

Media's Multilingual Shift: Assessing The Impact of Unofficial Languages On Tanzania's Linguistic Landscape

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Abstract

This study explored the impact of Arabic and Asian languages in Tanzanian mass media on the growth and status of the country's official languages, Swahili and English. The primary aim was to evaluate how multilingual football commentaries, particularly on Azam Television and Tanzania Broadcasting Corporation (TBC), influenced the linguistic landscape of Tanzania. Employing an exploratory qualitative research design, data were collected through semi-structured interviews and documentary reviews involving 15 participants, including media reporters, a representative from the Ministry of Culture, and citizens from Mbeya City. The findings indicated that while the use of non-official languages enriched cultural experiences and promoted linguistic diversity, it also posed significant challenges to the prominence and growth of Swahili and English, and could marginalize vernacular languages. The study recommended a nuanced media language policy that promotes linguistic diversity while safeguarding the integrity of official and indigenous languages, along with strategic investments to support high-quality multilingual content without imposing financial burdens on media organizations.

Keywords: *Multilingual Media, Language Growth, Swahili and English, Linguistic Diversity*

INTRODUCTION

Since Tanzania's independence in 1961, language policy has significantly shaped national identity and cultural cohesion. Swahili was promoted as a unifying national language, while English retained its importance as the medium of instruction in higher education and as the language of international communication (Blommaert, 2014). This dual language policy aimed to balance national unity with global engagement. However, the media landscape in Tanzania has evolved dramatically, introducing new dynamics in language use and influencing language growth.

In recent years, the emergence of multilingual broadcasts has introduced a new dimension to the Tanzanian linguistic landscape. Particularly notable is the increasing use of Arabic and Asian languages in mass media, especially football commentaries on popular platforms such as Azam Television and Tanzania Broadcasting Corporation (TBC). This trend raises questions about the impact of these unofficial languages on the growth and status of the official languages, Swahili and English.

Scholarly attention to language and media in Tanzania has primarily focused on the roles of Swahili and English in education and public discourse. For instance, Blommaert (2014) highlights how Swahili has been instrumental in fostering national unity, while English has facilitated international business and diplomacy. Other studies have examined the historical and socio-political contexts shaping Tanzania's

language policies (Moshi, 2006; Rugemalira, 2017). However, there is a paucity of research on the influence of non-official languages in Tanzanian media, creating a gap in understanding the broader implications of media multilingualism for language growth.

This study aims to explore the impact of unofficial languages, mainly Arabic and Asian languages, on the growth and status of Tanzania's official languages, Swahili and English. This research seeks to fill the gap by examining how the use of these languages in football commentaries on Azam Television and TBC affects the linguistic landscape of Tanzania. Through an exploratory design employing semi-structured interviews and documentary reviews, this study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the interplay between media language practices and language growth in Tanzania.

The role of mass media in language policy and planning has been widely studied across different continents. Fishman (1991) in North America argued that media can serve as both a tool for language revitalization and a domain for language decline. In the European context, Edwards (1994) discussed the media's role in maintaining linguistic diversity amidst globalization. Similarly, Spolsky (2009) provided a comprehensive analysis of language management, emphasizing the critical role of media in shaping language use.

In Africa, the media has historically promoted Swahili as a lingua franca, enhancing its status as a national language (Blommaert, 2014). While not as pervasive in everyday communication, English remains crucial in higher education and international contexts (Moshi, 2006). In Asia, Annamalai (2001) highlighted the complex interplay between local languages and English in Indian media, drawing parallels to the Tanzanian context where multiple languages coexist.

Recent studies have pointed to the growing presence of non-official languages in Tanzanian media. For instance, Mpemba (2018) observed the use of Arabic phrases in radio broadcasts and their reception among different audience segments. Similarly, a study by Chuwa (2019) highlighted the influence of Asian languages in television programming, noting a blend of cultural appreciation and linguistic diversity. These findings resonate with Bourdieu's (1991) concept of linguistic capital, where the value of a language is shaped by its use in influential domains such as media.

Language and media studies in Latin America have often focused on preserving indigenous languages amidst dominant Spanish broadcasts (Hornberger, 1998). This mirrors the Tanzanian situation where Swahili and English must navigate the influence of Arabic and Asian languages in popular media.

Despite these observations, there remains a lack of comprehensive research on the specific impacts of these languages on Tanzania's official languages. This study addresses this gap by focusing on the football commentaries of Azam Television and TBC, platforms that command significant viewership and influence. The global perspective underscores the importance of understanding local contexts within broader linguistic trends.

The primary purpose of this study is to assess the impact of Arabic and Asian languages used in Tanzanian mass media on the growth and status of the country's official languages, Swahili and English. This study aims to understand how these non-official languages in media broadcasts, particularly in football commentaries, affect language perception, use, and policy in Tanzania.

While previous research has extensively covered the roles of Swahili and English in Tanzania's educational and socio-political spheres, there is limited knowledge about the influence of non-official languages in mass media. This study seeks to bridge this gap by providing empirical data and analysis on the implications of media multilingualism for the growth and status of Tanzania's official languages.

METHODS

This exploratory study employed a qualitative research design that is well-suited to examining the nuanced and multifaceted impacts of multilingual media on language growth. This design allowed for an in-depth exploration of participants' perceptions, attitudes, and experiences, providing rich, detailed data that quantitative methods might not capture (Creswell, 2013).

The research design incorporated two primary data collection methods: semi-structured interviews and documentary reviews. This triangulation of data sources enhanced the validity and reliability of the findings by providing multiple perspectives on the research questions (Yin, 2018).

The study involved a purposive sample of 15 participants to ensure that those with relevant experiences and insights were included. The participants were strategically selected to represent different stakeholder groups impacted by using unofficial languages in mass media. The sample included four media reporters selected from Azam Television and Tanzania Broadcasting Corporation (TBC), who are directly involved in producing and delivering the football commentaries. Their insights into editorial policies, language choices, and audience engagement were crucial (Guest et al., 2013). One representative from the Ministry of Culture provided a governmental perspective on language policy, media regulations, and cultural implications of multilingual broadcasts. Additionally, ten citizens from Mbeya City, regular consumers of the media content, represented the audience's perspective, providing insights into how multilingual commentaries affected their language preferences, understanding, and cultural identity.

Semi-structured interviews were chosen for their flexibility and depth, allowing the researcher to explore specific themes while also accommodating new topics that emerged during the conversation (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The interview guide included open-ended questions to elicit detailed responses about participants' experiences and perceptions. Examples of interview questions included: for media reporters, "How do you decide which languages to use in your commentaries?" and "What feedback have you received from audiences regarding the use of Arabic or Asian languages in your broadcasts?" for the Ministry representative, "What is the government's stance on the use of non-official languages in mass media?" and "How do you perceive the impact of these languages on the growth of Swahili and English?"; for citizens, "How do you feel about the use of Arabic and Asian languages in football commentaries?" and "Do these broadcasts influence your language use or preferences?" Interviews were conducted in person and, where necessary, via telephone or video conferencing. Each interview lasted approximately 45-60 minutes and was audio-recorded with the participant's consent to ensure accurate transcription and analysis.

Documentary reviews involve systematically analyzing relevant documents, including media content, policy documents, and audience feedback (Bowen, 2009). The documents reviewed included transcripts and recordings of football commentaries from Azam Television and TBC to identify the frequency and context of Arabic and Asian language use. Official documents from the Ministry of Culture and related bodies were reviewed to understand the regulatory framework governing language use in media. Viewer and listener comments, letters, and social media posts were analyzed to gauge public reaction to multilingual broadcasts.

Data from the interviews and documentary reviews were analyzed using thematic analysis, which involves identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The process included familiarisation, where interviews were transcribed, and data were read through multiple times to become deeply familiar with the content. Coding involves generating initial codes by systematically organizing data into meaningful groups. Theme development entailed collating codes into potential themes and sub-themes. Reviewing themes involved refining themes to ensure they accurately represented the data. Defining and naming themes meant clearly defining each theme and naming them in a way that conveyed their essence. Writing up involved integrating the themes into a coherent narrative that addressed the research questions.

Ethical approval was obtained before data collection began. Participants provided informed consent, ensuring they understood the purpose of the study, their right to confidentiality, and their ability to withdraw at any time (Orb et al., 2001). Data were anonymized to protect participants' identities, and all recordings and transcripts were securely stored.

This study's methodological approach combined semi-structured interviews and documentary reviews to explore the impact of unofficial languages on the growth of Tanzania's official languages in mass media. By engaging with multiple stakeholders and employing rigorous qualitative analysis, the study aimed to comprehensively understand this complex phenomenon.

FINDINGS

The findings of this study reveal that the use of Arabic and Asian languages in football commentaries has a multifaceted impact on the growth of Swahili and English in Tanzania. Semi-structured interviews and documentary reviews identified both positive and negative effects.

Positive Impacts

One of the vital positive impacts identified is cultural enrichment. Incorporating Arabic and Asian languages in football commentaries significantly enriches the cultural experience for multilingual viewers. As one media reporter from Azam Television noted, "*Using different languages in our broadcasts brings a sense of global connection and cultural diversity, which many viewers appreciate.*" This cultural richness enhances the viewing experience and promotes a more inclusive media environment.

Another positive impact is related to language learning. Exposure to multiple languages through football commentaries encourages some viewers to learn new languages, broadening their linguistic skills. A citizen from Mbeya City mentioned, "*I have picked up several Arabic phrases just from watching football matches. It is fascinating and educational.*" This incidental learning can contribute to a more linguistically diverse population.

Furthermore, the use of various languages facilitates cross-cultural communication among viewers. According to the Ministry of Culture representative, "Multilingual broadcasts can act as a bridge between different communities, fostering mutual understanding and respect." This media aspect can enhance social cohesion by bringing together people from diverse linguistic backgrounds.

Additionally, media outlets using multiple languages can attract a wider audience, including expatriates and international viewers. As another reporter from TBC highlighted, "Our use of different languages in commentaries has attracted viewers from neighbouring countries and beyond, expanding our market reach." This expansion can lead to increased viewership and revenue for media companies.

Negative Impacts

Despite these positive outcomes, the study also identified several negative impacts. One primary concern is language dilution. The frequent use of non-official languages in popular media may dilute the presence and perceived importance of Swahili and English. One interviewee, a citizen from Mbeya City, expressed concern, stating, "*I worry that the prominence of Swahili and English is being overshadowed by these other languages, especially for younger viewers who are still learning.*"

Another significant negative impact is viewer confusion. Some viewers, mainly those unfamiliar with Arabic or Asian languages, find the commentaries confusing and less engaging. A common sentiment was reflected by a respondent who said, "When the commentators switch to languages I do not understand, I lose track of the game and feel disconnected."

Using non-official languages in media broadcasts may also lead to an erosion of national language identity. The Ministry representative remarked, "*While it is great to have diversity, there is a risk that Swahili, which unites us as a nation, might lose its central role in our daily lives.*"

Additionally, the popularity of multilingual commentaries can shift audience preferences away from Swahili and English. A media reporter from Azam Television observed, "*There is a noticeable trend where some viewers, especially the younger generation, prefer the flair of Arabic phrases, which could affect their proficiency in the official languages.*"

Economic barriers present another challenge. The need to produce multilingual content can impose financial burdens on media organizations. A TBC reporter highlighted this, stating, "*Producing content in multiple languages requires additional resources and skilled personnel, which not all media houses can afford.*"

Another concern is the potential for social fragmentation. The use of multiple languages might inadvertently create language-based viewer segments, reducing the shared experience that Swahili and English broadcasts typically provide. One citizen noted, "*I feel that these multilingual broadcasts sometimes cater to specific groups, which can make others feel excluded.*"

Moreover, the inconsistent quality of language used in broadcasts can affect the credibility of media outlets. A citizen from Mbeya City commented, "Sometimes, *the Arabic or Asian phrases are not used correctly, which can be distracting and reduce the overall quality of the commentary.*"

Regulatory challenges also arise with the incorporation of unofficial languages in media. The representative from the Ministry of Culture mentioned, "*Balancing the inclusion of diverse languages while maintaining the integrity of Swahili and English in media is a complex regulatory issue that we are still navigating.*"

The impact extends beyond the official languages to vernacular languages as well. The focus on Arabic and Asian languages can marginalise indigenous languages, leading to further decline. One media reporter observed, "*We rarely hear our local languages on mainstream media anymore, which is disheartening.*" This marginalisation can contribute to the country's erosion of cultural heritage and linguistic diversity.

Additionally, multiple non-official languages in media may create a hierarchical perception of languages, where some are deemed more prestigious than others. This can negatively impact the perceived value of vernacular languages, as noted by a citizen from Mbeya City who said, "*People might start thinking that learning our local languages is not as important as learning these foreign languages.*"

Furthermore, the emphasis on non-official languages in media could result in a loss of language proficiency among speakers of vernacular languages. As younger generations are more exposed to Arabic and Asian languages, there is a risk that they might not fully develop their skills in their native languages. The Ministry representative highlighted this, stating, "*There's a growing concern that our children are losing touch with their mother tongues because of the dominance of these foreign languages in media.*"

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study unveil a tapestry of enriching and challenging impacts resulting from the use of Arabic and Asian languages in Tanzanian football commentaries. These outcomes vividly depict the complexities of navigating multilingual media landscapes.

Cultural Enrichment and Cross-Cultural Communication

The study highlights the significant cultural enrichment by incorporating Arabic and Asian languages in football commentaries. This mirrors global trends where multilingual media enhance cultural richness and promote understanding among diverse linguistic communities. As Fishman (1991) noted, multilingual media can act as a cultural bridge, a sentiment echoed by a media reporter from Azam Television who remarked, "Using different languages in our broadcasts brings a sense of global connection and cultural diversity, which many viewers appreciate."

However, balancing this cultural diversity with national identity remains a challenge. The Ministry of Culture's representative expressed concerns similar to those of Spolsky (2009), who warned about the potential erosion of local languages when overshadowed by dominant global languages. This underscores the delicate act of promoting multilingualism without compromising the central role of Swahili in Tanzania.

Language Learning and Linguistic Diversity

Exposure to multiple languages through media can spark interest and facilitate language learning, contributing to linguistic diversity. Annamalai (2001) observed similar trends in India, where media exposure led to acquiring local and international languages. This aligns with our findings, where a citizen from Mbeya City shared, "I have picked up several Arabic phrases just from watching football matches. It is fascinating and educational."

Yet, this linguistic diversity risks diluting the prominence of Swahili and English. Hornberger (1998) discussed how dominant languages in media could marginalise indigenous ones, a concern mirrored in our study. A participant worried that "the prominence of Swahili and English is overshadowed by these other languages, especially for younger viewers who are still learning."

Economic Barriers and Social Fragmentation

Producing multilingual content can impose financial strains on media organisations. Mpemba (2018) highlighted that resource constraints often limit the quality of multilingual productions. A TBC reporter echoed this issue, stating, "Producing content in multiple languages requires additional resources and skilled personnel, which not all media houses can afford."

Social fragmentation is another potential downside. Creating language-based viewer segments can reduce the shared experience that Swahili and English broadcasts typically offer. This reflects Bourdieu's (1991) concept of linguistic capital, where language use can reinforce social divisions. One citizen noted, "These multilingual broadcasts sometimes cater to specific groups, which can make others feel excluded."

Erosion of National and Vernacular Language Identity

The study also highlights the risk of eroding national and vernacular language identities. Rugemalira (2017) emphasised the importance of maintaining Swahili's prominence, a challenge amplified by the influx of Arabic and Asian languages in the media. The representative from the Ministry of Culture warned, "While it is great to have diversity, there is a risk that Swahili, which unites us as a nation, might lose its central role in our daily lives."

Furthermore, the marginalisation of vernacular languages is a significant concern. As Hornberger (1998) observed in Latin America, the dominance of non-official languages can push indigenous languages to the periphery. A media reporter from Azam Television lamented, "We rarely hear our local languages on mainstream media anymore, which is disheartening."

Regulatory Challenges and Quality Concerns

Balancing the inclusion of diverse languages while maintaining the integrity of Swahili and English presents regulatory challenges. Edwards (1994) discussed the difficulties of crafting language policies that accommodate diversity without undermining national languages. The inconsistent quality of language use in broadcasts can also undermine media credibility, a concern highlighted by a participant who noted, "Sometimes the Arabic or Asian phrases are not used correctly, which can be distracting and reduce the overall quality of the commentary."

Global Context and Tanzanian Specificity

The Tanzanian experience with multilingual media reflects broader global trends and highlights unique challenges. While incorporating Arabic and Asian languages enriches cultural experiences and promotes linguistic diversity, it also presents significant risks to the growth of Swahili, English, and vernacular languages. These findings suggest the need for a nuanced approach to media language policy in Tanzania that promotes linguistic diversity while safeguarding the prominence and integrity of the country's official and indigenous languages.

CONCLUSION

The study underscores the intricate balance required to navigate the impacts of multilingual media on Tanzania's linguistic landscape. Incorporating Arabic and Asian languages in football commentaries enriches cultural experiences and promotes linguistic diversity, aligning with global trends observed by Fishman (1991) and Annamalai (2001). However, these benefits come with significant challenges. The dilution of Swahili and English's prominence, confusion among viewers, and the potential erosion of national and vernacular language identities highlight the risks associated with multilingual broadcasts. These findings echo the concerns scholars like Spolsky (2009) and Hornberger (1998) raised about the delicate balance between promoting multilingualism and preserving national languages.

Building on the findings and discussion, further research could explore several key areas to deepen the understanding of multilingual media's impact on Tanzania's linguistic landscape. One area of interest is the long-term effects of multilingual broadcasts on language proficiency among different age groups, particularly the youth, to assess whether exposure to non-official languages affects their competence in Swahili and

English. Additionally, examining the media's role in preserving and revitalising vernacular languages could provide insights into balancing cultural heritage with modern media practices. Another valuable avenue for research is the economic implications of producing multilingual content, focusing on cost-benefit analyses for media organizations. Finally, comparative studies involving other multilingual countries could highlight best practices and strategies for managing multilingual media environments, offering lessons that could be adapted to the Tanzanian context.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A nuanced approach to media language policy is essential to address the challenges of language growth or death. This policy should promote linguistic diversity while safeguarding the prominence of Swahili, English, and indigenous languages to prevent their decline. Regulatory frameworks must balance inclusivity with the integrity of official languages, ensuring that multilingualism's cultural and educational benefits do not overshadow the need to preserve national linguistic heritage, as Edwards (1994) suggested. Furthermore, strategic investments are needed to produce high-quality multilingual content that supports linguistic growth without financially straining media organizations, as highlighted by Mpemba (2018). By thoughtfully navigating these complexities, Tanzania can ensure the vibrant growth of its languages while preventing their potential death, thereby maintaining a rich and diverse linguistic landscape.

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