

THE POSITION OF KISWAHILI AMONG THE LINGUA
FRANCAS OF AFRICA: A TYPOLOGICAL SURVEY¹:

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I. INTRODUCTION

A number of studies have been carried out recently in Dar es Salaam to describe or account for the uniqueness of Kiswahili as a language with many ambivalent sociolinguistic features (see, for example, Khamis 1983; Mochiwa, 1986; Sengo, 1988; Batibo, 1987, 1988; Lwaitama, 1988). Such features include its function as both lingua franca and vernacular² language; the non coincidence between Kiswahili linguistic spectrum and Kiswahili cultural spectrum; the exogenetic rather than endogenetic trends in the development of standard Kiswahili; and the multistandard forms of Kiswahili. The obvious question is whether these characteristics are unique to Kiswahili only or are found elsewhere in Africa.

This central question gave rise to an investigation into the possible lingua francas of Africa. The author was mainly interested to know whether it was possible to establish a typology of the lingua francas of Africa in terms of their emergence, growth, characteristics, functional importance and how they compared with Kiswahili.

In this study it became necessary to define the term lingua franca as it was conceived in the Medieval times. A lingua franca was defined as a common or auxiliary language used to enable routine communication to take place between groups of people who speak different native languages (UNESCO, 1953, Samarin, 1962, Greenberg, 1965, Heine, 1970; Hudson, 1980; Trudgill, 1983). Such a common language may or may not belong to one of the groups. A lingua Franca is often characterized by:

- (a) a language or form of language
- (b) known to the entire or good part of the region in question,
- (c) accepted by all parties as the only form of broader communication,
- (d) able to respond to the specific communicative need of the groups concerned,

II: AFRICA'S LINGUA FRANCAS

After a survey of the major languages of Africa it was clear that in principle most of the large languages would qualify as lingua francas since they were often used as "go-between" languages. In this study I will limit myself to surveying only the most extensively and routinely used lingua francas³ which number around 40, namely Amharic (Ethiopia), Arabic (Morocco, Spanish Sahara, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Chad, Egypt, Djibuti, Sudan, Somalia), Bambara (Mali, Senegal, Guinea, Burkina Fasso), Bulu (Cameroun, Gabon, Rio Muni), Duala (Cameroun), Dyula (Ghana, Ivory Coast, Mali, Niger), Ewondo (Cameroun), Ewe (Togo, Ghana), Fanagalo (South Africa, Swaziland, Lesotho, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Zaire), Fulani (Senegal, Mali, Burkina Fasso, Chad, Niger, Nigeria, Cameroun, Guinea), Ganda⁴ (Uganda), Hausa (Nigeria, Niger, Chad, Benin, Togo, Cameroun, Ghana), Kanuni (Nigeria, Chad, Niger), Kituba (Congo, Gabon, Zaire), Lingala (Zaire, Congo, Gabon), Lozi (Zambia, Angola), Lwena Luba (Zaire, Congo, Angola), Lwena (Congo, Zambia, Angola), Maba (Chad, Sudan), Malinke (Burkina Fasso, Mali, Gambia, Ivory Coast, Senegal, Portuguese Guinea, Guinea) Mossi More (Burkina Fasso, Ivory Coast, Ghana), Nyanja (Malawi, Zambia, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Tanzania) Pidgin A70 (Cameroun), Sango (Central African Republic, Congo) Sara (Central African Republic, Chad), Song'ai (Mali, Niger, Burkina Fasso, Benin, Nigeria), Shona (Zimbabwe, Mozambique), Swahili (Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Somalia, Zaire, Rwanda, Burundi, Zambia, Malawi, Mozambique, Comoro, Madagascar), Sukuma (Tanzania), Susu (Guinea, Sierra Leone, Portuguese Guinea), Tswana (Botswana), Twi (Ghana), Town Bumba (Zambia, Zaire), Umbundu (Angola, Namibia), Wolof (Senegal, Gambia), Yoruba (Nigeria, Benin, Togo), and Zande (Zaire, Central African Republic, Sudan). For each of these lingua francas, the author investigated its origin, spread, function and status according to available information.

The author was able to compile a list of all the factors which have favoured the growth of lingua francas in Africa. Eighteen factors were identified which have favoured the existence of lingua francas in Africa⁵. These are chronologically listed as follows:

1. Tribal or Imperial Conquest.
2. Traditional Trade and Settlement.
3. Spread of Pre-colonial Religions (Islam, Coptic, Traditional beliefs).
4. Historical Identity.
5. Colonial Plantations, Mines, Labour, Settlements.
6. Colonial Administration, Army, Police,
7. Colonial Trade and Commerce.
8. European - African Communication.
9. Spread of Religion (i.e. Christianity)
10. Urban Settlements.
11. Mass Communication (Education, Literacy Campaign, Mass Media).
12. Symbol of National, Racial or Cultural Identity.
13. Conscious National Efforts.
14. Linguistic Similarities with Neighbouring Languages.
15. Absence of Ethnic (as opposed to Cultural) Identity.
16. Demographic Imbalance (i.e. among Minorities).
17. Emigration and Nomadism.
18. Social Prestige.

When the above factors were tested against the above listed languages it was found out that some languages had been affected by more factors than others. The real picture was as shown in Table I below:

Table I

Language	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	Score
1. Ambaric	+		+						+	+	+	+	+			+		+	10
2. Arabic	+	+	+	+		+	+			+	+	+	+		+	+	+	+	14
3. Bambara	+	+			+	+	+			+	+		+	+					9
4. Bulu							+							+					3
5. Dnala		+					+		+										3
6. Dyula	+	+	+				+										+	+	6
7. Ewe		+					+		+		+								4
8. Ewondo					+	+		+							+				4
9. Fanagalo					+			+							+	+			4
10. Fulani	+	+	+													+	+	+	6
11. Ganda					+	+			+		+			+		+		+	7
12. Hausa	+	+	+			+	+			+	+					+	+	+	10
13. Kanuri	+	+	+			+					+							+	6
14. Kituba		+				+	+	+	+	+	+			+		+			10
15. Lingala		+				+	+	+	+	+	+			+	+	+		+	12
16. Lozi	+																	+	2
17. Luba					+				+	+									4
18. Iwena					+					+	+			+		+			5
19. Malinke		+	+	+						+								+	5
20. Mende																	+		4
21. Mossi-More	+	+			+		+							+		+			6
22. Maba	+	+	+	+			+												5
23. Nyanja					+	+		+	+	+				+					6
24. Pidgin A70					+		+			+				+	+				5
25. Sango		+				+		+			+	+	+	+	+	+		+	10
26. Sara					+	+													2
27. Shona										+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	7
28. Songhai	+		+	+		+											+		5
29. Sukuma																+	+	+	3
30. Susu																+	+		2
31. Swahili		+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	15
32. Town Bemba					+					+		+	+	+	+			+	6
33. Tswana						+					+			+		+			4
34. Twi	+	+	+				+												4
35. Umbundu		+								+				+		+			4
36. Wolof		+			+	+				+						+		+	6
37. Yoruba		+					+									+			3
38. Zande	+						+												4
Total	13	19	11	6	14	14	16	6	10	16	14	6	10	13	8	18	9	15	

It should be borne in mind at this juncture that the results in Table I may not be complete or realistic for the following reasons: (i)

(i) The data which the author managed to collect on the respective languages are not of the same quality or extent. Not all the sources provided all the information about the factors which have contributed to the emergence of the relevant lingua francas.

(ii) Some of the information seemed out-dated, in that it was published many years back. The situation obtaining at that time may be significantly different from the current situation.

(iii) Some of the factors tended to determine other factors; thus there was an overlap or interrelationship between certain factors.

(iv) The investigation did not consider the qualitative incidence of these factors. Definitely there were differences of quality, intensity and extent of the incidence of a given factor on individual languages.

Given the above limitations, the discussions which follow should be treated as tentative and impressionistic. Nonetheless, the study provides a general framework of the typology of lingua francas in Africa, and the place of Kiswahili in this typology.

The survey rendered the following results:

(i) Some factors were more common than others. The most common factors which had affected more than 15 languages were:

(a) Linguistic Similarities with Neighbouring languages.

(b) Demographic Imbalances

(c) Traditional Trade and Settlements

(d) (Colonial) Trade and Commerce.

(e) Urban Settlement

(f) Social prestige.

We may then conclude that the existence of lingua francas in Africa has been grossly motivated by the need for trade and commercial exchanges in various centres, and that normally large languages emerged as lingua francas among minority language, especially where the languages concerned were closely related.

(ii) The importance of lingua francas regionally or nationally seems to correlate well with the number of factors which have motivated them. Thus they can be categorized in four groups as follows:

Group A: (Scores 13 and above): Mainly languages of regional (inter-national) importance. Only two languages are in this group, namely Swahili and Arabic.

Group B: (Scores between 9 and 12): Mainly languages of national importance. They are: Amharic (Ethiopia), Dambara (Mali), Hausa (Nigeria, Niger), Kituba (Congo), Lingala (Zaire) and Sango (Central African Republic).

Group C: (Scores between 5 and 8): Mainly languages of Zonal (international) importance. They include Dyula, Fulani, Ganda, Kanuri, Lwena, Mossi-More, Maba, Nyanja, Pidgin A70, Shona, Sing'ai, Malinke, Town Bemba and Wolof.

Group D: (Scores between 1 and 4): Mainly languages of localised (limited) importance. They include Bulu, Duala, Ewondo, Ewe, Fanagalo³, Lozi, Luba, Mende, Sara, Sukuma, Susu, Tswana, Twi, Umbundu, Yoruba and Zande.

(iii) Kiswahili and Arabic have the highest number of scores (15 and 14 respectively)⁶. These languages are also the most widespread lingua francas in Africa. It could therefore be deduced that these factors have, to various degrees of importance, favoured their emergence and spread.

IV THE POSITION OF KISWAHILI

Compared to the other African lingua francas, Kiswahili can be described as a typical lingua franca in its various aspects like origin, function and spread. However, the following characteristics have tended to be prominent:

(a) Origin:

Some authors like Le Page (1977) consider Kiswahili as a creole language because of its heavy infiltration of words and even grammatical and phonological features from foreign origins. Others like Fuller (1967) regard it as an Arabic pidgin. While others again like Stigand (1913) and Broomfield (1931) consider it as a mixture of Bantu languages particularly languages of former slaves) spoken along the coast.. The present study provides a different outlook. According to our analysis, the original Kiswahili language in its vernacular form as a descendant of the Sabaki complex (Hinnebusch, 1976; Nurse and Spear, 1985), probably spoken in or around the Lamu archipelago, was overtaken by the predominant lingua franca varieties in Mombasa (Kimvita) and Zanzibar (Kiunguja). Both and particularly the latter, acquired substantial neologisms from Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Hindi, Portuguese, German and English in their new roles. Kiunguja was declared the De jur lingua franca in the region in 1925 (Whiteley, 1969). However, in more recent years, the power center of standard Kiswahili has shifted to the cosmopolitan and multi-cultural center, Dar es Salaam, where a new form, slightly different from Kiunguja has emerged (Batibo, 1983). This new form, known by some authors as Kisanifu (Khamisi, 1983; TUKI, 1981; Mochiwa; 1986), has further differentiated or alienated itself from the earlier Sabaki character.

(ii) Spread:

As shown above, Kiswahili language embraces 15 out of the 18 factors, making it the most favoured language in terms of factors which have facilitated its emergence, spread and status as a lingua franca. These factors include precolonial, post-colonial, post-independence and other specific one, like linguistic similarities with neighbouring languages, absence of ethnicity, and social prestige.

III: TYPES OF LINGUA FRANCA IN AFRICA

There are two major types of lingua francas in Africa:

- (1) expanded vernaculars (native languages) and (2) hybrid - originated languages. By far the majority of the African languages belong to the first category. It should be noted, however, that the more a native language gets stretched as a lingua franca, the more prone it is to pidginization and subsequently to deculturalization.

1. Expanded Vernaculars (EC)

Most lingua francas in Africa are, in fact, native languages whose roles have been expanded to include one of communication between groups of people, to many of whom the idiom is a second or third language (Heine 1970). This category can further be subdivided according to the degree of "alienation."

(a) Predominance in Original Area (as Vernacular) (POA)

This sub-division includes those lingua francas whose function is primarily that of vernacular, that is their use as native languages. Not only their roles as lingua francas are limited but also their linguistic and cultural aspects have not been much tampered with by the new users. Languages in this sub-division includes, Lozi, Zande, Duala, Yoruba, Ewe, Luba, Ganda, Sukuma, Sara, Ewondo, Tswana and Bulu. These languages remain primarily vernacular languages.

(b) Predominance in New Area (as Lingua Franca) (PNA)

This sub-division comprises those vernaculars either whose roles as lingua francas became so predominant that they overpowered the original functions, or whose new area of operation became more extensive than the original one. Two groups are again recognized:

- (i) Those languages whose linguistic characteristics have **not** been substantially altered (NSA) in their new functions. The new learners have to abide by the native norms of the language in both its linguistic, cultural and pragmatic aspects. Such languages include Amharic, Arabic, Bambara, Kanuri, Maba, Fulani, Twi, Hausa, Song'ai, Mossi-More, Malinke, Umbundu, Wolof, Lwena and Nyanja.

(ii) Those languages whose linguistic characteristics have been substantially altered (SA) in their new functions. The new learners consider themselves learning a completely different language in view of the linguistic, pragmatic and cultural differences which may exist between the native form and the new form. Such languages include Dyula, Kituba, Lingala, Sango, Swahili and Town Bemba. The new (lingua franca) forms of these languages have often been considered as pidginized or creolized (Nida, 1955; Whiteley, 1956, 1969; Le Page, 1977) or bastardized (Weston, 1965). The most characteristic features include heavy borrowing from other languages; and phonological, grammatical and even idiomatic neologisms. Usually, the cultural component is either a degeneration of the native values or a conglomeration of the cultures of the new users.

2. Hybrid - originated (HO)

This category comprises those lingua francas which originated as pidgin or "mixed" languages. Again, two sub - divisions are recognized.

(a) Pidgin lingua francas: (PLF)

Those are lingua francas which originated as pidgins to facilitate communication between natives and foreigners. The only language in this category is Fanagalo whose vocabulary in 1953 was 70% Nguni, 24% English and 6% Afrikaans (Cole, 1953). Fanagalo is not a native language of any group since it is only used in inter-racial (and rarely inter-tribal) communication.⁷

(b) Inter-tribal "Mixture" (I T M)

The lingua francas in this sub-division are those which derive from two or more native languages which are in constant contact. The only attested lingua franca in this category is the Pidgin A70 which resulted as a "mixture" (Romaine, 1988) of closely related languages like Eton, Ewondo, Bulu and Fang (Alexandre, 1956). Normally one of these languages would predominate as the base language.

The above typology is summarized in Diagram I below:

It is therefore not surprising that a language which was once spoken by hardly a million people is now spoken by over 40 million people (Polomé and Hill, 1980).

(iii) Function:

As it is the case with most lingua francas in Africa, especially the ones described under III(1)(b), Kiswahili has become ambivalent in that as a vernacular language of the coastal people it maintains its conservative linguistic cultural and artistic character; but as a lingua franca of the larger part of the region it is only a functional language with specific linguistic and pragmatic character (Whiteley, 1956; Batibo, 1988). The new form looks deformed, degenerated and even de-culturalized in the eyes of the native speakers and other purists (Ali, 1966; Harries, 1968; Weston, 1965; Sengo, 1988). This feeling is widespread among the speakers of the other Lingua francas like Lingala⁸, Kituba⁸, Town Bemba (Richardson, 1961), and Sango (Diki-kidire, 1979). In all these cases language planners and promoters are faced with the problem of how to deal with the two varieties (Batibo, 1987), especially where the two varieties are in competition or conflict.

V. CONCLUSION

The objective of this study was to make a survey of the major lingua francas in Africa and to determine the factors which have favoured their emergence, spread and function. It has been found that many factors were responsible for the emergence of lingua francas, but their roles and importance differed from language to language. Kiswahili language had the highest number of factors, which have favoured its fast growth and predominance as the lingua franca of the major part of East and Central Africa. However, its new roles and the constant shifting of its power centers have caused new varieties to emerge, some of which are substantially different from the original native forms. This situation is not unique to Kiswahili since some of the other lingua francas in Africa appear to have experienced the same phenomenon. In such cases, the activity of language planning and standardization becomes a great challenge to linguists as they are faced with two equally legitimate linguistic varieties.

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A vernacular form (as opposed to a Lingua Franca form) is also called "basis form" (see Heine, 1970 p. 26).

In this study I will not consider foreign languages like English, French and Portuguese because of their different origins and roles. Also I will not consider those languages which are almost exclusively Vernaculars such as Somali, Makua, Siswati, Sesotho e.t.c.

For practical reasons, the prefixes have been left out in line with English conventions.

Most of these factors were extracted from documents dealing with the respective languages. The most useful document was the volume by B. Heine, Status and Use of African Lingua Francas.

The highest scores for Swahili and Arabic, may also be a reflection of our better knowledge about them as they are both well documented.

Although Fanagalo is widely spread in many mining centres in Southern and Central Africa, its use is very limited to specific situations (Richardson, 1961).

Makouta - Mboukon, personal communication.

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