

# A Chronicle of Language Policies in Uganda and the Status of Kiswahili

*Perpetua Arinaitwe\**

## Abstract

Uganda's history regarding the search for a national language has been characterised with by different language policies across different historical periods. These include both macro and micro policies that have had an impact on the promotion and development of Kiswahili in Uganda. Mainly, in the pre-colonial period, there was an unwritten policy in Buganda which gave Luganda, Kiswahili, and Arabic official language status, but following the declaration of Uganda as a British protectorate in 1894, the language policy changed from Kiswahili, Luganda, and Arabic to English as the official language. This examination of historical evolution of language policies demonstrate the bottlenecks that Kiswahili language has encountered in its promotion and development in Uganda. This is mainly attributed to colonial language policies that have influenced policy decisions across the different periods of time in Uganda's history. This article, therefore, examines a historical narrative on different language policies that have been proposed in Uganda across the different historical periods, namely, the pre-colonial period (1844-1894); the colonial period (1894-1962); and the post-colonial period (1962-2005). These periods represent historical milestones during which different language policies were proposed about Kiswahili. The article critically examines those different policies and how they affected the Kiswahili Language, and it seeks to demonstrate that language policy in Uganda needs re-thinking.

**Keywords:** Kiswahili, Chronicle, Language policy, Status, Uganda.

\* **Perpetua Arinaitwe** is a Gerda-Henkel Foundation PhD candidate in the Department of African Languages, Makerere University. She is also a Curriculum Specialist at National Curriculum Development Centre, Uganda. Her career interests are in curriculum design, development and promotion of Kiswahili language. She researches sociolinguistics with a focus on language planning and policy; culture; politics; and Kiswahili. Making a historical analysis of the cultural-politics of Uganda over time from pre-colonial, through colonial to the postcolonial period, examining the psychological and subjective dimensions of politics and culture vis-à-vis Kiswahili promotion and development. The central thesis of her research is that the politics of a particular place is a product of its history – the political, economic and cultural histories of its members. She is also interested in how culture and politics shape language policy and planning.



## Introduction

This article presents a historical analysis of the position of Kiswahili in the different language policies that have been proposed in Uganda across the different historical periods of time. It interrogates the question of language policy and how the policies have affected the status of Kiswahili in Uganda ranging from the pre-colonial period to the present. While the article examines the status of Kiswahili in Uganda, it refers to policies where the implementation of the use of Kiswahili has been successful, especially in Kenya and Tanzania (Mulokozi 2004; Vilhanova 1996).

The data for this article was collected through the use of interviews and document analysis. This helped the researcher to examine the meanings and implications of the Kiswahili language in Uganda in the pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial Uganda. Bearing in mind the socio-linguistic characteristics of Uganda, four language policy experts were interviewed with a view to better understand the debates around language policy's history and implementation in light with a specific interest in Kiswahili.

A documentary review of language policies was carried out in order not only to historicise language policy, but also to see how its language policy implementation has either promoted or hindered Kiswahili use in Uganda. The article examines the socio-historical narratives surrounding language policies regarding Kiswahili,

the beliefs, attitude, opinions, ideas, positions and politics behind the language policies in Uganda. This article is done to explain why Kiswahili, despite several policies for its promotion and development continues to have a low status in the country.

The history of Kiswahili in Uganda dates far back to the year 1800. Since then, colonial governments and the preceding governments up to date have each made attempts toward the promotion and development of Kiswahili in Uganda. Unfortunately, all the efforts made so far have not yielded significant achievements and the progress has been slow.

This article particularly sets out to examine the obstacles and constraints that account for the disillusionment to implement the various language policies that have been geared toward the promotion and development of Kiswahili in Uganda. In trying to unravel this emerging problem, the researcher attempted to situate the current problem into a historical perspective.

## Methodology

This article engages with the qualitative research approaches to examine Uganda's language policies and establish the place of Kiswahili during different historical periods of time. According to Silverman (2016), qualitative research approaches are valued over the quantitative methods because most of the techniques that they employed lead to the acquisition

of help in getting the first-hand information from participants and, this therefore, reinforces the authenticity and reliability of the research data obtained.

These “first-hand-methods” of data collection, in addition to generating in-depth data, help to get the emotions attached to the information collected. The study was positioned as a phenomenological study, that enabled the researcher to interview language policy experts about their experiences and positions with regard to the promotion and development of language policies on Kiswahili within the context of language policies in Uganda.

The article analysed policy documents such as the constitution, court rulings, policy guidelines, bills, political declarations and decrees, Acts of parliament to help understand the residence of Kiswahili during different epochs of time. The interpretive paradigm located this study as interpretivists, are concerned with “understanding the subjective world of the human experience” and rather, as part of our consciousness and due to our interaction with the world in which we live.

Interpretivists believe that behaviours can be understood by researchers only via those who are involved perform them in the context in which they occur (Assalahi, 2015). This study applies to Uganda as a country and its people. Four expert participants were engaged in interviews to generate in-depth

understanding of language policy formulation, development and application. Document analysis too was utilised to generate data for this study. Data were analysed using Braun & Clarke’s six-phase framework for doing a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke 2006).

### **Theoretical Orientation: The Historical Structural Model of Language Policy and Planning**

This article is guided by the historical-structural model to language policy as presented by James Tollefson (1991). This model examines the social structures which put limitations on the choices that people make. In this regard, historical and structural processes shape human behaviour and, therefore, issues of power, ideology, the state, hegemony, dominance, and social structure play a crucial role in the analysis of policies. Policies are evaluated in terms of their effect, by for example, on changing the existing social structure.

Tollefson criticized earlier approaches which saw language policy as efforts entirely intended by governments efforts to plan language development by governments. They were problematic because they ignored the ideological basis of language policy and the role of historical-structural processes that shape language policy and planning. To him, any researcher interested in language policy should explain the role of historical-structural processes

or the factors that shape language policies.

Researchers also ought to explore the philosophical keystones that legitimate or affect these policies. Tollefson's historical-structural analysis points to new avenues in research and the importance of incorporating issues of history and structure in the analysis of language policy. Drawing on Tollefson's understanding of language policy as a product of socio-historical experiences, I argue that the uncertain position of Kiswahili in Uganda is a result of policies that have been created without analysing the country's socio-historical experience. In this regard, the policies, despite being well intended, have disfavoured Kiswahili use in Uganda.

### **Historicising Kiswahili and language policy in Uganda.**

To understand how the position of Kiswahili in Uganda has evolved, it is important to understand the history of the Kiswahili language and the policies that have shaped its status in Uganda. This thus calls for a discussion of the different language policies across the different periods epochs of time in Uganda.

I start with the precolonial period to show the economic importance of the language at Kabaka Muteesa I's court. I go ahead to examine the colonial policies on Kiswahili language. Finally, I discuss the policies on Kiswahili in post-independence Uganda. How these policies have

affected Kiswahili promotion and development in Uganda the country is central to the discussion in this section.

### **Kiswahili in the Pre-colonial Period: 1843-1894**

In Uganda, the first Arab trade caravan reached Ssekabaka Sunna's court in 1843. By then, Kiswahili was already a lingua franca in the Kabaka's court (Whiteley 1969). According to Mukama (1995), Kabaka Muteesa of Buganda who was reigned ruling around this time had a high proficiency of in the Kiswahili language.

By the first decade of the 19th century, Kiswahili had gained root in Uganda. By the time the first explorers, such as H.M. Stanley arrived in Uganda in 1864, the use of Kiswahili in this country was not different from that of Kenya and Tanzania (Gerard 1981). Later in 1882, when Rev. T. Wilson, the first missionary arrived in Uganda, he observed that "the most useful result of the traders from Zanzibar with the Baganda is the introduction of Kiswahili language." He observed that though the people in general did not have the command of the language, two or three natives were found confidently conversing in it.

Muteesa I had succeeded his father, Suna after the latter's death in 1857. Muteesa tightened his trade relations, the legitimacy of his trade relations with Zanzibar and according to R.A. Snoxall (1942) the only medium of interaction in trade with the people from the coast was Kiswahili. His

close contact with Arab traders helped him to buy manufactured articles for his kingdom in exchange with for whatever the Arabs wanted.

The acquisition of guns helped to strengthen Buganda's fighting power, as R.A. Snoxall (1942) observes: "Kabaka Muteesa was in touch with the outside world through Arab traders and the medium of Swahili even before the arrival of Speke at his court in 1862." However, Muteesa began to learn Kiswahili in early 1862 to converse with his White guests. This was because, for all the explorers who came to Eastern Africa, spoke only Kiswahili.

According to Pawlkov (2006), the above made Kabaka Suuna the first Kiswahili scholar in Buganda and in 1875, he participated with Stanley in translating the Holy Bible into Kiswahili. Muteesa possessed an abridged Anglican Bible in Kiswahili embracing all the principal events from the creation in Genesis to the crucifixion of Christ as presented in the gospels (*Voice of Uganda* 10 March 1975; Pawlkov 2006).

This impressed Stanley for what he had seen in Buganda and the potential of the country and its people. The king was thus converted to Christianity through the medium of Kiswahili. Stanley then persuaded Muteesa to admit missionaries into Buganda and as a result, the Protestant missionaries reached Rubaga in 1877 followed by the Catholics in 1879. Whiteley (1969) notes that the process

of evangelization at first involved the use of Kiswahili medium.

By that time, Luganda was still an unwritten language of the 'heathen'. This power play at the court and in evangelisation shows that Kiswahili occupied a central space in how the Kabaka was then seen. Kiswahili held a noble position such that those who did not know it could not ascend the realms of both nobility and power, and limited their knowledge of God.

The missionaries were determined to show the Baganda new light by transforming their speech from Luganda as a heathen language to the noble Kiswahili. Perhaps the most prominent supporter of the use of Kiswahili at the time was Alexander Mackay, a missionary of the Church Missionary Society. He wrote, in December 1878, from his station in Rubaga, stated that "every Sunday I have held service in court in Kiswahili, without an interpreter, I feel much encouraged at the attention paid and desire to listen intelligently" (Whiteley 1969).

It is from this contextual background that I argue that Kiswahili remained the official language of the church and education in Buganda for many years. It had the power to not only reach the king but also maintain his noble position without it being threatened. However, after 1892, there was a gradual change over to the vernacular as portions of the Bible began to appear in Luganda. Kiswahili, nevertheless, continued to occupy an official position in Kabaka

Mwanga's court as a language of prestige and diplomacy.

It is worth noting that several early treaties with Buganda had Kiswahili versions. It is also interesting to note that even the 1900 Uganda agreement was negotiated in Kiswahili between Sir Harry Johnston and the three Buganda Regents, namely, Apollo Kagwa, Stanislas Mugwanya, and Zakaria Kangawo. All letters preceding the final treaty were written in Kiswahili by Baganda chiefs themselves (*Voice of Uganda* 10 March 1975:2). In this case, Kiswahili, as a language of negotiation maintained its central position of power and elegance and diplomacy in Buganda.

### **Kiswahili in the Colonial Period: 1894-1962**

Following the declaration of Uganda as a British protectorate in 1894, an attempt was made to bring up English as the official language. Whiteley (1969), notes that in Uganda where colonial language policy favoured the use and development of local languages; and Also, Michelman (1995) acknowledges that the British encouraged the use of indigenous languages in their colonial schools, in literature, and even occasionally in administration in Uganda. Despite this tendency, English was seen to offer the best hope for national unity and international cooperation.

Uganda's acting Attorney General, during a debate on the newly promulgated constitutional proposals,

regarding the official language of Uganda noted:

Official language that need not delay us. The official language of the government of Uganda shall be English. Now I hope that people will not spend a larger expense of time on asking the minister of Education when he is going to be teaching Swahili and Zulu: we are concerned here with the official language not with teaching another language altogether, which is altogether strange. Yes, if you teach Kiswahili, teach also Gujerati (Whiteley 1969).

The Attorney General in this address ignored the fact that none of these countries he referred to was linguistically uni-focal. No one language in the countries served adequately in all the complex patterns of social, political and cultural life. It can be argued, therefore, that if English had the potential, as an obvious choice for inter-territorial communication, so would the need to develop some African languages. This development would be geared at achieving national identity and unity.

The *Voice of Uganda* of 10 March 1975 acknowledges the fact that the 1900 Buganda Agreement gave the Buganda kingdom a special status in the protectorate. In 1903, Kiswahili was made the official local language in which all European officers had to pass examinations within one year after of their arrival at the protectorate. Furthermore, Kiswahili was made the official language of the Kings African Rifles and the Uganda

police Force and thus, in the period 1900-1912 Kiswahili as the official administrative language alongside English.

This was contested by the missionaries who vigorously campaigned against Kiswahili language by alleging that it encouraged the spread of Islam. Because of the relationship between Kiswahili and Arabic, the missionaries feared that the continuation of Kiswahili as a medium of Christian instruction could easily increase what they used to term as the “Mohamedan danger” (fear of Islamic dominance).

With this in the way, their power at the king’s court and in Buganda would be under threat. Eventually, the British government accepted the arguments of the White missionaries. The colonial secretary had substituted Luganda for Kiswahili as the official language by the end of 1912. When the missionaries introduced formal education, Kiswahili was given a raw deal (*Voice of Uganda*, 10 March 1975:2; Pawlkov 1996).

Whiteley (1969) further adds that in 1927, Sir William Gowers, the then Governor of Uganda, saw the importance in the promotion of Kiswahili, he made his major bid to pull Uganda into the mainstream of Kiswahili. The governor wrote a memorandum entitled: “The Development of Kiswahili as an Educational and Administrative Language in the Uganda Protectorate.” By that time, Kiswahili was being looked at by Gowers and other

colonial administrators as one of the tools which would make their East African federation a reality. With this great ambition, Governor Gowers issued a language policy statement elevating the position of Kiswahili. The policy statement read in part:

Kiswahili should replace  
Luganda in government business  
in Buganda, Busoga and Bugisu  
..... A policy by which a local  
dialect is encouraged at the  
expense of this widely spread  
alternative can no longer be  
maintained. The range of  
Luganda is in my opinion far  
restricted for it to be regarded  
as a dominant union language  
[Cited by Whiteley (1969);  
Sekamwa (1977)].

Sekamwa (1984) notes that between 1900 and 1912, the Uganda protectorate government had passed a regulation which strengthened the use of Luganda. Governor Gowers, however, dismissed the reason advanced to promote Luganda in that year as inadequate and prejudiced. He even doubted the ability of Luganda to spread in to all parts of Uganda. In his view, Luganda would have done it already since it had been enjoying great favours right from 1900. He further said that Kiswahili would bring Uganda closer to the other east African territories since in Tanganyika and Kenya already had had Kiswahili as an administrative convenience. In Uganda, on the other hand, where the missionaries had concentrated on using vernacular languages in mission schools, the governor saw the need

to make Kiswahili the medium of instruction after the elementary stage.

Despite the above advantage mentioned by the governor, his policy aroused a lot of opposition from Ugandans and some Europeans living in the country. The strongest opposition, however, came from; the traditional rulers of Buganda, Toro, Bunyoro, Busoga and Ankole. In Buganda, the '*Lukiiko*', that is, the parliament of Buganda held a very long discussion on the governor's language policy. Following this discussion, the then Kabaka, Sir Daudi Chwa II, issued a statement objecting to the governor's language policy. The Kabaka said in part:

I feel, however, it is my duty to add here in conclusion that it is quite unnecessary to adopt the Kiswahili language as the official native language in Buganda and I am entirely opposed to any arrangement which would in any way facilitate the ultimate adoption of this language as the official native language of the Baganda in place of, or at the expense of, their language since I feel convinced that such a course will assuredly bring about the loss of our tribal status and nationality among the native tribes of Africa (Sekamwa 1984).

Kabaka's negative attitude towards Kiswahili was mainly because the Kings and Chiefs as custodians of culture and customs were duty-bound to defend these cultures and customs from anything that looked threatening to them. Besides, the idea of an East African federation was unwelcome

and undesired by the traditional rulers who thought that such a move would reduce their political, social, and economic power. It can be argued that Kiswahili would not only adulterate the cultures that the cultural leaders represented and led, it would also take away the power of the kings and the people.

Another group that strongly opposed governor Gowers pro-Swahili language policy were the Christian missionaries who associated it with Islam. The missionaries had to encourage the growth of native languages as a matter of policy in a bid to achieve their major objective. Native languages gave them access to people's cultures and ideologies. Taking away these languages meant that it would be hard for the missionaries to show the natives how God would be a welcome topic in their local languages and cultures.

Welbourne (1965) asserts that the teaching of Kiswahili would have meant encouragement of a foreign language and that such a policy was in direct conflict with the development of local language policy. However, though the policy of promoting Kiswahili through the education system failed, Kiswahili remained alive in Uganda. It remained the medium of communication in the police force and the king's African Rifles (Mazrui & Mazrui 1998).

## **Kiswahili in the Post-independence Uganda: 1962-2005**

The teaching of Kiswahili was gradually thinned out after 1932. By the time the Second World War broke out in 1939, Kiswahili was no longer the official language, except in the Uganda Police and the Kings' African Rifles. However, despite this neglect, Kiswahili continued to feature as one of the best candidates for the national language considering its neutral status with no ethnic background in Uganda.

In 1962, Ugandan leaders started to see the need for a unifying language in the country. Kiswahili was the language which could satisfy that need adequately. The Obote I Government made positive steps towards the promotion of Kiswahili. In his speech at the inauguration of Makerere University on 8 October 1970, he made the following declaration:

The mission of this University as an instrument of the African revolution makes it imperative that here at Makerere, African languages be studied and developed. It will, therefore, be the responsibility of the University authorities to organize and establish a proper school of African languages and I hasten to add that the Government of Uganda will endeavour to introduce at least one African language in the schools feeding this University and that African language is Kiswahili.

From this declaration, it was obvious that the Obote Government was determined to bring Kiswahili back

into the Education System. The government, made steps towards Africanising the study of languages at institutions of higher learning. Before this declaration, debates on having Kiswahili as a national language kept coming up. However, this did not see complete fruition.

Another policy pronouncement came in 1972 when President Idi Amin issued a decree declaring Kiswahili as the national language of Uganda. However, as Vilhanova (1996) observes, this decree was never implemented despite being supported by a Bill of parliament declaring Kiswahili the national language. This Bill is still in place up to date but non-operational.

Besides, as observed by Sekamwa (1997), the NRM government through the National Council decided that Kiswahili besides English would be one of Uganda's national languages. The Uganda National Educational Policy Review Commission in 1986 also recommended the strengthening of the teaching of Kiswahili in secondary schools in Uganda and to prepare for the training of teachers of Kiswahili. Similar to the earlier pronouncements, these recommendations have not been implemented and remain largely on paper.

Equally, a 2005 amendment of the Uganda 1995 Constitution recognizing Kiswahili as "the second official language to be used in such circumstances as Parliament may by law prescribe." Despite this

amendment, the parliament has up to date not 'by law prescribed' by law how Kiswahili should be used as the second official language. Just like the Government White Paper of 1992 that stipulates that Kiswahili be taught alongside English as a compulsory subject to all learners throughout the primary level of learning, all policies aimed at making Kiswahili a functional second official language, have also, simply remained on paper.

There exists no law to support this recommendation. Because of this, the Ministry of Education's effort to introduce Kiswahili as a subject for from primary One to primary Seven during the 2008 Curriculum Review for Primary Education suffered the challenge of implementation in the absence of such enabling laws. This shows that despite policies being in place for a defined position of Kiswahili, laws have not been enacted to enable the implementation of this position.

The historical contextualisation of the Kiswahili language policies in Uganda underline both macro and micro perspectives. This can help juxtapose the status of Kiswahili across the different periods, from the pre-colonial, colonial to the present. This investigation of historical evolution of language policies has brought out the bottlenecks in the effort to promote and develop Kiswahili.

This draw back may be attributed to colonial language policies that have had influence on policy decisions

across the different periods of time in Uganda. In this case, I have adopted the position that language policy consists not just in the official or explicit statements about language that are found in constitutional provisions, laws, or administrative notices, but also in the implicit, popular, unofficial, ad hoc usages, and practices that are empirically observable especially in the pre-colonial period.

In certain circumstances, the lack of official policy is not the same as the absence of a policy. Similarly, it can be concluded that having a language policy in place is not congruent to its implementation and achievement of its desired effects. Furthermore, it is of the utmost importance to find answer to questions being asked about Kiswahili in the country. Now, I turn my attention to a discussion of the findings by showing why these relationships are in/significant, and weak /or strong about the phenomenon.

## **Language Policy and Indigenous Languages**

Language policy is defined as a body of ideas, laws, regulations, rules and practices intended to achieve the planned language change in the society, groups or systems (Jairo and Sawe 2013). Language policy determines which languages should get status and priority in society by being belled standard, official, local or national. Kaplan and Baldauf, (1997); Ruiz (1995) used the terms endoglossic and

exoglossic, coined by Kloss (1969) to distinguish three major types of language policies, each hinging on the great tradition and related to the twin goals of nationalism and nationism (Cobarrubias 1983; Fishman 1971).

Endoglossic (community-oriented) policies give primacy to and promote an indigenous language of the community. Where the indigenous languages are also the language of wider communication (LWC) with high prestige value inside and outside their native contexts. On the other hand, an exoglossic (externally-oriented) policy gives primacy and promotes a foreign language, frequently a former colonial language.

Lastly, the third type of language policy is a combination of the first two. The mixed language policies are essentially bilingual in nature. They accommodate the promotion of both indigenous and foreign languages. It should be noted that in Uganda, Kiswahili does not fall under the three categories of language policy. While others identify it as a foreign language, its origin and history are rooted at the East African coast. It can be argued that Uganda is partly exoglossic policy oriented since it gives primacy and promotes a foreign language, English.

The adoption of a language in a non-native context is a major indication of language of wider communication status. This is typical in multilingual states where none of the indigenous languages are LWC and there is a history of prolonged contact

with the chosen LWC state, tonically. Even after independence, many countries often found it necessary to adopt the former colonial language for official and public purposes given that the former colonial power and its institutions had pervaded the life of the colony. This has been true for most of the sub-Saharan states of East, and West Africa as well as Southern Africa (Omoniyi 2003).

In Uganda too, none of the indigenous languages could be described is a language of wider communication. However, Kiswahili, which would be a better choice of a language of wider communication (because of its neutrality in terms of ethnic background) still faces several political and cultural impediments. In several government institutions, English is widely used, superseding other local languages and their development. As a result of this, various compromises come into play where language related issues, especially those issues to do with education and wider communication, are concerned.

Language policy is, therefore, about language choice (Taddese 1985; Dzahene-Quarshi 2011; Kingsley 2013). The policies adopted to promote one or more languages specifying their usage in different domains, like such as education, administration, and media. This is usually necessary in a multilingual country like Uganda. In such similar countries, there are high competing language interests, hence recognition

is given to more than two languages either as national or official languages (Lambart 1999).

Spolsky (2004) asserts that language policy includes efforts to constrain what is considered as bad language and to encourage what is considered as good language. Language policy can, therefore, exacerbate or mitigate the growth or existence of a language.

Language policy is importance in a multilingual country like Uganda, a country where all other indigenous languages are fighting for influence to be at the top; demanding their functionality roles in their respective structures. Uganda has had several policies in education since independence, and other government and non-government institutions to address indigenous languages. Indigenous languages are languages that are native to a region and spoken by indigenous people, often get reduced to the status of a minority language in sight of an LWC being promoted to the status of a national or official language.

Spolsky (2009) argues that language policy comes with the concept of a nation-state when “one language, one nation ideology” is prominent. According to Singh et al. (2012), the emerging states were interested in controlling and manipulating the linguistic behaviour of their citizens. This led Such countries to enact policies that categorize languages as either mother-tongue, national, official, native, non-native, and many more.

Singh et al. (2012) further argue that after World War II, many states that started attaining independence retained the policies of their colonial masters, often favouring the colonizer’s education policies in general and language policies in particular. Many African states kept either English or French as their official languages. However, later, the wave of linguistic nationalism started inspiring the African countries to start efforts of promoting African languages to national as well as official languages became rampant.

Nationalism, with its search for national identity and ‘great traditions’, is a strong motivation for language management (Spolsky 2004). This continues to dominate language policy efforts up to date and also places indigenous languages into very ambiguous spaces to the indigenous languages because they are pushed to the periphery while the former colonial master’s languages gain a superior and privileged position. Consequently, an ethnic liking and non-liking for a certain language might affect a policy in its favour. This could explain reasons why certain local languages in Uganda affect the national language policies in relation to Kiswahili.

## Findings

This work used Braun & Clarke’s six-phase framework to do a thematic analysis of legal and policy documents such as the constitutions, government papers, policy guidelines, political

declarations and decrees, and Acts of parliament in order to answer the core questions of the study. The six-phase framework involved transcription (looking for segments that are relevant to the research and research questions and assign a word or phrase to it that captures its meaning); generate initial codes; search for themes; review themes; define and name themes; and present the themes. More so, data was generated using interviews and document analysis as discussed below.

With regard to Kiswahili and language policy in Uganda, for any language to develop, it needs a language policy that is fully supported by the government in terms of policy, planning and implementation (Esman, 1992). In such a case, the government either officially through legislation, court decisions or policy determines how languages are used, cultivate language skills needed to meet national priorities or establish the rights of individuals or groups to use and maintain some of the languages. Although Kiswahili is an East African lingua franca and has been the official language for the military since the era of the Kings African Rifles (1902-1960s), its use in Uganda mainly occupies a symbolic space rather than the practical one.

The proposal to make Kiswahili a national language of Uganda was opposed several times by Ugandans, and most especially, the Baganda (Mazrui & Mazrui 1998). Nonetheless, in 2005, the constitution was amended to recognise Kiswahili

as the second official language of Uganda. The article states that: “Kiswahili shall be the second official language of Uganda to be used in such circumstances as Parliament may by law prescribe” (The Constitution Amendment Act 2005). However, no law has been ratified to make Kiswahili an operational official language in Uganda fourteen years later since that amendment.

Mazrui & Mazrui (1998) note that there have been recurrent debates over several years on the possible promotion of Kiswahili to the status of a national language of Uganda. The two regimes under Milton Obote (1962-1971 and 1980-1985) failed to deal with this question. Therefore, this inability to make Kiswahili a national language left English as the only official language of Uganda. At the time, Kiswahili was more a language of economic influence than political participation. It was used by traders in both Uganda and the other East African countries.

In 1972, the government of Uganda, under Idi Amin declared Kiswahili a national language by decree. It also introduced it as a major language for Uganda’s electronic media. The military rule under Amin increased the use of Kiswahili amongst Ugandans. On national radio and television, for example, employees were, for the first time, ordered by the government to use Kiswahili as one of their languages. Myers-Scotton’s (1972) notes that this increased the use of Kiswahili

in Uganda during Idi Amin's regime. This shows that Kiswahili could have become Uganda's lingua franca with the largest number of speakers at the time. The post Amin era led to a drop in the use of Kiswahili. The civilian government of Obote's government (1980-1985) removed Kiswahili from the prominent position his predecessor had placed it in.

As a language, Kiswahili has been an important language of communication within Uganda's armed forces. The status of Kiswahili in the Uganda's armed forces and police in Uganda in the post Amin era period was originally purely instrumental. It was considered the language of command and order. The adoption of Kiswahili as a military lingua franca facilitated communication in the armed forces of Uganda who were at the time (the 1960s to the 1980s), multi-ethnic, largely uni-regional (drawn from northern Uganda). They were also considered not to have been well educated. This would hamper their use of English (acquired through the school system) to communicate within the armed forces.

It was this situation that led to the adoption of Kiswahili as the preferred language of use in the armed forces. As a language that did not belong to any specific ethnic group, Kiswahili could be adopted without fear of any ethnic group dominating the other in the armed forces. The uni-regional nature of the Ugandan army eventually created a sentimental

attachment to Kiswahili, virtually as a northern lingua franca (Mazrui & Mazrui 1998).

Besides the use of Kiswahili as the language of command and order could have been considered as an advantage, but other dynamics made Kiswahili discredited its adoption as a national or official language in the country. Firstly, it was used by undisciplined soldiers who terrorized local people in the period of political unrest, (1971-1985). This created negative associations with Kiswahili since Ugandans associated the language with political turmoil. In addition, because Kiswahili was widely used as a language of command in the army, by people who were especially drawn from southern Uganda, the rest of the country did not accept it a language for social interaction.

For example, the Baganda posed the strongest opposition to the proposition adoption of Kiswahili as the national language. They saw Luganda, rather than Kiswahili, as the preferred national language. There was also a case of language competition, where Baganda perceived Kiswahili as a rival to their language. They thought it would eventually threaten the use of Luganda in schools Whiteley (1969), Nsibambi (1971) among others. Additionally, because Kiswahili was widely used as a language of command in the army, especially under the military regime, many people, especially from Southern Uganda were not comfortable using Kiswahili. This was because they

viewed it as a language of command rather than a language for social interaction.

The hatred of Kiswahili by Ugandans due to its association with Amin's tyranny was now counterbalanced by more positive prospects, as a result of the National Resistance Army's (NRA)'s liberation efforts. However, since the political wing of the NRA's (now the National Resistance Movement NRM) assumed power in 1986, the government did not commit itself to introducing the Kiswahili language issue.

The President spoke about language issues and went ahead to meet experts to discuss language development strategies, but in the words of one linguist, Professor Ruth Mukama, formerly of Makerere University's from the Department of African Languages, there was no political will to implement a national language for the country. She further said that the absence of concrete support programmes and sound investment into the development of a national language development has affected Kiswahili's progress.

The interviews conducted for this study brought out the lackadaisical attitude towards the use of Kiswahili and its status as some of the sentiments from the interviews. It became clear that some Ugandans still associate Kiswahili language with criminal elements and bad memories of its use by the violent troops of previous governments. Although it is well stated in the 1995 Constitution

that Kiswahili is the second official language of Uganda after English, participants revealed that its uptake has been poor due to the bad attitude Ugandans have against it. This is because many associate with the past trauma they suffered under the previous regimes. Uganda civilians are reluctant to the use of Kiswahili because they believe that doing so would portray them as wrong doers and criminal elements in gangs and the military. A participant noted that:

Up to now we suffer at the hands of military, and which language are they using? Kiswahili and you expect me to speak that language? What will people think of me? Robbing now is done using Kiswahili, so, Kiswahili is a threatening tool.

This negative attitude puts the speaking of Kiswahili behind other local languages, like such as Luganda. Some people still associate Kiswahili with historical hostilities between the central government and the kingdom of Buganda, which occurred in the 1960s, which houses the capital city that occurred in the 1960s. The hostilities started when the Kabaka's kingdom was attacked and the king fled into exile. At this point, Kiswahili was the command language of the military and the lingua franca of the attacking forces. A participant observed:

We have a very bad perception towards Kiswahili because of its historical problems with the Buganda kingdom. More so, the language is associated with crime, toughness, brutality and soldier-

like attitude. You have seen, up to now, when the police are beating up people, they are using Kiswahili.

It is clear that with this unenthusiastic attitude towards Kiswahili, it would be difficult to promote its use among Ugandans, despite many language policies suggesting so. Speaking Kiswahili creates anxiety and fear among a big number of Ugandans. It should be noted that the education system of Uganda is not immune to this unenthusiastic and rather hostile attitude towards Kiswahili as it is further discussed in the next section.

While English is predominant in the medium of instruction in the Ugandan education system, some participants in this study believed that it is English that is associated with class school instead of Kiswahili. This perception is because English is widely used in almost all the school activities and functions while Kiswahili is given less attention. In other instances, Kiswahili is treated as another vernacular in some schools. This renders English an added advantage in terms of promotion and development. It was noted from by one of the participants thus:

You know, English is associated with class, Kiswahili is not. If I told my children at home to speak Kiswahili, they would say no. they do not know yet the importance of speaking Kiswahili. One of my children tells me they never use Kiswahili at school.

In relation to the above, English as the language of instruction in education,

it dictates the language used in disseminating knowledge at various levels. Government has in most scenarios reiterated its commitment to the promotion and development of Kiswahili. The important role that a language, such as Kiswahili could play in learning and teaching should be recognised. Several roadmaps to popularize and streamline Kiswahili in the education system have been drawn and several plans and efforts have been put in place to try and implement its teaching and learning in the Ugandan education system.

According to Nelde (2000), one of the strongest influences on language planning and policy is that of its use in education. The Ugandan Education Language Policy was enacted in 1992 in the Government White which embraced the Ssentenza Kajubi Commission Report of 1987 that attempted to evenly consider the position of Kiswahili and its subsequent realization and promotion in schools amidst social, economic and political tensions of various dimensions in the country.

To address the medium of instruction predicament in the education system, the Government White Paper stipulated that Kiswahili and English languages would be taught as compulsory subjects to all learners throughout the primary education level of learning, in both urban and rural areas. It further emphasized that time and instructional materials be allocated and provided to enable the

start of Kiswahili in Uganda's school system.

Despite this recommendation, no law has been passed by parliament to see to its implementation. Thus, the Ministry of Education's efforts to introduce Kiswahili as a subject from Primary One to Primary Seven during the 2008 curriculum review for primary education suffered the same challenge in the absence of such legal support mechanisms (White Paper 1992:19).

The White Paper pointed out the need for a systematic development of the main official and national languages in Uganda and recommended to the government on policies and programmes for the promotion of other Ugandan languages. The White Paper maintains that to ensure rapid social development in the country, efforts were to be made to strengthen Kiswahili language since it possesses a greater capacity for uniting Ugandans and as it is a language that would not raise ethnic rivalries.

While the government White Paper of 1992 stipulated that, Kiswahili and English languages would be taught as compulsory subjects to all learners throughout the primary school level of learning, in both urban and rural areas, this has not been done up to now. In line with the National Curriculum Development Centre, Kiswahili comes at a transitional stage of Primary Four after while the learners have engaged with the mother tongue up to Primary Three.

Despite this, many schools do not do this. They prefer English language right from the lower primary. Therefore, this also presents Kiswahili as a subject, rather than a medium of instruction or both. Nonetheless, learners and community members engage in a competition of which language to adopt given the diversity of indigenous languages in Uganda. The subsequent section interrogates issues in language policy vis-a-vis the functional role of indigenous languages in the context of a multi-ethnic landscape.

Data from interviews also reveals that the position of English language in most government institutions, relegates Kiswahili to a minor position very much like the other indigenous languages insubstantial, due to lacking prioritization by the government. It is evident from the data collected that despite several endorsements by the government to elevate Kiswahili to the position of Uganda's second official language, its implementation has not been prioritized by the government.

Some participants felt that the government has done little towards the establishment and implementation of policies, legal and institutional framework required for setting standards for the effective promotion, development and usage use of Kiswahili at all levels of education and in all domains. For example, it came out from the data that people feel the that government has not provided sensitization to Ugandans about the value of Kiswahili. This would help

reduce the fear that the people have about it. A participant observed:

There has not been a calculated effort by the government to sensitize the masses and shade off the language off those excesses, to me, I consider is a foreign language, Kiswahili is not Ugandan. So, bringing it to me, you need to convince me.

This perception from a participant puts Kiswahili speaking in a fragile tenuous that will require a lot of effort on the part and insubstantial place that would instead need government to prioritize its acceptance and development. The Constitution of the Government of the Republic of Uganda provides for Kiswahili as the second official language after English. However, Kiswahili's development has not been given any attention nor has any attempt been made at its official use in any way as much as English.

This argument is supported by Spolsky (2004), who notes that English as a global or international language affects the choice of national or official languages in most countries. According to Spolsky (2004), some countries adopt policies that are made to fight the growing influence of English by adopting a different language, while in other countries, English automatically becomes the official language.

The other factor outlined by Spolsky as influencing language policy is the notion of language rights. Spolsky argues that with the growing recognition that language choice is a

fundamental part of human and civil rights, various countries include in their language policies the language rights of all their citizens, especially the minority groups to use their own languages.

Such recognition affects how language is used, with the minority agitating for use of their languages in various domains as recognised by law. This has become a characteristic of language policies of most African countries that recognise, at least in policy, the recognition and promotion of the indigenous African languages, which is not the case in Uganda where English language is prioritised over other languages.

## Conclusion

The article examined language policies and the status of Kiswahili in Uganda across the different periods. The study found that the problems that Kiswahili has encountered in Uganda are not accidental but have historical roots. The study also revealed that the ambivalence in laws creates ambiguity in the space occupied by Kiswahili hence leaving it at crossways. Therefore, apart from several declarations and policy pronouncements, Kiswahili is just a proposed second official language but one that is not operational and cannot be used in all official contexts such as in parliament and courts of law among others.

This is because the policies about Kiswahili are not in tandem with the cultural-politics that would have

favoured its development of the time. This, in turn, has rendered language policy pronouncements about Kiswahili to turn out to be no more than public relations statements rather than a blueprint for action. This has meant that Kiswahili in Uganda has continued to register slow progress. The main argument is that the language policy in place, at any

one time, has not corresponded to its implementation to lead to the desired outcomes in Uganda. The study recommends that if Uganda wants results, it should adopt a policy similar to the Tanzanian language policy model that formalised Kiswahili as a national language for all purposes, which has been a resounding success.

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