

## **THE STATUS OF MOTHER TONGUES IN KENYA AND CHINA: LESSONS THE TWO COUNTRIES CAN LEARN FROM EACH OTHER**

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This paper is a comparative analysis of the language situations in China and Kenya, intended to identify the important lessons about language management in a multi-ethnic society that the two countries can learn from each other. China has over 130 languages, with Mandarin Chinese (Hanyu) being a mother tongue to over 90% of the Chinese population. The situation is different in Kenya, which has over 40 languages, most of which are minority languages. Significant differences are noted in the areas of language reforms and policy, language development agencies, and the treatment of ethnic minority languages. In each of the two countries, the constitution spells out some of the language concerns and the relevant guidelines for their usage and management. In Kenya, additional legal texts about the language policy are currently in preparation. The greatest lesson that Kenya can learn from China is the need to insist on catering for issues to do with language at the national government level, resisting any pressure from the county governments regarding variations on the relevant constitutional provisions (Republic of Kenya, 2010). The drafters of the Constitution of Kenya 2010 got this right by giving the national government the function of managing “Language policy and the promotion of official and local languages” (Fourth Schedule, Part 1 (5)). The national government must learn from China to treat this as a serious national responsibility by formulating the relevant policy guidelines and enacting the necessary supportive laws. For China, the greatest lesson to learn is the need to also include NGOs and individual efforts in the development of languages.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Geographically, Kenya is quite far away from China. However, the two countries are united by the fact that communication in the world at the moment is easier than in the past, and also by the fact that, in the recent past, the two countries have been partnering in many areas of development. It should be noted that China has developed one of its languages, Mandarin, to an extent where the demand for it is growing rapidly in many parts of the world. Mandarin, known to many only as Chinese, together with its culture, is taught in the Confucius institutes in some of the major universities in Kenya, including Kenyatta University and the University of Nairobi.

In contrast, none of the Kenyan languages is taught extensively outside Kenya. Even Kiswahili is not taught as much as Mandarin anywhere outside Kenya and Tanzania. Thus, China has done much better than Kenya in promoting one of its mother tongues not only at home but also outside. However, since Kenya is also operating in a reasonably complex multilingual

situation, there are bound to be aspects of its sociolinguistic challenges which it has managed well. It is therefore useful to carry out a comparative study of the language situations in China and Kenya with the aim of identifying the lessons the two countries can learn from each other.

The discussion starts by outlining the language situation in China; then proceeds to look at the Kenyan situation before making the relevant comparisons. The description of the Chinese situation covers: China's languages, language reforms and language policy. For Kenya, apart from its languages and language policy, some attention is given to the efforts of the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in promoting languages.

The Chinese language reforms did not all occur at once but in different stages. Most of the reforms were in support of Mandarin and not the minority languages. Since learning and speaking Mandarin seems to have an associated economic value, speakers of minority languages are progressively abandoning their own languages for Mandarin.

The lessons Kenya can learn from China are identified followed by those that China can learn from Kenya. Further recommendations on language matters for Kenya and Africa as stated by some linguists are discussed. The conclusion is that individual, non-governmental and governmental efforts count in the development and management of the languages in a multilingual country.

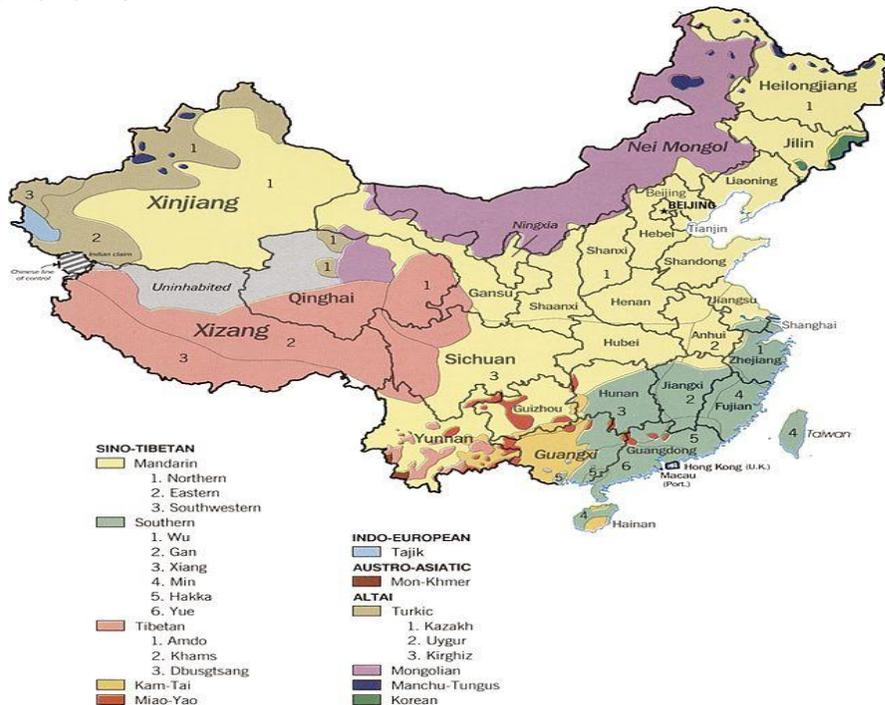
## **2. THE LANGUAGE SITUATION IN CHINA**

The People's Republic of China is one of the largest countries in the world. Its total area is about 9.6 million km<sup>2</sup>, making it the third largest country after Russia and Canada. Administratively, 34 divisions exist. They are then classified into 22 provinces, 4 municipalities (Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai, Chongqing), 5 autonomous regions (Xinjiang Uyghur, Inner Mongolia, Tibet, Ningxia Hui, and Guangxi Zhuang), 2 Special Administrative Regions (Hong Kong and Macau), and Taiwan Province (<http://www.gov.cn>). Beijing is the capital city of China. The current population of China is over 1.3 billion. The level of literacy stands at 95.1% ([http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/china\\_statistics.html](http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/china_statistics.html)). Its languages are identified below.

### **2.1 The languages of China**

China is a multi-ethnic and multi-lingual country. It has 56 nationalities of which 55 are minority nationalities. According to the 2010 Chinese census, the Han, the main ethnic nationality, accounted for 91.51% of the total population, while the other nationalities, including all minorities groups, accounted for the remaining 8.49% (<http://www.travelchinaguide.com>

/essential/people.htm). The map below shows some of the names of these language groups and their location in China.



Map 1: Some of the language groups in Mainland China and Taiwan (Taken from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Languages\\_of\\_China](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Languages_of_China))

### 2.1.1 The national language

Standard Mandarin Chinese (Putonghua) is the only national language in the People’s Republic of China. Its legal position is enshrined in the *Constitution* and the *National Language and Writing Law/Act of the People’s Republic of China* (Huang, 2003).

### 2.1.2 The official languages

The main official languages are Standard Chinese (Mainland), Cantonese (Hong Kong and Macau), English (Hong Kong), Portuguese (Macau), Uyghur (Xinjiang), Tibetan (Tibet), Mongolian (Inner Mongolia) and Zhuang (Guangxi). Cantonese Chinese is second after Standard Mandarin Chinese in terms of number of speakers. It is spoken by at least 70 million people mainly in south east China, particularly in Hong Kong, Macau, Guangdong, Guangxi and Hainan.

In many schools in Hong Kong, Macau and Guangdong, Cantonese is the medium of instruction, though students are taught to read and write Standard Mandarin Chinese. Cantonese is also the main language of business,

the media and government in both Hong Kong and Macau. In Hong Kong, Cantonese exists in the spoken (colloquial) as well as the written form ([www.omniglot.com](http://www.omniglot.com): Cantonese).

### **2.1.3 *The majority languages***

Internet information on Chinese says that it is a family of closely-related but mutually unintelligible languages ([www.omniglot.com](http://www.omniglot.com)). This means that the languages identified below are separate languages, not dialects of one language. There is a bit of contradiction in the cited website as Cantonese is referred to as a dialect of Chinese and as a language at the same time. The same website identifies a number of Chinese languages as being majority languages. They include: Pǔtōnghuà (Mandarin), Wú, Yuè (Cantonese), MǐnNán, Jinyu, Hakka, Xiang (Hunanese), Gan, Mǐn Běi, Mǐn Dōng, Mǐn Zhōng, Dungan, Pǔ-Xián and Huīzhōu. The last four languages have less than 50, 000 speakers each. The first three have over 50 million speakers each. According to *Nationalencyklopedin*, Pǔtōnghuà (Mandarin) had about 955 million native speakers in 2010. Wú has about 90 million speakers and Yuè (Cantonese), about 70 million speakers ([www.omniglot.com](http://www.omniglot.com)).

### **2.1.4 *The minority languages***

Most of the minority groups in China still use their mother tongues as the main vehicle of social communication. There are about 120 mother tongues in minority regions (Sun, 2004), only 30 of which have written scripts. Twenty of these minority languages have less than 1,000 speakers (Zuo, 2007). Approximately 90% of the minority groups speak 15 languages (Zhuang, Uygur, Yi, Miao, Tibetan, Mongolian, Buyei, Korean, Dong, Hani, Bai, Kazak, Dai, Li and Yao) and 80% of them speak the first 10 of those languages (Huang 2003).

Many local people have noticed the growth of China as an economic and political powerhouse. The learning of Mandarin among the minority ethnic communities is seen as a way of gaining more socioeconomic leverage. Thus more and more members of the minority languages prefer to learn Mandarin because it is of more economic value than their own minority languages. According to Bradley (2005) and Poa and Lapolla (2007), most Han-assimilated members of a minority ethnic group are often those who are more loyal to Mandarin Chinese than their own individual mother tongues. It has also been noted that some minority groups choose not to make an issue of language maintenance (Bradley 2005). Therefore, groups which speak minority languages are abandoning their own languages in order to learn and use Mandarin.

## 2.2 The language reforms in China

In the last century or so, the Chinese language has been undergoing language reforms in order to promote a common language. There were several reforms which, as already noted, were mainly aimed at promoting Mandarin Chinese. The first one was in 1913. After the 1911 Chinese Revolution, the pronunciation unification association in 1913 stipulated a common standard pronunciation (Cao 2006). The second reform, which is related to the first one, was in 1932. In that year, the Commercial Press, in China, published “the National pronunciation and commonly used vocabulary” (Liu 1999). This was followed in 1955 by the use of the term “Mandarin (Putonghua or Standard Chinese)” instead of the terms “national language” (Liu 1999). Before then the more common names were HuaYu and HanYu, both of which simply mean Chinese Language.

In 1956, the State Council issued “instructions on the promotion of Putonghua” (Cao 2006). Mandarin was based on the pronunciation of its northern dialect, i.e. the variety of Mandarin spoken in Beijing. This was regarded as the standard pronunciation (<http://www.ywcb.com>).

In 1958, Chairman Mao Zedong (the first president of the People’s Republic of China) required all government officials to learn Mandarin. The use of Pinyin (Roman script) was also introduced to help the learners of Chinese to read the language (Yu 1996). In 1982 it was stated clearly in the new constitution that Mandarin would be promoted by the State throughout the country (Cao 2006). In 1992 the State promulgated the 10-year State Language Work Plan laying emphasis on active promotion and gradual improvement of Mandarin. The provincial governments, capital cities of the autonomous regions, municipalities, special economic zones and key tourist areas were required to accelerate the process of promoting Putonghua. There was a concerted effort in the last 10 years of the 20th century to make Mandarin a medium of instruction in all colleges, primary and secondary schools (Liu 1999).

On 31<sup>st</sup> October 2000, the People’s Republic of China adopted the “People’s Republic of China National Common Language Law” which came into force on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2001. This is the first law in China’s history on language legislation (<http://www.ywcb.com>).

## 2.3 The language policy in China

The Chinese Communist Party, the ruling party in China, uses language policies in education to foster national identity among the 56 official ethnic groups. As already stated, the national language of China is Mandarin Chinese. In the 1950s, the Chinese government established autonomous governments in minority regions and helped to eliminate illiteracy in the minority regions.

Both the Han officials (Mandarin-speaking officials) and local minority officials were taught the minority languages (Zhou, 2000). In addition, policies for creating writing systems for minority groups who had no written language systems were developed. Mandarin Chinese was introduced in schools where minority groups did not have a written language system. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Central Committee in 1956 gave the minority groups the right to use their home language and stated that Mandarin Chinese should only be mandated for the Hans, i.e. the mother tongue speakers of Mandarin (Zhou, 2000).

The basic language policy of China is equality of all ethnic languages. It prohibits language discrimination and encourages the coexistence of languages. Each ethnic group has the freedom to learn, use and develop their own ethnic language. Therefore, when minority groups strongly identify with their language, policies that restrict minority language use in school are often met with resistance. The Chinese central government has always responded to such situations by allowing minorities a limited degree of autonomy in order to avoid social instability. Chinese minority education policy struggles to balance the goal of a national “One China” identity, while allowing a degree of autonomy in minority regions to quell potential rebellion (Nelson 2005). The National Commission of Minority Affairs is the principal government department that is responsible for the language planning of China’s minority languages.

### **3. THE LANGUAGE SITUATION IN KENYA**

Kenya has a total area of about 583,000 square kilometres (Mandila et al. 2003). Administratively, it has 47 counties. The current population of Kenya as compared to that of China is very small. By 2009, Kenya had 38, 610, 067 people (Kenya Population Census, 2009). Nairobi is the capital city of Kenya and the national level of literacy stands at 87.4% (<http://country-facts.findthedata.com/q/173/2395/What-is-the-literacy-rate-in-Kenya-a-country-in-the-continent-of-Africa>).

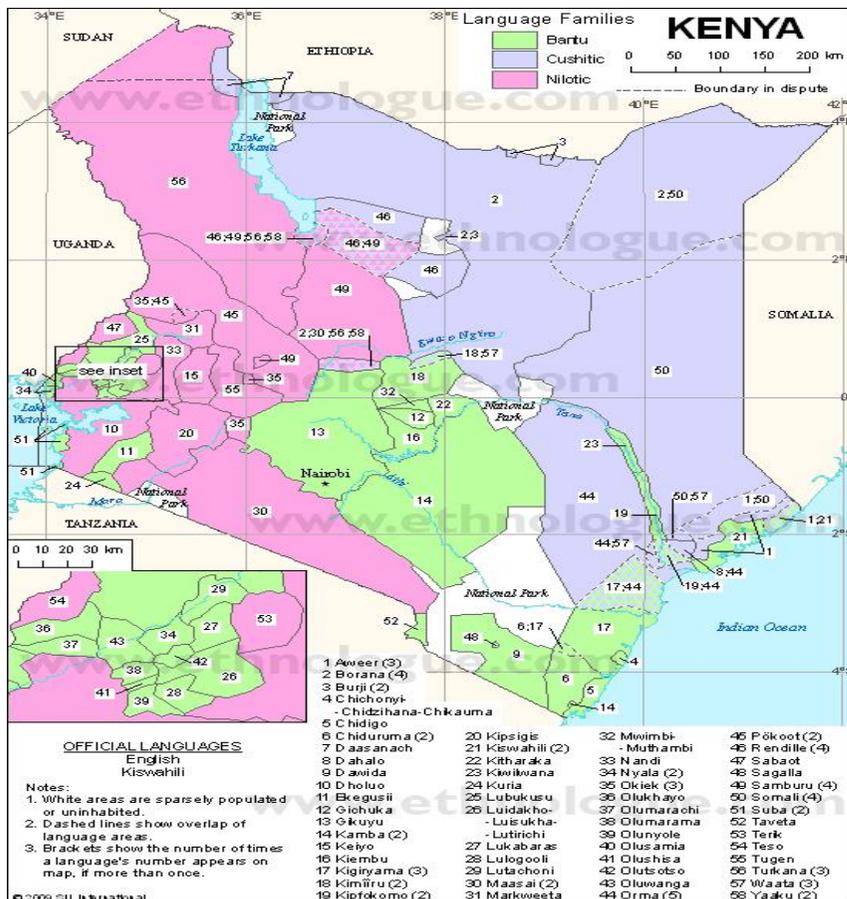
#### **3.1 The languages of Kenya**

Kenya is a multilingual and multiethnic country just like China. The indigenous languages spoken in Kenya belong to the Nilotic, Bantu and Cushitic language families. The Bantu group has the largest number of speakers. Among the Bantu languages, Kiswahili is the most widely used because it is used both as a first and second language. According to Webb and Kembo-Sure (2000), there are 42 languages in Kenya. Ogechi (2003) states that there are 42 codes in Kenya while Obiero (2008) states that many sources indicate that Kenya has between 30 and 60 languages. According to

Ethnologue, there are 68 languages. At the same time, the map labelled 2 below from Ethnologue shows that they are 58.

Map 2: Languages of Kenya (source: Ethnologue, SIL International 2015)

So,



one question that needs an answer is: how many languages do we have in Kenya? It should be noted that in Ethnologue, Oluluhya and Kalenjin are listed alongside Olunyore, Lwidakho, etc. and Tugen, Kipsigis, etc., respectively. Oluluhya is a general term referring to a group of languages such as Olunyore, Lwidakho, Lutachoni, Olusamia, etc. while Kalenjin is a similar term for languages such as Tugen, Kipsigis, Nandi, etc. This means that further research is still needed in Kenya for a more accurate documentation (and counting) of its languages.

### 3.1.1 The national language

Kiswahili has been the de facto national language of Kenya for a long time and, since the promulgation of the Constitution of Kenya 2010, is now legally

recognized as Kenya's only national language (Republic of Kenya 2010). It is a second language to most of its users. The situation is different from that in China, where the national language, Mandarin, is the mother tongue of over 90% of the Chinese.

### **3.1.2 *The official languages***

According to the Constitution of Kenya 2010, both Kiswahili and English are the official languages. (In the constitution that existed before the 2010 one, there were no provisions regarding Kenya's national and official languages.) This means that the two languages should perform equal roles in the whole country. However, in reality, English, presumably because of its longer history as the de facto official language in Kenya, still performs more official roles than Kiswahili. Some conscious effort is needed to make Kiswahili perform the roles it is entitled to by the Constitution of Kenya 2010. The "Languages of Kenya Policy", which is yet to be passed by the Parliament of Kenya, seems to have taken this into consideration. For example, according to the proposed policy, the government shall (our numbering):

- (i) avail its websites, web interfaces and social media platforms - and those of its agencies- in Kiswahili and English (p. 15);
- (ii) take measures to ensure that Kiswahili, English and Kenyan Sign Language are the languages of work in National and County institutions (p. 26);
- (iii) ensure that all Development Plans are available in Kiswahili, English and other formats and technologies accessible to persons with disabilities (p. 26).

These are just a few examples. There are many other examples to show that the writers of this policy have the intention of promoting all languages of Kenya.

### **3.1.3 *The majority languages***

SIL Ethnologue (2009) gives a report of the largest communities of native speakers in Kenya. They classify the relevant languages into Bantu and Nilotic families of languages<sup>1</sup>. The majority Bantu languages are Kikuyu (6, 622, 576), Kikamba (3, 893, 157), Ekegusii (2, 205, 669), Kimĩĩru (1, 658, 108), Oluluhya (5, 338, 666), Kipokomo, Kigiryama and Kiambu. The majority Nilotic languages are Dholuo (4, 044, 440), Kalenjin (4, 967, 328), Maasai (841, 622) and Turkana (855, 399). The Mijikenda, which consists of nine groups (Kauma, Kabe, Jibana, Chonyi, Giriama, Ribe, Dorobo, Digo and Duruma),

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<sup>1</sup> The classification of the languages is drawn from Ethnologue but the population of each speech community is from the 2009 Kenya Population and Housing Census.

number 1, 960, 574. The rest of the speech communities whose numbers are not stated or who are not mentioned form 13% of the population according to the 2009 Population and Housing Census. Once again the largest majority language in Kenya (Kikuyu) is very small compared to Mandarin and is neither a national nor an official language. However, the speakers of this language have settled all over Kenya.

#### **3.1.4 *The minority languages***

The languages spoken by ethnic minorities are also recorded by SIL International (2009), according to which the languages in the Cushitic family are part of the minorities. The languages of this family in Kenya include Oromo, Rendille, and Somali. Unlike in Ethiopia, where the Oromo speakers are a majority group, in Kenya, they are a minority. Among these Cushitic groups, the number of Somali speakers in Kenya (2,385,572) seems to have grown tremendously and the people have settled in different towns in Kenya. Arabic, which belongs to the Semitic group, is counted as a minority language in Kenya. In general, the many minority languages in Kenya are not listed comprehensively. There is, therefore, a need for research to identify them clearly. This would, among other things, help the government in planning for these languages.

### **3.2 The language policy guidelines in Kenya**

Kenya's language policy in education is contained in reports of various commissions. The Constitution of Kenya 2010 has also its contribution to make towards the language policy in Kenya. The Languages of Kenya Policy and the Languages of Kenya Bill, which are in the final stages of preparation, are offshoots of the Constitution. The contributions of each of these reports and documents are summarized below.

#### **3.2.1 *The language policy guidelines adopted from the reports of various commissions***

After independence, the Ominde Commission of 1964 recommended that from class 1 (grade1), English should be the medium of instruction. English has henceforth remained a medium of instruction in Kenya. Unlike in China, where the medium of instruction for many Chinese is a mother tongue, in Kenya it is mostly a second language in towns and, from class 4 (grade 4) onwards, in all schools. The medium of instruction from classes 1 to 3 is the language of the catchment area (except for towns), which is de facto the mother tongue as illustrated in the next paragraph.

The next report, known as the Gachathi Report of 1976, recommended

the use of the mother tongue from class 1 to class 3 (grades 1 to 3). The Koech Report of 1999 supported the Gachathi Report recommendations on the use of the learner's mother tongue. We agree with Mbaka (2010) that the Koech Report of 1999 did not add anything new on language to the existing language policy at the time. After class 3, in the regions where the mother tongues are used, English is used as the medium of instruction. This does not happen in China. There seems to be continuation with the same language since in section 2.3 above there is no indication of a change from one language to another in the Chinese education system.

The 1976 Gachathi Report recommended the introduction of Kiswahili as an examinable subject in primary schools. The Ominde Commission of 1964 had recommended that Kiswahili should be taught as a compulsory subject, that a Department of Kiswahili should be established at the University of Nairobi and that Kiswahili teachers should be trained during school holidays. The first two recommendations were implemented years later: the former with the onset of the 8.4.4. system of education in 1985, and the latter, when a department of Kiswahili was established before the admission of the first group of Education students to the University of Nairobi's Kikuyu Campus in 1988. The 8.4.4. system of education had been recommended in the Mackay Report of 1984.

The mother tongues in Kenya therefore are not used in Kenya's education system beyond Class 3. Some of them are only studied or subjected to research at the university level, where Kiswahili remains a subject.

### **3.2.2 *Languages in education***

English is the language of instruction at all levels (primary, secondary and university) in Kenya's education system and is taught as a subject as well up to O-level stages. Kiswahili is a compulsory subject in both secondary and primary schools. English and Kiswahili are degree courses offered to willing students at university level. A number of foreign languages, including French, German, and Arabic, are offered as optional subjects mostly in secondary schools and also as degree courses at university level. Chinese and Korean are offered mainly at university level in Kenya. At the University of Nairobi, for example, there is a degree course in Chinese Language and Culture and another one in Korean Studies. Chinese is already in demand at levels below the University. The Government of Kenya has made a decision to teach Chinese in primary schools and is in the process of making arrangements to implement this.

Apart from their use in classes 1, 2 and 3, the mother tongues of Kenya do not have any place in the education system. If there is no intervention to develop and use them, those among them that are endangered are likely to simply die.

### ***3.2.3 What the Constitution of Kenya (2010) says about indigenous languages***

According to the Constitution of Kenya (2010: 22):

- (1) The national language of the Republic is Kiswahili.
- (2) The official languages of the Republic are Kiswahili and English.
- (3) The state shall -
  - (a) promote and protect the diversity of language of the people of Kenya; and
  - (b) promote the development and use of indigenous languages, Kenyan Sign language, Braille and other communication formats and technologies accessible to persons with disabilities.

The first two provisions (on national and official languages) have already been dealt with in sub-sections 3.1.1 and 3.1.2 above. The third point clearly indicates that the state has the duty to develop and promote the use of indigenous languages. There is no evidence to date that the Government of the Republic of Kenya has taken this responsibility seriously.

The Constitution of Kenya (2010) Chapter 4, Part 2, Article 44, also states the following about language and culture:

- (1) Every person has the right to use the language, and to participate in the cultural life, of the person's choice.
- (2) A person belonging to a cultural or linguistic community has the right, with other members of that community-
  - (a) to enjoy the person's culture and use the person's language; or
  - (b) to form, join and maintain cultural and linguistic associations and other organs of civil society.

One very positive aspect in the Constitution of Kenya 2010 is the space for development that is given to all languages, though some are to play more important roles than others. The ones that are not yet developed do not have a good chance of playing significant roles in facilitating the achievement of the aspirations of their speakers in non-traditional communicative domains.

### ***3.2.4 The language policy documents to be presented to the Kenyan Parliament***

In response to the provisions of the Constitution of Kenya 2010, the Ministry of Sports, Culture and the Arts is in the process of preparing a document entitled "Languages of Kenya Policy". The document clearly states that:

The Languages of Kenya Policy has been developed in furtherance of the Constitution of Kenya Articles 7, 10, 11, 35, 44, 53, 55, 56 and 159 and the Fourth Schedule Section 5 on promotion of official and local languages (Ministry of Sports,

Culture and the Arts, forthcoming, p. 4).<sup>2</sup>

There is also the 'Languages of Kenya Bill, 2014', a document in which, it is stated that it is AN ACT of Parliament that is meant:

... to provide for the establishment of the legal and institutional framework for the promotion of Kiswahili and English as the official languages of Kenya; Kiswahili as the national language of Kenya; and the promotion and protection of community languages, Kenyan Sign Language, Braille and other communication formats and technologies accessible to persons with disabilities and for connected purposes (Languages of Kenya Bill, Forthcoming: 3).<sup>3</sup>

While we recognize the effort to create a language policy document that is comprehensive and sensitive to the language needs of all Kenyans, what is contained in these two documents cannot be assumed to be in existence until the bill has been passed or until the 'Languages of Kenya Policy' has been published. Until then, Kenya has to continue operating under the umbrella of what has been in existence in the reports of the various commissions.

#### **4. THE EFFORTS OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS IN PROMOTING LANGUAGE IN KENYA**

Non-governmental organizations such as Bible Translation and Literacy (BTL), the Bible Society of Kenya (BSK), the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL), just to mention a few, have been working tirelessly in the country to ensure that there are bibles written in Kenyan mother tongues. Whereas SIL seems to focus mostly on the small languages, BSK focuses on the big ones. BTL works in partnership with SIL. As they work with volunteers from, or members of, the speech communities, they ensure that they develop orthographies for those languages. Once a writing system has been developed, those interested in writing books in the mother tongue concerned can actually use it.

These NGOs also ensure that communities are trained to read and write so that they can read their bibles in their various mother tongues. They also write small simple books that members of a speech community can enjoy reading.

Mother tongue researchers and scholars in groups such as Multilingual Education (MLE) Network have written books to help teach mother tongue and in mother tongue in lower primary school section. BTL has also spearheaded the writing of books in mother tongue and introduced the use of

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<sup>2</sup> We expect that the content of this document will not change much because the document is already labelled as the final draft.

<sup>3</sup> Once again, we hope not much will change this document because it is also called the final draft.

those books in the relevant areas, for example in the regions where Tharaka and Sabaot speakers are found. In addition, they are known to have engaged a team in the evaluation of the success of the implementation of the Sabaot and Tharaka language projects as seen in Mutiga (2005) and Mutiga (2006), respectively. Writers such as Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Haggai Opondo Nundu and Asenath Bole Odaga have written books in mother tongues so that people, apart from getting informed, can enjoy reading them. Writers such as Ngugi wa Thiong'o have even translated some of their earlier books into mother tongue to increase their readership.

## **5. THE LESSONS THAT THE TWO COUNTRIES CAN LEARN FROM EACH OTHER ON HOW TO DEVELOP THEIR MOTHER TONGUES**

The possible lessons for Kenya are given first because Kenya seems to have more to borrow from China than the other way round.

### **5.1 The lessons Kenya can learn from the Chinese experience**

Since the language count for Kenya is not consistent and many researchers have opted to safely write that there are over 40 languages, there is a need to carry out a countrywide research to provide more accurate information on the number of languages that Kenya has. There should be a fresh count of the number of languages. This will give room for better planning for languages and addressing the issues concerning each one of them. China seems to be sure of the number of its languages.

Kenya can learn from the Chinese experience of promoting mother tongues besides the national language (Mandarin), through developing writing systems for all of them. Orthographies need to be developed for all the languages of Kenya. The Chinese government developed orthographies for all languages first. In developing the languages beyond the orthographies, there is a need to start with a few languages (some majority and minority languages). The selected languages should then be promoted. Those who are interested in writing in their mother tongue will then be in a position to use a writing system that is standard for the language. Writing in different mother tongues helps to promote diversity in the country. That is why the Chinese government has promoted the minority languages apart from promoting its national language. This in turn has promoted cultural identity and diversity in the country.

The Kenyan government needs to establish appropriate institutions to handle language matters at the government level and to carry out academic research. This should help in strengthening and developing the languages chosen for specific purposes, e.g. the national language and the official languages of Kenya. This will enable Kenyans to comfortably undertake

research in these languages. “The Languages of Kenya Policy” document and “the Languages of Kenya Bill” should be major steps in that direction. Oduor (2013: 241) notes that according to Wolff (2012), “... the Ministry of Education has a big role to play in ensuring that the proposals concerning the use of the mother tongues in education are implemented as they should”.

Kenyatta University already has an institute of African studies. An Institute or Department of Kenyan Languages is needed to enable us to study and do more research on our languages. Just as the Chinese government, the government of Kenya needs to be fully involved in this. The Department of Linguistics and Languages at the University of Nairobi was initially called “The Department of Linguistics and African Languages”. It lost this name when all language related departments, except the Sub-Department of French and the Department of Communication Skills at the University of Nairobi, were merged. If the idea of a Department of Linguistics and African Languages is difficult to go back to, then a “Department of Kenyan Languages” would be appropriate.

Kenya needs a language body which should consist of representatives from the government, i.e. representatives from the Ministry of Sports, Culture and the Arts and the Ministry of Education. These representatives must be people who are interested in language matters. The language body should also consist of representatives from the academic profession (especially from the language departments in the Universities). Other groups that should not be left out are the NGOs, such as BTL, BSK, SIL, and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

The membership should also include at least one representative from each language of Kenya. It should further include representatives from Kenyan Sign Language (KSL) and the Kenya Society for the Blind (KSB). They need to discuss how to promote the mother tongues and other languages spoken in Kenya. They should look at the language issues in the Constitution as well as the ones proposed in section 3 of this paper and discuss how to promote all the languages in Kenya. The language committee could also invite individuals who have worked on their own to promote Kenyan languages.

Since the Constitution of Kenya recognizes that Kenya is multilingual, there is also a need to develop multilingual or bilingual teachers for schools, especially those who can teach Kiswahili and a mother tongue, English and a mother tongue or English and Kiswahili. Although the national language is Kiswahili, not everybody is fluent in it and thus some people use English in situations where a national language would be more appropriate. In the same way as the Chinese government developed Mandarin and ensured that it was taught well within China before exporting it, there is a need to ensure that the languages offered in Kenya’s education system are taught well.

The mother tongues of Kenya need to have an attached economic value.

Being literate in a language used in a county should be considered as an added advantage for those looking for jobs in particular counties. Closely related to this point is the need to sensitize communities to the value of their languages. As already reported in section 2.1.4, some minority groups in China do not see any value in learning their mother tongues. So, they abandon them for Mandarin. Communities in Kenya need to be sensitized to realize that when a language is lost it goes with a lot of culture and knowledge that is of value.

The Chinese government is sensitive to the voices of the speakers of the minority languages. As already stated, when there are many complaints from such communities on their language needs, the government gives in to their demands. The government of Kenya should be ready to support the language needs of all speech communities in Kenya in a similar way.

The Maasai community is the flagship culture that attracts tourists to Kenya. For instance, the tourists from China who come to visit Kenya are always eager to see the Maasai, who they get to read about before they travel to Kenya. Therefore, there is a need to consider a pilot project to promote the Maa language.

## **5.2 The lessons China can learn from the Kenyan experience**

In China, most of the effort spent on language promotion has been from the government. In other words, there has been a top-to-bottom approach to promoting mother tongues. A bottom-to-top approach, where NGOs work hard to promote mother tongues, would also be very useful. Individual efforts usually contribute a great deal. In Kenya, NGOs such as BTL have worked in the communities and so they understand their language needs. They have worked on their own to develop bibles and school books for lower primary school, for example in the Tharaka and Sabaot projects mentioned above. They did not wait for the government to help them to fund these projects.

Just as in Kenya, communities in China should be sensitized to the value of their mother tongues so that they do not abandon them. In both Kenya and China, there are communities which have abandoned their own languages in favour of other languages. For example, the Ogiek are abandoning their language in favour of Kipsigis, Nandi, Maa and Kikuyu. The Elmolo and the Rendille people are also abandoning their languages in favour of the neighbouring ones.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

This paper has looked at the language situations in Kenya and China with a view to identifying ways in which the two can benefit from each other. The paper has shown that the national language in China is the Standard Mandarin

Chinese (Putonghua) and that China has several official languages, each in a different region. They are Standard Mandarin Chinese, Cantonese, English, Portuguese, Uyghur, Tibetan, Mongolian and Zhuang. Mandarin was mainly promoted through the Chinese language reforms. The government helped to develop orthographies for all unwritten languages and also allowed minority groups to use their mother tongues.

The languages spoken in Kenya belong to the Nilotic, Bantu and Cushitic language families though there are languages that are not originally Kenyan e.g. English, Hindu and Arabic. The number of languages in Kenya is not clear because whereas some sources indicate that they are 42, others show that they are 68 languages. Kiswahili is the national language as well as one of the two official languages in Kenya. English is the other official language. It is noted that the language policy in Kenya is contained in the reports of various commissions and in the Constitution of Kenya 2010.

In summary, the possible lessons that Kenya can learn from China include the need to have the correct number of languages in order to plan for them. Another lesson is the need to develop writing systems for all of them. Kenya needs a clear documented language policy, institutions of research, and support from the government through the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Sports, Culture and the Arts. There is also the need to train bilingual teachers and ensure that the languages in question are taught well. Speech communities need to know that their languages are of value. There is also a need to attach some economic value to all languages.

The major lesson China can learn from Kenya is the need for a bottom-top approach to language issues. Speech communities in China should be sensitized on the values of their mother tongues.

From the comparative analysis, it is concluded that individual, NGO and governmental efforts count in the development of the languages in a given country. All stakeholders, i.e. government departments, non-governmental organizations, academia and the media should play their roles in developing the mother tongues in both Kenya and China.

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