

# **The International Status of Kiswahili: The Parameters of Braj Kachru’s Model of World Englishes**

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## **Abstract**

This paper critically examines the status of Kiswahili as an international language within the parameters of Braj Kachru’s sociolinguistic construct – “Model of World Englishes”, that works to analyze how sociolinguistic histories, multicultural backgrounds and contexts of function influence the use of English in different regions of the world. In our view, such a model yields fairly objective results. Thus, the results of this paper are that Kiswahili perfectly meets the standards of an international language within Braj Kachru’s model, albeit with few disparities. The paper concludes that Kiswahili’s growth into an international language is clearly taking the trends taken by English as examined by Kachru. Hence, the findings reinforce Kiswahili’s geopolitical significance as it recommends the creation of conditions that would encourage its spread and influence in the world.

**Key words:** Kiswahili, international language, world Englishes, native speaker

## Introduction

Kiswahili is an indigenous African language whose origin, according to many researchers, is the coast of Eastern Africa. Traditionally, it was regarded as the language of the coastal communities of Kenya and Tanzania. It remained the language of the people of East African coast for a long time. It is argued that the early visitors and traders, such as the Arabs and Persians who came to the East African coast, used to speak with the natives in Kiswahili. Their interactions are well documented in the *Periplus of Erythrean Sea* which is said to be the earliest known document recounting the prehistory of East African coast. The fishermen of this region and the clove farmers from Oman are said to be the first ones to extensively use Kiswahili as a lingua franca. In the twentieth Century, Kiswahili was readily accepted in Kenya and Tanzania where it has played key roles of national development (Mukuthuria 2006:154). Its rise, development and spread in Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and the rest of Eastern, Central, Southern parts of Africa and elsewhere in the world has been sufficiently dealt with by Whitley (1969), Khamisi (1974), Chiraghdin & Mnyampala (1977), Heine (1990), Mbaabu (1991), Mazrui & Mazrui (1995), Chimerah (1998) and Mulokozi (2004) among others. Mulokozi (2004:1–2) outlines the following as being the factors that assisted the development and spread of Kiswahili in Tanzania and thereafter the rest of Eastern Africa: the maritime trade; the caravan trade into the interior; the rise of Zanzibar as East Africa's commercial capital; the Bantu cultural complex, with its affinity to the Swahili complex, and its cultural and political tolerance; the relative cultural and linguistic homogeneity of the Swahili communities; the factor of Islam; colonial language policy, especially by the Germans in Tanzania; Christian missionary activity, including alphabetization, book printing and publishing; mass media; cultural activities such as music, games, sports and ceremonies; economic and social change, including urbanization and new infrastructure; national politics; the school system.

Kiswahili scholars and promoters especially in Tanzania and Kenya have always argued that Kiswahili is the undisputed lingua franca of Eastern and Central Africa. They have also claimed that the language is spreading fast across Africa and beyond hence gaining the status of an international language. However, the real international status of Kiswahili is yet to be put to test objectively. Our aim here is to contribute to this objective examination by subjecting it to the analysis of Braj Kachru's Model of World Englishes (MWE).

## **Braj Kachru's Model of World Englishes**

Braj Bihari Kachru (1932-2016) was a linguist born in India who coined the term "World English", the Jubilee Professor of Liberal Arts and Sciences at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (named in 1992). Kachru carried out extensive research on the status and use of English as an international language, and in 1985, conceptualized and developed the Model of World Englishes with which he used to illustrate the status and use of English in different countries of the world. Kachru's impressive profile includes his tenure as head of the University of Illinois Department of Linguistics [1968–79], director of the Division of English as an International Language [1985–91]; director of the Center for Advanced Study [June 1996-January 2000]; 1978 director of the Linguistic Institute of the Linguistic Society of America; 1984 president of American Association of Applied Linguistics). His privileged position and passion for language enabled him to focus on the historical context of English, the status of the language and the functions in the various regions (Kilickaya 2009:35). Kachru's model comprised of three concentric circles of languages: The Inner Circle, the Outer Circle and the Expanding Circle. Kachru assigned the Inner Circle to the native speakers of English comprising of countries such as the United Kingdom, United States of America, New Zealand, Canada, Australia and Ireland. He estimated the total users of English in the Inner Circle to be 380 million. Kachru argued that because English is their mother tongue, the population in this territory possesses the best language norms and therefore are the language norm producers.

The territory of the Outer Circle, according to Kachru, comprises of countries where, despite English not being a native language, it enjoys wide usage among the populace. English in this territory has been given official recognition by the state and assigned important roles as an official language. Apart from it being used as an official language of communication in various institutions and government offices, English is also used as the main language of instruction in learning institutions. Examples of countries in this circle include Kenya, South Africa, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Philippines, and Uganda. The users of English in these territories were estimated by Kachru to be between 150 million and 300 million. The Expanding Circle comprises of countries where English, despite lacking any official recognition by the state, enjoys increased use as a foreign language mainly for the purpose of enabling communication between people of diverse nationalities. Such countries include Russia, China, Korea, Japan, Indonesia and Egypt. In these countries, English is taught and used as a foreign language. The population using English in this territory is said to be the hardest to tell but it is estimated between 100 million and 1 billion. This territory consist of what Kachru calls the 'norm consumers'. Learning of English in this territory is basically meant to enable its members to interact with the members of the Inner Circle. Kachru's MWE has been criticized as having limitations to reflect the reality of English usage. The critics of the Model have termed it oversimplified and unable to accurately accommodate the rapid growth of English especially the increasing status of English in the Expanding Circle. The critics therefore suggest a modification of the Model to a more dynamic one to represent the actual use of English preferably based on English proficiency in international and regional varieties.

In spite of these insightful criticisms, most scholars concur that the Three-Circle MWE remains one of the most influential models for grouping the varieties of English in the World (Mollin 2006: 41). It is due to this concurrence that we seek to apply the model to the international status of Kiswahili in this paper.

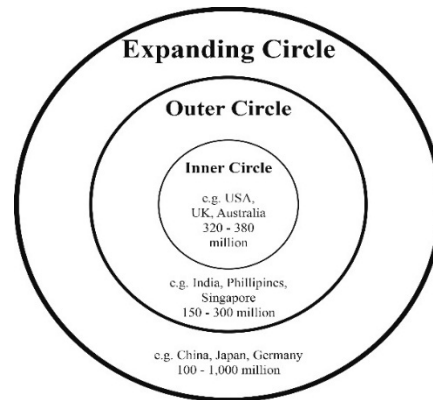


Figure. 1: Braj Kachru's Three Circles Model of World Englishes (Crystal 1997: 54, cited in Mackay 2002: 10).

## Kiswahili's Inner Circle

It can be rightly argued that Kiswahili's Inner Circle is a subject of debate. This is based on debates about the origin of Kiswahili. Chimerah (1998:25) captures this debate well when he says:

It will be noted that even though the identity of the language has been settled (as every reputable linguist and scholar agrees that it belongs to the Bantu cluster) its origin is still a subject of discussion and much dispute as some of its fine qualities, such as its vocabulary, particularly those lexical items that are known to originate from other languages, are perpetually being used to question its Africanness.

Of much value is the identification of Kiswahili as a Bantu language belonging to the broader umbrella of the North Eastern Coastal Bantu. Polome (1967:13) gives even a broader categorization of Kiswahili as a Bantu language:

Swahili is a Bantu language, i.e. it belongs to the vast family of languages spoken South of a line stretching from the slopes of Mount Cameroun to the Northern shores of Lake Victoria, and thence towards the Coast, to Meru on the Eastern slopes of Mount Kenya (and further South, embracing the Southern group (Zulu, Xhosa, Shona etc.). (Cited in Chimerah 1998:26)

Mukuthuria (2006:1) takes a direct approach to the issue of the origin of Kiswahili. He asserts that “Kiswahili is an indigenous African language whose origin is the Coast of Kenya. He adds that “in the 20th Century it was readily accepted in Kenya and Tanzania where it has played key roles of national development.

The above summarized views from some of the scholars who have commented on the discussion about the origin of Kiswahili are aimed at contributing to the wider understanding of the nativity that constitutes its Inner Circle. The overriding understanding is that the nativity of Kiswahili is to be found among the Swahili of the coastal Kenya and Tanzania. Apart from the Swahili, a majority of the speakers of Kiswahili in Kenya and Tanzania speak it mother tongue while the majority as a second language.

Kiswahili is the national as well as the official language of Tanzania. Its development enjoyed political good will from the onset after Tanzania’s independence to the extent that the independence party TANU published the Arusha Declaration document in Kiswahili in 1967. In Kenya, Kiswahili is the national language and the co-official language to English as per the country’s constitution. However, no concrete language policies have been put in place by the Kenyan government to actualize the official status of Kiswahili. Even though Kiswahili is widely used in informal spaces English remains the language of administration and communication in both public and private institutions. On this point, therefore, the status of Kiswahili can be said to be unhomogeneous in its Inner Circle. Chimera (1998:87) captures this well when he says:

Whereas Tanzania has been characterized by a realistic approach to Kiswahili, Kenya has been suffering from what psychologists call ‘the approach-avoidance conflict’; a conflict that slowed the development of the language in this country. Consequently, Kenya is still in the process of getting out of this situation, an unfortunate situation decried by the country’s leading Kiswahili scholars.

The foregoing withstanding, Kiswahili status in its Inner Circle continues to develop. Among the key indicators of this development are discussed. First, Kiswahili is the sole language of instruction in Primary and secondary schools in Tanzania. On the other hand, Kiswahili is a compulsory subject in primary and secondary schools in Kenya. It is also taught in tertiary colleges such as the Teacher Training Colleges. Moreover, Kiswahili is taught as a subject at the University level; both undergraduate and postgraduate in the majority of the public and private universities. Nonetheless, the Inner Circle of Kiswahili has made strides in establishing Institutes of Kiswahili research and other organizations such as *Taasisi Ya Uchunguzi wa Kiswahili (TUKI)* in Zanzibar and the Institute of Kiswahili Research at the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania. There is also Institute of Kiswahili and Foreign Languages in Zanzibar and the Research Institute of Swahili Studies of Eastern Africa at the National Museum of Kenya.

Additionally, there are organizations such as *Baraza la Kiswahili Zanzibar* (BAKIZA), *Baraza la Kiswahili Tanzania* (BAKITA), and *Chama cha Kiswahili cha Taifa* (CHAKITA), which promote the research and development of the language in its Inner Circle. Besides, more advances have been made in the writing and publishing of Kiswahili works in genres such as poetry, plays, short stories and novel published by various publishing companies in the two countries that constitute Kiswahili's Inner Circle. Other materials published include Kiswahili dictionaries (*Kamusi*) and journals such as *MULIKA*, *KISWAHILI* and *KIOO CHA LUGHA*. Also published are educational instructional materials at all levels of education.

Furthermore, Kiswahili is widely used in media and information technology in its Inner Circle. There is a number of radio stations both in Kenya and Tanzania dedicated to broadcasting purely in Kiswahili. In Kenya, the media stations include *Kenya Broadcasting Station* (KBC), *Radio Citizen*, *Radio Maisha* and *Radio Jambo*. In Tanzania, they include *Redio Tanzania* and *Sauti ya Zanzibar*. It is worth noting that these radio stations not only broadcast in Kiswahili but also, as noted by Chimerah (1998:13), produce "quite a number of quality radio programmes that have turned out to be a tremendous boon in the light of the country's meager resources". Such programmes include *Lugha Yetu*, *Ukumbi wa Kiswahili* and *Bahari ya Lugha*. These radio programmes in Kiswahili contribute a great deal to the widening of the scope of Kiswahili by discussing language issues, emerging issues as well as curricula content at all levels of education. Various television stations in the Kiswahili's Inner Circle also air programmes at various designated times. A good example is *Dau la Elimu* on Kenya Television Network (KTN). Apart from radio and television stations, a number of Kiswahili newspapers do exist. Examples are *Taifa Leo* in Kenya and *Mwananchi* in Tanzania. While some of the radio stations listed are owned and funded by their governments, others are privately owned. This shows the extent to which private institutions are being driven by enthusiastic citizens to offer information and entertainment in Kiswahili. These radio stations attract a large audience despite stiff competition from those that broadcast in English and vernacular.

Another notable contributor to the advancement of Kiswahili in its Inner Circle is music and entertainment. For the last six decades, Musicians in Kiswahili's Inner Circle have produced music of different genres in Kiswahili. Some of the most renowned musicians singing in Kiswahili from Tanzania are Mbarak Mwinshehe Mwaruka of *Morogoro Jazz* and Salum Abdalla of *Cuban Marimba Jazz*. From Kenya, Daudi Kabaka, David Amunga, Fadhili William Mdawida and Paul Mwachupa are remembered as being the first people to compose and produce memorable songs in Kiswahili. Over the years, many other musicians have produced songs ranging from *Zilizopendwa*, rap, gospel, R & B to *Taarab*. Today, *Bongo* genre has a huge following in the entire East Africa and many parts of the world.

The foregoing analysis shows that the Inner Circle of Kiswahili is fairly doing well to promote the status of Kiswahili. Many people continue to embrace this language. Mulokozi (2004:47) listed the number of Kiswahili speaking people in Kenya to be 20 million and 32 million in Tanzania.

Today, we estimate that this number has doubled and surpassed the 100 million mark in total owing to the promotion of the status of Kiswahili in its Inner Circle, and the enthusiasm with which it has been received in Kenya and to a large extent in Tanzania.

## **Kiswahili's Outer Circle**

Kiswahili' Outer Circle would be expected to constitute countries where, despite Kiswahili not being a native language, enjoys wide usage among the masses. Kiswahili in this territory ought to have been given official recognition by the state and assigned important roles as an official language or national language. Apart from it being used as an official language of communication in various institutions and government offices, Kiswahili ought to be used as the main language of instruction in learning institutions. At this point, one would want to pose and ask: Does such a territory exist? Has Kiswahili been assigned such important responsibilities in any other country outside its Inner Circle? These are the questions that confront any objective linguist who attempts to apply Braj Kachru's Model of World Englishes to the study of Kiswahili as an international language.

As to whether Kiswahili enjoys wide usage among the masses in territories outside its Inner Circle, the answer is obviously "Yes". Kiswahili is widely spoken in other countries of Eastern Africa including Uganda, Rwanda, and Burundi. It is also spoken in Southeastern and Central Africa in countries such as Mozambique, South Africa and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Commenting on the spread of Kiswahili in countries of Central Africa, Moshi (2006:170,171) says:

There is a historical evidence of the power of Kiswahili as demonstrated by its ability to penetrate areas like the Francophone countries of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Rwanda and Burundi, where French was introduced through the Belgians..." [...]. By the time the DRC achieved its independence, a substantial number of Congolese spoke Kiswahili with reputable proficiency. Kiswahili has since remained one of the most important languages in the DRC in addition to Lingala and Kikongo. Of the three, Kiswahili has been the most widespread especially in the economically rich parts, particularly the Shaba province (formerly Katanga).

Moshi attributes the further spread of Kiswahili to the countries in Africa south of the Sahara to misplaced communities that found refuge in Kenya and Tanzania. He names communities like Somalis, Rwandans, Burundians, and the Congolese. These groups had to learn Kiswahili as a lingua franca in the new communities, which they eventually took with them back to their homelands.

Although English and Luganda remain the official and National languages of Uganda respectively, Kiswahili is also widely spoken by the masses in Uganda despite the negative attitudes and resentment it faced from the local languages. The language is said to have slowly spread in Uganda since 1985 thanks to the National Resistance Army (NRA). During this time, Yoweri Museveni, and the entire leadership of NRM declared Kiswahili as the language of communication among the armed forces. Echoing this, Mulokozi (2004:9) has this to say:

In Uganda, the use of Kiswahili has also expanded gradually, in spite of resistance from hard-core Baganda traditionalists. More Ugandans are now interested in learning Kiswahili, and the government has, from next year, made Kiswahili a compulsory subject in primary schools. If this policy survives after Museveni, it may in future produce a new generation of Kiswahili speaking Ugandans (including Bugandans) who will probably not be hostile to the language.

Mulokozi (2004:7) estimated the number of people who understand and use Kiswahili outside in countries that we have labeled as Outer Circle as follows:

DRC Congo: 15,000,000

Burundi: 2,000,000

Rwanda: 2,000,000

Uganda: 8,000,000

Total = 27,000,000

Twelve years later, our estimation is that these numbers have doubled to about 54 million. This estimate is supported by an online programme of the African Studies Institute at the University of Georgia *Kiswahili Kwa Kompyuta – KIKO* (Kiswahili on the Computer) which puts users of Kiswahili in Central and Eastern Africa to 50 million. Kiswahili is also spoken in fairly substantial numbers in Zaire, Mozambique, Malawi, Comoros, Madagascar, and Southern Somalia. The language is also spoken as a mother tongue as well as a second language in the Island of Sokotra, off the Horn of Africa. Kiswahili speakers are also said to be found in Oman, particularly the descendants of migrants from Eastern Africa who went back due to various political, social and economic reasons such as the Zanzibar Revolution of 1964, search for their ancestry, and the collapse of clove industry.

It is out of this use of Kiswahili as a language of wider communication by the masses that several countries and regional organizations have recognized Kiswahili and given it a special role. Uganda and Rwanda have made Kiswahili one of their national languages hence encouraging its development.



The African Union has already adopted Kiswahili as one of its official languages. Equally, the East Africa Legislative Assembly in 2015 passed a resolution to make Kiswahili its co-official language with English. If this resolution is passed by the council of heads of state of the member countries of East African Community, Kiswahili will be used in all sittings, discussions and meetings of the East Africa Community. This official recognition of Kiswahili in its Outer Circle is seen as crucial for its status as an international language.

Although Kiswahili is not used as the main language of instruction in education in any of the countries that constitute its Outer Circle, deliberate efforts have been made by all the governments of the countries in this territory as well as individual learning institutions to promote the status of Kiswahili through teaching. The government of Uganda, for instance, declared Kiswahili a compulsory subject in primary and secondary education in 2002. Apart from Uganda, Rwanda has also adopted Kiswahili as a subject in primary schools. Many teachers are drawn from Kiswahili's Inner Circle to teach in Rwanda as well as Uganda. Whitely (1969) observes that in Congo, Kiswahili is used as the primary school instructional medium only in the deep rural areas in Shaba province, East and Northeastern Congo. (Cited in Chimerah, 1998:4). Universities and colleges in Kiswahili's Outer Circle also teach Kiswahili. Examples are Makerere University, Kakoba TTC, Islamic University, and Kyambogo University, all in Uganda (Mukuthuria 2006:158).

From the analysis of the Kiswahili's Outer Circle, we have demonstrated that Kiswahili is indeed a lingua franca in larger parts of Africa south of the Sahara including Eastern, Southeastern as well as Central Africa, hence uniting over 54 million people. We have also shown that Kiswahili has been recognized by the governments of two of the countries and given special status the as national language. Two major regional organizations i.e. the African Union and the East African Community have also recognized Kiswahili's ability as an international language. Looking at this status critically, one would argue that the level of recognition of Kiswahili as an international language especially by the individual countries is still low. Lack of any territory in the Outer Circle where Kiswahili has been given special role as the language of instruction in learning institutions is doing more harm than good to Kiswahili.

### **Kiswahili's Expanding Circle**

The population using Kiswahili in its Expanding Circle is hardest to tell. No comprehensive research has been carried out to establish this. However, it is known that Kiswahili is offered as a foreign language subject in many universities across Europe, America and the Middle East.

The subject is said to be a popular choice for the undergraduates in African Studies and Oriental who are required to study a foreign language for their graduation requirement. Chimerah (1994:4) estimates that over 100 universities in the U.S.A., including the most prestigious ones, offer Kiswahili as a subject of study.

Examples of these universities are Harvard, Yale, Cornell, Ohio, Illinois Urbana-Champaign, Michigan state University, Florida at Gainesville, St. Lawrence, Stanford, Texas at Austine, and Wisconsin at Madison. The subject is also taught in Britain in Universities such as University of London, York University and the famous School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS).

Other universities teaching Kiswahili in the Expanding Circle are found in countries such as Germany, Russia, Belgium, France, Switzerland, Norway, China, Japan, Sweden, South Korea and Finland. Outside Eastern and Central Africa, a number of Universities in the North, South and West Africa offer Kiswahili as a subject of study. The universities are found in Sudan, Libya, Ghana, South Africa and Nigeria among others. These universities have developed extensive study programmes in partnership with other universities in Kiswahili's Inner Circle where they send their students for intensive studies aimed at increasing their language proficiencies. The Inner Circle also provides the universities with most of their instructors. There also exist many predominantly African-American schools in the U.S.A. that teach Kiswahili as a second language to black students. Although it is not possible to give an estimate of the number of students learning Kiswahili in the Expanding Circle, it is safe to assume that Kiswahili is the most widely taught African language in the world. (Mulokozi 2004:10)

Another important factor driving the international status of Kiswahili in the Expanding Circle is mass media. Kiswahili features in some of the world radio stations such as the *BBC radio* and *BBC Television*, *Voice of America*, *Radio Deutsche Welle* (Germany), *Radio Moscow International*, *Radio China International*, *Radio South Africa*, *Radio Cairo* (Egypt) and *Channel Africa* (South Africa). Apart from relaying information and informative programmes, the radio and Television stations offer entertainment in form of Kiswahili hip-hop music which is increasingly loved by both locals and foreigners. The activities and programmes by foreign universities, Radio and TV stations make Kiswahili's Expanding Circle to appear more organized, deliberate, systematic and purposeful.

## **Concluding Remarks**

We have demonstrated in this paper that the spread of Kiswahili in Africa and beyond fits moderately well in Braj Kachru's Model of World Englishes which comprises of the Inner Circle, the Outer Circle and the Expanding Circle. The Outer Circle of Kiswahili appears to be more organized in its approach to Kiswahili as an international language. The activities that catalyze and drive the spread of Kiswahili in this territory are largely educational. The spread of the language is demand driven especially among the business community as international business look to expand into the African continent. Many universities offer the language to undergraduate students as a foreign language. This mainly aims to prepare researchers for field work in Eastern Africa. Kiswahili is therefore an important medium of communication between the members of its Outer Circle and the Inner Circle. Similarly, the countries in Kiswahili's Inner Circle, particularly Tanzania, have registered a lot of strides in promoting the status of Kiswahili as an international language by making it a practical official language in addition to it being a national language.

A larger part of Kenya's recognition of the status of Kiswahili remains largely on paper. The government is yet to make serious attempts towards promoting its official status even after Kenya's 2010 constitution recognized it as a co-official language with English. Kiswahili's official status thus remains at policy level. Having observed that, we recognize that Kiswahili is the lingua franca of the Kenyan communities hence spoken by a wide section of its populace.

We consider the Expanding Circle of Kiswahili to be less coordinated than its Inner Circle and the Outer Circle. There is less official status accorded to Kiswahili other than being taught as a subject in a number of schools. The language is thus a civilian driven lingua franca.

Although the status of Kiswahili as an international language remains average, it continues to grow. Kiswahili is the most developed African language and a lingua franca of the Eastern and Central Africa. The recognition of the language as one of the working languages of African Union as well as the East African Legislative Assembly is a testimony to its international ability. The economic and social demand of the language is increasing day by day.

The government and citizens of Kiswahili's Inner Circle have a role to play in ensuring that the language continues to expand. Kenya in particular needs to make deliberate efforts and plans to ensure that Kiswahili is accorded official roles in line with its constitution in order to be at par with Tanzania. These two countries of the Inner Circle should take a leading role in ensuring that Kiswahili spreads to the Outer Circle in a much more coordinated way while continuing to provide for language instructors and any other support to the educational institutions in the Expanding Circle. Moreover, owing to the growing status of Kiswahili as an international language, we emphasize the need for Kiswahili promoters, especially in the Inner Circle, to embrace Information Communication Technology in their activities to ensure that the language is accessible to all those who have interest in learning it across the world. This will position it to compete favourably with other globalized languages of the world.

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