
Research Article

(Re)Positioning the Swahili Language in Cultural Diplomacy Under the Capacity of African Ubuntu In Tanzania

Meinrad Haule Lembuka

Academician, The Open University of Tanzania P.O Box 23409 – Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

Abstract:

The article used the documentary analysis method guided by the Ujamaa Intersections Model in (re) positioning the Kiswahili language in cultural diplomacy through the Ubuntu Panorama. Ujamaa is among the core values of African Ubuntu that was integrated into Tanzania's policy framework in the 1960s under the influence of the Kiswahili language. Kiswahili is among the oldest and major lingua franca in African history, despite being undocumented in Ubuntu capacity it has a direct linkage with African Ubuntu throughout the history of the continent. Tracing back, Ubuntu is an African philosophy from pre-colonial times that guides all the major aspects of the continent including social economic, cultural, and political. Dr. Julius Kambarage Nyerere (Ubuntu Champion 2014) (who preferred to be called *Mwalimu* meaning a teacher) embraced Ubuntu philosophy through the Kiswahili language as a soft tool to spread Ujamaa into cultural Diplomacy in Africa and beyond. Dr. Nyerere engaged existing Ujamaa intersections in the community to develop, maintain, and promote the Kiswahili language ultimately influencing the international platforms. In the African Ubuntu capacity, a community is made up of various Ujamaa Intersections comprising primary family, extended families, neighborhood, local leadership, ecology, spirituality, and wider attributions, etc. Over time, Kiswahili became a tool for the decolonization, unification of Africa, and related cultural diplomacy. To mention a few, Kiswahili was the first African language in the United Nations and later it secured various positions as a working language in international organizations including EAC, SADC, COMESA, AU, UNESCO, etc. Moreover, Kiswahili entails more than 200 million speakers Worldwide, several countries have established Swahili radio stations including Germany, Japan, the UK, China, and the USA, etc. To date, Kiswahili continues to render opportunities toward transmission, acceptance, inclusion, hospitality, humanism, peace, equality, love, and coexistence of cultural diversity relevant to nurture cultural diplomacy. It represents African Ubuntu in cultural diplomacy with the relevant capacity to speak about Africa's past, present, and sustainable future in international relations.

Keywords: African Ubuntu, Bantu language, Cultural diplomacy, Kiswahili language, Language soft power, Lingua franca, Ubuntuism, Ujamaa of Tanzania, Ujamaa Intersections Model

1. Introduction

Tanzania formerly known as Tanganyika is a country located in East Africa within the African Great Lakes region, and according to the 2022 national census; Tanzania has a population of nearly 62 million, making it the most populous country located entirely south of the equator (United Republic of Tanzania, 2022). Tanzania, officially the United Republic of Tanzania came into being after the union of two countries named Tanganyika and Zanzibar on 24th April 1964 under the influence of African Ubuntu pillars. The first president of Tanzania the late Dr. Julius Kambarage Nyerere (Ubuntu Doctorate Award 2014) famously known by the Swahili name *Mwalimu meaning teacher* (Nyerere, 2011 & Lembuka, 2023), founded the union of two countries based on historical relations, ecology, trade patterns, cultural values, lingua-franca, bloody, etc. (Nyerere, 2011).

In 2014, Dr. Nyerere was awarded Ubuntu Honour (South African Government News Agency, 2014) and he joins other citizens of the world, who received the honor for their living evidence of the values of Ubuntu, such as Dr. Nelson Mandela (2006), Dr. Kenneth Kaunda (2007), Fidel Castro (2008), Dr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali (2009), Winnie Madikizela-Mandela (2011) and Miriam Makeba (2013), etc. (South African Government News Agency, 2014). Dr. Nyerere has been identified by a select committee of eminent persons as one such citizen of the world who, during his lifetime, lived a humble life prioritizing improving the quality of life of citizens of Africa and outside (Matshediso 2014). Also, Dr. Nyerere dedicated his life to decolonization and he invested in the Kiswahili as among tools in the liberation movement, education reforms, policy reform, regional integration, and cultural diplomacy (Matshediso, 2014 & Lembuka, 2024a).

The objective of the study is to assess the capacity implications of Kiswahili in cultural diplomacy through the Ubuntu lens. To enrich the study, the documentary analysis method together with the Ujamaa Intersections Model to analyze the (re)positioning of the Swahili language in the historical practice of cultural diplomacy of Tanzania from post-colonial times to the present. The Ujamaa Intersections Model is made up of various interdependent community sections including family, extended families, neighborhood, ecology, local leadership, spirituality, wider attributes, etc. The Ujamaa simply means brotherhood and sisterhood which resembles

Ubuntu philosophy toward the collective and holistic realization of humanity in all aspects of human societies including language (Buhori et al, 2024).

The Ujamaa Intersections Model is among the Ubuntu models that represent the functioning and interaction of African societies in spheres of life including culture from pre-colonial times and it was thought to be relevant in repositioning the Kiswahili in cultural diplomacy (Sambala et al, 2019). Like other Ubuntu models, the Ujamaa intersections Model is guided by cultural values that are similarly found across African societies including cooperation, solidarity, togetherness, peace, love, care, sympathy, communality, *Ujamaa*, and human dignity, etc. (Mugumbate et al, 2013). These values bonded the African societies along the East African coast of the Indian Ocean and rendered a supportive ecology of growth and spread of the Kiswahili for centuries.

In addition, Ubuntu societies represent all pre-colonial African societies that were connected with a similar vision of African philosophy of collective and holistic approach through communality, harmony, shared resources, connected by barter trade, shared cultural values, and sustainable reciprocal relationship bounded by similar lingua franca (Mulokozi, 2004). The early contact between Arabs, Persians, and Bantu-speaking people on the East African coast influenced the development of the Ubuntu sub-culture known as Swahili culture (Okombo et al, 2017). Their interactions are well documented in the Periplus of Eritrean Sea which is said to be the earliest known document recounting the prehistory of the East African coast (Okombo et al, 2017), the mixture of Ubuntu culture and Arab culture influenced the development of Kiswahili in East Africa from 07th century that continued to expand from the coastal to the interior of East Africa with an expansion of barter trade activities (Mulokozi, 2004).

The expansion of the Kiswahili attracted the growth of these communities coinciding with their participation in trade and commerce across the Indian Ocean (Mukuthuria, 2006). Merchants and traders from India, China, Persia, and Arabia traveled around the Indian Ocean using the monsoon winds to push them seasonally from one coast to another (Mazrui, 1988). Doubtless, the essence of the Kiswahili on cultural diplomacy can be traced from the 07th century as part of Ubuntu culture in hosting and welcoming newcomers/foreigners with a human dignity approach (Mulokozi, 2004).

The fact that most continents have their philosophy and Ubuntu guides Africa's all aspects of life including social, cultural, political, and economic, etc. The emergence of Bantu culture in central and eastern Africa is based on the Ubuntu pillars and justifies how the Kiswahili is a product of Bantu culture, and then engaging the Ubuntu framework was inevitable. Ubuntu framework can reflect the historical influence of the Kiswahili in cultural diplomacy in Africa and beyond, the Swahili name for the language itself is Kiswahili (Mazrui, 1998 & Petzell, 2012).

Kiswahili remained be Ubuntu language with an inclusive capacity that attracted other cultures and in the 1950s the late Dr. Julius Nyerere promoted Kiswahili as a diplomatic tool in advocating for peaceful independence from British colonial rule (Nyerere, 2011). Realization of the process could be noted on 07th July 1954 when Nyerere declared Kiswahili as a soft tool for the decolonization of Africa and he further managed to use Kiswahili as a lingua franca to unite more than 120 ethnic tribes. Tanganyika was overwhelmed by 120 vernacular languages in the huge country but Nyerere succeeded in positioning Kiswahili as the major language in pre-colonial Tanganyika toward the independence struggle (Nyerere, 2011).

In a similar path, other East African countries such as Kenya adopted Kiswahili as a soft tool in their independence struggle, and in the 1960s Kiswahili became a soft tool for decolonization in Africa (Mazrui & Mazrui 1988). Dr. Nyerere continued to envision Kiswahili as a relevant soft tool for the decolonization of Africa and spreading diplomatic relations in the continent and beyond, under his leadership, 1967 Kiswahili was declared an official language in Tanzania in 1967 following the nation's embracement of Ubuntu philosophy under the *Ujamaa* National policy (Nyerere, 2011). The Arusha Declaration of 1967 made Kiswahili as national language of Tanzania and it became a necessary soft tool in liberating Africa since the country hosted African liberation movement operations and respective training camps. As a lingua-franca that was used as a coding language by African liberation fighters and related operations, in the long run, it became a historical and principally a language of liberating some of the African countries including the Republic of South Africa, Namibia, Mozambique, Zambia, etc. (Nyerere, 2011). It played a significant role during the liberation struggles as it was used as a unifying language for military and diplomatic activities including ANC Umkotho We Sizwe and FLERIMO, etc. (African Union, 2022).

Apart from playing a great unifying role during the independence struggle Tanzania remained untouched by the plague of coup de tat, racism, and tribalism the fact that Kiswahili prevented the country from tribal conflicts and socio-economic chaos that plagued much of post-colonial African countries (Mwinyikombo, 2021). Taking practical evidence on the soft power of Kiswahili in uniting Tanganyika and Zanzibar in 1964 where Kiswahili was among the factors for this historical Ubuntu union in Africa (Nyerere, 2011). A similar factor influenced the establishment of East African communities in 1967 when Kenya Uganda and Tanzania joined hands in socio-economic regional integration (Lembuka, 2024a).

At the end of the Cold War at the end of the 1980s, the roles of the Kiswahili moved to a new paradigm of cultural diplomacy rather than a decolonization tool. 1990s new world order invested in soft tools and mechanisms of spreading the gospel of globalization for the best interests of neo-imperialism (Amidu, 1995). Gradually global strategies continued their new persuasion techniques to accomplish imperialism and globalization process through a language approach and to address this challenge African Union has endorsed various African languages as the official language of the organization. On the other hand, the East African Community has endorsed Kiswahili as an official language of the organization that entails various member states including Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, South Sudan, Congo DRC, Rwanda, Burundi, etc. Some East African countries officialised Kiswahili as their national language while others have made it an official language of communication (Yahya-Othman, 2020).

African socio-economic and political conflicts in the 1990s affected the East African Great Lakes region where ethnic and civil wars toned the region into a hostile environment for human survival (Yahya-Othman, 2020). As a relevant approach to settling ethnic conflict and tribalism, Kiswahili became a soft tool to settle disputes among the conflicting parts in Rwanda post-genocide and Burundi in 1994 and beyond (Fuoere, 2015). The significant expansion of Kiswahili amid the impacts of globalization in the year 2000s was experienced in the international relations platform when The Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) adopted Kiswahili as its fourth official language and some UN agencies adopted the use of Kiswahili in the organizations such as UNESCO, and diplomacy in the World as a result of new international undertaking strategies including language soft tool approach where the current focus became solicitation rather than coercion (UNESCO, 2022).

Looking back into history and present, World Kiswahili Day is celebrated every year on 07th July by UN agencies and this can be traced back to the 1950s when the United Nations established the Kiswahili unit of United Nations Radio, and today Kiswahili is the only African language within the Directorate of the Global Communications at the United Nations (UNESCO, 2022). The United Nations General Assembly, through its resolution 71/328 of 11 September 2017, on multilingualism, welcomed the implementation of a day dedicated to each of its official languages including Kiswahili to inform and raise awareness of their history, culture, and use (UNESCO, 2022).

In that regard, the 41st session of the General Conference of UNESCO adopted resolution 41 C/61 that recognized the role the Kiswahili plays in promoting cultural diversity, creating awareness, and fostering dialogue among civilizations and noted the need to promote multilingualism as a core value of the United Nations and an essential factor in harmonious communication between peoples, which promotes Ubuntu values through unity in diversity and international understanding, tolerance, conflict resolution, democracy, realization of human rights and cultural diplomacy (UNESCO, 2022). The resolution proclaimed the 07th July of each year as World Kiswahili Day and therefore Kiswahili is the first African language to be recognized in such a manner by the UN and respective agencies (UNESCO, 2022).

Over centuries the evolution and manifestation of the Kiswahili embraced Ubuntu values that represented African history, ecology, and cultural values in facilitated its expansion. This Ubuntu language has emerged as a common form of communication in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, and beyond (UNESCO, 2022). Kiswahili encompasses more than a dozen main dialects that represent African Ubuntu in cultural diplomacy with the capacity to speak the past, present, and sustainable future of Africa in international relations (Mwinyikombo, 2021). To date, with more than 200 million speakers Worldwide (UNESCO & AU, 2022), Kiswahili remains one of the most widely used African languages in regional, international relations and related cultural diplomacy. It is one of three official languages of the East African Community (EAC), one of the working languages of the African Union and of the Southern African Development Community and it's used as a working language in various UN agencies relevant to promoting cultural diplomacy in the international platform (African Union, 2022).

2. Background of The Study

Kiswahili is a lingua franca that originated from Ubuntu communities founded along the coast of East Africa particularly Tanzania (formerly known as Tanganyika) and its evolution was boosted by early contact with foreigners who came for trading activities in East Africa (Britannica, 2024). There are about 15 main Swahili dialects, as well as several pidgin forms in use but three dialects have covered a large part of East African societies namely kiUnguja (or Kiunguja), spoken in Zanzibar and the mainland areas of Tanzania; kiMvita (or Kimvita), spoken in Mombasa and other areas of Kenya; and kiAmu (or Kiamu), spoken on the island of Lamu and adjoining parts of the coast. Standard Swahili is based on the kiUnguja dialect of the Tanzania Isles (Britannica, 2024). The mixture of foreigners (Persians, Arabs, and Asians) and Bantu-speaking people from the East African coast triggered the emergence and expansion of the Kiswahili in the interior parts of East and center Africa (Amidu, 1995). People who speak Swahili as their sole mother tongue are usually referred to as *Waswahili*, but this name refers to their language only and does not denote any particular ethnic or tribal unit (Britannica, 2024). Like other African Ubuntu societies, the Bantu-speaking people of Tanzania accommodated and hosted foreigners under the values of human dignity, cooperation, equality, integrity, hospitality, Ujamaa, etc. According to Van Bredda (2015).

Ubuntu represents a collective and holistic approach to African ways of life from pre-colonial times where communities were guided by common values including solidarity, cooperation, human dignity, *Ujamaa*, equality, cultural diversity, inclusion, communality, hospitality, care, compassion, sympathy, unity, etc. (Van Breda, 2015). The expansion of the Kiswahili was influenced by the embracement of Ubuntu values among the Eastern and center African societies, these values range from micro, mezzo, and macro and rendered conducive ecology for the growth of both Swahili culture and Kiswahili (Choge, 2012).

Revisiting the evolution of expansion of the Kiswahili proved its position as an inclusive and holistic soft power relevant for building cultural diplomacy with the foreign World (Amidu, 1995 emphasize is mine). The evidence of these interactions is well documented in the Periplus of Eritrean Sea which is said to be the earliest known document recounting the prehistory of the East African coast (Okombo et al, 2017). Rise from a coastal language to a regional lingua franca is a testament to its adaptability and its ability to transcend geographical boundaries in pre and post-colonial domination (Britannica, & Fluency, 2024). To complement the argument on cultural diplomacy, the language's adaptability is reflected in its ability to absorb and incorporate linguistic elements from diverse cultures, making it accessible and comprehensible to people from different linguistic backgrounds (Mazrui, 1998).

Over centuries, Swahili's influence expanded beyond the coast, permeating the interior regions of East Africa. Today, Swahili is

not merely a language; it is a cultural bridge that connects people from different backgrounds and regions. It holds a unique place in the hearts of East Africans, serving as a symbol of unity and shared heritage (Legere, 2007). The fact that the foundation of the Kiswahili is based on a holistic, inclusive, and collective approach of Ubuntu then its role as a lingua franca was not limited to trading activities only but rather spread into other social, cultural, and political spheres. It continued to be a vital soft tool of communication in various contexts including governance among local rulers, religious activities, traditional rituals, customary laws, interpersonal relations, settling disputes, transforming indigenous knowledge and practices, etc.

Understanding the position of the Kiswahili in cultural diplomacy can't overlook the vital roles of the first president of Tanzania the late Dr. Julius Kambarage Nyerere famous known as *Mwalimu* or teacher who advocated for the development of the Kiswahili as a soft power for peaceful independence struggle and the realization of Ubuntu values through *Ujamaa* policy (Nyerere, 2011). Dr. Nyerere used *Ujamaa* policy under the Arusha Declaration of 1967 toward the expansion of *Kiswahili*. Dr. Nyerere's contribution and commitment to the development and recognition of Kiswahili enabled the language to overcome critical years when and where the political climate was much in favor of consolidating the position of English in Tanzania (Legere, 2007). While Dr. Nyerere has shown to have been a pragmatist who understood well the linguistic situation in Tanzania it is indicated also that at times Dr. Nyerere had some biased attitude toward colonial languages and thus practically used Kiswahili as a decolonization and Africanization soft tool (Legere, 2007).

In many ways, Swahili with its inclusive nature has become emblematic of the African continent compared to other African languages as a result it's taught in learning institutions and some universities around the world (Lisanza, 2021). Kiswahili's necessary quality of soft power has continued to gain its recognition in international affairs i.e. an official working language of the African Union, and recently years embraced by some members of the diaspora as a way to connect with the continent's histories and cultures, Swahili is a global language, its most far-reaching dialect is Standard Swahili (Robinson, 2024). The conventional historical narrative depicts Standard Swahili as a constructed language that was developed over the 20th century by the efforts of German, British, and postcolonial governments (Robinson, 2024). However, by pushing the timeline back into the mid-19th century, one begins to see the soft power of the Kiswahili within a precolonial history and present context (Robinson, 2024).

Penetration of Kiswahili as a cross-cutting soft tool depends on its capacity to influence both local and foreign languages in the socio-economic and political agenda in Tanzania and outside (Lisanza, 2021). With a practical example of the East African regional integration of 1967 that took place at the dawn of post-colonial Africa and its revival in 2000 which was predisposed by the Kiswahili (Fluency, 2024). One can envisage the position of the Kiswahili through a critical consideration of the East African region's overflowing cultural diversity, both in terms of its landscapes and the array of cultures and languages (Fluency, 2024). This diversity without the soft power of the Kiswahili couldn't be easy to realize East African regional integration and related diplomatic activities within the region. Kiswahili overcame racism, tribalism, and related colonial legacy that some African languages are challenged to address in post-colonial Africa (Lembuka, 2024b).

Language and diplomacy are inseparable thus Kiswahili has continued to be among the strong soft diplomatic tools that play a pivotal role in addressing regional issues, fostering peace, and promoting socio-economic and political development in Africa and outside (Fluency, 2024). The argument is supported by Fluency (2024) who cements that effective diplomacy requires a common language like the Kiswahili that transcends borders and bridges the gaps between cultures. Kiswahili, a language with deep roots in the heart of East Africa, has emerged as a powerful tool for diplomacy, serving as a unifying linguistic force in the region (Fluency, 2024).

Globally, Kiswahili continues to gain popularity and recognition as an international language, and for the past decade, Tanzania has significantly achieved its strategic goals in supporting and realizing the global diplomacy agenda through Kiswahili (Lembuka, 2024a). Based on African Ubuntu values such as solidarity, cooperation, cultural diversity, human dignity, and harmony, Kiswahili offers diplomats a powerful tool for effective communication and negotiation among nations in addressing international issues (AU, 2022). Moreover, currently, there is a movement searching for a language that will represent Africa as a soft power in the global agendas where Kiswahili has continued to attract many views to oblige as a symbol and power of Africa due to its capacity to bind various African societies based on the shared history and cultural ties under the influence of Ubuntu philosophy (Lisanza, 2021).

3. Methodology

The article used the documentary analysis method guided by the *Ujamaa* Intersections Model to analyze the position of the Swahili language in cultural diplomacy through the Ubuntu lens. The documentary method served an important function in the identification, analysis, and presentation of the findings of the study through various activities including scanning the literature, analyzing secondary data, and creating a reference list so that all documents are organized and easily accessible to all team members (Kothari, 2004 & Rwegoshora, 2014).

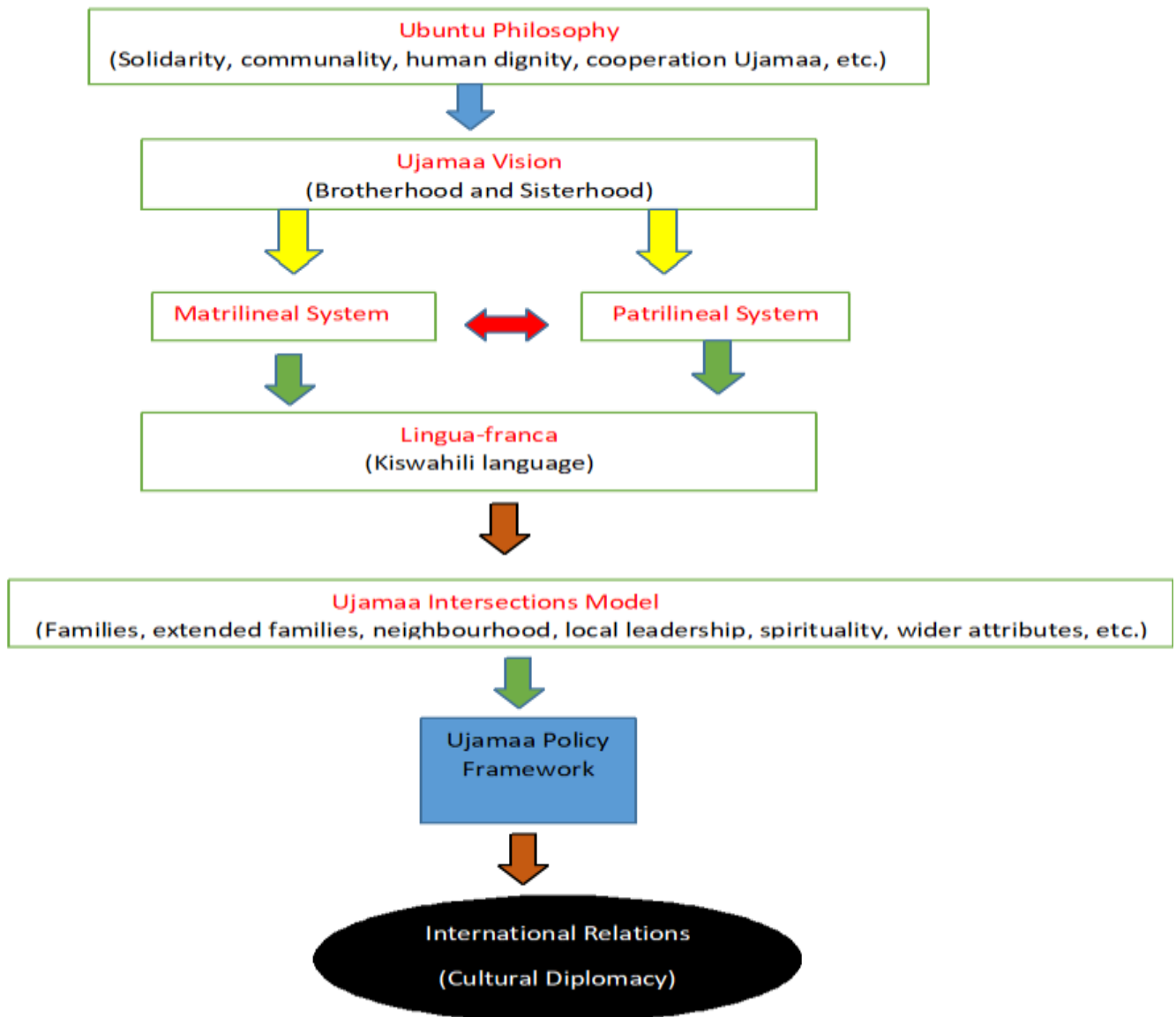
Pre-identification of online search material concerning the Kiswahili in international relations and other Ubuntu references toward cultural diplomacy was an inclusion criterion followed by reviewing or evaluating documents. Like other analytical methods in qualitative research, document analysis requirements, and collected data were examined and interpreted to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge of the capacity of Kiswahili as a soft toll of cultural diplomacy (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

In post-colonial Africa, decolonization became an endless process, Tanzania like other African states envisioned restoring

Meinrad Haule Lembuka / (Re)Positioning the Swahili Language in Cultural Diplomacy Under the Capacity of African Ubuntu In Tanzania

indigenous approaches in socio-economic and political agendas relevant to the African context to replace colonial legacy. In 1967 through the Arusha Declaration Tanzania under the influence of the late leadership of the first president of the late Dr. Julius Kambarage Nyerere (Ubuntu Champion 2014) opted to embrace Ubuntu philosophy through Ujamaa values and the Ujamaa Intersections Model became a guiding tool for all national agendas in the country. In a similar aspect, this review thought the *Ujamaa* Intersections model could be more relevant in analyzing the (re)positioning of Kiswahili in cultural diplomacy.

3.1 The Ujamaa Intersections Model



Source: Adopted from Lembuka, (2024a)

The capacity of the Kiswahili in cultural diplomacy is linked to the endorsement of the Arusha Declaration of 1967 which entails African Ubuntu values and approaches. The vision of the Arusha Declaration took deliberate consideration of Kiswahili as a decolonization soft tool and in the process, Kiswahili manifested its capacity in the regional and international relations beyond Africa. The direct link of Kiswahili in Tanzania's cultural diplomacy could be traced in its capacity to influence regional and international relations. Primary linguistic roles of Ujamaa intersections at the micro level such as families, extended family members, neighborhood, ecology, spirituality, and wider community attributes fast-tracked the growth of the Kiswahili. The Ujamaa intersections were responsible for linguistic roles in the Kiswahili including language custodianship, ensuring Kiswahili is a mother language and its inheritance from one generation to another, etc. For example, Ujamaa intersections played vital roles in ensuring the components of language development are stable in children, and this [pivotal role targeted the mental, social, and linguistic development of children, especially at an early age](#) (Saud, 2021).

The Ujamaa intersections expanded their linguistic roles to an intermediate level or mezzo level that linked both micro, mezzo, and macro levels where ethnic groups, clans, local rulers, spiritual leaders, and traditional institutions that were a vital milestone in

attaining the nation's cultural diplomacy agendas (Nyerere, 1967 & Fought, 2011). About Tanzania's richness of ethnic tribes that count to more than 120 different ethnic tribes and post-colonial Tanzania Kiswahili became a tool of solidarity and cooperation in both urban and rural Tanzania. Local chiefs and clan leaders used the Kiswahili to address the challenge of ethnic diversity through the restoration of a sense of social cohesiveness, community connectedness, and inclusiveness, or a sense of belonging. In consultation with community elders, local rulers, chiefs and clan heads used Kiswahili to influence socio-economic and political agendas in the community (Lembuka, 2024a).

Macro level, the implications between the Ujamaa intersections and Kiswahili resulted in strong historical ties, cultural values, and ecology. History, culture, and ecology are among the pillars of African Ubuntu (Mugumbate et al, 2019). Over time, the realization of Ubuntu values was demonstrated in Tanzania's development agendas through the bond of the Ujamaa and Kiswahili that represented Tanzania in international relations and diplomacy. The Ujamaa intersections are crucial in upholding culture and language in the community since language and culture are intertwined, and understanding cultural diplomacy in the Tanzanian context is essential for effective communication in international platforms (Fought, 2011 & Saud, 2021). To support African Ubuntu, cultural elements were integrated into the Kiswahili and national policy framework that ensured successful Kiswahili is a part and parcel of learning and development agendas (Nyerere, 1967 & 2011).

4. Findings

Internationalization of the Kiswahili could be reflected in the cultural infusion that led to the emergence and evolution of both Kiswahili culture in Tanzania and this marked the early expansion of Kiswahili to the global level (Choge, 2012). Also, the internationalization of the Kiswahili was boosted by cultural diffusion and when trading activities gained momentum between East African Ubuntu communities with Arab, Persian, and other migrants who reached the coast around the 7th and 8th centuries. Kiswahili facilitated effective communication that rendered considerable cultural infusion and numerous loan words from Arabic and Persian, as it has been reported in the Periplus of Eritrean Sea which is said to be the earliest known document recounting the prehistory of the East African coast (Amidu, 1995 emphasize is mine & Okombo et al, 2017).

Over time, Kiswahili continued to hold a unique position in East Africa due to its capacity to uphold Ubuntu competencies that entail African history, culture, and ecology (Choge, 2012). Its journey from a coastal dialect to a regional lingua franca is a testament to the Ubuntu interconnectedness of East African communities and their interactions with the outside world (Choge, 2012). Kiswahili continued to influence the diplomatic relationship in the growth and expansion of the coastal city-states along the East African coast in the 08th century when Tanzania was exposed to historical diplomacy with various foreign powers, including the Omani Sultanate (Okombo et al, 2017). In this early diplomatic relationship, the Kiswahili played the role of a soft power tool as the language of choice for conducting negotiations and treaty agreements with these external entities (Lisanza, 2021). Kiswahili spread to interior parts of Africa due to long-distance trade and other factors contributed by the growth of Swahili towns (Amidu, 1995).

The growth of Swahili towns and Kiswahili culture was an intertwined incidence as the Kiswahili became an administrative tool and diplomatic linkage with the outside World through increasing trading activities and wealth that developed into prosperous and complex city-states in the 15th century (Lisanza & Mwinyikombo, 2021). Remarkably, Kiswahili's journey from a coastal dialect to a regional lingua franca is a testament to the interconnectedness of East African Ubuntu local communities from Uganda, Congo DRC, Rwanda, and Burundi, and their interactions with the wider world (Choge, 2012). The diplomatic development milestones achieved in Tanzania after 60 years of Independence in international relations are highly attributed to the escalation of the Kiswahili, the fact that Kiswahili is among the Ubuntu factors that unify Tanzania and Africans in some global agendas (Okombo et al, 2017).

The use of a single unifying language among Tanzanians was brought about by the country's founding father, the late Dr. Julius Kambarage Nyerere (who preferred to be called *Mwalimu* or teacher) during the independence struggle he invested and promoted the Kiswahili as a unifying soft tool for Africans and non-Africans (Lisanza, 2021). The development of the Kiswahili in mid of 21st century can't leave behind the roles of Dr, Nyerere who advocated for Kiswahili development in the country and beyond (Nyerere, 2011 & UNESCO, 2022). Dr. Nyerere was an Ubuntu believer who advocated for the peaceful independence struggle of Tanzania and the decolonisation of Africa as a whole through Kiswahili that exposed Kiswahili in international platforms and colonial powers both German and British used Kiswahili as part of colonial administration in Tanzania.

Reflecting on the 1950s, the United Nations established the Kiswahili unit of United Nations Radio, being the first and the only African language within the Directorate of Global Communications at the United Nations (UNESCO, 2022). On the 09th December 1961 Tanganyika gained independence from the British and for the first on Earth Kiswahili became the national language of the country, it spread as a soft power in the decolonisation process of some African countries, especially in Eastern and Central Africa. The formation of the East African community in 1967 was a result of the growth and advancement of the Kiswahili (Mwinyikombo, 2021). The reformation of East African Regional integration in the year 2000 it was witnessed the soft power of Kiswahili when it was declared as a working language in the mission and related operational activities. The new East African community comprises Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi, Congo DRC and South Sudan. This community has a population of 135 million who use Kiswahili as a lingual Franca (Fluency, 2024).

Kiswahili is often employed as a common language during peace talks and negotiations involving parties from different linguistic backgrounds (Legere, 2007). Its use helps to level the playing field and reduce misunderstandings, as all parties can communicate

effectively in a language they share (CCI, 2020). This is particularly crucial in cases of ethnic or regional conflicts, where linguistic barriers can exacerbate tensions (Choge, 2012). An example of Swahili's role in conflict mediation can be seen in the negotiations that led to the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in Sudan. Kiswahili, being one of the working languages in the African Union, facilitated the communication between Sudanese parties and international mediators, helping to bring about a resolution to the long-standing conflict (Legere, 2007).

Peacekeeping Missions and Swahili-speaking troops, Tanzania and other East African countries have positive a history of contributing troops to international peacekeeping missions. Kiswahili-speaking troops from East African nations have been instrumental in these efforts with their ability to communicate with local populations in the region where they are deployed to enhance the effectiveness of peacekeeping missions (Legere, 2007). For example, the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), which involves troops from several East African nations, has benefited from the use of Swahili. The troops from Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda, all Swahili-speaking countries, can engage with local communities, gather valuable information, and work to foster stability and peace in a conflict-ridden region. Also, the use of Kiswahili by peacekeeping forces in East Africa reflects the commitment of these nations to regional and continental cultural diplomacy. It highlights the opportunities for Kiswahili in cultural diplomacy and shared resolve to be proactive contributors to peace on the African continent (CCI, 2020).

The multilingualism of the United Nations has integrated various languages into the organization including Kiswahili, concerning the United Nations General Assembly, through its resolution 71/328 of 11 September 2017 on the multilingualism agenda welcomed the implementation of a day dedicated to each of its official languages to inform and raise awareness of their history, culture and use, and encouraged the Secretary-General and in that regard (UNESCO, 2022). Therefore, the 41st session of the General Conference of UNESCO adopted resolution 41 C/61 that recognized the role the Kiswahili plays in promoting cultural diversity, creating awareness and fostering dialogue among civilizations and noted the need to promote multilingualism as a core value of the United Nations and an essential factor in harmonious communication between peoples, which promotes unity in diversity and international understanding, tolerance and dialogue (UNESCO, 2022).

Recognition of United Nations and agencies proved the soft power of Kiswahili in the cultural diplomacy and this was later proclaimed that 07th July is World Kiswahili Day (Fluency, 2024). With reference to the 41st session of the General Conference of UNESCO adopted resolution 41 C/61 that proclaimed 7th July of each year as World Kiswahili Day and making Kiswahili as the first African language to be recognized in such a manner by the United Nations (UNESCO, 2022). The current global practice demands for a soft power tools like Language and Kiswahili is taking of its Ubuntu richness to expand in the regional and international agenda.

According to African Union (2022) Kiswahili is among the fastest growing languages in the world, one of the tenth widely spoken languages in the world and it's an official language in the African Union (AU, 2022). In 2002, H.E. Joaquim Chissano, the Former President of Republic of Mozambique in 2002 emphasized the use of Kiswahili continentally and globally (AU, 2022). Due to its capacity Kiswahili is being used as diplomatic tool in settling conflicts in African Great Regions (Rwanda, Gurundi, Congo DRC and Tanzania) and beyond. Taking a practical example of Rwanda, Burundi and Kenya post-election conflicts proved the capacity of Kiswahili in diplomacy.

Kiswahili has moved from lingua Franca to international plays a pivotal role in resolving conflicts and an Ubuntu opportunity that connect diplomats from different linguistic backgrounds. Kiswahili allows diplomats and mediators to communicate clearly and effectively, ensuring that all parties involved understand the terms and conditions of any agreements (Legère, 2005 & 2006). This facilitates the process of reaching a consensus and fostering peace. Globally, Kiswahili is the most broadcasted African language, whereby most international radio stations have Kiswahili services. These include United Nations Kiswahili Services, Deutsche Welle (DW), British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Voice of America (VOA), Radio France International (Paris), Radio Beijing International, All India Radio (AIR), NHK in Japan, Cairo Radio, and RVOG in Ethiopia (Legere, 2007).

To date, Kiswahili is a language that speaks to both past and present containing over 200 million speakers Worldwide, it is one of the most widely used African languages that encompasses more than a dozen main dialects (Legère, 2005 & 2006). As Swahili has taken root as an official language of Tanzania in the 1960s, its importance in diplomacy has grown significantly and it offers diplomats a powerful tool for effective communication and negotiation across borders. Moreover, it serves as an Ubuntu reminder of the shared history, ecology, and cultural ties that bind African nations together.

5. Discussion and Implications

According to Nyerere (2011), embracing Kiswahili, Africans are not only expressing their history and cultural heritage but also reinforcing their commitment to decolonization and Africanization (Nyerere, 2011 & Choge, 2012). The fact that Kiswahili holds a unique position in Africa in embracing Ubuntu values due to its rich history and origins, over the centuries, this Ubuntu language has emerged as a common form of communication in many parts of Africa, the Middle East, and beyond (Legère, 2007). Kiswahili renders a relevant linkage between the past and present of Africa thus the efforts to promote Kiswahili should not fade away, they should be amplified and the adoption of Swahili as an official language not only in the African Union but rather to other African countries (Mwinyikombo, 2021).

On the other hand, the application of Kiswahili in cultural diplomacy is inevitable and should be consistently reinforced in global operations such as peacekeeping, peace observing, and conflict resolutions (Legère, 2005 & 2006). African nations with the support

Meinrad Haule Lembuka / (Re)Positioning the Swahili Language in Cultural Diplomacy Under the Capacity of African Ubuntu In Tanzania

from the African Union should continue to invest in Kiswahili training for their diplomats and peacekeepers, ensuring that they can effectively engage with their counterparts in the Kiswahili that is more inclusive, non-discriminatory, culturally diverse, and holistic (Legère, 2005 & 2006). Also, Swahili's prominence in the East African Community has led to a deeper sense of shared identity among member states (AU, 2022). By using Swahili as a common language for diplomacy and governance, the EAC reinforces the notion that, despite their diverse backgrounds, these countries are united by a shared linguistic heritage (Choge, 2012).

Kiswahili's reach extends beyond the confines of the EAC into the African Union (AU), where it has been adopted as one of the working languages alongside Arabic, English, French, and Portuguese (Legère, 2007). This decision reflects a growing recognition of Swahili's importance not only in East Africa but also on the continental stage (Robinson, 2024). The use of Swahili in these international organizations transcends mere language; it's a testament to the idea that East African nations are part of a larger whole and are dedicated to working together for their collective advancement. Swahili's historical significance as a language of trade and cultural exchange has evolved into a language of diplomacy, emphasizing a shared heritage and mutual goals. While conflict is an unfortunate reality in any region, and East Africa is no exception. However, the presence of Swahili in this diverse region provides an avenue for conflict mediation and resolution. The neutrality and accessibility of Swahili make it a valuable tool in peace negotiations and conflict resolution processes.

Swahili has become emblematic of the African continent, taught in universities around the world, an official language of the African Union, and embraced by some members of the Diaspora as a way to connect with the continent's histories and cultures, Swahili is a global language, and it's most far-reaching dialect is Standard Swahili (Robinson, 2024). This is an urgent call for upgrading the Kiswahili to a continental language since African leaders, officials of the Organisation of African Unity, African citizens of the continent, and sympathizers of African problems have for many years now been calling for one or more African languages to be used as the continent's official lingua franca(s), for official as well as intra-national business, and other social interactions in place of colonial languages (Robinson, 2024). Today several countries have established Swahili radio stations including Germany, Japan, the UK, China, USA, etc. Moreover, it has become a language in international organizations including SADC, COMESA, AU, UN, UNESCO, etc. It continues to render opportunities for transmission, acceptance, and coexistence of cultural diversity relevant to cultural diplomacy (Lisanza & Mwinyikombo, 2021).

6. Conclusions

Kiswahili embraces *Ubuntu* values such as collectiveness, cooperation, *Ujamaa*, peace, collaboration, equality, solidarity, neutrality, and hospitality that facilitate the realization of cultural diplomacy of post-independence Tanzania. Expansion of Kiswahili to a global language is challenged by remained colonial legacy and the existence of other lingua franca in the continent but it continues to render opportunities that most other lingua franca have failed to deliver i.e. it renders conducive ecology necessary for African identity rather than ethnic or representation of the specific nation. Compared to other lingua franca in Africa, Kiswahili is not claimed by any ethnic groups as its own (as Africa has many ethnic groups and languages). Based on Ubuntu's capacity, Kiswahili has a potential role in promoting holistic and collective socio-economic and cultural advancement in the regional integration and realization of the agenda of united Africa as proclaimed by our Ubuntu champions such as the late Dr. Nelson Mandela, Dr. Julius Nyerere, Kwame Nkrumah, Kenneth Kaunda, Samora Matchel, etc.

Recently, like other lingua-franca Kiswahili has become a diplomatic catalyst across Africa with its uniqueness to embrace and represent African history, identity, cultural values, and ecology necessary for nurturing cultural diplomacy in Africa and beyond. It continues to penetrate as a global language by playing a key role in connecting, finding shared interests, building bridges, and gaining trust in regional and international relations. Kiswahili will continue with its linguistic conquest abated or unabated in all spheres of life regionally and internationally, probably one hundred years from now it will be an equal competitor in the language market with French, Chinese, Japanese, Spanish, and English if it is not have overtaken them (Choge, 2012).

Therefore, the formation of the Ujamaa Policy Framework in Tanzania after independence of 1961 e under the leadership of Ubuntu champion 2014 the late Dr. Julius Nyerere (who preferred to be called Mwalimu meaning teacher) has been attributed to the existing Ujamaa Intersections in the community. In Ubuntu's perspective, community sections or Ujamaa Intersections play a significant role in the development of lingua-franca in the African context and this has been reflected in African countries. Dr. Nyerere officialized Kiswahili as a national language in Tanzania to promote economic interventions such as villagization, and rural development, and later he advocated for the Kiswahili language into Political agendas for the decolonization of Africa, the establishment of the East African Community, SADC, and conflict resolutions of Great Lakes Region from the 1990s.

My vision is to re-emphasize the proposition of Kiswahili to be an African language of cultural diplomacy in representing Africa into the global agendas while it embraces cultural diversity and inclusion capacity yet it has no string attached to colonial legacy and tribalism. No doubt the reflections of African Ubuntu in the Kiswahili language under the Ujamaa Policy Framework have demonstrated its relevance as a soft tool power in cultural diplomacy through the values of cooperation, unity, passion, care, harmony, peace, universal human rights, solidarity, Ujamaa, and human dignity which are crucial in the global cultural diplomacy. The evidence of the applicability of Kiswahili language in African regional integration, African Union, UN agencies and not to mention global North Countries is sufficient to reposition the language as an African soft tool for cultural diplomacy. In case Kiswahili is revisited with an Ubuntu lens rather than imported insight, it has a promising future opportunity to be among the soft powers in penetrating African agendas in the global platform. Kiswahili is an Ubuntu gift of Africa to the World and its pivotal role

in cultural diplomacy cannot be underestimated. The fact that it entails all requirements of the soft power of a diplomatic language that can be integrated into diplomats' communication, negotiate, and convey Tanzania and the whole of Africa's interests to the international platforms.

6.1 Recommendations

Based on the presented review and respective observations on the (re)positioning of Kiswahili as a soft power in cultural diplomacy regarding the Tanzanian context, the author delivers the following recommendations;

- Kiswahili is an Ubuntu language with deep roots in the heart of East Africa particularly Tanzania, known for its remarkable ability to transcend linguistic and cultural barriers that are relevant for sustainable cultural diplomacy. This is a call for African leaders, diplomats, and policymakers to integrate Kiswahili into their strategic plans for sustainable international relations
- Based on the historical vital contributions of the Kiswahili in regional and international relations, (re) positioning Kiswahili as the diplomatic language is highly demanded and thus there is an urgent need for more Africans and diaspora populations to play their noble role in increasing Kiswahili's visibility and adoption at the global level.
- Kiswahili has become a common language that unites different ethnic and nationalities in many countries beyond Africa thus it's the right time for African and global leaders to advocate for its full utilization in diplomatic discourse beyond the African continent
- The Kiswahili is among the best African lingua franca that embraces and represents Ubuntu (African history, ecology, and cultural values) relevant for sustainable international diplomacy. Global diplomats should continue to engage it in facilitating peaceful interaction between people and their leaders, across nations and continents
- Kiswahili should strategize on (re) positioning it from a regional lingua franca to an international diplomatic language to increase constructive and sustainable cultural diplomacy in Africa and beyond.

7. References

1. African Union (2022). *Inclusion of Kiswahili As One of The (AU) Working Languages* (Item proposed by the United Republic of Tanzania); Executive Council Fortieth Ordinary Session 20 January - 03 February 2022 Addis Ababa, Ethiopia <https://archives.au.int/handle/123456789/10397>
2. Al Saud, A. F. (2021). Family's Role in Achieving Language Affiliation among Children: A Comparative Study Applied to Some Families. *Arab World English Journal*, 12 (3) 111-128. DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol12no3.8>
3. Amidu, A. A. 1995: Kiswahili, a Continental Language: How Possible Is It? (Part I). *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 4(2): pp 50-70. www.njas.helsinki.fi/
4. Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia (2024, May 2). *Swahili language*. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Swahili-language>
5. Buhori. A.J & Lembuka, H.M. (2024). A Literature Review on the Dimensions of Ubuntu Philosophy Toward Child Protection in Africa – A Case of Para-social Work Model in Tanzania <http://www.imjst.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/IMJSTP29121038.pdf>
6. Charter Cities Institute (2020). Building Africa: Kilwa Kisiwani, the Indian Ocean Trade, and the Rise of East African City-States <https://charterscitiesinstitute.org/blog-posts/building-africa-kilwa-kisiwani-the-indian-ocean-trade-and-the-rise-of-east-african-city-states/>
7. Choge S.C. (2012). Fifty Years of Kiswahili in Regional and International Development <https://www.jpanafrican.org/docs/vol4no10/4.10FiftyYears.pdf>
8. Fouéré, M. A. (2015). Chapter 2. Julius Nyerere, Ujamaa and Political Morality in Contemporary Tanzania. In M.-A. Fouéré (den.), *Remembering Nyerere in Tanzania* (1-). *Africae*. <https://books.openedition.org/africae/713>
9. Fought C. (2011). Language and ethnicity. In: Mesthrie R, ed. *The Cambridge Handbook of Sociolinguistics*. Cambridge Handbooks in Language and Linguistics. Cambridge University Press; 2011:238-258.
10. Kishe A (2014). *Uhifadhi na Upanuzi wa Wigo wa Matumizi wa Lugha ya Kiswahili nchini Tanzania*, *Journal of the Institute of Kiswahili Studies, Kioo cha Lugha*, Vol. 12
11. Dzomba E. (2019). Historia na Maendeleo ya Kiswahili Nchini Zimbabwe, *Journal of the Institute of Kiswahili Studies, Kioo cha Lugha*, Vol. 17.
12. Fluency (2024). Swahili In East African Diplomacy: A Language For Regional Integration <https://thefluency.app/blog/swahili-in-east-african-diplomacy-a-language-for-regional-integration/>
13. Habwe, J. (2009). Role of Kiswahili in the Integration https://www.jpanafrican.org/docs/vol2no8/2.8_RoleOfKiswahiliInTheIntegration.pdf
14. Legere, K. (2007). *Marehemu Julius Kambarage Nyerere and Kiswahili*; University of Gothenburg <https://www.ajol.info/index.php/kcl/article/view/61489>
15. Lembuka, M.H. (2024a). Historical Contributions of Kiswahili in Demonstrating Ubuntu Values in East Africa DOI: [HTTPS://DOI.ORG/10.5281/ZENODO.13336528](https://doi.org/10.5281/ZENODO.13336528)

16. Lembuka, M. (2024b). The Evolution of Community Development through Ubuntu Perspective in Tanzania. *East African Journal of Arts and Social Sciences*, 7(1), 219-231. <https://doi.org/10.37284/eajass.7.1.1870>
17. Lembuka M.H. (2023). Prominence of Mwalimu Julius K. Nyerere in The History Of Community Development in Tanzania – Ubuntu Perspective <https://ticd.ac.tz/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/4.-Meinrad-Copy.pdf>
18. Lisanza, V. (2021). Swahili gaining popularity globally Africa welcomes UNESCO’s designation of 7 July as Kiswahili Day <https://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/december-2021/swahili-gaining-popularity-globally>
19. Matshediso, M. (2014). South Africa Honours Julius Nyerere - South African Government News Agency <https://www.sanews.gov.za/south-africa/sa-honours-julius-nyerere>
20. Mazrui, A. A., & Mazrui, A. M., (1995). *Swahili State and Society. The Political Economy of an African Language*. Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers
21. Mazrui, A. M. & Mazrui, A. A. (1993). *Dominant Languages in a Plural Society: English and Kiswahili in Post-Colonial East Africa*. International Political Science Review Vol.14(3), July The Emergent World Language System. pp. 275-292. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1601194>. (11/11/2010).
22. Mugumbate, J. & Nyanguru, A. (2013). Exploring African philosophy: The value of Ubuntu in social work. *African Journal of Social Work*, 3:82-100 Mutembei A. (2011), KISWAHILI 2011, *katika Kiswahili Silaha ya Afrika: Wanasisia na Watawala, Juzuu Nambari* 74, Massamba D (mha), TUKI, uk. 65.
23. Mukuthuria, M., (2006). Kiswahili and Its Expanding Roles of Development in East African Cooperation: A Case of Uganda, *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 15(2), 154 – 165.
24. Mulokozi, M. M., (2004). Kiswahili as a National and International Language, H Net; Humanities and Social Sciences Online: Department of History, 1995 – 2006
25. Mwinyikombo, A.M. (2021). *The Influence of Languages as Soft Instruments of Power: The Case of Kiswahili In Tanzania* <https://www.ndctz.go.tz/uploads/documents/sw-1676552345>
26. Nye S. (2004) Soft Power The Means to Success in World Politics, Public Affairs, United States.
27. Othman H. (2008) Democracy and Language in Tanzania, In Yes in My Life Time, Mkuki na Nyota, Dar es Salaam, Page 330.
28. Petzell, M. (2012). The linguistic situation in Tanzania, University of Gothenburg
29. Ramadhan, P.W. (2020). The Influence of Language on Regional Integration: Case Study – Kiswahili and East African Community <https://erepo.usiu.ac.ke/bitstream/handle/11732/6984>
30. Ressler, P. (2012). The kanga, a cloth that reveals: Co-production of culture in Africa and the Indian Ocean region, in «Textile Society of America, Symposium Proceedings», 1 Sept. 2012
31. Rivas, C. (2014) The use of the Spanish language as a Cultural Diplomacy Strategy for Extending Mexico’s soft Power in the United States, *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* Vol. 11, 2, 139–147.
32. Robinson, J.M. (2024). History of the Standard Swahili Language Locked <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277734.013.1012>
33. Sambala, E., & Cooper, S. & Manderson, L. (2019). Ubuntu as a Framework for Ethical Decision Making in Africa: Responding to Epidemics. *Ethics & Behavior*. 30. 1-13. 10.1080/10508422.2019.1583565
34. Shivji I. and Others (2020) Development as a Rebellion: A Biography of Julius Nyerere, Vol 3, Mkuki na Nyota, Dar es Salaam.
35. Toboso B. and Kangagor M. (2018) The Language Factor in the Attainment of Millennium Development Goals: The Case of Multilingual Sub-Saharan Africa, *Journal of the Institute of Kiswahili Studies, Kioo cha Lugha*, Vol. 16.
36. UNESCO (2022). Culture and Education: Kiswahili is a language that speaks to both past and present <https://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/july-2022/kiswahili-language-speaks-both-past-and-present>
37. United Republic of Tanzania (2022). National Bureau of Statistics: *National Census Survey of Populations and Housing 2022 of Tanzania* <https://www.nbs.go.tz/index.php/en/census-surveys/population-and-housing-census>
38. Wright, S. (2000). Community and Communication: The Role of Language in Nation State Building and European Integration.
39. Yahya – Othman, S. et al, (2020). Development as a Rebellion: A Biography of Julius Nyerere, Vol. 1, Mkuki na Nyota, Dar es Salaam