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Tanzania and Kenya: Appraisal of Continued Richness in Languages

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Abstract

The article is a plea for sustaining the indigenous languages of Tanzania and Kenya. These languages display an impressive richness in diversity which is diminishing currently. It is important to appreciate the value of the current linguistic diversity and that of multilingualism. The article is based on a presentation at a conference of the Languages of Tanzania project and hence is biased towards the Tanzanian situation. I argue that the success of the language policy of promoting Kiswahili now opens the ways to support the local languages that pose no threat to national unity. Given that this article is a plea and one making ample use of my personal experiences of linguistic research in Tanzania and Kenya the style is more personal and lacks the usual detachment of academic papers.

Keywords: *linguistic diversity, endangered languages, multilingualism, Tanzania, Kenya*

Introduction¹

This is a personal plea for the appraisal of the diversity of languages in Tanzania and Kenya based on first hand experience in research on a variety of languages in the two countries over the last three decades. Tanzania is an exceptional example in Africa for its language policy and the success it achieved by having Kiswahili as a truly functioning African national language. Kiswahili is used in every part of every-day life. Many articles have been written about the factors that made it possible for Kiswahili to gain this status and why other countries in Africa could not achieve the same (Topan, 2008; Blommaert, 2014; Russell, 1990). There is a lot of discussion on the role of Kiswahili in education in Tanzania and the division of work between Kiswahili and English (Roy-Campbell & Qorro, 1997). I want to concentrate on other issues, namely the position of those 120 or so other

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¹ This article was presented at the Kongamano la Pili la Hali ya Lugha za Tanzania; University of Dar es Salaam, October 31-November 1, 2013.

languages of Tanzania. I would like to point out how rich Tanzania is in its linguistic heritage and how this wealth can be used for the well-being of the nation.

My personal experience with Tanzanian linguistic wealth came with my PhD research in the Mbulu region in the years 1987-1991 when I studied the Iraqw language. My PhD dissertation was on the grammar of that language but since then I also published a dictionary, a collection of stories and wrote a number of articles on that language and its rich literature.² I studied the grammar of Alagwa or Chasi near Kondo, of Mbugwe near Babati and I wrote a historical study of the fascinating mixed language of the Mbugu in the Usambara mountains. One of my students wrote a grammar of Sandawe. I did some research on Datooga or Barabaig and I tried to find remnants of the original languages among the various Dorobo groups in the Maasai plains. Although most of my research was on non-Bantu languages of Tanzania, I am very much interested in the Bantu languages as well, as I am trained as a Bantuist.

My colleagues of the University of Dar es Salaam have published a monument for Tanzania's wealth in languages: The Atlas of Tanzanian languages resulting from the Languages of Tanzania project. This beautiful atlas is much more than an up-to-date inventory of the languages spoken in this country. It also reports on languages used as second or as third language. It highlights the fact that multilingualism of Tanzania as a country extends to its people as individuals. It emphasizes the dynamic character of language.

Tanzania's language policy of promoting Kiswahili has been very successful. Now that Kiswahili is the undisputed national language shared by the whole population, a strong factor in nation building and a marker of national identity, it is time to reconsider the other languages of Tanzania. It is unlikely that they all disappear in the near future; it is likely that some of them will disappear in the near future, and it is certain that they are all changing rapidly, under the influence of Kiswahili but also of other languages. Paying more attention to them can be very fruitful for the nation and its people. I propose that radio is one of the most important media where all Tanzania's languages can be used, gain esteem and thrive.

I will first discuss how appreciation for diversity works out for linguistics and in particular how it is relevant for the language situation in East Africa. The attention to the value of diversity has led to a rise of

² My academia site <https://leidenuniv.academia.edu/MaartenMous> contains 20 articles and two books: all freely downloadable.

interest in language documentation and description. I discuss what the endangered languages debate has meant for the scientific discipline of linguistics. After that I will discuss the societal and political sides of this debate. I assess the current linguistic situation in Tanzania in terms of challenges to loss of linguistic diversity, and of threats to the vitality of languages. I argue for the value of multilingualism both cognitively for the individual and in the educational system. I conclude with an outlook on the future of linguistic diversity in East Africa.

Appraisal of Diversity and Need for Economic Value of each Language

It was in 1985 that I decided to write my PhD on the Tanzanian language Iraqw. I was a student of linguistics, eager to work on an African language when Professor Herman Batibo visited our department in Leiden and stimulated us to come to Tanzania and study the languages of Tanzania. Batibo had a vision that the linguistic wealth of Tanzania was being ignored; he was a pioneer and ahead of his time. Not so long before that the Norwegian missionary FroydisNordbustad had prepared Iraqw alphabetisation courses as a way to learn better Kiswahili. At that time, it was politically essential to put Kiswahili first and the study of the other languages of Tanzania was not encouraged. The climate has changed, in Tanzania and in the world. The United Nations declared the year 1993 to be the year of the Indigenous people. The term “indigenous people” is nonsensical in the Tanzanian context. But the event made me realize that there was a change in thinking about diversity. In the globalising world that we live in today we have come to appreciate things that make us different, unique, and valuable. UN international years do not automatically change the world and I had expected little effect from this event. I was also very sceptical whether the international concern about languages dying would have any repercussions for the views by those last speakers of the dying languages. But I was wrong. That became very clear to me when Jennifer Konainte visited me in my office in Leiden, the Netherlands. Jennifer is an activist for the Yaaku people.

The Yaaku are a small Dorobo group in Kenya. Their language is a Cushitic language and it had been classified as dead in the most widely used inventory of languages of the world, the so-called ethnologue, www.ethnologue.com. This was highly disturbing for Jennifer and her group because in their view the language was still spoken and she persuaded me to come to Kenya to establish that fact. I did and met four old men and women who were still more or less fluent in the language and a few who had some memory of the language. Everybody spoke Maasai, while Kiswahili and English were spoken as second languages. But the interesting point for this presentation is the question

why the Yaaku felt a need all of a sudden for their language to be spoken and to be alive. Reasons for people to give up or to keep their language are usually economically motivated and for purposes of identity. Being Dorobo, they once formed a hunter-gatherer group living in a socio-economically and culturally unequal symbiosis with their powerful masters, the Maasai. They were bilingual in Maasai, they wanted to be and become Maasai and gradually lost their original Cushitic language but never became full Maasai in the eyes of the Maasai. The social economic and political circumstances have changed over the last century and the last decade. In the course of the last 100 years, the power of the Maasai has dwindled and the political context of the colony, and later the independent state of Kenya has become the dominant context. The way of life of the Maasai, keeping cattle and being mobile, has become non-viable in the modern state. For the Yaaku the status of Maasai has gone down. That fact coupled with the realisation that they will always be seen as second-class citizens by the Maasai has made the Maasai identity far less attractive for them. The time is now there to rethink their identity and to feel Yaaku yet again for a number of recent developments. One is the fact that “indigenous people” — whatever that means — are no longer seen as worthless. People like Jennifer know about the United Nations and their year of indigenous people, as she knows about NGOs that will support her cause, in Kenya and in the world. But there is also an issue of land and land control. The Yaaku live in a forest that is national property and a protected area. They want control over their land, and they see opportunities because land ownership is an issue in their region. The original Maasai land had been “sold” to the British administration in a 100 year’s lease and those 100 years are over now and the Maasai have started to claim their land back. This is source of conflict in the area, and it has made the Yaaku aware that they could claim land, and in particular the forest reserve. Well, only if they are recognizable as a social unit different from the Maasai, so only if they speak their original language, or at least some people do. At the same time the Kenyan constitution was reconsidered, and communal land rights were discussed in the process. There were strong economic reasons to rethink identity and to embrace the original Yaaku identity again, one in which they do not need to feel second class Maasai, one as a small group with memories of a traditional way of life which is no longer considered to be worthless, and most importantly one which allows them to have economic profit.

I come back now to the ideas about diversity. In current thinking diversity is valued and cultural differences are appreciated. The appreciation for diversity probably stems from biology. Lack of diversity in genetic pool van people and animals leads to weaknesses and

deformations. Biological diversity is crucial for development of new plant races. Biology has taught us how important, even vital, diversity is. Cultural diversity is now seen as equally important as a reaction to the globalisation in the world. Nowadays we can read in the mission statements of many organisations that they value diversity. The idea is dominant that diversity in an organisation is crucial for innovative power, and companies are more competitive if their workforce is more diverse. In fact, the central political debate in Europe is about diversity, and this view on the value of diversity competes with fear and insecurity due to a disintegrating model of economic growth and a shift of economic-political power. The European community propagates a language policy that stimulates its citizens to learn an extra European language, in addition to English and to introduce at least two languages early in education.

The question is whether we can simply replicate the argument for genetic diversity in nature to language. It is not automatically true that a country with many languages is better off than one with only one. In fact, the opposite has often been suggested, arguing that it is economically costly to have many languages and that a multitude of languages is a potential source for conflict. These suggested correlations are too crude. Looking at situations of ethnic conflict in Africa it is clear that such situations occur too where people share the same language, as in Somalia, Rwanda, Burundi, etc. The studies on the correlation of multitude of languages and economic growth often do not consider multilingualism. For many countries we do not have sufficient data on the level of multilingualism. But studies that take multilingualism seriously (Chibaka, 2018; Quinteros Baumgart et al., 2018; Yulduz et al., 2021) show that the crucial factor is whether people in country can communicate rather than whether they have different mother tongues (Buzasi, 2016). It has been shown that the communication index, that is the likelihood that two people in a country can communicate, correlates positively with trust, for example, and that is a major predictor for economic growth (Buzasi, 2016). One can imagine that multilingualism has a positive effect on tolerance. But the clearest profit of linguistic diversity is multilingualism at the individual level. We will discuss that later.

Since the beginning of the 1990s the linguistic community is aware of the alarming situation of the world's linguistic heritage. The expectation is that in the next decades most of the world's languages will disappear. Thus, if we want to really understand the human capacity in terms of language, we have to move all our attention to the languages that are in danger of disappearance. Even more so because we know very little

about most of the languages of the world. This is also true for Tanzania. The number of linguistic studies of the more than 120 languages of Tanzania is very limited. The linguists in Tanzania have reacted to this challenge by shifting their attention to the linguistic richness of Tanzania. The Languages of Tanzania project is one of the initiatives in this vein. For linguists it is of course a major shock to realise that your object of study is disappearing while we do not even know what we are losing. The endangered languages debate has changed linguistics in three important ways. The first one is that languages other than English, French or German have become central in the interests of linguists. Some decades ago, a linguistics student in Tanzania would feel that she or he should do research on English to be taken seriously by the international scientific community. Now those students have an enormous advantage by having easy access to a wealth of information that is highly valued in the academic literature.

The second change is about the orientation of linguistics towards data. Linguistics used to be a discipline in which it was possible, and highly valued, to concentrate on a highly abstract analysis based on just a few examples, and these examples were often made up by the author or about the intuitions of the author of what constitutes a grammatical sentence. Nowadays we want naturalistic expressions. Studying endangered languages forces the researcher to think about a future in which the language under study no longer exists. Thus, we are forced to be concerned to gather not only data that we are interested in ourselves for our own scientific questions, but we also have to keep in mind that later researchers will depend on our data for research questions that we have not even thought about. Therefore, there is an urge to document the language as fully as we can. We should also think about next generations of no-longer speakers who want to re-learn their ancestral language or at least use some of the language for cultural practices. Therefore, the texts of name giving rituals are important to document. And in fact, we should have video documentation. This concern and the emergence of documentary linguistics is gradually changing the way in which linguists approach their data. Nowadays we expect to indicate in our articles how we obtained our example sentences. Readers want to know in which context and how we can be certain that the example is a natural specimen of the language. In the near future, readers will want to be able to listen to the examples and see the context from which the example was taken. Actual language data are becoming central to the field of linguistics, and this is good for linguistics because it strengthens its scientific base and methodology.

The third major effect of the endangered languages debate to linguistics is the fact that language documentation requires more technical

knowledge. The linguist has to be able to use a camera, to produce high quality audio recordings. She or he has to be able to analyse these data in new sophisticated software and to archive the data in a way that smart searching is possible. More and more research will involve a large language corpus and the search results are ideally analysed with some elementary statistics.

The endangered languages debate clearly has societal and political dimensions as well. One central question is: Should the language be saved? It is clear that the linguist is sad about the language that dies but if this linguist is not part of the community, this is clearly not her or his concern. The only people who can save a language from dying are the speakers themselves by continuing to speak the language. The tricky issue is that by the time speakers regret that their language is dying it is usually too late to reverse the process. The death and birth of languages is an integral part of normal life. If people prefer the language that they are shifting to, then that is usually for very fundamental and valid reasons such as economic profit, becoming part of a larger culture, etc. A lot of the international debate around endangered languages is centred around the situations of the Amerindians in North and South America or the aboriginals in Australia. The situation in Africa and large parts of Asia is fundamentally different. In Australia the aboriginal language is linked to an ancient culture and their way of life which is miles apart from the way of life and culture of the dominant population. In Africa, in Tanzania, if the Zigua were to lose their language, their way of life and culture is not fundamentally different from the rest of Tanzania. This is not to say that there is little difference in the socio-cultural situations and ways of subsistence among the peoples of Tanzania. On the contrary, there are and were important cultural differences of nomadic pastoralism and sedentary pastoralism, different farming traditions combined with animal husbandry or not, various regimes of hunting, fishing, and gathering. All these different cultures and ways of life can be linked to indigenous peoples of Tanzania. There is no dichotomy in (East) Africa of the cultures of food production between indigenous people versus Western colonizers as it is the case in Australia and the Americas. In Africa, "indigenous" in the strict meaning of the word cannot be associated with pre-historical ways of life. There is a second consideration in which language death is less dramatic in Africa compared to Australia and the Americas. Most of the African languages that die, do so because people switch to other African languages and by doing so make those other languages more viable in the long run. In one way this actually helps to prevent the shift to world languages such as English. To some extent it helps to safeguard diversity. It is crucial to

keep these considerations in mind when we discuss language endangerment in Africa, and in Tanzania.

There is a danger of over-dramatization in the metaphors of death that are used. Professor Austin Bukenya ends his 2020 column entitled “Kiswahili as a ‘killer language’ is an argument against myself” with the wise words “No language should threaten another. But the most competitive language is that which best meets the needs of a society at any given time.” (Bukenya, 2020). The term killer-language has been used in the context of Swahili by the Kenyan philosopher and writer Ngũgĩ waThiong’o according to Wolff (2018:973), but languages do not kill; they come into disuse following the communicative and emblematic needs of the speakers. I would argue that the metaphor of death and extinction is dangerous and counter-productive. Dangerous because it puts normal processes of change into a negative light and blames speakers who follow logical choices. Counter-productive because it brings the emphasis on keeping the organism alive rather than on the essential concern, that of loss of diversity. I can illustrate this with two examples. If the speakers keep their language but converge maximally to another language, then their language survives but not the diversity, see also Muzale and Rugemalira (2008) for similar observations. Take for example the Mbugwe language from near Babati. Collecting lexicon from young men I got *okasirika* for ‘kukasirika’ or ‘to be angry’; this word used to be *ovéna* in Mbugwe; I got *opinda* for ‘kupinda’ or ‘to bend’; this word used to be *uúnyanya*; I got *chumbi* for ‘*chumvi*’ or ‘salt’; this word used to be *tónyo*. The heavy influence of Kiswahili on the lexicon is clear. The youth still speak Mbugwe but the lexical diversity is diminished. The Mbugwe language is still spoken and transmitted to children but the impact of Swahili on this and on most languages of Tanzania is so strong that original words get lost and are replaced by often adapted Swahili borrowings. Similarly, Swahili grammar finds its way into the grammars of original indigenous languages. For example, in 1987 I recorded the Iraqw comparative construction using an ablative clitic attached to the standard of comparison (1) (Mous & Sanka, 2008) but when my student checked the same example in 2017, the construction was considered marginally acceptable and the preferred construction was one in which the standard of comparison is introduced by the marker *ta* ‘than’ calquing the Swahili construction of comparison as in (2) taken from Kruijt (2017:75).

- (1) án kuúng u ló'wa slaá' geerá makay sleémeerówa alé.
 1SG 2SG.M O2SG.M very love:1SGin. front.of animals all:ABL
 RESPRO
 I love you more than all other animals

- (2) án kuúng u ló'wa slaá' ta makay sleémeeró
 1SG 2SG.M 02SG.M very love:1SG than animals all:ABL
 RESPRO
 Sw: kuliko wanyama wote
 I love you more than all other animals.

An exemplary instance of the influence of Swahili on the languages of East Africa is the spread of the item *mpaka* as a preposition 'until'. Being grammaticalised from the class 3 noun *mpaka* for 'boundary' in Swahili, this word has spread to virtually all languages in East Africa as a preposition, primarily in the temporal sense (Mous, 2020).

It is important here to point out that this loss of diversity is not something that can or needs to be countered, but it illustrates how important for history it is to document the diversity that there once was. The ability of Mbugwe and other languages of East Africa to adapt elements from Swahili strengthens these languages and helps them to survive. However, loss of diversity can and does occur independent from language endangerment. See also Mous (2003).

My second example is at societal level. When I visited the Yaaku in Kenya, I met an old lady who could still speak the language. It was not so easy to work with her because she was fragile and had little Kiswahili. From my side it was easier to work with a man who was a bit younger, fluent in Kiswahili and very much concerned with the faith of the Yaaku language. However, this man could not speak Yaaku fluently and one of the reasons for that was that he was aware of the fact that his language was heavily influenced by Maasai, and he was desperately avoiding Maasai words. His purism hindered him. For centuries already Yaaku has been influenced by Maasai and the idea of a pure Yaaku is declaring the language dead. But paradoxically it is precisely the concern about language death that evokes this attitude. If the people want to keep Yaaku then that is not out of need for a language for communication; for that function they already have Maasai and Kiswahili. Neither does Yaaku help to keep their culture alive because the shift to Maasai culture and way of life is already far advanced and what they have left in terms of memory of a former life as beekeepers and hunters can easily be accommodated by keeping some original words in their new language. The main reason for them to cling onto Yaaku is to show that they are Yaaku; what they need from the language is an emblematic function. It would be sufficient to be able talk different enough to be recognised as different.

The Mbugu, also called Ma'á, in the Usambara mountains realised this and found a solution. They once spoke a Cushitic language, but in a dominant Pare (Chasu) environment they shifted to Chasu. They were culturally different though and tried to undo the shift when they realised that they wanted a language of their own. At the last stages of language shift the new language is dominant in the minds of the speakers and the old language only exists in the form of some remembered words that are used parallel to the equivalent words in the new dominant languages. The Mbugu extended this set of remembered words with words from other languages, especially non-Bantu languages such as Maasai and Gorwaa (Fiome). They knew words from these other languages because they spent some time among the Maasai after they left the Pare mountains and they met Gorwaa people in that period. They also extended their extra lexicon by manipulating existing Chasu words to make them different enough. Having settled in the Usambara mountains they had a language with a double lexicon, one which is still basically Chasu, another one which completely deviant. This deviant lexicon is so extensive that it gives the impression that they speak a completely different language and one that sounds different from any of the surrounding Bantu languages. They have a “language”, technically just a vocabulary, that serves the emblematic purpose to indicate that they are different (Mous, 2003).

What is the Tanzanian Situation in Terms of Linguistic Diversity?

Tanzania has more than 120 languages. The state of the art of the Tanzanian language situation is published by the Languages of Tanzania project such as the Atlas of Tanzanian languages. The beauty of this atlas is that it recognises the fact that normally people speak several languages and that therefore languages are not single occupants of territories. This information on multilingualism also indicates where language shift might happen. Most of these 120+ languages are Bantu languages, but Tanzania can in fact boast on being Africa's most diverse country in terms of language diversity. Because all four major African language families are spoken in Tanzania: Niger-Congo with all the Bantu languages, Nilo-Saharan with the Nilotic languages such as Maasai, Datooga or Barabaig and Akiek or Dorobo, Cushitic with Iraqw or Kimbulu and its relatives, but also Sandawe (Khoë, formerly KhoiSan). And number 5, Africa's unclassifiable language Hadza is also spoken in Tanzania. Tanzania is one of the few African countries with a fully operational native national language, Kiswahili. Everybody in Tanzania speaks Kiswahili and Kiswahili is dominant in a large area of public life and thus obviously Kiswahili has its effect on the other languages of Tanzania, on all of them. But Kiswahili is not the only language people are shifting to. There are several regional languages that are strong and dominant. For example, the Alagwa or Wasi

speakers in Kondoa district will also speak Kirangi and for many of them Kirangi is their main language and, likely, in the future they will hardly use their original language anymore. And on top of that they are also influenced by Kiswahili. At this moment the population is at least trilingual: Alagwa-Kirangi-Kiswahili but my prediction is that they will become bilingual Kirangi-Kiswahili. The Ethnologue website (Eberhard et al., 2022) classifies languages in different categories and quotes the number of Tanzanian languages in each category as given in (3).

- (3) Distribution of Tanzania's languages across stages of endangerment according to Ethnologue (Eberhard et al., 2022)
- | | |
|-------------------|----|
| 5 developing | 22 |
| 6a vigorous | 54 |
| 6b threatened | 34 |
| 7 shifting | 9 |
| 8a moribund | 2 |
| 8b nearly extinct | 0 |
| 9 dormant | 1 |
| 10 extinct | 2 |

The details of this are in some places clearly wrong and sometimes the classification does not seem to be motivated. But still, it gives some idea of the vitality of Tanzania's linguistic heritage. There is a lot to do in terms of documentation and for most of the languages it is still possible. Strangely enough the latest version of the Ethnologue website does not make use of the Atlas of Tanzanian languages.

It is not only striving for diversity that makes us worry about disappearing languages but also the idea of losing our heritage. Heritage is seen as essential for a feeling of who you are and where you belong. Losing one's heritage is often seen as loss even when one is happy about the new identity. Hanging on to heritage is a strong emotional force. It is also essentially conservative. Apart from the feeling of losing your heritage, the disappearance of a language entails the final loss of a lot of information. What we know about the early history of Tanzania is for a large part based on historical linguistics. We draw conclusions from the distribution of related languages in terms of movement of people. We can reconstruct earlier contact situations on the basis of evidence from loan words.

In all sort of ways, the lexicon opens the past to us. For example, the fact the Kirangi word Vabondei means 'people from the coast' shows the route of the old trade caravan to the coast of Tanga. Words contain a lot of traditional knowledge. Another example comes from cattle names in

Iraqw. All the Iraqw cow names tell us something about how they were acquired, for example the names *digeet* for a cow bought with a donkey and this name *digeet* is the Datooga/Barabaig word for donkey. This shows that the Iraqw acquired a lot of their cattle from the Datooga. But the Iraqw already knew cattle long before that because their detailed cattle terminology can be reconstructed up to proto-Cushitic and beyond. Many agricultural terms in Datooga are Iraqw in origin; it shows that a number of agricultural innovations in Datooga economy came from Iraqw, but some others came from KIRIMI (Kinyaturu). KIRIMI in its turn is heavily influenced by Datooga in some of its lexicon but also in its sound system.

We can reconstruct a lot about the early history if we know how languages influenced each other. But in order to be able to do this we need to know the details of the lexicon, and it is precisely the specialised vocabulary that disappears in situations of bilingualism, loss of traditional life and schooling. The lexical heritage is extremely valuable in the area of names of plants and animals. The knowledge of how to use certain plants in food and as medicine is of enormous potential value. The hoodia plant of the Namibia desert was used by the San people to treat indigestion and is now a major element in pills to make people slim and a source of income for the San. Traditional knowledge turns out to be of great economic value.

Oral literature is another area of heritage that is easily influenced and affected by change. Stories travel fast, as news travels fast. It is only natural to tell a good story irrespective of the language you heard the story in. Tanzania's heritage in traditional stories is very rich but we are also forgetting stories and replacing them by new ones. If we can manage to document this rich tradition as the Grimm brothers did in Germany in the early 1900s then we will have a priceless source of inspiration for the future. Those stories that the Grimm brothers collected are still retold, appear in films in all sorts of new versions. They made Walt Disney rich. Songs contain a wealth of information. There is, for example, an Iraqw song about Koonki that recounts the first encounter between the Iraqw and the Germans. Colonial records will only represent the German side of the story, the traditional song is the only way to learn about the view from the other side. The heritage of oral literature is a wealth that we should not let go to waste.³

We have seen the values of linguistic diversity and of the knowledge stored in our languages. I would like to end this section with some examples of the diamonds that are stored in the Tanzanian languages

³ This and other songs are presented in <http://verbafricana.org/iraqw/WebsiteFilesSongs/main.htm>

for the linguist. In order to recover these diamonds, we need to analyze the languages form within. We can only find new insights from the linguistic diversity if allow ourselves to look at languages not through the structures of English and other Western languages but from what the structure of the language itself tells us. I can illustrate this from the qualities of the noun in Iraqw. The verb of a sentence changes according to the noun that is subject, just like in Kiswahili. If we say, “the tail is visible”, *mkiaunaonekana*, or “the cow is visible”, *ng’ombeinaonekana*, the verb changes. In Iraqw too: *hhaysooiharweerina* ‘the tail is making circles’; the verb ends in *ina*. If we say the boys are making circles, *daaqaayiharweerin*, the verb ends in *in*, not in *ina* and if we say the tails are making circles, *hhayseeiharweeriin*, the verb ends in *iin* with a long *ii*. It is very common in languages that the verb changes according to the subject noun. And on the basis of this we can recognize for Iraqw three groups of nouns: Those that behave like *hhaysoo* ‘tail, singular’, like *daaqaay* ‘boys, plural’ and those like *hhaysee* ‘tails, plural’. The remarkable fact is that the ending of the verb for *hhaysoo* ‘tail, singular’ as subject is the same as for the third person plural, the ending of the verb for boys, plural, *daaqaayas* subject is like that of the third person singular masculine, and the one for *hhaysee*, tails, plural as subject is like that for the third person feminine singular. We learn that we cannot know from the meaning of the noun what the ending of the verb will be. We also see that the ending of the verb has nothing to do with the number of the noun but only with what kind of noun class or gender the noun belongs to. We also conclude that there are three noun classes or genders in Iraqw, and we can call them masculine, feminine, and plural, following the meaning of the ending of the verb. French, German and many other languages have a gender system with masculine and feminine, but Iraqw is very different in the fact that the third value for gender is plural. This is truly exceptional in the languages of the world that Iraqw shares with some related Cushitic languages in Ethiopia. It opens our mind about the nature of the category of number and how that is different in a language like Iraqw.

These remarkable features of Iraqw may disappear. In fact, in Alagwa, a related language, the behaviour of nouns and their agreement on the verb of the sentence is changing and becoming more in line with the European gender system. It is these kinds of linguistic properties that make the study of the languages of Tanzania so rewarding for linguistics. But we have to go deeper than the surface, we have to confront the languages with open eyes, and we have to do it now. And by doing so we can enrich the field of linguistics.

Multilingualism, its Value and its Potential in Education

For some time, people have been thinking that speaking more than one language is a burden to our brains and that one can only master a language at a higher level if one speaks only one. Psycholinguistic research over the last years has shown that learning several languages at the same time as a child has major cognitive advantages beyond the advantage of knowing several languages. For example, it has been shown that bilinguals score better on tests for numeral ability, on verbal and perceptual flexibility and on general reasoning by comparison with monolinguals (Balkan, 1970, quoted in Romaine, 1989). And those who became bilingual before the age of 4 were even better. Studies in Spain show that pupils who are bilingual in Basque and Spanish show better results in learning English than monolingual Spanish students (SagastaErrastir, 2003). Other studies report on better control of attention, stronger working memory, better developed metalinguistic awareness and better abstract and symbolic representation skills, better in problem solving. These results indicate that the process of acquiring two languages and of simultaneously managing those languages allows bilinguals to develop skills that extend into other domains. These skills appear to give bilingual speakers insight into the abstract features of language and into their own learning processes. They also appear to give bilingual speakers an enhanced capacity to appropriately control and distribute their attentional resources, to develop abstract and symbolic representations, and to solve problems (Adesope et al., 2010). Most studies indicate that bilingualism has a positive effect on third language acquisition especially when bilinguals have acquired literacy skills in both their languages. This positive transfer between languages is enhanced if languages are typologically close. (Cenoz, 2003)

What is the role then of language in education? There is a continuing debate in most African countries on to what extent the mother tongue should have a role in education. Countless studies have shown that it is better to learn how to read and write in your mother tongue first and only later in another language. In the last decades several African countries have introduced an educational policy in which during the first years the mother tongue is the language of instruction, and they introduce the countries' official (and often colonial language) at a later stage in primary school. In addition to the fact that learning a new language does not combine well with learning basic language skills such as reading and writing, there is a second important problem with a foreign language of instruction in school and that is the fact that the grounding of other skills such as arithmetic is not in the language that is the child's mother tongue but in an alien language, and often one that is associated with a different culture, English or French. It is, however, not an easy task to introduce mother tongue education in the first years

of schooling. There are many practical obstacles. How does the situation in Tanzania differ from that in most of those countries? Kiswahili may be not always be the mother tongue for children who go to school in Tanzania but for many of them the language is not at all unfamiliar. It differs a bit from region to region, but many children already know some Kiswahili on the day of their first school visit. A second major difference is that for the vast majority of these children Kiswahili will be quite similar to their mother tongue; the distance between Kisukuma and Kiswahili is of a different order than that between Zulu and English. And thirdly the culture associated with the medium of instruction, Kiswahili, is not markedly different from the culture associated with the mother tongue of the child. In those three respects the situation in Tanzania is different from many other countries in Africa.

For some regions of Tanzania the mother tongue is, however, structurally and in all respects completely different from Kiswahili and unrelated to it. In those regions it would surely be extra effective to start primary education in the mother tongue. It would be wise to allow for experiments to try whether this would have a positive effect. If the situation in Tanzania is different from other countries due to the presence of Kiswahili as a national language of wider communication, this does not mean that mother tongue in the primary school could not be effective at all. It is just that the urgent necessity is less prominent. In fact, it would be an interesting issue to investigate and to experiment with. After all, developed multilingualism, including reading and writing skills in both languages has a clear positive effect on cognitive development of the child and even more so if the languages concerned are typologically similar.

Conclusion: Language in the Future

At the end of the paper, I want to speculate about the future. Communication has drastically changed over the last decades. Mobile phones are everywhere; we talk and text using the same device. The mobile phone does not mind whether we use Kiha, Kiswahili or English. For the first time, modern technology does not require a foreign language. People who never used their mother tongue in writing, now do so when they are texting. We seem to feel free from spelling rules when we text, and free to mix languages as we like (Barasa, 2010). The computer can talk to us, reading out text, and for some languages we can dictate the computer and it will be transferred to text. What is happening to the written word? After centuries of high prestige for the written word and low prestige for the spoken word, the spoken word is gaining ground again. In linguistics too, it is no longer enough to transcribe and translate the texts that we collect but modern

documentation wants these texts to be linked to audio, or better to video footage. If the spoken word becomes more important and the written word less, there is more room again for language diversity and variation and there is more room for Tanzania's languages.

We see already how the youth in the cities is making use of the new linguistic freedom of the spoken word. In most major cities of Africa, new words arise by the day and people enjoy linguistic creativity. Freed by the fact that communication is possible anyway, language can take all its other functions, of having fun, being creative, marking identity differences, expressing style, expressing who you are. Language is very much alive in *lughayamtaaní* colloquial Kiswahili', Sheng and Engshand here we see a growth of linguistic diversity in expression.

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