

Gloswahilization of the African Mind: Language Ideology in Action

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Abstract: This article articulates how Swahili, an African language, is perceived differently by its speakers based on varied reasons. The goal is to show contending views that reveal a linguistic ideology that may be understood by examining social, economic and cultural phenomenon resulting in a process through which Swahili speakers acquire a global understanding about the Swahili language – *gloswahilization*. The author used survey questionnaires conducted on sight in four different events to gain insights from 100 Africans regarding their perceptions of Swahili while in Africa and after staying in the United States of America. A thematic approach was used to analyze data. The themes and patterns seem to suggest that most Swahili speakers while in Africa are unaware of Swahili's value beyond Africa; most Swahili speakers in the USA are aware of Swahili's value locally and globally, and understanding varied functions of Swahili beyond Africa may lead to a *gloswahilization*. The article thus demonstrate how local and international forces play a role into creating positive and negative perceptions about Swahili into the African mind. Such understanding may play a critical role in helping Africans envision ways to capitalize the power of language for their economic success.

Keywords: Languages, Language Ideology, Globalization, Economy, Sub Saharan Africa(SSA), African Languages, Language Attitudes

INTRODUCTION

Africa is a resource-rich continent whose economy is based upon trade, industry, agriculture, and human resources but many African people are poor [1]. The impact of their economic status in the world should not be undermined since nearly 1.07 billion people lived among 54 African countries as of 2012[2]. The 2014 Index of Economic Freedom posted annually by the Heritage Foundation in partnership with Wall Street Journal declared Sub-Saharan Africa(SSA) as the world's fastest-growing region at 5.6% per year while at the same time recognizing it as the worlds' poorest inhabited region in April of 2013. Recently however, Africa has experienced some growth in sales of commodities, manufacturing and service with over one-third of Sub-Saharan African countries posting growth rates of 6% or higher per year [2-3]. By 2025, if Africa's GDP rises by an average of over 6% as is expected to reach, people living in Africa will be able to make at least US \$1,000 per year, hence reaching "middle income" status [3]. Whether this expectation will indeed become reality, history will tell but to capitalize on this economic momentum, it is rather necessary to look closely at language as an arena highly likely to propel Africa to a positive economic path.

Since communication entails language use, the value of speaking multiple languages, including African languages is ever increasing. As such, the power of a language to control human success is overwhelming particularly because the influence of mass media in shaping human reality is at its highest [4]. History shows language is not a mere communication tool, it embodies the past, beholds the present while predicting, propelling and controlling the future [5]. Language influences our thought processes and shapes culture. To that end, language has become an undisputable social, political and economic sorting machine. Even more, it is an authoritative force of control and a great power that shapes and reflects human development [6]. Language pervades just about every facet of individual and social life, including economic processes.

The following article presents results from a "language ideology" survey conducted between 100 Africans (50 Kenyans and 50 Tanzanians) currently residing in the United States of America (USA) to examine their perceptions of the value of Swahili, before and after they moved to the USA.

After the relevance of the study is noted, I will present a review of the literature pertaining to language use and economic success in the world and particularly

in Africa, and the various implications involved. Literature on the issue of language ideology in SSA and its implications for economic growth will follow. More directly, an overview of linguistic ideology in Tanzania and Kenya will come after. Following this introduction, I will discuss the methodology and results of my analyses.

This research is relevant by a theoretical as well as a realistic and economical perspective. Understanding how Africans gain a globalized perception of the value of their African languages based on local and international trends may help eliminate negative perceptions associated with African language use. By highlighting opposing examples of linguistic ideologies, Africans within the continent and those in the diaspora may begin to discover the significance of their languages and envision ways to capitalize on this treasure for their economic success especially internationally.

This section offers a review of the literature related to the relationship between language and economic development. The review mainly underlines contending perspectives regarding the use of African languages, in our case, Swahili as opposed to imperial languages such as English to bring economic gain in the African continent. The review also elaborates how multilingualism, a language reality in most African countries is used to explain Africa's unfavorable political, social and economic status, while calling attention to the need to examine closely prominent linguistic ideologies which favor English as a dominant language in Africa. Subsequently, I pose critical questions following this review to serve as a foundation for readers to digest the survey questions undertaken.

In regards to language and economic development, the concept "economic development" has several meanings partly because the term "development" embodies vast areas of social, political, historical and cultural phenomenon not easily measured. In this paper the term strictly focuses on income per capita or GDP, though not denying other meanings. Central to our discussion is the prevailing belief that using a common language strengthens trade because it increases communication [7-8]. In addition, knowledge and development of human capital is mitigated through the integration of local and international linguistic knowledge [9-11].

To that end, I highlight two camps of scholarship dealing with the relationship between language and economic development. The first shows multilingualism as detrimental to economic performance based on ethnic, linguistic or cultural disintegration on economic performance [12].). Typically, these authors appear to assume that internal conflicts are mostly an outcome of diversity which

automatically fetters the development of trust that creates a foundation for stable political and economic institutions. As Nettle and Romaine make clear, such scholars ignore, on the other hand, the role individual bilingualism plays in the development of intergroup trade. As such, Noguera and Siscart conclude that language barriers may indeed limit international trade [13], but the effect is considerably weaker than asserted by Ku and Zussman [14] among other scholars, because the ability to use multiple languages can alleviate the effect of historically determined language obstacles.

The other group asserts the true causes for slow economic growth lie elsewhere though ethno-linguistic division has taken the blame for it while only feeble correlation to economic performance, may in fact exist [15]. A number of authors show the GDP per capita in a country is not associated with gaining competence in a dominant language such as English [16]. Baldacciet al. [17] for example attest that economic development is not an outcome or a direct result of dominant foreign language acquisition, case in point, English for example does not ideally result in higher level of economic growth especially in formerly colonized nations. On the contrary, the widespread use of local languages, in fact increases income per capita, reflecting positive outcome of ethno-linguistic and linguistic fragmentation.

Laitin and Ramachandran [18] underscore this point by showing that a high exposure to an official language as well as a short distance to the area of use, causes low cost in the individual's participation in economic development. They continue emphasizing, especially in Sub-Sahara African countries whose official languages such as English are mainly used in the classroom and rarely outside school walls, such low exposure is intensified by the incapability to recruit teachers with proper language skills, thus, affecting high costs to the students, robbing them, in turn, of effectively contributing in the economy. As such, this is a significant factor in elaborating the relationship between language use and the poor human capital in Africa.

Even more, by investing in the production of reading materials in local languages, Ouane and Glanz [19] acknowledge the high probability that local languages would offer the same scope of benefits as those offered by dominant languages and boost the income per capita even further. And studies such as Dutcher [20], Heugh and Mulumba [21] show using local languages as the medium of instruction leads to higher aggregate stock of human capital by lowering drop-outs and repetition rates. For a language to be valued and used, however, what matters is not what research shows but rather how that language is perceived within a specific community or nation state.

Thus, I turn our attention to the meaning and economic implications of language ideology.

Language ideologies are belief systems interrelated with and informing linguistic behavior; they are also frameworks influencing decisions about language acquisition and use [22]. Such beliefs are based upon how a language advances individual and group interests; therefore, people's perceptions about the value and place of their language draw from not only local but also international realities and trends [23].

Most people in SSA think lowly about their languages and prefer learning using either French or English [24]. Recent studies on issues of language policy implementation in African countries, Tanzania, for example continue to show prevalent negative perceptions on African languages [25-26]. Africa's economy, among other things, needs to continue paying close attention in seeking to understand the role language plays in trade, industry, manufacturing and mastering knowledge dispersed in key institutions such as schools [27]. For example, Akerlof and Kranton [28] shows there is relationship between economics and identity. Lamberton [29] and Grin [30] attest to great correlation between language skills and labor income. To that end, considering the majority of African citizens, 90% to be exact in countries such as Ghana use their indigenous languages as opposed to the 10% who use imperial languages for their daily affairs, then the most effective language of development in Africa cannot be the former colonial languages because African people are the agents of development [31-32]. Even more recently, David Laitin and Rajesh Ramachandran clearly show a negative correlation between an official-language not well spoken or used by the local population with the level of income per capita.

Nevertheless, Tanzanians and Kenyans adhere to the belief that English, an imperial language is better for their social, political and economic development. One must not be surprised by this position because studies show the elite in these two countries (10%), and others in SSA are proficient in imperial languages [33]. However, as articulated before, the majority of the remaining 90% of the population are not well versed in English. Vavrus [34] and Brock-Utne [24] for example explain that most Tanzanians consider English to be superior to Swahili and other local languages because it promotes individual economic success. Rubagumya [35] study exemplifies this point by highlighting the mushrooming of English medium private schools in Tanzania. The idea that local languages and Swahili hinder academic and economic success is a prominent ideology fed by academic institutions which mostly draw their arguments from funding agencies such as the World Bank which encourages local language use in the

primary level and never in the tertiary level, hence, signifying African local languages' limited functionality in critical areas in the African society [36].

In Kenya, though slightly different from Tanzania, many Kenyans speak English; their country adopted Swahili as one of its official language much later than Tanzania did [37]. Like Tanzania, Kenya also has experienced the increase of expensive private international schools, whose teachers are expatriate native English speakers [38]. These schools host children who come from rich western elite families, leaving the rest of the African population, especially its neighbors --Tanzanians to believe that English is the sole reason behind such families' educational and in turn, economic success. To make matters worse, this Eurocentric linguistic ideology was instilled in the late 1980s when the World Bank suggested that the emphasis in using Swahili as the medium of instruction in Tanzania's primary schools is partly, if not mainly to blame for Tanzania's high school quality which they pronounced as inferior, at the time, to that of Kenya [36]. In a similar token, Alastair declared, "English is not only a structural reproducer of global inequalities but also produces inequality by producing subject positions that contribute to their subjectification. But it is also at this point that possibilities for resistance present themselves" [39].

Having this background in mind, the question that begs our attention now is: What would happen if Swahili speakers with high education levels are offered jobs that pay comparable salaries to those with English proficiency? Do most people in Tanzania and Kenya succeed economically only because they speak English? Does a language such as Swahili have nothing to offer to the world? What do Africans who once lived in Africa but now reside in the USA think about their African language? These questions fueled this study by shaping the questions I designed for the survey.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Having lived in the United States of America for nearly 20 years, I know many Tanzanians and Kenyans who came to the USA for various reasons and at different times. Most of those I know live in Columbia South Carolina, some in Birmingham Alabama, a few in Maryland and Ohio. All of them speak Swahili proficiently but I was not aware at the time, whether Swahili is their first or second language.

The 100 participants (50 Kenyans and 50 Tanzanians) comprised of 59% female and 41% male whose age ranged between 24 to 66 years. More than 82% of them graduated from College, 49% had a graduate degree while 5% had terminal degrees. More than 53% were married of which 45% had more than one child while the rest were single. About 98% have lived in the USA for more than 5 years and attended

American Colleges or Universities. About 62% were employed at the time and had been working for more than 3 years.

I started gathering data in May of 2011 till July of 2013 in four separate occasions: The first time at a graduation ceremony of a Tanzanian completing her college degree (Maryland, May, 2011); the second time at a wedding between a Tanzanian and a Kenyan (Alabama, November, 2011) and the third time at a Christmas party for Africans in Columbia (December, 2011) and lastly in Maryland during a Vijimambo conference hosted by the Tanzanian embassy to promote Swahili, July 2013). In addition to questions soliciting participants' gender, age, education and employment background, place of residency in Africa and in the USA, marital status and length of stay in the USA. The study used four main questions:

- 1) *Is Swahili your 1st language (the language you learned first and know the most)? If not, please say whether second, third etc. before coming to America, what did you think of Swahili?*
- 2) *Now that you live in America, what do you think of Swahili?*
- 3) *In your opinion, why do you think your view of Swahili remained the same or changed?*

- 4) *Please make any comments or pose questions you may have regarding this topic.*

Each participant was given the questions on a piece of paper and I gathered the responses before the end of each of the above mentioned events. A thematic mechanism was used to group words, phrases and statements into themes. In light of the reviewed literature, the themes were put together using the following process. First, answers were grouped based on the survey questions. Second, from the replies, key terms and phrases found in statements concerning language beliefs and perceptions were used as flag words. These led to the formation of key ideas from which categories of participants' explanations were formed. The findings conveyed the concepts behind this process to show the impact of local and global trends in the participants' perceptions about Swahili.

More specifically, to analyze data, the responses from the first two questions were examined to determine whether participants' beliefs about Swahili remained the same or changed after their residency in America (Table 1). This was the first stage of data analysis.

Table-1: Perception about Swahili Before and After Coming to America

Survey Question	Responses	# of Responses	Overview
<i>Is Swahili your 1st language?</i>	YES	43	
	NO	57	
<i>What did you think of Swahili before coming to USA?</i>	Swahili is a language to function here and there but not for important things like higher learning or jobs outside Africa	32	Negative 85
	I honestly didn't think much about it	10	
	Swahili is good for talking to my friends and neighbors	7	
	Swahili is good for songs in East Africa but not much	3	
	Swahili is a good language but leads me nowhere	18	
	Swahili is just a small language	15	Positive 15
	I can talk to many Africans in Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda and Zaire, Swahili is important	1	
	Swahili is a vehicle for national unity	2	
	Swahili is the reason you and I are talking though we are not from the same ethnic group	4	
	Swahili is who I am; it is my identity and I love it	8	
<i>Now that you live in America, what do you think of Swahili??</i>	I think knowing Swahili is the reason I have a job now	11	Positive 75
	My children need a foreign language in school, Swahili counts	3	
	I think it is a very important language, looks good on resume	21	
	Swahili is one of the UN languages- it is very important	9	
	Swahili is becoming very prominent worldwide for business, military, politics and other reasons	31	Negative 25
	I am not sure because in my job it doesn't matter	6	
	Compared to Spanish, it is growing but not strong yet	7	
	I think it is okay to know it but it doesn't matter a lot	7	
I don't think it will matter to me because I specialize in science	5		

Data obtained based on answers to the third question sought to examine factors or forces behind a

change or maintenance of specific linguistic ideologies about Swahili (Table 2).

Table-2: Factors Shaping Swahili Speakers' Language Ideology

Survey Question	Responses	# of responses
<i>State whether your opinion about Swahili changed or didn't and then explain, Why do you think it remained the same or changed after living in America?</i>	<i>It didn't change:</i> I don't see how Swahili makes any difference in the USA either, I want to learn Spanish because that would matter	23
	It changed: I am realizing the significance of this language internationally	4
	It changed : I see Kiswahili as a big language after realizing it is aired in many international radios	3
	It changed: I make money to tutor Swahili students	4
	It changed : When I talk to my friends in Kenya and some in Tanzania, I use Swahili a lot, Swahili keeps me connected to my people	4
	It changed: I see knowing many languages matters a lot here in the USA	18
	It changed: In College, you need a foreign language here and my Swahili counted	17
	- It changed: I realize Swahili is not a small thing, my friend who didn't have a job for a while found a job because of his Swahili	1
	It changed: Swahili is offered in universities, I think it is very important	5
	It changed: Just yesterday my American friend who is an engineer got a job in Tanzania because he learned Kiswahili here in the USA	1
	It changed : I think many of us Tanzanians don't think too much of Swahili, our Kenyan friends are gaining because of Swahili, so I think Swahili is big	6
	It changed : Swahili is big man, I see even jobs now for translation and I blame myself because I am not that good	3
	It changed: Even in the internet you now find books in Swahili, I think Swahili is not just a small tomato market language anymore	2
	It changed: Even though I have a terminal degree, it is Swahili that made a difference for where I am now	6
	It changed: Western companies in Africa hire people with both English and Swahili, I think Swahili is rising higher than we know	3

Participants' responses on the above questions (Table 2) were used to identify key words and phrases used in statements regarding language beliefs. I then used such terms as signals namely: "flag words" which

helped me to recognize underlying main ideas, which in turn resulted in categories describing a finding (Table 3).

Table -3: Sifting and Discovery of Findings

Question	Flag words	Key Idea(s)	Category	Finding
Question 2:- <i>Opinion while residing in Africa</i>	Not important; didn't think much, not for higher learning, leads me nowhere, small language	The usefulness of Swahili in Kenya and Tanzania	Opinion based on personal and local experience	most Swahili speakers in Africa are unaware of Swahili's value beyond Africa
Question 3, <i>Opinion since residency in USA</i>	Reason for job, counts for foreign language, good on resume, UN language, worldwide, doesn't matter, not strong yet	Significance of Swahili in the USA and internationally; Lack of connection between Swahili and occupation	Local applicability of language and occupation or schooling; Global linguistic trends and understanding	most Swahili speakers in the USA are aware of Swahili's value locally and globally
Question 4, <i>Reason behind ideological shift</i>	I don't see, internationally, international radios, universities, job, gaining, books, where I am, companies, hire	Benefits of knowing Swahili; Functionality/applicability of Swahili internationally	Local and international perspective on African language in a global platform	Understanding varied functions of Swahili beyond Africa may lead to a <i>gloswahilization</i> - a global perception about the Swahili language.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

I examined participants' responses regarding their view of Swahili before coming to the USA. Data

shows that 85 of them had a negative view of Swahili based on the functionality of Swahili in their local contexts, while only 25 viewed Swahili positively. On the other hand, 75 of those residing in the USA had a positive perspective of Swahili based on benefits of speaking Swahili in local American contexts as well as what Swahili offers them on a global scale. Even more, while about 23 of them didn't change their perception on the value of Swahili, data seems to propose that most speakers' perception about Swahili changed after residing in the USA. By examining the data, the findings indicate that most Swahili speakers in Africa are unaware of Swahili's value beyond Africa; most Swahili speakers in the USA are aware of Swahili's value locally and globally, and understanding varied functions of Swahili beyond Africa may lead to a *gloswahilization*- a global perception about the Swahili language.

Most Swahili Speakers in Africa are Unaware of Swahili's Value Beyond Africa

Because many of the participants understood the value of Swahili based on what it enabled them to accomplish within their countries, in Africa, they didn't have a positive attitude towards the language. The negative view of African languages by Africans seems to be echoed not only in previous researches but once again here. Such unfavorable perceptions are shaped by not what is really happening on a global scale but rather, what Africans, and in this case Tanzanians and Kenyans witness as contextualized applicability of their language. They cite reasons such as:

Swahili is a language to function here and there but not for important things like higher learning or jobs outside Africa; Swahili is good for talking to my friends and neighbors; Swahili is good for songs in East Africa but not much; Swahili is a good language but leads me nowhere; and Swahili is just a small language (see Table 1)

All of the highlighted reasons are a testament to the limited understanding of how far Swahili has reached on the global scale. Their words underscore the fact that it takes a social, cultural and even political strategy to enlighten the human mind on what is going on beyond local contexts. When few people living in Tanzania and Kenya are able to attribute their social, political and economic success to Swahili, the prevailing ideology will continue to be negative unless they see otherwise. In addition, their lack of opportunities to see the utility of Swahili in other nations contributes greatly to their continued ill feelings about the language. We must not, however, forget that even within a highly negative perception, still some see a positive aspect of Swahili while living in Africa.

Most Swahili Speakers in the USA Are Aware Of Swahili's Value Locally and Globally

Although about 23 out of 100 of the participants still didn't see the value of Swahili even after coming to America, it seemed they were stuck in the "majority drive" on which language(s) really matter. With statements such as "I don't see how Swahili makes any difference in the USA either, I want to learn Spanish because that would matter," they allowed their minds to believe that they would be better off knowing "Spanish" in America but Swahili wouldn't matter. On the other hand, it was rather surprising to me that the same people who once didn't see anything of value in the Swahili language ended up with a different perception mainly because of their exposure to the varied functions of Swahili beyond their African countries. Participants who changed their opinion from negative to positive observed:

I am realizing the significance of this language internationally; I see Kiswahili as a big language after realizing it is aired in many international radios; I make money to tutor Swahili students; Swahili keeps me connected to my people; I see knowing many languages matters a lot here; In College, you need a foreign language here and my Swahili counted; I realize Swahili is not a small thing, my friend who didn't have a job for a while found a job because of his Swahili; Swahili is offered in universities, I think it is very important; Just yesterday my American friend who is an engineer got a job in Tanzania because he learned Kiswahili here in the USA...

Their voices echoes a truth hard to deny: with varied exposure to what Swahili means to different aspects of life in America and internationally, Swahili acquired a different price-tag from "invaluable" to "valuable." Their perception, like the first group, was informed by the local applicability of Swahili but in addition, they were able to think beyond the borders of America and started to see themselves as global citizens, hence realizing where Swahili stands internationally.

Understanding Varied Functions of Swahili Beyond Africa May Lead to Gloswahilization

A close examination of most participants' reasons to change their negative view of Swahili to positive seem to suggest that it is not the language itself that determines how it would be perceived but rather, it is the opportunities for people to see language applied in multiple ways and in varied levels and reasons that enable them to form or alter their view of a language. This phenomenon is true for languages in general but particularly for Swahili and for other African languages, this finding is critical because, the persistent

understanding that dominant European languages are the sole reason for the economic, social and even political development of Africans both within and outside African borders needs to be closely examined. Some of the Kenyans and Tanzanians living in the USA highlighted ways they felt about Swahili after recognizing its local and international value:

I think many of us Tanzanians don't think too much of Swahili, our Kenyan friends are gaining because of Swahili; Swahili is big man, I see even jobs now for translation and I blame myself because I am not that good; even in the internet you now find books in Swahili, I think Swahili is not just a small tomato market-language anymore; even though I have a terminal degree, it is Swahili that made a difference for where I am now; Western companies in Africa hire people with both English and Swahili; I think Swahili is rising higher than we know.

The above statements indicate Africans who once couldn't believe their Swahili would contribute significantly to them having a job came to discover otherwise after living in the USA. Such declarations can only be understood as we discover factors contributing to their ideological shifts informed by global forces manifested in some local contexts but may not be visible in African local settings.

When I planned this study, I was compelled by the overwhelming efforts by many Tanzanians and Kenyans within Africa to enroll their children in English-medium schools. I wanted to understand whether they are aware, besides English, that an African language also matters for social and economic development because the argument has often being- "if I know English, I am marketable in Africa and elsewhere" though the reality is not so kind to their claims as discussed before. Though I hoped for a few who might change or show positive view of Swahili after their residency in America, I didn't think a significant number would do so but this is not what happened. More than 75% had a favorable view of Swahili after getting jobs that remarked Swahili as an asset. Such reasons include studying in Universities that accepted Swahili as an important language, realizing Swahili is on the international scale and is heard in radios and seen in the internet. Tanzanians for example became aware that Kenyans who know Swahili are getting ahead economically, and companies are looking for people who speak Swahili to work in companies located anywhere in the world, including Africa.

Hence, I would suggest future research explorations that might look closely at other avenues that may highlight a positive use of African languages internationally. We already know many Africans favor

imperial languages but we are yet to sort-out how many Africans are succeeding economically based on other factors besides speaking English. Research on the role of language policies in African countries to promote African languages are the more needed. For example, what would happen if Tanzania requires foreign workers who work in gold mining in Tanzania learn Swahili instead of hiring Tanzanians who speak English only? Furthermore, much scholarship is needed to explore how language policies in African countries contribute to the demise of the status of African languages in the global market?

CONCLUSION

While this study took less than 3 years, I was able to show how African languages can and needs to be seen through different angles and in different contexts. By doing so, I illustrate the potential for African languages to propel Africans economically locally and internationally. I showed that most Swahili speakers in Africa are unaware of Swahili's value beyond Africa, but once they move to the USA, they became aware of Swahili's value locally and globally. Most importantly, the study underscores understanding of varied functions of Swahili beyond Africa may lead to a *gloswahilization*.

Though language activists argue each language has the right to exist because it plays multiple roles in each society, people's decisions to acquire and use a specific language are based on multiple reasons, which in turn inform their language ideologies. The continual flow of sophisticated information technology in all aspects of human life in this age of globalization necessitates an examination of social control mainly deriving from the society as the proprietor of language, literature, and culture. Though agreeing with language scholars whose researches have focused on economic reasons Africans choose to learn and use imperial languages rather than their own native or national languages, this article highlights contending perceptions of Africans' opinions on African languages based on local and international factors contributing to the formation of a globalized understanding of the value and place of an African language such as Swahili. Be it economic, social or political trends propelling the power of one language over others, close examination of such tendencies need to be continually examined as a quest for the African mind to be completely liberated from its entangled historical web.

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