

**KARIBU TANZANIA, KARIBU ZANZIBAR: AN OVERVIEW OF THE ORIGIN OF
KISWAHILI
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BY
MIRIAM MATINDA & ELIFURHA LALTAIKA**

Introduction

1. History and Origins of Swahili.

Every language has an origin that attributes different factors that make such specific language grow. Like other languages, Kiswahili's growth has been influenced by both internal and external factors such as trade within and out of the African continent, colonialism, independent struggles and post-liberation use of the language as the major medium of communication.

A language grows when there are more users the in a given country, region or even at the global level. To date Kiswahili has more than 140 million people in the world, most of them living in Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Zambia, Malawi and Mozambique. For the purpose of this short introductory paper, I will focus on Tanzania.

A. History.

Who is a Swahili person? Is a native-resident of the East Africa coastal region. "*Mswahili*"

What triggered the growth of Swahili?

1. Trade routes

Trade in different parts of Africa can strongly be credited in the contribution of the growth of Kiswahili. In need of various commodities, residents of the **inland/heartland** commonly known as "**bara**" in Kiswahili developed a commercial relationship with inhabitants of the **coastal** area "**Pwani Swahili for Coast**". Whenever they travelled, they communicated in Kiswahili. When they returned home, they spread the language to their inland communities.

Trade routes expanded to include Arabs who reached the East African coast. When they arrived, they found Africans speaking Kiswahili. Since Kiswahili was growing, the Arabs introduced many words and other Arabic cultures that are alive in the country.

Europe and Asia were not behind in the business world. Trade routes from their end had an active role in the growth of Kiswahili. For instance, the Portuguese introduced several words such as "**Mesa (Portuguese) Meza (Swahili) – Table (English)**".

2. Colonialism

It is an undisputable fact that communication is a necessary element to continue any relationship, be it with a subject and master, allies, friends or families. To advance their domination, colonialists used Kiswahili to communicate with the subjects in their colonies.

During the German dominance in Tanganyika - also known as Deutsch Öst Afrika (1885 – 1916), the language was used to communicate and spread the German policy in the colony.

The British came to the territory and found that Kiswahili was widespread and would be easy to continue using it for their administration. Since the colony was not only in Tanganyika but also in other parts of the East Africa, and there were different dialects, the British decided to standardize the language. The meeting was held in Mombasa in 1928 with participants from different parts of the colony where Swahili was spoken. As a result, the Inter-Territorial Language Committee was formed to standardize the language and put it in writing for formal and informal usages.

3. Kiswahili in Tanzania

Prior to the attainment of the independence, the majority of the natives spoke Kiswahili. The use of Kiswahili was an enormous advantage to liberation movement as leaders could reach out to them quickly. During the liberation movement, **Mwalimu (Swahili) – Teacher (English)**, Julius Kambarage Nyerere and his political party used the language to unify every citizen to fight for the independence. In 1961, Tanganyika got its independence. Later on, in 1963, Britain granted independence to Zanzibar but left it to the leadership of the Arabs. The political unrest occurred, which resulted in the revolution in January 1964. Abeid Amani Karume, become the first president of Zanzibar.

In 1964, Tanganyika and Zanzibar united to form The United Republic of Tanzania. Comprising of more than 120 ethnic groups or tribes, Tanzania is a very diverse country. Nevertheless, all the tribes in the country are united by national language, Kiswahili. The majority of the population speaks and writes fluent Kiswahili. The official mediums of communication in the country are Kiswahili and English. English is a means of instruction except in elementary or primary schools. It is also the lingua of record at the High Court and Court of Appeal.

B. Theories of origins:

1. Swahili emanates from the Arab language

⇒ Presence of Arabic words eg. Swahili – Swahili, hatari, magharib etc.

2. Bantu speaking people

⇒ Creation stories

⇒ Its presence prior contact with other parts of the world.

⇒ Word structure

⇒ Tone of the language

⇒ Language morphology

3. From Congo/Zaire

⇒ Trade –copper mining

4. It's a mixed language

⇒ Developed though time

2. Pronunciations

⇒ Guided by the **vowels**: a e i o u

⇒ Swahili uses almost the same **consonants** as English except that there is no “**Q**” or “**X**”. The letter “c” is always used with “h” i.e. “**ch**”.

⇒ Sound-out at the vowels

⇒ **Note:** Swahili is written the way it should sound.

Examples:

Ma	mama (mother)	ba	baba (father)	da	dada (sister)
Be	beba (carry)	bi	bibi (grandmother, Ms, wife)	mo	moja (one)
Pu	pua (nose)	barabara (road)	barua (letter)	teua	(appoint, select)
Mbwa (dog)	kimya (silence, silent)	thamani (value)	Dhahabu (gold)		

Rafiki (friend)

ng'ombe (cow)

shule (school)

Ngumu (hard)

Nakupenda (I love you)

Samahani (sorry) Tafadhali

Kuenda (to go) → write the way it sounds: Kwenda.

Haajambo (he/she has no 'matter') → write the way it sounds: Hajambo.

Muandishi (writer) → write the way it sounds: Mwandishi.

Tembeleia (visit) → write the way it sounds: Tembelea

3. Notes:

(i) Greetings:

Culturally speaking, Greetings are very important to traditional Africans. These greetings are used to first inquire about the health of those greeting each other and the health of others. In some cultures, this inquiry also honors the clans and ancestors of both sides and also injects the respect given to elders. The second part of the greeting is used to gather "news" and information and, in case of strangers, the second part serves as an identity search. In some cultures, the greetings can take almost an hour for relatives who haven't seen each other for a long time!

Swahili follows this greeting format in a slightly simplified form: Please no matter how "little time" you have, perform both parts 1 and 2 of the greetings!!!!

Part 2 of the greetings: Newsgathering: (Habari ==> news)

Examples: Habari yako? "(Give or tell me) the news about you"

Habari ya asubuhi? "Good morning "

Nzuri "Fine"

Habari ya John? "(Give or tell me) the news about John – how is John"

Please note: These are greetings, therefore, you always have no issues (jambo) about you and the news is always good (nzuri)!!!

An example of a greeting:

Shikamoo – "Greeting an elder" – the literal meaning of the word **shikamoo** is – I am under your feet" but it is very common and acceptable in Kiswahili language. It is a greeting used by young people to greet elders.

Marababa – "This is the reply of Shikamoo" *both words – Shikamoo and Marababa have their origin from the Arabic language.

Hujambo? "You don't have any 'matter, thing, problem, etc' with you, do you" – how are you?

Sijambo. "I don't have any 'matter, thing, problem, etc' with me, - "I am fine".

(ii) Numbers:

Cardinals:

0: sifuri (ziro)

1: moja

2: mbili

3: tatu

4: nne

5: tano

6: sita

7: saba

8: nane

9: tisa

10: kumi

20: ishirini

30: thelathini

40: arobaini

50: hamsini

60: sitini

70: sabini

80: themanini

90: tisini

Ordinals:

1st: kwanza 2nd: pili 3rd, 4th, ... : same as cardinal number

Hundred: mia thousand: elfu million: milioni

(iii) Times of the day:

Morning: asubuhi afternoon: mchana evening: jioni night: usiku

(iv) Days of the week:

Jumamosi: Saturday	Jumapili: Sunday	Jumatatu: Monday
Jumanne: Tuesday	Jumatano: Wednesday	Alhamisi: Thursday
Ijumaa: Friday		

The day before yesterday: Juzi
 Yesterday: Jana
 Today: Leo
 Tomorrow: Kesho
 The day after tomorrow: Kesho kutwa

(v) Months:

January: Januari	1st month: mwezi wa kwanza
February: Februari	2nd month: mwezi wa pili
March: Mach	3rd month: mwezi wa tatu
April: Aprili	4th month: mwezi wa nne
May: Mei	5th month: mwezi wa tato
June: Juni	6th month: mwezi wa sita
July: Julai	7th month: mwezi wa saba
August: Agosti	8th month: mwezi wa nane
September: Septemba	9th month: mwezi wa tisa
October: Oktoba	10th month: mwezi wa kumi
November: Novemba	11th month: mwezi wa kumi na moja
December: Desemba	12th month: mwezi wa kumi na mbili

4. Simple dialog:

Hujambo? “You don’t have any ‘matter, thing, problem, etc’ with you, do you”?
 Sijambo. “I don’t have any ‘matter, thing, problem, etc’ with me, I am fine”.

Habari ya Asubuhi? “What is the news of the morning?”
 nzuri. “(fine).”

Jina lako ni nani? What is your name?
 Jina langu ni ... My name is ...

Unaitwa nani? What are you called?
 Ninaitwa I am....

Unatoka wapi? Where do you come from?
Ninatoka I come from

Ulikuja Tanzania lini? When did you come to Tanzania?
Nilikuja Tanzania tarehe moja mwezi Februari mwaka 2016. I came to Tanzania on February 1st, 2016.

Kwa nini unapenda kusoma Kiswahili? Why do you like to study Swahili?
Ninapenda kusoma Kiswahili kwa sababu nilisikia kwamba ni lugha rahisi sana. I like to study Swahili because I heard that it is a very easy language.

Kwa heri. Best wishes (Good bye).
Asante sana, na wewe pia. Thank you very much, and you too

Few words and phrases to go

Bahari – Ocean

Gari – Car

Chenchi - Change

Choo - toilet

Msaada – Help

Pesa/fedha/hela - Money

Polepole - Slowly

Polisi – Police

Hospitali - hospital

Hatari – Danger

Maji – Water

Mtu - Person

Nani – Who

Ipi - Which

Wanyama - animals

Krismasi – Christmas

Iddi – Eid

Pale – There

Pwani - Coast

Unakwenda wapi? - Where are you going?

Hakuna matata – there is no worry

Hapana asante –No, thank you

Mzungu – Non African of the European or American origin

USEFUL LINKS

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/languages/other/swahili/guide/facts.shtml>

http://www.glcom.com/hassan/lessons/useful_swahili_words.html

http://www.pbs.org/wonders/Episodes/Epi2/2_cult1a.htm

<http://tanzaniasafariadvisor.com/swahili-words-phrases-translator/>

Contacts:

Miriam Matinda
matindamiriz@gmail.com
+1520-342-7856

Elifuraha Laltaika
elilaltaika@yahoo.com
+1520-528-6600