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

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Introduction

Kiswahili is increasingly spreading globally (Massamba 1990:3), and 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 locked out Kiswahili in the key sectors of education, government, international commerce, diplomacy , science and technology.

On realising the instrumental role of Kiswahili as the only language of the Kenyan and East African masses, President Jomo Kenyatta decreed its immediate adoption in Parliament 1965. Kiswahili had been widely used as a language of political mass mobilisation in East Africa by Kenya African Union (KANU) and Tanzania African Union (TANU) during the struggle for independence since early 1940's. In 1967 Tanzania resolved 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, the 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 included in the national constitution (Mbaabu 1996).

This paper therefore, attempts to critically assess the problems of implementing the policy of using Kiswahili in Kenya's Parliamentary debates 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 express new ideas on a timely basis?

It is important to note that whereas a survey on this situation has been undertaken in Tanzania 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 percent 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.

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.

The 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 that 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 grappling with the task of getting Kiswahili equivalents for the following terms (King'ei 1999:147):

> 2000 year bug, solicitor-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 organisations 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 including 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).

Technical lexicon invention and modernisation techniques

Linguistically, Kiswahili has adopted many techniques of developing new technical or ordinary words that 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 that have been developed using the indicated techniques:

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	'barbeque'	(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.

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
k*orokoroni* prison
kasha   box
afendi   sir

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

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 that is the largest source language for Kiswahili accounting for over 30 percent 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	speaker
Inspekta	inspector
Meya	mayor
Kopro	corporal
Afisa	officer
Meja	major
Afisi	officer
Paredi	parade
Gameti	government
Chifu	chief
Kamati	
Kapteni	carpenter
Kandarasi	
Luten	lieutenant
Polisi	police
Jaji	judge
Dikteta	dictator
Fashsti	fascist
Ajenti	political agent
Diplomasia	diplomacy
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'

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 that 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
*Rasm*i	official (adj.)
Haramu	illegal
Halai	legal/lawful

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 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	launder/trade illegally	*ulanguz*i	'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.

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 (and literal meaning in brackets)
>
> *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' (a contestant 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)

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 e.g.

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)	(*mfuas*i	'follower or adherent'
M+sosholisti (*msosholist*i)	'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

Acronyms

This is the process whereby long names are abbreviated and the abbreviation used as a proper noun denoting a technical concept. In 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 political 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 Organisation of Trade Unions) (Kenya)
    PC   (Provincial Commissioner)
    DC   (District Commissioner)
    DO   (District Officer)

Computer-generated lexicon

In the recent years, linguists have developed special soft-ware for generating affixes that 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:

    Kenyanizeshen   'Kenyan**isation'**
    Afrikanizasheni   '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.

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.

Too many technical terms for the same concept

For instance some of the new terms are not always created because of 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* '	MP
Waziri mdogo	*waziri msaidizi*	'Assistant/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.

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* (proper noun?)
Udikteta 'dictatorship'	*utawala wa kimabavu*
Baraza Bubu 'Shadow Cabinet'	*Baraza Kielezo; Baraza Butu* etc

*Lack of standardisation of technical term*s

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'

Unique styles of discourse
Kenyan parliamentarians use Kiswahili, in a manner peculiar to themselves. This personalised 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:

Allusion

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

Ambiguities

> *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-committal)
> *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'

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)

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 kesh*o '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 Ja*mhuri 'Commander-in Chief-of All Armed Forces of the Republic,
> *Mkulima namba moja*, 'leading farmer',
> *Mwanamichezo namba moja* 'top sportsman'

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 in brackets)
>
> *Baraza* an elders' council (cabinet, local government council)
> *Mseto* 'a mixture of grains cooked together' (merger or coalition of parties)
> *Kupe* 'tick' (an exploiter)

> *Nyayo* 'foot-prints' (President Moi's brand of politics_
> *Nyonya* 'suckle like a baby'(exploit)
> *Beberu* a he 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)

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.

It is useful to recall the resolutions of the historic conference on African languages and literature held in Asmara, Eritrea 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.

5   African languages must take the responsibility of speaking for the African continent.
6   The vitality and equality of African languages must be recognised as the basis for the future empowerment of African peoples.
7   The diversity of African languages reflects the rich cultural heritage of Africa and must be used as the instrument of African unity.
8   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 that 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 stronger if she 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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