

Kiswahili Language Variations in International Communication

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Abstract

This study examines the existence of Kiswahili variations in international communication. It is anchored on two theories: the Wave Theory, which explains the origin and dispersion of language as resembling water waves with contact effects, and Howard Giles' Communication Accommodation Theory, which considers accommodation strategies in communication. A mixed-method approach was employed, with data collected through focus group discussions involving six participants and documentary analysis of five texts. The study finds out that Kiswahili language variations exist among speakers from different countries. From the focus group discussions and documentary analysis, two broad types of variations were identified: written and spoken. Additionally, semantic variations were observed, such as the use of "bibi" for wife in Tanzania versus "grandmother" in Kenya, the DRC, and Burundi. Other identified variations include phonological differences, contact-induced variations, regional and ethnic variations, and youth languages such as Sheng (Kenya) and Kindubile (DRC). While these variations enrich Kiswahili's linguistic diversity and reflect sociocultural identities, they may also pose challenges to mutual intelligibility across regions. These findings emphasize the need to address linguistic disparities to enhance Kiswahili's effectiveness as a global lingua franca.

Keywords: Kiswahili variations, Phonological differences, Semantic variations, Contact-induced variations, Youth languages.

Introduction

Language is a cornerstone of societal development, serving as a tool for communication and a bridge for fostering integration among diverse communities. Kiswahili, one of the most widely spoken languages in Africa, has gained substantial regional and global significance. As a

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language of social cohesion, regional integration, and cross-cultural communication, Kiswahili holds a unique position. However, it faces challenges that stem from linguistic variations across different countries and regions.

Kiswahili's role in facilitating regional cooperation and integration is critical. As the official language of the East African Community (EAC) and a vital medium in trade, education, and governance, its importance cannot be overstated. Yet, its effectiveness as a unifying language is often undermined by the variations within the language itself. These linguistic differences, ranging from vocabulary and pronunciation to dialectal distinctions, pose significant barriers to communication, particularly in professional, diplomatic, and international contexts where clarity and precision are essential.

The increasing number of Kiswahili speakers across borders and the language's rising prominence in global discourse make addressing these variations imperative. Kiswahili's evolution into a transnational language of trade, media, and socialization highlights its role as a cornerstone for regional and international integration. However, the linguistic barriers posed by variations challenge its effectiveness in achieving these goals.

This study, therefore, examines the existence of Kiswahili language variations in international communication. It seeks to understand the nature of these variations and their influence on trade, diplomacy, and other areas of transnational interaction. By shedding light on these challenges, the study aims to contribute to efforts aimed at harmonizing Kiswahili usage and enhancing its effectiveness as a global lingua franca.

Literature review

This literature review is organized into three sections: general studies on language variation, Kiswahili language variations, and the effects of language variations on cross-border communication and integration. Labov (1963, 1966) laid a foundational framework for understanding language variation and change through sociolinguistic methods such as surveys and interviews. Although his work informs this study, it does not directly address Kiswahili or cross-border communication challenges. Similarly, Voloshina and Fisunova (2019) analyzed variations in English influenced by cultural contact, providing a methodological basis for examining Kiswahili variations. Bright (1990) studied phonological, grammatical, and lexical variations in South Asian languages, offering comparative insights applicable to Kiswahili.

Gary (1979) proposed models for measuring language intelligibility, however, his work excludes Kiswahili and international communication. Karmaker (2012) investigated Bengali dialectal variations in phonetics and grammar, paralleling this study's approach to Kiswahili. Research on Kiswahili language variations has largely focused on regional and dialectal differences. Shinagawa and Nassenstein (2019) categorized Kiswahili varieties into coastal, urban, old Swahili, and inland dialects, providing a framework for identifying linguistic diversity. However, their study did not focus on the implications for cross-border communication. Colleta (2018) examined phonological and grammatical variations among Kenyan students, linking these differences to standard Kiswahili. This study extends her work by analyzing both spoken and written Kiswahili in international contexts. Gibson et al. (2019) analyzed morphosyntactic variations, such as double-marking, offering insights into the sources of linguistic diversity. Miyazaki and Takemura (2019) explored dialectal variations in Zanzibar, emphasizing generational and educational influences. Baraka (2019) studied Kivu Swahili, identifying phonological and lexical variations induced by cultural contact. These studies provide a strong basis for understanding Kiswahili variations but do not address their presence on international platform communication and impacts on communication and integration.

The reviewed literature underscores the complexity of language variations and their implications for communication. Studies on Kiswahili variations have largely concentrated on local and regional dialectal differences without fully addressing their international presence and impact on cross-border communication and integration. This study seeks to fill this gap by examining how Kiswahili language variations influence international communication, focusing on their effects on trade, diplomacy, and integration across diverse contexts.

Methodology

This research employed a mixed-method approach, integrating qualitative and quantitative techniques to ensure comprehensive and accurate results. The qualitative aspect focused on understanding Kiswahili language variations through methods like Focus Group Discussions and documentary analysis, as outlined by Miles and Huberman (1994:14). Kiswahili speakers with international experience participated in discussions, sharing Kiswahili language variations they encountered and their impact on communication and integration. They also provided suggestions on addressing the challenges posed by these variations. Secondary data from previous studies collected through documentary analysis and primary data from these

discussions enriched the study's findings on the existence, scope and nature of Kiswahili language variations.

Quantitative research, as described by Straus and Grunel (1998:159), involves data quantifiable and statistical data. A questionnaire method was utilized to collect both qualitative and quantitative data from a sample of 100 Kiswahili speakers with international communication experience. These participants, including youth and adults from various countries, were selected using purposive sampling, a technique explained by Sugiyono (2016) as targeting specific characteristics to achieve a homogenous population. The collected data was analysed using SPSS software, ensuring statistical rigor in identifying patterns and trends related to Kiswahili variations.

Data analysis involved transcribing responses, categorizing language variations, and examining their types and characteristics. The study's findings led to recommendations for addressing communication and integration challenges arising from Kiswahili language variations in international communication.

Results and discussion

i) Data presentation

Kiswahili language variations in international communication. Below are the data presentations from the findings according to each research method;

a) Focus Group Discussion

From the focus group discussion, it was discussed that two main types of Kiswahili language variations are common in Kiswahili language, that is; the written language variations which are variations exhibited mainly on printed media such as books, magazines, letters and even currency. An example of this type of variation is the rendition of Kenyan and Tanzanian currency as explicated by the picture below;

Figure 1: Picture of Tanzanian and Kenyan currency notes



Source: Fieldwork, 2024

In figure 1 above, the word ‘bank’ is translated in Kiswahili differently in Kenyan and Tanzanian currency. A Kenyan note is written banki, while a Tanzanian note is written benki. This is an evident written Kiswahili variation between Kenyan and Tanzanian shillings. There are also spoken language variations; these are variations that are realized verbally when speakers converse.

The focus group discussion further identified the following variations;

Semantic and Vocabulary Kiswahili language variations

Focus group discussion affirmed that several Semantic or vocabulary Kiswahili language variations exist in Kiswahili. Main vocabularies were identified by the moderator of the focus

group discussion, and correspondent variations in the different countries were discussed as in the below table 1;

Table 1: Major semantic/vocabulary variations exhibited amongst Kenyan, Tanzanian, DRC, Burundi and Rwanda Kiswahili speakers

	English	Kiswahili				
	Word	Kenya	Tanzania	DRC	Burundi	Rwanda
1	Wife	bibi	mke	bibi	bibi	bibi
2	Question	swali	swali	ulizo	swali	swali
3	People	watu	watu	batu	Watu/batu	watu
4	The way	venye	vile	ambavyo	ambavyo	Kama hivyo
5	Come	kuja	njoo	kuja	njoo	kuja
6	Cooked rice	mchele	wali	mchele	mchele	mchele
7	shouts	nduru	mayowe	kulalamik a	malalamish i	nduru
8	Master's degree	uzamili	umahiri	Master'	umahili	umahili
9	Bathe	kuoga	kuoga	kunawa	kuoga	kuoga
10	sell	kuzuza	kuzuza	kuzuzisha	kuzuzisha	kuzuza
11	buy	kununua	kununua	kuzuza	kununua	kununua
12	Rural area	mashambani	mashenzini	vijijini	bilimani	kijiji
13	You are working	unafanya kazi	unafanya kazi	unatumika	unatumika	unafanya kazi
14	Tax	ushuru	kodi	kodi	kodi	kodi
15	Doctor	daktari	daktari	mganga	mganga	daktari
16	Barber shop	kinyozi	saluni	saluni	saluni	saluni

1 7	Yams	nduma	magimbi	maole	magimbi	magimbi
1 8	Cooked maize andbeans/cornchaf f	githeri	kande	kande	kande	kande
1 9	Banana	ndizi	ndizi	vitika	ndizi	ndizi
2 0	Iron sheets	mabati	mabati	majanja	mabati	mabati
2 1	Water container (20 ltrs)	mtungi	dumu	mtunzi	galoni	galoni
2 2	Pant	suruali	chupi	chupi	chupi	chupi
2 3	Bridge	daraja	daraja	kilalo	kilalo	kilalo
2 4						

Source: Fieldwork, 2024

From the above table 1 of summary of focus group discussion on semantic/vocabulary variations, it is evident that there are a number of semantic/vocabulary Kiswahili language variations among speakers from different countries for example number 1, Kenya, DRC, Burundi and Rwanda are fond of using *bibi* for wife, while Tanzania *mke* is dominant name for a wife. On the other hand, *bibi* in Tanzania is a grandmother, while most Kenyans, Burundians, Rwandans and DRC use *nyanya* for grandmother. Other variations are indicated in numbers 2-24 in the table.

It was, however, noted during the focus group discussion that, some parts of the countries may have variations of the same word. For example, Kenyan coast will likely use *bibi* for grandmother and *mke* for wife. However, most Kenyan speakers use *bibi* for a wife.

The focus group discussion also realised that most Kiswahili dictionaries such as *Kamusi Kuu ya Kiswahili* by BAKITA and *Kamusi ya Kiswahili Sanifu* by TUKI, currently TATAKI, recognize some of these variations and document the origin and dominant places of use. However, it doesn't change the fact that the variations exist and they may affect communication and integration among the speakers.

Pronunciation or phonological variations

The focus group discussion was in agreement that there are a number of Kiswahili language variations that come as a result of pronunciation. This is mainly as a result of vowel shifts and even as a result of consonant variation. Below are some of the transcriptions of the Focus Group Discussion engagements on phonological/pronunciation variations among Kiswahili speakers. Below are some of the responses from the participants;

pronunciations appear to be different in different regions of my country. At international level, I encountered a difference in pronunciation pattern of my friends from Tanzania when pronouncing letter /l/ whereby it is pronounced with a voiced alveolar lateral approximant unlike most Kenyan's /l/ pronunciation. The same to /g/ and /gh/ pronunciations.

Another participant said the following concerning pronunciation and phonological variations he experienced;

*Listening to some of my Kiswahili speaking friends from Kivu, I noticed insertion or epenthesis in some of Kiswahili words they pronounce, most likely due to influence of the local languages, they add /y/ in words that end with double vowels. For example; **pigiya** instead of pigia (beat for) and **imbiya** instead of imbia (sing for).*

Another participant added that;

*I noticed consonant rhotacism from some of my friends from Tanzania. For instance, a letter /l/ used in Tanzanian pronunciation instead of letter /r/. They used to say; **Habali yenu** instead of Habari yenu (how are you). Sometimes /l/ misused instead of /r/ in words like; **Mtapiga kula** instead of mtapiga kura (you will vote), which completely changes the meaning of the sentence.*

Another went on to explain that;

*When talking to some friends from Kenya and even DRC, there were effects of parasitic syllables in Kiswahili they are called 'viangami'. These syllables 'cling' to a word but they don't have any necessary linguistic function. Example, Kenyans used; -nga-; they say **nakujanga** instead of huwa nakuja (I always come), **naletanga** instead of huwa naleta (I always bring). DRC use -ka- they say **nakujaka** instead of huwa nakuja (I always come) and **naimbaka** instead of huwa naimba (I always sing). Someone from environment where these epenthetic syllables are not common may not understand well what is being said.*

*While working in Kisii parts of Kenya, there were a number of phonological substitutions in Kiswahili pronunciations that I experienced like in words like; **kucha** instead of **kuja** (come) and **pika** instead of **piga** (beat).*

Another participant who had phonological variations experience in Kiswahili said;

There were some phonetic additions of some letters in pronunciation with friends from Kenya. Words like 'nchi' (country) was pronounced as inchi, /i/ at the beginning has been added in pronunciation but when writing he was writing 'nchi'. One may have a different meaning of the words since 'inchi' means inch and 'nchi' means country yet they are being used interchangeably when there is this phonetic addition.

Contact- induced variations

Contact-induced variations are variations that may be semantic, phonetic or even morphologic which come by a language being affected by neighbouring languages or languages in contact with the language. These were the responses from the focus group discussion. Below are some of the responses from the participants;

*Kiswahili from Kenyan youths in Kenya is affected by English. For instance, the sheng language which is a combination of Kiswahili and English languages such as; **Unicall** (call me) which is made up of Kiswahili word-**uni** (you) and English word **call** to come up with the word **unicall**. **Tulispend** made up of Kiswahili word **tuli** (we did) and English word **spend** to come up with the word **tulispend**.*

The next participant had the following experience on contact-induced variations;

*I have in several occasions met French effect in DRC's Kiswahili. I found them saying; **Yule Rafiki wangu ni wa vrai** (That friend of mine is good), **Vrai**, a French word for good being used instead of a Kiswahili language word. **Uko bien?** (Are you fine?), word **bien** is a French word for fine.*

These code-mixing uses of language end up causing Kiswahili language variations which interfere with seamless communication and integration among Kiswahili language speakers from different countries.

b) Documentary analysis;

In the documentary analysis method, five documented studies were sampled to supplement the focus-group discussion method. Below are some of the Kiswahili language variations exhibited from the secondary data explored;

Variations among the youth languages; Lugha ya mitaani (Dar es Salaam/Tanzania), Yabacrane (Goma/DRC), Kindubile (Lubumbashi/DRC) and Sheng (Nairobi/Kenya).

Nassenstein and Baraka (2019) did a study on Morphological features of Kiswahili youth language (s); *Lugha ya mitaani* (Dar es Salaam/Tanzania), *Yabacrâne* (Goma/DRC), *Kindubile* (Lubumbashi/DRC) and *Sheng* (Nairobi/Kenya). In the comparison of these youth Languages, they found out the following variation in the form of adopted noun classes by these youths as in the table 2 below:

Table 2: Noun class systems of the four youth languages

NC	Sheng	Kindubile	Yabacrâne	Lugha ya Mitaani	S/SW
1	m-	mu-	mu-	m-	m-
2	wa-	ba-	ba-	wa-	wa-
3	m-	mu-	mu-	m-	m-
4	mi-	mi-	mi-	mi-	mi-
5	-/li-	-/ri-	-/li-	-/ji-	-/ji-
6	ma-	ma-	ma-	ma-	ma-
7	ki-	ki-	ki-	ki-	ki-
8	vi-	bi-	bi-	vi-	vi-
9	-/N	-/N	-/N	-/N	-/N
10	-/N	-/N	-/N	-/N	-/N
11	u-	lu-	lu-	u-	u-
12	ka-	ka-	ka-	ka-	-
13	tu-2	tu-	tu-	tu-	-
14	u-	bu-	bu-	u-	u-
15	ku-	ku-	ku-	ku-	ku-
16	(pa)	pa	-	?	pa
17	(ku)	ku	(ku)	?	ku
18	(mu)	mu	(mu)	?	mu
19	-	-	hi-	-	-
20	-	-	-	gu-	-

Source: Nassenstein and Baraka, 2019.

The table 2 above summarizes the noun class systems of four youth languages; *Sheng*, *Kindubile*, *Yabacrâne*, and *Lugha ya Mitaani* compared to standardized Kiswahili. It lists the prefixes for each noun class across of these languages, revealing both commonalities and

unique features. For instance, all languages share common prefixes for noun classes 1-4, 6-8, and 10-11, with variations occurring in classes 5, 12-14, and 19-20. Notably, noun class 12 (ka-) and 13 (tu-) are active in youth languages but absent in standard Kiswahili, showing innovative diminutive and plural markers. Some classes, like 19 (hi-) in Yabacrâne and 20 (gu-) in Lugha ya Mitaani, are derived from local languages and are not present in Standard Kiswahili.

Below is table 3, highlighting a summary of variations identified against Standard Kiswahili in the youth languages of Dar es Salaam, Goma, Lubumbashi, and Nairobi, along with examples:

Table 3: A summary table highlighting variations in the four youth languages

Feature	Youth Language	Variation from Standard Swahili	Example
Noun Class System	Sheng	Retention of certain noun classes; introduction of new prefixes	NC12, -ka- for diminutives, e.g., katoto (small child)
	Kindubile	Similar structure but diverges in specific usages	ka-vieux (old guy) from mi-na-alé, ku-on-ana na ba-vieux yangu (I go to meet my old friends)
	Yabacrâne	Use of prefix -hi- for diminutives	Hi-ki-tu (small thing)
	Lugha ya Mitaani	Incorporation of diminutive prefix -ki- alongside -ka-	ki-panya (small rat) ka-toto (small child)
Nominal Modifiers	Sheng	Increased use of non-agreeing modifiers	ki-tu i-ngine (another thing)
	Kindubile	Use of possessive forms that do not agree	ba-vieux yangu (my old friends)
	Yabacrâne	Non-agreeing possessives and demonstratives	u-le petit yangu (my young friend)

Demonstrative Forms	All Youth Languages	Reduction from three demonstratives to two types	u-u/u-le (this/that)
Plural Marking	All Youth Languages	Development of NC6 -ma- as a general plural marker	ma-nyumba (houses)
	Sheng	Agreement often breaks with noun class	tu-me-build ma-nyumba (we have built houses)

Source: Nassenstein and Baraka, 2019

In table 3 above, the study highlights a summary of some of the common Kiswahili language variations among the four youth languages in Lugha ya mitaani (Dar es Salaam/Tanzania), Yabacrane (Goma/DRC), and Kindubile (Lubumbashi/DRC), focusing on noun class systems, nominal modifiers, demonstrative forms, and plural marking with examples.

Generally, the youth languages are examined across countries speaking Kiswahili; Kenya (sheng), Tanzania (Lugha ya mtaani), DRC (Yabacrane and Kindubile). These are variations across countries speaking Kiswahili language.

Variations among the Kivu speaking Swahili

Baraka (2019) carried out a study on ‘analysing ways of speaking Kivu Swahili: Variation and ethnic belonging’. In the study, the following were some of findings as summarised in the table 4 below:

Table 4: Identified variations in Kivu Swahili against standard Kiswahili with examples

Aspect	Variation	Example
Phonology/Morphophonology	Non-palatalized subject marker -ki- realized as -kya- instead of -cha.	‘Kya ba-toto’ instead of ‘cha watoto’ (the children's thing)
	First person singular future tense realized as ‘nda’ instead of ‘nita’	‘nda-soma’ for ‘nita-soma’ (I will study)

Morphology	Singular diminutive marked with ka-; plural tu- (pejorative) or bu- (non-pejorative).	‘ka-nyumba’ for ‘small house’ and ‘tu-nyumba’ for ‘many small houses’
	Use of Noun class 19 hi- as a diminutive collective, a borrowing from Kinande.	‘hi-ndege’ for ‘small birds’
Lexicon	Incorporation of loanwords from Lingala and other languages.	‘ndule’ for ‘popular music,’ ‘boke’ for alcohol
	Use of words from French and local languages (Kinyabwisha, Mashi).	‘bisi’ for ‘bus,’ ‘birayi’ for ‘potatoes’
Sociolectal Variation	Use of terms from other languages and self-created terms among youth (Yabacrâne).	‘Mi-na-end-a Bibon’ (I go to Butembo)
	Syllable modification language game (Kinyume) among children.	‘sitayadiru ole’ for ‘sitarudiya leo’ (I will not come back today)

Source: Baraka, 2019

Table 4 above highlights major variations in Kivu Kiswahili compared to Standard Kiswahili, including phonological, morphological, lexical, and sociolectal differences. These variations in Kivu Kiswahili may end up causing miscommunication and integration when a person from another Kiswahili speaking country meets them.

Kiswahili variations in Zanzibar

Miyakazi and Takemura (2019) did a study on ‘Dialectal variation in Swahili-based on the data collected in Zanzibar’. The study findings have been summarised as in the table 5 below;

Table 5: Summary of lexicon Kiswahili variations in Zanzibar

Lexical Variation

Aspect	Standard Kiswahili	Zanzibar Varieties	
Tunga penetrans (jigger)	funza/funza	Chepu/machepu (Kiunguja mjini variety)	Kepu/makepu (Kichaani/Kijambani/Kipaje)
Tomato	nyanya/nyanya	t'ungule/t'ungule, (Kiunguja mjini/kichaani)	tungule/tungule (Kijambani/Kipaje)
Spider	buibui	buibui/mabuibui (Kiunguja mjini),	bui/mabui (Kichaani/Kijambani/Kipaje)
Mango	embe/maembe	embe/embe (Kiunguja mjini/Kijambani/Kipaje), iembe/iembe (Kinungwi/Kimatemwe)	Yembe/yembe (Kichaani/Kikibeni)
Butterfly	kipepeo/vipepeo	Bangawi/mabangawi (Kichaani)	kitunguja/vitunguja (Kipaje/Kimakunduchi)

Source: Miyakazi and Takemura, 2019

The above table 5 shows lexical variations in Zanzibar in comparison to standard Kiswahili. The words *funza* (tunga penetrans/jiggers) and *nyanya* 'tomato' has different vocabularies used in their forms same to *embe* (mango) and *buibui* (butterfly) are variations, which have adopted entirely different terms, a proof lexical Kiswahili variation in Zanzibar.

Their study further identified grammar variations between standard Kiswahili and various Zanzibar variations as explained in the table 6 below;

Table 6: Grammar variations in Zanzibar Kiswahili

English	Standard Kiswahili	Variations	Variations
I am studying Kiswahili (Present tense)	Ninasoma Kiswahili	Nasoma Kiswahili (Kichaani, Kikibeni, Kinungwi, Kijambiani, Kipaje)	Niasoma/nyasoma Kiswahili (Kitumbatu-Gomani)

I don't study Kiswahili (Present tense negative)	Sisomi Kiswahili	Sinasoma Kiswahili (Kichaani, Kitumbatu-Gomani, Kikibeni, Kinungwi, Kipaje, Kijambiani)	
I cut meat (past tense positive)	Nilikata nyama	Nikata nyama (Kichaani, Kijambiani, Kitumbatu-Gomani, Kikibeni, Kinungwi)	Nkata nyama (Kijambani/Kipaje)
I did it (Past tense positive)	nilifanya	Ni-tend-e (Kichaani, Kijambiani, Kitumbatu-Gomani, Kikibeni, Kinungwi)	n-tend-e (Kijambani/Kipaje)
Ali was hit by juma (past tense positive)	Ali alipigwa na Juma	Ali kapigwa ni Juma (Kichaani, Kikibeni, Kinungwi, Kijambiani, Kipaje)	Ali kabutwa ni juma (Kitumbatu-Gomani)
What will you tell us? (Future tense)	Utatuambia nini?	Kutatuambiya nini/vipi? (Kichaani, Kikibeni, Kinungwi)	Kunaja tuambiya nini? (Kitumbatu-Gomani)
I am a student (present tense indicatif)	Mimi ni mwanafunzi	Miye mwanafunzi (Kichaani, Kitumbatu-Gomani, Kikibeni, Kinungwi, Kipaje)	Mie niwa mwanafunzi (Kijambiani)

Source: Miyakazi and Takemura, 2019

Table 6 above shows grammar variations in Zanzibar Kiswahili. There are variations in tenses; present tense, present tense negative, past tense, future tense, copular sentence and present tense indicative with examples.

All the above-identified variations in Zanzibar, lexical variations, and grammar variations, may pose serious challenges of communication and integration, especially when Kiswahili speakers from different Kiswahili-speaking countries such as Rwanda and Kenya contact each other.

Linguistic variations in spoken Kiswahili in Bungoma East Sub- County

Colleta (2018) studied ‘linguistic variations in spoken Kiswahili: a case of form one students from Bungoma East sub-county, Kenya. The findings of the study are elaborated in the table 7 below;

Table 7: Linguistic variations in spoken Kiswahili among students from Bungoma East

Aspect	Variation	Example
Pronunciation	Use of voiceless consonants instead of expected voiced consonants.	‘parapara’ for ‘barabara’ (road)
	Omission of the glottal sound (h) in certain words.	‘ospitali’ for ‘hospitali’ (hospital)
		‘kaawa’ for ‘kahawa’ (coffee)
Morphology	Use of emphatic morpheme (si-) for politeness and emphasis, which is not standard.	‘Sinilienda’ for ‘Nilienda’ (I went)
	Variation in use of sentence-final particles indicating locality or politeness.	‘Niliwekamo’ for ‘Niliweka’ (I placed)
	Use of diminutive prefix (kha-) instead of standard (ka-).	‘khale’ for ‘kale’ (that)
Vocabulary Choice	Preference for certain colloquial terms over standard forms.	‘kutenya kuni’ for ‘kuokota kuni’ (collecting firewood)
	Use of verbs indicating failure or falling differently.	‘kufa’ or ‘kuanguka’ for ‘kufeli’ (to fail)

Source: Colleta, 2018

Above table 7 outlines the main variations in the language of public day school students compared to standard Kiswahili, providing specific examples for clarity. Variations identified range from pronunciation, morphology and vocabulary, with examples of the variations in the last box of the table. These local and specific Kiswahili variations identified are likely to cause communication hitch and hindrance to seamless integration, especially when a person from a different Kiswahili-speaking country finds himself in this environment or meets a person from the Bungoma East sub-county. This is a likely challenge to communication and integration among Kiswahili speakers from different countries.

Kiswahili language variations among the Bajuni-speaking community

Derek and Hinnebusch (1993) in their study of the ‘Bajuni Grammatical Sketch,’ they did a vast study of variations existing between the Bajuni-Swahili speaking community from Northern Kenya and comparison to the Standard Kiswahili. They also made a comparison with neighbouring Kiswahili speakers. Below are the findings of Kiswahili variation between the Bajuni and the standard Kiswahili;

Consonant System Variations

/t/ in Standard Kiswahili changes to /ch/ in Bajuni example;

Miti (trees) is pronounced as michi.

/z/ in standard Kiswahili becomes /dh/ in Bajuni example;

Word *zuri* (good) becomes *dhuri*.

/s/ in standard Kiswahili is replaced by /θ/ (like the ‘th’ in think) in Bajuni, especially in Somali Bajuni. Example;

Siku (day) is pronounced as *θiku* in Bajuni.

/j/ in standard Kiswahili often corresponds to /y/ or /ɟ/ in Bajuni. Example;

Jina (name) is pronounced as *yina* in Bajuni.

Sound correspondences

In some cases, /w/ in Standard Kiswahili becomes /v/ in most Bajuni forms example, *Weka* (put) becomes *veka* in Bajuni

/m-/ in Standard Kiswahili is sometimes pronounced mu- or assimilated to the following consonant, in Bajuni. Example;

Msikiti (Mosque) becomes *nsikichi* in Bajuni.

/ny/ becomes /n/ in Bajuni example;

Nyumba (house) is pronounced as *numba* in Bajuni

Bajuni Swahili demonstrative pronouns

Table 8: Demonstrative pronouns variations in Bajuni Kiswahili against standard Kiswahili

Noun Class	Bajuni (Demonstrative 1)	Bajuni (Demonstrative 2)	Bajuni (Demonstrative 3)	Bajuni (Demonstrative 4)	Standard Kiswahili
1, 3, 11, 14	huu	hoo	ulee	uleee	huyu, huyo, yule
2	hava	havo	valee	valeee	hawa, hao, wale
4, 9	hii	hiyo	ilee	ileee	hii, hiyo, ile
5	hili	hilo	lilee	lileee	hili, hilo, lile
6	haa	hao	alee	aleee	haya, hayo, yale
7	hiki/hichi	hicho	kilee/chilee	kileee/chileee	hiki, hicho, kile
8, 10	hidhi	hidho	dhilee	dhileee	hizi, hizo, zile
15, 17	huku	hoko	kulee	kuleee	huku, huko, kule
16	hapa	hapo	palee	paleee	hapa, hapo, pale
18	humu	homo	mulee/mlee	muleee	humu, humo, mle

Source: Derek and Hinnebusch, 1993

From the above table 8, Bajuni introduces a four-way contrast in demonstratives (Demonstrative 1 to 4) compared to the three-way contrast in Standard Kiswahili. Vowel lengthening in Bajuni is common in the third and fourth demonstratives example: uleee, ileee, paleee (that, that, that) for emphasis or to add meaning related to surprise or previous reference, while Standard Kiswahili uses shorter forms, yule, ile, pale (that, that, there). Bajuni sometimes

uses unique forms like hoo (Class 1), hichi/chilee(this), (Class 7), hidhi/dhilee (these) (Class 8, 10), and hoko (Class 15, 17), which differ significantly from Standard Kiswahili.

Identified Kiswahili variations in Bajuni Kiswahili speakers; consonant system variations, sound correspondences and the Bajuni Kiswahili demonstrative pronouns are common variations that can lead to challenges in communication and integration among speakers from different countries in instances where a Kiswahili speaker from a different Kiswahili speaking nation gets into communication with Bajuni Kiswahili speakers having communication patterns with these variations.

ii) Discussion

The data highlight existence of Kiswahili language variations across different countries and regions, showcasing lexical, semantic, phonological, and even syntactical differences. These variations confirm Hypothesis 1, which posits that there are common Kiswahili language variations among people from different countries speaking Kiswahili. Below is a detailed explanation of the findings supporting this hypothesis:

Types of Kiswahili Variations identified from the study

From the Focus Group Discussions (FGD) and documentary analysis, two broad types of Kiswahili language variations are identified:

1. Written and spoken variations

Written Variations:

The written language variations are exhibited in printed media such as books, magazines, letters, and even currency. An example of a written variation in our study is evident in the currency notes of Kenya and Tanzania, where the word ‘bank’ is written differently in Kiswahili language notes: *banki* in Kenyan Kiswahili and *benki* in Tanzanian Kiswahili.

Spoken Variations:

These variations are exhibited when Kiswahili speakers from different countries converse verbally. Several spoken variations are evident in vocabulary, pronunciation (phonology), and even through contact-induced changes from other languages.

2. Vocabulary and Semantic Variations

The study shows notable differences in the vocabulary used to express common concepts across different Kiswahili-speaking regions. Example: Mke/bibi (wife): In Kenya, Burundi, Rwanda,

and DRC, the word ‘bibi’ is commonly used for ‘wife’, whereas in Tanzania, ‘mke’ is used for wife. However, in Tanzania, most Kiswahili speakers use ‘bibi’ to refer to a grandmother, which creates potential for miscommunication.

3. Phonological/Pronunciation Variations

Pronunciation variations arise mainly from shifts in vowel sounds and consonants, often influenced by local languages or even regional accents. Examples of Phonological variations are: The pronunciation of the letter /l/ in Tanzania versus Kenya: In Tanzania, the /l/ sound is voiced as in; /Habali/ instead of /Habari/, which may change meanings or cause confusion. Similarly, most Tanzanians might use /l/ in place of /r/, changing the meaning of the word or sentence such that instead of saying; *mtapiga kura* (you will vote) they may say *mtapiga kula* (you will beat eating), altering the meaning entirely. In the DRC, epenthesis (inserting extra sounds) occurs, such as adding /y/ between vowels, as in ‘pigiya’ instead of ‘pigia’ (call), influenced by local languages. Moreso, some speakers from Kenya and DRC add unnecessary syllables (termed as ‘viangami’ in Kiswahili language) to words, like ‘nakujanga’ instead of ‘nakuja’ (I am coming) or ‘naletanga’ instead of ‘naleta (I am bringing). These phonetic additions may confuse speakers from regions where these variations are uncommon.

4. Contact-Induced Variations

These types of variations mostly come from contact with other languages like French and English. Examples include: French influence on DRC Kiswahili: Words like ‘vrai’ (French for ‘true’) are used instead of the Kiswahili equivalent, *mzuri* as in; *yule rafiki wangu ni wa vrai* (that friend of mine is good). English influence on Kenyan Kiswahili especially in Kenyan youth languages with words such as ‘Unicall’ (you call me) or ‘Tulispent’ (we spent), reflects the influence of English in everyday conversation. This hybrid language is commonly known as slang or ‘Sheng’ in Kenya. The same case is for Bungoma East, where Colleta (2018) observed the use of regional terms like *kutenya kuni* instead of the standard *kuokota kuni* (collecting firewood), terms from Bukusu, a local language

5. Regional and Ethnic Variations

Significant regional variations exist even within a country, as observed in the coastal regions of Kenya and Tanzania or specific dialects like Kivu Swahili in DRC. Some regions have their own local Swahili forms influenced by neighbouring ethnic languages: In Zanzibar, variations of standard words like ‘jiggers’ (funza and chepu/makepu) and ‘tomato’ (nyanya and tungule)

reflect the different dialects within the island, such as Kiunguja and Kipaje. Sheng (Kenya), Kindubile (DRC), and Lugha ya Mitaani (Tanzania) have distinct noun class systems, where new prefixes for diminutives are created, such as ka- for diminutive. These youth dialects show both creativity and departure from standard Kiswahili grammar rules.

6. Phonological and Morphological Variations in Youth Languages

Studies of youth languages such as Sheng (Kenya), Kindubile (DRC), and Lugha ya Mitaani (Tanzania) have shown how noun class systems vary: For example, noun class 12 (ka-) for diminutives is common in youth languages but absent in standard Kiswahili. The use of non-agreeing modifiers and possessives also distinguishes youth languages from formal Kiswahili. These regional and sociolectal variations not only reflect linguistic diversity but also the socio-cultural identities of their speakers.

In summary, the findings provide strong evidence to support Hypothesis 1: There are indeed common Kiswahili language variations existing among speakers from different countries. These variations occur in written and spoken forms, influenced by regional dialects, local languages, phonological shifts, contact with other languages such as French, English, and sociolectal innovations, especially among the youth. While these variations enrich the Kiswahili language, they may also create communication challenges among speakers from different regions.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study highlights the significant linguistic variations in Kiswahili across different countries and regions, confirming the existence of both written and spoken differences. These variations, which encompass semantic, phonological, and syntactical differences, as well as the influence of regional dialects and contact languages, underscore the dynamic nature of Kiswahili as a global language. The findings support the study by proving that Kiswahili language variations exist in international communication

As Kiswahili continues to expand its role as a global lingua franca, addressing these linguistic disparities is crucial for enhancing effective communication and fostering greater mutual understanding among its speakers. This study calls for increased awareness and strategies to bridge these gaps, ensuring Kiswahili remains a unifying and effective medium of communication across regions.

Recommendations

Recommendations were made to Kiswahili language users, Kiswahili Policy-making Bodies and scholars, educators and researchers. Below are some of the specific recommendations;

Policy-makers like the national governments and state ministries of education and language bodies like the National Kiswahili Council of Tanzania (BAKITA), National Kiswahili of Zanzibar (BAKIZA), Institute of Kiswahili Studies (TATAKI), and the East African Kiswahili Commission (KAKAMA) are tasked with addressing Kiswahili variations to enhance cross-border communication and integration. The study recommends the standardization of Kiswahili teaching pedagogy across all Kiswahili-speaking countries, ensuring a more unified approach to teaching the language in schools and higher learning institutions.

Policy-makers are advised to work on establishing a global Kiswahili language body since current bodies like BAKITA and BAKIZA are national bodies and do not fully factor in the Kiswahili language across other nations. Another inclusive body, KAKAMA identifying itself with East Africa only and this may isolate Kiswahili speakers beyond East African region. More still, the available bodies can work on developing the Kiswahili language from a broad-based perspective with internationalization in mind. Doing this is crucial to overseeing Kiswahili's growth and development, enforcing common standards for language use, and addressing regional variations.

Scholars and educators are vital in navigating and resolving challenges associated with Kiswahili language variations. The study recommends that scholars conduct further research on Kiswahili variations to document and understand the impact of these differences on communication, integration, and culture. More research is needed to explore regional influences on Kiswahili, including youth languages such as Sheng, Lugha ya Mitaani, and Yabacrane. Educators should focus on teaching Kiswahili with an emphasis on its diversity, helping learners appreciate the rich linguistic heritage of the language while equipping them with the skills to communicate across regions.

Avenues for Further Research

Below are some of the suggested avenues for further research. It is important to note that the researcher did not abscond these avenues but decided to delimit themselves to one specific area for full exploration. The avenues for further research include:

Impact of Digital Communication on Kiswahili Language Variations; A critical area for further study is the role of digital communication platforms, such as social media, messaging apps, and online forums, in shaping Kiswahili variations. With the increasing use of informal language online, it would be important to investigate how digital interactions influence the spread of regional variations and youth languages like Sheng, Lugha ya Mitaani, and Yabacrane. This research could explore whether digital spaces are fostering new forms of Kiswahili or promoting standardization due to the broad reach of the internet.

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