



Endangering Local Languages as a Result of Adopting Swahili in Education, Religion, Politics and Local Trade in Tanzania

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Abstract

This paper aims to unveil the endangered Tanzania local languages as a result of adopting Swahili in all spheres of life in Tanzania. The study focuses on the identified endangered local languages, which are seldom used in businesses, especially those confined within the country of Tanzania. Swahili takes care of many socio-political realms as well as economic facets of life in Tanzania. The paper is guided by Language Shift Theory as developed by Joshua Fishman in 1966 and 1991. The theory explains how a speech community changes from using one language to another over a given period of time. The language shift specifically occurs across generations and results to partial or total loss of communities' original language. The theory assumes that communities are in constant interaction with their environment in order to acquire necessary needs and advance their connectivity. It further reveals the extent to which language is a core player in societal development processes and significantly contributes to explaining behavior, structure, stability, and change of organizations, which are social constructions. The study is a library exploration that identifies and studies written materials on the stated topic. The paper results indicate that a handful of Tanzanian local languages face danger of becoming extinct completely due to decreasing or lack of speakers. The danger of their extinction cannot be taken for granted because they exist with their culture. The paper recommends that Tanzania language policy should embark on aggressive local languages research and documentation countrywide but also encourage their use where possible.

Subject Areas

Linguistics

Keywords

Endangered Languages, Local Languages, Language Policy, Swahili Language

1. Introduction

Language endangerment is a fundamental concern for sociolinguists and language experts globally [1]. In the existing globalized culture, endangering a country's local language has become a disquiet in not only the anthropological field, but also in linguistics domain. Contemporarily, many post-primary school students find it difficult to communicate in their local languages because of early schooling and disconnecting from families and mother tongues when they commence their quest for education. Language is an identity that distinctively provides the differences in many global communities, Tanzania inclusive. From time immemorial, language's significant role is social functioning. It is an inherited feature and an essential tool to transmit or transfer culture from one generation to another. It preserves culture, traditions and customs of a given society continuously. Without language, there is no culture, traditions, customs preservation and transference.

Tanzania has more than 120 nominal ethnic communities spoken in Mainland and Isles.

The richness in language paves way to those languages that are majorly spoken and those with tiny speakers which are termed as being in danger. The country's language policy has directly or indirectly affected the number of local languages due to the country's change historically. As a result, minor ethnic groups see it as a prestige to adopt Swahili and English on the expense of their traditional language [2]. The informal and formal spread of Swahili as a language of distribution or lingua franca has increasingly limited the use of all other Tanzanian languages. In most formal domains, Swahili is dominant [3]. Many minor local languages are threatened by the language policy, which favors hugely the use of Swahili and English in such strategic domains as religion, politics, economics and academic life in Tanzania. In that regard, therefore, this study seeks to unveil how adopting Swahili in economic, commerce, politics and religious domains threatens minor local languages' endurance.

About 7000 languages are spoken around the world currently [4]. Most of them have fewer speakers. Those countries or regions that have adopted foreign languages have led to their local languages' disappearance in the estimated 500 years of their existence. There have remained around 6809 languages as listed in the latest printed edition of the Ethnologies. More than half languages are expected to disappear in the current century globally due to decreased number of speakers [5]. Each part of the world experiences the danger of disappearing of unused languages. Oppositely, dominant global languages continue to nourish. The global giant languages are: European languages such as English, Spanish and Russian, and non-European languages such as Japanese and Chinese. Most European languages are

replaced by Aboriginal languages. In Australia, more than 90% of languages that were spoken during the time of British colonization have disappeared [6]. Krauss (1992) [7] narrates that 10% of today's oral languages remain as vital and non-threatened languages.

2. Theoretical Framework

This paper is guided by Language Shift Theory as developed by Joshua Aaron Fishman in 1966. The theory explains how language in a given community changes from one language to another over a given period of time due to various circumstances like economy, commerce, politics and religion. The shift occurs progressively as speech community diminishes in using it in the stated areas of use. The change specifically occurs across generations and results to partial or total loss of communities' original native language.

For a shift to occur in any given speech community, Fishman proposed three features that exist. These are: a language community must be bilingual in nature; one language must dominate the other and lastly, the less dominant language must have fewer number of speakers. This theory aligns with this paper as it unveils how Tanzania's disadvantaged minor languages face a danger of disappearing due to their insignificance in economic, political social and religious activities.

3. The Situation of Local Languages in the World

Chelliah (2021) discusses endangerment of languages in the world, taking a case study of language endangerment in Nepal, Tasmania, Mexico, Northeast India, Hungary and North America [8]. The study reveals factors that contribute to endangerment of languages namely: natural disasters: local and geopolitics resulting from genocide, forced migration and political instability, government policy and discrimination, prestige and utility. This suggests that language endangerment is a problem of the whole world. Minority languages are observed to be hugely affected. Linguists should proceed to check the ways of doing revitalization of our languages, specifically local languages.

Al Jahdhami (2015) studied minority languages in Oman. The study employed survey method to unleash the speaker's knowledge with an estimated number of speakers [9]. The study used a three-level framework namely: definitely endangered, severely endangered and critically endangered. The results proposed that Oman languages belong to three families, which are: Indo-Iranian languages, Modern South Arabian language and Bantu languages. The study findings indicate that some languages spoken in other countries but peculiar to Oman speakers as mother tongue, along with Arabic, are endangered and threatened by Arabic, which is high ranked regional language.

4. The Situation of Local Languages in Africa

Languages that exist in Africa are estimated to be more than 2000 [10]. This indicates that Africa is productive in terms of existing local languages ahead of Asia,

which is a large continent in terms of size and population. African use of vernacular or indigenous languages is diminishing gradually. It is predicted that about 200 languages are endangered and some are dying because of being replaced by European colonial languages mainly English, French and Portuguese, which penetrated African nations in the past 200 years during colonial era. In some African countries, more prestigious African languages replace the least prestigious African languages, which are indigenous languages [11].

Enaikele (2014) analyzed Etsako minority languages in Central African countries [12]. The study used ethnography approach in data collection. The findings suggested that Etsako minority languages are totally moribund. The mother tongues are no longer being acquired by children whose parents are from their local language community. The study suggested specific measures to be taken to preserve the language in danger of moribund. The measures suggested include that children should use languages of their parents from childhood to ensure its survival and existence.

Dwivedi (2015) investigated linguistic realities in Kenya [13]. The study aimed to discuss the challenges that some languages face and give suggestions to revive the linguistic culture in Kenya. The findings indicated that Kenya is a multi-lingual country that use: Bantu, Nilotic and Cushitic languages. Minor and lesser-known languages of Kenya are mainly neglected inside and outside the country. Additionally, the linguistic diversity in Kenya is a boon for a field of linguist but misinformed politicians and education policy makers are deliberately forgetting this language heritage. Moreover, Yaaku language in Kenya revealed that Kenya has 49 distinct tribes and 69 languages. The Yaaku people of central Kenya found in Laikipia District, who are almost 5000 people, were assimilated to the Maasai people in 20th century. The reasons for assimilation were that the Maasai people have higher social prestige compared to Yaaku making it a moribund due to its speakers adopting Maasai languages.

In the same vein, Wamalwa and Olouch (2013) explored Kenyan languages with an aim of addressing the need to preserve and maintain endangered indigenous languages [14]. The study showed that over eight languages are endangered namely: Terik, El Molo, Ogiek, Omotik, Bong'om, Sogoo, Suba and Yaaku. Some of these languages have been classified as being extinct as indicated in UNESCO charter. Most African languages have not been phonemically coded. Many languages whose vitality is endangered need an urgent means for their preservation.

There is a need for an electronic method to be considered for preservation of the endangered languages. Bunyi (1999) demonstrates how indigenous African languages have suffered delegitimization and devaluation in colonial and post-colonial education in Africa [15]. The study used ethnographic data, taking Kenya as a case study. The findings indicated that the use of English in education medium contributes to differential educational treatments. The use of English leads to the perpetuation of social inequalities, particularly in Africa. The study comments that when local languages are preserved electronically, they survive for generations that

researchers from all over the world embrace. The colonial languages should not risk beautiful African local languages to diminish.

Kiva (2021) investigated minority languages endangerment in Uganda [16]. The study identified that linguists in Uganda are bothered due to the threat of extinction of languages spoken by small communities in Uganda. Linguists are contemplating on interventions of saving these languages. Additionally, Kishindo (1994) studied the impacts of national language on two minority languages in Malawi [17]. The study revealed that it is important to have a national language, though such nationalization affects minority languages. The decision of selecting Chichewa as a national language risked two Malawian languages namely, Chiyao and Chitumbuka to decline.

Mumpande and Barnes (2020) studied the revitalization of minority languages in Zimbabwe [18]. The results discovered that Tonga language of Zimbabwe is moribund. Tonga language is not restored and not extended in other domains of education, media and religion due to being a minority language. The study pointed out that restricting use of minority languages attacks them, thereby facing a danger of disappearance. In order to preserve culture of any language, local languages should be preserved. People who have the mandate of countries' language policies should take care of putting local languages in use in order to ensure their survival.

Dega (2016) studied minority languages in Nigeria in West Africa [19]. The study aimed to provide explanation of endangerment and pay attention to globalization as the root cause. The findings proposed that minority languages, especially those in Nigeria, may continue to be endangered as globalization becomes more and more sophisticated. The study encourages the use of minority languages in all endeavors like cultural heritage of indigenous people in Nigeria.

In Nigeria, minority languages are endangered because of constant changes and increase in socioeconomic and political development that favors Western culture-related languages. Minority languages fail to compete with other languages in those aspects [19]. Additionally, the Malawian Ngoni language famously known as Chingoni is going to shift to Chitumbuka and Chichewa as time goes because it seems to be neglected due to having minor language community. Moreover, Eegimaa is a language spoken in Senegal where revitalization is taking place. The efforts are underway to revitalize Khoesan languages like: Tuu, Kya, Khoe, Nluu and Tjwaod of Southern Africa. Nluu and Tjwaod are mostly endangered. In Kenya, over eight languages are endangered namely: Terik, El Molo, Ogiek, Omotik, Bong'om, Sogoo, Suba and Yaaku [20]. Other Kenyan languages are also endangered like Bong'om, a Nilotic language which has remained with few speakers. Elmorog, a Kenya language is now spoken at Sambaru, formerly, it was a Cushitic language. This tendency puts many minority languages at risk of disappearing. These languages are of vital value because they are used in the domains of life like preserving local customs, traditions and norms of specific speech communities but also a sign of continuity and generational inheritance.

Bamgbose (2011) gives reasons that lead African languages to have low status and restricted roles [21]. The mentioned reasons are: colonial legacy, negative perception of multi-lingual, language development status, national integration, modernization and economic development, globalization, negative language attitudes and defective language attitudes. Similarly, Batibo (2005) argues that when the next generation does not learn the current generation's language, it is threatened and endangered [22]. Colonization and globalization, coupled with other local factors such as military conquest and misguided government policies, simple demographic factors such as few numbers of speakers lead to the less widely spoken languages on the continent being endangered. The minority languages are seriously threatened by extinction. Serious measures ought to be initiated to preserve beautiful African languages. African local languages should be used for various roles in respective countries for them to survive and continue striving.

5. Methodology

This study employed library exploration approach. This method enabled the study to assemble the database based on suitability of endangered languages found in Tanzania mainland. The endangered languages for review were identified from relevant ethnologies of language and their threat of extinction. The languages were identified based on the trend and number of speakers in the past ten years, which have fewer number of speakers, low status and face challenge from neighboring high-status languages. The ethnologies of language reviewed specifically focused on Tanzania minority languages that have fewer speakers. Each identified language that faces endangerment scenario was discussed in relation to the number of users in the past test years and its involvement in all spheres of life by the relevant native speakers.

6. The Situation of Local Languages of Tanzania

Tanzania is rich in many local languages. Having many local languages, it is not safe in preserving them. The Kami language, which is spoken in Morogoro Region, is moribund. It has only few native speakers and most of them are code-mixed and code-switched with Swahili [23]. Similarly, Ngasa, a language found on the slopes of Eastern Kilimanjaro in the Useri Chiefdom of Chagga area is facing a danger of extinction. The Ngasa people abandoned their language and adopted Chagga, Pare and Swahili languages, which are termed as prestigious. The Ngasa people are represented by approximately 100 native speakers. On the other hand, Batibo (2014) explains that Tanzania, which is a multi-lingual country, has around 120 indigenous languages spoken within the country [24].

Kisukuma, Kinyamwezi and Kimakonde have over million speakers each while around 15 ethnic languages are spoken by at least 500,000 speakers each sending a concern signal about their thriving. About 95% Tanzanians speak Bantu language as their mother tongue. 90% of current population of more than 60 million Tanzanians speaks Kiswahili language as their mother-tongue, the remain-

ing 10% as a second language. This suggests that Tanzanians are abandoning their local languages due to Kiswahili. Those using their local languages are due to prestige and societal identification, they are mostly elderly. The local languages, basic reasons of survival like worship, businesses, education, and interaction, are losing value slowly. With this reason therefore, there is a need of researching Tanzania local languages because they are equally important for culture and norms preservation. It is unhealthy to see Swahili dominates almost all aspects of life because of different ethnicities in existence. In a multi-lingual society like Tanzania, if one language remains in expense of others, the flavor of multi-lingual experience is challenged.

Paulston (1992) indicates that Swahili is a native language of a very small group but has been adopted and accepted as a national language in Tanzania, which threatens minority languages [25]. It is amusing that English, a foreign language, does not threaten local languages' existence in Tanzania [26]. Janson (2002) argues that approximately 100 languages in Tanzania will lose their speakers within a generation or two if not used. Swahili language is used all over the country [27]. The local languages are only spoken in few homesteads and they are threatened by Swahili. They are rarely heard in public areas, their usage is prohibited in education, political gathering, religious meeting and in any radio or television station. Tanzania misses newspaper publications in local languages but rather embrace Swahili and English media houses. The reasons being that local languages risk the national unity.

There is a cultural policy enacted in 1997 in Tanzania, which states that local languages should be seen as an asset for tradition preservations, tourist's attraction and an important part of Tanzanian heritage. This policy rarely applies because education demands the use of Swahili, English and other acceptable foreign languages. There is almost no encouragement from the government to promote local languages in Tanzania, especially in strategic areas like religion, trade, social gatherings and political arena. Swahili is given massive priority in all spheres of life, as a result, local languages found in Tanzania are hugely in danger of extinct. Deliberate measures ought to be taken to preserve local languages of Tanzania. Approximately 20 local languages (L1s) are identified as highly endangered. All languages spoken in the hinterland of the Indian Ocean coast also fall into the same category, as inter-generational language transmission is interrupted there to a large extent.

Mkilima (2016) analyzes Matengo language in the aspect of language endangerment [28]. Using qualitative method with ethnographic and phenomenological research designs, the study employed observation as well as interviews in collecting data. Conducted in Mbinga District in Ruvuma Region, the study identified patterns, causes and effects of Matengo endangerment. The results revealed that Matengo language is unsafe due to its contact with Kiswahili. Lack of intergenerational language transmission, shift in domains, speaker's negative attitudes, urbanization, lack of governmental institutional support, lack of materials for lan-

guage education and literacy, few documentations, failure to respond to new domains like media and decreasing number of its speakers threaten its existence.

Matengo endangerment also has effects on environment, social-economic status and cultural aspect of the community. Dotto (2018), conducted a study on endangerment of Nyamwezi language of Tanzania [29]. The study aimed to assess the way ethnic community languages are perceived by native speakers in relation to wide expansion of powerful and prestigious languages like English and Kiswahili. Interview methods in data collection and UNESCO theoretical framework were used to analyze the level of endangerment from various domains of use namely: home, education, religious and tradition ceremonies.

The findings suggested that Nyamwezi is gradually losing power from home where the intergeneration transmission of language is inactive, leading to decrease in number of speakers. Furthermore, negative attitudes towards such factors like multi-ethnicity and inter-marriage, portray that language is still active to some elders in the community. The studies show that Matengo and Nyamwezi are unsafe mainly due to the contact with Kiswahili though there are other reasons for their endangerment. Speakers of these local languages should continue to use them and transmit the languages to the next generation.

Moreover, Ladefoged (1992) assessed endangered languages in Tanzania, a country that strives for unity and spread of Swahili [30]. Tribalism is seen as a threat to economic development and equal sharing of opportunities; this makes ethnic languages disadvantaged. The spread of Kiswahili seems to be dangerous to local languages. Similarly, Blommartert (2013) investigated on state and ideology in Tanzania [31]. The study revealed that Swahili had been strongly idealized since TANU. It was labeled as a language of liberation, national independence and freedom since Ujamaa era. The local languages received little attention because they were perceived as obstacles to national development. Strom (2013) analyzes the Ndengelo language of Tanzania [32]. The study uses sociolinguistic survey, interviews, questionnaires and corpus terms. The study areas were Rufiji and Mkuranga in East Coast of Tanzania. The results show that recent spread of education to all layers of the society with compulsory Swahili as a medium of instruction hinders young generation in expanding their language. The study assumes that the upcoming coming generations will abandon Ndengereko in favor of Swahili. Therefore, the findings of the study indicate a lack of consideration on local languages of Tanzania. Though Tanzania has many languages, it cannot evade the danger of local languages extinct. The fear of destructing the unity of the country should be cancelled.

Furthermore, Kami, which is prone to endangerment in Tanzania, faces a danger of extinct because of minimal number of speakers. In a study comprising Kami grammar, a sketch of phonological, morphological and syntactic structures revealed that only a few speakers are pure. Most speakers code-mix and code-switch with Swahili language. Lusekelo (2015) studied the consequences of the contacts between Bantu languages and non-Bantu languages in Northern Tanzania, the languages

around Lake Eyasi [33]. The study revealed that in Rural Tanzania, recent major influences that happened between Swahili and English to ethnic languages had been influencing each other. The studies indicated the danger of Swahili to the Kami and the local languages around Lake Eyasi.

Stegen (2003) conducted a study on the situation of Rangi language of Northern Central Tanzania [34]. The Rangi language project started in 1996 and focused on the key factors of language vitality, language attitude and project ownership. The study suggested the use of mother tongue to Rangi after observation in regard to how they use it. The study on Ngasa people in Kilimanjaro indicate a declined their language and due to native speakers adopted Swahili language because of its dominance. Since Tanzania is not a monolingual society, Ngasa people gradually abandoned it and adopted the language and cultural roots of Chagga, Pare and Swahili speech communities. They lost feelings of pride and self-identity of their speech. English and Swahili enjoy official status due to Tanzania's 1984 constitution, which does not establish an official language and protect indigenous languages in the country. The findings of the study suggest that the use of Swahili in communities is high because local languages are abandoned sometimes just because of the pride of using Swahili. Community members should keep in mind that the use of local languages helps them be identified among others and it develops the community's cultural harmony. They should feel pride in their local languages.

Mkude (2011) investigated the impacts of Swahili on Kiluguru language [35]. The study aimed to show how Kiswahili pervades and perverts Kiluguru in Morogoro region. The results suggest that Kiswahili and Kiluguru are both Eastern Bantu languages. Swahili tends to exert great influence on the other indigenous languages that do not enjoy official status. Legère (2006) analyzed Vidunda language "Chividunda" [36]. The study area was Vidunda Ward in Kilosa District, Morogoro Tanzania. The study used a survey from four schools to collect data. The results indicate that it is a highly endangered language according to the criteria of UNESCO.

The ethno-linguistic homogeneity in Vidunda ward still supports its use in informal domains, but it is threatened, making the extended family and the homestead its place of protection and hopefully, survival. In other domains, it seems there is no initiative to maintain language one or to broaden its use. The results of the studies propose that possible measures should be taken to save local languages of Tanzania. The Ministry responsible should take initiatives to protect local languages of Tanzania.

7. Conclusion

Swahili language is a lingua franca of Tanzania and an independent sovereign state. It is a prestigious language of the country which is hugely embraced by Tanzanians and many African countries, mostly from East, Central and Southern parts. Though it is very vital, it sounds depraved when it causes local languages of Tan-

zania extinct. The moribund languages have no status in media, education, politics, economy and other facets of life. Tanzania Language Policy Tanzania has empowered Swahili and other foreign languages at the expense of local languages. This signals ignorance of domestic cultures and their preservation. There is fear of losing unity because Tanzanian unity is very strong already and speakers of local languages should feel prestige of them. Speaking local languages is a people's cultural identification, it should be researched, documented and preserved.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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