiswahili (*Mpango Mkakati wa Taifa wa Ubidhaishaji wa Kiswahili*), was prepared by BAKITA in 2022.<sup>19</sup> In particular, to achieve the set goals, it involves training more than 600 translators at the University of Dodoma—professionals who are supposed to work at bilateral and multilateral high-level events.

Back in 2021, BAKITA purchased teaching materials for this project worth 187.5 million Tanzanian shillings (over \$80,000). Plans are underway to open new Kiswahili teaching centers at Tanzanian embassies abroad in the Netherlands, UAE, Germany, Italy, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Comoros, France, the Republic of Korea, and Turkey. Today, Kiswahili teaching centers for foreigners operate at major universities like the Open University of Tanzania and the University of Dar es Salaam. They are aimed at expats, researchers, and students interested in further study and work in Tanzania and other Eastern African countries.

In 2021, Kiswahili, at the suggestion of the country's authorities, won another victory, this time at the international level: UNESCO designated July 7 as World Kiswahili Day. This decision was made “in recognition of the global significance of Kiswahili as a language of global communication built in the daily life of Africans in a constant enrichment of its multiculturalism.”<sup>20</sup> According to its architects, Kiswahili should become a vehicle for the values of multiculturalism and peaceful coexistence. In particular, it is supposed to increase knowledge about the Kiswahili language and culture at the international level, encourage research, and encourage interest among young people through social networks, music, and cultural events.<sup>21</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The current language policy in Tanzania rests on two pillars: Kiswahili and English. Over many decades, the proportions of these two components have varied. Languages of other ethnic groups occupy a lower position, and if they appear in legislation, it is mainly in prohibitive formulations.

The current situation is largely a product of the colonial era. However, over the past decades of independent development, Kiswahili has become the language of government, education, and the political process, a symbol of national unity. In turn, English provides a link with the external, globalized world, but due to its exogenous origin in relation to the national state and its colonial past, it is perceived as alien. However, these perceptions and proportions are not set in stone for each of them; rather, they are bound to change every 5–10 years depending on the circumstances.

At the initial stage, the introduction of Kiswahili was due to the intention to forge a supra-ethnic identity and oppose colonialism. The language was perceived as a tool for the formation, storage, and transmission of national mentality [Vasiliev, Vasilyeva 2021]. In this regard, the campaign to push aside local, smaller ethnic languages seems like a

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<sup>19</sup> Baraza la Kiswahili laita wakalimani wa Kireno, Kihispaniola. *Mwananchi*. 15.08.2022. <https://mwananchi.co.tz/mw/habari/kitaifa/baraza-la-kiswahili-laita-wakalimani-wa-kireno-kispaniola-3915594> (accessed: 01.08.2024)

<sup>20</sup> 2024 Edition of World Kiswahili Language Day. *UNESCO*. 05.07.2024. <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/2024-edition-world-kiswahili-language-day> (accessed: 20.07.2024)

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

logical move. Kiswahili did actually become the mainstay of the Tanzanian national vision, helping to shape national identity and performing an important expressive identification function. However, as early as the 1990s, commodification of language became the new main trend. In the 2010s through 2020s, language policy is being revised in the light of development imperatives.

The main conflict today is that, in terms of status and foreign policy value, Kiswahili is inferior to English [Kamwangamalu 2013]. This imbalance is most obvious in the education system. Since most parents consider English a bonus in the labor market, facilitating vertical social mobility, many of them choose English-language schools. At the same time, English remains the main language of instruction in higher education institutions. On the other hand, most Tanzanians do not use English in everyday life, while Kiswahili is spoken everywhere, especially outside conventionally tourist areas. Thus, the African language performs a communicative, as well as participatory and unifying role, involving the Kiswahili-speaking population into politics: both as an electorate and by means of consolidating state structures.

At the same time, language policy in Tanzania cannot be considered truly “mass” when it comes to matters of agency. The preponderance in favor of English is often ensured by a narrow group of people, who maintain inertia thinking and overly rely on it as an important career portal. Foreign policy considerations, Tanzania’s ideas about where it stands in the regional and global system of international relations, plus the authority of its international partners also have a certain influence. The choice in favor of one or another language model is often complicated by a shortage of resources, which, however, cannot be perceived as the main reason for such inconsistency.

Nevertheless, the Tanzanian leadership intends to continue to scale up its Kiswahili project regionally and internationally, which means that the relevance of studying this African language in the medium term will remain. The future of Kiswahili and its chances of withstanding the total anglicization that has swept Africa will depend, among other things, on how well it manages to maintain and expand Kiswahili’s position in the public space, making it the language of science and technology. In this regard, supporting both state and private Kiswahili-language programs in Russia, as well as joint projects with Tanzania in this field, including the digital ones, seems promising from the point of view of developing relations with friendly African countries within the slowly but surely growing Kiswahili area.

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## СОВРЕМЕННАЯ ЯЗЫКОВАЯ ПОЛИТИКА В ТАНЗАНИИ: *CUI PRODEST? CUI BONO?*

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**Аннотация.** Современная Танзания – одна из немногих африканских стран, где население говорит на автохтонном языке суахили, а английский играет важную роль как второй из двух официальных языков. В статье исследуются факторы выбора языковой политики, проводимой с момента обретения независимости. На основе анализа политических функций языка автор приходит к выводу, что английский воспринимается в основном как средство социальной мобильности (статусная ценность) и культурной и экономической дипломатии Танзании за рубежом (внешнеполитическая ценность), в то время как суахили служит инструментом национальной самоидентификации, коммуникации между гражданами, катализатором политического участия и объединения политических структур. В то же время стратегия Танзании в этой области зачастую выглядит непоследовательной, что особенно заметно в сфере образования. Помимо низкой квалификации преподавателей и качества учебных материалов, анализ участников образовательного процесса и их позиций показывает, что значительная часть танзанийской



элиты склонна сопротивляться суахилизации или даже саботировать ее, рассматривая английский как ключ к более заманчивым перспективам трудоустройства или возможность эмиграции. Такой подход поддерживают англоязычные страны, в частности Великобритания, заинтересованная в том, чтобы не упустить Танзанию из сферы своего политического и экономического влияния. Однако поскольку танзанийское руководство продолжает продвигать язык суахили на международном уровне, маловероятно, что в среднесрочной перспективе страна вычеркнет его из публичного поля. В связи с этим для России представляется целесообразным участвовать в совместных с Танзанией программах и проектах, подразумевающих развитие суахили и его продвижение в других странах Африки.

**Ключевые слова:** Танзания, Восточная Африка, языковая политика, политические функции языка, суахили, матрица Менделоу, заинтересованные стороны

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