



— WHY
LEARN
KISWAHILI —
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Karibu (welcome)

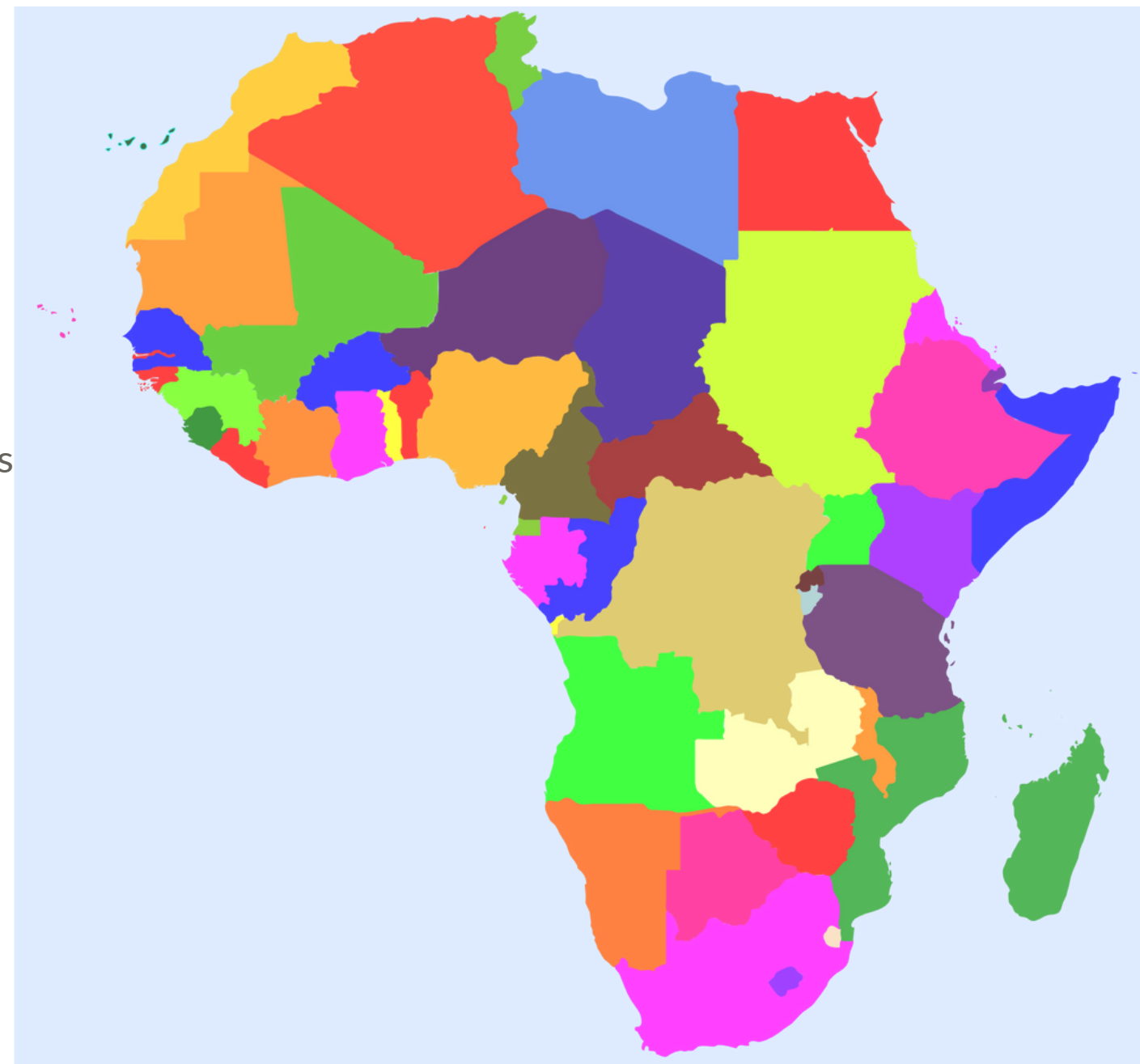
Why study Swahili?

Swahili - or Kiswahili as it is called when one is speaking the language - is the most important and widely studied indigenous language of Africa, the National and official language of Kenya and Tanzania. It is spoken as a native language on the East coast of Africa and the islands adjacent to the coast from Southern Somalia in the north down through the Kenyan and Tanzanian coasts.

It is also a Lingua franca of the African Continent spoken as a second language by millions of people mainly in Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, and the eastern side of Democratic Republic of Congo.

There are also speakers in Mozambique, Rwanda, Burundi, Zambia, Malawi, Southern Arabian countries such as Yemen and Oman, as well as other parts of the world. It is aired on radio broadcasts such as the British Broadcast Corporation, Voice of America, and Deutsche Welle.

Swahili is taught in academic institutions from Japan in the East to Mexico in the west. It can be used to fulfil language requirements. The study of Swahili also provides interesting issues regarding language policies and language planning.



Whatever the area of research one is in, be it linguistics, anthropology, geography, archaeology, or even sociology, knowledge of Swahili and its many varieties is essential if one is working in the East African region. There are many benefits of knowing the Swahili language, including the fact that it serves as a good vehicle to accessing Swahili culture.

Swahili has a long written tradition and remarkable history. Finally, knowing Swahili enhances the credibility of researchers interested in East Africa.



Who speaks Swahili?

Over 150 million people in eastern and central African speak Swahili. It is widely used in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. A little over six million people speak it as their first language. Most others speak Swahili fluently as a second, third or fourth language. Those who speak it as a first language are found along the coast of east Africa stretching from southern Somalia to the border between Tanzania and Mozambique.

The Linguasphere of Swahili according to the Wikipedia in comparison to the world. Dark green: native range. Medium green: official use. Light green: bilingual use but not official.

The East African coast was visited by Arabs and Persians as early as the second century A.D. These visitors settled in Africa and married local people.

Many local people modified and adopted the visitors' traditions. Later visits by Arabs to the area also introduced the Islamic religion, and today many Swahili speakers throughout East Africa are Muslim.

Travelers from Portugal, Germany, England and various Asian countries also went to East Africa. Each group left its mark on both the culture and the language.



Interesting Swahili language features

There is an abundance of vowels in Swahili words; all Swahili words, with few exceptions, end in a vowel. Additionally, there are almost no consonant clusters. Consonant-ending words that are borrowed from other languages, i.e. English, are often modified with the addition of a vowel at the end of the syllable/word, such as “bank” to benki.



Language and Culture

Swahili is a Bantu language of the Niger-Congo family and has a typical, complicated Bantu structure. For example, Swahili utilizes over 13 noun classes, the equivalence of a Roman language having 13 genders. Three full noun classes are devoted to different aspects of space and time. Swahili represents an African World view quite different from that of a European language.

Nowadays in most countries of the world, it is easy to cope only with English – and that is great. The knowledge that you will easily find your way around a foreign city greatly facilitates touristic trips– but we responsibly claim that this is not enough to get to know the culture in depth.

In Swahili, there is a saying: **MTU NI WATU**, which means **MAN IS A PEOPLE**. Through language learning, they get to know and understand different customs, natures, and behaviours.

The ‘kanga’ - picture from Wikipedia - is a popular Swahili garment. It is a rectangle of pure cotton cloth with a border all around it, printed in bold designs and bright colours and a Swahili saying or slogan inscribed at the bottom.

Women wrap the two cotton fabrics clothing around their waists and upper bodies and draped over their shoulders and heads.

The kanga is also ultimate public billboard for personal feelings. This phrase, called the ‘jina’, can be a useful communication tool. For example a woman who’s upset with a friend might give or wear a kanga with a phrase like “**njia ya mwongo ni fupi**” which means “**the days of a liar are numbered.**”

Kangas are extremely popular throughout East Africa not only for clothing but for their multiple uses.

Husbands give Kangas to wives, children to their mothers, a woman may split a pair to give half to her best friend, and babies are virtually born into them, and are usually carried in a soft sling of kanga cloth.



Kanga (Tanzania, 2011)

The jina of this kanga is **Usijaze masusu kwa mambo yasokusuhu** which means "Do not fill your mind with things that do not concern you" or "Do not get involved in matters that do not concern you".

Photo taken at a wholesale, Dar es Salaam (Tanzania), 2011 by Gavrosh - see Wikipedia.

Swahili traditional food

Anyone visiting the coastal region of Kenya for their first time, is always greeted with sweet aroma. As a famous Swahili saying goes “**Kuingia ni Harusi, Kuondoka ni Matanga**”. To me visiting coastal Kenya is like a wedding celebration, but leaving the place is compared to a funeral because no one wants to leave this amazing city.

The Swahili dishes are one of the elements that would make one fall in love with this culture. Swahili cuisines, which are highly spiced, have African, Middle Eastern, and Indian influences. Rice, the staple food, is cooked with coconut milk and served with tomato-based meat, bean, or vegetable stews.

Meals are incorporate with locally available vegetables (egg-plant, okra, and spinach), fruits (mangoes, coconuts, pineapples), and spices (cloves, cardamon, hot pepper). Fish is also central to the diet. Chicken and goat meat are popular for holiday meals. Sweet tea with milk is served several times a day.

The most popular meal is a Pilau Dish. Pilau is a common dish all over the world, but the secret to the Swahili version is that it's flavoured with the spices fresh from the “Spice Island”, Zanzibar. Famous for clove and cinnamon, and with the addition of cardamom, Swahili pilau is a delicate, fragrant and beautiful dish that's always welcomed.

For more information on how to cook pilau please visit: <https://cheflolaskitchen.com/east-african-pilau/> - the pictures where taken from there.

HOW TO MAKE THE EAST AFRICAN RICE PILAU

1. Toast and blend the pilau masala: In a medium saucepan over medium heat.
2. Brown the onions by frying it in oil until it caramelizes. This should take about 10 to 15 minutes. Stir in the Garlic, ginger and serrano pepper.
3. Add the meat stock cubes, pilau masala, cilantro, bay leaves, and salt to taste and brown the meat for about
4. Stir in the tomatoes and cook till it dissolves. Then stir in the potatoes.
5. Add water and bring everything to a rolling boil and leave the potatoes to cook for about 10 minutes.
6. Stir in the rice then cover tightly. You can use an aluminum foil to cover it first, this will help keep the steam in. Then place the lid over it and leave to cook on a low heat for 20 minutes until the liquid has been absorbed.
7. Serve hot! You can sprinkle the rice pilaf with some chopped cilantro, then fluff with a fork. Enjoy.



Swahili Music and dance

The slow rhythmic tunes mostly played in the Coastal Kenya will make you fall in love with the music over and over again. The famously known Taarab songs will slowly melt your heart into the rhythm.

Another unique coastal culture music is the Chakacha music. Chakacha is a very popular dance amongst the coastal tribes. Unlike the other dances, coastal dances focus mainly on vigorous waist movements and is danced along in the traditional taarab rythm.

With Taarab music and dancing, the instrumentals take up most of the song giving both the dancers and the performers' time to shake their waists and move their hands freely. The major difference between chakacha and Taarab is the tempo of the songs with chakacha being the faster kind of music.

Swahili has also become more and more prevalent in Tanzanian hip-hop, also called Bongo Flava (from the Swahili word for 'brains', ubongo). The Bongo Flava movement appeared around the 1980s, and became an important way for many artists to bring music and lyrics to the specific problems they saw in their environments. More recently, it has become a way to discuss HIV/AIDS and sexuality in a medium not normally done in informal conversation.

For more information on Chakacha and Taarab visit Youtube - the pictures where taken from there.

CHAKACHA:

<https://youtu.be/rmnxsFEtuZY>

TAARAB:

<https://youtu.be/aJysP8z4RRU>



Swahili Architecture

Swahili architecture, a term used to designate a whole range of diverse building traditions practiced or once practiced along the eastern and south-eastern coasts of Africa, is in many ways an extension of mainland African traditions, although structural elements, such as domes and barrel vaulting, clearly connect to Persian Gulf Area and South Asian building traditions as well.

Exotic ornament and design elements also connected the architecture of the Swahili coast to other Islamic port cities. In fact, many of the classic mansions and palaces of the Swahili Coast belonged to wealthy merchants and landowners, who played a key role in the mercantile economy of the region.

KEY ELEMENTS

Along the coast of East Africa, one can find many stone monuments built by the Swahili, including houses, tombs, and mosques. The materiality of local coral limestone marks the signature building language of Swahili architecture and provides a functional response towards both human needs and the physical environment.

Other raw materials, including coral rag and mangrove poles are commonly used to elaborate stone buildings. The decorative designs on the building facade are influenced from a mix of cultures from mainland Africa and inspiration from Arabia and Indian immigrants. Various designs on roofs and windows serve to protect buildings from dramatic monsoon seasons.

The most distinguished local features of Swahili architecture is Swahili doors. The designs and motifs of doorframes can be categorized into two types. Rectangular frames represent an older Swahili style with straight lintels, while arched lintels were more prevalent in the later nineteenth century. The center of the lintel often carries a carved Arabic inscription, such as a quote from the Quran or information of the householder. Therefore, doors usually serve as an important indicator to enhance and signify the social status of the householder. On the urban level, Swahili towns are organized through sections called mitaa, divided by city walls. In Swahili, mitaa are imaginary and symbolic districts with which local inhabitants associate their social identities. Each mitaa is centralized around a mosque. The social status of each mitaa can be reflected through the types of buildings and activities revealed through archeological excavations.



Within the internal structure, a typical Swahili house is designed around a self-contained central courtyard. Privacy of domestic life is valued, as the owners' living space is separated from the public space. An inner porch is oriented towards a blank wall that blocks the view of the inner courtyard. Courtyards also actively cool down the building internally.

For more information see Wikipedia from where part of this is taken: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Swahili_architecture

Language and Economy

As East and Central Africa interest in the regional and global economy grows, so does the interest of its people in languages used in our region. Students in secondary schools, for instance, are keen in other foreign languages than English and French. During this opportune time when the region is in a dynamic period of integration, it is worth examining how secondary school students perceive the importance of Kiswahili in the national development.

Taking into account that any additional language to the mother tongue is a new trump card in this globalization period, acquiring Kiswahili language as a second language for students can sharpen their intellectual skills, increase their benefit from Kiswahili phone countries, and broaden their cultural understanding. Strengthening Kiswahili in the educational system of the region will play an important role to create the ability to communicate in Kiswahili and provide access to the world's marketplaces, especially in our region of Great Lakes and the East Africa. This is a good starting point in development in our region.

The word “development” covers all economic growth indicators and non-economic indicators.

Economic indicators that are referring to the strengthening of the material base, mainly industrialization, while the non-economic indicators are those that refer to the strengthening of the wellbeing of members of the society. They include improvement in education provision, improvement in health conditions, a coherent and social organization, and adequately skilled labour supply to meet evolving national and international labour market needs.

By the term “development” we mean all processes involving structural transformation in response to on-going cultural, economic, political and social changes taking place within the society.

Many people choose to learn a foreign language precisely out of a desire for better business opportunities – or because knowledge of that language is necessary for their business field. However, learning a rare language provides a significant additional advantage in the labour market.

The Swahili-speaking area of East Africa is currently one of the most important points of economic growth and development. A large number of investments are being implemented – so it is more than desirable to know the language of the local population. If you decide to learn Swahili, you might find that your skill is extremely useful because it is not possessed by a large number of people – which automatically opens many doors for you.



African Union Adopts Swahili as Official Working Language

The approval comes after a request from Tanzanian Vice President Philip Mpango, who argued that Swahili is spoken by over 100 million people in Africa, making it one of the most widely spoken languages on the continent, according to the continental union's 55 member states. "Kiswahili is already in use in various communities including the East African Community (EAC), the Southern African Development Community (SADC) as well as a teaching language in many African countries," he said.

Data from the following article by Reuters published by Andrew Wasike Shimanyula on 10.02.2022: <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/african-union-adopts-swahili-as-official-working-language/2498467#:~:text=For%20a%20long%20time%2C%20African,the%20World%20Kiswahili%20Language%20Day.>

The African Union's Heads of State have now approved Swahili as an official working language for the bloc. The announcement was made during the African Union's Assembly of Heads of State and Government in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

For a long time, African leaders have tried to push for the AU to adopt Swahili as the Pan African language.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) declared **July 7 as the World Kiswahili Language Day.**

According to the UN, the language had its origins in East Africa, and Swahili speakers are spread over more than 14 countries: Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), South Sudan, Somalia, Mozambique, Malawi, Zambia, Comoros, and as far as Oman and Yemen in the Middle East.

Southern African countries such as South Africa and Botswana have introduced it in schools, while Namibia and others are considering doing so.



So why July 7?

7 July, which was the day in 1954 that Tanganyika African National Union (TANU) under the late Mwalimu Julius Kambarage Nyerere, First President of the United Republic of Tanzania, adopted Kiswahili as a unifying language for independence struggles. Indeed, former President and Father of the Nation of Kenya, the late Mzee Jomo Kenyatta, also used Kiswahili language through the use of the popular “Harambee” slogan in mobilizing the people of Kenya in the struggle against colonialism. In addition, on 7 July 2000, the East African Community (EAC) was re-established to rekindle the spirit of cooperation and integration among the East African people of the United Republic of Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda where Kiswahili language is widely spoken. Rwanda, Burundi and South Sudan later joined the EAC and are now members. For more information see: <https://www.uonbi.ac.ke/news/un-declares-july-7-world-kiswahili-language-day>

Kiswahili for tourists and social workers

If you're dealing with East Africa in any way, then it's essential you take notice of the Swahili language. Swahili is a Bantu language and therefore spoken by many communities that inhabit the Great Lakes region and other areas of southeast Africa, including Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda and Mozambique.

It's particularly useful to have knowledge of Swahili if doing business in Kenya. The country is the largest economy in East and Central Africa and has seen massive growth in areas such as telecommunications in the last decade.

Swahili is the national or official language of Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as well as being one of the official languages of the East African Community and African Union. It is a language of influence politically, economically and socially, and a knowledge of it can deepen business relationships.

Swahili plays an important part in education in several African countries. Uganda made Swahili a required subject in primary schools in 1992.

It is also a compulsory subject in Kenyan schools and a distinct academic discipline in many public and private universities. With the next generation of leaders, as well as consumers all speaking Swahili, ignoring it would be short sighted.

Inter-African trade at this point in time is low. Poor transport connections and infrastructure have thus far capped business movements between African countries. However, as investment is made in improving logistics, trading languages will emerge to aid communication between different peoples. Swahili is well placed to become such a tool.

Swahili has become a language associated with IT and technology and, as a result, arts and culture. As investment continues in IT infrastructure and mobile and online solutions in countries such as Kenya, the economy is growing tremendously.

When an economy grows so do people's spending power, their exposure to information and their inventiveness and creativity. The result will be a flourishing tech-culture scene expressed through Swahili. "Swahilihood" is a term already starting to make appearances online.



Knowledge of Swahili will enhance the credibility of researchers interested in Africa. Areas such as big data, social media and digital information are growing and to gain critical insight into Africa's evolving markets, having an understanding of Swahili will be very important.

I could be wrong, but I have seen languages rise from under the radar to become globally important. Ten years ago nobody would have even considered learning Chinese; now it's a crucial global language. Swahili has the same potential to become a global language, and this is why anyone looking to Africa should pay attention to it now.



The Future

Overall, the future for Swahili looks bright. Its widespread use throughout eastern Africa, especially as a second-language, provides an invaluable method of communication between many groups, especially important in light of Africa's rich and varied linguistic environment.

Swahili's place as one of the official languages of the African Union ensures its continued use in African politics and international affairs. Additionally, its growing importance in popular culture, especially through the growing Bongo Flava movement, provides a crucial way for young people to talk about their environment and struggles through the international language of music.

ASANTE - KWAHERI

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Jackson Kuya is a jovial and enthusiastic teacher from Kenya. He is trained, certified and registered with the Teachers Service Commission of Kenya. He has been in the teaching field for over fifteen years. As a renown teacher of Kiswahili he has taught in various institutions in Nairobi, the capital of Kenya, and has won several awards in recognition to his effort as a teacher of Kiswahili. He has co-published several journals and learning materials in Kiswahili for use in the Kenyan syllabus. Currently he is pursuing a bachelor degree in Education at a local university in Kenya.

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