

“We Have a Language Problem Here:”

Linguistic Identity in East Africa

Nick Gaw¹

Swarthmore College

Department of Linguistics

Abstract:

East Africa is home to incredible linguistic diversity. Indigenous languages, African *linguas franca*, and imperial languages foster a social landscape with diverse linguistic identities. Kiswahili and English are fixtures across East Africa, each bringing constructed histories to overlapping speaker populations: a web of language attitudes that is wrapped in the social and cultural history of the people of East Africa. The following work examines linguistic identities through interviews that I conducted during the summer of 2008 in Kenya and Tanzania. Contemporary linguistic identity is informed by a discussion of lexical change in Kiswahili – loan words from Arabic and English – just one observable change in the history of the language with an impact on Swahili identity. The paper begins with a discussion of the Kiswahili lexicon and lexical borrowing in Kiswahili as a way to concretize subsequent discussions of linguistic identity. I follow with a discussion of research methods and practices before analyzing key interviews. The study of identity is necessarily qualitative, and this paper aims to problematize concepts of linguistic identity in modern East Africa by detailing the language attitudes of a small group of respondents from across the region. Identity in East Africa is mutable, and individuals constantly navigate social and ethnic spaces through strategic uses of language. Here all language use is political, a reflection of power with real world consequences.

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1. Introduction

Kiswahili stands between English and ethnic languages in communities across East Africa, an African lingua franca that has defined social identity through varied patterns of use throughout the last several hundred years. In the time since decolonization, Kiswahili and English have been constructed by East Africans to carry widely different attitudes. Now, Kiswahili is a defining aspect of nationhood in Tanzania and, to a lesser extent, Kenya. English, widely used as a language of political and scientific discourse, has remained a powerful force in shaping East Africans' identity.

Because of the wide geographic area covered by East Africa, the patchwork of ethnic groups and communities, and the varied historical forces that have influenced African cultures, generalizations are difficult to make regarding the entirety of the East African experience. Despite many cultural differences, the communities of East Africa are united broadly by the language of Kiswahili. Throughout modern history, Kiswahili has been appropriated by various groups: missionaries, colonial governments, African nationalists. In each case, the language is used in a multiplicity of ways, bringing with it different social and cultural meanings. Kiswahili has been reinvented most recently by East African governments, instrumental as a force for marking the end of the colonial era and ushering in African independence.

The nationalist writer Shihabuddin Chiraghdi² writes that “we should not be afraid to say that the Swahili language belongs to a particular people, because there is the positive aspect that whoever wants it can make it his own.” It is true that Kiswahili has

² Translated by Mazrui and Shariff (1994: 85)

come to be a mutable marker of East African identity. The linguistic and cultural identity that Kiswahili has brought to East Africa is deeply intertwined with linguistic contact and structural change.

Throughout the following pages, I will refer to the language called *Swahili* in English by its name in the language itself: *Kiswahili*. The *ki-* prefix is a Kiswahili prefix identifying the language of the Swahili. I use *Kiswahili* for clarity's sake, to separate between the language and notions of Swahili identity.

In this work, I situate current popular attitudes towards Kiswahili and English in the historical landscape of language contact in East Africa. The description provided herein does not focus on indigenous languages, a defining element of the East African linguistic landscape, but rather, is limited to English and Kiswahili as a result of their wide scope as trans-ethnic languages. Despite this focus, some discussion of indigenous languages comes into this work through the analysis of interviews in Chapter 4.

Kiswahili's rich history of language contact with Arabic, Portuguese, and English informs much of its current status in the region. An exploration of the language's rich history and varied uses allows the linguist the opportunity to examine the historical patterns of linguistic identity, essential for analyzing the patterns of language attitudes that I uncovered through field research in East Africa during the summer of 2008. Lexical borrowing is a discrete linguistic phenomenon with ramifications on language attitudes and linguistic identity. Tracking the history of loan words in Kiswahili provides a historical context for describing linguistic identity in East Africa.

In a prolonged period of contact through trade, Kiswahili borrowed many lexical items from Arabic. This linguistic relationship reified social understandings of Arabs as

advanced seafarers, traders, and law-makers more skilled than their African counterparts. In an analogous phenomenon, today, English, used for development work and science and technology, imports many lexical entries into Swahili. The patterns of language usage in aid work favor speaking in English over Kiswahili. Scientific research, too, is expressed through the English language. When development, technology or science is discussed in Kiswahili, English loan words, like *komputa*, “computer” and *motokari*, “motorcar,” populate conversations. Loan words again carry significant social importance, in part, fueling constructions of English speakers as comparatively more scientifically and economically advanced.

Here it is useful to envision the languages of east Africa presented in the framework of language prestige abstracting a framework from the study of the post-Creole continuum (Bickerton 1971). English serves as the region’s acrolect, language of highest prestige, established through years of colonial rule. Swahili has, in the period since decolonization, undergone a process of debasilectalization, as its structure has come to borrow deeply from the structure of the acrolect, altering the language’s prestige (Mufwene 2007). I examine loan words as a driver of debasilectalization, structural change motivating changes in language prestige, which, in turn, affects language attitudes.

In order to concretely understand how structural changes in language contact influence linguistic and cultural identity, I examine lexical borrowing and its impact on Swahili identity. The loan words that I discuss in the following pages come from an analysis of my time observing economic development and aid in practice as well as from a combination of secondary sources. Much of the secondary source material used to

evidence lexical borrowing comes from internet sources and Malin Petzell's (2005) categorization of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) loans. In each case, each lexical item has been vetted by two speakers of Kiswahili – one from Nairobi, Kenya and one from Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. Both speakers learned Kiswahili as a second language in early childhood and are fluent speakers of both English and Kiswahili. The following discussion of loan words provides a small window into the ways that structural change in a language can have a profound impact on linguistic identity and language politics. In this paper, they serve as a context for understanding the structure of the Kiswahili language, as I relate the prevalence of loan words -- tangible linguistic phenomena -- to socially constructed identities. The majority of the following work builds upon the discussion of the structure of Kiswahili and loan words in Chapter 2 to focus on notions of linguistic identity in East Africa.

Chapters 3 and 4 are devoted to exploring linguistic identity *in situ*. Through interviews and observations, I catalogue the sentimentalities of a small but diverse group of East Africans, tracking an individual's linguistic identity. Linguistic identity is wrapped in social, cultural, and ethnic identities, and in order to begin to understand what composes a group of speaker's reactions to the languages of their lives, one must explore how they utilize and react to each language in context.

Swahili identity is constructed by individuals and communities primarily through the language of Kiswahili, lending great import to a linguistic account of the interactions between English and Kiswahili. Source material for these claims derives from interviews with East Africans and personal observations from East Africa. Through participating in development projects in Northwest Tanzania, I interviewed and observed agents of aid

work: English-speaking Americans, and Kiswahili- and English-speaking Africans, while examining the political and social consequences of their stilted interactions. Other data, including descriptions of loan words, have come through secondary literature and observations made during my summer in East Africa.

2. Linguistic Identity and Language Attitudes

Much of this work hinges upon ideas of “linguistic identity” and “language attitudes.” Both terms are somewhat loaded from previous scholarship in the field. As I use the term “linguistic identity” in the following pages, I am referring specifically to the ways in which language shapes an individual person’s social or cultural identity or self-perception of those identities. There has been considerable work on this subject, often focusing on minority languages and language hegemony (Joseph 2004). Manipulating minority languages through varied coercive methods certainly plays an important part of the colonial and post-colonial linguistic project (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991) but coercion is not the whole story. Individual actors have an incredible amount of agency in a multi-lingual environment to use language to their own advantage.

I believe the term also gains more utility when also viewed from an anthropological lens, specifically through the work of Frederick Cooper (2005). Cooper synthesizes much of post-colonial secondary literature to develop a robust understanding of “identity” as contextual, fluid, as a sum of past social interactions to create a dynamic present. Linguistic identity is no exception. This Foucauldian reading of identity is, I believe, the only satisfactory way to understand linguistic identity. I will return to this

discussion in my conclusion, once data has been presented and discussed to further evaluate a robust description of identity.

“Language attitudes” is a term that I borrow from Joshua Fishman (1999). Though Fishman often uses the term to uncover language’s role in creating ethnic identity, I am focused on language attitudes as building blocks in forming linguistic identity. A multi-lingual speaker has different attitudes, a wide spectrum from favorable to no, towards each language in which they communicate. These attitudes are influenced by language prestige and social circumstances condition language choice. Like linguistic identity, language attitudes are mutable. Language attitudes necessarily change as a speaker gains proficiency in a language or exposure to that language.

In the following pages, I will never attempt to define linguistic identity or language attitudes in an absolute way. I believe that a qualitative approach to these concepts provides the scholar with the most robust understanding of an individual’s linguistic circumstance, avoiding reductive descriptions of the complex systems of ideologies surrounding language.

3. The Kiswahili Lexicon

The Kiswahili lexicon is influenced heavily by the presence of loan words. Over the past many centuries, the Swahili people have interacted with representatives of many foreign communities and, subsequently, loan words have come to populate Kiswahili vocabulary. Certainly some Kiswahili loan words have come to English too, though in limited number. The Kiswahili word *safari* has come to mean a journey or hunting trip in English. This section focuses on the process of making new words in Kiswahili by examining borrowing, setting the groundwork for a later discussion of what kinds of

words get borrowed and the phenomenon's impact on linguistic and cultural identity. Loan words are representative of moments in language contact where a foreign language's utility in describing a concept outweighs that of a local tongue. Because of Kiswahili's rich written tradition, it is possible to construct a historical record of lexical borrowing and to infer some shifts in linguistic identity over time. This historical approach grounds later discussions of current linguistic attitudes in concrete language change.

The focus of this section of this paper is to describe the processes at work in describing new objects with Kiswahili. For this discussion, there are two important forms of borrowing to consider. The first is what Myachina (1981) describes as "transference of meaning," or, more commonly, a calque or a loan translation. This is a process by which a word already in the lexicon comes to stand for a new concept. In Kiswahili, for example, *ndege* 'bird' also means 'airplane.' To borrow terminology from Frege (1892), here speakers of Kiswahili appropriate the sense of 'bird,' analogizing that same sense with the flight of an 'airplane.' The lexical item is borrowed from another existing word in the language, creating a homophone, two distinct referents with a similar sense. However, speakers of Kiswahili more commonly refer to the referent 'airplane' with word borrowed from English: *aeroplani*. This is an example of the second form of borrowing by which a language borrows the lexical item from another language's term for the item. This type of borrowing is the focus of the following pages.

In the case of the lexical entry for 'airplane,' two speakers have noted that their word of choice is *aeroplani*, not *ndege*. It should be noted that both of the speakers also are fluent in English, and that may condition their preference in borrowing. That is not to

say that across the board, borrowing from outside of the language to form a calque is a more common practice than the creation of a new lexical entry from words already in the lexicon. There are a great number of innovative examples of loan translation that are in wide use, even in the field of Information Technology. Commonly, compounds serve this purpose. For example, *barua taka* ‘junk mail’ or ‘spam’ translates from Kiswahili as ‘trash letter.’ Likewise, *herufi nene* ‘boldface’ translates to English as ‘broad written word.’ This phenomenon is common throughout the language, but it is excluded from the scope of this work because I assert that it effects linguistic identity in a much more subtle fashion than borrowed words of foreign origin.

In borrowing from English or any other language, Kiswahili exhibits what Tucker (1946) describes as “underlying tendencies in borrowing.” Tucker’s tendencies result from Kiswahili’s Bantu structure, and make borrowed words “Bantuized.” The tendencies are found in the phonological phenomena of insertions of final vowels and epenthetic vowels and a stress shift. All Kiswahili words of Bantu origin end in a final vowel. Thus when a borrowed word ends in a consonant, often a final vowel is added to the word. Consonant clusters, excluding nasal combinations, are also foreign in Kiswahili. Thus, when a word is borrowed into Kiswahili, there is a tendency to break up consonant clusters with the addition of epenthetic vowels. Lastly, Kiswahili places stress on the penultimate syllable of the word. When words are borrowed into Kiswahili, the stress pattern of Kiswahili is preserved and stress is placed on the penultimate syllable.

Tucker observes that, in 1946, then-present generations sometimes resisted these tendencies when pronouncing borrowed words in Kiswahili. Indeed, this trend to flout the tendencies of borrowing in Kiswahili has continued to this day. Casual observation

from Petzell's (2005) corpus of computer and information technology loan words points to borrowed lexical items that increasingly flout certain tendencies. Especially salient, is the tendency to flout the addition of epenthetic vowels. In new loans such as *kuprinti* 'to print,' the consonant cluster [pr] is pronounced as in the English original. The tendency to add a final vowel is also flouted, though, perhaps less frequently. In the English loan *kudownload* 'to download,' speakers do not add a final vowel. Stress patterns seem to be the tendency that is most often followed. Some might argue that with the continued influence of English on Kiswahili, these tendencies play less of a role than they once did. One possible explanation for this trend could be found in the rising number of East African English-speakers and their increased comfort with the English language and its phonology. New studies are needed to determine if this is in fact a plausible explanation for new trends in lexical borrowing.

Throughout Kiswahili's history, contact with foreign peoples and languages has greatly influenced the Kiswahili lexicon. Arabic and English, and to a lesser extent, Portuguese, loans populate the Kiswahili lexicon. As has been hinted at above, one fundamental truism of contact linguistics holds for Kiswahili's interaction with other languages: Kiswahili borrowed lexical entries from the semantic categories where the Kiswahili and a foreign language interacted. In subsequent sections, I will detail the semantic classes of progressive phases of borrowing, focusing on Arabic and early English borrowings as a model for uncovering the issues of identity wrapped in something as seemingly non-descript as a loan word.

3.1. Kiswahili Morphology

Kiswahili is a morphologically rich language. To completely understand the process of borrowing, it is imperative to detail the morphological processes at work in Kiswahili. This section does not aim to give a complete picture of Kiswahili morphology. Instead, this section provides a simplified primer on nominal and verbal morphemes available to speakers of Kiswahili.

The most notable feature of Kiswahili nominal morphology is the noun class system that Kiswahili shares with other Bantu languages. Noun classes in Kiswahili are distinguished by nominal prefixes. The classes also roughly correspond to semantic categories. The classes are detailed in Figure 1 below.

Class	Nominal Prefix	Example	Semantic Categories
1 (SG) 2 (PL)	<i>m-</i> , <i>mw-</i> <i>wa-</i> , <i>w-</i>	<i>mtoto</i> ‘child’ <i>watoto</i> ‘children’	Animates
3 (SG) 4 (PL)	<i>m-</i> , <i>mw-</i> <i>mi-</i> , <i>m-</i>	<i>mti</i> ‘tree’ <i>miti</i> ‘trees’	Plants, nature, body parts
5 (SG) 6 (PL)	<i>ji-</i> , \emptyset <i>ma-</i>	<i>chungwa</i> ‘orange’ <i>machungwa</i> ‘oranges’	Fruits, everyday objects, some nouns of Arabic origin
7 (SG) 8 (PL)	<i>ki-</i> , <i>ch-</i> <i>vi-</i> , <i>vy-</i>	<i>kitabu</i> ‘book’ <i>vitabu</i> ‘books’	Everyday objects, animals, diminutives, languages
9 (SG) 10 (PL)	$\emptyset-$ $\emptyset-$	<i>njia</i> ‘path’ <i>njia</i> ‘paths’	Kinship terms, animals, natural elements, foreign nouns
11 (SG)	<i>u-</i> , <i>w-</i>	<i>uzuri</i> ‘beauty’	Singular abstract nouns
15	<i>ku-</i> , <i>kw-</i>	<i>kujua</i> ‘to know’	Verbal nouns

Figure 1. Noun Classes in Kiswahili. *Adapted from Petzell 2005.*

Verbal inflectional morphology in Kiswahili is complex, as Kiswahili forms verbs through processes of agglutination, expanding from a stem with affixes. A subject marker, tense marker, optional relative marker, and optional object marker are affixed

before the verb stem. After the verb stem, a speaker may inflect the verb with the optional imperative affix *-ni*, a relative marker in certain constructions, or a mood suffix.

The following examples illustrate the use of inflectional morphology using the verb stem *busu* ‘kiss.’

(1)
ku-busu
 INF.kiss
 ‘to kiss’

(2)
a-li-m-busu Lucy
 3SG.PAST.HER.kiss
 ‘He/She kissed Lucy’

The second example shows the infinitive form inflected with subject, tense, and object markers. For a more robust explanation of verbal morphology see Vitale (1981) and Ashton (1944). Inflectional verbal morphology is summarized in Figure 2 below. Optional inflections are denoted by parentheses.

Subject Affix	Tense	(Relative Affix)	(Object Affix)	STEM	(Post-Stem Affixes)
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Figure 2. Inflectional Verbal Morphology in Kiswahili. *Adapted from Vitale 1985.*

In Kiswahili, borrowed lexical items are open to the same morphological processes as words of Bantu origin. Words of Arabic origin have been incorporated into the lexicon, and are now read through Kiswahili morphology, as demonstrated below.

(3)
ki-tabu
 N7.book
 ‘book’

In this example, *kitabu* ‘book’ from the Arabic *kitab*, is analyzed by speakers of Kiswahili as a member of noun class 7. The following example shows a similar phenomenon with the English loan word ‘virus.’

(4)
vi-rus
N8.virus
‘viruses’

This example is notable because the word ‘virus’ is read into Kiswahili as member of the 8th class, making the noun plural. From there, speakers understand the singular of *virus* to be the 7th class singular form, *kirus*. These examples show the elasticity of loan words and the rigidity of Kiswahili morphology.

Speakers apply verbal, inflectional morphology to loan words as well. Each of the following words can be inflected using standard Kiswahili morphology.

(5)
ku-reboot
‘to reboot’

(6)
ni-li-reboot
1sg.past.reboot
‘I rebooted’

(7)
ku-recordi
‘to record’

(8)
tu-na-recordi
‘we are recording’

3.2. Lexical Borrowing from Arabic

Unlike the other Bantu languages of East and Central Africa, Kiswahili has been highly influenced by Arabic. By sequencing phonological changes in Kiswahili's past, Nurse and Spear (1985: 15) conclude that most Arabic loans entered Kiswahili after 1500 A.D., following the completion of the major phonological shifts in Kiswahili's history. Arabic loan words have been the root of much controversy in the study of Kiswahili. They complicate notions of belonging and, for years, have been used by colonial governments as part of a complex devaluation of the Kiswahili language and through it, the Swahili experience.

Arabic loan words populate the Swahili lexicon from the extensive contact between Arabic and Kiswahili. Arabic loan words cover a wide variety of semantic fields (Myachina 1981: 17-18). Many loans relate to religious life: *ahera* 'the next world,' *mola* 'God,' *imani* 'faith' all derive from Arabic words. Many loans, too, relate to navigation and trade: *ramani* 'chart,' *deni* 'debt.' Jurisprudence and the rule of law and science also show many loans: *kadhi* 'judge,' *sheria* 'law,' *elimu* 'knowledge.' These semantic categories of loan words provide insight into the cultural contact between Arabic speakers and Kiswahili speakers.

Loan words are one of the most central pieces of the interaction between Arabic and Kiswahili. Whiteley (1969: 7-8) describes the often held view that Kiswahili is a combination of Arabic and Bantu influences, and as a result, that Kiswahili is not a proper language, devoid of a grammar or literature and unworthy of study. Whiteley describes a reported conversation in the December 6th, 1952 edition of the *East African Standard* where a British author is quoted as describing Kiswahili as a '...“lingual obscenity” to which no Briton “worth his salt” should be a party.' On February 24th,

1967, Susan Feller wrote in the Times Educational Supplement that “The long association between the Bantus and Arabs in Zanzibar produced Swahili.” Madan’s 1903 Swahili-English Dictionary describes the ethnic composition of the Swahili people as mirroring the assumed hybridity of the language. “The term Swahili represents, ethnologically as well as linguistically, the mixture of African and Arab elements on the East Coast of Africa.” (Mazrui and Shariff 1994: 58) This view of the Swahili people, of ethnicity expressed through the Kiswahili language, was regularly espoused by the British colonial government. This construction of East African linguistic history reveals a hidden value judgment. Creating a new history of any shared cultural experience, like language, inherently shapes the way that participants in that cultural form view their shared identity. In this case, to understand the history of Kiswahili as a hybrid language alters the agency of the African, a consistent feature of the colonial project carried on far after colonialism’s end in East Africa. The logic of the reasoning enforces the central role that Kiswahili plays in dictating perceptions of Swahili identity.

One often-cited example of Arabic’s influence in Swahili identity is the word *Swahili* itself. Mazrui and Shariff (1994: 56) discuss *Swahili* as an Arabic loan, coming from the Arabic *Sawahil* for “port town,” likely used to describe the ports of East Africa. The authors point to the importance of the introduction of the word *Swahili*, for before the term came into use, a shared Swahili identity as we know it now could not have existed. Its roots in the Arabic language show the influence of that language in defining the Swahili people. The people of East Africa’s coast would not be deeply affected nor, perhaps, even conscious of the etymology of the word *Swahili* lest colonial governments

and others did not consistently use the anecdote to produce value judgments on Kiswahili.

The civilizing mission of British colonialism, seen through the eyes of missionaries, reflects the historical influence of Arabic in Kiswahili and Swahili identity. The task of missionaries was to communicate the word of The Bible to African natives. Linguistically, missionaries approached their charge by reaching out to Africans either through African languages like Kiswahili or to teach European languages to Africans. (Mazrui and Shariff 1994: 59-61). Missionaries inspired by Livingstone believed that their mission could best be completed by utilizing Kiswahili and other “tribal” languages. Other missionaries saw Kiswahili as unfit for teaching Christian religion because its character was essentially Islamic. In using European languages, then, Christian missionaries propagated the notion that Kiswahili was not an appropriate instrument for religious education because it was too closely linked to Arabic. This is an example of what Mazrui and Shariff describe as a tendency to *over-Arabize* the nature of the language.

After independence, during the nationalist period, it is not surprising that many leaders tended to *de-Arabize* the language. Mazrui and Shariff note that they “have sometimes come across Swahili nationalists who claim that it is, in fact, possible to speak or write a Swahili that is free of Arabic-loaned words.” (1994: 62) Whether or not it is true, the sentiment expressed by those who would avoid Arabic loan words reflects a desire to reject the cultural history that links Kiswahili and Arabic and the more-recent affirmations of that cultural influence by colonial governments. It is a sentiment of

nationalist independence, recognizing language as a marker of a people's determinism over their own history.

The preoccupation with language in the post-independence nationalist period follows a consistent logic of language's relationship to the nation. Drawing on Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, J. Joseph Errington understands missionaries as subjects of the modern nation who "partook of such social imaginaries and cultures of standardization" (Errington 2008: 109). This analysis can be extended into the post-colonial period, by viewing the missionaries and indeed the entire colonial apparatus as the purveyors of a modern, Western view of the nation through language. The same language-centric logic for defining nation that nation-states ascribed to in the late 19th century was brought to east Africa by these agents of the colonial states. It follows that after independence, as African nations strove to be numbered among the modern states of the world, language politics read as a part of the modern nation. Though the policies of the state after decolonization were often reversions of colonial ones (the tendency to de-Arabize Kiswahili after the colonial over-Arabization), language remained foundational to the identity of the nation. There is a certain Foucauldian irony to this discussion of language's relationship to the nation: once the logic was imparted, the framework set, it becomes impossible to completely dispose of it. In this way, even the post-colonial policies intended to be a rejection of the colonial can be read as a part of the same system.

The tendency to view Kiswahili in terms of its relationship with Arabic is not new. The results of such a view, of Arabic loans themselves, have had powerful political effects on Kiswahili. Loans from Arabic are often-used examples of the Arabic influence

over Kiswahili and the Swahili people. The social consequence of loan words from Arabic is immense. As varied actors *over-Arabized* Kiswahili and manipulated linguistic identity, social identity hung in the balance.

3.3. Lexical Borrowing from English

Lexical borrowing in Arabic provides a model for Kiswahili's interaction with English. Though certainly there are different forces acting upon the languages, Arabic's influence long predating that of English, there certainly remain powerful similarities between the languages and their effects on linguistic and social identity.

One of the earliest references to English loan words in Kiswahili comes from early in the nineteenth century when, between 1832 and 1834, rough cotton cloth was imported to Zanzibar by ships originating in Massachusetts. The cloth was called *amerikani* or *merikani* from the English *American* (Whitely 1969: 45). Today *merikani* means 'American.' Knappert (1979: 34-36) points to the first verses of Kiswahili poetry containing English loans as roughly contemporaneous. The following comes from an early nineteenth century poet, Swadi bin Ali of Lamu:

Haifai kutoyuwa yangu hali
Nili hai kwako siweki badali
Gudi bai yanisiki mai dali

'You ought to know my condition:
I am alive, I love no one but you,
Good-bye, I am sick my darling'

This verse, translated in Saavedra (2004: 199), is notable for its last line, which is composed entirely of English loans. Because of militaristic contact, early English loans were largely related to British war making. Saavedra notes the early frequency of the

Kiswahili *manuwari* ‘Man-o-war.’ (2004: 204) Later, administrative terms, like *guvenuri* and *govana* ‘governor’ came into the language. Other early borrowings are in the field of transportation: *reli* ‘railway,’ *baisekele* ‘bicycle,’ *motokaa* ‘motor-car.’ (Gower 1952: 155) The expression of sport was also populated early with English loan words: *penaltii* ‘penalty,’ *tuliwini* ‘we won.’ (Gower 1952:156)

At present, many loan words describe aspects of information communications technology and modern sport and entertainment. Loan words that relate to technology are often borrowed nouns and verbs. They include words like *italiki* ‘italic,’ *kuupgrade* ‘to upgrade,’ *monita* ‘monitor.’ (Petzell 2005) Discourses of science and technology are primarily carried through the English language. Even when Kiswahili is used, through the presence of loan words, the presence of English is still felt. Some East Africans react strongly against the presence of English loans.

The Kenya Swahili Council, *Baraza la Kiswahili Kenya*, a Mombasan non-governmental organization, has a very explicit mission “...to provide lessons of pure language to those nationals who use some words of this language inappropriately.” The council’s view of language planning in Tanzania during the 1970s is that planners were “*unconsciously spoiling the language* by adopting words from other languages or writing them recklessly whilst the words are already in existence in many [Swahili] dialects.” (Mazrui and Shariff 1994: 76) And so, the council provides resources for purifying the language of loan words. This case is an extreme one, but the existence of such an organization shows the saliency of loan words and their importance in constructing linguistic identity.

Loan words and their usage in Kiswahili have a noticeable impact on a speaker's linguistic identity. The loan words change the nature of the lexicon. Though a feature of all language, in Kiswahili, lexical borrowing plays an important role in identity politics. During colonialism, lexical borrowing from Arabic was used as evidence for postulating a different history of the language, to manipulate the origins of Kiswahili and devalue the African experience. Loan words became, and remain, an important part of a lexicon of difference – they are somehow less African. English loan words continue the pattern set forth by Arabic. The loans are from specific semantic domains: war, transportation, sport, and most recently, information technology. These loans influence African attitudes towards Kiswahili and English. Loan words are a useful linguistic phenomenon for exploring the historic notions of linguistic identity. Recognizing the processes at work in East Africa with regards to Kiswahili, English, and other languages, we are able to inform a discussion of current linguistic identity with a historical perspective. The following sections build upon the discussion of the structure of Kiswahili and loan words through observations and analysis of interviews conducted in East Africa during the summer of 2008.

4. Research in East Africa

On May 28th, 2008, I left New York for Nairobi. From May 28th to July 13th, I conducted interviews and made observations by interacting with East Africans. The basis of my work is an attempt to understand the complex attitudes that East Africans have towards the languages of their lands.

I studied Kiswahili and Kenyan culture and society while working on a project with a Washington-based NGO, The World Institute for Leadership and Management in

Africa (WILMA). Throughout the duration of my trip, I conducted interviews (some digitally recorded, some recorded through handwritten notes) concerning how individuals perceived the utility of various languages in their daily lives and in the course of aid work. The interview process is discussed in the *Data Collection and Methodology* section below, and examination and analysis of the data itself follow.

Upon arriving in East Africa, I spent May 28th to June 28th studying in Kenya with a summer study abroad program through the Department of African and African American Studies of Washington University in St. Louis. We were based in Nairobi and Mombasa, but traveled extensively throughout Kenya. My studies focused on Kenyan history and Kiswahili language learning. I conducted two recorded interviews during this time, adding to many dozens of informal conversations with Kenyans about Kiswahili and their society and language. These interviews were conducted in English, and provided background for later interviews in Tanzania, where the bulk of my research was conducted.

Following the program with Washington University, I joined Innocent Bash, an employee of WILMA, to observe development work in practice and perform field research concerning linguistic identity of those East Africans working with aid organizations. The opportunity to work with Bash derived from communications with Paul Armington, WILMA's President and a Swarthmore College alumnus. Armington's training is as an economist, and his career has included posts at the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. His philosophy for economic development in Africa is informed by his work with these institutions, together with a community-centered approach based on establishing and empowering community leaders, providing

them with the resources to lead development projects. One such project in Ahakishaka village is a water treatment facility that provides clean water to the village through a system of spigots. The site of the main water pump is also the location of a tree nursery. The nursery was established in connection with the water system for short-term income generation through the sale of coffee plants and as a long-term reforestation strategy for the plains scattered around Ahakishaka.

On June 12th, I began a week's stay in Ahakishaka and Nyakagoyagoya Villages in the Karagwe district of northwestern Tanzania. In the villages, I assisted Bash in laying the groundwork for three volunteers from Mt. Sinai Medical School who worked for the summer on a mosquito net distribution project. Their project focused on assessing the uses of mosquito nets in Nyakagoyagoya village and providing nets free of cost to the residents of the village. The project was an extension of a successful project in Ahakishaka, performed in part, by one of the volunteers. All three of the volunteers spoke English as their only native language. Two of the volunteers had not studied Kiswahili or Kinyambo, the indigenous language of the village, before arriving in Ahakishaka. One of the volunteers, who will be referred to by pseudonym - Mike, had limited prior experience in the community through his participation in the Ahakishaka mosquito net project. Through experience, along with personal study, Mike achieved a working knowledge of Kiswahili, which was instrumental in his communication with Tanzanians. Observing their interactions with community leaders and villagers in Ahakishaka and Nyakagoyagoya informed my observations of language contact in Karagwe. Members of the team, other volunteers, and their African implementing partners also consented to interviews. Each provided unique views on the practice of

development in East Africa, and the utility of Kiswahili in carrying the discourses of their professions. Biographical details of each informant are included in the following sections.

Because of Innocent Bash's unique position in the community, I was able to step inside a series of successful development project performed by an American-funded community-based development organization, the Solar Village Institute, SVI. Bash is a native speaker of Kinyambo, and has a cultural advantage over other development workers who are linguistic outsiders in this place. Though Bash resides in Dar es Salaam with his immediate family, he has extended family in Ahakishaka and his connection to the village is powerful. It was clear from our first moments in the village, when Bash was immediately embraced by his family and the village government, that he is known for bringing aid money to the community and allocating it to successful projects. Innocent's father, Stan Bash, is largely responsible for first bringing American development initiatives to Ahakishaka village after connecting with Paul Armington and WILMA. Because of his regard in the village, I was able to conduct several interviews with strangers, using Innocent Bash to interpret Kiswahili or Kinyambo, for more generalized information about the languages used in Karagwe and people's cultural or professional attachment to those languages.

4.1. Data Collection and Methodology

The data that support the following conclusions come from interviews, observations, and secondary sources. In each case, my data and the data of others must not be taken as a sum of all African linguistic experience in East Africa. Partially because of the varied linguistic environment throughout the continent, extension of the

arguments collected herein is precarious. That is not to say that the views of isolated Africans are not important. They express attitudes towards languages that do not appear to be rare, but to prevent from overextending the words of the informants, it is vital to situate their comments within the specific context of their utterance.

The following section, *mechanics*, describes the mechanics of data collection, including recording methods and my approach to recorded and hand-transcribed data. *Informants* includes brief biographical sketches of five of the informants who are most central to this work in an effort to acquaint the reader with some of the individuals who provide data to this work. Because of the limited set of interviews that I conducted and the qualitative nature of the subject matter, context is of paramount importance for analyzing the statements that each informant has made. The concluding sub-section, *Contextualizing Research*, provides some considerations that have influenced and tempered my analysis of the informants' statements.

4.1.1. Mechanics

The recorded interviews were conducted with a small digital recorder in conditions selected by the interviewer to be most conducive to lengthy, uninterrupted conversations. On occasion, when a subject did not consent to a recorded interview or conditions made recording impractical, I recorded interviews by hand. Most of the recorded interviews lasted well beyond thirty minutes, extending beyond questions solely related to language use. The total time of all recordings made during the summer of 2008, discounting interviews transcribed by hand, is 3 hours and 41 minutes. Each interview began with a verbal agreement in which the informant assented to a recording

being made of the conversation. After the agreement, the informants were asked a standardized series of questions developed over the course of the first several weeks I spent in Kenya. This survey included basic biographical information as well as information about the distribution of the informant's language uses. Where and with whom does the informant speak an indigenous language, Kiswahili, or English? The responses to those initial questions served as a jumping off point for further discussion. The survey is included as Appendix A.

In addition to recorded interviews, many of the anecdotes and generalized statements come from observations made in the course of my travels throughout Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, and Rwanda. Many observations were also taken from casual interactions with East Africans and observation of the ways that the English, Kiswahili, and other languages are used together in community settings.

Throughout the course of the interviews, I attempted to refrain from injecting value judgments about language. In some cases, I did find that expressing agreement or understanding about a certain social or political view was helpful in building a relationship with the informant. For example, while speaking with an HIV/AIDS activist, I agreed with the informant by affirming his statement that the Kenyan government had not done enough to stem the epidemic in order to encourage the informant to continue discussing the heated political issues surrounding HIV/AIDS policy. After understanding the informant's concerns, I was able to bring the conversation back towards the linguistic practices that complicate, in this case, HIV/AIDS education. In this and other isolated incidences, I sacrificed complete objectivity for a relationship with the informant and a

conversational tone which, in turn, encouraged honesty from both the informant and the interviewer.

I found it comparatively difficult to find female informants who were willing to be recorded. Two women were interviewed and recorded, and two more were interviewed without recording the interview.

4.1.2. Informants

The following work draws heavily on the content of these interviews. I include the following details about five of the informants to provide general insight into some of the different personal experiences that inform the analysis of interviews that follow. Each of the following informants is identified by fictional names to preserve their anonymity.

Juma, 27, was born in the Thika District of Central Province, Kenya. He is ethnically Kikuyu, and identifies his mother tongue as Kikuyu, the first language that he learned to speak. He is a nurse's aid in Nairobi and a columnist, writing in Kikuyu about the HIV/AIDS epidemic and gender issues in Kenya. He writes for a community magazine published monthly and targeted to church-goers by focusing on social and moral life in Kenya. Juma targets his columns to young people because he identifies with Kenyan youth. He speaks Kikuyu, Kiswahili, English, and Sheng (a dialect of Kiswahili that is popular with young people, especially in and around Nairobi). I traveled with Juma throughout Kenya for nearly four weeks. I interviewed Juma twice, once on June 6th 2008, after working with him for about one week, and once, two weeks later on June 21st, 2008. Collectively, these interviews give color to the language policy of the Kenyan

educational system and explicate the ways that a Kenyan NGO connects with young people through HIV/AIDS education. Juma's anecdotes set up a linguistic environment based in conflicting spheres of influence between English, Swahili, and ethnic languages, a defining feature of the linguistic environment of all of East Africa. Interviews were conducted in English without any others present.

Mike, 26, is an American and native English speaker. Mike also speaks Spanish with relative fluency and "*kiswahili kidogo*," 'a little Kiswahili.' He describes his level of language proficiency by saying that he is able to hold "simple conversations, more than the *habari, nzuri*" (referring to the simple greeting of 'what is the news?') but he does not maintain that he is fluent. I met Mike in Ahakishaka, Tanzania, where he was working with two students from Mt. Sinai School of Medicine to educate about and distribute malaria nets throughout the neighboring Nyakagoyagoya village. Prior to the summer of 2008, Mike had visited Ahakishaka village twice, during the summer of 2006 for several weeks and for several months during the summer of 2007. I shadowed Mike and the students from Mt. Sinai School of Medicine for several days as they were establishing protocols for evaluating Nyakagoyagoya's level of education about malaria prevention and later dispersal of malaria bed nets. Mike provides, through one interview and my observations, an example of one Western agent of development. His interactions with African development workers illuminate the disconnects between American NGOs and African recipients of aid work. The interview was conducted in English without any other people present.

Ally, 40, is a medical attendant at a shop that sells bed nets to protect against malaria. She speaks Kinyambo, Kiswahili and knows a few words of English. As an

African recipient of aid, she speaks to the languages of development within the communities of African NGOs. The interview with Ally was conducted in Kiswahili, with Innocent Bash acting as a translator.

Edward, 50, is a native of Ahakishaka village in the Karagwe district of Tanzania. Edward identifies as a farmer and a “peasant.” He also has served as Ahakishaka’s Village Government Chairman since 1999. He works to direct aid work throughout the community in his role as Board Chairman of SVI, WILMA’s community-based development organization based in Ahakishaka. Edward speaks Kinyambo, the indigenous, ethnic language of Ahakishaka as his mother tongue. He also speaks Kiswahili and English fluently. In the course of his work as chairman of the Board of Directors at SVI, he serves as an intermediary between WILMA and the employees of SVI. As such, he speaks to the role of interpreter, and which languages are most useful in which contexts for communicating different concepts to the people of Ahakishaka. Edward was interviewed at the SVI campsite.

Benjamin, 34, owns a small dispensary in Ahakishaka village. Benjamin serves as the SVI Coordinator, and, as such, much of his time is spent coordinating development projects on the ground. Benjamin speaks Kinyambo as his mother tongue, and is fluent in Kiswahili and English. A father of two, he speaks to his family’s language use and the utility of English, Kiswahili, and English in the village environment. Benjamin reveals much about his sentimentalities regarding the languages he speaks through a very personal discussion of his feelings towards each language. Benjamin, too, was interviewed at the SVI campsite.

4.1.3. Contextualizing the Research

One important feature of my time spent in Kenya was the recent political upheaval surrounding the contentious December 27, 2007 election. Immediately after the election and the onset of ethnic-based violence, Kenya's major tourism revenue stream dried. The Washington University Program was one of the first programs of its kind to return to Kenya after the violence. As a result, I am forced to wonder if the data that I collected is not biased by the recent upheaval and a desire to minimize conflict, whether it be political or linguistic. Because language politics were such an integral part of the violence between Kikuyu and Luo ethnic groups in Kenya in early 2008, it is conceivable that informants would minimize linguistic difference, emphasizing Kiswahili's usage as a part of a national, not ethnic, identity in order to demonstrate reconciliation. This possibility is especially plausible given many of the conversations that I was party to throughout my time in Kenya: many Kenyans, recognizing me as an American, saw me for the tourist dollars that I brought with me. Often, casual interactions with Kenyans were punctuated by encouragement to tell my American friends that Kenya is a safe country. This concern bears much weight over some of the more informal, hand-recorded, interviews that I conducted over the month I spent in Kenya. This concern weighs heavily on my interpretation of short interviews or passing comments about language that I heard from Kenyans. The two recorded interviews that I conducted in Kenya were with informants with whom I had built strong relationships. With each of these informants, I had previous conversations about the nature of post-election violence in which neither informant spared gory detail. They each felt like some six months after

the outbreak of violence, tensions between ethnic groups in Kenya were still very close to the surface.

The observer effect is also a complicating factor in deciphering the truth from comments made by the informants with whom I spoke. As an *mzungu* ‘white,’ American researcher, especially, there is always a very real concern that I am collecting a presentation of reality rather than reality itself. I have tried to control for this concern as much as possible by interviewing people with whom I traveled or worked after I had the opportunity to engage with them outside of the interviewer/respondent dynamic. I found this to encourage honest responses, while allowing me to target questions based on shared experiences with the informants. Indeed the work that I present here has explanatory power over much of the related secondary literature on Swahili identity formation (Mazrui and Shariff 1994, et al.), though the concern is worth noting.

5. Analysis of Interviews

“They don’t speak real Swahili in Nairobi,” I was told in Mombasa. “They speak Sheng,” said thirteen-year-old Ali. Beach boys, young men who spend their days and, in many cases, their nights, on the shores of the Indian Ocean, often create fictional identities rooted in such language politics. “Captain Pole Pole,” now living on the North Coast of Mombasa, piloting a small vessel called “Karibu Glass Boat,” was one such character. Captain Pole Pole, who actually hailed from Lamu, insisted throughout the duration of our first interactions that he was a native of Mombasa. He constantly discussed the status of language on the coast, reifying many of the popularly held beliefs about Kiswahili among coastal people – that he was ethnically Swahili, and that he could

tell when someone from inland tried to pass for a Mombasa native. The notion of a “real Kiswahili” is one rooted in complex systems of ethnic identity wrapped in language politics. The following section describes a generalized pattern of language use, instrumentality, and identity in East Africa. First, I focus attention on Kenya, where the observed interaction between languages is representative of much of East Africa. Later, I focus intently on the language questions surrounding one community – Ahakishaka village in Kagera province, Tanzania – as a method of concretizing the linguistic experiences in East Africa within a small, knowable community.

5.1. Kiswahili and *Kiingereza* in Kenya

As I traveled across Kenya, one of the most salient differences between different parts of the country was the status of Kiswahili in different parts of the country. Nairobi, as the economic center of Kenya, and indeed the center of East African commerce, is a hub for both *Kiingereza*, ‘English,’ and Kiswahili. On Kenyatta Avenue, one of the largest thoroughfares through Nairobi, advertisements for Equity Bank read in Kiswahili: “*Tunakujali kwa sababu tu wakenya.*” The next sign past is the English translation of the advertisement, “We understand you because we are Kenyan.” As these advertisements show, in Nairobi, one can read a national Kenyan social identity through the languages of English or Kiswahili. English is the language of business, the language of multi-national corporations. As Nairobi assumes its identity as a center of trade for East Africa, discourses of globalization, expressed in English, become part of Nairobi’s landscape. Kiswahili, too, carries important instrumentality because the language unifies the many different Kenyan ethnic groups that find home in Nairobi. Juma notes:

“Knowing Kiswahili, you know, it is spoken widely in East Africa. There are so many tribes in Nairobi. You have to speak Kiswahili. You’ll be speaking to someone else. Maybe he’s a Luo and you’re a Kikuyu, you’ll find it hard communicating. But once you speak in Kiswahili, you’re speaking one language and you’ll be able to get a lot of things, food, transport, and get a nice house to rent.”

But both English and Kiswahili are languages of a Kenyan identity in Nairobi. The same does not hold true for other areas in Kenya.

In Mombasa, Kenya’s second largest city, English is a foreign, non-Kenyan language. English’s status on the coast is affirmed by the construction of Swahili identity on the coast. Mombasa sits in the historical tribal lands of the Waswahili, the coast of Kenya, and there, Kiswahili is a marker of ethnicity. Ali’s statement described above “they don’t speak real Swahili in Nairobi” is a powerful nod towards this geographic distinction. Instead of seeing Kiswahili as a part of national identity akin to how it is viewed in Nairobi, residents of the coast envision the language as tied to their ethnicity, and see those non-ethnic Swahili speakers of Kiswahili as perverting their cultural identity as it is manifested through language. A beach boy who would only be identified as Johnny revealed to me that when he sees a Kenyan who is from Nairobi (he claims to be able to spot one out of a crowd), he likes to ask why they’re in Mombasa, to find out their name and guess what ethnic group to which they belong. This performative interaction is rooted in the supremacy that Johnny and others place on their ethnic Swahili identity. After discovering a Luo or a Kikuyu speaking Kiswahili he takes pride in being ethnically Swahili, in speaking with others in a language he sees as *his*.

Johnny's attitudes towards Kiswahili, his feelings of pride in the Kiswahili language, are enabled by cultural distinctions between Nairobi and Mombasa. Johnny is reacting against the construction of a national identity rooted in Kiswahili, reclaiming Kiswahili as ethnically Swahili in personal interactions. Importantly, the Kiswahili language, as a *lingua franca* of East Africa, affirms the importance of his ethnic identity, its centrality to Kenya. In this way, Johnny's reaction against the national Kiswahili identity and the pride he takes in his own linguistic and ethnic identities, is rooted in what he perceives is a tacit validation from the state – the primacy of Kiswahili validates the Swahili experience.

Though there are certainly profound differences between Kenya's coast and inland communities, much of the distinction that governs the distribution of languages is also heavily influenced by the differences between rural and urban environments. Juma's time in school, first in rural Thika, Kenya, then urban Nairobi and urban Kampala, Uganda, provides a glimpse into the differences between cities and the surrounding countryside with respect to language. Juma began learning English and Kiswahili in primary school from Standard One (equivalent to First Grade in the United States). Kiswahili and English are taught alongside Kikuyu in primary schools in Thika, Kenya. He describes the linguistic difficulties that he experienced in his schooling:

“Having been brought up in the rural areas, it proved a bit of a challenge.

When we went to high school, we met with other people who are from other areas and communities. Now we had to form at least one common language, and that is Kiswahili. We found that the urban people were speaking more fluent Kiswahili because they were brought up with

Kiswahili. On the other hand, they didn't know their mother tongue so we were like kind of balanced. At the end of their secondary education [in Nairobi] you find that people are going back to like where they were – their mother tongue. It is quite important to balance all of them.”

In the course of Juma's work doing educational advocacy with young people in Kenya about HIV/AIDS, these language concerns motivated many linguistic decisions. One unifying thread throughout all of the informants is a desire for “direct communication.” Language choices, Juma emphasizes, are always motivated by the target audience. Always, Juma evaluates both proficiency in a given language and that language's particular social utility with a target group. Juma describes working with different groups of children, educating them about HIV/AIDs in Kenya:

“You have to look at all of the languages. Like when we're sensitizing through drama, we had various groups. First group we had young children, that's about five to twelve years, that's a lower primary class. Then the upper group, the teenagers, from thirteen all the way up to eighteen. And then we had a specialty of dealing with high school kids. For the young kids we used to make very funny comedies portraying AIDs as like a monster with a skull, something very scary. But we never got in depth, so we had to be very sensitive. It is hard when you teach a young child about sex.

For the kids in the rural areas, we use the mother tongue, because they are very comfortable with that in central Kenya because they are all Kikuyu. Then when we came to the second group, we are doing it in a

mixture of Sheng, Kiswahili and English. Then the high school kids and college, we used Sheng, because our message would go direct. When you are acting in Sheng, we wanted to drive that message to the youth. Education system in Kenya does not condone the use of Sheng in schools. So some teachers were not really comfortable with our Sheng. So they would tell us ‘can you avoid much use of that Sheng language?’ So what I would do, I would portray Sheng users as those drug addicts, those prostitutes on the streets to discourage the use of Sheng. But they ended up loving those characters more than other characters.”

It is important to note that “direct communication” as Juma describes it is more than just simple proficiency in a language. For communication to truly be “direct,” the target audience must have favorable attitudes towards the language – the language of communication must be a part of the speaker’s linguistic identity. For these reasons, Juma communicated with students using Sheng, a language considered to be a slang dialect of Kiswahili, in which many lexical items are formed by blending Kiswahili and English words, and is very popular amongst young people in poorer sections of Nairobi. The Kenyan government, as is evidenced above by the school teacher, actively disapproves of Sheng. But, as Juma attests, the language is an important force for development because of the sentimentalities that are attached to the language. Sheng is a large part of the linguistic identity of many young Kenyans in Nairobi, and therefore becomes a central part of working with young people. Juma’s decision to speak with this group in Sheng exemplifies the two considerations that must fall into the question of direct communication. At the most basic level, Sheng is intelligible to the target

audience. But Sheng also resonates with the linguistic identity of the target group, making it a clear choice for teaching that group about HIV/AIDs.

5.2. Ahakishaka: The Linguistics of Development

Ahakishaka, Tanzania, a small village in the Kagera Province of northwestern Tanzania, is an archetypal community for describing linguistic attitudes in rural East Africa. The community sees few outsiders except through the course of aid work. Development workers bring language expectations into the community, and create the kind of language conflict that typifies much of the East African experience.

5.2.1. Personal and Family Life

Kinyambo, the indigenous language of Ahakishaka, is spoken regularly between members of the community: residents of Ahakishaka and neighboring towns Benjamin says of the language:

“When I speak Kinyambo I feel good because it’s my mother tongue. Because I’m living in the village so I have to speak it to many people. As I told you before, the meaning of language is just to have communication with other, to give a message or get a message to other. So I’m okay with Kinyambo, but it’s a very limited means of communication because there is a big barrier in Kinyambo. You can’t speak Kinyambo with somebody from Mwanza or other regions. It’s just in the boundaries of Karagwe district.”

Benjamin has two young children, one three years old and the other two years old. He consciously speaks to them in Kinyambo so they will take the same pride in Kinyambo that he does. Benjamin says, “I want teach my kids their mother tongue. At the age to go to school, English medium school. So they’ll never have a chance to learn their mother tongue again.” In the village, as mandated by the Government of Tanzania, the languages of instruction in school are English and Kiswahili, leading Benjamin to teach Kinyambo to his children.

Kiswahili is spoken more commonly with outsiders, because most of the visitors to the village are from neighboring areas of Tanzania who have come to the village for purposes of trade. Many of the older generations do not speak Kiswahili, and so, younger generations translate from Kiswahili to Kinyambo in the weekly marketplace. Edward describes the utility of Kinyambo:

“In fact the Kinyambo can be a useful mode for the people who are living just in the surrounding. It’s still a problem. For example if you don’t know how to read or how to write and you don’t know how to speak Kiswahili he can simply speak Kinyambo.”

Most people in the village, Edward affirms, read and write Kinyambo, though some members of the village never attended school and are not literate.

Only vary rarely do people from the community speak English with one another. Though, as Edward proudly states, “I enjoy English.” Edward takes great pride in speaking with his family, his seven children in English. Though, he notes, he most regularly speaks Kinyambo with his children and his wife because the communication is most “direct.”

As testified by Benjamin and Edward, Kinyambo holds a special sentimentality with its speakers. It is the language of the shared history of the village, the community of Ahakishaka. It is linked with the family, a personal past and future. Its use is a marker of inclusion, an acknowledgement and affirmation of shared the shared experience of the community of speakers. English, however, is exclusionary. Edward and others are proud of their command of English not because of the history of a community that language use encodes but rather because English provides avenues to participating in a global community. They are proud, in part, because their mastery of English is rare in their communities.

5.2.2. Healthcare

Healthcare workers in Ahakishaka village work in a fascinating position within the village social structure. They negotiate between English-speaking NGOs and customers who often lack knowledge of English. It is their job to communicate with English-driven discourses of science and medicine and make healthcare understood through local languages.

Ally sells treated anti-malaria bed nets out of her small shop front in the Ahakishaka marketplace. She obtains the bed nets from NGOs with financial help from government subsidies. This communication with the Tanzanian government is performed almost entirely in Kiswahili. The nets themselves, however, come with instructions in English or French. Ally provides her customers with a one-page handout describing bed nets and their efficacy written in Kiswahili. She obtained this literature from a Tanzanian NGO. No such description of anti-malaria nets exists in Kinyambo. Selling only to the

immediate locality, her interactions with customers in the store take place almost exclusively in Kinyambo. Despite the predominance of Kinyambo and the lack of written instructions for nets in that language, Ally does not believe that much miscommunication happens with regards to net usage in the community. Ally, herself, makes regular trips to their neighbors to talk about bed netting, dispelling myths about the nets and describing proper techniques for covering a bed in the Kinyambo language. She emphatically affirms the efficacy of these trips. Further discussion of language politics surrounding bed nets in the context of foreign aid work is included in following sections.

At another dispensary, Faith, 40, notes that only one person in her dispensary speaks English: the medical officer. Despite this, she notes that “Kiswahili is not a problem. Sometimes someone comes in who doesn’t speak Kinyambo and [we] all speak Kiswahili.” Faith speaks Kiswahili and Kinyambo, and has never encountered a situation where Kiswahili and Kinyambo were not sufficient for communicating with customers.

Both Ally and Faith utilize the language of the nation, Kiswahili and the language of the community, Kinyambo, to communicate with the people they work with and serve. English, the modernizing tongue, is absent from their work environment.

5.2.3. Development and Language at SVI

Within the context of their work at SVI, Benjamin and Edward speak to language’s role in executing effective community development work on the ground. Both begin by affirming the primacy of Kiswahili, its instrumental value and newly constructed nationalist sentimentality. Edward describes Kiswahili: “It’s the language of

the country. Because everybody in Tanzania knows how to speak Kiswahili. Even in our neighboring countries.” Benjamin notes that while “Kiswahili is the language of East Africa” there is still a need for other proficiency in the English language. “I think it’s still a problem. There is a big need for people, maybe the majority, to know English in order to be in a globalization, we need to speak English as the medium of communication... [With English,] I feel that I can communicate with many [more] people in the world than [with] Kiswahili.” Both men were proud of their command over the English language.

As was common with most interviews conducted in English, the men apologized for their broken English only moments later refer obliquely to their fluency in English. Viewed in this context, their apologies seem to be attempts to solicit feedback on their language proficiency from the interviewer. My affirming their fluency in English made both Edward and Benjamin visibly happy. But beyond personal pride, there is a great need for knowledge of the English language in the course of work at SVI.

SVI plays host to many guests from different parts of the international development community. Representatives of East African development organizations frequent the campsite, and are often communicated with in English. Edward describes, “If we have visitors from abroad, from Uganda, from Rwanda, those who don’t know how to speak Swahili or Kinyambo. Those that don’t know how to speak Swahili or the vernacular³. Simplified communication with English.” Because of SVI’s partnership with the American NGO, WILMA, many of the foreign guests to SVI are English speakers. These English speakers are rarely proficient in Kiswahili and, never, Benjamin

³ It should be noted that all informants discussed their interactions with “the vernacular,” by which they mean the indigenous, ethnically-tied language of the area. In Edward’s case, he is referring to Kinyambo.

says, in Kinyambo. Benjamin says of language in the development community, “There is a need of language. Either English to be taught in the village or Swahili to be taught to the guests before giving or making any meetings with the villagers.”

In Edward’s position as Director of the Board at SVI, he affirms the utility of English. “The board was composed with seven members. All of them they knew how to speak at least English.” Though board meetings were conducted in English, they were also translated, often by Edward himself into Kiswahili because “hamlet leaders, they were board members [in addition to the seven members mentioned above], so we needed to have someone who could translate in Swahili and Swahili into English.”

With the employees at SVI, however, Edward, notes, Kinyambo is the language of choice:

“Anyway so long as we have more than one language, we speak in Kinyambo so that we have direct communication. To avoid indirect. To communicate with them directly, to control the business best, we have to use our vernacular...What I can say here, for example is that we usually use our language. If you want to succeed, of course you have to use the language of the certain area because to make sure that they understand what you mean.”

This is an interesting language choice because every employee at SVI is also fluent in Kiswahili. This affirms the notion that “direct communication” is both more complex than purely language proficiency, but that language attitudes and linguistic identity come into play when choosing a language for communication.

SVI's theory of change is driven by relationship building within the community. The institute takes pride in being a permanent fixture in the lives of people in Ahakishaka, and therefore relates to members of the community through the language with which they most closely identify, Kinyambo.

5.2.4. Translating the Languages of Development

The villages of the Karagwe district are divided into smaller units of local governments called hamlets, each represented to the village government by a hamlet leader. From time to time, when important decisions are being made, all hamlet leaders assemble to hear from the village chairperson and discuss matters. Throughout July and August of 2008, the village of Ahakishaka and neighboring Nyakagoyagoya hosted three development workers from Mt. Sinai School of Medicine, students from the School of Public Health who carried out an anti-malaria mosquito net survey and distribution project. Nyakagoyagoya, where the project was to be centrally located, held a meeting on July 1st 2008 of hamlet leaders, presided over by the village chairman of Nyakagoyagoya. The meeting was designed to introduce the students from Mt. Sinai School of Medicine to the community leaders of Nyakagoyagoya and extend a warm welcome and greeting from the village's leadership. As village chairman of Ahakishaka, Edward was present at the meeting. So too, was Benjamin, as a representative of SVI. Both men served as translators for the English-speaking students from Mt. Sinai.

Given the web of linguistic sentimentalities that participate in creating linguistic identity, navigating the process of translation can be complex. Both Benjamin and Edward regularly serve as translators in the village and commonly translate meetings like

the July 1st gathering of Nyakagoyagoya's hamlet leaders. Edward affirms the need for translators at the most basic level: "In order to make sure they understand what's going on, we use these translators." He notes that in the course of translating he attempts to translate the general idea of a statement, not direct text. Benjamin describes the process: "It's just a message. When a message goes to someone indirect there is some breakage. Not perfect... You take a picture of the message and then you translate it to somebody. Of course it's still an issue."

At the July 1st gathering, Benjamin and Edward translated Kiswahili and Kinyambo into English. The primary address of the meeting was conducted in Kiswahili. Edward describes rationale behind conducting the meeting in Kiswahili:

"According to our experience, we knew that everyone there, the most enjoyable language is Kinyambo. But if we were addressing the general meeting, for example I'm the village chairman, when addressing the village assembly, we normally use Kiswahili because we know there will be visitors, maybe the district commissioner or others who don't know Kinyambo."

Though the formal parts of the meeting were conducted in Kiswahili, after the opening announcements from the American students (translated into Kiswahili from English by Benjamin), the question and answer session was primarily conducted in Kinyambo. When hamlet leaders or other members of the community addressed the village chairman they asked for clarification in Kinyambo. Yet when the same group of speakers addressed questions to the students, they spoke in Kiswahili, with full knowledge that the students from Mt. Sinai would need questions and comments translated into English.

Peter Benziger, one of the American students from Mt. Sinai found the translation to be essential for his comprehension of the meeting's content. But translation, he remarked, is about more than simply making content accessible. "Edward and Benjamin gave us the idea of what was being spoken and gave us an idea of the social context of the statements," Mike described. Edward and Benjamin are able to provide the students with an explanation of the social context of the hamlet meeting because they have relationships with both the students and the hamlet leaders of Nyakagoyagoya – they serve as social and cultural translators because of their understanding of both groups.

5.3. Linguistic Identity

Benjamin puts it very bluntly: "We have a language problem here." Throughout East Africa, this "language problem," arises from varied linguistic identities, often conflicting webs of attitudes rooted in a conflation of social, ethnic, and linguistic difference.

In East Africa, all speakers navigate the three-tiered linguistic landscape of ethnic languages, *lingua francas*, and imperial languages. Each speaking population carries an understanding of each language's utility through a constructed history. Native speakers of Kinyambo understand that language through the history of the Karagwe district and through familial histories in Ahakishaka and Nyakagoyagoya. Kiswahili speakers in Mombasa, Kenya, who identify as ethnically Swahili attribute a different attitudes towards that language. Amongst that group, Kiswahili is an appropriated language of the nation, but one with a history that truly resides on the coast. English speaking East

Africans in Nairobi, Kenya view English as a part of a global Kenyan identity, reinterpreting the histories of English use in East Africa.

As evidenced by the interviews in the preceding sections, speaker populations and any collective linguistic identity that they might share are dynamic, ever-mutable constructions. Africanists have long fixated on the fluidity of ethnic identity in East Africa and the Great Lakes regions. Even what would appear as starkly defined ethnic lines – the difference between Rwanda’s Hutu and Tutsi – are grayed by cohabitation, intermarrying, and other social choices that reject the importance of discrete separations of ethnicity. (Taylor 1999) In a similar manner, speaker identities are fluid, overlapping collections of feelings and expressions about a particular language. For example, Benjamin is a member of the set of English-speaking residents of Ahakishaka, a subset of English-speaking Tanzanians. He is also a member of the set of English and Kinyambo speakers in Ahakishaka, and again a member of the set of English, Kiswahili, and Kinyambo speakers in Ahakishaka. The list of combinations goes on. Even for one individual speaker, the number of various communities with different, equally complex sentimentalities is immense. A speaker navigates through a linguistic landscape as part of the social, cultural, or ethnic identity relationships they find in the course of their life. In fact, linguistic identity is tied up in all of those relationships.

One of the most accessible components of a speaker’s linguistic identity is how that particular respondent feels when they speak a given language (linguistic relationships between speakers are difficult for the outside researcher to fully assess in a short amount of time). In the preceding sections of Chapter 4, I have detailed many of the relationships that individuals have with the languages they speak. I would like to dwell on one

particular relationship that I found to be a salient similarity throughout East Africa: a speaker's pride in being able to communicate in English language.

Mike notes that "here, people who speak English are quite happy and quite proud to speak English." Certainly Benjamin and Edward were proud of their language proficiency in English, happy to be able to conduct an interview in English, eager to act as translators for their American guests. In *The Political Sociology of the English Language*, Ali A. Mazrui disambiguates the notion of a speaker's pride (Mazrui 1973). He notes that there is an important distinction between being proud of a language in the abstract and being proud of one's own capacity to speak a language. The two, Mazrui notes, are not mutually dependent. A speaker can be proud of their own proficiency in a given language without that necessarily translating into a value, a positive language attitude, on the entire language. This is certainly the case with English, as I observed it in the East African context. Many speakers were proud of their ability to speak with me in English, but that did not necessarily follow to positive attitudes towards the language as a whole. This appears to be a feature of the trans-ethnic imperial language. The speaker's pride is connected with the increased access that language proficiency provides, not necessarily to a sense of shared history or community, as is the case with ethnic languages and in some cases, *lingua francas*.

6. Conclusion

The preceding work is but an exploration of some of the considerations that factor into creating the linguistic identity of a community. East Africa is an ideal backdrop for conducting research about linguistic identity. The region is populated by diverse sets of

people, overlapping ethnic, social, and linguistic groups. Despite the differences, certain linguistic phenomena unite the people of East Africa. The prevalence of English and Kiswahili throughout the region and, further, the constructions of English as a global standard and of Kiswahili as the language of the East African nation are widespread.

The incorporation of loan words into Kiswahili from Arabic and English provides an opportunity to contextualize language change, to historicize linguistic identities. The bulk of this work focuses on current language attitudes, but it is only through examining concrete language change through phenomena like loan words, we can begin to situate the current linguistic landscape in its historical context.

In conversations with East Africans, I found that mentioning Arabic's influence in Kiswahili was often met with hostility. In the port town of Mombasa, racial slurs followed mentions of Arabs and their linguistic influence. A rejection of the Arabic influences on Kiswahili is a nationalist backlash to both the influence of Arabs in shaping the language and the colonial exaggeration of an *over-Arabized* Kiswahili.

Likewise, the notion that Kiswahili was some how lesser for its incorporation of English loan words was met with visceral, negative, reactions. East Africans say that do not see the language of Kiswahili as less able to carry scientific discourse than English. The strength of such negative, emotional responses perhaps indicates the power of characterizations of the language through its borrowing patterns. An understanding of loan words serves as a historical backdrop for current attitudes towards the languages of East Africa.

From my time in East Africa, it is clear that linguistic identity is a vital part of the East African experience. As offered by speakers from across the region, a robust notion

of “direct communication” must include recognition of linguistic identity – people want to communicate in a language that carries favorable attitudes for both the speaker and the addressee. In a multi-lingual community, each language means different things to individuals, sets of individuals, and the community at large.

Difference between communities abound. From urban Nairobi to rural Ahakishaka or littoral Mombasa to inland Thika, communities interact with Kiswahili, English and indigenous languages differently. These differences impact the nature of linguistic identity. Regardless of this difference, I found certain expressions of pride to be constant across East Africa. Linguistic identity is wrapped in ethnic and social identities and is a fluid combination of attitudes towards the languages a given speaker uses. In Mombasa, beach boys remind us that their linguistic identity with respect to Kiswahili is tied in their identity as ethnically Swahili. In Ahakishaka, development workers connect with Kinyambo for its connection with the community as an indigenous language. In Nairobi, English and Kiswahili are languages of nation, symbolic of Nairobi’s place in the global community.

In the preceding work, I attempt to study linguistic identity in the multi-lingual communities of East Africa. This study is by no means intended to be an exhaustive look at Swahili or East African identities. It is intended to problematize the current, lacking literature around these questions of identity and language.

Further work in this field must be conducted in order to better draw conclusions from the linguistic landscape of East Africa. It is necessary to perform a study several orders of magnitude larger than the pilot study discussed herein. A broader sample of individuals, more representative of a given community, is necessary. In conducting

research, I was limited by my contacts in a given community, time, and my own knowledge of Kiswahili and local languages. Follow up work would benefit from more of all three.

The Kiswahili language connects all of East Africa. But in this multi-lingual environment, its ability to unify is not complete. Linguistic identity, language attitudes carried by each person, drive communication between speakers and communities of speakers. Like ethnic or social identity, linguistic identity, is an integral part of personhood and shapes the interactions between all.

Appendix A

Linguistic Survey

This survey was used to standardize the interview process. I began each interview with the following questions to gain some background information on each informant and their uses of the languages they speak. The phrasing of each question varied depending on context. Though these questions began each interview, they primarily served as a jumping off point for later discussion about language use and sentimentality.

- 1.) Could you please state your name, age and occupation?
- 2.) What languages do you speak?
- 3.) Which of those languages do you speak with your family?
- 4.) Which languages do you speak with in the course of your daily work routine?
- 5.) When do you prefer to speak the vernacular?
- 6.) What are your opinions of Kiswahili? / How do you feel when you speak Kiswahili?
- 7.) What are your opinions of the vernacular? / How do you feel when you speak the vernacular?
- 8.) What are your opinions of English? / How do you feel when you speak English?

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