

Changing phases of linguistic ecology in Tanzania: The vitality of ethnic languages

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Abstract: This article explores the vitality of Tanzania's ethnic languages. The study examines the relationship between language ecology and language vitality. Like many minority languages around the world, Tanzania's ethnic languages are under threat of extinction. This threat is primarily attributed to speakers of those languages abandoning them in favour of Kiswahili, the national and official language of Tanzania. The article comprehensively analyses the sociopolitical environment that has contributed to the current situation. Based on the arguments from critical analysis of secondary sources, the article presents a historical and eclectic account of the factors that have contributed to the marginalisation of ethnic languages in the prevailing sociopolitical environment. The article argues that for a language maintenance programme to succeed in Tanzania, the sociopolitical environment responsible for the current state of ethnic languages must be addressed.

Introduction

The vitality of ethnic languages can be well understood by examining the social-cultural environment these languages exist in. As with living organisms, the environment of a language can be friendly, hostile, or indifferent to the life of that language (Mackay 2001; cited in Ludwig et al. 2019). In line with this reasoning, Mühlhäusler (1996) argues that in any study of language, whether historical or grammatical, ecological factors need to be considered first.

Tanzania¹ is a multilingual country with over one hundred languages. However, only Kiswahili and English are designated an official status in the country. Kiswahili is the most widely spoken language in the country. Eberhard et al. (2023), in the *Ethnologue*, estimate that Kiswahili is spoken by more than 90 per cent of the 61.7 million population of Tanzania, of which about 30 per cent speak it as their first language. According to Eberhard et al. (2023), English is spoken mostly as a second language by about 10.9 per cent of Tanzania. Other languages are primarily spoken by the different ethnic groups that constitute Tanzania. Although Tanzania is cited as a unique case among African countries for promoting an indigenous African language as the primary medium of communication (Dzahene-Quarshie 2011), this move has led to an uncertain fate for the other indigenous languages. These languages are threatened by extinction as the numbers of their speakers decline.

Several studies, such as Batibo (2005), have identified factors that may lead to language endangerment. These include the shrinking of domains of use, negative attitudes of speakers toward their languages and intergenerational language transmission break-ups. There are studies (e.g. Sasse 1992; Agyekum 2009; Kantarovich et al. 2021) that, in addition to the abovementioned factors, see the simplification of the structure of a language as a factor that may lead to language endangerment. These studies have illuminated the field of language endangerment; however, they do not provide an exhaustive account of the process. This is because usually the factors do not occur in isolation. They interact and are mediated by linguistic and non-linguistic variables. A successful account of language endangerment calls for an ecological approach which, according to Ludwig et al. (2019), allows for a considerably larger range of parameters underlying the structure and use of a language. The overarching argument of the ecological approach is that language can be studied in the same way as one studies the interactions and interrelationships of an organism with and within its environment, which entails that language is an entity that can be located in time and space (Mühlhäusler 1996). In line with this approach, Bodomo et al. (2010) introduced the term

*ecology of language shift*ⁱⁱ to refer to the context in which language shift occurs. According to the authors, any adequate analysis of language in a country needs to consider the ecology of language shift in it.

Drawing on the critical analysis of secondary sources in linguistics, history and politics from the precolonial era to date, this article explores the relationship between Tanzanian language ecology and the vitality of its ethnic languages. Although the term language ecology refers to the interaction of language and all the complex functions surrounding it, the discussion here focuses on the sociopolitical environment that has had an impact on the languages of Tanzania. Thus, in this article, the term language ecology refers to the interaction between language and the sociopolitical environment. In the subsequent sections, I discuss the place of ethnic languages in the language ecology of Tanzania. I then trace the dynamics of the language ecology in Tanzania, and discuss the relationship between language ecology and ethnic language vitality. Finally, I provide recommendations for addressing the vitality of ethnic languages in Tanzania.

The place of indigenous languages in Tanzania

Tanzania is a country with many languages. As mentioned earlier, there are more than a hundred languages currently spoken in Tanzania. Most of these languages are indigenous to Tanzania, with about 8 of them non-indigenous. There are about 150 indigenous languages in Tanzania (Language of Tanzania Project [LoT], 2009). These languages belong to four different African language phyla, which makes Tanzania the only country in which all four major language families are represented. The majority of indigenous languages in Tanzania belong to the Bantu language group, a sub-branch of the Niger-Congo language family. The others are Cushitic languages in the Afro-Asiatic language family, Nilotic languages belonging to the Nilo-Saharan language family, and Sandawe and Hadza, languages belonging to the Khoisan language family. The number of native speakers of each of these languages varies considerably. There are languages such as Kisukuma, Kiha and Cigogo with more than a million speakers each on one hand, and languages such as Wanda and Kiga with a few hundred speakers each on the other hand (LoT 2009). The ethnolinguistic map in Figure 1. shows the distribution of ethnic languages in Tanzania, and the relative size of each ethnolinguistic group is indicated by its geographical dispersion.

Most indigenous Tanzania languages coincide with ethnic groups and therefore language has become the salient feature that identifies an ethnic group. The exceptions are several languages spoken by the Chagga ethnic group, and Kiswahili, the national and official language and therefore perceived as the language of all Tanzanians. Owing to this relationship, indigenous languages other than Kiswahili are referred to in various literature as ethnic community languages (Mekacha 1993; Muzale and Rugemarila 2008). The use of this term, however, has been criticised as tautological in the sense that no ethnic group exists, at least in Tanzania, that does not have a particular language or languages associated with it (Legère 2002). Besides, labelling these languages as 'ethnic community languages' may suggest the commonality of their speakers such as living in the same geographical area or sharing traditions that have become less prominent markers of ethnic identity in modern times. Legère (2002) labels these languages as minority languages. He argues that this term is more appropriate since, function-wise, they are all relegated to a few informal domains and hence have become the minority languages to Kiswahili. One problem with this label is that the term minority is normally associated with languages whose speakers are fewer in number or have less power than speakers of a dominant language. Although Kiswahili is considered a dominant language in Tanzania, it is perceived as ethnically unmarked, or as Topan (2008: 252-266) puts it, 'an egalitarian language which belongs to all'. To most Tanzanians, both Kiswahili and the other indigenous languages that they may speak constitute part of their identities. In this case, Kiswahili indexes national identity, whereas an indigenous language indexes ethnic identity. In this article, therefore, I will refer to the indigenous languages other than Kiswahili simply as ethnic languages (ELs).

Under normal circumstances, ELs and Kiswahili are concurrently used by speakers in a fairly compartmentalised way. Thus, it has long been noted that a certain diglossia situation exists between ELs and Kiswahili. ELs are used at home, and among relatives and close friends. They are also used



Figure 1: Ethnolinguistic map of Tanzania (Courtesy of LoT 2009)

during social economic activities in rural areas such as farming and fishing communities. Kiswahili is used when the interaction involves participants who do not share a common ethnic language.

ELs are not sufficiently described. The majority of these languages lack standardised orthographies, appropriately documented grammar, dictionaries and elaborate writing traditions. There have recently been some efforts by various organisations and researchers to develop these languages such as the publication of dictionaries, grammars and descriptions of these languages. One such effort was the Language of Tanzania Project funded by the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida). The project produced a language atlas of Tanzania as well as dictionaries and grammars of various ELs.

Generally, as Muzale and Rugemarila (2008) remark, ELs in Tanzania exist in a hostile environment. This is because they were and are still considered a threat to national unity. As such, their use is restricted in public domains. ELs are not permitted in the education system, politics and media. Any use of these languages in these restricted domains may be sanctioned. LoT (2009) cites two statements that indicate the government's position concerning the use of ELs in the media. The first statement published in *Nipashe* newspaper (13 August 1999) states that the government will not

register newspapers that publish in the ELs because doing so will sow seeds of tribalism and disunity in the country. The second one published in *Majira* newspaper (30 October 2003) states that the government has prohibited broadcasting with ELs and that only Kiswahili and English can be used. Any radio or television broadcast in ELs will be sanctioned under a 1993 media law. In politics, any use of ELs at political rallies would constitute sufficient irregularity for the court to nullify the election results (Muzale and Rugemariila 2008).

The reason behind these decisions is to avoid tribalism which was thought to result from using and promoting these languages. The restrictions imposed on ELs went with the vigorous promotion of Kiswahili as the national language as it was seen as a language that belonged to all and not just a section of society. These language policies resulted in the subordination of ELs to Kiswahili. Speakers started developing negative attitudes toward ELs as a result of the lack of socio-economic opportunities associated with them as opposed to Kiswahili.

Indigenous languages in a changing ecology

The language ecology of an area is rarely stable. It is constantly shaped by different forces which are brought by processes such as trade, colonisation and cohabitation. These do not only affect the composition and status of languages in an area, but also the internal structures of the languages. The history of various factors that have influenced the language ecology of Tanzania over the years can be divided roughly into the following four periods: precolonial immigration, East African trade, colonisation and post-independence.

Precolonial immigration period (6th century BCE – 10th century CE)

There are no written records documenting the original inhabitants of what is now Tanzania. However, archaeological, linguistic and genealogical evidence indicates that the early inhabitants of this area were Khoisan-speaking people (Morris 2003; Brenzinger 2007; Marlowe 2010). These were hunter-gatherers who lived by foraging wild foods. Changes to this composition started with the wave of migration from various ethnolinguistic groups. According to Marlowe (2010), the early immigrants to this area were Cushitic-speaking people from modern-day Ethiopia and Somalia around 2500 years before the present. These were followed by Bantu speakers from the west and central Africa around 1500 before the present and later the Nilotic-speaking people from southern Sudan around 200–300 years ago.

The successive immigration of different ethnolinguistic groups altered the language ecology of the area. Many indigenous languages and some early established immigrant languages were replaced (Brenzinger 2007). The number of indigenous languages decreased drastically. By this time, only two Khoisan languages still existed. These are Hadza and Sandawe of central Tanzania. The expansion of different ethnolinguistic groups further resulted in language shifts in smaller ethnolinguistic groups. A salient example of such an expansion is of Maasai, which spread to a much wider area in north-western Tanzania assimilating the Cushitic hunter and gatherer communities of Aasax, Akie, Sonjo and Kwasi through pressure and their pastoral lifestyle (Batibo 1992; Brenzinger 2007).

Language contact resulting from migration also contributed to the formation of hybrid languages. A typical example of these languages is Mbugu/Maa spoken in north-eastern Tanzania. This language has a Bantu grammar, which is basically Pare, and a lexicon of Cushitic and Nilotic (Mous 2020). It is not clear what led to this formation. However, Mous (2020) speculates that the Mbugu once spoke a Cushitic language and lived in the same area as the Maasai. Later, they moved to Pare Mountain where they settled and their language shifted to Pare, a Bantu language indigenous to their newly settled area. As the shift was about to complete, they consciously created a parallel lexicon to the emergent one to set them apart from their Bantu neighbours (Mous 2020). This resulted in the formation of two varieties of Mbugu: the relatively unmixed variety called normal Mbugu, and the mixed variety, inner Mbugu.

Generally, ethnic languages which were considered more prestigious dominated, and in some cases triggered language shift from the less prestigious languages. According to Batibo (1992), the prestige of a language was associated with the ethnolinguistic group's history, cultural, or military superiority, possession of technology or art such as iron-making or pottery, or demographic predominance.

There also have been language contacts that have not led to language shift or assimilation of one community to another, but rather a mutual influence on one another. Lusekelo (2015) provides data that show the convergence of Datooga (Nilotic), Hadzabe (Khoesan), Iraqw (Cushitic), and Sukuma, Nyisanzu, Nyilamba (Bantu) around Lake Eyasi. These languages appear to influence each other without triggering language shift processes, which indicates a state of balance in the linguistic ecology.

Early East African trade period (11th century CE – 18th century CE)

The trade contact between East Africa and the other parts of the world can be traced to as early as the first millennium. It is well documented in various early written works on maritime trade voyages such as the *Periplus of the Erythrean Sea* and *Ptolemy's Geography*. The *Periplus of the Erythrean Sea*, for example, mentions a voyage from Egyptian towns mentioned as Ariaca and Barygaza to East African (referred to as Azania) coastal towns which are called Sarapion, and Nikon (Schoff 1912). It also mentions a town called Rhapta which is described as the last market town of the continental Azania rich in ivory and tortoise shells. Although the location of Rhapta is not yet firmly identified, historical and archaeological evidence indicates the location of this town to be along the Tanzanian coast between the Tanga and Rufiji River deltas (Dato 1970; Chami 2021). In this section, however, I specifically refer to the period between the eleventh century and the eighteenth century, the period covering what has been referred to as the golden age of Swahili commerce (Wynne-Jones 2016) and Omani's rule of the coast of East Africa.

The trade had a far-reaching impact on the linguistic composition of Tanzania. The growth of trade facilitated the emergence and growth of trading ports as well as trade routes to the interior of East Africa. Kiswahili, the language spoken on the coast at that time, emerged as the language of trade, diffusing to the interior along the trade routes. The scale and intensity of the trade increased when Zanzibar became part of the overseas holding of Oman in 1698 after the defeat of the Portuguese by the Omanis in Mombasa and later the establishment of the Zanzibar sultanate (Aboh et al. 2019). The trade further facilitated the spread of Kiswahili to the interior. The Swahilis were the middlemen in this trading system travelling to the interior to trade with the local communities. The trade routes later formed the basis for European penetration into the interior, with Christian missionaries and colonial administrators using the ancient path. The missionaries relied on Kiswahili guides. Kiswahili thus becomes a lingua franca facilitating communication between traders, missionaries, colonial administrators and local communities. As a result of this trade, a new layer was added to the existing language ecology. Thus, by this time the linguistic ecology consisted of two layers. The first layer comprised ethnic languages which were used for intra-ethnic communication and the second layer was made up of Kiswahili which was used as a lingua franca.

The European colonial period (19th century CE – 20th century CE)

The colonial period is divided into German and British rule. Colonialism has had a huge impact on the language ecology of Tanzania. It was during this period that status differences between Kiswahili and other indigenous languages became more vivid. During the early establishment of German rule, the German colonial administrators employed junior staff from the coast who were native speakers of Kiswahili. Thus, according to Bromber (2004), Kiswahili was spoken when the Germans set up their first district quarters (*Bezirkämster*) and military posts (*militär-stationen*). The Germans made Kiswahili the language of administration, albeit against their ambition of advancing *Deutschtum* (German culture) in the colony. In 1887, the *Seminar für Orientalische Sprachen* (seminar of Oriental languages) was established at the Friedrich Wilhelm Universität in Berlin where many future German officials for East Africa would learn Kiswahili. In the colony, they established government schools (*Regierungsschule*) to prepare enough qualified junior administrators to fill government posts, and as Pike (1986) claims, Von Soden, the first German governor, insisted all government teachers would have to know Kiswahili. Thus, a working knowledge of Kiswahili became a prerequisite for participation in the government administration through junior civil service (Topan 2008), thus reinforcing its prestigious status over other indigenous languages.

The Germans' rule is also credited for the spread of Kiswahili and its use throughout the country. The Germans made great efforts to disseminate the Kiswahili language. In conjunction with missionaries, they published textbooks and other Kiswahili educational materials. There were also newspapers published by the government and missions which formed the basis for the further spread of Kiswahili in the country. A few of these as mentioned in Sturmer (1998) are *Msimulizi* (1888), *Maongezi na Maarifa* (1889), *Habari za Mwezi* (1894) and *Kiongozi* (1905).

The British took over the administration of what was then called Tanganyika following the German defeat in WWI. As opposed to Germany's direct rule, the British instituted an indirect rule strategy which they had employed in the running of their colonies elsewhere. Under British rule, therefore, much of the German policy was rescinded. In language too, although the British are credited for the standardisation and further consolidation and spread of Kiswahili, it was their decision to introduce English, which had a far-reaching impact on the language ecology of Tanzania. The British introduced English as the language of colonial administration and education in upper primary schools, secondary schools and colleges. The acquisition of English followed these objectives. It was limited to a few people who were prepared to assist in higher levels of education and administration. Kiswahili was undervalued and left for low-level primary education and administration. As a result, English came to be viewed as a prestigious language of progress and upward social mobility. As Coleman (1971) put it, the pride in being able to communicate effectively in Kiswahili that developed under German rule was connected with English under British rule. Kiswahili came to be viewed as a second-class language compared to English.

By the time of the pre-independence movement, the linguistic situation of Tanganyika and Zanzibar had already developed into what Mkilifi (1972) termed triglossia, with English occupying the upper layer, Kiswahili occupying the middle layer, and ELs the lower layer. The subordination of Kiswahili under English under British rule, as Bwenge (2012) argues, enabled it to gain momentum as the language of the masses and nationalism during the struggle-for-independence period. A status it retained after independence.

Post-independence period (1961–1985)

Although ethnic languages were not given much prominence during the colonial periods, they were actively used in several domains. According to Batibo (1992), these domains were the native authority councils, cooperative movements, primary courts, lower primary education and literacy education. There were also some newspapers published in ethnic languages during both German and British rules. Some of these newspapers as mentioned by Sturmer (1998) were *Mbuya ya Vandu Veu* (The Friend of the black people, 1904), *Mkoma Mbuli* (The Storyteller, 1904), *Lumuli* (The Torch, 1936), *Lusanji* (Fellowship, 1936) and *Bahaya Twemanye* (Bahaya, let us know each other, 1953). After independence, the government took aggressive steps to promote Kiswahili as the language of national unity. In 1962, Kiswahili was decreed as a national language. This move implied that other indigenous languages were considered non-existent (Batibo 1992; Legère 2002). The policy of the government as underlined in the National Assembly by the then Minister of Education, Solomon Eliufoo Nkya, was to build the nation by using the lingua franca Kiswahili (Sturmer 1998).

The government aimed to promote Kiswahili as the main official language. According to Batibo (1992), Rashid Kawawa, the prime minister and the second vice president of the United Republic of Tanzania (1964–1977) sent a circular to ministries instructing them to avoid using English where Kiswahili could be used. Other steps taken to ensure the hegemony of Kiswahili in Tanzania were the launching of political campaigns to discredit English, describing it as a colonial hangover (Batibo 1992), and the creation of Kiswahili promotion and development bodies like the National Council of Kiswahili (Baraza la Kiswahili la Taifa, BAKITA) and the Institute of Kiswahili Research.

This linguistic reorientation after independence resulted in Kiswahili being used in some language domains previously occupied by English. These include becoming the language of government business, the courts and law, and primary education. English continued to be used as the language

of diplomacy, international contact, foreign trade and the medium of instruction in secondary and tertiary education. The ethnic languages were further marginalised, and the domains they once served like primary courts, village and ward administration, literacy campaigns and lower primary education were taken over by Kiswahili.

The vitality of ethnic languages

Generally, language vitality refers to the health and strength of a language. The Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL n.d.) states that language vitality is demonstrated by the extent to which a language is used as a means of communication in various social contexts, and for different purposes. Throughout the discussion in the previous sections, I maintained that ELs in Tanzania are endangered and therefore have low vitality. Now, I will discuss the endangerment of ELs in Tanzania.

Indicators of language vitality

The evaluation of the state of the vitality of a language is challenging. As Brenzinger (2007) correctly puts it, speech communities are complex and patterns of language use within communities vary and are difficult to explore. There are thus various factors to consider in the evaluation of the state of vitality of a language. The UNESCO Ad hoc Group on Endangered Languages identifies six issues that need to be considered important for the evaluation of language vitality and endangerment (UNESCO 2003). These are:

- i. Intergenerational language transmission;
- ii. Absolute number of speakers;
- iii. Proportion of speakers within the total population;
- iv. Trends in existing language domains;
- v. Response to new domains; and
- vi. Materials for language education and literacy.

These issues are measured on a six-point scale ranging from safe (5) to extinct (0). Anything between these points is considered endangered. For speakers' population factors, for example, a language that is used by all ages is considered safe (5), whereas a language with no speakers (0) is considered extinct.

The application of language use domains and materials for education and literacy indicates that ELs are endangered in Tanzania. In Tanzania, ELs have been relegated to a few informal areas. They are used at home and with relatives or close friends. There is no formal education on ELs in Tanzania. Consequently, there are hardly any EL materials prepared for EL language education. Few written materials on ELs exist in some languages. According to LoT (2009), most of these are religious documents and newspapers written and published before independence, thus before the government started promoting Kiswahili as the main medium of communication. Other materials available in ELs are grammars, vocabulary list, and dictionaries written by different researchers with the aim of providing documentation of these languages. Although these materials offer valuable contributions to the development of ELs, they are not accessible to the majority of speakers of these languages.

It is somewhat difficult to determine the state of vitality of ELs based on the number of speakers and the proportion of speakers in the total population. This is because it is difficult to get reliable information about the number of speakers of a language. Tanzanian national census practices do not inquire about the ethnicity and linguistic composition of the population. The most recent available statistics of speakers of the languages of Tanzania can be obtained in the *Atlasi ya Lugha za Tanzania* published by the Language of Tanzania Project (LoT). The authors estimated the number of speakers of ELs based on 2002 census data. Target languages were those spoken by speakers as their first languages. Likewise, it is also difficult to map the process of intergenerational language transmission. The other challenge to speakers' population and transmission factors as indicators

of the vitality of a language is the fact that there is a possibility that they may not reveal the actual number of active speakers of a language. This is because speakers may have competence in a language, but may not use it, as in the case of language shift.

Notwithstanding these drawbacks, these factors may still be used to demonstrate the vitality of ELs. This may be done through inferences about them. For example, by the fact that the public domains are dominated by Kiswahili and English, and with the restrictions on the use of ELs in these domains, we can conclude that ELs are relatively less actively used in urban areas. Moreover, Kiswahili is progressively replacing ELs even in areas with no restrictions on their use. This is demonstrated by Ngonyani (1995) who provided data to indicate that Kiswahili is increasingly becoming a very important language in the family. The study also revealed Kiswahili was the most preferred language in both formal and informal domains by people under 45 years old.

The interruption of intergenerational transmission of ELs may be deduced from the fact that the number of speakers who use Kiswahili as a first language compared to those of ELs is disproportionately increasing. In his study, Ngonyani (1995) showed that over 22 per cent of Tanzanians speak Kiswahili as their first language. Eberhard et al. (2023), in the *Ethnologue*, estimate the current speakers of Kiswahili as a first language to constitute about 30 per cent of the Tanzanian population. This triples the earlier 10 per cent estimate by Mkilifi in 1972. This trend implies that there is an increase in the number of people who are acquiring Kiswahili as their first language instead of ELs. As revealed by Ngonyani (1995), the majority of this population is urban and from the younger generation.

The state of language endangerment in Tanzania

The discussion presented above on major evaluative factors for language vitality reveals that ELs in Tanzania are endangered. The combined use of these factors would reveal degrees of endangerment ranging from a language that is vulnerable to one that is critically endangered. In fact, according to Legère (2006), in a 2002 press release, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) designated Tanzania as a 'crisis area' along with Kenya, Ethiopia, Nigeria and Sudan. The press release states these countries have the most moribund or seriously endangered languages. The severity of ELs endangerment in Tanzania can be revealed by comparing the 1967 census data with language data from the atlas of Tanzania languages published by LoT in 2009. Given that the atlas provides data for existing ELs in Tanzania, ELs that were listed in the 1967 census but are not in the atlas can be considered extinct. These are languages such as Asaax, Ngasa, Okie and Kwavi. In fact, Asaax is said to have been extinct since 1976 (Winter 1979; Ehret 1980; cited in Batibo 1992), while Okie had only a few speakers remaining (Rotland 1982; cited in Sommer 1992).

Table 1 provides a summary of endangered languages in Tanzania by comparing the population of ethnic groups between 1967 and 2009. It is compiled from Legère's (2006) data on ethnic languages in Tanzania based on the 1967 census and ELs data in LoT's (2009) *Atlasi ya Lugha za Tanzania*. The comparison reveals that the languages marked by an asterisk such as Dorobo, Nata, Isenye, Wanda, Doe, Shashi and Kami are critically endangered as the populations of their speakers shrink. The other languages in the table are equally endangered. Although the populations of speakers of these languages grow, they are declining compared to the total population of Tanzania.

Causes of ethnic language endangerment

Several factors have been advanced as the cause of EL endangerment and shift in Tanzania. These include language prestige (Batibo 1992) and the same factors responsible for the spread of Kiswahili such as trade, urbanisation, politics of popular participation and institutional support (Ngonyani 1995). Although these are to be considered in explaining EL endangerment, there is a need to account for the fact that this endangerment gained momentum after independence.

Table 1: Critically endangered ethnic languages in Tanzania

s/n	Glossonym	Classification	1967 (N)	Per cent	2009 (N)	Percent	Absolute growth	Proportional growth
1	Dorobo*	Nilotic	2 038	0.017	1 152	0.003	-886	-0.014
2	Nata*	Banti	7 336	0.060	7 050	0.016	-286	-0.044
3	Ikoma	Bantu	8 568	0.070	19 393	0.044	10 825	-0.025
4	Isenye*	Bantu	9 235	0.075	8 238	0.019	-997	-0.056
5	Burunge	Cushitic	9 286	0.075	27 942	0.064	18 656	-0.012
6	Mbunga	Bantu	10 957	0.089	11 589	0.026	632	-0.063
7	Wanda*	Bantu	12 008	0.098	182	0.0004	-11 826	-0.097
8	Mbungu/ Wungu	Bantu	12 362	0.100	30 332	0.069	17 970	-0.031
9	Sonjo	Bantu	12 418	0.101	24 618	0.056	12 200	-0.045
10	Mbugu/ Ma'a	Hybrid	12 556	0.102	33 653	0.077	21 097	-0.025
11	Tongwe	Bantu	12 851	0.104	37 686	0.086	24 835	-0.01863
12	Doe*	Bantu	13 869	0.113	7 944	0.018	-5 925	-0.095
13	Kisi	Bantu	14 922	0.121	22 395	0.051	7 473	-0.070
14	Shashi*	Bantu	14 951	0.121	4 449	0.010	-10 502	-0.111
15	Alagwa	Cushitic	15 746	0.128	52 816	0.120	37 070	-0.008
16	Kami*	Bantu	16 411	0.133	5 518	0.013	-10 893	-0.121
17	Taturu	Bantu	16 648	0.135	22 672	0.052	6 024	-0.084
18	Ndonde	Bantu	17 653	0.143	2 458	0.006	-15 195	-0.138
19	Segeju	Bantu	18 688	0.152	23 232	0.053	4 544	-0.099
17	Vidunda	Bantu	19 585	0.159	25 318	0.056	5 733	-0.102
18	Ngurimi	Bantu	20 917	0.170	52 360	0.119	31 443	-0.051
19	Bondei	Bantu	47 944	0.389	121 988	0.276	74 044	-0.112
20	Kutu	Bantu	22 922	0.186	27 512	0.063	4 590	-0.124
21	Kwere	Bantu	48 132	0.391	151 583	0.345	103 451	-0.046
22	Ndegereko	Bantu	67 817	0.551	139 224	0.317	71 407	-0.234

EL endangerment in Tanzania can be linked to the nation-building and development rhetoric and its fundamental *Ujamaa na Kujitegemea* ('socialism and self-reliance') ideology that followed after independence, and later, the union formed between Tanganyika and Zanzibar to form Tanzania. The *Ujamaa* ideology was based on the African traditional extended family and society based on principles of equality, dignity, work ethics and public ownership of resources. According to Blommaert (2013), the ideology aimed at national construction and increased control over the social and economic life by the state. Most of the policies were subsumed under the Arusha Declaration which was the basis of *Ujamaa na Kujitegemea*. The Arusha Declaration had a huge impact on ELs. One of the measures taken to operationalise the ideology was the introduction of the villagisation project. People from various small villages were brought together into larger communes that were at the same time political, economic, educational and social units. Kiswahili was considered an important

instrument for this socio-economic transformation in the country. According to Blommaert (2013), Kiswahili was seen as a language that could facilitate the spread of *Ujamaa* ideas and values, allow maximum democratic participation of the masses in the decision-making process, and act as a language of identity for Tanzanian citizens.

Contrary to the ELs, Kiswahili was viewed as a symbol of national unity. It was perceived and constructed as a non-ethnic and egalitarian language. It was also perceived as a modern language that was capable of being used in every aspect of life by a modern Tanzanian (Topan 2008). Thus, in 1967, the government formed the National Swahili Council (*Baraza la Kiswahili la Taifa*, BAKITA) through an Act of Parliamentary Act to coordinate and oversee all efforts of promoting and developing Kiswahili. In the same year, Kiswahili was made the sole language of instruction throughout primary education and also became the medium of instruction in teacher training colleges.

According to Blommaert (2013), efforts to promote Kiswahili were damaging to the ELs, as the government no longer paid attention to them. ELs were no longer used in the dissemination of information. According to Blommaert (2013), there were no efforts to translate political materials into ELs, no printed or audio-visual reporting was done in ELs, and no teaching was done in ELs. They were also replaced by Kiswahili in most of the domains they previously served (Batibo 1995). The result of this was less use of ELs in public domains, which negatively impacted their growth and development. This is because languages are supported and sustained by the communication functions to which they are put. The functions, as Mühlhäusler (1996) argues, are the life support system of the languages. Moreover, although Kiswahili has always enjoyed higher prestige than ELs, the sociopolitical landscape increased its prestige and positive attitudes towards it. According to Batibo (1995), Kiswahili came to be seen as a more functional medium rather than a cultural language, which made its expansion to the grassroots easier.

The government's attitude toward ELs has continued to be negative, even after the post-Arusha Declaration period. As stated previously here, there have been declarations by government officials restricting the use of ELs. Moreover, restrictive policies and regulations against ELs continue to be adopted. For instance, the electronic and postal communications (radio and television broadcasting content) regulation of 2018, prohibits the use of any other languages apart from Kiswahili and English for broadcasting. There, however, has been a change in the tone against ELs. In 1997, the government adopted a language policy that formally recognised the existence of ELs (*Wizara ya Elimu na Utamaduni* 1997). Translated here in English, the policy states that ELs are the main sources of customs, traditions, technology and culture in general. In line with this, it declares the following:

- The communities shall proudly continue to use ELs;
- Individuals, parastatals and private institutions are encouraged to write in, collect information, research, document and translate ELs into other languages;
- Production of dictionaries and grammars of ELs will be encouraged; and
- Government institutions and individuals will be encouraged to publish in ELs.

The government's change in attitude towards language matters can be attributed to the economic and political liberalisation that began in the 1980s. As part of these changes, state power eroded gradually and *Ujamaa* ideology and the ruling party, CCM, which was the only political party, lost their hegemonic power (Blommaert 2013). The change opened up the political space and policy planning process to more actors such as international organisations like the United Nations Organization (UNO), civil society organisations and academics.

Although the adopted policy indicates a change in the government's position regarding ELs, as Legère (2006) points out, it failed to adequately address the issue of allocating meaningful functional domains to these languages in the country. The priority of the government has continued to be the consolidation of Kiswahili in the country. The current language policy indicates that incentives will be put in place for individuals and organisations to publish and distribute materials in Kiswahili. It also states that BAKITA (the National Swahili Council) and other institutions working to develop Kiswahili will be strengthened and given the tools to assume their responsibilities properly. This is an indication of how

Kiswahili and ELs are treated differently. While the government is willing to commit resources for the consolidation and development of Kiswahili, the development of ELs is left to their speakers. According to Msanjila (2003), this is done deliberately to weaken ELs so that they cannot compete with Kiswahili.

Thus, with the current situation surrounding ELs, their vitality is expected to continue to deteriorate. At present, these languages are mostly spoken in rural areas. However, it was noted that the speakers of these languages are older people, women and those who do not know how to read and write (Mekacha 1993; Msanjila 1999; 2003). Other members of societies such as the youth, educated people, public servants and traders prefer Kiswahili (Ngonyani 1995; Msanjila 2003).

Promoting the vitality of ethnic languages

Before discussing the promotion and maintenance of ethnic languages in Tanzania, we need to ask ourselves: do we still need ELs in these modern times? After all, language shift is not a recent phenomenon. As discussed previously, it has been occurring since historical times and therefore seems to be a part of linguistic evolution. Moreover, language shift may occur as an adaptation strategy to new social, political and economic situations. Mufwene (2017) says about promoting ELs' vitality that there is a need to correct deleterious linguistic evolution trajectories like language shift, and this can be done by having an informed historical perspective regarding the process itself.

ELs in Tanzania, as outlined in the language policy, are important sources of, and custodians of customs, tradition, technology and culture in general (*Wizara ya Elimu na Utamaduni* 1997). Moreover, the speakers of these languages value and are proud of the languages (Mekacha 1993; Msanjila 1999; 2003; Ström 2009). Therefore, these languages need to be maintained and their vitality promoted. This can be achieved by encouraging communities to use these languages for different communicative functions. As mentioned previously, languages all over the world are maintained by the communicative functions they are used for. ELs use can be promoted by removing restrictions imposed on them and adopting policies that will assign them meaningful functional domains. Another way to promote these ELs is by allowing them to be used in the mass media. As Msanjila (2003) pointed out, any language can grow and acquire prestige when used in media such as radio, television and newspapers. One of the reasons why ELs are not allowed in mass communications in Tanzania is the concern that their use could instigate tribalism in the country. However, as LoT (2009) argues, tribalism does not result from people using their languages but, in most cases, it is a result of a corrupt system that exploits particular members of society and the unequal distribution of resources. Ghana offers a good example of a country where mass media has contributed to supporting and promoting indigenous languages. Several radio and television stations broadcast their programmes in the indigenous languages of Ghana. According to Bodomo et al. (2010), this has not only contributed immensely to the development of the indigenous languages in Ghana, but has also given opportunities to marginalised voices.

Encouraging ethnolinguistic communities to actively discuss and seek solutions to their language's problems can also help promote the vitality of ELs. A community that is worried about the deterioration of their language may come up with a solution to alter its future. The Mbugu are an illustration of this point. They originally spoke a Cushitic language, but in a Pare-dominant environment, they switched. Eventually, they attempted to reverse the shift when they realised that they needed a language of their own (Mous 2020). Griscom et al. (2018) provide an instance of involving communities in the discussion of language matters. The authors organised a conference on languages in Babati in Tanzania that gathered representatives from Datooga, Gorowaa, Hadza and Nyihanzu communities to discuss changes that had been occurring in their communities and the effects of these changes in languages and cultures, and how they can cope and mitigate adverse effects brought by these changes. By extending this approach to other ethnolinguistic communities, there could be more discussions about ELs. This goal can be achieved by establishing a national day for ethnic languages every year, similar to the UN Swahili Language Day. This day would be to celebrate the existence of these languages, which would likely boost the positive attitude of the speakers towards the languages. It would provide a forum for discussing the transmission of languages and their potential use.

The vitality of ELs cannot be maintained without active community involvement. Using these languages in communities and at home is crucial to their transmission. Parents and community members who perceive themselves as responsible and capable of influencing their children's heritage language development are likely to create supportive environments for learning these languages. On the contrary, parents and community members who feel powerless or not responsible for their children's heritage language development are unlikely to provide these supportive environments. Batibo (1992), for example, observed that Hangaza and Haya parents at the University of Dar es Salaam ensure that their children learn their ethnic languages first, as opposed to Zinza and Pogolo whose children are likely to learn Kiswahili first. An analogous observation at the community level was made by Ström (2009). In her study, she observed that throughout the area where Ndegeleko is spoken, children learn the language in a very limited way, and almost all children learn Kiswahili as their first language. According to Ström (2009), the reason for this is that the community members have given it up in favour of Kiswahili. She contends that the Ndegeleko are convinced that their language is declining and believe it is beyond their ability to change the situation, rather than accepting that it will disappear. In contrast, Ström (2009) observes that Matumbi parents who lived in the same area were more inclined to pass on their language to their children.

Conclusion

This article aimed to explore the connection between the current language ecology in Tanzania and the vitality of its ethnic languages. The article discusses the dynamics of the language ecology in Tanzania. To put the discussion into perspective, Tanzania's linguistic ecology was roughly divided into four periods: precolonial immigration, early East Africa trade contacts, European colonialism and the post-independence era. The article examined the language situation in those periods and how each has contributed to the current situation with ethnic languages. In the precolonial migration period, there was the influx of different linguistic groups into modern Tanzania, which resulted in language contacts of different forms. The influence of one language over the other, during this period, resulted from population and cultural expansion. In the early East Africa trade period, Kiswahili started to diffuse into the interior of Tanzania. Following its use in trade, it gradually emerged as a language for intercultural communication, while other indigenous languages remained used for intra-cultural communication. In the European colonial period, the language ecology was transformed into three layers. English was transplanted into the ecology as the prestigious language, followed by Kiswahili, and indigenous languages occupied the lowest layer. The post-independence period further marginalised indigenous languages.

The discussion has revealed that the position of ethnic languages in Tanzania was gradually shaped by the economic and sociopolitical conditions that prevailed during the four periods. The position of ethnic languages started to be weakened with the promotion of Kiswahili as the language of administration by the Germans, followed by the introduction of English by the British. Later, the post-independent nation-building policy that reinforced Kiswahili's position as the principal language of communication in the country led many ethnic languages to the edge of extinction. To maintain these languages, it is suggested that the restrictive policies on ethnic languages need to be rescinded, and in their place, meaningful functional domains should be allocated to them. It is also suggested that community-based approaches should be adopted where the communities are actively engaged to find solutions for their endangered languages.

Endnotes

- ⁱ While the article uses the term Tanzania, most discussions are based on mainland Tanzania where most ethnic languages are found.
- ⁱⁱ This is the replacement of the communicative functions of one language or language variety by another for both an individual and a speech community.

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