Kiswahili in the Technical Age: Lessons from Kenya's Use of Kiswahili in the Legal and Parliamentary Registers

Kitula   King'ei
Kenyatta University
Department of Kiswahili and Other African Languages
P.O. Box 43844, NAIROBI; KENYA
gkkingei@yahoo.com

Abstract

Kiswahili is increasingly spreading globally, (Massamba 1990:3), and it is rapidly becoming more than just ordinary lingua franca in East Africa. Until recently, this important African language played a limited role in the technical fields such as science, technology, higher education or government. For instance, its use in Kenya's National Assembly was virtually a non-issue in the colonial era. This was the situation despite the fact that since 1944 when the first African MP joined parliament up to independence in 1963, many native Kenyans had been elected or nominated into the House. Thus, the official status of English in Kenya has to date been taken for granted. This fact has for over a century no locked out Kiswahili in the key sectors of education, government, international commerce, diplomacy, science and technology.

1:0 Introduction

On realising the instrumental role of Kiswahili as the only language of Kenyan and East African masses that, President Jomo Kenyatta, decreed its immediate adoption in Parliament 1965. Kiswahili had been widely spread as alanguage of polical mass mobilisation in East Africa by Kenya's KANU and Tanzania's TANU (now CCM), during the struggle for independence since early 1940's. Since 1967, Tanzania made a firm resolution to use Kiswahili in Parliament and has done so consistently to date (Mwansoko and Tumbo-Masabo 1996:1)

However, Kenya's parliamentary language policy has, been ambivalent especially with regard to the relationship between English, the official language and Kiswahili, the national language. On paper, these two languages have a co-official status in the House. However, in practice, English seems to enjoy an upper hand since it is the language in which all motions, bills, notices, contracts and proceedings of the House are prepared.

Additionally, English is the only language of law including the national constitution. (Mbaabu 1996)

This paper therefore, attempts to   critically assess the problems of implementing the policy of using Kiswahili in Kenya's Parliament House debate   given the language's relatively undeveloped legal register as compared to that of English. The article does so by focusing on the ways in which Kiswahili technical legal vocabulary is developed Secondly, it examines the challenge posed by the need to keep up with the emerging new and foreign concepts. The underlying question here is, how is the language coping with the need to adequately expressive the new ideas on a timely basis?

It is important to note that whereas a survey on this situation has been undertaken inTanzania by the Institute of Kiswahili Research (IKR), it is yet to materialise in Kenya (Mwansoko and Tumbo-Masabo, 1996). As Abdulaziz (1985:195), notes over 95% speakers of Kiswahili today are not original native speakers of the language and yet, it is they who have influenced the direction of the development of Kiswahili especially in the post-colonial era (Chimera 1998). This fact has been more manifestly proven in the field of parliamentary Kiswahili than in many other domains of socio-cultural life in contemporary Kenya.

2:0 Theoretical Background in the Development of Kiswahili Technical Vocabulary

According to Abdulaziz (1985), technical vocabulary can be developed systematically through formal research by official organs or, on the other hand, it can be done randomly by interested individuals , groups, or organisations. In the case of Kenya, it is the latter which has largely been responsible for the task of forging new technical terminology. This has mainly been the case due to lack of official and legal language research institutions in the country.

However, Kenyans have consistently aspired to participate in the development of Kiswahili technical vocabulary though recognition of the language's role as a tool to 'facilitate the national, integration, both political and cultural' (Okonkwo 1977:146). The latter lists six major socio-political functions of a national language such as Kiswahili as follows:

  (a) expressive (embodiment of culture and collective identity)
  (b) communicative (instrument for exchanging ideas, concepts and
       notions)

(c) unifying (to promote social and political integration)
(d) separatist   (marking the uniqueness and distinctiveness of the people)
(e) participatory   (tool for public debate, decision-making and conflict resolution)
(f) prestige (symbol of national pride and esteem)

For the purpose of this discussion, the expressive, participatory and communicative functions are viewed as the basic or most instrumental roles of Kiswahili as a co-medium of Kenya's parliamentary business. Kiswahili, originally a language of a minority community, ideally fits this role and its adoption as a language of parliament enjoyed popular support nationally and in the region.

3:0 Development of Modern Kiswahili Technical Terminology.

 The task of modernising Kiswahili in the technical domains has been spearheaded by IKR as already mention above. The work of IKR has been to build on the firm foundation set by missionary scholars whose grammar books and especially dictionaries provide useful information on the language's lexemes, synonyms, explanation of meaning, signs and/or formulas of grammatical category, usage and illustration where necessary or possible. In addition, University of Yale has recently launched a programme to develop a comprehensive English-Kiswahili bilingual dictionary which will also be available on the internet. However, although, as noted by a number of experts in this field, Kiswahili technical terminology has expanded a great deal in the recent decades, it has not grown fast enough to accommodate many new concepts that enter the Swahili speaking society almost by the day (Irila 1995).

To give a quick example, Kenyan parliamentarians and other users of Kiswahili have been groping with the task of getting Kiswahili equivalents for the following terms (King'ei 1999:147):

2000 year bug	solistor-general
Islamic fundamentalism	process
2000 year compliant	horticulture
vigilante groups	anthrax
infrastructure	water hyacinth
condoms	transparency
accountability	free airwaves
free market economics	liberalisation

The problem of having to get technical equivalents in Kiswahili for such terms has not just been experienced by parliamentarians but also parliamentary reporters working for various media organizations in Kenya. The latter face a bigger challenge since they hardly have any time to carry out systematic research. The news they collect on a daily basis from the House proceedings may be mostly in English but it has to go on air or to the print only press hours thereafter. The staff reporters are therefore hard put to obtain the technical details in Kiswahili on the spot. Since they are limited by time and other resources, they often fall back on improvisation such as loan translation of the English concepts or just rough approximation of the meanings of the concepts based on the contexts of usage.

Since, as Kiango (1996) observes, the contemporary globalising world is ruled by science and technology, many new technical concepts are consistently being filtered into Kiswahili, this occasions the urgency to get Swahili equivalents or paraphrases to render the new meanings. Kiswahili is increasingly being assigned new technical roles such as education, science, technology and government. This post-war linguistic experience is shared by many other languages and cultures include Finland and Switzerland in Europe and India, Indonesia and Malaysia in Asia; Israel in the Middle East and Somalia, Tanzania in East Africa (Fishman 1977).

4.0 Technical Lexicon Invention and Modernisation Techniques

Linguistically, Kiswahili has adopted many techniques of developing new technical or ordinary words which have helped the language enrich itself in many technical areas. The most commonly used techniques include direct borrowing, indirect borrowing, loan translation, compounding, calquing, or morphological adaptation, acronyms and computer-generation of lexemes (Dadi 1995:32-35). The techniques have been used variably and with different degrees of success. Many technical fields or registers including government have greatly benefited from these efforts to expand and modernise Kiswahili as will be illustrated below.

These are some of the examples of technical words in the realm of government and legal/parliament which have been developed using the indicated techniques:

    4.1 direct borrowing: (From African indigenous languages)
            bunge   'parliament'   (Kihaya)

ikulu	'state house'	(Kisukuma)
Mkrugenzi	'Director'	(Mkru-Proto-Bantu)
	ng'atuka	'to retire' (
Kizanaki) kawi	'energy' (kingozi, an archaic Kiswahil dialect)	
kitivo	'faculty'	(Kipare)
umangimeza	'bureaucracy'	(Kichaga)
mbuti	'duodenum'	(Kimasai)
ikari	'berbeque'	(Kimera)

Although   Temu (1984) observes that local African languages are more endowed with socio-cultural rather than scientific and technological words, it is also true that Kiswahili lexicographers have not done enough research on this aspect in a attempt to enrich Kiswahili in all its technical fields. If Temu is correct, then there is no excuse to turn to English or Arabic to borrow even technical political and legal vocabulary as has largely been the case in the past.

   4.2   Borrowing from foreign languages. Examples:
   (i) Portuguese:
   Meza '   table'
   Mvinyo   'liquor'
   Kanisa   '   'church'
   Gereza   'prison'
   Embe   'mango'
   Pera   'guava'
   Karata   '   gamble'

   (ii)   Hindi
   Pesa   'money'
   Biashara 'business'
   Bepari   'capitalist'
   Bima   'insurance'
   Hundi   'cheque'
   Laki   'one hundred thousand'

   (iii) Persian
   meli   'ship'
   jemadari   ' chief army commander) (CGS)
   bandari   'harbour'
   karani   'clerk'

(iv) Turkish

balo zi	ambassador
bahasha	envelop
korokoroni	prison
kasha	box
afendi	sir

(v) English

gari	'car'	(now used for all auto-mobiles)
shati	'shirt'	
koti	'coat'	
gazeti	'gazetti'	

4.3 Indirect borrowing from foreign languages

skuli or shule (school)   from Germany via English
Amri-jeshi (Commander-in Chief) from Persian via Arabic
Bakshishi 'discount'   from Persian via Arabic)
Sukari   'sugar' from Arabic via English

Although Kiswahili has borrowed quite a few words from English, it is Arabic which is the largest source language for Kiswahili accounting for over 30 % of all loanwords in Kiswahili (Chiragdhin and Mnyampala 1977:15-18). In the fields of law, military, political science or government, Kiswahili has borrowed and morphologically adapted many common words such as :

Spika	Inspekta
Meya	Kopro
Afisa	Meja
Afisi	paredi
Gameti	Chifu
Kamati	Kapteni
Kandarasi	Luteni
Polisi	Jaji
Dikteta	dictator
Fashsti	fascist
Ajenti	political agent
Diplomasia	diplomaci
Demokrasia	democracy

However, there are also cases of liberal borrowing from both English and Arabic sources, perhaps at different historical times when Swahili speakers came into contact with the two foreign cultures. Here are some examples:

Kiswahili	Arabic	English
Jaji	hakimu	'Judge
Korti	Mahakama	'court'
Chemba	kizimbani	'chambers'
Kansela	diwani	'Councillor'
Ripoti	taarifa	'report'
Kesi	mashtaka	'case'
Divisheni	taarafa	'an administrative area'

4.4 Direct Loans from Arabic

Direct loans from Arabic into Kiswahili are numerous, as mentioned above and cover many domains such as religion, material culture, commerce, sea sailing, foods, politics and government, among others (King'ei 2000). This large number of Arabic loans is due to the long historical contacts between the Swahili coast and Arabs which date back many centuries . This contact expanded tremendously from the 19th century with the settlement of Oman ruler Seyyid Said in Zanzibar in 1832. Examples of the political Arabic loans in Kiswahili include:

Siasa	politics
Sheria	Law
Rais	president
Jamhuri	republic
Uhuru	independence, freedom
Taifa	nation
Amani	peace
Mamlaka	power
Udhalimu	oppression
Waziri	cabinet minister
Hazina	treasury
Wajibu	responsibility
Wadhifa (or cheo)	post
Tawala	rule/govern
Katiba	constitution
Hotuba	public speech
Maafikiano	agreement
Umma	public
Ushuru	tax
Ufukara	poverty

Utajiri   riches
Tabaka   a socio-economic class
Katibu   secretary
Rasmi   official (adj.)
Haramu   illegal
Halai   legal/lawful

4.5 Coinage of New Words

As pointed out above, Kiswahili has been able to create new technical political lexicon simply by invention. This is a process which does not rely on any existing indigenous or foreign vocabulary but purely invents a totally new word which, may or may not bear any semantic or grammatical relationship with the concept it denotes. Here are some examples:

Tapeli   con, cheat   utapeli
   conmanship
Langua   laund7trade illegally ulanguzi 'illegal trade'
Kibonzo   cartoon

However, this process has not yielded much result as it seems to be naturally and linguistically unproductive, perhaps due to the lexicographers' preference for other techniques.

4.6 Loan Translation

The parliamentary and legal registers in Kiswahili have made a great due of use of the method of loan-Swahilization by translating the new technical concepts. Translation is an important tool in the development of new technical terms where there is an urgency to express new concepts. This way, the field has created many terms now in use (Zawawi 1974:4) Examples include:

Kiswahili Translation **English**   **Literal meaning**

Mwenyekiti 'Chairperson   'owner of the chair
Mpingamapinduzi 'counterrevolutionary' 'one opposed to change'
Mwanamapinduzi 'revolutionary' 'one who advocates change'
Kufuata kikasuku 'dogmatism' parroting
Democrasia ya vyama vingi   'multi-party democracy'
Ukoloni mambo leo   'neo-colonialism'
Mgombeaji kiti 'candidate' one contesting for a seat in an election

Uuzaji wa bidhaa kwa matifa ya kigeni   'export'
Kuishi pamoja kwa amani 'peaceful co-existence
Umoja wa mataifa   'United Nations'
Vita baridi   'cold war'
Mfumo wa uchumi huria/huru   'free market economy'
Kiongozi wa mrengo wa kushoto   'leftist'
Maongozi ya siasa kali   'fundamentalism'

However, it is important to note that not all foreign political concepts are easily and readily rendered into Kiswahili in a literal and straight sense. For instance, *' a lame-duck president' can not be translated as 'Rasi mlemavu kama bata' but 'Rais asiyekuwa na uwezo'* (powerless president). This means a deep understanding of the original meaning and connotations of the foreign concept is necessary before translating it into Kiswahili(Yang 2002)

4.7 Compounding

The joining of existing words to form new compound ones in order to express new technical ideas is also a very productive process in Kiswahili lexical development. The political register has benefited widely through the creation of compound words denoting hitherto unknown concepts in Kiswahili. Examples:
Mwana+another noun eg.
Mwana+harakati   'activist'
Mwana+chama   'party member'
Mwana+siasa   'politician'
Mwana+nchi   'citizen'
Mwana+sanaa   'artist'
Mwana+sayansi   'scientist'
Mwana+taaluma   'specialist/expert'

Mwenye+another noun

Other compounds take the class prefixes such as **m, u** , **ki** and suffixes such **ish, uz** the following examples show:
M+verb
M+shauri   (shauri)   'advisor
M+fuata)   (mfuasi   'follower or adherent'
M+sosholisti msosholisti   'socialist'
M+kereketa (mkereketwa)   'fan'
M+shirikisha)   (shiriki)   'convener'

M+verb+noun

U+pingana) (upinzani)		'opposition'
U+wekaji huru uchumi		'liberalisation'
U+haramia		'gangsterism'
U+gaidi		'terrorism'
U+mataifa		'international (ism)'
U+ongoza	(uongozi)	'leadership'
U+bagua	(ubaguzi)	'discrimination'
U+nyonya	(unyonyaji)	'exploitation'

Ki+ noun/verb

Ki+tega uchumi	investment
Ki+komnisti	communist
Ki+serikali	'governmental'
Ki+beberu	'imperialistic'
Ki+ndugu	'brotherly or friendly'
Ki+sasa	'modern'

Derivation Using Suffixes

Taifa	nation
Taif+**ish**+a	nationalise
U+taif+**ish**+a+ji	nationalisation
Naizi +iz+a = naizisha	eliticise

4.8 Acronyms

This is the process whereby long names are abbreviated and the abbreviation used as a proper noun denoting a technical concept. This way, even names in English have been Swahilised since their acronyms have been fully absorbed in the language. Here are some examples:

KANU   (Kenya National African Union)   Kenya's ruling party.
UKIMWI (Upungufu wa Kinga Mwilini) lack of natural immunity (due to HIV)
CCM   (Chama Cha Mapinduzi)   Tanzania's ruling party
BAKITA   (Baraza la Kiswahili la Taifa) National Kiswahili Council (Tanzania)
TUKI   (Taasisi ya Uchunguzi wa Kiswahili)   (Institute of Kiswahili Research)

COTU   (Central Organization of Trade Unions)..(Kenya)
PC   (Provincial Commissioner)   "
DC   (District Commisioner)   "
DO   (District Officer)   "

4.8 Computer-Generated Lexicon

In the recent years, linguists have developed special soft-ware for generating affixes which are subsequently used to generate new technical words especially in the natural and physical sciences and engineering. These affixes are created in line with the morphology of international scientific vocabulary in these fields. However, some of the affixes have been used to develop new technical terminology in the political field. Examples of such words include use of the English derivational morphemes **ize** and **ization** to make a Swahili word. eg.

Kenyan**izeshen**   'Kenyan**isation'**
Afrikan**izasheni**   'African**isation'**

These two terms which were widely used in Kenya and Tanzania in the 1960's also gave rise to another term called 'naizi'((pl. Manaizi) (elite) and abstract noun, 'unaizi'(elitism) which were used to refer to the emerging class of African political and economic elite(Berwouts 1989:24). However, this method has not benefited the socio-cultural domains such as politics because such fields are not as deficient as the scientific and technological ones.

5.0 Problems of Usage of New Technical Terms

The acceptance and absorption of new borrowed or coined technical terms is often beset with a number of problems both for the specialised and non-technical user of the language. The following are a few examples of such problems.

5.1 Too many Technical Terms for the Same Concept

For instance some of the new terms are not always created a perceived need to express a new foreign concept. This means that some terms are formed where old ones are still in active use, thus creating unnecessary competition. This situation is not health in a technical field as it may impede the high degree of conciseness required for specificity. Here are some examples:

New	old
'	
Kashifa sakata	'scandal'
Kinara wa Mbunge spika wa mbunge	'Speaker of the House'
Mwakilishi	mbunge '
Member of Parliament'	
Waziri mdogo	waziri msaidizi
'Assitant/Deputy Minister'	
Pensheni malipo ya uzeeni	'pension'
(also:kiinua mgogo, bakshishi)	

It is not clear why such new competing terms are being introduced especially where other more established and widely used words already exist.

5.2   Use of Equivalents and Descriptions Together

Equivalent	Description
Mhazini 'Treasuer'	Mhazini and Mweka / Mtunza Hanina
Marupurupu 'allowance'	malipo maalum, ; bango; pesa za mfukoni;
masurufu.	
Jumuiya 'community'	umoja wa nchi jirani cf Umoja wa Mataifa
noun?	
Udikteta 'dictatorship'	utawala wa kimabavu
Baraza Bubu 'Shadow Cabinet'	Baraza Kielezo; Baraza Butu etc

5.3   Lack of Standardization of Technical Terms

In this case, a number of different terms are used for the same concept, often causing confusion to users at to which of the terms is most correct or acceptable.

Kiranja , Mratibu   for 'Chief Whip'

taarifa, arifa, ilani, tangazo   for 'notice'

jinsia,;umenke   for 'gender/sex'

ushunuzi; ushunuzi; saikolojia   for 'psychology'

kamati; kitengo for 'committee'

washikadau; wahusika for 'stakeholders'

5.4   Unique Styles of Discourse

Kenyan parliamentarians use Kiswahili, in a manner peculiar to
themselves. This persoanlised style of usage, which one is tempted to
call an aspect of Kenyan brand of Kiswahili in the political or public
domain has been fashioned over the years.(Abrahams 1957). Although
the stale is not markedly different from the Tanzanian one, it
distinguishes itself through the following characteristics:

5.5   Allusion
-mzee   'President' or another known political leader
-viongozi wlioishiwa na mwazo   'leaders who are bankrapt of new
ideas' (the opposition)
-makabila makubwa and makabila madogo Gikuyu (opposition) and
the   other communities who support the ruling party.

5.6   ambinguities
-muradi utatekelezwa mara tu pesa zitakapopatikana   (the project
will be implemented as soon as funds are available)   a vague way of
stating that the government is unable to undertake the project.
-haya ni maagizo kutoka juu   'these are instructions
/or orders) from above' (vague and non-commital)
-imedaiwa, imetangazwa, imeamliwa … (it is has been alleged;
announced; decided)   This deliberately impersonal style of
language use is one of the major qualities of Kenya's political
register.

-Kwa sabau zisizoepukika 'Due to unavoidable
circumstances or reasons'

5.7 archetypes

Parliamentarians are also fond of dichotomising the society
they present or describe in their speeches. For instance,
they often distinguish between the following concepts:

Mjini and mashambani   (rural and urban)
Wazee na vijana   (the aged and
                                                        the youth or
                                                        young turks and
                                                        old guard)

Wabishi na watulivu (wapenda amani)   (the hawks and the doves)

Matajiri kwa maskini   'the rich and the poor'

Wapende wsipende   'whether they like it or not'

5.8 burlesque   (an incongruous imitation)

This figure of speech refers to uncreative parodying of the thoughts or ideas of others. For instance, Kenyan parliamentarians are fond of parodying their senior fellows thus creating a caricature. Some of the political statement made in caricature over time degenerate into hyperboles and clichés . Examples:

harakisha maendeleo   'accelerate development'

uwazi na uwajibikaji   'transparency and accountability'

peleka serikali karibu na wananchi 'take the government nearer to the people'

vijana ndio viongozi wa kesho   'the youth are tomorrow's leaders'

chama chetu kitaongoza kwa zaidi ya miaka mia moja 'our party will lead for more a century from now'

chama chetu ndio baba na mama   'our party is our father and mother'

This aspect of language use is also replete with examples of terms of endearment and

disapproval. For instance, the President is also fondly referred to as:

-Baba Taifa   'Father of the Nation',

-Mkuu wa Majeshi yote ya Jamhuri 'Commander-in Chief-of All Armed Forces of the Republic,

-Mkulima namba moja, (leading farmer),

-Mwanamichezo namba moja (top sportsman)

5.9   Words with Extended Meanings

Kenyan political jargon is also characterised by the use of technical words with extended semantic field or meaning. Such words have

had their meanings expanded to include a political concept denoting a new idea in Kiswahili. Examples are:

Original meaning	extended political meaning
Baraza (an elders' council)	cabinet, local government council
Mseto (a mixture of grains cooked together)	merger or coalition of parties
Kupe (tick(s)	an exploiter
Nyayo (foot-prints)	President Moi's brand of politics
Nyonya (suckle like a baby)	exploit
Beberu (a male goat)	an imperialist/coloniser
Chai (tea)	a bribe
Kitu kidogo (a small thing)	a bribe
Mpambe (a fully prepared bride)	an aide-de- camp
*Kabwela 'an ordinary person'	poor workers and farmers
*kabaila a person of a noble background'	'an exploitive rich person'
*bepari 'an Indian merchant'	'a capitalist'

6:0 Conclusion

This paper has surveyed some of the challenges facing Kenya in her effort to develop technical terminology in Kiswahili for use in parliamentary and legal registers. In conclusion, it is useful to recall the resolutions of the historic conference on African languages and literature held in Asmara, Elitrea in 2000, whose theme was 'Against All Odds: African Languages and Literatures in the 21st century".   The following 4 points in the Asmara Declaration are relevant to this discussion as they touch on the importance of using African languages such as Kiswahili in modern technical fields.

1.   African languages must take the responsibility of speaking for the African continent.
2. The vitality and equality of African languages must be recognised as the basis for the
   future empowerment of African peoples.
3. The diversity of African languages reflects the rich cultural heritage of Africa and must be
   used as the instrument of African unity.

4. The effective and rapid development of modern science and technology must be used for

  the development of African languages*.*

It is important to note that the importance of African indigenous mass languages such as Kiswahili in East Africa can not be over-emphasised. This is because, as Mazrui and Mazrui (1998) note, while African national politics, economics and law are conducted in foreign colonial languages, the cultural life of the majority of the citizens is carried out through local languages or dialects. This fact, among others, makes language an issue of governance. It is in this light that this brief paper has discussed the challenges experienced by Kenya's National Assembly in using Kiswahili , the national language and a co-official language in the House business.

As mentioned above, languages may be developed formally through official corpus planning or informally by interested individuals or groups. The attempt by Kenya and Tanzania to use Kiswahili as an official parliamentary language along with English is in line with the Asmara spirit outlined in the above declaration. Time has come for Africa to develop regional languages such as Kiswahili and others which will help promote not just closer socio-cultural and commercial interaction among the people but also accelerate the empowerment of these languages as tools of education, science and technology. Africa will be much more stronger if it can build bridges that unite its people through intra-African economic and educational ties and only the deliberate promotion of African regional and even continental languages will best serve to realise this ideal.

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