

ATTITUDE TOWARDS KISWAHILI IN URBAN KENYA

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Abstract

The present paper Attitudes Towards Kiswahili in Urban Kenya aims at observing, identifying, classifying and analyzing language attitudes regarding Kiswahili in urban Kenya in order to show how they impact on Kenya's language policy generally and on language planning in particular. Data for this paper was collected by means of library research, field visits, interviews, observations and discussions. This work, being field based, used tape recorders also and the information recorded was transcribed and analysed focusing on specific items of the interview schedule. This work purposively selected its sample and was conducted with the participation of 100 respondents. Using the sociological theoretical framework and the social psychological theory, the paper has found out that the majority of urban Kenyans have positive attitudes towards Kiswahili mainly for integrative reasons and not for instrumental reasons.

Key words: Language attitude, Kiswahili, English, Instrumental orientation, Integrative orientation.

1.1 Introduction

This paper presents the results of a public opinion poll about the attitudes of Kenyans towards the use of Kiswahili in urban Kenya. First the study was interested in situations in which Kiswahili is considered to be more appropriate and second, what Kiswahili's relative position is to English and other Kenyan languages.

In this paper as we examine the issue of the use of Kiswahili in urban Kenya we shall talk as linguists and not educationists. The paper refers to attitudes towards Kiswahili because it is the language with which most Kenyans are familiar, and yet there are many other languages (Mukhwana 2008, 2010). This aim arises out of the realization of the fact that language contact situation serves as an effective catalyst in bringing out beliefs, values, prejudices and contradictions of a speech community (Mukhwana, 2010). In the urban Kenya case, the diversity in speech between speakers of English, Kiswahili, mother tongues, and Sheng/ Engsh (Kenyan slangs) might lead one to assume that the people of urban Kenya have good reasons for the choice of either English, Kiswahili, mother tongues or Sheng/Engsh. The diversity in speech in the urban areas is the essence of this paper on language attitudes in urban Kenya. This paper is valuable in that it will help locate significant Kiswahili language problem areas, describe and analyze this interesting linguistic behavioral phenomena, and suggest variables which play a vital role in determining language attitudes towards Kiswahili in urban Kenya.

1.2 Theoretical Framework

In this paper, two theoretical frameworks are used for data analysis and they are the Sociological theory and the Social psychological theory.

1.2.1 The Sociological Theory

The Sociological theory is mainly associated with Fishman (1972). The major contribution of Fishman's approach to language study is his concepts of domains of language behaviour. This theory helps people know who speaks what language, to whom and when in a speech community that is characterized by widespread and relatively stable multilingualism like Kenya (Kembo – Sure 1996, Abdulaziz 1982). According to Fishman's Sociological theory, language behaviour is determined by spheres of activities which are organized into specific sets of culturally determined role relations which are understood to belong to specific spheres of activity. Thus, to Fishman, proper language usage dictates that only one of the theoretically co – available languages or varieties in a multilingual setting will be chosen by particular classes of interlocutors on particular kinds of occasions to discuss particular kinds of topics (Fishman 1972: 15). In general, the Sociological theory is an attempt to show that language behaviour is a powerful marker of intricate social relationships and roles and an indicator of social goals and the large scale value laden arena of interaction that typify every speech community. This is the way the theory has been applied in this paper on attitudes towards Kiswahili in urban Kenya.

1.2.2 The Social Psychological Theory

In this paper the Social psychological framework that we have used is that by Lambert (1963). According to this theory, an individual successfully acquiring a second language gradually adopts various aspects of behaviour which characterize members of that linguistic cultural group's members. The motivation for one learning a second language is thought to be determined by his or her attitudes and by his or her orientation toward learning the second language. Lambert (1971) later explained that peoples' attitudes are directed by two types of motivation: integrative and instrumental motivations. The question that arises therefore is: What motivates urban Kenyans to either accept or refuse to accept Kiswahili in the various domains of the language's usage?

These two theories have been helpful in handling the issue of language attitudes towards Kiswahili in urban Kenya.

1.3 Methodology

The present study is both a qualitative & a quantitative one. The research employed the quantitative methodology in analyzing the content using frequencies and percentages of responses from respondents and which represent the criteria of data analysis and interpretation. Qualitative methodology was used to gain a better understanding of the nature of the attitudes given towards Kiswahili in urban Kenya.

After determining, by use of income, place of residence, educational levels and expenditure, who belongs to what class in urban Kenya, a total of 100 residents who fall into the category where purposively selected from 5 Kenyan towns. They served as the basis for the data analysis in the study of language attitudes in urban Kenya (tables 1 and 2 are representative of the data).

The primary dependent measure was the subjects' responses to the main question:- "What is the attitude of the people of your town towards Kiswahili?" On testing variables that include place of birth, length of stay in urban Kenya, age, sex, marital status, occupation, language of birth, educational level, types of

schools attended against language attitudes towards Kiswahili in urban Kenya, the following results were recorded:

1.4 Results

A look at the above variables in relation to the topic under investigation indicates that language attitudes towards Kiswahili in urban Kenya are the domain of the male youths (see table below)

Table 1. Age and Sex of respondents in urban Kenya

Age	Total No.	%	Male	%	Female	%
Under 20years	4	4	2	50	2	50
20 – 29 years	20	20	12	60	8	40
30 – 39 years	38	38	30	79	8	21
40 – 49 years	26	26	19	54	7	46
50 – 59 years	8	8	6	75	2	25
60 years plus	4	4	2	50	2	50
TOTAL	100	100	66	61	34	30

The above tendency implies that the male youths more frequently respond than female and the aged when it comes to the issue of language attitudes (in this respect to Kiswahili) in urban Kenya. Another point that clearly comes out from the above variables is that regardless of the education levels and types of School attended, the respondents have similar disposition as regards the issue of language attitudes towards Kiswahili in urban Kenya. In the investigation, the occupational phenomenon variable can be broken into two: white collar and blue collar respondents.

When language attitudes towards Kiswahili were measured with the samples of 100 residents of urban Kenya, there was a clear tendency for the interviewees to reject Kiswahili in terms of social mobility but not its role in national social contacts where it clearly comes out as a national language. The attitudes, while not frankly aversive, were reported to be somewhat uncomfortable and uneasy in contact with Kiswahili speakers. In terms of linguistics affective responses, the most prevalent attitude reported by the respondents was 'sympathetic.' Very few respondents indicated an attitude that can be called favourable to Kiswahili.

About the variable of age and maturity, and sex as determinants of language attitudes towards Kiswahili in urban Kenya, the study notes that several urban estates have reported that regardless of age, men tend to show a more positive attitude towards Kiswahili than do women. Over 70% of men respondents favoured Kiswahili compared to about 40% women. A possible explanation for this difference could be an implication that the underlying language feelings are similar but men are more subject to national social pressure to have this kind of language attitude.

The variable of age has been investigated and its relation to attitudes towards Kiswahili in urban Kenya is such that older people were consistently more accepting in their attitude towards Kiswahili than were the youth. As a general rule, a linguistic continuum exists relating to age and maturity towards Kiswahili in urban Kenya. The current evidence provides some basis for logical separation of general attitudes towards Kiswahili on the one hand and attitudes towards Kiswahili in terms of what it can offer economically and socially on the other hand. The people of urban Kenya may be perfectly willing to choose Kiswahili on the basis of personal merit, but nevertheless note its socio-economic disadvantages

compared to a language like English. In order to gain some understanding of the respondents' attitudes towards Kiswahili in urban Kenya in terms of social advancement, one question was asked: "What language do you think will be of greatest use to you in your local business, career or profession?" In answer to this question, 60% of the respondents indicated Kiswahili. It is evident from this result that even though a comparatively small percentage of respondents have a positive attitude towards Kiswahili when it comes to issues of social advancement, a larger majority still consider it the language of business in urban Kenya.

One of the most conspicuous differences in language attitudes towards Kiswahili in urban Kenya is related to age. Younger people tend to have more pronounced negative attitude towards Kiswahili than do old people. One of the reasons for this attitude may be that young people do not have everyday and more natural contact with Kiswahili peers such as at places of work, at casinos and hotels. Another fact is, of course, education. Young people are generally better educated. Our young respondents, for instance those in which young people were interviewed with one or both parents, also suggest that they resent sometimes – bigoted attitudes of their parents about Kiswahili in urban Kenya. The young upper and upper middle class people also tend to have different attitudes towards Kiswahili as opposed to older people because they have different language contacts and experiences. The language of educational instruction in Kenya is English and not Kiswahili as was the case during the Kenyan colonial period(see Whiteley 1969).

The paper has noted, from its results that in local business, the language attitudes towards Kiswahili in urban Kenya are remarkably favourable. It seems likely that different value set controls the attitude towards Kiswahili in business encounters in urban Kenya. On the basis of this data, Kiswahili seems to be emerging as a more favourable language, especially in national business spheres. This notion of positive attitudes towards Kiswahili is statistically established and is significant (80%). In urban Kenya's multilingual setting, people associate each of the languages used there with a different set of functions in the society. Besides the value of national solidarity typically being associated with Kiswahili, the people of urban Kenya have an attitude that they have to adjust to Kiswahili to succeed in local business.

In Nairobi, for example, the value of solidarity is associated with Kiswahili. Thus, the language attitude that is associated with Kiswahili in Nairobi is that of Kiswahili being used as an instrument which Kenyans use to group themselves together or to separate themselves from others. This is the binding or separating function of language. Thus, the solidarity value attitude towards Kiswahili by the people of urban Kenya makes the language an instrument that allows Kenyans to participate in certain activities and enjoy certain privileges. Therefore to the people of urban Kenya with such attitudes towards Kiswahili, the language has a symbolic function. Kiswahili symbolizes identity whereby it symbolizes being a member of the Kenyan nation. In this sense, Kiswahili functions like the Kenyan national flag or the Kenyan national anthem or even a national holiday like Jamhuri day. This attitude towards Kiswahili in urban Kenya stems from the fact that in Kenya, Kiswahili is the national language which represents the political identity of this state. Therefore, Kiswahili symbolizes being Kenyan or holding Kenyan citizenship. Besides this attitude towards Kiswahili, it is important to note that language attitudes in urban Kenya can be elucidated through the application of the concept of social identity. The respondents in urban Kenya constantly compare languages in terms of what they can offer to their struggle for social identity. However, the upward moving and the good education attributes that go with English in Kenya

give rise to new measuring and redefining of the attitudes some urban Kenyans have towards Kiswahili(see Adegbiya 1984).

The perceived inferior position of Kiswahili by some respondents in urban Kenya is based on the attitude that to them it has more disadvantages compared to English. Such people of urban Kenya have an attitude that will make them not to socially identify with Kiswahili because it is socially disadvantaged. The necessarily heavy reliance on English for many aspects of the life of urban Kenya, and the fact that English is the means of practically all advancement is reflected in the attitudes of some of the respondents towards Kiswahili in this experiment. There is, however an attitude of strong interest in Kiswahili as part of the cultural heritage of Kenya. When to use English, Kiswahili or even mother tongues and Sheng and English is not so clear-cut and involves some unconscious weighting of factors: prestige, cultural romanticism, officialdom and intellectualism.

This result about language attitudes towards Kiswahili in urban Kenya is backed by the fact that it is impossible to argue that similarities in language attitudes are a factor of place or town of residence. Residents of Kileleshwa in Nairobi, by virtue of their stay in a posh residential area would be expected to have language attitudes that differ strikingly from those residents of low classes estates like Kangemi and Kawangware. Similarly urban centre may not be a factor in determining language attitudes towards Kiswahili in towns in Kenya (see table below).

Table 2. Individual Samples and attitudes towards Kiswahili.

- a) In relation to national integration and
- b) In relation to socio – economic advancement.

Estate	Total No. of respondents	National integration % (attitudes)	Economic advancement % (attitudes)
Nairobi	18	Over 82	Over 90
Eldoret	17	Over 83	Over 93
Mombasa	13	Over 78	Over 90
Kakamega	26	Over 90	Over 90
Kisumu	26	Over 94	Over 92
TOTAL	100		

One of the main aims of this paper was to find out attitudes the people of urban Kenya interviewed have towards Kiswahili. The respondents in urban Kenya were asked directly whether Kiswahili should be encouraged in Kenya if Kenyans as a nation hoped to advance economically. All the research questions were answered using frequency distribution which compared responses of the subjects in age groups, sex groups, ethnic group, place of residence among other factors. The analysis of the above has been done and has been referred to.

1.5 Types of Language Attitudes toward Kiswahili in Urban Kenya

In this section, the paper categorizes language attitudes in urban Kenya with respect to Kiswahili. As a result of the categorization, some impression has been gained on the attitude of the people of urban Kenya towards Kiswahili and by implication certain other features that characterize the Kenyan society where Kiswahili is a national language.

The questions for the present paper called on the interviewees to make arguments that might explain, “Why Kenya as an independent country should use Kiswahili language.” The respondents on the average replied that Kiswahili is needed for Kenyan self expression. On the specific question of the use of Kiswahili an official language, most of the respondents tended to support the argument that Kiswahili would promote better national communication for all Kenyans regardless of their social, ethnic and academic backgrounds. But it was noted that most non – Nilotes opt for this argument and attitude more strongly than Nilotes. Speakers of Nilotic languages tend to gravitate toward the sentimentalist attitude of communicative enjoyment given by English.

Another attitude that came out clearly in support of Kiswahili stated that Kiswahili can provide national linguistic unity and identity. This attitude about Kiswahili is given by all the ethnic groups studied in urban Kenya although by slim margins by people of Luo ethnic group. This attitude about national linguistic unity and identity is held mostly by women among the Luo people in urban Kenya. Therefore in Kenya, the use of Kiswahili is for unifying the nation. The use of Kiswahili in all regions of the nation promotes ideological assimilation and national solidarity. This is the essence of the language attitude towards Kiswahili in urban Kenya. What is meant here is that there are cases in urban Kenya where a bilingual chooses to use Kiswahili language knowing that the listener would prefer Dholuo, Luhya or Kikuyu. Here, this language attitude is a symbol of national identity(Adegbija 1984, 1997).

The attitudes toward Kiswahili in urban Kenya are therefore of different types in different items of the questionnaire used. The attitudinal responses are situation specific. The respondents preferred the sentimentalist arguments and attitudes in the context of Kiswahili being used as a national language. This attitude was given because the respondents felt Kiswahili was their unifying and identifying linguistic badge as Kenyans.

From the attitude above, Kiswahili is seen by the people of urban Kenya as a Kenyan language that expresses Kenya’s cultural heritage. On the other hand, the attitude towards English in urban Kenya is that it is a remote language that is based on a cultural heritage that is not Kenyan. Therefore the attitude most of the people of urban Kenya interviewed have towards Kiswahili is that this language must be known by Kenyans and used for the purpose of identification of Kenyan national culture. This kind of attitude holds that it is by the use of Kiswahili in Kenya that alienation from Kenyan culture can be avoided. This attitude about the use of Kiswahili by the people of urban Kenya is in itself a sign of growing national linguistic pride. Therefore, Kiswahili is in urban Kenya used for pleasure and identification with national linguistic culture (see table below)

Table 3. shows how language attitudes of ethnic groups in urban Kenya are distributed in favour of Kiswahili’s position as a national unifying language.

Ethnic group	No. of Respondents	%	% of language attitude
Dholuo	70	81.4	80
Luhya	11	12.2	90
Kikuyu	2	2.3	90
Ateso	1	1.2	50
Other Kenyans	2	2.3	50
TOTAL	100	100	

There is an attitude among a section of the respondents to the effect that Kiswahili language has shortcomings and deficiency as far as standardization of its vocabulary is concerned. This attitude is particularly in comparison to English which is felt to be a very polished language and so very effective in communicating information (see Ansre 1977, Kembo-Sure 1988). This attitude about Kiswahili's shortcomings is expressed mainly by the youth and from all the estates of cities studied. But most of the older people of urban Kenya feel that by emphasizing English, there develops a situation of alienation among the young people of urban Kenya. Of course, these older people are anxious for an education in English but they feel Kiswahili also should be given a chance. This attitude towards Kiswahili starts from the fact that those with an education in English only may have no respect for Kiswahili and yet some of the older people never had a chance of getting education in English.

The above attitude by the older respondents of urban Kenya towards Kiswahili points to the fact that Kenyans should not be made to think all along that Kiswahili is inferior to English. To these older people of urban Kenya, the attitude is that Kiswahili is speedily developing and expanding in vocabulary, literature and use. Therefore, Kiswahili can also express technical and scientific concepts as well as English can. Because Kiswahili is a language which is growing, it should therefore be loved by all Kenyans of good linguistic and cultural will.

The positive attitude for Kiswahili by some respondents in urban Kenya becomes necessary because "without a people sustaining their national language, they cannot sustain their culture as a people with the same history." The attitude expressed here is that Kiswahili gives Kenyans delight. Due to this, Kenyans can express in Kiswahili whatever is deep down in their hearts and so Kenyans should be proud of it. This pride attitude towards Kiswahili is because Kiswahili is Kenya's cultural heritage and so its use will mean the Kenyans are proud to be Kenyans. Whatever attitude that is contained in this statement is that Kiswahili is equally as valuable as English because these two languages are both capable of effectively performing their roles as media of communication in their respective spheres and domains.

In spite of these very positive attitudes toward Kiswahili by the people of urban Kenya, the issue of social mobility and survival comes in. Arguments against Kiswahili are such that although it is a truism that people should be proud of their heritage, circumstances in Kenya's linguistic and educational policy circles are against this very noble fact. Economic times that go with job placement are against the people of urban Kenya who would have wished to opt for Kiswahili instead of English. There is no job security with Kiswahili. The attitude that there is lack of job availability and security with Kiswahili is because the Kenya government has all along history made sure that Kiswahili always remains subordinate to English; and given that people are now living in a 'global village,' only an international language like English would serve to give the people of Kenya job placement. Therefore, respondents with positive attitudes towards Kiswahili in urban Kenya find themselves in a kind of national bilinguistic conflict. This national bilinguistic conflict arises when Kiswahili can be interpreted to be in a state of suppression at the expense of English. The apparent Kenya government regard for Kiswahili as not important in the eyes of the people of urban Kenya who enjoy and would like to encourage the language makes the people of urban Kenya to have an attitude towards Kiswahili that can be called 'indifferent' but with a guilt feeling. Therefore, the people of Kenya may be enthusiastic about Kiswahili as their national

language and hence view it as their national linguistic hope, nevertheless realize the importance of English in relation to Kiswahili because English has international credentials (Ansre 1977).

In-as-much as it would presumably be easier for urban Kenyans to excel in Kiswahili, the attitude that a majority of the respondents hold is that the teaching of English will ease their children's integration into the children's new school environment. Being almost mostly native speakers of Kiswahili, urban Kenyans have an attitude that sees any move meant to encourage the use of Kiswahili in education as an insult and demeaning to their children (see Sindiga 1977). Therefore, urban Kenyans feel it is better for their children to be taught in English and not in Kiswahili, even if English proved to be harder to learn. This attitude is the kind of force of urban Kenyans' attitudes towards Kiswahili, and generally, attitude towards language in education. Therefore, a negative attitude toward Kiswahili is noted among urban Kenyans when it comes to the question of public education in Kiswahili. These urban Kenyans look upon Kiswahili as an inferior language in education and that the way to advance within the Kenyan society goes via good knowledge and use of English in education but not Kiswahili.

But some of the respondents in urban Kenya have positive language attitudes toward Kiswahili without questioning the attitude. These urban Kenyans approve of loyalty and respect for Kiswahili, particularly for good Kiswahili. They thus do not support deviants of Kiswahili by name – calling, like *watu wa bara*, meaning up-country people who cannot properly coordinate their Kiswahili speech. This attitude is prevalent in the mostly native Swahili coastal towns.

Generally, in urban Kenya, the attitude that Kiswahili carries is that of a language that acts as a marker of ethno – linguistic group membership besides being considered important for national unity and development. This aspect of development comes in as an attitude towards Kiswahili because when a people is stripped of its identity, it is no longer able to function as a society.

From the results of the language attitude towards Kiswahili by some of the respondents in urban Kenya, the theoretical thesis that the present paper can advance is that prejudiced and hostile language attitudes by urban Kenyans are expression of their inner socio-economic and cultural needs or impulses created as a result of the people's historical experiences. The inner needs of urban Kenyans are manifested not only in prejudiced language attitudes but also in a variety of perceptual, conceptual and behavioral language styles. The urban Kenyans feel Kiswahili has to be defended against English, a language that causes cultural and linguistic insecurity. It is this insecurity issue that makes urban Kenyans studied have positive attitudes towards Kiswahili without which they feel they will be socially punished.

As has been pointed out, language attitudes towards Kiswahili by urban Kenyans vary particularly depending on the respondents' age. It clearly comes out that older generation of urban Kenyans are less adaptable to the linguistic environmental changes and so have language attitudes that depict them as less willing to face the current novel linguistic situations in Kenya where English is the language of wider national and international communication as opposed to Kiswahili which is generally accepted as a national language. This age factor is the reason why over 70% of the urban Kenyan respondents interviewed (10 out of 12) and who were 60 years and over, had language attitudes that favoured Kiswahili. This result is in direct contrast with the attitudes of the young respondents who appeared to welcome the linguistic wind that is sweeping Kenya and the world as a whole where English is the main language. Therefore, by the older urban Kenyans rejecting this linguistic truism situation where English

is held in high esteem, the respondents tended to have lingual – sociopolitical attitudes that are conservative and rooted in the history of Kenya. However, the study's interpretation of such language attitudes by the older people of urban Kenya is difficult; this is because these older people differed not only in age but also in the kind of experience they had when they grew up. It is therefore the suggestion of this paper that longitudinal study of language attitudes is needed to determine the effects of chronological age on language attitudes towards Kiswahili in urban Kenya.

Another demographic characteristic that the study set out to test in connection with language attitudes towards Kiswahili in urban Kenya was sex. However, there was no evidence that women actually matter in lingual socio – cultural matters pertaining to language in urban Kenya. This apparent male chauvinistic notion would be consistent with the Islamic faith generalization that women have no much say where men are. This attitude was prevalent in Islamic towns like Mombasa. And given that Mombasa is predominantly muslim town, this Islamic teaching about women has to be adhered to (**refer to Utenzi wa Mwana Kupona**). This notion explains why in Mombasa out of the entire population interviewed, only four were women. Furthermore, the women's history can be traced from the predominantly non Muslim up country tribes (Luo and Kikuyu). Overall, this result suggests that the language attitude towards Kiswahili is gender biased.

Other variables whose linguistic attitudinal relationship the paper sought in relation to Kiswahili in the urban Kenya were place of birth and current residence in the urban Kenya. In Mombasa it came out clearly that upcountry people who had stayed in Mombasa had language attitudes towards Kiswahili that were similar to those attitudes of indigenous coastal people; they both had positive language attitudes towards Kiswahili when it came to the issue of national cultural identity but this attitude changed when it came to the social mobility aspect. When it came to the issue of place of residence in urban Kenya almost all respondents had similar language attitudes towards Kiswahili. In fact the study's respondents from Mombasa's estates like Bamburi, Old Town and Kiembeni had language attitudes that did not differ from those expressed by their counter parts in Bombolulu. Therefore, language attitudes towards Kiswahili in urban Kenyan are found to be determined primarily by congruence in attitudes rather than by place of origin or residence in urban Kenya. What this finding points to is that people acquire the attitudes of the people with whom they interact or share certain societal standings like socio-cultural levels.

1.6 Conclusion

The result on the language attitudes towards Kiswahili in urban Kenya has shown that language is a skill that is reinforced by reward or extinguished by non-reward. So if there is no reward in preferring a certain language, there is less likelihood to keep preferring the language. Therefore, in language preference in urban Kenya, the reward is that of social approval from other people when one speaks in Kiswahili. This social approval is what makes urban Kenyans to have language attitudes towards Kiswahili varying from very positive to very negative. In other words, the language attitudes in urban Kenya are traceable directly or indirectly to social-economic incentives that Kiswahili can offer. This relationship is in direct agreement with the fact that when a person is rewarded he seeks to repeat the rewarding experience.

Overall, as Adegbija(1984) rightly put it while referring to Sub-Saharan Africa, the language attitude towards Kiswahili by urban Kenyans differed from correspondent to correspondent in two distinct and consistent ways. The main points of difference centred on:

- a) The need to be one people, and
- b) The need to advance economically. Of the two, the attitude about Kiswahili and the need to advance economically received less weight for more interviewees were against it. On the other hand, the need to be one people carried weight in terms of language attitudes towards Kiswahili in urban Kenya.

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