



IN THE QUEST FOR A LANGUAGE COUNCIL OF EASTERN AFRICA: AN IDEALISTIC FUNCTIONAL JUSTIFICATION

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Abstract:

With the world becoming a global village today, it is normal to attempt to make every development initiative to involve as many states as possible. Collective effort brings more strength which in turn makes it easier to handle common problems. Language problems which are universal and cross-national can be handled better if states that are close to one another (economically, politically geographically) merge their efforts and resources for this purpose. This is why nations of the European Union handle, among many other issues, their linguistic and language problems as one front. This is the responsibility of language specialists, experts and researchers. To be effective and successful, however, such efforts need to be consolidated and coordinated. This paper argues for an ideal Language Council of Eastern Africa (LCEA) and outlines the linguistic objectives and justifications for such an institution in view of the linguistic ecology of the region. In the core of the paper, the main tasks of handling linguistic issues on various fronts are exonerated. This paper contributes to the substantial and growing corpus of research literature that explicates the inextricable relationship(s) between languages on the one hand and regional integration and development on the other.

Keywords: Language Council of Eastern Africa, integration, language ecology, supranational, East African community, The East African Community Languages Permanent Commission

1. Background

"The discourse on integration in the East African Community has focused on basically two levels, namely economic and political integration.....overlooking the social and cultural levels. One obvious casualty from this scenario has been the treatment of the language issue in the Community and the attendant challenges posed by multilingualism in an integration framework."

(Kiliku, 2011)

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In an increasingly globalising world, most nations of the world are adopting regional co-operation and integration strategies through which they can address various social, economic and even political challenges facing them. Cross-border relations have resulted in regional co-operations that are deemed to have more bargaining power than individual nations (Kiliku, 2011). Since most African countries are small in terms of population, a need arises for an enlargement of their development base in order to benefit from economies of scale in operating major services (Ndegwa, 1986).

In Africa, there have been numerous co-operation arrangements bravely taken to solve the many social and economic problems that burden the continent and its people. The central motive for the constitution of most regional blocs has to do with an envisaged faster development through regional integration. These envisaged development initiatives can only be actualized if there is effective communication with the masses. This is about language. This explains why policy makers and scholars are fast realising that language is an important factor in the dynamics that define social, political and economic co-operation and integration.

By becoming a 'global village' therefore, the contemporary world attempts to make every development initiative to involve as many states as possible. This integration effort brings more strength and makes it easier to handle common problems. Literature on the integration of regional blocks indicates that language is indispensable. Language problems are universal and cross-national (Ndegwa, 1986; UNDP, 2010). Mohochi (2005) asserts that meaningful integration is elusive if the language issue is ignored. He states:

“Quite naturally we must be able to communicate effectively in order to plan and forge ahead together in whatever integration arrangements we put in place. Without effective communication, we cannot talk about integration that involves the majority and goes beyond the meetings held by the leaders at the never-ending summits. (p46)

After several negotiations, the new EAC was inaugurated in 2001. Its Development Strategy, about faster development of East Africa through regional integration and development (EAC, 2000), involving civil society, implies the creation of an enabling medium of communication, apparently in a linguistic diversity of more than 250 languages in use. One of the main objectives of the Community, according to the treaty, is to develop policies and programmes aimed at widening and deepening co-operation among the partner states. The success of all the sectors is dependent, to a great extent, on how the language issue will be handled. The centrality of the language factor is illustrated in the functioning of the Community.

The EAC has a number of semi-autonomous institutions that help it implement its mandate. These institutions include:

- The Civil Aviation safety and Security Oversight Agency (CASSOA);
- The East African Development Bank (EADB);
- The East African Health Research Commission (EAHRC);
- The East African Kiswahili Commission (EAKC);

- The East African Science and Technology Commission (EASTECO);
- The Inter-University Council for East Africa (IUCEA);
- The Lake Victoria Basin Commission (LVBC);
- The Lake Victoria Fisheries Organization (LVFO).

The concern here would be about why the Community has not thought it necessary to establish a commission (or Council) on language bearing in mind the centrality of communication in the achievement of its mandate. The objective of this paper to argue for a regional Institution, legally instituted within the EAC Treaty tasked with handling language issues.

2. Language and the Pre EAC Era

The language Plan of Action for Africa¹ which was basically about the development and promotion of Indigenous African Languages had one of its objectives as;

“...to foster and promote national, regional and continental linguistic unity in Africa...” p4

This meeting recognized the importance of supra-national efforts in tackling language issues. Advising on the kind of research that would be suitable to help understand Africa's myriad of problems-including those to do with language-Kembo-Sure (1998) in his paper *Language as a Resource*² observes that the involvement of people of different nationalities and discipline in research will bring a rich integrative understanding of international problems. This approach, he argues, is not only holistic but also objective and creative. In yet another of his papers - *Language Development and Integration in Kenya since Independence*³, Kembo-Sure alludes to the important role that could be played by regional co-operation, if established, especially as far as language is concerned. He reminds those concerned that the transnational co-operations or unions should not be limited to handling only internal and labour issues. He further suggests the setting up of language institutes to improve intra-Africa communication and interaction.

As early as 1995, Mazrui and Mazrui (1995) suggested the setting up of several East African institutions of cooperation which would include a Language Council. This council though, in their case, would concentrate more on the promotion of Kiswahili as a regional language. The understanding at this time tended to expressly behave that a single linguistic dispensation would be the antidote to bring regional integration. I disagree with this petition (Kiliku 2011, 2013).

And, one of the proposed activities of the Harare Declaration (1997) Plan of Action whose time-frame had been set as 1999 - 2010 was to revitalize regional and sub-regional structures to rehabilitate national and transnational languages through regional and sub-regional institutions and partners. This, it is argued, would facilitate the continuance of regional research institutions in linguistics, one of the goals of the Pan African Association of Linguistics. To date, this is, largely, yet to be actioned (Mohochi, 2005; Kiliku, 2011, 2013).

The short overview given above illustrates the justification that there has been and still exists an urgent and real need to set up a regional council or institute that would deal with, among other issues, the political, social, ethnological, developmental and political issues of language in Eastern Africa.

This paper briefly outlines the linguistic objectives of such an organization-The Language Council of Eastern Africa (henceforth LCEA) by highlighting an idealistic functional justification of such Council. In the following sections, I therefore idealize the linguistic mandate the LCEA.

The proposed LCEA will have the task of handling linguistic issues specifically;

- The language Ecology of Eastern Africa;
- Ethnic languages of Eastern Africa;
- Language policies of Eastern Africa;
- Language-related issues in the region;
- Languages of the East African Community;
- Research.

3. The Language Ecology of Eastern Africa

The Ecology of a language has to do with particular language, their users and the relationships created by the uses of these languages in the multilingual society (Haugen 1972). In his paper 'Researching African Languages for Scientific and Technological Development, Kwesi Prah⁴ attempts, and very convincingly, to cluster the languages spoken in Africa into twelve core 'mother' languages. By doing this, he justifies his argument that Africa, though expansive, is to a great degree linguistically mutually intelligible. At some point, he attempts to present, in a nutshell, the languages spoken in Eastern Africa. Prah's work is a good proof that we lack a comprehensive work that defines in totally the languages spoken in Africa-save for some "introductory" texts (e.g. Vic-Webb and Kembo-Sure 2000).

The position of this paper is that a survey that would establish the language situation in the various countries in East Africa is necessary. Though Kiliku (2011) attempts this task, his analysis therein does not present fully the kind of image Kwesi was imagining of. Such an analysis would also be an achievement of one of the goals of the Second International LICCA Conference of Lesotho 1993.

It is important to mention here that there are several studies that have investigated specific languages in East Africa. However, here we propose that this council would spearhead studies that would establish;

- the number and location of languages spoken within the stated in Eastern Africa;
- the history of each of these languages;
- the social status of each of these languages in relation to each other;
- the users (linguistic demography) of each of the languages;
- the domains and frequency of use of each of the languages;
- the attitude of users towards the languages;

- the kind of institutional support each language receives/has won - mass media usage-effect- how to improve the situation. (Haugen 1972)

When this comprehensive attention is given to all the languages in the region, this sociolinguistic profile shall generate data that can provide the first step in sorting out many of the sociolinguistic problems in the region.

This linguistic-ecological study would also pay particular attention to Trans-border languages. When such languages are well 'managed', communicative efficiency across the border may be meaningful and effective. In fact, this would, as it has in some countries, solve inter-territorial conflict. Obviously, this efficient communication is an indispensable ingredient for the success of the region's integration.

The above task is only possible if we start with a detailed classification and description of the regions' languages. Such a study may even go further and establish the ideological and ethnolinguistic issues related to language contact, conflict and dominance. It may even highlight minority languages which should be given priority in research and promotion, an issue also proposed as a policy option by the Harare Declaration 1997 - the importance to '*establish how many languages and language families there are in a given country, as well as what each is used for, who uses them and people's attitudes towards them*' (p3)

4. Development of Ethnic Languages

From a broad appreciation of the linguistic human rights perspective (Skutnabb-Kangas, Various), and the school of thought that vouches for linguistic diversity, all languages need to be developed, maintained and protected. There are countless justifications/reasons for this. Among the most obvious and commonsensical ones include the fact that each of them has speakers who have the right (which must be respected) to use them (since they are the best vehicles) for communication. Related to this is the fact that language is a cultural endowment which is closely linked to individual identity.

Again, all over the world, different speech counties have argued for and defended the development and sustenance of their languages. A lot of research has shown that languages have survived from extinction-technically linguicide-through various means some of which have been rather intentional, including research and documentation. An example would be the use of research finding the documented data of languages to mitigate against their endangerment and death (Batibo, 2005).

The Ethic languages of East Africa should be developed, not necessarily from the platform of making them equivalent to English or other international or global languages but to be effective carriers/maintainers of the rich diversity of African culture through communication. It is important to remember here that bi-/Multilingualism is an asset.

There exists a lot of research on African Ethnic languages. A lot of this research has studied specific linguistic aspects of specific languages like syntax, semantics, discourse analysis, phonology and morphology. Other researchers have attempted to provide reasons that should/do inform the drive for the development of African Ethnic Languages which is the concern of this section (Djiite, 2008). The Harare Declaration (1997) envisions a

democratic Africa where all citizens will participate actively in all institutions i.e. where among others:

- all rights will be respected, including linguistic rights of the minority
- language policies will produce Africans who can operate effectively locally, regionally and internationally
- language policies will have all languages spoken in the specific countries finding their place

Importantly, this gathering of Ministers and Language experts recommended that there was need for the development of language databases/language databanks both at national and regional levels and the teaching of African Languages as part of achieving the development of Africa.

The Centre for Advanced Studies of African Studies (CASAS) has held workshops and conferences mainly on African Languages and Linguistics. One such meeting was the First International Conference on African Languages whose proceedings were published under the title *Speaking African* (2002). During this workshop, scholars presented papers touching on diverse aspects of African Languages. The broad themes of African Languages discussed during this conference were Empowerment, National Identity and Development, Education, Oracy, Communication and Development and Ethno-history, Standardization and Modernization (Kiliku, 2017, *forthcoming*⁵)

What was clearly communicated throughout this conference was that African Languages have the capacity to achieve what any other language could, and even better for Africans. Most presenters however regretted that African Languages had not helped achieve the above goals due to their drawback-they are 'not developed'. It thus came out clearly from most of the presenters that these languages needed to be developed urgently. Whatever this development entails is beyond the scope of this paper.

The work by Kembo-Sure and Vic Webb (2000), though introductory as they describe it, explored pertinent issues in the languages and linguistic of Africa. One of the questions this text attempts to tackle is whether African Languages are equipped enough, as European languages, to express complex ideas.

The point that I have attempted to allude to is that for a long time now, there has been, a growing concern to develop African indigenous languages so that they can have the "capacity" perform the functional roles presently mostly performed by European languages in African Countries. Research in Linguistics Language and Communication has shown that most of, if not all, of these communicative goals, may it be in education, identity, development and modernization and communication itself can only be achieved best in a language that is closest to the speaker's first or to be precise the speaker's indigenous language.

On this particular task, the LCEA would facilitate:

- research in the various ethnic languages in the region and hence the development of data bank on them;
- writing in these languages which could promote readership in the languages;
- printing of books, dictionaries and language guides in each of these languages;

- use in vernacular media for meaningful development.

The position of this paper is that this could in turn facilitate the standardization of these languages and further make their use in education, media etc. easier and more uniform. Researching these languages will help establish their relative suitability for use in various domains in relation to English and other dominant languages. It will then be easy to address any shortfalls the languages may have/face in achieving this status or performing these functions (Sipho Seepe 1996).

4.1 Language Policies in East Africa

In my paper *The Harmonization of Language Policy, Development and Implementation: The Prerequisite for the East African Community agenda* (Kiliku, 2006), I explore in some depth the issue of language policy in East Africa. The mentioned paper though, seems to propose a harmonized/uniform language policy for the entire region, more so for the purposes of the East African integration. To be able to come up with a harmonized language policy one needs to do a lot of ground work concerning the languages of the individual partner states. This is later attempted in Kiliku, 2011.

As has been mentioned earlier, it is the wish that regions in Africa develop policies in language that would enable them work and provide services effectively. Effectively the LCEA would, with respect to language policy, attempt to study the language policies in the partner members in view of establishing:

- their appropriateness to the national, regional and international development and integration
- their provisions vis-avis the actual practical situation on the ground (their implementation)
- to study the language policies of other close states like Somalia, Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopian and Sudan which though not yet members of the EAC but maintain a lot of relations with the East African Community members states.

Such a study will unearth the crucial sociolinguistic realities about English, Kiswahili and the many indigenous languages in each of the nation. One thing that should be born in mind is that language planning should be as democratic as possible. Mazrui (1996) laments that most of the language planning initiatives have been motivated by political survival (Argument more explicit in Kiliku 2011 and 2017 forthcoming⁵) rather than the drive to establish a democratic tradition.

It is important to note there here that the place of ethnic languages in these policies determines quite a lot as far as national development is concerned. These are the languages of the masses, through which labour can be mobilized at the local level and, as mentioned earlier, the best vehicles for imparting knowledge of new and relevant technologies of production. This is the point that Mutua intends to put across in his article "Ensuring the Message Gets Across" in the Sunday Nation of November 23, 2003. Here, he argues that development plans are useless if their contents are not communicated efficiently using an appropriate language for the masses. He categorically says that Kiswahili or English are not the best languages for this.

The point that I am trying to put across here is that the LCEA would establish how much the language policies have entrenched ethnic languages in them relative to the other languages and if any gaps are left we may think of ways bridging them.

A point of caution here would be that it is worth noting that the policies that have been developed in respect to languages in East Africa have been more biased on Education than on any other domain. Nevertheless, it would be important to find out, as a form of evaluation; how satisfactorily specific languages have performed the various duties they have been relegated for.

Language policy extends to include a decision of/on the language(s) to be used as media for instructions in the education of a nation. All states usually have a legislation pertaining to what language is to be used at what stage where (and why) of its education system. However, several questions may be raised for most of these policy provisions thus.

- How precisely have the present educational language policies been implemented?
- Are the present educational language policies likely to spur development?
- Are the languages designated for use in instruction in the language policies the appropriate ones, do we have other options?
- During this era of regional integration when we even propose harmonized curricula and exchange programmes between states are the educational language policy provisions in various countries able to cater for this? (Daily Nation 2003 Oct. 10th)
- Is there a viable possibility of adopting Kiswahili, the only International African Lingua Franca as the language of education in East Africa?
- Kiswahili Commission.

These and may be more questions would be the guiding problems/are in re-designing better policies on language of Education in East Africa. It is important to have in mind at this stage that it is clear that only African languages would be/are the best languages of instruction for the education of their speakers. But again, for any language to qualify for this task, it must be developed enough i.e. be codified, have literacy materials, rise above tribalism and harmony (attitudinally) and be technicalized enough. Are our East Africa Ethnic languages up to this state? If not, are there evident efforts in making them attain this status.

It will be one of the duties of the LCEA to positively contribute to the area of language planning and policy in East Africa in all fields of communication. Part of this duty will be the regular evaluation of the implementation and usefulness of the language policies from time to time.

The LCEA would also work to implement any regional language policy developed, including the proposed *Five-Tier EAC Supranational Language Policy* (Kiliku 2011) which proposes the following language Status Allocations.

1. **Regional Languages:** All the indigenous languages spoken by the local people in the East African member states, also referred to as Regional Ethnic Community Languages (RECLs).
2. **Supranational Lingua Franca** or Regional Language of Wider Communication (RLWC) - Kiswahili.
3. **Supranational Tier 1 Official Languages (SnT1OLs)**

Kiswahili, English, French and Sign Language

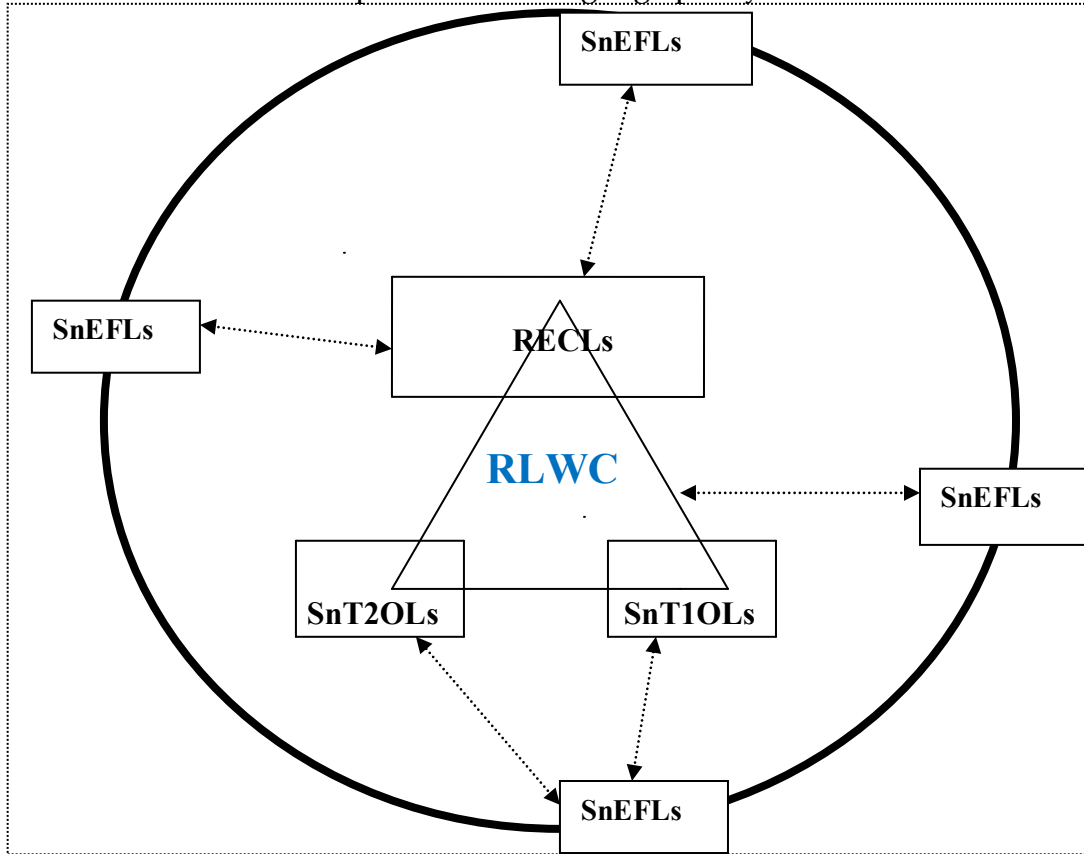
4. **Supranational Tier 2 Official Languages (SnT2OLs)**

Kiswahili, Luganda, Acholi, Runyakitara, Kinyarwanda and Kirundi

5. **Supranational/Regional Extra Foreign Languages (SnEFLs)**

Lingala, Dinka, Arabic, German, Chinese, Japanese etc

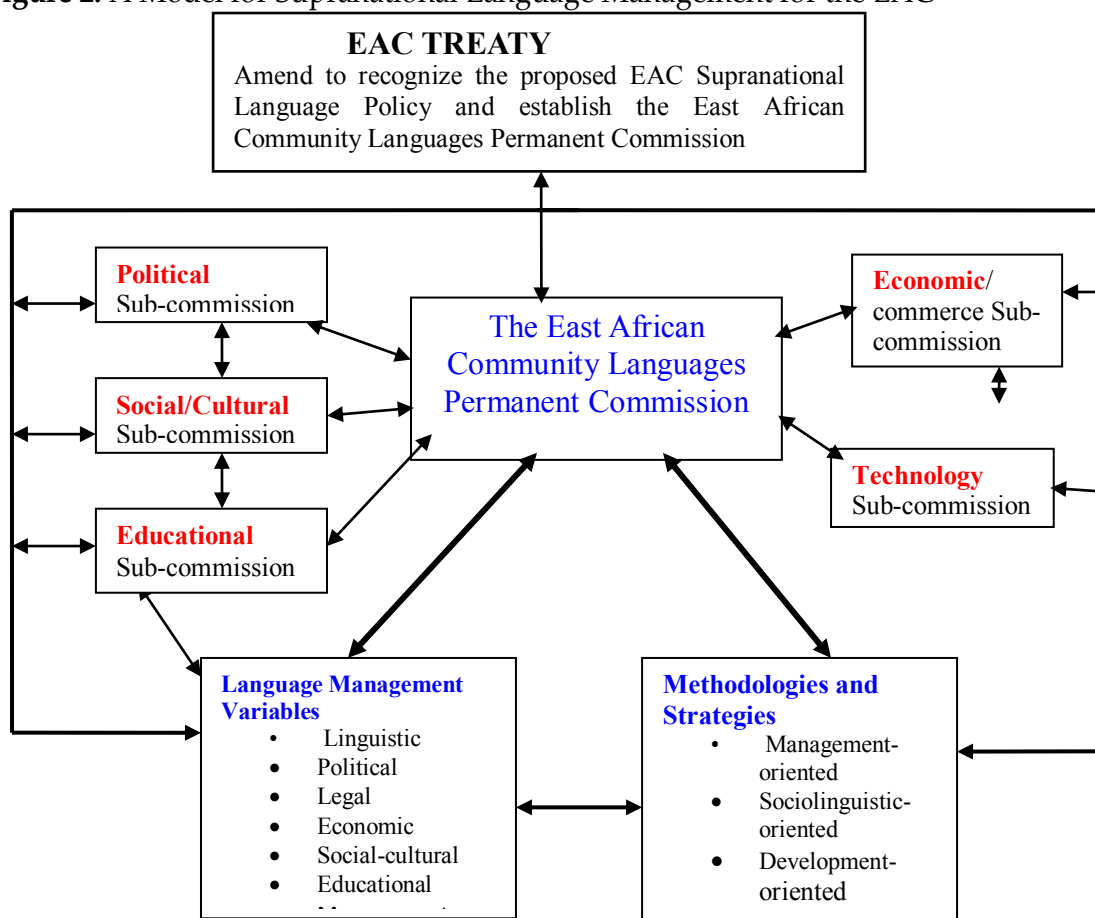
Figure 1: A Framework for the symbiotic relationship among languages in the proposed EAC Supranational Language policy



Source: Kiliku (2011: 334)

And since the LCEA will be a legally established institution of the EAC, it would, as a matter of necessity, domesticate and spring the management of proposed policy implementation within the EAC Treaty, as shown in the model below.

Figure 2: A Model for Supranational Language Management for the EAC



Source: Kiliku (2011:348)

4.2 Language related problems and enhancing the Languages of the E.A.C

Obviously, there are numerous problems related to languages if we follow Vic-Webb and Kembo-Sure's (2003) discussion of language and language based problems. In fact, it is possible that most of the problems they highlight in their work are evident in East Africa and hence require urgent solutions. In my own opinion, I would propose three areas which the LCEA may have to concentrate efforts over and above many other problem areas. These areas are what I would term as:

- The English problem in Tanzania;
- The Kiswahili problem in Uganda;
- The growing importance of French in Kenya.

Of course, the areas listed above have a lot to do with policy on language, an aspect that has already been mentioned earlier in this paper.

The place of English in Tanzania has been widely discussed especially with respect to Education and in relation to its status and position vis avis Kiswahili (Abdulaziz-Mkilifi M, 1972. Blommaert, J. 1999, Lwaitama et al 1990, Mongella 1990, Rajabu et al 1994, Qorro 1997 and Yahya-Othma, 1990). These and many other studies help us to understand why English is presently not as "popular" compared to Kiswahili. It is important to mention here that Kiswahili is the language of instruction in primary education, the national and official

language, used by the majority of the population in a wide range of functions (Msanjila, 1999). It is the language use in Certificate Teachers Training Colleges, the language of communication in the Parliament, lower courts of law and most government business. It is thus developed like a part of the country's cultural heritage. Thus, about 95% of the population is highly competent in the language (Abdulaziz 1971, Rubagumya 2010)

On the other hand, English is the medium of instruction in post primary education, language high courts of Law, legal documents, international business and banking. Generally, English is not as promoted as much as Kiswahili is. There has been arguments that Tanzania has been affected by its embracing of a policy that has lacked the promotion of English which is to some people, the language of survival, language of emancipation, the empowering language, the language of science and technology, the language of development (Eggington et al 1977). The attempt to 'catch up' with the rest of the world may be the justification for the present clamour for English in Tanzania and the pleas from several quarters of the country to give the language a more central place in the state's language policy.

Kiswahili has for a long time faced similar circumstances in Uganda. For quite some time the language has faced a language choice-competition with Luganda. Thus, Kiswahili in Uganda has had an ambiguous official status with a long oscillating history of unstable on and off official recognition. It has therefore been argued that the language policy in Uganda must address the problem of Kiswahili in respect to its interrelationship with Luganda (Vierra 1996) see Kiliku 2012 for a relevant detailed analysis.

One linguistic issue that does not seem to be getting a lot of attention in Kenya today is what I will call the growing importance of French in the country. If one could do a simple survey in the curricula of many educational institutions in the country one most likely finding would be that the language is being taught as a subject. In a significant number of private schools (Popularly referred to as academies) in the country are offering the language as a school subject. Most international and private organizations value competence in an extra international language as an added advantage for employment opportunities in their establishments. The language is therefore becoming an important economic resource, a situation similar to the case of English in Tanzania. With time, if the trend continuous, we may require a more serious position and legislation as far as this language is concerned especially with respect to educational language policy.

What comes out of the brief discussion above is that more has to be done on Kiswahili in Uganda and English in Tanzania especially now that they are the two languages of the EAC. The LCEA could monitor the harmonious promotion of these languages. This takes us to the point of enhancing the languages of the country. For integration to be achieved English and Kiswahili, and/or any other language that may apply, have to be developed adequately throughout the region. Mazrui et al (1995) refers this task as the development of regional languages. To this end, we may think about pertinent issues including:

- how the present language policies are promoting these languages in each of the member states
- the adequacy of English and Kiswahili as regional languages

- any other language(s) that could be (developed into) lingua francae in/for East Africa
- more technicalisation of Kiswahili and the East Africanization of English/French to make them perform regional communicative purposes better.
- the extra international languages that most international and private organizations value and whose competence is an added advantage for employment opportunities and therefore becoming important economic resource.
- Trends that may require serious position and legislation in educational language policies in the region

5. Research

The fact that there is a lot of linguistic research going on in or about East Africa cannot be overemphasized. It does not however follow thus that many such problems have been solved or are about to be solved although so much has been done. Yet much more needs to be done. One important duty of any language institution has to be research. This may be from different fronts with experts doing and coordinating research activities. Specifically, such duties would include:

1. Championing the implementation of the enormous findings and workshops, conferences, seminars and research studies on linguistic and language issues. These for a have produced findings and recommendations which would very richly inform existing policy. Much of these regrettable, have not been implemented thus escalating the rift between ideal policy provision and actual practice. (This is so not only in language but in most sectors.)
2. Soliciting, providing and monitoring the use of research funds in Languages and Linguistics of East Africa. This would perhaps be in the form of scholarships awarded to scholars specifically for research in these areas (like it is the case in South Africa, Russia and Germany). This will attract scholars whose research would develop these languages and hence increase their prestige.
3. and in Mazrui and Mazrui's (1995) words, such a council would have other functions/roles like;
 - Providing a forum for discussing language issues
 - providing advice to the concerned governments on the implementation of national policy on languages
 - The standardization of East African English

6. Conclusion

With the world becoming a global village today, it is normal to attempt to make every development initiative to involve as many states as possible. Collective effort brings more strength which in turn makes it easier to handle common problems. Language problems which are universal and cross-national can be handled better if states that are close to one another (economically, politically, geographically) states merges their efforts and resources

for this purpose. This is why nations of Southern Africa and the European Union handle among many other issues linguistic and language problems as one front. The handling of such language issue would be done better of a specific institution, with clear roles/functions in set at the regional level. This institution, proposed and justified in this paper as the Language Council of Eastern Africa, has to be hinged within the EAC Treaty, with clear roles and functions.

Notes

1. Language Plan of Action Drawn During the 44th Ordinary Session of the Council of Ministers, July 21-25 1986 Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
2. Kembo-Sure 1998 'Language as a Resource' Paper presented during The ACC 11th Biennial Conference October 10-15, 1998 Nairobi.
3. Kembo-Sure 1997 'Language development and Integration in Kenya since Independence' Paper presented during the conference **Breaking the Borders** March 1997, University of Natal.
4. Kwesi Prah 2002 'Researching African Languages for Scientific and Technological Development' Paper presented during the First International Conference on African Languages, 2002, Maseno University, Kenya
5. Kiliku, M.P 2017 Language Planning Vs Practice as a strategy for Survival: An Historical Perspective of East African States (Forthcoming)

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