While the Kiswahili language has played a key role in the linguistic ‘decolonization’ and national integration of postcolonial Kenya and Tanzania, its more dubious reputation in neighboring Uganda has stemmed from perceptions about its inherent ‘deficiencies’ and its use by imputedly dangerous or antisocial people (including the historically unpopular security forces). Dominant linguistic ideologies in Uganda, in contrast to those of its two neighbors, do not recognize local forms of Kiswahili as symbols of transethnic solidarity nor of local political identities. They cast them, rather, as linguistically and culturally deficient idioms that invoke coercive contexts, colonial class relations and official political terrorism. Representations of second-language speakers of Ugandan Kiswahili in popular media often draw upon stereotypes illustrating their supposed illiteracy, criminality, and ‘foreignness’ in constructing images of general linguistic, political, and moral decay.

0. Introduction

In postcolonial Anglophone East Africa, the Kiswahili language has proved itself of increasing importance as a practical medium and symbol of national integration and the decolonization of national political cultures. In terms of bridging social difference, Kiswahili has figured prominently, both in the formation of transethnic, nationalist/Pan-Africanist consciousness (horizontal integration) and in the creation of economic opportunities for individuals who lack extensive formal schooling in English (vertical integration). In this sense, the Kiswahili language has been expropriated from its original (coastal Islamic) milieu to new politico-cultural contexts in which its functions and social meanings are locally emergent and sociohistorically specific. Mazrui and Shariff (1994:72) note:

The historical development of Swahili has given rise to new varieties of the language that are gradually becoming native to an increasing number of east Africans. The concept of a ‘Swahili-speaking people’, therefore, has now transcended Swahili ethnicity in the narrower sense of the term, even though it fits perfectly well with the Swahili multidimensional concept of kabila. This then has created a complex situation of new public affirmations and counter-affirmations about the boundaries of Swahili identity.

In colonial times, the East African military was a primary site of transethnic, regionalized identity formation, and its Kiswahili came be associated with a kind
of ‘barracks solidarity’. This indexicality potentiated Kiswahili as political capital; it became the most conspicuous symbol of Nyerere’s *Ujamaa*, or African socialism, and in Kenya, where it was made co-official language with English, Kenyatta ventriloquized important aspects of Nyerere’s discourse in articulating his *Harambee*. This image worked in favor of the reputation of Kiswahili(s) in Kenya and Tanzania, where the security personnel were more ethnically diverse, and therefore perceived as more ‘national’. But it worked perhaps to the detriment of Kiswahili(s) in Uganda, where the military was predominantly northern and Nilotic- or Sudanic-speaking, and in postcolonial times, was dominated in turn by the ethnicities of the successive regimes. Kiswahili’s most dubious distinction came in 1973, when the military dictator Idi Amin Dada declared it to be Uganda’s national language (although the decision was never implemented). When the East African Community broke down in 1977 (due to a rift in relations between Kenya and Tanzania), the regional impetus for the development of Kiswahili in Uganda did as well. More recently, however, the National Resistance Movement (which came to power in Uganda in 1985) has declared its intention to reintroduce Kiswahili as a compulsory subject in schools, and to informally promote it as a national lingua franca. As will be discussed later, the NRM regime is ‘softpeddling’ a program to rehabilitate Kiswahili in Uganda by linking it to popular initiatives in East African political and economic integration.

The nationalist/Pan-Africanist embrace of Kiswahili, however, has presented a perceived threat to the identity claims of the coastal ethnic Swahili communities on the one hand, and the multitude of inland ethnic communities on the other (most notably, the Baganda of Uganda). These respective lines of tension have been manifested in the emergence of a contested political terrain around definitions of Kiswahili identity, both between ‘native’ and second-language speakers and between second-language speakers and nonspeakers. Discursive anxieties around language use are very often the terms in which other sociopolitical struggles are waged; language issues become particularly sensitive in the context of competing sociopolitical interests finding political voice. Among the more than 20 recognized native Kiswahili dialects, the language of Zanzibar (*Kiunguja*) was chosen by the British as a model for the official administrative standard, and in the hands of post-independence Tanzanian language-planners it underwent rapid lexical elaboration and syntactic codification. As an ‘improved’ linguistic technology, Kiswahili became ascriptively ‘neutral’, as standardized, literary languages are often assumed to be. In this, however, the emergent standard became discursively disassociated from its coastal sources. And as their political and economic futures in post-independence Kenya and Tanzania have faced periodic uncertainty, coastal Swahili communities have resisted tranethnic readings of Swahili identity. They have found unexpected allies in cultural activists from the East African interior who resist the encroachment of a regionalized tranethnic identity on their own cherished ethnic identity claims.

The emergence of a standard Kiswahili has also figured in negative (re)evaluations of nonnative ‘upcountry’ (East African interior) varieties as corrupted versions of their coastal counterparts. One dominant discourse constructs the nonna-
tive varieties as a continuum of progressive linguistic ‘decay’ from Zanzibar to the Congo River. The well-known adage runs: ‘Kiswahili was born in Zanzibar, grew up in Tanzania, grew old in Kenya, died in Uganda, and was buried in Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo).’ And as nonnative varieties of Kiswahili have facilitated interethnic communication in increasingly multilingual urban contexts, perceptions have arisen about their role in the dilution of traditional forms of rural-based authority (that find their cultural expression in ‘mother-tongues’). Thus, the constructed linguistic decay in urban centers (as manifested in emergent sociolinguistic hybridity and various forms of code-switching) is coarticulated in certain moralistic discourses with images of generalized social and moral decay. In some locales, Muswahili ‘Swahili person’ has come to denote any ‘outsider’ with ascribed subversive characteristics. Mazrui and Shariff (1994:81) note:

The other level of language attitudes has to do with how a language triggers certain stereotypes about its speaker(s) in the mind of the audience. A classical example of this tendency with regard to the Swahili is described by Jaramogi Oginga Odinga, the first vice-president of Kenya, in his famous book Not Yet Uhuru. In particular, Odinga refers to some African adjuncts of the British colonial administration who used to ‘invade’ Luoland periodically to collect taxes. Precisely because these people were themselves not Luo and had no proficiency in the Luo language, they were forced to use a transethnic language of the common Kenyan. To the Luo this created the impression that the tax collectors were Swahili even though there is no record that the Swahili ever participated in collecting taxes in Luoland or anywhere else in Kenya. As a result of this association of the language with the ethnicity of the tax collectors, however, Odinga tells us that the Luo referred to the ‘Swahili’ people as okoche (1967: 2), a Luo word meaning ‘vagabond, rogue and cheat’. As far westwards as Uganda, in fact, the Swahili language conjures up images of the bayaye, the lumpenproletariat, the underclass.

In as much as intensive multilingualism, sociolinguistic hybridity, and code-switching parallel the demographic and socioeconomic consequences of unchecked urban growth, moralistic discourses coarticulate images of linguistic decay with those of increased crime, prostitution, overcrowding, poor sanitation, alcoholism, the disintegration of families, and the miseducation of children. In this way, perceived linguistic problems are represented as the harbinger and/or source of more general social problems.

1. Kiswahili in Uganda

In the linguistic economy of Uganda, to an extent unparalleled elsewhere along the Kiswahili periphery, these discourses have constructed the Kiswahili language (and its second-language speakers) as the source of untold social degeneracy and mayhem. Ugandan Kiswahili, illiteracy, and criminality are three terms that commonly cooccur in social texts that take as a central theme Uganda’s post-
colonial experiences of political turmoil and terrorism. Such texts appeal to a certain common-sense knowledge about the relation between language and social behavior. Fairclough (1992:84) argues:

Texts postulate, and implicitly set up interpretive positions for interpretive subjects who are ‘capable’ of using assumptions from their prior experience to make connections across the intertextually diverse elements of a text, and to generate coherent interpretations.

In this paper, the ‘interpretive principles’ under consideration construct unlettered, Ugandan, Kiswahili-speaking, criminal identity in opposition to a literate, civically responsible, elite, urban, Anglophone identity based on formal Westernized schooling. To a limited extent, this elite Anglophone identity, because it has emerged in Kampala, the Ugandan capital, is at times also associated with proficiency with the Luganda language (the language spoken around Kampala). In the opinion of one prominent Ugandan literary scholar, the image of the uneducated Kiswahili-speaking urban proletariat took hold before that of the Kiswahili-speaking bandit (Abbasi Kiyimba, personal communication). The older image emerged in colonial times as immigrants came from all over East Africa to build the Mombasa-Kampala railway and to work in the industrial areas in Kampala’s south suburbs. The second image, arising in postcolonial times as a northern-dominated, Kiswahili-speaking military waged political terrorism in Kampala, drew on the ascribed ‘foreignness’ of Ugandan Kiswahili implicit in the first to cast them as bagwira ‘foreigners’, and to position military culture in opposition to the civic culture of Kampala.

This oppositionality emerges in part from colonial linguistic ideologies that attribute to English efficacy as a tool of thought, in contradistinction to African languages, which are the idioms of emotional and cultural expression. In this sense, the languages that individuals command are understood to determine the extent of their intellectual abilities and leadership capacities. The discourses outlined above construct second-language speakers of English (and by association, Luganda) to be more civically responsible than second-language speakers of Kiswahili. As Spitulnik (1992:338), taking the example of discourses around language in Zambian radio programming, argues:

...some languages are constructed as more ‘intellectually equipped’ and others as better suited for ‘cultural expression’ through their exclusive use for certain program types. Significantly, these perceived qualities of languages are entangled with particular assessments of their speakers, e.g. as rural people, urban consumers, ‘illiterate’, ‘sophisticated’, ‘insignificant’, etc., and I would argue that the two modes of evaluation are not really separable. These evaluations do not emanate strictly from radio, however, but are more directly grounded in the overall political economy of languages in the country, as linguistic competence (and membership in certain speech communities) structures access to education, labor markets, and political power.
Rationalizations of linguistic hierarchies tend to invoke popular sociolinguistic stereotypes of certain kinds of social actors and their ascribed social characteristics. Mazrui and Mazrui (1998: 156) note:

The Baganda elite have regarded Kiswahili openly as the language of ‘the lower classes’ (Bakopi, Luganda for peasants) since Kiswahili was the language of the workplace and the market, and the language of soldiers from the barracks. Less openly, some Baganda aristocrats have also regarded Kiswahili as the language of ‘lesser breeds’ in the ethnic sense, the northern ethnic groups despised by such haughty aristocrats.

Myers-Scotton (1990) argues that rationalizations for the continued political dominance of ex-colonial languages in African countries (which include arguments about their ‘neutrality’ and ‘efficiency’) tend to elide discussion of the vested interest that small Westernized elites hold in the maintenance of a sociolinguistic ‘glass ceiling’ she terms ‘elite closure’. Linguistic elite closure is one aspect of a structural inequality imposed by the limited availability of educational opportunities within political economies for which schooled linguistic practice licenses rights of speaking.

Much of the complexity of nation-building in Uganda is imposed by the material consequences of uneven development across ethnolinguistic regions and the discursive practices that construct oppositional social identities out of them. There is a widespread perception that Baganda (Luganda-speaking individuals) have had greater access to education, employment opportunities and political influence than other groups. This so-called ‘Buganda Syndrome’ continues to figure prominently in discussions about enduring structural inequalities and the feasibility/desirability of legislated attempts to redress them. The economic and political importance of Buganda, (the historical territory of the Baganda), however, has ensured the currency of Luganda as a lingua franca, primarily in southern (predominantly Bantu-speaking) Uganda. Kiswahili, the lingua franca of northern and eastern (predominantly Nilotic- and Sudanic-speaking) Uganda, the military and police forces, and the urban proletariat (including Kampala), has virtually no reading public and is allotted only two fifteen minute news slots a day only on the state-run Radio Uganda and Uganda TV stations. Rutooro, Luo, Teso, and more recently Lusoga have vernacular newspapers, and together with other Ugandan languages are well represented in Radio Uganda broadcasting, but not in privately owned radio broadcasting or any TV broadcasting. The simplified, lingua franca form of Kiswahili commonly spoken in Uganda has emerged from a sociohistorical context in which it has served the basic needs of interethnic communication, especially in the military and police barracks, trading centers, urban industrial areas, ethnically heterogeneous neighborhoods, transportation, and cross-border trade.

The location of Kampala, the colonial administrative and postcolonial national capital, in central Buganda has created opportunities there coveted by non-Baganda, and also provided the context in which a Westernized/urbanized/Kigan-
daized ‘town’ culture has emerged, envisioned by some as a potential basis for a national culture. Mazrui and Zirimu (1978:439) argue:

Because the Baganda under the colonial administration had been a privileged group, and were allowed to retain considerable influence and prestige, their language in turn commanded derivative prestige, and many of the workers who came into the capital of Uganda felt they had to learn Luganda. Indeed, Kiganda culture favored the linguistic and cultural assimilation of newcomers. In one or two generations many workers who were descended from non-Baganda became, to all intents and purposes, native Luganda speakers and were absorbed into the body politic of Buganda.

In this way, issues of ethnolinguistic identity, urbanity, and social class intersect in the formation of linguistic elite closure, which in Uganda has in part regulated the boundaries of an elite, urban, Anglophone (and therefore partially Kiganda) identity based in Kampala. As manifested in occasional calls for the promotion of Luganda as an indigenous National language, this expanded ‘Kiganda identity’, as if by default, has sometimes stood in for a truly ‘national’ identity.

As successive northern-dominated regimes (Obote I, 1963-71; Amin, 1971-79; Obote II, 1979-85) waged political terrorism in and around Kampala from the 1960’s through the mid-80’s, the ascribed civic and moral respectability of elite, urban, Anglophone culture was constructed in opposition to the ‘degeneracy’ of northern-dominated, Kiswahili-speaking, ‘illiterate’, and criminally-inclined military culture. This discourse operated upon common-sense knowledge about the efficacy of formal Westernized schooling, and its scribal practices, in instilling civic spirit and moral character. Ugandan soldiers, typically unsocialized to schooled linguistic practices, were represented as the very antithesis of an educated citizenry. The language of the barracks suffered further disrepute. To this day, representations of Kiswahili-speakers in popular media generally cast them as criminals, illiterates, womanizers, prostitutes, drunks, or gun-happy (northern, non-Bantu) soldiers. This set of interdiscursive connections works up Oluswayiri (the Luganda word for Kiswahili) as an antisocial behavior. A distaste for the perceived language of both common and political criminals functions as a form of discursive resistance to the brutality and corruption of the postcolonial northern-dominated regimes. In linking the Kiswahili language with the street- and state-level criminality of non-Baganda immigrants and dictators, and positioning it in opposition to the literate, Westernized, civically responsible, urban, elite Anglophone (and Kigandaized) culture of Kampala, these discursive practices construct Kiswahili-speakers as somehow ‘foreign’. In Luganda, the word bagwira ‘foreigners’ can apply to both non-Ugandans and non-Baganda. The growth in the number of non-Baganda in Kampala is often noted in the context of increased linguistic ‘anarchy’, illiteracy, crime, overcrowding, poor sanitation, prostitution, and the breakdown of rural-based forms of traditional authority.
2. Discursive constructions of Kiswahili-speakers

This paper will present a critical discourse analysis of three texts drawn from popular media (one an excerpt from a popular Luganda language TV sitcom, the second a newspaper article, the last a newspaper installment of a novel) that depict the two major ascribed characteristics of second-language speakers of Ugandan Kiswahili: their ‘illiteracy’ (constructed as a linguistic deficiency) and their criminality (constructed as a personal or cultural deficiency). ‘Illiteracy’ is used here in its most ideologically laden sense, i.e., as unschooled linguistic practice, including oral performances of nonnative and nonstandard linguistic varieties. The three texts achieve their characterizations precisely through invoking well-worn sociolinguistic stereotypes, of the ‘illiterate’ domestic servant, drug-dealer, and military dictator, respectively. In each case, the constructed linguistic deficiency frames the participation of the stereotyped character in an antisocial or criminal activity. In the first text, transcribed from the TV sitcom That’s Life — Mwattu, Olanya, a drunken, womanizing, northern-born domestic servant, abuses his wife (and humiliates himself) in a highly simplified Luganda, repetitively punctuated by a small repertoire of Kiswahili connectors, adverbs, and interjections. The second sample, from the Health section of the state-run newspaper The New Vision, juxtaposes the inability to sustain a conversation in English (and recourse to Kiswahili) with the culture of drug abuse. And the third, from a book by Maria Karooro Okurut entitled The Invisible Weevil (which was prereleased in installments in the privately-owned newspaper The Monitor), invokes the darkest humor in the linguistic caricature of Idi Amin Dada himself.

2.1 The tongue of ‘Bagwira’ and lousy husbands

Although television stations have been operating in Uganda since the late 1950’s, there has always been a dearth of locally produced programming, and especially so in Ugandan languages. Radio has been the medium most accessible to rural areas, both technologically and linguistically: TV has been primarily an English-language, government-run affair, and has always catered to the population in and around Kampala. Since the 1990’s, however, with the advent of several privately owned TV stations, there has been a certain noticable growth in programming variety, although still relatively little of it in local languages.

One notable exception is the popular Luganda language TV sitcom That’s Life — Mwattu. This program achieves at least some of its humor through invoking well-entrenched social stereotypes, such as those of the womanizing civil servant, the greedy South Asian businessman, the ‘quack’ muganga (‘traditional healer’), the scheming teenage gold-digger, and the northern (muwigira), Kiswahili-speaking domestic servant. This analysis will focus on the discursive construction of the last in the character of Olanya, an ethnic Acholi who lives in the ‘boys’ quarters’ of a mansion belonging to a Pakistani-born businessman. When working in the Pakistani’s mansion, Olanya is the image of stoic deference, never invited to sit, and never comfortable sitting on his employer’s furniture. Communication between the Pakistani employer and Olanya is always in English, generally in the form of an aimless rant from the former and short expressions of com-
pliance from the latter. Olanya’s wife Fiona, an ethnic Muganda, lives with him in the ‘boy’s quarters’ and seldom interacts with her husband’s Pakistani employer. The linguistic economy of the household is partly structured by gender: Olanya speaks enough English to communicate with his employer at a basic level, but Fiona speaks no English at all. This language barrier itself is used in certain episodes to construct comic situations; it also defines a structural inequality between husband and wife in the realm of wage labor.

In the ‘boy’s quarters’, however, an altogether different linguistic economy obtains. And as this second space is connected socially to the surrounding Luganda-speaking community, Olanya does not have exclusive control of the linguistic resources most valued there; rather, he has only a secondary (nonnative) socialization to their use. His tenuous grasp of the Luganda language continually places him at a disadvantage in dealing with Fiona’s machinations, and those of her Baganda relatives and friends. Olanya’s linguistic deficiency is juxtaposed to his general social ineptitude and gullibility. Olanya the compliant, subdued manservant of the mansion is transposed into Olanya the surly, ill-mannered and misogynist cuckold. Linguistically, Olanya the English-speaker becomes Olanya the *Mugwira*, the speaker of ‘broken’ Luganda laced with enough Kiswahili to make the intimation of linguistic deficiency and moral degeneracy complete.

It is worth noting here that the character who plays Olanya is himself a highly educated, native Luganda speaker, and actually does not speak any form of Kiswahili very fluently. For purposes of playing his role, however, he has caricaturized the lingua franca form of Luganda commonly learned by non-Baganda working in Kampala, and has exaggerated selected marked features to nearly complete consistency. Most noticable of these is the severe reduction in grammatical agreement; it is also worth noting that reduced grammatical agreement is the most noticable difference between second-language and native forms of Kiswahili. In a sense, then, the character of Olanya is *Oluswayiri-*izing his Luganda. As do most Bantu languages, Luganda displays more than twenty grammatical classes;¹ in Olanya’s speech, they are reduced to one or two (namely, classes 7 and 9), making cultural and linguistic purists cringe and less heritage-conscious Luganda speakers just snort.

In the episode partially transcribed below, entitled ‘*Kwenda kwa dongo*’ (Kiswahili for ‘sleep on the floor!’), Olanya has been ‘sent’ a ‘second’ wife (Lena) by his village elders back in Acholi (northern Uganda), because he has failed to produce children with Fiona. Because she is an urban-bred Muganda, the elders doubt Fiona’s ‘character’ (adherence to rural norms for gendered behavior), and so have found for Olanya a good ‘village’ wife. This development actually comes in the context of Fiona’s recent affair with a Muganda *muganga* ‘traditional healer’ named *Kakinda*, whose name Olanya usually mispronounces as *Kakinda*. Infuriated at having been made a cuckold, Olanya is taking his revenge by flaunting his affair with Lena in Fiona’s face, and using it as a pretext for ejecting Fiona from her former rights in the household, including that of sleeping in her bed. Infuriated at now being treated like a domestic servant in her own house, Fiona becomes aggressively vocal, and so brings out the worst in her drunken, womanizing husband.
As the scene opens, Fiona is combing her hair on the bed late at night as she hears Olanya and Lena are coming in. As they enter, Fiona gets under the covers and pretends that she is asleep.

Luganda is given in normal font, Kiswahili is italicized, and English is bold-faced. Instances of agreement reduction in Luganda forms are indicated with italicized boldface: in most cases, the reduction is in grammatical class 9, although there are some in grammatical class 7.

(1) [Olanya and Lena enter, laughing drunkenly.]

01 O: Wa jamaa! Genda wali, kwenda sana.
   oh brother go there go very
   ‘Hey! Go there, go quickly.’

02 L: Olanya!
   Olanya!’ [laughs]

03 O: Maama yangu, habari kwa muntu muzima sana.
   mother mine news of person sound very
   ‘Goodness, what a very tough person (woman).’

04 L: Olanya!
   ‘Olanya!’

05 O: Kweli wa-na-tumia bwana--sasa
   truly they-pres-use mister now
   ‘Lord do they drink--and now’

06 L: Olanya!
   Olanya!’

07 O: Sasa ggwe e-yingir-e. Eh. maama, pole wuko, pole
   now you 9-enter-subj hey mama gently there gently
   ‘Now you enter. Hey, mama. careful there. careful.’

08 L: Am tired.
   ‘Am tired.’

09 O: You're very tired indeed you're very tired, pole wuko.
   You’re very tired indeed you’re very tired, careful there.’
   Lakini nze e-ba-dde t-e-manyi nti ggwe e-manyi ku-zinna sana.
   but I 9-be-perf neg-9-know that you 9-know inf-dance very
   But I didn’t know that you really know how to dance.’
   Lakini ggwe e-ki-ko-ze bwe-n-ti. Now I've got a real woman.
   but you 9-7-do-perf like-I-do now i’ve got a real woman
   ‘But you do it like I do. Now I’ve got a real woman.’

Pole wuko.
   gently there
   ‘Careful there.’
10 L: Olanya, it’s been the best day, the best night, it’s been interesting!

11 O: Eee, alaah! Maama yangu Fatuma, sasa ggwe y-ebak-ee-ko, yes god mother mine Fatuma now you 9-sleep-subj-17 ‘Yes, by God! My mother Fatuma, now you sleep a bit,’ 
e-labika e-ko-ye nnyo. 
9-seem 9-weary-perf very ‘you seem to be very tired.’

12 L: Am even tired.

13 O: You’re tired--ggwe e-ki-koz-e sana, sasa ggwe e-yingir-e you’re tired you 9-7-do-perf very now you 9-enter-subj ‘You’re tired--you really did it, now you get in.’ 

[Lena gets up and goes to change in the next room; Olanya notices Fiona covered in the bed behind him]

Alaah! Wa jamaa! Maama yangu mimi, hi-ki ni ki-tu gani?! god oh brother mother mine this-7 is 7-thing what ‘God! Oh brother! My mother, what is this thing?!’ 

What are you?! Wee nani?! Alaah! Kisirani, we toka what are you you who god curse you leave ‘What are you?! Who are you?! My God? (You) curse, get out’ kisirani wewe! curse you ‘you curse!’

[Fiona pretends to wake up.]


15 O: Toka kisirani! leave curse ‘Get out, (you) curse!’

16 F: Ki-ki kye-‘m-ba n-toka-ko? 7-what 7rel-I-be I-leave-17 ‘And what is it I am getting out of?’

17 O: Wa jaama, ani ey-a-ku-gamb-ye-ko oku-beera kwa ki-ntu e-no? oh brother who 9-past-you-tell-perf-17 inf-stay on 7-thing 9-this ‘Oh brother, who told you to stay on this thing?’ 
Sasa nze ki-ma-zze oku-goba-ko ggwe, e-v-ee-ko! now I 7-finish-perf inf-chase-17 you 9-leave-subj-17 ‘Now, I’ve already told you, get out of here!’
EDWARD A. MINER: Discursive constructions of KiSwahili speakers

18 F: O-n-gob-ye-ko?! Ani gw’-o-manyiira?!
you-me-chase-perf-17 who 1rel-you-familiarizing
‘You chased me from here?! Who do you think you are?!’
Nti o-n-gob-ye-ko!
that you-me-chase-perf-17
‘You chased me from here!’ [incredulously]

19 O: Toka! Hi-i ni ki-tu y-ako? E-no mwana y-a bendi ki-ee-se
leave this-9 is 7-thing 9-yours 9-this child 7-bring-perf
Get out! Is this thing (the bed) yours? This is a child of good
family I’ve brought’

ki-ntu mu-pya era na ki-ntu ki-pya! Leka ggwe e-yingir-e,
7-thing 1-new also and 7-thing 7-new stop you 9-enter-subj
‘a new person and a new thing (the bedding)! You get out!’

Ggwe e-yagala ky-a bwerere--toka! Nze n-ku-gamb-ye
you 9-want (something) 7-of free leave 11-you-tell-perf
‘You want something for free--get out! I told you’
e-v-ee-yo!
9-leave-subj-loc
‘to get out of there!’

20 F: Nga ku-ki kwe-n-va?
so loc-what loc/rel-l-leave
‘So where am I getting out of?’

21 O: Wa jamaa, o-na-taka ku-leta muntu taabu. Nze ki-ma-ze
oh brother you-pres-want inf-bring person trouble 1 7-finish-perf
‘Oh brother, you want to bring a person problems. I’ve already’

ku-gamba-ko ggwe, ku-mala ggwe, ki-maz-e ku-genda na
inf-tell-17 you inf-finish you 7-finish-perf inf-go with
‘told you for good. I’m finished with you, you’ve done’

ki-ntu mu-kambwe na Kabinda, ggwe t-e-genda ku-dda-yo
7-thing 1-cruel with Kabinda you neg-9-go inf-return-23
‘a cruel thing with Kabinda, you aren’t going to again

ku-laba nze.
inf-see me
‘to see me (my body).’

22 F: Ani gw’-o-manyiira?!
who 1rel-you-familiarizing
‘Who do you think you are?!’

23 O: Nze t-e-yagala!
I neg-9-want
‘I don’t want (you)!’
24  F:  T-o-manyiira, si-manyi n'-o-lyoka o-woza nti,
    neg-you-familiarizing (neg)I-know and-you-forever you-say that
    ‘Don’t test me, I don’t know why you’re always saying that’
    si-manyi, nze okw-ebaka.
    (neg)I-know, I inf-sleep
    ‘I don’t know, I’m sleeping.’

25  O:  Kwenda kwa dongo!
    go to floor
    ‘Get on the floor!’

As mentioned earlier, at least two characteristics of Olanya’s speech set him apart from the more than fifty regularly appearing characters who speak at least partially in Luganda. First, Olanya is the only one whose speech evinces the kind of severe reduction in grammatical agreement seen in (1) above, and secondly, he is the only one who code-switches with a language other than English. Where grammatical agreement is entirely reduced to class 9 (as in line 09, partially reproduced for convenience as (2) below), the logical relations of verbal arguments become somewhat opaque. (2) is rendered in ordinary, grammatically correct, non-code-switched Luganda in (3).

(2)  Lakini nze e-ba-dde t-e-manyi nti ggwe e-manyi ku-zinna sana.
    but I 9-be-perf neg-9-know that you 9-know inf-dance very
    ‘But I didn’t know that you really know how to dance.’

    Lakini ggwe e-ki-ko-ze bwe-n-ti.
    but you 9-7-do-perf like-I-do.
    ‘But you do it like I do.’

(3)  Naye nze m-ba-dde si-manyi nti ggwe o-manyi ku-zinna nnyo.
    but I I-be-perf neg(l)-know that you you-know inf-dance very
    ‘But I didn’t know that you really know how to dance.’

    Naye ggwe o-ki-ko-ze bwe-n-ti.
    But you you-7-do-perf like-I-do.
    ‘But you do it like I do.’

A particularly comic use of unlikely codeswitching comes in lines 13-16 (partially reproduced in (4) below), when Fiona ‘mimics’ Olanya by embedding his Kiswahili ‘order’ toka (‘get out’) in a morphologically robust Luganda verbal form.

(4)  O:  Kisirani, we toka kisirani wewe!
    curse you leave curse you
    ‘(You) curse, get out you curse!’

    [Fiona pretends to wake up.]

    F:  N-tok-e ku ki?
    I-leave-subj on what
    ‘What should I leave?’

    O:  Toka kisirani!
    leave curse
Ordinarily, Fiona never code-switches her Luganda with Kiswahili in the way that Olanya does. In embedding the root *toka* (‘get out’) in her verbal forms, she uses mimicry to belittle Olanya’s domestic authority. In her revoicing of Olanya’s verbal abuse, his attempt to project authority is represented as childish incompetence.

There are two main points to be made here about the role of ‘code-switching’ in the construction of the interaction. First, Lena, in contrast to Fiona, has received some basic schooling, and so speaks English at times (as in lines 08, 10, and 12), perhaps to project her ‘worldliness’. Olanya attempts to follow her (line 09), but quickly reverts to his *Oluswayirized* Luganda. This indexes his inability to handle English casually, when he is master of his own circumstances. Rather, his English is really only adequate for the social role of an underling, as his immediate recourse to Kiswahili, the language of colonial-style servitude, further suggests. Secondly, Olanya’s use of Kiswahili lexical items is relatively sparse until he starts chastizing Fiona (see lines 13, 21, and 25). The harshest remark he makes is purely in Kiswahili: ‘*Kwenda kwa dongo*’. The tendency of ‘rough’ Kiswahili to coincide with coercive contexts draws in historical memory of the circumstances of colonial class structure, when European and Asian settlers used to simply order Africans about without much concern for linguistic grace.

### 2.2 The tongue of the common criminal

The newspaper article *Mairungi causes jealousy* (see Illustration 1) addresses the recreational abuse, health consequences, and ambiguous legal status of the psychotropic plant known in the Luganda language as *mairungi*, and elsewhere in East Africa as *khat*. The article exhibits at least three major turns of voice: opening in an interaction between the journalist and *mairungi* traders in the bustling industrial area of Kisenyi in Kampala, it then moves to the discourse of medical diagnosis in the commentary of the *Journal of the Royal College of Physicians of London* and of the Head of the Department of Pharmacology and Therapeutics, Makerere University Medical School, and finally to the discourse of legal regulation in the commentary of the Secretary/Registrar of the National Drug Authority. Although this article is published in the Health section of the newspaper, it exhibits certain features more characteristic of a Leisure piece: beginning with the somewhat comical portrayal of the *mairungi* traders themselves (particularly their rough appearance and language), it moves to a general portrayal of the effects of chewing the plant (drawing upon popular images of drunken idlers), and finally refers to the infamous entropy with which the Uganda Police (fail to) approach law enforcement. For purposes of this analysis, the first two paragraphs are of the most immediate relevance, because it is here that the writer engages dominant common-sense knowledge about the relation between schooled vs. unschooled linguistic practice and social behavior. The journalist begins by portraying the intoxicated, unkempt, somewhat menacing Rasta-like countenance of one trader,
which is consonant with his inability to sustain a conversation in English: ‘Obviously finding problems with English, he changes to Swahili ...’ The trader’s Kiswahili that follows is typical of that spoken in Kampala, but is comical in this context precisely because it is an inscribing of a generally unwritten variety. Further, its subject matter draws upon popular assumptions about what ‘illiterate’ people do with their time: get high, any way they can.

(5) 01 O-na ku-wa wewe mwenyewe. Kama o-na ku-la yi, 2ps-pres inf-be you yourself if you-pres inf-eat this ‘You become yourself. If you eat this, you talk with’

02 o-na wongeya ya roho yako yote.
2ps-pres with talk soul your all ‘all your soul’.

Stymied in self-expression by both his ‘high’ and his lack of formal education, the trader calls over his colleagues for help in conversing with the journalist. The other traders proceed to take great delight in projecting the erratic behavior of the journalist after chewing the mairungi leaves.

Illustration 1. Kiswahili-speakers as bayaye (common criminals).

In juxtaposing the uninformed and self-destructive behavior of mairungi traders with the intellectual and moral authority of medical and legal experts, the article draws upon long-entrenched assumptions about the efficacy of formal Western-style schooling in the English language in promoting consciousness of personal responsibility and a greater social good. The opening depiction of the traders portrays mairungi use as rooted in a cultural deficiency, conceived mainly
as a lack of education. In invoking the discourse of medical diagnosis, however, the text now spins *mairungi* use as the source of a mental deficiency:

A circular released by the National Drug Authority early this year … reads: ‘The leaves of this plant *mairungi* contain an active substance METHACATHINONE which is like cocaine. Chewing large amounts causes paranoid psychosis’. Paranoid psychosis is a mental disorder characterised by false perception and unwarranted jealousy.

As manifested in the person of the *mairungi* trader, the use of *mairungi* does nothing to help one’s ability to sustain a conversation in English, which is how one would make sense to a more socially respectable person such as a journalist. Moreover, the language of the trader’s ‘false perception’ (*Ona kuwa wewe uwenyewe ‘You are you yourself.’*) is the unlettered Ugandan variety of Kiswahili, which in the assessment of some Ugandan elites is not really a language at all. As the text turns to the voice of legal regulation in the words of the Secretary/Registrar of the National Drug Authority, *mairungi* chewing is now cast as the source or multiplier of other social ills, such as traffic accidents and alcoholism. The resonance of the *mairungi* trader’s general social and sociolinguistic degeneracy carries forward in the reading, however; *mairungi* chewing, ‘broken’ English, and unlettered Ugandan Kiswahili are all implicated in traffic accidents and alcoholism, at least in the sort of ascribed cultural and mental deficiency that they index.

### 2.3 The tongue of the political criminal

The extract (see Illustration 2) from the novel *The Invisible Weevil* by Maria K. Okurut (prereleased in installments in the privately-owned newspaper *The Monitor*) reaches into Uganda’s postcolonial historical memory in the way that it juxtaposes images of ‘broken’ English, snatches of Ugandan Kiswahili, illiteracy, and the darkest days of state-sanctioned political terrorism. Ugandans had suffered untold repression at the hands of the security forces under the first regime of Milton Apollo Obote (1963-71) by the time it was overthrown in a coup led by Obote’s top military commander, Idi Amin Dada. Amin’s rule began with widespread euphoria around its professed rejection of ethnic clientelism and its commitment to socialist democratic reform. Shortly, however, mass disappearances of government officials and civilians alike began to make clear that state-sanctioned political terrorism was only to get worse. It is during Amin’s tenure that Kiswahili, in the mouths of AK-47-wielding, northern-born and relatively undereducated soldiers terrorizing civilians at roadblocks and arbitrarily arresting people in *pandagari* (‘get in the truck’) operations, began to be closely associated with state-sponsored violence. Moreover, the habit that soldiers had developed during Obote’s regime of singling out ethnic Baganda for harassment (in Kiswahili) became a standard practice during this era. Most Ugandan soldiers were from the northern, Nilotic- and Sudanic-speaking regions which had been poorly served by the British colonial administration in the providing of educational opportunities. Ironically, the discourse of resistance that developed in opposition to the state-sponsored violence tended to equate the ascribed illiteracy of its leaders and sol-
soldiers with their corruption and brutality. And Amin, who himself spoke English poorly, but the Ugandan variety of Kiswahili very fluently, came to epitomize the coarticulation of ascribed sociolinguistic and moral degeneracy.

This installment gives a fictionalized account from the perspective of a group of secondary school students of that day in 1971 on which Amin took power in Kampala. After a huge explosion rocks the city (as Amin’s forces destroy Obote’s main armory), the eldest student, Mzee, tunes his radio to the state-run station, Radio Uganda.

Marshal music filtered through. Then a voice came on, speaking slowly, almost like a child learning to talk.

Ziz is a speso announce—ment. The government spokesman wisez to inform all the piploz (peoples) of Uganda zata za Uganda armed forces led by his excellent major General Idi Amin Ada have tooks over (taken over) the government of Uganda. Zey have overthrown za killing regime of Obote. Ze now president will swear at four hocklock dis morning. End of Speso announce—ment. By government spokesman.

From then onwards, the ‘government spokesman’ became a permanent feature on the radio. He would come on with all sorts of bizarre announcements, appointing and dismissing ministers over the radio, etc.

Later in the day when the students go to hear Amin sworn in as President at the Parliament, they find more reason to worry about the political future. This representation of Amin’s speech is a caricature of the pretentions of uneducated political strongmen to a respectability historically ‘earned’ through formal schooling. His comically awkward, repetitive syntax and misapprehended denotations in English are immediately interpreted by the audience as an indication of his general political incompetence. His periodic resort to common Kiswahili connectors, adverbs, and pronouns (indicated in bold, with translations given in parentheses), might seem an attempt to project a populist pan-ethnic political persona, but to the audience it underscores the fact that he is an ‘intellectually deficient’ soldier playing the part of a politician.

Amin smiled, took the microphone and addressed the nation:

Ladies under gentlemen, Sasa (‘now’) I am very happy completely and also to stand here and undress you on this suspicious (auspicious) occasion. I not politician, I professional soldier, and man of few words.

It has been for long time, nani (‘who’) Obote huyo (‘this one’) very bad also. I am sunk (thank) you very much but also I tell him mini nitafinish wewe (‘I will finish you’). Completely Kabisa (‘completely’) and also. Me big daddy no ambition man to tell you the true, me Idi-Dada, big Daddy, I am good man, kind man completely and through-out.
NEW BOOK
Part Three: 1971 - 1979
THE INVINCIBLE WARRIORS
By Mari Kurooro Okuru

Amin's reign of terror unfolds.

In 1966, Amin's regime in Uganda was established. The regime was characterized by widespread human rights abuses, including political arrests, torture, and executions. The government's main objective was to suppress opposition and maintain control over the population. Amin's regime was particularly known for its brutal suppression of the 1971-1979 period.

Amin's policies included the use of a secret police force, the Internal Security Organization (ISO), which was responsible for a range of human rights violations. The ISO was known for its brutality and inefficiency, and it was often used as a tool of political repression.

Under Amin's rule, the Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA) was created. The UNLA was responsible for widespread atrocities, including massacres, forced labor, and human rights abuses.

In 1979, Amin was overthrown in a military coup led by the Uganda National Liberation Front (UNLF). The UNLF, led by Lt. Gen. Milton Obote, was able to oust Amin from power. The aftermath of Amin's reign was marked by a period of political instability and economic hardship.

From 1979 to 1986, Uganda was ruled by the UNLF. The UNLF was able to maintain control over the country, but it was met with widespread international criticism.

In 1986, an agreement was reached between the UNLF and the National Resistance Army (NRA), led by Yoweri Museveni. The agreement paved the way for a transition to civilian rule in Uganda.

The transition to civilian rule was not without its challenges. The country struggled to recover from the years of war and political instability.

In 1991, Museveni was elected the first civilian president of Uganda. He has been in power ever since, and his government has been marked by efforts to promote stability and development.

Today, Uganda is considered one of the most stable countries in East Africa, and it has made significant progress in terms of economic growth and political stability.

Illustration 2. Kiswahili-speakers as political criminals.
Tomorrow I write to Mr. Queen of Englanda. I to tell her now Uganda also good Obote to go. Obote he thief, tribes (tribalism), drunco etc. Sunk you asante sana (‘thanks very much’). I tell to you again kesho (‘tomorrow’), for tomorrow.

I sunk you very big.

The listeners’ commentary following Amin’s speech, on the other hand, articulates essentially two voices: the first speaks to common-sense knowledge about the relation between colonial education and the ‘training’ of the African mind; the second resists that interpretation, pointing to the failure of the colonial education system to actually produce politically competent leaders. As noted above, formal schooling in English literacy had been widely assumed to engage and prepare the rational faculties of the African mind in a way that socialization to orality in indigenous languages did not. In early colonial times, the British administration and missionary establishment had exhibited a preference for Baganda recruits into the civil service, based upon essentialist assumptions about their ‘educability’. Similarly essentialist notions about the ‘warlike’ nature of Nilotic- and Sudanic-speaking cultures (including Obote’s Langi group and Amin’s Kakwa group, respectively) dictated a preference for military recruits from northern Uganda. At the eve of independence in 1963, non-Baganda politicians suffered from a certain deficit of politico-cultural capital, whatever their actual educational qualifications, and so sought to compensate in symbolic ways for the perceived ‘roughness’ of their background. Amin’s predecessor, Milton Apollo Obote (born Apollo Obote, but in his political career known as Milton Obote), so as to underscore his personal erudition, had added his first name after becoming enamored of the works of the English writer John Milton. The second commentator in the passage below gives voice to the disenchantment with such educated political strongmen, in whom formal Western schooling had apparently done nothing to instill a vision of indigenous democracy or sense of civic responsibility toward their fellow Ugandans.

There was thunderous applause. Genesis and Mzee had kept on pinching each other as Amin spoke on almost unintelligibly. One man remarked: ‘Eh, this fellow who does not know English, how will he rule us?’

‘But is it English which rules us? Look, Obote knew English and yet he has ruled badly,’ said another.

‘Eh, but at least the President should be educated!’ persisted the first.

‘Look where the educated landed us, in trouble. Maybe the uneducated one will rule better’, answered the other. That evening, BBC commented that on his swearing in ceremony, Amin spoke in a language ‘similar to English’.

‘That does not worry me. Even if he spoke in vernacular, it would not matter, what we want is somebody who will rule us without us keeping in constant fear of being killed. And Amin looks so kind we shall live
peacefully’, said one. ‘I am not sure about that. There are so many dead bodies and they say things which start in blood draw more blood’.

The words of Amin’s detractor are prescient: within months, the state-run newspaper would abound with reports of ‘rebel kidnappings’ of politicians and civilians alike, and Amin would stage mock trials and very real executions of alleged perpetrators. Ugandan Kiswahili would now be indelibly associated in the national political imagination with the banging of rifle butts on the door in the dead of night, and the disappearance of family members who would never be seen again.

3. Conclusion

The three texts, in progressively stronger degrees, show the cooccurrence of Kiswahili linguistic material in popular media together with representations of antisocial or criminal behavior. In this, they draw on discourses that have constructed oppositional sociopolitical identities out of sociolinguistic stereotypes, which ultimately place the source of Uganda’s political turmoil of the last 30 years on the relative lack of formal Westernized education among the predominantly non-Baganda urban proletariat and military. This represents a local adaptation of an received colonial ideology that equates schooled linguistic practice to intelligence and urban, elite social practice to the spirit of civic responsibility. As has been noted, this linguistic economy stands in partial contrast to those of Kenya and Tanzania, where Kiswahili is more deeply-entrenched, both as a first and a second language.

In 1995, a motion was introduced into the Constitutional Assembly to install Kiswahili as the national language of Uganda, and although it received a simple majority of delegate votes, it did not attain the 2/3 majority needed to pass. The vote broke down largely along regional lines: the north and east voted overwhelmingly for Kiswahili, the west supported it rather less overwhelmingly, and delegates from Buganda (central region) voted against it as a block. The discussions around the issue revived all of the old discourses that construct what has been referred to above as the ‘Buganda Syndrome’ — that Baganda have benefited inordinately from a political economy in which formal Western schooling and English literacy license rights of speaking, and that the installation of a ‘neutral’ indigenous lingua franca is necessary to ‘level the playing field’. The delegates from Buganda, for their part, denigrated Kiswahili as spoken in Uganda as linguistically deficient and morally repugnant, and so unsuitable for any serious political or civic purpose. Failing in its constitutional initiative, the ruling NRM undertook to promote it as a mandatory subject in primary and secondary schools.

An important aspect of the rehabilitation of Ugandan Kiswahili is the rebuilding of public trust in the security forces, which continue to suffer from a reputation for corruption and indisciplined use of force. Interestingly, promotion in both the Uganda People’s Defense Force and the Uganda Police is now tied to demonstrated ability to read and write standard Kiswahili as well as English. Since the East African Community was resuscitated as the East Africa Cooperation in 1996, the NRM has staked its political future within the ideological framework of
regional integration, a kind of step-child of the Pan-Africanism of the 1960’s and 70’s. In hitching its wagon to the sociopolitical and socioeconomic futures of Kenya and Tanzania, the NRM is participating in an attempt to redefine Swahili identity in transethnic and transnational terms. In doing so successfully, however, it will ultimately have to accommodate the cherished identity claims of politically powerful groups like the Baganda of Uganda.

NOTES

* An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 6th Annual Symposium on Language and Society — Austin (SALSA VI), on April 12, 1998.

Luganda, like other Bantu languages, has up to twenty three grammatical genders. The chains of agreement that the respective grammatical genders condition are illustrated in the examples below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CLASS</th>
<th>EXAMPLE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Omw-ana w-ange o-no omu-rungi a-buze.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1-child 1-mine 1-this 1-good 1-lost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘This good child of mine is lost’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Aba-ana ba-ange ba-no aba-rungi ba-buze.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘These good children of mine are lost’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Omu-kwano gw-ange gu-no omu-rungi gu-buze.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘This good friend of mine is lost’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Emi-kwano gy-ange gi-no emi-rungi gi-buze.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘These good friends of mine are lost’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Ef-fumo ly-ange li-no eli-rungi li-buze.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘This good spear of mine is lost’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Ama-fumo ga-ange ga-no ama-rungi ga-buze.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘These good spears of mine are lost’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Eki-taabo ky-ange ki-no ki-rungi ki-buze.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘This good book of mine is lost’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Ebi-taabo by-ange bi-no bi-rungi bi-buze.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘These good books of mine are lost’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>En-koko y-ange e-no en-rungi e-buze.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘This good chicken of mine is lost’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>En-koko z-ange zi-no en-rungi zi-buze.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘These good chickens of mine are lost’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Olu-limi lw-ange lu-no olu-rungi lu-buze.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘This good language of mine is lost’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Aka-saale k-ange ka-no aka-rungi ka-buze.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘This good arrow of mine is lost’.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Otu-lo tw-ange tu-no otu-rungi tu-buze.
‘This good sleep of mine is lost’.

Obu-saale bw-ange bu-no obu-rungi bu-buze.
‘These good arrows of mine are lost’.

Oku-fumba kw-ange ku-no oku-rungi ku-buze.
‘This good cooking of mine is lost’.

Wa-kati wa-no wa-li-wo enicungwa.
16-middle 16-this 16-be-16 oranges
‘Right here in the middle are oranges’.

Ku-kitaabo ku-no ku-li-ko ebigambo.
17-book 17-this 17-be-17 words
‘Right (there) on the book are some words’.

Mu-kitaabo mu-no mu-li-mu ebigambo.
18-book 18-this 18-be-18 words
‘Right (there) in the book are some words’.

Ogu-sajja gw-ange gu-no ogu-rungi gu-buze.
‘This good giant of mine is lost’.

Aga-sajja ga-ange ga-no aga-rungi ga-buze.
‘These good giants of mine are lost’.

E-Kampala e-no e-ri-yo abantu abangi.
23-Kampala 23-this 23-be-23 people many
‘Right there in Kampala are many people’.

REFERENCES


