Examining African Languages as Tools for National Development: The Case of Kiswahili

by

Kanana, Fridah Erastus
erastusfk@gmail.com
Department of English and Linguistics
Kenyatta University; Nairobi, Kenya

Abstract

Language can be a key contributing force towards the consolidation of nationhood and the realization of national development. It is a means by which participation by citizens is facilitated or prevented and, it holds the key to the establishment of true democracy and equality in a country (Bamgbose 2000). There is a close relationship between language and development and meaningful development cannot take place where linguistic barriers exist. The failure of many states in Africa, to come out with a clear transformational language policy appears to be a major handicap in their experiences of nation-building. Despite the fact that language is a powerful tool of society, if its potential is fully recognised and exploited for development, ironically to-date European languages dominate in most African states in all the formal and technical domains, such as government, business administration, science and technology, trade commerce, international relations and education. Indigenous languages in Africa have been restricted to a few domains of use and the less formal ones such as intra-community communication, interpretational roles in local courts, use by politicians in local political rallies to name a few. There are only a few countries in Africa, e.g. Tanzania, Ethiopia, Somalia and most of the Arabic speaking countries, which opted to develop their indigenous *linguae francae* to serve as national languages. If we consider the case of Tanzania, Ethiopia and Egypt, Kiswahili, Amharic and Arabic respectively, have been used as languages of education, trade and commerce. These are just but a few examples that illustrate successful government decisions to empower and develop common lingue francae for national development. In many other African countries, the ex-colonial languages have continued to strengthen their positions of prestige at the expense of the indigenous ones. This has partly been due to inherited colonial language legacy and partly because the African leaders are not willing to change the language policies they inherited from the colonial masters. Consequently, Development in Africa slows down because important communication relies on foreign languages and the parties involved in the process of development cannot interact effectively. A common language, therefore, should be seen as an integrating force, a means by which political empowerment and participation of all citizens is fully facilitated.

This paper, therefore, seeks to explore how African languages, if developed, would foster development of Africa, to begin with, by involving the entire population of a nation, and consequently spill over to other countries of the world. It makes sense to argue that the dominance of foreign and largely colonial languages has undermined not only national cohesiveness and their perceptiveness of responsibilities as citizens but also seriously undercut their development of self-confidence and sense of Africanness. As a result many nationals are rendered unable to access government information because of bridling communication barriers. Africa need not rely on foreign languages for its development when it has such diverse linguistic resources which are well saddled in its cultural heritage that is critical for social capital formation. If developed this capital can form a basis of uniting not only people of its various nations but also foster prospects of enhancing regional integration. We cannot ignore the fact that language has also been used as a divisive tool, e.g., in Kenya, indigenous languages were used to spread hate speech and incite ethnic animosity after the 2007 elections. However, language is not the only basis for such conflicts. Even in countries with a common language, e.g. Burundi, Rwanda among others, warring communities have used other methods to propagate ethnic hatred. That is basically why the paper seeks to show that if a common language is adopted, the transfer of skills, new knowledge and other vital information desired to effect radical and sustainable changes in 21st century African states will be both feasible and germane to the building of a true sense of Africanity.

Keywords: Linguae francae, trans-national languages, multilingualism, development.

Introduction

A considerable majority of Africa's modern states exists in their current territorial shapes as the result of earlier Western colonial expansion in Africa, and the imposition of boarders on contiguous bodies of land with almost no concern for creating homogenous or coherent populations (Simpson 2008:1). Consequently, a wide range of quite distinct ethnic groups were artificially assembled as the demographic co-constituents of European protectorates and colonies, while other groups were divided by new borders and separated into two or more Western administered territories. After independence, in the second half of the 20th Century, the inheritance of these externally and arbitrary imposed borders consequently led to the sudden emergence of a great number of states with mixed populations with little in common except a shared officially recognized territory. The leadership of these independent states has been very challenging, especially issues of language and cultural integration. How to bring together the diverse ethno-linguistic groups occupying many of the continents new states and create a sense of belonging and loyalty to a collective national whole is a challenge yet to be addressed. Simpson (2008:2) captures the language challenges of Africa accurately when he states that:

"In the general attempt to build stable, integrated new states in heavily multilingual and multi-ethnic sub-Saharan Africa, language has, not surprisingly, proved to be an important and contested force intimately connected both with citizens' individual access to education, employment and political participation and with the broader growth of a shared sense of national community, and has often given rise to perceptions of multilingualism (in the sense of occurrence of many languages within a single population)as principally negative complication for national development rather than an asset to be exploited".

Multilingualism has therefore been viewed as problem rather than an asset that can be exploited to "unity in diversity". Moreover, scholars and governments in Africa see language policies adopted at the end of colonial rule as the genesis of the good or bad practices observed today. For many African states, important influences on the prominence, extension and functional use of languages in post-colonial times were already established during the experience of colonial occupation, not only as the result of the creation of borders which put together various ethno-linguistic groups as members of future states, but also through specific language related policies and activities (Simpson 2008:2). For instance, in education, usually the kind of education offered to Africans was one to prepare them for blue-collar jobs, and thus the local indigenous languages were used as media of instruction.

Another common approach used by colonial administrators was to provide a minimal amount of western-language medium schooling, sufficient to train up a necessary number of junior-level civil servants with the proficiency in French and English, and to leave any education of the remaining majority of local African populations to the sporadic initiatives of the missionary groups (cf. Simpson 2008). As a consequence, the missionary involvement in education and spread of Christianity resulted in the use of indigenous languages, and thus various languages had to be standardized and formally described. It is during this period that many dictionaries, grammars, orthographies and teaching materials on many African languages were developed and produced. The languages and varieties of languages that were selected and formally developed and promoted acquired a higher status and in many cases became *linguae francae* and these languages also emphasized ethnic identities that were previously not clearly defined.

The use of African languages in education was not always appreciated because the knowledge of a Western language always resulted in access to better jobs. Since English and French were used as the official languages of colonial bureaucracy, the use of indigenous languages rather than European ones as mediums of education created resistance, and evoked emotions that indigenous language education was a deliberate attempt by the Europeans to withhold the linguistic means of advancement for Africans.

As African states approached their independence in the mid-20th Century, the former colonial languages had become positioned as languages of economic success, higher education and prestige, and as mentioned above, they were known by a small percentage of the population. In contrast, the African languages were confined to informal domains of use and had less overtly recognised prestige, even when occurring as regional *linguae francae* among larger populations (Simpson 2008:3).

Evidently, after independence, many nascent nations had to begin by addressing situations of high linguistic diversity and complex socio-cultural identities. Ideas inherited from the ex-colonial masters suggested that the new independent states of Africa should identify and promote a single indigenous language to function as a national language, a linguistic means aimed at achieving national unity and a better future for all. In addition, there was the need to determine a language(s) that would be used in government, education and administration. However, this did not become a reality in many African states. Instead, most African states opted for ex-colonial languages to serve these functions. In Kenya, for example, various commissions were set up to deliberate on language issues but implementation of the recommendations made has taken decades (the Kenyan case will be revisited later in detail in this paper). It would have been practically possible to use a single language in some countries or a small set of languages to serve all these functions. For example, Tanzania, a former British and German colony adopted Kiswahili as the official language and immediately set up a language development academy of experts to recommend new words to express highly technical concepts into the language. Today, there is hardly any scientific term that Kiswahili lacks a word. One can even use google search engine in Kiswahili. It is the language of formal education, parliament and government business, alongside English. As Okolocha and Yuka (2011:5) put it, "decades after the Tanzanian evidence of how a dedicated application of a carefully designed language policy can turn the fortunes of indigenous African languages many educated Africans still advance the argument of vocabulary limitation as a reason to object to the adoption of indigenous languages as official languages".

In most of Africa, the governments opted for a simple continuation of the basic language policy of pre-independent colonial times, with minor modifications in the form of declarations of intent to revisit issues of national language in the future, as and when opportunity and resources became available and presented themselves (Simpson 2008:4). Consequently, the ex-colonial languages, which had become entrenched in administration and known to the educated minority were accepted and recognized as the official languages for use in government business, administration and education, and little was undertaken to select, develop and promote national languages which would have shaped the new identities of independent African states. Therefore, there was lack of commitment in development of national languages which was rationalized in terms of expenses and availability of resources in the future.

Thus, even though the nationalist movements were prominent in the 1960s and arguments in favour of adopting African indigenous languages as the media of instruction were widespread, many African countries still adopted the former colonial languages as languages of instruction in the schools (Muthwii and Kioko 2004:2). Many people preferred the languages of the former colonial masters because they believed that these languages would give them access to white-collar jobs, European thought and other privileges. The foreign languages were favoured for a number of reasons: (i) they already had standardized orthographies and could be used right away, instead of awaiting the development of the orthographies of the indigenous languages (ii) they had adequate literacy materials for use in the schools (iii) they were deemed to offer a unifying force in the multilingual and multicultural setting of most African countries, and they paved the way for African countries to be part of the international community.

As stated above, a lingering reality in many countries has been the dominance exerted by European languages in most African states in all formal and technical domains, and education (cf. Eastman 1991). The domains of use accorded to indigenous languages have been restricted to a usually less formal level such as primary trade and industry, and local courts (Kishe 2004:124). It appears that Africa's failure to harness the cultural and social efficaciousness of language in national construction is contrasted with the observable trend in all the world's developed countries which have well calibrated language policies. In these countries, technology is adapted and integrated within their cultural and social values, thereby providing a means of mobilization and the fomenting of national cohesiveness. A common language can be an effective tool of political socialization and mobilization for effective participation of all citizens in nation-building. This explains why countries like the Netherlands and Denmark in Europe have preserved their languages for use in their daily social and economic activities. Moreover,in many countries you will find medical personnel from Egypt who studied in Arabic and most of what these experts need is only interpreters to work. Currently, there are Chinese engineers and contractors who are contracted in the construction industry by various African countries to revamp their infrastructure, ailing railway lines, real estate and it is their languages they speak but the engineering is of standard. Many of us Africans buy Chinese, Korean and Japanese products, e.g., mobile telephone handsets, cars, household appliances etc. whose manuals are in languages of the source countries. We neither speak nor understand the scripts, yet we are the end users of these products. Interestingly, the African end users can still figure out the Chinese, Japanese or Korean orthographic representation of, for example, missed calls and received calls, or start and stop etc. The secret is that these countries base their development strategies on the indigenous languages exactly what is missing in most African countries.

Okolocha and Yuka (2011:8) argue that one of the reasons that explain why the African continent continues to lag behind in human creativity and has thus remained a continent of consumers is because African government have not recognized that when their citizens compete intellectually in a second language they end up being a step behind their competitors employing their mother tongue as a language of business.

Consequently, countries with productive intellectual capacities end up forcing their languages to consumer nations with their end products and thus restricting African languages to tools of communication within tribal and ethnic interactions. There are about 2035 indigenous African languages that have largely been neglected by language policy makers. Accordingly, Yuka and Okolocha (2011) emphasize the need to rethink our strategies towards the development of indigenous African languages. This is because the adoption of former colonial languages and neglect of African languages was not without consequences.

Consequences of Neglecting African languages

The use of ex-colonial languages has far reaching implications to the extent that these languages, not only limit a large number of the population of a nation who are not very competent in these languages, and who would otherwise contribute positively in national development, but hinder the development of such a nation in general. If communication in African nations relies on the languages of the former colonial masters (e.g. French, Portuguese, English etc.) development of such nations slows down since the parties involved in the development process cannot interact effectively. Therefore, people's contribution to development can only be realized when the communication barriers are removed. A common language can thus be seen as an integrating force, a means by which participation is facilitated or hampered.

According to Batibo (2005:47), speakers of minority languages in most African countries are excluded from or marginalised with respect to national participation because of the use, by the ruling elite, of an ex-colonial language or of a dominant indigenous language, which may be used as a lingua franca while not understood by certain groups within the nation. Speakers of minority languages are thereby denied direct participation in public interaction, meaningful audiences with government authorities, and contact with other groups, or active contribution at public rallies. The exclusion of minority language speakers for these reasons is very common in Africa, as most countries either assume that all are able to follow discourse in those languages or insist that all official communication be made in them whatever the social cost. The immediate consequence is that nationalism, which is an economic necessity that can only be achieved by a communication that is capable of reaching all members of society in the economic process, is not achieved.

Development is a process which involves the entire spectrum of the society, with each individual making a contribution. A communication channel is, therefore, imperative in order to mobilise the whole society in the process of social change. It is an essential tool in ensuring the full participation of the masses in the political, socio-economic and cultural development. In other words, institutions, organisations and even governments cannot perform clearly and effectively to expectations unless they can understand and be understood by every citizen of a particular nation. This argument is summarized by Simire (2004:1) as follows:

"In order to achieve rapid political, economic and sociocultural change in the country, all academic and specialized institutions and corporate organisations in the local and federal governments, should mobilise, inform and educate the old and the young, illiterate and literate, male and female, lowly and highly placed individuals across the diversified ethno linguistic groups in their respective code"

If a common language is not adopted, which in this case would be a common African language serving as lingua(e) franca(e) of that particular nation(s), the transfer of skills, new knowledge and other vital information desired to effect changes cannot be delivered to the target group at both the regional and national levels to mobilise the masses for the development endeavour.

There have been sporadic campaigns and declarations on linguistic human rights which are aimed at the promotion of linguistic justice and the removal or prevention of linguistic injustices that may occur because of language. For example in Africa, *The Asmara Declaration on African Languages and Literatures of January 2000* states, among other things, that:

(1) All African children have the unalienable right to attend school and learn their mother tongues and that every effort should be made to develop African languages at all levels of education.
(2) The effective and rapid development of science and technology in Africa depends on the use of African languages.
(3) African languages are vital for the development of democracy based on equality and social justice.
(4) African languages are essential for the decolonisation of African minds and for the African Renaissance (Asmara Declaration 2000 and for additional details see Musau 2004)

There was an earlier declaration, in 1976, on linguistic human rights. *The Cultural Charter for Africa*, articulated by the organisation for African Unity (OAU) in article 6(2) stated that member states should 'promote teaching in national languages in order to accelerate their economic, political and cultural development' (Phillipson and Skutnabb-Kangas 1994:135).

However, there are no mechanisms put in place in Africa to guarantee that the policies stipulated in these charters and declarations are indeed implemented. In fact, they do not state what ought to be done to guarantee linguistic justice for all the language communities. Some of the benefits accruing from the implementation of these rights include: the right to be different, the right to identify with one's mother tongue, to learn it and to have education through it and to use it (Phillipson et al. 1994:7).

Linguistic rights also include the right of an individual to learn other languages including the official language or languages that are used in a particular area so that the individual can participate in the social, political and economic processes of a given geopolitical entity (Musau 2004:59). The question of linguistic rights needs to be discussed farther. Linguistic rights are in essence language rights or put a bit differently, they are linguistic human rights pertaining to the individual and collective right to choose the language or languages for communication in a private or public sphere. This assemblage of rights includes the right to one's own language in legal, administrative and judicial acts, language education, and media in a language understood and freely chosen by those concerned. However, parameters for analyzing linguistic rights include degree of territoriality, amount of positivity, orientation in terms of assimilation or maintenance, and overtness. These rights also include 'major languages of global communication', which can enable people to 'access power and information sharing in the twenty-first century' and to 'bridge the gap between the rich and the poor countries' (Hurst and Lansdell 1999:3).

Linguistic rights also enable a person to access information and knowledge, particularly basic scientific and technical knowledge (cf. Phillipson and Skutnabb-Kangas 1994:344). As formulated by UNESCO, linguistic rights are important for an individual's 'development', which has been defined as the process of 'increasing and enhancing human capabilities, affording people access not only to material benefits but to such intangible benefits as knowledge and to play a full part in the life of the community' (quoted in Wolff 2000:7 and Musau 2004:59).

The lack of recognition of language rights of minority groups means that the local languages will inevitably not be developed and empowered. In turn, their speakers will not have access to government services, programmes, knowledge and information. The speakers of these languages often do not understand the policies, the objectives and the procedures of development and, therefore, cannot meaningfully participate in these processes.

Research has shown that minority languages taken together account for a substantial proportion of the population in most African countries. In Ghana, for example, minority language speakers constitute 44% of the population, while in Nigeria they make up at least 36% of the population. It is, therefore, unfortunate that many African heads of state deliver key national speeches – which touch on most people's lives – in English or French solely because one of these happens to be the official language, even if the majority of their people do not understand a word of these languages or understand them only partially (cf. Batibo 2005).

African Languages and Economic Development

With regard to the effect of language use on national building in Africa, we observe that African states, with a small number of exceptions, have not experienced language nationalism that has characterized the growth of various nations in Europe from the 19th century onwards. A common language is paramount in establishing nationhood and subsequent development of such a nation. In fact, we need to acknowledge that all the world's developed countries have developed on the basis of their national languages, as they have adapted and integrated technology within their cultural and social values, thus reaching all the people in their countries. The problem of Africa has been captured by Mazrui (1999) as follows:

" ….*no country has ascended to a first rank technological and economic power by excessive dependence on foreign languages. Japan rose to dazzling industrial heights by scientificating the Japanese language and making it the medium of its own industrialization. Can Africa ever take-off technologically if it remains so overwhelmingly dependent on European languages for discourse on advanced learning? Can Africa look to the future if it is not adequately sensitive to the cultural past? This lingo-cultural gap, then, is seen as a serious impediment to the full maturation of Africa's own scientific genius. Against this backdrop, then, the need to "scientificate" African languages cannot be over-emphasized*"

As Batibo (2005) notes, the fast-developing countries of Asia, such as China, Korea, Taiwan[1], and Thailand[2] base their development strategies on their indigenous languages as this is the only way to involve the whole population in the development effort and to meaningfully bring technological advancement within the country's cultural framework. Unfortunately, in most African countries language planning activities and issues of language policy are not given much attention. Of 54 countries (including South Sudan), indigenous African languages are recognized as official in only 10 countries, Arabic in 9, and all the remaining 47 countries have ex-colonial ones as official languages distributed as follows: French in 21 countries, English in 20, Portuguese in 5 and Spanish in 1 (cf. Bamgbose 1991:30-31, 2011:2 for details). This is a result of the colonial legacy where the dominance of "imported" languages which began in the colonial period has persisted to-date. Another aspect of colonial legacy is the separation of some languages in arbitrary geographical divisions arising from the artificial borders created as a result of partition of Africa at the Berlin conference of 1884-1885. Consequently identical or related languages came to be divided and this has led to the incidence of cross-border languages. The severity of the partition can be illustrated by the example of Cameroon, which shares as many as 70 cross-border languages with the neighbouring countries, one of which is Nigeria, with which it shares as many as 45 languages (Chumbow and Tamanji 1998). The reason for the partition was to reduce the numerical strength of each cross-border language in the territories concerned and correspondingly enhance the status of ex-colonial languages (see Bamgbose 2011 for details).

Many parents and policy makers in Africa clamour for ex-colonial languages such as English French, Portuguese as the languages of instruction in schools. However, the statistics on the success of such an approach are not encouraging. Instead of children adapting positively to the school environment, they tend to be withdrawn when they cannot meaningfully interact with the teacher or fellow students. This not only affects their personality, but hampers the whole learning process. School life and education in general become more of a punishment than a means of acquiring knowledge and skills. To give an example of Kenya, the language policy in education stipulates that children should be taught in the language of the catchment area, an African language, during the first three years of schooling. However, the reality is different. Most parents prefer an education for their children in English. The trend has been a rapid growth of more and more private pre-school institutions that offer learning in English. Public schools have also joined in offering the 'preferred language' as a medium of instruction and children are even punished for using their mother-tongues in school. This is the trend in many other African states as echoed by Bamgbose (2011:5).

Simire (2004) points out that of about 33% of the total population of Nigerians who are literate in English (the official language), only about 15% of these can really use English effectively in professional and administrative activities. This can be interpreted to mean that 85% of Nigerians do not have sufficient knowledge of the official language, a situation that is similar to other African states that use an ex-colonial language in official matters. Simire's sentiments are echoed by Bamgbose (2011:2) when he argues that when people talk of a common language that will facilitate communication; they almost always refer to an official imported language, which, as is well known, is only truly common to perhaps 10-20%.

In the light of the above, education in foreign languages has thus become education for a minority, and the majority is excluded in national development programmes. If the development of such countries were to hinge on communication using English, then we must accept that it will involve a very small minority of the population (See Muthwii and Kioko 2004:8 for details). This becomes a hindrance to economic, political and socio-cultural development because institutions and other corporate organisations cannot perform their developmental roles effectively unless they can understand and be understood. Our African leaders ought to appreciate that development is about people, and as the former Tanzanian president Dr. Julius Nyerere put it "development is for man, by man and of man" (Nyerere 1978: 27). Development should be perceived in a broad sense to mean socio-economic and human development, i.e. the full realization of the human potential and a maximum use of a nation's resources for the benefit of all.

If we consider the case of Kenya, we observe that there have been serious challenges of developing our own African languages. There have been Commissions set up to empower our languages but implementation has taken decades. For instance, The Education Department's Annual Report for 1951 (Colony and Protectorate of Kenya 1952:13) called for the teaching of English from lower classes because it contended that it was pedagogically unsatisfactory to use three languages (English, Kiswahili and Mother tongues) as media of instruction in primary schools (Musau 2004:61). This started to be implemented in 1958 in what came to be known as the 'New Primary Approach (NPA)'. The approach involved using English as the medium of instruction on an experimental basis in Asian schools from the first day that a child entered school (Mbaabu 1996:115). This policy was later extended to cover African schools. The policy disadvantaged African children because they were not given a chance to adapt to the school environment. The children were forced to learn in a language they barely spoke or understood.

The Kenya Education Commission, also referred to as the Ominde Commission (1964), which was appointed to review education matters for independent Kenya recommended the continued use of English from Class One. Kiswahili, which the commission recognised as 'a tool of national integration and means of Pan-African communication' (Republic of Kenya 1964:60-61), was to be made a compulsory subject in all primary schools. As for the vernaculars, the commission recommended one daily period of storytelling! (Musau 2004:61). The recommendations of the commission were adhered to with respect to English. Kiswahili was taught, but not examined; the result was that both teachers and pupils did not take the language seriously, teachers concentrating on examinable subjects at the expense of Kiswahili.

Regarding the possibility of making Kiswahili the language of instruction, The Kenya Education Commission Report, also known as the Ominde report (1964), for example, claimed that this would not be possible because it would be 'a grave misuse of public funds to translate textbooks and supplementary books into Kiswahili' and that it would not be possible to use this language because 'it would require adaptation to unaccustomed scientific uses' (Mbaabu 1996:125). The negative attitudes are, therefore, rationalized in terms of 'expenses', 'non-scientific language', 'lack of neutrality', 'lack of internationality' and other similar descriptions (see Ansre 1977 as cited in Musau 2004:66). Later, 1976, the 'Gachathi Report' reiterated that Kiswahili should be a compulsory and examinable subject in primary and secondary schools. This boosted the status of Kiswahili. Kiswahili is an examinable subject in primary and secondary schools to-date and it is also taught as a subject of specialisation at the University level. In addition, Kiswahili has been declared an official language in Kenya in the new constitution.

Although there have been pronouncements and even decrees with regard to enhancing the role of Kiswahili, these have not been followed immediately by concrete measures of implementation. For example, the recommendation that Kiswahili becomes a compulsory and examinable subject made in 1976 was only implemented 9 years later in 1985.

The recommendation made by the ruling party (Kenya African National Union), which was in power from 1963-2001, to make Kiswahili the official language in all government business made in 1970 was not implemented by 2010, when the people of Kenya voted in a new constitution. The constitution is yet to be implemented.

Failure to make Kiswahili the official language since 1970 clearly shows lack of commitment among the élite and in particular the policy makers. We now only hope that Kiswahili will indeed acquire the same status as English after being elevated to the official status. The status of Kiswahili in Kenya now shows the decisive role of policy in the development of a language. It shows that favourable policy can boost the fortunes of a language. It should be noted, however, that no policies or plans have been put in place, either for the short or the long term, to make Kiswahili a medium of instruction for other subjects except the language itself. In the new Kenyan Constitution it is the right of every Kenyan to access information and Government records in Kiswahili. One can only hope that institutions of higher learning, the government and non-governmental agencies interested in issues of language policy will come together and set up departments that will take up the role of translating documents into Kiswahili.

From the above discussion, it is obvious that if language groups are given a chance to develop literacy and knowledge in their own tongues, it will prompt them to develop different world views and make them a more informed and tolerant population and also enable them to participate more meaningfully in development issues in their nations (Muthwii and Kioko 2004). Speakers of these languages would not look down on their native tongues; since they would appreciate that their mother tongues are as important as the European languages.

Multilingualism in Africa should not be used, by the African states or the ruling élite, to discriminate against a section of its citizenry either on the basis of a linguistic variety or ethnic group. In both national and regional spheres, there is a need to understand the dynamics of modern linguistic needs for sociocultural, political economic integration. Perhaps what the ruling elite need to consider is the possibility of developing regional languages that can be used across certain geographical boundaries.

This paper has highlighted some contributions and solid arguments of scholars such as Bamgbose, Batibo, Chumbow and Tadadjeu among others who have relentlessly argued for the empowerment of African languages in all domains. However, it goes beyond these arguments and illustrates how this could become tenable through the development of *linguae francae* that can be used across borders in Africa. In the following section we will explore such a scenario.

Development of Regional *Linguae Francae*: Solution to Africa's Multilingualism Problem

While African Languages can be used to enhance solidarity among the speakers, there are times when they have also been used as divisive tools. Since a common language is the most conspicuous feature in group identity, it can be used to divide people according to ethnicity, causing hostilities, particularly in countries where ethnic conflicts are already in existence. This was, and in some cases still is, the situation in such countries as Angola, The Democratic Republic of Congo, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Sri Lanka etc. However, the numerous conflicts in various regions cannot be solely blamed on linguistic diversity, since language is not the only basis of identity. For instance, after the 2007 elections in Kenya, a section of Kenyan communities started fighting each other because of the disputed election results. The use of ethnic languages in mass media is said to have perpetrated ethnic hatred and violence, but the root cause of the violence was more political than linguistic. Language was only used as a tool for political incitement. Kenya has more than 42 ethnic communities and most of these communities were peaceful. In fact, only three communities were affected. As much as language was used to cause the strife the underlying problem was political; historical injustices of ancestral land, inequalities in education, employment opportunities among others. In some countries with a common language, such as Burundi, Rwanda and Somalia, belligerent groups have identified themselves by other features, e.g., religion, ethnicity and quest for political balance. Monolingualism is, therefore, not a guarantee against strife. We can cite many more examples; the religious violence in Northern Nigeria, the killings of Christian Southerners by the Sunni Northern Muslims in Sudan, the orthodox Serbs and Muslim Bosnians have little to do with linguistic differences. If a language is used regionally, such conflicts would perhaps be avoided, since a large majority would be using it as a mode of wider communication. A language adopted regionally would reinforce solidarity, ethnic/inter-tribal and regional integration.

Perhaps a further discussion of the notion of multilingualism in Africa is apt. Multilingualism has emerged as a social phenomenon governed by the needs of globalization and cultural openness, and in essence it is the act of using, or promoting the use of multiple languages, either by an individual speaker or by a community of speakers. As Mahendra K. Verma states multilingualism is the norm in the world; monolingualism is the exception (http://www.llas.ac.uk/resources/gpg/634). The multilingual situation of African countries has, in most cases, been more of a challenge in empowering any language to official or national status. This is because every community considers its language as important and, therefore, elevating any to official status would not be without serious consequences. One of the grave concerns is that languages in Africa have divided people into major linguistic and tribal blocks. This definitely affects development of these states. The question we are seeking to address in this section is: should regions come together and develop one or more languages as *lingua(e) franca(e)?*

Africa has the largest concentration of languages in the world (Batibo 2000:21, Bamgbose 2011). About thirty-one percent of the world languages are found in Africa and this translates to an average of 50 African languages in each country. So why should Africa depend on ex-colonial languages as official languages? Are any of these languages spoken across boarders? If so, can they be developed to serve as regional *linguae francae* with several nations sharing the burden of developing and documenting these languages if they are not documented?

Africa has regional languages that are culturally widespread and sometimes politically neutral. African countries can conveniently adopt such regional languages as tools of development. Hence, Bamgbose (2011) notes that the negative perception of multilingualism serves to diminish the status of African languages, presenting them as a problem rather than an asset. He groups African languages into three types: major, minority and endangered. The major languages such as Kiswahili, Yoruba, Hausa, Zulu, etc. are spoken by a large number of speakers and many of these languages are spoken in a number of countries in Africa. These languages are also almost invariably associated with higher status, economic and perhaps political power.

Let us consider the case of Kiswahili and its geographical distribution.

Documented evidence shows that Kiswahili is the largest language in the continent in terms of number of speakers in comparison to other African languages (Kishe 2004). It is estimated to be spoken by 100 million people in the world (Ntakirutimana 2000). It is spoken as a lingua franca in East and Central Africa.

If we consider what Kishe (2004) calls the Great Lakes region, one can actually explore the possibility of Kiswahili becoming a lingua franca of a number of nations. In her paper, Kishe discusses the potentiality of Kiswahili in accelerating social, political, economic and cultural integration in the Great Lakes region. The countries that are included in this cluster are: The republic of Burundi, The Democratic Republic of Congo, The Republic of Ruanda, The Republic of Kenya, The United Republic of Tanzania and The Republic of Uganda. Each of these countries has various African languages spoken by their population but Kiswahili, which is used as a lingua franca, unites them.

Tanzania has about 131 ethnic languages with Kiswahili serving as a national and official language side by side with English; Kenya has over 60 with English and Kiswahili serving as national and official languages (The new constitution is yet to be implemented concerning this issue); and Uganda has 47. In Uganda, English is the national and official language. The linguistic complexity also applies to Rwanda, Burundi and Congo. In Rwanda, three languages serve as official and national: Kinyarwanda, French and English, and in Burundi two: Kirundi and French (Kiswahili also spoken by a large population). The democratic Republic of Congo has the largest area with about 221 languages spoken alongside four national languages, namely, Lingala, Kiswahili, Kikongo and Tshiluba. Not to mention that French is used as the official language in Congo.

If Kiswahili is adopted, it will not only facilitate nation building in the above states but will enable the region to establish its authenticity throughout the continent. The use of Kiswahili in official matters and day-to-day business will make regional leaders less dependent on ex-colonial languages and provide the countries in the Great Lakes region with a debating medium for their regional affairs without the dominance or influence of foreign thought which is at times prejudiced. With reference to the significance of Kiswahili in promoting unity and nationalism, Indakwa (1978:58) notes:

Modern African nationalism is now conceived as the necessary framework for and propelling force behind catapulting Africa into a complex industrial world. Africa needs to build their (sic!) *national states into stronger entities but this work can hardly be achieved when common languages of communication are alien languages rarely spoken and understood by the majority of the people in every African country* (Cited in Kishe 2004: 125).

Kishe (2004) further notes that if Kiswahili is officially recognised as a medium of communication at the regional level, it will become an important integrating force at the upper horizontal level, thus uniting the élites from the respective countries. In addition, if Kiswahili is adopted as a working language, it will act as a point of contact between the government and the people who are the target of development, thus providing a means of sharing information and the exchange of ideas. Kiswahili will, therefore, create a major bond between the macro-level, with the professionals and politicians, who hold the knowledge and skills for development. The use of European languages, either French or English, in this region has erected communication barriers between the regional level and the national level.

Some of the reasons that would make Kiswahili the favourable language in the region include:

- Its wide geographical distribution: Kiswahili is spoken by over 100 million people in the world. This means that it is a language of widespread communication in Africa and beyond. As a lingua franca for East Africa since the 19th Century, it has gained recognition beyond its traditional boarders (Ashton 2000). For example, the language has gained popularity beyond East Africa and it is taught at the university level in departments of African languages in Europe, America and Asia. Kiswahili, is therefore, widely accepted due to its geographical coverage, history and origin, function, social prestige, use in trade and commerce, and use as a symbol of national identity (See Kishe 2004:127 for details).

- The language was used as an administrative language in colonial times as well as a medium of communication in the education system. It was a communication tool capable of reaching and uniting the members involved in the slave trade and in the spreading of religions such as Islam and Christianity. Missionaries used Kiswahili in writing religious literature, e.g. Bibles and Liturgy to educate the people on religious matters. Kiswahili also played a prominent role in the struggle against colonialism in Tanzania (cf. Mkilifi 1980). This means that Kiswahili has been used as a symbol of national identity and a unifying force in East Africa for a long time. Moreover, its use in the education system, since the colonial times, shows a long legacy of literacy materials. This means that school materials were developed in the language and therefore the language is well developed and documented.

- Kiswahili has a highly developed grammar, rich vocabulary and creative literature. It has been used as a written language of art, literature and commerce since the beginning of the 20th Century and, as stated above, it was the language of instruction in colonial days (both in German and British East Africa). Therefore, if the Great Lakes region would seriously consider the adoption of Kiswahili as potential for economic development and a means of providing an inter-regional integration, the dissemination and development of the language would not be an uphill task, as would be the case if another language such as Kinyarwanda, Kirundi, Kikuyu or any other African language, spoken only in one country, were adopted.

- Kiswahili is a medium of instruction in various levels of education in different East African Community states. For instance, it is taught as a subject is primary and secondary schools in Uganda and Kenya, and in Rwanda it is the medium of instruction in some secondary schools and colleges. It is now one of the official languages in Kenya and it is also taught as a subject area of specialization at the university level. In Tanzania, Kiswahili is a sole medium of instruction in primary schools, primary teacher training colleges and adult education institutions. Therefore, introducing the language in the other states would not be difficult, since the curriculum developers would only need to develop common materials for the entire region. Moreover, Kiswahili is a Bantu language and like many other Bantu languages in the region, it is easy to learn. Not to mention that Kiswahili can now be learned without major difficulties through computer programs and softwares, online lessons, online materials and dictionaries (e.g. Kamusi Project, Google in Kiswahili) among others.

- In July 2002, Kiswahili was declared one of the working languages of the Organisation of the African Unity (OAU). Scholars felt that other languages would have been selected to serve this vital purpose, such as Amharic, Arabic, Fulani, Hausa etc. However, Kiswahili and Arabic received the highest scores. These two languages are the most widely used *linguae francae* in Africa today. However, Kiswahili is the most favoured as communicative tool in African forums in the Great Lakes region. So why not take advantage of this important recognition of Kiswahili and use it for regional development and commerce. The Great Lakes region would take advantage of the popularity of Kiswahili to sell their inventions and to trade with other African states.

- In the mass media, Kiswahili is very popular in getting news across the globe. It is used in national broadcasts in the Great Lakes region, other African countries e.g. Comoro Islands, Ethiopia, Mozambique and the Republic of Congo (cf. Kishe 2004:128). There are also other international stations, such as the BBC, Radio Moscow, Deutsche Welle, Radio Beijing, Voice of America and Radio India that broadcast in Kiswahili amongst other African languages. This makes Kiswahili an international language and the Great Lakes region can exploit the acquired status of Kiswahili to foster development.

This is not an exhaustive list of the factors that render Kiswahili a preferred language of regional integration and economic growth, but it offers insights into an important resource, whose potential is yet to be fully exploited.

So much has been said about Kiswahili and the East African Community states including Congo and Burundi. We need to explore the possibility of having *linguae francae* in other African regions. In the following section, we will explore the possible *linguae francae* in selected Anglophone and Francophone West African countries.

Trans-national Languages in West Africa

Trans-national, (also called trans-frontier) languages is a term that refers to languages spoken across several borders (see Ouedraogo 2000 for details). We will focus on selected countries of the West Africa sub-region. These countries include Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal and Togo. The countries are selected to represent the Francophone and Anglophone West Africa.

The countries are selected on the basis of a shared colonial legacy; British for Ghana and Nigeria and French for Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Mali, Niger, Senegal and Togo. The francophone West African states belong to the same organizations or institutions headed by the system of Francophony. They have almost identical language policies. The two Anglophone countries, Ghana and Nigeria, also share almost the same language policies. The countries form political and economic regional entities in West Africa besides the shared colonial legacy. Examples of languages used for communication in several of the selected countries include:

Hausa [Hawsa]	Nigeria, Benin, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Mali, Niger
Fulbe, Fulfulde (Pulaar)	Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Gambia, Cameroon
Yoruba	Benin, Niger, Nigeria
Bambara/Jula	Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali
Senoufo	Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali
Ewe	Benin, Ghana, Togo
Gurmancéma	Benin, Burkina Faso, Niger
Dagara	Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana

(Data adopted, with modifications, from Ouedraogo 2000:8)

This is not an exhaustive list, but it exemplifies some languages that are used beyond their traditional geographical areas as mother tongues.

From the data above, we can summarize the distribution of the languages as follows:

Example 1

Language	No. of countries where they are spoken (X/12)	Percentage (%)
Hausa	6	50
Fulbe, Fulfulde (Pulaar)	6	50
Bambara, Gurmancéma, Senoufo, Dagara,	3	25
Ewe	2	17
Yoruba	2	17

It is evident that out of the 12 states above, Hausa and Pulaar are the dominant languages. This constitutes a whopping 50% of the states in question. What is interesting is that none of these languages has ever been referred to as an "international language" or "language of wider communication" (LWC). If languages that are so widespread in West Africa like Pulaar and Hausa have not been considered as "international languages" or "languages of wider communication" (in Africa), it seems that such terms carry so much prestige that they never apply to African languages. They have become almost specific and tend to exclusively mean English and French in West Africa and other former French and British colonies in Africa as a whole. The trans-frontier languages listed above are spoken by populations whose traditional geographical area has been dissected by several boundaries, yet the fact of being used across several borders has not given them any particular status.

To show a more precise distribution of trans-frontier languages in West Africa, we will summarize the language situation across borders in this West African regional block in the table below:

Table 1: Major West African Languages: Geographic and population spread

Language	Countries where the language is used	Population speaking the language
Fulfube	Mauritania, Ghana, Senegal, Togo, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Niger, Guinea, Nigeria, Mali, Cameroon, Sierra Leone, Burkina Faso.	11 million
Hausa[3]	Niger, Nigeria, Tchad, Benin, Cameroon, Ghana, Sudan	34 million
Mandinka	Senegal, Mali, Gambia, Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire	2,8 million
Songhay[4]	Mali, Niger, Benin, Nigeria	2,4 million
Wolof[5]	Mauritania, Senegal, Gambia	3 million
Yoruba	Nigeria, Benin, Togo	12 million
Djula	Burkina Faso, Côte-d'Ivoire	2 million
Ewe[6]	Ghana, Togo	3,3 million

Note: The data presented in this table is adopted from Ouedraogo 2000:39

The statistics in table 1 above indubitably illustrate that African languages can be a key instrument for fostering regional cooperation. This table lists African indigenous languages spoken by millions of people within and beyond the boundaries of countries e.g. Kiswahili in East Africa (the Great Lakes region); Hausa (spoken by over 30 million people), Fulfulde, Bambara/Jula, Akan-Twi, Wolof etc., in West Africa.

The irony of these facts is that there has not been any significant political will to make any of these indigenous languages, a medium of instruction in schools, official business and administration. Therefore, these important indigenous languages have remained a preserve of horizontal communication.

When one considers the dynamism of indigenous languages which are used by millions of speakers for communication and business, such as Wolof (in Senegal and Gambia), Bambara/Jula (in Mali, Côte-d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso), Akan-Twi (in Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire), Moore (in Burkina Faso), Fulfulde (in the entire West Africa region), Hausa (in Niger, Nigeria, Mali, Benin), Yoruba and Igbo (in Nigeria),   we can argue that what is needed from policy makers is to find the best way to attend to this natural trend and use these majority languages or indigenous languages as languages of wider communication. This can be achieved by making teaching and learning materials in these languages available; suggesting, without imposing, the inclusion of the languages in school curriculum as optional subjects to increase literacy, and, lastly, creating awareness to sensitize people on the importance of these languages as tools of their own social, economic and regional integration.

The future of Africa, therefore, lies in its languages which should be developed and preserved. It is a pity that none of these trans-frontier languages is considered as a language of wider communication. The functions and roles assigned to languages vary and evolve over a long period of time. Therefore, developing African languages should not be seen as a threat by the ruling elite but strength geared towards development and economic growth. Typical examples of change in language status, functions and roles in history include the shift from Greek to Latin   when the Romans ruled over western and Mediterranean Europe, and later on, the shift from Latin to modern European languages for administrative and educational purposes. It is also a historical fact that Arabic has been adopted or imposed in the Middle-East and North Africa following the conquest of these territories by Islamic armies (Ouedraogo 2000:27). This shows that if there is a political will in a country or a region as a whole, language policies can be decided upon and implemented.

In Africa there have been successful politically motivated decisions to assign new roles and functions to languages thus changing the status of these languages radically. Examples of such decisions include the choice of Arabic in Mauritania, Kiswahili in Tanzania, Amharic in Ethiopia, Somali in Somalia, etc. The experience of South Africa also shows that strategies can be elvolved to make oficial communication feasible in several languages.

African languages can, therefore, be developed alongside the ex-colonial languages to serve various functions in the region. Some of the recommendations that would facilitate the development of African languages are discussed below.

(1) In Education, where the body of knowledge is generated and conveyed in a different language it would be difficult for a learner to grasp it easily. There are numerous countries we can cite: China, Japan, Turkey, Russia, the Middle East, Asia and Latin America which have all advanced due to their policies that knowledge should be taught in the local languages. The statistics of the examination failures in many African states are real and to achieve success in education, we need to achieve success in the language of instruction. We will then be talking of policy and practice to ensure a rethink in our approach to indigenous languages and constructing it as integral part of the economic development of the nation.

(2) African states need to select and empower languages that can be used across language boundaries as *languages of wider communication* (LWC). Examples of such languages are Kiswahili in the East African community (Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Burundi, Rwanda and Congo); Pulaar in Guinea, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Togo; Bambara/Jula in Mali, Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso; Hausa in Benin, Mali, Niger and Nigeria; Akan-Twi in Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire; and Wolof in Senegal, Mauritania and Gambia. These languages have important communicative purposes. They could facilitate horizontal integration as *linguae francae* across a large geographical area. They need to be elevated officially to serve as official, provincial, national or regional languages, both for administrative purposes and as media of instruction in education. As soon as these languages are empowered horizontally as languages of communication among the masses and as languages of education, they can easily become languages of vertical integration. There would be need for corpus planning to ensure these languages can be used in science and technology. Eventually, they would serve in all sectors: education, commerce, science and technology and regional integration in Africa.

(3) It is evident that political leaders and politicians use African languages for horizontal mobilization during political campaigns. African leaders are probably afraid of the vertical mass mobilization that will result in mass literacy and mass education in languages of wider communication, hence the reason why they have ignored the calls to empower African languages. These languages are powerful tools that can be used to mobilize masses and foster development in Africa as a whole. The electronic media is an important means of communication with news cast on radio and television in several African languages. An example of the power of a language in mobilizing people can be seen in the civic education that was conducted by community FM stations in Kenya in 2010 with an aim of sensitizing people on the content of the new Kenyan constitution.

During the referendum campaigns to sensitize Kenyans on the contents of the New Draft Constitution, the few ruling élites, with their own political interests, tried to mislead the public about the content of the draft constitution, since most copies were written in English. However, various FM stations that broadcast in Kiswahili and other Kenyan vernaculars turned around the false ideologies by interpreting the document in languages that the masses could understand.

When people understood the draft constitution, they overwhelmingly voted for it against the wish of politicians and the church, which was divided on the contents of the draft. This is an indication of the power of a language in bringing the people of a nation together. It shows how a language can mobilise a population of a nation towards economic and political advancement and also exemplifies the important role the electronic media can play in developing and empowering African languages. The freedom of expression by the media should also be guaranteed by African states.

(4) Empowering African languages to serve as languages of wider communication does not mean discarding the European languages.The former colonial languages, English, French and Portuguese can be *preserved* and *their roles re-defined*. These languages are important in international communication and trade and they also serve and languages of wider communication in the African continent where French and English are commonly used as official languages. European languages in the whole of Africa could serve as languages of self enhancement and self-empowerment. For instance, in South Africa, English became associated with the anti-apartheid movement and it was perceived as the language of unity and freedom from Afrikaner rule among the black population of the country. Following the eventual successful uprooting of the apartheid system, English has emerged with strong positive connotations stemming from its earlier role in an opposition function and its representation of future hopes. However, the new status of English did not stop South Africa from recognizing ten other languages to serve as official.

Naturally, European languages will be the languages used for communication with the external world in any domain of development. Empowering African languages to serve as languages of wider communication in regional or national or even trans-national/trans-frontier communication will by no means replace the English and French as languages of international communication and thus should not be seen as a threat.

(5) Since no African state is *monolingual,* the people who speak a particular language should be *allowed* and *encouraged* to use their respective mother-tongue. This will avoid conflict among different communities whose languages will not be used as languages of wider communication. Therefore, language use as a normal medium of communication and interaction among the members of a single cultural or ethnic group should be encouraged. The people need to be educated that their languages are not inferior but that the selected languages are chosen on the basis of regional distribution.

(6) Sometimes the language choice may be *primarily connected with the rituals of a particular religion*. For instance, Arabic is widespread in North Africa due to its use in Islam; it is viewed as the language of religion. It would not be a problem for other countries where Islam is the dominant religion to adopt Arabic. For example, Arabic is gaining more and more importance in countries like Senegal, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Burkina Faso etc., because of the development of Islam in these countries.

There are schools that have been created where Arabic is taught as the main subject. Arabic is likely to emerge as a strong language of wider communication in these regions and develop strongly alongside English and French. This is a trend that is encouraged by other Arabic speaking countries and international organizations such as the organization of Islamic conference, the Islamic Bank of Development, the Islamic Education, Science and Cultural organization etc. (cf. Ouedraogo 2000:36).   The language policy makers cannot ignore these trends in language development. Just like Chinese is gaining popularity worldwide, Arabic is likely to emerge as a *linguae francae* in the Muslim states alongside other languages of wider communication that we have discussed. Therefore, policy makes need and should take into consideration the religious beliefs of a population and encourage languages that unite people towards a common cause – religious or otherwise.

Conclusion

African countries need to undertake a thorough review of their language situation and establish policies which are consonant with their national aspirations, optimum utilisation of the national linguistic resources and the ultimate national goal. Such a goal should include, not only economic development, but a truly democratic and harmonious way of life. Okolocha and Yuka (2011:10) have captured this idea very well when they state that *"what African countries need is to accommodate and tolerate their unity in diversity"*. Not all languages need to be accorded the same role or status. The positions and domains of use of each of the languages in a country could be determined by its relative demographic and socio-political position in that country. Hence, a hierarchy of language use could be established.

Since most of the administrative documents, legal acts and proceedings, government policies etc. are written either in   English, Portuguese or French depending on whether the country is a former British, Portuguese or French colony, the first step towards making them accessible to all would be to translate these important documents into the dominant languages of the respective countries, and then make efforts towards making them accessible to speakers and readers of other   African languages through the regional or trans-frontier languages.

It is true that most countries in Africa belong to regional or sub-regional organizations, e.g. East African Community states (EAC), and most of these regions are opening up to citizens of their member states for trade, work, education and other endeavours. The regions are attempting to develop   regional integration policies that will harmonize several development sectors such as: common commercial laws, regulations, and customs policy etc. This has also been the case with the West African Economic and Monetary Union (UMEOA) countries, namely, Benin, Burkina Faso, Cóte d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Niger, Senegal   and Togo. Once countries open-up to their regional member states, there will definitely be a free   movement of people and goods.

This means a common language is absolutely necessary for people to communicate. As people move, they will use the dominant languages of wider communication, the trans-frontier languages, if they have to survive the regional integration. In fact, the regional integration is a major way of encouraging people to learn a common language. It is the nature of man to seek what is beneficial to them in spite of the pain they have to undergo. One advantage of using regional and trans-frontier languages is that the cost of production of the   bilingual documents will be shared by several countries.

African states should, therefore, embark on a vigorous drive for the training of professional interpreters and translators in European and African languages. It may, therefore, be necessary to create national and regional schools of translation and interpretation, a usual practice in multilingual countries, whose areas of specialisation should cover political, scientific, cultural, literature, technical, literary and philosophical fields. Despair will not solve Africa's problems and, consequently, Africans need to work towards developing regional languages.

Notes

[1] Mandarin Chinese (official), Taiwanese (Min), Hakka dialects
[2] Thai, English (secondary language of the elite), ethnic and regional dialects

[3] Also spoken in Mali, Burkina Faso - Kedrebeogo (1997)
[4] Also used in Burkina Faso
[5] Also spoken in Guinea
[6] Also spoken in Benin

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